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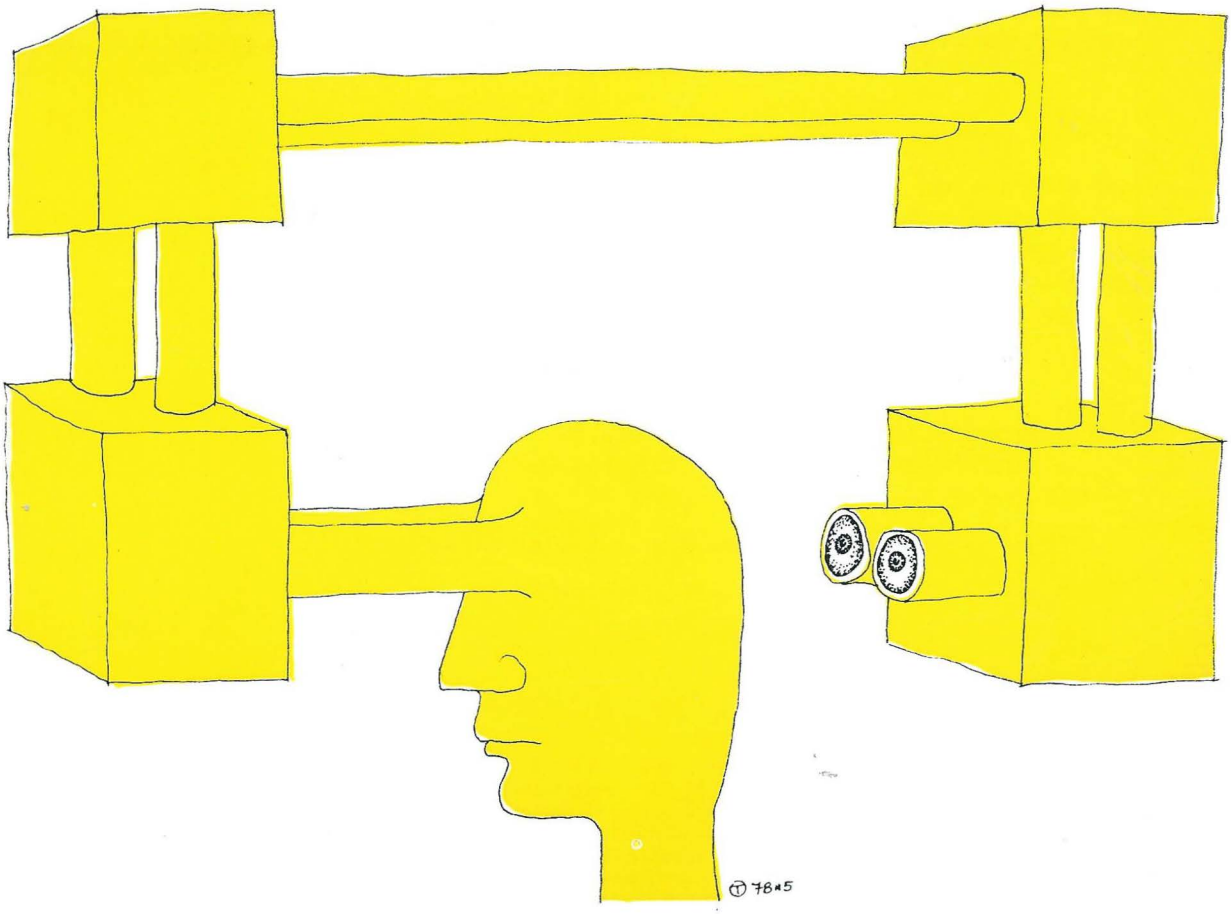

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WILLIAM MAYNE

Sea Serpent

William Mayne, an Englishman who has spent much time in Australia, is one of the best-known children's authors of our day. This is an extract from a forthcoming book, Salt River Times.

"What you come in so late for?" said Gwenda's mother. "So late, much too late, coming home from school this time."

"Just coming home from school," said Gwenda. "It's where I was, isn't it?"

'Don't you be cheeky, my girl, to me," said her mother. "Where you go coming from school, eh? I look out and you don't come and you don't come and then you come the other way, and home is here, not some other house."

"I just came round by the river," said Gwenda.

"You keep away from dirty place like the river," said her mother. "Dirty water in the river and all the rubbish been there years and years."

"I didn't say I went in it," said Gwenda. "Just on the road, just on the bank."

"Well, I don't like it," said her mother. "You come home from school a better way."

But Gwenda did not take much notice. She walked that way with Sophia sometimes, that was all. She went that way the next day, and the next after that, but she was not really friends with Sophia every day.

The next day after that, Thursday, Sophia had got tired of her, because really she treated every friend in the way she treated her mother. No one liked her for four days in a row.

On Thursday she had fallen out with Sophia so she went along by the river alone. It was not a dirty river, she thought. Of course there was mud in it. You get mud if you mix water and earth. You get water and earth if you mix rivers with land. And the other way about.

In fact the river was cleaner than coffee. Or Gwenda was thinking that before she looked. She had thought how clean it was when she went down the gravel road to the water. She was going to walk along the bank behind the houses, just by the water. This was the way she came with Sophia. When they were together Gwenda was busy making Sophia agree with her about things. She had no time to look where she was going.

Now she thought she would look at the river and find it was clean and make her mother agree. She knew she must be right, because she had thought of it so clearly.

The river hadn't been thinking clearly. It was the color of coffee. But coffee does not have things floating in it and on it. On the water there was slimy green oil. In the water were lumps that looked like bundles of toes or ears, going black. At the edge of the water there was half of a car engine, red and black with rust. Beside it was a heap of ash, and all round were beer cans. On the bank and in the water were plastic wrappers and bags and pieces.

There was mud. It was covered in green slime. Bubbles came up out of it. They burst, and had a bad smell.

There was a small dead fish hanging in the water. Nothing moved. All the nasty things stayed where they were.

There were lumps of brick by a garden fence. Gwenda threw one at the floating fish. She missed it, but it wobbled, at least. Then it was all still again. Nothing moved by the bank.

She looked out across the water. The other bank was nearly the same. Gwenda thought she had lost. Her mother would not agree with her now that the river was clean. It was not. The best thing was to keep quiet about it. Perhaps, she thought, if I waited a few days and then shouted at her that the river was dirty, then she would have to agree with me. That is not the same as me agreeing with her.

So she felt she had not lost. She picked up a good big piece of brick and threw it into the middle of the river. To teach it a lesson.

The water rippled. And something out there

in the middle lifted up its head and looked at her. It looked first with one eye, and turned round and looked with the other.

Then it put its head under the water and began to swim up the river. Its head came up and looked at her again.

Most people would have gone home then.

Gwenda picked up another brick and threw it. She picked up another, ready.

The head looked at her again. It went on swimming up the river. Behind it was a long body that showed above the water in little lumps. It was very long. The whole thing was a monster of some sort.

Most people would have gone home by now, at least.

Gwenda threw her third brick. She hit the thing in the middle of its back. It shook its head and stopped swimming.

Gwenda walked up the bank, level with its head. All she did before she walked was see that she knew the way back. Most people would have left, but she just took care.

The thing was going to have to agree with her.

But it took no more notice. It looked at her with one eye only. It rocked its head a little, and that was all.

Then it went on up the river. Gwenda watched it go. She let it go for today, and went home for tea. On her way she got her foot in the water, because the tide was rising and lifting the river.

Her mother shook her for that, and told her never to go to the river again.

But Gwenda went on Friday after school and saw the monster swimming further down. She shouted to it to come back. But she was at the back of Sophia's house, and only Sophia answered by looking over the fence. But they did not speak to each other. And the monster said nothing.

On Saturday she walked a long way up the bank, until she came to the high wall at the tallow factory. There was nowhere to walk, and the smell was worse than she could remember after. The monster was not up there. She walked down the river to the wharfs and went home.

"Where you been?" said her mother. "You smell. Smell."

"You live here too," said Gwenda.

But it was the tallow factory smell, in her hair, and she had to have it washed.

On Sunday she thought, No one like me for four days, so they don't hate me for four days. So the monster will come today.

And all the morning she knew it was waiting for her, but her mother kept her in the house. And in the afternoon her uncle came and stayed and stayed.

Then, with the beer and television, they all fell asleep and she could go out. She went down to the water.

The river was down low. The tide was out and all the mud was drying. There was a nasty smell, and a dead dog, and the mud was thick.

Out in the middle of the mud, in the middle of the river, looking for her, was the monster. There was not enough water to swim.

So she had only to wait. She knew he would swim to her.

And that would have been all right. But the other side of the river were two boys. They had a rope with a noose on it. They were trying to throw the noose over the monster's head.

'It's mine. Stop it," shouted Gwenda.

'Get lost," said one boy.

"Rack off," said the other.

If they had been sensible they would have gone home. For one thing they were messing with a monster in the river. For another, they did not know Gwenda. If they had they would have gone.

First she threw stones and bricks at them. The half bricks were too heavy. Smaller pieces were better. She could just get them across the water. And she was a good shot. She had practised on Sophia.

The boys did not take much notice of that. By the time the stones got across the river they had nearly stopped moving.

Gwenda grew tired of throwing. Her arm ached. She made a different sort of attack. She ran up into the road, down it to the bridge by the wharf, and across the bridge. She could still see the boys from the bridge.

Then she got down on the river bank on their side. They thought she had gone away. But she had not. She was angry enough for six. She gathered stones and pieces of iron and some tough mud. She took her stones and iron and mud up behind a wall.

Then she waited.

She thought the boys might as well do the work for her. She gave them time and they did it.

After a great many throws they got their noose over the head of the monster and started to pull it in. She let them pull it.

Really, before, she had been thinking that the monster was alive, and alive for her. But now she did not care about that. She would rather have a fight than a friend. And she knew the monster was something floating up and down the river on the salty tide. But he belonged to her.

And when the boys had brought him across the mud and were about to put their hands on him she started the fight.

The boys ran away. Most boys would have run away much earlier. But these did not not know her.

They ran away. They dropped their rope and yelled and ran. Gwenda threw some stones after them, and then ran down to the monster.

The monster was a piece of wood. She had been right. It was a monster, a head carved from wood, with eyes that had some gold on them, and teeth that were broken but had some white on them. The long tail was a trailing rope with canvas and cloth and weed on it.

She put her arms round the head, just touching with her hands. The smell was very bad. But she knew she had to drag the monster home.

Then the boys came back. Everything went wrong for Gwenda. She took hold of the monster and mud covered her arms. She tried to run away, because she had no stones to throw. She ran into the mud of the river. She tripped over the rope and fell down, and the head fell asleep on her and knocked all her breath out.

So the boys rescued her.

"It a little kid of about nine," said one. His name was Mel.

"Yeah," said the other, whose name was Kev. "We'll take her back to her home."

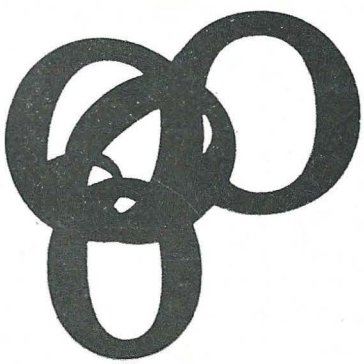
'We'll drop her back in the river," said Mel.

But they picked her up and carried her home, and after them they dragged the wooden head, and they put them both in at her gate and left her.

Anyone else would have run away then. But not Gwenda. She was brave. She knew there would be trouble. But she walked up to the door, opened it.

"I fell in the river," she said. "It is very dirty."

"I should throw you back," said her mother kindly. "Just rubbish in the river, you know, just rubbish."



Peter Murphy

MARK O'CONNOR

The Graying of the Underground

Australian "Avant Garde" Poetry In The Sulking Seventies.

Where did we go wrong? Was it us? Am I to blame?

— John Forbes in Australian Literary Studies

Is it possible that the whole exercise was of the middle class, by the middle class and for the middle class?

— John Tranter in Australian Literary Studies

As late as 1974 when Robert Kenny's anthology *The Applestealers* appeared in the bookshops with the characteristically irresponsible cover-advertisement "This book contains the best poetry written in Australia", it still seemed possible to claim that the poetry which had begun in Fitzroy and Balmain in the late 60s was destined for the same success as the new drama of Williamson *et al.* According to Kenny's preface, previous styles of Australian poetry belong in the dustbin of history and are of interest mainly for their "abnormal mediocrity"; whereas for his school "Any predictions must be optimistic."[1] Yet by October 1977 when Australian Literary Studies devoted half an issue to the first comprehensive collection of statements and manifestos from this group of poets,[2] it found most of them sunk in gloom. Kenny himself in an article entitled "Living, Fighting and Sulking in the Seventies" confirms that the wave he tried to ride is "over", adding "Having said that, feeling it, I'm not sure how to elaborate."[3]

What went wrong? As a member, despite my Queensland affiliations, of the Canberra Poetry group I've long been intrigued by that splendid circus that seemed to be going on "up the road" from us in Balmain or down in Fitzroy. Not that there was any chance of our taking them as models! But they had made some important experiments. For instance, when we were setting up Canberra Poetry part of the argument might go: Why shouldn't we bypass the establishment magazines and publish and distribute our own work like Kwoltor Brippings does with his Our Glass Cage in Fitzroy? And the answer might be: Yes, and within three issues we'll be publishing just that — the trade journal of a mutual admiration society. (In the event we did set up Canberra Poetry to publish our beliefs and preferences, but made a practice of publishing most of our own poetry in magazines with which we had no ties. It was an important lesson.)

Some explanations for the decline of the late-60s avant garde are obvious. They overpromoted themselves; they grew older and began to suffer competition both from younger poets and from powerful near-contemporaries like Roger Mac-Donald, Geoff Page and Andrew Taylor, who had absorbed the techniques of the American West Coast poets without needing to make a fuss of it. Then came the ending of the Vietnam War, and the new willingness of the commercial and semi-commercial press to publish anything with a fair smack of literary merit — all these changes helped to unstick that curious glue of shared beliefs, indistinct radicalism, and defensive communal self-esteem that once bound the Underground scene together. Yet a movement whose principles have been honestly thought out should not melt away like snow when the literary climate changes. The publication by Australian Literary Studies of this series of questionnaire-replies and interviews with the poets themselves is a valuable opportunity to find out where the old avant garde went wrong, and how younger poets, perhaps, can avoid the same mistakes.

One of their great mistakes, I believe, was failure to think through the consequences of being their own publishers. This is a subject on which they still tend to be defensive and polemic (one con-

tributor in Australian Literary Studies argues that the act of publishing yourself is "in itself socialist"),[4] seeing only the short-term advantages (e.g. a quick way round "establishment prejudice") and not the long-term disadvantages.

It is no accident that bodies like the Australian and British Societies of Authors repeatedly warn beginners against the mistake of unpaid or "vanity" publishing. This is not simply because authors have a right to payment for their labors: it involves the psychology of authorship. When a person writes a literary work (especially poetry) a great deal of self and self-esteem goes into the work and makes it very hard for that person to judge its merit. (One has only to think of the mountains of drivel that have been published by major poets, Wordsworth for instance, when editors indulged them.) So long as the work is a private MS shown to friends and family, tact and sympathy rule the day. But publication crosses that Rubicon into the public world where it is as true as ever that "neither gods nor men nor the booksellers' advertisements have room for a mediocre poet." Critics dissect the work mercilessly, drawing attention to all its real or imagined inadequacies; by the laws of libel they may even "dip their pens in gall". Not that they will necessarily agree! The self-publishing author, if his book is (as is likely) an uneven mixture, will be bewildered by the variety of judgments passed on it. Almost inevitably his self-esteem causes him to explain this by believing the favorable ones and attributing the "hostile" ones to prejudice, cliquery, conservative conspiracy, etc. In short, he (or she) develops the beginnings of paranoia.

Writer's paranoia is of course a notorious occupational hazard, though one that can be prevented with proper precautions. To know that he or she has been edited and published by a reputable publisher who believes the book is good enough to find a market is the best security an author can have when the reviews start coming in. After that, the only rules are to learn from the unfavorable ones and never try to promote yourself in the face of genuine indifference to your work. Whereas the self-publishing writer almost inevitably flounders between arrogance and insecurity. Describing a recent poetry reading at Surfers Paradise, Dennis Haskell writes: "Smugness, paranoia and contempt were the key words of this reading, which may be best summed up as one hour and a half of acts of cowardice."[5] The same sort of testimony could be duplicated *ad libitum* for Fitzroy and (adding the threat of physical violence) Balmain.

Arrogance of course is the flip-side of insecurity: the poet writes his own ticket, finds it ignored, and defiantly rewrites it more strongly. (The activities of the New Poetry reputation-forging machine are a good example.) Or alternatively, he decides to despise the common reader and take his work "underground". For instance, we learn in Australian Literary Studies that Kris Hemensley, whose Ear in the Wheatfield the inimitable Kenny describes as one of Australia's two "most influential & respected magazines",[6] prints only about 100 copies.[7] With his own poetry Hemensley is a little more generous, printing some 200 copies which he sends off to contacts around the world. Michael Wilding expresses some hesitations about this "negative elitism", but dutifully notes that if you do it this way "you'll get at least a ten per cent response (other books in return, nice letters, routine 'Will read it as soon as I get the time . . .')."[8] For "major writers" like Hemensley, says Wilding, "that is only the beginning." (Having met some of Hemensley's European correspondents I would suggest respectfully that what it *may* be the beginning of is an international consolation club for failed writers.)

The low standards of many Underground publications are indicated by the Free Grass episode. In Tranter's words

> *Free Grass* was a five page roneoed 'underground'-type magazine that I wrote one morning during a slack period at work, typing it straight on to stencils. . . . A lot of people took it seriously as another underground magazine — Richard Tipping even wrote a poem in praise of it. . . . I think [9 years later] most people have woken up to the fact that it was a hoax, though Kris Hemensley hasn't quite worked out why I did it.[9]

In the curious world of the Underground Tranter winds up more or less apologizing to Hemensley for having confused him, while Hemensley reassures us that there was no chance of the victims feeling this as another Ern Malley hoax because

> the bulk of the new poets were *not* heirs to the Australian Literary Tradition, but rather were an illiterati, unschooled, and read only as far as new writing of the post-war (and mostly American) epoch.[10]

None of this should lead us to deny the value of the small presses, especially those which have the resources to edit rather than merely print MSS, in giving young authors a start. And cer-

tainly small-circulation magazines can be ideal as a means of communication among groups of people with special interests. They can also be fun. What could be more delightful than to find yourself on the mailing list of a fugitive free publication called Mere Anarchy, published allegedly by one Alexander Chaos and consisting of an immaculately printed yellow broadsheet of anarchist epigrams, with as an annual special number "Alexander Chaos's Christmas Card"? Or to be stopped in the rush-hour traffic of rainy impersonal Melbourne by a young woman spontaneously handing away roneoed copies of her poems? (Provided, of course, that it *is* an act of spontaneity and not of desperation.)

For when you publish in this way it is essential to be honest with yourself both as to your motives and expectations. Unfortunately the 60s Underground nourished two great delusions. One, the original one, was that they were part of a great happening, "the 1968 revolution" (sic) which would make obsolete all earlier Australian poetry.[11] It was a hopeful belief, founded not on any deep knowledge of the work they hoped to displace, but according to Kenny "in profound *ignorance* of it."[12] The second, and consoling delusion which is repeatedly assumed in Australian Literary Studies (though not in *Applestealers*)[13] is that major writers are always rejected when they first appear. This of course is nonsense: I can't think of even one great English poet who went unrecognized in his time, unless he hid himself away like Blake or Hopkins, or died like Keats or Shelley within ten years of starting to publish first-rate work.

As the above would suggest, many of these poets are obsessed with achieving *status*. Indeed Tranter has complained of "young poets on the make" who are "little more than a blend of stage impresario and greedy kid", while Andrew Taylor explicitly warns of the egocentricity that leads "to a one-man P.R. drag . . . or a solipsism curling into nonentity, death, the ultimate fix."[13a] Admittedly Kenny claims that the avant garde wanted to destroy "not just a particular literary establishment, but the very concept, the fraudulent concept, of a consensus opinion of what was good or bad"[14]; but his own behavior in *Applestealers* is sufficient comment on this. Reading through the Australian Literary Studies issue one finds hardly any discussion of particular works; the emphasis is always on literary movements rather than literature; *what's newest*;[15] and above all, endless names (Hemensley's questionnaire-reply averages a dozen names a paragraph) — who's important, who's "not serious", who's in, who's out. Many of the interviewees treat questions about their work as an invitation to displays of ponderous egoism, for instance Rae Desmond Jones:

> The reason I have taken so long answering the questionnaires about poetry and the magazine *Your Friendly Fascist* is, I have difficulty with such concepts as 'voice', particularly when applied to my own poetry. Although I am, (almost?), at times the (player at the) fool, I am not quite comfortable talking in the first person about my work. Hence my first impulse was to answer your question about 'what was my voice?' by saying 'mine' — a good quip, perhaps, but not helpful because it is as certainly untrue as it is obviously true. Such self-consciousness has a lot to do with the difficulty of the artist as self versus artist as expression of Zeitgeist . . ."[16]

Jones' cumbersome prose is not so much native badness as a conscientious attempt at the essential modern virtue of self-consciousness as prescribed by Hemensley.[17] Similar passages abound (notably in Krausmann, Faust, and Hemensley *passim*).

John Tranter is one of the few notable prose stylists in Australian Literary Studies, and Vicki Viidikas one of the very few who sets herself simply and honestly to answer the questions. In discussing other writers extremes of compliment and denigration seems to be the norm. Elaborate pedigrees are attached to worthless trifles, as in Hemensley's notorious editorial notes in Meanjin, e.g.

> The author of 15 or so collections since 1953, Eigner is named by Robert Duncan among those poets who were writing out of the late 'forties work of Williams and Pound. His *Selected Poems* were published in 1972 by Oyez (Berkeley, California).[18]

This introduces two equally nugatory untitled poems by Eigner, the shorter of which runs: "a structured field is / the mind / light / and the view / with whatever eyes". (cf. the satirical reference in / *The Harrowing of Balmain* to how "fifty leaves of learned epigraph / Precede another *Dransfield* epitaph.")[19]

Extravagant expressions of admiration for third rate American work tend to be couched in quirky self-conscious prose which scarcely conceals that what the author really wants to exalt is

his own work, e.g. this paragraph by Clive Faust with matching footnote:

> A few little things. When our culture has been reduced to nothing — for 'those who have eyes to see' — the reduction allows also a concentration not open with the expansion of a culture. (We are in the age of a new puritanism, culturally. [I am not talking about sex — though maybe that too.] Puritanism can bring ridding of excess, and *that* sort of elegance.) Many of the great Yanks display it — Oppen, Corman, Zukofsky (sort of mentors of mine — though they're all wrong, somewhere).
>
> The Dust (Corman)
>
> every
> where descends.
> The sunlight
>
> glittering
> in the re-
> velation.
>
> Clean it up.
> Make it ha-
> bitable. (*Madrona*, III 11-12)
>
> Notice how tradition is both concentrated and discarded. (But if you don't realise how good *that* is, no use me telling you why.) Next, myself — in the medium term more pessimistic — in the long term not much more fatalistic, if one *can* be more fatalistic . . . .
>
> (F'note): Corman in a letter: 'I don't live *for* each day, I live *through* each day'. He has also given me permission to quote the above poem."[20]

If ever a false relic was appropriately enshrined "in a hogges turd" it is Corman's banal lyric set in Faust's inspissate prose. (Though Corman *can* write good poetry. It would be unfair to judge the Americans by their Australian disciples — Robert Duncan, after he visited the New Poetry group in Sydney in 1976, freely described them in conversation as phonies who wouldn't let him meet any real poets. But Duncan, Olsen and Creeley are certainly guilty of teaching curious promotional tactics, which in Donald Allen's 1961 anthology *The New American Poetry* reached such extremes of self-parody that that Jack Kerovac concludes his own prefatory blurb with the words "Sometimes even I have trouble believing my bullshit lies.")

