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DAVID POTTS

Alternative Australia

New wheels or re-treads?

David Pott's acquaintance with alternative life-styles started when he attended that remarkable experimental school Koornong, at Warrandyte, Victoria, in the years from 1942 to 1946. Since then he has been a journalist, teacher and industrial training officer, and is now senior lecturer in History at La Trobe University. He has published Australia since the Camera: the Twenties. *Here he discusses Peter Cock's recent book,* Alternative Australia: Communities for the Future? *(Quartet Books, $19.95).*

Peter Cock and I have been shadowing each other for years in the alternative game. I was already living communally before I went to the United States at the end of 1969. In California I visited a number of urban and rural communes, and came back fired enough to be drawn into giving talks on the subject wherever I was invited. In 1970 I joined what became Round the Bend Conservation Cooperative and the next year, invited to talk at Camp Eureka, I found myself sharing a platform with Peter. We have shared a lot since. Meanwhile, I have remained living in urban communes and spent several months, while on sabbatical leave, in communes in New York and London. Peter, for his part, having had a go at an urban one-roof collective in Melbourne, has now retreated (or advanced? — it's not quite clear from his discussion) to less intensive alternate living, that is, to cluster housing on collectively owned land at Healesville. Both of us have continued to work at universities; he in sociology and I in history.

What Peter primarily discusses in *Alternative Australia* are the alternatives to the nuclear family, to husband and wife and their children living together alone under one roof, particularly in suburbia. He sees a "movement" away from this nuclear style and towards living in communes, and he describes a commune (perhaps too broadly?) as "where people have chosen to live closely with, care for and share with each other". Generally this means several adults, and sometimes children, living under one roof and consciously organizing a new lifestyle to meet their needs; Peter also includes cluster housing experiments on commonly owned land. This movement, he argues, began about 1968 with student political activists living together, and it rapidly gained momentum from 1970 onwards aided by conferences, information systems, magazines and so on, all of which encouraged and fed on such experiments. The experiments include what he describes as political collectives, student houses, self-exploration communes, communal groups of families, feminist, gay, religious and social work communes, theatre or artist collectives, income-sharing groups, semi-rural communes, rural survival communities, bourgeois urban and rural communities, and so on; in a word, almost anything that is consciously not nuclear.

There are in Australia, Peter estimates, about 600 communities, and "overall those who were, are, or sought to be involved in alternative living efforts comprised at least 100,000 people", with less than half that number still directly participating. In his research for his book he visited more than fifty communities and twenty-five other groups, gathered information from another thirty, and issued a questionnaire on communal living to a hundred individuals.

The bulk of the *Alternate Australia* comprises descriptive accounts of the wide range of communities on which Peter gathered information.

He describes experiments from all states, mostly in terms of aspirations and ideals and specific planning on the acquisition of property and daily organization (for many communes this is as far as they ever got); but he also goes into ongoing experiences and problems. For the general run of people going into communes the ideals have been mainly about better human relations, and the practical considerations include economies and the sharing of potentially tedious chores, from cooking and cleaning to minding children. The realities include a lot of hassles or problems about who is pulling their weight and who is not, rules (about noise, animals, attendance and so on), personality relationships, sexual relationships (generally painful retreats from openness back to monogamy), quests for common purpose, collective and private property, boredom, childraising and, in some ways above all (because it affects chances of working anything out) comings and goings — basic turnover.

To me the undigested details of these experiences are the most rewarding part of the book. Peter is not a very evocative writer, his style smacks a little of the duller aspects of his sociological skills, but the sheer energy of varied communal experiments shines through. There are, for instance, many quotes from alternative seekers themselves. By and large, then, the reader gains a pretty vibrant clutter of valuable information. If it does not all amount to a movement, it certainly amounts to a fascinating cultural tendency for a vigorous minority.

Through his survey Peter valuably manages to offer an estimation of the durability of communes. He concludes that two-thirds last less than one year. Very few get beyond two or three years. Moreover turnover within communes means, of course, that continuity of relations is even less stable than the site or name of the commune itself.

Though the survey approach has rewards in presenting the reader with a sense of breadth and common trends, it also creates problems of repetitiveness and superficiality. On the latter it was disappointing to me to see Commune 33, to which I belonged over three years and which was right on Peter's doorsteps, reduced to a seven-line commentary, and only on its initial aspirations. Most communities surveyed for this book will find they are similarly treated. But given the scope, it is inevitable. Peter is best, I think, where he allows himself more room on particular experiments, especially beyond the plans and into the ongoing experiences. Two sections that stand out are one on Finn Village, a cluster-housing experiment in a rural valley in N.S.W., and Peter's own urban commune, Moorabee, in Melbourne. Both, by the way, have since failed. His only other detailed account is of his cluster-housing project at Healesville, which is still going, but here I find there is too much on plans and ideals rather than daily realities, and Peter is too much a propagandist for the project to assess it adequately.

Within the book's sweeps and plunges there are a few themes which I think needed more detailed attention. One is childraising. It seems to me if communes are to be more than half-way houses between home and suburbia, or places for specialist groups, or recuperation pads for divorcees, then they must embrace what seems to be indisputably the mainstream of people's living preferences and aspirations, namely monogomous sexual partnering and childraising. The commune, to entice the main population and to flourish over a long time, needs not to deny the traditional family but to enhance it. All the extra value of communal living can be built on this base.

Peter shows that nearly all communes, often after a stage of promiscuity, stabilize (if at all) around sexual partnerships, and single people will mostly leave as soon as they find an outside mate. But while Peter gives a fair amount of attention to problems of coupling, the longer-term ones of childraising receive very little attention. I think his most sustained passage on this issue is four lines. Indeed, very few communes comprise established couples and children, and of three he describes all quickly disintegrated. In his own commune there were five couples and one child, and when a second child was born some members complained that the group had become too child-oriented and half the adults left soon after. Peter never discusses why he and Sandra themselves later decided to quit the commune (which brought about its downfall) but as I recall, from private conversations with him, childraising problems had more to do with it than he writes about in the book.

In Commune 33, to which I belonged, we had initially eight adults and five children. From this experience I could readily see the great advantages of collective childraising, such as the ease of baby-sitting or the ready pleasure with which single adults played with children. But there were other unexpected problems. One was exploitation by parents of childless adults, especially the refusal by some parents, rather than non-parents, to allow new single parents into the commune,

which suggests that despite their rhetoric of sharing they only wanted help with their own children but not responsibility for the children of others. Another was neglect of children where adults were fascinated by each others' company. And another was problems about growing intimacy between children and non-parents, leading to resentments by parents, and later hurt to non-parents as parents with their children withdrew. I wonder if other communes with children had problems of the same type, and what longterm solutions are possible.

I would also like to see more by Peter evoking the advantages of communal living. He clearly lists a number of advantages from time to time, such as about economy, company, and sharing responsibilities and skills, but these are dealt with very generally and become a little stereotyped. Only in two half-page passages does he try to *recreate* a sense of the richness, and never the fun (to me the book lacks a sense of humor), of the day-by-day life of any particular group of several adults and children successfully living together. This needs to be done sensitively and in detail, with space Peter never allows himself, if a reader is to gain a feel for the potential of communal living, beyond a set of abstract arguments. It will not, I think, be necessarily persuasive, because it can never easily be weighed against successful nuclear-family life, but it may help readers to understand what others see in communes, and, whatever the problems and collapses, why communards so often try again.

Outside the descriptive aspects of Peter's book lie his various explanations for the emergence and nature of the alternative movement. His first type of explanation relates to social changes that encouraged people to seek alternatives. He sees the main underpinning cause as the Corporate State, and the catalyst as the Vietnam war. The Corporate State, he argues, is characterised by a power elite, material greed and bureaucracy, and it demands "that the individual be competitive, ambitious, superficial and conformist", living in "small social consumer units" (suburbia), engaging in "meaningless labor" and the "consumption of unnecessary, obsolescing items". All this is at the cost of "fraternity", and presumably "pleasure" (see Peter's comparisons with other Utopian movements), and because of it the existing order in Australia by the 1960s became in some sense "impossible". Under these conditions for many young people, especially students, the Vietnam war was a spark to action. It symbolised the ills of Australian society and led to the "creation of the New Left". And it concurrently led in 1968 to the "first" urban communes (namely of student activists) which were attempts to form a "microcosm" of what a new society would be like. Peter also sees some influence from young middle-class people who had travelled overseas and forged or been in contact with cheap-living collective lifestyles, but he gives this little emphasis.

For my part I find Peter's "firsts" to be rather too late on the scene to be either firsts at all or useful as explanations. My idea of the New Left begins sometime after 1956 and around 1960 with responses to the Algerian war, and links up with such events as the Berkeley Free Speech Movement in 1964. It also links, in a broad cultural sense with the Beatles, Dillon, the mini-skirt and the flower people. All of these pre-date the Vietnam war. On the other hand the Corporate State as Peter describes it (emphasising power, bureaucracy, materialism, work alienation and suburban isolation) seems to me to have been around too long to adequately explain, in itself, sudden changes in the 1960s. I do not believe the Corporate State *in these terms* suddenly made life less *possible* at that time. (And if life were impossible it is troubling, for explanation purposes, that Peter's alternative movement embraces less than one per cent of the population.)

I prefer to stress two main changes since the second world war (and to see the Vietnam war as only giving a peculiar character to some of a wide range of experiments in lifestyles that would have occurred anyhow, and which still go on since it ended). These two changes are the general growth in affluence of the community and the huge expansion in tertiary education. The affluence inspired a general culture of pleasure-seeking and carried its possibilities down to a younger generation (spurred on by advertisers selling not only goods but a philosophy of indulgence). It was this philosophy which I think helped alienate young people from the power exerted by others, from power as a distant aspiration, and from such controls as regulated and monotonous work. The new economic (consumer) culture also included toleration of single people living together.

Next, the growth in tertiary education (backed by parent wealth and government grants) seems to me to have had four effects: it has kept students out of the workforce till late in their social development; it has lured them away from home, rich enough to be independent but too poor not to seek collective living arrangements (from colleges to student digs), delaying marriage and childrais-

ing; it has informed them of non-materialist philosophies and other alternative values and activities (particularly from the U.S.A. where the education explosion has been earlier and more extensive) — values that more adequately matched their already existing life styles; and finally it massed students together as a significant power group with established systems (and further potential) for political organization and communication.

It is for these reasons I think, more than from a war-oriented assessment of the Corporate State's failure (though it came to *include* that) that students were, as Peter clearly shows, the backbone of the new self-conscious, intercommunicating, and sometimes integrated alternative living experiments. From that I would agree the Vietnam war helped get things moving, particularly because of conscription in 1966, but I doubt it was crucial. Experiments had begun in a less conscious way earlier. In sum, the movement was not, I believe, in essence a reaction against the evils of the Corporate State and suburbia, but a seizure of new opportunities for young people, partly led by a mainstream culture of consumerism.

Peter's second set of explanations for the alternative movement is not about actual social change encouraging new ideas, but an attempt to define the new ideas themselves, as a system of beliefs on which alternative seekers can draw, that is a sort of enticement towards alternatives rather than what he saw as the spontaneous reaction against the State. This he discusses in a late chapter titled "The Philosophy of Alternatives". In it he takes most of his presentation of beliefs from Maslow, but also from a number of other social philosophers and psychologists such as Carl Rogers, Eric Fromm, Charles Hampden-Turner, and Ivan Illich. His general tone is consistently one of approval of these ideas. I do not respond to them so generously. I think what is presented as "the philosophy" is really a grab-bag of philosophies, and that they are more likely to generate confusion than clarity for anyone setting up a commune.

To start with, Peter accepts an assumption from Kanter that it is "possible to perfect man". And from his later attacks on Pavlov and Skinner I take it that he believes in free will and that people can perfect themselves. All this troubles me. It boggles my mind to even try to imagine what a perfect person would look like (or sound like, or taste like, or anything else), and even if I could imagine it I do not think anyone could get there (thank the Lord), and I believe any suggestion that they should try leads to a lot of wasted effort, pain and disillusionment.

The problems are highlighted when one looks at the startling assumptions about what perfection should be. Most, as offered by Peter, are uselessly vague, for instance that a person should become "authentic", "self-actualised" and "open", and discover his "inner identity", to be "healthy" and to "grow". I really cannot come at this true-self sort of philosophy, because it lacks practical definition (there is no way to know if you've got there or not) and it suggests a static inner truth and not that we are what we become — which is only good or bad to different degrees, according to the circumstances in which we operate. People drifting around communes trying to discover their inner selves can be a huge drain on everybody around them. Philosophies of perfection seem to feed too darkly on people already weakened by a range of life's adversities, and entice them to further turn in on themselves.

The next set of words that trouble me are those related to rampant individualism, encouraging people to do their "own thing" or be true to their "own trip", to be "autonomous" and to "exist freely" (to take a few at random from the chapter). Again, they seem to be too vague to be useful, and they are broadly in conflict with those other concepts to which communes aspire: caring, responsibility, cooperation, sharing, relating — even loving (others, not self). In this chapter Peter does not discuss any contradictions in these concepts. However, in his earlier descriptions of communes he notes problems that seem to stem from such contradictions. Many clashes occur between doers and bludgers, for instance between those who plead with help with dishwashing and those who back off with such language as "Hey, lay off man, I need space, I just want to do my own thing". It is a clash between the carers and the care-less, those trying to run a domestic cooperative unit and those floating on Cloud Nine and self-needs. The "own thing" philosophy heightens the clash and helps hasten the demise of many communes.

Further trouble for communes can be found in humanistic psychology. Peter illustrates this well in other chapters. He cites cases of communes starting off, or continuing, with encounter groups, in order to improve relationships, only to find that such activities increased tensions rather than reduced them. Mostly encounter-type meetings were gradually abandoned. This reflects some-

thing of our own experience at Commune 33. Pitching people in on "their anger" sometimes generated what was never there. Encounter theories need a lot more questioning and development. So do other forms of humanistic psychology. I have been increasingly struck by the culture-bound nature of many of their assertions of values (and I have done a lot of groups over the last ten years, here and abroad). Many of the American recipes for self-discovery and fulfilment seems to come from migrant Jewish traditions of obsession with the past (to know one's origins is to know the self — as if this were of practical use) and from migrant Italian traditions of flambuoyant expression of emotion (some sort of rejection of Anglo-Saxon reserve as "unhealthy"). More recently, though, Eastern philosophies have had an impact, and the hapless alternative seeker can wander, in the same "movement", in the same cluster of experimenters who push egoism and emotional expression, into groups preaching something like a denial of the ego, a rising above the emotions, and a search for cosmic harmony.

Crudely, I am saying that the alternative movement abounds with contradictions in philosophies. And I think any one of the philosophies listed above can make it harder to get on with others — the very basis of community. It disappoints me that Peter does nothing to sort this out. He even manages to praise as "positive and confident" a young person claiming to seek in community "peace and stimulation". These strike me as vague and contradictory. They also suggest a taking from communal life rather than a bringing to it. And they suggest too little awareness of the limitations and practical necessities of domestic life (communal or not). In the light of the vague idealism of the "alternative movement" it is no wonder to me, as Peter concludes in one of his more impressive moments, that "experience [he is always best when keeping close to experience] has shown that the 'movement' is over-optimistic about its own reality and its potential, and over-pessimistic about 'straight society' ". I go along with that. And I do not think Peter's chapter on philosophies helps reform the situation. The alternative movement as yet awaits ideological clarity and direction.

Finally, in many ways the alternative movement is not alternative at all. Much of its ideology is in direct line with that of seventeenth-century bourgeois society through to modern consumer capitalism. Bourgeois individualism and concepts of "rights" are not too different to "doing your own thing". And traditional concepts of democracy have had all sorts of impacts on commune organization. Above all, the cultural persuasion with the largest impact on "alternative" thinking is, I think, modern consumerism. The alternative seekers are not alone in rejecting an endless grind of hard-work, discipline, self-control, efficiency, and abstemiousness — nineteenth century production-oriented virtues. As mass production of consumer durables has grown so has a capitalist counter-culture grown. It is a movement away from work ethics to consumption ethics.

There will always be a tension between needs of the factory manager (for employees inspired to work hard on low wages) and the needs of the retailer (for people to have money and spend freely on domestic and leisure products). However, as productivity has increased and more people have joined service occupations, and as the church has faded out and as advertisers have developed their use of mass media, it is the consumer philosophy that has become more pervasive in capitalist society. And it is a philosophy not just of the importance of goods but generally of self-indulgence, pleasure-seeking, the importance of happiness and the use of leisure time and so on. Desire, too, is widely promoted, probably, as Jules Henry has argued, because it helps increase general appetite and through that the consumption of goods. Interestingly, on my count ninety per cent of commercial songs are about love, almost none about work or service.

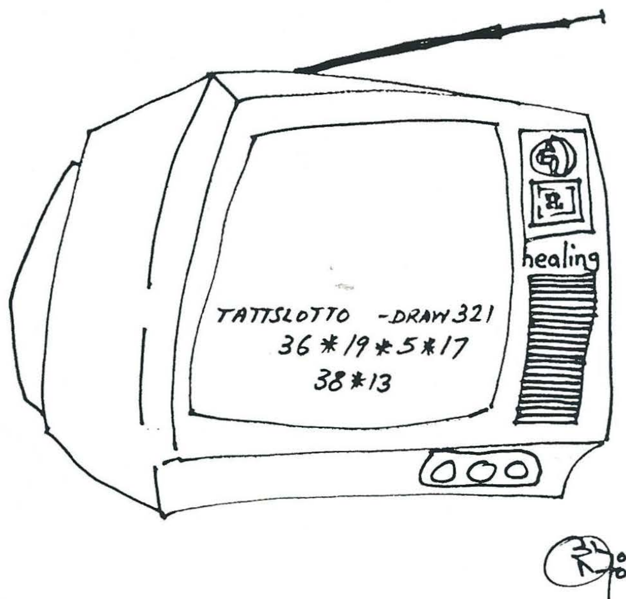
Now, to my mind the alternative-seekers do not escape all this. They may eschew the materialism of modern society, especially in buying goods, but they heavily stress the pursuit of love, pleasure, and a sort of heady consumption of experience that still reflects the mood of the wider culture. I don't know that the hippy promotion of love is all that different to the commercial one: both stress it as a noun, as a product, and it is bandied around as a great sensation to be consumed. Is there much difference between the leisure-joy promoted in Coca Cola advertisements of people on water slides and that in Jim Cairns' Down to Earth Confest, or at Woodstock, of people playing in the mud? Is the youth-beauty enticement of advertisements so very different to the 'beautiful' people of the counter-culture, where beauty is supposedly of personality but so commonly too a quest for physical perfection? Peter condemns an ideology where people are urged to buy swimming pools and cars for elusive goals of personal happiness, but I wonder if it is altogether much different in style to the calls to

join community, drop-out and achieve love, joy, and fulfilment. Something of the same self-indulgence and restless dissatisfaction marks it all. And something of the same disillusionment results.

I think for my own part communes will function best where they are seen less idealistically and more as a practical economic, domestic and fraternal arrangement — a sensible way of reducing overhead costs, of sharing cooking and cleaning, and a way of avoiding isolation and loneliness, where people can care for each other in many small practical ways and share a variety of experiences and friends. Seen more functionally, too, I think communards should not feel they have to love, or even like, everyone they live with, but that, as in a nuclear family, a whole lot of sensible balances can be made in order to get on with daily living necessities, and in order to protect and maintain and stabilize the group as a whole. That, to me, could be a sensible achievement in our society as it stands. And that would be for people not satisfied with nuclear family life, which certainly is not everyone. Suburbia has its advantages, as Hugh Stretton argues interestingly in his *Australian Cities*. The nuclear family is not a major source of the ills of our society, nor is communal living a panacea.

In that communal ideology reflects the wider culture, I suspect that the commune, like society at large, needs to reduce expectations of self-knowledge and perfection and the importance of human relationships. These things will look after themselves when a person or group has a sense of practical purpose, in a word, work to do. But meanwhile we are all embedded in the wider society's values and lifestyles that ignore work values and foster desire and dissatisfaction. Communes, even if they knew what they wanted, could not go it alone. A real alternative society, to me, would be one that denies, and deliberately represses, the twentieth-century consumer culture, one where new styles of importance are given to things like (my guess at the moment) harmony, community responsibility, and work. I think it needs to be done in two ways: one centrally (politically) through control of the economy in general and the mass media in particular, and the other, at the same time, from the grassroots up, through continued discussion and experimentation.

Much of my criticisms of Peter's book are around emphasis and degree. I greatly admire him as a social activist and I admire his book as a rich source of information and ideas for an important debate.



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A Rough measurement of the Yard

MURRAY BAIL

Ernest Templeton, whose Christian name is Rodney (Rod for short), was writing his thesis on the Australian Yard. The original measurement to which all subsequent yards belong, the Sovereign Yard, is preserved in a glass case mounted horizontally inside the grandstand of a North Queensland race-track. "Backyard" is an offshoot from the original; that's one example. Inside the case, parallel to The Yard, is a three-foot ruler. ("A yardstick?" — Templeton.) He wrote in his notebook: it shows The Yard is three feet or a yard long.

Templeton took out his tape-measure. Holding steady and double-checking he found The Yard ⅛" too long. He measured the ruler fixed alongside it. It too was ⅛" over. This suggested either his Sheffield steel measuring tape was inaccurate or — and this appears to be the *crux* of his thesis — the Australian Yard is longer than the standard European Yard. A shade but enough to be important. While Templeton scratched his neck, his paraphernalia scattered around him, the grandstand began filling up. A woman had her big foot on one of Templeton's notebooks. The first race was won by Yarborough, 9/1; the second by Noah's Ark, 7/1; the third by Scottish Ruler, 20/1; the fourth by Hydra, evens. Races five, six and seven were cancelled by rain. Within the hour the crafty country characters, those lunatic cockies, had gone. The owners were among the first with their fancy floats. The pie stall, the beer tent, the portable lavatories (the organisers were expecting a big turnout), the loudspeakers and loops of rubber wire, the steps and bags of the bookies were snapped, folded and loaded — all that human equipment — and driven away through the rain.

Templeton was bad at reading elementary signs. His nine-year marriage felt unstable for that very reason. He remained in the grandstand while it poured, having one more beer, another, forgetting himself, and actually witnessed the exodus in all its hurried detail, fool, and decided to have just one more before getting a taxi back to town; back to the Hotel Caledonia.

When he woke up it was dark.

In the distance a light flickered. It was heavily raining.

At dawn, the grandstand view took in the entire track and the long line of gums marking the river. The rain, more like tons of nails sliding down the tin, drowned out all other sounds.

Templeton woke up stiff and cold.

"Oh no, Jesus, stupid fool! No!"

Water, pale brown water, was up over the land. Under were the rails, the oval shape of the racecourse, and on the town-side the picturesque straight road which yesterday had cut through receding squares of farmlands. Water spread across overall and back past him, sideways, and behind. It bubbled around a white post directly in front. It was halfway up the judges' tower, making it ridiculously short. The stables were reduced to rectangular cavities barely a foot high, porcupined with branches and muck. Templeton could then feel the flood running heavy under the floorboards. He ran to the bottom — and drew back. It was into the grandstand, and rising.

Templeton couldn't concentrate on any one thing. He twisted his checks and felt his stubble. In the grandstand lay bottles and cans. His brief instinct was to count them; but he couldn't take his eyes off the flood, the expanse of it. Confusing traces — broken — isolated — suggested a former landscape. Blobs. Islands. But all far away, even by boat. Remembering the light in the night, he swung around: a silver roof (farm?) showed at about 30°. Nothing else. The strange

impression left by a flood: a land empty, yet full.

The sun came out through the rain, and in a vast sweeping motion lit the water from pale khaki to green-yellow, as if the flood was accepted by the other elements as something normal, possibly permanent, in this region.

Templeton looked around his . . . rectangular territory.

A grandstand interior, bleached pine, sloping down in steps. Paced across, it converted to an "exercise yard", ten yards long. It creaked and faintly shifted like a hulk. Five steps down to tons of water: a shoreline of silt was being deposited in steady waves. On the side wall The Yard lay in its display case, the lid fogged up with condensation.

Templeton put his toe out on the water. He immediately overbalanced and fell, one leg plunging in several feet. He sat back, shaking. It was as he had feared: five, possibly six, steps were under. Templeton had pale legs, was weak at sports, especially power activities. He couldn't swim.

It doesn't matter, he smiled. Rescue teams would already be out, organised by Rotary or the Australian Army, all very efficient, lifting widows, chooks and suitcases off the pyramid rooftops. This was one of those periodic floods of the region. Coming in he'd noticed the flood-markers like giant rulers stuck in the mud. Last year they probably had a drought.

He rubbed his hands and began work on the thesis.

> The yard consists of space [he wrote]. It existed before us. It was there, but part of general space. We isolated it; man made it matter. That's right. The Yard exists in thin air *and* as a solid. Within it now are smaller spaces, articulated notches numbering 3, in turn divided into 12, and so on. Top notch is at one end of the scale. The measure unit adopted by a community infiltrates its culture. France, for example, is very lucky to have the metre. It has been beneficial to their poetry.
> So far as the Australian Yard is concerned

No one knew he was there.

He'd told no one at the hotel.

Why should a boat appear? Why should it head for the grandstand? His only hope lay in one coming past from some other rescue; and what were the chances of that? Nothing had moved all day. The water had the monotonous shapelessness of an ocean. A trail of acid stained his stomach. Already the grandstand had a sickening familiarity. He would have screamed out at the emptiness if he wasn't afraid of the echo. He hadn't expected to stay another night. It could be days, weeks even, before the water went down.

Going through his assets he felt each item reach out into the real world.

Small color snap of his wife. Characteristically, Annie is squinting.

Seven dollars, forty-six cents.

His driver's license!

Two ballpoints — green.

White handkerchief. He waved it experimentally.

Then he blew his nose.

Steel tape measure, Made in Sheffield.

His watch (Swiss). It pointed to almost six o'clock.

His glasses. These were not "assets" but part of his body.

He removed his belt and tie.

The water slap-slapped beneath.

At least he wouldn't croak of thirst, his tongue the size of a boot. That was a point. Putting things into perspective — one of the great achievements of man — made him feel better. Food would be the problem. A man, can't he go forty days without eating, especially a religious man? Zeal in tracking down aspects of The Yard could be described as religious. His zeal in this respect was well-known. Remembering a pie crust on one of the steps, he went down and found two, one with sauce, and took them to his corner.

Small figure busying itself in the yawning box.

His shuffling sounds travelled across the water. He was arranging his shoes, his handkerchief and some race programs into a pillow. It had stopped raining. The moon reflected on the water.

And in the cities millions faced the TV screen, bodies glowing in the half-dark a collective electric-blue. 1.7 minutes were allocated to the flood, mainly aerial shots. Several hundred viewers let out a similar low whistle; a few old ducks made a clicking sound with their tongues. The town nearest to Templeton was under. Some men in boats waved. The cameraman then panned left to show the wash entering a clothing store. Templeton's wife caught only fragments. Annie was having a TV dinner with Harold Owens, the Lecturer in Logic, and was arched back, smiling, as he kept touching and kissing her throat between courses.

A dream included his own drowning: tiptoe on the top step, as water tickled his nostrils. He was

found (eyes bulging, screaming) by his wife. She'd mysteriously acquired a flying licence. Typical illogical sequence of a dream?

A magpie woke him. Its claws on the gable twisted under the vocal strain. Smaller, sweet birds repeated ornithological scales. What a din. Yesterday he hadn't noticed the birds, or many small details. The thick light of this humid region softened, the broad liquid grew into translucent bone. Now many dark birds skidded low, suddenly rose. For a minute he could forget his troubles; he was allowed. An intricate system unfolded, on time. The sun appeared, rim 15° left, staining the sky a deep orange, until Templeton had to squint. He went down to wash.

He counted back to the top: another step had gone.

Part of the next was already an inch or two under. The grandstand must be sloping slightly. The nausea returned. Twenty yards out the water was turbulent, swirling, coming from somewhere. He looked back at his corner. About six feet (two yards) remained. Add another five to his chin. He turned back to the water, the expanse. It couldn't all rise another eleven feet. He smiled: otherwise, half the state of Queensland would be under.

Dead matches and butts floated past among broken twigs and struggling insects, and there were Coke cans, balls of cellophane, bits of torn card and drowned bettles. Taking off his shirt and singlet he whiffed his armpits. He took off his glasses. Slowly he washed, rubbing his armpits. Sniffing them again he pulled a face.

Returning to his corner Templeton intended to eat a pie crust. He found red ants swarming over both. Some ran up his arm, others were stuck in the sauce. He ran down, rattled both crusts in the water. The sauce dissolved. Nibbling at the smallest crust he suddenly swallowed the lot.

He noticed other ants: long lines of them climbing the steps, like retreating refugees. If necessary they'd climb the walls, even to the gable of the roof. Spiders must have come out too, though he hadn't yet seen one. And lizards and snakes. Queensland has many snakes. They can swim. Birds were lucky, the most gifted.

Ten o'clock.

He'd been daydreaming about his wife, her name Annie, her "location" as wife, her way of talking lately and sneezing; and the strange yet familiar shape of Australia on the map surrounded by water. Other images: the number 8; the emptiness of Sydney on Sundays; Sydney Harbor — and what if it suddenly rose unaccountably, filling the houses? Things like that.

"Pull yourself together," he gritted his teeth.

"You're only alone. Take it easy." This hadn't happened since he was a child: talking aloud to himself. Embarassed he murmured, "Old chap . . ."

He decided to clean up the steps. In no time he had a pyramid of cans — all aluminium. These he put in his corner with about twenty race books. Cigarette stubs and dead matches were also common. He put them with the pile of betting slips. Screwed-up bags and paper he chucked away. Bottles were best. They were solid. He made a row, shoulder-to-shoulder, all brown bar a lemonade one. He realised then there was always a beer bottle in the water, released from some hidden source, some drifting far out, almost invisible, others closer in, resting on the step before floating on.

Holding a pair of programs together Templeton swept the steps. It took an hour or more.

With the place now clean and organised there seemed to be a better chance of rescue. A crow flew across, slowly crying.

Templeton squatted over the water with his trousers down. Lumpy crap fell out. The isolation seemed to purify his mind. Perhaps it was the hunger. Propositions shot off the enamel-like cortex to be mouthed. He waved the flies from his face. The anus of Western man is artificially raised on the porcelain pedestal by at least eighteen inches (half a yard). The consequences, he argued, could well be a subtle constipation, resulting in European bad-temper and *instinct for hoarding*. Nodding at the idea Templeton suddenly had to splash to prevent his crap coming back onto the step.

Along the back wall he'd found a crack. He could see an uprooted tree jammed against the stables, its roots facing him like a woman lifting her skirts. It would be full of snakes. More trees were on this side, more birds, and a low rounded hill — solid ground — at middle distance. To the right he noticed a roof, silver like the one in front. He could see what looked like a chimney. But its nearness was more or less cancelled by the angular restrictions imposed by the crack.

Templeton suddenly straightened. He ran down the steps.

