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TOM GRIFFITHS ON
ANZAC DAY

FRANK KELLAWAY ON GEORGE TURNER
AND PATRICK WHITE

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stories
poetry
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Science

fiction

is not

what

it seems:

GEORGE

TURNER





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JOHN BEST **Outline—The Third**

Let's say his name is Tim Smith.
Let's say he is in his mid-thirties.
Let's say he is the marketing manager of a small business firm—say a plastic moulding firm.
Let's say he is on holidays—with his family—yes, with his family.
He is a jogging freak.
His sporting achievements—well, he broke five minutes for the mile when he was seventeen—he had finished seventh.
He played cricket for a church team.
And he read the paper from the back—get the populace reading the sporting pages, the leader exhorted. And he did just that!
He was a fanatical football supporter.
And of course he was a pilgrim to the T.A.B. on Saturdays for a bet on the horses.
His conversation on Mondays was always in the form of the post-mortem:
—in summer the cricket
—in winter the football
—all the year round, the horse that got away.
And in every four years the increasing lamentations over the fate of Australia at the Olympic Games.
He had remembered 1956—the year the Games were in Melbourne. He had jumped out of his seat when Strickland had exploded over the 80 metres hurdles.
He had basked when the swimmers had cleaned up the world.
But since, it had been all down-hill.
Now Tim had driven a long way—and he had reached the Kimberleys.
The town lay in the vast valley under the protection of a number of roughly assembled sandstone hills—knobs they were called. Not mountains and without the smooth contours normally associated with hills. They were knobs.
On the second morning of his stay, after recon-

noitring the situation, he decided to run up to the lookout on one of the secondary knobs. Actually he had announced his intention and his wife had said—don't wake me up.

He woke at five.

He donned his shorts and his Jumbunna Plastic Co. T-shirt, laced up his running shoes, and emerged from his motel confinement.

The sky was lightening—the tinges of lilac around the indigo clouds. The town was in darkness. He ran along the road. His shoes drummed along the macadam surface out past the shopping centre.

The neatly laid out town aseptically indicated the town planner's grid mentality.

Ugly tropical houses elevated on stilts with the solar heating like half-uncoiled sleeping bags on the roof still covered in darkness but half smothered by a profusion of bushes and trees.

Not everyone had the privilege of being able to take his holidays at such a time. However, he had earned it. And the Kimberleys were an area which very few of his friends had penetrated. He and his wife could eat out on it—instant experts, and at least he knew that the line between interest and insufferability would not be broached. He did not have home slide movie nights to ram it down everybody's gullet.

He began to puff slightly. He prided himself on his fitness. He was as fit as he ever was except for those odd twinges in the hips. He hesitated for an instant in the unfamiliar surroundings, and then turned right running off the road into the grass and sand at the side of the road.

The job was not a bad one, but he wondered where he was going to end up—Marketing Manager was not bad, but he had done a business administration degree part-time. That could lead

upwards, but Tom was about the same age and general manager. He had all the qualifications—and was related to the company's founder, Dick—Dick O.B.E. for community services. The bluff Dick who sat as the managing director still and Tom was his nephew. Yes, he would have to think about his future with Jumbunna.

His thoughts were interrupted by a couple of terriers, which hurtled out from a driveway and confronted him. Their barking set off a chain reaction of dogs down the street. He ran back from under the shelter of the trees into the middle of the road. The dogs tended not to follow beyond the first few tentative steps.

His shirt began to show darkened patches over his lower rib cage, as he reached the boundary road and ran along with the houses with their frangi-panni fragrance on the one side and the cane-grassed scrub on the other. He kept to the centre of the road. His legs felt light still and he made sure he ran with a rolling motion action to cushion the hard surface. He measured his pace as the road inclined downwards. But at Jumbunna he had authority—he had his own secretary, but the view from the office could be improved. There was not a wide knowledge of Jumbunna when he mixed socially in the four-bedroomed en-suite set. Still it was legit to call himself senior executive when people asked him what he was. He had a car—it was automatic and Australian-American, in the middle-price range. The car had got him to the outback and he had moved out of the caravan holiday set. In the flattened diamond of hierarchy, he was definitely above halfway, but Jumbunna was not that big.

He suddenly looked up at the mountain where he was aiming, and cursed. He had run down the wrong road, but fortunately not so far that he could not change direction.

The boundary roads intersected, and he was still feeling good, although he was breathing heavily and beginning to feel the run. His gut was giving the first sign of distress. In response he straightened his back and increased his pace. The light was steadily improving, and the countryside was emerging from its shadows. He had reached the town perimeter. Houses had degenerated into shacks and were no longer hidden in delightful tropical gardens.

Now there was dirt as the garden, and shade was no longer provided by exotic plants but by the ubiquitous gum tree. The signs of consumption

were not understated as in the town houses—it was the litter in the yard.

The sound of his shoes on the road—the slap of rubber perceptible to his isolated senses.

Then there was nothing but the bush on each side of the road. It was slowly beginning to rise.

He began to feel his quadriceps tighten. He attempted to lengthen his stride. Jumbunna and its problems began to recede as he began to feel the first pain.

He was running now—no longer could he detach himself from the task, and he cut across the road and then he was into the hill itself.

He could see the road ribbon climbing and bending. His pace began to slacken as the grade became steeper. The environment was in a tunnel. He could see the road. He could see the overhanging trees. He would reach the first landmark and then the next.

His legs were slipping from under him. He was not seventh in this race. He was alone in front. He was in the Marathon, Doranda the Italian collapsing and falling before the line—the Belgian in 1948 was coming first into the London stadium and was passed in the last stretch in the stadium first by the Argentinian and then the Brit.

He was not going to be beaten—he was so far from Jumbunna and from the encapsulated reality of the motel as he struggled upwards.

Don't fall—don't stop—you are in front and the finishing line is not far. There is the crowd waiting for you. There is the expectant Australian crowd crying for you to finish.

Air hunger—he felt that crushing pain in his lower back. His feet were sore. He was pushing himself to win. The next bend must be the finishing straight, and he ran. There was the white winning post. He sprinted and crashed through the spindly lower branches of the gum tree at the top of the rise. Without stopping, he ran up the steps to the victor's dais. He threw his hand into the air and exulted. He had done it. He threw his hand into the air in a clenched salute. He was grasping the peeling railing of the lookout. His audience was the broken red standstone—mute obelisks of the dreamtime. They allowed him his dream.

He slumped against the railing. The sky was lined by heliotrope lines—the reds and blues merging gracefully and draping the mountains at the other end of the valley.

The audience had receded—the valley lay before him. The neat row of houses in the town—the green heads of eucalypts appearing from the

gloom. The scattered dilapidation of the Aboriginal reserve at the edges of his visual field.

There was no sound from the bush. There were no native bird calls. Only the dogs barking—and then the rooster crowing and the harsh voice from the reserve. Every sound was discrete against the valley silence. The harsh voice rang out again—it was below and a mile away, but he could feel the anger, if not pick out the words.

His eyes could see the flickering blue light of the airstrip—an unreal blue of an inert gas harshening the edges of nature. He was breathing less heavily.

He could see the yellow flowers and the overhanging bolls of the kapok tree. This abounded on the slopes of the mountain. He laughed. Kapok. Who the hell used kapok any more but, despite the efforts of government, no other crop grew in the area without bowing to the harshness. Bloody kapok. He felt better. He pulled off his Jumbunna T-shirt and hung it on the kapok tree. There was the time when there was no Post-Industrial Technocrat Man—nor a marathon

runner. He pulled his shoes off and threw them into the valley.

Let's say his name was not Tim Smith.

Let's say he did not work for a plastics company.

Let's say it was a fantasy.

But then the world without a fantasy, is a world committed to suicide.

Let's say the man walked off the mountain—slowly, and in some pain. At least he had not jumped off to add his statistics to the overwhelming obits, e.g.

—Smith, Tim—suddenly (as a result of an accident) on (date, year). Our heartfelt sympathy for Brenda and family. A mate always.—Directors and staff of Jumbunna Plastics.

—Smith, Tim

So much vim;

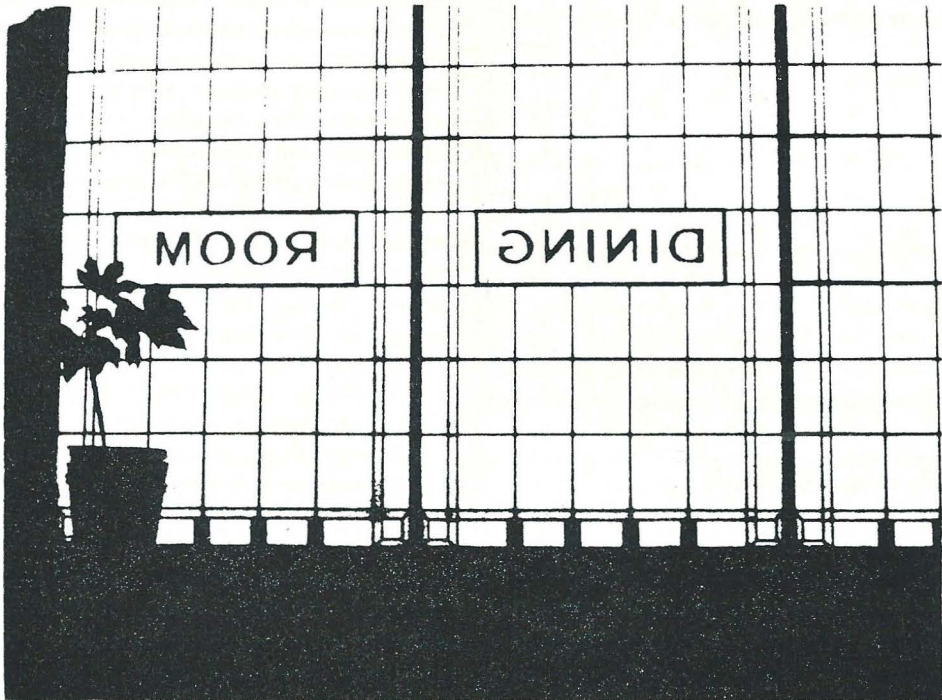
Died on whim;

Out on limb

in the Kim(berleys).

—Author's name (withheld).

His wife wondered where he had been; and he said, for a run, and went and had a shower.



TOM GRIFFITHS **Anzac Day**

Tom Griffiths is writing a doctoral thesis in Australian history at the University of Melbourne.

It is difficult to observe an ex-serviceman's Anzac Day. An observer watches the be-medalled men march down the main street, or stands alone in the back row at the service. He sees only the public moments, the occasions when individuals are conscious of their audience. But Anzac Day is not just a march or a service; it stretches from dawn till dusk, a day also of more private moments. When I arrived in a small Victorian country town asking about Anzac Day activities, it was Ted, an R.S.L. man, who told me that observing was no good. "You've got to be in the thick of it, in the ranks with the boys," he declared. He invited me to spend the day with them, from six in the morning till six at night, and he swept aside my hesitations about not having war stories of my own. "Besides," said Ted, "they'll probably think you're Vietnam."

Participating, rather than merely observing, allowed me to share some of the changing roles of that day. The ex-serviceman is not only the mourner at the service, not only the performer in the march; he is also the organizer of all these things. The day does not just happen, it is created. But the men did not feel free in the way they created it.

At 5.15 a.m. a few lights in the main street relieved the gloom of night, but all was quiet. At the R.S.L. hall we gathered in dribs and drabs, swapping words about the cold. Most of the men were wearing jumpers, thick woollen shirts and long coats. The early hour and the sense of effort in turning up for what was later referred to as the "dawn attack" excused any need for formality. Reverence lay in being there. There were a few in suits, but a tie was more to keep the neck warm than to look smart in the light of dawn.

As members gradually arrived, there was an air of expectation, a gathering into small groups, frequent pauses in conversation, and a sense of waiting for something to happen. "Fall in, chaps!" was the call they awaited. We shuffled untidily out of the door just after six. (There was some concern that we had missed six exactly, the R.S.L. clock being quite divorced from Eastern, Winter, Summer or any other time.) Outside, under the giant trees in the dark, we formed two lines facing the hall, amidst mutterings of "spread the ranks", "Good Morning, Sergeant", and other half-amused, half-reminiscent words. Frank, the estate agent, directed us: "Squad . . . Attention! Right Turn . . . Quick March! Left, Right, Left . . ." It wasn't a smart group that headed down the main street in the half-light towards the gardens — some of the old legs found it hard to get going but, clumsy or not, they at least strove for a swinging step. We were mostly silent, a few words, always joking. But we could have been on the march, a much longer march, and it could have been anywhere in that darkness — but what was a passing thought to me must have been a much stronger reminiscent one to those who marched with me. I think that's why there was silence — concentration on the feet in front and suddenly, an image from the past.

We covered the rough terrain in good time from the footpath to the cenotaph. Here the bulky, unimaginative block of granite could be barely distinguished in the light. We stood at ease and watched as Eddie the President took the proceedings, business-like but respectfully. We watched as Eddie's torch picked out the plaque while he said those words: "They shall not grow old as we who are left grow old . . .", giving away its truth by the elderly quaver in his voice and the youth of the people in his memories.

The minute's silence brought, strangely, a sudden awareness of noise — a realisation that one stood in row of men, looking over the shoulder of another row, all shuffling, breathing, small and frail in the dawn.

We hung the wreath, listened to the cornet, and did a right turn and a right wheel — this time there was more talk, more jokes and, with anticipation dissolved, less order. Men broke ranks within sight of the hall and we went in to a cup of tea or a glass of beer and snags on bread for breakfast. There was talk now at the different tables, not about the war really — a few cracks about who got Victoria Crosses and how D.S.O. really stood for “Dick Shot Off” and hence wasn't really an honor at all. But mainly the talk was about other Anzac Days. There was talk about how, each year, the white crosses that marked the town dead got greater in number, and how those who remembered grew gradually fewer. It would dwindle away eventually, this Anzac business. It was sad to think so, but the young people of today don't really understand what it's all about, they don't realise the hardships.

Some Right Way of Doing Things seemed to hang over the R.S.L. member's confrontation with the ritual of Anzac Day. There was no definition of who decides the Right Way, but there was a definite groping towards its fulfilment, whatever it was. Questions were continually asked about how things should be done, and the answers precipitated through the assertion of a vague group memory. While we talked in the hall, a number of plastic bags of white wooden crosses sat in the corner, and gradually an agreement arose that 7.30 was the time to lay them out. So the air of expectancy mounted again.

When the hour came, we grabbed a bag fairly irreverently, and struck out into the sunlight. Suddenly we were in the little town and not soldiers at all; we were, in fact, suddenly not so much private mourners as the organisers of an event for other people. The Dawn Service was definitely our thing, for us to remember, but now we became a show ourselves — relics of the war, and high priests of the public event. We approached the cenotaph again, realising this time that the sunlight could tell us more about it. The lawn in front of the granite monument was surrounded by concrete — the grass patches each formed a side of a bisected cross and left a central path leading to the stone cenotaph. We tipped the crosses rather unceremoniously onto the surrounding concrete and began sorting them

into alphabetical order. Brothers lay slung together — two white crosses with the same names, but contrasting initials. Our task was to line the 283 crosses into even rows so that they would completely cover the grass area. Spare space was not to be left. Several cries of “close the ranks” initiated repositioning to fit in the last few crosses. Only one spot was left clear — it was to be filled at the public service a few hours later by a much larger cross in memory of the Unknown Soldier (“could have been an Australian”, said Eddie). Some remembered when the space between crosses had been large, and the number small. Many knew the names as we laid them out, and talked with rough affection — not gentleness, but joking, tough reverence. A cross out of line was called a “drunk”, and they recalled that the description had sometimes fitted the person, too. They could see these crosses as people — initials grew into names and nicknames in their talk; they could even imagine themselves there too, a stark white cross. “There'll be hardly any space left for us,” they said. “Where'll we fit?” A line of string with poppies was placed around the slightly raised cenotaph platform. In days past, a poppy had adorned each individual white cross, but when it rained the color had come out and run like blood. It had honed the moment too sharply, this planting of the crosses, this laying out of the dead.

The official part of the day contrasted with the informality and poignancy of the morning. The march down the main street was the men's public moment — it brought all the dignity that ritual bestows, but also the awkwardness. Their suits fitted rather stiffly, and on their chests were medals or, if not medals, any badge they could find — Anzac, Apex, Lions. As they shuffled into ranks for the procession the banner, entrusted to Thommo and left to lean on a lamp-post, toppled and fell into the gutter. There was mock uproar, half serious, sure that “that's no way to treat it, Thommo!”, but finding it funny all the same. “That's as bad as dropping your rifle!” they cried. Upon picking it up, Thommo was unsure, now the time was near, of which way to hold the thing. “Do you put your right hand or your left hand on it?” He was genuinely worried, for he was only a ‘stand-in’ for old George, the Gallipoli man who usually carried it and led the procession, but whose legs were now bugged, and was consequently relegated to the back, following in a gently-driven taxi — still dressed up though, tie, suit, medals and all. We hustled into our

ranks, three across and about ten deep, Eddie on the front right, and Thommo, having figured out some way of holding the banner, only a step behind the pipers.

The procession, past the crowd which we were too important to acknowledge, led us, warm with activity, into the silent arena of a civic reception. There, at the Town Hall Gardens, the cenotaph, defined by our frail string of poppies, formed the focus of a half-circle of seats. Upon these sat the town dignitaries and residents. But there were no seats for the marchers. We, who had marched while the others watched, who had fought while the others waited, and whose legs were not as strong as they used to be, were expected to stand. It was part of the sense of trial which surrounded the day for the old soldiers — those who arose at dawn crowded about it to those who did not; and so they were proud now that they could stand while others sat, as they were proud later when they completed the final attendance of the day. Time was stretched throughout Anzac Day in a necessarily demanding way — like the war itself, it was long, with periods of waiting and moments of focus, and there was a sense of achievement in “making it through”.

But this was not really an occasion for us, for we had done our personal mourning at dawn. Now we stood on the periphery of this circle, watching almost as strangers while other members of the town presented their formal respects. It was difficult to muster a sufficient sense of reverence. The wreath-laying was prolonged and mechanical, the Anzac Address was a little too argumentative to catch our emotions, and the program we held in our hands was elaborate and numbered — so, feature passed on to feature in such a way that the program itself gained too much of our attention. We finished with “God Save The Queen” and then we dispersed, glad to retreat from the cold. The garlanded cenotaph was more moving now it stood bare and unattended than when it was a focus for town politics. The loudspeakers had blared, and Eddie’s clumsy frailty, so appealing at dawn, was made to seem inadequate here.

That afternoon, in the silent gardens, there fell the first, gentle rain of the day. “Ever known an Anzac Day it didn’t rain?” says ‘Mum’ in Alan Seymour’s play, “The One Day of the Year”. And it did suit the scene in the quiet gardens, this patter of drops and, at nightfall, we would brave the elements for the dead.

A few minutes before six a motley group of

figures bundled out of the R.S.L. Hall and dragged some big plastic bags towards the gardens. They were not marching, there was little decorum, and they were early. They reached the cenotaph in disorder and started ripping the crosses out of the soil and stuffing them in the bags, any bag. “We’ll sort them out again next year”. Some of the crosses were hard to get out, and the rain was beginning to make the lawn muddy; it was not easy work and some just stood around watching. One of the workers mused: “You know, boys, we’ll be in here one day . . .” It was poignant in the rain, and brought a moment of thought. But he quickly defused it: “The only consolation is that there’ll be someone else pickin’ these bloody things up!” They loved that joke and laughed long, but it was comforting in a way, too, the thought that this ceremony was ongoing, bigger than themselves.

The six bells of the post-office clock chimed, and Ted and a few others arrived, hurrying and annoyed. “You’re too early, you started before six . . . come on, get some order into this!” “It’s nightfall when we do it, Ted” came the reply. “No, it’s always six, and couldn’t wait, you blighters.” Ted brought a reminder of the need for reverence, of the need to follow the Right Way. There was some shame at forgetting, but a complete inability to muster a sufficient sense of presence. They swayed on their feet, and joked; it had been a long day at the hall. There was a gradual remembrance that there was usually a short service at this point . . . but where was the bugle player? We jumped from one foot to another, waiting in the rain. When he finally arrived, we shuffled into two untidy lines, some giving directions, some joking back. Our number was less than the morning, perhaps half. When we had arranged ourselves, the bugler tackled the Last Post. It was a very ragged performance, but few noticed how wavery those notes were. They had tried to remain silent, not with complete success, and they had tried to remain still, but some had stuttered for balance. We now split up and grabbed roughly for a bag of crosses. Ted was indignant as some wandered aimlessly off: “Some reverence, please! Some decorum you blokes, come on! Two to a bag! Cripes, we should have had the flags laid across them . . . Wait! Into a line, come on. Two to a bag, or one if you have to. That’s it. Come on, left, right, left, right . . .” Ted spiked their consciences and we formed a motley line, but the jokes rolled on. It was quite a different atmosphere to the morning — no silence, little order, and only hollow ritual,

following the bare outlines of what had to be done, but not feeling the relevance of it. We dumped the bags in the hall foyer and exchanged quips and shammy fights before splitting up. "I've made it through!" yelled Thommo in mock delight, throwing himself at the President. "I got through the day, I did!"

There was hilarity and high spirits there that evening, certainly, but a sense of shame, too. The lack of reverence was regretted; they were like kids with uneasy consciences but saddled, at the same time, with an uncontrollable hilarity. They wanted to muster more decorum but couldn't; they were almost embarrassed at how they had let the mask of reverence fall, and how mechanical and meaningless it had left the shell of ritual. Ted had tried to badger some respect back into the activities, but even he couldn't keep it up — his step had faltered, his bag had dragged. But he talked sincerely of his feelings because, at the end of the day, they were still there: "You get a lot of talkin' about this One Day of the Year and the drunk digger, but look, it isn't

true — sure they like their beer, they have it during the year, too, but these blokes have been through some hard times, lost a lot of mates, and they have a think about it. You know, I felt it even more this year that, come Anzac Day you start remembering things that you haven't thought about for twelve months and it makes a bloke sad. It's sort of the one day of remembering after a year of forgetting."

The long day had begun with the diggers, their feelings at the fore, their respect inherent in their dawn attendance, and it ended here with Ted reasserting those feelings. Past Anzac Days were as much in their memories as were past battles, and they had lined this day up against an ideal all the way through. They sought to anchor their action in precedent. Sometimes the feelings had fallen short of the ritual and left it empty, sometimes their emotion had been beating up against the very limits of that framework, bursting it with significance. But the day had been long and demanding, and each had served it, believing that, when their name was on a little white cross, others would serve it too.



FRANK KELLAWAY

Visions of Conflict

The Novels of George Turner

Frank Kellaway, born 1922, went to school with the editor of Overland, served in the navy during the war, and after a spell as a librarian has lived what may be called an itinerant, rural life — at present in Tubbut, in remotest Victoria. He has published a novel, children's books, an opera libretto and poetry, his latest collection, Mare's Nest, being published by Overland in 1978.

Turner's first novel, *Young Man of Talent* was published by Cassell in 1958. Simon and Schuster brought it out shortly after in America under the title *Scobie*, the name of the central character. Since then Turner's publications include *A Stranger and Afraid* (1960), *Cupboard under the Stairs* (1962), *A Waste of Shame* (1964), *The Lame Dog Man* (1967), all with Cassell. *Cupboard* was an alternative Book Society Choice, shared the Miles Franklin award with Thea Astley's *The Well Dressed Explorer* and sold paperback rights to Corgi. In spite of this distinguished output, Cassell complained that they weren't making enough money out of his books and rejected his next novel *Transit of Cassidy*, which was finally published by Nelson in 1979. Before it appeared Faber brought out his more recently written science fiction novel *Beloved Son* in the same year. This was the first of a trilogy, of which the second, *Vaneglory*, has just been published. The concluding volume (all from Faber) is expected later this year.

The themes of Turner's early novels concern the social misfit. They explore the impact the odd-man-out makes on more normal individuals in society. He will be constrained and sometimes helped by social institutions, but what will happen if an individual of strong intelligence and personality tries to constrain or help him? There will be occasions when this must become inevitable. *Young Man of Talent* is built around one of them. A tough criminal recruit, Andy Payne, is sent as a reinforcement to a battle station in the New Guinea jungle and threatens to disrupt and cripple the platoon commanded, after the deaths

in action of its lieutenant and sergeant, by Corporal Scobie. No physical match for Payne, Scobie must subdue and control him by psychological means; men's lives and the effectiveness of the platoon depend on it. It is a tense, exciting struggle with many surprising twists. Although Scobie wins a spectacular victory and manages not only to subdue Payne but to get his wholehearted devotion, he suffers an ironical reverse in the dramatic conclusion, perhaps because in his overweening pride he has gone too far and temporarily reduced Payne to a creature of his own will.

From the theme for a single novel this develops into a vision of what human beings are like in conflict. The next four novels are set in the fictional Victorian town of Treelake. *A Waste of Shame*, the third, fits uncomfortably into this sequence because, though there is plenty of conflict in it, the serious implications of Turner's central preoccupation are swamped by the propagandist intention of arguing a case for Alcoholics Anonymous. The dice are loaded not by fate but by a theory of what happens in the cure of alcoholics. In all the Treelake novels Jimmy Carlyon is one of the main protagonists. He is a smart operator who begins, in *A Stranger and Afraid*, bearing a strong family resemblance to Scobie; by *Lame Dog Man* however we are brought to know a far more complex character. The odd-men-out, Alec McLean of *Stranger*, Harry White of *Cupboard* and Ted Johnson of *Lame Dog Man*, are all individual creations and quite unlike Andy Payne.