The Underground's various acts of self-promotion have a kind of guerilla-style impudence, but the real victims in the long run are always the perpetrators of the hoax, because once they come to believe their own bumpf they are unable to profit from any accurate criticism of their work. Kenny's *Applestealers* is a good example of how to destroy young poets by over-promoting them. According to its preface it represents "what can be considered a renaissance in Australian poetry".[21] In fact, once one takes out Viidikas, Dransfield and Tipping, whose merits had already been recognized by the commercial press to the tune of two or three books a-piece, most of what remains is "promising" rather than praiseworthy. A good average sample of the groundnote of the book is Kenny's "Untitled": "Everything mystiqual: Enveloped in a lovely intelligence / that seduces the rigmarole of the hours: the mornings / so beautiful that it is worth waking early *every* day: a / knowledge that ignores the bland classifications of science / and weaves itself down a tunnel of endless consequences. / To have this poem tell you / it wants everything and / does not think / it asks too much." This is not strictly *bad* writing. In a high school magazine it would rightly be thought very talented, albeit a bit wince-y to re-read years later. But it is the sort of stuff that desperately needs *criticism*, not exaltation. As Kevin Hart, himself a full decade younger than most of the late-60s "new poets", brusquely noted in Canberra Poetry: "Much of the verse in *Applestealers* suffers from a total disregard for rhythm, a strong tendency towards obscurity and an easy willingness to focus on slightness of subject matter."[22]

Even when you add, as I would want to, that there are fine things scattered throughout the movement's work, and that they include talented poets like Roberts and Gilmore who are bending its initial *self*-consciousness back towards a real non-solipsist awareness of the detail of city and country environments, or like Vicki Viidikas towards real human relationships, or even like Tipping and perhaps Wearne towards a Mersey-style populism, — it remains a lamentable record of achievement for a movement that took up so many people's time and energy. Perhaps, as Dennis Haskell's acute judgements in Australian Library Studies imply, the saddest thing is the amount of real talent which has been wasted on nugatory subject-matter.[23]

A full explanation of what went wrong at the creative level might involve tracing out the American influence on these poets, and also their own

scattered attempts at a poetic theory. My suspicion is that the main blame would fall on Hemensley who in his confused wellmeaning way taught them how to convert European cultural-relativist criticism into a rationale for self-conscious subjectivism.[24] It was a way to have your Marxist cake and eat it.

But as a partial *sociological* explanation of their failures I suggest the following theory: the florrescence of the late-60s scene depended on advances in printing technology that made small-run presses astonishingly cheap for those who were prepared to contribute their own labor. The "little magazines" served splendidly as forums to exchange views, air early drafts of work, communicate specialist interests, and publish what was at the time non-commercial work. Unfortunately they also served many of the poets as retreats from public criticism: in these small pools they grew to be almighty fish; when they ventured out their inflated reputations proved to be so much paper money. Some lost contact with reality, and erected their prevailing preference for various surreal, subjectivist, mythical-revelatory styles of writing into the myth of a sort of great-leap-forward in poetic theory that had invalidated all earlier writing. From there it was a long and painful road back to Rob Tillet's and Richard Tipping's indictment of "the effervescent closed circle of the 'Underground' ":

> Our 'culture' is inwardly oriented — we close our books to the uninitiated. Let's forget about being great misunderstood artists struggling in noble poverty and actually produce something.[25]

To have come so far is at least to stand where the new drama stood when they parted company with it in Melbourne in the late 1960s.

[1] *The Applestealers* ed. R. Kenny & C. Talbot, Outback Press, 1974, pp. 22-3 & 26.
[2] Not, as the preface loosely states, from the "new writing that has grown up in Australia since the late 1960s". Australian Literary Studies, ed. L. T. Hergenhan, University of Queensland Press, VIII, 2, p. 114.
[3] A.L.S. VIII, 2, p. 205.
[4] A.L.S. p. 116.
[5] A.L.S. p. 143.
[6] *Applestealers* p. 30; cf. the false information about magazines ibid. p. 23.
[7] A.L.S. p. 220.
[8] A.L.S. pp. 125-6.
[9] A.L.S. p. 164.
[10] *Applestealers* p. 17.
[11] cf. *Applestealers* p. 17, A.L.S. pp. 133, 160-1, 227, & 237, cf. Meanjin 4, 1976 p. 362, and more generally Hemensley's and Kenny's handing out of accolades in Applestealers and in Hemensley's article in Meanjin 1, 1976, pp. 56ff.
[12] *Applestealers* p. 25.
[13] Note too the dropping in A.L.S. of the emphasis on the alleged *La Mama* connection with the new drama, which was used as a promotional tactic in *Applestealers*. The connection with the "new prose" (to which half the A.L.S. issue is devoted) is more defensible.
[13a] Tranter in Meanjin 4, 1976, p. 307. Taylor in Meanjin 4, 1972, p. 384.
[14] A.L.S. p. 202, cf. p. 205. Contrast Tranter's remarks A.L.S. pp. 159-160.
[15] cf. Tranter in A.L.S. pp. 133-4, and Haskell's comments ibid. p. 140.
[16] A.L.S. p. 212, cf. pp. 152 and 191, and 232-3.
[17] A.L.S. pp. 233 & 238; cf. Meanjin 1, 1976 p. 63.
[18] Meanjin 4, 1976 p. 356.
[19] *The Harrowing of Balmain* by "Stan and Mort Quartell", Book 2. *The Harrowing* appeared in four parts in Nation Review from April 23rd to May 14th 1976.
[20] A.L.S. p. 170.
[21] *Applestealers* p. 13, cf. pp. 22-3 & 31.
[22] Special issue "Within the Hill", 1975, p. 66.
[23] A.L.S. pp. 139-44.
[24] cf. note 17; and compare Krausmann's waterlily poem in Meanjin 1, 1977, p. 52.
[25] A.L.S. pp. 208-9, and cf. Wearne, ibid. p. 155.

CATHERINE HOFFMAN

A Useful Exit

That afternoon the man experienced an infinity of greyness and silence.

He sat all day without the refuge of music, afraid to disturb his daughter, who was more remote than even his pain. A flailing process, a ruinous division of cells thrashing within him all day. He remained thoughtless as far as he could. Several times every hour he rushed to the bathroom to empty his aggrieved and useless throat of phlegm. He stood and swabbed the strangling mucous. His body was bent so as not to get it on his dressing-gown. When it had never bowed to anything. But he swabbed and swabbed. Realizing the destitution of silence.

I have lived as a man, he told himself, even at the greyest ebb, as friend, as sportsman, as husband, as father, as citizen; not philosopher or mystic. Which the renewed throbbing in his throat, the devastation in his neck, that alarm ring of his pulse all required of him now.

And he did not have it. In the twilight. In the throbbing. In the thrashing. The petering out. His human neck, a lump. His fear stirring, rising. He had no reserve of thinking. His veins slugging. Blood cooling. He had no God. His breath thinning. Or if there was a God, this God did not have him.

All his fibre, dwindling, perishing.

If at least he had a human hand. If at least a touch from the living. He stood up seized by this moment of surrender. And would have gone into his daughter's room to ask — to hold her hand. Which was ridiculous.

The man sat down again.

And the twilight, the room, the throbbing, the thrashing, flailing, thinning process turned and turned in him. His mind sank away, overloaded by its emptiness, the terror unscreamed.

When the house was entirely in darkness, remembrance, that bail-out of the present, began to flicker its summons to him.

Responding swiftly to its invitation the man stood up to be more wholly received back.

Into the beer-garden. The swishing of green-gold chestnut leaves. The gold in Feiman's flashing laughter. Lanced by the sun. Glinting, piercing. It stabbed his throat. The man walked faster through the flat. The boards beneath his tapping feet groaning.

His stride now slowly eased. *By his wife's hand, a certain morning, leading him, a child, beneath the jacaranda tree. Blooming. Booming. Crashing like oceans in his veins. The walking man's body was swirling, roaring like a deluge. A catastrophe of flesh. Which was strolling now. In the circumstance of wealth and taste, immaculately dressed, along the warmly greeting, tree-langorous, night-expectant streets of Budapest. In an oasis of music he sat. In his pearly silk shirt. The simple, lavish cloth of his suit. The joyous shoes from France. His friends around him and at their centre the graceful, high-cheeked woman with the gold cigarette case. There was a man whose face he couldn't see, but whose joke he was returning over the mahogany table with wines — or was it Budapest espresso? Steaming double-black? They laughed. His friends. Delirious with the Danube evening, the wine, the stars, their friendship, but most of all his wit, crackling like a practised whip. Toasting Feiman, his gold-toothed friend. The charmed circle of his applauding friends. The woman to whom, he now remembered, he had given, casually, that gold cigarette-case. Leaning forward elated.*

"Enchanté, but brilliant, Kiki!" The woman glowed praises at him. So he was raising the crystal again. In self-celebration or self-mockingly. The walls of the restaurant echoed the

mirth of his friends. Feiman was making some refined obscenity about the Danish whores, who danced.

As he was now. In distress.

In the dark house the air had suddenly refused to go down his gulping neck. The man's feet were dancing. Chopping, clopping. To make the air come. He was running now, up and down, a cabaret clown, this old, unbreathing, oxygen burnt dark steel in your lungs. Up and down. Running. Running. Running. His arms jiggling like a marionette. To make the air come. He couldn't help it. Thundering through the house.

Which tore open into light.

She stood in it, quivering by the door. Her face featureless with fright.

She was coming hugely. And with her, air.

"Father! . . . Dad! . . . oh Dad . . ." His daughter came. "Ah, what!" she caught him as masterfully, as powerfully as a man. She grabbed him, hooking her arm into his elbow. So that both, in a ghastly mazurka of horror, danced. And fought. And struggled. Their feet scuffling on the boards.

"God in Heaven!" she boomed. Her father would choke in her own hands.

But suddenly he stopped. Just like that. The air had come. He searched her face. They looked at each other like sleep-walkers who suddenly woke and wondered why they had danced.

"It's all right now." He touched her kindly from his assembled state. "Thank you, thank you." His face was so meek and accepting now that it was his daughter who crumpled in shame.

"Oh Dad," she whispered, unable to move, touch, change anything, least of all her hate, "you are so . . . brave".

And it was this which finally folded the old man. He wanted so much to be. He wanted to exit without causing further harm, or noise, or protest, in dignity.

"Do you think so, little Alex?"

With the simplicity of desolation, Alexandra opened her arms and received her father.

"Do you really think I'm brave?" He, who was so afraid, was whimpering.

She hugged his child's body. "You are so brave, so very brave, why you are a . . . hero — a champion!" She lied to him through tears.

They went into the room again. At his feet she crouched, or knelt. She had despised this man for his emptiness.

But there it was now, his slender, pliant hand in her own. She bent over it. And kissed it.

So she took his head into her hands and said, "Tell me about your life, Dad."

'It was useless," he said.

So, they were united.

"Then . . ." she stammered, pressing his face to overcome her own dread, "Tell me, teach me, about death."

So he did. Through the long night he told her everything. What it felt like inside him. He taught her.

"Thank you, . . . thank you, . . ." she mumbled sometimes to truths she couldn't help feeling were ceremonial, privileged.

By morning the old man felt perky, having been so properly used and witnessed. He felt the agony ahead might have purpose.

"I think I'll do some planting in the garden, Alex," he said.

"Don't tire yourself," she warned him with a little punch that conveyed their new tenderness.

He went planting into the garden. His throat hurt. And there was that eastern light which would always move towards the west.

DESMOND O'GRADY

One Prick After Another

Moira rarely confided with her mother since illness had left her only fluctuating contact with reality. Her mother's latest trick was to mention that film stars such as Gary Cooper had come to dinner if their photographs were in the day's paper. Moira was thankful her mother recognised few contemporary actors for otherwise meals would be crowded. Nevertheless Moira could not wait to tell her that Vernon had begun working for the Corporation: she had to tell someone. But when she reached home, Father Dorgon was ensconced in the lounge, a plate of sponge in his lap, a cup of tea in hand. Moira had been angry with Dorgon since her last confession and avoided discussing personal affairs in his presence. Not that he gave her much of a chance. He was claiming that recent statements showed certain Labor politicians remained soft on Communism.

Moira, after helping herself to the tepid tea, tried to shut him out by watching the raindrops squiggle down the windows, change direction, veer again as if vainly seeking to avoid the frame. She had to intervene: "The Liberals could use you, Father."

"Dorgons have always been Laborites," he answered as if offering a pedigree, "but the party has gone off the rails."

"Keep your hair off your forehead, dear."

Her mother's solicitude was the heaviest cross. She always interspersed conversation with swift advice delivered deadpan as if this made it inaudible by the third party. She assumed sight of the broad Keating brow would excite beaus: a conviction as unshakeable as Dorgon's that God was in his heaven, leaving him a fine free hand in this world.

Moira decided to shock them by announcing that she had seen Vernon at the office water-bubbler. In faded blue jeans and matching shirt.

"Father Mangan gets about wearing a red tie," said her mother.

"Vernon's left the Order. I told you. Remember?"

But Moira's eyes were on impervious Dorgon. "I knew him at uni," she explained, without adding that she had expected to marry Vernon.

"Did you know him well now?"

"Well enough."

"I think you'll find this . . . Vernon is it? never had a vocation." Dorgon gathered sponge crumbs between thumb and forefinger. "They're the ones who pull out thinking 'life begins at 40'."

Would it for her, Moira wondered. She had a struggle to control her feelings when Vernon had invited her for a drink in the canteen that afternoon. Employed for the forthcoming Eucharistic Congress he had sought office information. But at the same time he promised Moira, who worked for radio current affairs, that he would help her obtain a position she sought with an equivalent television program. Its producer Zammit, Moira recalled, had briefly been a fellow seminarian of Vernon.

A matter-of-fact exchange but with deeper vibrations, at least for Moira, for Vernon's languid voice was that of the gentle guru she had known at university. Older than most of his university contemporaries, he had had an intriguingly melancholy air. Now, although grey was creeping through his still abundant hair and crowsfeet wandered from his eyes, he was more buoyant. But his soulful look was unchanged.

Could they resume? Did she want to with someone who, as her brother Ray said, had blighted her troth? At university she had heeded Vernon's advice ("too much fat cat for someone as finely tuned as yourself") to drop Philip Win-

throp who had subsequently become a successful politician. And tried not to resent it when Vernon's spiritual trajectory had carried him to a monastery rather than matrimony. But after missing two marriages because of Vernon's spiritual exigencies, she was shaken to find he had left his religious order. His fidelity there had somehow justified hers.

So sedulously had she schooled herself not to resent Vernon that she was swept off her feet by his residual charm. He managed to move her with comments she recognised as banal.

"Same color as you had at university," Vernon greeted her expansively on his third morning. He turned her to examine her marsh green jacket. "That was a winter coat though."

She had forgotten it.

"Of course. Goes with the eyes. You can still wear it because you haven't changed."

She took it as a compliment. It achingly recalled the time when her pleasure lay not so much in doing things as in imagining reporting them to Vernon. A lunchtime visit to an art show reminded her that her first enthusiasm for Vernon had inspired her interest in art. She had haunted the national art gallery examining statues for enlightenment on the male physique. Ashamed of her ignorance, she had kept the motive for her visits to herself and, as a bonus, acquired an interest in art apart from male nudes. But she had long stopped attending art shows by herself. With Vernon entertaining and perceptive, she recaptured her enjoyment. A late return to the office increased it.

Moira's colleagues noticed that she had acquired a glow since Vernon's arrival. Frequently he called at her cubicle for advice on holding the bureaucrats at bay.

"You'd have seen through this outfit straight off, Moira," he praised her, "why stick it out? Too much persistence, it's bred in us."

At times when they had coffee in the canteen, she could believe it the university cafe again, the sugar so many granulations of joy, the brown brew a bond. When, on their tenth visit, Vernon took her hand, her flesh responded. But it was merely to enable him to ask, yet again, how much sugar she wanted. If he couldn't remember even that!

"None," she had snapped, forcing herself to drink the bitter brew although she usually took two teaspoons. Brittle stuff, bad for you. Even when asking about the sugar his eyes had been soulful, caressing . . . sugar daddy. Had she sought anything other than a substitute father, falling for his soothing wisdom?

Her bitterness was due to disappointment, she realised eventually. Vernon was friendly but that was all, an office acquaintance. "We were mates at the Shop" he told Moira's colleagues, adding "cobbers" just in case they jumped to the right conclusion. He was not prepared to unpack the past and showed only a distant interest in former close friends. But once, in the corridor, he asked without preamble if she saw Philip Winthrop.

"Difficult not to see him," Moira replied, "if you open a paper or watch TV."

"No, personally. See anything of him?" Was he going to advise her against it, she wondered.

"He dropped in at the Savages' last christening party," she admitted and saw Philip, still hawkishly handsome although his hair was arranged to hide a bald patch, sincere as a Christmas card from a PR firm. But riding the wave of success.

"How's Suzanne?" Suzanne was her substitute: Philip had married her shortly after Moira had heeded Vernon's advice.

"Still a bit of a sparrow — but she's no longer frightened."

"Should be, as a fat cat's plaything. You don't know how lucky you were to keep clear of that plastic politician."

At least let me cast my own vote, Moira wanted to say. Apparently Vernon expected her gratitude.

But his own performance, leaving her stranded? She tried to lead him back to it but he jibbed.

"You don't remember anything that happened about then, do you Vernon?" she said one morning when he asked the year the Korean war ended, "total amnesia."

He was running up a biography of the Korean cardinal invited to the Congress.

"Some things," he answered, "but not . . . dates."

"Ever look back at yourself?"

"I don't want to turn into a pillar of salt."

Especially salt that has lost its flavor: Moira bit it back. She had tried to forget the sacramental-stain teaching: once-a-priest-always-a-priest.

"Looking backwards won't get you anywhere, Moira," he added, "you can't stay immobile for decades."

He just might have opened up but, from the adjoining cubicle, his boss called that he wanted the biog within 15 minutes.

"You made a lucky escape," he cut her off

when she tried to pick up the thread at lunch, "I guess I bore too quickly."

Others or yourself Moira refrained from asking, thinking the problem, rather, was that he had coarsened, downgrading his experience. After a month, annoyance was replacing the excitement she had felt at Vernon's arrival, although certain expressions or gestures, such as grasping his forehead at sudden illuminations, still tore at her. His criticism, that she was stuck in the past, stung. Her university years did seem closer than more recent experience. Every now and again, in the soft disorder of her mother's house, she came across a postcard or letter she had sent from overseas. Maybe in a bundle of old clothes in a corner or when shifting furniture. Anything which crossed the threshold, it seemed, drifted into a timeless dimension. She read the epistles as if they were by another hand, always surprised that they dated from only a few years earlier.

An aerogram from a delightful beachside house near Naples to which an Italian couple had invited her: the husband had built it for a German doctor who had not completed payments. The day after she had posted the aerogram describing the sundrenched peace and quiet, a carload of Germans had arrived, there had been an angry discussion, and within half-an-hour she had had to leave with the Italians.

A card from Salzburg chattered about minor misunderstandings in the pension. She recalled that after posting it she found she was pfennigless, without groat or groschen, at the end of supper in a hillside openair restaurant. She had sneaked out, then run downhill, frightened of being spotlit but, as she gained distance, enjoying it.

On reaching London, she felt she would really open her wings. But she had been called back urgently by her brother Ray. Her mother had suffered a stroke and there was no one who could look after her. Ray's wife was pregnant again, it would be the fourth child. At least that was legit but Carrie, Moira's younger sister, had to marry a local footballer in a hurry. Their mother could not live long, Ray had told Moira, and she was not hardhearted enough to stay in London.

Her mother made a strong recovery although her brain had misted. Moira had found work in the Corporation but feared sinking in insipidity.

Things had come to a head at her last confession. Dorgon had pushed his large, soft, Irish grandmother's face close to the grate to interrupt her: "You don't really need to come, Moira."

Just like that, when confession was supposed to be anonymous. She had not known what to say. Even his musky breath seemed feminine. Perhaps he took breath-sweeteners before his stint in the box.

"I can need confession as much as anyone else."

"You're leading a blameless life. If you've something to tell me, I'll hear you at home."

"No you won't," she had fended him off, "I won't have anything to say." And had left fuming because he wanted to reduce her to the status of her mother, beneath good and evil. The quicksands of niceness.

To avoid disappearance without trace, she had kept contact with members of her university circle. Quickwitted, equable, she was interested in new ideas and old friends even though most of them had abandoned the ideals they had shared in the 1950s.

At university they had proclaimed the need to love black man, brown man, beggar man and thief but, in the event, most found it impossible to live with their soulmates. Marriage breakups were becoming the rule among her friends. Moira was the lightning conductor of their conjugal tensions and honorary aunt for their children.

Some were now as unidealistic as her brother Ray had always been. Others had transferred their hopes wholly to the political plane. Phonse Casey, wearing a headband, had arrived unexpectedly at Moira's house late one night. He recounted incredible stories of police harassment in the other State where he now lived. He still used the word "parousia" which she had not heard since their ecstatic university days when much of the excitement lay in discovering new dimensions of the faith. For him it had become a synonym for "revolution", although it meant the recapitulation of all things in Christ at the second coming.

Vernon had never had political interests, which may have made it easier for him to despise Philip Winthrop. His stress had always been on the spiritual but the seminary had soured him: although many of Moira's friends had abandoned the faith, none had adopted Vernon's jeering tone. It increasingly riled Moira, making her appear more doggedly Catholic than she was.

"You'd think the great unwashed would see through this mob by now," said Vernon when photographs of the cardinals due for the Congress

hit his desk. He had become a great "see-through" man. He saw through everything but the latest fads.

"I don't know," responded Moira, "television's more the opium of the people these days than they are."

"That has the right, epsicopal ring." He raised an arm like a preacher. "I can see it in the parish pump press. Brava Moira. Defensor fidei. Star of the See."

From then on, wryly amused, he used 'Star of the See' as a nickname. For colleagues he would spell out 'See'. It conveyed that she was a convent product 25 years on, splendidly preserved because untouched by life, although she did compress her lips every so often as if to quell anger.

She could not think of anything to match the sobriquet and regretted she had no capacity for venom. Vernon could not only wound casually but seemed impregnable. Nevertheless she still grasped at straws when Vernon invited her for a drink one oppressively hot evening shortly before the Congress began. Apart from Moira and Vernon, there were few couples in the bar. Outside, secretaries, their makeup smudgy, and clerks, carrying their jackets headed homewards. Their departure seemed to ease the unexpected heat.

Vernon exercised his humor on their colleagues just as he had once parodied their professors. He mimicked them performing at home as in the office.

"Aimez-vous Congress?" he asked all of a sudden, with a boyish grin, presumably at the double meaning. Moira let him field that one. "All for it myself," he answered his own question, hitching his forelock which she suspected was dyed to preserve its chestnut, "but not for these eucharistic games." As if afraid he had hurt her, he added: "Not, at least, the way they're going about them."

With anyone else, she could have readily agreed. He sipped his beer as if it were wine, then continued "They've lost touch with the natural rhythms."

"Thought they did nothing but talk about rhythm." She was ready to laugh but he was not amused. School was in. At university his seriousness had impressed her but she wondered if he had not been a didactic bore, as Ray had always maintained, twenty years ago. He expatiated on the need to heed the life force, to let instinct nourish, as he said, the intellect. Jacques Maritain to Norman O. Brown, she noted.

"When did you last let go, Moira?" he asked, clasping her forearm.

Oh God, she thought, an insufferable bar-room bore, but her heart slammed.

"Depends on what you mean," she fenced.

