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MORRIS LURIE **Zaydeh**

A picnic in a green field somewhere in France. Fresh bread, pate, apples and cheese. A bottle of wine. We sprawled on a spread rug. It was warm. Marianne hitched her dress up to catch the sun on her legs. She was wearing, I saw, pale pink pants. I opened the wine. Clouds like airships, like puffy whales, drifted in the blue sky. There was a soft sound of water. We were near a stream. At the end of the field cows gently grazed.

"I'm worried about those bulls," I said.

Marianne laughed. "They've got udders," she said.

"Doesn't mean anything," I said. "The farmers clip them on. Fool the trespassers. Inspire terror. Keep them away. They're cunning, the French. *Très diabolique.*"

Marianne shook her head. "You're just like my grannie," she said. "Terrified of everything."

"I am not terrified. I'm just cautious, is all."

Marianne cut some pate. "We took grannie for a picnic once," she said. "Richmond Park. It was the middle of summer, a lovely day. Hot. She wouldn't get out of the car. She sat in the back all afternoon. With the windows up."

"Quite right too. Nasty things in Richmond Park."

"Every time we looked over, there she was, red as a beetroot, *glaring at us*. I thought she was going to die."

"I'm not like that," I said. "I would have opened the window. At least an inch."

"Dear old grannie," Marianne said. "Well, she was brought up very strict. She's a Quaker. Well, *she* isn't, I don't think she's anything, but her parents were. Quakers are terrible. Do you know what grannie thinks is the worst thing she's ever done in her whole life, her most horrible sin? You'll never guess. She once rode a boys' bicycle down the street. What a disgrace! Ladies didn't ride boys' bicycles. Her parents heard about it.

They made her stand in a corner all afternoon. She wasn't allowed to move. She had to learn a chapter of the bible. A whole chapter. By heart."

"You call that strict? You know what my grandfather did to me?"

"What?"

"Everything," I said. I took a deep breath. I looked at the cows, at the clouds, at the distant trees. "Ah, you don't want to hear about him," I said.

"Go on," Marianne said. "Tell me."

I looked at her. I could see the freckles across her nose. How beautiful she was. I had never told her about zaydeh. I had never really told her anything.

"Wait here," I said. "I'll be back in a minute."

I got my wallet from the car. I showed her the photograph, zaydeh and five months old me.

"Is that you?" Marianne said. "Hey, you're sweet. I didn't —"

"Don't worry about me," I said. "Look at him."

Marianne held the photograph closer. She narrowed her eyes in the sun. "He looks all right," she said. "Very distinguished."

"Like Sigmund Freud?" I said.

"Well . . . a bit."

"O.K.," I said. "Imagine this. I am ten years old. I am coming home from school with some friends. Suddenly one of them shouts, 'Hey, there's your grandfather!' I look up. There he is all right. He's wearing his suit, his vest, the cufflinks, the shiny collar, exactly the way he is in that photograph, and do you know what he's doing? He's bending down in the middle of the road, with a big suitcase, shovelling it full of horse manure."

Marianne was about to say something. I held up my hand.

"What did he want the horse manure for? For

his radishes. He grew radishes in the garden. The bitterest radishes you've ever tasted. But that doesn't matter, forget the radishes, it's my friends I'm talking about. Do you know what they did when they saw him? They ran. They ran like hell. You've never seen kids running so fast. They were scared of him. Terrified. They thought he was a madman."

"Well, kids," Marianne said. "Kids think anyone who —"

"But I ran too. He *was* a madman. He was a monster, a tyrant. I was just as scared of him as they were. More. He was terrible. Everything I did was wrong, as far as he was concerned. If I whistled, he hit me. 'Don't whistle!' Bang! If I swung my arms when I walked. He didn't like the way I sat. The way I ate. The way I combed my hair. Everything was wrong. And that was only the beginning of it. Oh, he was a madman all right. If anyone came into the house, some friend of mine, he'd chase him away. And they ran. God, they ran. He had a walking stick. He used to chase them with that. Run out into the street after them, waving his stick. And then come back and hit me. A monster. He hated everything, everyone. Cats. He couldn't stand cats. He used to stalk down the side of the house, slashing at the bushes with that walking stick, hoping there was one in there so he could give it a crack. A madman. He used to tear up my comics. He wouldn't let me listen to the radio. If he caught me listening, he wouldn't just switch it off. He'd bend down, red in the face, *furious*, and yank out the plug. Zaydeh."

"Did he live with you?" Marianne asked. "What about your parents?"

"My parents. Dad worked. Mum worked. He was in charge. I was his little boy. He had a room just off the kitchen. Do you know what my first memory is, the very first. Zaydeh — that's what we called him, it's Jewish for grandfather — wheeling me in my pram to the public gardens. That's what he did every day, every morning, took me to the gardens, first in my pram, then in a pusher, when I was a bit older. Every single day. Which you might think was very nice but let me tell you what he did there. He'd wheel me up to his special bench under his special tree — Zaydeh's Bench, we called it, Zaydeh's Tree, he never sat anywhere else — and then he'd light a cigarette, take out a newspaper, and forgot all about me. He got his newspapers from Palestine, from Israel, a big parcel of them every month. He read every word. He'd read and I'd sit. I was strapped in. I wasn't allowed out. I wasn't allowed to run

on the grass. I wasn't allowed to do anything. Just sit. I sat. And then along would come his friends, three of them, old men from Europe just like zaydeh, in their big overcoats, smelly cigars, shuffling along the gravel path, Mr Altshul, Mr Teitel, I forgot the other one. Zaydeh would put his newspaper away. They would sit and smoke and talk, all morning long. One of them used to spit a lot. Mr Teitel blew his nose with his fingers. On the path. And then rub it with his foot. But first, before they sat down, they would come up to me, crowd around me, pinch my cheeks, poke me, blow cigar smoke in my face. Zaydeh's little boy, they called me. A darling. A little apple. How are you today, Zaydeh's little boy? You love your zaydeh, no? Ah, let me pinch you, you little apple, what a sweetness. When I cried, they laughed. When I screamed, they shuffled away. Leave him, they said, he's too excited. Then they sat down with zaydeh and forgot all about me. They spat. They smoked. They blew their noses. While I just sat there, strapped in, trapped."

Marianne didn't say anything. I took a sip of my wine.

"You can't imagine what a monster he was. He used to shout at my mother. Terrible scenes. Everything she did was wrong. Someone once gave her a little statue, an ornament, to put on the mantelpiece. It was a little cat. Zaydeh spat at it. He was shaking with fury. My mother had to give it away. My father wanted to throw him out of the house. She wouldn't let him. Leave him, she said. He's an old man. The strange thing is, zaydeh had a wife, he was married. She was in Israel. He wrote to her every week. He was always writing. He sent her food parcels all the time, clothes. That's how he spent his pension. I could never understand why he didn't live with her, why he had to live with us. Well, he had an ideal life. My mother used to give him pocket money, he got his cigarettes for nothing from a friend, he never bought clothes. The only things he ever read were those newspapers, and he got them for nothing too. What a wonderful life. Can you blame him for staying?" I didn't look at Marianne. I looked across at the trees. "Well, we got rid of him in the end."

"What do you mean?"

"We sent him back to Israel. Kicked **him** out at last. Well, that's not what my mother told me, she told me zaydeh wanted to go back, he didn't want to die in Australia, and maybe that part of it was true, but the rest wasn't. He didn't want to go. We made him. We were broke. It was as simple as that. We just couldn't afford to keep

him any more. Well, he wanted to be buried in Israel and he was, he is. He died six months after he arrived."

"How old were you then?" Marianne asked.

"Twelve."

The wine was finished, the pate, the cheese. We could eat the apples in the car. Marianne began to clear things away.

"People used to tell me I was like him," I said. "The image, they said, just like your zaydeh. God, I hope not. He was such a bitter man. I hope I'm not like that."

Marianne moved across on the rug, put her arm around me. "Rubbish," she said. "You're you, that's who you are. No one else. And I love you."

She kissed me. She was lovely and hot from the sun. I put my arms around her. We were on our knees on the rug. It was not very comfortable like that. I started to move her sideways. "Wait a minute," she said. She reached behind her to unzip her dress. "I hate having it all bunched up in the middle."

"Here?" I said. "Someone will see us . . . what about the cows?"

Marianne smiled. "Ah, so you admit they're cows," she said.

Her dress fell away.

What did he want from me, what did he want me to be?

Marianne drove. The shadows of trees flicked one after another across the bonnet of the car. The tyres hummed. The road was straight. We swallowed it beneath us. I saw him, in his striped shirt, the shiny collar removed, I saw his thin neck. He was sitting in his room. Smoke from his cigarettes stood against the window. I heard the scratch of his pen. He was wearing his backless leather slippers, no socks. I saw his ankles, his heels, white and thin, naked as bone. His lips clicked dryly as he smoked, as he wrote. Then he turned, saw me, standing in the doorway. Get out! he snapped. Get out of here!

What did he want from me? I felt his cold,

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bony hand. It gripped mine like a vice. He was taking me to the synagogue, to *shul*. It was Saturday morning. He squeezed me next to him on the hard wooden bench, tight against the wall. I could barely move. There was no escape. He opened his prayer book. Here, he said. He pointed with his finger. I watched his finger move slowly down the page, word after word, then the next page, then the next. There was a barmitzvah. I knew the boy. I looked up. Zaydeh jabbed me with a bony elbow. Look in the book! he hissed. I dropped my eyes at once. His long bony finger was brown with nicotine. The nail was yellow. He smelt of pepper, of dust. There was no escape.

He loves you, my mother said. I saw myself running home from school. It was lunch time. He made me soup, sandwiches, hot cocoa, summer and winter, always the same. It was there on the table. He watched me while I ate, his lips opening and closing with those dry clicks. Sit up straight, he said. Eat properly. Eat slower. Don't rush. He didn't eat while I ate. He sat. He watched. When I got out of the door I ran like mad. There was just time. The bell was ringing. I heard it from streets away. Everyone else ate their lunch at school. Once I vomited. It was the cocoa. I told my mother. Why can't I take lunch like everyone else? I shouted. Why do I always have to come home? I vomited! I was sick! I nearly died! I vomited and vomited! He made me nearly die with his lunch! Ssh, my mother said. He'll hear you. Have some respect. Her eyes were anxious, rimmed with dark. He loves you, Leon, she said. You are his boy.

He took me to buy shoes, to the barber, to the

doctor, to the dentist. Everywhere I felt his cold, bony hand. Don't walk so fast! Don't scrape your feet! He cuffed me on the back of the head. Don't swing your arms! His eyes were everywhere I turned. The dry clicking of his lips. The sound of his scratching pen.

There was no escape.

Then out of the blue came a miracle. My mother told me he was going away. I couldn't believe it. When? I said. Leon, she said, you will take a day from school, you will see him off. On the ship. I can't! I shouted. I'm not allowed to miss a day like that. If you miss a day you never catch it up.

I saw him sitting in his room. There were suitcases. His overcoat, his heavy black overcoat, lay across the bed. His walking stick. His hat. Light through the window caught the ends of his beard. The light seemed to shine right through him, through his suit, his shirt, through his thin, bony hands. It shone through the veins in his eyelids, a merciless knife. His eyes were like water. His dry beard pricked my face. I can't go, I said. Good-bye. I ran from the room.

I didn't go. I didn't see him off on the ship. I ran with my friends at school. I saw myself, running. I ran further and further, forbidden places, wherever I wanted. My legs were like pistons. My heart pumped. I ran where no one had ever been before. The sky stretched over me, limitless. I saw the curvature of the world. I was alone, running. I saw his pale, watery eyes. I saw his mouth, opening to speak. I heard that dry clicking, the sound of his lips.

I will hear these sounds forever.

NOEL McLACHLAN

Letter From Ireland

The Poised Toilet Seat

SPEAKER. Cursed be he who values the life above the dream.

VOICES. Amen.

SPEAKER. Cursed be he who builds but does not destroy.

VOICES. Amen.

SPEAKER. Cursed be the eye that sees the heart of a foe.

VOICES. Amen.

Denis Johnston: *The Old Lady Says 'No!'*
Dublin, June 1977

Dear Stephen,

Three months ago today we arrived in Dublin, and clearly, if I'm to fulfil my promise to let you have my farm-fresh impressions of this country, before usage takes the bloom off them, I must delay writing no longer, especially as I have failed once again to keep a diary.

But where to begin? It would be folly after such a short stay to even try to draw up any kind of balance sheet of good and bad things. All that I can confidently offer now is, first and foremost, the reinforced conviction that Dublin will be a very agreeable place in which to live for three years.

The wealth of Georgian (and early Victorian) architecture turned out, when we explored the metropolis for a house, to be even more breathtaking than we had realised. In fact the sheer scale of it puts Dublin well ahead of Bath, London and Edinburgh in the Georgian league, despite the recent deplorable devastation of some of it. Like Bath it also enjoys the *sine qua non* of civilised city living: the ability to see nearby unspoilt hills from the centre. The closeness of a city of nearly one million people to the spectacular, wild and empty Wicklow Mountains is nothing less than a wonder of the western world. "For the Londoner," Brendan Lehane notes in

The Companion Guide to Ireland (1973), "it is as if the Lake District began at Golders Green." For the Sydneysider, one could add, it is as if the Blue Mountains began at Parramatta, and for the Melbournian, as if the Dandenongs rose just beyond Balwyn.

How long the Dublin and Wicklow Mountains survive unspoilt is now a troubling question: as with the Dandenongs the insatiable, outer suburban frontier has already reached their feet. Meanwhile, though our quest for a cottage in the Wicklows (where Ray Lawler lived) or a modest Georgian town house proved fruitless, we *have* found a mews cottage by Bray which combines at least some qualities of both. Only eight miles or so from the Belfield campus of University College, it was first built around 1800, is in the foothills of the clearly visible mountains, in a secluded spot with occasional rabbits, foxes and hedgehogs (and rats) in the garden, and apparently has no social problems more contemporary than the donkeys which the tinker boys from over the way drive onto the estate uninvited, allegedly knocking-off anything which comes to hand on the way. ("Looking for the donkeys", one boy casually declared, when discovered in our neighbor's kitchen and asked what he was doing there.) Our children from the slums of South Melbourne are thriving abundantly in the wide open spaces of Ireland, while their parents savor semi-rural domesticity for the first time in some 25 years. The overgrown garden has been a splendid procession of color through the spring, as much from weeds/wildflowers as from 'cultivated' plants, a democratic wilderness.

As for the Dubliners themselves they are generally, as we know, remarkably cheerful, charming, polite and friendly, whether it is in giving you detailed (and often accurate) directions or simply

stopping you in the street to exclaim on, and share with you, the beauty of the morning. People tend to look you in the face, like country people, rather than askance as Londoners and Melbournians do. True, by Australian standards, they are not excessively hospitable, but this is a poorer community and, even in London and certainly Paris, hospitality these days ends rather than begins at home. And as and when hosts they are, of course, superb. Understandable pride in Dublin's literary tradition is manifest in the Irish Times (a solid sort of combination of the Guardian and the Age) and on RTE radio (which also draws richly on folk music). They also make patriotic gestures to Gaelic though only about 27 per cent of the Irish population are said to be able to speak it. The deference accorded professional status is agreeable, but may be what one Irish Australian here meant when he talked impatiently of "Irish servility".

Comfortable pubs still abound, and bar conversation is often of a high order. I must report that I heard more excellent stories during half an hour after work at the U.C.D. Common Room bar than I probably would in a week at University House, Melbourne. My fears about my own failings as raconteur turn out to be groundless. All one needs to be is a good listener — a role I shall be happy to stick to.

As in Britain tourist-trapping is now a national game/sport/industry and the Irish dream up festivals for everything from pram racing to bachelors. There is one every September in Galway featuring oysters and Guinness, a sublime union we came upon during our first visit to Ireland. But I trust oysters are cheaper there than at Neary's in Chatham Street.

The cost of living in Dublin is even more dreadful than we had bargained for — petrol costs about a pound a gallon, and our Renault 5 cost about £500 more than in London. With inflation racing on at nearly 17% and the paper money visibly fading in value in your hand one occasionally feels fears comparable to those the Germans felt in the 1920's. Good wine is as expensive as whisky, and the cheapest Italian and French reds we make do with are so mediocre that the Cawarra claret we had at dinner with Tom Holland, counsellor at the Australian Embassy, made us quite homesick. Irish haute cuisine was recently the subject of a hilarious, column-long letter in the Irish Times by an acidic English visitor, but at least milk, butter, bread and black pudding are reasonable in price and quality and

the ham and bacon outstanding, even if Irish potatoes are, surprisingly, disappointing.

But enough of this simple yea-saying. Rather than prolong this miscellaneous reportage, all of it wide open to the charge of special pleading, I prefer to concentrate on two simple questions: What difference have these three months made to my understanding of Ireland? And what difference to my understanding of Australia?

The main difference has certainly been an enhanced recognition of the labyrinthine complexities of Irish society and of the consequent dangers of indulging in pat generalisations, except that one. This, I suppose, is really another way of saying what must have been said many times before: that this is pre-eminently a nation of individualists, in which eccentricity is cherished so fondly that one suspects no one is completely concentric. Patrick Kavanagh's aspiration is evidently still widely shared:

If ever you go to Dublin town
In a hundred years or so
Inquire for me in Baggot Street
And what I was like to know.
O he was a queer one
Fol dol the di do,
He was a queer one
I tell you.

My fellow professors in the U.C.D. federation of history departments are not only formidable scholars of great charm and *virtu* but richly idiosyncratic: the chairman has the mien of an old Irish chieftain. I was privately advised when I came to cultivate some eccentricity, and my old, blue, French workman's coat (made in Romania), moleskins and longish hair no doubt stand out somewhat in the college staff restaurant where sober suits predominate, but I freely confess I am out of my class.

Individualism may, indeed, be the key to the apparent paradoxes one continually encounters here. Take what I had supposed to be the supreme unifying fact of the Irish nation: dislike of the British after all the centuries of oppression. According to a survey of some 2,000 Dubliners the English are, in reality, the favorite foreigners of the Irish, well ahead of Northern Irishmen. Of course, "favorite" may mean no more than "least disliked" or reflect a canny consciousness of the contribution of English tourism to the Irish economy, but it is all the same hard to reconcile with the stereotype. Despite the E.E.C. (which has

certainly reduced the traditional dependence) and all the other foreign investment the Irish economy is still intricately tied to the British — even the brogues I saw in a shoe shop the other day were made in Northants, and the connexion evidently generates a whole range of attitudes, favorable and unfavorable. The hush which fell in the conversation when I went into a suburban pub one night and ordered a drink suggested Dubliners are still sensitive to non-Irish accents, yet British television is very popular, and the proposal that the second Irish channel should be B.B.C.1. attracted surprising support. (The present one, government owned, is not too bad, but, horror, carries ads., as does RTE radio.) Anglo-Irish culture seems to co-exist pretty contentedly in Dublin: when Gawain and I looked in at the Ireland versus Australia match at the ground of the Leinster Cricket Club (1852) in Rathmines, an inner suburb, you would have sworn you were at a game in an exceptionally pretty English village. Though RTE television ignored live coverage of the jubilee celebrations it did give generous time to the match both days. (The Australians, incidentally, were very lackadaisical, and I shall be surprised if they do well in the First Test.)

Other expressions of individualism abound. The most dramatic are to be seen every day in Dublin streets. At first encounter Irish driving is likely to make any Australian feel at home — often here, as in Melbourne, I become uneasily aware of being the only driver on a crowded dual carriage-way sticking to the speed limit, and Garda cars are as rare here as police cars there. But it must be conceded that the Irish outshine us in highway lawlessness, as well as central city congestion. I have never witnessed, anything so suicidal (and homicidal) as women with prams suddenly plunging across O'Connell Street just in front of speeding double-decker buses, and I have seen more crash relics here (and broken down cars at weekends) than in any other city I've been in. No doubt these quaint customs have something to do with the fact that *less than comprehensive* car insurance from the Private Motorists' Protection Association (*sic*) cost me some £300.

A related and exasperating habit we encountered during our week on a farm in County Kildare (near Joyce's Jesuit boarding school Clongoweswood): the popular pastime among country boys of turning signposts the wrong way — perhaps a symptom of sexual frustration happily not shared by Australian kids. (It would be interesting to know the incidence of rape here.) "Physical force

and violence, and the threat of them against persons and property to achieve political and social ends, has been a recurring feature of life in Ireland for centuries", observes *Violence in Ireland*, the report of an inter-church working party published last year. There are fascinating issues to be explored here related to the fact that, even after the establishment of an efficient system of police in 1836, violence and crime in general remained at "what was undoubtedly a higher level than in any other area of western Europe" (Galen Broeker, *Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland 1812-36 (1970)*). But in Dublin the only trace of violence I have seen was the huge glass panel at the bus shelter outside University College, which had mysteriously been shattered, and I have not encountered any aggressive Irish drunks here as I have in London and Melbourne. Better protection of old people against muggers *has* figured in the election campaign, but that problem is hardly unique to Ireland.

Bus queues are pretty orderly in some parts of the city, but having spent an hour trying to get on buses one evening outside the college I gave up and took a taxi — that was taking individualism too far I thought! Another annoying trait is the habit of leaving names or numbers (often both) off houses; even in College many staff leave their names off their doors. Whether this secretiveness can be construed as individualism I'm not sure, but it's certainly very strange.

So is the gradual realisation, after all the blarney, that, though tradesmen and salesmen will promise you anything with enormous charm, that certainly does not mean it will be carried out. Striking the balance between exasperation and resignation takes a little practice, but I am reassured to find that even the most devout Hibernophiles among the Irish Australians here share our irritation. Certainly it's best to keep one's temper. "We make haste slowly in Ireland", our landlord said with a smile the other day, delivering the lease three months after we had moved in. "Yes", I said as levelly as I could. Occasionally, in despair, I am moved to wonder not so much at British arrogance as at the sheer lack of imagination which ever made them suppose they could govern the Irish.

Gaelic football displays the same genius: though I know Ian Turner denies any connexion it seems to me that Australian Rules is much the same game plus what I can now recognise as Anglo-Saxon discipline. Certainly the scope for individual and glory is much greater in the Irish version. A very different expression of respect for

individual effort is evident in this month's fascinating election campaign: several Labour Party aspirants, having failed to win endorsement, are standing as Independents *without being expelled from the Party*. In one case, the official Labour candidate publicly wished the unofficial one 'the best of luck'. Imagine that happening in the A.L.P.! At first sight, the small following the party — the oldest of them all — attracts is inexplicable, but I'm told the relatively conservative and Catholic working class is the short answer. By origin as you may know the two major parties (Fine Gael and Fianna Fail) are distinguished by their attitudes (or their predecessors') to the 1921 Treaty, but these past weeks they have been trying to outbid each other in much the same shameless way as parties in Australia, and the widespread cynicism evident among voters is also familiar. It was Yeats who, long ago, offered this advice:

A STATESMAN is an easy man,
He tells his lies by rote . . .
So stay at home and drink your beer
And let your neighbours vote . . .

What *is* clear from the Coalition policy is that the Labour Party has failed to persuade its relatively conservative partner to embark on the radical reform of the social services urgently needed. So one of the least attractive forms of Irish individualism — begging in the streets — is likely to continue, irrespective of whether the beggars are tinker children, down-at-heel drunks or old-fashioned charity workers on one of the never-ending appeal days. [Later — The landslide victory for Lynch and Fianna Fail had been predicted by an Irish Times poll at the outset of the campaign, but still seemed to astonish everybody. Given the inflation and unemployment rates I would have found any other result astonishing, and there were many echoes of the last Australian election: it was also a foretaste of the almost certain fate of the Callaghan government in London, which seems hell-bent on a Gadarene descent. Conor Cruise O'Brien wasn't the only Minister to lose his seat.]

Individualism may likewise account for the extraordinary of plays like O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars*, the fiftieth anniversary production of which I saw at the Abbey in May last year. It was a splendid production with Siobhan McKenna and Cyril Cusack in the cast and deserved the ardent reception it received. Yet this play attacks the most venerated event of modern Irish history

— the Easter Rebellion, the original production created a storm, and it was after a performance of the play in 1951 that the back-stage of the Abbey burned down. Why such indulgence now? It could be attributed to the cooling of old frames — in the same way that University College now has no inhibitions about claiming Joyce as a distinguished student — and Irish ability to divorce appreciation of fine theatre from private prejudice. But it probably also bespeaks the whole variety of public attitudes to 1916, something easily forgotten, though Conor Cruise O'Brien has reminded us that on that Easter Monday there is some reason to believe the main focus of Dublin middle class interest was not the G.P.O., but Fairyhouse Racecourse. There is an analogy here with the Gallipoli legend which I touched on in my Anzac Day public lecture: in both cases a small minority were able to exact recognition of their monopoly of patriotism, but only in Ireland has *national* continued to overlay and abstract *class* consciousness for better or worse.