Water had been close to The Yard all morning. To reach it now he had to lean out. Inside The Yard was dry — but red ants and termites were all over it. Templeton threw handfuls of water

into the box. It wasn't enough. Banging with his fist the whole thing suddenly parted from the wall, splashing him. It had been hanging by a thread. He barely managed to grab it. Those crawling ants were a nightmare to him: insects devouring essential measurements, the very basis of solidarity. With his handkerchief he wiped The Yard dry. Then to take his mind off he squatted and washed his shirt. The Yard was behind him, clean and dry, but he kept glancing at it.

He remembered something else. The flagpole: it was fixed there to the corner of the grandstand, its base deep in the water. He hop-hopped out of his trousers. His hands followed the rope down into the water; he had to duck his head several times to find the sailor's knot. Standing up he felt dizzy. But he had the rope. Fastening the shirt, he raised it like a flag.

His legs were vibrating. Probably the hunger. Yet he felt pleased with himself. Under the circumstances he thought he was doing well.

He tore a page from his notebook.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I say 'to whom it may concern' but clearly no one in this God forsaken country is concerned. Who cares? I found The Yard in a deplorable state. Its display case was infested with Compass Termites (*A. meridionalis*). The screws were loose.

History is a dirty word to you lot without history. Is that it?

Mugs! Thick necked, big eared cretins!

Dreary lot!

And you're not even happy.

Why worry about a length of wood?

Because this Yard is part of our Heritage. It's the measurement of our origins. Our beginnings. Idiots!

We have little else.

I propose to launch an immediate appeal ["launch" — Templeton glanced up at the water] to save our Yard. Send donations, loose change even, to R. Templeton, the Caledonia.

Incidentally — I write this from the grandstand of the racetrack. If anyone should be coming this way . . .

After changing "cretins" to "yahoos" he dropped it inside a bottle and rolled a program into a cork. He shoved the bottle out from the shallows. He watched through the hole at the back. The solitary bottle came into view, spinning. It was heading straight for the uprooted tree; Templeton twisted like a golfer. It touched near a nest of other bottles, hesitated, broke free.

"Yipee!"

And looking up he saw his shirt waving its arms. He had reason to be doubly pleased.

Before putting his trousers on he decided to save some more bottles. They were trapped against the side wall, and knee-deep he grabbed another few coming in. It gave pecular satisfaction adding to his collection. How many could he get tomorrow? Whole trees had drifted past earlier. He'd watched an old ghost gum take hours to pass. At intervals, mysterious fresh leaves and green twigs patterned the water. Along with the bottles these were the things which altered the expanse.

The Australian Yard. Found to be longer than the European model. It doesn't surprise me.

It may have suited England originally; I am not disputing that. A measure was arrived at proportional to their scale of things, and I have no doubt it proved useful, accurate, essential even over the years.

Distances out here however are of quite a different order. Yet their little yard was shipped out holus bolus. Result? A yard that is inadequate, almost ludicrous. It's puny here like man. In many quarters, ha ha, it's a laughing stock. Doesn't it almost disappear (physically, psychologically, literally) inside our 2.9 mill. square miles? Yes, it does. So it is gradually here there being "corrected."

Our athletes perform conspicuously well, athletic events, after all, being geared to distance. The sprinter, the pole vaulter and swimmers in attempting to exceed the puny foreign yard, cover an extended "true" distance in the same time. Hence our inordinate number of world records.

This attempt to overcome trivial distance explains the Australian obsession with watching horses racing.

More important is the Australian face. It strives to grow longer and over the years has succeeded. It has become our national characteristic.

We have big ears to hear greater distances. Noticed the big ears?

Templeton's wife sat up with the Lecturer of Logic in his waterbed watching "News at Nine". Little Sony on the chest of drawers. What appeared to be helicopter shots of a family of four on an iron roof. Suitcases and blankets by the chimney. The tall farmer had his flannel shirt buttoned to the neck. Rough estimate of damage. Several million dollars. Property. Fencing. 15,000 sheep. "Hey, that's good," the Lecturer elbowed Templeton's wife. Film showed a man rowing

across the main street to buy a newspaper showing a photo of him rowing across the main street. The man held up the paper and pretended to read. The Lecturer had his mouth open as he smiled along with the newsreader. Leaning on one elbow, Templeton's wife was more interested in the Lecturer's hair growing on his shoulder blades. It also swirled around his wrists. Owens was one of those men who wear their watches to bed. Her breasts were hanging down. The room, its furnishings, his interest in the News, suggested simple impermanence.

Early in the morning Templeton awoke with stomach pains. He drank some water and walked backwards and forwards. Birds were scratching on the tin; others were screeching on the water. He couldn't see them. All night mosquitoes had attacked his face. And so he had dreamt of Queensland snakes, Queensland spiders and lubra-lipped gropers. They were swirling all around him. On the boards he was forced to lie on his back and make vague swimming motions for protection.

Vagueness this morning . . .

Templeton should have known: keep movements down to a minimum. He was pacing again.

Along the wall were drawings and words. 'HEY, EWE!' and other stupid things.

AUSTRALIA HAS THE BEST
COWSHEDS

Someone had added BULLSHIT.

Who would have written that word? Young man? Templeton began to look annoyed. One who goes around deflating. Thick neck and tattoo: one of those rustics ready to jump on you? Probably.

There was a mist. It was cold. Removing his shirt he raised it on the pole. Templeton then stood to attention and saluted. "You're really stupid," he said aloud. "Really stupid. You always were. You don't know what's going on." He kept saluting. "Does it matter though? There's nobody watching." He put his coat over his shoulders, Italian-style. He searched the water, left to right, and at the back. He was no longer worried about the level, but he was still pleased to find it had risen barely an inch, if that. He took out the last crust. A crumb fell on his knee; he grabbed it. To consume time, Templeton used his tape to measure the crust: 2¾″ long. Close up it was remarkably coarse-grained. Amazing this blank-looking stuff provided energy. He tasted a piece. A flood of sensations occurred, vanished. He'd swallowed the lot.

The water changed several shades; crows blackened the judges' tower; shadows gradually altered or were removed, never static. Dark bottles drifted past, slowly now. The corner had trapped a few overnight, the bottles clinking like harbor boats, and among them a new item: plastic containers, mainly suntan lotions, shampoos and detergents. They came in a range of colors and shapes.

Several times he glanced at his shirt. It wasn't moving. He took off all his clothes, except his underpants.

Must have dozed off.

A flock of sheep approached from the left. Above them, crows kept flapping, trying to land. A staring ram kept rolling in the water. Already Templeton was in up to his waist and thinking about a knife and matches for a fire. He'd break a bottle for a knife; he had plenty of bottles.

"Here," he urged, "in here."

Templeton stopped. The nearest ram's mouth and greasy eye-sockets were alive with maggots. Templeton turned away. He almost pewked. And as the carcases drifted closer he blurted: "Curse this place. I hate you, God!" He was crying with rage. "Don't mean that," he mumbled. But he shouted again, "Bastard!"

Taking bottles he threw them at the rams which came in filling the grandstand with stench. Only by throwing them filled with water did he manage to drive the flock off.

He sat down, exhausted.

He saw a face reflected.

His jug ears; his glasses; his solemn eyes. Three days growth. A white cloud passed as if he was smoking. He looked life a serious farmboy with poor eyesight. Templeton was thirty-nine. He shook his head.

This was the longest he'd gone in the world without speaking to another soul. It was beginning to feel strange. Without words, his face felt less complete. The words which had been assigned to objects around him now seemed abstract. And as the words "Rodney Templeton" fell away he saw himself, as if for the first time, essentially a body with —

Seemed to have lost concentration. If only he had someone with him it wouldn't be so bad. Together they'd soon work something out. The hours here were like the water: flat, oppressive.

He scribbled messages.

SLOBS! MUGS! HURRY UP!

He calmed down.

WHATEVER HAPPENS TO ME [he wrote nobly] PRESERVE THE YARD. BUILD A STRONGER CASE — LABEL IT — CLEAN REGULARLY — INSPECT ANNUALLY BY A COMMITTEE. OUR VISION SHOULD BE CLEAR AT THE SOURCE.

HELP! GRANDSTAND!

LEAVING ME HERE, IS IT A TRICK BY HIM UPSTAIRS OR NEGLIGENCE ON MY PART? LISTEN! WE'RE ALL MUGS. AND YOU KNOW WHERE I AM.

ONE MIXED GRILL. FRUIT SALAD, COFFEE WITH TWO SUGARS. THOSE THIN SLICES OF WHITE BREAD FROM THE GLASS DISH WITH BUTTER.

PLEASE PHONE MY WIFE SYD. 36 4025 REVERSE CHARGES. ISN'T THERE A RESCUE SERVICE? WHAT'S THE MATTER? IN THE GRANDSTAND — HURRY.

The scenery blurred like a film slipping its sprockets: dark projectiles, the birds, were yanked up and across; the water broken into concentric circles; a deafening clubbing above coupled with a metalic whistling as if the sound was faulty (though Templeton never went to the movies). He waded into the water, slipping and splashing. His shirt violenty waved its arms. "Yes, down here. Here I am. Righto!" He laughed, nodded, encouraging. The shadow remained on the water as Templeton tried to get out from the hang of the roof. The water rose up to his chin. All they'd see would be the roof. "No, wait. Someone's here! Stop!" He was about to launch himself into the turbulance, and dog-paddle to be seen, when the shadow tilted, an edge entered the thudding.

Templeton waited for it to circle as a helicopter is supposed to do. He stayed up to his chin in water, but now he was muttering aloud as the old stillness returned. His shirt had gone limp on the pole.

Next minute he was accusing: "What have I done? Listen! You stupid, nasty. It's you! No, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Bring that pilot back or someone, that's all."

His entire body, its loose skin, trembled. He couldn't help it. He lifted his head. "Silent bastard, shit!"

Then he went still.

The helicopter, yes, had seen the shirt and realised someone was under the roof. That was it. It would be back at base now giving the alert. Templeton felt slightly better. On the other hand, his stomach pains reminded him he was growing weaker.

At this stage, Templeton's thesis remains interesting. In a hand which was definitely more languid, he wrote

> Everything is bigger in Australia. The sky is "bigger", therefore so is time. The Yard, a foreign import, is too small for Australia. To get back a second to time, what is it? [Templeton glanced: half past four.] It is a measurement of air-distance. It is intimately related to (as all things are) The Yard.
>
> We talk about a "long" time. A clock with its 12 numerals is like a foot rolled into a circle.
>
> In this country there is greater emptiness. Too much emptiness. Timelessness.

He stood up. A group of colored mattresses had caught his eye, about ten in all; bright colors. Some had the suntan bottle, women's magazines and cigarette packets.

Rubber mattresses.

By lying spread-eagled he could get away paddling from one post to the next. He could reach the town. If there was no puncture. But the closest was twenty yards away, and as he watched it entered the rapids by the judges' tower, half spun, and others bounced into it, catapulting the plastic bottles, the hand-lotions and a pair of Hong Kong sandals — "thongs". All got through except one patterned in sunflowers. It met the judges' tower, damming the water, and Templeton noticed a sheep's carcase caught too, half eaten by the crows.

Here was a classic example of opportunity passing him by, so vivid he could measure it. It was as though he had been placed and forced to watch (from a grandstand) as avenues of escape or hopes were passed before him, to test or to torment him for someone's amusement. The beer bottles had arrived again. As he counted them out of habit the mattress punctured and collapsed. Tilting his head Templeton laughed. It's all a game. It can't last.

If he'd done all he could there was nothing more he could do. It was a matter of waiting. No hysterics, no more abuse.

He could even come out of this wiser. There is a theory, vaguely but widely-held, that to suffer must reveal certain fundamental truths. Already he felt he was getting close to them, insofar as The Yard was concerned.

Templeton here experienced a touch of happi-

ness. It was a renewed interest in himself and the things around him. He even thought for a second his situation was pleasantly absurd — melodramatic. He was on a stage. Hauling down his shirt he felt a sort of tragic grandeur. Many eyes were on him. He imagined them. People felt sorry for him, terrible sorry for him. For a long time he sat holding his knees in the corner and began to feel sorry for himself again.

"He's quiet and nice. Don't be a pig."

"Haw."

"He's misunderstood, I, for one. I am the first to admit."

"Boo-who."

"You know he gets absorbed. He's a dear."

"Christ, what next. You said just before he was a drip."

"I'm too young."

"Hasn't old Rod-lad been hitting the bottle lately?"

"You can bloody talk!"

"What's biting you? What's the matter?"

"He wouldn't hurt a flea."

"Protestant guilt!" Owens lectured. He had problems of his own. "At least stay," he begged, "and see the late film. I'll get you a nice drinky-wink."

Templeton was down to his underpants again. He was busy scraping one of the cans to make it reflect. There was nothing else to do. It took a good hour to get a mirror effect. When he tried it a faint silver fish slid on the water. He put it on a ledge easy to grab; not in his trousers.

Until about eleven, the grandstand caught the heat like a sunbather's open mouth. Already it was all he could do to stop day-dreaming, a form of drifting, distinctly worse than yesterday. He had lost count of the days. He sat with his back against the wall.

Facing him were the crows, more than a dozen judging him. A movement at the bottom caught his eye: wedgetail eagle driving its beak into the sheep. Its sharp flapping seemed incongruous in the hum of the hot morning. Distant left there the line of delicate pins in the water, telegraph poles, marked the road to the town. Hum and faint water-rustle of the hot morning.

MAN MISSING FROM THE CALEDONIA IS ME. THE GRANDSTAND.

He scribbled messages for all his bottles.

STUCK HERE FOUR DAYS WITHOUT A BITE. THIS IS THE GRANDSTAND. WHAT ROOF COLOUR? RED FROM MEMORY, BUT PERHAPS IT'S GREEN.
R. TEMPLETON
* HOY! A WHITE FLAG IS FLYING.

Others were incoherent, written hastily, but he threw the bottles out anyway. He felt a bit dizzy. He noticed his watch had stopped. He hadn't wound it. Seagulls flew past.

With the pen still in his hand he picked up the thesis.

> From memory [he wrote] the word in the English language after Yard is Yardage, is Yard-arm . . . is Yard-land, Yard man, Yard measure, Yardstick.
>
> Scrub them. The word after is Yare. *Of a ship; Responsive to the helm. Quickly, promptly, esp. in nautical use.*
>
> This is all from memory, but here I am. This stinking water mess. Dunny water. Brown, brown. It feels like a ship.

For the rest of the morning he stayed in the corner, going down only once to piss. And looking down he thought: how about 'eating' his piss? A re-cycling, filtering of rejected vitamins. He decided against.

Exploring possibilities: sifting through the past. Regrets.

His head kept falling forward, then'd yank up at the slightest movement: a bird, a shadow sharpening or a fly could do it. For he had worked out that with each hour the chances of rescue, oddly enough, improved.

Wife. Pictures of her. You know, he'd hardly thought about her . . . something wrong with him? His excuses were hurried, as if to her. Her thin lips. He saw she was harsh one minute, gentle the next. To her, he pretended to absorb these moods equally, casually; perhaps that was wrong. He tried to understand but his ideas on the subject were limited. It was a puzzle. Yet he felt some sympathy; when he got back he'd tell her. He'd do things differently. He'd been strengthened!

Templeton was up on his feet.

Music? Then again: distinctly louder now. Everything came from the left. He turned.

"Ha ha. Lord!"

The car and caravan approached slowly like a marriage. The car had its driver's window down. The radio and the headlights were on.

He said aloud, "Swan Lake?" He added. "It would have to be, wouldn't it?"

The music stopped for a race-call. The nasal

voice seemed to speed around the water-logged course, hysterical at the end — the first voice he had heard in four days. He made a mental note: an Australian has to shout faster than an English race-caller in order to cover the 'same' distance. The hysteria towards the end is due to this and other factors.

Pale blue and glittering, the car came close to the grandstand. Its bonnet and windscreen were splattered with mud, bits of bark, but along the back window he could see a tennis racket and two yellow cushions. For a second, Templeton thought they would both crash into his position — this was an old wooden grandstand — but the car swung the caravan, almost sharply, towards the judges' tower. By then Templeton wished they had hit. Caravans have cupboards stacked full of food; those little plywood cupboards. It had all passed a few yards away. As he watched open-mouthed the car shuddered, the caravan slowly swung to about 45°.

"Yes," he cried, "stay there. That's it."

Templeton stood at the bottom step. The current built up and rattled against the caravan. If he dog-paddled and missed he'd be carried away.

A red flash ran down the side, broken by the door. The two small windows were decorated with frilly curtains. The immediate scenery was now largely man-made. A branch stripped of leaves touched the car, was levered up by invisible forces, and for a long time groped at the open window like an arm, which eventually tires, before falling down.

He didn't take his eyes off the caravan in case it began moving. He kept estimating the distance. A bottle he threw fell short. On the first day he could have perhaps dog-paddled, touching the caravan just in time, though even that was doubtful. He imagined the struggle. He could feel the current twisting his legs.

A woman's voice came across, clearly enunciating, without emotion, the closing stock market prices. Half-listening, Templeton stared at The Yard beside him. The glass lid was open. He stood up, almost immediately fell, and went to the flagpole; but he changed his mind. He went to his corner and found his belt and tie. The woman's voice still came across the water. Once he returned to The Yard he began working quickly.

He tied the lid to the case tightly. Pages from programs were then stuffed into the gap, sealing it. Three beer bottles were strapped at each end. These he plugged with paper. He was engrossed and puffing so much he didn't hear the radio.

It was an ungainly-looking thing but it floated. After adjustments to the bottles it took terrific pressure to submerge. By then it was almost dark. Standing in up to his knees — the caravan's oblong blocking the sky — he decided to wait till morning. He'd be able to see then, and the current should be weaker.

"I've been thinking about our friend today," said Owens removing his coat.

Already she found him irritating.

"Who?" she asked, matter-of-fact.

"You know. The one-and-only."

"This is what I reckon then." He was breathing heavily. "The man, the poor bugger, is wet. He's too boring by half. No *panache*. He's in another world. You're bored. He slaves away, head down, minding his own business. He doesn't make you nervous. Of course he doesn't. The word is beaver, or non-entity."

"Is that what you decided?"

"Our boy is too factual. Too factual for the times, too factual for this country and you. I've known him longer than you."

The way he came in hairy and straight to the point: at least he wouldn't do that.

"I'm the base to which he is compared. But he's right out of step. Fish out of water."

Owen scratched his chest.

"I'm not knocking him," he went on, his hand inside her blouse, "but he's staggering along miles behind. You just about need binoculars. And I don't think he's aware of it."

"Stop it. I'm leaving. What's today?" He usually phoned. "I said stop it. I'm going." She shook herself free.

It burst under him and shot through his crotch and over, splashing his hair, breaking into his mouth. He fell below the surface but held on, chin up. His body became long, too long, the legs pulling him down. The bottles rattled on either side. His feet kicked into air and water. That was better. It was still dark. This, the only way out. Still dark, but lighter than the night before. Growing lighter, increasingly now. The caravan was very near. The red flash was blurred. Too late to take off his glasses. How many yards?

He paused, his legs hanging down.

He was gasping.

Coldness suddenly stroked his legs. He felt himself moving. He glanced up. The water here was bumpy and he found himself being taken without doing anything.

The door was almost within arm's reach.

Yet it took him several seconds to realise: although he was moving, the distance to the door remained constant. It seemed to widen. Then part of the judges' tower appeared on the left. "No!"

Paddling, he tried to touch the caravan; but the car had taken it another yard.

"Stop . . ."

Now he was turning like a bottle. He glanced back at the grandstand, from a distance so quaint and safe. His only hope was to steer across and arrive back in an arc. He was swallowing water. The stables might serve as safety-net.

On his left the car knocked down a rotten telegraph pole and wires; he was too busy trying to stay afloat. A bottle slipped through its bandage. It loosened the others; the glass box sank on that side. It began filling with water.

The corner recently painted white stood a yard away. He thought he'd miss, sliding past. As he twisted his glasses fell; clutching at them, the box plunged on one side; other bottles slipped out; his glasses splashed somewhere. He was under. So many of his failures rushed to mind, a circuit of his family and wife, his Annie squinting, struggles amid blinding light, then shade.

Templeton stared at wood grain. He had his back to the judges' tower. It was deserted. The crows sat on the grandstand gutter now.

That was the scratching.

Unable to move, his mind drifted over events. This was like dying. A limbo of emptiness, the inability to complete an image. He had difficulty keeping his eyes open . . .

Careless despair. The boards were solid at least.

"Ahhhh . . ."

He followed some ants along the wood.

"The Yard," he heard his voice, "is home and dry." His mind however didn't quite match the words.

"I'm a lucky man. Am I? I don't know."

With the future so imprecise he stuck to his thesis. As usual, that was clear.

"The Yard. There it is. By comparison, we flap around. I do."

A white paste fouled his tongue. Now he could mumble freely, his eyes bulging near the weathered wood.

"We wait longer here. Always waiting. Where are they? Water-skiing? I'm here waiting."

He lay silent for a while.

"Even time is 'longer' here. Add that to the list. A 'long' time. Hurry up. And isn't this temperature too high? . . . Another excessive longitudinal measurement."

His voice trailed. He remembered far back.

A 'long' summer, of 'high' temperature. We shouldn't be here . . . in this place."

"Ohhh."

"Shudup."

He measured his sounds. He opened both eyes. Raising himself on his elbow he dictated rapidly.

Simultaneously then the hum of the heat and the racket of the birds grew louder. Everything seemed to be competing.

"To sum up . . . in short. Why have our voices become nasal here? It is connected to The Yard . . . everything is bigger here. The sky, the air, the water. Bigger. European air is dense. It blurs. In this clear country . . . this place . . . we have evolved the nasal accent to prevent our voices carrying too far. Yes. Natural-selection governor. Everything is louder in Australia, like America. I see it now. Some things have become clearer. It fits. Voice patterns connected to The Yard . . . of course. Voice patterns —"

"Ahoy!"

Templeton stopped.

"What?" he spoke to himself.

Without his glasses the world beyond arm's length was all mirage. Yet alongside the judges' tower . . . a white boat low in the water, black with heads, vibrating like insects, and what appeared to be a makeshift yard-arm.

He jumped up.

"Yes! Here!"

"What's that?"

"Help!" cried Templeton, waving his arms.

"You allright?"

Templeton waved his arms.

A man stood up in the boat.

"We got a sick lady here, and kiddies. Hang on, OK? We'll be back in an hour or two. OK?'

Templeton nodded.

They probably wouldn't see that.

Alright then, he croaked. And because the other man kept saying it, added, "OK."

"Hey, and put some strides on."

"You lost your shirt?" someone else laughed.

"But listen —" Templeton realised.

Wasn't there room? They must know how he felt. This seemed the wrong way — madness again. Already the boat had begun veering away.

Relief however lifted him; and looking down at himself naked he imagined how he looked, a

pale uncertain figure to them. Already he saw himself as A Rescued Man. The steps and the wooden walls had altered to the plain appearance of scenery no longer needed.

The trap had been broken, the thesis completed. The knowledge of both lifted him to the corner steps.

The outboard engine rose, a distant whine.

Already the past began falling apart. Did it ever exist?

In the corner he reached down for his trousers, and the snake, a yard long, thin and wet, stretched, striking twice, before clinging to his wrist. Templeton jumped on it, slipping sideways. A scream shot out. Thousands of ants too sheltered on the boards. He shivered and scratched. "Stop!" he turned to the boat. "A snake, it's bitten!"

The wash of the boat hit the step like Pacific surf.

The blood thundered. He reddened and sweated. His hands were no use.

He tried to hold on. A wave of brown, pale blue, then the transluscent swarming corpuscles from behind the eyelids; cartwheeling. This body, his shape, somehow separated, rolled in the air. Yet he saw during a slow spin, sparks and darkness, grand architectures, the secret proportions. He heard himself talking. He was obsessional, always was. He hit his head. He understood too late. Sliding! Even this new knowledge fell apart. No one was listening. It came to him alone. Spiders, ants, flies and maggots scratched at his eyelids, his teeth and calves. The black hoods of crows covered Templeton, feet in his eyes.

Meanjin

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GRAEME TURNER

Travel Books in Disguise

The Australian film and the Australian novel

Graeme Turner teaches in the Department of English, Western Australian Institute of Technology.

I

The recent National Film Theatre season of early Australian films touring the major cities directs attention to the lively tradition of film upon which is built the contemporary development of the medium in Australia. These films disclose, among other things, how similar they are in form and material to our current productions — despite differentials of sophistication and technique. "On Our Selection", for example, is low-key and episodic, a sympathetic human saga, in much the way that two films as disparate as "Caddie" and "Between Wars" are. The lines of a continuing tradition are certainly apparent in film, although these lines have not been able to develop as steadily as they have in fiction and poetry; yet this is a perspective rarely offered us by local film criticism. This is disturbing, since the critic's neglect of the traditional context of the material criticised makes possible the often misleading view we customarily receive of the development of the Australian film; further, this view inhibits movements towards the further artistic development of our film.

If the current directions in discussion of contemporary film in this country are to be accepted, it seems that the mainstream of serious Australian cinema has acquired an identifiable profile of formal characteristics. On the simplest level, there is a dominant visual interest in setting and atmosphere, a minimal use of studio and a maximum use of location shooting, and an almost definitive mode of documentary realism. Interestingly, there is often a disjunction between the objective realism of the script and the lyricism of the visual effects — for example, the loving touch of the camera in "Caddie" while dealing with Sydney's more depressed inner suburbs, and the mythologising visual treatment of the shearing sheds in "Sunday Too Far Away". The structure of many of our most prestigious films — "Caddie", "Picnic at Hanging Rock", "The Getting of Wisdom", "Sunday Too Far Away" and "Newsfront" — is not tightly plotted, but episodic; or, at most, it is loosely organised into a saga-like form. In "Sunday Too Far Away", the inclusion of the gun shearer's private distress, displayed unknowingly before the boss's daughter (herself an inconsequential character) is exemplary of the use of scenes which are not indispensable parts of an organic whole. The film, instead of progressively sharpening its focus on its 'main' character, develops a documentary approach, finally withdrawing its commitment from the gun shearer and announcing, in the end titles, the film's real subject — the shearer's strike. This being its subject, there are many scenes in "Sunday" that do not belong there organically; that is, they are not indispensable parts of an ongoing narrative direction. One result of this characteristic minimising of narrative imperatives has been that our films tend to be low-key, eschewing excursion into high drama, and disclosing a distinct antagonism to style, in anything other than the purely visual sense.[1] There is a preference for period settings, and a marked sympathy for elements of the picaresque in the film-maker's affection for building films around 'characters', figures who are simply presented as being colorful, rather than specifically meaningful, examples of human life.

Both film-makers and critics express concern over the comprehensiveness or, less flatteringly, repetitiveness of these characteristics of the Australian cinema. This concern focuses on the limita-

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ROBIN BOOKS

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ROBIN BOOKS, P.O. BOX 355, WYNYARD, TASMANIA 7325

tions of the dominance of documentary realism as a mode, and the loosely structured nature of our films' narratives. There is sufficient controversy over the formal characteristics and interests of the Australian cinema to provoke occasional explanations and justifications from film-makers. Tim Burstall has made the point that the dominance of visuals, setting and atmosphere in the modern Australian film is related to the professional background of the film-makers and cameramen, many of whom come from TV and advertising careers. Further, the documentary experience of so many film personnel who were trained in television is repeatedly invoked to explain the widespread influence of documentary realism in modern film. In addition, we are told that the world-wide fashion for less resolved, more open-ended movies is influencing local film-makers and reducing the importance of an organic and tightly plotted narrative design in their productions.

Such contradictory images of the industry, on the one hand limited by its parochialism and lack of experience, and on the other hand influenced by a highly professional internationalism, would lead one to be wary of accepting these explanations as a sufficient account of the contemporary Australian film and its tradition. We would not be satisfied with an approach to the development of, say, the Australian novel that was content with such a limited enquiry. But it is symptomatic of the problems caused by the dual allegiance of the modern film — allegiance to the worlds of entertainment and of art — that the development of an important expression of our culture has been the subject of such inadequate and misleading assessment.

Our precociously maturing film industry is seen to be at the stage of development that the novel reached in the fifties, with the novels of White, Porter and Stow. All comments on our film industry, asserting claims for international recognition, claim this. Yet, when one compares the development of film and of fiction in Australia, one not only realises that there are wide areas of similarity and cross-fertilisation, but one also recognises that there are important differences.[2] The effect of the long hiatus in the history of our film, the period from the 1940s to the 1960s when foreign domination of production and distribution all but eliminated the local industry, has been to 'freeze' the development of film during the period. The N.F.T. films do reveal that the lines of tradition were not broken but, unlike fiction, film has been denied the opportunity to mature steadily and continuously. The implications of this divergence in the histories of film and fiction suggest that film is at a more primitive stage of development as an Australian art form than either the film-makers or the critics would have us believe.

By this I do not mean that we are making worse films than we know, but that the kinds of activities our film-makers have been involved in may have been judged harshly, even churlishly, because film is expected to take on the responsibilities of an adult art form before it has passed through its adolescence. So, rather than having reached the stage the novel attained in the fifties, film is passing through the familiar pattern of the colonial or immigrant art form, as it grapples with its growth to a nationalist art form. In fact, the emphasis on documentation of Australian ways and customs suggests that the industry has yet to become confident of the very subject matter with which it deals.

II

Like most art forms in Australia, the novel begins with physical documentation of the environment, continues on to documentation of the society and atmosphere of the environment, and only thereafter moves towards acceptance of the reality behind such documents as the source of aesthetic possibilities. We are familiar with the orthodox history of Australia's literary beginnings, dealing with such problems as the absence of a local literary culture; the alien-ness and untransportable nature of the British literary heritage; and the difficulties involved in producing artists in a new community. Similarly, there is in Australia, even now, the lack of a mature "film culture" — although, as Jan Dawson pointed out in his article in Cinema Papers (April, 1977), this is not unique to Australia.[3] The influence of American film threatens the growth of local productions, and the character of the argument between film-makers, distributors and critics over the progress of the medium in Australia leads one to conclude we are watching the very beginnings of the art form, not its arrival at maturity.

One of the ways in which the early Australian novel responded to the lack of a literary culture was to imitate the productions of the country where one did exist. Like the novel and the poem, the film in Australia has understandably emulated foreign models: one thinks of the 'kangaroo western', "Raw Deal", and Michael Pate's "The Mango Tree". Film has also offered up Australian exotica in order to pander to foreign audiences'

notions of the Australian stereotype — a Chips Rafferty syndrome that characterised the most static period of film's development in the forties and fifties, and which recurs, only slighty modified, in the Barry McKenzie movies. Even Peter Weir's much acclaimed "The Last Wave" exploits the simple strangeness and blackness of the Australian Aboriginal face as a crude source of primitive threat. Of course, like the better early Australian novels and poems, the film has been successful in finding its own 'language', largely in its pictorial and often lyrical relationship to the landscape and physical setting. It has also built upon some of the discoveries of local fiction and drama by recognising and exploiting the resources of the Australian idiom for humor — although few of our successful films could be called comedies.