The ironical handling of the manipulators

becomes more subtle. In *Stranger* Jimmy does not try to subdue his half-brother Alec, as Scobie did Payne, for the situation here does not call for it, but he assumes that because he is in fighting form and able to deal with the world, while Alec is in a neurotic mess, that he is intrinsically the stronger and maturer man. He discovers, as Alec gradually finds his feet, that his half-brother has qualities that make his own look a little shoddy. Jimmy's interference never looks like turning to tragedy. He does alter the lives of those about him, but not in the way he intended; in spite of his definite actions he finds that his role is finally that of a catalyst. The implication is that neurotics sometimes have a hidden power and bigness of personality which, if it is able to emerge, will make the patronage of glibber, more easily-adjusted people look a little absurd.

In *Cupboard Under the Stairs* the psychiatrist Moxon plays a more dominant role as manipulator than does Carlyon. Harry White has been a voluntary patient in Moxon's mental hospital. The psychiatrist, like Scobie, is struggling to adjust the social mis-fit. Unlike Scobie he is not at the same time struggling for his own survival. Unlike the young man of talent he has no over-weening pride and he also has the advantage of professional training and experience. Nevertheless his intervention almost produces disaster when he arranges for Harry to visit Julia Shaw, whose lover he has once been. Julia is a neurotic with an insane fear of anyone who has been in a mental institution, and she carves him up with a bread-knife and claims that he tried to rape her. The situation is saved by Guinevere Martin and Jimmy Carlyon, two of the Turner characters who combine kindness, courage and honesty with tough, wise-cracking talk. Turner believes in the possibility of social re-adjustment for his odd-men-out, and Moxon is allowed to win in the end. I used to think that Moxon's triumph reflected the self-educated novelist's wrong-headed reverence for the professional expert, but now I believe Turner allowed Moxon to win because he was acting, not as a private individual, but as the agent of a social institution.

Cupboard is one of Turner's most gripping narratives, but in it his ironic view of the manipulator is seriously modified. Perhaps this is because, in spite of the brio of the writing and the pace of the story, this is a strangely uncertain novel. Its last words are "Case-history on Harold Joseph White Closed." They make one realise sharply that this is a novel in which case-history elements have been imperfectly fused. Turner

presents Harry in action with an instinctive feeling for his every word and gesture. He also presents him as an amateur psychologist might, claiming to have the correct clinical explanation of his behavior. These two very different ways of looking at a man are in conflict. One is analytical and sees a man's life in the context of his sickness in order to try to explain it; the other is the synthesising way of the novelist who sees the whole man and looks at his motives and behavior in the context of the single, growing organism which is his life.

Irony comes back in full force in *Lame Dog Man*. Jimmy Carlyon is the central character; he is still the moral one-upman, the foul-weather friend, but less than ever before is he the master of his own fate. He is incapable of breaking out of his obsessive pattern of behavior, his need to interfere in the lives of others, particularly those who are outcasts. This time it is Ted Johnson, an emotionally retarded degenerate and criminal, no thug, unlike Andy Payne, but self-pitying and unable to cope with normal living. Jimmy knows very well that playing father to Ted is stupid; the man should be in some kind of institution, indeed he is only reasonably happy and secure in himself when he is in prison, though that is hardly the appropriate place for him. But Jimmy can't help himself, even though he realises that he is acting compulsively and that his behavior has something in common with Ted's, and even though he knows that it will wreck his love affair with Verna Craig. Here the wheel has come full circle, and we see the smart operator as himself the victim of neurotic obsession.

Transit of Cassidy is not about a manipulator but it is still about conflict and personal domination. Cassidy is a boxer; he doesn't pick on particular people and try to mould, help, or change them; he uses his forceful personality to attempt to hold everyone in his sway. Naturally this doesn't work. One by one he alienates all the people who love him and in the process ruins his career. After a series of degrading experiences he manages to regain some dignity working as a gardener in the country until his hero-worshipping son, Mike, comes to look for him. The old Cassidy reasserts himself and tragedy becomes inevitable. Here, as in *The Lame Dog Man* the irony becomes a function of psychological determinism.

The first science fiction novel, *Beloved Son*, though it deals with cloning and is set in Victoria and outer space with the main action in the year

2020, is still a novel projecting Turner's vision of human beings in conflict. It extends the basic themes to deal with megalomania and power struggles at a political level. The power men talk the same witty, stylised, wisecracking dialogue as the people of Treelake, and labor in the toils of similar compulsions and neuroses.

This article was written before the publication of the second of the SF trilogy, *Vaneglorry*, which does not fit comfortably into the framework of these remarks, so I will comment on it separately at the end.

There is a way in which it makes sense to talk about somebody we met yesterday as a "Graham Greene character" or about another person we know well as being "Dostoevskian". Both Greene and Dostoevsky saw the world as in the distorting mirrors of their own personalities. They imparted to every character in their novels something of the quality of their own essential beings. A great many lesser novelists than Dostoevsky, of whom Turner is one, belong in this category. The idea of a large number of people brought together by the random forces of fate, all partaking of some aspect of the protean personality of a Dostoevsky, is unreal if we are thinking in terms of truth to everyday experience. In terms of art we accept it, partly as a convention and partly as an expression of a subjective vision. These novelists are involved in a different sort of activity from the Tolstoys, Flauberts and Zolas, who create characters which seem to have a freer, more objective life, independent of the personality of their creator. Neither group is superior. It would be childish to dispute the pre-eminence of Tolstoy over Dostoevsky or vice versa; we must be grateful for both approaches to the art of the novel.

Some naturalistic critics have praised Turner for his creation of a Victorian country town and at the same time complained that people in such places do not carry on brilliantly savage dialogues in the manner of the characters in the novels. Both opinions derive from a mistaken notion of the sort of realism which has been achieved. Until *The Lame Dog Man*, Turner's Treelake was not a place at all, merely a flat backdrop for his witty dialogue and fast moving action. After reading three Turner novels set in Treelake, the reader will have no impression at all of what it would be like to walk down its main street. On page 105 of *Cupboard* Harry White does just this: "He loitered up the street, enjoying the town because it was clean and bustling and full of its affairs" — any busy street, any place.

"He inspected the window of a men's outfitters, mindful of not spending like an idiot. A blue suit, a hat, a couple of ties, new shoes; that should do it" — any men's shop, any town. "Once, in the distance, he saw Julia, standing on the steps of the Employment Office, talking to a small neat, fair-headed man" — any town where they have an employment office.

No attempt is made to evoke the sights and smells, noises and tactile impressions peculiar to a Victorian town. Turner was simply not writing that sort of novel. His work belongs far more to the family of Ivy Compton-Burnett, of whom Arnold Kettle says in *An Introduction to the English Novel* "Her novels are built on dialogue — they contain the very minimum of descriptive writing — but it is a dialogue of an original and highly conventional kind . . . the conversations are certainly nowhere near naturalistic . . . No one ever talked like the Gavestons and Seatons any more than anyone ever talked like Mirabel and Millament or the Macbeths. But like Congreve's or Shakespeare's, Miss Compton-Burnett's dialogue is not so far removed from colloquial speech that she cannot use and echo the tones and rhythms of actual conversation." Though Compton-Burnett's novels are more extreme in their stylisation than Turner's, the stylisation in his is one of their most important elements, and to read them as straight naturalism in the nineteenth-century manner is not to read them carefully or attentively at all.

Almost as though to please the critics who saw something in the early Treelake novels which wasn't there, Turner went to a lot of trouble to give a full, naturalistic picture of the place in the last of the series *The Lame Dog Man*. Whether the increase in naturalistic description and sociological observation makes it a better novel is doubtful. It seems more likely to make the reader expect naturalistic treatment in other parts of the novel. It is a mixture of modes which gives some justification to those critics who objected to the stylisation of the dialogue.

In *Transit*, no longer set in Treelake, Turner returns to the manner of *Stranger and Afraid*. He suggests place in passing, far more deftly than in the earlier novel, always through the subjective reactions of one of the characters, but the stylization demands the exclusion of sensuous evocations of smell, sight, touch and sound. In the science fiction novels these are even less appropriate.

The special world that Turner creates in all his

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novels does not need that kind of naturalism to make it convincing. However stylized their conversation the characters come to life and compel our recognition, and with them his vision of conflict emerges with great power and conviction. An admiration for honesty, courage, generosity and unsentimental kindness is apparent in all his novels, and these virtues are assumed to be desirable even when the characters are slashing one another most viciously. Turner doesn't believe in evil in the sense that Patrick White does, as a free-floating quality which can possess certain people. There are some particularly nasty people in all Turner's books, but they are not intrinsically different from the men of good will. Turner sees everyone as being capable of nastiness, and most as being capable at some time of honesty, courage or generosity. However tough his vision becomes it never loses a strong, unsentimental element of compassion.

In *Vaneglory*, the second of his SF trilogy, Turner has in some ways gone beyond any of his earlier themes. Here there is still a vision of human conflict presented with more than customary vigor and conviction. Like the earlier novels this one can also be seen as a highly sophisticated modern morality, but here there is a new metaphysical element which gives another dimension.

The setting is Melbourne and Glasgow in the 21st century after an atomic holocaust. Some of the characters from *Beloved Son* reappear, and the contrast between the culture and mores of survivors from before the holocaust and the younger people of the newly reconstructed world is given greater depth and subtlety. However the main problems in *Vaneglory* arise from the discovery that, scattered through the earth's population, there are mutants who, if they are not killed by physical violence, may live indefinitely. There are some who have lived for thousands of years and new mutants, none exactly alike and none able to reproduce, are being born every decade or so. The terrifying possibility of reproducing the mutation artificially through cloning is the mainspring of the action.

Swift struck at the human dream of immortality by showing his Laputans gradually becoming less and less human, degenerating gradually

to slug-like lumps of living matter. Lionel Davidson in *Under Plum Lake* (children's) SF imagined a medical technology which would enable people to live for about a thousand years, and brought out differences of outlook between them and people with a normal life expectancy. Turner, like Swift, has shown (but in a very different, very modern way) that the idea of living indefinitely is a shocking one, that our humanity and our mortality are dependent on one another. Like Davidson (though more thoroughly and more seriously) he has used the contrast of immortal beings to say something about the nature of the human condition.

In the science fiction novels something has been gained. They have enabled Turner to make a more general philosophical comment on human life than he has previously done. Something too has been lost. Damien Broderick, reviewing *Vaneglory* in the *Age* wrote "the immortals Angus and Alastair . . . the ageless bitch Jeanie and her gang-pressed human Scots lover . . . the starfarer James Lindley and the Security Commissioners Beckett and Ferendija — each is as fully dimensioned as any character in Turner's domestic *Treelake* sequence." This is simply untrue. The fact is that the immortals are not really human, as Broderick admits. We have no sense of them as people who have experienced childhood for example, so that they cannot be "fully dimensioned". Nor do we have the sort of personal details about Donald, Lindley or Ferendija which we do about Jimmy Carlyon, Alec, Guinea or Harry White. The SF characters are convincing in their way but we see them in action from the outside. In the early novels on the other hand we have a sense of experiencing what happens in the company of the characters; we become involved with them and get to know them better than we know most people in life, even though they are all 'Turneresque' and all speak a heightened, stylised dialogue.

The important thing is that Turner is still a developing novelist. He said recently in an interview with Stuart Sayers he intends to turn back to more naturalistic novels for a time. It will be very interesting indeed to see whether he will now be able to develop his more general, philosophical perceptions in greater depth in his original genre.

GEORGE TURNER

Some Unreceived Wisdom

This issue of Overland constitutes, among other things, a tribute to the Melbourne novelist George Turner, and we are fortunate to have this piece from him to add to it. Turner was born in Melbourne in 1916, served as an infantryman in the war, then worked as an employment officer and factory hand until 1976, when he became a full-time writer. He has in preparation a ninth novel and Not Taking It All Too Seriously, a book which he describes as part autobiography and part an account of the special world of the science fiction writer.

Scene: Spring Street, outside the Princess Theatre, time about nine-thirty, the first interval of "Norma".

Inside, the singing had been stirring enough but the opera was seemingly staged in a coal cellar, lit only by the whites of the singers' eyes; I'll swear they felt their way around. The night, on the footpath, was brighter.

There Stephen Murray-Smith and I, in our guises as opera buffs, played 'long time no see' and he congratulated me on my Lit. Board grant. When I expanded on the book I proposed to write in the time donated by the Board's largess he demanded a chapter for Overland — at once. A sucker for flattery, I agreed with those same stars in my eyes that shone there in 1958 when my first book was accepted for publication. You never quite get over being sought after, even in a small way, do you?

Without change of pace he added a demand for a review of the Patrick White autobiography, named a deadline two months too close and vanished smoothly into the crowd.

As I write this the White piece is done (farewell to a hoped-for idle Christmas) but the damned book is not properly into the planning stage. It would be an unprofitable exercise to guess at the content of a middle chapter and write it here and now; an alternative might be to begin at the beginning and write the first chapter, but my still uncertain idea of the shape of the work suggests that the opening pages will be tangential stuff, scene-setting, not touching the nub of the book.

It will be an unorthodox work, partly autobiographical and partly a collection of interpolated but relevant essays on science fiction and criticism. It will be in one sense a book about the things most people, including Australian reviewers, don't know about science fiction, and about the mildly insane people who inhabit the genre's ambience as well as the very sane people who create that part of the genre which is worth attention; in another it will be a pursuit of the inevitability of events, foreshadowed in childhood, which drove a respectable writer of staidly respectable novels to throw his cap over the moon at the age of sixty and start a fresh career as a writer of science fiction.

The book requires a preface, if only to explain why I should think it worth writing . . . perhaps by the end of it I will have a better idea of how to go about this work entitled Not Taking It All Too Seriously. (The publisher will probably want the title changed but it expresses my feeling about the book and its writer.)

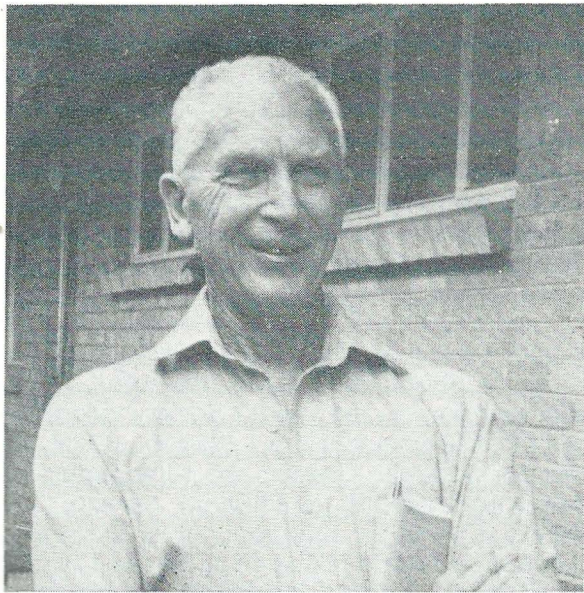
So, herewith:

PREFACE

Constant Lambert — composer, conductor and critic — complained many years ago of "the appalling popularity of music", referring to the too-easy accessibility of gramophone and radio and the resulting clamor of the second-rate assaulting the ear at every turn. Opera and symphony were firmly cornered in a shrinking number of theatres and halls, while dance rhythms and the ear-catching jingles of advertising curdled the public air.

Something similar has happened with science fiction. When in 1960 Kingsley Amis fluttered the critical doves with a serious critique of the genre, *New Maps Of Hell*, faithful readers who had served their time through the dreadful pulp era felt that faith had paid off, science fiction had made the grade, come of age, justified its existence, entered into its kingdom . . . Well, maybe.

Amis's book (which flushed a fair number of academic closet fans out of hiding into timidly approving postures) appeared when the genre was preparing at last to sow some literary wild oats, to attempt fresh modes of thought and expression; this brought about a sort of in-group "new wave" (so referred to) which bid fair to wash away the death rays, mad scientists, paranoid dictators, invaders from the fourth dimension and the whole ancient and creaking apparatus of aficionado's delight. And not before time.



It was about then, also, that bad science fiction became a threat to reading taste. Now it has spread across the body of popular fiction to the point where it has been calculated that about ten per cent of the world's annual production of novels belongs directly or marginally with the genre. This means that hundreds of authors are struggling for a slice of a mass-ingredient bonanza cake and scores of publishers are pouring out the resulting pulp-magazine-style junk — and selling it. It is as though science fiction's largely successful attempt to reshape itself in a quality image had never been made.

It is not true that the bad drives out the good,

but it can make the good damned difficult to find. An abysmal standard of genre criticism further obscures the existence of science fiction with reasonable claims to literary and intellectual excellence.

Finally, sheer gaudiness of cover design and 'blurb' writing, seeking the lowest common denominator of appreciation, often belies and disgraces the honest nature of the contents.

Given such taste-destroying conditions of propagation, it is little wonder that the rise of a limited and cautious academic interest has done nothing to alter the commonly received wisdom that science fiction does not warrant serious acceptance. Even my acquaintances in the literary business, who should know better, prefer to tacitly ignore my foray into writing the stuff. "Can't say I've read much of it," is the standard evasive manoeuvre, and my uncivil response that the loss is theirs deepens no friendships.

So, perhaps, my flouting of the received wisdom that 'science fiction is junk' needs some justification. Received wisdom is not totally wrong; most science fiction *is* junk. So — when the mass of production is compared with the worthy — are most films, novels, plays, operas, paintings, poems, songs and criticism. What concerns me here, and should concern received wisdom if ever it stopped to think, is the small percentage of science fiction which is not junk, not immediately disposable. It will be a large part of the concern of this book.

For the rest, this will be the sad/hilarious tale of my literary career, such as it has been, all anecdotes and character sketches . . . but don't let yourselves be taken in — this autobiographical element is only a rack of hooks on which to hang discussions of one of the least understood facets of today's literature.

My personal involvement began in 1919 with myself, aged three, seated enthralled in my father's lap while he read *Alice In Wonderland* to me. The connection between *Alice* and science fiction may not be obvious but is a strong one; Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, if he lived still, would see it at once. As a mathematician he was impelled to write 'nonsense' stories which scholarship has discovered to turn acutely on mathematical propositions and philosophical speculations as much as on the observation of human absurdity. Many a science fiction writer uses similar methods and sources, burying them just as thoroughly though not as wittily in plot and situation. Such writers as R. A. Lafferty, J. G.

Ballard and even Arthur C. Clarke must recognise Lewis Carroll as a not too distant cousin.

Naturally I did not understand all this at age three, but I did understand — as does every child until life teaches him differently — that marvels are not necessarily spun of moonshine and that Alice's adventures made perfectly good sense. Later I was weaned to the idea that these were fantasy, *not real*. Meaning that a work which has held English-speaking humanity enchanted for 116 years deals in unrealities? If you believe that, stop reading at once; my book is not for you.

The recognition of reality, not grasped but imminent, just beyond perception, is what links *Alice* with science fiction. *Alice* is fantasy only in the most superficial classification; it is, at least in part, absurdist fun-poking, and absurdism is a technique science fiction uses often and well and not always in fun. I refer you again to R. A. Lafferty and add the names of Michael Moorcock and Ray Bradbury as two that spring at once to mind. You don't know their work? I fall back on my arrogant insult that the loss is yours.

In that last paragraph lurks a nettle for grasping. I have separated science fiction from fantasy while admitting that it sometimes uses the methods of fantasy, but have not said what science fiction is — and many a sturdy critic has foundered on that rock of definition.

This is why: "Science fiction", heard from the mouth of the rampant fan, refers to a literary spectrum spanning H. G. Wells and the Flash Gordon comic strips as well as Lucian of Samosata and Tennyson's "Locksley Hall"; *The Epic Of Gilgamesh* has been cited as a direct ancestor as has *The Book Of Genesis* on the ground that it presents a consistent, if scientifically-suspect, cosmology. In spite of Robert Grave's protests, *Seven Days In New Crete* was noisily claimed for the genre at a New York convention, lumping it in with practically any fiction which on the one hand departs from strict realism and on the other deals however tenuously with science. Incompatibility of the hands is not admitted, probably not noticed. (Would you believe *Voss* and *Martin Arrowsmith*? Many a fan will.) The detective story with its forensic gadgetry is easy prey; horror stories and occultism are gathered in under the headings of Psychology and Metaphysics: the Western has proved difficult, but is regularly raped of plot material for transfer to alien worlds. The historical novel is not immune; in Bulwer's *Last Of The Barons* an alchemist invents the steam engine out of strict chronology, and John

Cowper Powy's *The Brazen Head* is powerful science on the part of Roger Bacon. There is no end to the stupidities of fannish plundering.

Do I now propose to capture so vast a field of bloody nonsense in a single smallish book?

I do not. I shall rid myself of nearly all the nonsense by explaining now what I mean when I write the phrase "science fiction". It will be a personal definition which most inhabitants of fandom will decry as pedantic, restrictive and élitist (I must find room somewhere in the book to dwell awhile on the use of 'élitist' as a pejorative term; there's food for laughter there) but will at least rid us of Flash Gordon and *The Epic Of Gilgamesh*.

The argument runs thus: The school of thought — if "thought" be the *mot juste* — which claims that the origins of science fiction are to be found in myth, legend and fantasy can be dismissed as pseudo-literary; *all* fiction finds its origins there. A useful definition must locate the point where the special attributes and mental attitudes displayed in science fiction become sufficiently differentiated from the general concerns of fiction to justify recognition as a genre.

My stand is that science fiction is not basically a product of fantasy but is *opposed* to the purely imaginative method of fantasy. I see it as *a logically derived presentation of activities and their consequences taking place under conditions which, while scientifically admissible, represent life and the universe not as we know them but as under changed circumstances they could be*. "Scientifically admissible" are the words which eliminate fantasy, the sword'n sorcery epic (usually too deliberate to masquerade even as fantasy) together with the cheaper and sillier forms of space opera and bizarre adventure romance. My definition leaves us with those novels and stories in which genuine thinking about physical, sociological and psychological issues is the backbone of the work. One needn't demand polymathic genius in the author, only a commitment to logical extrapolation and common sense.

While open to correction by those better versed in literary history, I see Thomas More's *Utopia* as the first fiction wherein a practicable alternative society was intellectually conceived and presented in narrative form. Basically, that is what all responsible science fiction seeks to do, whatever direction it may take. Francis Bacon added the hardware and physical gimmickry to the method a century or so later, in *The New Atlantis*, and the genre as we know it was born. (The whole argument is, of course, longer and

stronger than this, but the chapter is yet to be written.)

My definition spreads its net widely enough to include every work in the genre which has earned continuing critical regard. Even *The Lord Of The Rings* and Le Guin's *Earthsea* trilogy hover, for reasons to do with logic and derivation, in that no-man's-land at the edge of all definitions where genres borrow of each other to merge and overlap.

Here, in the pause before a slight change of direction, let me note why I use the phrase "science fiction" rather than the abbreviation "SF", which is a trap for the unwary. "SF" does not necessarily stand for "science fiction"; it can be expanded also as "science fantasy", a hybrid for readers and authors who know no science but like their derring-do set in far futures or on alien worlds. For the very eminent (within the genre) Samuel Delaney who if he knows any science hides it under snowblinding pseudo-erudition, it stands for "speculative fiction"; I don't know why — I have never caught him actually speculating in any of his stories. There is a third revisionist school which, with tongue in cheek I hope, plumps for "scientific fantabulation", which means whatever you think it does.

* Do you wonder that I favor conservative, fuddy-duddy, merely mindblowing "science fiction"?

With science fiction's appalling popularity (using the all-encompassing fan definition) has come an increasing and I sometimes think appalling academic respectability. (Not the same thing as public respectability.) Quality 'small' magazines featuring reviews and theme articles by highly qualified persons proliferate in America and have a foothold in Britain, where Oxbridge dons review science fiction for the *Times Literary Supplement* and other emblems of taste; American colleges and universities provide more than a thousand courses in science fiction — teaching what? I wonder — and London's North East Polytechnic supports the British Science Fiction Foundation.

Australia has so far escaped the worst of this academic interest, but the future looks grim. Michael Tolley of Adelaide University has joined forces with Kirpal Singh of the National University of Singapore to edit a volume of essays on science fiction, *The Stellar Gauge*; our National University in Canberra has staged a seminar on *Speculative Fiction* (playing safe with the definition game); Van Ikin of the University of West-

ern Australia publishes a magazine, *Science Fiction*, which teeters on the brink of serious academicism. The Higher Criticism is at our gates; we tattered and indigent writers had better watch with narrowed gaze.

(That I provided an ill-tempered essay for *The Stellar Gauge*, took part in the ANU seminar and have written several pieces for Van Ikin does not involve confrontation of beliefs and practice. Inviting me into academic fields is always a risky procedure — though I did behave myself properly in Canberra — and likely to produce anything but the gentlemanly contribution expected. Usually, but not always, the Higher Criticism grinds its teeth and puts up with me.)

I have no basic quarrel with academics and their high-powered critical tools — I wish I had a comparable training — but I object to their use of the tools for scraping easy theses from the surface soil when what science fiction needs is excavation in chunks. You might imagine that under the pressure of such intellectual muscle science fiction would improve by leaps and bounds. Not a bit of it; it is, if not in the literary doldrums, at least in a period of coasting with much the same cargo as in the late 1960s. You might imagine also that Academia would have addressed itself to the problem of a definition of the genre, if only to ensure that in discussion everybody meant the same thing by the same words. Not a bit of that either; Academia avoids controversy like the plague; no Leavis/Snow uproars in our tidy community. I have tried to start an uproar or two; no takers.