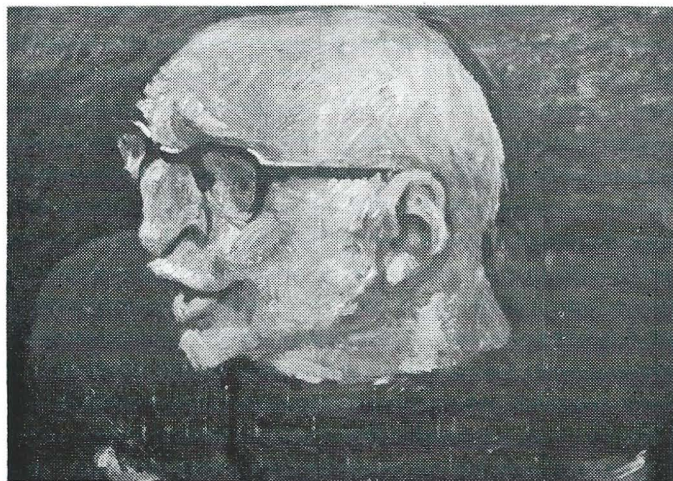
Similar factors could explain the popularity of Denis Johnston's *The Old Lady Says 'No!'* which we saw at the Abbey in March. It seems so modern that it is astonishing to think it was first performed at the Gate Theatre in 1929 after being returned (under its original title *Shadow-dance*) by the Abbey with a note attached: 'The Old Lady Says "No!"' The Old Lady was, of course, Lady Gregory, but in the play she is a timeless Irish hag with fewer elements of the Shan Van Vocht than of Yeats's Crazy Jane, surviving and, like most of the other characters, virtually oblivious of the historic struggle for nationhood. It is a fantasy about Robert Emmet — or the actor playing him — surveying that subsequent fate of the Irish cause, and the bitter words in the epigraph above are his. Having brought back with me a cherished print of Emmet (which I thought at the St Kilda auction years ago, it was a serendipitous choice for our first play, though I now realise the heinousness of the detail that someone has painted his coat blue instead of green — symptomatic of blurred Irish Australian memories?)

(Johnston, incidentally, is still alive and, I gather, living in Dublin, quite a survivor himself; but not so old as the 78-year old Master of the Bray Hunt who (Frank Martin tells me) was warned in 1912, after a serious fall, to give up hunting if he wanted to live long, and still rides out. Simple notions of Irish mortality have to reckon with such tough old practitioners of longe-

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vity. It would be interesting to have — for Ireland as for England and Australia — a class breakdown of life expectation during the past century and a half. One novel statistical fact which *is* available is that there is now, after all the centuries of diaspora, net *immigration*, not emigration, to which, of course, the McLachlans are modestly and temporarily contributing. But unemployment is still around 8.4 per cent., and not long ago at dinner I heard one young Irish academic wife declaring that it was ridiculous for young people to claim they had a *right* to a job in their own country.

But the fundamental vital statistic remains the spectacular decline of the Irish population, even though it was overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, from a little over eight million in 1841 to less than four and a half million in 1901 — “the only country which has had a declining population during the last century”, Ruth Dudley Edwards observes in her *Atlas of Irish History* (1973), and a trend only reversed during the past decade or so. How many died from famine during the 1840s will never be known, but 1.6 million deaths were recorded during that decade. Anyone wishing to understand Anglo-Irish relations could well start with the appalling suffering buried in these formidable figures.)

But, to get back to Irish individualism, it was George Russell (“A.E.”), hero of the Gaelic League, who asserted the right to national non-conformity in his poem “On behalf of some Irishmen not followers of tradition”:

They call us aliens, we are told,
Because our wayward visions stray
From that dim banner they unfold,
The dreams of worn-out yesterday.

After much that is pure O’Dowd it ends splendidly:

No blazoned banner we unfold —
One charge alone we give to youth,
Against the sceptred myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth.

How widely held is the “golden heresy” today? That depends on where you look. Exasperation at the constraints of Catholic Ireland drove Joyce, O’Casey and Beckett all into self-imposed exile — and artistic revenge — many years ago. Arguably Irish individualism was then only the icing on the heavy brack of rigid social conformity. Even now there may well be some validity in Austin Clarke’s devastating description of it as a land

. . . where every woman’s son
Must carry his own coffin and believe,
In dread, all that the clergy teach the young.

In *Is Ireland Dying?* (1968) Michael Sheehy argued that Jansenism has had a stultifying effect on Irish culture: “Nothing so distresses the Irish clergy as a vital belief in man — unless it is disbelief in God”.

Yet his book *was* reprinted by the Catholic Book Club, and Irish culture strikes me as far from moribund. The yeast of change *is* palpably at work here, even if its pace is snail-slow. Although, for example, I heard Anthony Cronin on RTE radio one Sunday morning recently defending Casement in conventional anti-British terms, as if B. L. Reid’s *The Lives of Roger Casement* (1976) had never been written (his right to be homosexual wasn’t even considered, since the issue was never addressed by name), my first meeting of the Academic Council at U.C.D. yesterday (13 June) approved the constitution of a student Gay Society without discussion or a vote. Although a list of 21 books banned by the Censorship of Publications Board was published in March, at a glance most would probably have been treated in much the same way in Australia (though I suppose Henry Miller’s *The Rosy Crucifixion* may have slid in by now). And, though RTE television observes the Angelus at six o’clock every evening, it is now (thank Aengus) ignored at U.C.D. lectures where the whole class had formerly been expected to stand for a minute’s prayer, but where only a small minority of staff are these days priests or nuns. Still, I don’t recall going to an academic party in Australia where a family Bible stood open on a stand in the dining room . . .

Happily sectarian feeling seems slight. That, Catholics assure me with a laugh, is because the Protestant minority is so small. Even so, it was a remarkably statesmanlike gesture of self-denial that St Patrick’s and other lovely old churches were not claimed back by the Roman Church at independence: it seems both unfair and ironical that the Protestants should have most of the oldest (as well as emptiest) churches. As in Italy an overwhelmingly Catholic society has its exotic charms and spectacles, including the infant armies of little, white-gowned brides of Christ to be seen walking proudly off to church with their parents for Confirmation these past several weekends. For one thing, the clergy are relatively relaxed — and often surprisingly broad-minded. When I was here last year I went to a play at the

Gate Theatre about an early ex-hermit Pope who is first exploited and then poisoned by his successor who is left firmly in power at the end. The author was a priest, a U.C.D. graduate, and the priests and nuns who made up a large part of the audience clearly enjoyed it hugely, laughing loudly at such lines as (I think from the poisoner pope): “Well, if God didn’t exist we should certainly have to invent him!”

In fact, the Church is sometimes more liberal than the State. Church annulments, for instance, are always recognised by the State, and, though I understood that Miranda was to be excused religious instruction at the National school she attends, it seems she has been subjected to a good deal, including prayers and hymns in class. One day she was provoked into exclaiming: “Well, Lucy Smythe doesn’t believe in God,” with the result that Lucy, the 11-year old daughter of our nearest neighbor, was summoned before the headmistress and apparently threatened with expulsion for influencing young girls. In reality the influence, if anything, was probably the other way, and the conversation to which Miranda had alluded, having taken place at home, was none of the school’s business, anyway. Happily, by the time this happened, we had already decided to take Miranda away from a school in which she is in a composite class of about 41 with children up to two years younger than she, quite a test of her natural ebullience. Next year she will join Gawain at St Gerard’s, an outstandingly good private (Catholic) school where he is in a class of 25, is excused formal religious instruction as a matter of course and Irish (though we wouldn’t mind him learning that), and even has another lanky Australian in his class; but it will be financially crippling. Apparently it was incomprehensible to her teacher that Miranda might be neither Catholic nor Protestant, just as everyone seems to find it quite incredible that I don’t spell my name the Irish way and don’t claim any Irish blood.

But the present limits to Church tolerance have recently been disturbingly demonstrated by the sacking of two staff at St Patrick’s College, Mavnooth, a constituent college of the National University, apparently for having laicised themselves and or written mildly controversial articles. This reflects no doubt its origins as a theological college — we attended an excellent choral concert in the chapel there during the week we spent in County Kildare — but the most shocking thing is that the trustees have treated the welter of

criticism they have attracted with the utmost silent contempt.

Individualism clearly also exists in attitudes to the North. The inferno across the border — more people have been killed there than in any episode of Irish politics since 1798 — looms large in the Dublin newspapers, but it seems to impinge less obtrusively on the consciousness of Dubliners than I had expected. Early in this month’s election campaign an Irish Times poll suggested that only 2.3 per cent of people questioned thought Northern Ireland the most important issue, though 20 per cent did think it “important”. During the Portlaoise prison hunger strike I took Gawain to the grand final of the National Football League — our first Gaelic game. Before it started, some youths climbed onto the field and mounted quite an effective demonstration in support of the prisoners, but one was tripped by a Dublin player and another grabbed and thumped and handed to a policeman. When this happened a substantial number of spectators applauded, and I subsequently discovered that the Dublin footballers concerned were both stars.

So much for national solidarity on that subject. From Australia it had seemed almost self-evident — distance as usual lending political enchantment — that the British Army should get out of Ireland as quickly as possible, but whenever I have said as much here I have been quickly assured that the only result possible is not a sobering moment of truth but a bloodbath. The subject usually looms in the background, not the forefront, of conversation, partly perhaps because it is so depressing, but even people from the North (the only ones I have heard get excited when it is discussed) usually hasten to stress that they only want an announcement of a time-limit — say withdrawal within ten years.

That may well be the only solution, but I sense that many southerners are none too keen on disturbing the relative stability and tranquility of politics here by bringing in any of the six northern counties. One Catholic farmer I met in County Kildare solemnly warned me against visiting Wolfe Tone’s supposed grave at Bodenstown on his birthday when, he said, busloads of “wild men from the North” descend on the shrine and things can get rather nasty. Certainly, as Mary Holland pointed out in the Observer articles on the Church in the Republic last year, the privileged position accorded it and its dogma will need to be expunged from the Constitution first if there is ever to be any prospect of most Ulstermen abandoning primeval fears. In *Towards a New Ireland*, an

interesting study of the problems of unification, Garret Fitzgerald, Foreign Minister in the Cosgrove Coalition, argued that these changes could easily be made, but that was in 1972, and significantly little progress has been made in the direction of secularisation since. The fate of the latest attempt to liberalise the law relating to annulment (not even divorce) is hardly encouraging, and the policies of neither the Coalition nor Fianna Fail in the election even mentions annulment, let alone other plans for secularising the Constitution. The prospects of unification therefore seem depressingly remote.

The efforts of Conor Cruise O'Brien to bring the North — and Fianna Fail's internal differences on the subject — to the forefront of the campaign do not seem to have been very effective, and one suspects most people would prefer to leave it discreetly in the background. But he probably *has* succeeded in increasing the hatred with which the I.R.A. and other extreme republican groups view him. "C. C. O'Brine is a traitour" read a sign on a wall in the Stillorgan Road not long ago, perhaps from the same camp as the "Brits out Peace in" slogans all over the place. "I call him the hyphenated whore from Howth", one middle-class man from the North told me with a laugh in a pub not long ago.

O'Brien may be "a queer one", but he is certainly a man of extraordinary courage. Ironically his best protection is probably memories of the danger of making martyrs bequeathed by the Easter Rebellion — the event whose position in the national pantheon he has so embarrassingly challenged: "we must condemn all murderers but we have a special duty to condemn murders committed in our name", he told the Galway conference of the Labour Party. His position is the antithesis of that expressed in the curses at the top of this letter, and which I think of every time I read of another assassination in the North.

During last year's bomb scares in Dublin I am told that on one occasion word was received that there was a bomb in the boot of a Volkswagen parked outside the G.P.O. in O'Connell Street. The army officer endeavoring to delicately pick the lock on the boot had to work through the cheerful and noisy distractions of the crowd which quickly gathered. Boys climbed on the roof of the car and leaning over said: "Can we see the bomb, mister?" When the exasperated officer told them to get off the father of one fiercely defended his son's right to be where he was. In the end the boot was opened and apparently there was no bomb, but the story highlights the fact that

violence like that which occurs every day in Belfast still lies outside the experience of Dubliners and accordingly has some curiosity value. The truth is that Belfast doesn't seem much closer here than it does from London. When we went on a Dublin Historical Association excursion to serene sites in Counties Meath and Louth one Sunday recently it was quite a shock to reflect, when we were at Mollitor and Monasterboice, that we were actually in the same county as the one where the British army officer had been done to death a few weeks before.

That brings me, at last, to the poised toilet seat. By the genius of Irish plumbing our seat declines to remain vertical like toilet seats all over the world, but with true Irish eccentricity falls back several degrees and hangs poised in extremely unstable equilibrium while one pees — occasionally descending to cut off the flow, if not one's manhood. That could be construed as a homely symbol of the place the North occupies in one's thinking here. A threat but not a very serious one. I am much more likely to be a casualty of Irish driving than of Irish idealism. Mistaken identity is, I suppose, always a possibility, and I find myself making excuses for not wearing the raincoat I innocently bought at a Moss Bros. sale two years ago and only recognised when I got home to be a trenchcoat! I still think living here is probably no more dangerous than riding on Bourke Street trams, but the latter *have* killed people . . . But, more personally, at 49 I confront the unease of middle age and the much closer prospect that some time the toilet seat of life will slam down and flush me away: Catholic Dublin is an excellent place for a case-hardened Humanist to clarify his attitude to life and death, and welcome the exercise.

What, finally, of Irish attitudes to Australia and the differences these three months have made to my understanding of Australian history? I have no illusions. Though Australian programs ("Seven Little Australians", a repeat run) occasionally turn up on television, and though my arrival was recorded and I was briefly interviewed, the attendance at my three public lectures averaged 40. But at least this reflects a healthy provincialism rather than the compulsive boredom Australia seems to arouse in Londoners.

On the other hand my sense of the profundity of Irish influences in Australian history has certainly been intensified. I begin with the advantage of liking Ireland and the Irish, and in a sense an Australian *does* feel at home here in a way that

Americans, burdened with the work ethic, can't. All three share (in contrast to the English) an addiction to Christian names, but only the Australians and Irish also share a traditional dislike of police and authority and, alas, a long history of male dominance.

Certainly my respect for the secular state and a secular education system is already enhanced (even though Northern Ireland has both), but one glimpses here the manifold advantages Australia missed three-quarters of a century ago by not attaining complete independence then. Irish culture is ancient and indigenous in a way Australian culture can't be for several centuries, but the Irish, with less than one-third of the Australian population, are taken much more seriously in international affairs and enjoy the quiet pride of unambiguous sovereignty. Even when the British Army does leave Ireland it will still be just across the Irish Sea as a constant spur to national consciousness. By contrast the British Army left Australia in 1870 and that spur with it.

Two passages had to be left out of my piece in the Anti-Jubilee Number of the *New Statesman*. One was the simple statement: "If the British want her that is their business, but her conspicuous great wealth and the shrill snobbery that surrounds her run clean contrary to Australian egalitarian tradition". That was easier to write in Republican Dublin than in the fantastic Royalist hysteria of London. The other passage concerned the transition to an Australian republic:

What if Joh Bjelke-Petersen in Queensland or the Liberal-National Party coalition in mineral-rich Western Australia refuse to take part in the reforms? What if either attempts to secede from the federation? The answer in both cases would be an historic moment of truth simply resolved by the Australian army, probably without bloodshed, and the belated recognition that the Australian national now exists in its own right and no longer depends on the grudging consent of constituent states. Like the Queen state sovereignty is an anachronistic 19th century relic Australia could well do without.

That statement is not inconsistent with the increasing respect I feel for Scotch and Welsh nationalism. Queenslanders and Western Australians can hardly claim ancient cultures distinct from the rest of the continent. But if, as I hope, the Australian republican movement now goes on from strength to strength, Irish history since independence will repay careful study. It was, after all, the first Commonwealth country since 1776 to become a republic, and there is much in that experience from which Australian republicans can draw heart and inspiration.

Thanks for the letter and for agreeing to keep an eye on my books. Our love to Nita and the kids, and remember us to Ian and other friends. Did *Meanjin* win the cricket this year?

Yours for the Republic,
Noel

BARRY OAKLEY

Visions of Macoboy

On a seat in the courtyard of the Tower of London, six weeks since he'd left his home city, in a warm wind that tumbled paper and ruffled the feathers of the ravens, Macoboy had a vision of his wife. A cleaner in chapped leathers had halted his apparatus of bins and brooms to say that he knew he was Australian, it was on account of his fresh complexion. It was said loudly enough for some American tourists to hear and as Macoboy owned up with a nod the cleaner suddenly whacked him on the back. At that moment, as if he'd coughed it up, his wife appeared to him, lying in a park with a man. The man was on his back and his wife was partly across him, looking down. Was it a bearded face she gazed at so fondly? He tried to bring the picture back all the way home on the bus, but by Camberwell Green it was gone.

Three days later he was visited again. He was drinking behind the Anchor on a platform that extended out over the mudflats of the river. It was a dreary place and he was with Frank, a dreary friend, who had once fallen in love with Macoboy's sister, and by the way he'd dogged him over the past six weeks, hadn't had an encounter with either sex since. Frank taught drama at a comprehensive school, despised his students, and dreamed of having his own theatre where he'd do Shakespeare, not in raincoats or sandpits or Prussian uniforms but in straightforward doublet and hose. Frank was pointing to the spot along Bankside where the Globe Theatre had once been — but what Macoboy saw in that humid twilight was a couple walking arm in arm, and the woman had the willowy blondness of his wife.

What was happening? Was his loneliness starting to extrude visions, or was it a telecommunication from the other side of the earth? Why this jealousy about a fantasy when he was

supposed to be so indifferent to the real? The morning after his second vision, Macoboy decided to phone his wife. It was night-time in Melbourne. Where's your mother? he said to his son. She was, well, out. Out? At the, um, theatre. Who with? Silence, the cable filling with electronic winds and waters. He asked again, careful to sound off-hand. With that man, his son thought, that she'd met at Adult Education classes.

That man was Norman, who taught her art. He'd never met him, but knew him well. He knew about his beard, his soft voice, his sensitive hands, his habit of talking to himself when his students were busy as their sketches. If you find him so damned appealing, Macoboy had roared at her in one of their climactic arguments, then damn well go to him, go on. I just might do that, she'd roared back. But if he was as indifferent as he claimed, why now this unease? Were his visions disturbing him with too much rather than too little information, signalling that he could be losing her for good?

Macoboy was supposed to be engaging in sabbatical research on Cornish migrations to Australia during the various mining booms, but he'd done almost nothing. He did have eight months to go but that was exactly what made him afraid. How could he cope, when during these first few weeks an insidious languor had taken hold, sending him plodding heavy-footed round his rooms like Neil Armstrong on the moon?

All London seemed to be conspiring against him. The shopkeepers mocked his accent, the milkman misread his notes, he was fighting a West Indian plumber over a repair bill, four different men had come to read his gas meter, the newsagent couldn't keep the Guardian for him, the lady next door said he'd have to clip his

holly hedge, fifty windows overlooked his grubby washing and behind his floral bedroom wallpaper, maybe flushed out by the unusual May heat, he could hear the scufflings and squeakings of rats.

He had his third visitation at the Constable Exhibition at the Tate. Because the foreground of every landscape was filled with bobbing, peering English heads he'd moved on to where the crowd was thinner only to find that at No. 84, there was a message. *Two Studies From The Life*. On the left was a naked man and on the right, discreetly divided, a naked woman. The man was in a strange straddling pose, as if he'd just jumped down into the frame. The woman, profiled, head down, had an air of submission, sadness. Perhaps because Constable rarely did naked figures, the pair seemed surprised and ashamed, as though they'd suddenly stripped. They were on separate panels and yet linked by whirlwinds of black and white chalk. They looked nothing like his wife or Norman, yet the way they were united across a divide suggested an unwilling but irresistible love.

That night, sitting in his blue Marks & Spencer underpants in sultriness that rivalled anything he'd endured in Australia, he rang home again, catching her unprepared in what she described as a sharp May morning, full of frost and sunshine. Yes, she had been out with the accused but no, they had not yet been to bed. Macoboy felt she was lying, but the air of enlightened tolerance he always affected made interrogation impossible, so after checking on his mail, his car and his kids he had to hang up. Some trick in the cable had made his voice echo back to him, making his questions ring back louder than her replies.

What he needed right then was cold beer and warm company, but the relentless Frank was all he had left. Jack had been his only other London contact, but even there something had gone wrong. Jack was an old friend from his secondary teaching days who was now a T.V. director with the B.B.C. Jack was going to be his avenue to literary London. After a lunch at Shepherd's Bush they'd exchanged phone numbers, but that was a month back and he hadn't heard since.

He'd had his first funny feelings in that restaurant. Jack had talked all the time about famous writers, all of whom were apparently his friends—and the more he did so the more Australia receded and dissolved. Macoboy started to feel unreal, from nowhere, so that when he finally got to his feet he could have floated up weightless

to the green plastic grapebunches hanging from the beams.

Abandoned from above, plagued from below—the neighbors, the persistent plumber, illiterate milkman, gloomy Frank—he retreated inwards to a region between the morning papers and evening T.V., living on apparitions and packaged pies. He saw the *Girl Before a Mirror* motif printed in blue on his wife's nightie of white cheesecloth and recalled Norman's passion for Picasso. He saw them walking by a river, meeting secretly at exhibitions, standing mute before *Guernica*, poised in a world of love where it was always May, always morning. And every evening, somewhere far above him, Jack hung suspended, with his Lithuanian wife, entertaining, entertaining, in a terrace by a square. He would be sitting on a park bench below their window, while tiny sharp pieces of talk and music and clinking glasses would come down like diamantes to torment him through the elms.

On the eighth day of heat and fevers, the thermostat on the gas boiler started to misbehave. The tiny dial clicked and glowed, the heat in the house came on and off. He rang another plumber but he couldn't come before the weekend. Out! He had to get out! But where? How pouched and pale he looked, how undernourished, how overgrown! A haircut, that's what he needed!

He wanted a plain, simple haircut and walked half London looking for a plain, simple hairdresser that would do it. It was the hottest May day in London since 1940. Cars broke down, kids bathed in the Trafalgar fountain, and a bus driver, so he read in the paper, overcome by the heat, shouted he'd seen Jesus and gave the day's takings to his passengers. In Soho, too hot to walk any more, he descended some stairs to an air-conditioned barber's shop, and found himself in an infra-red pit. Under a vermilion light, in the middle of crimson drapes and leathers, an unsmiling Japanese girl waited for him by a chair of brass. Rock music was playing softly. The entrance to a bordello? A place of geisha massage? The girl's look of total indifference led him on.

Just a trim all over, he said. He had to repeat it. He was enfolded in crimson and tilted too far back. He saw himself distorted in a ceiling lamp, red and decapitated, sprawled back on an operating table in a cape of blood. There was a Deep Purple track playing, a favorite of his son's, a boy and girl moaning their way to climax. He

was trapped here, unable to move, forced to listen to his wife's secret sounds, while someone steadily clipped away at his hair.

He refused pomades, oils, sets, shampoos, freed himself before the girl had finished, paid an absurdly high price and left. In front, blocking his way to the bus, were the oppressions of Soho. Bare-chested touts lounged in archways surrounded by colour pictures of naked women, their open mouths and legs calling to him, their flesh a pornographic, dressed-poultry blue. He was walking a gauntlet along a footpath that was soft and sticky to his shoes, with the sounds of skin-flicks in his ears and above it all, on top of the Windmill, a huge Venus presiding, with a back-

side so swollen it seemed about to explode. His wife's erotic awakening seemed to saturate the city. He must go home, not to Camberwell Green but to Melbourne, he must leave this sweaty underside and clear the suitor from the place.

Late that night, after he'd done some packing and some drinking and was nodding off to sleep, he heard Frank knocking, he knew the nervous rhythm of the tap. It was himself calling to himself, the rejected coming to claim its own, with the urgent staccato rappings of someone trapped in a sunken ship. Though the heat was overpowering he turned to the wall, put his head under the blanket and waited for a time that seemed interminable for the sounds to go away.

RECORDS OF THE VICTORIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY

The Victoria Archaeological Survey, an agency of the Ministry for Conservation, Melbourne, is concerned with the management, documentation and investigation of Aboriginal sites in Victoria, and as such makes important contributions to the Australian prehistory. The Survey communicates this information and publishes the results of on-going research in a new journal called *Records of the Victorian Archaeological Survey*. There have been five issues to date. Associated working papers and detailed reports relating to Victorian prehistory and ethnography make up the body of this journal and while it is meant to be a principal publication for archaeologists working for the Survey, it is an important means of disseminating information to the public at large. The Survey is concerned that there should be a greater awareness of our Aboriginal heritage, and that the community should recognise and understand that there are a vast number of Aboriginal sites in Victoria that are in need of protection, preservation and study. Too often sites are destroyed unwittingly and it is our aim to educate and produce a continuing dialogue with the public. Our journal, therefore, is a means of describing and communicating the results of our research, and by this means we hope to encourage people to participate in our programmes. Field staff from the Survey have found that information received from the public has been of great assistance and has often led to the discovery of very important sites.