There are, however, more useful parallels between the development of the novel and of film which illuminate the level of maturity our film industry has reached; such parallels become clear if we look more closely at the beginnings of the novel. Frederick Sinnet, writing in 1856, complained that too many Australian novels were apt to be "travel books in disguise" ignoring the "larger purposes of fiction".[4] The justice of this complaint has been recognised. Both John Barnes and Geoffrey Serle have drawn on Sinnet's forthright comments while trying, in general accounts, to explain the dearth of worthwhile fiction in the nineteenth century. Barnes argues that nineteenth century novelists were "more interested in details of setting than in narrative, and were using the novel form as a vehicle for impressions and information about the colonies".[5] Chronicles and autobiographical romances begin our histories of fiction in Australia, and exploitation of local color, the exotic, the pictorially unusual and the strange, figures as a major activity of fiction writers throughout the nineteenth century. This was encouraged by the demands of the English market, a market of which the writers in Australia were keenly aware; but it also coincided with the writer's endeavors to paint an accurate and detailed picture of Australian life and customs. They were trying to discover the country not only for themselves, but also for their foreign readers.

This introduces an element of explanation and justification, and may also suggest why so many novels avoided the presentation of contemporary life while finding surer ground in the historical novel depicting the unequivocally colonial past. Geoffrey Serle has noticed how "backward looking" the novels were, "how little they reflected contemporary life, and how little of the Australian spirit or idealism they showed, how *The Bulletin* school was almost totally unanticipated".[6] It seems that the earnest desire accurately to portray Australian life combines with the colonial sense of inferiority to force the writer to objectify his material, to present document rather than art. It is not until *His Natural Life* that we have a novel which uses Australian material aesthetically, to present a study of evil and injustice rather than a reproduction of Australian life and customs.

With the progession from a colonial literature into a nationalist literature achieved, Australian novelists seem to apologise, implicitly, for considering life in Australia as a subject. Mrs Praed has one of her characters express the basis for this feeling: "I am always fancying that we Australians are like children playing at being grown-up. It is in Europe that people live." It is this sense that life does not "go on" in Australia that seems to be behind the use of document, the accent on setting, the rigorous attempts to present a 'true picture' of Australian life in the early Australian novel. The novelist had to prove that there **was** an existence in Australia before he could proceed to assume that it might be an existence that was interesting, meaningful, and a legitimate aesthetic resource. The argument about the legitimacy of Australian material in serious art was current in the nineteenth century; Sinnet offered a Shakespearian defence of the use of such material:

> We have here the "same organs, dimensions, sense" as the good folks in Europe. "If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you prick us, do we not bleed?" Human nature being the same, the true requisites of the novelist are to be found in one place as well as another.[7]

Once the nationalist impulse provided by the Bulletin pushes the novel past this stage, life is apparently presumed to exist in Australia and to be a fertile subject for art. But the next obstacle the novelist encounters is the organisation of his material. The popular form of the romance seemed unsuitable for adaptation to Australian experience, and this fact alone presented the novelist with the problem of devising an alternative plot and structure. Lawson, as Colin Roderick's article in Overland (66, 1977) suggests, found the organisational talents of the novelist

beyond his grasp, even when dealing with such promising material as the Joe Wilson stories.[8] Indeed, the problem still exists in some of our fiction, but the Australian novelist has partly resolved it by complicating and sophisticating the model of the saga.

Important equivalents of these features and problems of the early Australian novel are evident in the contemporary Australian cinema. The use of local color — the dominance of setting and visual detail, of exotic and strange events authentically presented as Australian — is a common element. Our films' accent on landscape, the country itself, has been justified by "Caddie's" producer, Tony Buckley, on the grounds that it satisfies the foreign appetite for something new to look at on the screen. This argument is only acceptable if the film's ambitions are purely commercial, and the high level of government subsidy to the film industry is intended to decrease the importance of such commercial imperatives. However worrying the artistic implications implicit in this marketing of Australia as an exotic cinematic fruit may be, such limitations are occasionally overcome by the earnestness with which authenticity is pursued by film-makers, even when this authenticity is pursued at the expense of more ambitious objectives. While this is true, however, the motive of explanation and justification we find in ninenteenth century fiction figures large in the intentions apparent in contemporary film; the desire to record and document the film-maker's impression that meaningful life does go on here permeates even the most confident of our films.

"Caddie", "The Picture Show Man", "The Getting of Wisdom", "Picnic at Hanging Rock", "Sunday Too Far Away", "Newsfront" and "Between Wars", to name some, all seem to be incorporating, as a major intention, the illumination and realistic portrayal of certain phases and aspects of Australian life. The hidden premise, as in the colonial novel, is the assertion that we have an existence here. "FJ Holden" for instance, does not strike me as a copy of, but a direct answer to "American Graffiti", stating that our youth culture has its own icons and myths; it does not, however, go as far as the American film in its penetration of those icons and myths. Such films are documentary slices of life, and they consistently subordinate interest in character to interest in social process, and interest in narrative to interest in observation. Often, the resulting weakness in plot structure is glossed over by the use of such crude techniques as location and date subtitles. In both "Caddie" and "Sunday" important narrative information is supplied by subtitles and end-titles — solutions, no doubt, to budget problems but primitive solutions nevertheless. Character is often used as a substitute for plot, but in such a way as to direct attention to the customs and mores of the society from which such a character might spring — much as it is by Lawson in many of his short stories. The aggressive nationalism that is generally such a positive sign in this developing medium becomes a limiting factor in films such as "Sunday Too Far Away", where the character is seen solely in terms of his social and ethical determinants. The way in which "Sunday" squanders the interest supplied by Jack Thompson's portrayal of the gun shearer in making him merely an example of his kind, is typical of the documentary mode's dissipating effect on drama and narrative in our feature films.

If the progression of film from a colonial to a nationalist art form, then, is not yet complete, we are still awaiting the next step — to a national art form; it is at this point where the medium can become more artistically self-conscious and confident, with an Australian-ness that is expressive, as well as observant, of our culture. This is not to denigrate the achievement of the considerable number of quality films produced during the last decade in this country, and by no means all our films fall into this, admittedly generalised, discussion. "Wake in Fright", for one, strikes me as a film that is aggressive and incisive in its treatment of Australian experience, and does make a significant contribution to our understanding of that experience. A short film made recently by Perth film-maker, Steve Jodrell, "The Buck's Party", approaches its subject with an anger and penetration that takes it beyond the documentary and brings it towards artistic statement. But I do suggest we may be doing Australian cinema disservice by treating the medium as if it has reached a watershed similar to that reached by the novel in the fifties. Film-makers' reluctance to exploit a wider variety of styles — the low level of the artistic self-consciousness mentioned earlier — in itself, marks the cinema's immaturity, and this immaturity must be recognised and understood if the medium is to be exposed to informed criticism. One need only look at the developments in the post-war novel — to do with a relaxation of reliance on social realism, the use of style as a definitive element, sophisticated structural strategies, and a more metaphysical conception

of character — to see that it is reasonable to accept that it will be some time before the Australian cinema can display equivalent characteristics.

The critic whose appraisal of contemporary film does not involve some sense of a developing tradition within the medium, as appraisals of the Australian novel consistently do, will be of limited usefulness to that medium. The need to accept that our "film culture" has generated just this kind of criticism is reinforced by the implications arising from Tim Burstall's article in the Bulletin (24 September, 1977). He claimed that the film culture in Australia, while still preoccupied with justifying itself, was exercising a retarding, inhibitory influence in much the way the nineteenth century literary culture did upon our novelists. Burstall blames the critics, generally, for creating a barrier of parochialism which limits the range of films attempted. Critics and other opinion-makers, he says, have insisted upon "Australian authenticity in its narrowest sense", and this has "encouraged certain sorts of film-making (documentary realism, lyrical naturalism)".[9] On the other hand, Burstall claims confusion is created because the most aggressively Australian films, such as the ocker comedies of David Williamson ("Stork", "Don's Party") have provoked ambivalent reactions from the critics.

The argument about what constitutes suitable subject matter for an Australian art form is a familiar one in our history, and discloses a cultural insecurity that is not the mark of a mature medium, or a mature culture, for that matter. An approach to criticism which draws on subjective fears about the kind of national 'image' we transmit through our art forms does get in the way, in my view, of a reasonable and legitimate assessment of the art form itself, and certainly reveals recognisable remnants of a colonial mentality. Perhaps we need to emulate Frederick Sinnett's cultural confidence and encourage the kind of criticism which frees the Australian artist to at least make his mistakes more honestly. In being free from the need to justify a frankly parochial focus, he may well be free to direct his attention, not only to the Australian "place", but also to Australian, and human, experience.

1 Tim Burstall, "Triumph and Disaster for Australian Films" (Bulletin 24 September, 1977), pp. 45-55. The phrase, "antagonism to style", is Burstall's; I gather he is using it to refer to the film-makers' limited consciousness of the potential of film as an art form — a lack of artistic self-consciousness in their approach to their productions. This would help explain the dominance of several modes or types of film in Australian cinema, and also suggest why so many of our producers seem to avoid commitment to an unashamedly dramatic film.

2 The degree of cross-fertilisation is great, many of our most successful films being 'translations' of novels into visual terms; "The Getting of Wisdom", "The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith" and "Picnic at Hanging Rock" are examples of this. The novelist Thomas Keneally's involvement in film script-writing suggests how direct the influence of fiction on film can become.

3 "Australian Film Culture", pp. 307, 373.

4 *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (ed. Cecil Hadgraft), University of Queensland Press 1966, p. 31.

5 "Australian Fiction to 1920" in Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), *The Literature of Australia,* Penguin 1976, p. 149.

6 *From Deserts the Prophets Come,* Heinemann 1973, pp. 37-8.

7 *The Fiction Fields of Australia,* p. 28.

8 "Henry Lawson's Joe Wilson", pp. 35-47.

9 Bulletin, p. 48.

Three poems by John Manifold

NINETEEN SEVENTY-NINE AND ELEVEN-TWELFTHS

Lord, I must get this finished quickly
Or 1980'll catch me up!
It's been, I think, a rather sickly
Decade; we've all been sold a pup.

Ethology has won the cup*
In sciences, though somewhat slickly;
In arts old Xavier leaves them rup-
tured, ruined runners, breathing thickly.

Yet one thing you must grant. Embellish
The future as you will with hellish
Inventions, I've rewon the heart

To write, and like a glorious sunrise
Where vapors, as from Kiley's Run, rise,
The eighties have a racing start.

** Yes, I know it was Hyperno. Don't interrupt! Read on.*

THE WOMBAT EATS ROOTS AND LEAVES

There are zoologists who claim
(See that fine book, *The Carnivore*)*
That lions and cheetahs, tho' in name
'Loners', go round in fives and more.

In adult groups they snooze and snore
And hunt — they eat, not play, 'the game' —
But drink at water holes and roar
Singly. In humans it's the same.

At meeting-pools they condescend
Towards 'game', ignore them, or begin
Mixing, and generally pretend.

One Question I should like to ask
Is: have you seen a cheetah's grin
Under a wombat's comic mask?

**"Zoologists who claim": notably the authorities quoted by R. F. Ewer, whose book is called* The Carnivores *(plural) and was published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in 1973.*

THE ANAESTHETIC WEARS OFF

I fancy I recall,
When pain was most severe,
A woman sitting here
Between the bed and wall.

No uniform at all,
Plainly a volunteer,
No Sister. It was queer
Like something in free fall.

The passage light shone through
And lit her auburn hair.
I wasn't spoken to.

She held my hand. Her bare
Hand holding wine withdrew
The pain. A girl *was* there.

ZERO MASS

1

The whistling unbelievers have passed this way.
They work for the most private industry,
are recognized by few. Their cause: to mark
like television does, its lurid heroes
turn to each other in their seats,
respond like a poor script.
They will drop by
with acres of advice and good things
and a frail questionnaire with multiple-choice answers.
They're thoughtful.

2

In love with his former self, the clone is dramatic,
popular, his sandy tears have moved a whole row
to sway like a phalanx. He'll help you out, modestly,
his face pinned like a badge on the future.
His head's ointment belongs to everybody like free speech.
It helps if you lie.

3

The man's slick temporary lying truce
stands outside. You're glassed-in like a phone,
your paranoia standing behind you and pointing
its kind obliteration like a drug. When you come down,
you can't breathe, force-fed by a younger sister.
Here, the martian life swells in our ration of air
like zeroes.

GIG RYAN

BACK COUNTRY — CUNDERANG

Life ends and the silence begins
only darkness crosses the gorge
The wind runs into cliff faces
Rocks cling to their own shape
unlike any before
Here nothing knows what it is

The blaze of a far river
has no reference point
Art as a taught thing
cannot focus on it
Untouched in the beautiful earth
it does not know what it is

Far from here a city
keeps faith with its architects
The young and the old hint
at what they will become
and that is cold to the touch
cold as an outburst of glass

The season lives in a word
Here there is no voice
no particular hour
nothing to correct the clocks
no mind to torture the wind
Here nothing knows what it is

JOHN MILLETT

TOWARDS GAINING THE CONFIDENCE OF MATURE WOMEN

mature women have trusts, pensions or the like,
and are gifted with the use of the can-opener;
often they live in solid houses, established suburbs,
with abundant tree and shrub growth in their gardens,
providing an ideal habitat for bird-life.

mature women, having endured life's fierce vortex
that devours the human voice without trace,
are often resigned, soft in the heart,
yet harbor a hatred for man
and fear of rodents.

mature women often remember themselves as children,
as girls without care; and in their quieter moments,
beneath a yellowed lamp in a Christian Television
living room, in the season of autumn,
they might recall the fluffy kittens they once held:

that is the moment to strike.
remember,
mature women wear the thicker stockings,
so don't skimp on the claw:
they love it.

LARRY BUTTROSE

TONY BENEDICT'S TREE

Riveroaks brush their tines against the light
All day a wind moves its scythes
through the hunting summer
to knife-edge the wise whisper of boys
carving their epitaphs
on the rough bark sleeves of trees

Tony Benedict once lived nearby
I drag him back
to the tin and bark hut he built
his bed of saplings and corn bags
in a southward summer hungry for rain
the land stained with thrill-lightning
and where it struck the tree
huge limbs close their bones
on the red arms of his unreadable dreams

The only mark he left is on that tree
and on those he taught to listen to these oaks
or watch eagles tethered to a wind
and at night reach for high bleak cadmium stars
alive in the great ventricles of his heart

These other boys may know his bloodwarm summer
his hallmark fixed into the earth
and on late afternoons watch stormbirds
lie on the thunderheads of their own death
and later going home
and watch a night-owl
swing its black and silent calm across the sky
and then at eight o'clock the sound of a train
may loop in the dead
from their lost estates in defunct subdivisions of air

JOHN MILLETT

THE WEEKEND

the city grows old.
seas shimmer, reflect cruel days
on tattered bikini beaches. the weekend
frowns
in the pulse of the morning heat.

saturday rainbows perspire, trickle beads
that stick women's hair. the flowers
walk by, heartbeats of one mango season.
in the middle of the city, port moresby
speaks a babble of love rhetoric.
the soul flutters
streaks past streets left by the sun.

RUSSELL SOABA

I DON'T THINK I MEAN WHAT I'M SAYING

Yes, she left quite a while ago, discourteously.
Suddenly everyone was looking.
"Poor girl," they said, "so young and so much to live for."
She had flirted and dallied before, she was always saying she was leaving,
but see after all, she meant it.

She doesn't seem absent now, not at all present,
she was and that is the end of it.
We're alive and the air's full of spring
and she could be here in the thick of it.
"I'm different," she said, "my nightmate's superior,"
wilful and mulish and flouting us spitefully,
"I shall do as I want," and she did, and what has she got for it?
a black joke, a gamble that didn't pay off.
Just think of the dancing we've done,
the places we've been and she wouldn't take part in it,
wholly gone in this spring when the tulips are candidly vain
of their color and shape and their weight on the stem,
and the world wags on in a springtime way, and nobody's grieving.

BARBARA GILES

PUPPET SHOW

she keeps her hands inside her gloves
black soft leather
softer than any one of our four hands

her hands are better off inside her gloves

.'m better off with her hands in her gloves

after all   where they belong   fit
        where   they're warm

now,
in her gloves in her lap
dull claps
and fingers gloving around in there,
gloves become puppets
we watch

and we're all better off,
the two of us, four of us,
all twenty of us.

KEVIN BROPHY

DEFLECT

The woman in the mirror has damp eyes
as though she has been walking
against the wind.

Her face is as flush as her nipples
in the loose pink shirt.

Her body is not sad. She rocks her hips
slowly in the jagged frame,
moves like a camera is watching
from the other side of the glass
as she dances with her thumbs
caught in the belt loops sliding
out of the jeans

leaving sloughed skin
and an empty frame.

JENNY BOULT

THE ADDICT LOOKS UP AT THE SKY

They do not love you, Saint Kilda;
They adore you.
Madly. Deeply, as deep as your eyes
Burning like the outrageous beauty of the sun
That same sun that killed Christ as he
Burnt for flowers that some taxidriver
Kept in his care for half an hour
Driving the square paragon of useless streets
Finally to allow to be strewn over Acland St,
The agent here refuses to repair my window
On the assumption it is beyond repair
Fair enough, fair enough too to let in light,
Yachts like bottles float to my finger
Youth sucking cans cut down out of powerlines
Killed in pissed morning and fainted star
I just argued and fought with a madwoman
Slapped and spat on one whom you love
That's the world closing in on us old dogs,
I bought a hamburger and watched her howl
All the way back to Albania where she comes from,
Her old man kicking her dear head out of shape
Poverty in Australia watching synthetic soup
Boiling over in twopenny aluminium pots
On sundays i am awakened to the mechanics
Who test the Ghost train, pissed.

She just walked in again as i write this line,
All her/my groceries returned, sago and rice,
A handful of windtossed sultanas in this world,
Such are arguments between little ghosts
She is nervous and weeps on the fucked-up lavatory,
The one the agents steadfastly refuse to service
She lights a botted smoke, and i just heard her laugh,
Milo soon, then copulation. This world is madness,
It's a mad world my masters, but think of Saint Kilda
With its female boats and slender waves,
Think of the sun on the tramway mechanics,
Huddling round my fire i think of eyes, eyes, eyes
Eyes alive in the world, brimfull of tears,
For whom they burn so willingly and so often,
Soften eyes, give love back to the world.

BARRY DICKINS

SONG FOR SUNRISE

in my universe snakes
shed skins & crabs discard shells
from tired flesh as man's envy
of becoming

immortal

birds are song. the rivers become
birth & the hills are protection
in poetry. the valleys are rain
that is green. all becomes cloud,
unremembered sun.

RUSSELL SOABA

SKELETON OF A POEM WRITTEN DURING A NIGHT OF A 48 HOUR BLACKOUT

I am grieved that there are more poets in the world than
ever I may meet or hear

I am harmed because there aren't more poets

I write this   blind in the night   without even the moon's
glow to guide my pen

There is a white space

There is a white space always that my heart bleeds to fill

I pity those who are blind to poetry   sometimes I shed a
tear for myself

If in the morning light I cannot read this   one more poem
has escaped

I shall search all day for the words

I shall see words everywhere   but they will not fill the
space of my poem

I can hear my words   but shall I ever read them?

I trace them in dark ink on a black night   nobody has heard
them   in the morning the poem will be indecipherable and I
shall listen to the triumphs of honeyeaters who remembered
their songs

Someone will say   he is not a poet   and the poet inside me
will scream   sounding the tortures of the poet's imprison-
ment   I shall cry   the poet is there

I may even avow murder   for him

He is the poem whom I have never met

In my Country there are no legends of me about him   he has
no tombs   no altars   but looks at the block mountains and
wonders whether they are his

They are not peaks   but plinths   each without a statue
and he wonders   to what heights could poets aspire in this
Land?

The stars that will not let the blind man see what he has
written   form like laurels about his brow

He may rest peacefully   he has met all the dark poets who
explain to him the Country of his birth

He capitulates

They were many   but not enough in their numbers   always the
numerals are overpowering poets' lives

most dreaded
he may never be seen to have been among the numbers

JOHN BLIGHT

ON THE DEATHS OF JOHN CORNFORD (1936) and MY MOTHER (1979)

Always before the lights of home
Shone clear and steady and full in view.
Here if you fall there's help for you.

A year older than me, a Cambridge Communist,
he died when I was twenty and afraid to go
into that Spain where politics, too soon, came true.
Forty-three years separate these so disparate
deaths, only my syllabics now can link them. They
died (or were died) young, revolutionary,
and old, conservative.

Both had this in common,
one shining hymnlike light led them both on; for he
believed in a real paradise on earth, while
she had vague thoughts of a Church of England Heaven.

She was known for her kindness and unselfishness,
he died in a war he need never have fought in.

I sympathise with him though, cradled young in such
ideal intellectual surroundings, I
in Philistine and medical troughs of sense — yet
when he died we believed the same: revolt, a strong revolt, dead
against the liberal, the fatherlike facade.
My sisters property-mad, I mother-fixed. This
bourgeois mitigation of sadistic surgeons
screwed up my love-life. Who knows what of his?

If you can go back home — what peace, what rest! No more
fighting the restless world, where all goes wrong, so wrong.
The bad regimes prevail.

A woman within two
months of ninety, a lad of twenty-one; dying
in sleep or (roughly) on a battlefield. She held
the steady light he missed. Till now I had it — I
didn't need it, weaned long ago. But he? All he
could say: *Now with my Party I stand quite alone.*

GAVIN EWART

THE JESUIT

he does not hide at all.
dangerously perceptive, incredibly truthful
lives in books & holds several higher degrees

his students roam the campus, red-eyed
(sorcerized, according to paper reports)
with downcast stares of stunned silence.

no, he's not in the committee. we'll be
deporting him soon.

RUSSELL SOABA

THEY'RE CALLING ME A FAT MOLL, BUT I'M SKINNY

From behind neat wooden fences
they're calling me
yes they're calling me names
again.
Telling stories.

They say
I sleep all day.

They say I'm mad
they say I read all night
they say I fuck with cops
they say I talk about them . . .

One says her cleavage is the best
one says her man is the best
one says at least she has, curves,
and then looks at me . . .

They're calling me a fat moll, but I'm skinny.

They say no wonder he left me
they say my children are not controlled
that my four-year old son
has been seen
sexually assaulting
a three-year old girl.
They're listening at my back door,
watching my letter box lock
recording number plates on cars
time and date of arrival . . . departure
and noting the time my bedroom light
goes on, off, on, off, on-off, on.

So now I'm keeping lights on at night
blinds up windows open,
there are no more secrets worth inventing here,
but they still insist in whispers
I don't know what I'm revealing.

They're calling me a fat moll, but I'm skinny,
and we all know
that the three-year old virgin in question
slipped
while climbing over a
fence.

KEVIN BROPHY

SUMMER MOVES

low cloud is sitting
on the canberra hills
like a dinner guest
waiting
for the main meal

days

wind will move it off
unfed

hungry with its
unraining

centennial park at sunset
there is a city
a sydney skyscape

lights in the water

the city under the water
breaks
ripples with the wind
its lights

possums
piss from the palmtrees
onto the dry leaves
loud
acrid drops

white fronted cormorants
the little grebe
roost like dark fruits
in softgreen basket trees

at dawn they drop upward
falling into the sky
like fruit

ripened by light

there are a pair of
dark musk ducks

diving for fish

J. S. HARRY

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

One of the good things about that odd and unsatisfactory newspaper the Australian is Max Harris's Saturday column. Max reacts on some people like a good spaghetti bolognaise on a dyspeptic stomach, and indeed one Australian bookseller and publisher of repute recently cancelled his Overland subscription because we printed a poem by "that fascist". (An interesting commentary on that bookseller/publisher's stance on civil liberties, which he has always vigorously supported.) I am not only very fond of Max Harris as a civilized and decent man (though, strangely enough, a very private one), but I respond to his public courage — to his refusal to tailor his views to any intellectual fashion.

In his column on 2 February Harris asked why, with so much going for us in Australia in the arts as elsewhere, we are cursed with "moral atrophy": "We do not produce men who either advocate or exemplify moral idealism". Why do we not hear, for instance, Tom Uren on Afghanistan, Cairns on the cruelty of the Iranians to innocent Americans, a spirited debate *from the Left* on the question of the Olympic Games or the way pro or anti Chinese/Russian stances in the union movement and elsewhere are used to the detriment of the community at large.

Very fair, I think. There's an enormous false urbanity on the Left as in the community generally. We gloss over as uncomfortable all sorts of issues that Max Harris keeps on raising (he's not always on the ball, but he is often enough). We laugh at people who say "It's not good form", but the same kind of behavior exemplifies the behavior of a great many who regard themselves as Australian democrats. A Bob Hawke, as Harris suggests, *is* left out on a limb, largely because he tries to advance the values of social democracy — a vastly more important topic for the Labor Party to be concerning itself with than pious, misleading and anachronistic debates on the so-called "socialist objective".

So I think I should say a few things, in reply to Max Harris, and in support of him, so that I do not pretend that I edit Overland in an ideological vacuum. And in doing so I don't know to what extent members of my editorial board would agree with me — and I don't really care, because we find common cause readily enough on the issues involved in the continued production of this magazine. But yes: I do believe that we live in a country where men and women, to quote Brian Fitzpatrick, can call their souls their own. I do believe that we have constructed, partly by luck, a better society than exists anywhere else. I do believe there are slave-minded people in positions of power and influence throughout our society — and because I feel myself to be of the Left I am particularly concerned about the Left, and those who undermine it — such as the so-called "socialist Left" of the Victorian ALP scene. I not only oppose them because I see the thrust of their policies as totalitarian (and in this sense the Left might be as big a threat to our freedom than the Right), but I fear them because their essential aim is anti-Parliamentary: their influence is greater when Labor is out of office, and they are happy to keep it that way.

I think it obscene that few prominent figures on the Left have thought it to their advantage to say anything very critical about Afghanistan, for instance, or Sakharov. I think it insulting to our intelligence to argue, as Bill Hayden has, that a boycott of the Olympic Games (a moral gesture which means a lot but doesn't materially hurt us in the making) should coincide with a ban on

the sale of Australian farm products to the Soviet Union — a ban which would seriously affect our economic interests. (Obviously the real intention of the Labor Party was to find a snide way of attacking the very idea of a ban itself.)

I am deeply influenced by the personal experience I had of the cruelties and viciousness of the so-called "socialist" countries, from which I get quite enough reports to persuade me that in important respects there is indeed, as a Spanish Civil War veteran told me not long ago in Prague, no difference between Brown Fascism and Red Fascism. (Whatever the ideologues and the political theorists may say, the reason you are in a concentration camp, to the person in the concentration camp, is of less relevance than the fact that you are in one.)

I do not believe that China is a 'white hope'. I was never taken in for a moment by the "cultural revolution", despite the succession of supposedly well-informed Australians who assured me that we were witnessing a New Dawn in human affairs. I believe that when we learn (though neither the Left nor I think the Right wishes to learn) of the wholesale murders of perhaps millions carried out in China in recent years the truth will be so appalling that for most it will be simpler to ignore. I believe China to be no more admirable a country than the Soviet Union, though just at the moment I'd rather live in China than Russia. I believe that with all our cruelties and oppressions in Australia, we have done better than any of them. I believe that America is a terrifying country in terms of human rights and liberties, but I also believe that it is the heartland of democracy as I understand the word, and that — like it or lump it — the chances of our retaining such aspects of decent human existence as we have, and of building on it, rest largely on what happens in the United States.

I do not like any of the Australian political parties very much, but I am comforted by the thought that politics are not nearly as important as we pretend to ourselves they are. While I can't imagine having a pleasant dinner-table conversation with him, I am quite prepared to believe that Malcolm Fraser is, personally, a nice enough fellow. (If you say that that is irrelevant to his politics, I answer that I fear the kind of reification of politics as real life which leads a Kocan to take a shot at a Calwell.) I think that in practice the difference between what a Fraser government does and what a Hayden government can do is strictly limited, though I hope that a Hayden government would have some success in reducing foreign control of our resources. I would hope for a Labor government basically because there are a lot of ideas locked up in the Left generally which ought to be given a go. Their impact would be in a variety of small things (appointing a Jim Staples to the Arbitration Commission) rather than in big things. And I believe that the Australian people are *not*, in any significant sense, victims of the Marxist concept of "false consciousness", which is a concept that is used by the Left to excuse themselves when they have failed to move the people. The Australian people, and I suspect most people who have an open vote, have nearly always shown great sense in the way they have voted and behaved politically.

I believe that the Whitlam government was more disastrous than most of us on the Left are willing to admit. It did many good things but did them so ineptly that it, having dragged Australia into the 1970s, then drew us back again to the wolves. I believe that the Whitlam government sold us out on at least two issues of major importance (to get back to Max Harris's "moral idealism"): Lake Pedder and Timor. That of these two there was less excuse for Lake Pedder. And I remember that Ian Turner and I had to send an urgent telegram to the Whitlam government begging that deserting Czechoslovak seamen (yes there are, in a metaphorical sense, seacoasts of Bohemia) be not forcibly sent back to imprisonment and persecution.

I believe that Bob Hawke would make quite a good politician but probably a bad prime minister, not that I think he'd ever be allowed to get there by his own comrades. In any case I distrust intellectuals in politics. A lot of us would be in gaol by now if intellectuals ran this country. The place for intellectuals is in universities and colleges and schools, though it would be a good idea to have a few more free-ranging eggheads of the type of Brian Fitzpatrick, Donald Horne (when he was), Arthur Phillips. Actually what we do need is more freelance literary intellectuals of the London/Paris/New York kind: writing perceptively and wittily about our local scene. It's not just that we don't have the support systems for them: it's also that Australians are desperately insecure, as witness the utter inability of any Australian to write an autobiography that carries conviction beyond the age of puberty.

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ROBERT HILLMAN **Gavin**

Gavin Maynard was standing in the rain at the bottom of the back steps to his home — a plain, white weatherboard farmhouse set a hundred metres back from the Shepparton-Silberton road. He'd just come up from the dairy after the milking — not a morning like any other morning. He squinted up through the drizzle to the verandah, gazed downward again; the rain had thoroughly beaded his longish brown curls by the time he finally clambered up the five wooden steps.

In the kitchen, Susan Maynard was putting breakfast together for her husband. There was toast under the griller and she was making scrambled eggs in a pan on the hotplate. She didn't turn to Gavin when he walked in, but said quietly, "It'll be ready shortly." Gavin pulled apart the press-studs of his boiler suit intending to leave it to dry by the fire, but in the middle of the operation he suddenly found it so insignificant, a wet or a dry boiler suit, and he drew it back on.

He went to stand by the fire. "That suit must be quite wet," said Susan Maynard, glancing over her shoulder — she sounded as if she were sorry to make an issue of the wet suit, but felt compelled to speak. "It's okay," said Gavin, with despair in his voice — he knew this was not a satisfactory reply. He saw his tobacco on the mantlepiece and began urgently to make his pipe. His wife put a mug of tea in front of him on the mantlepiece and calmly added the sugar, stirring the brew unhurriedly, while Gavin stuffed the pipe overfull and created a little bonfire when he put a match to the heap.