A young woman, in faded jeans, was kissing Vernon: Natalie Natanson, one of the drama department people who affected the manner of the stars down to the fast life-style. Always loads of makeup on her eyes which, even without it, were as big as soup plates. Had Vernon invited her for a drink merely to while away time until Natalie's arrival? Or was their meeting casual?

Whichever the case, Natalie was the centre of attention. The conversation became so discontinuous and trivial that Moira suspected it was coded. Natalie's patter was subintelligent but she conveyed a lot without words. Moira sensed the current between Natalie and Vernon, who plied her with drinks. She did not sip like Vernon, she gulped them down. Hungry mouth.

Moira left as soon as possible without making it seem she was upset. In twenty years, flouncy Natalie would be huge, those breasts would positively dangle. As trim Moira walked to the tram-stop, she asked did she have to descend to Natalie's level to achieve intimacy? Did she seem so old that she was allowed to leave without any objection while the youngsters enjoyed themselves? She found herself pushing her hair from her forehead.

She chose the tram which took longest to reach home: she needed time to calm down if she was not to snap at her mother. She sat outside, seeking a breeze. When dismounting passengers left them alone, a sharky, sandy-stubbled man who sat diagonally opposite began to talk softly.

"God has the answer," he began, "no — God *is* the answer. Don't think you can find it in entertainment, fast living, illicit pleasures. That's the wrong direction . . ."

Moira, scarlet woman, stared fixedly at the bland housefronts. The tram was less than halfway to her destination. If she went to the inside compartment, he might follow. As it was, his voice was co confidential no one would overhear him. Only the slight pendulum sway of his head could attract attention. She breathed deeply, trying to close him out.

"You haven't read the Bible, have you? God sees. Build on anything else and you build on soft foundations. What happens: no matter how

solid your palace looks, it can be swept away in a second. Man cannot lift himself from the mire. Can the Egyptian change his skin, the leopard his spots?"

Preferable, she decided, if he had made obscene suggestions. He was the type, squint-eyed, stained fingers fiddling now in his pockets. Why me, me, she asked, longing for a drink. Could his sharp nose detect she had been drinking? What was it about her that attracted people keen for religious kicks?

He was rolling a cigarette. Wasn't smoking a sin? As the tram ground on, iron on iron, Moira wondered how many in the homes they passed were isolated by the eye of his dire God. Would he trail her across the park? She remembered her mother's story of a man exposing himself years ago when she was alone in a train compartment. "Put that dirty *little* thing away," her mother had said. Moira would like to have told the man opposite to put away his pathetic little version of religion, she had seen bigger and better.

"Correct thinking is constructive, wrong thinking is destructive. No two ways about it. Are we jealous? Nurse grievances? Stained by unchastity? . . ."

At least he sees more potential in me than Dorgon, thought Moira, who would have liked to slap the man's face. Instead, having reached her stop, she held herself ready and leapt off at the last minute. He scarcely turned to look after her as the tram proceeded.

She found her mother bathed in the pool of television light. It did not help when her mother said Clark Gable had come to dinner: she had found his photograph in a weekly which lay open on the kitchen table.

That night Moira dreamt she was a little boy being elaborately dressed for an excursion in frills and finery fit for Lord Fauntleroy. When finally ready, there was an interminable wait until a male voice said, "All dressed up and nowhere to go."

In another dream, she was perhaps the same boy with a creased old face. She wanted to scream her horror of aging but her mother said, "Don't shout your sorrows at the moon." Even in her dream, Moira noted the comment was offkey: not sorrows but frustration, longing prompted howling at the moon.

Disappointingly obvious dreams, she felt, but for her male role. She was able to blame Vernon even for this transformation: one evening, during a walk around the university oval, he had argued that Australian women were insufficiently feminine.

The Congress cometh. No longer was it merely an office flurry of papers and preparations whose only point was Vernon revenant. Now it hit the headlines, there were street banners, Congress buttons, crowds congregating.

Reluctantly Moira agreed to take her mother to the Aborigines' openair Mass in the gardens by the river. Father Dorgon had convinced Moira's mother it was her duty to attend.

In cauldron heat they climbed the hill but from its rim the dark figures on the distant stage were indistinct. Moira's mother, too short to see over the onlookers' shoulders, retired to sit in a tree's shade muttering weakly about the heat. Her face was flushed, her step suddenly uncertain. Stones clacked to a unfamiliar beat as a highpitched voice praised wombats and kangaroos. Since her illness, Moira thought, her mother had entered a dimension which might make death to Aboriginal music easeful.

After the Mass, with help from two schoolgirls, Moira raised her mother to her feet. Her burning face was caked with the powder she had applied under the tree. Step by unsteady step, Moira escorted her downhill wondering if she would ever reach the bottom. Near the exit, her mother spotted an Indian nun. She questioned her closely, although short of breath, on the presumption that she was an Aborigine. When Moira enlightened her in the homebound taxi, her mother laughed uproariously, blue eyes overflowing with happy tears. Rejuvenated by its ridiculousness. Moira's eyes smarted too as she recalled her mother's ebullience before she retreated into vagueness. It had seemed less incongruous then. Moira realised far more than a steep hill climb in 95 degrees was needed to finish off her mother; good for another 15 years at least.

"You knew Vernon at the Shop, didn't you?" asked Natalie brightly the first time their tracks crossed after Moira had left them in the hotel.

"A little."

"Tell me all about him," said Natalie, widening her huge eyes avidly, oblivious to the possibility of anything between Vernon and stodgy Moira Keating. "Was he always . . . like that?"

"You'd have to ask someone else — he was quite a bit older than me."

Moira felt she knew a lot about Natalie. In Vernon's absence, she had gone to his desk drawer, almost innocently, in search of a typewriter ribbon. Instead she had found a diaphragm.

She regarded the delicate egg-blue instrument with fascinated distate: it enabled Vernon to enjoy Natalie without facing consequences.

Somehow that made her decide to go with Ann Savage to the Congress' final evening at the cricket ground. But Father Dorgon's sermon, on the morning of the Sunday it was to be held, changed her mind.

After stressing the importance of the event, Dorgon said he noticed a number of old ladies in the congregation. "This is a pleasant suburb," he continued, cheeks gleaming as if he had been bent over an oven for hours, "but I can assure you heaven is far more pleasant: if some of you went under in the crush this evening trying to get into the ceremony, it would be a worthwhile sacrifice. People would ask what it is that can bring over 100,000 Catholics together. It'll shake them to find the eucharist has as much drawing power as a football final."

Oh for a tape recorder, Moira prayed, to capture this recommendation to her mother to be trampled to death. Moira knew Dorgon would consider her suitable canon fodder also. Noting that he remained in splendid spirits while recommending sacrificial suicide, Moira envied his narrowminded devotion to a cause.

Would Vernon have become the same if he had remained in his Order? But hadn't he been the same, even if less crude, when he entered it with her as victim? And wasn't he the same now, obliterating their past, ready to lay down new commandments if she would only listen. And was her brother Ray any different, consigning her as nurse for the term of her natural life?

"Weren't you going with Ann, dear?" her mother asked, already forgetful of Moira's wrath that morning, as they watched the telecast of the concluding Mass.

"I thought the better of it," said Moira, impressed by the sunstruck solemnity of the ceremony. She did not give a hoot if the heathens were impressed but hoped Vernon was watching.

"If you don't sit up straight, you'll have a bad back later on," her mother advised, not for the first time.

Moira waited vainly for a casualty report during the offertory: 32 old ladies and 27 unmarried women of unspecified age trampled underfoot, alleluia.

"Didn't spot you in the grandstand," said Vernon the following morning, his penultimate. Moira did not admit she had given it a miss.

"Great turnout. What does higher criticism say?"

"I'd like to have seen some of those cardinals dancing — they certainly had their warpaint on."

But no animosity now. In his looselimbed, relaxed way, Vernon was drifting on. Might make a film with friends. Near 50 and still gangling, Moira reflected, envious of his floating freedom.

His life was free flow improvisation but, Moira felt, she could only add minor grace notes to a basically dull theme: her setting was too much for her. She played Aretha Franklin and Beatles records but her mother exacted equal time for "My Fair Lady" and Bing Crosby. She might cook moussakas as darkly exotic as any Vernon praised at lunchtime restaurants but they would be wasted on her mother and her imaginary guests. They relished a solid diet of steak and boiled vegs. She wore faded jeans as faded as Vernon's but not to the office. What had divided them was a question of style, Moira realised, as much as of ideas.

Vernon did not return after lunch that afternoon. Nor did Natalie. No one gave importance to the double defection but it irritated Moira. Her mood worsened when her boss handed her a lengthy report on a promised new program only a hour before knock-off time, requesting an opinion first thing in the morning. "Use it as a pillow," he advised breezily.

Moira had enough home problems without importing office ones. It would not do to be reading a report if there was an Oscar winner for dinner. Sure enough: when she rang to say she was delayed, her mother whispered that Tyrone Power was her guest.

Moira sat reading as colleagues left. Eventually she found herself alone, hungry, at the end of the meandering report. She liked the deserted office, the desks in shadow, the typewriters still, the huge factory resting. An occasional tyre-screech or the grind of a tram's clanking were the only evidence of an outside world.

She strolled about, monarch of all she surveyed, enjoying the luxury of not humoring her mother or workmates. Her transfer to television current affairs was imminent. Vernon had taken the sheen off that by claiming credit for it. "You'll find that step up taken care of," he had said confidentially the previous day, "just had a word to Zammit about it." "Thanks," Moira had replied stonily. She knew the promotion had

been decided weeks before but trust Vernon to claim he had arranged her future.

She swung her arms and began to hum indistinctly. It developed into "I should have seen right through you but the moon got in my eyes." If only I hadn't been moonstruck 20 years ago, she thought, there'd be no need to howl at it now. She was drawn to Vernon's desk strewn with Congress debris. On the nearby hatstand, a straw boater with a red silk band. Gondoliers. Venetian Vernon. Its jaunty incongruity was the man.

Despite his promise to keep in touch, he would leave nothing but the memory of a false hope, a pale copy of the one which had deluded her 20 years ago. Her Gary Cooper, her Clarke Gable, her Tyrone Power. Natalie, Moira thought without pleasure, would be the link between them.

Had they taken their link with them? She opened the desk drawer. The diaphragm still nestled there, a pale-blue promise of licentiousness. She took it out gingerly, revolted by its latex smell. She cast a cautious look around the office, then selected a long pin from a bowl on the desk and plunged it into the blue sheath. I'll make my mark she thought, as her breath began to pump, although the pin pricks remained invisible. She would pin down the phoney butterfly. Vernon would have cause to think in nine months time, and Natalie or whoever a big belly to flounce.

She replaced the diaphragm in the drawer feeling slightly crazed, convinced that she would not be fading out of his life tomorrow and thankful, yes thankful that the bastard had returned because otherwise she would have sunk in suburban sponge. Now she had something which would break through even Dorgon's imperviousness, make him splutter in his tea. Killed two birds with the one pin, yes Father, she could drawl, pricked a diaphram, many times, that's really the story of my life, one prick after another.

The After-flood Poems

finally
(& don't ask where this began for you to end it)
the ocean is cruel to children who crave for cruelty.
the stone fish felt disturbed, declare our village

elders, for they've seen at low tide the children trimming
the tentacles of an octopus & encircling with their toy spears
the rock wherein slumbered the stone fish. & that's one cue
so far. we are now watching wayward poets' canoes wreck

upon our shores, & crabs or wild boars,
turtle doves or sharks, clams or redbreasted parrots,
sea or land monsters
fall
from the skies, laughing, dancing, clowning
& carrying on, until our ancient village propheteess
soothes the pain, coaxing; "you need not fear,
o foreigner, of self-exposure; every soul here

has read hermann hesse. & no one will shed blood".
THE AFTER-FLOOD POEMS proclaim THEIR OWN FLOOD.

RUSSELL SOABA

GLEN LEWIS

Looking for the Great A.P.C. Debate

When I saw Ian Turner's piece in Overland 72 I thought the great Australian popular culture debate may have been entering a new, more self-reflective stage. But no. Turner's defence of the Overland tradition against Aitken, Connell, and Rowse was both fair-minded and intelligent, but it missed too many important points. I would like to try to indicate some of these in an admittedly impressionistic way, not with the aim of buying into other people's arguments, but because the subject is so important.

The first major point Turner didn't explicitly discuss was the generational differences between himself and his critics. I don't know the exact ages of the people concerned, but my impression is that Turner has been an established figure on the national scene longer than either Aitken or Connell, and that Rowse is a relative newcomer. My point is that even among critics on the same side of the political fence there are bound to be significant differences of approach which reflect different lived historical experiences. One aspect of this is Turner's professional background as a historian, Connell's as a sociologist, and Rowse's less identifiable stance which resembles some contemporary European structuralist approaches. These differences are significant in that they can be read as a rough yardstick of the dominance (hegemony, if you like) of history and literature in the Australian academy during the fifties and early sixties, the swing towards social sciences after that, and the current importance of marxism in many tertiary institutions.

And how does this relate to Overland? Well, simply but importantly because the magazine is a *literary* magazine. For at least ten years now the dominant form of cultural expression in Australia has been television, yet Overland's attitude to television has been to ignore or ridicule it. The clever cartoons of Jiri Tabor in the same issue are a concise statement of this attitude. His three sketches show (1) a person's eyes which have become over-developed into a set of TV eyes, then (2) the TV eyes become a periscope, and lastly (3) the TV set disappears and the periscope remains. Fair enough, but it's unfortunate and symptomatic that Turner's article doesn't once mention television. I would suggest that Overland has adopted an unfortunately elitist attitude towards the visual arts, by paying some attention to painting, ignoring photography (one striking exception: the cover of 72), making occasional reference to film, and giving regular coverage only in the area of black and white line drawing.

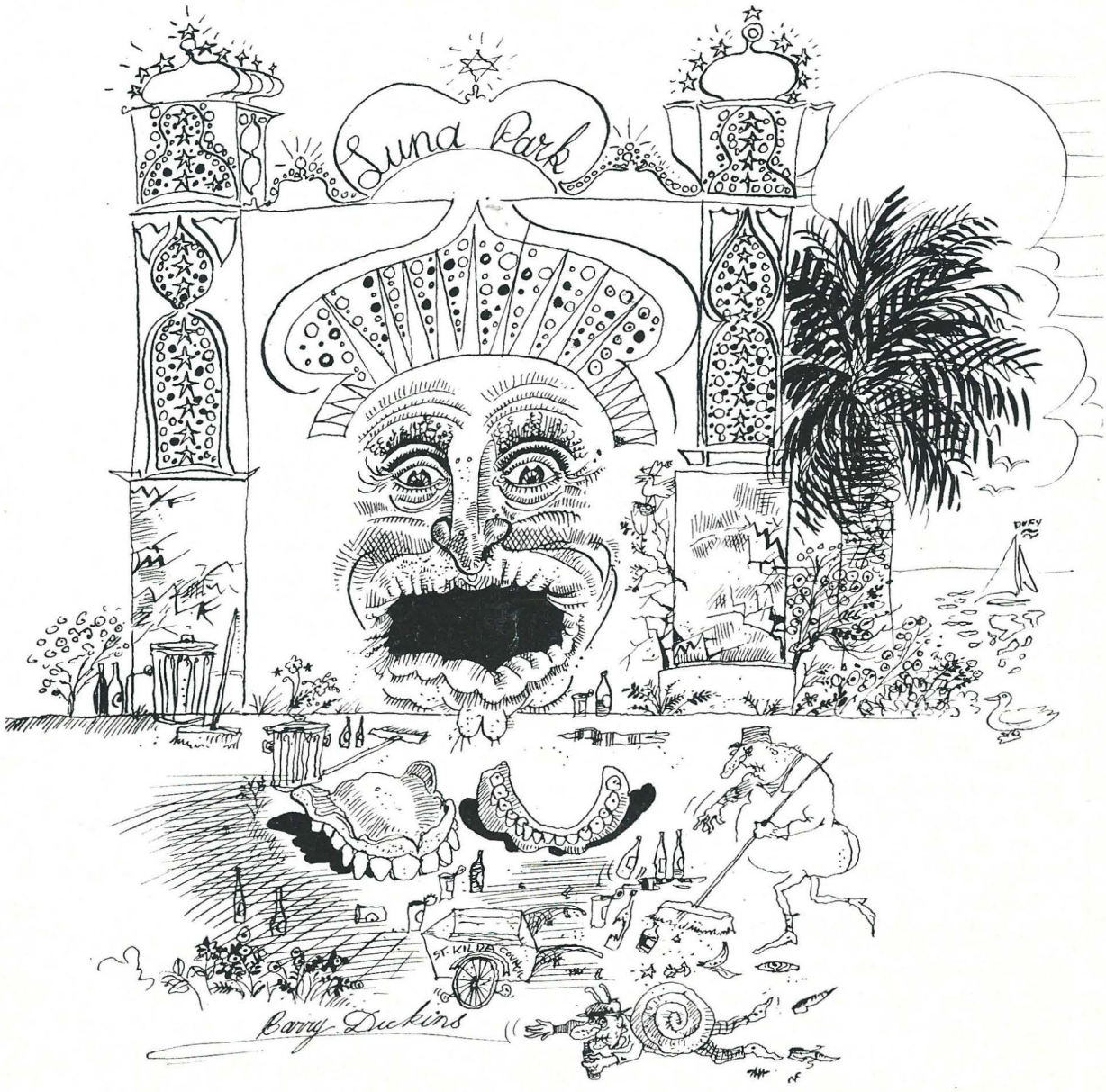
The magazine may not deserve special criticism here, of course, as none of the other Melbourne based little-left magazines have performed any better. In this sense Overland has reflected the print-oriented sensibilities of the average educated Australian, which are only now beginning to change with the development of a viable Australian film and television culture. This particular blindness, which McLuhan relished pointing out, was characteristic of Western culture generally until the late sixties. Even today, various left groups which have an established concern to relate to popular culture are just beginning to break free from the blinkers of linear logical traditions. The New Left Review group, for example, who have tended to displace Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson in the spectrum of modern British marxism, have still not developed a viable approach to either visual or popular culture. Some American left groups, in contrast, have begun to do just this. The San Francisco-based Socialist Review group has started to develop an effective critique of American popular culture and a strategy for working

with and against it. An important recent article of theirs on television has been reprinted in Australian Left Review, a normally inflexible journal which seems to be moving towards a more realistic appreciation of the role of popular culture.

But to return to Turner's defence of the Overland tradition. My feeling is that his lack of explicit discussion of the role of generational differences in the A.P.C. debate is probably due to a more basic lack of self-reflectiveness in his and Overland's work. This may be due to a typically Australian reluctance to be personal, or an impatience with abstract thinking; perhaps it's because many Overland supporters had to cope with the exigencies of the depression, the war, and the cold war. There is a world of difference, however, between self-reflectiveness and self-consciousness, which is something Australians traditionally have been quick to detect and reject either in their fellows or overseas visitors. I think it is important to make these kinds of distinctions in relation to cultural debates today, as we are now living in the wake of the feminist and gay impact on an entire range of patriarchal assumptions. In the U.S. recently, for instance, Christopher Lasch has labelled the mood of the seventies as 'the new narcissism', implying rightly in some ways that the activism of the late sixties has given way to a new concern for individual self-realisation.

The contact point here with the Australian scene in general, and Turner's defence of the Overland tradition particularly, is that one of the positive virtues of the new mood may prove to be a higher obligatory level of self-awareness for people on the Left. For example, it is just this developing late seventies awareness about the importance of being self-reflective which is probably the greatest strength of "Newsfront", Phil Noyce's recent award-winning film. The Redex trial is immortalised rather than the Petrov trial, but the film is still a winner as well as being the finest collection of Australian popular culture so far put on the screen. Yet despite its genuine sense of simplicity and straightforwardness, "Newsfront" is actually a complex and sophisticated creation at both the technical and conceptual level. Its strength is due to two features most reviewers so far have missed — one, that it is a highly self-reflective director's film in the way the story revolves around the life of a newsreel cameraman, and two, because the film skilfully juxtaposes the generational experiences of two brothers in their forties with that of younger men in their twenties.

So, returning finally to the Overland tradition, perhaps every magazine deserves to go under after a certain time if it doesn't change to accommodate new perspectives. That certainly was the situation Meanjin was in before its new editor took over in 1975, and perhaps Overland faces a similar identity crisis today. At present, unfortunately, the magazines which are the richest sources of material on Australian popular culture are Cinema Papers and Quadrant, which are a-political and right wing respectively. But if Overland does survive and goes on to treat Australian popular culture as a central issue, it will need to pay attention to range of areas it so far has tended to skate thinly over, such as popular media culture, and the experience of women, blacks, migrants and the gay communities. The radical nationalist tradition that Turner invokes at the end of his article normally has been hostile to the rights and identity of minority groups in Australia, and the present economic and political state of the nation encourages the re-birth of old intolerances. This last point may be so subjective as to be superficial, but as an ex-Queensland, thirty-five year old socialist, I perceive Meanjin as fundamentally too elitist, Arena as too ideological, and Overland as too ocker. But of those magazines only the last one seems to have any reasonable chance of making contact with ordinary Australian people.


Luna Park
ST. KILDA COUNCIL
Barry Dickins

Artificial Light At St. Kilda

Take those waves in, in light
Beaming down out of your eyes, St Kilda.
Aphrodites too young for the water
Walking and singing the streets to sleep.

Lovely as the council alcoholics
Watering down the pavement, glitter like yachts
Dazzling as they sweep across the sheets
Of the mind's bedroom.

Whoever comes dreaming down Fitzroy Street now
Highbeam and flowers and shattered lightbulb head
Christ, how many bouquets before the blood clots
And the young and wasted wounded may be called to bed?

Heroin cloudbank poisonous gamblingjoint earth
What cigarette held at what fanciful attitude matters now?
What verse sang over hospitals, crooned like a bird
Can return the elegant and dreamlike youth to the bone?

Bottle of speeches and snowcool words, paradox, misnomer
And dregs of ashcan sherryheads and giddy australians
Climbing with their ghosts up barricades of stairs
I want to go with them into the bedrooms of Barkly Street

And die in their arms. Nights like this plant gelignite
Blow up the Shrine and hurl grenades until the dead can come home
Draw up a chair on the quay and consider the profile, strut and light
Of infantile birds gathering for the storm, the weightless tidal wave

The junk and wardrobes of rain and twisted backyard gap in the fence
The junk of years, the bronchial rooms screaming for a match,
The years that swear and swear and cry WASTE: WASTE: WASTE:
The barbed wire rose whistling through the air

The maidenheads and boyheads snivelling in filthy flats
The agents carefully locking away their rented crystal pistols
The pimps and whoring moonlight giggling shitheap american cars
Where children? Where water? Where love? Where fingers joyfully entwined?

Entwined in condemned rooms like smoke rolling round
The fingers that raise the blind to see the world
World of enormous silence after the criminals have gone
Rain striking the same female fingers poised with the lightswitch.

At five or six the next morning the vagrants light up the day.

BARRY DICKINS

Return of the Native

The big house is turned into flats, the last camphor laurel
cut down, alas; the street paved, the cool weatherboard suburb
gone trendy with fancy brick; but the roses spill
their old abundance of scent, and across the kerb

as if this were a film, a Mintie wrapper blows.
So cut to two freckled children unwrapping Minties
in their camphor laurel house, and from wide windows
let the sounds of teacups and voices and laughter rise.

It is late afternoon, and the towering cumulus gather
over city, suburb and treehouse as everyone tells
silly stories. A pause. A rich baritone voice is clear:
"Well, a gentleman knows where he is if the police own the brothels."

The grown-ups shriek, and repeat the curious line.
Heaven cracks open. The children run, drenched, inside,
and the girl, who learns like a parrot, repeats it again
and is slapped into tears without knowing how she has offended.