Academia concentrates on producing the unassuming minor paper on some facet of an aspect, where an impressive bibliography affirms research and takes the place of thought. A raffle through recent copies of *Foundation*, the organ of the British Science Fiction Foundation, provides a depressing cross-section of critical interests:

John Dean (University of Paris XIII), "The Science Fiction City".

Brian Stableford (lecturer in sociology at Reading University and space opera novelist), "Man-Made Catastrophe in SF".

Colin Greenland (Writing Fellow at the Science Fiction Foundation), "From Beowulf to Kafka; Mervyn Peake's *Titus Alone*." (I'm not kidding; read on.)

Kenneth Bailey (ex-BBC, otherwise apparently harmless), "Spaceships, Little Nell and the Sinister Cardboard Man: A Study of Dickens

as Fantastist and as a Precursor of Science Fiction”.

These are competent and moderately interesting essays, researched to the point of exhaustion, replete with reference and quotation, progressing remorselessly from Intention through Exposition to Argument and Conclusion — and all about as useful to the understanding of science fiction as muscular dystrophy to a coalheaver. The titles of the Greenland and Bailey articles announce that their authors accept without question the idea that legend and fantasy are relevant to and ancestors of, if not actually to be equated with, science fiction. They not only fail to question this relationship but proceed as if it were received wisdom, whereas the forms have little in common beyond a certain bizarrerie in their use of story apparatus. Australian criticism, which hasn't as yet done much thinking for itself, also follows this line with slavish obedience to overseas models.

Yet fantasy operates *in spite of* reality; it is arbitrary; you are required to accept because the writer says so. The science fiction writer cannot merely 'say so', he must demonstrate, must justify each departure from the known norm and at every step relate firmly to the real world.

There is always, as admitted, an area of overlap, but as a life-long devotee of both Dickens and science fiction I find their relevance to each other tenuous in the extreme; the trendy title of the article gives a fair clue to the preciousness of the conception. The Beowulf-Kafka article is solid stuff for a Writing Fellow justifying his grant; it simply isn't relevant to science fiction.

Scrabbling through the corpus of world literature for connections has produced a vast number of essays which surely serve to fill tiny niches in the total understanding but do little to promote the overview without which science fiction will remain in fan-dominated chaos.

Authors, who should be the beneficiaries of informed criticism, get little of use from the work of the professional critics. They must instead observe each other, noting each success or failure in the unending struggle with relevance, technique and intellection at the far-out edges of fiction, and trying to fit it into their understanding of what they are doing.

The academic criticism, which could do much to open up perspectives in a genre which is uncertain even of its identity, prefers to concentrate on trivia. It should be asking: What is science fiction? What is its relevance to the real world?

What is the social significance of the hunger of the young for futurology and fantasy? Can extrapolative science fiction indeed act, as has been claimed, as a buffer against 'future shock'? Has science fiction brought anything new to the techniques and interests of fiction? And, on the technical side, why is characterisation so singularly lacking in the work of even the most competent science fiction writers?

The list of basic questions needing answers can be extended much farther and the answers are less obvious than the uninvolved may guess. I shall have to grapple with all of them before this book is done.

Unfortunately the nonsense doesn't stop with the literati. At the other end of the critical scale the journeymen, the reviewers for periodicals and newspapers, have much to answer for. Let me quote J. G. Ballard on the subject (he refers to the writers of short reviews for *Foundation*, people who should know the difference between the genuine article and shoddy): "there seems to be a vast discrepancy between the high-flown perorations from the mouths of the critics and what is actually being produced by the writers . . ." (*Foundation* 23; "Letters" section.)

That says it all; they can't tell good from bad or, if they can, blur distinction in that pursuit of 'balanced reviewing' which tends to magnify tiny virtues for setting against horrendous faults. For science fiction's sake it may be time to say "To hell with balanced reviewing" and get into the business of treating books with the respect or disrespect they deserve. I am not advocating slaughter, merely an understanding that there is more bad fiction published than good, and that among the good only a very small fraction is superior. It is an attitude which, put into practice for some fifteen years past, has made me a few enemies among science fiction writers who confuse adulation with talent, but more friends among those who are pleased to see someone laying a firm finger on the overpublicised nonsense they know is fudged and second rate.

It is probable that the only useful science fiction criticism to be found in Australia is published in Bruce Gillespie's *SF Commentary*, with Van Ikin's *Science Fiction* as runner-up and the rest nowhere. In the general welter of thoughtlessness and plain obtuseness it is a wonder that such writers as Brian Aldiss, Doris Lessing, the Strugatski brothers, Ursula Le Guin, Gene Wolfe, John Sladek, Thomas A. Disch, Michael Moorcock, J. G. Ballard, Ian Watson, D. G. Compton

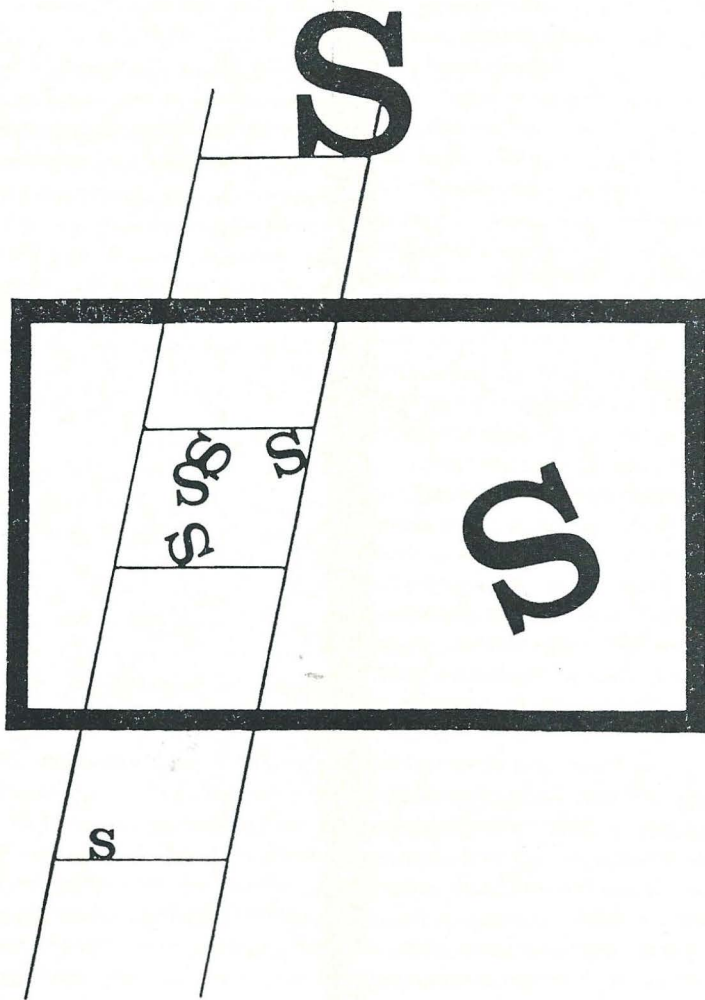
and a few more have been able to maintain standards of good writing and intellectual honesty. The financial gravy goes to the junk purveyors, with the reviewers solidly behind them.

You will by now have tumbled to the fact that what began as a Preface has got out of hand and begun to take on the hue of a manifesto. It plainly will not make a Preface, but it has made for me a fine draughting board on which to lay out the general lines of attitude and subject matter which had not been firmly formulated before. I know now what the hurdles are and how high the jumps must be in a combative, contentious book full

of kicking against the pricks (and mixed metaphors, no doubt), designed to irritate those who need irritating and to amuse all others.

And the autobiographical element? I promise that all these snarling, arguments and exhortations will be wrapped in incident and experience, the best of it verging on the incredible, some of it mildly traumatic and all of it leading to the understanding of how and why at pensionable age a new, probably unimportant but thoroughly entertaining career has opened for a novelist who had, so to speak, hung up his typewriter.

The book has begun itself. Thank you for your attention so far.



GEORGE TURNER

Looking at a Portrait:

An Approach To *Flaws In The Glass*

Autobiography invites suspicion on any number of counts — not least misdirection, self-justification, vanity or the brazen tattling of gossip for money. Only small-mindedness would accuse Patrick White of small-minded intentions in the writing of *Flaws In The Glass: A Self-Portrait* (Cape, \$17.95), but neither White nor any other can dodge the question that dogs law, art, science and the simplest effort at communication.

Francis Bacon noted that Pilate, having asked his question, would not stay for an answer. Wise of the Procurator; he would be waiting still. Truth, like beauty, not only lies in the eye of the beholder but at the mercy of forces the beholder cannot control; the inward eye is rarely less than astigmatic when self-portraiture is contemplated.

Given the most scrupulous intention of honesty, the ego with its back to the moral wall will defend itself, frustrate the truth-teller with confessions whose persuasiveness conceals the deeper-laid untold confession, reshape memory at the bidding of that psychological censor which represses the unbearable in the interest of making life itself bearable, resort to subtleties of syntax to load the emphasis and divert attention . . . There's little to be done about the sentinel ego (except perhaps thank God for it) whose ability to lie, delude and tergiversate is in evolutionary terms a survival trait, to be overridden at the confessor's peril.

Ego aside, there remains the question of what and how much may safely be told. The man or woman with financial, social or intellectual status can risk a more questionable revelation than can Bill Smith the council laborer, whose sole stable currency is the goodwill of neighbors. Weathercock Eumenides, those. And even the 'safe' man has his sensitive areas, not lightly to be advertised.

So there will be gaps, however unintentional, patches of verbal fog and diversionary tactic, occasional inconsistencies when opposed statements will lack the link making both tenable — and the reader will eventually ask, "Do I believe in this image of a man?"

That is not enough; we will come, shortly, to a more important question.

Writing about *Flaws In The Glass* poses the problem of too much familiarity at secondhand; the book has already been reviewed from every angle of accessibility in the literary columns of the country, praised, damned with faint praise and gutted of newsworthy quotations.

There has been the odd extreme of thoughtless adulation and, in one case, of spectacular hostility, but most notices have been remarkably middle-of-the-road, cautious in response to challenge. Most agree that the "Journeys" section is unrewarding; all give the "Episodes and Epitaphs" more prominence than they deserve (but dishing the dirt is easier than fixing its place in the portrait); few make more than a token attempt at assessing the portrait itself; most give Manoly Lascaris an obligatory mention and then settle for letting well alone.

With all this decision and dismissal, who am I to question the massed judgments of Australia's literati and decide that much remains unsaid? Well, I am the asker of the more important question prefigured above: "What can this man's life mean to me, as a reader?"

Rephrase it as: What's to be seen in the portrait other than the artist-sitter's self? Having talked out his inner problems, resolved apparent paradoxes of personality and behavior, why does he offer it to the public? Does the artist feel he does not exist except before the public? Smaller men

may, but reason suggests that White feels he has something of value to pass on.

So let the cold blood of lit. crit. take on a little human warmth while I 'walk a mile in the other man's moccasins' on the offchance that I may learn something, if only sympathy with his aching feet.

Pictures seduce; illustrations whet expectation before the text is broached. The author chose them or at least approved them; they must tell something of the man as he sees himself or wishes to be seen.

The first is captioned "Fashionplate photograph for *Big Toys* programme". Raincoat over white roll-necked sweater. Forbear wondering what he might have chosen for a more casual occasion; ask rather why this grim-featured picture, calculated to keep any but a reporter at arm's length, seemed suitable for a theatre programme. It is a Hurtle Duffield persona, not self-satisfied but equally not caring whether or not *you* are satisfied.

There are nine other photographs of the author as an adult and they form a curious gallery. There is the obligatory vague snapshot of "Manoly and PW on leave in Beirut" which could be any pair of servicemen anywhere; it is followed by another, not at all vague, of PW milking a cow while glaring slaughter at the unfortunate behind the camera. One might fear for the cow but the snap is paired with a genre piece, PW at home with cat on lap and dog at knee; here a smile is barely present but the animals seem safe and unterrified. There are others, mostly uncommunicating masks, but not until the insert opposite page 230 is there one unposed and unaware — a laughing and happy Patrick White giving the lie to the arctic introvert of the others. There are passages in the text which made it worth while to recall that this cheerful and unstudied man also exists.

He may be one of those unable to relax for the merciless lens, but all the other subjects — some two dozen of them — face photography as naturally as breathing. This is disquieting at the outset. Appreciation of a human being requires that there be recognition points and there are few here. I recognise the austere writer of *Voss* and *The Vivisector* but not the warmer author of *The Solid Mandala* or *The Aunt's Story*; the happily laughing man seems to have written little or nothing. Still, it's nice to know he's around somewhere, however privately.

I search for recognition, holdings in common.

We are sufficiently of an age to have shared certain general experiences and to have acquired common historical perspectives about which to agree or differ. That we are both writers of fiction is not irrelevant despite the gulf between achievements. Somewhere along the lifeline will come a moment when I can slip the oyster knife between those clamped lips and glimpse the live creature within.

It comes in the early pages, taking me by surprise.

The first section, itself titled "Flaws In The Glass", fills some three-fifths of the book and is designedly kaleidoscopic. The difference between self-portrait and linear biography is demonstrated at once; flashes of recollection jostle in time and space — early teens to late teens to childhood, Australia to England to France to Australia to Germany — sometimes with no immediate signal that the switch has been made; recollection, rumination, statement and conjecture tumble over each other. Aspects are being pursued, not activities; the method is not haphazard; the personality is built up in rapid, slapped-on patches. A technique that could have been irritating fascinates as loves and hates and bewilderments swarm on a theme.

The definitive patches appear early; family relationships and school experiences dominate until nearly the end of the teen years, mixed in presentation and in White's perception of them.

The lasting spirit of his mother, Ruth, looms over this section of the book, not so much a physical presence as an opponent impregnable even in her absence, to whom recollection must return again and again in exasperated and unproductive attack. She defeated him, right to the end. If he can claim, probably rightly, that she never understood her "changeling" son (the word was actually applied to him, not kindly) neither did he understand her. This mutual shutting out was more than a matter of temperament and physical separation. That sensitivity of which the boy had such a full and quivering share tends always to anatomise its own responses rather than probe the true nature of the unwitting torturer; not much comprehension appears until hostilities have been soothed by time.

Ruth comes through, despite her son's bitter conclusions, as very much a woman of her class and period. In his account of her it is easy to develop strong empathy with the adolescent Patrick; I recognised Ruth at once. She was precisely what my mother would have liked to have been

and was denied by circumstances against which she raged throughout her life.

White couples the unhappiness of his school years with Ruth's action in sending him to England for education; the complaint is just but the sending was, in the context of the time, inevitable. In the nineteen-twenties — young Patrick's formative years — self-identification as a son or daughter of the 'Old Country', however many generations removed, was common to a degree the present day Australian must find ludicrous. Among the monied and landed families as well as among the not-so-monied, almost vanished breed or the middle-class genteel, belief in the virtue of things English was unquestioned. One did not visit England, one 'went Home' for a few months; one bowed to the taste of the 'Old Country' in manners, education, culture and that amorphous condition later identified as quality of life. That this attitude of mind — probably the last entrenchment of the true cultural cringe and finally overrun during 1939-45 — co-existed with the Australianism of Henry Lawson, Tom Roberts, the Bulletin, C. J. Dennis, Norman Lindsay and 'ruies' football is one of those historical inconsistencies which make all periods transitional.

Into this double-think milieu Ruth White seems to have fitted exactly, and that the portraitist makes no mention of this cultural dichotomy may be due to his having been through the period of his emerging intellectual awareness a prisoner of English schooling and English culture. Cut off from Australian ambience and influences the boy became not Anglicised, except in small matters, but a cultural fence-sitter, unbalanced and uncommitted, proclaimed by his later feeling of returning as a foreigner to his own country.

He did not see, possibly still cannot see, that in his mother's eyes an English schooling was his fortune and her triumph. That an element of snobbery was involved is hard to deny, but it was surely backed by a conviction which most women of social standing would have confirmed that she was giving the boy the best education possible. "Possible for whom?" was not a question asked in our 'twenties. (The unnecessary answer: "For a gentleman of social standing.") No consideration of the effect of cross-cultural tensions could then have been entertained; the phrase would not have been understood save among very 'advanced', suspect groups. Ruth White was not an 'advanced' woman; her worship for England and matters English was too much a com-

monplace for her to have done other than she did.

My own mother would have condemned me to similar exile for similar reasons had the money been available; luckily it was not and I was able to approach England, nearly half a century later, when I was ready for it. Young Patrick was not ready for it and seems to have adapted only sufficiently for defensive purposes; it is our literature's good fortune that he not only knowingly resisted more than a superficial imposition of the alien but may have been in fact incapable of deeper immersion in British molasses.

Whether his reaction to an Australian schooling would have been less tension-ridden, though for other reasons, is moot, but at least he would have been fighting on his own terms with a backing of home and familiarity into which to retire for holiday regrouping of spiritual forces. If home meant a mother he could not love and a father he found inadequate, it also meant staff and servants for whom he maintained lifelong affections, and that sense of place which carried so much of his early surroundings into his novels.

There is little sign that mother and son understood each other even in flashes. Her use of the epithet "freak" shocks and wounds the reader, and White's epitaph for her does little less: "Except when a little child, I don't think I loved, I only admired her after a fashion, until I pitied an old bedridden, half-blind senile woman, and pity is a pinchbeck substitute for love." Pity is not a substitute for anything; it is too often the only bearable expression of guilt for the irrecoverable, for the irrational but inescapable feeling that one should have loved but did not. I recognise the Ruth-Patrick relationship; I also learned pity when death had stopped the war.

The failure on both sides of compassion, understanding and the subtleties of inter-communication did much to drive the boy's attention outwards to the frailty of human relationships and to form views of them uncluttered by family glosses and assurances of 'what to expect of people'. The failure is not a matter for moral stances; more families live together in individual loneliness than will be easily pressed into admitting it, and there's nothing gained by wringing hands over it. Snug togetherness may breed contentment, but the art that is not founded in discontent is popular pap.

When assessing the accuracy of the characterisations in this book it must be remembered that White describes himself as "unforgiving", and

he is not the man to be unaware of the implications. Assessment has little to do with liking or disliking, approving or disapproving, much to do with the effort at comprehension; one must here be conscious always that the sitter is also the painter, that the visions of other people are not further portraits but projections, still lifes, the annually depreciating furniture which the painter-sitter cannot discard while he lives.

If White cannot forgive Ruth for not giving him the life *he* would have preferred, would he have been any different for having it? What matters is that what he is and what he gives arise from his discontents and ferocious memories. We can only be selfishly glad of it.

With mother so dominant, what then of father? "My father was small and mild." "The whippings were left to my mother." "He was forty-two when he married . . ." This becomes uncanny; to a mother who could be sister to my own he adds a twin to my father.

Victor White was called familiarly "Dick". We catch only glimpses: "I might have loved Dick had I dared, and had we been able to talk to each other." More needs explaining here; what emerges is that Dick was in his son's eyes colorless and distant, a man unable to approach a small boy and content to leave emotional needs to the womenfolk. A small handful of references adds little to this.

What's to be said other than that the lack of a specific influence can be as deplorable as the presence of a perverse one?

This: that there is nothing unusual in the grouping of parents and child enwrapped in mutual isolation. (Other members of the family remain lost in the background, insubstantial and transient, as though they contributed little to the boy's conscious fulfilment.) The essence of the grouping is common. In families there is love, or the tolerance born of lifelong familiarity, or the non-contact of self-absorbed personalities; the third sets the pattern for unhappiness, at least for the one who needs contact but doesn't know the password. Despite Tolstoy, unhappiness in families betrays a common strain.

Of course the darkness was not total. There were the memorable though lightly-sketched servants — Sol Rakooka the Solomon Island seaman who became the drunken gardener — Matt Davies, an ex-footman from Yorkshire and his wife, Flo — Lizzie Clark — Sid Kirk — each in some manner loved though not devotedly loved.

They were much but not enough and the sense

of solitude is never far from these pages. The school experience seems to have installed it permanently at the same time as it powered penetration in the gaze levelled at the behavior of others; the vigilant stander above the battle came to life here yet this school experience impresses as being, while distasteful, less than traumatic.

In the short but vivid account of life at Cheltenham, the English school to which Ruth sent him for final polish, an unexpected nostalgia came briefly to life for me. Such words as "prep" and "dormitory" raised ghosts of the Magnet and the Gem as though those riotous texts of half a century ago had some relevance to reality. Frank Richards, however, did not tell of a prep room called the "sweatshop", of study conducted late at night and shivering on a lavatory seat, or of plates of lumpy porridge on grey winter mornings. One wonders did English public schoolboys read *Magnet* and *Gem*? If so, what the hell did they think of their characters' unflagging high spirits and blithe skipping over the blunt facts of monastery life?

Frank Richards did, however, know of the fate of the outsider; many a series dealt with the "scholarship boy" (snivelling swot), the "dark-skinned foreigner" (probably keeps an idol in his gear) or the "bookmaker's son" (gutterbred) and his fight for acceptance — a fight which he always won with a display of true-blue Englishness, being thereafter admitted to the circle whose snobbery he had battled. But he knew better than to write of the 'sensitive' outsider repelled by the closed ranks and crass manliness of the Shell or the Upper Fourth; it would not have been published.

Nor would Richards's readers have been more than momentarily amused by the boy from Australia who ". . . hardly dared open my mouth for fear of the toads which might tumble out, and the curled lips, cold eyes waiting to receive renewed evidence of what made me unacceptable to the British ruling class."

No doubt the outsider accent was swiftly modified along with other surface details, but Australia could not be eliminated by protective mimicry or even successfully covered with a veneer of England. Australia was home that had been taken away; there was nowhere to turn for a *known* ambience where problems responded to known methods of dealing with them.

Young Patrick felt that he had been imprisoned. Old Patrick asks, "Would I have felt sentenced in Australia?" and answers, "The masochist in me might have seen to that."

Aside from the fact that the book presents little in the way of masochism in its writer (if he makes capital of his miseries it can't be said that he actively seeks them), the question is peculiar because before asking it he has already supplied an account of life in an Australian boarding school at an earlier age — a much less acerbic account than that of Cheltenham, tinged with amusement, even if an amusement soiled with a retrospective discontent which was possibly in abeyance in the actual occurrences. Some kicking against pricks but no sentence.

In another part he writes (the grasshopper method keeps the reader alert for cross-references in unlikely contexts): "Adolescence was probably not much different from the unmade bed in which every young person of average sensibility tosses and turns interminably." If this is a summing up it does not negate the complaints of school, but puts them in perspective. Young Patrick's road to selfhood was pretty well determined in his mid-teens; what remained was to grit his spiritual teeth and see out the time of waiting. Which is probably what he did, which is probably what most of us have done when times of waiting came to us. In a sensitive nature already aware of its inability to conform, and probably aware too of intuitive rebellion against conforming, the waiting may have been more oppressive than for most. There was no percentage in sensitivity in the 'twenties; you 'grew out of it' or had it 'knocked out of' you or you 'learned to take it on the chin'. So they said. Actually you did as young Patrick did, clasped it to you, protected it as well as you could — and waited.

With Cheltenham at last behind him, the homecoming to a couple of years of unproductive family contacts in Australia made a return to England — an after all attractive England, visited this time on his own terms — inevitable.

Here his course becomes clear to the reader though not yet to himself; he is achieving balance, meeting pleasant people as well as the dreary and unpleasant, discovering London, discovering theatre and art, discovering all that comes under his eye. He is at last doing rather than being done to . . . Cambridge . . . flat in London . . . literary ambition . . . *The Ham Funeral* written much earlier than one had suspected . . . *Happy Valley* written and published (never having so much as seen a copy, I take White's word for its shortcomings) . . . visit to America . . . hordes of names of relatives, friends,

acquaintances, forgettable background to the sitter . . . *The Living And The Dead* written and published while World War II gathers power during the 'phony' months . . .

What impact did World War II have on the burgeoning writer? My conclusion is, not much. Most of the burgeoning had accomplished itself between Cambridge and the second novel; now a settling process set in, to be followed in good time — in remarkably fast time once the interrupting war was over — by the consolidation and tightening of literary and personal strengths.

White's war was, in terms of melodrama, fairly uneventful once the experience of London under bombing had initiated that deadness of reaction which shuts out recognition of the ineluctable. He joined Air Force Intelligence with, praise heaven, much less of the emotional fuss that D. H. Lawrence made about his medical examination a generation earlier; White is content to record flesh tints and the smell of socks.

His service in Africa and the Middle East seems to have been, like most ancillary unit service in those areas, as placid as such things can reasonably be. The man who first summed up war as months of boredom relieved by moments of intense fright was dead on the mark, and White offers little more than a couple of acidulous character sketches and passages of jostling leave. It is probably fair to say that only two aspects of the war years mattered to the later White: the experience of helplessness under bombing taught the reality of animal fear and of the carapace of familiarity to be built against it, and he met Lieutenant Manoly Lascaris of the Greek Sacred Regiment.

Far too much nonsense has been written about homosexuality by the doctors and psychiatrists who claim to know something about it, by the legal and sociological do-gooders who confuse statistics and law-court evidence with in-depth perception, and not least by the homosexuals themselves. From the welter of yap about female personalities in male bodies and vice versa (which doesn't make much sense), parent-child conflict (which does make some sense), the tedious special sensibilities of the love which dares not tell its name (and in fact doesn't know it), some courageous and justifiable hitting out against discrimination, plus the emerging truth of the tragedy of some ill-considered surgery, little in the way of collated knowledge appears. Systematic study is rare and inconclusive.

Social attitudes remain dependent on social

ambience. Patrick White can mention his homosexuality offhandedly because it is generally acceptable in the stratum of society he inhabits; just let Joe Blow, council laborer in Fitzroy, try it! Beyond acceptance in one area and the cruelty of backbiting and snide jokes in another lies the probability that few except the biblical extremists give a damn about the other person's sexual preferences so long as they aren't required to declare a stance on the matter. They don't really care so long as young Billy doesn't turn out camp and cause talk among the neighbors.