"What a bastard of a morning!" said Gavin suddenly, taking a few steps towards the window over the sink and frowning out angrily. "Is it worse than other mornings?" said Susan, in a tone of calm disapproval. "It's a proper pain to be getting out of bed at five in the morning to milk twenty cows," Gavin went on. "Only a fool'd do it, for sure. But I must be a fool then, musn't I? Well I suppose I fucking am!" He went to the mantlepiece and stood glaring down at the brilliant coals. Susan put his scrambled eggs on the table. Glancing over his shoulder, Gavin could see only part of her profile but he knew that she was beginning to understand. He went to the table and took up the plate, with a fork and the pepper shaker. Standing before the fire again, he began to wolf down the mush in order to have it out of the way quickly: Susan, with her mother-of-the-family priorities, would hold up the trauma even as it swept down on her like an avalanche to point out that his eggs were growing cold.

She had sat down at the table and was staring out the window to the mud of the back-yard. She was still holding the egg-slide but didn't seem to be aware of it. Gavin went to the sink with his plate as quietly as possible. He rinsed it under the tap, as he almost never did, and Susan automatically came to her feet, murmuring, 'I'll do that." "No," said Gavin, dropping the plate into the sink. "I want to say something." He went to the fire drying his hands on the tea-towel and continued drying them as he struggled for the words. "I don't know how to put this," he said, running his hand over his head. "You probably know that I've been seeing Ursula Phillips —?" "Ursula?" said Susan quietly, and she sat down suddenly at the table. "I've been seeing her for a while," said Gavin, determined to hand over all the basic data now that he'd begun. "About six months. Nearly everyone in Silberton knows what's going on. The school knows." "Wait!" Susan cried. Her face was shrunken and sharp, terribly pale, and her freckles were ugly on her pale skin, as they were whenever she was ill.

Gavin faced the mantlepiece again. He exhaled all the air in his lungs and closed his eyes. He was deeply, wonderfully relieved to have confessed. He opened his eyes and stared at the small, uneven sampler in vulgar pink and chartreuse stitched by his step-daughter in her needlework class. It said, "Bless This House" twice, and featured for some reason elephants holding tails with their trunks. He closed his eyes again, still experiencing the rich relief, but very soon the relief began to fail. It ran away quickly, like the last little bit of something. He felt hot and dried-out in this room with the fire blazing and he still in his boiler suit. He glanced irritably around and saw Susan sitting at the table, staring out silently to the muddy backyard, shoulders rounded, the egg-slide held uselessly in one hand resting on her lap. This was her widow-mood, what Gavin thought of as her widow-mood, when she turned into some interior cave and sat silently with the memory of her dead first husband.

Gavin sat down at the table with her. She didn't look at him but gazed out of the window, a shallow frown pleating her brow. He found her silence an intolerable burden on top of his misery and he sprang out of his chair and began pacing the floor between the table and the fireplace. When she still said nothing, he blurted out — "You must have known something! Everybody knows!" Susan's frown smoothed away in surprise for a moment, returning as she took in what Gavin was shouting. She stood up from the table, gathering up a coffee mug and a teaspoon. "I thought something else was going on," she said tiredly on the way to the sink. Gavin waited for more but nothing followed. "What?" he demanded. "I thought you'd had an affair with one of the teachers, but not Ursula," she said, speaking over her shoulder. "Who did you think?" asked Gavin — he couldn't imagine himself with any other teacher than Ursula. "I didn't know," said Susan. "The one with the long black hair . . ." "Gail Parkinson!" said Gavin with a snort of disgust. "You couldn't possibly have thought of her."

When Susan continued to clatter at the sink, Gavin cried out angrily — "Talk to me!" Susan looked at him briefly over her shoulder and seemed to decide something. She dried her hands on her dressing gown then turned to him, leaning against the sink, hands in her pockets. In something of the deliberately calm, clear, sensible manner she had once used in front of classes of third and fourth formers when introducing them to the biological function of the testicles, she said — "I had accepted that you were having an affair with one of the teachers . . ." But having begun this lecture, she seemed to change her mind, and halted, so that Gavin frowned in annoyance and urged her to go on.

"Oh, to hell with it all," she said quietly, almost beneath her breath, and turned her back to her husband again. But she said over her shoulder as she wiped a Wettex over the sink — "I've been waiting for you to confess so that I could forgive you. It was very romantic. But somehow I didn't think of Ursula — anyone else but her." She stopped there with a suggestion of something left unsaid, but which she might be prompted to add, and Gavin prompted — "Go on." Susan wrung out the Wettex under the tap and folded it at the back of the sink. She took a loaf of bread down from a cupboard above her head and sat it on the breadboard. She turned around to Gavin with her eyebrows raised in a way which made it obvious that she'd been running over in her mind the words she was about to speak.

"As soon as you said 'Ursula' I rather accepted that it was all over — I was thinking romantically still until you said Ursula. That snapped me back." "Why did it make any difference that it was Ursula?" said Gavin; he knew that it should make a difference but he was hoping Susan could put it into words. Susan pushed a hand through her hair — the long, thin, freckled fingers raking the red-brown strands like a tortoise-shell comb. "I don't know," she said irritably, "but it did — it does." Gavin frowned at her critically, for this answer gave him no satisfaction at all. "It *does,*" Susan repeated as Anna called for her from her room at the end of the corridor, and she went to see what was wanted.

The back door slammed and Jenny trotted into the kitchen with Morgan, her dog. When the smiling dog spied Gavin, it came to a halt and began moaning in its throat — Gavin didn't permit it in the kitchen, but normally he was out working again by this time and Morgan was used to the fire while Jenny ate her breakfast. "Take that dog outside!" he ordered automatically, and Morgan left without any further encouragement. Jenny went to the breadboard and began sawing thick slices from the loaf. She was sulking. She tossed her long, fine, golden-red hair as she passed Gavin on the way to the cupboard for the peanut-butter. "It's a funny time for you to be here!" she blurted out finally, unable to restrain her vexation. "You should be down the shed." Gavin closed his eyes and hissed beneath his

breath. He and Jenny had been enemies for two years and he knew a hundred different ways of putting her in her place — but not this morning.

Meanwhile, an argument was raging down the corridor between Susan and Anna. Gavin heard Ursula's name screamed out by Anna — he must be meant to hear, he realised. He couldn't make out the sense of the argument, but it hurt him a little to think of Anna upset by Ursula. He had hoped to take her aside in his history class that morning and very carefully and truthfully explain himself to her. But how pathetic, his vanity! Really! Explain what? But it irritated him to seem a traitor to the girl.

'D'you know what it's about?" Jenny called gaily from behind him. Gavin looked over his shoulder and saw her grinning up at him as she tied on her sneakers — on this last day of term, uniform wasn't compulsory. "Don't be a smart-alec," said Gavin mildly, and Jenny mimicked him cruelly, in a mincing fashion, "Ooh, don't be a smart-alec!" Gavin hadn't decided what to say next when a shriek came from the corridor, followed by the sound of the front door slamming hard; Jenny sped out of the kitchen to catch her sister.

A minute later, Susan walked in with her hand on her forehead. She went to the window above the sink and watched there silently until first Anna, then Jenny, cycled past in their yellow vinyl rain-cloaks: Gavin understood that she was making sure that they were both wearing rain-cloaks. She busily filled the kettle, slopped away tea-leaves, briskly rattled stray spoons, cups, saucers together. "She wouldn't eat any breakfast," said Susan fretfully — to herself, more or less. All at once, she was crying. She wept without stopping work for a few moments, then dropped everything and went to a chair where she sat weeping into her two, narrow, freckled hands.

Gavin, standing by the fire with his hands behind his back, watched Susan closely. Emotionally, he was becalmed. He could only think to himself — I don't find her attractive at all; if I ever did, I can't recall it. But no — it hadn't been that way he realised, as he went quickly back over two years. At first, he had enjoyed the awkward poetry of her red hair and freckles; her thin limbs, small hanging breasts and long back — and with this, most importantly, her bleak widowhood. When her husband had died, she'd missed just the one day of school. And she'd seen the body, identified the body, in the mess it was in, as everyone said . . . Gavin had fallen in love with her strength of character, and then he had been wonderfully pleased to find that he enjoyed her, admired her so much, enough to marry her. He enjoyed her plain-ness. Leonie, his first wife, had been a perfect example of a beautiful and graceful young woman and he had turned from that to — to something quite different . . .

But here Gavin lost his temper with himself — his vanity and superficiality so often exasperated him. He began pacing up and down rapidly. Susan stared up at him miserably and asked what was the matter; Gavin shook his head and continued pacing, then abruptly sat down across the table from her. "What are you thinking?" he asked helplessly. Susan gazed at him blankly for a minute, then frowned.

She ran a hand through her hair. "I suppose I was thinking about Anna and Jenny," she said in a troubled voice. "Anna is very attached to you — neurotically attached, I think. You might have gathered that the argument was to do with you? I saw her coming this cropper —"

"Saw that we would break up?" asked Gavin quickly — this was something he was looking for, an intelligent recognition of his likelihood to fail in marriage.

"No," said Susan slowly, as if it hurt her to have to say so. "No, with Anna I meant that she was bound to be hurt just in the way most imaginative girls of her age are when they find a handsome idol who is really only as human as everyone else."

Gavin nodded, horribly disappointed. "One of us will certainly have to leave the district," said Susan, her voice running down the scale of a sigh. "The girls would be upset going to school under Ursula and you . . ."

"What do you think of Ursula?" asked Gavin seriously — he was desperate to have her apply herself to the problem of what was the matter with *him*.

"Think of her?" said Susan, with a short, mildly ironic laugh. She gazed at a point halfway up the wall, and abstractedly drew the lapels of her dressing gown tighter over her chest. "I don't like her," she said, after a few moments, raising her eyebrows as if this news was a little surprising to her. She looked at Gavin. "Why?" she said.

When Gavin made no reply, Susan volunteered, "She's very beautiful." Gavin glanced at her sharply at this, but he saw instantly that she was merely naming what was most outstanding about Ursula without imparting any inferences.

He began to roam about the room, reaching out to such things as doorhandles, the backs

of chairs, and squeezing them. Presently he shrugged, sighed deeply and went to the fire. He leaned forward and braced himself against the mantlepiece, staring down into the fire. He heard Morgan barking in the backyard — at the magpies, probably. He began to see visions. He saw his father and himself standing by the side of a country road staring out over the paddocks. He'd been fishing with his father that day, and it had been a good day, one of those rare days for fathers of George Maynard's sort—a tall, sinewy, sentimental working man, scarred from the depression — when they love their sons for being sons, for being boys. In the glow of comradeship, Gavin and his father had had a leak together, side by side; tucked back in again, Gavin was obliged to remain gazing out over the paddocks in deference to his father, who would have something to say about the land, which he believed in so strongly. He turned his gaze down to Gavin and smiled against the tears that stood in his eyes. "Lad," he said, "no matter what you do in life, get on the land if you can — it'll be the best thing you ever did."

This memory of his father lying to him about what the land could do for him had come into his head regularly over the past two years. It came into his head whenever he was depressed, miserable, restless; whenever he looked around at the family he had tried to become the head of and felt like running away, that memory returned. He *had* expected the land to be the making of him. Gavin guffawed without mirth or the slightest sense of irony as he thought of all that was associated with Susan that was meant to be the making of him: her children, her unbeautiful looks, her honesty and determination, her land — her little ready-made farm.

Morgan was still barking. When Gavin realised this, he was suddenly irritated with the dog and he stumped out of the kitchen, down the back steps and in to the fine, sticky rain. Morgan was galloping about under the wattle tree, infuriated at the magpie perched on a high branch singing happily in the rain. Gavin charged at the dog and chased him way behind the dairy.

Walking back to the house, he felt himself strangely contented and satisfied to be leaving the farm, to be leaving everything. He thought to himself, it was a sham, it was false, it was no good from the beginning. But then, when he reached the back stairs, he was teased by guilt once more and he thought solemnly — I could stay, we could make a go of it. The idea almost made his stomach turn, however, and he clumped up the steps determined simply to tell Susan that he would move his things out over the first few days of the holidays.

He found Susan in the living-room tidying up. He noticed that their wedding picture was not on the mantlepiece. "I thought you'd gone," said Susan, climbing up from her knees — she'd been sweeping the fire hearth. Gavin was surprised to see her face so altered in ten minutes — she was bright, there was an odd, busy light in her eyes and her lips were wettly reddish. "I'm going now," said Gavin. "I'll move my stuff out tomorrow, if that's convenient."

Susan shrugged. "Yes, perfectly," she said. "Will you, ah, be dining home tonight?" Gavin gazed at her quizzically — Susan was never sarcastic. "I suppose not," he said. He gave her a quick, puzzled smile.

"Well!" said Susan, glancing about this way and that, and Gavin understood that she would be pleased for him to go as soon as he would. He nodded and raised his eyebrows then went out to the walled-in section of the verandah where his teaching clothes hung. As he changed, he experienced an odd sense of dissatisfaction with everything, everything in his life or in the world for that matter. It crept in quietly and sat in his chest, not very conspicuous but oddly affecting everything about him. At the same time, he was convinced he would never regret leaving Susan and the farm.

He drove to Silberton High with this odd, persistent but perfectly sublime sense of dissatisfaction inside him and it only struck him that evening, as he lay in bed with Ursula, that between the alternatives of Susan and some other way of life there was absolutely nothing to choose. Dwelling on this, he climbed out of bed, slipped on his jeans and pullover in the dark and went into the little kitchen of Ursula's cottage. He sat at the table and made up his pipe. He tried to think clearly and intelligently about Susan, but his head would not join in. Only he knew this, when it came down to it, only in theory did he have a choice. He could no more have chosen to stay with Susan than he could have flown to the moon. He went back to bed without feeling that he'd accomplished anything by getting up.

JOHN LACK **Australian Cities**

John Lack, lecturer in History at the University of Melbourne, here surveys several accounts of Australian cities that appeared in the 1970s. He is particularly concerned with Peter Spearritt's Sydney since the Twenties *(Hale & Iremonger, $11.95 and $22) and Graeme Davison's* The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne *(Melbourne University Press, $18.80 and $9.80). John Lack is writing a history of the Melbourne suburb of Footscray.*

Twenty years ago, reviewing the study of Australian history 1929-1959, J. A. La Nauze observed that "the early existence of relatively large-scale urban life on this continent of small total population . . . has failed to impress Australian historians". N. D. Harper too stressed the necessity for, shifting "the vantage point — from back of Bourke to the coast". What La Nauze and Harper noted, J. W. McCarty in 1970 attempted to explain: Australian historians traditionally operated within fixed boundaries, whereas urban history demanded mastery of economic, political and social themes for which a chronological, regional or territorial framework might be inappropriate. As a result "urban history, lacking any generally accepted method of analysis of its own, has been unable to claim the attention of the historian".[1]

In the last decade there has developed a corpus of urban history, largely focussed upon the capital cities, including Peter Bolger's *Hobart Town* (1973), Ronald Lawson's *Brisbane in the 1890s* (1973), Peter Spearritt's *Sydney Since the Twenties* (1978) and Graeme Davison's *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (1978)[2]. All in varying degrees bear evidence of their origins as doctoral theses, and they testify to the resourcefulness of young historians exploring largely unmapped territory and their difficulties in fashioning new approaches and new kits of tools. The results, it must be said, have been decidedly patchy.

Ronald Lawson's *Brisbane in the 1890s* demonstrates how the urban historian, confronted by the complexity of the city and by the necessity of new methodologies, can be tempted by ready-made theories promising revelation of the underlying order of the complex patterns of city life. The Chicago school of urban sociologists has exerted a strong influence. Attempting to explain and examine the consequences of the spatial distribution and segregation of urban popuations on the basis of analogies between human society and plant ecology, members of the school employed the concepts of competition, selection, segregation, dominance, invasion and succession to explain the continuing dispersal of population from the city centre to the periphery and the resulting spatial pattern. E. W. Burgess's concentric zone hypothesis, which visualized the configuration of the city as a series of five zones of succession, each of which constituted "natural areas" or associations of people possessing common social and economic attributes who had gravitated to physically distinctive areas, was referred to in passing by Bernard Barrett in establishing a context for his fine study of environmental blight in Collingwood and Fitzroy (*The Inner Suburbs,* 1971), but it is central to the methodology of *Brisbane in the 1890s.*

One of Lawson's many obpects is to discover if Brisbane society was "classless or class-divided", contradictory ways in which, he alleges, historians characterize late nineteenth-century Australian society. He "asserts the major importance of status differentials while denying the existence of meaningful social classes. It is argued that the reality of social differentiation in

Brisbane in the 1890s is best described in terms of continuum of status based upon occupation". The underpinning consists of an assertion that examination of residential segregation reveals "the finely graduated stratification system." Burgess's concentric zonal scheme — a central business district, a zone in transition from a residential to a business and industrial area, a zone of workingmen's homes occupied by skilled artisans and white collar workers, a middle-class zone, and a commuters' zone —is said to be confirmed by Brisbane. Maps are produced which suggest that at the very least samples of the population have been examined from non-aggregated data according to the most specific and revealing social criteria the historian can muster; in fact, as Lawson confesses, "such a mammoth undertaking was clearly beyond the scope of this study", and the 'ecological zones' are *inferred* on the basis of an analysis of 162 of Brisbane's elite, general press commentaries and census reports. Lawson's maps and his discussion of ecological zones is not a test of the Burgess hypothesis but an *imposition* of a scheme on the basis of the most generalized contemporary descriptive evidence. There is also an unstated assumption that the nature of social relationships may be inferred from the spatial distribution of populations.

The treatment of class and status in Brisbane are equally inadequate. The basis for class and status groupings is never defined, although there is a fashionable reference to modern sociological surveys. Hardly a jot of evidence is supplied in support of assertions that status groups failed to coalesce and form classes because of the fluidity of society produced by the common experience of upward mobility, the fragmentation of the status continuum resulting from the increasing complexity of the metropolitan economy (more rungs to a ladder), and the satisfaction of immigrants with their improved situation. Lawson's interdisciplinary reading leads him to half-baked methodologies and short cuts which provide him with plausible but unsubstantiated generalizations about class consciousness (or rather, the want of it) and 'the influence of the city in Australian history.'

Peter Spearritt has opted for a period from which there survives aggregated census data (at the metropolitan and municipal level) and of non-aggregated material. A veritable smorgasbord of a book, profusely illustrated with maps, cartoons, photographs and tables, *Sydney Since the Twenties* becomes an exercise in self-indulgence. One is early struck by the lack of vision, organizing principles or even a point of view. Unable, apparently, to decide whether to write a city biography or explore aspects of Sydney's spatial growth, Spearritt does neither satisfactorily. Instead, he leaps from topic to topic, now pausing for a purple patch on, say, the opening of The Bridge, or for a burst of indignation about social inequality in the city, now doubling back to resume and expand upon themes announced earlier. Apart from the declared general aim to "reveal how the process of suburbanisation affected the lives of Sydney's inhabitants at work, at home and at play", there is no statement of intent and no explanation of the decision to focus on the years since the twenties, let alone on Sydney.

An introductory chapter indicates the broad reasons for Sydney's dominance of New South Wales in 1921 and outlines the changeover in the late nineteenth century from a walking to a public transport city. There follows an amorphous discussion of town planners' attempts to "improve the metropolis". This discussion takes place in a vacuum, for neither the condition of housing, transport and public health nor the pre-war urban reform movement are treated in any detail. As a result the motivating principles of the 1913 Town Planning Authority and the 1919 Local Government Act remain vague. Only in a later chapter are we informed of the failure of building to keep pace with housing needs between 1911 and 1921. Although the reader is told that "Public transport made Suburban Sydney possible", the subject is only briefly touched on until half way through the book, long after the discussion of urban form and the journey to work in the interwar period. The impact of heavy motor transport and the electrification of railways on industrial and housing patterns is virtually ignored.

Even at the narrative-descriptive level there are some surprising inadequacies: we are told that the middle class promoted the home-ownership ideal after the Great War in their own economic interests and the interests of social stability, but Spearritt also asserts on the basis of a comparison of the 1921 and 1933 (depression) censuses that there was no marked increase in home-ownership, and the apparent paradox is not explained. There are no maps to aid readers to visualise the patterns of suburban growth in the 20s. Nowhere are we told, or invited to speculate profitably on, the meaning of "suburb" or "suburbanisation". There is the astonishing suggestion that suburbanism "could well be a uniquely

Australian ideology", but that ideology is described in only a mechanical fashion, and the values, hopes, ambitions and psychological needs which the detached owner-occupied home served, or was thought to serve, are not broached. The relevance of the home-centred life style and local loyalties to the failure of Greater Sydney proposals is only dimly perceived, the social area analysis of Sydney between the wars is wanting in focus, and the social and political history of Sydney during Lang's rule are not integrated. Again, basic mapping is required if the reader is to make sense of the resumption of suburbanisation in the thirties. Neither the extraordinary burst of flat development, not the vehemence of the anti-slum crusade, not the relationship of these phenomena to the vaunted suburban ideal are explored.

No Australian city has attracted the creative writer as has magical Sydney. Spearrit does not define the Sydney persona, estimate the contribution of literary figures to that persona or distil the essence (if it were possible) of such as Lower, Stivens, Herbert, Cusack, Slessor. Rather, literature is quarried in an essentially arid manner for bits of evidence. Is there any other Australian metropolis where wealth is so conspicuously displayed, and where the contrast between vulgar wealth and shameful squalor is so visually stunning as Sydney? The reader receives no insights into the engines of city growth, functional differentiation or social segregation. Who owned and owns Sydney and who ran and runs it, and in whose interests? What discussion there is of class and urban society is simplistic to the point of banality, and Spearritt patently misreads one of the classics of Australian history.

W. K. Hancock, in a particularly penetrating and debatable chapter of his celebrated *Australia* (1930), suggested that Australia, being a 'new society', was a fluid one — that is, characterised by considerable social mobility. As Spearritt quotes Hancock: "Society in Australia is not yet fixed and formalised. Men do not find it difficult to change their house or town or class". Spearrit 'contradicts' Hancock, asserting that classes not only existed but were seen to exist. The argument, having implied that Hancock saw Australia as classless (which he clearly did not, as the unquoted sentence following shows: "There is no class except in the economic sense"), now 'slides' in a most interesting fashion: "My argument (in this chapter) is that there exists, and existed at the time Hancock wrote, a class structure of the suburbs which was 'fixed and formalised'. It had been formalising in Sydney since the late nineteenth century and by 1921 it was pretty well fixed: there have been relatively few changes since". Spearritt proceeds to establish from census data the existence of a status ranking of Sydney suburbs. As interesting as that is, it neither contradicts, nor tests nor illuminates Hancock's point about individuals' prospects for social mobility. The exercise is quite marginal to an investigation of segregation in the city, surely a central issue for any study which evinces an interest in "how a class society operates and perpetuates itself".

Sydney Since the Twenties testifies to a commendable zeal and a noteworthy facility for assembling and summarizing a considerable array of published but inaccessible data, but the goals are ill-defined, the project is misguided, the energy is largely misplaced and much of the material is ill-digested. By constrast, there is never any doubt about the purpose and direction of Graeme Davison's *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne,* a well-orchestrated investigation of the interplay of the myths and realities of metropolitan life between the International Exhibition of 1880 and the depths of depression in 1895. "Marvellous Melbourne", a seductive subject which in lesser hands invites superficial treatment, becomes here the object of disciplined and vibrant inquiry.

Davidson takes as his central point the definition of the city. What does the city *mean?* What forces determine expansion and contraction? What is the chemistry of the economic, social and cultural ingredients which produces a spatially ordered and internally structured metropolitan community? A splendid recreation of the opening of the International Exhibition in October 1880 broadens into a sketch of Melbourne's historical development and emerging persona. Here the theme is the transformation of a commercial city from early trading and industrial stages into a fully-fledged metropolis, Australia's financial and investment centre. This analysis is firmly grounded in an exploration of the changing occupational structure of Melbourne's workforce, drawing attention to rapid increases in tertiary fields of employment — transport, finance, communications, and public administration — which reflect in turn the growth of a 'metropolitan economy'. The segregation of economic functions in a formalized market system *expressed itself* in the emergence clearly recognisable city zones — wholesale, retail, financial and profes-

sional — and the proliferation of services and agencies.

This sophisticated argument — based upon impressive employment of aggregated and non-aggregated data in censuses and directories — leads to a sketch of the increasingly depersonalised world of business and work, which fuelled the flight to the suburbs. The creation of far-flung suburbia is not, then, merely a reflex of demographic change, not simply a result of changing transport technology, Melbourne's peculiar geography or rising personal incomes.

The demonstration of the Davison thesis is accomplished in two sections, one of the city and the other on the suburbs. Through boom and depression he examines in turn commerce, manufacturing, the building industry, the professions and the public service. Challenged on the one hand by foreign manufacturers aided by improved communications and on the other by tariff-supported local manufacturers, the old merchant elite in the 1880s revolutionised the conduct of business. Relations within the merchant fraternity, with clients and with staff became more formalised, indirect and impersonal. These developments were hastened by the depression, and are neatly illustrated by Davison's explication of the reorganisation of business houses and his analysis of declining opportunities for advancement among commercial clerks. A review of the development phases and geography of Melbourne manufacturing leads to the cautious conclusion that the decade saw significant erosions of solidarity between masters and men, brought about by the increasing scale of industry, the introduction of sophisticated technology and declining opportunities for mobility within and out of the ranks of the working class.

As Davision appreciates, any explanation of the emergence of 'class consciousness' among manual industrial workers is complicated by the inappropriateness of one-factor interpretation, given the variable effect from industry in industry of these developments. The reorganisation of the factory along more formal lines and the increasing division of labour must be set against the continuing local residence and paternal interest of the old factory masters. There is also evidence — and Davison produces some of it — that the depression provided fresh opportunities for aspiring workmen to reach employer status, especially in metals, engineering and implement making. It seems likely, however, that further exploration of social mobility and employer paternalism will explain only the aberrant behavior of working-class areas slowly gathered to the Labor fold. Davison's treatment of the manufacturing section provides the best context so far for an understanding of the uncertain state of Labor in the early 1890s. The emphasis on a property-and wage-conscious rather than a class-conscious working class ties in neatly with the elusive nature of class identity and class conflict in the early 1900s, recently the subject of John Rickard's *Class and Politics* (1976).

Davison establishes that Melbourne's prodigious building boom spawned a race of innovators, adventurers, and spec. builders which overwhelmed old established contractors on the suburban frontier. The background of these interlopers, their technical accomplishments in domestic building, as well as the inevitable dilution of standards of workmanship, and their defiance of traditional organisations and structures in the trade, are admirably traced. In similar fashion the social origins and spatial geography of Melbourne's upper middle class-dominated professions — medicine, the law, dentistry, pharmacy, and architecture — are laid bare. And the final chapter in the section on the city completes the analysis of the five estates by scrutinizing attempts to reform the expanding government bureaucracy on business lines, and the ironical outcome in the mean-spirited 1890s.

In sum, Davision argues that the boom years had pushed Melbourne to a new threshold in her history — indeed, propelled the city into a 'metropolitan stage' of the urban cycle, a stage characterised by the substitution of formal for informal systems and of secondary for primary contacts. The suggestion is that, while the 1890s were distinguished by a nostalgic yearning for the traditional honesty and trust issuing from earlier smaller-scale face-to-face relations in commerce, manufacturing, building and construction, and the professions, the movement of history had been inexorable and irreversible. Suburbanisation is interpreted primarily as a response to the commercialism of the metropolis. The form taken by Melbourne's growth — by dispersal of population to far flung low-density suburbs, characterised by detached, single-storey dwellings for nuclear families — was not new in the 1880s, but it accelerated to a crescendo. Changing land use patterns in the inner city, maturation of the gold-rush generation's progency, immigration and the propaganda of building society promoters cannot explain the resurgence of the suburban ideal, which essentially signalled a headlong *retreat* from the City. Home and garden became

the domain for the expression of personal values and relations increasingly eliminated from the workaday world — "Home Sweet Home", appropriately enough, was Victoria's signature tune at the International Exhibition.

This is a most persuasive explanation of late nineteenth century suburbia, and my few quibbles detract little from its power. Davison is properly circumspect in surmising that the realities of marital and familial life in the suburbs may have differed considerably from the myth which asserted a sharp division of roles, echoing the identification of men with the world of work as breadwinner, and that of women with home as mother, wife, and homemaker. How far the division extended in matters of decision-making, domestic economy and child rearing is left open.

Future historians will need to disentangle appearance and reality. They will also need to ponder whether suburbanites of the 1880s achieved the "peace of mind based on the home and garden" (to use a modern phrase) that suburbia promised. My guess is that it did, even bearing in mind the variable achievement of home-ownership, and the offsetting influence of primitive hygiene and industrial pollution. The proper perspective, it seems, is not the rhetoric of the 1880s building societies or today's standards of suburban comfort, but the marked improvements in the size and quality of housing in the three decades from the 1850s, and the way home-ownership in Melbourne reached heights singular in both Australian and world terms.

There also remains the task of the precise definition of segregation — by class, and of work and residence — in the city, and of social and geographical mobility, and the linking of segregation and mobility to illuminate the nature of class in Australian urban society. The charting of the urban tides of movement and association related to work, leisure and social mobility might lead to a questioning of Davison's dichotomy of City and Suburbs. A social typology of Melbourne's suburbs in the 1880s in terms of workplace-residence patterns and employer-employee relations might reveal a wider range of suburban modes and of responses to Marvellous Melbourne than is subsumed in an investigation of the scope and kind mounted here. The teasing out and realization of both the manifest and implicit content of Davison's thesis will be a major preoccupation of historians over the next decade or so. It is to be hoped that the exercise will be more

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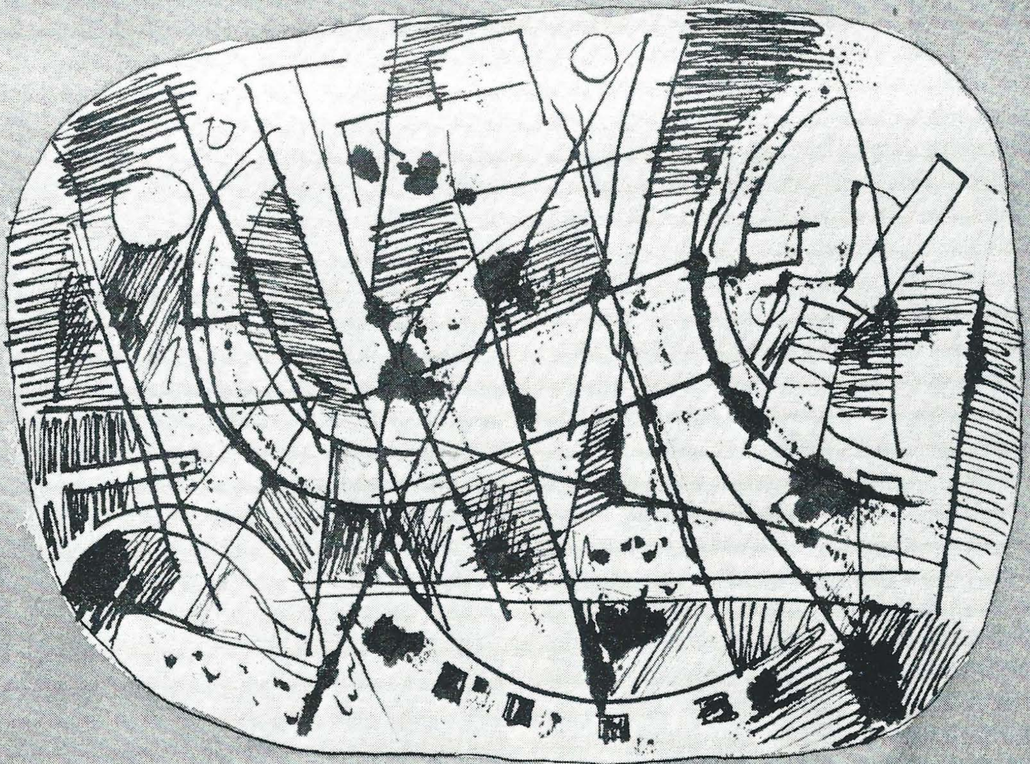
disciplined and profitable than the exegesis so far performed on Russel Ward's *Australian Legend*.