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The journal is published from time to time, and the cost of each edition varies though they rarely exceed \$A2.00. People who wish to obtain copies and/or information should write to:

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Records of the Victorian Archaeological Survey,
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These people will be added to our mailing list and as each issue becomes available, they will be notified.

BARBARA GILES

Who Reads Poetry?

A Reply to Michael Dugan

Michael Dugan's despairing question "Who reads the stuff," and his figure of one thousand (two hundred on bad days) fire me to a rejoinder.

I am reminded of Peter Pan's call to the children to save Tinker Bell.

As I did when I was seven, I answer "Yes. I believe."

I believe there is a sizable audience for poetry. I'd like to ask first why Michael excludes from his count those who write and those who teach poetry. It is rather like saying that those who play football, and those who coach, should not be numbered among its fans.

My impulse was to ask the first hundred people I met if they read poetry, and I may do that yet, this being an age which believes in statistics.

However, my impressions, my intuitions are admissible as evidence. With twice as many years to my credit as Michael, and having lived for much of this time among non-writers, I am sure that there are many people who read poetry. Not as many buy it as should, I'll grant you that, they borrow it, read it in the papers and in magazines, listen to it at readings, on air, on record. Listening must, I feel, equate with reading, perhaps with a plus mark for effort.

I'll begin with my parents, who never wrote a line, but who read and recited poetry to us in our childhood, and who bought us books. On my eighth birthday I came downstairs to find a small pile of poetry books. (Have you given your children any books of poetry lately? Possibly you have been looking only on the children's shelves in bookshops, though you'll find Nonsense there, that excellent step to Parnassus.)

I'll continue with my teachers, the people I have taught with, my fellow students, the students I have taught.

I'll call on my library, which is continually

buying books of verse. Unless you happen to see a new one on the day it is first put on the shelves, you could be pardoned for thinking they kept no recent poetry, for from then till the day the book falls apart, it will seldom return to the shelf, being picked from bin or trolley on its way back.

I'll quote my non-literary acquaintances. They continually comment on the poems printed in newspapers. They are sometimes puzzled, I'll admit, and want to know if they must take what they read there as exemplary of the best that is being written, but they are reading the poems, and thinking about what is written.

As Michael says, the Australian poet is well provided with outlets for publication. I incline to think that to some extent this militates against reading, on the principle that bad money drives out good. It is easy to buy a little book of verse at a small price, and this is just the volume that is likely to be bad, immature or inaccessible verse, and very off-putting to the inexperienced buyer. It is not so easy to buy good poetry except in anthologies, and one has to be sure of one's judgement before risking, say \$8.95 on a large collection of one man's verse. There should be more small attractively produced volumes of poetry by our best poets. Their verse is not well marketed, and is expected to succeed against odds of dull covers and no publicity.

I'm convinced that Michael is wrong, and that many people are reading "the stuff". But how to prove it? Shall we have Peter Pan Couchman cry to the (selected) masses, "Do you believe in Poetry?"

Or must I go on my projected opinion survey? Maybe when the weather is better . . . I think, however, that Michael has forgotten the sifting effect of time. Hasn't it always been true that much of what is written is not read?

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GRAHAM ROWLANDS **Anne Elder: Poet**

I

I had hoped that Australia had passed the stage when poets had to die without honor in their own time and land. Not so. Anne Elder was born in Auckland, New Zealand, in January 1918, and died on 23 October, 1976, having lived all but her first three years in Melbourne — and without honor in her own time. In fact, almost unrecognized as the magnificent poet she was. I confidently predict, however, that she will not remain without honor in the annals of Australian literature.

It is of course excellent that Michael Dransfield published three volumes of poetry, including two simultaneously, in his brief lifetime. The first was widely acclaimed. It is excellent that Xavier Herbert lived to see the hardback and paperback publication of his grand opus and to accept an honorary doctorate from the University of Queensland. Excellent again that people have been able to ignore the often corny and sexist jokes in some of Frank Hardy's writings and serialize *Power Without Glory* (1950) on television, lavishing praise on *But The Dead Are Many* (1975). Why should not primary, secondary and tertiary students be familiar with Judith Wright's poems? Why should not David Williamson's plays be staged overseas and turned into film? And why should not Patrick White have received the Nobel Prize? Yet it is still possible for a magnificent writer to die almost unacclaimed.

The bluntest fact about Anne Elder's writing life was that she wrote nearly all of her poems-for-publication in the last decade of her life. Indeed the time-span is even shorter than that. Although she was able to revise between 1970 and 1976, after her two heart attacks (the first in 1970, the second in 1971) she found poems

difficult to write. This means that there was one intense creative burst, 1967-1971.

From 1968 until her death Elder was often published in the Australian, in Quadrant and to a lesser extent in Southern Review — a select trio, the last having an exclusively academic audience. A number of factors coalesced to ensure that Elder's audience would be smaller than may otherwise have been the case. Nothing could have been more antithetical to her poetic aims than the rise of underground poetry publishing in roneoed and rather scruffy mini-magazines (the 1967-1970 Carlton poetry push), unless it were the feminist magazines of the 1972-1975 kind. Insofar as Elder knew about this underground, she avoided it like the plague. This meant that she cut herself off from a group of young people who were genuinely interested in poetry. In response to an invitation to participate in a panel discussion on poetry and politics, she replied (1973): "I would never vote for a Labor Government because I instinctively shy clear of the brute masses." When anthologized in Kate Jennings' *Mother I'm Rooted* (1975) Anne Elder expressed her "horror" and "mortification", and said she would not have submitted had she known the book's purpose. She did not like words like "fuck", and she was "disgusted" by the Lesbian wing of feminism. She also liked to be addressed as "Mrs".

Anne Elder was imbued with a mixture of humility and pride on the issue of publication. She did not work at it, thinking that talent (if she possessed any) would win through in the end. If only things were so simple! This almost-fatalistic attitude may not do a young writer any harm; such is not the case for a writer who developed and perfected her talent in her late forties

and fifties. She was hyper-sensitive about rejection-slips; could sound nonchalant about the size of her readership, initially *disliking* paperbacks. Moreover, rather than initiating happenings, she tended to wait to be invited to join poetry groups or workshops and to read her work at small soirées in bookshops and in other venues around Melbourne.

Given the limited choice of established magazines and newspapers to which Elder submitted, she achieved a considerable rate of acceptance in her last years. The story was otherwise with book publication and with reviews. When she submitted *For The Record* to Angus and Robertson, Douglas Stewart referred to her "high quality" and suggested that she try again when Angus and Robertson had less of a backlog. Australian National University Press said that it was too slender for a volume — a polite but preposterous lie. Although Hawthorn Press, publishers of the 66-page *For The Record* print their books attractively, they do not promote them. Again, their preference is for hardback rather than the cheaper paperback that usually gains a larger readership by the economies of the comparatively longer print-run. Elder realized this only after some considerable time. Between 75 and 100 of the poet's first collection were sold *only* because Dennis Davison set the collection for study at Monash University. In January 1977 there were still over half of the print-run of 800 copies awaiting sale. R. A. Simpson's slightlying brief and mainly destructive review in the *Age* "shattered" the poet "particularly as it was the only one in my home state and city". She continued: "I can only thank God it wasn't the first or I would have crawled away into my little hole." After this review she submitted no more poems to that newspaper. Both the *Advocate* and *Nation Review* "noticed" Elder's book. Peter Steele's favorable review in *Poetry Australia* reached only a small and specialized poetry readership. Geoff Page's favorable review reached only the readership of the *Canberra Times*. There were 'rave' reviews in *Makar* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* (the latter by David Martin).

By the time Anne Elder submitted the manuscript of her second collection, *Crazy Woman*, for publication, she was suffering serious health problems. She softened her dislike of paperbacks to the extent of submitting to *Gargoyle Poets* (*Makar Press*) and *Paperback Poets* (*University of Queensland Press*). Despite Martin Duwell's enthusiasm, he was not in a position to publish a full size collection until 1977 at the earliest.

Elder knew that it was too long to wait. Publication in the excellent *Paperback Poets* would have ensured the larger readership she deserved to have in her own lifetime. Roger McDonald's rejection of the manuscript, then, will be of great interest to Elder's biographers. I hope Angus and Robertson makes a mint out of *Crazy Woman*.

Anne Elder was not always unlucky; nor did all her hopes diminish into disappointments. For instance, she accepted her second invitation from the Adelaide Festival of Arts. She read at Writers' Week in March, 1976, although only on the condition that the session's overall theme, "Poems In Public", was not feminist or more generally political. Bruce Dawe anthologized her in *Dimensions* (1974), having said specifically about Simpson's review and more generally: "There is a tendency for critics to use terms like "morbid", "self-effacing" as though they are dirty words . . . It does so happen that *some* people are *not* affecting these moods but really feel them . . . The tragic vision is still likely to be shot on sight (a fitting fate, one might think, in this land of the Levellers!)" Elder was "very proud" to have been included in Dawe's anthology because she regarded it as superb: ". . . almost every poem giving that sort of almost physical thrill which means a real winner".

Rodney Hall, then, was not the only person to see the quality of Elder's work. Hall was, however, the only person well placed to act on his perception. He published her frequently in the *Australian*. Sometimes Hall even had to implore her to submit. He wrote a glowing reader's report in favor of *Crazy Woman's* publication. He had a major part to play in the A.B.C.'s taping and broadcasting of her reading from her two collections not many months before her death. (The unedited tape is now in the National Library.) The *Crazy Woman* section was broadcast again as an obituary a week after her death. Many poets are terrible readers of their own work; Anne Elder was excellent. No one who heard her read at her best (as she did then) can forget the experience: her almost hypnotic presence, her voice-enactment of each poem and her acceptance of the moment for the moment's sake.

Now Anne Elder is dead. If sudden flurries of interest are any indication it would appear that her death had occasioned some guilt, gnawing and soul-searching. It is a pity that she had to die before knowing how indispensable she will

become to all future anthologists of Australian poetry.

II

When the poet was asked about influences on her poetry, she thought, firstly, of her mother who used to read poetry to her at an early age and secondly, of her grandfather who used to copy them out for the young girl. Since music and the performing arts are often either the subject of, or a rich source of imagery for, her poems it is not surprising to learn that Anne Elder was a foundation member and soloist with the Borovansky Australian Ballet Company from 1940 to 1944. Moreover, she wrote an article on Edouard Borovansky for *Overland* which prompted Vivian Smith to encourage her publicly to write a full study of Borovansky's contribution to Australian culture. She did not write the book but she did write a poem. Two major *literary* influences were Emily Brontë and Stevie Smith. Elder's attraction to Brontë's emotional turmoils results in a violent poem, as will be shown. It is equally important to know that Elder's poem "To Stevie Smith" is chatty, amusing and particularly witty in using various linguistic persons in connection with the Christian Trinity and the two criminals executed with Jesus Christ. It was fortuitous that a Stevie Smith poetry program immediately preceded the A.B.C. obituary segment.

Anne was born in 1918, married in 1940. From 1950 to 1964 she was busy "scribbling". For the most part she had no desire to publish these efforts, although she later returned to re-work them for publication. Despite Frank Kellaway's influence on the poet in the direction of formal Spenserian style and stanzas, throughout the 1960s Elder gradually broke away from the formal rhyme. As mentioned, from 1967 to 1970 she poured poem after poem onto the page. After her coronaries she found writing new work quite difficult. These lines (addressed to a friend) can equally apply to the poet:

The heartbeat seems to have shifted somewhat to dead centre under the breastbone swinging the weight of a clock.

In the following description of her poetic process it is evident that there was as much hard work as pure facility in her art. "It was instinctive like thread unwinding from a spider. That was when all went well. Sometimes it's more difficult, like the outstretched rod of a water diviner, you can feel the mind groping and sometimes it's a very bumpy progress. That's why it's called

a gift I guess. The ideas plop into the consciousness like an apple off a tree."

Anne Elder's rhythm moved quickly or slowly, depending on her purpose, but always via puns, assonance and alliteration. Her poetry is riddled with internal rhyme. These techniques assist in producing a strong sense of developing story or viewpoint. The ends of poems are not just where the poems *end*; rather where they *climax*. This applies to the numerous instances where Elder uses the effect of accumulation until the reader feels that the poem must surely end soon only to find that there is more.

The best way to become acquainted with Anne Elder's work, of course, is to read it. But Peter Steele's *Poetry Australia* review of *For The Record* is important:

There is a big difference between what might be called parasitic attention to the work of others and what might be called mediatorial interest. Any number of poems have been written about or after paintings, scenes, pieces of music, chiefly because the poet is temporarily benumbed and is yet reluctant to hold his peace. The really interesting ones, however, are the ones in which art as a composite of datum and process, of achievement and interrogation, mediates the poet's own stance in the world and towards his reader. His fervour, paradoxically, has to be cool in a sense before it can be his, and indeed before it can be fervent. And this seems the normal state with Anne Elder's work, whether or not she has to do with some pre-existing work.

"The Degas" is an excellent poem to examine in the way that Steele has generalized from it. It introduces Elder's particular interest in the visual and performing arts which are so often used in her work as means to another end. Steele is concerned with the wider application of his specific point. This interest can be further extended as far as saying Elder writes because the pressures of life must find release and relief. The arts, however, are themselves a pressure. Indeed, the reader can absorb half a poem before realizing that what is evoked by the poem is not life but dance or painting.

But there is considerable range in Anne's poems. Consider "Street Dancers, Montmartre":

In effect
the black cummerband, device
that seeks in the mime to please her
with twining, by winding,
staggers and blinds her. She thuds

to her knees, bares
the vulnerable nape. He glowers
above her, an axeman
to black-bandaged victim
rather than lover to lover.

Now it is seen
that the woman is haggard
with over-rehearsal.
The crowd that hoped for strip-tease
drifts away in clots.
Under the bare trees of the Place
no one will remember them
who addressed one another in black
and dismembered a dance.

(1970)

The poet pops in at a few tourist spots while
on a European tour in 1960. Instead of sending
back to Melbourne a postcard of the Eiffel Tower,
she sends this poem back to Australian literature.
She shows us the male's psychological power
relationship over the woman. Moreover, because
the woman is over-rehearsed, she is not only
dancing poorly but she is destroying the dance
itself. The male loses out as does the woman.

Consider too "May We Quote You?":

She'd always loved a Spaniard,
that sashed waist, the side-stepping thighs
nippy as blades in the pas-de-basque,
and the picador glance of the eyes;

shutting her down
to the cruelty in them
the derisive spit in the dust
ready on a tongue that rattled
consonants like pebbles
and sheathed them in a lisp:

and sheathed her disgust
for baited blood, not his, in the dust.

But when a party of Olympians
slouched in to Mexico City bullring
and then blundered out, she felt
a shift of allegiance
back to the home side. The blade
of her infatuation stubbed on a blunt
refusal of theirs to applaud. Succinct,
plain as the type on a handbill
and large as life it came —
Good on yer, bull.

(1968)

It would hardly win a Spanish or Mexican
travel poster competition, would it? What is
fascinating about this poem is that Elder is

attracted to the cruel and bloodthirsty Spanish-
Mexican *machismo*. The slang in the last line is
definitely and deliberately Australian.

Consider too "Fable" (1970). The first three
stanzas present the companionship of man, dog
and horse. It's "so pure a folk tale". The last
stanza presents woman as alien

Woman is absent. Her story
is said in the eyes of love
without move. But she crawls
on her belly after, after the walking ones.
She is their gazing house and their danger.
She is both foreskin and burden-carrier
and she is pain-bearer.

She is the stranger.

Repeated reading reveals that what the woman
has to crawl to reach is not companionship on an
equal basis with man, but the subservient position
of his horse, a gelded horse. But woman is
alienated even from *that* inequality ironically
because she is "foreskin", "burden-carrier" and
"pain-bearer". This is a poem of statement—the
double bind of female service and slavery. There
is implied protest in every line.

This discussion of feminism in Anne Elder's
poetry should end with a poem that she could
well have chosen herself if she had accepted that
she did write feminist poems. Of "Forgive Me,
David" she wrote that the poem contained ". . .
every mother's amazement at the growing child
who has come from her. Particularly the male,
the unknown."

my son
walking for all men with Mediterranean
dark heads kinking in rain, for all
eastern western or fabulous
eldest or middle or youngest of three
seekers of antipodean gold, south poles apart,
or red herrings in the north sea;
and acting for old-world other worldly
demi-gods and fauns and deathless youths
wantonly crumbling into stone

went
shapely across the window into the storm
for a week and a day or a year or two,
muttering "Women!" under the breath of them
all
and then forgetting at once and being gone,
which is always chancy in mist and for ever . . .
(1969-1970)

Asked why she wrote poetry Anne Elder's stan-

dard reply was: "I think that everything that I relate to emotionally is the death consciousness. I have this acute longing to pay something back into the world and to express a huge gratitude before I'm gone . . . 'Dead Bat' is a very small celebration of life and death." Here Elder is delighted to have bats in the belfry. She uses the old adage to her advantage:

Turned over, the blind vestigial eyes
smiled on closed secrets either side a nose
of exquisite convolution. I prised
apart the rigor of his jaws
and the teeth were for Dracula, each
one a canine but fine
as split hairs. The belly was kittenish.
Speck of a hole for excreting.
A blunted tube for mating.

I pulled at his sleeves to be wings
and smoothed the exact texture
of dusky crumpled poppies made for sleep
but hooked with an eagle's beak at the elbow.
All the transparent bones were lit
with blood. He was neat,
adorable. Oh he was pitiful!
How he was terrible!

None of these things.

He was a bat.
He was perfect bat designed for death.
His retracted wings
hooked in my belfry's airless dark.
Wisp swings.

(1970)

There is unquestionably a strong strain of emotional violence in Elder's poetry. Sometimes she uses it against herself. Haunted by the Brontës of Haworth she writes of one sister's dying:

In secret,
stubborn and plain, you practised to wear it:
to stand alone, curb the tongue,
rise early, look daily at graves,
set the lit word in cryptic by a dying wick,
meet the last hour in a neat dress,
hair parted dead centre, and,
upright on a tight horsehair settee
choke on rattling blood with such asperity.

The poem concludes, directly addressing Emily:

look, I am kneeling
sawing my wrists on the broken glass
of this stammering spring . . .
and on the words, in envy.

Given Anne's intense life-long response to the Brontës, it is not surprising that immediate surroundings will also include *acts* of emotional violence—to both herself and others. In "Ma Griffe" (1970-1971) the poet tells about taming a half-wild cat, only to have the cat claw and bite her. She makes it appear as if she slits it from one end to the other but apparently this is only what she wanted to do or imagined she did:

It offered its swansdown belly
And milk-white paws to pit-a-pat a child.

It lies dead under the house where ants and
blowflies gorge. It rants and moves and mews in
Elder's blood:

I call its sharp name,
Ma Griffe, Ma Griffe. It will come
Svelte as a fish from under the house
With its bloody rip. It will come.

It would be a mistake, however, to see only introverted violence in Elder's work. In "Seen Out" (1970) the description of, and comment on, socialites changes from:

Some of them evil, most good,
all nice people with various eyes.
They are The Club.

to

Not a bad lot.
Most devils do some good —
as the hooked mullet
is stunned by a merciful club.

The poem is social satire on a particular set of moral values, as is "School Cadets" (early 1960s):

But Colonel Bogey, limping a bit but still
incorruptible, taking fair advantage
of the British Raj and The Bridge on the River
Kwai,
draws them by the nose.

Elder continues:

they are terrible
as Kings in Babylon. The hateful nations
inhabit their slight frames, the future leers
desirous on their wavering formations.
The private school teaches the "game of War".

The last poems in *Crazy Woman* reveal the poet ill, alone (except for her husband) and with "recurring nightmares of sought death". Memories of childbirth return with "that far close agony returns, the birth of bone from bone". The going of her children "is a sorrow in me / akin to a gust up the belly of a derelict chimney". It is not that Elder begrudges pregnancy and motherhood. Not that she demands that adult children remain with her. Rather, it is simply that she misses the children and the loss is profound. She is going to die and that is the complementary drama to birth. Poems, as well as expressing dramatic attitudes, are themselves a drama of birth. Elder's grandmother used to buy useless items from starving hawkers during the Depression; Elder stores

the days and years like that, supporting
myself during the depressions
with two fingers on an Olivetti and pitiless
poems.

Elder rejects the cold charity of life assurance
salesmen, saying:

Only the grave is warm, Granny,
isn't it. Lend me your arm.

In "At Amalfi" (early 1960s) a woman visits
the town scribe, requesting that a passionate letter
be written to her prospective lover. Then she
leaves the love-letter with the scribe who waits
until she is out of sight before he smiles. End
of poem? Not when it is Elder's!

Italy. Where the tongue is easy
in plausible flower towards a reluctant caesura;
where the belvederes of the crumbling villas
hang over haze over turquoise enamel
of bays over emerald caverns; and where
the old gods of broken stone
recline discourteously in their grottos
and do not smile. In a certain light
their pitted eyeballs roll
deploringly as though they had foreseen
through the wreathes of time
no laughing matter.

"Save The Last Dance" is memory of awkward-
ness, need for companionship and bitter-sweet
realization that the need to be with-it means that
fashions and crazes have come and gone since
one was with-it. Even the passing of fads is the
passing of time. And the "awful blank space" is
a terrifying universe devoid of amoeba, cat,
brontosaurus, music, dance and men and women:

Shall we ever
be split from the tunes? At the party
to end all parties, the Big Surprise
Conflagration
that everyone pretended not to know was
planned
won't there be just two atoms with the courage
to pair up, by accident you know, first sight you
might say,
give a hitch, and, tentative at first, glide,
gathering hazy
momentum, gyrating, out on that awful blank
space
for a waltz ?

The clinch again. Old hat ? Well, at least
give a bit of a twist in the flux, to the sob
of the very last sound-wave breaking on
Crazy, man, crazy!

(1965)

POEMS BY ANNE ELDER

Eopsaltria Australis

Well, Yellow Bob,
it's all the same.
Cocksure Yellow Bob,
we're all in the same game.

So quiz me. What slant
do you advise
for the pen? Backhand
or copperplate?
Lend me your cheek,
Yellow Bob.
Lend me your ear,
Harpist of Dawn.
Harp me your little sob.
Chop chop chop
it's all the same
early or late, a note
only as blithe as being alive
which is not . . .

Until I saw your flick of gold,
your puff-paunch, Yellow Bob.

Millennium

Some days are so long as to be
like a sentence for life
not just to hard labor but torture,
the rack, the thumbscrew, the chains
that dangle from the ceiling, waiting
to feel the weight of a being.
All three await the screaming.

The rack looks like a comfortable bed
and the screw like a child's toy
in Meccano, or one of those mysterious
tools that clutter up sheds, for no one
knows their use. With this
friendly trio the victim
is incarcerated under the scant light
from a high embrasured window.
In prison all time is deep night.

All is a sham
designed to make the heart bang.
Through this endless day I avoid
looming shadowless thoughts, stoop over
the obstacles of reminiscence and so
stoop hangdog to my asvlum in sleep;
and once again the day will come
to wrack, screw, dangle, creep.

The Cane Farmer: Emil Engstrom (1905)

For Elvie Davis

Yes they're here the new boatload of Kanakas yours
signed under agreement poor dazed islanders what
is a nip of rum to them now the noose of a contract
no they're not in chains but the bargain's as rough bound
though for you (dear God) think of the timing the cane
stooped and ready the days thickening a harvest of the proud

Emil in this heat your soul stains like sweat it's good to be proud
but not virtuous black bodies won't blister won't scald as yours
must scald for all your idealism this social reform call it what
you will Queensland's no Sweden you did agree to contract
black labor the co-operative's yours damn it you're bound
relax then accept the heat your verandah's a good place to watch cane

I will not condone slavery so YOU will cut cane?
Yes, even that you Emil? look at that delta your argument's proud
but your sinew's impractical *I will pay the top wage then* and if yours
are top rates you undermine the co-operative is that what
you propose Emil is that *I refuse to make contract
with slavery* Accepted though a bit late to be bound

by nicety or to deny that every Kanaka is bound
as firm as you to the greater will of the co-operative cane
has a way of whipping back it can sting the more you are proud
the harder you feel it they are already laughing the loss is yours
there are always Kanakas to harvest and be harvested what
you achieve with your 'fairness' is merely salt in the wounds of the contract

already the committeemen deal and what they contract
now will send their children in white liners bound
for Europe far enough out of the smell of cane
to sweeten this black tar of commerce why so proud
Emil what gain God has been bought off many times yours
is such ingenuous virtue *Call it stubbornness it's what*

I believe even your sureness is nothing Emil though what
does refuse denial is this: once out of the contract
you must endure your convictions not your children (they are bound
to be restive) but your grandchildren learning, they'll agree the cane
not worth that inhuman costing it is they will be proud
that the right choice in the scrutiny of history was yours

Your canefields burn for sweet harvest it will not be yours.
A last chance do you still refuse the agreed contract?
But you are proud, Emil you have the right to be proud.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

Staying

I travelled, learned new ways
to deceive, smiling not
frowning; kept my lips supple
with lies; learned to digest
malice, knowing it tribute
to my success. Is the world
large? Are there areas uncharted
by the imagination? Never betray
your knowledge of them. Came here,
followed the river upward
to its beginning in the Welsh
moorland, prepared to analyse
its contents. Stared at the smooth pupil
of water that stared at me
back as absent-mindedly as a god
in contemplation of his own
navel. Felt the coldness
of unolumbed depths I should have
stayed here to fathom. Watched the running
away of the resources
of water to form those far
seas that men must endeavour
to navigate on their way home.