White does a fairly successful best to treat the subject with objectivity. He proposes no theories, treats it for what it is — a fact of life — and refers to it only when relevance dictates. He makes, I think, only one statement which links it closely with his artistic development, and it is worth quoting in part: “. . . I never went through the agonies of choosing between this or that sexual way of life . . . I recognised the freedom being conferred on me to range through every variation of the human mind, to play so many roles in so many contradictory envelopes of flesh.”

There is, even for himself, no way of checking on the validity of his role-ranging and, taking into account the infinite boxing of the sexual compass between the masculine and feminine poles, there seems no reason why any but the most immovably chauvinistic heterosexual should not do as much. It might be better argued that the homosexual is, given the necessary intellect, capable of an unpolarised point of view, able to see heterosexuals as they do not commonly see themselves; ability to enter the infinitude of sexual skins seems more doubtful.

Mistaken or not, the quotation leads directly to *The Twyborn Affair* and its very considerable agonies of choice. So there is a powerful temptation here to play not altogether fairly, to cast White as Eudoxia-Eddie-Eadith testing his capacities in “contradictory envelopes of flesh”. Eddie steps straight off the page of *Flaws In The Glass* and the more exotic Eadith is logically foreshadowed — she who was the problem transformation for so many reviewers — once you have understood the mental shock inherent in the role-reversal scene with manager Prowse (page 298 in the Cape edition); only Eudoxia seems to me something less than fully realised. Whatever the writer's involvement with this chameleon character, it is difficult to avoid the assumption that he used the novel to set up models for contemplation, looking from the inside out, and found no satisfactory viewpoint.

An observer might suggest that Eddie Twyborn is a constant loser because he rejects instead of assimilating. The reader of *Flaws In The Glass* will be oppressed by White's own habit of massive rejection, to the point where an angry despair for humanity cries out, “Where I have gone wrong in life is in believing that total sincerity is compatible with human intercourse.” Very wrong; total sincerity would probably destroy the race. The rub lies in our inability to manage our insincerities with competence and kindness. Human failing must be allowed for rather than rejected out of hand. There must come a point where all that's left for rejection is the ground you stand on. Goodbye, cruel world!

Only White knows how much of himself is indeed loaded into Eddie Twyborn, but the character throws the anguish of rejection and search into sharp relief; one must be permitted to wonder if adolescent Paddy's acceptance of his sexual role was so readily achieved. The existence of many internal battles becomes plain only in retrospect, and others are forgotten once resolution is effected.

That's a trouble with self-portraits: the viewer is constantly requiring that some detail be brought forward from the chiaroscuro into the light, but is reduced to spotting maybe-outlines and perhaps-contradictions which only raise further questions. The painter may say, “That's all there is”, but the viewer is entitled to sulk a little and speculate on what may have been eliminated as inessential from the preliminary sketches.

So — will White's account of Manoly Lascaris open access to his real feelings about the sexuality problem — if there is or ever was a problem?

It won't, because there isn't any life-size account of Manoly Lascaris. As Ruth White broods over the first half of the “Flaws In The Glass” section without often obtruding personally so Manoly broods over the second half, an influence rather than a character. His impact is shown mainly in a lightening of White's attitudes. When Manoly enters his life the tone of complaint fades, shrillness descends to mutterings between pleasures and people lose much of their roles as whipping posts (and, let me be shameless about it, are less interesting for that).

There are two photographs of Manoly, cheerful enough, but I recall only a single word of physical description, “small”. It is embedded in description of another and to its writer more immediate kind: “. . . this small Greek of immense moral strength who became the central mandala in my life's hitherto messy design.” Not

really so messy, looking from the outside; the psychological pattern has built inexorably. Manoly, it would seem, was a fortunate accident who happened before it was too late; he did not re-design the pattern but introduced a stabilising element that rendered it less arid, less bitter than it might have become.

He exists as a force rather than as a person for display, and then only in flashes: "During the brash barren years of what I saw as intellectual and sexual freedom he was my ethical if not my spiritual guide." In an approach to religion after coming to Australia: ". . . Manoly was less expectant or more sceptical . . . I could not protect myself as he did from the bigotry we found." In general: ". . . though Manoly, I think, disapproves of my erratic spirit, chafing free, rejecting tradition." As a hitching post: "To be able to rely on *one* human being in 1981 is reason for belief in miracles." That last reads like poppycock to me but the outburst is understandable in a beleaguered and threshing spirit.

All in all, Manoly comes through as a solid presence of patient good sense, the necessary foil to White's eruptive discontent, the safe retreat at his back allowing him to slash at will and not be spiritually outflanked. Manoly has need of his private strengths at times: "It was worse for Manoly in that he had attached himself to a prickly character who protested against his fate by throwing saucepans of Irish stew out the kitchen window, cursing and getting drunk."

This is the proper place to note one other reference to drunkenness which intrigues, involving not Manoly but Stravinsky, an underplayed little scene wherein the writer and the musician each confesses to the other that he is an alcoholic. The word is too much a debased currency (even AA can't use it with precision) for much to be hung on its use in an anecdote, but the sudden vision of an alcoholic White throws a sharp light on the record of spites and tantrums and unforgiveness. Alcohol and resentment notoriously feed each other, adding a touch of subtext to the statement that ". . . Manoly has always been determined, otherwise we shouldn't have lasted together."

Perhaps White blames and excoriates himself too much — always the risk in trying not to hide the warts — but one has every so often an urge to murmur, "You must be a pretty able bloke, Manoly."

Nobody shows much enthusiasm for the second section of the book, "Journeys", and I confess

to being only mildly taken with its travelogue aspects. White insists that it is important to the self-portrait, but I can't see that it adds much to the full-length which is complete on page 159. If the blindness is mine, I am not alone in it.

What the whole section lacks, surprisingly in such a craftsman, is vitality. Descriptions lie flat on the page, personalities fail to breathe, incidents collapse into gossip; the trip to the Holy Mountain leads off with a promising strangeness but little comes of it and the rest has no grip.

About half way through this section it struck me that any of these short pieces would, appearing in a White novel, be charged with life and meaning and that the reason for their liveliness would be the personality of the fictional observer; vision and reaction would illuminate character and character lend perspective to things seen, evoking reverberations of interlocking meaning. Hurtle Duffield rather than Patrick White should have described the Isles of Greece, or perhaps Theodora Goodman. And Mrs Godbold would have lent some bounce to her account of them.

The late Peter Sellers, character actor extraordinary, claimed that he was unable to give fully of himself unless he was being somebody else, breathing outrageous reality into some fictive dream. White also?

There's little point in rehearsing other people's comments on the third section, "Episodes And Epitaphs", a deliberately planted cartoon strip of White the kicker against pricks; the jibes and snarls have been quoted *ad nauseam*; let them rest. It is sour stuff mostly, but even so shot through with some sweetness, such as the Sherman chapter. Still, too much contempt is spilt and contempt isn't a safe weapon; it involves a touch of holier-than-thou, of looking down from the judgment seat. Nobody can afford that.

Unforgiving, White calls himself.

Yes.

But does he forgive himself? One gets the impression that he doesn't until a closer look suggests that most of his guilt memories have been satisfactorily accounted for — not assuaged but bearably accommodated.

And why not? Only an idiot carries the load until it breaks his back. Accommodation is most sensibly human and if the self-portrait shows it in process of being arrived at, then this is another small victory for truth. When the spitting and dodging and occasional facing up are all done, the written portrait is less vengeful than its writer would have us believe, certainly less granite-

carved than some of the forbidding photographs. An honest portrait? He has told as much of the truth as he can observe through the fire slits in the ego's defences and more has leaked between the lines. The leaks may beg interpretation but the text is plain; I think not many would have done better. Rung on the counter of one's own world experience it rings true. And thereby — in that welter of metaphor which I have no intention of disentangling — fulfils the condition without which nothing.

With the book read, what has the reader gained beyond a few hours of pawing through another man's mind? Some understanding of Patrick White? Some, yes, but not a great deal. White has tried to present a clear view of himself, but those flaws in the glass which gave him his title also distort a true reflection, and much is hidden from his own gaze. Just as well; too much truth of oneself could be hell on Earth for the best of humans.

The revelatory aspect is not the most important. A work of art is an encounter, that personal experience I invoked several thousand words ago, but you and I will not take the same things away with us from the trip through another's vision. What I take is the tremor of recognition of frontiers where our visions match, though never exactly — the family situation, the bloodiness of school years, the sense of solitude, the furious drunkenness — and sudden perceptions of the real nature of those ancient attitudes and dead antagonisms. My constant questioning of White's attitudes is the questioning of my own; the trip has been a productive one. More than that, this book can be in a measure cathartic for any man or woman reading with an open mind about his/her nature. White has resented compulsion, convention and insincerity and has suffered for it. If the wounds have often been self-inflicted, there's no cause for jeering; the human being who hasn't done as much sometimes has done precious little, and for him the ruminations of a man who has tried to be himself will be meaningless.

That I share fringe understandings with White implies no emphatic bond; if we met I doubt we'd have more than "Hello" to say to each other. We share the same world but not each other's vision of it; I have come to terms with mine — I'll let it alone while it lets me alone — and White is not one to approve of anybody coming to terms with anything. He will be manning spiritual barricades to the end, always bleeding from the odd gash. He pursues "that razor-blade truth" and surely knows the penalty for grasping it ungloved; still, one must admire, and there is more that is admirable in the portrait than he grants himself. It's a pity he persists in glaring at a world which fails *his* conception of rectitude (there's a puritan behind the rebel) and defying it to disagree with him — which of course it does and will continue to do, if only from sheer cussedness.

Few of us will ever confront Patrick White in the flesh; we will continue to know him by his books, wondering with each new reading, "Have I got him right this time?" In *Flaws In The Glass* there are few direct references to the books; he tells of places that appear in the novels, not of what of himself appears. A writer's self is not easily discerned in his fictions; thoughts, memories and meditations filter through meshes of art and artistry, dodge through inspirational detours and are smudged by thematic and dramatic necessities; he is spread symbolically through his fictions, too thinly for total recognition.

The fiction being the only contact most of us will ever have, we must use the portrait as best we can to assist understanding the works afresh; there is enough there to aid some rethinking.

Before finishing *Flaws In The Glass* I had already determined on reading the *oeuvre* again during the next year or two, hopefully with a better focussed mind. Thirty years have passed since I became ecstatic over *The Aunt's Story* and twenty-five since I fell in love with *The Tree Of Man*, unaware that critical opinion had found them wanting.

I care as much for critical opinion now as I did then.

WATER MUSIC

1

Even now
its black waters
are tanked 'nd

safely intact. Pour
seeds or syllables
back down that throat

and all you'll hear
are scattered ping-pings
on an iron roof. Does

ocean turn
on a feather-bed, a trapped
artesian lake

release its muscle
of pure water, pure speech?
Spring, well

river and waterfall:
all these soft and fluid bodies
have their one source

down here, and in their
various music
you can hear

the pleasure water takes
in always being
its varied self.

2

Insistent
as a metronome
a tap is dripping

in a far part
of the house. If
the elements

indeed have
their own logic
then on this night

water is trying
to tap the darkness
into place. In six

or seven hours time
when we both rise
from this ocean

we may well find
that the new morning
has failed to arrive

above will be
this dark ceiling
and through it

the same watery nails
will be tipping
and tapping.

3

For just one moment
I hold in my hands
the soft

unshelled body
of the water. More shy
than any creature

it trembles,
sways,
then wriggles away

leaving
its silver coin
deep in my palm.

Wet hands,
when clapped together,
produce a strange

clopping sound
—like that of a leg
being tugged

from the fierce
embrace of mud,
or the sound

two bodies make
when prised open
in warm water.

4

Water, water.
Water was there
at the beginning

and at the end
there shall be
nothing but water.

It is wrongly said
that dust
is the final state

yet what is dust
but condensed
and hardened water

water so
aged and decrepit
it cannot move

of its own
free will? See,
mix dust with water

and dust
betrays itself. Here
you see it

in its true light:
dust is merely
impure water.

5

Put your ears
to a bowl
of clear water

and what do you hear?
Not, surely,
the sea

heaving and groaning
on its bed
or even a river

bowling
sedately along. No,
just like a puddle

reflecting
the sky above,
a bowl of clear

clear water
tells only
of silence

of silence
at the heart
of the world

of silence
at the heart
of water.

GARY CATALANO

JOHN TURNS 35

So often on desolate streets I meet you
You stand clean and tall against
Buildings of the mind I know, you stoop
To cleave a pineapple with startling speed.

Some distance from the carnival
We lay aside the day and mask we carry
We marvel at our invisibility
For a time we eat this fruit with no centre.

At your forehead is a shrine.
After a weary, crooked journey the wanderer enters.
Weary, crooked entry! — The wanderer journeys,
The shrine is a light without source, in spite of yourself.

I would like to say nothing about you.
You define yourself, your fragile excellence, at the pace of light.
You are my amulet against misfortune.
If you meet my poems on a desolate street, kill them.

PETER HICKS

SALE!

Amid the roar and hubbub of the store — this
is the salesman's desk: I sit.
He sits. Among other such papers here —
this is the document.

He looks. I look. Yet with which hand shall
I take it? The dangling one
behind my back hangs withered in its sleeve;
wrapped in my coat, the other six

have no fingers today. Or with which eye
read the finer print — I
have one that porpoises crazily behind its
glass of snow — green — arctic,

the other is covered by a whitish growth.

Amid the roar and hubbub of the store is where
I sit. Is where the salesman sits.
This is his desk. Though an older man, he is
still a flexibones:

his stomach rests upon a hole where grey silk
baboons sit all afternoon
before they vanish up his arms — a single gold
magician's tooth

is also wired for sound. Then because I smile,
he smiles. The flash. He nods.
I nod. Tropic ferns begin to sway: between my
feet a silver orchid

opens up. I smile. He smiles. We nod. They nod.
". . . is this a pen?" I ask
as a single flower drops upon the desk. And
because pens also explode — I write myself

quickly into the sudden ecstasy of ten thousand
colors drifting through a sphere:
and then a flight of parakeets swooping and whistling
around the chandelier.

PETER LLOYD

TO JOHN OLSEN . . .

it was the painting
of a frog

not
"good old frog"

not
"freddo frog"

not
"froggy"

it was frog
before frog
got his
name

MAL MORGAN

JOHNNY JACK'S SQUEEZEBOX & A LITTLE TOOT

I heard about your man.
I thought: another nuzzling your sex
another pantomime of attention, affection
another down on his fours
baying & rummaging
between your timeless thighs

And I thought of barges,
block-nosed barges breaching, the crunch
of contact, the clang of coupling
Old girl
you don't know when the tide's in or out
you can't tell the pilot from the tanker
the parks by the river are no longer green
Old girl
you've been well & truly barged
& a pub could fill with captains
who've manoeuvred your sloughy bends
They all guffaw now

And I think now of a moon
as tarnished as an old penny
stars wiped from the blackboard night
factories punch the wings of the setting sun

And I know old girl
too much oil has oozed under your bridge

BILL FEWER

AUNT MAY

From twelve to two
each afternoon
Aunt May, my father's aunt
kept to her room.

If someone called,
her sister, Dolly,
would yell through the locked door
sounding jolly

"Here's Jean . . ." "Here's Rose
to see you May!"
"Between the Lord and me,
this time of day,

no-one may come,
as well you know.
So tell her she must wait
or else must go."

What intercourse
took place between
the Lord and Great Aunt May
remained unseen,

but I suspect
she told Him what
He ought to do each day,
what He ought not.

From four to six
in streets and pubs
she'd shower the damned with tracts
ignoring snubs.

This dauntless stand
embarrassed Dad . . .
not quite respectable.
Then I was glad;

uneasy now
I wonder why?
There but for Grace above
I see, go I.

FRANK KELLAWAY

LIVING IN QUEENSLAND

Living in Queensland
is like living in a tree
— bananas, sunlight through leafy canopies,
safaris, jungle drums,
ape-like Ministers (with
multi-colored bums)
grunting from under knitted brows,
gnarled elders of the troop
chattering abstractedly, chewing fleas,
dangling from arthritic vines,
the rot on the jungle floor deepening
while exotic orchids burst like star-shells
in the humid gloom . . .

By mid-afternoon
is it any wonder then
that one dozes . . . ?

Only to start wide-eyed awake
from some terrible dream
where one plunges, crying like a police-siren
or a newsboy, downwards
into primeval space
into the breathless simplicities of pre-history . . .

BRUCE DAWE

BANGKOK

Cradling dysentery I walk the streets
avoiding fruit on the pavement, drinking Coke in bars
where cockroaches parade confidently along the counter;
I suck the ice pretending not to see them,
consciously trapped on a street back home:

"Mohammed, Mohammed Ali,
floats like a butterfly
and stings like a bee"

It is the only song selected on the juke-box,
hummed by the suicidal taxi-drivers, the soldiers
guarding shoes at the temple:
at the airport jets come to ground in the heat,
the soldiers in white spats walk in twos
around the passenger lounge, the homosexual couple sleep
and the Singapore model smokes her Benson and Hedges

"I have been to London for surgery,
my nose was not good for a model"

Buddha smiles, the jets come to ground,
the honey night settles on our heads,
none being so dispossessed as travellers;
the Swede with bad teeth strokes his passport,
the white spats clap to attention
the while spats clap to attention
the model blinks.

PHILIP NEILSEN

LISTEN AUSTRALIA

*"Australia is a lucky country run by
second rate people who share its luck."
— Donald Horne*

Listen Australia
I think you need
a lucky transplant

Listen Australia
whenever I want to do something
I am rebuffed by a beer nut

Listen Australia
to increase the price of toothpaste
will not wipe your clichés away

Listen Australia
why don't you teach your politicians
a metaphor

Listen Australia
when do you let
something happen

Listen Australia
otherwise I can't
help you either

Listen Australia
I know
it's nice and warm here

Listen Australia
why don't you dig your earth
with your own hands

Listen Australia
why do you paint your lips
with Helena Rubinstein's shoepaste

Listen Australia
why don't you listen
if somebody says something

Listen Australia
I am tired of hearing
how lucky you are

Listen Australia
I am sick of listening
to your 'headmasters'

Listen Australia
it's time
to learn to listen

Listen Australia
I am going to sell
my tongue tomorrow

Listen Australia
by trying to find your identity
you forget what's going on

Listen Australia
you are wrapped
in a super-market-towel

Listen Australia
I know I am not speaking
your language

Listen Australia
I am ready
to go anywhere

Listen Australia
I advise you
to let hell in

Listen Australia
as long
as it's not mediocre

LISTEN AUSTRALIA.

RUDI KRAUSMANN

NAUSEA IN LAUNCESTON

the window/apparitions of tree & wind; the moon
found me with difficulty; an anarchy of light preparing
for war;
behind the rain/dark rectangles in julie's mind
the moon again sitting on her nipples;
the little dildo of soap she was at my body with; i was
making all these mistakes a matter of articulation
conversing about
a man
in an asylum whose eye was bashed out in his sleep the
mice ate it; & julie
singed the bathwater with a cigarette we were sharing
circumnavigated me with no no no no keep the
horror to yourself getting out of the bath her eyes
shifting full tides of pupil & green
iris her eyes maybe
preparing for
war with the moon out there
in the paddocks the
blades of grass
whipping each other to
bits

ROBERT DRUMMOND

TALKING TO A PRISONER

they've given me a passport, a small pink card
th guards have their little joke; "better not lose it"
I keep making sure it's there, at each of th 3 gates
flowers edge th shaved lawn, sharp as heartbreak
men carefully apart at th swimming pool —
another blue patch of loneliness
I'm thinking of how th maoris had no word for theft
if you liked anything enough then it was yours
but you had to be careful not to stare
accumulate too much & th party was on, at your place
& yr house would be left as bare as an eyeball
as for finding a man out in a lie
how often has th truth been found by an exaggeration?
do they teach you in prison, not to be an escapist?
here, where sometimes men are bombs against th sky
th sun burning bright & fast, on a short fuse.

ERIC BEACH

THREE POEMS FROM A SEQUENCE: KAROLY PULSZKY (1853-1899)

Karoly Pulszky, the first Director of the Hungarian Fine Arts Gallery, Budapest, came to Brisbane after a political scandal. His purchases for the gallery, now its chief glory, were criticized as extravagant and as fakes. He suicided in Brisbane in 1899. His widow was the famous actress, Emilia Markus, and one of his daughters was Romola Nijinsky.

1. KAROLY PULSZKY REMEMBERS BUDAPEST

I remember when I first saw Budapest.
I was eight, my father returned from his exile
in London, my first home. The wooded slopes
of the Buda mountains with the broad band of the Danube
declared me their hostage. Even the sandy dust
of the Rákos, and the flat plains beyond Pest
in those years had a wildness, an excitement.

Brisbane,

flat to the sea with its river pushing back
the quick clamber where hills come down to water
has strange echoes and an aftertaste. What foretaste
might it offer? Some things are impossible. Budapest
those first years was small, provincial, Palace and walls,
cathedral, fragments — in my own lifetime it became a plan
brought to acclaim: the boulevards and trees of Pest,
the dream of order realized yet retaining wildness
and the Buda magic. On Margaret Island
I would wander all summer, lost in pure forest reveries.
Even now I would spend hours there.

Exile

strips the trees in this wilderness, knots them
with knobbed growths, warts, diseases. So little shade.
On Margaret Island I fought a duel once
with an enemy of my father, to defend the family honor.
My father is dead and my enemies prosper
they even now thwack their knives on the table,
sniff and lip for their latest raw meat
which was my whole life in art. Géza Polonyi
with his talk of "Corruption" and my "mad money sacrifice
from the National Fortune to purchase beautiful faces and lips
by Rafael." — they should crawl in the dust to approach
what I brought them: I found them a pure orchard
with fountain and wall. Someone — my daughters perhaps —
will enter there and be nourished. Let them
bay and yelp at the gate. In their rich houses
they are exiles. I am shut out from that orchard.
Várady also, returning again and again to the smell
of my ripped entrails, slaving, ripping, on fire to reach
for the heart-fire: enmity refines him. He will be locked out
forever. He will thirst till his tongue bloats.
He lives it up now.

I spit my full curse on him. I curse Polonyi.
I curse all of them, in that Party,
in that Parliament, in Budapest. May the Hordes
return on them, may their children be twisted
and their grandchildren grind stones against steel
without freedom, may the lovely streets fester
and shatter, let it return to its desert and sand
and may Buda with all its hill terraces find pure bile
in its fountains and fresh blood in its mineral springs.
May the locusts descend. May there be exile
and homelessness, may it be unending.

Two months

and it is unending. So much for curses. I am done.
This is a rough town without fingerprints
and no direction. Nothing is planned,
there are no boulevards, gardens, forest walks.
Women jump over mud, nothing is paved,
the tallest buildings jostle and contradict.

It has a remorseless vigor born of exile
and cupidity. It will prosper from rootlessness,
it will spit dust, mud and its own entrails
without pride. It will forget everything
and will learn nothing. They say it was drowned
six years back. They have filled in those marshes
for subdivisions — that sort of prosperity.
Its plains are chopped treeless. In my lifetime
I saw a true city rise from the sand wastes. Perhaps loss
is inevitable. Let all my enemies dwell in this exile.

I will never return to unreal Budapest or its reality.
I could not believe myself so entirely hated. Forgive me,
father. I am glad you did not wait longer. It was my name
they were pack-dogs for. It was your blood in my prison,
my exile is half-yours. Your blessing has struck me down,
your humiliation destroyed me. Forgive me, father,
forgive my curses.

2. KAROLY PULSZKY IN EARLY JUNE

A morning of varnished light, each hill
revealing its purpose like a landscape by Giorgione,
the town clearly important to each roof-chimney
after the manner of Carpaccio, each tree by Bellini
and the road with its blond cuttings precise as Mantegna.
A rich gold stillness that is Antonio Vivarini.
On this branch dewdrops like jewel encrustations: Crivelli.
We see by associations. I once loved Italy.

But having seen, we inhabit the land. I could
become lost here truly, taking this into me,
transmuting the mornings of ocean-drenched light
(the sun shaking its salty limbs out of
the largest ocean and calling through white teeth
like the naked boys along the Lido, as carefree) —
I could become these hills that only an artist
might unveil to his fellows. No photograph
will ever uncover the stillness, the feel of air
with its sea wash, the blue and gold we are drenched in.

On my face, fingers of godlike air, a perfume
clean as the lines of Piero.

Those born here
must find their own names: how many generations
before the names for this morning are discovered?
Its richness lifts me up, I am the visionary who
might have authority, by this canvas of air,
to hold it forever. It is not mine —
I possess it no more than these surly Britishers
who dream rain-misted villages into this landscape
and must be dismayed. This is a place should be seen
through the eyes of an artist from Tuscany, Umbria,
the Veneto. The long plains of Hungary breed eyes
to see clearly such distances: I could dream the white deer
of Magor into the foothills and sea plains of Brisbane.

Things I bring with me.

This morning I will walk
into these hills. I will be humble. They must teach me
themselves. I must savor their otherness, each tree
has its own lore.

Who are the others I would instruct?
Who listens to me?

On a morning of Apollo light
I must discard my seven languages — I must discard Apollo.

Even naked, the limbs I imagine are those of some boy
in the hot summer banks of the Donau. I have no language here.
Others will ache with this sunlight, and will rein in
whatever the god of stillness is, out of pure movement
that soars through my trained body like vertigo.