And Freddy, who said it while managing his tea
with his hand and his hook says, "She didn't understand,"
and talks about Little Pitchers and says he's sorry.
(He told me once: "When the Germans shot off my hand

"God gave me this hook, it's much better for carrying parcels."
I believed the curving steel grew out of his arm.)
But it's time for some good old songs, and music quells
the world's injustice, and clears away the storm.

My taxi is waiting. The driver puts down his book.
It's volume two of the brick-red paperback Popper.
I say, "Full Marx?" He grins, "Half. Have you had a good look?
Was that your old home? Do you like what they've done to her?

"Do you like what they've done to this old State of yours?
I'm a useless M.A. It's no use whingeing, but.
You can't sing hymns in a park, and the police own the parlors.
But I've a sick wife and a kid, so I keep my mouth shut.

"Ban Uranium, one bald tyre, they'll have you off.
If you're sporting a Jesus Saves they'll let you go
without tyres or lights. You'd better go back down South."
I remember Freddy singing "My old Shako,"

and would like to say, he'd given a hand for freedom
and would use his hook if anyone threatened his rights.
But the truth is, he'd have voted to build the Bomb
and to clean the long-haired larrikins out of the streets.

Turn like a jewel that small, clear scene in your head:
cloud-blaze, tree-glitter, loved faces, a radiant voice
singing "Fifty years ago . . ." Though you summon the dead
you cannot come as a child to your father's house.

GWEN HARWOOD

The Way a Policeman . . .

I wanna talk about the way a policeman sits
on a train
with his arms folded across his chest
and his shiny metal buttons.
I wanna talk about the way a policeman sits
on a train
like an unlikely promise of peace,
like a suggestion of gas and Jews.
The way a policeman sits on a late, night train
with the fluorescent lights in his shoes,
and his lips sucked back to a slit,
feeds the ladies with furred hats
expensive trifle,
rations jerky to the poor.
I wanna talk about the way a policeman sits
on a train
moving nothing but his neck,
his jaw set like a centurion
through 15 inner-suburban stations,
his crow-eye on the drunk at the front
of the car.
I wanna talk about the way a policeman sits
on a train
and how everyone is as silent as hell,
his white hat on his head
like a chip on my shoulder.
I wanna talk about a policeman sitting
on a train
with his black shoes fixed like the claws
of a sphinx sunk in a desert.
I wanna talk about the way a policeman sits
on a train,
and then:
I wanna change the way a policeman sits
on a train!

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

Goody Rose & The Ploughman's Share

the ploughman has a wife
who rubs his balls
with cute pink roses

she can stir up his semen
with two fresh handfuls
after the hardest day

& by the smell of his foreskin
she knows whether he has ripped
or tilled harrowed or hilled

she jigs both the flame
& the embers of her splendor
when he's frozen with snow

& he knows how
not to strike metal
against stone

he sleeps with her unpruned
he gathers her hips generously
gulps & guts her blooms

TERRY HARRINGTON

Monsoon season

hot chocolate & stirring it
running it over & under
slipping & running

point point point
*sinabada** on tiptoe

rain rain rain
weather on taptoe

with sort of weather
Moresby is understandable
going always & nowheres
in the palm tavern &
Old Colonial toilet

at Ela Beach

DON MAYNARD

*white woman

To A Polite Academic Who Asked the Local Name

Well, I'm sorry, but we don't have a name for it.
I know that our language
like our customs and our desires
is supposed to be quaint
worth writing up, a learned footnote or two.

But a thing for picking mangoes
is just that:
if you want mangoes, you
borrow one, make one, find another way,
or wait for them to fall.

A thing is its function
or the use to which it's put.
Some things are nameless as too trivial
and some as safeguard against
talking about instead of doing.

I'm not sure how you write that up.

R. G. HAY

TWO POEMS BY ANIA WALNICZ

Little Red Hiding Hood

I always had such a good time
good time, good time, good time girl.
Each and every day
from morning to night
Each and every
twenty-four hours
I wanted to wake up, wake up.
I was so lively, so livewire tense,
such a highly pitched little
I was red, so / red, so red.
    I was a tomato.
I was on the lookout for the wolf
want some sweeties mister?
I bought a red dress for myself.
I bought a hood for myself.
    Get me a hood.
I bought a knife.

Apple

    I'm red.
  I'm apples.
I'm an ever-ready
    lad.
I'm the small
  warsaw boy
  who
  survived
all that.

Small Animal Poem

Okay, there's room for one more
small animal in my life,
behind the bad future, as long as he
doesn't complain. His fate will be secret;
I am not to blame.

If you imagine you are not so
lucky today, rehearses the other,
the guilty animal, look at tomorrow —
the good days are gone, in future everything
you do goes wrong,

you will be broken down.
But the new arrival, the blameless
animal, I warn him, is not to know
that his future's just begun, nor how soon
the damage will be done.

JOHN TRANTER

Motel Amalienburg, Melbourne

i
The housemaids must boggle: you bring your typewriter,
three framed prints (2 for me!), cassettes, books,
catalogues, a silver dinosaur, a special vase
— across benches and beds we strew our visible accomplices
as if we were a barricade, holed in for the siege.
We draw the blinds,
we tear at each other's clothes, they are part
of the wilful clutter. At dusk we sip cognac
and then saunter out
ready for anything.

ii
In the Botanical Gardens we walk slowly.
I rattle off names and trees, sometimes accurate.
There is a pond with black swans down below us
it is a secret arrangement of memories
already slotting us like cassettes
taking the spin.
There is a beech tree, there are chesnuts, elms.
I point out *Tristania Alberta,* the acclimatised box-tree
native of Brisbane. Brown water. Damp grass-slopes.
In the Botanical Gardens we walk slowly indeed,
naming things, storing in our way as they in theirs.
You call out for an icecream. Yes, that too.
I thrust another leaf into your hands. Feel it.
Touch it carefully, throw it away. Remember.

iii
It is years since I soaped another's back.

iv
5 p.m. and we're out of cash. We dine in
on ryebread and leftover cheese. We have built archives
into any corner store and a gallery into this motel.
What is its name? Let's call it the Amalienburg.
Let's invent the Rococco together. Let's invent
landscapes and terraces — and a pond, there must be a pond
for the white swan/black swan. No matter what god
scheduled them ,they're ours now. Let's return,
let's forget them all,
let's invent each other's body.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

peter lee's poetry

I

you 'n me, we're th finest contradictions of th capitalist system,
I mean; I'm working th concrete pump on th prison walls today,
th boss I don't like, don't like at all, he's one of those 'hey —
boy' fellas, but this arvo he yells out in italian & everybody
downs tools & goes running over, well th concrete's pumping out
& no-one to take care of it, he yells out to me "stop th pump"
& I go over to take a look-see, there's these two birds nesting
in the mortar in these bloody great concrete walls, jeee — zus,
it must've cost th company $500, I tell ya, when these migrants
learn to organize on th site, there'll be no stopping them

II

or I'm on this construction site, when they take off their shirts
there's a cross round every neck, I'm no jew, but next day
I'm wearing this star of david, well, anyway, there's this hungarian,
I'm turning th shovel & he blows this kiss at th sun, "what's that"?
I say, "what's that I just saw you doing"? & he says;
"just blowing a kiss at th sun — I do it every day" he says,
"when I was a kid I used to sing it up, came up every time, too"
well y couldn't tell him anything new about social relations
& th value of labour

III

johnny doesn't bother changing out of his work clothes
he walks into th boardroom, picks up th family photo
(th boss with his wife & kids) & when he leaves off
examining it he puts it face down, gives th boss
his full attention, th boss is going on about safe
levels of potassium, fit for human consumption, etc. etc.
johnny plonks down a plastic container of th river water
"well, drink that"
th boss don't drink
"clean water" says johnny "clean water — that's what we're
after, & it's for *our* children"
& he goes over & replaces
th photo on its stand, & walks out, leaving th boss
to stare at th wife & kids

IV

he walked around with th rats in a sack over his shoulder
& he stank — how he stank — th men took a wide berth
but y couldn't say a word against him, it was his job,
but th foreman despised him, he'd give him overtime, but
not till knock-off time /
hey you, over here,
dig a trench /
10 metres long
1 metre deep
we all knew it was for nothing — he'd have to fill it in
the boys all looked at each other & said nothing
later, johnny wanders over, sure enough he's filling it in
only there's a man's boot sticking out of th dirt
inside it was th foreman's foot, luckily he was breathing
th rat catcher had split his head with th shovel /
it was
assault /
johhny /
assault
— th ratcatcher's shouting
& johnny /
johnny pats him on th shoulder /
I know
brother /
I know /
assault it is then

ERIC BEACH

Father and Son Reunion

tyres around
treeforks
dark around me
led into town
dolled up by
mining magnates
in flimsy cadillacs
pegging
another boom
& old fossickers
pegged out
in wine saloons
veins spent
hopes bad
liquor
& memories
of innocent
geographies I hung
around waiting
to arrive
at your door

scared
shitless
you nearly died
twice
the heart dusty
lungs sighing
for worked out
towns fast
women & slow
horses: dividends
you gave me
a way out
in the desert
drifting thru
licked men
at the TAB two-up
sheds & bars:
frail walls
against a dread
wind blowing
what gold
failed them
thru their fingers

& beyond
it now
pensioned wise
to the wind
filling your days
with small wonder
you picked up
my dread
made it shine

in your eyes
the words
our departure
failed you as I
set out into nightfall
loaded with gold

PHIL COLLIER

Orient
from *Complex Of Abandonment*

1
Hurtles back suddenly burning,
those paragons the sun and moon in their phases.
Vegetables scavenged from under stalls at the market,
maybe a season pacified by emotion.
Episode to episode, grievance flying.

2
The Revenant, the gypsy here.
Around her tight mouth quick shame
and suspicion, events no anecdotes ever caress.
In the air's singing width we waited
hardly believing.

Come through clashing steel cradles
and forklift whining.

3
The few spies I've loved beyond number,
travellers whose élan alone was arson.
Hurtles back suddenly burning

gray flaring sunshine will not be
and these between us towers of our laughter
altered in story, serial.

4
The one along who always says
"scavenging fucking food off the floor".
Cabbage mulch streams in the gutter,
a plunging decimal point at the square root
of purpose. For these fruit I reel back every time
to this Orient casual in ugliness,
in strong arches.

5
Through the poles and shadows a child's horse propels
a further telegraphy. The same square gait
that silos have, or love trading purpose
for bloody trophies the letters

as hinged in sleep the vision came
of gold rain sweeping a charnel street,
luminous, unsad, absolute.

The kid gets on her horse shrieking.

6
Sometimes a touching clumsiness
would overtake me or my comrade
or, when the order was evidence
one of us would have to be a sour note in the massed
choir under incense.

Though fallen beyond complicity and transgression,
deeper than they are in life and death.

7
The market buildings insist they know
your ambience in echo. Even in your silences,
a crisis of sound flew up to debate
this presence.

Cold salamanders in girders,

the distances clearer for crying out.

8
Hard blue, hard blue. I heard you
singing then. Your deep acceding pleasure
was a barbed flower tossing order thanks
in order to resume itself.

I call that the ultimate hour

we didn't care, however in time,
if we were how far aside or were there
or had entered a fiction.

9
The nod the bag opened never enough
Altamont, or the vessel in from Noumea
the one called Ile de Lumiere

How it hurtles back burning.

ROBERT HARRIS

The Malcolm Fraser Tram

I hail trams. I Sieg Heil
the Malcolm Fraser tram from Glenelg.
Like a dislocated train carriage
or a sardine can on roller skates,
grating, rattling, bumping, humping
over the old wooden dipper, its
doors hiss open like pneumatic drills
before the bump and grind routine.
State-owned, of course.

Take her away, Malcolm.
The graffiti dares you to take her
away completely, rolling navy blue
steam over bitumen's racing track.
Radon gas leaks from one wall now
Out of lilac spraycans onto brick.
Some illiterate failed to finish
the K in SACK. It's sack you,
Malcolm. He's through. Export you,
your head on that Merino ram conicaled
with white paint and paintbrush.

You're running the line, Malcolm,
your own. Can't you see what people
do when there's nothing to do? You.
There's a message two metres brazen
along fifty metres of concrete drain.
The soursobs are green winter over it.
You're taller than I am, Malcolm.
Do you, will you read its outrage
It will be easier to see coming back
or in summer — not the next or the next
but whenever there'll be no need.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

The Germanic Day

I wake the wifehag in the marriagebed
She makes quickcoffee in the breakfastcups
We wake the girlchild in her sleepingroom
I take the hounddog for a pavementwalk
We eat the cornflakes and the baconegg

I drive the smallcar to the officeblock
I read the newmail on the clear desktop
My giggling girlclerk takes the shorthand down
Reports from salesmen take up workingtime
My brainpan rings with what the farsound says

I mealeat in Directorsdiningroom
The Chairman tells me of his salesforecast
The afternoon has salesfigures for food
Salesareas are in the meetingroom
A wellshaped lovegirl brings the teacups in

I end the workday with campaignplan talk
My girlclerk tells of farcalls from outside
I drive the smallcar to the privatehouse
I take the hounddog for a pavementwalk
I kiss the wifehag in the marriagebed.

GAVIN EWART

Jackson Jacob Stranded on Dialysis

Jackson jacob on the dialysis machine
says the white man's medicine is taking
away his magic from him
jackson is a tribal Aboriginal with bad
kidneys
in a dream his father has told him it is
the work of evil spirits sent by an old
grudge bearer
poor mr jacob can't understand the clash
of cultures, explaining that the dialysis
is all right for white man ailments but no
good for this fellah
he lies in bed, his powerful, untamable and
childlike appearance contradicting the white
setting of pressed sheets and twisting tubes
full of his blood
I felt sorry for jackson stranded in our century
like a manta ray on white sand
the spirits of his father and grandfather are
trying their best to dislodge him but the sydney
doctors insist on saving him although he is already
dead.

DAVID J. BAKER

Newtown, Passing Through
a multi-ethnic poem

Out along King Street
the traffic's packed,
pavements jammed
Greek to Greek.
Street of the King!
Christos, Christos — oi

Autumn — a slight nip
in the air, on the airwaves.
My car radio tells me
to "Learn Japanese",
and I learn that in Japan
commercials speak English too.
"Kleenex Boutique — ah!
In Elegant Mauve,
Lotus Blossom White — ah so!"
Comics come to life:
real Japanese really saying
ah so!
Street of the King!
Christos, Christos — oi

Christ what a street!
The Japanese trains, now,
that's something else,
orderly folk folded in
like so many Kleenex
(aregato / Christos, oi)
or London Transports
of delight, the Northern Line
underground I rode,
puts Dante to shame,
the sad-eyed Cypriots,
where the Camden Town Flasher
used to hang out . . .
Christos, Christos — oy-oy!

Driving in a doze, the crowd
flowed on, I did not know
pawn-shops had undone so many
when FLASH the fiery-red chinese-red fin
of the turtle-wax-lacquered supercharged
stereodynamic triple-overhead come-shaft
CHAAAAARger nips out
in a disembowelling slice of
parallel-park air:
Biggles, cool as ice, whips his
Sopwith Holden over the centre line
just .0575 of a second, slips back
into the orderly stream

Jeee*sus!* christos oi

ANDREW McDONALD

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

Ian Turner's death, playing cricket on the beach on Erith Island, in Bass Strait, on 27 December, was a great personal blow to all his friends, and also a terrible blow to Overland. From the time, twenty-five years ago, when Overland was first discussed, right up to the present day, Ian was this magazine's friend, mentor and contributor. He counselled moderation when — as it subsequently was shown — moderation was the right tactic, but also knew when we should stick our necks out on something. He was a perfect friend: amiable, supportive, a share of enthusiasms, tolerant. For year after year we did those awful morning wash-ups on Erith Island together, in glum mateship, not finding it necessary to exchange a word. What more can one say?

We will be saying more, of course. An early issue will be a commemorative issue on Ian. We would welcome from readers short accounts of specific memories of Ian: not generalized panegyrics but how those of you who knew Ian actually remember him in terms of an anecdote, remark or occasion. We would also welcome suggestions for inclusion.

A memorial fund in commemoration of Ian's life and work has been set up. It is not yet clear what form this commemoration will take — it partly depends, of course, on the amount of money collected. But details can be obtained from, or donations sent to, this magazine.

Another sad personal loss in recent months has been that of Don Mackay, who was drowned in February near Airey's Inlet, Victoria. My friendship with Don went back as far as that with Ian Turner, and he used to play the bagpipes while I accompanied on the bassoon at university election meetings. Don was a historian at the University of Melbourne, but to Overland he was particularly important as the Permanent Vice-Captain (acting in fact as Captain) of our cricket team, which he ran firmly but humanely, as he did all things. (The twenty-first test has recently been played — we lost.) A tribute to Don by his old friend, John Legge, who is Dean of Arts at Monash University, will be found on the next page, taken from his remarks at Don's funeral.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to John McLaren, who so ably edited Overland during my absence in 1978, achieving the all-time record of producing *five* issues in a year! Too, *too* humbling, my dears! John has now returned to doing only some three full-time jobs at the one time: these include running the humanities department at the Footscray Institute of Technology, researching and writing in the fields of English and education, and editing Australian Book Review. I trust all Overland readers are subscribers to this admirable journal which, in a way Overland cannot hope to do, offers an overview of all significant Australian publishing, mainly through expert reviews. An advertisement appears in this issue.

A couple of George Apostilidis's lively photographs of poets in our last issue were unfortunately transposed. Barry Dickins is actually Les Murray, and Les Murray is Barry Dickins. Neither has so far protested. John Bechervaise has asked that we note the following corrections to his story in Overland 73: p. 28, col. 1, line 19, "treen" not "trees"; do., line 33, "on" not "one"; p. 30, col. 1, line 43, "remembered" not "mannered"; p. 31, col. 1, line 27, "papers" not "pages".

Quadrant has asked us to inform readers that an annual $1000 prize for a political essay has been established. This may have been published in a book, journal or newspaper, may deal with any political issue, past or present, and will be judged in large part on the basis of originality and literary quality. Entries close 1 July, to the Editor, Quadrant, Box C344, Clarence Street Post Office, Sydney 2000. Endorse "George Watson Essay Prize".

My daughter Cleeve was talking to me the other day about the way the growth of unemployment has led to an increase in latent racist thinking and talking. She was teaching not long ago in an inner-suburban Church school. One of the teachers was sounding off in the staff room about the migrants. "They come in here, they take everything over: they take over the vegetable shops, the milk bars, the taxis and the pizza parlors."

Eric Westbrook, who will be annotating for us Rick Amor's series of caricatures, is of course Director of the Ministry for the Arts (Victoria).

DON MACKAY

We will all have our own memories of Don Mackay. Mine go back to the close companionship of our undergraduate days, when we did most things together. They include those hours of conversation and argument that seem to be less a feature of modern undergraduate life — hours of talk outside the doors of the old library or while walking from the university to Flinders Street Station at the end of the day, or late at night between his home in Auburn Road and the Auburn Station, or on reading holidays in the Dandenongs (in the cottage, amongst others, of Oppy Waller, the English master at Scotch to whom Don felt something of an intellectual debt).

Others of you can go back further than that — perhaps to Scotch College where, amongst other things, he was editor of the Scotch Collegian and a prolific contributor to its pages — as a poet under the pseudonym of "Hielander". For others, the memories may be of the time in Armidale, New South Wales, which followed his army service — he was a sergeant in the Survey Corps in the later years of the War — or of his company at Oxford in the early 1950s, or at the University of Melbourne since then.

There will be uproarious memories — Mackay with the bagpipes leading a march down Auburn Road at the end of a party. There will be quietly happy memories — his enjoyment of cricket, for example — progressing from an Auburn church team to Balliol and the Oxford Barnacles to the comradely rivalry of the Overland-Meanjin games. There was his membership of the Airey's community.

As an historian, Don's fields of interest were varied — the Rocky River Goldfield, the Risorgimento (the Risorgi-bloody-mento, as he always called it) and, more recently, women's history — a field which he entered in a fresh and open-minded way when some of his more conservative colleagues still viewed it with suspicion.

He did not publish much, but made his contribution in other ways. He was a rare teacher, understanding and patient with students, alive to the inner nature of their anxieties, self-sacrificing, conscientious to a fault in his marking of essays and exam papers. Generations of his students will know that no trouble was too much for him to take. These were things that were known about even in universities other than his own.

It was, however, his more personal qualities which commanded our affection and which will make us mourn for him. His warmth and his capacity for unstinting friendship, his sense of humor, and the dry style that he took over from his father. Like his father, he was a master of the gentle leg-pulling conversation. With both of them, one was never quite sure whether one was being sent up. We will remember his sense of the ridiculous — there was nothing so effective as the Mackay grin in puncturing pretentiousness. There was his passionate sense of justice and his sense of what was proper and principled behavior. With his feeling for principle he carried also the authority to pull up, in a gentle fashion, friends who fell short. There was his fairmindedness, extending to a sometimes exasperating capacity to see all sides of a question.

Above all, there was his compassion. He was a truly compassionate man, and it was that quality perhaps which made us all feel comfortable in the warmth of his company and which will make us grieve for him now.

JOHN LEGGE

DESMOND O'GRADY

Letter from Italy

What is the effect on fiction writers if events themselves are shaped like a gripping play with strong symbolism? This was the case when, a year ago, former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Aldo Moro was kidnapped on his way to parliament for a vote of confidence in the new government, based on a Christian Democrat-Communist agreement, that he had negotiated. After 55 days imprisonment, in which there were frequent messages from Moro himself and his Red Brigades kidnappers, his bullet-ridden body was left equidistant between the Christian Democrat and Communist party headquarters.

It was a media event *par excellence*. The Red Brigades, who showed sophisticated knowledge of the media, supplied material to rekindle interest whenever it declined. Journalists could sense when the next Red Brigades communique would arrive, as if they and the terrorists were working in harness to keep the spectacle alive.

The novelist Alberto Arbasino said that Italian fiction writers' concerns were pale and private compared with this public drama. He complained that Italian novelists, always as "insignificant as English composers", continued to concentrate on petit-bourgeois, intimate issues without touching the problems which plague Italian society.

In London at the time Moro was taken, Arbasino was impressed by reports of Italians' dramatic reactions. He flew home but found, contrary to the newspapers' rhetoric, widespread indifference, unaltered routines, sarcastic jokes about the affair. He recorded reactions in a book *In questo Stato (In this State)* which exposes hypocrisy and the inanities of "commonsense" in what he calls the "country of bla-bla".

Arbasino is probably best-known in Italy for his journalism, which is similar to Tom Wolfe's reporting of the social scene but applied instead to the international cultural circuit. A key technique is the use of unexpected comparisons. *In questo Stato* likewise uses provocative comparisons, such as that between Moro and Maria Goretti, who was canonised after preferring death to loss of her virginity.

In writing what he calls an "anthropological diary of a choral happening", Arbasino claims he was inspired by the Braudel school of historians, who pay attention to everyday life's minutiae rather than to the more or less institutional sources of information such as newspapers.

Leonardo Sciascia, the Sicilian novelist, also pursued habitual methods in his book on the Moro case. Unlike the novelists Arbasino criticised, Sciascia's fiction concerns social problems such as the Mafia. Another strand in his fiction is reconsideration of historical events in a philosophical 'who-done-it' genre. Shortly before Moro's kidnapping, controversy had flared over a film based on a Sciascia novel, *Todo Modo,* which showed Christian Democrats slaughtering one another during a weekend of spiritual exercises.

Sciascia, who had been elected a Palermo town councillor on a communist ticket but resigned because of boredom, aroused the wrath of Italian communists when he refused to stand up and be counted among those defending the State and opposing negotiations after Moro's kidnapping. In preparing his book, *L'Affaire Moro,* he examined all the published evidence, as if conducting a historical investigation into a crime.