R. S. THOMAS

The Source

This is the journey that going back
on makes all things clearer
to the mind. I follow again the hymn
stanza by stanza to its beginning
in the imagination of Ann
Griffith and find it was the same source
that all drank from who took their departure
from God. There is a congestion at the fountain
that thins out as we go back
till it is only one who watches
the drops returning to it as leaves
to the tree. There are too many of us
now. In the deciduousness
of the nation it is hard to discover
pattern, but the further we go back
the shapelier on the horizon
the tree that is still in bud
with its poets and princes. We land
on a fresh shore at full tide
with the first pilgrims and see the waters that
have conspired to confuse their wake.

R. S. THOMAS

Jerusalem

This 'good plan, fleshed in childhood'; these fruits
raised out of the lintel. Meagre light

smoked the aperture where Rome, elbowed
in brass, illuminates the war-caves

the North's bashed out of; but not Israel,
a stone sumptuous with carved light.

Hollows fruit under the olive tree, pith
to cram the black seed. Every creature

works out from the dark: miners
cough in Solomon's emerald caves, scooped

by lust for delicate Sheba, in whose flesh
the fertile cock never sates. This good plan.

Without which no God would be adored, none to
raise earth's pillars, or the North's mild orange brick.

So much of the world is as this, fine
arousals of flesh pinioned in spirit tack

through ginnels: the soft wood-pigeon.
Sieged Jerusalem runnels on the sword:

like wind famine clings the canvas walls.
Yiddisher flesh concaves; children, mothers

in seed lie like Babylonish reeds
wailing outside the wall, whose stench

spasms Roman muscle. Our temple's
the Sabbath's candle, and our prayers

disperse in rubble. This wall is a straight
piece of misery whose root like babies' teeth

's a row of tears that blench and harden, altogether
changed from grief; and that small figure, god,

undone of clothes, stares doll-like on ashes.
I can't tell you.

To think hurts. It hurts not to: still
I can't tell you. Jerusalem, olive

and white; light glutinous against
stone. Flesh sings as if spirit;

would to God it were, but then, no. All
I have to do, where clashes

of serene absence whiten blank stone,
is lift you to where this illumination

overfills with space.

JON SILKIN

The Misery-go-round

The winning move had been marked
in dust under the chessboard,
but no-one was game to lift the game.
In a whole room of chess-playing nudes
not one moved out of turn,
they strangled themselves
by crossing their legs.
One pawn drowned, face down in a glass.

The front door was locked and watched,
but someone slipped away
through the back door which is
just the front door without its hat on;
and they tore down the beach —
bursting into the sea, intending
to drown among towering, crashing waves
but actually stumbled over knee-high water.

BRUCE HANNA

Factory Boss

He bleeds and bleeds the countless
pale corpuscles of his sweats which,
on appearance, don't rate a glance;
but when his temper rises, the
corpuscles are pulsing with the
blood's red fury.

His anger
is immense: tall as a chimney-
stack which writes black messages of
smoke on hitherto clear skies. One
can imagine the furnaces
beneath that factory chimney
. . . but the factory doesn't
(sad to say) make ease.

Wait for
Saturday, when the corpuscles
lose count again; he'll be content
to cool down — apparently with
not much smoke to write about his
'riding the high horse'.

The winds will
have unbridled that animal
which should then be freebooting to
the country, or following a
breeze that phases out to sea.

He'll
seem no longer the factory
boss, but recluse.

Have they pulled down
the chimney-stack?

At least till Monday.

JOHN BLIGHT

Olympics

They swarm & roll.
They ache through orchards.
Their stunts toward me are thin & ravenous.
They come to eat; I'm gathered.

It's a mad grace shows me with them, rising & falling.

Who puts who in harm's way?

I offer fruit; they shuffle forward.
They love me; they promise to eat the worst thing from my childhood.
Poison this snake before they whip it to death.
Put this tail in this mouth.

Who puts who in harm's way?

It's a mad grace shows them with me, rising & falling.

PHILIP HAMMIAL

Solid Member

I'm a solid member of th mythical working class

— how naive
— you don't do 8 hours prison a day
— you've been educated out of it
— you cling to th coat-tails of th rich
— you defend yrself with yr past

when I take off my shoes
my toes are like th claws
of a bird /

my shoes
grew more slowly than my feet
I knew my place & it pinched

silence is th humility of th poor & th pride
of th rich /

&

I hated to ask for anything

I wriggle my ten little marxists
I want a new pair of shoes

ERIC BEACH

My Fitzroy Campaign (1973-74)

under your doors, i slide leaflets.
on your walls, i draw secrets.

next to—

“please let me be
a mystic”

i draw—

“i want to live in,
fitzroy”

the landrovers rest in the gutters & afghans
have rested in the orange-red carpets.

my campaign is lonely.
my voice; of the few.

& my friends tease me,

π !
get out of
fitzroy.

in the suburbs
after dark
i duck the torches.

3 POEMS BY π . O.

π -Oetiks

take a word,
use it.

use a word,
project it.

make it music,
make it message,

& damn it!
tear it!

I Can Name Drop Better Than All Of U

fuck off lowell!, i'm more obscure
than you. watch!

watch! () ()
(i can't
burp)

now! fuck off lowell! auden's got nothing
on me. i don't CARE
what nigel sez. (i've got a quote from rilke
somewhere there).

Death Of A Shearer

She walks by the grey lake
Where a heron stands
Ringed by rings of water.
Swans pass in pairs with rippling prows.
Only the heron is lonely.

To the northward
Back of Brewarrina
Emus pick their way
Through mirage water,
Myalls stand like willows
On the bare ring of the plain,
Like white willows
Clouds go over.

Lofty as cathedrals
Shearing-sheds shimmer
Under a daylight moon.
Naked sheep shy at their shadows
Leaping from their counting-pens.

Men in grey singlets
Drift to iron huts, to the river.
Beneath the she-oaks
Diving in brown water
Their skin is whiter
Than shorn sheep in a pen.

Where is the heron's
White-skinned lover?
They are dragging the river.
Redfin and jewelled yabbies
Drink at the sky of his eyes.

The Royal, The Commercial,
Hum like hives.
For seven days now
The men have been drinking.
A blue heeler sleeps in the shade.

She walks by the grey lake
Under a daylight moon.
Black swans stretch long necks
And hiss at her shadow.

DAVID CAMPBELL

A Degenerate Painter

Klee
was a color
bandit
rustling
fish
in his neighbor's
tank.

Law n' order
arrived in 1933
and sent him
scuttling
with a stitched mouth.

Through
black n' blue
canyons
I follow
his howling horse.

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

Football At Slack

Between plunging valleys, on a bareback of hill
Men in bunting colors
Bounced, and their blown ball bounced.

The blown ball jumped, and the merry-colored men
Spouted like water to head it.
The ball blew away downwind—

The rubbery men bounced after it.
The ball jumped up and out and hung on the wind
Over a gulf of treetops.
Then they all shouted together, and the ball blew back.

Winds from fiery holes in heaven
Piled the hills darkening around them
To awe them. The glare light
Mixed its mad oils and threw glooms.
Then the rain lowered a steel press.

Hair plastered, they all just trod water
To puddle glitter. And their shouts bobbed up
Coming fine and thin, washed and happy

While the humped world sank foundering
And the valleys blued unthinkable
Under depth of Atlantic depression—

But the wingers leapt, they bicycled in air
And the goalie flew horizontal

And once again a golden holocaust
Lifted the cloud's edge, to watch them.

TED HUGHES

A Level Crossing

On the long waits
ill-luck still dusks here.
“I don't know where she hit,
but everybody tried to force
a corridor into another
carriage — it's odd that:
not the doors.”
Reality the spent farceur
puffing like a bitch,
a whore, a train
delays herself tonight to don
a baby's bangle: hearts,
the stars, the harps, the clover.
All the shops that crawl
rapaciously near to the station
huddle open In the time
it takes, you can almost
buy what you suddenly need.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

Metamorphosis

There are reasons for us not to go back
to the scene of the crime, the first party
where we were shocked by the metamorphosis
of friends with wine in their stomachs—
the snake of drunken wit, the lame donkey of career,
the moth-eaten tiger fingering the backside of
a colleague's sun-tanned wife: even, the sweaty
shirts of depressed losers cast up in the lounge
upon an island of Verdi or Joplin.

There are the white-bodied mutes with
soft unformed faces who sit in the dark
watching the bargaining on the verandah;
those who this morning kissed their women
no longer recognizable, whose pale vigilance
you will sense at the next party;

you will notice a pause in conversation from
the next room, or an ambiguous smile in a drowning face,
then, a second faster than the moment of change
you will seize your partner, and jumping
from the verandah, escape through moon headed trees,
running silently to magnify the dark.

PHILIP NEILSEN

Solitaire

late into afternoons a woman will sit

pouring herself rain into earth
waiting
for growth
without any seed

no impression of strain in a kitchen so tidy

these piles of cards
neat
as the cupboard
or sink

slowly she clenches them fifty-two all

in her small woman's
hand
wise as the kings
sad as the rain.

KAREN MacCORMACK



... is Man no more than this

'IMAGES OF LEAR'

Chalk drawings by Noel Counihan

A 1977 Series

FRANK KELLAWAY **The Writing of Poetry**

A Manifesto for my ex-students

The poem has an independent being. It is not a creature of the poet. It is not an end-product of self-expression.

The Freudian attitude is that the poem is the result of the *poemwork*, something analogous with the *dreamwork* or the *jokework*, an unconscious process of matching and patterning. It seems likely something of the sort occurs some of the time. But in the first place the explanation's not much use to the poet because it doesn't seem to correspond with the experience; that's not what it feels like to write a poem. In the second place there is also a conscious component.

The poet receives (in the sense of receiving the Host) certain combinations of words and/or images and/or rhythms, which make up a poetic impulse, and each time this impulse is different or anyway is seen/felt to be different except that always, every time, it feels as though it came from outside. The Goddess speaks to us, dictates for a moment or two, becomes bored with us and turns away but always leaves us with an imperative demand to complete the fragment we have been given and to complete it appropriately. The work of completion is sometimes more intuitive, sometimes more conscious, but unless it is appropriate the poem fails.

The poet is the servant, indeed the slave of the poetic impulse. He must find the most perfectly fitting form for what he has been given. Sometimes it may be a traditional form. He may know that the impulse involves a question and an answer, a statement and a contradiction, a vision and a qualification, then the lines he has been given may perhaps belong most appropriately in the shape of the sonnet. Next time he may have to invent a form of his own by repeating, with variations, an irregular verse paragraph which suggests a similar organic shape for other parts or for the whole of the poem. Sometimes a free

flow of words must be completed in the continuing rhythm it suggests and must be held together by internal tensions. The possibilities are infinite, but if the poet is working at the top of his bent, true to his gift, each poem will be radically different from the one before.

Of course there is a family resemblance between poems from the same maker and the critics' attempts to trace a poet's development do have some validity, though a good deal less than is generally assumed; but from the poet's point of view, each poem that's any good, perhaps a dozen or so of his total output if he's lucky, will seem not to belong to him at all. If he recognizes the quality of the best poems, and sometimes he may not, he will be astounded and will genuinely wonder how the hell he ever had a hand in producing them. If he were a great enough egoist to see them as self-expression then he never could have written them. It is only the ranters and ravers—Whitman and Ginsberg were major writers but not major poets, if poets at all—who hear the same tone of voice, their own, in everything they shout.

W. H. Auden, one of the most inventive and original of twentieth century poets, also used a greater variety of traditional forms than most poets ancient or modern. He once said that if you asked a young man, who said he wanted to be a poet, why he did, and the boy said he wanted to express his view of the world and tell people what was what, you could be pretty sure he wouldn't continue trying to write poetry though he might go on to develop into a philosopher or a novelist or a politician. On the other hand, if the young chap said he didn't really know why he wanted to be a poet, he was just fascinated by playing with words and making patterns, then he would probably go on writing poems and with luck might discover their true meaning later.

Rather than try to *express himself* in moments when the poetic impulse fails to stir, the poet would do well to play games with words, attack and master difficult forms like the sestina to get his muscle up so that he will have more sophisticated means at his disposal when he needs to invent an entirely new form to satisfy the demands of the always importunate goddess.

The trouble about that is that sometimes while he's fooling around doing his gymnasium tricks the genuine impulse will strike and he will find he's been given some lines of real poetry. Then he's got to look sharp if ever he does. Perhaps the lines will only belong in the elaborate shape he's playing with and nowhere else; then he's stuck with it and simply has to go to work to rewrite what he's done and try to make it worthy of the given lines and appropriate to them, their genuine completion. If this happens he need not despair; it is possible to bring old forms alive and make them sing truly in the twentieth century. Auden isn't the only one to have done it; many modern American poets have succeeded: Dylan Thomas' "Do not go gentle into that good-

night" is a villanelle. However, the given lines may *not* be appropriate to the form the poet's been playing with, and then he must start again and shape an entirely new form for them.

Of course the poet can and should feed the goddess ideas, but he is unlikely to write a good poem if he simply sits down with his idea and tries to hammer it into poetic shape. Even doing that, on occasion, may produce a strike, but it is usually better for the poet to let the idea rattle round in his head like a pea in a forty-four gallon drum or, to vary the figure, to let it dangle like a pretty trifle in front of the goddess until she deigns to notice it.

Having said all that it is necessary to add that W. B. Yeats sometimes wrote drafts of his poems in prose and then turned them into verse. Any procedure, however seemingly mechanical, which produces, or rather provides conditions favorable for, a genuine strike of the poetic impulse, is valid—every poet must find his own way. However, whatever way it is, it is not the way of self-indulgence or of self-expression or of anything else with the emphasis on the *self* of the poet.

Aboriginals and the Arts

- ★ An interview with Kath Walker, new poetry, and prose by Colin Johnson
- ★ The Black Theatre of Redfern, and scenes from *Here Comes The Nigger*
- ★ The first bibliography of Aboriginal Literature
- ★ Articles on culture contact then and now, whether Missions, Northern Territory Schools, or the English spoken in Redfern
- ★ The White's response — Aboriginal art, and in novels and poetry
- ★ Bobbi Sykes on the situation now

ALL IN A SPECIAL, SUMMER ISSUE OF

Meanjin

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Reading the current edition of that admirable journal *Australian Literary Studies* (University of Queensland Press, \$10 a year, two issues), which is devoted to discussions of “new writing in Australia”, I was reflecting whether my lack of response to many of the scores or hundreds of names mentioned (and taken seriously, especially by themselves) is really due to a withering of response-capacity, a conservatism deepening as it grows older, or a jealousy of the young (or, at any rate, of the *younger*—quite a few of the ‘new’ writers mentioned here are getting dangerously middle-aged, like the leaders of the *Kom-somol*).

Always willing to give myself the benefit of the doubt, I came to the conclusion that what is really going on, for the most part, is the Celebration of the Navel. Writers writing for each other, a strong dependence on mutual support and admiration, a deliberate restriction of audience. I said something about this in *Swag* in *Overland* 64, quoting A. D. Hope on the contemporary poet as “The voice of a cocktail party”; both Michael Dugan (last issue) and Barbara Giles (this issue) have more to say on this.

But I remain pretty unregenerate. What I should have done was not just to talk about poets, but to talk about the whole literary scene, which is following natural history, music, painting and thinking into preserves signposted FOR THE ELECT ONLY. There are of course some few exceptions in the names listed in this *Australian Literary Studies*, but for the most part they command small territories (which is not to say all the work lacks distinction). I am interested in the extent to which community support, including the generosity of the Literature Board and its sym-

pathy for the experimental and the trier, has in fact produced a literary sub-culture which (as well as producing some real talent) has also promoted a pretentiousness which, in the long run, is going to be sad and self-defeating for everyone. It sometimes seems a world in which, if anyone dared to write with the economy, command, popularity and skill of a Blainey, Charwood or Ray Parkin, they would be laughed to scorn. The turgid prose, reflecting would-be profundity, in some of the material in *A.L.S.* has to be read to be believed.

I am of course aware that to get great talents you may have to support many lesser talents. I am also aware that it takes a long time to sort out who and what is worthwhile in the literature of a given period in a given country. Yet I remain astonished at the humorless self-regard of this enormous legion of *published* writers of the last ten years, and at the amount of shoddy and derivative writing, posing as ‘experimental’, which has received serious attention and critical acclaim, as though to challenge it would automatically expose one as a Hun, Goth and Philistine. I believe fashions are created as cold-bloodedly in literature as they are in the workshops of the *couturiers* of Paris.

Noel McLachlan, author of our Letter from Ireland, is normally found in the history department of the University of Melbourne, where amongst other things he edits *Historical Studies*. But from 1977 to 1980 Noel is professor of Australian History at the University of Dublin—one of the initiatives initiated by the Whitlam government was to establish several such posts at foreign institutions. The most important, of course, was the establishment of a permanent

chair of Australian studies at Harvard. So far as I know this position has not yet been filled.

“Eopsaltria Australis” and “Millenium”, the two unpublished poems by Anne Elder we print in this issue, have been found among her unpublished work since her death. We are informed that an annual Anne Elder Poetry Award to the value of about \$500 has been established, to be administered by the Fellowship of Australian Writers (Victoria).

We welcome English poets Ted Hughes, Jon Silkin and R. S. Thomas to this issue, as well as the young Canadian poet Karen MacCormack. Our next issue will also have an international emphasis, with a remarkable series of translations from one of the great Japanese poets of this century, and some fresh new work from one of

the grand old men of English poetry.

Apropos of a statement I made in the last Swag that “in the C.P. in those days we all thought of ourselves as future leaders of a Communist Australia”, Russel Ward writes indignantly from Armidale N.S.W. to say he was “astounded” to read my comment and “Just for the record: I never at any time so thought of myself nor did I ever imagine that there was the remotest chance of Australia becoming a Communist (or socialist) country in my lifetime”. Russel asks for a straw vote from the ex-Comms on this one; after all, as Rupert Lockwood has remarked, we are the biggest political party in Australia.

I shall be away in 1978, and John McLaren will be acting editor. I wish him well for the new year, as I do all our readers.

It seems appropriate that, with the passing of the poet James McAuley, more light be shed on the little known life of Ernest Lalor Malley, whose sole collection of sixteen poems, under the title "The Darkening Ecliptic", was published in 1944 in the literary journal Angry Penguins. Ern Malley's poems are commonly spoken of as "a famous literary hoax": it is said that James McAuley and Harold Stewart concocted the verses one afternoon, 'taking'—I quote from The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Verse—"haphazard words and phrases from a chance assortment of books", an exercise intended, apparently, as a disparaging comment on the work of such contemporary poets as Dylan Thomas, Henry Treece and others. The hoax was more than successful: it boomeranged upon its perpetrators in a manner quite unexpected and subsequently drew international comment from some of the most eminent critics of the century, including Herbert Read who, in effect, posed the question: when is a hoax not a hoax?—And answered it by the pronouncement: when it is devised by a poet. The publication of the poems involved the publisher of Angry Penguins in an infamous trial for obscene libel, with a law court transcript worthy of The Magic-Pudding.

The legend of Ern Malley has inspired a memorable series of paintings by Sidney Nolan, who also designed the cover of the August 1944 issue of Angry Penguins, and in 1974 a tribute to Ern Malley composed by Don Burrows was performed in the Art Gallery of South Australia, where the Nolan paintings are on display. The first performance of a musical work by Peter Tahourdin, similarly inspired by "The Darkening Ecliptic", will take place in 1977.

The poems were submitted to the editor of Angry Penguins accompanied by a letter pur-

porting to be from Ern's sister, Ethel. It is from the sparse details of the poet's life contained in that letter, together with evidence deduced from the poems themselves, that the following account of Ern Malley's hidden years in Melbourne has been written.

In 1942 Ernest Lalor Malley was lodging in a double-breasted terrace house that offered accommodation to single gents, in an elm-shaded street in South Melbourne. A stone's throw from Albert Park and the South Melbourne football ground, a two-minute sprint to the tram stop—Ern's daily point of departure for the National Mutual Insurance offices, where at that time he was employed.

Ern's front room was bleakly tidy. A Yale lock secured loneliness, at times intense. The handsome marble mantel that dominated one wall had been covered with chocolate-brown paint, the chimney blocked off and a gasfire and shilling meter fitted. Arrayed along the mantelshef, precisely set out, were the working parts of whichever clock or watch Ern was currently repairing. He had always had a mechanical turn of mind, always been clever with his hands. When he left school, aged fourteen, he worked for a while in the local garage at Taverner's Hill, in New South Wales. It was two years after that, when Ern's mother passed on (she had emigrated to Australia from England in 1921, after his father died of war wounds) that Ern had come to Melbourne with an elated sense of escape, and proceeded to immure himself in the twin prisons of insurance office and bed-sitting room. He had lived here now for eight years.

Neatly stacked beneath a Chinese vase at one end of the mantelshef was a pile of letters from his sister, Ethel, who wrote dutifully, in a stilted, pot-hooked hand, at Christmas and for Ern's birthday, which was in March. Ern did not answer

her letters any more — he had last written two years ago. He lacked the family feeling, he supposed, although he did retain a vague, affectionate remembrance of his mother, whose earthly remains now lay beneath a neat rectangle of sunbaked granite chips. Ethel he recalled mainly as a bossy elder sister with the distressing habit of spitting on a corner of her handkerchief in order to wipe his face clean.

One day, walking down Collins Street in his lunch hour, Ern was hailed at a street intersection by a khaki-clad acquaintance of Ethel's from Sydney. An awkward conversation battled against the grinding trams and hiss of car tyres on the wet road — for it had been drizzling. Ern learned that Ethel's husband, Joe, now a corporal, had gone overseas; he became aware that he himself was unsuitably attired in the uniform of an insurance clerk.

Shortly after this encounter, a letter arrived unexpectedly from Ethel (since it was neither Christmas nor birthday). "Jack Kelly said you were looking poorly," Ethel wrote anxiously. "I hope you are taking care, for you were never very strong. Of course, I realize it is your health that has prevented you from joining up. You would want to do your bit, like Dad."

Dad and his Great War Wounds! A post-war killing. Ern felt no great desire to emulate his father's example. Besides, it was true he was not strong. There were undeniable symptoms — sometimes his face grew puffy and his ankles swelled. He had to get up three or four times, some nights, traipsing to the water closet in the yard at the back of the house — surely an abnormal frequency. The yard gave on to a narrow cobbled lane, built originally to accommodate the width of a night-cart. Since the advent of main drainage, however, the back fences had gradually encroached upon the cobbles: now only a bicycle could negotiate the alley behind Ern's lodging house. Beneath the cobbles lay primeval swamp land, buried beyond hope of resurrection. No, Ern would never have passed an Army medical examination, even if he had presented himself for one. He had visited a doctor once, and been given a note addressed to the urology department of a big hospital. But he had not gone there. He buried the thought of disease deep in his mind; it lay stagnant as the swampland beneath the cobblestones.

The other inhabitants of the house were for the most part heard but unseen: steps on the staircase, light and springing or else a heavy, creaking

tread; spasms of coughing from the first floor back; occasionally a shout of laughter or perhaps the flare-up of a quarrel; on summer nights sometimes an unintelligible murmur of voices from the worn-out sofa that had been relegated to the front porch.

Then Davy came, his advent just about coinciding with Ern's first meeting with Lisa: two events destined to give importance to his hitherto drab and insignificant existence.