It would indeed be ironic if *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne,* concerned as it is to establish the reality of suburban man beside the stereotype of the noble bushman, were to invest the 'Australian legend' with new life. Davison's last, penetrating chapter explores the popular historiography of the European penetration of Port Phillip, the creation of Melbourne's foundation myth, and the ambivalencies at the heart of celebrations of "Marvellous Melbourne", and then analyses the rural dream, a reflex of the urban nightmare of the 1890s. The rural myth, embodying 'natural' bush values, lay at the centre of the village settlement movement and was rapidly enshrined by artists and writers. Davison has made much sense of literary and artistic currents in the 1890s, but surely goes too far to assert that events had dealt the suburban ideal a fatal blow. It seems an exaggeration to picture Melbourne "the proud city, with all her marvellous skill and enterprise, [as] shackled to the alien mythology of a nomad tribe". After all, didn't the ideal of the privately-owned suburban home re-emerge alive and well, one is almost tempted to add, reinvigorated and with an element of urgency in the 1900s? Indeed, hasn't that been the longer-term effect of depressions in this country?

Whatever reservations one has about these tendencies of Davison's thesis, *Marvellous Melbourne* is crucial reading for those suspicious of the rampant individualism, not to say selfishness, at the heart of the suburban ideal. Davison delineates an urban society in which the property mentality finds expressions in the home-ownership ideal established on the basis of a wide, popular dynamic. His realistic view of 80s society dispenses with heroes and villains, eschews moral judgments on land developers, jerry builders and building society promoters, and properly presents the land boom as a contagion rather than a conspiracy. Thus Davison carries forward the corrective to the historiography of the period begun by Geoffrey Serle in *The Rush to Be Rich,* offers us the first persuasive Australian diagnosis of suburbanism, and in terms of methodology, organisation and the quality of writing provides a long-needed model for students of urban history. *Marvellous Melbourne* will shape historians' perspectives and set standards in the field for a long time to come.

[1] J. A. La Nauze, "The Study of Australian History, 1929-1959", *Australian Journal of Science,* vol. 22, no. 6, 21 December 1959, p. 231; N. D. Harper, "The Rural and Urban Frontiers", *Historical Studies,* vol. 10, no. 40, May 1963, p. 421; J. W. McCarty, "Australian Capital Cities in the Nineteenth Century", *Australian Economic History Review*, vol. x, no. 2, September 1970, p. 107.

[2] Peter Bolger, *Hobart Town* (A.N.U. Press, Canberra, 1973); Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s A Study of an Australian Urban Society* (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1973); Peter Spearritt, *Sydney Since the Twenties* (Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1978); Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (Melbourne University Press, 1978). Two fine urban histories which explore the relationship between cities and their hinterlands, are not discussed here: J. B. Hirst, *Adelaide and the Country 1870-1917 Their Social and Political Relationship* (Melbourne University Press, 1973) and Weston Bate, *Lucky City; The First Generation at Ballarat: 1851-1901* (Melbourne University Press, 1978).



ROGER KEMP

ERIC WESTBROOK

R. K.

After being neglected, except by a small number of his fellow artists, for a large part of his career, perhaps too much has been written about him in the last year. It is therefore to be hoped that this tiny Overland Ossa perched on the Pelion of print will not make his problems greater. It is, of course, pleasant and proper for a major artist to be given a public party on his seventieth birthday, but when at that party the voice of the guest of honour is in danger of being drowned by the noisy congratulations — including the self-congratulations of those who are now preening themselves on their perspicacity in recognizing his qualities — then it is time for the celebrations to end before the guest suffers from a kind of artistic laryngitis.

And yet no-one would wish to ignore the achievements of such an important and individual figure who stands apart from the flow of painting in this country, but who is, at the same time, one of its major elements. Only when, as recently, something of the range and depth of his enormous output has been shown to us for the first time, do we fully realise his remarkable achievement. The slow refinement of a deliberately restricted number of formal elements and a deceptively simple range of color make him more akin to some European, and especially French painters, than to the majority of his compatriots.

The cross, the circle and the mask, together with the red, white and blue palette appeared in the small, tightly painted panels which were shown to a largely uncomprehending public in the exhibitions of the Victorian Artists' Society in the early 1950s. With only a few hesitations and detours they have continued, constantly enriched, expressively and technically, into the large canvasses of the seventies. A question still hanging in the air and certainly not to be brought to earth here is: from which source sprang these images into the experience of the young Australian and drove him to wrestle with them in hundreds of paintings, drawings and prints over so many years? One very tentative and perhaps preposterous suggestion is that being born in Bendigo just after the turn of the century, when that strange city still retained much of its cultural ambiguity, some spark was struck from the meeting and conflict of Irish Catholics and Chinese.

His kinship with European artists goes further than a reluctance to play the local game of stylistic rock-jumping. We wears the characterless garments apparently fished at random from the same wardrobes as those which had served Leger and Braque. Mr Amor has chosen for his drawing one of those occasions when a tie was included, but at these times the tie seems to feel its irrelevance and tries to hide under the point of the collar or the right ear. Above it is the intelligent artisan's face, with the small eyes of a type frequently encountered in the industrial suburbs of Paris or on the roads of the Auvergne. In fact, for a time, he worked on various manual jobs, and his paintings are well and strongly put together, like farm gates or packing-cases rather than carrying the air of a cabinet-maker's self-satisfaction. Only the voice is not Mediterranean but soft and faintly blurred, so that especially in public places the long conversations which he enjoys have the uneven level of voices on a radio short-wave band. And as with talk picked up at random on a radio, we seem to cut into a section of an endless monologue, diffuse but never boring. Perhaps he likes to talk at length because the art of painting is a lonely one, with the applause, unlike that received by the actor or musician, coming months or even years after the performance.

Talk about his work is often at one remove from it, so that the streams of painting and talking move in the same direction but never quite

meet. What is going on in his head seems essentially private, and one is privileged to share a little of it. Perhaps also this is his way of avoiding the risk which faces every artist, of 'talking-out' a work so that in the end there seems no point in making it.

He has not produced a 'school' and few, if any, obvious imitators, but he has the deep and genuine respect of younger artists which few of his contemporaries enjoy. They admire the integrity which has seen him safely through the fashions from New York, and his remarkable skill in avoiding the social traps which are dug to capture the lions before they are driven into the park where they can be watched at play. There is a parallel in this respect in the feelings which the young poets of the thirties had for E. M. Forster. This is all the more remarkable in that the Australian tradition is to respect members of one's own age group or at most those slightly older, and then to suspend admiration and even attention until an older artist is safely dead.

He now clearly enjoys being in the spotlight, largely because it warms him and he has earned the right to this warmth, but both the dazzle and the after-image are dangerous, and perhaps now is the time for him to turn away a little and to pick up again what he was doing before the light came on. His is too fine a talent to have reached its peak at seventy and, like Titian and Picasso, he can have some twenty years of good painting in front of him. This should benefit him, but we can safely assume that it will benefit us.

SWAG *continued from page 53*

If you don't accept this charge of insecurity, reflect on this. Betty Burstall is a marvellous woman, and her La Mama theatre in Melbourne's Carlton has been a very important factor in new Australian drama. Yet it was called after a similar enterprise in New York. I have always thought this ironic. Then last year we had Peter Luck's widely-praised series on TV, 'Australia through old newsreels', so to speak, ineptedly done in some ways but at least straight out of the native soil. It was called "This fabulous Century". I was looking through some American books of the 1930s the other day, and came across one containing great pictures of the past. What was it called? Why, *This fabulous Century*, of course.

Well, Max, I'm sure that this hasn't done what you really called for, but it's an attempt at a start. I wonder how many subscriptions Overland will lose?

A footnote. I met and very much liked the Chinese writers' delegation which was out here recently for an Australian tour, including Writers' Week in Adelaide. I had a chance to say a few words to them at a lunch, and I mentioned to them an inscribed bamboo I was given by the Chinese writers' organization in Peking in 1956 or 1957 — a verse from the classic poet Li Po (A.D. 701-762):

All forgotten the names of the wise and the sage
But the names of the drinkers are in history's page.

(My translation.) The writers were delighted to hear it, and immediately quoted it straight back to us in Chinese. I asked if it would have been possible in more recent years for me to have been given such a present. "No, no", they said, "Li Po was regarded officially during the 'cultural revolution' as a traitor" ". These distinguished people have all served long terms in prison and had their libraries burned. One spent four years in solitary confinement. I'm pleased that Li Po, drinker or no, has been reinstated to history's page; and that people like these very human (and well-informed) Chinese writers survived.

In my last 'Swag', on page 55, I used the phrase "we *have* to deman lighthouses . . ." (arguing of course that we don't). Unfortunately this came out in the print as "demand lighthouses". As a lighthouse fancier I have no objection to *demanding* lighthouses, but that is not what I meant. Readers who were puzzled, but I expect they were few, may also care to note that the subject of Eric Westbrook's article and Rick Amor's drawing in the last issue was Noel Counihan. Incidentally, this series has been so well received by readers that we are extending it, with the special object of bringing in some artists who are not Melbourne-based. Then we may go on to have a series on writers.

JUNE FACTOR

David Martin's Writing for Children

June Factor is a lecturer at the Institute of Early Childhood Development, Melbourne.

Writing for children is for some authors what has been called an occasional muse. It may be done for the amusement of particular children, for variety — "to switch from one form of writing to the other is like resting one set of muscles and bringing another into play"[1] — or even to prove something to one's contemporaries, the reason Norman Lindsay is said to have written *The Magic Pudding*. David Martin is one of those writers who, in Bettina Hürlimann's somewhat patronising phrase, "have persuaded their muse to spare some time for children".[2] Born in Hungary, educated in Germany, a refugee who came to England before the Second World War, he was already a published writer (in English) before he settled in Australia in 1949. Since then he has become familiar as poet, short story writer and novelist. In 1972 his first book for "young readers", *Hughie,* appeared, and he has since published ten other titles.

David Martin's work offers an interesting opportunity to follow the development of a children's writer, to note the social and cultural values that underline his work, and to trace the increasing skill and complexity of his writing.

In an article in Overland no. 65 (1976), Martin wrote:

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

Thus one of Martin's central concerns: how to recreate the gritty, uncomfortable, often unhappy real world without too much reticene or compromise, and yet do so without destroying the young reader's hope, his belief in the possibility of a secure and worthwhile future.

Writing for children raises certain problems not present for the novelist who is writing for his peers. The latter is permitted to delve into motivation, to elaborate connections and influences which may not be evident to his characters, to suggest, by narrative, dialogue and juxtaposition, exactly how these people live, speak, think and feel. But the children's novelist has traditionally emphasized action, sometimes at the expense of characterisation; the movement of the story dominates. And his story ends happily, or at least with an 'open' ending which suggests that happiness is possible. Which means, according to Martin, that there are some aspects of reality which cannot be encompassed in such writing, for there are some aspects of reality which can be regarded optimistically only if the writer falsifies experience:

> In my own case, I don't feel I need all that many books which hold out hope. I've lived long enough to appreciate that order is arbitrary and that nature, though vastly rich in structured patterns, has no hierarchy of 'values'. I can accept nature, but it hasn't come all at once. Children cannot be left to confront chaos directly, just like that. As a writer, I cannot leave them without hope. (Overland, no. 65.)

That, for Martin, is the dilemma, the challenge, of writing for children. He criticises some recent

attempts by writers to give "the semblance of out-of-luck reality" while retaining "happy endings by implication", and then admits:

> I am not slinging off, unless it be at myself. I am aware of internal conflicts when I write for children, a tension between knowledge and conscience. I partly avoid the dilemma by avoiding relationships and confrontations of the more hopeless kind, which is the easier because it agrees with my temperament, though not with my intellectual convictions. (*Overland,* no. 65.)

His goal, he says, is to "bridge the last span of the gap between young writing and other writing. "Children's Literature" as such doesn't interest me. We are not failed teachers! We write to express ourselves, and we write best, for whatever reader, if we hold back least, because then we give most." But the questions remain:

> How can we find a language and a style to express reasonably subtle and complex actions and feelings in a much more simple way than hitherto? . . . Does anyone know how despair-resistant 'normal' children really are, how much pessimism — if that is the word — they can accept in their reading (as distinct from horror) without serious harm? (*Overland,* no. 65.)

Martin's first five children's novels have central characters who are about thirteen or fourteen years old. He is thus generally categorized as a writer for 'young people', that uneasy euphemism coined by publishers for books for children over eleven or twelve. Martin suggests that readers like characters "roughly of their own age . . . with whom they can identify"; I would guess that children rather younger than his protagonists are attracted to his books.

The first novel, *Hughie* (1971), concerns the attempts of an Aboriginal boy and his white friend to persuade the people of a small Australian country town to de-segregate the swimming pool, where only whites may swim. The difficulties of this undertaking almost destroy the friendship. In *Frank & Francesca* (1972), three youngsters, one of whom is an English and the other an Italian immigrant, combine to solve a double mystery involving a Sicilian-based vendetta and lost natural parents. *The Chinese Boy* (1973) is set in the Australian goldfields of the 1860s, where the boy of the title shares the adventures and hardships of the many immigrants who dreamt of making their fortune by finding gold. *The Cabby's Daughter* (1974) is also set in the past, in 1903, and concerns the struggles of a young motherless girl to cope with a kindly but heavy-drinking father, a younger brother, and her own growing. Vincent, the co-hero of *Mister P And His Remarkable Flight* (1975), is a lonely boy who trains an ordinary street pigeon to become a racing pigeon. The pigeon, Mr. P, overcomes tremendous obstacles in order to return to his owner.

Each of these novels is 'realistic' in the sense that it is concerned with probable, everyday experiences set in historically and geographically accurate times and places. There are no magic doors, secret passages or time machines. "The world of childhood is very much part of the other, and very troubled, world, and whether and how a child finds its way about in it depends on how it lives and how its friends and parents live." (Overland, no. 65.) Martin's characters may engage in daydreaming and imaginary wish-fulfilment, but Martin will not resolve their dilemmas by recourse to fantasy. His children must function within a world of adults, and these adults are often weak, inconsistent, prejudiced and even cruel. However, in Martin's children's novels the young are not contaminated by the vices of their elders; there is thus still hope for the future.

Martin's novels for children provide unusually clear evidence of developing skills and subtlety in writing in this genre. *Hughie,* the first novel, is awkward and stilted, a beginner's work. The opening is direct and interesting, the ending unexpectedly and dramatically unresolved (Martin is consistently strong with openings and endings), and there is some strong writing in between; but the exploration of racial and class antagonisms in an Australian country town is undeveloped and sometimes unconvincing. This is not due to the limitations imposed by restricting our understanding of the events to the perception of the young Aboriginal, Hughie. (There are also occasional authorial comments, and some adults-only conversations late in the book.) Many writers have accepted such a limitation and turned it into a powerful focus — Mark Twain is an outstanding example. The problem lies in Martin's straining towards balance, with the consequent distortion of his "virtual world".[3] Take this section, where Hughie runs off to Sydney to visit his cousin, a university student:

> His cousin, sitting cross-legged on a couch like a Turkish pasha, had stopped singing at

his entry. For a moment Hughie hardly recognised him. He had let his hair grow long and a magnificent beard framed his face, lending it a piratical air . . .

"If it isn't the infant Hugh!"

To Hughie's slight annoyance he did not even get up, but merely saluted him with a lordly wave, "You people, meet my baby cousin from the bush. Hughie, this is Alberto, and this fat monster here is Phil. And this is Phil's best girl, Kathie. Or his second-best; I've lost count. Yes, yes, you've guessed it, Alberto is an Italian."

"A New Australian," the lanky Alberto politely corrected him from his corner. He was almost dark enough to have passed for an Indian or a Malay, and like Greg he was holding a guitar. "I am a new one, you are a super-old one, and Kathie and Phil come somewhere in the middle."

It is not the rather conventional picture of university students that jars: that would be acceptable in the relatively non-complex structure of a children's novel. It is the obviousness of the attempt to make these students representatives of Australian society, underlined (in case we missed the point) by Alberto's statement. Martin wants his readers to believe that tolerance and 'a fair go' will ultimately triumph; these young people (and Hughie and his friend) represent the future, which confronts the bad old ways and succeeds in dinting them. The successful Aboriginal student offers an alternative to the poverty of the Aboriginal camp; the honest policeman in the country town balances the harsh police in Sydney; the adults' bigotry is redeemed by occasional changes of heart; the brawl outside the swimming pool is seen to be everybody's fault. Moreover every character is 'knowable' almost at first glance: we never understand more about Alberto and Co., they remain 'typical' students. And despite Hughie's difficulties and disappointments, we are confident that the author will not allow him to suffer for too long. In other words this is a quite conventional disaster-followed-by recovery children's novel, and this conventionality softens and diminishes the harsh implications of the story.

The language, too, lacks conviction. Australian slang and allusions pepper the novel, presumably in order to provide authenticity, but some seem forced: "Clancy was sitting on top of him like the dog on the tucker box", "the buttery galah", "one of those days Aussies call a real blackfellow day", "you're terribly decent coves". The slang contracts oddly with the often stilted language of the narrative, and sometimes of the characters: "Clancy riposted", "Yes, it was she", and so on.

And yet there are redeeming moments: the picture of the Aboriginal elder, powerless and powerful, beside a campfire in the bush at night, "a gum leaf puffing into a small flame with a quiet hiss"; the story of the Aboriginal boxer, whose unhappy experience lingers with us beyond the telling. In these moments we recognize a more considerable writer than is evident elsewhere in the book.

Frank & Francesca (1972) has a modern urban setting. As in *Hughie* the opening is tense, full of implications we wish to pursue. The three youngsters — Frank (Australian), Francesca (Italian), and Monty (English) — echo the 'representativeness' of the students in *Hughie,* but Frank at least is a much more complex and ambiguous character than any in the earlier novel. A disaffected teenager, believing himself unloved by his adoptive parents, he sets out to discover his origins and on the way becomes involved in an Italian feud. Francesca is pretty, modest, obedient, and occasionally timid (until *The Cabby's Daugher,* Martin's female characters are painfully stereotyped), and Monty's role is mainly to rescue the hero, Frank, when rescue is needed. But Frank's conflict with his parents, and with adults in general, is convincing. Here is an early confrontation with his father:

> "They tell me you're still wagging it," he said without beating about the bush. "What have you to say?"
>
> Frank swung round to face him. It was on his tongue to ask who 'they' were, but it would have sounded lame. Therefore he said nothing and merely smiled in a dull sort of way.
>
> "Friend of mine saw you in a milk bar this morning, miles from your school, so you can wipe that smirk off. You'd do better to get yourself a haircut. You look like a sheep, a sheep with dandruff."
>
> "Only had one three weeks back," Frank replied morosely.

The parental tendency to shift any discussion on to matters of personal appearance and hygiene will be recognised by most children; they will also understand Frank's response.

The search for roots, for origins, and above all for love, unfortunately is overlaid by the heavy plotting of the 'adventures' of the story — spying, kidnapping, guns, red stains on the bathroom

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wall — which we know will all come right in the end. Martin does not make us fear for his characters; his crises do not match the tension and remorselessness of Ivan Southall's. Nonetheless, this novel is a distinct improvement on *Hughie.* There is less awkwardness in the narrative and dialogue, and the inner-city environment is drawn with assurance and an eye for significant detail. The twin themes — prejudice and deception — are cleverly interwoven, though their complexities are denied in the happy-ever-after ending. But once again there is an attempted mitigation of the ugliness and potency of national and racial chauvinism. Those who speak in cliches about Italians are either joking, like the kindly policeman who talks about the 'garlic belt", or quickly reformed, as in the confrontation between Frank and Francesca, when the boy foolishly asks, "What's wrong with you Italians?" There is a suggestion that the outside world is harsher — few people believe that an Australian boy would use a knife in a fight — but this is not shown as impinging directly on the youngsters in the story. They are mates, and mateship (as in *Hughie*) overcomes suspicions based on nationality or color. A comfort to the reader, pleasing to the society in which such a book is published, but not what one would expect from a writer who questions "the constructivist, optimistic assumptions that seem to underlie the 'philosophy' on this genre [children's literature][4]".

With his third novel, *The Chinese Boy* (1973), Martin faced a new set of problems. Apart from the limitations of 'juveniles' which C. S. Lewis listed ("a strict limit on vocabulary . . . erotic love [excluded] . . . reflective and analytical passages [cut down][5]"), there are complications for the writer who chooses to set his story in the past. Like another children's novelist, Geoffrey Trease, Martin takes up an historical subject which has been obscured and falsified. Trease recognised some of the difficulties of the historical novelist: the need for historical accuracy, and at the same time the importance of keeping the reader's interest and sympathy, despite the sometimes critical differences between the values and attitudes of people living in different periods. As well, there is the problem of writing appropriate, authentic-sounding speech, usually not resolvable except by "artistic compromise"[6] and an awareness of the dangers of what Rosemary Sutcliff calls "gadzookery and modern colloquialism".[7]

Trease has written about the English Civil War and the French Revolution; Martin concerns himself with the Chinese, mostly peasants, who came to the Australian goldfields as indentured laborers in the 1850s and 1860s. There has been very little written about these people except by a few historians, and the folk-myth of mysterious, inscrutable, hard-working aliens is wide-spread in Australia. Martin set out, quite consciously, to challenge this myth by portraying a group of Chinese so warmly and intimately that the reader would recognise their common humanity. "I don't deliberately set out to 'teach' kids good, tolerant, attitudes on any question", says Martin, "but one finds that my books, taken together, would be an innoculation against spiritual racism and any sort of fanaticism."[8]

It is an ambitious project, not wholly successful. The central character, the Chinese boy Ho, who speaks English and acts as interpreter for the small group of miners led by his uncle, is the most passive hero of any of Martin's children's books. He rarely initiates action; adventures and disasters befall him and he responds bravely, but a trifle woodenly. We are told that he feels sad, or lonely, or frightened, but the writing does not convince us:

> He looked round. Straight into the barrel of a pistol.
> "Move and I p-put a b-ball through you!"
> A man, mounted on a horse, was staring down at Ho. He sat stock-still in the saddle, his head covered by a sugar-bag with two narrow slits. Ho, petrified with terror, let his eyes travel down the rider's body. He was wearing green trousers.
> "A b-ball through the head. So w-watch it!"
> This was rapped out sharply. Green trousers and a stammer! No, it could not be! Surely he was dreaming — another of his nightmares. He shut his eyes and opened them again. The apparition was still there.
> "B-back with me! To your c-camp!"
> Felix Price. Who had robbed and battered Tom Flanagan and disappeared without trace. Felix Price, Octavius Lawson's crony.
> "Not going."
> Ho was slowly recovering from his shock. One moment he was watching two bullocks, the next a pistol was pointed at his head.

This is meant to be dangerous, exciting, but the tension is diminished by the obviousness of phrases such as "petrified with terror", "No, it could not be!" and so on. Compare this with an extract from Southall's *Josh,* where the hero is also in danger:

Kids coming, five or six of them together suddenly whooping, as many and more behind them, Josh glimpsing his book flying in pieces from somewhere out of Harry, Harry slinging punches but kids all over him, trampling on pages and trampling on bodies, Josh on the ground half-suffocated, kicking and writhing and then being frog-marched, being rushed into nowhere, great long strides, each as if falling from a precipice, kids all round him shoving and yelling, running into nowhere, driving him until his senses were reeling. Mum, they'll kill me, I can't keep going.

Southall pushes the narrative to mimic the heaving, chaotic, fighting mass of children, the turmoil made more dreadful by Josh's unspoken cry. Martin develops the action bit by bit, describing and explaining all the while. The reader follows the author's pointing finger, and is reassured to know that the author will look after Ho, will rescue him again. In *Josh,* there are moments when such certainty fades, and the power and tension of the narrative is consequently vastly augmented.

Fundamentally, *The Chinese Boy* is an 'end then' novel, a series of events linked by the same characters. Perhaps this is the result of trying too conscientiously to show how the Chinese lived in a variety of situations: on the road, at the diggings, as part of the Celestial Transport Company, and so on. Certainly the prejudice of the other miners against the Chinese is demonstrated to be unjustified and unprovoked. But the writer, "committed to some kind of moral betterment" (*Overland,* no. 65), thrusts too much information at us, overlooking the sage advice of an experienced historical novelist "to keep people from being engulfed in the trimmings".[9]

This novel, however, shows Martin increasingly able to shift easily between dialects, use Australian speech that rings true, and vary the narrative stylistically to heighten or focus the action. And there is one small section of the book, when the rough Gap Tooth returns to camp with a white woman and a baby, which could stand alone. Here humor and pain are blended to considerable effect.

The Cabby's Daughter (1974) marks another departure for Martin; it is written in the first person, and the narrator is a girl. Until this novel, female characters in Martin's children's novels were largely passive and peripheral. Indeed Martin sometimes descends to the crudest stereotyping, making his good females pretty, the bad ones ugly. With *The Cabby's Daughter,* however, he moves away from such simplistic characterisation towards a subtle and perceptive portrayal of a young girl growing up amidst poverty and hardship.

The novel opens with the thirteen-year old girl, Bess, standing by her mother's grave, hoping that her father will not break down and weep. It ends a few months later, the girl mature beyond her years, comforting her father as her mother might have done. He breaks, she does not. Between those two events we follow her 'getting of wisdom', which includes experiences traditionally taboo in much twentieth century writing for children: parental drunkenness and grandparental irresponsibility; sadistic teachers; sexual inquisitiveness; attempted seduction by an older man; illegitimacy. What is impressive is Martin's ability to maintain the humor and essential innocence of the central protagonist. By structuring the narrative retrospectively, he proffers painful experience through the assuaging filter of time past, time survived. Bess tells her own story, and the perspective of her telling allows the reader to enter her world and also to judge it. We can see this in the following passage, when father and daughter confront each other:

"I'll have the truth, girl, if it's the last thing, Now, whose was that money"

"I found it in the park." I spoke very quietly. He beckoned me to stand closer. I did and he put his arm round me. The old beer smell. I turned away slightly.

It never was in no park. A man gave it yer — right?"

"No, Dad."

He studied my face, then ran a finger down my nose and over my lips. Almost in a whisper he said:

"Kissin' on the mouth. Kissin' on the mouth, an' then askin' me about babies. Two nights ago. Think I came down in the last shower? Come, tell us who done it. You tell us who you got it off." His grip tightened; he squeezed so hard that I was helpless. "Better come clean. There's a bloke an' he gives yer money. What for? An' yer takes what he gives yer." He shook me gently. "Yer can tell yer dad. Know what I mean? Yer let a bloke kiss yer, smack on the mouth. He puts his paws on yer, gives yer a few lousy bob . . . an' there's Horrie's boots. That's so, ain't it?"

It was so mean and so plausible. Our faces nearly touched and I saw the flecks in his irises.

"Not true, not true, not true!"

The scene is vividly 'now', but framed by re-

membrance, by the use of the past tense, by the commentary "It was so mean and so plausible" which is the language and thought of the narrator, not the child she was once. This dimension of time, and of maturing, is a new element in Martin's work.

The author Lloyd Alexander writes:

> I think perhaps it may be more heroic to say: This is how things are, and I must see them as they are, rather than give myself any kind of happy illusion, or escape into a saccharine dream of any kind.[10]

For the first time in his writing for children, Martin avoids most, though not all, the 'happy illusions' which impair his earlier work. There is an unfortunate lapse when, in chapters 8 and 9, villains are outwitted and an ugly teacher turns into a kindly, blushing woman-in-love. Fortunately these regressions make up only a small part of an otherwise strong and moving novel.

The fifth book, *Mister P And His Remarkable Flight* (1975), shows the author utilising a different literary strategy. The earlier novels were broken up into traditional chapters. *Mister P* has only two parts, intriguingly titled "Vincent and Mister P" and "Mister P and Vincent". It is not until we are half-way through the book that we realize the significance of these appositions. Part I concerns the experience of a country boy, Vincent, living away from home because of the drought, who befriends a town pigeon, Mister P. He trains it to become a 'homer', a racing pigeon. Part I finishes at the point where Mister P has been sent off on a long cross-country race, and hasn't returned within the expected time. Part II shifts the focus from the boy to the pigeon. It is the bird's experiences we follow now, through storm, capture, attack. The last three segments break the pattern but prolong the tension: segment 4 has Vincent at the centre again, segment 5 takes us back to Mister P, and the final section brings the two together.

The old theatrical warning that actors should avoid appearing with animals seems to be reversed in the children's novel; here the presence of an animal may have what the psychologists call a halo effect: the reader's interest in the animal is so great that it stretches to include any human beings in the vicinity. Certainly, in *Mister P,* it is the long, eventful flight of the bird which grips and holds us. Not since Frank Dalby Davison's *Manshy* (1931) and *Dusty* (1946) has an Australian author portrayed an animal with such force and conviction. To give the flavor of the writing in a short extract is difficult, for more than in any other of Martin's books the effect depends on the cumulative layering of the narrative, each small crisis, each reversal the basis for the next advance. The writing is uncompromising; Martin is no longer "holding back":

> They made their nuptial flight: the dance on the roof became a dance in the sky. They soared and tumbled in sheer exuberant happiness. Their trails laced and criss-crossed in a marvellous, everchanging pattern. For long minutes they seemed to be racing, white wing to blue-grey wing, up to the clouds and back, around spires and down to the roof-tops. When she rested, Mister P paraded round his bride, his tall stately-spread and dragging. These respites however, were always short. On they would fly, aware of their strength and grace, challenging each other's speed and power. But even such a flight must end, and when the time came he led her to his perch beneath the rim of the gasometer, where they sat side by side in companionable peace until darkness fell, and right through the long, cold night.

Not all the novel works at this level of intensity. Vincent's relationships with his parents, his aunt and his teacher are well drawn, but it is only his connection with Mister P that makes him a character of depth, someone whom we care about. He is modern children's literature's archetypal hero: the outsider, lonely, dissatisfied, uncertain of the future. The bird does not resolve his problems, but it provides him with purpose, a focus of interest. He learns about the bird, and he learns much more than pigeon-lore. He does not become top of his class, a famous pigeon-fancier, or even much happier. But he grows, matures just a little, and it is precisely the minuteness of the change that makes it seem convincing. When Vincent sees Mister P again, battered and "clinging precariously to the moulded projection" on the Town Hall roof, he says, "He's changed". Without pressing the point, Martin has shown us that that is true of the boy as well.