3. KAROLY PULSZKY IN GEORGE STREET, BRISBANE

I seem in a mood for the unreal:
Even a street of shopkeepers is not real
in a certain light. The light, here, is certain
only of its memory of eucalyptus bark, shadetree
darkness with mosquitoes, tiers of hoop-pine stiffness.
Or the flash across water to the mangrove beds
as a white heron arches. Yesterday, two pelicans.
Against the reality of birds in flight, or birds
crushing waters into reflections and loops,
these houses have no substance. The timber walls
have forgotten wood, tin squinting all angles
has surely forgotten earth and the underground
storehouses of geology.
HABERDASHERY, GREENGROCER, REAL ESTATE, the BANK
OF AUSTRALASIA. Men wear the garments of London
or Vienna. Unreal, the burden of garments on men
here. Gloves. The determination of hats.

Is the business of selling, buying, spreading
the rank butter of profit any more real
than the business of sitting, looking, being
amused or not amused?

My business was seeing.
My reality was the clear world of vision,
it seemed specific. It was an ordering
and serving, it was spread by fine artisans,
strong with their hands.

In this climate the hands sweat
in their gloves: this is called 'Winter'.
Brown ink, black ink, paper. What is INSURANCE?
Yesterday someone before me brought in a bag of stone: gold.
He exchanged it for paper. He will trade that paper
for title deeds as if he were to become the possessor of land.
Wild grasses carry seeds that clamber into wool
and would burrow like worms into flesh.
They will not be purchased. They will be owners forever
or as long as forever matters. Pods rattle
among stained and torn leaves, grotesque, more than beautiful.
Insects croak out, birds yelp, beautiful beautiful. At noon
even horse-and-cart noise becomes apologetic, the noise
of humans separates like glass splinters. I am lost
in the mood of these times. How can only the grasslands
be real? Europe has never seemed further.
I have never felt more invisible.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

To watch Fred Williams dying was no different to watching anyone else dying. On his part it was a mixture of great gallantry ("The least of my worries," he said of a hole in his shoe) and great anguish, shared by a remarkable family: Lyn, Isobel, Louise, Kate. But it was the death of a man rather than the death of an artist, and perhaps in what has been written about Fred the tragic national loss we have suffered has taken—for me, at least—undue precedence over the extinction of a sparkling spirit, and a brilliant mind.

Nita and I had not known Fred that long, less than ten years. I had accepted the fact that, in my fifties, it was unlikely I would make another profound friend, but so it turned out. It is tiresome and useless to try to define either genius or friendship. But I found in Fred Williams an honesty bleached like a bone, an honesty tempered by a wicked wit and love of human inconsistency. I found in him a capacity for judgements, moral and otherwise, that transcended all fashionability and deceptions. I found in him an almost frightening sense of artistic purpose, but one that unexpectedly and refreshingly was never used for indulgent or self-deluding purposes.

I found in Fred Williams a literary as well as an artistic range of curiosity, knowledge, awareness and perception that I had never expected to find in his world, and have rarely found outside it. I did not find the universal man, thank God. But I find someone with a consummate understanding of life, and people, and politics, and pleasure, who not only painted the best pictures we are ever likely to see but who showed those allowed to glimpse it what a good life, fully lived, might be. "We possess a great man most when we begin to look at him through the glass plate of death," said Henry James of Browning. Perhaps in some ways this will be so with Fred, but for many and for me there will also be despair that the personal style of the man, his authority and humility, his sharpness and softness, his ungainly grace, his grin and his grimace, can no more be reassembled than can his painting be carried on by another.

It may be possible, eventually, and in Overland, to try and assemble a tribute to Fred Williams. But I haven't the heart to try to think about it now, and perhaps that in itself is a tribute to the man.

JONATHAN DAWSON

A Test for Loving Readers

She came and butted into the group of television writers. Chris had seen her before actually, dying (at twenty dollars an hour) under an old Holden. Hi!

It was their pub: but he knew that Dave, who liked writing chancy and a bit way-out numbers, knew her. Even the veins showing up on his eyes flicked their eyelashes. Well, Dave could be zeroed. Turns out that what she wants is to be a writer. That's an ambition most of the guys round the table haven't faced themselves. After all, Hector pays good bread: for not trying *too* hard. But Di is after a bit more. She's actually read all those Arts Council grant novels. But this is a writers' pub. The Arts Council is just not in the game. It's not as if they all live in Carlton or Balmain. In fact they're scattered through the suburbs, or up in the hills (Dandenongs equals Hollywood). Was a time, when there was plenty of cash, that some of them bought second houses, worried about tree planting.

It was a short sweet spring.

SGT ADAMS: Thought a bit. About buying some land, up in the Dandenongs.

(Cut that line.)

(a) he couldn't afford it;

(b) bit personal, isn't it?

and (c) we're running twenty seconds over.

So: is it still Di and Dave? Seems not. Di has done her homework. She knows who is who. Which you don't, rhetoric aside, if you're in the group.

Look around the faces. Dave has been making time with Di because his wife now looks like a potter or something, all smock and motherliness, which isn't surprising after five kids. The rest? Some straights, in grey suits . . .

And, of course, the poetic ones.

The rest? Sam has written radio plays and wishes he weren't here . . . London perhaps. But he fancies Di. Who of them doesn't?

So maybe it's time to move in, the rest being so pissed.

Except when he says what he needs to say, Di says

You're a bit out of it.

Which every writer knows means . . .

WOMEN'S WEEKLY T.V. MAGAZINE.

Chris looks like becoming one of our top writers, his latest . . .

Like that feature film he wrote. At least it was about REAL AUSTRALIANS (whatever that means).

How much do you, does anyone, owe to the first, the only man to write a genuinely local film?

Which also begs the question, is that

Good? says Di, suddenly standing over him.

So that, after a lot of lovemaking, Chris is worrying. Because it's happened before. Pretty ladies

who want to write, or act. Is he being conned?

Two weeks later it doesn't really seem so. Di is in love. Indeed she's into writing verse.

Man

You're full of words

(etc.)

To offset that kind of stuff, there's her mouth, coming down on him, restless, relentless. Suddenly, it's a love affair. Chris owes her a lot. She owes him, well,

SGT DIXON: All right Miss. Suppose you start to be honest with me.

MARIE: (DESPERATE) I can't. I love him. And such stuff. The question remains. Am I in love? Couldn't Chris write a novel?

SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (Imagined) Thursday 26? 4/81, oh, page twenty three:

This masterly novel seems to sum up . . . the apparently desperate condition

(wrong, that sounds like a male critic, perhaps . . .)

Di rolls over, he feels good, he can delay now, loving her, but he won't think yet.

The accidents of love are that both of you may like paté, or vichyssoise: but what does that mean? It might mean that Di could equally well love anyone who happens to have got a tele screen credit.

Darling: why don't you want to write a novel?

Now that is a fair question. Why not? The answer is that television scripts pay better, more regularly. And when you're lying, awake, as the dawn light comes in on you, and unfortunately, you're in love, you know that a television script for Hector, for Reg, for all you're been through, whatever that may mean, is worthless.

Cut to: problems.

Di, the third night they have made love, is prepared to make trouble.

Di: I chose you, bastard. I wanted you. The rest were, well, just Ragtimes people. They wore the right stuff, they said the right words, but they weren't right. Answer: you *were*?

It would be unfair to give you Chris's background at this stage. Except a couple of items. Public school, for one. So we're in love.

Di, well, she's something, something else. Her tongue, her perfect silky skin are fucking up my prose . . . particularly my prose.

I used to like writing sonnets, after all they are controllable. So is television drama. They keep on saying to the writers KEEP ON BEING REALISTIC. But what the, sorry, *what* is real? Four men sitting around talking about wartime, about, about . . .

Chris has had it with plots. But Di? anne wants to be a writer. And writing means believing or at least caring about the fake cops. We need a commercial break.

CHRIS: Darling. (A commercial break). Why do you want to write police stuff . . . when it

couldn't be further from your life, or your understanding.

By now Di has picked up on a dangerously honest body, she moves down, she touches him, with flickers of her tongue. And suddenly senses that he is not with her, he has gone beyond the commercial break.

So we must flashback, a stroke of film, to make sense of all this. Chris wants

to remember when he was, well, younger, actually twenty-four, and publishing good horror stories. Very good ones, and anthologised. And it turns out that Di has read those. And remembered them. Chris can't remember them at all.

They're past, says Di. What is left of love. And love making.

The whole house had to be white. If only because Home Beautiful has recommended so many other colors.

But leaving aside the house, the imported Habitat stuff, there remains, the bed:

And in the bed, Di recalls a time two weeks ago. Writers after all, are full of recurring memories. So Chris, sensing an end, should and will give in gracefully. That's one of the penalties of loving and of knowing. In this scenario he is the sergeant of police and Di is the young female constable.

Logically that should make it easier. So much, Without a man and without a woman there is no tension. There can be no drama. There can be no love.

There will have been a last scene between the young man and the young woman. There must have been objects in their room that you would like to describe.

You should.

THE DOCTOR WHO DARED

The story of Henry Price, M.D., Berlin, M.B., B.S., Brisbane

by Joan Clarke

Remembered still as one of the most colorful personalities in Australian medical history, Henry Price was born "Hans Preiss" in German Kattowitz (now Polish Katowice). During the 'golden years' of the Weimar Republic, he studied at the universities of Breslau, Freiburg, Vienna and Berlin, training under such giants of medicine as Bier, Chvostek, Fischer, Trendelenburg, Pick and Stoeckel. Being a Jew he was forced to flee Germany in 1933. Overcoming tremendous obstacles he became Beirut's leading gynaecologist, until 1939 when he was interned by the French then forced to join the Foreign Legion. Finally escaping Vichy France, he enlisted as a Medical Officer with the British Army in North Africa.

After the war he migrated to Australia and settled in Wollongong. His struggle to practise there led him into his final and greatest battle against prejudice, and a court case that made legal and medical history.

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MARTIN DUWELL **Letter from Iceland**

Martin Duwell, a member of the Overland board, teaches in the English Department at the University of Queensland. He runs Makar Press and has a book of interviews with contemporary Australian poets, A Possible Contemporary Poetry, appearing in 1982.

I'm writing this outside Borgarnes, a small town about one hundred and fifty kilometres by road north of Reykjavik. Actually all towns in Iceland are small, but this one seems to be thriving at least in a mercantile way. Since I was here last a lot of work has been done building a bitumen road into the town and across Borgarfjord and trucks are busy everywhere. Borgarnes itself is built on a small peninsula called Digranes which juts out into Borgarfjord. A stone's throw from Borgarnes (a cliché excused by a nasty double-meaning which I'll explain in a minute) is the site of the home of the original settler of the area, Grim Kveldulfsson, better known to posterity as Skalla-Grim or "bald-Grim". He was one of the Norwegians who settled this country in the late ninth and early tenth centuries and claimed vast tracts of land which were eventually parcelled out to followers and descendants. He called his home Borg, which means a small hill or fortification and, sure enough, there it is (just above an example of those small churches that seem obligatory at saga sites), an impressive curved ridge of rock that stands well above the green pastures of the area and the green waters of the fjord.

Grim, I should explain, is the father of Egil Skallagrimsson, the greatest of the Icelandic poets and hero of *Egil's Saga*. If you haven't read it, I recommend it. It dates from the early thirteenth century and is really a sort of prototypical literary biography. It contains what must be the most extraordinary picture of a poet created by any culture. Egil himself has pronounced troll-like properties inherited from father and grandfather and he's a man I can honestly say I'm glad never to have met. He is a warrior (in moments, at least, a genuine 'berserk') and quarreller with kings. And not only kings. If the saga is to be believed, at the age of twelve Egil provoked his father into such a fit of rage that his life was

only saved when a slave woman who had fostered him distracted Skallagrim. She attempted to escape by jumping into the sea off Digranes, not far from where the citizens of Borgarnes comfortably do their Saturday shopping or look to see what's on at the movies in the evening. She was killed by a huge boulder which Grim threw into the sea after her.

Anyway, I'll have to be careful not to burden you too early in this letter with literary reminiscences that remain, in Australia, regrettably exotic. I'm writing this in the front of a hired station wagon that I've been piloting over Icelandic roads on this trip and tomorrow I should be in Reykjavik ready for my flight out a couple of days later. The car is a tired Datsun 180B whose suspension, beaten into submission by a brief lifetime on the roads here, veers irrevocably to the right. As one drives on the right, it means at least that the car drags itself towards the lava field at the edge of the road rather than the oncoming traffic, but steering a reasonably straight course is producing weary forearms and weary forearms make for labored letter writer.

I've been on my own this trip, surviving on bread, cheese and some fruit and sleeping in the back of the car. This may appear an unsociable way to travel, tantamount to getting around like a self-sufficient one-man expedition, but it is cheap. The first thing you discover when you arrive here is that you're poor. The exchange rate seems designed to reduce all but the most wealthy visitors to the status of vagrants. I can remember one of those ubiquitous 'World on So-many Dollars a Day' books devoting a page or so to Iceland. Its verdict on Icelandic prices, particularly the cost of accommodation, was that they were "paralysing", a description that hardly seems adequate now that I'm here. Petrol costs about a dollar per litre and I've only eaten two

hot meals since arriving; two sad little plain omelettes that cost something like three dollars fifty each, not to mention accompanying drinks of fizzy orange at about a dollar fifty a glass!

Why the exchange rate should be so punishing remains an economic mystery to me. Undoubtedly it's coupled in some way with an inflation rate that's regularly over fifty per cent. It's difficult, in fact, to imagine an economic approach less like Australia's. Iceland has a high inflation rate and full (or even under-) employment. Many people have two jobs. I can't work out how people save for large items such as cars (fantastically expensive here) and houses, but I gather that wages are protected by some form of full indexation. Whatever the system, it hits the visitor, at least, very hard.

I spent much of the first part of this trip in Njál country, to the south-east of Reykjavik. Icelanders call it the "Landeyjar" or 'land-isles', and the name gives an accurate indication of the region's geography. It's part of a larger plain that is made up of the estuaries of a number of glacial rivers and which extends between the inner highlands and the sea. This plain narrows to a close at its eastern extremity where the highlands in the form of two large glaciers, the Eyjafjallajökull and the Myrdalsjökull, get so close to the sea that there's only a narrow strip of land left to accommodate the road.

At its widest this southern plain, which in summer is very lush pasture indeed, stretches fifty or sixty kilometres back along the rivers into the interior, but Njál country is at the eastern end where the plain has already narrowed considerably. Most saga sites have something topographically exciting about them, and it's quite an irony that the location of the greatest of the sagas and the scene of the greatest event in the family sagas — the burning of Njál and his family in their home at Bergthorshvoll — should be so flat and thoroughly uninteresting. Every so often there's a large mound rising out of the grassland, and it's on these that the local farms are built. One advantage of this, I suppose, is that one can be reasonably confident in identifying Njál's farm with the site of the present Bergthorshvoll, since large mounds are unlikely to move far, even over nine and a half centuries! If the country here is boring, the weather was the best it had been up till then. The overcast skies cleared and the days were as bright, warm and hospitable as good winter days in Brisbane. And long, of course — in mid-summer the most you can expect is a few

hours of partial darkness in the early hours of the morning.

North of Njál's farm but still in *Njál's Saga* there is an altogether more attractive area. The southern plain rises up toward higher land in a slope or 'hlid' — in this case Fljotshlid — which runs pretty well east-west. The farther east you go, the steeper the slope gets, until it eventually becomes a vertical scarp. Just before the point where the steepness of the slope renders it uninhabitable in Hlidarendi — the site of the farm of Njál's friend, Gunnar. Gunnar must have had excellent taste, for the view south-west towards Njál's farm and the sea, and east towards the glaciers, is absolutely magnificent. A long gloomy valley extends beyond Fljotshlid into the highlands, and it's cut off by mountains at its eastern extremity. The southern wall is made up of the Eyjafjalla glacier and in front of it, quite near Hlidarendi and somewhere near what must have been the site of Ketil of Mörk's farm, is a strange, pyramid-shaped, little hill. It looks man-made, like a large version of Maeshowe with the top cut off, but obviously can't be. I tried to drive south across the mouth of the valley to get closer to it, but in order to do so I would have had to have forded the Markafjot — known to all readers of *Njál's Saga* as the site of the battle in which Skarp-hedin killed Thrain Sigfusson so spectacularly. The Markafjot is a broad glacial river that flows in a series of intertwined streams down the valley towards Hlidarendi. It takes a sharp left hand turn at the end of Eyjafjalla and broadens out even further before flowing into the sea. My Datsun took an exploratory dip into the first ford, but its courage failed and I was forced to double back down along Fljotshlid!

I can't leave the subject of Hlidarendi without recounting Icelandic literature's most celebrated anecdote. I blush to repeat it, since it is to saga readers what Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy is to English theatregoers: at once cliché and splendor. Gunnar's enemies in the first part of *Njál's Saga* contrive to have him outlawed, and he and his brother make plans to leave Iceland for the mandatory three years. On their shortish journey from Hlidarendi to the sea, Gunnar's horse stumbles and he is forced to jump off hurriedly. As he gets up he finds himself looking back at the slopes of his home — *Fögr er hliöin, sva at mer hefir hon aldri jafnfögr synzt*: "fair is the slope, more fair than it has ever appeared to me". He refuses to leave Iceland and is killed at Hlidarendi not long after. An equally unforgettable scene takes place after Gunnar's burial,

when Njál's son takes Gunnar's son Högni to the burial mound on a bright, clear, moonlit night. They see and hear Gunnar singing a defiant poem within a now illuminated mound — *katligr ok með gledibragdi miklu*: “cheerful and with an enormously happy expression”. It's a spinetingling and tremendously poignant moment and the memory of it makes the whole area of Fljotshlid doubly magical. There's a lovely moment in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* where he describes the understandable reluctance of some barbarians to embrace the doctrines of Christianity, a faith which automatically consigned their noblest ancestors to eternal damnation. The author of *Njál's Saga* was a faithful Christian but he had the courtesy to allow Gunnar a heroic afterlife in the old style.

While in Fljotshlid I camped below a waterfall that flows over the steep part of the slope beyond Hlidarendi. The waterfall, by the way, is called Gluggafoss or “window-fall” apparently because at one stage it falls through a hole in the rock. While there I fell in with two families of Icelanders, one from Selfoss, the other from Reykjavik. The little daughter of one of the families decided to adopt me and, as she was not yet old enough to have learnt any English, we had to speak Icelandic. Now Icelandic is a fantastically conservative language and Modern Icelandic doesn't differ too much from Old Icelandic — indeed children at school read early thirteenth century literature with the kind of ease with which we would read Malory's *Morte Darthur*. I can get by in reading Old Icelandic, but speaking modern Icelandic is a different thing altogether. The problem of course is the inflections or word-endings, which Icelandic has retained but which most other Germanic languages have jettisoned. Understanding is not too hard, but as you try to generate a sentence your mind runs frantically ahead trying to conjure up the appropriate endings. A sentence begun confidently (after all, simple nominatives usually come first!) quickly develops into something like a maze full of landmines. Knowing exactly where you want to go doesn't help at all. Though it's infinitely simpler than Latin or Sanskrit, conversing in Icelandic with a small, puzzled child was quite a strain, despite my earnest efforts with the Linguaphone Icelandic course and my much thumbed *Teach Yourself Icelandic*. What happened of course is that conversation with little Sigrum quickly deteriorated into a kind of uninflected pidgin.

Fortunately her parents' English was markedly

superior to my Icelandic. I made a shamefaced linguistic retreat and contented myself with practising my pronunciation. The older children could speak English but seemed, for the most part, too shy to try hard, although I noticed a distinction that I'd seen before. The parents spoke with American accents, while the children's accents were impeccably neutral. Later in the afternoon we played parlor games. The rules were incomprehensible — they generally involved trying to hit each other with rubber balls — but I enjoyed myself enormously, nevertheless. Days later, in Borgarnes, I had the idea of improving my Icelandic by buying children's books. I explained my plan to a sympathetic bookseller and was interestedly eyeing a lurid little production called, I think, *Vikingar og Vaereyingar* (“Vikings and Varangians”) until the bookseller explained, shocked, that this was a comic and written in “bad Icelandic”. After some careful consultation I finished up with three Paddington Bear Books, translated into what I was assured was “good Icelandic”!

Leaving Hlidarendi I gave a lift to a couple of French student teachers who had been stranded along the valley and badly needed a lift to the main road to catch the bus. They didn't share my high pulse rate about the area or about Iceland in general. They seemed to have come to the place as a kind of out-of-the-way, *ersatz* Alps, and were travelling to Myrdalsjökull to do a lot of walking. They were impressed by the picturesque elements but complained that the great mountains and glaciers were “too far apart”! This led to an interesting debate about landscape, spectacular landscape in particular. I respect size, verticalness, freakishness and so on, but have trouble relating to them. Last century, I suppose, one saw the hand of God in this sort of scenery, but a more sceptical age might be lost attempting to understand its own admiration after all, once a landscape can't be said to be ‘made’, it's hard to know on what to focus one's response. I assume that to a geologist these problems wouldn't occur since he would relate to a landscape that he was able to read like a book, although I suspect that Iceland would be a book with a complicated plot. I'm a lot more affected by landscapes with human significance, and the sites of the at least partly fictional events of the sagas are far more likely to make my heart pound than a row of Grand Canyons or Vatnajökulls stood end to end. After Fljotshlid my limited petrol budget offered me a choice of pressing on to the massive southern glaciers that sit up like iced Christmas cakes, or

of exploring the land-isles and seeking out Bergthorshvoll. I chose the latter and I'm sure I'd always do so.

My final memory of Njál country is the site of dozens of Icelandic horses strung out along the side of the road. There seems to be far greater numbers of them here than in the other parts of Iceland I've seen. My students always burst out laughing when they see pictures of them, since the splendid steeds of Egil, Gunnar *et al.* seem about half as big again as Shetland ponies. I'm probably exaggerating, but anyway, what the horses lack in size, they make up for in intelligence and endurance. They have a particularly canny look about them and, although they seem happy enough to pose for slides by the side of the road, one has the uncomfortable suspicion that they're sharing a joke at your expense.

After leaving the south I drove north-east to the Thingvellir or "Thing-plains". This is the site of the old Icelandic legislative assembly, the Althing. It was begun in 930, not long after the period during which the land was settled, and was a meeting held every year. The whole affair was dominated by the chieftains who had, in fact, instituted it, but it must also have been a social event of some magnitude, especially as groups travelled from all over Iceland to attend. The law was borrowed from the Gula assembly in Norway and portions of it were recited from memory each year in pre-literate days by the elected 'law-speaker'. It's familiar territory to readers of the Icelandic family sagas, and I can't think of one of them that doesn't have a major scene set there. One Grim Geitskör was commissioned to find a site and settled on the plains to the north of Iceland's largest lake. It was a moment of genius. If, as Auden said, all Iceland is holy ground, then this is the holy of holies.

The best way to approach Thingvellir is from the south. You drive up from Ingolfssjall and then for fifteen kilometres or so along the eastern edge of the lake, an area dominated by low (less than a metre) scrub and moss. As you round the northern part of the lake you begin to cross large rifts in the lava plain. Some of these are very deep and many have very still water in them. All of these rifts run parallel to each other and more or less north north-east. They're called "gjár", a word which survives as "geo" in the place names of the Norse areas of the Northern British Isles. The Thingvellir is the area immediately before the last and greatest of these rifts, the massive Almannagjá. This rift is visible from ground level

because its far wall has been raised above the near one by some geological action. At its highest, I suppose, it must be fifteen metres above the lip of the near side, while the rift itself would be something like ten metres wide. In other words, as you cross the first rifts you find yourself looking over the Thingvellir towards a long and completely sheer grey rock face. Towards the right hand end is a vertical white streak. It's here that the Öxar river falls down into the rift. It runs along the floor of the Almannagjá for half a kilometre or so and then spills over the lower lip down onto the Thingvellir from where it wanders into the lake. It's a sight you never forget.

In the middle of the river is a small island where judicial combats were fought in the early days of the Commonwealth, and between the far bank of the river and the near lip of the Almannagjá is a wide grassy area that slopes upward quite steeply. On this rise at the top, so that behind you is the chasm of the rift and in front a marvellous view of the whole plain, is the site of the 'law rock'. Its agreed-upon site has been marked with an ostentatious wooden pole and it's surrounded by Icelanders and tourists, for the locals come just as earnestly as outsiders do. It's a tremendous place to find at the metaphorical heart of a country. I won't pretend that the great moments of saga literature that are set here came crowding in on me at this point. Your heart's too busy rattling around inside your ribcage for you to think of literature and you really just wander around, happy to be on such magical ground.

In saga times the visiting families erected tents over existing low walls and the remains of these 'booths' can still be seen. They're surprisingly close to the law-rock, and I suspect it was this unlikely proximity that led people, in the nineteenth century at least, to believe that the true site of the rock was across the river along the next row of rifts. There's a fine example of an overgrown, eroded booth directly behind the present law-rock on the floor of the Almannagjá. Some whimsy of nationalists or historians or tourist promoters has labelled many of these booths with little stone plaques as belonging to well-known saga figures: Snorri the Priest's booth, Gest Oddleifson's booth etc., but these ascriptions seem quite without foundation.

One of the tourist sights of Thingvellir is the sight of groups of Icelanders admiring the re-forestation project near the Hotel Valhöll. Iceland's original trees were quickly used up by the first settlers, and the country has no trees apart

from areas of deliberate replanting. The trees in the little plot at Thingvellir are, at best, five to six metres high, and the Icelanders seem to be admiring them solemnly. I don't know how old they are, but in this climate trees grow slowly. I tried to explain to a fellow visitor I had fallen into conversation with that I have a eucalypt in my garden which grew to ten metres in three years. Either his English or his credulity failed and that avenue of conversation quickly broke down. There's a sad moment in the *Icelandic Road Guide* in which it explains the meaning of the word "holt" which occurs in many Icelandic place names. It gives as a definition "formerly a wood, now a stony hill"!