Lisa, first. Dark-haired, white-skinned — almost pallid, in fact — daughter of Jacob, the second-hand dealer who gave Ern the broken timepieces to repair. Father and daughter were Polish reffos, sad-eyed survivors of a family which once lived in the Warsaw ghetto. Jacob's shop was in Princess Street, Footscray, not far from the Yarraville and Footscray wharves. A dingy place, filled with the pawned or rejected trivia of other people's lives, to be picked over and bargained for, desired for secondhand reasons. There were living quarters behind the shop, and a rusty yard that provided room for weightier junk: brass fenders, discarded iron work from verandas, bicycle frames. . . .

Lisa glimmered in the gloomy shop, to Ern's gaze, like a pale lily. Eagerly he proved his skill, taking infinite trouble to repair the broken springs of cheap wristwatches overwound and the mechanisms of ornate wedding-present clocks or seven-day alarms. Jacob, well pleased, allowed Ern to spend the money he gave him on taking Lisa to the pictures. Occasionally Ern shared a meal with them, cooked by Lisa, spiced with caraway seeds, garnished with dumplings, too rich for Ern's delicate mechanism. Afterwards he would lie awake in his bed, racked by caraway-flavored indigestion and thoughts of Lisa's lily flesh. It was a strange, unlikely relationship, as ill-assorted as the arbitrary juxtaposition of any two or three objects on Jacob's shop counter.

Next, Davy. Davydd Davis, taster of poetry and process engraver. He entered Ern's world when the unseen incumbent of the first-floor back was taken off to hospital following a penultimate paroxysm of coughing. Davy took over his room. It was small, and looked out on to the brick wall of the next-door house. Davy littered it with paperback editions of contemporary poets, literary magazines, and stacks of musty books he'd bought secondhand. He was darkly Celtic, with restless movements, a quicksilver tongue. He first made himself known to Ern one evening when the two

of them met in the first-floor veranda, which had been enclosed with louvre windows and fitted with a couple of Early Kooka stoves to serve as a communal kitchen.

"Ha! have you come to stir a mess of potage?" Davy demanded, looking up from an overflowing saucepan. His voice was a deep sing-song, inherited from forebears who had emigrated from old South Wales.

"Er — just baked beans, on toast," Ern replied flatly, and displayed the tin with its garish wrapper, turquoise-blue and tomato-red.

"Baked beans . . . on toast!" Davy's rich voice elevated the humble snack to the status of a feast. He waved his spoon. "My own experiment does not, I fear, titillate the olfactory sense. As you may observe, my friend — I know not your name —"

("Ern," said Ern.)

"— the mixture is a trifle singed. I am in fact about to consign the entire contents of this saucepan to the drains, and sally forth in search of Neptune's fare."

"Fish and chips?" hazarded Ern. He sometimes completed the Herald crossword. "There's a good place down Bridport Street, across the railway line." He gazed thoughtfully at his tin of baked beans. "I wouldn't mind some myself."

"Come! Let us leave this light-winged Dryad of the trees" — Davy gestured towards the richly-hued kookaburra enamelled on the oven door — "and seek other sustenance."

Ern found himself almost hypnotically propelled downstairs and out of the front door.

"And," Davy continued, deflecting their progress in the direction of the Bay View hotel, "we will first fortify ourselves with two beakers full of the blushful Hippocrene with beaded bubbles bursting at the brim."

A long-forgotten afternoon of Eng. Lit. at Summer Hill Intermediate High School stirred in Ern's mind. He had a good memory. ("Ask Ern," they used to say at the Insurance office. "He'll recall the details.") "Winking," he said, now, "not bursting." And surely it was a nightingale, not a kookaburra . . . but that, he realized, was a joke. "And — and purple stained mouth," he went on, amazed at himself. "But I'd prefer a beer if it's all the same to you."

Davy clapped him on one shoulder, delighted at such poetic recall. "Poetic licence, mate," he reassured Ern. "Beer was what I had in mind. Fill for me a brimming bowl and let me in it drown my soul!"

Bemused, Ern followed Davy into the public bar, filled with men in service uniforms and weekend mufti. It was the beginning of the best friendship in his life.

Davy told Ern: "I am poet first, process engraver last. The etching acid is of no account — otherwise it might have eaten my soul."

After that, Ern sat often in the sagging armchair of the first-floor back while Davy read aloud, usually his own compositions. The room became as familiar to Ern as his own: the solid brick outlook, the scarred cedar dining-table which served as a desk; the reproductions of two Dürer etchings that hung above it — "Innsbruck 1495" and "Samson killing the Lion, 1498" — thumbs twisting the great snarl of the beast's mouth in bearded rage.

Davy, as he told Ern, felt a peculiar affinity with Keats; he told Ern of his premonition that he, too, like Keats, would die young. There was a deep strain of pessimism in his soul. "I am a black swan," he declared. Swans seemed to fascinate him. Once or twice he persuaded Ern to go with him on a weekend afternoon to the Botanical Gardens, where he would stand at the rim of the lake, gazing at the swans, savoring alike their water-borne grace and their earth-bound clumsiness. Ern was aware of the darker side of Davy's nature, though he did not define it. One day, several months after their first meeting, Davy read aloud a new poem: "In the year 1943," he declaimed, "I resigned to the living all collateral images/Reserving to myself a man's/Inalienable right to be sad/At his own funeral."

Paradoxically, Davy was superstitious: he carried a rabbit's foot in his left pocket, perhaps in a desire to ward off his prescient fate. He did not court that fate by enlisting, a fact he celebrated in another poem: "What would you have me do? Go to the wars?/There's damned deceit/In these wounds, thrusts, shell-holes, of the cause/And I'm no cheat."

Inevitably, Ern thought of his father and his Great War Wounds, of the gas, not etching acid, that had eaten, not his soul but his lungs, his wheezing chest, the spittoon close by the chair where he sat all day in a stuffy room.

Davy had lived in Footscray before he came to South Melbourne; he knew Princess Street, and one day, out of curiosity, he went with Ern to the secondhand dealer's shop and met old Jacob and pale Lisa.

"Shylock and his Jessica!" he declared after-

wards. "I will write a love poem for you Ern Malley, and it will begin: Princess, you lived in Princess Street —"

Ern smiled approval.

"—Where the urchins pick their nose in the sun/With the left hand."

Ern frowned in protest.

"It is in perspective," Davy told him. And added: "Oh, how you long to deflower that lily!"

Ern's sly smile was a dutiful response . . . but in fact by this time his physical preoccupation was increasingly with his disease, so long submerged. He was alarmed, during one of his frequent nightly visits to the yard, to perceive blood admixed with urine; the next day he took out the old letter addressed to the hospital urology department and presented himself there. He was submitted to extensive tests, providing specimens of urine at intervals throughout the day. He learned that his blood pressure was high. They told him to come again in three days' time; finally he confronted a doctor in a little room, privately, to hear diagnosis and prognosis, both grave. It appeared he had Bright's Disease, a chronic condition of the kidney. He could expect rapid deterioration as his kidneys degenerated. Disease; deterioration; degeneration: there seemed to be no hopeful words. A year, the doctor pronounced. Puffiness would increase; eventually he would be confined to bed. Drugs, medicine would be prescribed. Had Mr Malley a family who would care for him? ("I have a sister," Ern mumbled, "in New South Wales.") The doctor advised him to find out whether his sister would be able to care for him. That was all.

Ern swayed back to South Melbourne on the tram. A year. "We are helpless against the choking sands of time in our throats." The line, from one of Davy's poems, blurted into his mind. Sentence of death: but no ritual to dignify it, no black cap upon the judge's wig, no axe with honed blade turned towards him. Just medical phraseology and the smell of antiseptic, and the next patient waiting. Ern's thoughts were not so specific, however. Choking with sand and "they didn't even offer me a cup of tea" he articulated to himself.

Davy received the news unwillingly at first, as though it were a telegram from the War Office proffered to a reluctant hand; then, adjusting to

fate, he entered into Ern's illness with a sort of Celtic celebration. He insisted that Ern accompany him to the reference room of the Public Library; here he riffled through indices, turned the tissue-thin pages of encyclopediae and even ran to earth a privately published pamphlet on Dr Bright.

"Glomerulonephritis!" Davy intoned, scanning a half-column of close-set type. "Your disease has a splendid name, my friend. Granular degeneration of the kidneys," he elucidated in rich, sonorous tones that echoed through the official silence of the library.

It was almost as though Davy were taking Ern's disease upon himself. Ern said so. "A bloke would think it was your kidneys," he remarked. But really, he did not mind. Already he felt himself relegated to a certain category of society: that of the chronic invalid; he seemed to have forfeited his place as an individual. He felt he knew the meaning of the phrase 'out of the race'.

Then, through the cross-reference of his own thought processes, Davy made a discovery which lifted Ern's affliction out of its mere medical context on to the plane of poetry.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, using a pen-knife to rip the uncut leaves of *Dr R. Bright: Study of a Physician*. He gripped Ern's arm and thrust the pamphlet before him. "Look!" He pointed to the page.

Ern read aloud, ponderously: "In 1820 Bright was appointed assistant physician at Guy's Hospital, London; in 1824 he became full physician, continuing his research into the nature of drop-sical cases and proving that they involved a diseased condition of the kidney . . ."

"Yes, yes, all that — but *he* was there, at that very time!" Davy interrupted. "Keats, at Guy's Hospital, a student. . . Imagine it! They might have brushed by each other, those two, in the corridors, the poet passing himself off as medical student, the physician destined to bestow his name upon diseased kidneys! Perhaps the poet joined in the consultation — 'And what is your opinion, Mr Keats?' — 'I, sir, I am of the opinion that I shall never finish *Hyperion*.' Oh, what if it had been the other way about? What if Bright were the poet passing himself off as physician and the medical student the one destined to leave as his memorial the discovery of—Keats' Disease? Or

—what do you say, Ern—is poetry a disease? If so, Keats is surely synonymous with poetry, as Bright is with the kidney.”

That evening, Davy began a poem which he called “Colloquy With John Keats”, and Ern wrote at last to Ethel, asking if he might come to her in Sydney. After all, the days when she rubbed his face with spit and the corner of her handkerchief were long past . . . and in any case, it would not be for long.

“. . . we are as the double almond concealed in one shell./I have mistrusted your apodictic strength/Saying always: Yet why did you not finish Hyperion?” Davy wrote, sitting at his scarred table, while downstairs Ern labored over his pad of ruled (feint) notepaper. “. . . I shall try to be as little trouble to you as possible. Perhaps you have a sleepout that would suit, like the one we had at home. I am good at mending clocks.”

Ethel’s response was swift and kind. She urged Ern to “come home” as soon as he could. The children, she wrote, would look forward to having their Uncle Ern living with them, and it would be good to have a man about the house. She did not refer directly to Ern’s illness; and he knew that, afterwards, she would say he had “passed on”.

Ern resigned his job with the insurance office and collected his superannuation; it was, perhaps, ironic that he, an employee, had fulfilled one of the risks of an insurance policy. They gave him a leaving present, an electric toaster with a one-year guarantee. Ern felt he had something in common with the gadget, but thought Ethel would be able to make use of it . . . afterwards.

There was a final visit to make to Princess Street. Ern did not tell Jacob or Lisa about his illness; merely that he was going to live in Sydney. They accepted his removal passively: a relatively minor loss in their bereft lives. Lisa took one of Ern’s puffy hands and pressed it between her slender palms. They did not say much—they never had. Ern looked back as he walked down the street, and saw her standing palely, looking at him through the shop window.

The week Ern left for Sydney, Davy sprang two surprises upon him, one deliberate, the other involuntary.

“I have enlisted,” he told Ern one night. “I have taken the King’s shilling. I am now a hero! Davydd Davis, private person in a public army. I am metamorphosed. The plain poet has become a soldier. Possibly I may one day become a tree

planted in some Avenue of Honor. Then I should never, never see the tree that grew instead of me. And what if the tree, too, should die? As a mere sapling? What would replace the tree?”

He admired Ern’s parting gift from the insurance office. “What will a whip-round at the engraving works produce?” he wondered.

In the event, even before Davy set off for the army training camp at Puckapunyal, his fellow engravers subscribed to a wreath of gladioli, for he was run over and killed in St Kilda Road. At the hospital where he was taken, “dead on arrival”, it was discovered he had no known next-of-kin. They contacted his landlady in South Melbourne, who told Ern the news and also informed the manager of the engraving works. Ern went to the funeral, the solitary mourner, where the gladioli wreath was the sole floral tribute.

Afterwards, the landlady said, “There are papers on his table. You were his friend, Mr Malley. Perhaps you could sort them out?”

It was the day Ern himself was to leave Melbourne, on the overnight train from Spencer Street station. He gathered up the folder of manuscript poems from the cedar table. The Dürer etchings were still pinned to the wall, and on top of a pile of magazines lay Davy’s lucky rabbit’s foot and a bunch of keys.

There is little more to tell. The train bore Ern through the darkness towards his own greater darkness, which finally overcame him on 23 July, 1944. Ethel had looked after her brother tenderly. He was cremated at Rookwood cemetery. She sent a bundle of his clothes to the Smith Family, and discovered the typescript of Davy’s poems amongst his effects. Ern had, during his last months, laboriously copied out the poems on a machine Ethel had bought to teach herself typing so that she could take a part-time job. Written across the front of the folder that contained the typescript was a title: “The Darkening Ecliptic”.

It was only to be expected Ethel should form the conclusion that Ern had written these poems, during the years he spent in Melbourne, and although she could not say she knew much about poetry, and was, indeed, a little shocked by some of the lines she skimmed, she felt she should not simply throw the manuscript away. And the Smith Family did not require poetry. She sought advice at a city bookshop, and sent off the poems to an address they gave her. In August, she received through the post a copy of a magazine

called Angry Penguins. (The name surprised her.) She saw that the poems had been printed in it, and, although she did not read them again, she was satisfied. She kept the magazine in the canterbury in her front room, alongside the yellowing sheet music that no one played any longer. She was truly pleased at the outcome of her action

and felt she had done the best she could for her brother. She remained quite unaware of the subsequent furore that broke loose in the literary world, and the distressing case of obscene libel brought against the publisher of her brother's poems. "Your Uncle Ern was a clever man," she told her children. "You should be proud of him."

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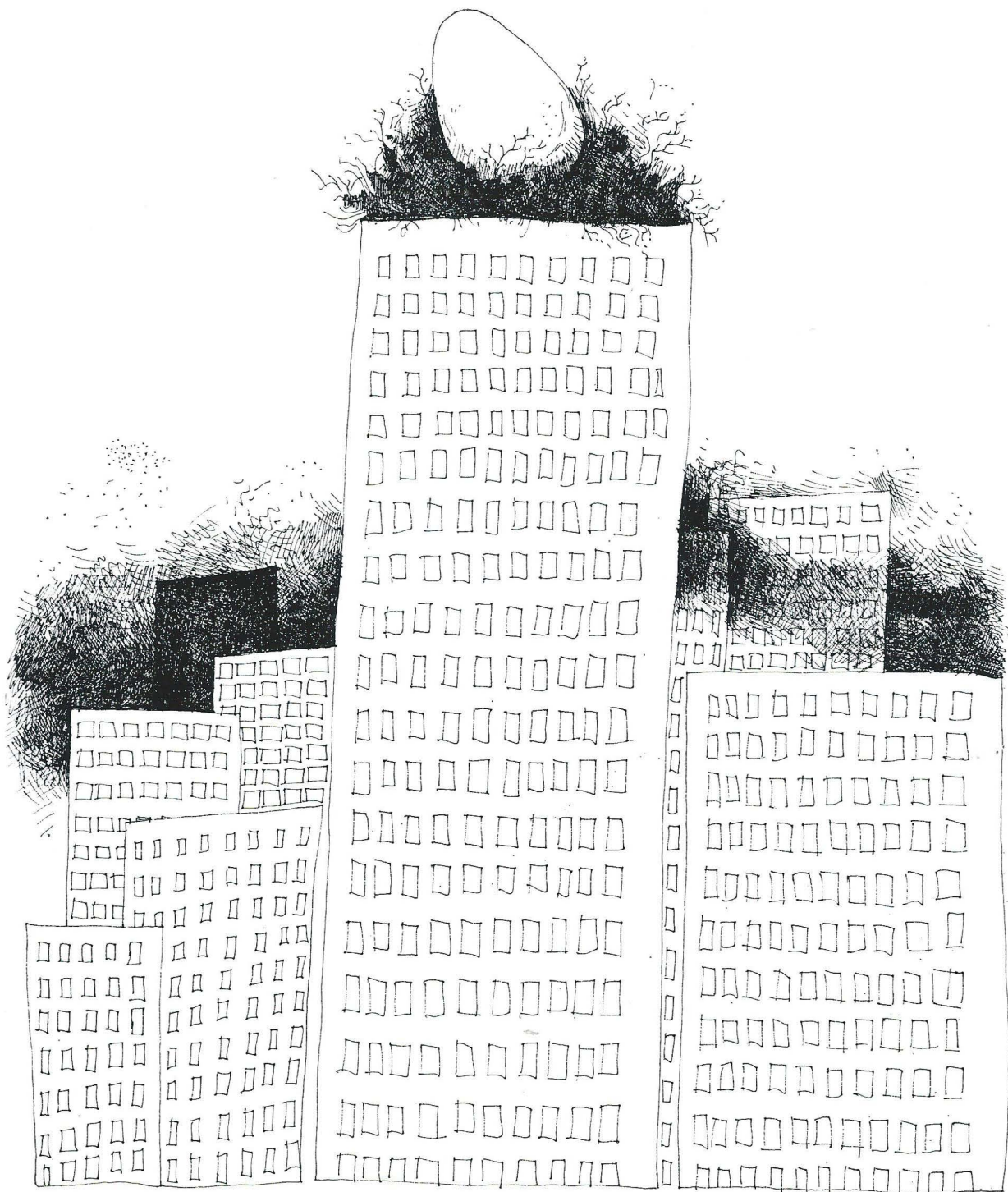
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1975/6

Jiri Tibor

MONA BRAND **The Missing Steps**

I welcome the opportunity to comment on Geoffrey Hutton's important article "Playwrights in Search of a Direction" with which I find myself in a good deal of agreement, particularly with his suggestion that an absence of compassion might be a feature of some of the recent works by Australian playwrights.

Apropos of this I would like to draw attention to his words: "the radical theatre" (i.e. Nimrod and A.P.G.) "was not politically attached to the Left like the New Theatre of earlier days, except in its revues" and to submit that this brief dismissal of one of Australia's most influential "little theatres" might hold at least some clue to the general problem he poses.

It is fairly common these days for summaries of Australian theatre activity to exclude or gloss over the 36 years of continuous New Theatre history that preceded the emergence of the Nimrod and the A.P.G. about 1968. (An important exception is Leslie Rees' "The Making of Australian Drama" (1973).) It seems to me that to try to come to any satisfactory conclusions about the direction of today's socially oriented theatres and playwrights, while leaving out New Theatre's lengthy contribution, is rather like trying to build a staircase leaving out a whole flight of steps.

It could be as important for playwrights to recognise their theatrical antecedents as it is for individuals to know something of their personal ancestry. Yet from views expressed from time to time by A.P.G. writers and their supporters, one could be forgiven for getting the impression that they believe they were the originators of radical theatre in Australia—or that radical theatre sprang fully grown, if not out of Jupiter's head, at least out of La Mama's.

The reality is that New Theatre was pioneering socially significant theatre in our country when some of the comparative newcomers were, liter-

ally, in their prams. What they seem not to realise is that by 1968 a good many battles had been fought and won, and that government support for the arts, together with a lessening of the cold war, made it possible for new theatres to be formed on a professional or semi-professional basis, free of the shackles of old labels.

Sydney New Theatre alone during its forty-five years history has staged 75 plays by Australian writers—plays in which compassion was usually one of the strongest features. Most were premiere productions and 39 of the 75, incidentally, were written by women. The first performance of an Australian play took place in 1933, the most recent in 1976, with another in rehearsal now. The 75 productions have included works by Leslie Rees, Kathleen Carroll, Betty Roland, Katharine Prichard, George Landen Dann, Oriel Gray, George Farwell, James McAuley, Dick Diamond, David Martin, Ralph Peterson, Pat Flower, Alan Seymour, Dymphna Cusack, Kevin McGrath, Frank Hardy and myself.

While not disputing the expression "attachment to the Left" I feel that it is one that needs clarification today, and ought to be looked at in the light of New Theatre's complete work for the stage—the extent and variety of which might come as a surprise to many. Of 277 productions, a mere 16 revues or revue-type musicals could be said to be "political". Among the rest have been plays by writers including Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Chekhov, O'Casey, Clifford Odets, J. B. Priestley, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller, Brendan Behan, William Saroyan, Leo Tolstoy, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, N. E. Simpson, Paul Foster, Jules Feiffer, Ted Willis, John Whiting, Kurt Vonnegut, David Storey, Tom Stoppard and of course Bertolt Brecht who is so ardently acclaimed and imitated today in a variety of theatres. New Theatre first produced

Brecht in 1939 and Shaw's "Pygmalion" in 1934. Dale Wasserman's stage version of John Hersey's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was staged in 1975 before the film version arrived in Australia.

Behind "radical" in the 1970s spells approval and acclaim for productions at the Nimrod of "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been . . .?"—an indictment of cold war McCarthyism—and "Fanchen", a sympathetic treatment of land reform in the Peoples Republic of China.

But in 1936 being "attached to the Left" spelt something very different for New Theatre when, under pressure from the German ambassador of the day, the N.S.W. chief justice sent police to try to stop a performance of Clifford Odet's anti-fascist play, "Till the Day I Die".

In 1948 New Theatre was placed under almost total press censorship after the Sydney Morning Herald's critic praised a production of Sean O'Casey's "The Star Turns Red". So for 12 years, during which the Herald would not even accept an advertisement, New Theatre operated with scarcely any media coverage. During that time there were twenty productions of new Australian works at New Theatre, including two seasons of "Reedy River", as well as a number of overseas plays by writers such as Arthur Miller, Jean Paul Sartre, Sean O'Casey and Ewen McColl—works not being shown elsewhere in the city.

(Now history seems to be repeating itself. After some 16 years of often very appreciative notices, the Herald has advised that they will no longer be sending critics to review the works of the "little theatres".)

As recently as 1968 N.S.W. police tried to arrest actors after a special performance of "America Hurrah", when the chief secretary had banned a segment of that play—a segment that seems quite tame today compared with some other plays in other theatres.

"We shall not travel, but we make the road." This line from a poem I have now largely forgotten comes to mind when I recall how often in the past New Theatre plays were dismissed as "propaganda" and when I read, not without irony, Geoffrey Hutton's complaint that "playwrights had no central propagandist theme like the Irish", and that "Hopgood handled the Vietnamese war, but so nervously that nobody knew exactly what he was saying." In 1967 New Theatre handled the Vietnam war with "On Stage Vietnam" far from nervously, and audiences throughout a six months Sydney season knew exactly what was being said. On this occasion the Sydney press was generally warm in its praise, but I understand that the Melbourne papers ignored the season there, despite its good houses.

Co-operatively created, this "history musical" used narration, drama, movement, music and the vaudeville presentation of politicians with a group of 16 playing many roles—a format developed even further in 1968 with "Going, Going, Gone"—thus introducing to Australian audiences a new theatre style for which organisations like the Jane Street, the Nimrod and the A.P.G. have received most of the official credit. It was a style influenced by earlier New Theatre experiences of the "living newspaper" of the 1930s, Brecht, political revues, folk music, straight drama—and dance-drama under the direction of Margaret Barr, its noted Australian exponent and part-time tutor of movement at the Sydney-based National Institute of Dramatic Art that incorporates the Jane Street Theatre.

It is true that the new writers sometimes fail to develop the sort of sympathy for their characters needed to induce audiences to care deeply about what happens to them. Perhaps this is due in part to the very personal and limited vision those characters are permitted in relation to the broader issues in the world around them.

GWEN HARWOOD **Goddess of the Cross-roads**

My father had a joke about me which made visitors laugh, though I did not understand it. "We call her Salonola, the only non-scratch talking machine on the market." By remaining neither heard nor seen while my mother and grandmother chatted to their friends from town, I had learned my character, and took great interest in it. I could talk the leg off an iron pot; I ate everything, but you could never fill me up or put an ounce of meat on me; I could read anything; you would not know I was listening, but afterwards I could repeat things word for word; my nose had been put out of joint when the Little Man was born; I was terrified of the dark.

No doubt our visitors found other and shorter descriptions of me to enliven their train journey home: a talkative, greedy, jealous, skinny little nosey-parker. I was certainly terrified of the dark. Having learned to pray at Sunday School, I prayed, standing at my bedroom window, to the fairies. Sometimes I saw them moth-pale and wavering in the grasses. I asked them to let me live for ever, and to take away the baby and leave in his place a changeling, preferably a hedgehog or a small red fox. Imagine my mother's surprise when she looked in the basket-weave hamper! By day things were substantially themselves, trustworthy, but at night they changed. I did not believe my teacher when she said that darkness was not a thing, but just the absence of light: when we called the roll each child would answer "Present" to his name; but if he were not there, she would write "Absent". It was like that, she said. The light was simply away. The children knew better. Darkness, like the word "Absent" written in red ink, was something.