In this novel Martin finally bends, if not breaks, the taboo he railed against in 1972:

> When a boy wants to say something is upside-down, ten to one he'll call it arsy-wisy, or arse-wise-up. But no children's editor will let such words besmirch his pages.

This is a taboo familiar to children's writers all over the world. Even in the U.S.A., which has

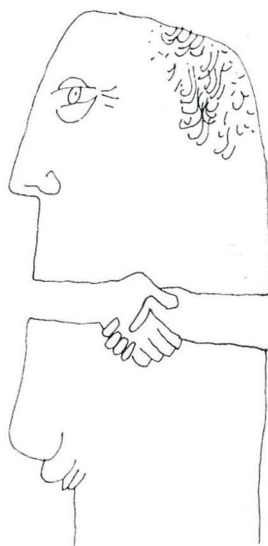
been most permissive in this regard, writers such as Mary Steele and Judy Blume have recorded their dissatisfaction with the editor's erasor.[11] Martin must have persuaded Hodder and Stoughton that by 1975 it was safe to allow the occasional swear word. When Vincent is angry with his teacher for making a broadcast which refers to his experiences with Mister P, he uses language which, while hardly an exact replica of the forceful expressions of a fourteen-year-old Australian boy, does sound authentic:

> The Losley dame had upset him. Why, by what right, did she trot all this out, making him look a twerp? Two-thirds of it she had arse-up . . . He hated being judged, being measured—- being compared. Why couldn't she stick to her blasted books? Why did she have to yammer on about real life? Real life, my eye!

The author's considerable knowledge about pigeons is generally well integrated into the story. Once or twice Martin offers direct comment and information, but these intrusions disappear in Part II. So successful is this section that it is able to support a shift in perspective, when for a time Mister P is no longer seen directly, but through the eyes of a man and woman who temporarily care for him. A less skilful writer might have avoided this altogether; a purist who demands consistency in patterning above all else would object. However Martin takes advantage of the shift to offer an alternative perspective, in much the same way as the composer of a fugue. He is by now an assured and confident practitioner, the author of a subtle and moving novel for children which does indeed "bridge the last span of the gap between young writing and other writing".

Apart from the books discussed by June Factor in this article, David Martin has also published The Man in the Red Turban *(Hutchinson, 1978) and* The Mermaid Attack *(Outback Press, 1979). Rigby's will publish* Peppino says Goodbye *this year.*

1 Geoffrey Trease, "Why Write for Children?" School Librarian, July 1960.
2 Bettina Hürlimann, *The Centuries of Children's Book in Europe* (Oxford, 1967).
3 Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form* (London, 1976).
4 Extract from a letter from Martin discussing his writing, 1978.
5 C. S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories* (London, 1966).
6 Geoffrey Trease, "The Historical Novelist at Work", *Children's Literature in Education*, no. 7, March 1972.
7 Rosemary Sutcliff, "History is People", *Children's Literature: Views and Reviews* (London, 1971).
8 Extract from letter from Martin discussing his writing, 1978.
9 Rosemary Sutcliff, loc. cit.
10 Lloyd Alexander, quoted in J. Wintle and E. Fisher (eds), *The Pied Pipers: Interviews with the influential creators of children's literature* (London, 1974).
11 See Mary Q. Steele, "Realism, Truth and Honesty", *Horn Book Magazine*, no. 46, February 1971, and the interview with Judy Blume in *The Pied Pipers*.



Jiri Tibor

ROBIN WALLACE-CRABBE

David Campbell

An Appreciation

Robin Wallace-Crabbe is well known as a painter, and his recent novel Feral Palit *received high critical praise. He lives at Braidwood, New South Wales.*

Early in 1979 I was sitting in a house looking out onto a landscape of rocks. I had been sitting there for several months. Most of that time I was feeling bad; beleaguered and bad. And the sky had forgotten how to rain. There were worms in the fruit. I painted a picture on the wall, fiddled about with sentences and, in the evenings, listened to the wireless.

A feature of news broadcasts at that time was the declining health of John Wayne. Wayne sons moved into hospital, all America waited, I felt doubly bad.

At the same time I became aware that David Campbell had lung cancer. I had a tendency to favor those reports indicating that he had a chance of recovery. Still there was the doubt. And, on the wireless, reports of John Wayne.

I had seen one John Wayne film, "True Grit," projected in a school hall while the community's most recent teenage procreators cuddled on a bean bag missing each other's synthetics with glowing tips of cigarettes. John Wayne, and the film, failed to grip me. It was particularly irritating — the news reports of Wayne's decline — because, occasionally, I heard more of David Campbell's condition. There was an outstanding product of a generation, an important poet and many other things besides, ailing (dying, it turned out) and not a mention. Only John Wayne.

And that was the A.B.C., the hope of broadcasting. The other stations were distorted by the stony hill.

Perhaps it could be argued that with poets, artists, composers, the shift from being alive to being dead is of no public importance. Only film actors, sportsmen, politicians, deserve note in and out of life.

Maybe this is proper in the majority of cases. A lot of poems — good or bad — are, in a sense, remote. This is also true of painting, true of prose, true of music. But, to my mind, it is not true of David Campbell's poetry. That is easily accessable at first reading. Unmistakable symbols recur, it celebrates life and looking at the illuminated world. There are not many Ariadnes and hardly a word in Latin. To deliberately hold fine, available, poetry in obscurity seems improper to say the least, as it is improper to ignore its makers. Certainly I can think of no volume of David Campbell's poetry more obscure than "True Grit," and not a line that comes within cooee of that film's banality.

There is always an edge:

> Old Harry Pearce was with his team.
> "The flies are bad," I said to him.

Of course I must point out that I am not attempting to compare John Wayne with David Campbell. Not at all. I am trying to indicate something about the interest Australians are permitted to develop in the work of their major artists.

A particular quality enables people to live, to die, weaving words together, clarifying responses to the world and all that it contains; enjoying, almost perfecting, the limitations imposed upon such forms of making. David worked at that quality, personalised it and through it drew a line around private concerns.

I met beside the sea
Two priestly orchids three
Centimetres tall
Who stood with outstretched hands:
To bless, in sleep, to fall?
They call them Parson's Bands.

Yet he was a rather public figure. Unwittingly transformed, in the minds of many, into something not three centimetres tall, not a natural height but larger than life.

And although I have personal doubts about the aggrandizement of anyone upon the earth (don't we all have a squandered dignity?) it is difficult to deny that David Campbell was a man of achievement. He might have talked of his achievement to close friends, sometimes boasted, but I never heard him. And, to some extent, I was disappointed. I would have enjoyed a droll, a bemused description of a boxing match or items of nastiness from the scrums when he played football for England. It would have interested me to hear a description of bringing a shot-up bomber back (though he told that in a short story). The only fishing stories I remember finished up with Douglas Stewart getting all the fish.

Oh, of course, he played polo and that, for some, set him adrift from the 'reality' of flat-earth Australia, just as jousting or hot air ballooning might have done.

I first saw David Campbell in the Blue Moon Cafe on Alinga Street, Civic, Canberra. It was after an Odetta concert. He was buying cigarettes. I did not know who he was but there were few people in the shop so I noticed him. When I arrived at the post-Odetta-concert party and saw him there and he was identified, I was able to declare to myself, "So that's David Campbell, the poet."

He stood in the kitchen, drinking. One of a group talking with the singer. I was with the juniors, rocking where the rugs had been pulled back.

I was new to Canberra, hardly knew a soul, but I could sense that David aroused interest — animosity in some — that people were aware of his presence. I seem to recall a resentment among some young, over-zealous, lefties that he should represent, so unashamedly, those terrible devils the graziers, yet seem to hog conversation with the black singer of protest.

I may be wrong but I imagine he was wearing a dark grey flannel suit (he had been known to wear pyjama trousers underneath to ward off the cold). Atop the flannelled bigness of the body his remarkable head, stained by the weather. At a distance, middle distance, a big bull of a man. But close up, gentle about the eyes, gentle and, in a way, seemingly eager to give pleasure, almost a hint of nervous anxiety. Altogether a most charming way of being, of enlarging others with his interest.

I took little interest in a poet at a party being more concerned with dislocated hip movements and pouring large quantities of booze into my less than willing disgestive tract. I had read some of his work and liked it. But then I am a sucker for the grazing lands.

One world is of time,
And the other of vision,
And the magpie's song
Brings peace and fusion:

For now the sharp leaves
On the tree are still,
And the great blond paddocks
Come down from the hill.

I like to imagine that the Odetta party was in 1966, if it needs a specific date. Canberra was pretty small in those days. It was difficult for everybody not to know everybody, and some found it claustrophobic.

Opposition to participation in the Vietnam war was hotting up. Police, students, lecturers, anti-war sympathisers, the occasional Croatian, niggled one another.

Serious poets were getting about their tasks, comfortable in the knowledge that David Campbell was a sort of anachronism: old Cambridge man, war hero (D.F.C. and bar), sportsman, grazier — let us not forget the polo — who wrote lyric bush verse throughout which red stock routes, day moons, tongueing kelpies, snow-gums and stockmen recurred.

All that was old wide-brimmed hat. Australia had invented the Victa lawn mower, we were a manufacturing nation! The consciousness of the people was urban if not urbane, the consciousness of artists was, amazingly, 'international', particularly 'American International', no matter which side of which political fence you were on.

What is the meaning of 'kelpie' on Tenth Street?

Poetry I know nothing about but I guess then it was still more English — Irish — Welsh than American. Whatever it was there were a lot of people for whom it seemed not to be,

Hear, the bird of day
Stirs in his blue tree,
Fumbles for words to say
The things a bird may learn
From brooding half the night,
What's matter but a hardening of the light?

They were dramatic days. I am put in mind of a story I was told — probably untrue — about Matisse at the outbreak of World War Two (terribly optimistic, numbering wars!). In the Matisse story, that wise old artist, understanding that a long conflict is at hand, realises that art materials may well be hard to come by and, so, stocks up in preparation.

Keeping the story in mind it is interesting to look at the art of Matisse — David was keen on Matisse — and consider its curious tranquility, its apparent insulation from a world of 'real' events.

I have a soft spot for the Matisse solution. I do not think of it as a cop out but, rather, as optimistic.

In the poem, "Hear the Bird of Day," there is a repeated question: "What's matter but a hardening of the light?"

In this an earlier, metaphysical, concern for time — time and bright illumination — finds a degree of physical clarification. David is moving into a landscape, becoming part of a continuum of matter, energy, light: the amazing, universal glow. He was a very visual artist working with words. His eyes, hooded against the sun, informed him about the shining world.

All of which is not to say that he had no concern for the world in which human beings do terrible things to each other. And, of course, there is a 'real' world screaming behind the opaque interiors of Matisse.

I recall a night at Palerang. (Canberra's expansion unsettled him from Wells Station, at the city's edge. He moved to Palerang on the coastal side of Bungendore). It was a dinner during which one of the guests argued strongly in favour of Australian participation in the Vietnam war; apart from all else he thought that any nation should keep its troops blooded. I was, as usual, almost too drunk to speak. David was passionate, heated, indignant, disappointed, strong in his opposition. After the hawkish guest left he was depressed until — inspiration — we put on highland songs and he danced, we danced, even I managed to stay on my feet (ancestral rhythms).

It takes, I think, courage in art to keep your heart off your sleeve.

About that time, around the publication of *Selected Poems 1942-1968,* David was expanding, finding time to indulge a wide range of interests. He was moving forward technically, his rhythms were becoming more complex, more subtle; rhyme patterns more convoluted. And, as well, his voice was coming through, the conversational voice and its rhythms.

Palerang seemed gloomy (the cook had to be treated with kid gloves), he rolled a jeep and broke his legs. He was at the point of abandoning serious farming in favor of poetry.

He was amusing about the business of farming. He told me "when I was going broke on the land" — his phrase — he found that sitting outside and meditating he could make it all go away, the fences, the grazing animals, leaving only the lit landscape. And he said that he once got to a stage where he could not bring himself to sign a cheque, things were that bad, he could not get himself to do it. Then, finally, he wrote one for enough to take him on a holiday. I suppose that story would have meaning for those who have the misfortune to live on an overdraft?

In retrospect farming became a source of anecdote though its landscape never ceased to thrill him.

But it was not only the landscape that held his attention. He observed people and had a fine ear for conversation, for the meaning of words and their tenuous link with actions. This was not part of a late development. By 1959 he had published a sequence of stories, "Evening Under Lamplight," through which a family unfolds before the challenging energy of children. I thought these stories beautifully done.

"Evening Under Lamplight" was included in *Flame and Shadow,* a volume of selected stories published in 1976.

The same bemused attention to childhood, to memory of people long gone, to lost patterns of family life, is evidenced in the Brindabella Press publication *Starting from Central Station* and in *Deaths and Pretty Cousins, published* in 1975. All these pieces, in dealing with a family, emphasize the twists of individuals, the fragments that constitute singular identity. In fact, I find it hard to think of a case where David Campbell engaged in a belittling compaction of individuals into sociological generalisation. Making it all the more curious that, for so long, others sometimes pigeon-holed him, for convenience, under something like "anacronistic grazier balladist" while totally misrepresenting themselves to themselves one way or the other.

Among family poems the tone of the seven-part "Deaths and Pretty Cousins" is perfect:

> Jo was the first to go. She was four feet ten
> And men and mirrors loved her. She said to cook:
> 'If I hear one word of you, I'll come straight back
> And fire you from a cannon.' 'That Josephine!
> She would, you know.' It took a cup and scone
> To settle cook's ruffled feathers. Jo had no truck
> With Gran whom she loathed, and her gigolo. 'Good luck
> To the pair of them!' In six months she held the town
> In her small gloved pointing hand . . .

The house David built at "The Run" is full of light. Initially he wanted to call the place, "Folly Run". It is about a hundred acres just outside Queanbeyan on the Captains Flat road. The Molonglo, destined for transformation into Lake Burley Griffin, flows past below the house. A wall of glass in the main room frames the slope to a gully and, beyond, a plump arc of land rising to the sky. On this curved surface twisted grey trunks — unpatterned arabesques — interrupt grass. Two groups of what I assume are native cypress, the base of the trunks protected from stock by kero tins, add a dark, pencil character unique in the landscape. The earth filling of the terrace beyond the window glass is held in place by sleepers. Here small dragon lizards run like anxious bipeds into and out of the sun. The sleepers have also been used to create an indoor garden roofed with corrugated fibre glass. There, at two tables made of bolted planks, David liked to entertain beneath a mass of wistaria, beside cumquats, azaleas and bamboo. It is a romantic room. In one corner he kept his potter's wheel.

David's pottery is a surprise. His drawing is a struggle with the problems of delineation. He once commented to me on his own awe of those artists — I suspect he was thinking of Matisse and Picasso — who can capture a complex form with the rhythms of a few lines. In the pottery he comes out well on top of the struggle. Casseroles, coffee cups, a tea pot that is difficult to pour from, a number of other pieces classified best, I suppose, by the word 'pot'.

There is, in forming clay on a wheel, an interesting conflict that must be resolved. Hands and arms push at a centre held by the rotation. The clay, which would like to be a flat, round, knob, is pulled up in tension. The mind and hand of the potter must come to terms with the grain and atomic weight of the material.

This is like an extension of David's light, matter, energy concerns. In a late poem he takes it one stage further.

> Within the stone
> A dance of atoms
> Warms the basking lizard
>
> The warmth of the lizard
> Quickens the atoms
>
> About the stone and lizard
> Where they lie like lovers
> The cosmos dances

Always in his work, interwoven with rapidly widening cultural interests, the process accelerated by the abandonment of farming, there is the countryman's eye for which the otherwise undifferentiated landscape comes alive, surrendering fragments of its meaning. He notes details and gives them particular significance, as Bruegel does in his nature passages.

> Love who points the swallow home
> And scarves the russet at his throat,

or, much later:

> And a spurwing plover
> Stands her ground
> Wing hooped as a shield
> Over olive eggs in a nest of dust
> Pecking at a while faced hogget

His understanding of the work of painters was considerable. Here the country eye, well-trained, could capture what was happening within an illusory space and pin point meaning. Cezanne is contained within

> Mont Sainte-Victoire prayed for him
> Fruit and fields showed their true sides
> Melons worshipped at the classic dome of his head
>
> Peasants played cards like royalty
> ignoring him

Even the obscure Balthus is, to a degree, unmasked. With a smile?

> Hanging out of windows
> Noses in books
> Showing their drawers

Dreaming naked in a looking glass
Looking for pimples
Nipples pubic hair

Of course a seeing eye is the enemy of political bigotry. When ideas assume their own mystique apart from the mysteries of the evident world something cracks and falls. David seemed to me to be a pretty apolitical character. His concern about involvement in the Vietnam war was, I understood, not based on political thought. I do not remember his displaying a preference for those terrible conversations where we all shout at each other what is heard on a television or read in a paper.

Being apolitical does not diminish the importance of a voice in our time. Perhaps it enhances it. Myself, I find a warming, of a kind, in:

The one living thing,
The wren on its violin
Frets out a song;
And the sun, that great oaf,
Like Jehovah cries from a cloud:
My son, my son!

It is fresh, loud and real, built on the innocence of the non human world.

In the late poetry the meaning turns, again as a result of visual stimulus. The surrealists who glimped at the edge of the field of the seeing mind a moment between two fixed, unlikely points of meaning, captured David's particular attention. And this, if you think about it, is another form of energy: a spark leaping a gap, silence between notes of music. So, "Kentish Cherries":

And bitter
As babies fingers
The stones
Like little skeletons
Skulls still bloody
On thin bone stems.

From the little I knew it struck me that David Campbell was as frail as any man, even though to many he appeared larger than life. He seemed kind-eyed, often anxious to please and had a good smile. Perhaps, being observant, he could always see how the landscape mocks us and will not permit what we seem to demand, a grand overview.

David did not seem to try for a grand overview but rather to penetrate some meanings of the light.

What a tragedy people say
The mask has fallen
And they frown in the hall mirror

In a heap of rubble
The mask looks up from the floor
With a broken smile.

TO DAVID CAMPBELL

Staying with you at Palerang, I walked
Alone in the sharp grey morning through your paddocks,
And in the creekbed, picked up a stone, sculpted
By water to the outline of a heart.
Then climbed the bank and came on a dead fox:
Dew on his fur, he lay as if still running.

Later, you and I walked in the sun. Jo Gullett,
The young collie, ran up a leaning tree,
Barking with pleasure. You too climbed a tree.
No branches within reach: knees, feet and arms
Gripping the trunk, bark-stains on your white trousers
As you slid down again.

And at the end
Of your long strip of earth, there were the graves:
The earliest settlers, quiet under their headstones,
Inside your boundary, close to the old road
Grassed-over many years. And you grew silent.
Tall powerful body, broken nose, fair hair,
You stood beside me, yet you stood apart,
In a moment's piety towards the dead, and towards
The earth they knew, and were.

Speech is good,
But silence also. Let me do as you did.
Standing in thought by your grave, I fall silent.

PHILIP MARTIN

W. R. STENT

An Individual vs. the State

The Case of B. L. Cooper

Bill Stent is senior lecturer in the Department of Economics at La Trobe University. He spent six years as an agricultural officer in Papua New Guinea, and went to East Kew Central School, in Melbourne, as did Brian Cooper. He plans to publish more fully on Brian Cooper and his case.

With the single word EXTRADITED, in six centimetre capitals, the Sydney Sun headed the front page of its 1 December 1960 issue. This reported that a Sydney clerk had been ordered to return to New Guinea to answer a charge of sedition. Two days later, morning papers throughout Australia carried photos of Brian Leonard Cooper being escorted to an Ansett-ANA DC6b to fly back, under police custody, to Port Moresby. It was expected that, after a brief appearance in the Madang court on the following Monday, Cooper's trial would be transferred to the Supreme Court later in the week.

But it was not dealt with as summarily as that. Cooper managed to have the preliminary hearing at Madang postponed for a fortnight so that he could obtain legal representation from Sydney, and he did not appear before the Supreme Court of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea until 23 January 1961. There it was charged that—

> on or about the fifteenth day of September 1960 he advisedly spoke and published, in Pidgin, words to the effect that—
> "You must have a new government of your own. Often I've heard some countries refer to Australia as an Imperial country and I've been very ashamed about this. Now Menzies Government, I hate it very much all the time. He hasn't done any good for Australia, and the Cleland Government is the same, it is worthless.
> Now I don't want a long delay. You must set a date and you must sing out for all the men and speak to them so that they will all hear. I don't want a long delay. Set a Saturday, that's a good day. All right then, I can send talk to some people so that they can come and help you. Me I'm not afraid. All right if they want to do something to me later on I can go in the high part at the back of Amele and put headquarters there. Now some men can come and help me. You have heard that in Africa in the Congo, that they have got a new Government of their own, and they all stay contented. Now I want you people to get it within six months. It'll be no good to leave this talk for very long because the District Officer will hear of it and prevent us. Set a meeting and tell all the men so that they'll hear, tell the Police who speak your same language to hear this now. Don't worry about the Native Affairs Field Staff. Consider only the Police Officer. First a group can go and take hold of the Police Officer and tie him to a post with a rope so that he'll remain there. Some groups can go and break into the stores, into the place where the rifles are and get them all; some groups can go to the big stores and take things such as beer, rum and food and they can all eat and drink. Expel all the white people and tell them they have to go back to their own place. Now all the men must go and occupy the places of employment so that they can't come back. They must remain in their houses, board a ship and then they can go back. Now at the airstrip a group can go and cut some trees and throw them onto the airstrip so that the Australian and American soldiers can't come down. Your own army can get rid of all the Europeans so that they go back to their own place, Australia. If the Australians want to do something, if they want to come and

> fight with you, all the Russians and Chinese can help you.
> The Australians will be frightened if the Russians and the Chinese make threats. I can get a message to the Russians and they will come and help you."

In retrospect it seems that it was politically most opportune that a 'security' charge involving New Guinea should have been brought before the courts at that time. The Attorney-General, Sir Garfield Barwick, three months before had announced that it was the government's intention to amend the Crimes Act so that it would extend to the Commonwealth's territories and include the new offences of treachery and sabotage. The amendments were, however, introduced to parliament at a time when the government's attitude to security and the competence of A.S.I.O. were subject to widespread attack, and indeed ridicule. The immediate cause for this was the "Gluckman affair".

Professor Max Gluckman, the distinguished British anthropologist who was visiting the Australian National University, had in March applied for a permit to enter the Territory of Papua and New Guinea so that he could spend three weeks there visiting the university's anthropological research projects. In July he was notified that his application had been refused. No reasons were given but it soon became obvious that it had been rejected on 'security grounds'. Professor Gluckman had taken an active part in the British appeal for defence funds for the then current South African treason trials, and he had publicly expressed his opposition to the creation of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. In addition Mrs Gluckman had, until 1956, been a Communist. Gluckman made no effort to make public the rejection of his application, no doubt not being anxious to encourage other countries to deal with him in the same manner as had the Australian government, but within a month the story was featured by the Melbourne Age.

Gluckman's inability to go to the Territory had become known at the A.N.U. and whilst some senior academics there had sought, through unofficial channels, to have the decision revoked, the Staff Association had written to the Minister of Territories, Sir (then Mr) Paul Hasluck, asking that he provide reasons for the rejection of Gluckman's application.

In response to questions asked in Parliament on 3 August, Hasluck, reading from a prepared answer, stated that the application had been rejected by the Administrator, Brigadier Cleland, on the basis of "advice received". The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, added that he had himself seen the information provided for the Administrator and that he "would never dream of overruling his decision".

Editorials in the Age, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Sydney Sun and the Manchester Guardian were outspoken in their condemnation of the government's decision, and insisted that in such matters it is essential that governments recognize their moral responsibility to ensure that the information on which they act is both sound and conclusive. They went on to argue that even if Gluckman were a communist it was unlikely that he could do much harm in three weeks in the Territory.

On 8 September, immediately after a debate on the Gluckman affair, Sir Garfield Barwick rose in the House of Representatives to ask leave to introduce his amendments to the Crimes Act. His Bill was very critically received. It was seen by the labor movement as an attack on legitimate trade-union activities and to stem from the government's paranoid fear of subversion. The reaction of the Parliamentary Labor Party was explained by the Canberra correspondent of the Age as being "the product of the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion which [has] hung over parliament for the past two weeks [and] also . . . of the tension generated by the government's handling of the Professor Gluckman affair". The correspondent then went on to discuss the inadequacies of A.S.I.O. "On the few occasions when the activities of the Security Service have been exposed to public gaze and put to the test of independent judgement, there have been disturbing signs of inefficiencies and irregularity" (14 September, 1960). This view was supported in the paper's editorial on the following day, which emphasized that "neither warfare nor subversion appears to offer any immediate threat to the security of Australia". That was not, however, the opinion of Menzies. At a mass rally held in Melbourne on 23 September he directly referred to the Age editorial and claimed that the communists had, with their recent attacks on A.S.I.O., scored a propaganda victory. He went on to warn that "as the campaign has been renewed with great virulence, I believe that we are, in this very year, facing one of the crucial periods of history". Menzies then proceeded to link the "communist" attack on A.S.I.O. with the opposition to the Bill to amend the Crimes Act.

> That the Communists are conducting a campaign of propaganda, which also relates to

> the Security Service, against any law which proposes to increase the defences of the nation against treachery and sabotage, is something I can well understand. The campaign is expected, since in their very nature active Communists are expected to prefer the interests of their foreign masters to the safety of their own land.
>
> (Age, 24 September, 1960).

Nevertheless opposition to the Crimes Bill mounted, with various church groups and a number of eminent lawyers, as well as the labor movement generally, being very critical of it. The Leader of the Opposition, A. A. Calwell, told a mass rally in Melbourne that he saw as particularly repugnant the provision which would enable the fact that an individual was a communist, or that he had a criminal record, to be introduced as evidence to convict him. This, he claimed, smacked of the McCarthy principle of guilt by association. (Age, 7 October, 1960).

As a result of such criticism, Sir Garfield Barwick, on 10 November, foreshadowed 21 changes to his Bill, including amendments to ensure that all security offences were to be tried by jury and to provide that

> evidence of the known character of the defendant may be taken into account only on the question whether the purpose of the defendant was a purpose to be prejudicial to the safety or defence of the Commonwealth. Such evidence was to be disregarded by the jury with respect to any other question such as to whether the defendant had actually committed the offence. (Age, 11 November, 1960).

The proposed amendments were welcomed by Labor, but it nevertheless was yet to be convinced of the immediacy of the communist threat and of the reliability of A.S.I.O.

Brian Cooper was, at the time of his arrest, 11.30 a.m. on 30 November 1960, employed as a clerk with Bradford Knitting Mills, a position he had taken up after resigning from the Administration of the Territory of Papua and New Guinea. He had joined that service as a Co-operatives Officer-in-Training in January 1958 and, after two years during which he worked in the New Ireland, Sepik and Madang Districts, he had travelled, whilst on recreation leave, in Indonesia and other parts of South-East Asia.

That might now seem an unremarkable enough thing to have done but, at the time, the Australian government was suspicious of Indonesia's Soekarno government, which it considered dangerously left-wing and undesirably expansionist.

Cooper returned from leave to Port Moresby on 9 September, the very day on which a resolution was carried at a special meeting of the council at the A.N.U. condemning the government's action over Gluckman. During the lunch-hours of Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of the following week he held the series of conversations with half-a-dozen or so employees and members of the Madang Association of Native Societies which led to him being charged with "advisedly speaking and publishing seditious words". On the next Friday Cooper was told by his superior officer that he was not to continue working at the store outside which the meeting had taken place. Ten days later he was transferred to Port Moresby. He did various odd jobs there but, after failing to get a satisfactory answer to his request to be transferred back to the field, he resigned on 21 October to take up a position in Australia.

In view of the fact that the authorities seem to have expected Cooper's trial to be quickly under way, it appears likely that they had hoped that he would plead guilty and that the matter would therefore be quickly settled. Such was not to be, for despite the enormous cost of doing so, Cooper chose to fight the case.[1] He thereby forced the authorities to reveal more of their approach to security than they might have wished. Cooper was not charged under the Crimes Act but under a section of the Queensland law as adopted in New Guinea. However it was quickly established, when the trial commenced at Port Moresby in the Supreme Court before the Chief Justice, Sir Alan Mann, that the charges had been laid only after Commonwealth involvement at the highest possible level. One of the first witnesses was the Regional Director of A.S.I.O., K. A. Donovan, who was normally stationed at Port Moresby. Cooper's counsel, J. H. Staunton of Sydney, protested that the evidence which Donovan was to give related to events which had occurred at least two years before the alleged offence and therefore was inadmissible. The Chief Justice did not, however, accept this argument, nor apparently did Sir Garfield Barwick, who, as Attorney General and therefore responsible for A.S.I.O., must have approved Donovan's appearance in court.

Donovan reported that, as a result of "certain information" he had received,[2] he had interviewed Cooper on 23 July 1958. He claimed that the interview, which was held in the little court room

at Wewak, had been friendly, and that during it Cooper had discussed his interest in communism, which he had said had begun when he was a final-year student at Melbourne University studying Modern History. Donovan told the court that Cooper had said that he had twice visited the Yarra Bank and had politely applauded the communist speakers there. He had denied that he was a member of the Communist Party but had claimed to be a member of the Australian Labor Party. Cooper had also denied that he had read any of Marx's works, and said that he disapproved of the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956. Donovan told the court that Cooper had told him that "economic development would be greater in Russia than in America, because communism is so ruthless". Donovan also said that Cooper had told him that prior to coming to the Territory he had "held the view that the natives of this Territory should be given their independence [but that] he realized now that the natives . . . are not or would not be ready for independence for perhaps 30 or 40 years".

A later witness was A. M. Davis, Deputy Commissioner of the Commonwealth Police, who reported on his interview with Cooper in Sydney a few days before his arrest. He said that he had then told Cooper that he was acting on behalf of the Attorney General's Department and the Department of Territories and that he was going to report the result of the interview to the Solicitor General of the Commonwealth. Davis was careful to say that he had pointed out to Cooper that Donovan was not a member of his organization but of A.S.I.O., and that therefore his report had gone to the Director General of Security. Even so Davis had had access to that report, presumably with the approval of the Attorney General, and he had based some of his questions to Cooper on it.

A third witness, Detective Sergeant Bacon of the Commonwealth Police, gave evidence about the arrest of Cooper and the subsequent search of his room and the seizure from it of a variety of reading matter. Staunton queried the admissibility of evidence relating to Cooper's reading habits, but the Chief Justice permitted some ruthless cross examination on it from the Crown Prosecutor, Mr. Greville-Smith of the Crown Law Office.

Smith pointed out to Cooper that twenty-eight books and pamphlets had been taken from his room in Sydney and that they were all pro-communist. This, he suggested, indicated that Cooper had strong pro-communist sympathies. Cooper replied that not all the reading matter in his room had been seized that some of it was patently not pro-communist. He further insisted that he had only collected the material during the five weeks that he had been in Sydney and that he had not even had time to read it all. One book to which Smith specially referred was *History of the Australian Labour Movement — A Marxist Interpretation,* a book which he claimed called the government of Australia "Imperialistic" and a "promulgator of fascist legislation".