His book eulogises the imprisoned Moro, whom Sciascia had previously criticised, and accuses the politicians and newspapers in refusing to take seriously the desperate letters Moro wrote from prison. "Moro was killed twice" is Sciascia's accusation: firstly by those who refused

to recognise him in his letters, and only secondly by the Brigadists' bullets. The book's epigraph contains the chilling phrase, "a man . . . died at the right moment," which suggests Moro's death was politically convenient. Sciascia does not explain how the State could have negotiated with the Red Brigades without losing its remaining credibility, nor exactly what could have been offered in exchange for Moro's release.

Incidentally, proceeds from Sciascia's brief book, which inspired countless newspaper discussions, are to fund research into press coverage of the Moro affair.

In June Alberto Moravia's novel *La Vita Interiore* (*The Interior Life*), on which he worked for seven years, was issued with fanfares by its publisher, who received 100,000 pre-publication orders. Expectations were high for this 408-page imaginary interview between Moravia and a rich Roman high-school student Desideria, who tells him how she became a terrorist.

Like Joan of Arc, Desideria hears a Voice but, in her case, it came to her as she was masturbating. The (female) Voice dictates a program of transgression and desecration, supposed to make Desideria a revolutionary. The program consists in disrupting values such as property (by stealing); religion (by impiety); love (by prostitution); culture (by its rejection); respect for life (by killing).

The characters in this novel, which Moravia has called a "study in sexual semiotics", have a wide range of bizarre sexual experiences. For instance, Desideria's American mother, whose sexual preference is anal intercourse, wants to practice incest with her daughter. Moravia argues that sexual positions correspond to a world-view but, perhaps because his characters are cardboard, their predelictions remain sexual quirks rather than having wider significance.

What is Moravia saying about revolutionaries? The interviewer makes intelligent observations on them but the novel's revolutionaries are as squalid as all the other characters. As a reviewer in Rome's Communist daily Paeae Sera commented: "The novel tells us more about Moravia than about revolutionaries — but, alas, we knew about him already."

The Voice who commands Desideria is probably her Superego, and the novel a study of Desideria's dissociation rather than her development. It could be read as a criticism of sexual 'liberation' but, although the ideas underlying it have interest, its elaboration is mechanistic. The prevailing impression is of imaginative bankruptcy.

In a barrage of interviews, which accompanied its publication, Moravia made the novel sound interesting. It is a technique he has followed with success: he is omnipresent in the cultural-chat scene; prompt in engaging emerging talents, such as the late Pier Paolo Pasolini, in public debate and journalistically alert. It has ensured his continuing dominance of the literary scene even though he is 70 and what may have been his best book, *The Time of Indifference,* was published in 1929.

Moravia's pronouncements on terrorism became part of the search by Italian intellectuals for scapegoats in the Moro affair. To the accusation that terrorism was fostered by years of irresponsible revolutionary rhetoric, Moravia responded that it derived from social conditions, not from words, and that its roots lie in ignorance and a quasi-religious fanaticism. In other words, the problem had arisen because Italy is not sufficently enlightened, rational, modern.

This interpretation is disputed by others, such as the literary critic Carlo Bo and the playwright-poet-art critic Giovanni Testori. They claim those who share Moravia's views are merely "dancing on the edge of the abyss", that they have a reductive idea of man without any understanding of evil, and provide slick sociological justifications for every misdeed.

The debate between those who complain that Italy is not sufficiently modern and those who argue that "rationalistic modernisation" has distorted the spirit indicates a widespread dissatisfaction with Italian society. The 81-year-old poet Eugenio Montale captured the mood in "Springtime Torpor" in his last volume *Notebook for four years:*

It's the kidnapping season
We're told not to go out alone
The evening hours are the most dangerous
But it goes without saying
that daytime is dangerous too
The teachers of judo and karate
are in the seventh heaven
tailors make bullet-proof vests
Parents go to school
their children do without it
Our civilization is at its flood tide
now that muzzles have broken
the tongues are free, without brakes.

Montale found another motive for scepticism

about contemporary society in the breakdown of standards among academics who concentrate on pop culture:

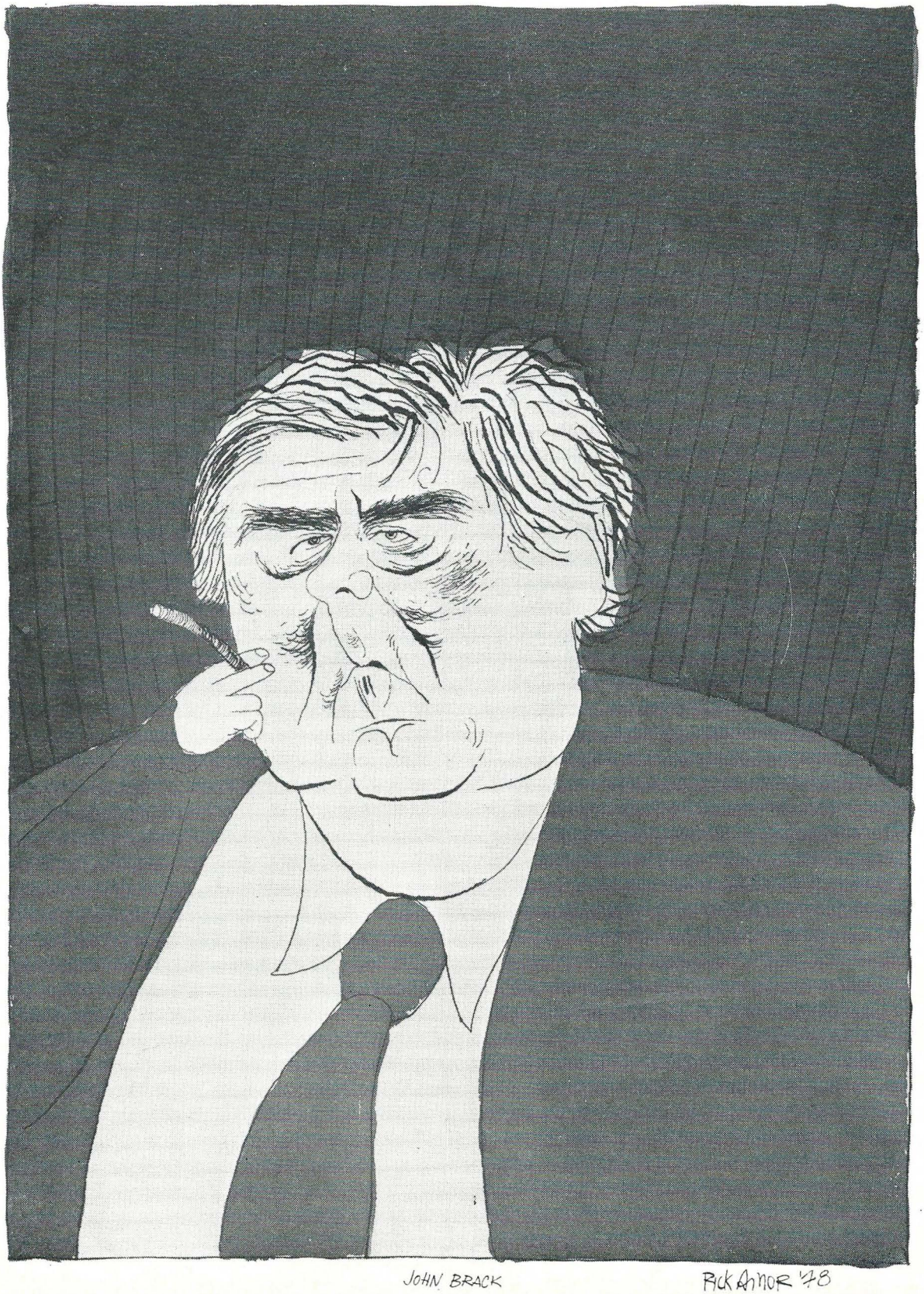
> The interdisciplinary philosopher
> loves to wallow in the filthiest consumer rubbish
> Worst of all, he does it with supreme gratification and obviously from the eminence of a chair he despises.
> A shipwreck victim, unable to swim,
> has never been delirious with joy
> as his ship flounders
> but there's no danger for balloon men — and he knows it.

Many Italian writers recoil from their society even though they give contrasting explanations of its defects. The recoil is so strong, the social events so impelling, that some feel they must comment on events directly.

But this is not true of all Italian writers. And many who recoil from Italian society are simply determined not to recognise its positive features. For instance, a few years ago a book appeared in which one Italian writer after another decried Rome. Now although modern Rome is ugly, the city centre is still one of the seven wonders of the world, not only because of the architecture but because it is a lived-in patrician-plebian mix with palaces and craftsmen's shops side by side. There are still attractive aspects of Italian life and society which some Italian writers refuse to acknowledge.

Content is not the sole criterion for a novel's relevance or worth, as is shown by Ferdinando Camon's work. Camon, a literary critic and poet, has written a novel about terrorists in his native Veneto region which has been made into a television serial. But his best novel is the winner of the 1978 Strega prize *Un altare per la madre* (*An altar for the mother*). In brief episodes, Camon builds a portrait of his mother, a sturdy, fearless, religious peasant whose extreme poverty was cultural as well as material (in addition to her dialect, she knew only a few words of Italian). The novel is also a tribute to peasant culture and a meditation on death.

It is not one of the intimate, still-life interiors Arbasino criticised, but nor is it a headon grappling with social problems. Rather it is a valid novel which conveys attitudes and feelings rather than of facts or ideas. This is probably the most valuable function of imaginative writers, even though the Moro affair has shown they can make valuable comments on contemporary events. In the rush for immediacy, it tends to be overlooked that novelists can also respond to the Red Brigades by providing a convincing image of man which is not confined to the political sphere. The Red Brigades, in fact, reduce life to purely political terms, a danger that Italian intellectuals constantly run.


JOHN BRACK
RICK AMOR '78

ERIC WESTBROOK **J. B.**

He is one of the oddest figures in contemporary Australian painting, and in both subject matter and technique his work escapes the net of any theory of national style or attitude. Although he has made only one, and that a rather reluctant journey away from Australia as a civilian, he has the air of an outsider looking in. It is as though, through the window of his canvases, he studies the tribal customs of the natives without blinking, but on his face is an expression made up of astonishment, horror, and cold amusement, an amalgam which slides sometimes into compassion, and on others into something close to hatred.

He was born in Australia in 1920, but the atmosphere in which he moves is that of the English intellectual world of the 1930s, the world of grey flannel or corduroy 'bags', the hacking-jacket reinforced at cuffs and elbows with leather, the check-patterned woollen shirt with collar points escaping from the pullover and knitted tie. These may not be the actual clothes he now wears, but out of them he looks as uncomfortable as a priest in a dinner-jacket. The essential New Statesman under the arm may not be there, or if it is it is opened only at the book reviews, for he is not of the Left, although it is difficult to see the Right taking him gladly to its bosom. The voice is English upper middle-class, constricted and dry with a slight stammer, which gives time for more precise expression and which can be a vehicle for great charm when he chooses to use it that way. He might be an army officer or a schoolmaster at a public school (both of which he has been), or a slightly eccentric surgeon, a profession the working tools of which have been the material for some of his most disturbing still-life paintings. He has chosen to be a painter, but in any of these roles he would be, and is, deeply conscientious and accurate, rather remote in personal relations, especially with juniors, and with a shade of arrogance which is modified and made acceptable by a deep questioning of the ultimate value of his own activities. This questioning is not necessary, for he is a fine painter.

He clearly knew early that he wanted, as an art student, to be a painter, for after a brief pre-war trial run he returned under the Commonwealth Post-War Reconstruction Training Scheme to work under William Dargie at the National Gallery of Art in 1948-49, the school to which he returned (nearly twenty years later) as Head. His own period as a teacher of potential professionals will take time to assess. It was certainly not a time of heat and excitement and he would not have wished it to be, for when he took over there had been quite enough grotesque passion spilling out of the studios in Swanston Street. New students, or older ones who might forget, were given a lecture by the Head dwelling on the miseries, rather than the splendors, of the life of an artist, and they were warned of the hardships and self-discipline required of the serious practitioner. Yet one felt that the quiet school was filled with tensions all the stronger for being held in by the boundary fences of searching personal draughtsmanship, restricted color and a distrust of the sensuality of surface. No one was to show off, or believe that he was Australia's very own Vincent Van Gogh. There was indeed something monastic about the place in those years and while, as far as one was aware, there were no physical scourgings, the wiry drawn line and the dry voice provided plenty of intellectual ones.

The National Gallery of Victoria had bought a mildly comic but very competent picture of a barber's shop early on, but it was only with "Five o'clock, Collins Street", painted in 1955 but acquired in the following year, that the quality of the painter was clearly seen. This was a large picture for its period (45″ x 64″) and conservatively

painted on canvas as against the panels of masonite and hardboard then popular, and which posed the constant threat of a hernia to those who had to handle them. Its subject is a Collins Street which has largely disappeared together with the hats and haircuts of its cast of characters, but it still stands out against the wildness of Melbourne Expressionism and is superbly constructed and wickedly accurate in its observation.

When the picture was hung, indignant citizens claimed that they saw themselves or their friends pilloried there, a tribute to the artist's ability both to draw out and impose upon us his image of the world. After an exhibition of such works, people seen in the streets, cafes and trams, were of the same shape, colour and flat texture. In specific portraiture he has been truthful to the point of cruelty, so that at least two commissioned portraits were, like Sutherland's "Churchill" and a few pictures by Augustus John, paid for and then consigned with fury to the flames.

This almost sadistic truthfulness is part of the same wry puritanism which can translate "Miss O'Murphy", one of Boucher's most desirable little whores, into a suburban wife modelling professionally to pay her husband's way through his accountancy course. It sprays the bar of the Folies Bergeres with aerosol to remove the smell of sweat, cheap scent and breath compounded of beer and Gauloises. These French pictures both attract and repel the painter and force him to bring them to the seat of penitence on his easel. In his own territory he is no less puritanical, and this attitude provides a drawing and creative force, as it can often do. His female models have an angularity and acidity of color which would give seduction an air of perversity, and their usual furnishings of one hard chair and a small carpet would offer little comfort even for that.

For a time it seemed to some that he had affinities with Bernard Buffet but, even when Buffet was briefly a serious artist, the differences were vastly greater than the similarities. In even a minor work by the Australian, each square inch of the surface is under control; no 'happy accident' is allowed to divert him from the course he has chosen; and the paint is put on with a deliberation and a deliberate lack of sensuality which puts him in the great stream of 'intellectual' painters flowing through Piero della Francesca, Poussin, Juan Gris and Wyndham Lewis. Like them he is deeply concerned with the structure of his paintings, its justification in terms of an expressable theory, and it is no accident that like them he can write with a clarity equal to that of his drawings and paintings.

He was one of that strange company assembled by Bernard Smith in 1959 to make what seemed then a last-ditch stand against the advance of abstraction. As 'Antipodeans' they were ill-assorted, but this banner looked at its strangest when waving above an artist whose work has had no regional flavor. His jockeys and trainers could have just as well had their being at Newmarket as at Flemington, while the prize-seeking ballroom dancers and wedding parties have the same macabre mechanisms as those in Oxford Street, in the neighborhood of the Pont Bir Hakim, or in Surbiton. His place in the history of Australian painting is assured, and will not be disturbed by this brief residence in the wrong camp.

DOROTHY GREEN

Pot and Kettle

Elizabeth Summon's article in Overland 72 on Henry Handel Richardson's treatment of her relatives, the Sheppards and the Greens, in *The Getting of Wisdom,* makes fascinating reading, partly for its refreshing irreverence. It is to be hoped that it will inspire others who are descendants of acquaintances and friends of Walter Lindesay Richardson and Mary Bailey to volunteer further information which would assist a biographer. Perhaps it may also inspire to action descendants of the Richardson and Bailey family who may have survived in Australia: Richardson's nephew in Sydney, for instance, married and had children, and Mary's brother John had three wives, each with children.

When Mrs Summons refers to Richardson's "biographers" she is using the term loosely. There is no biography of H.H.R. in the proper sense of the word. Mrs Palmer's book is largely a study of the novels, and she made no attempt to verify material H.H.R. had given her in conversation and letters, and no attempt to provide a factual basis for some of her own 'hunches'. The book is an act of piety rather than a biography, though it is immensely useful and critically far sounder at times than some later work which has received more attention. The book produced by Olga Roncoroni, Edna Purdie *et al.,* is a collection of reminiscences, not biography; and I stated categorically, in the first few pages of my *Ulysses Bound,* that I was not writing a biography of H.H.R., for explicit reasons. It is true, nevertheless, that it contains more biographical information than work up to 1973, since it was based on documents and personal information not before available.

To write off Olga Roncoroni as Elizabeth Summons does is insulting: the situation was far more complicated than one of idol and sycophant, and Olga Roncoroni was, and is, a strong, interesting personality in her own right. It is certainly not fair to insinuate that she claimed to have special knowledge of H.H.R.'s childhood and Australian background, which was unreliable because she had never been to Australia. No doubt she accepted what H.H.R. told her on the subject at face value. Why should she not? Her chief aim was to record what she knew of that part of H.H.R.'s life she had shared. Biography is a delicate, subtle and demanding historical discipline, for which Miss Roncoroni did not claim to be trained.

One wonders where Mrs Summons stands herself in this scene. For one who criticises H.H.R.'s alleged biographers for taking too much on trust what H.H.R. chose to tell them, she herself appears to accept a good deal of unsupported testimony from witnesses who cannot now be called upon provide evidence for their statements. Walter Lindesay Richardson's alleged alcoholism, or his dipsomania, for instance. Which is it? Are they the same? And was Thomas Sheppard a reliable witness? There is also the Sheppards' opinion that W.L.R. was a sponger, a loafer and shiftless: what is the evidence? If these claims are indeed true, then a great many others supported by documents and records are very difficult to reconcile with them. What does Mrs Summons mean and on what does she base her statement when she says W.L.R. had no intention of setting up in practice and "was content to live off the pickings of the gold-fields"? How can she be certain of his "intention"? Richardson came to Australia after graduating M.D. at Edinburgh and obtaining his F.R.C.S. the same year, and putting in more than 18 months of practice in Wales and Kent. The fact that he did not begin practice in Australia at once is not in itself significant: there are other

possible explanations besides the one offered by Mrs Summons. He was a young man, free from the restraints exercised by a dominating mother for the first time, and possibly feeling the want of some outdoor life and adventure after years of study in a northern climate. Why should he not relax for a while, take out a miner's licence or keep a store? He would not have been the first well-educated young man of good family to have done the same on the gold-fields. He had at the time no one to support but himself, though he may still have been helping to educate his young nephew, as he had done in England. Thomas Sheppard, on the other hand, had a wife and three young children when he arrived on Ballarat and the pressure to make money was strong. In any case, W.L.R. registered as a doctor in December 1856 and began practice at Mount Pleasant in March 1857, only three years after his arrival; and, as his letters reveal, on his own initiative, the better to support his wife. He had also been practising medicine sporadically before registration, as he was perfectly entitled to do; registration was not compulsory before 1862. H.H.R.'s handling of these facts in *Richard Mahony,* as I have pointed out in *Ulysses Bound* (pp. 338-40), is inconsistent and, in one place, contradictory. She is usually better at manipulating her material than that.

Mrs Summons has missed the point altogether of my reference to the "curate episode" in *The Getting of Wisdom:* and I am sure a large number of people have accepted without thinking much about it that the " 'Shepherds of the curate episode' were real people", just because they have accepted *The Getting of Wisdom* wholesale as an accurate account of H.H.R.'s life at school. Mrs Summons herself points out quite rightly on page 28 of Overland that it would be naive to expect *G.O.W.* to be taken as autobiography; and my reference to the curate episode was not to deny that the curate might have been based on a real person, but to suggest that it was not altogether safe to trust as factual the picture that emerged from H.H.R.'s grafting of fiction on to fact. When the young Laura was asked why she made up such taradiddles about people who had been kind to her, she said she didn't know. Of H.R.H. herself the remark, I should think, would be only partly true.

What is disturbing about Mrs Summon's article is the way she shifts her ground. In column 1 of page 25, she tells us the Sheppards "branded" W.L.R. as a loafer, that is, she presents us with their unsupported opinion. In the next column, however, she herself calls him "shiftless": the allegation has now become a fact, with no more evidence to back it up. Above, in that column, we are told that her great-uncle regarded W.L.R. as a "complete bounder — *and worse",* and we are evidently supposed to take this opinion as having some substance. Why? Would such an opinion be accepted in a court of law? Or by a careful historian? Articles of this kind, fascinating as they are, are useful only if they pay some attention to the laws of evidence, and do not exaggerate to score points. The opinion does not fit in for instance with the documentary evidence uncovered by Stoller and Emmerson about W.L.R.'s life in Ballarat. Mrs Summons has accused H.H.R. of malice and bitterness in dealing with her relatives — I should think quite rightly. But was malice entirely absent when Thomas Sheppard uttered his slanders? I do not know what "and worse" means, but Mrs Summons appears to accept these slanders, as well as the allegation that W.L.R. was a disomaniac, at face value.

The whole question of dipsomania and alcoholism is very involved, and I am aware that dipsomaniacs can perform incredible feats of deception about their secret drinking habits, thought it is not clear that alcoholics who develop a "toxic (alcoholic) psychosis" and finally die insane can perform similar feats. It is certainly possible that when young W.L.R. came to the colony he might have played around for a while and have drunk more than was good for him. So did many another young man of his day, both on and off the gold-fields, no doubt to the advantage of brewers like Thomas Sheppard. But it is difficult to believe that if he did kick over the traces he went on doing so for any length of time. If he were as true an "alcoholic" as Mrs Summons in the later part of her article seems to believe, it would surely have been difficult to conceal the fact in a small community. There is of course a portrait of dipsomania (not toxic (alcoholic) psychosis) in *Richard Mahony,* in the character of Agnes Ocock; H.H.R. certainly knew of the deviousness of such drinkers. But Agnes Ocock was not a public figure, and concealment would have been comparatively easy.

If W.L.R. had been a dipsomaniac in his Ballarat days, would Thomas Sheppard, who presumed to know about it, have kept quiet when the object of his disapproval was practis-

ing as an obstetrician? W.L.R.'s casebooks are in existence, and Stoller has pointed out that he was a popular obstetrician, with recorded cases of more than a hundred confinements a year. However skilled a dipsomaniac might be at his work, it is hard to believe that rumors would not have got around. The drunken country doctor is a fairly common figure in nineteenth century Australian literature. It is difficult to believe that a man who was known to at least one of his acquaintances as a dipsomaniac (or an alcoholic) would have become an important citizen in the life of the town, popular and respected as a freemason, and honorary surgical officer to the Ballarat Hospital, whose foundation-stone he helped to lay. Among W.L.R.'s papers is a letter from the Lodge Room, Buninyong, 15 April, 1859, sending him sympathy in his illness, assuring him of the members' concern for his welfare, and expressing appreciation of "the anxious solicitude which you have always shown for the advancement of the craft, as well as that rectitude of conduct which entitles you to the respect and esteem of your brethren and freemasonry". The letter is signed by sixteen members. Were they really *all* deluded?

It is difficult to believe that if Richardson were shiftless and a loafer he would have helped to found the Ballarat Horticultural Society, or that the members would have wanted a dipsomaniac as its vice-president, in 1859. In Melbourne, ten years later, he was elected an honorary member of the Medical Society of Victoria, at the same meeting which elected his friends Baron von Mueller, the Government Botanist, and Robert Ellery, F.R.S., the Government Astronomer. W.L.R. wrote copiously, and stylishly, for the medical journals of his day; he was correspondent for the Medical Benevolent Society of Victoria, and a foundation member of the Australian Health Society (concerned with public health questions) in 1875. His paper dealing with the pollution of the Yan Yean reservoir in the Australian Medical Journal, 1869, showed his life-long interest in better sanitary laws and their strict observance, which marks him as in advance of his time. It was commended by the Melbourne Argus and its author alluded to as a public benefactor. Taken together, these details do not make a picture of a shiftless loafer, a sponger, or an alcoholic drinking so heavily he was finally driven insane. It is barely possible that he might have been an enormously clever dipsomaniac covering his tracks from wife, friends, patients, acquaintances, medical colleagues, etc., but we need more evidence than Thomas Sheppard's say-so before coming to that conclusion.