We had a country girl called Grace to help in the afternoons. By the time I returned from school she would have hung out the baby's washing while my mother had her rest and my grandmother

crocheted intricate fine cloths or worked glittering bead flowers on velvet. Grace would take my school bag and tidy away the papers and the white napkin in which my sandwiches were wrapped; she would rinse and set to dry the sponge from the sponge-tin, and wash the smeary slate. My four-o'clock would be set out: a thick slice of home-made bread and butter with Windsor sausage, which my grandmother called German sausage. I did not like this name for it. I knew all about the Germans, the Huns, the gorilla-like monsters who threatened women and children in kitchens like ours; under the house in a trunk thought safe from my fingers were the Norman Lindsay posters at which I loved to look in daylight. When they came at night, step by evil step through the shadows, I would say the magic word: Gallipoli, Gallipoli, as I covered my head.

But it was afternoon, and the misery of school was over, and I was back in paradise with my orange taken from the box of dry-creek-sand. I should have loved to eat it slowly on our walk, as Grace pushed the baby and I hung on the handle of the pram talking, talking, talking. But eating in the street was utterly forbidden; so was going into people's houses, or going to the creek. Grace was one of a large, honest, sober, industrious family who lived up the road from us; I understood that she was a country girl from a way my mother, essentially urban, had of saying "She's only been to town *twice* in her *life*." We would wave to Grace's mother, who was almost always washing, poking at clothes in the outdoor copper with a huge bleached copper-stick, or gathering them in, but she would not come to the gate to see the Little Man as so many women did; she had seen enough of them. At the dusty crossroads we could go right, or left, but not onwards to the creek. One day we stopped by a small flaking white weatherboard house near the crossroads.

Black fowls picked and scratched among the ferns and roses. I said loudly to Grace, "A witch lives here." I believed it. My mother called the old woman who lived there "The Gypsy." My father referred to her as "The old witch." I had never seen her closely, but my friend Alice said that she looked like an owl, and had a chopper.

"Don't be silly," said Grace. "She's a fortune-teller. She told me my fortune, and said I would be rich one day." The Little Man, because his pram had stopped moving, started to howl. Grace rocked the pram and tickled him, but he howled more loudly. The old woman appeared at her gate.

I drew away, afraid, but she walked slowly towards me and put a hand on my head. "What splendid hair!" She stroked me like an animal. Then she turned to the pram and lifted my brother in his frilly clothes high in the air, as my father loved to do. He stopped crying, and she gave him to Grace.

"Come inside, out of the sun. You are all much too hot." And so, it seemed, we had been, when we sat on her cool veranda shaded by green canvas blinds. She poured a mug of water from the stone water-monkey and we looked at one another as I drank. She did indeed look like an owl with her round goldrimmed glasses and feathery white hair. "Tell me my fortune again," said Grace.

The old woman shook her head. She kept staring at me. "So unlike the mother," she said, and to Grace, "I read the mother's hand. I told her she would have the boy."

I read the mother's hand. Were hands, then, like books?

"Give me your hand, child."

I put down the thick china mug of cold water on a wicker table and she turned my hands gently in hers. "A good hand," she said. "A lucky hand." She drew her finger across one palm. "A long life, like the mother." Her soft touch and tender strange voice held me captive as an animal that knows it cannot escape and must keep as still as death. The baby sat quietly on Grace's knee.

From a shelf the old woman took a pack of playing cards. For a moment I thought we were all going to play "Snap" or "Strip-Jack-Naked," but she knelt on the wooden veranda boards and began to arrange the cards in front of me in a semi-circle, in groups of three, murmuring over and over, "Bombo, Mormo, Yellow Capella, Bombo, Mormo, Yellow Capella." She told my fortune in the same soothing voice, looking up at me now and again with her owl-eyes, but I can

remember nothing of it except the promise of four children.

She put the cards away and said, "Off you go now. Back home."

Off we went, a fourteen-year-old, a rogue from First Babies, and a real baby. At home again I was uncontrollably wild and naughty, and my mother sent me to play in the garden while Grace prepared the vegetables and my grandmother went to do the milking, remarking that Satan had got into me. She meant it literally. When everyone thought I was with someone else I slipped through the post and rail fence and started off for the forbidden creek. Since I had transgressed by *going into someone's house* and had not been punished I thought myself invulnerable. I walked quickly past the crossroad and on through the lantana patches to the place where the men and boys swam on Sunday afternoons, a rocky basin under the shade of the ironbarks.

The creek, empty of human beings, seemed oddly sinister. The voices of water did not suggest I was welcome. I longed to run home, but was determined to enjoy myself. Sometimes, when I refused to give in, or admit I was wrong, my father would recite

O the queen is proud on her throne,
And proud are her maids so fine,
But the proudest lady that even was known
Is this little lady of mine.

I said the verse to myself to give me courage. I leaned over the bank to look at my reflection, saw only shadow, and slipped down on to a rock, cutting my knee. The swift twilight began. The bank loomed above me, to an adult a stretching step, to me a fearful height. Who would help me? *What* would come? Gallipoli! Gallipoli!

The old woman, the gypsy, the witch. No doubt she had seen me from her garden, and followed. But she appeared like a miracle, hauled me up the steep bank, and, without a word, held me tightly for a moment.

I ran home, and, sneaking through the side fence, saw Grace leaving and my father arriving at the front gate. Under his protection I went in and sat with my bleeding knee hidden by the table.

My grandmother was setting out the breathing lamps.

My father got the cards from the drawer and said, "How about a game of snap before tea?"

I said, "I'll tell your fortune," and began putting the cards out in a semicircle, reciting

“Bombo, Mormo, Yellow Capella, Bombo, Mormo, Yellow Capella.” I told him he would be rich and live for ever.

My grandmother said sharply, “Where did you learn such things? What have you been doing? Where have you been?”

But my mother said, “Leave her alone; she’s only playing.”

I read the mother’s hand.

Mother, you are like an old gypsy yourself now with your snowy hair and tanned skin; the promise of long life was true, and I have had my four children, and will have my long life. I alone can remember you as you stood by my bed, young and beautiful, chasing away my nightmares with lamplight. “There is nothing to be afraid of.” Now it is I who must comfort you against the dark.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: We have recently received the year’s accounts from our splendid and long-suffering and just-about-honorary accountant, Willie Melzer. Our income in the last financial year was near enough to \$19,000. Of this \$8500 come from sales, about the same from grants and \$2000 from donations to the Floating Fund. Our surplus for the year was \$450 — so, without the Floating Fund, there would have been a deficiency of \$1550. Friends of Overland, you can see how important you are. Many thanks to the following for the substantial sum of \$552:

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THE GENIUS OF GRAINGER

Bruce Clunies Ross

John Bird: *Percy Grainger* (Macmillan, \$12.95).

Twenty years ago the composer Keith Humble suggested that Percy Grainger, then working in his museum in Melbourne, be asked to write a piece for the concert opening the Melbourne Olympic Games. The suggestion, Humble remembers, was received as a joke. Yet as this new book demonstrates, there was at that time no composer in Australia more fitted by musical genius and athletic experience to undertake the commission, and more, probably, who would have relished it more. In the last decade of his life Grainger still retained his extraordinary artistic curiosity and imaginative vitality. He was familiar with a vast range of music, from South Pacific polyphonic improvisation to the latest developments in electronic music. He could arguably claim priority for his experiments *before the First World War* in irregular rhythm, polytonality, improvisatory and aleatory music. Yet fifty years later there were only a handful of people in his own country who understood and appreciated such things and of these only the rarest, like Keith Humble, were aware of Grainger's serious work in these fields.

To the rest of us Percy Grainger was the eccentric old concert pianist who composed the piece which in its especially easy versions could be heard any afternoon after school banged, thumped and stumbled out from double-fronted bungalows across the country. We victims of suburban music teachers pursued it through dreary hours of scales and arpeggios as donkeys do carrots. I never found out whether competence in the especially easy version was rewarded by the gift of beginning upon the easy version, and so on,

upwards, because by that time I had rejected "Country Gardens".

We knew, too, about Percy Grainger's long distance running, and ability to throw a cricket ball up over the roof from one side of a house, dash in through the door, down the passage and out again, in time to catch it before it landed on the other side. The image we had of him then was of a kind of cross between Keith Miller and Liberace, though older, with hair like Leopold Stokowski. This was not without foundation. It was a definite side of Grainger which was fostered by his public behaviour. John Bird records periods of self-disgust, when Grainger referred to himself as a "sham" (in comparison to Busoni, for example), and it is clear that he was thinking of his life as a public virtuoso. Yet in spite of public ignorance and apathy, the occasional mockery of his friends and those times when the aural manifestation of his music failed his inner vision, he never seemed to doubt the *authenticity* of his creative genius. Throughout his life he retained the conviction that he had something essentially Australian to express in music. It led him by the end to the frontiers of the art.

Some time after Grainger's remains had been quietly laid away in Adelaide's West Terrace Cemetery, where one night some forty years before it is thought he secretly buried his mother's ashes with his own hands, his central position in Australian musical and cultural history was established by Roger Covell in a chapter of his pioneering *Australia's Music* (1967). John Bird's new biography adds little to the general outlines of Australian musical and cultural history drawn by Roger Covell a decade ago, but it fills in an enormous amount of detail about Grainger's life and thought. The book is packed with revelations, and constantly arouses curiosity and surprise about the composer's versatile genius.

There is first of all the strange history of his reputation. It is characteristic of the intellectual climate of the fifties, particularly in Australia, that by then Grainger was dismissed because of his public image and what might be inferred from it. We have learnt since the falsity of such easy categorical dismissals. They fail, simply, to capture the complexity of a man like Grainger. His many sides may seem to be irreconcilable, but they co-existed in the same person and developed in response to his experience and compelling inner vision. A consideration not of "Country Gardens", but another of his 'popular' compositions, "Colonial Song", might exemplify the point.

When he first heard it, Beecham called "Colonial Song" "the worst piece of modern times". Yet as John Bird suggests, "Colonial Song" was an attempt to meet Melba's concept of musical "muck", a category which Grainger for these purposes may have understood descriptively rather than evaluatively. He recognized that Australian musical taste was not well-developed, yet wanted to write a piece which would have a widespread impact on a popular audience in the way that the songs of Stephen Foster did in the United States. This was not only a laudable aim within the limitations it sets, it was absolutely essential, given Grainger's vision. *In order to be Australia's first serious composer, he had to be its first popular one.* The one presupposed the other. Herein lies the distinction between the Australian musical inheritance and the American, and between Grainger and Charles Ives. North American composers of Grainger's generation and earlier had been able to draw on an enormous richness and diversity of popular folk music, both ethnic and regional. The Australian folk tradition, on its *musical* (as opposed to literary) side, was much thinner, for complex historical reasons discussed in Covell's book. This gap has always been a stumbling block for composers who see themselves as essentially Australian, thought it may be much less of a problem in these days of internationalist music. Grainger's invocation of the example of Stephen Foster was neither tasteless nor eccentric. His music was an important element in the American tradition, recognized and admired by Grainger's near contemporary Ives and by Louis Moreau Gottschalk half a century before. Both drew upon it for their compositions as did Grainger, who always remembered the Foster songs his mother sang to him. His "Tribute to Foster" (1913-31) is built on "Camptown Races" as, in its very different way, as Gottschalk's "The Banjo" (1851), which suggests, incidentally, that if we

want an American analogue for Grainger, it is not Ives, but Gottschalk, the romantic, cosmopolitan concert hall artist from New Orleans, whom he resembles more closely.

Grainger's interest in folk and popular music, and the use he made of it, was connected with his sense of being an Australian composer. This is probably why his curiosity was so wide-ranging, embracing oriental music, English and Scandinavian folk-song, Maori singing, South Pacific polyphony, ragtime and jazz. According to Mr. Bird, the interest in Afro-American music developed before the first world war, in which case Grainger was one of the very first 'serious' musicians to discover the form. As early as his Australian tour of 1924 he was praising jazz in his lecture-recitals, and this, surely, must be very nearly the beginning of Australian jazz history. In 1932, during his only stint as a university teacher, he brought the entire Duke Ellington orchestra into the lecture hall to illustrate his discussion. Ellington was introduced as the world's third great composer after Bach and Delius. A few years ago this may have looked like facile boosting, but in 1932 it could only have been based on an authentic insight. No one could sham by praising Ellington at that date. His reputation and music were not widely enough known or understood to support it.

Grainger's association with folk singers and popular musicians brought him in touch with people for whom music was a functional activity rather than a specialized 'high' art. Grainger came to admire this, and deplored the cultivation of specialization and virtuosity (even in himself). He had an insight into musical activity as a physical and social phenomenon, somewhat like that accounted for in John Blacking's brilliant recent book *How Musical is Man?* (1973). Even some of Grainger's apparent eccentricities might simply have been a delight in the physical concomitants of music. Certainly some of his innovations, like 'Elastic Scoring', were developed to aid the *use* of his music.

In this, as in every aspect of his career from beginning to end, Grainger saw himself as an Australian composer, even though he left the country at the age of thirteen. He described one of his earliest innovations, the style of harmony in unresolved discords (developed around 1898) as "an Australian contribution to musical progress". John Bird's biography is packed with similar testimony. The vision of 'Free Music' which preoccupied Grainger throughout his life

had its roots in his childhood experience and would free "Australian musical life . . . from the absurdities, falsenesses, ignorance & good-for-nothingness that plagues European and American musical life".

The chief components of this vision were the sounds of lapping waters on the Albert Park Lake (then lagoon) in Melbourne, and the rolling contours of the Adelaide Hills. Incidentally, in writing about the latter Mr. Bird reveals an annoying vagueness about Australian geography and topography, at one point placing the Hills in 'the deserts of South Australia'. There is no evidence in this book that Grainger ever saw any South Australian deserts, except the broad stretch of flat mallee country between Tailem Bend and Keith which he once walked across with a 42 pound swag.

Grainger's remarks about 'Free Music' indicate that he saw its essential Australian qualities as positive and radically innovative. When declining an honorary Mus. Doc. from McGill University in 1945 because of his "democratic Australian viewpoint" he added that he considered his "Australian music as an activity hostile to education". If he was thinking of musical education, he almost certainly meant the dominance in musical academies of Austro-Germanic formal and harmonic models. John Bird cites numerous documents which indicate that Percy Grainger regarded his eclectic openness to other forms of music, with its power to subvert the Germanic classical tradition and what he called "the filthy Sonata-Symphony form", as a distinctly Australian part of his genius.

This emerged, too, in a kind of healthy Barry MacKenzie-ism (which is not the same as Ockerism). Grainger believed in sticking his neck out, a virtue championed by Max Harris (*inter alia*) in recent times, and he had a positive liking for vulgarity, which he considered an essential element in all great art. These are indeed virtues by which the Australian creative tradition has sometimes been able to revive European modes expiring of good taste. It was an aspect of Patrick White's contribution to the high art novel for example.

In the last analysis, Percy Grainger always considered himself an Australian because he was a racist. Mr Bird seems to find this difficult to reconcile with Grainger's democratic socialism and egalitarianism in other things. But as he points out, Grainger was a child in Melbourne just at the time of the first flourishing of Austra-

lian nationalism, and his attitudes to his own country must have been shaped by this. In one respect at least, this was probably true. Socialism was quite consistent with the Bulletin line on race and in general with racist ideas widely held around the turn of the century, in Australia and elsewhere. In fact, it is doubtful whether Grainger's interest in oriental music (aroused when he heard a Japanese orchestra in Melbourne, as a child) would have allowed him to go to the crude lengths of the Bulletin on that question. Percy Grainger was not a racial supremacist, in spite of such things as his efforts in later life to collect color photographs of the eyes of "Blue-eyed" composers, but he was a racial determinist. Thus he was an Australian composer not because he wanted to be; he believed he was by necessity. It was decided for him by birth and parentage.

A clue to Grainger's thinking on the question of the Australian race is contained in one of the extraordinary letters he wrote to the brown haired Dane Alfhind Sandy (*née de Luce*). Speaking of his youthful works he pointed out revealing flashes which mere "truly Nordic, truly British, truly new-world, truly Australian". This is decidedly odd, but not inconsistent if we recognize the force of those *trulys*. The pure, but not the only racial stream in Australia (and, it seems, the New World) is that which stretches back through Britain (or better, England) to the Scandinavian invaders and settlers of the middle ages. And so Percy Grainger always regards the battle of Hastings as a personal tragedy, forgetting, perhaps, that it was won by Normans.

Nordicness obsessed Grainger from childhood, when he read H. C. Andersen and the Icelandic sagas. In later life it expressed itself through the close links he established with Scandinavia and particularly Denmark. According to Mr Bird he acquired a total fluency in Danish, including a mastery of the Jutish dialects (which he needed for his folk-song collecting activities with Evald Tang Kristensen). The Danes to whom I have mentioned this are incredulous, for few English speakers can have had such a complete mastery of their language, but it was probably not beyond the capacity of the inventor of Blue-eyed English.

This sympathy for Scandinavia expressed itself, above all, in Grainger's love and advocacy of blue-eyed Nordic music, such as that of the Scots-Norwegian Grieg and the Germano-Dutch-Englishman Delius, but excluding that of the Dane Carl Nielsen, who succumbed to the dominance of Germanic formalism. It is obvious from many of

the documents cited in this book that music becomes blue-eyed through its rejection of Austro-German harmonic and formal elements. Mr Bird argues that from the thirties, if not earlier, Grainger began to assert the superiority of blue-eyed Nordic music, with all the racist implications of such a belief. This may be so, but such a strong case is not necessary to fit the facts cited. Rather, it seems that Percy Grainger's advocacy of music such as Delius's was another part of his campaign to subvert the unthinking acceptance of models based on the German classical tradition.

The distinction I am making between racial determinism and racial supremacism may be like that between soft and hard drugs, and the step from one to the other just as easy to make. But John Bird cites no evidence that Grainger actually made it. On the contrary, while he was in Chicago during the notorious riots of 1919, he, together with one of his black students, took a public stand in support of racial toleration. His interest, throughout his life in oriental, polynesian and Afro-American music entailed a respect for the peoples who made it. Bird points out that A. J. Knocks, the collector of Raratongan and Maori singing, "½ (at least) native in feeling, married to a Maori" (as Grainger put it to Quilter) was one of the composer's culture heroes. Grainger explained things in terms of race the way some others explain them in terms of psychology. It is significant that in answering a letter in which Alfhind Sandby had ventured a psychological analysis of his character, Grainger responded angrily with a racial explanation: "I was born right—I don't have to 'develop'. I am happy thru & thru; Happy in my race, happy in my art . . . I don't have to behave morally—I am good. In other words, I am an Australian."

If blue-eyed music required the rejection of Germanic elements, Grainger's other lifelong project, the invention of blue-eyed English, entailed the elimination from plain English of all words of Greek, Latin and Romance origin, with the substitution of new words built upon Germanic roots. Grainger was not the first to suggest such a reform. Similar attempts have been made ever since the English againbirthingtime. However, Grainger's beforebutthoughts on his askingaim have one-outstanding sight-traces which selfforearm full mindhandling. Judging from the extensive quotations cited in this new book, the resulting language, because of its syntax and vocabulary, is rather more like transliterated Dan-

ish than German. This is quite consistent with Grainger's obsession with Nordic as opposed to west Germanic culture. His writings in and on this subject and others, no less than his serious music, stand in urgent need of rescue from obscurity. Mr Bird reprints two important pieces on "Free Music" and "Elastic Scoring" and hints at many other riches, such as "The Love-Life of Helen and Paris" and various autobiographical writings. There is clearly room for an edition of these.

Others, such as the detailed accounts he left of his sex-life, will probably have to wait. It was fortunate, given his sexual proclivities, that Grainger did not apply for the Chair of Music at the Elder Conservatorium in 1947. Our loss was very probably his gain, since the ensuing decade was high season for the popular Australian spectator sport of hounding distinguished musicians for their alleged sexual deviations. John Bird documents this side of Grainger's life very fully, and these revelations seem justified by the fact that Grainger wanted his sexual history to be made public in detail and left extensive records to ensure that it was. However, the attempt to explain Grainger's sexual nature and relate it to his art and thought on other matters is a complete failure. Granted that even an expert psychologist (which Mr Bird clearly is not) would probably have little insight to offer on this question, and that Grainger's own ideas about it were confused; all the more reason to resist interpretations which can only be superficial. Mr Bird is acutely aware of this problem, and throughout the book draws attention to contradictions, paradoxes, inconsistencies and non-sequiturs in Grainger's life and thought. Some like Grainger's ideas on race, were not inconsistent at all (though they were consistently wrong) but, even so, it is not necessarily the biographer's job to establish consistency in a life, particularly one as rich and varied as Grainger's.

Mr Bird makes one attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable in a paragraph which begins "Percy Grainger was made". On the evidence cited (or any I can imagine he possesses, even including a medical opinion) this is very doubtful. Nor does it help to explain that Grainger was an unbalanced genius. Who wants a balanced one? There ought to be another paragraph somewhere beginning "Percy Grainger was a genius", but perhaps Mr Bird's entire book meets that demand. It firmly establishes Percy Grainger's achievement and is clearly based upon a close familiarity with many of his scores, which are discussed sensitively in easy non-technical language, without

even recourse to musical examples. It will thus make Grainger's work known to the wider public he always wanted and deserved.

It is a pity, however, that such an important book is not better written or organised. The clumsy periphrasis, in the penultimate paragraph, describing Grainger's death, is unfortunately only too characteristic of the author's style. His command of direct narrative is weak, so that the retelling of Rose Grainger's death trails off into trivial unsubordinated details, and the story of Grainger's courtship, with Ella learning the chords of "I Wanna Be Happy" on her banjulele sounds as if it was invented by P. G. Wodehouse, but written with his boots.

However, the book's biggest fault is its documentation, which often stops short of giving the reader sufficient information for following up a particular point. There is, of course, a problem here, since Grainger apparently left vast sources, scattered in various libraries throughout the world, and Mr Bird has had access to most of them. Yet in a pioneering book of this kind the point should be to chart the territory with as many signposts as possible. What is needed, instead of the bare indication "See Notes for unpublished sources" is an essay on the provenance of manuscript material. The sources also need to be evaluated, and clarification is required in every case and not just occasionally on their original language since Grainger used others besides English, plain and blue-eyed. It is not clear to me how the code, based on Danish, which Grainger used to record his sexual activities in his diary, was broken, for example.

These flaws are regrettable, but do not alter the fact that this is a major book, worth writing and well worth reading. Percy Grainger's life was rarely trivial or ordinary, and so often quixotic and extraordinary, that it would enliven any retelling. That, perhaps, was his last legacy.

THE DIARY OF A NOBODY

Edward Kynaston

Arthur Hickman: *Arthur and Eric*, edited by Bruce Grant (Heinemann, \$14.50).

The male spinster aunt was one of the odder products of Britain between the two world wars. He was usually lower middle class, often unconsciously or unacknowledgedly homosexual, physically timid, passionately tepid, an androgyne, a sort of castrato common amongst teachers, clergy-

men (Anglican more often than not), back room civil servants, scoutmasters, and in other refined and respectably unobtrusive occupations. The male spinster aunt was middle-aged from earliest youth and belongs very clearly to the shabby, shallow, superficial, brittle, bizarre years of the sentimental gaiety of the young Noel Coward and Ivor Novello, as well as, more macabrely, to the depression years, the General Strike and the lengthening shadows cast by the early concentration camps.

These men, young and not so young, were usually kind and amiable and colorless as glass. They were rather sad figures tolerated for their malleability and social usefulness as fill-ins at parties and gatherings when real people cried off or were unable at the last moment to turn up. Many had pale artistic pretensions which they wisely never attempted to implement seriously, being quite content to talk about and hint modestly at their unique talents while they quite happily and comfortably lived out their lack-lustre lives on the periphery of the little literary and artistic worlds of London.

Arthur Hickman, the Arthur of the title of this book, was just such a person, judging from his journal. He was kind, amiable, respectable, refined, colorless, painfully sexually-inhibited (though who wouldn't have been in a society that still spoke in whispers of Oscar and Bosie and maintained barbaric laws on male homosexuality?), timid, secure in a behind-the-scenes job at the venerably reactionary Times, and immovably installed in the small flat he was to occupy for the rest of his life. Arthur's pretensions were literary. He kept a journal from when he was in his twenties, from 1923, until he died. His journal was marred by one major fault. He couldn't write.