This indispensable little volume deserves more than a brief mention. It's a guide to practically every road in the country, though, as the Icelanders are the first to admit, most of the 'roads' are little more than wide dirt tracks. The book unfortunately is not organised on the grid principle and I'm ashamed to admit that even now I still have only a hazy knowledge of how to find my way around in it. Once you do locate your road in the guide though, it's superb — a rare example of the word "guide" being used accurately. Each page contains the map of a few kilometres of road accompanied by brief descriptions of what you're seeing as you drive past. The other valuable help is the series of 1:100,000 maps available in bookshops at Reykjavik. With *Road Guide* or maps it's useful to have a passenger who doesn't get car sick to read out information for you. Driving with one hand on the wheel, the other on the relevant page of the guide, one eye on the road and one eye on the book, would be dangerous on good roads. Here it could be fatal. The English version of the guide, requiring not only translation but also some compression, often has a marvellous tone. One of my favourite entries tells of a place on the Snæfellsnes peninsula tautologically called Stadastadur. It mentions the bishop who lived there and continues: "A fourth bishop, Hallgrímur Sveinsson, was brought up there. The folktale about Galdralofur ends at Stadastadur, where a shaggy grey paw dragged him into the sea." I wonder what the possibility of a recurrence does for the tourist trade on Snæfellsnes!

As you leave Thingvellir by the northern route you immediately have your first brush with Iceland's stony interior. There are tremendous mountains like great piles of orange rocks, practically no vegetation, and very few fellow travellers. It

all looks like the surface of the moon spray-painted in sepia. At the tops of the mountains are large patches of what must be more or less permanent snow, in hollows hidden from the sun. A sign warns you, in case of sandstorms, to turn left; all this on what is really quite a significant road between Thingvellir and Borg, marked on the map by a healthily thick red line. After twenty kilometres or so of this lonely landscape, you get to an intersection. The road to the more comfortable pastures inland of Borg turns left, but I pushed on north north-east along a road that travels through the Kildadalur, or "cold valley". The fact that no description of this road is included in my edition of the road guide was a source of some concern, especially as many of the roads that are described there are nearly too much for my Datsun. A friendly tourist coach driver, however — parked with his charges at Biskupsbrekka where Jon Vidalin died — told me that the road was perfectly safe and so I pressed on. The Kaldidalur skirts the western end of the Langjökull, the westernmost of the huge central glaciers. The road passes between it and a smaller glacier called Ok. It's high, stony country, and although the day was fine and the air clear, the temperature was appreciably chilly. At the side of the road it's possible to stumble over stretches of pebbles to ponds of ice, all the while with the enormous white-topped end of Langjökull high above you and not a sign of life anywhere.

The road eventually comes down to the headwaters of the Hvítá, or "white river", which flows into the sea fifty kilometres later at Borg. Here it's a small, swiftly flowing glacial stream which rapidly gets very fast and very large. The road turns back sharp left to follow the river and runs past Gilsbakki (known to readers of *Gunnlaug's Saga*) and Snorri Sturluson's farm Reykholt. I would have dearly loved to continue travelling along the northern face of Langjökull into the real wasteland where Grettir spent many of the years of his outlawry, but you need horses or a four-wheel drive and in either case a guide to attempt it, so it will have to wait for a wealthier trip.

Reykholt was my last stop before Borgarnes. It was, as I've said, the farm of Snorri Sturluson, the finest of Iceland's many fine (but usually anonymous) vernacular prose writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He was also a chieftain of enormous power, at a period towards the end of the Commonwealth when power was beginning to become increasingly concentrated in the hands

of wealthy families and groups. His not particularly edifying life story is told in part of the *Sturlunga Saga*. In 1206 he moved from Borg up to Reykholt and Snorri, like Gunnar, must have had excellent taste. Reykholt is set in beautiful, low, grassed hills and as well as its own thermal springs has some of the best looking pasture I've seen. Reykholt, Kaldidalur and Hvitá share a property common to many Icelandic place names. To the outsider such as myself who knows them from the literature, they are enormously evocative and suggestive. Yet they are, as names, lamentably prosaic. Smoky-wood, cold valley and white river all appear elsewhere on the map and do seem rather unimaginative at best. Anyone who has read the marvellous *Laxdæla Saga* remembers the Svinadal where Bolli Thorleikson kills his foster-brother Kjartan Olafsson. The place itself is magnificent, a long steep valley rather like a scale model of Glencoe. The name, translated, though, means "pig valley". So much for evocation and suggestion!

A few days after beginning this letter I arrived in Reykjavik and began to fill in time before my flight to Glasgow. As I was walking along one of the streets (weighed down by a pile of second-hand editions that I'd used up my remaining

kronur on) I heard a voice call out my name. As it's hard to think of a capital city more remote from Australia than Reykjavik, this came as a considerable surprise. It turned out to belong to a student from my university now on a scholarship and doing a two-year course in Icelandic for foreigners. We ate at his flat in the evening and I was treated to Icelandic delicacies that his stomach seems to have acclimatised to. The raw dried fish is actually delightful, but there was the inevitable row of curdled, soured, separated, coagulated and otherwise mistreated kinds of milk. I managed a little "skyr". We parted in the evening and now my plane flies out in a few hours. I'm distressed that I can't stay longer. I have, in fact, during my trip been searching for an Icelandic family that would like to swap house and car in Iceland for the equivalent in Brisbane for six months or a year. I've had no success though, the usual response has been that it's "too far" — well that's what the French hitch-hikers said about the distance between Icelandic mountains! Even my ace-card, that Brisbane is only a hundred kilometres from the world's best beaches, has so far produced only puzzled frowns. I'm jealous of my friend's two years here, and if my face is green this morning in the airport, it's not as a result of last night's "skyr" — it's pure envy!

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: A handsome total in the Floating Fund this time, not entirely due to the delayed publication of this issue. All the more important because we have had to join the so-called "Challenge Scheme" of the Australia Council, whereby if we raise so much in donations we get given a 'has tried' prize. Since there's not much chance of getting hefty handouts from our corporate eminence or anyone else I can think of (we have a happy knack of annoying a wide range of institutionalised 'thinkers') you Overlanders are our only staff. And that's why the price of Overland has, to the editorial board's great regret, gone up to \$4—but still less than the price of many paperbacks. So thanks for a splendid total of \$1615 to:

\$270.00 N&CC; \$100.00 L&FW; \$50.00 BS, DM, Currency; \$38.00 NG, RM, J&CC; \$30.00 DO'H; \$28.00 Granada Publishing; \$27.00 PA; \$26.00 AP; \$25.00 JW, SMcI; \$23.00 JD; \$20.00 EM; \$18.00 RS, G&MD, IMcI, GKS; \$13.00 JB, MM, CM, A&KI, DJ, AD; \$12.00 GH, HHJ; \$10.00 TM; \$8.00 RD, CS, V&JB, SMcI, JL, GS, DW, RB, PC, HF, BD, MB, JP, RG, FJ, JM, IG, BN-S, KS, R&JS, RC, GC, RG, CE, EC, RB, JS, EW, HH, MO, DC, ADH, RB, IP, JO'C, J&CH, WW, JB, SD, PG, DD, LB, ML, PM, JK, VN, PW, PB; \$6.00 LD, HD; \$5.00 JB, RN, AB, LMcK, JB; \$4.00 JJ, RB, RW, GS, KS, BW, NG; \$3.00 DB, LF, TG, CC, JL, MD, BA, OR, AS, HR, LR, JMcn, RB, SC, ML, KP, MCP, VB, BM, DI, JM, KS, RW, HH, BG, EK, NN, NS, JS, DG, DM, RW, HW, ED, GL, TD, PS, AB, GW, BG, JE, IH; \$2.00 RC, MF, GA.

A BUZZ AT THE QUEEN ST FAIR

(To Neville Wran QC MP)

All year long the ants, peanuts,
black-widows and bees
are busy, busy, busy knitting,
stitching, fixing and mixing,
sawing, drawing, ruling and joining,
weaving, wiring, throwing and painting,
cooking and growing
all sorts of goodies
to sell, sell, sell
with a barker's yell
or alluring smell
at the frightfully fashionable,
envious, arguable,
madly desirable,
(readily hireable),
stalls, nooks and niches
of the deliciously viewable,
investment-renewable,
annual Queen St Fair.

As bustling bright as lorikeets,
they set up their wares along the street:
goods and chattels, scones and rattles;
packets, pots and forget-me-knots;
printed shirts, see-through skirts;
thongs, bongs and gaudy sarongs;
all things nice, some things naughty;
the nouvelle vogue, the zappy and sporty;
trinkets and treasures, flags for all weathers;
rings and things spread out
as bright and as brilliant as butterfly's wings.

All day the movement fluctuates;
buyers to sellers soon gravitate:
everyone keen, alert and buzzing;
friendships renewing, friendships bestowing:
a wonderful feeling growing and growing:
life a flutter,

gossip a mutter
hope a stutter . . .

And seeing this is
a hot Australian day
in wonderful Woollahra,
the most consistent flutter,
the most enormous buzz,
is in and all around
our central trendy pub.

While all the busy bees are earning money,
seven hundred brightly-tinted drones sip honey
and swarm around two hundred golden queens:
the bronzed, elastic, angry, ecstatic, *manly*

New Gays:

muscled, mustachioed,
circused and rodeoed—
midnight cowboys in mid-afternoon!

Mainly happy, raunchy and randy,
linking arms with anyone handy,
DEVO-revolting against
the tired maudlinities,
narrow affinities, pokey-nosed prejudice

of tidy straight streets
and tiny straight minds;
drinking and singing,
hugging and kissing,
calling all friends to their corralled roll-call;
munching, not punching,
slapping and pinching,
rumbling and sunning,
brazenly buzzing and *having a ball*;
disdaining discretion
(like putting a bet on):
displaying and wallowing wildly in revelling,
offering raucous and rowdy affection for all;
shining and handsome, radiating freedom,
calling the lie to mere mercantile cant!

As the day detumesces — slowly, luxuriously —
families, exhausted, wander away;
a lone guitarist,
mod-haired and pensive in khaki,
serenades himself quietly under a tree . . .
while all else quietens,
the incessant drone of the drones' celebration
rises like lava, bubbling and glowing,
slowly mounts to the shape of a mountainous roar:

droning: demanding acceptance;
droning: seeking the freedom to love as they can;
droning: proclaiming their beauty;
droning: denouncing repression;
droning: crescendoing violently into a roar:
an explosion of pent-up frustration:

The New-gays, fag-hags, hopefuls and bis,
proclaiming their preferences fair to the skies!;
two thousand years of rejection and hatred
turn up the flame in their eyes;
life-energy escaping as sun-blazoned sighs!
till the buzz rises, molten, volcanic,
to a roar as ferocious, confronting and primal
as the wild mating call of the stoned bull koala:
a buzz like bazookas looming,
menacing, over the city's sick sky,
booming and building

to a high rebel cry:

"Give us our freedom!
Just give us our freedom!
Come on, give us our right!
Or next year we'll
get up and take it!
(yes, we just might)

Wake up, brother, wake up!
Give us our freedom . . .
Like you, we just want to make it.
Give us our freedom
or soon, real bloody soon
We'll get up and take it!"

ADRIAN RAWLINS

Charles Holmes and Walkabout

JOHN BÉCHERVAISE

The death of Charles Holmes at the age of ninety, on 31 July, 1981, passed unnoticed by the daily press. Holmes survived, by almost a decade, the last issue of the great journal, *Walkabout*, which he had conceived, founded and edited for twenty-three years (1934-1957); its forty-year continuum, into the 1970s, will remain a rich, inexhaustible lode to be prospected and mined. It is probable that the name *Walkabout*, connoting the Australian scene and ethos, will never long be absent from the bookstalls. Here, only in passing, I mention a far broader field of action in which Charles Holmes excelled, that of advertising to the world, by innumerable brochures and posters (many by distinguished artists of their day), the character and opportunities of Australia for both tourist and immigrant. On his foundation (always confirmed by an honorary board of stalwarts such as old Sir Harold Clapp) stood the Australian National Travel Association, inevitably succeeded by the Australian Tourist Commission. Fifty years ago, Holmes published *We Find Australia*; five years later, *A Passport Round the World*. Many other aspects of the career of Charles Henry Holmes, O.B.E., M.C., F.R.G.S., await his biographer.

What J. K. Ewers once described as “the happiest editor-writer relationship I have experienced” was shared, in Charles Holmes’ *Walkabout*, by many contributors, including myself. Mostly we knew each other, and through *Walkabout*, followed each other’s tracks. I can recall, almost at random, such names as Arthur Upfield, Ion Idriess, Charles Chauvel, Vance Palmer, Bob Croll, Donald Thomson, Charles Barrett, Michael

Sharland, W. J. Dakin, Ernestine Hill, Henry Lamond, Bernard Cronin, George Farwell, Alec Chisholm, David Fleay, Basil Hall, Frank Hurley, J. K. Davis, Tarlton Rayment, Crosbie Morrison, Mary Durack, H. Drake-Brockman, C. P. Mountford, Bill Harney, Peter Fenton . . . Charles, himself contributed a number of significant articles and editorials.

It would be fitting here to quote Ernestine Hill, writing of *Walkabout* to Charles Holmes at the time of his retirement in 1957:

Through its twenty-three years it has been such a valuable and poetic expression of Australia, as well as informative and scientific — all due to your own personal interest and inspiration — that I just can’t imagine *Walkabout* without you. I remember the pleasant surprise of the first issue . . . That type of publication in Australia was new and all who love this land of ours, in all its moods, were full of admiration and pride. We felt the real Australia was beginning to arrive . . .

So far as writers are concerned, apart from the honour and pleasure it has been to be among them, I want to express my thanks for the exact and beautiful production, often enhancing our work, and never-failing courtesy of an association always welcoming, thoughtful and kind.

I go along with most of that! Had I not been lured away from the co-editor’s desk by the illimitable Antarctic, I should certainly have hoped to remain for many years in *Walkabout*’s good and active company.

JACK LINDSAY

Will Dyson and Philip Lindsay

I read Alan McCulloch's essay on Will Dyson (Overland 86) with pleasure till near the end where he divagated into some hearsay tales of my brother Philip, which seem to be entirely fantasy. First the tale about going ashore at Melbourne on his journey to England and staying for weeks as an unwelcome guest at Will Dyson's place, infatuated with Betty Dyson (aged fifteen). Phil was definitely not left behind by his boat. He duly arrived in London in the boat in which he had left Sydney, as I know, having met him on his arrival. The boat was that which the letters had notified me as being the one in which he was sailing; the date was that which I had been told of in the letters from Sydney.

Phil, one of the most talkative of persons, never mentioned to me that he had met Will. In his autobiography, *I'd Live the Same Life Over* (published just before the war), he states:

Of the sea journey there is little to relate. Most such voyages run to a similar routine, and although, like others of the Abedreen-Commonwealth Line, we stopped at Colombo, Port Said, and Malta, after leaving Perth, there is little for me to report in the wake of innumerable other scribblers who have bound their impressions into book-form . . . At the three Australian ports — Melbourne, Adelaide, and Freemantle—I was greeted by friends, fêted, and carried back aboard at some dangerous hour when the ship was already fretting at delay.

An important motif in the book is his increasingly strong desire to get away to London. If he had been so stupid as to miss boats at Melbourne, he, who loved to tell tales against himself, would certainly have seized on the event as an amusing betrayal of his earnest impulse to get away. But,

as I have said, there is no question of his not having arrived in the boat in which he sailed from Sydney.

What particularly annoyed me was the statement that after Phil had had all his luggage thrown out of the house after weeks of delay, next morning Dyson found on the front door a small circle drawn with chalk. "In its centre was stuck a knife, signifying eternal enmity between the house of Lindsay and that of Dyson. I learned many many years later that the enmity had begun with a row with Philip's father, Norman, soon after the joint arrival of the two artists (together with Dyson's wife—Norman's sister—Ruby) in London, in 1910."

There was no such enmity between the houses. Strains had indeed early begun in the relationship of Norman and Will. John Hetherington in his biography of Norman says that Will fell in love with Rose. Will certainly had an affair with my mother not long before he married Ruby. (Sexual relations between her and Norman had long ceased.) Norman tried to make light of the matter in his reminiscences, but he certainly was upset. Hetherington says that Norman was delighted that Will and Ruby decided to go with him to England; but after Rose joined him in London, relations between the two couples grew very tense, with Norman writing an insulting letter to Will and Ruby. Will called on him and there was an exchange of bitter recriminations. Hetherington says that the respectably married Dysons objected to the unmarried relations of Norman and Rose. That seems to me an oversimplification. Probably Ruby disliked Rose and disapproved of her. In any event the relations of Will and Norman were disrupted. When in the later 1920s Will called at Springwood, there was sharp disagreement. Certainly by that time their

social, political, and aesthetic views could hardly have been more opposed.

But in all the times I talked with Norman in our Sydney days he never once made any hostile comment on Will. The attitudes of myself and my brothers never had anything the least antagonistic to the Dysons. What we recalled were the early Sydney days when he was a sort of kindly uncle. As I tell in *Life Rarely Tells* my mother always carried in her handbag the farewell letter in which he asked her never to forget that he was ready to do anything to help her. (I tell in *Fanfrolico and After* how about 1933 I recalled this letter and wrote to Will for some help.) To assert then that in 1929 Phil was expressing an Eternal Enmity between Dysons and Lindsays is sheer nonsense. As for the idea of his fixing a knife in the door, I cannot think of anything more out of character.

Finally the account of Phil turning into an immaculate English gentleman:

Some few years after this incident I met a mutual friend just returned from London, having been with Philip Lindsay at the launching of his second successful novel, *The Path of the King*. "What does Philip look like these days?" I asked. "Marvellous, absolutely marvellous. He dresses like a Threadneedle Street banker, or like a county squire, and carries a furled umbrella."

I presume that the reference is to his third novel, *Here Comes the King*, which established him as a writer and was a book choice. It is possible that his wife Jeanne, with some money unexpectedly in the bank, pushed him to get a new suit for the occasion; but I can testify that throughout his life Phil remained the same careless, amiable, untidy fellow. I cannot think of a more incongruous image than that of him with a furled umbrella. I burst into laughter when I read the account.

BOB HAWKE REPLIES

If *you* think I'm deliberately misrepresenting the findings of the Arbitration Commissioner after the number of times I've already referred (This hasn't been Hawke speaking but the Commissioner) to the Full Bench's statements on this & all other matters concerning industrial disputation (& in all humility I think I can say I'm as well versed in the findings of the Commission as anyone not on the Commission) just for the sake of currying favor with what *you* call the Right wing (It used to be the Left, the alleged Left but I'll refrain from insulting the intelligence of the viewers by going into *that* particular fabrication) (Can't you *hear* properly? I said "fabrication". I'll thank you not to put words into my mouth) if *you* think I'm deliberately misrepresenting the latest findings of Commissioner Mandala (Yes, of course I'm using them selectively; it took Commissioner Mandala a full two hours to hand down what I might be permitted to call his perceptive, pertinent & very perspicacious findings) if *you* think there's any deliberate deception or disloyalty to the Leader of the Opposition (I've known Bill, now, for at least twenty years) if *you* think there's been any attempt on my part (If you'll stop interrupting, I'll answer the question) to misconstrue or misrepresent the Commissioner or mislead on this issue or any other issue of industrial disputation

then, you must be *wanking* yourself.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

"You're just a fence-sitter," she decided. "Too weak in the knees to take a stand!"

I could understand why she felt that way, and told her so—but it only goaded her on.

"That's *exactly* what I mean!" she said. "You always *understand!* Don't you have a mind of your own?"

It was her favorite theme. Something else might start her off—politics, usually, or in-laws—but it would always be forgotten when the real issue surfaced.

"I can see your point of view," I tried. "And I think it's healthy to get it off your chest."

She groaned despairingly, and left the room. Walked out of the debate. But I could understand that manoeuvre, too. Agreeing with her only seemed to force her back against the wall. Into even more extreme positions. As if she needed to define herself by identifying what she was definitely *not*.

She came back into the kitchen and thrust the morning headlines in front of me. It was The Unions this time. SHOCK STRIKE HORROR PROBE, OR HORROR STRIKE PROBE SHOCK, or some other permutation of the basic ideograms. *Idiotgrams*.

"Look at this!" she exploded. "They're holding the bloody country to ransom!"

"You're probably right," I murmured, and went on chewing my cereal. It was too early in the morning for a fight—and anyway, she probably *was* right. I'd heard the same phrase a thousand times before—there must have been some truth in it.

Of course, she wasn't satisfied with that.

"They're fascists!" she fumed, her voice moving further up the octave. "A pregnant woman trapped three hours in a lift because of a bloody power strike! In total darkness!"

Well, how could I argue? That really was a terrible thing, whichever way you looked at it.

Although I still would have liked to have heard the union's side of things.

"Jesus!" she shouted. "I'd shoot the scum on sight!"

"Well, maybe that's a little excessive," I ventured, and she had me. On the ropes.

"That's exactly what I mean!" she flashed back triumphantly. "You're a fence-sitter!"

I suppose it was a rather irritating habit—the way I always tried to steer a middle course, to understand all points of view. She liked to tell me that I was spineless, gutless, weak in the knees—that one day my head would nod right off my shoulders. But I preferred to think that it was due to empathy, to innate understanding, rather than any anatomical defect. I've always believed that fault is never found on one side only, that it's always fifty-fifty—or sixty-forty at the most. That it takes two to tango, as they say.

Because it sometimes seems as if we humans have a natural instinct for dispute. An inbuilt contrariness. Look at the way we rush to take sides in politics, for example—two parties, two rigid sets of policies, everything black and white. And the voting always split so closely down the middle—as if we somehow *needed* the excitement of it all.

My parents' marriage was like that—two armed camps between which love and hate discharged with approximately equal frequency. The two passions so easily interchangeable.

I read somewhere about a tribe in New Guinea where the men and women spoke a different tongue. Certainly my parents spoke different tongues—or different dialects of English. They used the same words, but with different meanings. Take an ordinary noun like *dog*, for instance—to my mother it meant licks and games and com-

panionship. To my father it meant cleaning shit off his shoes. Even their senses of time were different—as if they lived in different zones, different longitudes. *Noon* to my mother was the vague region between breakfast and early evening. To my father it was twelve sharp—plus or minus a few seconds if he were in a good mood.

I could go through their entire vocabularies like this—every meaning completely opposed. Although something must have bound them together, I guess. Some deeper language—sex, perhaps, or their love of music. And me, their joint creation—as a child I was always translating between them.

So I grew up bilingually—able to see both sides of an argument. Words never developed fixed meanings for me, never became entrenched positions. I tried to explain it to her once, but she only laughed.

“What a cop-out!” she said. “What a load of intellectual bullshit to hide what’s merely cowardice! You couldn’t even make up your mind about Adolf Hitler!”

She may have been right about that. I read somewhere that he had no father. Perhaps he just fell in with the wrong crowd.

“We’re all innocent—until proven innocent,” I told her. “After all, he did make the trains run on time.”

She didn’t smile at my irony. Her anger was too important to be deflected by that.

“Yes—cattle trains,” she sneered. “Full of Jews!”

She was doing her articles with Legal Aid at the time, and bringing her briefs home with her. Rapes, childbashings, drunken assaults—all the usual everyday utterly unbelievable stories. The trouble was, they were giving her a rather jaundiced view of the male sex.

“Sometimes I could cheerfully castrate the lot of you!” she announced one night after a particularly trying day. She meant it, too—I could see it in the way she carved the meat. As if the way to a man’s heart was through his ribs with a carving knife.

Maybe that explains her behavior after we split up. The trail of broken hearts—and broken cocks—she left behind her. As if she was trying to punish us all in bed.

Thinking back, it amazes me how naive I was. She must have been playing around for months before that final night when I actually *caught* her at it. Only then did the endless stories of late work and flat tyres fall into place. Not to

mention the mysterious phonecallers who always hung up if *I* answered.

But I still can’t understand why she didn’t tell me. I’d always kept her up-to-date on my affairs—we had that kind of relationship. Different people have different needs, we’d decided at the start, and I thought she’d understood.

I still remember every detail of that final night. Waking in the small hours feeling thirsty, and groping my way through the darkness to the kitchen. Then hearing a noise in the hall, grabbing the bread-knife, thinking it was a burglar, and creeping to the light switch. And when I flicked it on, finding *her* there—frozen in the glare like a spotlight rabbit. Naked, and sprawled on the carpet with our next door neighbor, of all people.

I guess I must have looked pretty dangerous, standing over them with a six-inch blade in my hands. The neighbor was certainly worried, and tried to get up—but she pulled him back down again.

“Don’t worry about *him*!” she laughed. “He’ll *understand*!”

For a moment it all seemed too melodramatic to be real. My eyes were still trying to accommodate the glare, let alone that impossible tableau on the floor in front of me. Perhaps it was just a mirage, a trick of the light.

I wandered half-stunned back to the kitchen and filled a glass with water. As if trying to restore the previous order of things—and failing. All kinds of ridiculous anxieties began lobbing into my mind like unexploded bombs. Did I have bad breath? Was my prick too small? What did it mean—making love to a neighbor while I slept in the room next door? Was she trying to tell me something—and I didn’t understand the language?

Then I heard the front door click shut, and she came out into the kitchen—smiling.