Mrs Summon's own unsupported assertion that I was "anxious" in my book to prove W.L.R. a syphilitic (p. 28) does not inspire confidence in her accuracy. I was careful to point out on page 23 of *Ulysses Bound* that I did not consider the point proved: "How Walter Richardson became infected — *if the final diagnosis of his illness is correct* — is a matter of speculation . . .". In a note on page 308 I wrote: "Richardson's attitude is curiously devious. Her *narrative* points in the direction of G.P.I., but the possibility that her father's terminal illness was wrongly diagnosed cannot be ruled out. She, apparently, accepted it as correct". In the Appendix devoted to W.L.R. I wrote on page 537: "Dr Alan Stoller and Mrs Emmerson have put forward what seems to be the most likely explanation of Richardson's disease, so far as this can be ascertained *in the absence of blood tests''* (italics mine). I am as aware of Mrs Summons of the Wassermann tests. And if Mrs Summons demands a Wasserman test for a diagnosis of syphilis, what does she demand for a diagnosis of "toxic (alcoholic) psychosis" leading to madness and death? What is needed on this point is a debate between Dr Alan Stoller and the unnamed medico on whose diagnosis, as posthumous as Dr Stoller's, Mrs Summons relies.

Whatever was the nature of the terminal illness of the real-life Dr Richardson, his daughter does not, *in her novel,* present a picture of an alcoholic; though in Agnes Ocock, she draws a picture of a dipsomaniac. Throughout my own book, the possibility that her *father* suffered from G.P.I. (incipient) late in his short life, caused by an earlier syphilitic infection, is treated as a very credible hypothesis and no more. There is a weight of evidence to support this hypothesis which Mrs Summons has either not considered, or has chosen to ignore. I am not a doctor, and neither, I gather, is Mrs Summons. She, like me, has had to be guided finally by qualified medical men interpreting (a) the syndrome which gradually unfolds itself in the novel — which may of course have nothing to do with the real-life W.L.R. and be pure invention on his daughter's part. And (b) the meagre evidence, supported by the letters so far available, about the illness of the real-life W.L.R. Certainly his nephew, a distinguished forensic psychiatrist, holds Dr Stoller's interpretation to be correct. Which is some indication that the family

did. Why one should prefer one's great-uncle to be known as a syphilitic, rather than as a dipsomaniac, if the relatives are covering up, needs some explanation in itself.

There are frequent comments in W.L.R.'s letters on colonial drinking habits, of which he was critical. Towards the end of his life, when he is arranging to settle in Queenscliff, he writes to his wife: "Most medicos who come here end by getting muddled with liquor, and one, Dr Roberts, not only got drunk and neglected his patients, but left heavily in debt and paying no one . . . I suppose it is the solitude that drives them to alcohol." The day before we find him writing to Mary about a visit he had paid to their house in Hawthorn to see their tenant: "She evidently indulges, for her face was like a peony, and she was very pressing that I should have some ale or wine". These are not the remarks made in a private letter after more than twenty years of married life by a man who is soon to die of alcoholic poisoning, unless he is unbelievably devious, self-deluded or out of his mind. And his letters of this or any other period do not produce any of these impressions: he had a just estimate of his own difficult nervous temperament, for one thing.

W.L.R. never made any attempt to conceal his interest in good wine and vinegrowing; the household accounts show regular purchases of wine and beer. Early in his career he advises his wife to drink some beer for her health's sake; just before he left Chiltern he ordered a case of wine for his friend, Dr Graham, with whom he was going to stay in Melbourne. None of these facts mark him as unusual; many doctors of the period prescribed wine, beer, porter and champagne for their patients. The Mahony of the novel is possibly more abstemious than the Richardson of the letters, but there is nothing in the existing letters to suggest that the latter drank to excess. He lived for several months in the Star Hotel at Chiltern, a town notorious for drinking, before his wife arrived, and they wrote to one another every day. The letters are, at times, full of anxiety about money and the difficulty of finding a suitable house, but they are not the letters of a man the worse for drink. One of these letters describes his first meeting with Mrs Summons's grandfather, Stanley Dutton Green: "Rohner being still here, I am not doing anything but getting known — one patient yesterday — Revd. Mr Green, English clergyman, called this morning — nice little man — 3 children grown up — lost his wife — says he is likely to leave his cottage and to move out a mile off — cottage is of brick, he thinks it is as good as Arrowsmith's; only no ground. Said he was very glad to see me coming — as there must be a good practice in the district".

Several of the letters refer to Green's serious illness and reveal Richardson's solicitude for his patient. The collection contains a letter from Green himself dated 13/7/1876, written after his recovery to thank W.L.R. for his care and attention. The references to Arthur Green in the letters are friendly but non-committal.

What is Mrs Summons's evidence for saying that W.L.R. practised "so little and so unsuccessfully as a doctor" it is difficult to imagine. He practised for nearly two years in England before coming to Australia; he practised in Ballarat from March 1857 to November 1867, not counting the unofficial practising earlier; in Hawthorn from 1874 to 1876, in Chiltern from 1876 to 1878 and for a short while in Queenscliff before his collapse. He graduated when he was 24 and died when he was 53, that is, he practised at the very least seventeen years out of the 27 years of his working life, and the working period in England during his first visit has been omitted. I have made it clear that I disagree with those who assume Richardson made a great deal of money out of his practice (*Ulysses Bound,* p. 344) but that does not mean he was not a good doctor. Doctors were not the tycoons 120 years ago that they are now. Richardson was supplementing his income from shares early in his career, as his letters show, and there was still a useful amount from shares recorded in his statement of his assets in the dark days in Chiltern. His wealth was, like many another gold-rush fortune in the sixties and seventies, short-lived, but his accounts in the early seventies leave no doubt of its brief reality. This corresponded with the early childhood in Melbourne of Ethel and Lilian, so that I was perfectly justified in commenting on the (to them) "inexplicable change from riches to poverty". If they had been indulged as toddlers, and then suddenly required to live modestly, it would have been hard for them to understand the change.

Mrs Summon's statement "an alcoholic's finances are always shaky" begs too many questions to be taken seriously. However shaky W.L.R.'s finances were, he left his wife an estate more than three times as large as that left to his wife by the first Principal of the University of Sydney, Dr John Woolley, a few years earlier. Mary Richardson after probate received

£1,850, a sum roughly equivalent to the price of a large, well-appointed house in those days, and an ordinary comfortable suburban house today. With an income between £100 and £150 a year she could have managed to live very quietly without working for about 15-20 years if there were no inflation, or until the children were grown up. She also had shares of her own. She seems to have decided wisely not to live on capital, a risky business in days when there were no old-age or widows' pensions and banks could founder overnight.

Another disputable, if less serious, point made by Mrs Summons is that H.H.R. never saw John Stretch again after he left Maldon. There is evidence she may have seen him in Melbourne before she left for England, and she certainly records in her diary, when on holiday in London in 1897, that on September 16 she "called on John Stretch". Like Mrs Summons, I doubt whether John Stretch studied theology at Durham as H.H.R. claimed; she may have confused his university career with his father's. With Mrs Summons's conclusion I am in general agreement, as my book makes abundantly plain, since the point is discussed at length on several occasions. She says: "My belief is that she (H.H.R.) fantasised all her life, as she had fantasised in childhood, and by the time she wrote *Myself When Young* she had lost her way among those fantasies". She had certainly lost her way over her parents' letters (*Ulysses Bound,* p. 343). Whether she had lost her way entirely is another matter: *Myself When Young* was written in some haste with a very specific purpose in mind. The real point about H.H.R. is that her fantasies were always subject to control for a purpose; in her novels, they are organised by a truly imaginative act into unified works of art, one of them of a very high order, and all of them, even though their artistic excellence varies, of great interest and importance.

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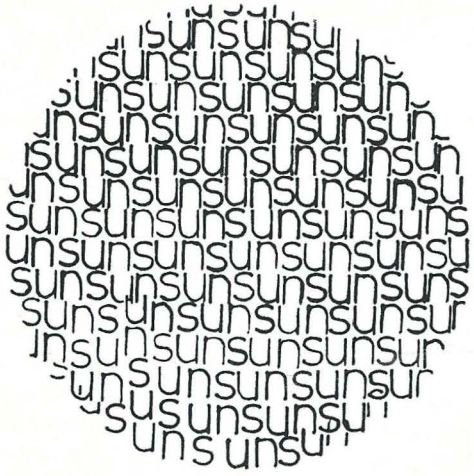

Peter Murphy

ELIZABETH SUMMONS

A Reply

I expected to hear from Mrs Green and will begin by saying that I do regret the Roncoroni remark and feel guilty about it. I did not know that Miss Roncoroni was still alive until Bruce Beresford, during the making of GOW, told me that he had interviewed her in (I think) hospital, or a home. To me she has always come over as a self-effacing and rather ill-treated shadow and I am interested to learn that she was, in fact, a strong personality.

When I wrote the piece I said that much was oral history. Of course I cannot call upon witnesses now dead, but the Sheppards were, in every case, sensible, practical, down-to-earth people and very truthful. They got on well with other people and had no axes to grind. They were, above all, trustworthy and they despised gossip. Family discussions are not gossip, they probably would have defended Dr Richardson hotly outside the family.

Of course I did not know my great-grandfather Thomas Sheppard, or my grandfather, Samuel Dutton Green — the latter died at forty-eight. But my father was brought up by his uncle, Stanley Sheppard, and by his mother and aunt, Amy Dutton Green (Sheppard) and Mary Sheppard. They all lived to a lively old age, in full possession of their senses and wits. I saw them frequently and, as I was an only child, I seemed very often to be present during their discussions; they always talked very freely in front of me. My parents also talked to me a great deal and answered questions frankly. I have no reason to disbelieve anything that was said. Of course the Richardsons were only an occasional topic, but I was interested in the Buninyong days and liked to hear about them.

I know I used the term "biographers" loosely but qualified it by referring to Mrs Palmer's "study" and Mrs Green's "interpretation".

I do not pretend to be a historian; I am simply putting forward the Sheppard view of W.L.R. My grandmother told me, without heat, that her father, Thomas Sheppard, was bitterly disappointed when Lindesay told him that he had *no intention of practising for a couple of years,* and I have no reason to disbelieve her. As my great-grandfather's cousin had given W.L.R. a letter of introduction to him, he probably felt a certain responsibility toward the younger man. Mrs Green asks "why shouldn't he relax for a while" But the point is that doctors were needed, so in refusing to help he would quite naturally be "branded a loafer" by a very energetic man who had a strong civic conscience which, incidentally, was a family characteristic.

My great-uncle Stanley was much given to making pronouncements, dark with meaning, such as ". . . a complete bounder, *and worse".* We called these "Stanleyisms". He always had some reason which he preferred not to spell out. This particular remark was made in my hearing and I was amused by it. I was not exaggerating or scoring points, and I can only guess at what he might have meant. Certainly malice was not present when these things were said, always to the immediate family only. I would not call them "slanders" and think it melodramatic to do so. And one is not thinking about courts of law in relation to private opinions. I might add that the Sheppards would no doubt be furious with me for quoting them publicly.

As to the "dipsomania", it is oniy an old-fashioned word for alcoholism if or when it goes through a 'bender-drinking' stage. I am not a doctor but my husband is, although not a tycoon. As a dermatologist he has been trained in venerology. He also has taken a very great interest in the problems of drug and alcohol dependency. We have both been involved with

this. It is a fact that an alcoholic can function quite normally for years and enjoy acclaim and respect. His family will invariably cover up for him and some other disorder be used as an excuse when at times he is unfit for work or to appear. He (or she of course) can be incredibly clever and devious, so that even the family is sometimes bluffed. But though H.H.R. herself provides strong hints as to the nature of W.L.R.'s trouble and Mrs Green fills in (to us) the picture of an alcoholic (although of course this is not her intention), it was the opinion of a psychiatrist who is regarded as a leader in the field of understanding and knowledge of treatment of these disorders that I sought. I did not give his name for ethical reasons and as he is not at present in Australia, I am unable to ask his permission to do so now.

And what are the letters of a "man worse for drink"? Drunkenness is not even remotely the same as alcoholism.

Incidentally, my grandfather, *Samuel* Dutton Green, described in a letter from W.L.R. as "nice little man — 3 children grown up — lost his wife", happened to be six feet tall and recently married to my grandmother. His first wife had died some years before. So W.L.R. was inaccurate in this.

As to my statement, "an alcoholic's finances are always shaky", I cannot agree that it begs questions. Lift the lid on any drinking alcoholic's private life and you will find money troubles. It is an expensive illness to maintain and there are other factors.

W.L.R. claims — or rather it is claimed for him — that he was bored with the early country practices in England. Several of his Australian practices crumbled. This surely points to something being wrong, though not necessarily that he was not a good doctor when he was on a fairly even keel and before his final sickness — *whatever* it was — caught up with him. Both alcoholism and G.P.I. are progressive.

The main point about my article, however, was not to pass any kind of judgment on Dr Richardson even if, in private, the Sheppards did. What interested me was H.H.R.'s spiteful treatment of Arthur, Florence and Mattie Green in *The Getting of Wisdom,* using the Sheppards' name, although spelt differently, when she did it. Even more interesting, perhaps, were her schoolgirl 'crushes' on two men, both clergymen, who were apparently so extraordinarily alike in looks and personality and whose careers ran on such parallel lines. Most interesting to me is that when, in old age, she was describing Stretch she was actually, much of the time, describing my uncle, Arthur Green, and her mistakes prove it. There is plenty of documentation for this.

STEFAN WILKANOWICZ

Vietnam 77

The first part of this article appeared in Overland 72.

A few hours after we landed in Vietnam, a pleasant surprise awaited us: it was a concert at the Hanoi theatre. Before we had the time to discover the content of the programme, we had embarked upon our first evening's entertainment.

The theatre is of average size, with a certain familiarity about it, its decor recalling the style "fin de siècle". We arrived a little after curtain rise and we made our way to our seats as discreetly as possible. The greater part of the audience were young people. We also noticed some children. Everyone was listening and everyone was chattering. The audience covered a wide spectrum; the town dwellers in their Sunday best, their brand new pullovers, quite out of place with the local scenery, rubbing shoulders with the villagers who had come straight from their ricefields. There was indeed a holiday atmosphere.

The symphony orchestra played Dvorak, to my mind tolerably well, although I do not possess a great competence in this regard. There followed works of Vietnamese composers, that is European music which had undergone the Vietnamese influence. It was enjoyable to listen to but for my taste was not first class. A choir sang, the women were dressed in beautiful tunics, the men wore lounge suits. The voices were good and the sound agreeable. You could work out the theme: it was a patriotic cantata, half traditional, half revolutionary, solemn without being pompous, melodious and delicate as an oratorio would be. It evoked an emotional response but at the same time, I am obliged to say, the music was indeed European. And then those questions arose again, which had not left my mind since the beginning of the journey, more especially since our lightning visit to the city of Moscow, and which here assume more intensity. They concern the relationship between new things and tradition and the interpenetration of the cultures. How should Asiatic cultures develop, how can they develop under the Euro-American impact? What sort of cultural revolution would I find in Vietnam? Would it be an imitation and a mixture, or an original creation?

At interval, we went out on to the balcony. At the side of the theatre, in the half light, a sort of huge flat strip shining from all sides. Do the bicycles belong to the audience? In what sort of order are they? How does the individual find his own cycle? — a veritable mystery, which says a lot about this society.

On the stage, the set was changed, the musicians had moved to different places. A microphone had been introduced. Something new was about to happen. Whispering sounds issued from the microphone and the loud speakers rendered them sharp, unintelligible and excessive. Sporadically the instruments reverberated. Strange sounds seem to come from all sides and to meet in the air. "It is just like 'The Varsovian Autumn' ", whispered my neighbour. (The Varsovian Autumn is the annual modern music festival.) Gradually the sounds increased, and became denser. Cries like warnings or military commands were heard. From time to time a word in Vietnamese floated past. The tumult of battle was developing, the fear of the war became explicit . . . Enthusiasm on the part of the audience and the orchestra leader's ceremonious greeting. Someone came onto the stage: thanks, flowers, speeches. What did it all mean? Had the new music been born? It is difficult for me to imagine a composer living in Hanoi and writing this music of our time.

If this is the case, then it is a revelation, a revelation likely to change our opinions on the cultural policy of the new regime. Shortly afterwards things became clear. The composer is a native of the country who has lived in Paris for

ten years. He has returned to Hanoi on the invitation of the Ministry of Culture and has personally directed the performance of his work . . . . A page to be torn off the calendar and pinned on the table of imports. However, the fact that he had been invited has perhaps meaning with regard to the direction of the regime.

On the second concert, which we attended at Huê, I was going to write: on another planet, for we were transported one evening in the company of a group of young student enthusiasts to the River of Perfumes. Doubtless it is an old local custom that these songs are performed in the boats which cross the water, or performed while rowing. Huê is a city of tradition. So it wishes to resume this tradition which the war interrupted. We cross the river in the silence of the evening, we tourists in one boat, the singers in the other. Why is there this segregation? It would be much more pleasurable to be together in a gathering without official overtones. Of course, the most popular revolutionary song, which is struck up on every occasion, comes first. The refrain: "Vietnan Ho-Chi-Minh" — we have ended up by knowing it and singing it in four keys. Finally, the folkloric chants the majority of which treat with love. They are accompanied by an instrument having a very simple form, which accords wonderfully with this type of music. It is here that I experience Vietnam although I do not understand the words. The guides summarize the words for us, but their poetry is lost in translation. To the European ear, the chants could appear either a little monotonous and strange. For myself, I experience the meditative lyricism of the words and I know that once performed, the synthesis of the text, of the voice and the exquisite accompaniment reveals the fullness of their beauty.

> O flute! your songs reach the heavens
> and the sweet rushes of the riverbank
> flower
> O quivering flute! murmurs of love
> Delicate and undulating . . . .

Suddenly the flash of a searchlight blinds us, a camera rolls. We have been included, whether we like it or not, in a publicity film for the tourists!

I recall a melody singing the praises of the Huê countryside, the work of a modern composer. A melody bearing the mark of an almost refined art, expressing at the same time the freshness and simplicity of the people, and which has its source in the local tradition of fishermen's songs. This type of adaptation of the folklore can be a revelation, can create music born of the soil and from this fact authentically Vietnamese and universal. Unfortunately, I have heard nothing similar during my stay.

After the concert, there was conversation with a few Huêians who I am almost certain have been involved with the rebirth of this music.

Our third encounter with it took place in Saigon, alias Ho-Chi-Minh-City. We had been invited to a concert given for the foreigners in one of the ex-capital's luxury hotels. The setting was an American-type night club. There was a good light orchestra of the cosmopolitan variety, a group of singers and dancers, soloists. The programme was varied, suitable for an audience which consisted of about 20 Japanese, 16 Poles and a few of other nationalities. We were therefore entitled to some Japanese items, a Chopin waltz, some German and French songs, a Polish song, rendered with a strong Russian accent, and of course some Vietnamese songs. We listened to Chopin without vexation. As for the Japanese musical compositions, it is easy to understand that I am not able to make judgment. The German song was, to say the least, tactless, exuding the unpleasant odour of the Third Reich according to the opinion of the experts. Let us hasten to add that the singer was not familiar with the language of Goethe, although he sang correctly enough. He was much happier with "Domino", agreeably rendered in French . . . . .

Whilst I listened my thoughts returned to the Huêian chants. I saw once again the rice fields and the fishers' boats, all the reality of Vietnam which seemed to me so far from this hotel and this company.

The most important part of the evening was the Vietnamese music and dances and it was this area which gave rise to problems, at least for me. The traditional songs and the dances had been integrated into a sort of politico-revolutionary creation, a tolerably good work but not sufficiently Vietnamese for my taste. And I entertained some doubt regarding the interpretation, which was an artificial trifle. However, the most important thing was to see how the music and dances of the people were treated. Alas! It was not up to my expectation: here was a dance which called to mind a sort of family rite. To be sure, I would willingly acknowledge a certain authenticity if it were not hidden away under the artificial smiles which clung to the faces of the performers — it was so little Asiatic — and veiled still further by a thousand little details borrowed from other cultures. It was the same with the

music. Everything was reasonably presented and the whole had real qualities. Perhaps it had been converted to the style a little too hastily, without enough study having been given to its concept of the art. Moreover, the hotel itself was diametrically opposed to what constitutes the essence of Vietnamese culture: such was my impression, an impression which is perhaps unjust and artless.

A strange thing — there are modern "beat" arrangements of classical works which do not shock me and sometimes even please me. Here I could not stand this type of adaptation. Nevertheless, I will refrain from pursuing my remarks any further. Astonishing indeed was this foreigner who could not claim to be an artist, and who had scarcely landed, than he set himself up as the defender of an authentic Vietnamese culture. Moreover, I was probably the only one to grind his teeth; it pleased the others. But I am certain of one thing: it is that the Vietnamese culture should not take this path. If it was a question of a simple entertainment for tourists, it would only constitute a small harm. On the contrary, if this music was to be taken seriously . . . In order that all hope should not fade, let us return to the songs heard on the River of Perfumes, and to poetry:

> I know — life is a poem,
> The heart, music
> Thoughts, the rhythm which commands it.

"Half-traditional, half-revolutionary Cantata", I wrote a little too quickly, but without the least affection for paradox. Actually, the Vietnamese revolution has a strong national component and conceals a real desire for authenticity, to be defended against foreign influences. Nevertheless, it is firmly rooted in history, and there exists quite a revolutionary tradition, that of the peasant revolts.

"Last Year in 1773", wrote a Spanish missionary, Don Diego de Jumilla, "at the beginning of April, Cochin Chinese troops have appeared. They were accompanied by bandits from the mountains who are marking the boundaries of Qui-Nhon and Phu-Yen. In broad daylight they arrived in the market place, bearing side arms or bows or even steel weapons. They have not harmed the people nor their property. On the contrary, it seems that they desired more equality for all the Cochin Chinese. They went into the houses of the rich and have not occasioned them any injury when the latter offered them gifts. But if they should meet with the slightest resistance, they take possession of objects of value which they then distribute to the poor, only keeping for themselves rice and victuals . . . They have been called the robbers who are compassionate towards the poor".

These lines relate to the beginnings of the Tây-Son revolt, a revolt lead by three brothers, two of whom were probably merchants and the third, a Buddhist monk. After they had conquered Saigon, they threw all the goods amassed by the Chinese merchants into the sea. (Around the same time the Americans in Boston had made a similar gesture in tipping the English tea into the Atlantic.) The Tây-Son brothers unified Vietnam, but their power was short-lived and the old order was re-established. Moreover, this is the fate reserved for popular uprisings: as a rule, if they are not nipped in the bud, they bring only a temporary relief to the people. The new masters, following a fatal downward path, fall again into their old habits.

I have written in the first article that we were received as an official delegation and not like ordinary tourists which we in fact were. Also our arrival at hotels was greeted both cordially and ceremoniously, marked by the tea ritual. The ceremonial was repeated during our visits to the various institutions. In the streets, there was a considerable obstacle: the language barrier.

There was a certain distance in our contacts with the people, the dose of courtesy or cordiality being more or less heavy. Sometimes there was a crack in the curtain because of the unanticipated behaviour of the Poles and especially because of the children, always on our path. Their direct manner of approaching us could have been extremely tiring but they displayed so much joy that you could forgive them everything.

> The evening zephyr exudes its freshness
> Upon the verdant field.
> Perched on a buffalo,
> A little girl sings of peace.