This book is made up of edited extracts from Arthur's journal, chosen to illustrate his friendship and involvement in the life of Australian author Eric Muspratt. The journal makes it clear that Arthur thought of himself as one of the worldly wise, a sophisticated, fashionable, witty, slightly weary litterateur. The journal also makes clear that he was in fact naive, unworldly, innocent, unfashionable, unoriginal and untalented. His writing is trite, inept, cliched, platitudinous, clumsy, inelegant and verbose. He has no wit and his humor is a vestigial remnant of his schooldays. Hardly a fault enumerated by Fowler (whose *The King's English* had first been published in 1906) is missing. Here faultlessly demonstrated

are elegant variation, inversion, redundancies, truisms, circumlocutions, euphemisms, as well as much else offensive and archaic. Arthur's writing is, in addition, wooden, stiff, mannered and embarrassingly self-consciously 'literary'. His attitudes to life are pompous, pretentious, superior, self-important, snobbish, with just a hint of the fashionable anti-semitism of the English upper classes of that time.

Any journal aimed at posterity (and what journal is not?) must have certain basic qualities. It must first of all be reasonably literate. If it is to have style it must be the product of a formed original personality. The author must be absolutely ruthless in his self-expression and self-exposure as well as inflexibly truthful. His ear for the nuances of speech must be acute. More than anything else he must be beyond limiting self-consciousness and the evasiveness and the coy lily-gilding that accompany it. Without these qualities everything is seen in a glass darkly, in the smoky distorting mirror of imprecise expression and vain self-regard. This journal has none of these qualities. It only demonstrates what we already know: that people who go to great pains to conceal their true selves usually have nothing worth concealing.

A major trial of this book, on top of everything else, is the way in which dialogue and monologue are rendered into standard arthurian (it is impossible to use an initial capital letter in this connection) speech, rather as if a very intelligent rabbit had taken to reading back his own furry shorthand.

The journal begins when Eric Muspratt comes into Arthur's life in 1926. They meet one evening at the central London YMCA. Eric is bumming his way around and is hungry. Arthur seems to have been eyeing-off the young christian males. Using simple cunning Arthur gets himself introduced to Eric. Eric is an exceptionally well-built young man and Arthur is immediately infatuated with his knotted musculiness. He takes him home for the night and the friendship begins. For the rest of the journal one is treated to frequent lengthy dreary boring repetitive sets of clumsy panegyrics on the quantity and quality of Eric's torso and his physical vitality. Beyond his ever-larger-looming body Eric seems to have been an averagely mindless, loudly offensively extroverted young Australian of his time, a hobo-adventurer already with a shrewd eye to the main chance and the ruthless gusto of the average ocker

Australian expatriate for exploiting acquaintances and manipulating friends.

Arthur's social connections with some of the sillier gushing middle-aged women of the well-to-do middle class leads, to his barely concealed chagrin, to Eric becoming a popular novelty gigolo passed swiftly from bed to bed and paid for his servicing by given small household jobs, like painting doors. Nevertheless the friendship continues with Arthur tolerating Eric's night work so that he may have *The Body* close at hand.

Arthur and Eric get up to some scintillating high jinks, like staying at a Brighton boarding house together and walking on the Sussex Downs. They return from their walk by bus. "Our seat gave us an uninterrupted view of the broad and shaven neck of a hatless young woman with fiery red hair. " 'Flaming youth!' said Eric." With this and other similarly delicious witticisms the time soon passed and they returned to London where Eric showed he was capable of more seriously profound philosophical insights. They walked on Hampstead Heath together one day.

We walked across the open heath past hundreds of sheep feeding on the wind-swept slopes.

Eric discoursed.

"Wisdom is the grasp of ultimate truth", he said.

I thanked him and asked him who said it first. "As far as I am aware I did", he said "I thought it out one day".

"A good day's work for you," I said good-naturedly. Talk to me of other things."

It is not often that one can encounter on the printed page, all in only seven or eight lines, a combination of pomposity, pretentiousness, patronage, mock-modesty, and arrant nonsense.

There were other intellectual and aesthetic feasts. Eric was taken to meet the immortal Arthur Purvis, the founder and editor of the *Fur World!* A conversationalist extraordinary. Unfortunately most of his wit and wisdom was not recorded. "In the next three hours he covered most fields of human endeavour in one form or another and many of the personalities of today and yesterday. There was far too much to be recorded here but this will do for a sample." The "sample" consists of three dull anecdotes about eccentric English clergymen in English villages, commonplaces of the then recent past.

In between times, to balance the richness of the intellectual fare, Arthur eulogised *The Body* and solemnly wrote down in his journal its every

dimension. Whenever they visited the country they found quiet places where Eric could rip off his clothes and prance around in the nude for Arthur to photograph him. Arthur put on what appears to be the dullest dinner party ever held for two young women named Betty and Ivy. Betty, predictably, was bowled over by Eric and after dinner sat on his lap. Arthur read from his journal by candlelight! Afterwards he sat chastely on the floor with Ivy. "Betty's arms were twined round Eric's strong body, exploring the reefs of muscle under his shirt. Occasionally the noise of lips in contact would come to us, but we continued our talk on love and life and literature."

The infinite tedium of the journal, relieved only occasionally by unintentional humour, continues. Eric came and went. He wrote a successful book about his experiences on a south sea island and was briefly lionised. He remained an emotional moron about women who continued to gorge themselves on his physicality. He wrote some more books, none as successful as his first, got involved with a mother-of-four-daughter-of-a-baronet and took a long time to get uninvolved. In 1936 Eric finally returned to Australia.

The remainder of the book, the last thirty-six pages, is made up of letters, chiefly between Eric and Arthur, extracts from Arthur's journal, and a connecting narrative by Bruce Grant. After unmitigated Arthur the relief is very great and since these thirty-six pages cover the years 1937 to 1949 there is a welcome feeling of compression and pace about them.

Eric Muspratt was a moderately competent writer whose work suffered from patchiness. Hickman was not a writer at all. Why then this painfully inept curio of a pseudo-book? In his introduction Bruce Grant writes of the journal providing "... a unique account of an unusual and tragic person, making a footnote to a footnote to the history of Australian literature or a footnote to a footnote to the history of English literature."

But the journal is completely without any sort of literary or other merit. The account of Muspratt is obviously distorted by Hickman's prejudices, lack of perception, and invincible narcissistic insensitivity. To claim this journal, by a barely literate mediocrity, even as a footnote to a footnote to a footnote to anything at all is to claim, however apologetically, that it has a value which it simply doesn't possess. Too many academics and ex-academics try to insure themselves

against future criticism by this sort of modestly deprecating comment, not that the risk is very great in the mild and incompetent atmosphere of what passes for criticism in Australia. That this book secured publication in the first place is a pretty fair indication of the almost total lack of critical acumen applied to books in this country.

In his postscript Bruce Grant repeats, once again, the tired old pathetic fallacy of Australian writing in the usual fine bulldust of national special pleading.

But it is also clear, especially to an Australian reader a generation later, that the cultural isolation of Australia played its part in Muspratt's life, as it has in the lives of many Australian writers. Although not Australian by birth, his home was Australia and his struggle to write in his own country is always in contrast with the exciting literary life on standing offer to him abroad. There is a theme here as old as the first stirrings of Australian literature.

Fiddlesticks! This hoary old myth, part product of nineteenth-century Australian egalitarianism (we're all equally ordinary blokes—it's the environment that gets us down!), part feeble excuse for lack of talent, should have died long ago. Talent is what makes a writer and real talent always dominates environment (if sometimes only by escaping from it). The romantic illusion of "... the exciting literary life on standing offer to him abroad ..." is a rare survival of bohemian nonsense into the twentieth century. Real writers, major writers, professional writers of integrity keep well away from the pseudo-literary life of the cliques and coteries of the great cities. They have serious work to do and generally they prefer to live real lives amongst real people.

Dull safe mediocrity is the great Australian dream. It is the chief reason for the absence of informed intelligent *critical* (that it has to be said is in itself devastating criticism) criticism that might offend juvenile ideas of mateship.

With *Arthur and Eric* the strange dreary, dull, flat death-in-life of so-called Australian literature drags on its weary way spreading yet another distinctively Australian bit of literary dilution into a sea of it that is already utterly tasteless in every respect. Arthur Hickman was to prose roughly what McGonigal was to poetry, but without McGonigal's talent. The laughter of the rest of the world will be a long time dying away.

SALE OF THREE CITIES

Peter Spearritt

Leonie Sandercock: *Cities for Sale* (Melbourne University Press. \$14.40).

1977 is an appropriate year in which to review Leonie Sandercock's *Cities for Sale*, a book conceived and written in Canberra amid Labor's hopes of a new deal for urban Australia. Many of those hopes are now in ruins. The Labor-created Department of Urban and Regional Development (DURD, one of the more memorable Canberra acronyms) has been dismantled more rapidly than many observers thought possible. The budget of the Department of Environment, Housing and Community Development which replaced it has been so reduced that it can no longer have much impact on major urban problems. The author's optimistic expectation that DURD would be "the most powerful initiative" for urban change in Australia will not be fulfilled.

Sandercock begins her book with the emergence of the town planning movement in Australia between 1900 and 1920. She traces its origins to British middle-class reformers with strong beliefs in physical determinism, but points out that by 1918 most Australian town-planning advocates had rejected the necessity for municipal ownership of land. This concern about public ownership of land is central to Sandercock's main thesis, that planning will fail unless planners control the land itself. Not surprisingly then the book, as the author tells us, is a study of failure.

The first part of *Cities for Sale* is taken up with an historical analysis of the laissez-faire nature of planning in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide before 1945. In these chapters the author is preoccupied with the generally unsuccessful attempts to legislate for Town Planning (with capitals). Since she defines town planners only as those people who saw themselves as such, she spends a considerable amount of time discussing the obstacles facing town planners like Charles Reade in Adelaide and the advocates of Greater Sydney and Greater Melbourne. But she gives little attention to the role of state governments in providing public transport, roads, water and sewerage. Surely such public works are at least as important to town planning as any attempts to create metropolitan governments? While the author is aware of the vital role of the Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works in

the planning of that city, she ignores the part played by the Metropolitan Water, Sewerage and Drainage Board in Sydney. More serious still, she dismisses suburban electrification, Australia's first underground railway (Melbourne's is still not completed) and the Sydney Harbor Bridge in two lines. My complaint is not mere Sydney chauvinism. Those three interrelated schemes represent the most impressive and coherent attempt at public transport planning ever undertaken in Australia. And unlike most of the schemes for metropolitan-wide government and housing reform, they actually came to fruition.

In the second half of this book Sandercock examines, within a more convincing historical framework, the fate of planning since the second world war. In a pioneering chapter on "Limits of Reform: Federal Labor and Post-War Reconstruction" she points out that a redistributive approach to city planning required changes in the system of property ownership, and that the Labor government "simply could not get the votes for such changes, as the 1949 election shows". Although she notes the total lack of interest shown by the Menzies government in our cities, she does not explain why a majority of electors and urban members of the Liberal Party were prepared to accept this situation. An analysis of our pervasive anti-urban bias—a deeply shared, cross-class Australian ideology—would have been welcome.

Sandercock comes closer to the nexus between ideology and practice in her chapter on post-war Adelaide. She shows that Adelaide was the first Australian city seriously to question freeways, but also notes the irony of such questioning in a state where 39 per cent of the workforce are dependent on the motor industry for employment. It is all very well for enlightened sections of the Adelaide bourgeoisie to talk about getting rid of their cars, but if their motor industry shut down, Adelaide would shut down too. Sandercock is aware of these contradictions, even to the extent of choosing for the front cover a striking Petty cartoon which sums up one of her main conclusions: the power of Australia's existing economic and social structure to compromise even our most ardent reformers and revolutionaries.

The chapter on post-war Melbourne—"Capitalism, Crude and Uncivilized"—is probably the most convincing in the book, for here Sandercock can clearly identify an enemy unprotected by a humane establishment (as in

Adelaide) or an ALP government (as in Sydney). She establishes the class nature of the Melbourne city council and its extraordinary ability to defeat any reforms not in its own interests. She also documents some gross cases of land speculation, unmatched by anything in Sydney or Adelaide, namely the industrialisation of Westernport and the notorious profiteering surrounding the Melbourne Underground Railway. It is fitting that such examples should come from Melbourne, which continues to house more corporate head offices than any other city in Australia.

In Sydney successive ALP governments made post-war capitalism look acceptable, but Sandercock has got the measure of these governments and the ALP city council in her subtitle for this chapter, "Development Without Improvement". The Liberal regime of 1965-76 merely continued and occasionally enlarged upon such ALP projects as the Warringah Expressway, while the Civic Reform city council pursued the ALP's policy of encouraging so-called "urban renewal" and high-rise development. It is to be hoped that the Wran Labor government will not fall into the same thoughtless trap. One of the few causes for celebration in the current scaling-down of the public sector is that there will no longer be funds for freeway projects, but of course the unfortunate corollary is that public transport will suffer too.

In her final chapter Sandercock discerns a movement in public opinion which might have made it possible for DURD to overcome the opposition of "the recalcitrant Liberal states and the political power of the big property owners". She traces the rise of middle- and working-class residents' action groups and of the Builders Laborers' Federation, and the 'unusual alliance' that developed between them. But Sandercock also realises just how fragile this working-class/middle-class popular front really was. One of the preconditions of the BLF's success was a buoyant building industry, and because of the property boom, this is precisely what we had. Up to this time the BLF was led by the charismatic Jack Munday and other members of the Communist Party of Australia, who were responsible for the introduction of the now famous "Green Bans". Thanks to these, many of Sydney's historic buildings are still standing. But in 1975 the building trade went into decline. Norm Gallagher, Federal Secretary of the BLF and a member of the Communist Party of Australia (Marxist-Leninist) managed, with the help of the Master Builders' Association, to displace the NSW leadership. Thus was a new and very unusual cross-class

alliance forged, but one which was not interested in Green Bans. Since then much of this debate has become academic, because the depression in the building industry, particularly in Sydney, has been so severe that there is now little demolition or construction to place Green Bans on.

Sandercock is constantly concerned in this book to compare Marxist and social democratic analyses and solutions for Australian society. It is unusual in Australia to tackle both at once, and this gives rise to some of her best observations. She is aware of one well-publicised Marxist criticism of DURD, namely that the department merely redefined the problem of inequality and did not see it as a function of the ownership of the means of production. But as she writes,

This criticism may be true but it is not particularly useful since it merely states the obvious, that the Labor Party is not a socialist party but a social democratic one and as such chooses to tackle the consequences of the capitalist economy (like locational inequality) rather than to dismantle that economy. (Pp. 219-20).

The message of *Cities for Sale*—and it is very much a book of messages—it is a very depressing one. First, planners may never control much land in Australia because non-Labor governments and many Australians do not accept the idea of leasehold or the public ownership of development rights (i.e. elimination of private gains from land-use changes). (Canberra is, and will probably remain, the notable exception.) Second, although the working-class outer suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne can be improved, their location vis-à-vis the central city—which as Sandercock constantly reminds us is the key to so much inequality—cannot be changed.

But there is cause for hope. The ideology of the "property democracy" is now under challenge. After the war, home ownership in Sydney and Melbourne rose spectacularly: in 1947 only forty per cent of all dwellings were owner-occupied, but by 1971 it had risen to 71 per cent. But home ownership is now declining. It is too early to predict what effect this change will have on party support and housing policies, but if rental housing continues to be scarce and rents to increase, attitudes towards home ownership could change drastically.

Cities for Sale is an important and provocative book. Together with Stretton's *Ideas for Australian Cities* (1970, new edition 1975), it provides the most illuminating study of urban Australia

yet attempted. Because of their preoccupation with town planning—narrowly defined—there is much that these books do not explain about our cities. But other historians have made recent contributions to the urban debate. Lawson's book on *Brisbane in the 1890s* is a brave but not entirely successful attempt to merge urban sociology with conventional history, while Hirst's *Adelaide and the Country 1870-1917* is an original study of the political interplay between city and country, surely one of the most important themes in Australian history. We look forward to the publication of Graeme Davison's *Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne (1880-1895)*, while Max Neutze's *Urban Development in Australia* (Allen and Unwin, 1977) provides a useful underpinning for urban histories of all major Australian cities. Post-graduate students around Australia, authors of the nostalgic coffee-table boom—and, yes, even some academics—are at last becoming interested in our urban history. *Cities for Sale* is one of the best expressions of that interest.

RECENT FICTION

John McLaren

Kay Brown: *Knock Ten* (Wentworth Books, \$7.50).

Noel Hilliard: *Send Somebody Nice* (Robert Hale and Company and Withcoulls, £stg.3.10).

Frank Moorhouse: *Conference-Ville* (Angus and Robertson, \$2.95).

Michael Wilding: *Scenic Drive* (Wild and Woolley, \$3.95).

Christine Townend: *Travels with Myself* (Wild and Woolley, \$4.95).

The title page of Kay Brown's book describes it as 'a novel of mining life'. It is set in The Mount in Queensland — presumably Mount Isa — during the years of the depression, and deals with the realities of Townside and Mineside, the Company and the Union, school, home and work, from the point of view of a miner's daughter and wife. The book is not, however, another grim record of struggle against poverty and oppression, but rather a joyful account of growing up in a world where the Church provided certainty for the women and the Union did the same for the men. The comfortable domesticity which the child experiences between these two pillars is, however, shadowed both by the threat of disaster underground, marked by the signal Knock Ten, and by the sense of personal violence which is generally curbed by social order

or individual virtue, but which surfaces in such people as Thad Barrigg's father.

The story is told in the first person by Lee Cleary, but Thad provides the focus of her perceptions, as well as being protagonist in the love story which dramatises the class conflicts in the town. Thad himself is a picaresque figure, almost larger than life, but the author's presentation of him through the hero-worshipping eyes of his childhood companion gives his mythical status credibility. The same technique prevents the novel lapsing into the sentimentality which threatens it. We have the perceptive, sympathetic, but above all enthusiastic account of a participant, not the cold chronicle of a reporter. The feeling that there were giants in those days is a natural result of the style of presentation.

The novel is not, however, a self-indulgent piece of recollection. By showing us these events both as they were and as a participant felt about them, the author has both created a legend herself and demonstrated how Australians have come to see themselves. The code of mateship is a real thing in the pages of the book, but it is also the code of a community which, however closely it reproduces the conflicts of a wider world, is separated from that world. The code which is warm and inclusive for the people of the mine is therefore capable of developing into a rigid and exclusive code when confronted by events beyond its comprehension. Larry Wicks, the sole communist in the town, attempts to explain the conflicts with the company in terms of world business, but his remarks seem remote from the affairs of the miners. Their reliance on the Labor Party is instinctive and conservative rather than thoughtful or even evolutionary. They see the party as the extension of themselves, the guarantor of their continuing interests, rather than as a bridge to a wider society or a means of changing that society. Their range is domestic, their solidarity a defence of the individual against arbitrary power, not an assertion of collectivity. Beneath the slogans, the ideology is little different from that of the Country Party in post-war years. It is no paradox that in Australia the dream of the unity of farmers and workers has been achieved by reactionaries rather than revolutionaries.

Noel Hilliard's collection of short stories, *Send Somebody Nice*, is characterised by the same kind of humanity that marks Kay Brown's work. Even when he uses the first person, however, the narrating voice is wry and detached rather than

involved. He is the observer who enjoys the variety of human experience. The mood of the collection is perhaps best summed up in the words which close the final story of the book: "the splendour of life when it is lived with dignity and purpose". Hilliard, a New Zealander, finds this splendour not in the high places of society, but in the unregarded corners, among Maoris and drifters and children, and, in the title story, even in the life of a young girl, naive if not innocent, being trained by an older pair for the career of call-girl. Waiting for her first client, she asks her employer to 'Send someone nice'. Fate for once obliges.

In *Conference-Ville*, Frank Moorhouse also writes a first-person narrative. This device is not, however, used as a device for presenting a fiction, but rather as a means of allowing fiction to give him a purchase on reality. The subject of the book is Moorhouse's participation in Writer's Week at the Adelaide Festival. When it first appeared in serial form in *Nation Review* it read like an unsatisfactory attempt at humorous reportage. This, I think, is because the format of the newspaper inevitably emphasises the status of the writing as a report of what happened. Within the covers of the book, however, it becomes apparent that Moorhouse is concerned with what happens to him as a performer in his own drama. The first-person narrative paradoxically enables him to be detached while still placing his own behavior and reactions in the centre of the reader's attention.

The book commences with Moorhouse encountering one of the *academic participants* on the plane to Adelaide, and concludes with conference post-mortems over a cafe table in Sydney. In between, he gives his paper, becomes involved in conference politics and conference sex, drinks a lot, obtains material for a number of stories, observes the behavior of sundry academics, journalists and other writers, and is apparently none the wiser. Verisimilitude is given by the mixing of real people with his fictitious characters, and the central political demonstration is based on fact. The interest of the book is not, however, in the external facts, but in the grand comedy of human behavior.

The importance of the comedy in this book is that it takes place within the narrator's consciousness. As in his earlier books, his characters are isolated, using words, booze, sex and politics in an attempt to give their lives some reality. In Hilliard's stories, written within the

realist tradition, the characters are isolated by society, but they create a reality for themselves through love, friendship, action. Moorhouse's characters, on the other hand, are isolated within society, so that actions and relationships are robbed of any meaning. The only meaning that exists is that created by the author, and however amusing this may be it remains ultimately hollow. In *Conference-Ville* this hollow is filled as the narrator takes the external world into his consciousness at the same time as stepping outside himself to take the role of observer. External and internal realities are thus fused, creating a world in which something real can happen. Both words and politics acquire significance. The author, like his narrator, remains detached by the fact that he is an intellectual, but there is now substance within which his intellect can work. The world, seen in the microcosm of the conference, may not change, but it does matter.

This is not so in either of the two remaining books, neither of which creates a world in which anything matters, or is even real. *Travels with Myself* is exploitative in the worst sense. In the first half of the novel the narrator screws with Aborigines in an attempt to find her identity. In the second part she meditates in India and Ceylon to the same end. The book, despite the trendy crudity of the language, is filled with the sentimentality of the modern imperialist who still camouflages his imposition of himself on others with the illusion that he is doing it for their own good. In the Indian section of the book this cant is mixed with the further hypocrisy that westerners can extract the spiritual essence of the east without becoming involved in its material problems, while remaining blind to the fact that they are in fact adding to them.

While *Christine Townend's* book is trendy feminism, Michael Wilding's is crude masturbatory male chauvinism. It is presented as a fantasy in which neither reader nor narrator can be sure of which events or people are to be taken as literally true. To emphasise this blurring of distinctions, at one place he alternates a piece of instant writing, immediate but selective, with his later composition of fantasy recollected in tranquility. Instead, however, of interweaving inner and outer realities, all he does is to blur all distinctions and thus to destroy any interest in what he is telling us. His friends and colleagues and women may be figures from a dream or people who affect the course of his life, but we are unable to take any serious interest in this

life because it is placed beyond any possible context. It exists neither in relationships nor in itself. This lack of existence is confirmed by the repetitiousness and inadequacy of the language.

ADDLED SCHOOLS

G. J. Engwerda

Barry Hill: *The Schools* (Penguin, \$3.95).

When butchers' apprentices are required to have matric it may truly be said that the era of the 'paper chase' has arrived and become a reality. Students are having to stay on longer at school in order to keep pace. By 1991, it is estimated that 54 per cent of our seventeen-year-olds will still be at school trying to do exactly that.

That will, and is already, costing us a lot of money. Remember that the education budget exceeds that of the defence budget and in many respects is just as inefficiently used. It seems ludicrous that such an expensive piece of public investment as a state high school is allowed to lie unused for 86 per cent of the year. Yet that happens all too often. The waste goes even further than that—the amount of money lost (or misspent) each year on vandalism, theft, furniture, underemployed inspectors and officials, tendered constructions which local parents could themselves build, inappropriate equipment and sheer mismanagement staggers the imagination. Let an outside auditor go through the books of, say, any metalwork or woodwork department, and some disquieting findings may emerge.

But what happens in that fourteen per cent of the time used in class? According to Barry Hill the schools' educational programs have "a horrible tendency to regiment learning, over-formalise social and intellectual processes, value ritual over reason, instil false notions of authority, bore, oppress and stultify students and confuse tokens of learning such as examination marks and credentials with educational outcomes . . . They seem to perpetuate many false distinctions between learning and real life . . . [and] have done little to remove structural social inequality".

Hill's first concern in this book is to show the quality and direction of eight different schools by sitting in their classrooms. What he finds there is the basis of this work and a commentary on the education system as a whole. All the schools mentioned are disguised under pseudonyms.