Cooper denied that he had even read it, but, in reply to a question, said that he would, with reservations, agree with such a view. This led to the following exchange:

Smith: Well now of course, to your knowledge imperialists and fascists are the enemies of communism aren't they?
Cooper: Yes, they are.
Q.: I will ask you again. Since you had this literature in your possession you are strongly in favour of communism?
A.: I have not studied it enough yet to be able to commit myself.
Q.: I am not asking you to commit yourself. I am asking you are you strongly in favour of communism?
A.: Not necessarily.
Q.: Are you ashamed of your political and other views?
A.: No, but they are not yet fully formed.
Q.: They are well developed aren't they?
A.: Yes, fairly well developed.
Q.: Will you stop evading the question? You have strong pro-communist views and sympathies haven't you?
A.: I would say yes if I didn't fear . . . that you would commit me to being in favour of everything of which the communists are in favour.

A little later despite Staunton's objection, the Chief Justice permitted Smith to probe Cooper's religious beliefs. When Cooper admitted to being an atheist Smith asserted that it had been a farce for Cooper to have taken the oath in the witness box and that in doing so he had deliberately deceived the court.

Whilst much of the time of the court was taken up with this sort of evidence establishing Cooper's "known character" it was, of course, necessary to provide details relating to the alleged offence. The principal witness here was Stahl Salum, a twenty-six year old clerk with the co-operatives who had, on the day prior to the commencement of the preliminary hearing in

Madang, been appointed by Hasluck to be the first New Guinean member of the Copra Marketing Board. Stahl and four other clerks testified that Cooper had, at the meetings, spoken the words contained within the indictment. They insisted that he had said that they must have a "new government" and that he had not spoken of "self-government". They also denied that he had discussed with them the details of his recent overseas travels. Four other Crown witnesses who had been at one or more of the meetings claimed that Cooper had referred to "self-government" and they also agreed that he had talked on a wider range of subjects than Stahl and the other clerks had claimed.

In his evidence Cooper admitted that he had used many of the words attributed to him but said that they had been taken totally out of context. He said that after his return from leave he had, on the Tuesday, been working at the cooperative's store and that at lunchtime he had offered to tell some of the employees about his recent travels. About six or eight young men, including Stahl, had sat with him in the shade of a tree while he told them of the countries he had visited. On the Wednesday he had compared the economic development of these countries with that of the Territory and had pointed out that its relative lack of development could be attributed to the Australian administration's policy, which he considered to be out-of-date and almost completely stagnant, but which, for reasons of political prestige, Australia was reluctant to abandon. He had said that he thought self-government would be a better alternative and that it would bring with it rapid economic development.

In response to a question as to how self-government could be achieved he had outlines three possible methods. The first thing was to do nothing, and within twenty or thirty years the Australian government would grant it. The second method was to do the opposite, that is to engage in the violent overthrow of the Administration. He had outlined how this might be done — they could organize a market day, or some similar gathering and then seize and tie up the police officer. Probably a large body of men would then go into town and break into and loot the stores and seize rifles, ammunition et cetera. No doubt some of them would block the air strip by placing logs and burning aeroplanes on it to prevent troops landing there. Eventually, when the government forces did arrive, people could go into the bush to make their headquarters from which they could continue the fight.

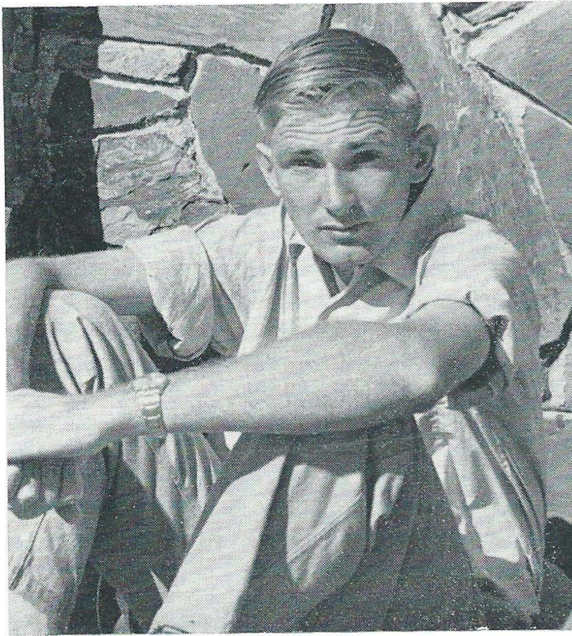
Cooper said that he had told his listeners that while such a method might be very quick it was never-the-less violent and unlawful. He had added that if that course of action were followed the Europeans who had not been sent home would still want to leave and thus there would be great disorganization and chaos and the outside world would think that New Guineans were a lot of savages. Cooper claimed that he did not labor this point but that he had immediately proceeded to the third method which he had strongly advocated.

This method needed much organization. It was not simple or a matter of two or three men asking for self-government, but required the establishment of large groups through which the government could be convinced that the people both wanted, and were capable of, self-government. In accord with this policy he had advocated that trade unions and political parties be established. He had suggested that in New Guinea there would probably be two parties. One would be like the Australian Labor Party, but more socialistic and radical, and would have a communal approach to land and work. The other party would be more individualistic.

Cooper said that he told the group that in pursuing the third method of gaining independence it would be a good idea to hold a large meeting, possibly on a Saturday afternoon after the Madang market.

At the meeting they could talk about the desirability of achieving self-government, whether they should be allowed to drink alcohol, and whether they should be allowed to organize their economic development communally. He had also told his listeners that they need have no fear about proceeding along such lines because they were quite legal and, moreover, in doing so they would receive the support of all the African and Asian countries who would help them through the United Nations and in other ways. He had added that when independence was achieved they might be able to ask China and Russia and other countries to give them technical and financial aid and that would in turn lead to an upsurge in industry and the manufacture in New Guinea of nearly everything consumed there.

The Chief Justice was unassisted by a jury in coming to his judgement. This, Sir Alan argued, was not necessarily to Cooper's disadvantage, for, whilst the jury system was claimed to bring with it some of the "sober notions of the British people, including their love of liberty and fair play", that might not apply in the Territory



Brian Cooper on a bush-walking trip, Mount Hotham, 1961.

where the people were neither British nor of European extraction. Sir Alan's task was, essentially, to choose between the two different accounts given of the lunch-hour meetings; that given by Cooper, and that given by five of the Crown witnesses. The latter account was, in part at least, supported by the accused, whilst the former was supported at several important points by other Crown witnesses. Coming to a judgement on the basis of the evidence before the Court clearly required great insight into the respective characters and motivations of the witnesses and the accused. Sir Alan decided that Cooper was guilty. In accepting the testimony of Stahl and his fellow clerks, Sir Alan was posed with a crucial problem. They had alleged that Cooper had told them to rise in rebellion and to hold the police officer captive and that he could get a message to the Russians who would come and help.

It was on the basis of these very allegations that the Indictment had been laid and yet they were, at least from a European point of view, fanciful in the extreme. Cooper denied that he had recommended an armed uprising, and also pointed out that the statement about the Russians was nonsense. Sir Alan had to decide whether the witnesses, who were poorly educated and politically naive New Guineans, were to be believed even though they reported a conversation that was, in part at least, fantastic, or whether Cooper, a well-educated, though ideologically unusual, Australian was to be believed when he denied the entire construction put on his conversations by his accusers. Sir Alan accepted the testimony of the New Guineans explaining that —

> I do not believe for a moment that the Accused himself supposed that he was in a position to summon military aid from Russia or China, for any native insurrection which might have taken place last September. It may well be that the native witnesses gained the wrong impression on this point, and that the Accused told them in response to their questions as to how they would get on when they threw the Europeans out of the Territory, that they could count on Communist countries such as Russia and China to lend them general support, and particularly support of an economic nature. On the other hand the reference to Russia and China might well have been made quite falsely to give the natives the impression that they would not be alone in their struggle, so that they could proceed with confidence and not be deterred by any fear of losing the support of the Administration on which the natives are, as they fully realize dependent for any hope of social advancement. I cannot believe that the accused really expected to see an immediate armed uprising of natives in the Madang area nor do I think that the Accused supposed for a moment that such an uprising would serve any useful purpose for the natives or do anything but occasion a great deal of distress and conflict.
>
> Whether he did what he did merely to justify himself against the Administration or to establish for himself a reputation as a political disorganized and trouble-maker, which he might be able to exploit after leaving the Territory, which he obviously had already decided to do last September, I do not know. I think that with his experience of natives in the Sepik and Madang Districts and the well-known propensity of these and other primitive natives in the Pacific area to express their confusion and frustrations in the form of Cults of various kinds, his intention was to start a movement which would be likely to extend along the Northern coast of New Guinea, and which would cause the utmost embarrassment to the Administration at a time when international attention was critically focussed on the situation of primitive people in this and other areas. He does not appear to have overlooked the strategic importance of the spheres of influence of the various missions in the area, against some of which at least, he was bitterly

antagonistic. It is significant that he had some assurance than an uprising might be organized readily in the Finschhafen area.

> Although his immediate influence was limited to a few native clerks and officials associated with the co-operative societies in the Madang area, it is clear that political meetings attended by large numbers of uneducated natives, discussing even the officially sanctioned topic of self-government, would be likely to cause a great deal of confusion and conflict between the natives who at this stage of their development are ill-equipped to understand the responsibilities of Government.
>
> When one of the means of achieving power which the accused intended these meetings to discuss was the violent overthrow of law and and order, destruction and looting of property, and the expulsion of Europeans from the Territory, the subversive nature of the whole campaign becomes obvious. The assertion of the Accused that he put this proposal as only one of three alternatives and that the only course which he advocated was immediate organization towards achieving a position in which the natives could lawfully demand self-government, is in my view only playing with words.

Sir Alan's analysis argues that the recommended course of action was impossible, but that the speech in which it was contained would excite disaffection with the government because it would lead its listeners to conclude that, whilst they could not in fact tie up the policeman and engage in the looting, they would nevertheless like to do so. This, Sir Alan suggested, would probably lead to a situation in which "the Administration would suddenly find itself confronted by an actual or imminent uprising of natives over a wide area of difficult country". It should be emphasized that at no stage in the trial was evidence or argument adduced to suggest that this was indeed Cooper's intention, or that it was an ever-present possibility. However, if it were Cooper's intention to stir up such trouble, then he was guilty of sedition because sedition requires only the intent to excite disaffection which could lead to the illegal overthrow of the government, and not the prescription of a practicable route whereby that end might be achieved.

In arriving at his judgement, Sir Alan Mann had had to go beyond the evidence and to read the thoughts of Cooper. It could therefore be that Cooper was convicted because of his demeanor and personality rather than because of what he had actually said. Indeed Sir Alan had concluded as much when he said that Cooper's evidence and demeanor in the witness box provided a "key to the real understanding of the actions and intentions of Cooper in September". He had concluded that Cooper had been driven by his own "fanatical zeal" and lack of patience to deal with his own interests in a way which would not be expected of a responsible Administration officer. The result of this was that his political views had shown a "marked tendency to veer further and further to the left and towards atheism which appears to be the fashionable corollary to Communist thought". Despite this trend which he detected in Cooper's views Sir Alan felt that Cooper lacked the necessary confidence in himself to obtain a "position of any real importance under the banner of Communism". When it came to considering the actual charge Sir Alan concluded that he had used words corresponding 'in substance and meaning to those set out in the indictment" and that they had been uttered with seditions intent.

> In sentencing Cooper the Chief Justice argued that — although it is in a sense a very bad thing for a person of [his] education to find himself with a conviction of this character . . . at the same time it is . . . a very much better thing for such a conviction to be associated with a period of youth . . . and zeal, because [he] will have, if he is prepared to think over his situation earnestly, some opportunity to prevent himself from destroying any value he may have to society.

Taking into account that Cooper had already been in custody for two months, Sir Alan sentenced him to a further two months imprisonment, which he said he regarded as very light.

After being found guilty, Cooper sought leave to appeal to the High Court of Australia, and on 9 February he was released on bail pending the hearing. The appeal was heard in Melbourne on 9 and 10 March 1961 by a full bench of the High Court, consisting of the Chief Justice, Sir Owen Dixon, and Justices Fullagar, Kitto, Menzies and Windeyer. The High Court in its judgement ruled that

> the evidence which the Prosecutor placed in the forefront of his case [including all of Donovan's] was obviously irrelevant and clearly inadmissable. Not only ought it never to have been entertained; it ought never to have been tendered. According to our notions there are few things more objectionable in a criminal case than the introduction of matter which has no probative value in relation to any issue, but is calculated to create prejudice in the mind of the tribunal.

The Court declared that it had found most objectionable the evidence which had been tendered "to show that the Accused was a communist or had communist leanings and was an atheist and hostile to missionaries". Their Honors went on to argue that "to suggest that such evidence was in any way relevant is absurd". Because of the inadmissible and prejudicial nature of such evidence they concluded that "if the trial had been with a jury, and all the inadmissible evidence had been heard by them, the conviction must be quashed". However the trial had been conducted by a judge alone, and the Court argued that in such a case, if it appeared that he had determined the question "without reliance on the considerable mass of inadmissible evidence which had been put before him, it would not be proper for a court of appeal to quash the conviction". Their Honors therefore decided that it was necessary for them to determine the matter on the basis of the evidence which they considered admissible. In so doing they placed heavy reliance on the testimony of those witnesses who had actually attended the lunch-hour meetings, and also upon Cooper's own testimony. They were especially influenced by their opinion that the trial judge had apparently dismissed Cooper's interpretation of events. The Court recognized that in parts of Sir Alan's judgement he had given reason to believe that he had attached importance to the inadmissible evidence; but that he had, nevertheless, in other passages given reasons which did not rely on that evidence and which substantiated his finding. It was because of this that the High Court decided that "there was no misuse of [objectionable] material in relation to the fundamental question of the case" and accordingly refused Cooper's appeal. Cooper returned immediately to Port Moresby to complete his sentence. When he received the final account for his legal expenses he noted that he owed more than two and a half thousand pounds, an enormous debt considering that his salary had been less than thirty pounds a week.

While on bail awaiting the High Court appeal Cooper wrote an article for *Overland*[3] in which he gave his version of the events leading to his arrest, and after his release from gaol he continued his propagandizing for self-government for Papua and New Guinea, speaking at various left-wing gatherings and writing for minor magazines. He also wrote small handbills which he distributed at the Melbourne University where, after several months of unemployment, he managed to obtain a clerical position.

Despite Cooper's involvement with many minor political groups in Melbourne he remained an isolated figure. He announced his engagement in December 1961, but his fiancee terminated it because of his political views nine months later. For the next two and a half years he continued working at Melbourne University, but became increasingly remote from other people. He developed the feeling that he was under constant A.S.I.O. surveillance, and believed that his motor cycle had been forced off the road by their agents on several occasions. These claims seemed to be sheer fantasy to those with whom he discussed them and he was pursuaded to consult a psychiatrist who declared him to be schizophrenic. On 9 April, 1965, he resigned from his position at the university on account of 'nervous tension". On 18 May, at the age of 28, he shot himself.

The story is tragic and one might wonder what the government achieved as a result of pursuing the case. Cooper himself posed no immediate threat to the security of the Territory, because once he had left he could not return without being granted an entry permit. Thus, if the authorities considered him to be a security risk, as they had Gluckman, it was simple for them to keep him out. It was, however, decided to extradite him from Australia and return him to New Guinea for trial. That decision must be seen as being aimed not at the simple protection of the Territory from Cooper but at other ends. Two possible advantages of the case were that it would highlight the risks that were posed by thoughtless 'intellectuals' in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea and that it would also show A.S.I.O. to be both essential and efficient. An added advantage of the case was that, unlike Gluckman, Cooper probably had no effective links with powerful pressure groups.

Thus, even if Cooper were able to mount a protracted and expensive trial, it was unlikely that he would gain the widespread press support that Gluckman had received and of which Sir Paul Hasluck subsequently wrote that 'the left wing whooped with joy at the story of [his] permit being refused".[4] The 'right wing' was probably able to "whoop with joy" over Cooper. The newspaper accounts of his extradition to New Guinea no doubt provided evidence enough for the public to believe that A.S.I.O. was needed and that the Territory of Papua and New Guinea was at risk to subversion. A longer-term consequence of the trial was alluded to by one commentator,

writing before Papua New Guinea achieved self-government,

> the penalty for first offence sedition is three years and for a second offence, seven years with hard labour. Many of Papua/New Guinea's 35,000 Europeans have firm ideas about the way in which village people should take their independence, but since the Cooper trial, most of them have been a little more circumspect in talking about it.[5]

It would seem, therefore, that considerable political advantage resulted from Cooper's arrest and conviction. It is true that a young man's life was ruined in the process, but in matters of security there have always been those who argue with Caiaphas "that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John 11:50).

[1] As soon as the Commonwealth Police learned that Cooper was to be represented by counsel they checked with his solicitor to ensure that his expenses were not being met by the Communist Party. They were met entirely by Cooper and his family — the Communist Party had very early on indicated that they wanted absolutely nothing to do with Cooper.

[2] Amongst the "information" Donovan received was a report that, shortly after his arrival in the Territory, Cooper had been listening to Radio Peking.

[3] "The Birth-Pangs of a Nation," *Overland* no. 20 (Autumn, 1961).

[4] P. M. Hasluck, *A Time for Building* (Melbourne, 1976), p. 406.

[5] J. Ryan, *The Hot Land* (Melbourne, 1969), p. 325.

DON WATSON

Ian Turner — Bibliography

An addendum

As foreshadowed in the Ian Turner memorial issue of Overland, nos. 76/77, we print here further items to be added to the bibliography to be found in that issue.

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(This was the year of the U.S. consulate's widely publicised decision to refuse Turner a visa to visit the U.S. See e.g. editorial in the *Australian*, 13 November 1968.)

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books

THE POLITICS OF PAINTING

Richard Haese

Humphrey McQueen, *The Black Swan of Trespass: the emergence of modernist painting in Australia to 1944,* (Alternative Publishing Co-operative, $14.95).

Radical social critics, an intellectual élite, purveyors of a national sensibility, guardians of traditional values — whether willingly or not, painters in Australia have invariably been cast in the role of cultural heroes and shock troops. Of all the arts, painting has been claimed as the surest touchstone for a sense of cultural identity and as an index to our place in the wider scheme of things. Not surprisingly, therefore, artistic issues have prompted not only some of the bitterest cultural clashes in Australia, but among our most spirited intellectual debates. Even that celebrated literary fracas, the Ern Malley hoax (from which Humphrey McQueen has drawn the title for this book) had a profound effect on the reception of modernist painting. As McQueen points out " 'Ern Malley', was intended to signal the end of Modernity".

Yet despite this role of the visual arts, few general historians have ventured into the arena to challenge the more specialist preoccupations of their art colleagues. Among the exceptions which spring to mind are the lively comments by such catholic-minded spirits as Manning Clark and the late Ian Turner, and more recently Geoffrey Serle's pioneering survey of Australian cultural history.

As a self-professed "cartographer of ideas", McQueen aims to provide an alternative account to more conventional studies of Australian painting. These he characterizes as usually "little more than a station master's log book detailing the progress of a cultural baggage train which is forever being derailed or shunted into sidings, when it is not running out of track." By dividing his book into three distinct parts, McQueen offers instead three pantechnicons, yet appears to be equally uncertain of their ultimate destinations.

The first section is a more or less straightforward account of the intellectual issues and debates which surrounded the emergence of modernism up to 1944. The second, with its twists and turns and quick scene changes, is the longest of the three. In it McQueen expands his notion of modernism in terms of its relationship to monopoly capitalism and canvasses a vast range of subjects: Marxist theories of culture and class conflict, Australian responses to two world wars, the debates between communist and non-communist in the early 1940s, the reception of the ideas of Freud and of Einstein's universe, Australian landscape painting and the Ern Malley affair, to list merely the most prominent.

The final section is an appreciation of the ideas and work of Margaret Preston, whom McQueen singles out as, not merely the finest artist of her period, but the one whom he claims most truly embodies the spirit of modernism in Australia. On either ground this judgement is questionable. Nonetheless, McQueen's admiration is well to the fore in this warmly-felt portrait, the first extended treatment of this fine, if erratic and uneven, artist.

In all this to-ing and fro-ing, the reader is treated to many fascinating and often valuable insights into the ramifications of Australian modernism. Everything is grist to McQueen's mill as he deftly cross-cuts from such subjects as relativity and quantum theory to the enthusiastic reception in Australia of Conan Doyle's spiritualism and Norman Lindsay's obsession with the ouija board in the years following the Great War and its atten-

dant tragic losses. There are fresh and sympathetic assessments of such key figures of the inter-war years as Lionel Lindsay, Elioth Gruner and Hans Heysen, as well as movements such as Meldrumism and the Jindyworobaks.

While much of this is of considerable value, the book gives rise on almost every level to serious reservations and misgivings. It is claimed, for example, that each of the three sections — narrative, thematic and biographical — are independent and mutually reinforcing in providing "different paths across the same territory". Yet in spite of this and the characteristically tendentious tone of the writing, McQueen disclaims that he intends to lead the reader to a conclusion. The consequence is that, however doggedly the reader struggles to follow the paths, they inevitably peter out into intractable labyrinths of observations and comments which, while of value in themselves, offer little sense of a topographical overview.

The point at which McQueen chooses to end his study is in itself puzzling for a work claiming to present an overview of emerging modernist painting. Certainly the court case over the award of the Archibald Prize to William Dobell in 1944 represented the death rattle of the conservative old guard. Few would question that judgement in terms of who lost. But apart from acknowledging that "a surface Modernism — imitative and debased — was conquering a crumbling fortress . . .", McQueen fails to pause and ask who it was who actually won the case. Instead he opts for the conventional wisdom. Had he probed deeper he may well have been forced to conclude that in reality this victory not only had nothing to do with radical modernism, but was rather more of a threat to real progress than it was to those who were defeated. It was in the courtroom of the Supreme Court of N.S.W. in Equity that a newly emergent cultural Establishment made its first public debut. The benign and apparently liberal features of this new Establishment in the event proved far more obstructive to genuine radical artists in Melbourne and Sydney than outright reactionaries like J. S. MacDonald or Lionel Lindsay.

Such conclusions are not possible for McQueen because of at least two limitations from which this book suffers. Firstly, it is biased to an overwhelming extent towards a Sydney-based view of events. As a consequence, there is no indication that the most thorough-going and radical modernism appeared not in Sydney but in Melbourne at the end of the 1930s, reaching maturity after 1943. In this regard McQueen only makes passing reference to the work of Bergner, Vassilieff, Tucker, Nolan, Boyd, and social realists like Counihan. Albert Tucker's role is examined solely in relation to his participation in debates with communists in the pages of Angry Penguins and the Communist Review in 1943-44. While McQueen summarizes these exchanges, just as he fails to recognize the extraordinary character of Melbourne modernism, so too he fails to see that the issues canvassed on this occasion formed the basis of the richest intellectual ferment for the arts in Australia during the entire phase of emerging modernism.

This failure is compounded by a more methodological limitation. Given its political bias, McQueen's world is frozen in a bi-polar conception of people and events. With few exceptions both are forced into one of two exclusive categories—reactionary or progressive. The resulting caricatures and distortions have the inevitable effect of blurring real distinctions. McQueen refuses, or perhaps is simply unable, to make any distinctions between a Robert Menzies or a Sir Keith Murdoch, or between such key figures as Lionel Lindsay or Adrian Lawlor. To account for inescapable differences in outlook, he falls back on the hoariest of Marxist shibboleths. Thus while individual responses by members of the bourgeoisie to the crisis of capitalism and its works will range from the fascist Gottfried Benn slipping the safety catch off his Browning at the mention of the word 'culture', to a newspaper magnate's toying with artistic novelties, the two are viewed as of a kind and the differences mere matters of degree.

The result of this failure borders at times on the absurd. McQueen rejects out of hand the often incisive writings by the immigrant art critic Gino Nibbi, whose ideas he links with Arnold Shore's "empty ephemera". But perhaps the most serious example is his treatment of Adrian Lawlor. While acknowledging Lawlor's powers as a polemicist, McQueen concludes that Lawlor not only had almost nothing to say as a champion of modernism, but that what he did say verged on crypto-fascism. Thus, McQueen is prepared to damn one of the liveliest minds in Australian art and letters, a man who was, moreover, one of the two most courageous spokesmen for enlightened humanism in Australia in the 1930s and early 1940s. The other figure was the art critic Basil Burdett. Burdett would appear to be dismissed as being capable of only rare flashes of

perception. Yet it is in Burdett's writings almost alone at this time that we find any sustained and informed critical comment on the visual arts until his untimely death in 1942.

To be fair there are several instances when McQueen drops his political guard and, as noted, offers sympathetic and rounded portraits. The assessments of Heysen and Gruner, together with that of Margaret Preston, are among the best things to appear on these artists. They demonstrate what McQueen might have produced had not the geographical and ideological limitations prevented a more accurate assessment of the roles of individuals and of the real dynamics of the culture he sets out to explore. McQueen does not for example discern any appreciable difference between Lawlor's views in 1937 and those of 1942. He correspondingly fails, therefore, to perceive the extent to which Lawlor's world had been transformed from that of the Great Depression to that of an Australia enlisted in the grand crusade against fascist evil.

McQueen's world is, paradoxically, a static one. Even his conception of modernism as a "range of responses to a nexus of socio-artistic-scientific problems" is largely reactive. By opting for such an open-ended intellectual grab-bag, McQueen simply avoids the issue of definition. Likewise, while locating precisely the difficulties of Bernard Smith and social realist painters in the 1940s in formulating an effective theory of contemporary realism, McQueen himself is not able to offer anything new. Artists, he seems to suggest, have a political duty to convey "a vision of a radically transformed future". How this should be done is never made clear and, if Margaret Preston's work is to be accepted as a model, the mystery only deepens.

It is characteristic that, whereas McQueen deals confidently with Preston's theoretical writings, his supplementary discussions of visual sources are vague and halting. At no stage does one feel that the gap between word and image is effectively bridged. Preston's writings imply evidence of a twentieth century spirit, although her privileged life-style and social position would seem to make her sense of contemporary realities somewhat suspect. In any case her decorative sensibilities rarely translate into the kind of art McQueen struggles so hard to defend. The weight of the image and any real intellectual edge is simply not there.

For a book ostensibly concerned with art (although much of it turns out to be peripheral indeed) many of McQueen's judgements are strangely uninformed. Is Bernard Smith's *Place, Taste and Tradition* (1945) really a more important contribution to Australian art criticism and history than his later *Australian Painting*? And what is one to make, for example, of the extraordinary assertion that Roberts' "Shearing the Rams" can be equated with Lambert's "Across the Black Soil Plains" (the title of which is incorrectly given) as proclaiming the wealth of wool growers and therefore a celebration of the triumph of the Australian bourgeoisie?

It might be churlish to single out such points were they not symptomatic of a general looseness of thinking which characterizes this book. Its strengths lie in the vigor of McQueen's prose and the fact that it raises vital questions that will continue to be hotly disputed by cultural historians. One wishes, therefore, that this was a better book than it is — perhaps even a more honest one. In spite of the apologia McQueen does pretend that its tripartite structure adds up to something significant. But in the absence of any coherent argument, however fragmented, or even a thorough-going Marxist exegesis applied to Australian culture, this book can only be regarded as avoiding the real purpose of scholarship. Certainly, it would have been more readable had its author scrapped any pretensions to unity and opted instead for a series of essays entitled "Aspects of Australian Modernism".

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LUCKY BECKER?

Ray Ericksen

Marjorie Tipping (ed.): *Ludwig Becker: Artist and Naturalist with the Burke and Wills Expedition* (*Melbourne University Press,* $58.60).

This book lacks three things: a portrait of the man who is at once its subject and its chief contributor; a steady balance between quality of content and weight of paper; a straight answer to the question, "Who killed Ludwig Becker?"

In all else within the purpose of its makers the book succeeds handsomely. It is enormously satisfying to the eye and a pleasure to handle — a volume finely fashioned by editor, designer and printer to present the work accomplished and the experience endured by a talented man in the fifty-third and last year of his life. Even the extrava-

gance of the presentation, larger than life throughout, could in some sense be thought appropriate for material which raises profoundly Australian question: how beautiful is big, how adequate small; how comic is suffering, how valued intellect? Questions of size and power, of responsibility and fate, are inseparable from the comedy and the tragedy of this funny, sensitive, humorous, brave intellectual caught up in the monstrous bungling and massive waste of the Burke and Wills Expedition. Lovers of symbols might well reflect upon Becker's loyal observance of a convention of the German romantic movement that the human figure in landscape be made diminutive. On a broader canvas students of land exploration are again obliged to wonder at the extravagant carelessness and rash incompetence with which an assault on a distant interior was planned and conducted from a seaboard city far to the south.

It required another decade of extrapolation from the tested strategy of depot and reconnaissance and from the weight of other accumulating evidence (to which, ironically, the successes of the Burke and Wills Expedition contributed as much as did its failures) to confirm at last a theory of exploration which suited the peculiarities of the Australian interior. During the 1870s, without exception, the task of making the first traverses and finding the waters on which later scientific expeditions would base their operations was entrusted to small, mobile parties unencumbered by laggard support groups prone to disintegrate. There was not one scientist amongst them.

In 1860 the men of the Royal Society on the organising committee in Melbourne still wanted it all at once: primary geographical discovery of the shape of the land *and* detailed examination and description of the rocks that make it and the life it supports. And, while such ambition in itself was innocent, the impatience it generated sat uneasily with surrounding assumptions that the larger the force committed (men, animals, equipment and stores, even just money) the better the prospects for victory.

Long before this expedition reached Menindee, still within travelled country, tensions of a kind inherent in all multi-purpose exploring caused an explosion. Robert O'Hara Burke, contemptuous of scholarly pursuits in general, antipathetic to Becker in particular, and maddened by conflicting demands for both haste and thoroughness, sought deliverance by attributing to the distractions of scientific investigation delays which had many causes. He commanded his officers to discard part of their equipment and personal possessions and to take a full share in the gruelling labor required to keep a grossly overweight caravan in motion.

That order, never withdrawn, established priorities and routines which six months later led, almost inexorably, to Becker's miserable, wasting death on the Bulloo River. Becker was too devoted to art and science, too conscientious in duty and, in a moving way, too loyal to abandon the work he had been appointed to do, even when it meant working far into nights of exhaustion; and he proved to be too gentle a man to survive the brutal physical strain imposed on him through the long torment of an inland summer.

The pity is that his death was almost pure waste. Most of the stores in the heavy packs were not consumed and many of the camels were put to no good use. Nearly all of his time was spent in country already known where he was denied that privilege of discovering new forms of life for which he had volunteered to hazard his life. Burke, Wills and Gray at least experienced the joy of being the first of their own kind to cross a great region. Becker didn't even get as far as Cooper's Creek.

Yet, given the original design of this expedition, in an age before the camera separated art from science and before specialisation of knowledge devalued the role of the gifted amateur, Becker was an obvious choice for the post of artist and naturalist. He was one of the widest ranging, most practised and enthusiastic dabblers in the natural sciences to be found in the city of Melbourne. He had travelled the bush extensively in Tasmania and Victoria, more than once in company with the experienced Baron von Mueller. Above all he was a talented artist with an established reputation as an illustrator of scientific works. Also he could write. His journal, here reproduced with its correct syntax and wild spelling, and his letters written in the field, are invaluable and moving documents.