Among other excursions, we visited a village of stone cutters, close to Danang, so that we might see a temple hollowed out of a cave. Immediately the children surrounded us. What strikes you at first glance is a sort of kinship and concern which one has towards the other. The picture of the little girl aged eight or nine, carrying her brother on her hip, is a faithful cameo of the situation. In this group of quasi-independent youngsters, you find babies who can scarcely walk, placed in the care of a scarcely older child. The children, hungry for new things, formed a

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compact circle around us. The eldest sold fruit or refreshments. They knew how to make the most of their wares, without being obsequious. Some begged, but without servility. Moreover, they are under surveillance, as this occurrence in the port of Haiphong witnesses: a member of our group kneeled down next to a youngster whose tear-stained face had a mischievous air, and looked for a coin in his wallet. He was called to order by a warning launched by a Russian behind him.

"Comrade! It is not permitted".

Whenever we strolled around in the town or on their outskirts, the children immediately appeared and accompanied us faithfully, crying out from time to time: "Lien Xô, Lien Xô! [The Russians, the Russians.] Becoming a little bold as a result of the walk, they started to feel our limbs to see if our hair was real. Sometimes, the troop enlarged to such an extent that it became a mini-parade. The passers-by took them to task, which proved to have no effect in the long term. Once a boy stared at my companion and exclaimed:

"Lê-nin Lê-nin!" The resemblance of the facial characteristics, the beard, the bald head, was striking . . . Then the children took up the cry in chorus: "Lê-nin! Lê-nin!" But our Lenin also looked like a Buddha with the same roundness and the same joviality!

At Qui-Nhon, we had the misfortune to pass by a school at the end of classes. Immediately a procession formed and marched in the direction of the hotel, at which point the children did not wish to leave us, and the hotel employees had a tremendous problem in trying to get them to clear away.

In Saigon, we visited an orphanage. Once managed by the Amantes de la Croix (very old Diocesan order), it has become a State institution. Of a staff consisting of 50, there are a dozen nuns, one of whom is the assistant director. As it should be, there are portraits of Ho-Chi-Minh hung here and there and that refrain already heard many times . . . . We make an inspection of the premises: classes, workrooms, garden and farmyard with the pigs. The children learn and at the same time undergo training in the various trades. Greetings, songs, dances. You breathe a pleasant air here, although you cannot forget that our young hosts are war orphans. Perhaps this reality would not upset my companions as much as myself, who was the only one really moved by looking at these orphans whose fathers would have been Caucasian. I asked if it was possible to adopt one. It seemed to me that I had the right to ask this question. Astonishment. However, the guide knew that I was married to a Vietnamese and that I had two daughters. — No, coming from abroad this step would be unacceptable. Moreover, adoption is not practised in Vietnam.

The time had come to say goodbye. The children had given us their presents, table napkins which they had embroidered by hand. After discussion, it was decided that one of us, a teacher, would take them for the children at her school. We did not wish to be left out, however, and I asked for the address of the orphanage. Of course, they would give it to me. But matters rested there. The children seemed happy and joyful, yet no one will ever say:

Mummy, give me the moon.
The child looking at his mother, tries to
catch the sky.
. . . . . .
You play with me in the moonlight,
You hold me by the hand and with my out-
stretched hand,
I reach the moon which is up there.
The child has not yet touched the moon
which the mother's heart warms with a sun-
beam.

books

CULTURED, ARTISTIC, ENJOYABLE: RECENT FICTION

D. J. O'Hearn

James McQueen: *The Electric Beach* (Robin Books, PO Box 355, Wynyard, Tasmania 7325, $6.50 and $4.50); Nicholas Hasluck: *The Hat on the Letter O* (Fremantle Arts Centre, $4.25); Keith Thomas: *Idlers in the Land* (Hutchinson, $9.95); Barry Hill: *A Rim of Blue* (McPhee Gribble, $8.95).

It is pleasant to return to Australia after several months abroad and find an array of books, most of them first books, waiting nervously to be read. It is even more pleasant, having read them, to be able share one's pleasure with others. It is perhaps curious, though not historically unusual, that at a time when many young intellectuals are beginning to register privately their intense dissatisfaction with and disaffection from the land of their birth and their culture, there should be a distinct flourishing in the quantity and quality of our literature and, as everyone is aware, in the fields of film and drama. The general blight on political and social idealism and the ever-spreading disillusionment with the gross materialism of this land may be strong factors underlying the search for creative outlets — or at very least they do not counteract this spirit.

James McQueen's *The Electric Beach* is a venture by a new publishing house, Robin Books of Wynyard Tasmania, and is McQueen's first book. It is difficult to remain less than jubilant on reading this talented writer. McQueen is assured, controlled and brilliantly perceptive. His stories range from the intimately personal to the compassionately objective and they focus with profound insight on the lives of ordinary people — an unnamed old man, workers in a fish factory, an hermetic sculptor, a shirt salesman, an alcoholic. McQueen brings them to life with quick sharp strokes, and they live their unforgettable dramas before our eyes. McQueen has that extraordinary talent which allows his readers to burrow deeply into the lives of his characters, to feel their lives from the inside, to move from sympathy to compassion.

His prose is varied and creative, almost as if forming itself out of the existence of his characters, rather than vice-versa. So we have the broken musings of an old man, teetering his way to death:

> Christ I'm crying stop pretend I've got something in my eye bits of kids looking at me laughing bugger them eighty one years old me why no reason in it not the pain hurt like buggery when Jerry Trapp put my shoulder back when we were breaking horses in the Territory pain no I can handle pain it's the bloody *indignity*.

or the anguished brooding of a man reviewing his ordinary life, feeling the dissatisfaction and the helplessness of it all:

> Yes I have changed. In some ways. By being what I am, by being what I believe was wanted, I have changed. And in subtle ways I have disappointed her. She knew me before the change. I am frightened, somehow, by her knowledge. But can I love any more? Without owning? I am tired, I want nothing.
> The boys splash in the sea, and I seem to sink under the weight of an impending loss.

McQueen manages to express, with quiet acuity, the sensitivity of his characters, to reveal beneath the mundane and the humdrum a quality of feeling that is both profound and moving. His stories are artful and masterly.

So too are those of Nicholas Hasluck in *The Hat on the Letter O*. Hasluck's range is considerable, his stories varied, yet he is always precise and accurate. He can capture an ageing academic:

> In recent years, no matter how hard he tried to put it right, the tone of his articles always came out the same way; clever superficial and, ultimately, vulgar. The strange thing was that nobody seemed to notice.

as easily as he can manage the scene between an errant car-salesman explaining to his de facto why he is late home:

> Betty was still up: making coffee in this kitchen. She was standing there in her dressing gown. She didn't waste much time.
> "So wher've you been?'
> "Having a quiet beer."
> She snorted; rattling the spoon she had been stirring her cup with, down in the saucer.
> "Take it or leave it" Cleary said. He went over to the fridge to get a bottle of milk.
> "I have to, don't I? According to you."
> "What?"
> "Take it or leave it."
> Cleary shrugged. He poured out a glass of milk and put the bottle back in the fridge.
> "A quiet beer," she said mimicking "That's what you used to tell your wife when you were with me."
> Cleary took his glass of milk over to the table and sat down.
> "Anway", he said, "Where have you been?"
> "Nowhere."
> "You weren't here when I rang at eight," he said, taking a punt.
> She put down her cup on the drawing board.
> "I slipped out for a while."

Hasluck's prose is subtle and sensitive, lucid enough to bring situations into sharpness, reflective enough to create the sense that there is another dimension to human acts and that life, even at its most mundane, may be enriched by symbolism. The stories in this collection are, on the whole, restrained and finely structured. The author's consciousness roves over a world that is familiar but delves beneath that familiarity to discover the richness and humanity of people and their attempt to draw meaning from the well of anarchy. Hasluck captures the inner feelings of his characters, their reflections, their fears and their longings. He does so with great artistry and one can only look forward with eagerness to his next work.

Keith Thomas has produced his second novel *Idlers in the Land* and none of the promise of his first work *There was a Man in our Town*, has been disappointed. This new work centres, as does so much of modern fiction, on a university department, and on the struggle by Reg Hughes, a young anthropology lecturer, to topple his world-renowned professor whom Reg believes has built his reputation on falsehoods and scholarly ignorance.

The novel is immensely readable and entertaining. Thomas can write dramatically and humorously and the narrative flows with great ease. The first half of the book, set in urban Sydney, is sharp and funny, capturing with incisiveness the social gauntlets run by young bearded lecturers, separated from their wives, and trying to cope with professional and personal obstacles, their professors, students, children and would be mistresses. Reg decides to raid his professor's room, steal his decades-old notebooks and use them as the basis for ruining the professor's reputation. The room, however, is guarded by the professor's senior colleague and devout Cerberus Frieda, a woman of redoubtable size and madness. To compound the adventure the room is next to the Council Chambers which are housing numbers of students, 'sitting-in' in protest against the University's hated conservatism. Reg and his dour colleague Janos manage to get to the professor's room and steal the note-books, but Frieda returns. They hide in a cupboard but Janos falls asleep and begins to snore. Reg clothes himself in Aboriginal garb and shouting in the Kili dialect dances past Frieda out of the room. Frieda, whose academic interests lie with the Batcha-Batcha tribe, thinks Reg is a student and hurls a spear at him which lodges firmly in his backside. He escapes into the 'occupied' council chamber.

> The students, smoking, drinking flagon red, talking over the noise of music, with faculty papers spilled out of the cabinets into a mess over the floor, looked at him in puzzlement. He still had on his gown and his feather mask, still grasped Hole's notebooks in one hand, and held the shaft of the spear in the other. Was this a university regiment prank being played on them? And what was all the commotion outside?

Reg, aided by "a pudgy blonde girl," makes good his escape by jumping out the window.

The second half of the book relates Reg and

Janos's work in Northern Queensland, where they establish the errors in the professor's theories by their own intricate field-work. Thomas shows his detailed knowledge of the land, Aboriginal customs and the people, with an unobtrusive ease that is the mark of a careful craftsman. The story maintains its creative gusto and not a little ironic suspense as Reg develops from blundering, idealistic naif to a member of the University Hatchet Club.

Upon his return to Sydney, armed with the material to destroy Professor Hole forever, he finds he is welcomed by the Dean and his inner circle of manipulators. Reg is seduced into the 'club,' and he likes it.

> Reg was aware that having done the right thing he was being allowed in, that the occasion was for him a rite of passage. He had made his way into the circle of old, dominant males, the ring of leaders, privileged, entrenched, wise.

Thomas's novel is lucid, witty and incisive. He is fully in command of his subject and characters, and the sharp critique of academic life is balanced nicely by the later section of the novel which deals with Reg's field work up North among the Aboriginals. One is impressed by Thomas's depth of knowledge and his ability to create a realistic, hard-hitting and sympathetic overview of the Aboriginal problem. He avoids the sentimental but points up the serious social and cultural problems which affect this ancient people.

Thomas is an impressive, intelligent and professional novelist. His hallmark is accuracy; there is a rightness and a sharpness to his observations and remarks, and his narrative style, while unobtrusive, flows with the ease of a craftsman. The ironies are humane but incisive, and the modesty of his authorial presence veils a perceptive imagination, gazing steadily and critically at the seductive idiocy of much of contemporary society.

It is somewhat unfortunate for Barry Hill that his first book of stories, *A Rim of Blue,* should have to be reviewed in the company of these other three authors. By comparison his work is a little too stilted, a little too self-conscious. The reader feels the awkwardness of the author, the sense of pressure to get it right, a slight unease with the enterprise. Nevertheless there are some stories which indicate that Hill's imagination can play on social themes with some insight, and that a little more experience will remove what appears in this volume as maladroitness. He is more at home with personal compassionate stories, such as the young husband's return home to see his new son and the wife's disbelief in his fidelity, "I hold him rocking," than he is with more general narratives such as "Getting to the Pig." His difficulty at the moment lies in his own self-consciousness, which tends often to fragment the narrative flow and the rhythms of the prose.

All in all then, if we are to judge from these works our literature is in very healthy shape. There is a maturity and, for the most part, an artistic confidence amongst the very different writers which bodes well for their future works and makes these books excellent examples of the writer's craft. There can be no doubt that our literature has come of age and that our contemporary writers experience a sense of freedom in ranging widely over the pluralist and mostly urban society in which we live. There is no sense in these books that literature is less than a civilised art or that social critique and insight must be informed by specific ideologies. This work is cultured, artistic and unobtrusively craftful — and it is also immensely enjoyable.

NEILSON'S OWN STORY

Nancy Keesing

The Autobiography of John Shaw Neilson, introduced by Nancy Keesing (National Library, $11.95 and $6.95).

Shaw Neilson's autobiography is in the form of long letters which he dictated to his sister Annie McKimm and his step-sister Lisette Neilson towards the end of his life when his blindness, always a bitter handicap, was almost complete. The project was suggested by James Devaney, who was also a poet, the mentor and friend of Neilson in his later years. Devaney himself and other biographers have drawn on this autobiographical material, but until now it has not been available except in the National Library of Australia, which in 1964 acquired the manuscript from Harry Chaplin. In the early 1970s the ANL decided to publish it and invited me to contribute an introduction.

Unfortunately, and for many reasons, publication was delayed but the introduction I wrote over five years ago still makes most of the points I would wish to express and I do not propose to paraphrase it here, and refer to it

only briefly. "The letters," I said, "make a rare and exciting document for sometimes unexpected reasons which transcend direct literary interest . . . [its] interest and importance lie not only in its commentaries on Neilson's poetry and work as a poet, but in its value as a work of social history. It would merit publication were the author an unknown man, because of the absolute rarity of documents describing the day-to-day lives of obscure people in their own straightforward speech."

I further stressed that Neilson was not a distinguished writer of prose. He "believed that 'rhyming' and 'prose writing' not only needed different skills, but were distinctly separate creative acts . . . He conceded to adverse critics of his poetry the right to their own opinions, but his poetry was daemonic, and he knew it, and never wavered in his conviction of his own uncommon capacity." Neilson wrote: "I was about twenty-two before I came to the conclusion that I could not write prose" (p. 34).

My introduction contains one original segment: I asked Dr Reuben Hertzberg, a senior opthalmic surgeon, to read every reference I could find, both in Neilson's own writings and the observations of Devaney, to the poet's blindness. His response is interesting and valuable (pp. 17-18).

In some ways, though, that introduction to a scholarly edition had to omit, or mask, my feelings then. Those feelings are stronger now. By this side door, as it were, I must get them off my chest.

Neilson's plodding, uncomplaining, determined catalog of talented, sensitive people striving and laboring hard and unremittingly to earn sufficient money merely to feed and clothe themselves (and nearly always failing, or meeting disaster when modest success seemed likely), is one of the saddest, most horrible documents any Australian, with any historical sense, could possibly read. OK, so that is the lot of peasants the world over. OK, so it isn't good enough.

One reason it isn't good enough is its appalling wastefulness. Wastefulness not only of sweat, health and actual lives (read this book and count how many of Neilson's relatives died young) but wastefulness of brains. Whatever was Australia's loss of talent and ability in the past? What is this blinkered lucky country prepared to lose here and now and in the future?

So early in 1973 I was sorrowing, and good and angry, on behalf of a dead poet and his family. Just then the Australian government reorganised its policies of assisting the arts by forming the Australia Council. I was appointed a member of the newly established Literature Board. This Board superseded the existing Commonwealth Literary Fund which had, with compassion, vision and distinction, attempted to stretch its ridiculously inadequate budget to further the work of Neilson himself and many another fine Australian writer. Never talk to me about the deep culture of Australia's political masters in the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s. Witty, well-read and widely educated they may have been, but instead of offering cultural leadership to an ocker community through all the prosperous years, they let the arts and artists wilt for want of a few cans of water that would have cost no more than about thirty miles of secondary road.

In 1973 for the time being literature had a realistic budget. The newly established board was able to assist some talented young and a few older new writers, and to devise plans for continuity of support to established authors. It had other projects to encourage the publication of good Australian books and for the promotion and distribution of literature. It even had enough leeway for a little experiment: a modest component of taking a risk on a few likely bets. In fact the new board's schemes were very largely a continuation of the CLF's policies. For its new initiatives the board sought expert advice from many quarters of the literary and book-trade worlds.

In August, 1973 it made its first announcement of grants. On the whole they were received with constructive interest by those who know anything about writing and the making of books, all of which is a fairly slow business. (If someone receives a fellowship to write a novel today, and begins work tomorrow, and sits at his desk for eight to twelve months, researching, writing, typing and revising, and has a publisher awaiting the manuscript, it will still be near to two years before that novel appears in the shops.

Predictably, people who know nothing of writing or the book trade leapt in to scoff and complain — "Whyntcha send a football team to Kamchatka instead of spending my good taxpayer's money on all of them Balmain bludgers?" What was unexpected was to discover that certain well-heeled, well-fed newspaper columnists went in there knocking with the rest, trumpeting flatly about the tremendous advantages, to artists, of starvation, preferably in garrets.

Max Harris was one of them and, of all people,

he seized on Shaw Neilson as the emblem of his argument. Shaw Neilson! There was the manuscript delayed in its publication, and me, for all my time on the Literature Board fuming and wishing it was available for quoting right back at the fat garret advocates who trumpeted, and still do, whenever grants to the arts are announced.

Harris, in the Australian in 1973, cried woe about "handout orgies" and "the age of the cultural bludge." He said: "The philosophy of the handout is, of course, sterile, dated and ineffectual. John Shaw Neilson was a navvy . . . no poet will write a better poem as a result of a governmental golden gift. Probably the opposite. Poets write because they like it. There's no such thing as a full-time poet . . . Money for poets merely reveals the snobbish ignorance of governmental patrons."

> My next job was grubbing & I was working a forest devil. This was on new country being cleared for the soldiers. I was only working a week when I jagged one of my fingers with a raggedy wire rope. I had to have a months spell. I stayed with my sister in Mildura. She was living in a little cottage on the river bank. Her husband was away all the time in the mill-boat fetching logs down. I think it was just after I gave up the horse-driving job that [I] did a little weeding amongst the oranges for a few days. It was then that I was struck with the very beautiful light there is in May in Northern Victoria. The dark green of the orange [trees] & beautiful sunlight give them enchantment hard to describe.
>
> It was there that I got the main idea 'In [in] The Orange Tree', but I was not able to finish that rhyme till about the end of 1919.
>
> Some parts of the stanzas I had in a piece of the same metre which I had tried to write in '16 or '17 when I was in Melbourne. I dont remember doing any verse in '17, except 'To a Flowering Almond', which was not published in the first book.
>
> During '16, '17, '18, & nearly all '19 I was too much worried at making a living to do any good at verse." (pp. 96-97).

Whether poets write "because they like it" or despite hating what drives them, no poet welcomes the frustration of being unable to write because of weariness, starvation, sickness or despair. (Read the book.) A poet's books are peculiarly like his children. He wants them perfect. Neilson was asked to "read proofs and make corrections" before *Ballad and Lyrical Poems* was published in 1923 but "This I could not do as I had no money to stay in Melbourne and was bound to go out to work."

The book itself (together with the introduction I wrote) tells of the generosity of many people, of the outrage felt by Blamire Young and others when they learned of Neilson's destitution, of the ways in which they raised money for him. Whether Harris and his ilk would lump this kind of generosity in with governmental patronage, and describe it as "snobbish ignorance", or whether they believe Patrick White's award to Gwen Harwood (so greatly applauded by most of us) may be the ruin of her genius, I have no idea and don't wish to know. It's nearly six years now since I've read Mr Harris's column and I don't miss it.

ERIC BEACH'S POETRY

Larry Buttrose

Eric Beach: *A photo of some people in a football stadium* (Overland, $3).

This collection of seventy-three poems follows Eric Beach's 1977 collection, *In Occupied Territory*. It succeeds in almost every way the previous book failed. The selection is an effective statement of what Eric Beach is writing now, while at the same time pointing to the likely direction of his work. It has an integrity of style, power and tone which sees it fulfilling the real promise of his first Australian collection (Beach came from New Zealand several years ago), *Saint Kilda Meets Hugo Ball*.

There's a back-cover blurb by Rae Desmond Jones, and it's the only completely worthwhile blurb I've ever seen. Jones summarizes the main elements of Beach — the blues-singer scat-singer stance; the self-deprecating, often cheeky, tone; the poignancy (which sometimes approaches sentimentality); the dry anger; and the feeling through much of the poetry of destiny that this is the way it *is*, folks, but fight on nevertheless. Beach's stance is often political, but is always enriched by other elements that lift the work high above simple protest or dogma. The title poem's football stadium was the destination of many of Allende's supporters after the coup, and although admitting the limitations in writing 'political' poetry, ("when y write a poem on Chile/most of it's MADE IN USA") Beach delivers his rage with great control and effect.

In the case of "foot in th door" the political

stance is circumspect, reflecting back on himself—

(smile timidly at th dole office
go home & fight uranium)

while in the case of one of my favorites from the book, "East Timor Street", the political emphasis is derived not from what is stated, but from what is not. It's about a person whose suburb has undergone one of those Australia Post (read Kafka) reclassifications (read declassifications). East Timor and its own declassification are only drawn in with the title and a single reference in conclusion —

East Timor? they said
which suburb is that?

This reminds us of another of Beach's talents — the evocative power of his thumbnail sketches. He often picks a single image in his sketches, and lets the context do the explaining. Beach calls "a jingle to indooripilly" a "bad-tempered poem", yet the cheeky humor can't help but surface, among his sketches, even in the wreckage of love —

. . . while this public school
accent
(the good doctor)
'once, old boy, a communist'
drones on
& his wife sits like someone
who always had somethin'
to inherit
& the aged daughter
(calls her mother 'lizard')
(her father 'loathe')
tries to sweep up
the remains of our romance
with a smile . . .

It's obvious from this poem and many others in the collection that Beach writes poetry which lends itself well to performance — and anyone who's been at all interested in Australian poetry of the past few years has probably seen him do so. "Perform" is the right word for it — and it's one of the very few criticisms of this collection that some of the poems really are 'off the page'. I've heard Eric Beach perform on a lot of occasions, and I'm well acquainted with his rhythm, his emphasis. Despite this, there are some poems I find difficult to understand as printed. It's not a problem of attenuation of image or of obscurity — it's that Beach often neglects his leading audience in his effort to get poetry back to a hearing audience.

Besides the political/social poems, there are several superb pieces that deal with death, a number of which deal specifically with the death of Beach's brother. One of them is called "who cry any road", a pastorale with a poet alone in a shoreline setting, with the wind and the death of kin. Here Beach knocks fearlessly at the door of sentimentality —

. . . a raw cold coast I come from
& the waves walk, & the winter returns a hard stare
th waves are twins/
& my brother is dead
& th wind doesn't work
nor does th time pass, to be killing it . . .

Two other fine poems deal with the minutae of the social processes of death: the funeral and the comforting of the bereaved, the $254 left in a bank account, a house once lived in. One of the poems, "someone else", ends with consciousness trying to accept the unacceptible —

as for my brother
& as for my brother
my brother jumped off th sydney harbour bridge

This is the most significant collection of Australian poetry since Rae Desmond Jones' *The Mad Vibe.*

CHOICE OF DIRECTION

Kylie Tennant

Ray Ericksen: *Ernest Giles: Explorer and Traveller, 1835-1897* (Heinemann, $18.50).

An early familiarity with Arctic and Antarctic exploration is a useful training for the study of the opposite, heat-prostrated efforts of explorers in the Western Australian deserts. My generic term for the Arctic heroes was "dog-eaters". They would cheerfully dine on their canine companions in order to be first to cross some place no one else ever wanted to go. With Leacock I could put my feet on the mantelpiece and read on until they ate the last dog, but without any commitment to the spirit which moved them. Similarly when Ernest Giles slaughters a favorite horse, and lives on strips of it, I am sorry for the horse, not Giles.