“What are you trying to tell me?” I asked her, but she only filled her mouth with water from my glass.

And gargled.

I’ve thought about it a lot over the years since she left. She must have actually *wanted* to be caught—that much is obvious. But why? Some crazy self-destructive urge, perhaps—or a way of punishing me.

I don’t blame her, though. She must have had her reasons, and I’ve tried to understand them. Something in her childhood probably, as the shrinks like to say. We’re all victims of birth, I

read somewhere. Products of circumstance.
But I still get angry thinking about it. And
frustrated. I've always been like that with prob-

lems I can't solve.
It's the same with chess.
We play it all the time here.

THE NIGHT THEY ADMITTED ME TO THE PSYCHIATRIC WARD

At dusk it comes again & you
start thinking
the nostrils hang lower & the sun
is an orange behind clouds that
hang like laddered stockings & its
always there; those dim lights
that strange singing;

First

they present you with a long hatpin,
pronounce your full name glibly & you
smile when they smile you start at the
elbows on the floor under the arse of two
coppers you are calling them
cunts & they all push on you real hard
it is nearly a yoga exercise you feel the

shit hitting/you hear them speak in a

language of walls & corridors that it'll be
all right from now on they offer you a wheel-
chair & a white gown they keep pushing you
up, your bum is hanging out in the elevator
you notice their faces arriving at ward 4.

and go to bed to experience the dream.

all night you are paralysed all night you are thinking
that maybe
they are right that maybe their sweet propaganda is
personally devoted to your own mess, all night you
want to scream
the voice of a nurse
pumping up your arm
& letting you down like
a silent garlic fart.

all night
the pillow & peoples
feet in your head. all night the wires of thought. all night.
all night you are dreaming that you are awake
& have a decent job & have a decent image
for those with this power, all night you are
trying to fathom if it is the injections or whether you have
gone over the edge;

ROBERT DRUMMOND

The 382nd Anniversary of Australian History

C. C. MACKNIGHT

Campbell Macknight teaches Aboriginal and Indonesian history in the Faculty of Arts at the Australian National University. His book The Voyage to Marege, on Macassan trepangers in northern Australia, was published in 1976.

The documentary history of Australia began in 1606. As the bard was writing of flies and wanton boys, his countryman John Saris was noting that the “Flemmings Pinnasse” had returned to Banda from Cape York Peninsula. It says something about the ideology of those concerned with such memorabilia that the seventeenth century scrawl of that good servant of the English East India Company is not one of the familiar icons of our history. Perhaps the content of the associated comment is against it, for the crew of the Duyfken found “no good to be done” in their new land.

Another 382 years will bring us, with luck, to 1988, and plans are well underway for a strange medley of events to mark “the bicentennial”. No doubt we’ll have a stamp or two and a rash of tee-shirts and tea-towels commemorating the events of 1788 and all that. Already there is a scratching of the pens of authors hoping to capitalise on an expected boom in the Australian market.

Among much else, most of those with a serious interest in our past have probably heard by now of a co-operative project to produce a nine-volume work under the general title of *Australia 1788-1988: a Bicentennial History*. It is the most ambitious of several planned bicentennial histories. Four volumes are to be given over to technical matters—bibliography, maps, statistics and a digest of facts and dates—while each of the remaining five is to be, in some way, centred around a particular year; 1788, 1838, 1888, 1938 and 1988. (The first and last necessarily involve a treatment of the preceding period.) Editors have

been appointed, judicious publicity has involved an immense range of talent and substantial work is underway on this very considerable enterprise. It seems so fair a thing, that to complain or even voice a doubt is hardly form. Ah well . . .

Of course there is much to applaud. What a good thing to have people laboring together to produce more than any individual could achieve; how fortunate to have an inherent time limit, and how rare to have begun planning an ample (though not excessive) time in advance; what a useful focus for thought and magnet for job-creating funds. All sorts of people have been stimulated into thinking and talking, writing and researching in ways that they would not otherwise have done. Long may this innovative vigor continue—well, at least as long as debate about and around the project, which will certainly continue after that day when the appropriate editors send off the final proofs and there can be no going back on what is said and how it is said.

I expect I’ll buy all nine volumes—and take them off my income tax—rather than drop broad hints about which volume I’d like from whom as a Christmas present. I also expect to use them, especially the four technical volumes which may be able to squeeze in beside that happily expanding fount of knowledge, the *A.D.B.* Perhaps, as some supporters of the project claim, those involved in a few of the more fanciful of the planned ‘celebrations’ may take the trouble to get their ‘facts’ more probably right than more probably wrong, or even reflect for a moment on the justification for their celebrations.

Maybe, but I do have doubts, more particularly about the five 'year' volumes, though the same criticisms may be made in general terms for the technical volumes.

Much has been spoken and written about the concept of the 'slice' approach for the volumes on the five years strung out like convenient stepping stones. It is indeed a coincidence that the events of each of the years—or at least, of the three middle years—peculiarly reflect certain important tendencies in Australian history. (It is fun to play the game of guessing better years: 1822, 1851, 1915, 1942, 1975?) Given the boldness of the decision to adopt this approach, it has surely been right to disregard the carpers and quibblers, and press on. My own view is that, while the analogy of anthropological description, on which the concept of the 'slice' seems to be based, may be of interest to historians and may, in skilful hands, be a powerful tool for the historian's task, it remains, at base, only an analogy. To take an outstandingly successful example, Graeme Davidson begins *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* with a brilliant descriptive passage that lays out the shape of Melbourne society in 1880: the rest of the book tells the history of rise and fall. An attempt to write history at length as if it were anthropology ends in trivia, however charming and diverting that may be.

It would be nice to look forward to being proved wrong, as well as being charmed and diverted, but I doubt the chance will arise. As I read the emanations from the committees charged with the production of each of the five volumes, they are going in five different directions, impelled in part by the nature of their particular beast and, in part, by their own training and proclivities. I have no objection if the pudding between each slice changes its flavor for, as Bill Barnacle remarks, "What this Puddin' requires is politeness and constant eatin'," but I do not think the proponents of the slice approach envisaged slices of "Christmas, steak, and apple-dumpling Puddin'", however evenly divided. But if one is going to raise the matter, then why not question the equality of the slices? In other words, can we expect more than five co-operatively written, more often than not descriptive and chronologically-limited treatments of various themes in Australian history? That is not quite the 'slice' approach.

One of the odder aspects of the project is the enthusiasm with which some experienced historians have committed themselves to co-operative writing, or at least the promise of it. From

all I've ever heard, and a little experience, that's very hard work, even when it's possible.

The commonest form of multi-authored work is joint authorship, that is a collection of pieces or parts, each written by a single hand. There are many examples of great historical works written on this principle — the Cambridge Histories, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern, the Australian war histories, or the monumental *Geschiedenis van Nederlandsch-Indie* spring to my mind. Even in this case, there are problems enough. My favorite example is the disagreement between R. G. Collingwood and J. N. L. Myres, the joint authors of the first volume of the Oxford History of England, over the reality of Arthur. After Collingwood had completed his section on Roman Britain, and Myres his on the Anglo-Saxon settlements, each without reference to the other, and differing on the question of Arthur's existence, they settled down one evening in Oxford to try and resolve the problem. When the port had run out, and no solution, much less a compromise was in sight, they retired to their respective beds, and have no doubt caused considerable confusion to all those since that time seeking an authoritative view on the question.

Occasionally two authors, often husband and wife, have so much in common that they can evolve a plan of writing in which both contribute in substantially the same way, but the only large-scale example I know of history written by a group is *In Search of Southeast Asia*, edited by D. J. Steinberg. Although each of the six authors is clearly identified, through his other writings, with the history of a particular part of the area covered, the overall result is remarkably uniform — a uniformity achieved, so the story goes, by long and intensive criticism within the group. It may also be worth noting that all are men, and all then held posts of roughly the same rank in broadly similar American universities.

Perhaps, then, it can be done on occasion, though the period, the approach and the personalities of the various volume editors will no doubt influence the extent to which each of these five volumes, as they finally appear, will represent a genuinely co-operative effort. Yet even on the most optimistic assumptions, the results are hardly likely to receive universal acclaim. If, as we tell our students, the writing of history results from a dialogue between an historian and the evidence, then it is not to be wondered at when arguments break out among a babble of voices. Not only do the proclivities of historians vary, but not all use the same sources. Some of these arguments have

surfaced already in the squabbles between Marxists and Whigs at a conference in Canberra. I hope neither side convinces the other of the error of its way, nor that anyone attempts a grand synthesis by a process of tokenism: having said I'll buy the books, I want to stay awake reading them.

If this were all that could be said about the project, then it could be casually dismissed as a fairly harmless game with reviews in the proper journals as final score-cards. Since most of the players would probably be doing something rather similar without the project, one might even claim that it wasn't costing the taxpayer much beyond what he could pay anyway. Unfortunately it's not quite as easy as that, for there is some truth, perhaps more truth than many historians realise, in the claim that we make our own myths. Because myths do matter, we should take heed of what we make.

It's a commonplace to say that the moral assumptions of an historian and the judgement of what deserves discussion reflect an ideology or view of the world. This is what the historian contributes to the dialogue with the evidence. Just as it applies to content, so also it applies to form.

The whole concept of a 'bicentennial history', like all the other 'celebrations' that we can expect in 1988, is inescapably bound up with the view that something important happened in 1788. It did, of course. But to go further and speak of *Australia 1788-1988* is to make another claim: that what happened in 1788 is, in any sense that matters, the origin of whatever we mean by Australia. That is, Australia is, essentially, built on the ideas and ideals of those convicts and their gaolers who stepped, thankful and amazed, into the sixth day of this austral Eden.

But, it will be immediately objected, isn't the first volume going to deal, in one way or another, with all the period before 1788, so that what the reader is led to see is the grand panorama of circumstances, both within and without the continental landmass, which produced the events of 1788? From all I have read of the plans for this volume it does promise well and, as John Hoffman has been reminding us with his work on the interaction between Dutch and British interests, there is much mending of the myths still to be done, even in what is supposed to be a well-explored field. Most obviously though, we can expect a fluent and persuasive account of the Aboriginal past.

This does not, and will not satisfy those Aboriginals with an interest in such matters. They claim,

rightly, that the history of Aboriginals in 1838, 1888, 1938—a bad year—and the present must be told. They, too, are part of the '1788 and all that' history of Australia. Yet one need go no further than the first mention of 'colonialism', a concept which in certain circumstances has contributed greatly to our understanding of essential relationships affecting Aboriginals, to scent the danger. Most myth-makers who imagine that they have just escaped from a colonial relationship gleefully turn the myths of their former masters upside down. It's a passing phase and in each case seems ever briefer. Indeed, there are some signs already of its passing here but, at least for the early 1980s, it has allowed the liberal ascendancy neatly to co-opt some Aboriginal opinion.

If I am right in thinking that the 'anti-colonial' phase of Aboriginal interest is giving way to deeper insights into the historical experience of Aboriginal Australians, then the need to placate certain sections of Aboriginal opinion will not figure among the major worries of our authors. The 'ideology of 1788' has bigger troubles. Two major ones can be distinguished for discussion.

Firstly, the 'ideology of 1788' promotes a Sydney-centred view of Australia. New South Welshmen may like to proclaim their patch the Premier State, but I doubt whether the claim inspires respect south, north or west of the borders. While it's true that four of the other states and the two major territories have at various times been part of New South Wales, the western third of the continent is very conscious that it never was. It has its own anniversaries, and in 1979 celebrated what it took to be its 150th with, amongst much else, a fine series of jointly-authored books. Perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of a centralist view of Australia, for it is not too hard to fit Canberra and its concerns into the saga of the squabbling sibling cities of Sydney and Melbourne. Not surprisingly, or even regrettably, most of the laborers in the mighty history industry of Canberra, which has done so much to inspire and promote the project, have devoted their interest in Australian history more to the 'central' issues than to the 'periphery' of the subject. However, if I read their publications and course offerings aright, those historians teaching the sons and daughters of north Queensland or the West have developed a rather different way of looking at our history.

The issue is not just one of state identity. My own, mainly Scots, ancestors came, some after brief experience of Van Diemen's Land, to the

broad acres of Victoria's Western District—and a Geelong brewery—in the brave days before the gold was found. Admittedly, the Port Phillip district was part of New South Wales, but I don't think any of my great-grandparents got within 500 miles of Sydney. In 1988, my roots in Australia will not yet reach down 150 years. How much shallower are the roots of most Australians, but who is to say that the trees with the deepest roots are the most beautiful, or even the most secure?

It may be worth recalling, because it is usually forgotten, that even the name Australia did not exist in 1788. More cynical observers of material for popular consumption will have noticed how close some Australian government pronouncements on bicentenary matters come to suggesting that even that entity has a rather more considerable antiquity than it has. One wonders how conscious is the manipulation of political ideology.

The second problem with the 'ideology of 1788' is its Britishness, indeed its Englishness. It is true, of course, that the present Queen of Australia is the successor and descendant of George III, to whom the toast was drunk in 1788. Of the symbols of the British connection, the royal anthem has been around from the beginning, though the Union Jack as we know it dates only from the time of Governor King. Yet it is hardly a secret that the potency of these symbols is fading fast in modern Australia and some would advise against laying down a really good port to break out on the eve of the republic. A nineteen-year-old port would produce a good anniversary date. Certainly the thought of a republic is hardly foreign to that sizeable minority of Australians who were born in one. What a pleasure it is that our highest mountain is named after a Pole by a Pole—even if it's not very high and we mispronounce both names horribly.

The extent and speed of the changes in Australian society are perhaps less obvious to those of us who teach in universities than to factory managers and outer-suburban real estate agents.

Few of us in the liberal ascendancy speak any 'foreign' language with fluency or even notice that we don't, for so much of our education has been focused on the English-speaking world and so many of us have even had part of our formal or informal education in the mother-culture of Britain. It is easy enough to assert and accept the authenticity of a derivative Australian culture: it is rather more daunting to face a future without great and powerful friends in cultural, as in other matters.

I admit that I'm often at a loss in persuading those with their eyes on the present and the past that there is any connection between tartufi (unknown in Italy outside the Piazza Navona, but familiar and better in Lygon and Hindley Streets), the varied influences on Peter Sculthorpe's music, and Iwasaki-san at Yeppoon. But I do know that it won't be so hard in 1988, and perhaps then we will all have a clearer sense of where it's all leading. Of one thing, at least, I am very confident: Australia will be looking and feeling less and less British, so to that extent the 'ideology of 1788' will seem more and more anachronistic.

Those of us who have done so well out of the old Australia and its place in the world will probably not do so well in future, and I do not look forward to a less comfortable future with equanimity. However, it seems wise not to burden ourselves with myths of which the usefulness has passed. The task of building myths of current relevance is hard enough. That is why my objection to the 'ideology of 1788' is not merely that my dialogue with the sources I choose to read tells me something different about Australian history. If that were all, then those who support that view of the world—and that means all those prepared to put their name under the banner of a bicentennial history of Australia—would, in my view, be wrong-headed, but I doubt that I would enjoy a world in which I had convinced everyone to agree with me, and there's certainly no danger on that score. I object because I believe the new myths.

books

DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

George Seddon

Geoffrey Bolton: *Spoils and Spoilers: Australians make their Environment 1788-1980* (Allen & Unwin, \$17.50 and \$9.95).

Eric Rolls: *A Million Wild Acres* (Nelson, \$25).

History has made history in Western Australia in the last few years: fourteen volumes in the Sesquicentenary series; *The People of Perth* by Tom Stannage, and *A New History of Western Australia*, edited by Stannage. Geoffrey Bolton wrote two outstanding chapters for the *New History*. In "Black and white after 1897" he provides an account of race relations that contributes greatly to the avowed aim of the volume, that "history ought to be an unending dialogue between the present and the past — that the past ought to be reinterpreted in the light of current preoccupations and that the reinterpretations themselves may generate social thought and action in contemporary society".

Bolton also wrote the final chapter, "Western Australia reflects on its past", which is a brilliant analysis of changes in historiography and in the nature of historical consciousness. Bolton's vivid re-creation of the human face of the Depression in Western Australia (*A fine country to starve in*, 1972) has itself contributed to our changing perceptions of the nature of history and its uses.

Changes in historical consciousness have now become a part of the subject matter of historians who work in Australian history, and this makes it an intellectually exciting field. New questions are asked, and new insights offered. For example, there is a fascinating recent account (Graeme Davison, in press) of the replacement of horse power as a means of urban transport by new technologies, which shows clearly that the pro-

cess was not one in which horses were superseded by superior technology; rather, the energy relations of horsedrawn transport became such that new technologies were demanded. As the cities grew, the work required to bring hay by horse carts from outlying pastures around Melbourne and Sydney became greater than the work returned. An energy analysis of Australian society through time should provide a searching new point of view.

So should environmental history. But who should write it? The catch so far is fairly small. There are some good regional histories, led by *Discovering Monaro* (W. K. Hancock, 1972); a first-rate account of pests in Australia, *They all ran wild*, written by a farmer-poet (Eric Rolls, 1969), followed by Rolls' new work, *A Million Wild Acres: 200 Years of Man and an Australian Forest*. There are some good essays in environmental perception, of which the best are *European Vision and the South Pacific 1768-1850* (Bernard Smith, 1960) and *Mirrors of the New World* (J. M. Powell, 1978). Aboriginal pre-history and urban studies have made very great progress in the last decade, and there is now a choice of good books on both: on the Aborigines, there is *Fire and Hearth* (S. J. Hallam, 1975), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Mulvaney and Golson, eds., 1971), and an outstanding popular account, *The Triumph of the Nomads* (G. Blainey, 1975), all with an ecological bias. The burgeoning literature of the cities is headed by *Urban Development in Australia* (G. M. Neutze, 1977). There are also some invaluable accounts of specific cities, including *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne* (G. Davison, 1978) and *Lucky City: the first generation in Ballarat* (W. Bate, 1978). But there are also many gaps — the sequence of changes in much of Australia is poorly recorded.

Dudley Stamp has shown the English, and J. B. Jackson the Americans, how to read their landscapes and to interpret their meaning, but they have had no equals in Australia, yet.

Geoffrey Bolton's *Spoils and Spoilers* is described on the back cover as "the first comprehensive account of the strange love-hate relationship between Australians and the land they live in". It shows practised literary skill and the balance and range that befits an experienced historian tackling new material: but it is not a success, either in detail or stance.

First to detail. The book is full of mistakes, such egregious mistakes as to be howlers. I mention a few examples, not to score points, but because this is the only way adequately to put the case. To take a geological error, we read that in sewerage the cities:

It often took some time before the less affluent working-class suburbs were connected, and in some areas, such as the limestone on which much of Sydney is built, it was difficult and costly to lay pipes (p. 118).

But Sydney is built on the Hawkesbury Sandstone, not on limestone, which is easily dissolved by water. Limestone (or more precisely, calcarenite) is responsible for much of the gentle topography of Perth, where it is also a preferred building stone. But the Hawkesbury Sandstone is a hard, cliff-forming rock that has dominated Sydney's history in innumerable ways. It is in the shape of a great basin with a rim of high country ringing it — the Royal National Park to the south, the Blue Mountains to the west, Ku-ring-gai Chase to the north. It made Sydney a natural prison, but it was the wrong choice as centre of a free colony. Had the country been surveyed before settlement, Port Stephens would have been a far more logical choice. It was also a sterile prison, in that the sandstone weathers to an infertile, shallow soil that is almost useless for agriculture. For the same reason, however, Sydney is now ringed with great natural parklands. The warm honey color of the stone makes it a fine and enduring building material. It dominates the urban landscape, both early and late, from the Argyle Cut in the Rocks to the Warringah Expressway, one of the world's most dynamic landscapes, and the exhilarating power of the Newcastle Tollway across the Hawkesbury.

This may seem to make too much of a minor slip, but there are many more. "In Adelaide and the surrounding districts a considerable number

of houses and public buildings were constructed of bluestone". "Bluestone", the stone-mason's term for basalt, is used occasionally in and around Adelaide, but it is the typical building stone in Melbourne and Western Victoria; the grey and sombre stone of Pentridge, St Patrick's Cathedral and the City Square in Melbourne. The common building stones in Adelaide are the pale Mount Gambier limestone, and various golden-hued sandstones and quartzites from the Lofty Ranges. There is also a grey-blue sandstone with a high clay content that is sometimes used around Adelaide, and was sometimes called "bluestone", but that needs a footnote. The comment is otherwise misleading for most people.

There are many botanical errors. The Aborigines did well "in an environment without cereal crops and with a poorer diversity of plant life than was accessible to most other cultures". The diversity of plant life in Australia is high, very much higher than that of Europe, which has the remains of a flora greatly reduced by successive glaciation. Aboriginal women spent much of their time collecting seeds from abundant and diverse cereal crops, and this formed a major component of their diet. Aboriginal populations were relatively high in precisely those areas now used for cereal agriculture.

In New South Wales,

building was at first held back by want of suitable timber, but the she-oak and the cabbage tree were soon found useful, and by the first decade of the nineteenth century excellent building timbers were discovered in the Hawkesbury and Illawarra districts.

But the she-oak (*Casuarina* spp) and cabbage tree (*Livistona australis*, a palm) were not used for building, but for roofing. She-oak was split for shingles, and the palm leaves were used for rough thatching. What is perhaps better worth mentioning is that the *Acacia* family got its popular name ("wattle") from early building technology. A closely related legume (*Albizia toona*) was used in 'wattle and daub' construction of saplings plugged with clay, and the name was transferred from the function to the trees used to perform it. As for building timbers, the problem was not a resource problem, but a technology problem. There are excellent hardwoods around Sydney, but the early settlers were not able to fell, dress and cure them easily and adequately, whereas the 'cedars' of the Illawarra were easy to split. They were more properly cabinet timbers than building timbers.

There are many more examples. On page 120 we encounter *Acacia amata* (which means "lovable") rather than *Acacia armata* ("armed with thorns"); and 'tea-tree' is given as "ti-tree" (it was used by Cook and others to make tea in New Zealand). On page 142 we read of the introduction of pasture legumes such as "medicagos", which should read either "medics" or "*Medicago* spp." In Kings Park in Perth the statement that "the bush was all secondary growth after the clearing of the original jarrah" (p. 105) is at least misleading. On these neutral sandy soils over calcarenite, tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) was mixed with jarrah (*E. marginata*) and some marri (*E. calophylla*) over an understorey of *Banksia menziesii* and *Casuarina fraseriana*. Most of the jarrah and some of the tuart were logged, but it is incorrect to say that "the bush was all secondary growth". Invasion by veld grass and a dense understorey growth of *Casuarina* as the canopy was opened are the primary features of disturbance.

One of the most amazing passages to anyone familiar with the natural history of Australia is the following: "Sand drift was noted in the Victorian Mallee as early as 1878, and in 1892 a correspondent in the Victorian Naturalist wrote of districts where bare dunes overwhelmed pasture formerly covered with she-oaks and blackwoods" (p. 39). 'Blackwood' is the common name for *Acacia melanoxylon*, which is restricted to moist gullies in high rainfall areas of Victoria and Tasmania — so the reference must be either to coastal dunes in a high rainfall area remote from the Mallee, or to a rare use of "blackwood" to describe some other tree species, in which case it requires an explanatory footnote (a check of the original reference shows that it relates to the site of the Victorian coastal city of Warrnambool!).

This is a sample only of the errors in this book. An environmental historian cannot afford to make such mistakes. There are many other statements that are misleading, because incomplete. For example, of the introduction in 1925 of the *Cactoblastis* moth Bolton says "in five years nearly all the infested country was cleared", but this was true only in a warm and fairly dry climate. In the cooler tablelands and wet coastal areas of New South Wales prickly pear was little affected, and more than \$1 million was spent on its control in New South Wales as late as 1966.

An even stranger statement, in respect of the need for water conservation, is that "rural Aus-

tralia learned the lesson well. It was only among metropolitan users of water that waste would eventually present the prospect of serious problems" (p. 138). The truth is more nearly the reverse; industrial use of water in Australia, the major metropolitan use, is generally efficient, and rural use is scandalously inefficient, largely because the water is grossly undercosted. Domestic suburban use is extravagant, but only because we have so far been able to afford green lawns. Another partial judgement is that John Sulman introduced town planning ideas to Australia towards the end of the nineteenth century, ideas that might have replaced "the greedy improvisations of the past" (p. 122). This is less than just to Australia's quite remarkable planning achievements in the last century; Bendigo, for example, has few equals as a planned city. Clunes is an even more remarkable example, in that the improvised shanty town of the first decade of mining was pulled down and replaced by a well conceived and laid out township in the late 1860s. But there are very many fine towns of the last century; the Macquarie towns, Goulburn, Bathurst, Orange, Light's Adelaide and La Trobe's and Hoddle's Melbourne, for example.

There are also marks of haste in the writing of *Spoils and Spoilers*: "the smaller wallabies and rat kangaroos were decimated" (p. 100, my italics) — but they were nearly wiped out, not reduced by one-tenth. Tarmac roads in Sydney were clean, but ". . . they reflect heat" (p. 132); they absorb the heat rather than reflect it, and hence remain hot. A good editor should have picked up such details but, because he did not, it is clear that the book is all second-hand. There is no direct observation of the Australian environment, and because this is so, the stance taken by the author also seems open to question.

The stance is indicated by the title, *Spoils and Spoilers*; by some of the chapter headings ("They hated trees") and by editorial comment:

For most Australians living today the public environment will grow steadily worse. It will grow worse because decentralisation is impossible without a degree of regulation which would prove politically intolerable, and because those members of the younger generation who have moved back to the land and expressed an interest in 'organic' agriculture are seen as an uninfluential minority. No acceptable way is known of planning Australia's cities to cope with increasing numbers. Traffic congestion will increase. For most people living in the city and suburbs it will become increasingly difficult to travel to any

other environment within Australia except for holiday resorts which are in effect pieces of transplanted suburbia.' (P. 173.)