But it is the sketches, almost all of them done on the way to or in the vicinity of Menindee, which mostly make the book. There are seventy, in various stages of completeness and variously in pencil, pen and watercolor; and each one is elegantly presented on fine paper with technical notes and comments clear on the opposing page. The subjects are diverse: river banks, trees, Aboriginals, birds and reptiles, locality maps and landscapes; the caravan in travel across an open

plain, a frumpish tick removed from the armpit of a lizard.

The quality also varies. A dozen or so seem not worth including even for the sake of completeness: Becker was not a great master whose every scrap is to be treasured. Another twenty, perhaps, will attract only small and passing notice from the general viewer: even the editor seems at a loss for something worth saying about them. The rest, though they are small works, offer plenty of interest and pleasure, some delight, and evidence of a strong talent at work: undoubtedly they are worth publishing in respectful form.

But pity the forest and grieve for the trees; for in this book waste is thrice compounded and the logic of purpose split in twain. More than once Marjorie Tipping gives assurance that Becker really was a fine artist, and her appreciative reference to some of his earlier work makes one wish for a more comprehensive selection. Oddly enough it is that for which her introductory essay, surveying the full span of his life, seems to be preparing the reader; and there would be few tears if a score of the present sketches had been omitted in favor of others.

All right: restriction makes a convenient package, taken from the one album in the La Trobe Library, comfortably accommodating the artist's field journal and letters, and certain to profit from association with an exploring expedition which is part of our romantic folklore. Given that, there clearly is advantage to be found in making the thing complete, scraps and all, and avoiding the uncertainties and embarrassments which might follow omission or dilution.

What is most trying about this book, indeed downright disturbing, is having to decide whether it is meant to be read as well as to be handled and looked at. If the purpose is only the latter, it must be rated a huge success and its makers loudly applauded. Goodness knows we need books of beauty to please the senses as well as books of sense to engage the mind; and here an inspired conjunction of fine paper and changing type, the way the sketches look and the pages fall open, the very sound of them being turned, and a spaciousness which admits no trace of clutter or cramping, combine to make a truly beautiful object. Though even on that count I cannot see that the vast amount of expensive page space left vacant in the opening sections is an artistic necessity.

Once entertain a suspicion that close and thoughtful reading, as well as superficial scanning, was anticipated and part of the design starts looking not only wasteful, but plain silly. At the back of the book Becker's letters and his journal, some 17,000 words in all, 160 editorial notes thereon, 6 appendices, a bibliography and an index are beautifully presented with varied type and generous spacing in 38 pages. Near the front of the book an essay of only some 13,000 words is astonishingly set in outsize type in a single column down one half only of each large page. The essay and 170 notes thereon occupy 40 pages; and another 14 pages are squandered with comparable prodigality on undistinguished preliminaries. Even a great classic might look embarrassed in such ostentatious dress.

Marjorie Tipping has a well-deserved reputation for thorough research and graceful writing. Hence it is no surprise to find that her introductory essay is unfailingly informative and very well-written. It is a most welcome account of an interesting life, a pleasure to read, immediately stimulating and along the way satisfying. Yet, on reaching the end, I had a further sense of something having gone very wrong in the making of this book. Where is the ringing prose, the bold imaginative thinking, the fierce scholarship and the definitive statement the great pages seem meant to carry? Nowhere to be seen.

There is not one heroic or comic or magisterial paragraph in the lot. On the contrary, Becker, already being crushed by sheer weight, is further in danger of being mislaid in a maze of small fact, dense with names and bedevilled by cross-reference. I defy any reader, except perhaps one who habitually plays Scrabble with a dictionary ever to hand, to tread a sure path through the numerous notes: they are collected in two widely separated lists, then split within each list to avoid using any numeral higher than 99.

Mind you, even those pages are attractive to look at. Viewers who come down on the right side of the crucial question, "To read or not to read?" will find no affront and much delight. For others there is cause for some dissatisfaction. Of the many interesting questions touched upon — e.g., the role of German intellectuals in the social life of Melbourne, the effect of distance in delaying the impact of Charles Darwin's work, the significance of the troubador component in Becker's life-style in Australia — almost all are immediately abandoned. Even the account of Becker's last months with the expedition — that short segment of his life to which the main con-

tent of the book is so firmly directed that it demands intensive treatment —is little more than a summary of event and circumstance. Though, to be quite fair, several wobbles in the existing record of fact have been adjusted, more information added, and an inquiry into the causes of Becker's death opened.

While the inquiry is not pursued far, those who like to play detective will find a good array of clues and suspects. Burke, who in the beginning objected to Becker's appointment, tried to shake him off on the way to Menindee, and at one stage thought he had succeeded ("You should have seen old Becker's face . . . I don't think he's able to carry on much longer"). Hermann Beckler, medical officer and botanist, contemptuous in dismissing his fellow officer as "a man whom the artists are proud to call a scholar and the scholars are proud to call an artist", and during the final weeks increasingly impatient for him to die. Macadam, and other members of the organising committee in Melbourne, who failed even to acknowledge receipt of letters and reports, ignored anguished appeals for drawing materials to be sent, and bungled almost everything they touched. Landells, in whom sensitivity and compassion were not large enough for him to bend his leader's orders (amongst the few Burke ever gave that were unambiguous). Wright, who allowed himself to be too easily persuaded of the hopelessness of Becker's condition.

There are others, too. Wills, whom usually no one cares to question, steadily winning Burke's confidence but anxious to secure his own standing and unwilling to intervene. The region with its terrible complex of harsh terrain, ever-changing, and the unrelieved inferno of the summer of 1861. Becker himself, a man who was at once lovable and infuriating, not quite so enduring as he had represented himself to be, tormented by trials beyond his expectation, and too stubborn to give up before death took all choice from him. But don't blame the camels: it wasn't their doing, except perhaps as instruments.

Marjorie Tipping knows more than anyone else about Ludwig Becker and her estimation of him must command respect. Certainly it is no pleasure to feel duty bound to question her judgment and to criticise a quite lovely volume which is receiving many deserved plaudits — so much so that this review, if it stood alone, would be unfair. Yet in unfairness some part of truth sometimes lies; and there is no avoiding a troubling conclusion. If Becker is not worth more serious attention than the editor gives him, this book is grossly pretentious: if he is worth extravagant presentation, the editorial text is sadly inadequate.

Lucky Becker: he now has a beautiful shrine in which much of his best work is preserved, though on limited view in libraries and the studies of the rich. Poor Becker: for years ahead now there will be no chance of a more imaginative study in a different kind of book more widely circulated. Outside-chance Becker: should a perceptive film-maker happen to read his journal and the supporting text we might be given a distinguished serio-comic feature distributed across the land.

Ray Ericksen, formerly a historian at the University of Melbourne, is well-known for his books West of Centre, Cape Solitary *and* Ernest Giles. *He is at present working on a novel.*

THE WISECRACK MANIFESTO

Graham Rowlands

John Tranter (ed.): *The New Australian Poetry* (Makar Press, $12.75 and $22.50).

With poetry anthologies it's usually discourteous to included poets to focus on the Introduction. With Tranter's anthology, however, it would be discourteous to the *excluded* poets to ignore the Introduction and its implications. Tranter is a sound textual critic. But that's not enough. He (a) is ignorant of historical and sociological methodology; (b) is consequently unable to define Modernism and therefore unable to select poems consistently; (c) exhibits hypocritical anti-academic academicism; (d) makes excessive claims for his Modernists — typically Modernist behavior.

To write about the period 1968-1980 Tranter accepted successional time. He tells us that two American (where else?) anthologies showed his "Generation of '68" that "there was a real and vigorous alternative to the world of Henry Lawson and A. D. Hope". Ignoring the two poets' chronological and personality differences, Tranter also ignores how closely Lawson's alcoholism resembled the more addicted of the 1970s junkie poets — while nevertheless mentioning the importance of illegal drugs to his poets.

Again, despite Hope's classicism, his early poetry is saturated with psychoanalysis — which on almost anyone's definition but Tranter's is a major part of Modernism. But perhaps Freud

isn't part of Tranter's Modernism, because Freud didn't meet Pascal and Descartes who, according to Tranter, were Flaubert's contemporaries. Perhaps it was Emma Bovary who met Pascal and Descartes — after her suicide, presumably. When Tranter can get his dates wrong by *two centuries,* it would be kindest to assume that he's trying to apply Einstein's principles to history. But it's probably just incompetence.

Politics means only *poetry politics* for Tranter. (See later.) But there's no way that he can avoid the consequences of omitting actual politics from his discussion of Modernism when he argues that his poets were deeply influenced by the Vietnam war. In fact, it's doubtful whether Modernism and Leftism have much in common. The war radicalized Modernists *and non-Modernists.* Moreover, if radicalization was so important for the Modernists, why is it missing from their *poetry?*

Vicki Viidikas' shafts at the Left don't belie a higher Marxism. That professional, Robert Adamson, is utterly apolitical. It's some time since Nigel Roberts and John Forbes took *anything* seriously, let alone Left politics. Forbes' clever absurdities don't even take *dope* seriously. Roberts is semi-political once when he calls a rural commune small "f" fascist. Marvellous what the Modernists' beloved lower case can do to a political comment! The closest that Martin Johnston comes to political satire is comparing chooks to governors-general — not the reverse. These Modernists are nabobs of nihilism. Their main poetic device (other than wilful obscurity) is the wisecrack. Overreaching it occasionally, they overreach Modernism.

Tranter somehow manages to include six non-Modernists and exclude at least one Modernist—according to his own criteria. Rae Desmond Jones' violent underdog allegiance in compulsive narratives isn't Modernist. And "The Front Window" aside, Jones' opinions on poetry are the *opposite* of Adamson's. *Both* can't be Modernist. Dransfield is equally irrelevant — almost pure Romanticism. Charles Buckmaster's talents were developing in the same direction. Walter Billeter's serious elegy is closer to Tennyson's "In Memoriam" than to Kris Hemensley's work. Alan Wearne's dramatic monologues are Modernist only if Browning is Modernist. Bruce Beaver is only the *father* of the poets. *He* isn't Modernist, being only two painfully aware that what runs through his veins isn't ink. The omitted Richard Tipping is as Modernist as anyone Tranter sees as Modernist. Perhaps his Vietnam war masterpieces precluded him from the apolitical pantheon.

Unincluded young Modernists must feel that Tranter has established Old Boy Modernism — emphasizing "Old". 1970s women poets would stress "Boy". There are only two women among twenty-two men. Feminism has been *the* major influence on 1970s women poets; it has much to do with most new anthologies having a higher percentage of women than before. Tranter's Modernism is so important that half of the human race has to be excluded before he can do us an anthology. (It mustn't help sales, either.)

No matter how much Tranter dislikes academia, he's strongly influenced by its Practical Criticism plus a desire to hoop poets together in movements, fashions, even fads. He can't conceive of a poet's writing because he or she *can't help* confessing or protesting. The poet must always belong to some rebellious or reactionary school. This is why Tranter misses older poets who changed some of their direction towards his criteria. John Blight and David Campbell have written more playfully and less confessionally than Viidikas and most of the non-Modernists.

Non-Modernist and Modernist readers can at least agree on which poems are *most* Modernist — without, of course, agreeing on their worth. The poets assume the impossibility of knowing reality and contemplate only their alphabetic navels. When the English Romantics wrote to and about poets, poems and poetic processes they might have been elitest and paranoid; but at least their egos were still *in* their poetry. Tranter's Modernists are anaemic and emaciated Romantics without egotism *in* their poetry. Excepting Hemensley whose poetry is a snap-frozen grapevine of sub-literary twit and gossip, the Modernist ego erupts *outside* poetry in clique self-promotion, self-publishing and gratuitous, grandiloquent Introductions. Here it's vulnerable to tests of logic and history, as shown. For the most part the poetry itself isn't vulnerable, however, because it's indistinguishable from self-parody — a remark that shouldn't upset the poets with their penchant for parody. This indistinguishability must surely make another Ern Malley hoax pointless.

Since Tranter claims that Modernism is the most important European intellectual movement since the Renaissance, his poets automatically become Australia's most important phenomenon. This leads to absurdities such as "Laurie Duggan versus Judith Wright". Poor Duggan! It must be bad enough being John Forbes II. The point is

that Tranter's group is only *one* ill-defined group. There are other groups. There are many other individuals. Poets who want to read "determined and serious attempts to revitalize a moribund poetic culture" might discover how to write for Tranter's next anthology. Readers who just want to read poems will know what to avoid. Those saddened to see Martin Duwell's publishing initiative overpowered by Tranter will want to remember Duwell's past achievements.

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THE SCHOLAR'S ART

H. P. Heseltine

A. D. Hope. *The Pack of Autolycus* (Australian National University Press, $6.95). *The New Cratylus: Notes on the Craft of Poetry* (Oxford University Press, $17.95.)

"Poetry," Wallace Stevens once wrote, "is the scholar's art." These books exemplify the truth of Stevens' dictum, at least in one Australian instance.

Of the two collections of essays, *The Pack of Autolycus* is the less ambitious, though Hope is unduly modest in describing its contents as "the result of forty years spent hanging round the purlieus of scholarship and criticism" (p. v). While a number of the footnotes suggest interests formed and attitudes established in the 1930s, an almost equal number indicate acquaintance with the latest scholarly research. What all twelve essays most pleasingly demonstrate, however, is that professorial criticism can manifest the amateur's delight in literature without losing its professional status.

The essays cover a very wide range of periods, authors, books — from *Beowulf* to D. H. Lawrence. While virtually every one of them contains some fresh personal insight into its subject, some of course are better than others. I find, for instance, "*Beowulf* and the Heroic Age" and "What Happened to Rum, Ram, Ruf?" just a little dutiful in their relation to their theme; " 'Shee for God in Him' " (Milton and Tennyson on women) and "Wordsworth as the Man of Feeling" slightly disappointing — because noncommittal — exercises in historical exegesis.

The most interesting and convincing pieces in *The Pack of Autolycus* are those in which personal affection is joined to scholarly precision. "*Lavengro: A Dream*", for example, awakens new interest in a long neglected writer; "The Apocalypse of Christopher Smart" leaves us in no doubt that the "*Jubilate Agno*" is indeed a "magnificent poem" (p. 120). Probably only a scholar-poet could have produced so fine an account of the relation between Marlowe's verse and Chapman's as is given us in "Goose after Swan", while literary criticism becomes in "Squire Meldrum" a splendid medium for conveying Hope's own delight in the salty romanticism of experience. The claim in the opening paragraph of "*Wuthering Heights* Revisited" that "the book goes beyond imagination to something that can only be called revelation" (p. 135) stirs wide reaches of critical understanding, but the best essay of all is, perhaps the last: "How It Looks to an Australian: D. H. Lawrence's *Kangaroo*". This deflation of a major modern reputation ("only a very minor Blake", p. 202) is done with the poise and informed passion which characterise only the best and most responsible criticism.

There is something of a paradox here. Hope writes of *Kangaroo* with Australian eyes unawed by foreign pronouncements. Yet many of the other pieces in *The Pack of Autolycus* (and among them the best) deal with lives or literature far away or long ago. The paradox, if it is one, is resolved in the final sentence of "The Apocalypse of Christopher Smart", wherein Hope defines his own view of poetry: "a celebration of the world by the creation of something that adds to and completes the order of nature" (p. 123). As a critic seeking to connect the works of nature with those of the human imagination, he can align, say, *Beowulf* and *Kangaroo* in a single perspective only because he is so confident of the ground, the here and now, on which he stands.

As poet, Hope has experienced many of the matters which he analyses in *The Pack of Autolycus*. It is the poet's perspective and understanding which are his concern in *The New Cratylus*. The title is fittingly borrowed from Plato, since the main aim of *The New Cratylus*, like that of the old, is to explore "the essential nature of language and how it works in poetry" (p. x). Hope's discussion starts out in the definition of language as a kind of code; it develops, however, along lines and in directions quite different from those usually associated with modern linguistic analysis. There are at least two themes in *The New Cratylus* which place it in a more humanistic tradition of enquiry. In the first place, he insists that "language . . . represents an inheritance of common social experience with-

out which the code could never be more than a code" (p. 23). Language, that is to say, is more than an abstract structure — it bears a living freight of human experience and wisdom. Secondly, Hope is largely concerned with "the way poems come into being" (p. x). At the point where the process of creation intersects with the language code the poem has its being, a "kind of conversation with an unknown person" (p. 19), a medium by which a state of consciousness, once set down in words, can be transmitted to whoever has the wit and will to receive it.

The view of language proposed in *The New Cratylus* is, I take it, familiar enough. The whole study gains much of its unique interest, however, from Hope's highly personal account of the psychological genetics of verse. What he has to say in this regard has enormous fascination as both autobiography and literary theory. It may initially seem surprising that so much of the work of one often regarded as the Grand Cham of conservative classicism should have had its origins in the promptings of a remarkably vivid subconscious (see Chapter 3, "Dream Work", and *passim*). Yet when one follows the progress of those initial promptings through the shaping power of rhythm to the final text of an achieved poem, one is left in no doubt that we are close to the authentic processes of literary creation.

So vital, indeed, is the pre-rational in Hope's imagination that his description of what he calls his "dream team" becomes (as he is the first to admit) a kind of myth in defence of his own kind of poetry. The element of self-justification, however, does not operate to the disadvantage of *The New Cratylus*. If nothing else, it immediately associates Hope's book with another, similar work of aesthetic speculation — Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*. I suggest that comparison not merely because Coleridge is one of the recurring reference points in *The New Cratylus*, but because Hope's achievement seems to me comparable in quality as well as in kind to that of his great predecessor. Like Coleridge, Hope can sometimes seem cranky — particularly at the expense of "modernism". But like Coleridge, too, his understanding is fed and fired by a splendid fund of metaphor and analogy (often drawn from the natural sciences). And in one respect at least *The New Cratylus* arguably surpasses the *Biographia* — in the lucidity and modest confidence with which it develops its argument, strips poetry of its mysteriousness without destroying its mystery. Sensible, sensitive, and sensitizing, the book should become required reading for undergraduates ill at ease with verse.

Finally, *The New Cratylus* is more than simply a descriptive account of language and of the processes of creation. In its closing pages it moves naturally from a description of the nature of poetry to a defence of its value. Out of the definition of poetry as "sitting at the cross-roads of language" (p. 173) arises the final and eloquent assertion of its worth: "to keep and tend the delicate, inexorably extending edge of human awareness" (p. 172).

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THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BLACKBOARD

Keith Simkin

Gwyneth Dow: *Learning to Teach: Teaching to Learn.* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, $28.50).
Jean Ely: *Reality and Rhetoric. An Alternative History of Australian Education.* (Alternative Publishing Co-operative, $6.95).
Peter Gilmour and Russell Lansbury: *Ticket to Nowhere. Training and Work in Australia.* (Penguin, $4.95).

Three recent books in the field of education provide an unusual opportunity to compare past with present speculations about the future of educational institutions in Australia.

Each, in a distinctive style, confronts us with the importance of knowing much more than we do about the factors influencing the educational and occupational futures of our children.

Gilmour and Lansbury's *Ticket to Nowhere* examines the relationship between educational institutions and the labor market. The authors argue that the labor market can be divided into two segments. The primary sector consists of well-paid, secure and sometimes interesting occupations to which access is gained by children of the rich and by the acquisition of tertiary educational credentials. The secondary sector encompasses low-paid jobs with little security and meagre chances of promotion. The incumbents of these positions have not had the opportunity to gain high educational qualifications. Their schooling fits them only for uninteresting, dirty jobs. It provides few skills to help them reduce the ever-present threat of unemployment, poverty and dependence on welfare.

These people are the recipients of "tickets to nowhere". They are over-represented among the sons and daughters of the lower socio-economic groups, among migrants and among women.

Jean Ely's *Reality and Rhetoric* is an historical analysis of how some aspects of our social and educational inequalities have developed. Ely argues that both the rhetoric and the reality of Australian education have been remarkably constant over the last century. The rhetoric accompanying the expansion of primary, secondary and, finally, tertiary education has exploited several recurring themes. Politicians, administrators, moralists and the ambitious among the citizenry have harped upon the dangers of an ignorant proletariat, and the productivity of a skilled workforce. They have praised the justice of an educational system that has opened the doors of advancement to able, industrious and well-behaved pupils.

The reality, according to Ely, can be likened to a never-ending relay race in which the rival teams represent different social strata.

> The 'haves' race on the inside tracks, handing on the baton under auspicious circumstances from generation to generation. The upwardly mobile often begin at, but hope desperately not to finish on, the outer tracks. Many stay, willingly and sometimes unwillingly, on the outer lanes.

Ely fleshes out the analogy with detailed case studies of colonial governments' involvement in primary education in the last century. Next, she examines the state governments' creation of secondary schools up to 1918. Finally, she traces the growth in Commonwealth financing of secondary and tertiary education during the last three decades.

In contrast, Gwyneth Dow's *Learning to Teach: Teaching to Learn* does not sweep across vast areas of Australian history or sociology. It describes and analyses the progress since 1973 of an experimental Diploma in Education course for trainee teachers at the University of Melbourne.

> The Course was a total reconstruction of teacher education based on integrating theory itself and relating it to action, on working towards a close partnership with schools, and on experimenting with student autonomy. It was the totality and attempted consistency of the Course that may be regarded as truly innovative.

Some practical applications of this attempt have included a major contribution to the course from supervising teachers in schools where trainee teachers carried out their practical experience, and an emphasis on problem-centred studies of educational questions central to good teaching. A crucial role was played by diaries, in which students continuously evaluated the course and their own developing philosophies of politics and education.

The Diploma in Education course described by Dow has another characteristic which broadens its relevance. This is described in Chapter 5, which is titled "Assessing oneself?"

> The most radical feature of the Course was our abandonment of competitive assessment (ranking of students), replacing it by consultative and open assessment, as well as our promise that students would collaborate in day-to-day decision-making about the nature of the Course.

Despite the many difficulties, Dow concludes her analysis of the experiment on a cautiously optimistic note:

> What emerges from the story of Course B over five years is that students, in learning to teach, can learn to learn; indeed they are forced to become more self-conscious and less self-centred about their own learning.

In the final pages of her book, Dow argues that broader movements of reform will not succeed unless the people affected are fully involved in the organisation and evaluation of the whole program. Only if this principle is followed can we hope for rejuvenation, a "self-renewal", of our educational institutions.

Let this conclusion serve as a starting point for comparing the implications of the three books under review.

It should be said at the outset that each book is limited in scope and implication.

At first glance, Dow's recipe for self-renewing educational systems seems restricted in scope to teacher training and to the revitalisation of teaching methods in schools. Some readers might argue that an appeal to grass-roots democracy as a method for the development of professional expertise has a logic visible only to someone whose daily vista is limited to that green sward surrounding an ivory tower.

Ely's historical analysis might also be dismissed by the politician or the administrator as an elegant jigsaw. It might gather dust with a reputation as a well-written journey through our past which arrives at the all too familiar conclusion that political rhetoric and actual equality of opportunity

are not good travelling companions.

Ticket to Nowhere has already been slated in reviews as a gallop around the course of trendy lefty economics and sociology, arriving at the post with the news that we are not all equal in this vale of tears. Some critics have implied that it is little more than a pale late 1970s version of the Schools Commission and Poverty Commission reports, differentiated from these sometimes angry proclamations by its neutered sociological jargon and its insipid recipes for a vague, reformist future.

These sorts of comments underestimate the insights into the relationship between education and the economy which the three books contain. They will repay a careful reading.

For example, Ely doesn't speculate upon the future of educational reform. But she does indicate the mistakes that our social democrats should not allow to occur again. Consider this verdict upon the Schools Commission, so lovingly created by the Whitlam government as an instrument for egalitarian reform.

> Until the commission confronts the church, and even perhaps the state bureaucracies; until it has the power effectively to demand accurate information and control over the actual expenditure of public money; it will continue to be dogged by ambiguity, inadequate information, and compromise . . .
>
> The federal parliament, acting through the agency of the Schools Commission, is now in effect sustaining and extending an infrastructure of religious establishment more powerful than any which this country has known.

Ely is relentless in her exposé of the often self-interested rhetoric of politicians, administrators, religious and commercial leaders. It is rare to find in recent histories of education such a powerful combination of critical analysis and cadenced, sweeping prose.

The concluding pages of *Reality and Rhetoric* press home Ely's conclusion that we have consistently (and our politicians have deliberately) blunted the distinction between education as critical enquiry, directed towards the improvement of our society, and education as an instrument for the advantage of our political, economic and religious elites.

She leaves it to us to conjure up visions of how we might redress the balance, in favor of education for critical enquiry aimed at egalitarian social reform.

Gilmour and Lansbury do not lack visions. Yet, they curiously claim to shy clear of "major institutional and social change". Rather, they suggest "some less sweeping actions which can be taken to ameliorate the current situation".

Included in their list are: realigning educational qualifications and job requirements; overcoming family background factors affecting (poor) educational performance by students; abolishing the stigma attached to unemployment; reducing the elitism of universities; government management of the labor market through formal training programs; bussing students from poorer to richer state schools; creating a more egalitarian tertiary educational system, and raising the prestige of the skilled trades.

This list is not meant to be summary criticism, for *Ticket to Nowhere* is a timely book. It presents little that is original, but its potentially seminal influence lies in the urgency with which it points up the glaring need for parents and citizens to know more about education.

We need to know more about the impact of current economic and technological movements upon the future of our social and educational institutions and, through them, upon our children's life chances.

As an example, to implement many of the recommendations in *Ticket to Nowhere* would require affirmative action by a reformist central government. Yet Ely has quite clearly shown how such action has been subverted repeatedly in this century by our social and economic elites. How, in the future, are we to try to avoid this dilemma?

As another example, Gilmour and Lansbury speculate upon a scenario for the year 2000, in which a succession of conservative governments implement meritocratic education policies based upon centralised and standardised ability testing. The result is a very unequal society in which an aristocracy of technocrats manipulates the mass of technological illiterates.

This is a plausible scenario, as are others discussed by Gilmour and Lansbury. But equally plausible is the possibility that future conservative governments will adopt quite the reverse policy. They could drastically reduce their involvement in education and encourage the growth of the private educational sector. The growth of New Conservatism around monetarist economic policies and the catch-cry "Small government is beautiful" is already reducing the amount of attention being paid to government schools.

Quite possibly, the results will be similar to those suggested by Gilmour and Lansbury. But

we don't know. We need to pay more detailed attention to the relationship betwen political and economic policies, technological innovations and the role of educational institutions in social life: much more than can be provided in Gilmour and Lansbury's overview.

Of the three books, Dow's *Learning to Teach: Teaching to Learn* is the most richly loaded with insights into relations between education and society.

Some of the insights come from the Course B students. Much of the book is based on excerpts from their diaries, in which they raise issues central not only to teacher education but also to other areas of professional and community education. These issues include: the pitfalls surrounding claims to "expertise" in the area of relationships between people; conflicts between personal and professional self-perceptions; the necessity for coercion when adults face groups of adolescents, and the inevitability of that painful blunting of sensitivity in young people when they encounter the unforgiving impersonality of the bureaucracies in which they are to be employed.

The insights which make this book such a joy to read are Dow's comments upon the students' perceptions of their experiences as student teachers. She is mistress of the humane but intelligent critique, the witty but friendly aside, the wry irony of the still committed but older social reformer.

Many of Dow's insights are concerned with the complex ways in which schools are political instruments: how they influence relations between social classes, between male and female, between children and their parents.

The other books reviewed here also emphasise the political and economic functions of education, but not in the vivid manner of Dow. Part of her impact lies in the intensity and honesty with which she faces up to the political and moral dilemmas in education. Part of it lies in her control of her material, which is so great that the book must have been a labor of love. Another reason for the impact is that many of her students are seeing the links between schools and social inequality for the first time. Their diary excerpts show their black anger at what schools can do to children. Dow weaves these excerpts into a powerful tapestry.

Each author of the books under discussion has confronted the question, "For whom does the school bell toll?" Each has given a related, but different, answer.

Ely has documented the story of those groups who have lost out in the educational relay races. In so doing she has highlighted what might have been, but was not, a great achievement of our educational institutions.

Gilmour and Lansbury suggest what might, in future, make for greatness in our educational system. There are numerous short- and long-term proposals. However, since the authors eschew major social change, their last resort is to a critical humanism, to "education — for life and not merely for work".

In comparison, Dow's book is a deep and stylish reflection upon how greatness can be, and sometimes has been, achieved by a group of enthusiastic neophytes and dedicated professionals. Her book is ultimately the most visionary, but also the most practical. What a pity that arguably the best book on teacher education in this country should lock up this vision inside hard covers that require nearly $30 to be prised apart!

Keith Simkin is a lecturer in comparative education at La Trobe University.

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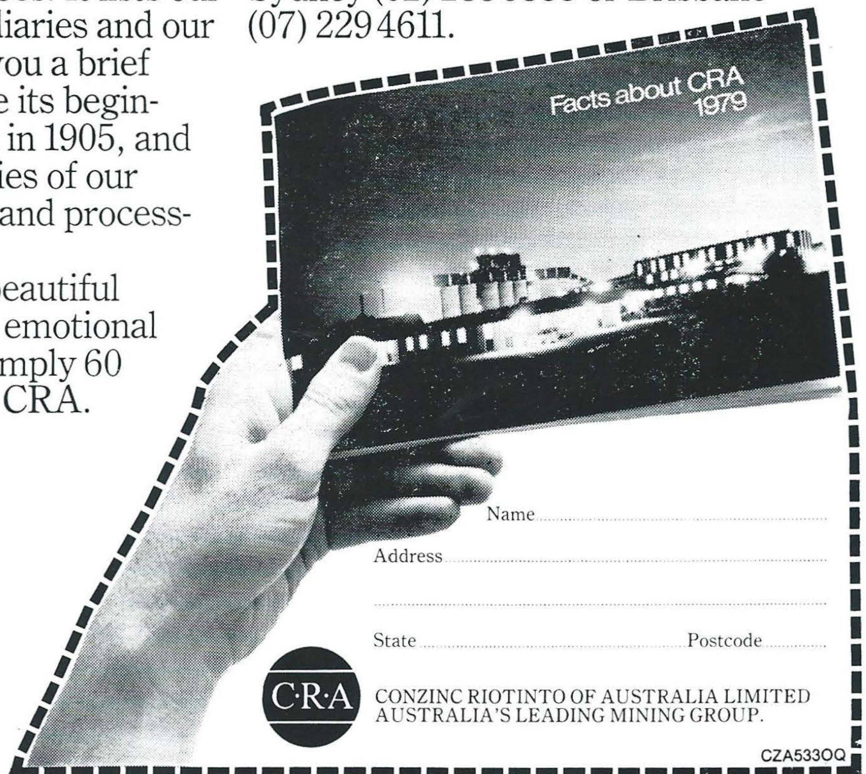

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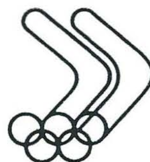

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