The majority of schools today are beginning to accept, in varying degrees, the truth of what was previously quoted, and are in the process of moving away from the traditional type of schooling to the 'progressive'. However Hill cites the case of the aptly named "Port Arthur", a "four storey fort" with high spiked gates and barred windows. Corporal punishment, in the form of the cane, is "absolutely standard practice". The school sees itself as an upholder of academic standards and relies heavily on the performance of its pupils at the public examinations for its reputation. By fifth form, thanks to a rigorous academic streaming, two-thirds of the original form one intake have left the school. Only 5 per cent of the original intake go on to higher education and "the standards which worry the Head, and shape the curriculum, do not apply to most of the school". The staff, while having the freedom to design their own curriculum, follow, like the Headmaster, the syllabus instructions drawn up by head office five or six years ago. Staff morale and teamwork is poor and the school suffers a high staff turnover. There is no S.R.C. or staff association.

"Port Arthur's" better students are creamed off by "Royal High", or "snob's castle" as it is locally known. It is a school where assemblies, academic results, the school song, school history and cadets are not to be sneered at. Its one-thousand strong old boys association includes diplomats, cabinet ministers, Rhodes scholars, a Nobel Prize winner and numerous other notables. It stresses academic excellence and competition:

'O'Neill! you,' said the sixth form economics master one year, 'are the Exhibition.'

O'Neill looked up.

'Yes, you're the Exhibition this year. Last year we had a Jew. We haven't had a Catholic for some time.'

The class was naturally amused. For the chances are that O'Neill *will* get the Exhibition.

At the other extreme of the social spectrum is "Working Boy's" Tech., poor, looking like a chicken farm but starting to experiment, with limited success, on its own.

"Working Boy's" is probably the most absorbing study in the book. Its description of the casual violence of the environment and the account of Don Chipp's visit to the school make interesting reading to say the least. Unlike "Port Arthur", it has turned its back on military regimentation,

and has attempted to substitute a more 'open' learning approach that takes in everything from Delarcartos remediation to film making, photography and boat building. Despite all that, the school lacks confidence; the curriculum may be interesting but it's still not relevant to the world of woollen mills and meatworks that surround it and in which most of these boys will finish up.

It is, as they say, after all only a tech. school. Well what about the alternatives to this boredom, sense of failure, employer fodder type of approach? Doing your own thing has its hazards and Hill is well aware of them. As Kozol in *Free Schools* puts it:

Harlem does not need a new generation of radical basket weavers. It does need radical, strong, subversive, steadfast, skeptical, rage minded and power wielding obstetricians, paediatricians, lab technicians, defence attorneys, building code examiners, brain surgeons . . . there has to be a way to find pragmatic competence, internal strength and ethical compassion all in the same process.

And that is one of the major problems of 'free' schools. Too often both here and over there they are obsessed with their own internal dynamics and have no clear goal in sight. Too often the struggle between the free principle and the necessity for structure and organisation strangles the initiative in the place. Electives are poorly administered and the school becomes merely an exercise in experiential democracy with no more real life contact than the institutions they seek to change or replace.

For a teacher used to the traditional school, the new 'free' schools are a harrowing experience. He may have to share the staffroom with the students, put up with impossibly loud music and come to terms with being treated as an equal. He may find the assessment system, such as that used at "Ultra Mod.", anarchic, with no percentage grades and report cards filled with only the most general of comments.

Nevertheless if it's hard for the teacher, particularly in the open classroom situation where the noise and the exuberance is enough to try the patience of a saint, he may be consoled by the fact that at least the students like it.

These places make much greater demands of the teacher and they are without a doubt much more humane and stimulating than the old-style traditional school. It is also the way of the future and, whether schools like "Port Arthur" like it

or not they are going to have to take more power and decision making into their own hands.

Still, I must admit that as a classroom teacher I have some misgivings about the 'progressive' trend. I appreciate the fact that many students are going to be far better off engaged in learning programs that involve a number of disciplines at once, and that it gives them a more rounded education, something that they can take with them when they leave, but too much of it still seems to me to be left up to chance. Whether they are any better equipped to cope with society seems extremely doubtful.

Too many of our students are leaving school and entering the tertiary system as jacks of all trades and masters of none. They are highly articulate and always ready to offer an opinion on matters that they know a little of but no more. Too often their written work lacks objectivity and proper organisation and, if it's not fun, why do it? They have been fed a diet of Ecology, Advertising, Drugs, Pop sociology, Pollution and Self-Confidence. Granted it's all worthwhile but it has often been done at the expense of a decent grounding in expression, a sense of culture and a clear idea of how they measure up.

Let's face it, unlike school, the outside world is not always a fun factory where everyone can be themselves, creative and democratic. Employers may not value your knowledge of Ancient Sumer all that much but they will expect a literate employee who is both punctual and methodical in his work. Schools never have been nor are ever likely to be democratic, and that's the way it should be. As far as I am concerned, students are there to learn what I regard as essential skills and to be socialised. Naturally I try to make that process as interesting as possible, but the point remains: they learn and do as they are instructed and their opinions are listened to when I am convinced that they have done their homework on the matter.

As Max Teichmann has said at various times, for the many radicals in the conventional rather than the 'free' schools, teaching is a "licence to bludge" and teaching itself, unfortunately, is a safe haven for those who want to do exactly that. There are not many but there are enough to give the profession a bad press.

All this may sound overly reactionary. It is not meant to be. There is too much to reform and Hill's book makes a valuable, honest contribution to that process. Many teachers will have, and

many parents too for that matter, books by Holt, Kozol, Goodman and Kohl on their shelves as required reading on education. Barry Hill's *The Schools* would be a worthy addition to the collection. Anyone at all who is interested in our schools and what they are doing and where they are going should read this book.

MARSDEN THE SURVIVOR

Roger Hainsworth

A. T. Yarwood: *Samuel Marsden: The Great Survivor* (Melbourne University Press, \$18.60).

Ten years ago A. T. Yarwood gave us a miniature biography of Samuel Marsden in the second volume of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. It was informed, lucid and even stimulating—the last a rare quality to find lurking in a sober and prestigious work of reference. Ever since, students of the early history of New South Wales colony, their appetites well whetted by this entrée, have waited impatiently for the full scale life of Marsden which Yarwood had promised. Like the crocodile for Captain Hook, they have had to wait a long time. Happily, they have not waited in vain.

Yarwood has produced a first class life of a significant colonial Founding Father, the man's career always tightly and lucidly integrated with the era through which he lived. Too sophisticated a writer to be lured into the familiar error of falling in love with his subject, Yarwood is too committed a historian to be tempted by the facile success of the debunker. The 'warts and all' are contemplated judiciously with a clear-eyed objectivity. However, Yarwood's humanity, and his capacity to relate to a historical character with whom he could have had little in common, prevent this detachment from rendering his study a lifeless narrative.

Yarwood has wrestled with Marsden, has gnawed on Marsden like a determined hound with a very hard bone, and has lived with Marsden to the point where he has got under the skin. There are several moments in the book when the reader feels, just for an instant, that he is inside that bellicose, insecure bull of a man, peering out at New South Wales through his hot, restless eyes. Yarwood understands Samuel Marsden better than could reasonably be expected of any biographer, and thereby is enabled to interpret his actions, his decisions, the contradictions and ambivalences of his career, and his

reactions to the strange society in which he prospered. These are impressive achievements. Of the exaggerated reverence curiously combined with triviality and vulgarity which have disfigured one or two biographies of Marsden's contemporaries there is not a trace.

Samuel Marsden was appointed assistant chaplain to the New South Wales colony as early as 1793. He arrived in 1794 and, save for a well-timed absence in England from 1807-9 (thus missing the Rum Rebellion of which he would undoubtedly have been a victim), and seven missionary voyages to New Zealand, remained in the colony until his death in 1838. The son of a Yorkshire blacksmith, Marsden grew up in an area much influenced by the Wesleyan religious revival. Through the patronage of the Elland Society, an evangelical group within the Church of England, Marsden was rescued from the blacksmith's anvil, educated, ordained and persuaded to go to Botany to lead the godless convicts to the light. In this task Marsden appears to have been a total failure, and does not appear to have tried very hard to disguise the fact.

One of the many oddities of Marsden is that although he must have been much influenced by Methodism as a youth, he never became a 'dissenter'. However, as a low-church evangelical Anglican he showed considerable tolerance of ministers of other Protestant sects, particularly when they had seen service in the mission field. Yarwood exposes as myth the allegation that Marsden was intolerant to dissenters. For example, he quite unsolicitedly lent J. D. Lang £750 at very low interest to help him build his Presbyterian church, a demonstration of Christian tolerance which Lang ill-requited. For Catholic priests, as distinct from Roman Catholics, he was a bigoted, formidable foe but for reasons more political than theological. Like Cromwell, Marsden sought to suppress the mass because of the opportunities it gave a priest to preach sedition to his Irish flock.

Yarwood also rightly stresses Marsden's very real dedication to the protection of the colony's children, and his long labors for the Orphan School for which he always declined the remuneration to which he was entitled. A devoted and by no means a domineering parent, a warm friend to many in distress or need (especially the missionaries who were sometimes driven to take refuge in the colony from the perils of the Pacific frontier) Marsden clearly had his gentler side. Yet he could be an aggressive, humorless com-

batant, and was the focus of numerous controversies which disfigured the colony's public life.

Marsden has always had the reputation of being a "flogging parson". Yarwood shows not only that this was justified, but it was almost unavoidable once he had accepted a magistrate's commission from Governor Hunter. Even Marsden had his doubts about the propriety of accepting such a position, but felt it necessary to his battle for status with the ruling caste of the colony, and also that it was his duty to give all the aid and co-operation to Hunter that he could. Earlier, after some heart-searching and seeking advice from home, Marsden had accepted land grants and turned to farming. Undoubtedly, as magistrate Marsden could give his governor useful support. Undoubtedly, as farmer Marsden helped to transform the squalid and impoverished prison farm into a viable, indeed flourishing colony. (Yarwood's account of Marsden's contribution as experimental agriculturalist, scientific stock breeder and, eventually, pioneer exporter of fine wools is particularly valuable, placing John Macarthur's better known contribution in a proper perspective.) However, these benefits were accrued at a heavy price. The magistracy and its claims and duties conflicted wildly with the compassionate role of the priest. The convicts he was meant to evangelise saw him, not as a source of aid and comfort, but rather as one of their oppressors, the more hateful because (unlike their official gaolers) oppression should have formed no part of his duties. Writes Yarwood, echoing Commissioner Bigge: "... his regular contemplation and punishment of evil had undermined that sense of compassion which should adorn the character of a minister of God." This devastating judgment appears irrefutable.

This alienation from his flock was reinforced as the years passed by his growing affluence. Marsden was no agricultural dabbler drifting along in the lee of government grants and patronage, but a highly skilled, effective farmer and grazier. The more effective he became the richer he became. (His estate was valued for probate in 1838 at £30,000, which was close to a million dollars in modern purchasing power). Unhappily the richer he became the more he was cut off from his flock by his identification with the attitudes and interests of the silvertails. The latter despised all convicts and ex-convicts alike and refused to receive the most respectable of emancipists under their roofs. Little wonder Marsden was a hopeless failure in the principle function for which he had been sent to New South Wales. How could

he evangelise convicts when he would not meet ex-convicts socially — or even publicly when he could avoid it? Yarwood's judgment is once more uncompromising: "Marsden alienated himself from the very flock that should have received his prime attention. The effect on his ministry was profound, and, on his local reputation, enduring . . . [Moreover] he drew on his church as a whole the censure that attached to him as an individual." Similarly, as Yarwood shows most effectively, Marsden not only never tried to extend his mission to the Aborigines, he was frequently a hindrance to those who did. As a huge landowner (by 1838 Marsden owned 29 farms comprising 11,724 acres stocked with more than 10,000 sheep and cattle) he tended to see Aborigines as simply a menace to his stock; as a people whose ultimate extermination was inevitable, rather than as souls in need of protection.

Marsden's reputation as a missionary rests on his work in New Zealand, where in spite of many flawed instruments among the missionaries in the field, and much cunning exploitation of their self-appointed deliverers by the Maoris, Marsden did accomplish much. The New Zealand mission was his great achievement, and it is in New Zealand that he is shown at his best. He made seven voyages to New Zealand, although he always suffered terribly from sea-sickness. The last expedition took place during his seventy-third year. Among the Maoris, helpless amid crowds of short-tempered cannibals, he showed a quiet, sustained courage which must have been awe-inspiring to his companions. For the more squalid aspects of his hosts' primitive life he never betrayed the faintest revulsion, or even the patronising superiority so common among even the best-intentioned whitemen. There was less of the racist in Marsden than was characteristic of his period, even among missionaries, and this makes his apathy and even hostility to Australia's Aborigines appear so paradoxical. However, Yarwood shows that Marsden's devotion to the Maoris and rejection of the Aborigines stems from his essentially materialistic attitude to life. Maoris were more 'sophisticated' than Aborigines, they had a hierarchical organisation, they could grow crops and, most important of all, they understood the concept of private property. To evangelise a primitive people, Marsden believed, it was necessary to demonstrate the superiority of white technology, agriculture, life style, to show them how to accumulate greater wealth and an improved standard of living, and then conversions would follow.

Such a program was a hopeless prospect with the Aboriginals. They were incapable of "adopting the white man's material values", the essential prerequisite, in Marsden's eyes, to successful conversion. All in all, it is hard to fault Yarwood's closing assessment: "He had a sense of destiny and divine purpose which not only sustained him in physical danger and political controversy but drove him on to the zealot's great error of believing that ends justified the means."

Yarwood's biography has several other virtues. He is an indefatigable searcher and fossicker, and would whole-heartedly subscribe to R. H. Tawney's dictum that the successful historian must own a strong pair of boots. He has followed his protagonist's trail through Yorkshire villages and New Zealand estuaries as well as Australian scenes. Very aware of the shaping forces of environment, he has an eye for uncluttered detail which brings long vanished communities, scenes, landscapes vividly before the reader. He has skilfully woven into the fabric of his biography a rich and varied amalgam of recent research by a number of historians of colonial Australia (including his own research students) and his debts to them are scrupulously, indeed generously, acknowledged. As for the scholarly apparatus of the book, any aspiring historian need seek no further for a model.

Yarwood's grip sometimes slackens. He seems too credulously to accept the view that Governor King had deliberately incited the Irish 'Vinegar Hill' uprising, while later quoting King's dispatch, written only three days before the rebellion, praising the Irishmen's "generally quiet and orderly behaviour". King would never have written that if he was trying to provoke a rising by what Yarwood stigmatises as "a cynical policy". He is also very severe on Macquarie, and (as he shows) not without cause, but he notes without comment that while under Macquarie floggings were limited to fifty lashes, under Brisbane the limit was raised to five hundred. Macquarie demonstrated more mercy to the fallen than Marsden ever did, and his reputation for compassion was well deserved. More importantly, the last two chapters seem at times rather 'woolly' when compared with the sinewy lucidity of the book as a whole. For example, the Rev. Mr. Hill's wife is mentioned obscurely on page 265, Hill's death is referred to on page 271, but nowhere (unless the index misleads us) is his identity or significance explained. Moreover Marsden must surely have played a role of some significance in the Yate case, for his actions led to his being shunned

by old friends — yet what Marsden did is nowhere described, nor is the hostile reactions of his friends explained.

These are minor matters. The book as a whole is a substantial achievement which will for many years enrich the understanding of all who are interested in Australia's formative period.

TO DEATH AND BACK

Ray Ericksen

Lennard Bickel: *This Accursed Land* (Macmillan, \$9.95).

It is a great and terrible story, an epic of compelling power. Within the time-span of ninety days in the Antarctic summer of 1912 there was a progression from a determined man's attempt to impose his will on intractable country, through a sequence of swift disaster and prolonged suffering, to an awesome triumph of lone survival. It has the internal dramatic consistency, the tautness and suspense, of a fine piece of adventure writing, transcended by the scarifying fact of experiential truth; and, like all great stories, it illuminates a wider reality.

Even the circumstances of the time which diverted attention to events further south—the dramatic race to reach the South Pole which ended in victory for Amundsen and death for Scott—illustrate a recurring conflict in the history of land exploration between the search for personal glory in spectacular feats of definable magnitude and the systematic pursuit of geographical discovery. Douglas Mawson's design for four three-man parties, working independently of each other from his base camp at Commonwealth Bay on the edge of the then unnamed King George V Land, was a well-conceived attempt to extract maximum advantage from the resources in men and time that were available to him. In the event, though a long persistence of adverse weather delayed an effective start until November—almost ten months after the initial landing—and thereby halved the expected working time, a substantial coastal survey was completed and the position of the South Magnetic Pole was accurately fixed. It is this context of controlled planning which gives special poignancy to the experience of Mawson, Ninnis and Mertz on their attempt to connect with Mawson's earlier line of 1908, 500 miles south-east of Commonwealth Bay.

For the most part Lennard Bickel is content to tell the story straight, and for the most part he

does it well. After a faltering start in which he labors with strained language to depict a land of towering ice shields and treacherous glaciers, of sastrugi and crevasses, of killing cold and blizzard, whose presence is so overwhelmingly strong that it needs few words to make it real, the power of the narrative takes captive author and reader alike. With the benefit of Bickel's careful listing of equipment, his effective description of the order of travel and his attention to practicalities, it is easy to join the three men and their seventeen dogs; and, once engaged, there is no easy escape before the end.

Even on the long haul out, which most closely approximates normal Antarctic travel, there is mounting tension from the death of the first dog to the moment when the sudden disappearance of Ninnis and his sledge down a crevasse—together with the six strongest dogs, all of the dog food, most of the other goods, and several items of equipment—transformed an exploring expedition into a desperate march for survival.

The return consists of two stages. The first—a growing agony of dying dogs, near starvation, failing strength and increasing illness—ends, after three weeks, in the harrowing death of Mertz. The second—Mawson's lone walk through recurring blizzards, breath-taking hazard, appalling hardship, and a sequence of near misses as extraordinary as that which brought death to Burke and Wills—ends in early February with Mawson, desperately ill, condemned to spend a second winter in camp at Commonwealth Bay. In a narrative of absorbing interest, which stirs compassion, wonder and admiration, Bickel sensitively and skilfully admits us to intimacy with a man of exceptional quality and heroic proportions. The reading is a deeply moving and ennobling experience.

Is it churlish then to temper gratitude with complaint? The pity is that several deficiencies in the book could have been avoided with comparative ease. Two spare locality sketches—*sans* latitude, longitude, points of the compass and scale of miles—are inadequate aids for following a text in which statements of position, direction and distance are frequent and crucial to an appreciation of what is happening. Equally confusing is a failure to give the unbroken sequence of dates without which it is difficult to follow the progress of any expedition.

Also surprisingly, Bickel seems to have underestimated the power of the story he tells. Fuller documentation and pauses for orderly analysis, so far from weakening the narrative, would have enriched it and produced a more satisfying result. For example, an assurance that all conversations recorded are based on entries in the diaries of the men concerned would be more comforting at some points if the several sources had been identified; and fuller quotation would have given the reader an opportunity to make up his own mind, instead of being wholly dependent on the interpretation presented by the author.

Many incidents in the history of exploration pose a problem of understanding why one man died and another lived; but it is unusual to have the controlled conditions for study provided by the contrasting fates of Mertz and Mawson. Each of them was subjected to the same experience; and each had exactly the same food, including carefully divided portions of husky liver. Bickel makes something of a centrepiece of the catastrophic effects of Hypervitaminosis A, a deadly illness caused by absorbing the high concentration of vitamin A which accumulates in the liver of the Greenland husky. He includes clinical notes on the swift progression of the illness from scaling skin and falling hair to final dementia and death, calculates that the two men between them consumed some sixty toxic doses of Vitamin A, and movingly describes Mertz's decline and Mawson's awful dilemma. But he does not attempt an explanation of the difference between Mertz, who died, and Mawson, who suffered all of the symptoms short of dementia and still lived. Neither does he explore far the mystery of Mawson's survival on the final stage of the return which, even without the vitamin poisoning, in all reason ought to have been impossible.

It is unfair to criticise an author for not attempting more than he set out to do; but the fact that there is more to be explored in this subject makes a failure to divulge the location of the diaries of Mertz and Ninnis smack more of a journalist's wish to preserve an exclusive scoop than a scholar's willingness to open a path for others to follow. At the same time it is Bickel's act of writing an exciting book which stimulates the questions. For that, and for the quality of what he has done, he richly deserves our gratitude.

RADICAL MISFITS

John McLaren

Joseph Johnson: *A Low Breed* (Nelson, \$8.95).

It would be easy at first reading to dismiss Joseph Johnson's new novel as just another piece of trendy conservative chic. It is written with the same kind of panache that characterizes Max Harris's weekend effusions, and with much the same targets — the fashionable radicalism of the sixties, its causes and carriers. Johnson's satire, however, carries weight because his characters are fully imagined and credible people, not mere bogeymen. It carries force also, through his technique of holding the mirror up, not to nature, but to the reader. The novel is at times very funny, at times compassionate, at times perceptive, but always disturbing.

The story of Gavin Campbell, progressive teacher and militant unionist, is told by his younger brother, who has watched his career from his youthful championing of justice to his burgeoning as president of the Federal Union of Secondary Teachers and on to his emergence as model of the new liberated man. This career of great public success and eventual failure is matched by an athletic private sexual career, starting with the local librarian, a woman of surprising talent, and leading by way of a tempestuous marriage to bisexuality in the aptly named *Bangkok* and death in the back streets of Hong Kong. We come to know Gavin not as the practised manipulator of his public life, of which we see very little, but as a person "as much the instrument of recondite demons as anyone else". The name of his familiar demon however is not legion but zero. His personality lacks any principle of integration, and his energies therefore tear him apart, eventually destroying his own life and those with which he has become entangled.

This undirected energy provides the link between the private and the public concerns of the novel. Driven by his impatience to create a new and better world, Gavin has no time either to build his own life and relationships or to give any hard thought to the details of the world to which he aspires.

However outrageous his behavior he justifies it with the appeal to high-minded principle. These principles give Johnson the opportunity to mock the whole range of progressive attitudes in education, law, politics, religion and manners.

Yet while this mockery is the source of the book's energy, it is also the cause of its weakness.

While Johnson keeps his eye on the behavior of Gavin Campbell and his associates, observing the failure of their principles in action, their use of the new morality to excuse their own indulgence, the gap between their ideals and their personal insensitivity, his writing is wickedly accurate. But when he starts to editorialize he aims wide and misses the target.

The key to this weakness lies in his treatment of his narrator, Roger Campbell. In four critical episodes we see how Roger first sees his older brother as a hero, then finds himself set at a distance, then becomes sufficiently detached to be sceptical, and finally is affronted so that further relationship is impossible. Yet between these episodes we see too little of Roger's own development to make him real. He watches Gavin's progress, he acts in a way that shows concern, but we do not feel his involvement, nor do we see the effect in his character of the development of Gavin's life and ideas. For long stretches of the novel, therefore, the narrator merges with the author, and his comments becomes a commentary on the action, not a product of it.

It would, however, be wrong to dwell on these deficiencies to the exclusion of the book's strengths. The author has an ear for the idiomatic and an eye for affectation which create a superb portrait of intellectual fashion. His talent for the invention of improbable but revealing incident is even stronger than in his earlier novel. *His observation of the world of the child growing up with hostile parents provides the criterion by which the follies of the adults can be judged.* For despite the humor and the bizarre sexuality, the novel is, like all satire, essentially moral. If it fails to destroy all the ideas it attacks, it nevertheless reveals how easy it is to use radical slogans to cover an unwillingness to fit in with any kind of society, to accept any moral imperative.

A Low Breed does not discredit radicalism, but it does demonstrate the denial of life which results when abstract slogans are allowed to guide actions to the exclusion of any response to the actual situation. Ironically, we see this most clearly in Hannah, Gavin's wife and victim, who is attracted to him in the first place by his ideals and his sexuality, but remains passionately bound to him long after he has shattered her illusions. Yet even this passion is self-seeking, and the measure of her failure, like his, is the sterility of her relationship with their daughter. Despite her unconvincing, and unexplained, end, the daughter is probably the only person in the novel who achieves a satisfactory life.

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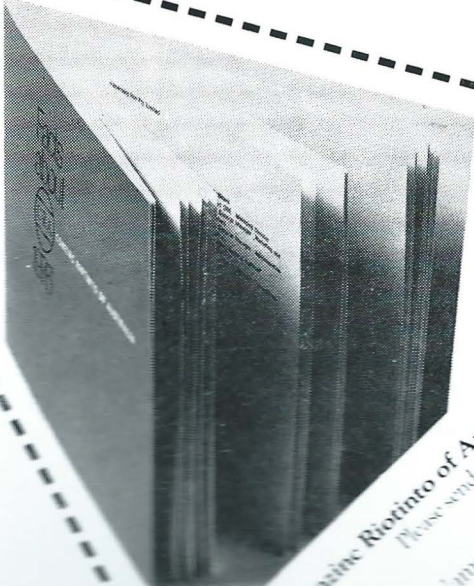
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