Perth, the author's home, is singled out for especially dour comment, such as "Perth profited from its belated growth by reserving in 1894 Kings Park at the City's western edge, but although this was frequently extolled as a far-sighted decision to preserve "a thousand acres of natural bush" near the heart of the city" (p. 105), it isn't natural and they couldn't afford to do anything else, and "In most Australian cities — even in remote and backward Perth" (p. 113).

It is proper to stress the overwhelming dominance of Melbourne in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the insignificance of Perth and Hobart, but the automatic mockery seems pointless, and has nothing to do with conservation. In 1966 Jock Marshall, a great prophet of the embryo conservation movement, published a book with the searing title *The Great Extermination: a guide to Anglo-Australian cupidity, wickedness and waste*. His anger was based on deep conviction and a vast personal knowledge. His tone was never merely peevish.

But there are some good things in *Spoils and Spoilers*. There is, for example, a well balanced account of the history of the conservation movement (chapter 14); the creation of Canberra is given its due as a 'notable triumph' (p. 127), the magnitude of which most Australians obstinately refuse to recognise, although it is in many ways the best in the world of the post-war New Towns, despite some obvious shortcomings. The key importance in Australia of soil conservation is recognised (p. 146) — this is one of the least publicised but most critically important conservation issues in Australia. The bibliography and reading lists at the end are comprehensive and very useful.

But there is also much that is missing. There is no sense of the energy-relations which have played such a key role in determining environmental behavior, nor of the role of technology — the introduction of artesian bores, for example, or good barbed-wire fencing as a means to improved stock management or, for that matter, of the minimum-cultivation techniques that are today transforming Australian agriculture yet again. There is, in short, no sense of the dynamics of change. There is little to be gained by sermonising about *Spoilers* — environmental understanding can be improved, not through moral

superiority, but through a better understanding on the one hand of the imperatives that drive ordinary men to behave in particular ways and, on the other, of the peculiar difficulties of a large, semi-arid, isolated continent with a unique environment for which the rules have to be learnt anew. Australians have not intended to despoil their environment — they have tried rather to make a living in circumstances that have been hard for most people through most of our short history (as Bolton showed very well in *A fine country to starve in*). Perhaps the key problem with this book is that it is premature — there aren't enough good regional histories yet to allow a basis for generalisations about a continent.

Eric Rolls's book, *A Million Wild Acres: 200 Years of Man and an Australian Forest*, is twice the size of *Spoils and Spoilers*, and well illustrated with old photographs. It is based on a lifetime's observation and a good deal of original research. Its subject is the Pilliga forest, the tract of country "between Narrabin and Coonabarabran, between Baan Baa and Baradine", in north central New South Wales. This forest, so rich, natural and primeval in its character, is the outcome of a sequence of events induced by European occupation. The primary event was the cessation of Aboriginal burning, and this part of the story has been told often in the last decade, by Sylvia Hallam (1975), Mulvaney and Gulson (1971), Rhys Jones (1969) and others. The country first encountered by Europeans was generally open and park-like, with well-spaced trees and little undergrowth. There was very little dense forest anywhere in Australia. The dense forest grew up when the controlled burning system of the Aborigines broke down.

But Rolls goes far beyond this general account — all the changes in the Pilliga over the last one and a half centuries are recorded. When the first settlers sent their stock in, much of the area was "grassland dominated in the east by three to four big iron-barks (*Eucalyptus crebra*) to the hectare, and in the centre and west — about half a million hectares — by three to four big pines (*Callitris collumellaris*) to the hectare . . . The first change noticed throughout Australia, and the principal change, was in the texture of the soil. Cloven hooves destroyed the mulch of thousands of years in five to ten years. So the grasses changed. As the Aborigines were displaced they ceased their husbandry of the land by fire. For varying periods over Australia there was no more regular burning. In the Pilliga forest

the period was about twenty-five years from the 1840s to the early 1970s.”

The grasses changed to spear grasses (*Stipa* spp.) and wire grasses with vicious seeds that corkscrew into flesh. So the sheep man began to burn off the grass before the seed ripened. Fire aids the germination of the pine seeds. Then there was a drought in 1877, followed by exceptional rains in 1879:

The old pines seeded well in the lush spring. When the stockowners burnt, pine seedlings came up thickly in the ash. Rat-kangaroos, eaters of seedlings, were in low numbers after the drought. Sheep had destroyed their cover as well as their feed. The pine grew unchecked. In one of the periodic depressions in cattle prices that still trouble Australian graziers, thousands of extra sheep were brought into the forest area. The burning increased. More pockets of pine came away in good years in the early 1880s. Many runs were abandoned. When the 1902 drought ended there were more bursts of pine growth here and there. Scrub extended off the ridges and belts of oak came away.

Thus far the story is fairly simple, but complications follow. Rabbits began to build up, and they ate off the new seedlings, but not the established trees. Then “In 1917 the Pilliga West and Pilliga East State forests were dedicated and the New South Wales Forestry Commission took control. Although fire germinates pine seeds, it kills growing pines of all ages, so the Forestry Commission stopped the burning where it had authority. For forty-five years there was little fresh growth.” (p. 247)

The thick pine grew in belts, but much of the forest was still fairly open. The next major event was a disastrous fire in 1951 after a series of good years and heavy litter accumulation, and the forest “went up like a masonic bomb” said one old resident of Baradine. This fire was followed by germination of close-spaced seedlings throughout the area, and since rabbits by this time were greatly reduced by myxomatosis, the seedlings grew unchecked to form the dense forest of today.

That is the substance of the story, which the author gets to in chapter 8. It is followed by a further six chapters which give an intimate account of the natural history of the forest today, of the people who work in and around it, and of future management options. He does not think much of it as the site for an international airport. As a farmer rather than urban conservationist,

Rolls likes to see land well managed, so he is in favour of controlled burning, and of productive use for forestry, but as a naturalist he is aware of things that foresters have missed in the past — that a reduction in hollow logs through the clearing of ‘useless’ over-mature timber means fewer possums, and few possums means more mistletoe, to the point of destructive infestation; or that elimination of ‘useless’ acacias from the forest leads to a breakdown in the nitrogen cycle.

The first seven chapters of the book are a history of early settlement, from the first explorers, through the squatters to the selectors. Most of the present forest area was cattle or sheep country for nearly a century, and Rolls gives the boundaries and the names of everyone who ever lived within 100 km of Narrabin. These early chapters are like the Book of Genesis, with its endless “And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah”. There is a walk-on-walk-off cast of thousands, and the detail is numbing — but this *is* the Pilliga Book of Genesis, and I think the author was right to put it all in.

The seventh chapter, “The Breealong Blacks: a sinister comedy” stands on its own, perhaps like a masque or interlude. It is a powerful and compassionate tale of two displaced Aboriginals, “offended out of all dignity”, trying to win back their self-esteem by eliminating all those who had offended it. Thus began some bloody murders, followed by a spectacular man-hunt that went on for weeks. Jimmy Governor, the leader, chased through “the central north of New South Wales by more than 200 mounted police, and off and on, by about 2,000 civilians, enjoyed the chase more than anything he had ever been allowed to enjoy”.

We follow the hunt in detail, and the strange, taunting game that Jimmy Governor made of it, leaving blatant clues, and then disappearing for days at a time. But in the end, of course, he was taken, and put on a steamer for Sydney, concluding that:

“Bushranging’s not the fuckin’ game it’s cracked up to be”.

He would never be anybody’s hero. Tomahawks and knives are not heroes’ weapons. Jimmy had frightened far too many people. He was hanged at Darlinghurst gaol.

This chapter is the biggest plum in a pudding full of plums. Rolls loves tidbits of information (so do I); and he is a connoisseur of people, of farming practices and land, of natural history,

and of words, so his tidbits have a broad provenance. Did you know, for instance, that the first deep water bores were put down in Australia by contractors who built their rigs to a French pattern? The word 'artesian' is the adjective from the province of Artois. Or that Kurrajongs "belong to the same family as the cocoa tree that produces cocoa beans. The seeds are higher in caffeine than coffee beans, and settlers frequently used them to make a drink. Leichhardt on his journey to Port Essington drank Kurrajong coffee for several months."

Knowledge of the land shines through every page of this book, and an intimate family relation with it that comes to be shared with the reader as Eric and Joan (his wife) set off to check some early settlers' graves, or prepare the church at Barradine for their "daughter's wedding which excitingly disrupted the finishing of this book" by fulfilling it with big bunches of Kangaroo Grass to show off "its light brown heads on purple stalks".

The stalks may be purple, but the prose is not. Rolls write with restraint. "Lovely" is his most extreme adjective, as in "the lovely Goorianawa Valley". Much of the writing is exact and matter of fact, but more effective for that, as in his account of the introduction of hooved animals and its speedy consequences, for which see pp. 28-29.

Rolls communicates very strongly his sense of the dynamics of the intercourse between man and land. There is always change, some of it for the worse, some for the better. Our history of occupation is short, and the story will never be finished. There have been some great successes — Rolls understands very well the value of scientific research, especially the accomplishments of CSIRO in improving land management, understanding of Australian ecosystems and of natural resources and of their use without damage.

Many opportunities for 'creative ecology' are noted, and there is a great deal of personal observation by Rolls, and of research by CSIRO and others, on the natural grasses and cereal resources of the area. There is still much to be learned about the most effective ways of making use of these resources. The suggestion that we may one day farm kangaroos rather than sheep is a familiar one, but Rolls discusses it as someone who has had long practical experience of both animals, and is familiar with work on other continents which has shown the superiority of native animals.

So this is a positive book. A good note to end

on is Rolls' description of the plains around Warrah:

When they were first seen they were covered with high grasses, mostly panics. The lightly timbered tongues of land between the creeks ran down to the rich spongy plains like green headlands into a brown sea of grass. Low grey islands of Myall were the only trees. Sudden ridges and isolated conical hills broke the flatness.

The plains are now farmland, and as Rolls says, still beautiful.

Scientist, philosopher, historian and environmentalist, George Seddon is Director of the Centre for Environmental Studies at the University of Melbourne, and Dean of the faculty of Architecture and Planning. His books include Swan River Landscapes (1970) and Man and Landscape in Australia (1977).

CLARK'S MASQUE

Marian Aveling

C. M. H. Clark: *A History of Australia*, volume 5 (Melbourne University Press, \$21.80 and \$14.80).

The time scanned by Manning Clark's new volume, 1888 to 1915, has provoked more research and debate than any in Australian history, embracing as it does the great strikes, the depression, the rise of labor and the new liberalism, the achievement of federation and the arbitration system, White Australia, the political emancipation of women, and the beginnings of the First World War. Historians have differed radically in their assessment of the achievements of this period. One line of thought, recently characterized as Old Left, stretching from Hancock to Gollan and beyond (with some associations with Overland), has accepted the self-estimation of Labor and Liberal politicians of the day, seeing the period as the triumph of the national will, and the constitution as the political expression of the people's consciousness (R. Gollan in Greenwood's *Australia*, p. 145).

Clark calls his volume "The People Make the Laws", but he is not associating himself with the optimistic tradition of radical nationalism. Rather his interpretation looks back to the much gloomier note first sounded by Brian Fitzpatrick, and taken up recently by the historians of the New

Left (Fitzpatrick, *The British Empire in Australia*, p. 195):

When the great strikes were over, and there was no longer any doubt as to whether capital could maintain the right to control industry without reference to labour, a *modus vivendi* had to be found by which the beaten unionists could be induced to accept their lowly status.

For Clark the major element in that compromise was the federal compact. He writes of the delegates to the 1891 federal convention (p. 66):

They were men who shared the developers' view of the future of the colonies in Australia . . . They were men looking for political institutions which would handle strikes, lockouts, industrial anarchy, commercial depression with more facility, indeed agility, than six or seven colonial governments and parliaments. They were looking for political institutions that would solve the dilemma of the bourgeoisie: how to reconcile a colonial political democracy, with its approximation to political equality, with the survival of the institutions of private industry and the profit incentive.

For Clark the decades are those of the 'embourgeoisement' of Australia, the falling away of the people from the Australian virtues of mateship and independence to the old British sins of racism, toadyism and chauvinism — from Vercaldine to Gallipoli.

But do not assume that Clark has begun writing class analysis. The continuities with earlier themes and methodology are much stronger than any new departures. Clark has always been too sceptical of the values espoused by his characters — especially the heaven-on-earth men — to adopt a Gollan-type appreciation of the radical dream. The unusual emphasis on bourgeois hegemony in this volume derives mainly from the centrality of the federal compact to its themes — and here Clark is still fighting the battles of 1975. His most biting attacks are reserved for the federalists, men who in his terms set out quite consciously to frame a constitution which "would prevent any radical change in the ownership or distribution of property" (p. 67).

So Clark's use of the language of the New Left does not mean that he is setting out to write another kind of history. For all his references to class and even to family, he still writes an essentially political narrative, or drama, in which the structural elements of society are either propped up as scenery behind the action, or occasionally pushed creaking forward to act as *dei ex machina*.

For those tutored in more analytical modes, this style of presentation can make the story seem to lurch from scene to scene, without explanation. Thus the early disappearance of bush radicalism from the program of the Australian Labor Federation is due only to the "hard-headedness" of labor leaders and the duplicity of the bourgeoisie. There is no questioning of the attitudes of the rank and file. Neither consciousness nor material conditions rate a mention, except perhaps in the symbolic guise of William Guthrie Spence (p. 41): "For him socialism was a question of how many 'bob' a man got in a day. He was an Australian trade unionist."

Women and Aboriginals are notably more in evidence than in earlier volumes, but they too must serve the needs of the dramatic narrative. Where their stories impinge intelligibly on the flow of political events, they fare well enough. Louisa Lawson, previously reviled by Clark, figures quite sympathetically as a public reformer trapped by the private misconceptions of her sex. But the Aboriginals cannot be linked to Clark's major theme of democratic self-assertion, except by their exclusion. Those who suffer history rather than make it, suffer the double ignominy of playing the Greek chorus and playing it mutely, the only words allowed them those of their visitors.

None of this means that Clark's method does not work as he wants it to work. The volume is a dramatic and compelling whole. The first half is bound together by the drama of federation, the second less tightly by the creeping corruption of labor. The paired symbols of Lawson the Australian dreamer and Deakin the Anglo-Australian does serve to link the whole. The old technique of marshalling the swelling tide of events can work splendidly to startle the reader into a new understanding of particular moments in time. Thus Clark juxtaposes the collapse of the 1890 strikes and the opening of the 1891 federation convention with Parkes posturing against the echo of the bushmen threatening to "shoot the floggers down" (p. 60). The opening of the Commonwealth Parliament in 1901 is set against the barbaric performance of the Australian volunteers in South Africa (p. 195). The Boer War serves as the federal turning point of the volume, to foreshadow the grim conclusion.

Another joy of the volume is the vitality of the lives threaded through its pages — and it is remarkable that those unburdened by symbolic luggage are judged least harshly. George Reid,

that witty and quite unprincipled inhabitant of the Kingdom of Nothingness, appears as the capitalist fat-man, and more as a decent, jovial clown. Billy Hughes' nihilist, disciplinarian streak is explained as overexposure to the Queensland sun. Both are treated less critically than the drunken, "muddled" Henry Lawson, teller of truths about Australia too great for the political part of man to bear.

The greatest moral burden is reserved to Alfred Deakin — or "Mr Deakin", as Clark ponderously and selectively calls him for more than three quarters of the volume, having warned us in the preface that "the reason for this emerges from the description of what happened to the public man and what happened to the private man". It first "happens" on page 83, where "Mr Deakin" is judged guilty of perceiving that "Victoria had no need of the Labor dream", her manual laborers being already little capitalists. The public-private split is most fully spelt out at the moment of Deakin's greatest political effectiveness, when, in 1906 (p. 276):

A man committed privately to the proposition that it profited little to gain the whole world, was presiding over a government which equated material well-being with happiness and individual fulfillment. A man who believed the warning that those who wanted to have more than food and raiment would fall into temptation and drown in destruction and perdition was presiding over a people's ambition to achieve just that.

Deakin should have been an ideal character for a Clark tale — charismatic, eloquent, with a divided soul massively in evidence. But the result is a cardboard cutout. Deakin as bourgeois betrayer, Deakin as purveyor of the materialist heaven on earth — these are true enough in their external realities. But the masks distort the man's self-understanding. Clark pays extravagant tribute to Deakin in his epilogue: "no words could do justice to the mighty spirit encased in his native earth, nor to the tragic grandeur of what had happened to the most distinguished son of the Australian-Britons." But the "Mr Deakin" nomenclature seems to me less noble than that. Rather it serves as a device to isolate and distance a character whose vitality and ambiguity threatens to burst the bounds of Clark's elaborate masque.

Marian Aveling teaches history at Monash University. Her most recent book is Western Voices, documents in Western Australian social history.

BULL, MAGPIE AND OUTER

John Tittensor

Serge Liberman: *On Firmer Shores* (Globe, \$9.25).
Garry Disher: *Approaches* (Neptune, \$6.95 and \$3.95).
Chris Wallace-Crabbe: *Splinters* (Rigby, \$9.95).

Behind each of Serge Liberman's stories stand the millions of Jewish dead bequeathed us by the Third Reich, their voices still resonant in the minds and lives of those who survived. "God died in Auschwitz", one character says, reminding us that for him this world can never again be an acceptable, inhabitable place, that the life he has managed to preserve can now be no more than a protracted version of what befell friends and loved ones in the death camps.

Liberman's concerns, as he explores the strange, isolated world of Jewish survivors living in Melbourne suburbia after the war, are of an openly humanist kind, and his belief in the healing power of art and of love freely given is on every page. It is no coincidence that the first-person narrator utilised throughout is often a doctor or a writer: each has his own intimate involvement with the question of death, his own need to report on the investigations his calling imposes. Yet this narrator is for Liberman much more than a mere observer or reporter: he is a necessary intermediary between these people of the old world, uprooted and filled with a pain too raw to communicate, and the callow, uncomprehending inhabitants of the new.

Clearly then, these are stories with large ambitions and Liberman has not lacked the daring the enterprise calls for. In "Plaques", perhaps the best of the collection, this element of conscious risk-taking is beautifully exploited: in the course of a controlled, simple narrative — a successful businessman and philanthropist discovers that the lover he abandoned years before has borne him a retarded son — the author moves on the razor-edge of melodrama, of bathos, then turns away effortlessly from both in the final sentence, leaving the reader with a lesson in ambivalence and irony that makes him laugh even as it jabs at his conscience.

One of the special qualities of this book is its authoritative and for the most part unsentimental establishing of the life and culture of its characters. In "The Kitchen" five families share the same grimy inner-suburban house amid banter, bickering, an attempted suicide and readings of his own poetry by Nussbaum the housepainter. Nussbaum saves enough to buy a house in a

Carlton that for Australians is still a slum, but on the verge of moving in dies after a mildly anti-semitic affray at work. The other residents have seen too many deaths for the pattern of their lives to be much altered by this one, but for the narrator, a child at the time, Nussbaum's memory does not fade; as he grows older and finds himself beginning to write poetry, he realises that Nussbaum has been the trigger for his own creative urge, and that what he is writing is both an epitaph to "that saintly gentle ill-fated man" and an attempt to preserve and pass on his spirit.

This is not the only story in which creativity becomes for the young a way of escape from an environment seen as hostile and philistine, and no Anglo-Australian will be able to read "Two Years in Exile" without being chilled by the totality of the rejection of life and culture here in the forties.

On Firmer Shores is not a flawless book. An occasional loss of control obliges the reader to hear, for example, that "Jagged teeth of shame gnaw at the marrow of my being"; a similar tendency to overstatement and melodrama sometimes mars the dialogue in otherwise convincing stories; and the last half-dozen or so pieces — notably "Tinsel and Dust", in which Dieter and Morry play out German-Jewish conflict in an intolerably trite fashion — could have been omitted to the benefit of the whole.

To welcome Liberman merely as a promising writer would be unfair: in scope, intention and commitment the best of *On Firmer Shores* is so far in advance of most local short fiction as to be hardly related to it. And if the writing — handicapped perhaps by an excessive attachment to the first-person narrator — has not yet achieved the depth, the breadth, the agonised sureness of a classic story like Stanley Elkin's "Criers and Kibitzers, Kibitzers and Criers", there certainly remains the sure indication of better work to come.

Garry Disher's *Approaches* is largely what people from Sydney like to call 'discontinuous narrative'; within the genre its structure shows a certain originality, but beyond this the collection has little to say for itself. Imprecision as epitomised by "They stopped beneath a looming rugged hill, really a small mountain" is its long suit, and the offhand, downbeat tone of much of the writing too often sounds like mere complacency. What is absent from these stories set in Australia, the USA, South Africa is that necessary spark of intellec-

tual struggle, that vigorous coming to grips with people, events, ideas, language. A story like "Wipeout", with its deliberate bittiness, its Bazza Goes to Uni dialogue and its minimally significant conclusion irritates by its unearned sense of its own importance; and in this volume it is far from alone.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe has at his disposal an elegance and flexibility of style that has eluded Garry Disher, but the way he has chosen to deploy it in *Splinters* is not going to be to everyone's taste. This book is a conceit rather than a novel, and many readers will take issue with its deliberate withholding of most of the conventional novelistic pleasures; nor will their indulgence be regained by the aggressive reticence of "In an outer suburb, the name of which the novelists forgets . . ." or "Here the novel goes to sleep for the night."

Most of what is bad about *Splinters* comes from the near-perversity of its structure, from its refusal to let itself follow up in any detail the characters it creates or the issues it raises. The source of the technique is the book's epigraph, drawn from William James: "We see that the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities . . . Other sculptors, other statues from the same stone . . ." One cannot help feeling that the statues envisaged were to take a more complete form than is permitted them here.

On the other hand, what is good about *Splinters* is clearly the result of the author allowing himself to be a little more himself: Jack and Gael driving to Kennedy Airport to watch the passengers is light, funny and shrewdly done; Anita abruptly giving boorish Des the push is harsher but still entertaining. There is a wry reality about these people that has to dissipate its energy struggling against unnecessary restrictions; it is when it breaks these bonds that *Splinters* is at its most pleasing.

John Tittensor, writer and critic, lives at St Andrews, Victoria.

A BEANBAGGER WHO ESCAPED

Denison Deasey

Rosemary Crossley and Anne McDonald: *Annie's Coming Out* (Penguin Books, \$4.95).

This is the remarkable story of Anne McDonald, who was placed in St Nicholas' Hospital, Melbourne, when she was three, as a sufferer from cerebral palsy. It was also assumed that she and the other children there were severely retarded.

Little effort seems to have been made to stimulate the patients, and the official view was that they could not communicate. But ten years later, Rosemary Crossley, a twenty-nine year old country girl with a strong character and independent frame of mind, went to work at the hospital as an assistant. She was a graduate in Arts.

This was in 1974, and change in the hospital began from this point. Rosemary discovered a means to help Anne, and other severely handicapped children, to communicate, read, and spell. Hospital authorities were helpful at first, but sceptical about Rosemary's claim that Annie was beginning to spell and read. When Rosemary began to receive support outside the hospital and the Health Commission, the argument became public and the press printed sensational stories.

The Supreme Court of Victoria finally ruled that Anne McDonald, at the age of eighteen, was an adult person able to communicate her wishes. She left the care of St Nicholas in 1979 to live with Rosemary and her friend, Chris Borthwick, and when she left her home of fifteen years, "no one said goodbye".

Anne's recollections of life in St Nicholas, and Rosemary's observations, make uncomfortable reading. In the wards the nurses, assuming the patients had no understanding, discussed them freely and colorfully. The children were, because of their handicaps, unable to control their functions. They were put to bed at four in the afternoon (and some of them were teenagers). They existed in a twilight world inside this great progressive city, and only Rosemary Crossley knew that some of them were intelligent, sensitive human beings.

Annie's Coming Out is an upsetting book. Her fellow-patients are still inside, and Rosemary Crossley is not allowed to work among them.

This is also an unfinished book, in some ways. It sketches the beginnings of Annie's life *outside*,

and we want to know more about the improvement and changes in Annie's health since 1979. And what of the other people involved in the drama, Annie's parents and their dilemma?

The story of handicapped people is very much the story of those who have cared for them. When Rosemary does tell us something of the feelings she and Chris Borthwick were sharing, and gives quotations from her diaries (pages 160 and 161 for instance), it is enlightening. "Calm and controlled relationships are not my forte," she writes. "I don't like the responsibility inherent in close ties which is the main reason I don't want to have children."

In spite of the difficulty involved in being endlessly patient and affectionate with Annie, they made their choice to go on, and offer her a home. A fuller account of their life with Annie might bring them some of the recognition they deserve for their achievement.

Victoria's "institutional heritage" came under sharp criticism from the Premier's Committee on Mental Retardation, in 1975. Miss Crossley herself gave evidence to that committee on conditions at St Nicholas — particularly about the evening meal-times (3.30 p.m.). Yet neither the Committee nor the Ombudsman were able to change anything she had described.

Now there is a plan to sell the hospital (which is of course on prime real estate land in Carlton) and to place the patients in "community-based homes". The Premier's Committee indeed proposed this solution six years ago.

Yet the surviving Beanbaggers are still inside, and the dead weight of our complacency is probably what keeps them there, even after the Year of the Handicapped.

Denison Deasey drives a Melbourne taxi and is working on a life of the explorer Warburton.

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