It must have been singularly galling to see on the desert horizon little groups of men, women and children strolling across the burning wilderness. The Aboriginals avoided the white incomers or, spear-flourishing against firearms, tried to drive them from the waterholes. Ray Ericksen tells us that the explorers had an uncomfortable habit of maltreating any native they caught, so that he would reveal the water supply. Warburton, with that callousness perhaps natural in a senior public servant, relates how his expedition managed to pounce on one old woman: "We secured this old witch by tieing her thumbs behind her back and haltering her by the neck to a tree; she kept up a frightful howling all night — during which we had to watch her by turns . . . We let the old witch go. She had been no use to us . . . for under pretense of leading us to some native wells, she took us backwards and forwards over heavy sandhills, exhausting the camels as well as my small stock of patience . . . I was savage enough to have hung her up to the first tree." (Good on you, Ma!)

Halfway through *Ernest Giles* with exclamatory murmurs ("This is such a well-written book") I turned to the potted biography on the back cover to find that it is written by the Ray Ericksen of *Cape Solitary*. Ray Ericksen! He even changed my attitude to blowflies! Anything Ericksen undertakes has that imagination and originality of mind he attributes to Ernest Giles. In this wide-ranging survey of Australian exploration he is talking about luck, chance, decision and character.

The construction of the Overland Telegraph in 1872 laid two thousand miles of posts and wires along McDouall Stuart's line of march and gave a jumping off place to the conquerors of the deserts that lay between South and Western Australia. "The major challenge . . . was the western interior." It was Giles who met this challenge most completely.

Giles never led an official party and was shabbily treated, meagrely rewarded. The explanation for this may lie in a description of him at a later date, in Melbourne on the spree, "flashing rings on every finger, displaying lines of glittering tiepins down his shirt front and wearing a coat freely spotted with food stains." Dickens was considered a howling cad for wearing jewellery. Giles might have been a superb bushman but he was not a gentleman. Small, incredibly tough, with brave, wide-set eyes and a love of verse — particularly Byron's — he was a born outsider.

Given a classical education at Christ's Hospital, where the diet, as Ericksen points out, was fair training for eating horse in the Gibson Desert, the former Blue Coat boy became a clerk in the Melbourne post office when his family emigrated. He was sacked as ringleader when the clerks protested against sorting newspapers on Sunday after working a nine hour day six days a week. He disappeared into the hinterland west of the Darling and surfaced again sixteeen years later as the protegé of Baron von Mueller, the botanist who backed Giles's first expedition, together with a few persons willing to have mountain ranges named after them. When his later backer, Thomas Elder, surfeited in the quest for new pastures, retired from the hunt for a stock route across to Western Australia, Giles went off to the Kimberleys gold seeking, vanishing into the great pool of adventurers and wanderers with which Australia, at that time, was remarkably well supplied.

Giles's book *Australia Twice Traversed* took twelve years to get into print; he had to sell the few parcels of land he claimed to pay the debts of his five great expeditions, or to surrender them because he was too poor to stock them. He was reckless, his parties were inevitably too small and Ericksen admits Giles's "incorrigible carelessness in recruiting subordinates". The first expedition was ended when Robinson and Carmichael refused to carry on. The second closed down when Giles allowed Gibson to go with him on a forward dash in search of water. Gibson was morose, dirty and somewhat unpopular. When the horses were dying Giles gave Gibson the compass and the remaining horse and followed back on foot. Gibson panicked and died in the Gibson desert. Giles got back to base and started the vain search. On the fifth expedition, returning from Perth where they had met with the usual cheers, banquets and balls, they struck a new northerly line and spent three days en route looking for Gibson's body. Giles had switched to camels, which brought him ultimate success. On this journey he was blind with ophthalmia for seven days. Flies, bull-ants which bit them if they lay down in the shade to snatch some sleep, thirst, hunger, heat — he went through the worst. Warburton, on an official mission at the age of sixty, had nearly died. Gosse, another official candidate for desert honors, lost his nerve and, after keeping pretty close to Giles country, returned to an accolade befitting the great. Forrest, the West Australian candidate, believed the Lord looked after the efficient. "Our usual good fortune" is frequently mentioned. "Rain fell ahead of him

precisely where he needed it." Not for him was Giles's disregard of danger.

"He is the one Australian explorer," Ericksen writes, "who repeatedly made it clear amid ritual complaints about 'hideous scrubs' and 'howling wilderness' that he had no wish to be elsewhere; that exploring, with all its frustrations, dangers and hardships, was a thoroughly enjoyable occupation . . ."

Somebody must be joking.

AUSTRALIA IN DISGUISE?

Philip Martin

David Malouf: *An Imaginary Life* (Chatto & Windus, $12.25).

At the end of Cavafy's poem "Waiting for the Barbarians", word reaches the city that the barbarians won't be coming after all: they don't exist any more. A cry goes up

> What are we going to do without barbarians?
> Those people were some sort of a solution!

And what would many writers, from the Romantics on, have done without them? Edward Lucie-Smith's fine poem "Among the Scythians", my own short sequence on the encounter of Romans and Huns, and this much-praised book by David Malouf just couldn't have been written.

I've admired Malouf's work since he began to publish, but my interest in this book was quickened, before I read it, by the news that it ends with the old Roman poet going off across the Danube and into the steppes with a wolf-boy (your ultimate barbarian), much as my young Roman took off that way with the Huns.

The poet, of course, is Ovid, exiled by Augustus in A.D. 8 to Tomis on the Black Sea. The place is now Constanza in Rumania, just to the south of the Danube delta and, for Ovid, well beyond the Black Stump. As his "Tristia" and "Ex Ponto" show at some length, he took this exile hard: he was cut off from the civilized life he'd basked in, and life among the Sarmatians was tough, especially in the long, severe winters, when beards "tinkled with ice". This is one of many details Malouf takes over from the "Tristia". I might say here that, like Shakespeare, Malouf often keeps very close to his sources (Ovid himself, Herodotus on the Scythians, and to some extent Itard's famous account of the wild boy of Aveyron). But he's no more a plagiarist than Shakespeare: both know when to stick to the book and when to range more widely.

If winter hits Tomis, spring and summer aren't far behind, even in the earlier pages. While the seasons are strongly evoked, Ovid's initial sense of total alienness is gradually if partially broken down. He keeps on writing in Latin, but he begins to pick up some of the local lingo (rather slowly for a poet, I thought) and to appreciate the good points of the locals, particularly Ryzak the headman. And then, on a hunting expedition, he sees "the Child": an embodiment of his boyhood imagining, as described in the book's prologue. He takes the child into his care, until eventually the roles are reversed.

Ovid has been the poet of the "Metamorphoses", the 'changes' of one form of life into another: Daphne, for instance, into a laurel tree. And throughout Malouf's book this idea recurs: indeed it does much to shape the book. The outer and the inner world interfuse, the Child recalls Ovid's early vision, Ovid calls out some power of language latent in the Child, and when they escape together from the threatening superstitions of Tomis, the Child leads the ageing poet into the vast grasslands of the steppes under the arch of of spring sky.

> In whose trance am I making this journey? . . .
> I have taken my last step. . . . From here I ascend, or lower myself, grain by grain, into the hands of the gods. It is the place I dreamed of so often . . . the point on the earth's surface where I disappear. It is not at all as I had imagined.

An Imaginary Life is called 'a novel'. Some will say it's really an extended lyric in prose, and I'm inclined to agree, though it has a firm narrative base. A poem, certainly, and at times the language tries too hard, putting a strain on the reader. By contrast I find the language of Malouf's verse (including the most recent) more at ease with itself and its ambitions. There are times, too, when the long flow of the novel's sentences gives way to mannered, chopped-up phrases which I find rather irritating:

> He is the wild boy of my childhood. I know it now. Who has come back to me. He is The Child.

Or again (and *here's* a risky one):

> Slowly they came to a halt.
> Stood.
> Breathing.

But the irritations, the breath of the verbal hothouse, are minor worries. This is a book to be grateful for, and for many reasons. While it's in the broadly Romantic tradition, it's Twentieth Century Romantic. Many contemporary perceptions have gone into forming it. I'm struck, for instance, by the nimbly intelligent treatment of superstitions about disease, and Ovid's comment:

> As well as the plague itself . . . there must also be the shadow of the plague that lives in the body or in the mind, and . . . only when the two meet and recognize one another can the disease break in. . . . It is terror that is the link.

More generally I welcome Malouf's large concern with an ultimate fulfilment and with the way that leads to it. His book gives its own flesh to the well-known sentiment that "The end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."

"It's a strange novel" (someone said to me) "for an Australian to have written." But is it? My friend was thinking of Malouf's choice of Ovid, rather than of the richness of the book's resonances. But perhaps we should look closely at those ends of the earth to which Ovid is banished and where he makes his final acceptance. The whole book is a kind of metaphor, and one of its points of reference is the civilized European's experience of a vast uncivilized new terrain. Could Tomis and the steppes to the north be Australia in disguise? Several passages suggest this. I can quote only one, from near the end.

> Here the immensity, the emptiness, feeds the spirit, and leaves it with no hunger for anything but more space, more light — as if one had suddenly glimpsed the largeness, the emptiness of one's own soul, and come to terms with it, glorying at last in its open freedom.

A TRUE ENGLISHMAN

R. Selby Smith

J. R. Darling: *Richly Rewarding* (Hill of Content, $16.95).

My great-great-grandfather, William Selby, lived, farmed, and died in the same Medway valley in which James Darling was born and in which he lived his early life. On William Selby's tombstone, in a country churchyard overlooking that valley, one may read an epitaph, composed in 1804, and typical of its period. It concludes

> "A truly honest man lies here
> Selby, farewell! — *that* few can boast to hear."

Fortunately, there is yet no need to be concerned with an epitaph for J.R.D.; and those of us who know and admire him hope that there will not be for many years to come. But we know that he too is "a truly honest man". Every page of this endearing autobiography bears witness to it; as Stephen Murray-Smith says in the preface "he usually sees his own demerits clearly, sometimes too clearly, and has always been perfectly happy to advise others of them. . . . He has never hidden his struggles with himself from others, and in this way he has made himself credible as teacher and leader".

When one puts down this handsome and well-produced book, one knows that the author is a man of great sincerity and strength of character; in each succeeding phase of his life, described in a chronological sequence, in the usual manner of autobiographies, and in strong, lucid and unaffected prose, one sees the same basic character, the same high ideals, the same resolute stance — just as one does, for example, in the writings of Field Marshal Lord Slim. One sees him "warts and all", and even his "warts" are endearing, and sometimes admirable too. No one with strong convictions, firmly held and bravely proclaimed, can avoid, at best, having opponents or even, in the case of people of lesser calibre, making enemies.

As he describes his own school days at Repton — not, at that time, it would seem, a really good school, and that in spite of having two future Archbishops of Canterbury as its headmasters, his time as a very young artillery officer towards the end of World War I, his relations with his family and friends, and with society as a whole, he gives us a remarkably clear picture of himself. So does he when he speaks of his life's work as the Headmaster of Geelong Grammar School for over 30 years, and his five years as Chairman of the A.B.C.

He reveals himself very much a man of his time, and of his English upbringing in a society so different from today's — and indeed surprisingly different from that which I knew, in the very same part of England and in another public school (though I must say, with what I hope is pardonable pride, it seems to me to have been a much better school than his!) only half a generation later. And this is the key to the interesting nature of his autobiography. It may prove to be of more interest to those who, like myself, have had so many experiences which were similar, even though different, to his than it will to younger people, or

to those who experience has been largely confined to one society, either on this side of the globe or that. But his account of his attempt, in three rather different periods, to put his ideals into practice on the windy plains of Corio, shows him not so much as an innovator as one who was constantly striving to interpret to his staff and his boys those verities which still to many of us seem to be eternal, and to show how that they could illumine and inspire our efforts to meet the needs of people living in a society which was, and is, changing at such unparallelled speed.

He clearly feels that the third period of his work at Geelong may have not been as successful as the first. The first — in the 1930's — he describes as the halcyon years; and others shared that view; J.R.D. quotes a letter which his predecessor, Francis Brown, wrote in April 1933 saying "I would give much to see the great work which you have done, to rejoice with you in what has been so well conceived and accomplished".

The second period, during and immediately after the Second World War, was bound to be something of a holding operation. Buildings could not be improved, or even well maintained; much more important, the building up of a first-rate staff had to be held in abeyance. But the third period was different. The school's reputation grew and spread; financial problems, though difficult, were not insuperable and progress, though of a rather different kind, was begun again, and maintained. J.R.D. makes very clear his doubt whether he was right to have continued so long in the one post. He made at least one unsuccessful application for the Headship of an English Public School; other possibilities appeared, but were not accepted, or did not finally materialise. He tells us, too, how hard he found it to accept the somewhat critical appraisal of the state of the school which Professor W. F. Connell and his team made in response to an invitation issued by J.R.D. himself. It disappointed him, and herhaps even hurt him. I remember very vividly the time when I, as a fellow Headmaster, asked for Darling's advice as to how one might best seek and find a helpful and thorough appraisal of one's school and one's work in it. He writes here of his own experience just as he spoke to me of it then. So, too, when I mentioned to him an invitation which I had had to become the Headmaster of a great English school, and told him why my wife and I had decided not to accept it, he spoke with obvious feeling of the difficult personal choices to which such a situation gave rise.

But, on balance, the impartial observer may conclude, as I do, that he was right to stay. Could we imagine another Head who would have been likely to have achieved more in those last twelve years also? I doubt it. This was the time when he conceived, and persuaded his Council to allow him to carry out, his great plan for the creation of the country branch of the school at Timbertop. In describing it, and making very clear the debt which he owed to Kurt Hahn and his invigorating philosophy, he does not gloss over the economic issues which helped to make it attractive. He seems almost half ashamed to admit them. He need not be; an independent school is, in a real sense, a business. It must be a prosperous, or at least a solvent, one, if it is to achieve its educational aims. Timbertop, as he describes it, and as interested visitors saw it, under the leadership of the redoubtable Montgomery, combined and achieved these aims in a way for which many young men are enduringly grateful.

J.R.D. writes of his "strong belief that the most important contribution which even very great men make on the world is the effect which they have on other men and women in the course of their lives". It is a well based belief; and he himself must rejoice as he meets so many who acknowledge how much, and for the better, he has influenced them. Those of us who were his fellow headmasters are to be numbered among them, just as are many of us who worked with him and for him in the foundation and infancy of the Australian College of Education.

In his concluding chapter he writes that he is beginning "to feel the result of not having developed any truly compulsive hobby". Charles Darwin, in his later years, expressed his regret that, because of his long years of intensive and devoted study he had lost the capacity — which he had once possessed — to enjoy great poetry and music. Those of us who feel a different regret — that we have spent too much time, in such pastimes as the pursuit of the elusive wild duck or goose, or the attempt to delude the all-too-wary trout or salmon — may, I suppose, take comfort in the old proverb that the "Good Lord does not count the time spent fishing against a man's allotted span". We may even hope that St. Peter, in his elevated sphere, may have sufficient fellow feeling to put in a good word for us.

J.R.D. need have none of *those* regrets. We hope — and surely not in vain? — that he retains his zest for literature and music, and his appreciation of other beauties, and may even find some worth while recreation in the gardening to which he refers somewhat deprecatingly. Above all, he

still has a priceless possession in his much loved wife, to whose wise and loving counsel he owes so much. He remains, certainly, an Englishman (in spite of all temptation, and in spite of what he says himself), and an Englishman of a particular period, too. But how else could he be true to his "own self"? How else could he have made the enduring contributions to Australian life for which so many of us hold him in such affection and esteem?

THAT SUBVERSIVE, GOLD

Austin McCallum

Weston Bate: *Lucky City: the first generation at Ballarat 1851-1901* (M.U.P., $15).

In 1965 Weston Bate was commissioned by the Ballarat City Council to write a history of Ballarat to the present time. The requirement was a "readable" book which wasn't to be a history of the council. In *A History of Brighton* (1962) Bate had shown distinct talent for writing local history in a lively style after perceptive research and disciplined preparation. The advice was hardly necessary but understandable, as generally councillors, provincial and rural, are suspicious of the academic's approach to everything, including history.

The commission arose mainly from the initiative of Cr. Jack Chisholm, civic pride and a need to update Withers, about whom more will be said later. Now that a magnificent book has appeared 13 years later (not three to five as expected) pride is again to the fore, matching that of the Courier editor in 1901 who looked back to Athens and Florence before he could find a city to compare with Ballarat "as cities encapsulating larger themes within a local ethos" and suggested that civic patriotism was as valuable as imperial or national. Thus again we Ballarat natives are reassured by our distinguished historian that our city's achievements are unequalled in the nation's annals; our pioneers true representatives of the radical-liberal pulse in Australian life; our grandparents and their children (our fathers and mothers) at the close of the century, "secure from the restrictions of the class structure of the mother-land". With 78 years to go and luck still holding, Weston Bate bestows the accolade "Ballarat at that period (1901) was like a city-state, self-sufficient, distinctive, cohesive and proud". So, where do we go from there? After fifty years packed with incident, progress, prosperity and still producing an annual 70,000 ozs. of gold, Bate launches the Golden City into the twentieth century and Alfred Deakin into the first federal parliament as the member for Ballarat. Assuming that this history was not only written for the council but also for his peers, one must expect the author to produce, in time, a continuation or a sequel.

It's been easy for writers to feel romantic about Ballarat. A long list would include Trollope, Twain, H. H. Richardson, Xavier Herbert, Eric Lambert and Catherine Gaskin but not historiographers Serle and Blainey, and certainly not Manning Clark who said it was the new name for Buninyong when others had it down as "the rich and respectable man's diggings" and, in 1870, "a perfect Arcadia", the fourth city of Australia, with 50,000 inhabitants, most of whom would have sung the praises of their own achievements.

Who would blame the opportunist authors when the nation is light on for incident and glamor? Here on the richest goldfield the world had ever known were fabulous discoveries, a rebel flag, a battle between Her Majesty's armed forces and a defiant, small army of miners; larger-than-life characters and, up to Eureka, the drama of skirmishes, protest meetings, police brutality, pub burnings, a murderer acquitted and a seditious editor sentenced, all happening before Lola Montez "inflamed the lusts of Ballarat's manhood." No wonder Clark wrote that: "Gold was subverting the old social order of rank and degree."

Weston Bate's love affair with Ballarat has been going on for a long time — perhaps fifteen years. One might anticipate from a title like *Lucky City* and from a consistent pre-occupation by his students and his lectures, that some romantic indulgence would follow. Instead he has written, with remarkable scholarship, an entertaining and definitive history of an illustrious city during the period from 1851 to 1901, when a first generation of children was proving that luck *is* a fortune and a begetter of loyal local solidarity.

A confident William Bramwell Withers published a second edition of his *History of Ballarat from the first pastoral settlement to the present time* in 1887, seventeen years after the first edition had documented the origins, growth and achievements of the township. Withers, a failed fossicker, returned to his vocation in order to survive, the experience of men who had no luck on the diggings.

Throughout his book Bate emphasises that men

like Withers were crucial to the rise of the city, its institutions, political vein, environment and industries. The avalanche of men that descended on the treasure trove were a conglomerate of greater social value than gold — men in a wilderness grasping at an opportunity to use their abilities and beliefs without the restrictions imposed on them in their homeland by class structures, privilege, conservatism and prejudice.

Withers, the journalist, newspaper proprietor and respected historian, exemplifies Bate's local heroes, and justifies his principal thesis on the reason why Ballarat excelled. That was the luck, along with the gold. Bate shows convincingly that the Ballarat goldfield was unique in simple terms, the miners, by changing techniques and locations, by gaining new knowledge of the progression of leads, gutters, quartz, reefs and geological indicators, went on finding gold. Furthermore, the gold finders were chasing greater riches by putting capital into their own mining enterprises, and thus gave the losers a reason to stay on and work at their trades and services. The men who walked away disappointed from the mud and slush of the goldfield to set up their shops, forges and offices were, in the long run, the luckier.

At the end of the rainbow the capital ran out for the small fry who inevitably finished by working for the mighty companies, in darkness and water, deep under the beautiful lucky city, the domain of the properous losers. Ballarat kept and increased its population; its local technology, manufacturing and commercial enterprises met the demands while gold continued to shine on the city, a seemingly inexhaustible harvest responding to the reaping of determined men and machines.

This book is straightforward history documented in an entertaining way. From a mass of available sources, researched by the author's skilled assistants, he has meticulously covered every aspect of Ballarat's origins and growth to the chosen cut-off. The reader confronts a detailed account of growth as a response to the labors, beliefs, ambitions and talents of a fragmented migrant society.

Thanks to golden luck the community was welded to a common purpose. The result was the city of gardens, statues, song, gold, benefactors, speculators, iron lace . . .

What did Bate miss? I don't know, it all seems to be there: the Chinese, Main Road, mining techniques, the foundries — an inexhaustible accounting of the particulars which were peculiarly Ballarat. No injustice appears to have been done: the commentary shows Bate's humane attitude to the Aboriginals, the Chinese, the underprivileged, the exploitation of the working class. Perhaps the book is too even in temper — too much luck and not enough muck; sweetness and light where there could have been stench and darkness. This is not a criticism but rather a nagging fear that somewhere along the line something went wrong. From 1901 to 1950, the same time scan as *Lucky City*, a book could be written and titled *Stagnant City*.

Lucky City is not a book you can't put down: it's heavy, and its shape (not unusual these days) makes it awkward to hold for long periods. It's well presented and splendidly illustrated. Most of the fascinating prints and photographs are reproduced for the first time. Bate has made a careful selection from a wealth of picture collections held in Ballarat. The wide double column pages allow the illustrations to be placed alongside the appropriate text, and this explains the shape of the book. As one would expect there is an index to the text and a separate index to the illustrations, with sources indicated. References (a remarkably high proportion are to local newspapers) are listed in chapter order and will delight the student and researcher.

For good measure there is a comprehensive bibliography, including unpublished sources used by the author. An unexpected bonus is the low price. The reason for this, and further evidence of civic pride lasting to the present time, is that when the cost of production took *Lucky City* into the expensive book class, the City Council willingly provided the publisher with enough funds for it to retail at $15, in preference to having the printing and making done overseas. And for good civic measure the council insisted that the book be printed on Ballarat paper.

As Ballarat booksellers are my good friends I made some enquiries about local sales of *Lucky City*. From information received I estimate that close to 2000 copies have been sold in three months. As this is half the print run, would you please put your hands together for Ballarat!

VETERANS REMEMBER

A. G. Austin

J. N. I. Dawes and L. L. Robson: *Citizen to Soldier* (Melbourne University Press, $12.60).

This book, based as it is on the reminiscences of veterans of the Great War, is, in a sense an appendix to Dr. Robson's earlier work, *The First A.I.F., A Study of Its Recruitment* (M.U.P., 1970). The intention of the book is admirable, to discover exactly how these veterans felt about their enlistment in the first A.I.F., but as one reads on, their story tends to become confused. In his earlier work Dr. Robson wrote, "During my research I sought and received hundreds of letters from veterans of the war. It was intended to incorporate these reminiscences . . . into this book but my focus of interest changed and this became impossible. Reluctant to let . . . the letters slip through my fingers, I intend to incorporate them in a subsequent work." The present book is apparently that subsequent work.

Unfortunately these reminiscences needed to be presented through the researcher's eye; left to speak for themselves they become repetitious and wearisome. Here and there this very repetitiousness is telling: the patriotic urge (inculcated in them by the home, and the schools which they attended prior to 1914), the effect that their mates' action had on them, the presumed response of their girl friends, the lure of 6/- a day, which was not inconsiderable, all these things come through very clearly. But, after all, most of these men are now about 80 years of age and their motives tend to blur. Here Dr. Robson's skill as an interpreter would have been inestimable. This is a noble attempt to reproduce exactly a body of evidence; but it needs the historian's touch.

floating fund

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