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BUENAVENTURA DURRUTI'S FUNERAL

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IMMIGRATION AND THE
BLAINEY DEBATE

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FRANK MOORHOUSE

Buenaventura Durruti's Funeral

A compilation of references and encounters, plans for a pilgrimage, a love story, notes on the problem of "discipline of indiscipline," and two footnotes to a poem.

The American Poet's Visit. After lunch over coffee and stregas at Sandro's the poets showed their pens. Two of the poets had Lamys, another a Mont Blanc, and another a pen from the New York Museum of Modern Art which looked like a scalpel. A fifth said he thought he'd "get a Lamy."

They handled each other's pens, writing their favorite line from Yeats or Eliot or whoever. "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world," one wrote. He had not seen poets at this before.

He then made a reluctant presentation of a book of Australian stories to the visiting American poet Philip Levine, for whom the lunch had been organised. He said the book contained the story "The American Poet's Visit" and that he had been induced to present it by his friends as a "*joke Australien*."

"Did Rexroth ever read the story?" Levine asked after being told that it was about the American poet Rexroth.

That wasn't known. It is necessary, he explained, to comprehend the Australian condition or what was then the Australian condition. When we here, he gestured at the table, were all younger, we wrote from a special freedom and perspective which came from feeling that we lived outside the "real world." For us, Europe and the US were the world. We lived somewhere else. When we wrote we did not conceive that people from the real world would ever come to read our work. We could write about them without fear of being read.

"That's right," said John, "without the fear of being read by anyone really."

"Further, people from the real world were, paradoxically, people from literary history and they had a fictional gloss to them – you were not of the world of Meanjin."

"Meanjin?" asked Levine.

"Our literary world, I mean."

"It's the Aboriginal word meaning 'rejected from the New Yorker'," someone else said.

"Hence our special freedom."

Levine, or someone at the table, said that now someone else would be able to write another story – "The Second American Poet's Visit."

"Ah there cannot be another story because we are being read now by the people from 'out there'."

Everyone fell thoughtfully glum at this observation.

"But when the first story was published the editor thought 'Rexroth' was a pseudonym for a 'real person'."

"And Philip isn't the second poet to visit – there's been Duncan, Ginsberg, Simpson."

"Kinnel, Levertov, Snyder."

"Strand."

"The Harlem Globe Trotters."

"We are now part of the poetry night-club circuit."

"The poets arrive – we look them up in Norton's *Anthology of Modern American Verse* so that we can quote them a line or two of their poetry."

"Speak for yourself," said John.

" 'In this cafe, Durruti,
the Unnameable
Plotted the burning of the bishop of Saragossa.' "

"Very good," said Levine, "they are indeed my lines from Norton's."

Levine said that although Norton was laboriously footnoted for students there was no footnote for his poem "The Midget" to explain who "Durruti" was or the "Archbishop of Saragossa."

"Do you people know?"

We shook our heads expectantly.

He wrote down the name Durruti and the name Archbishop of Saragossa on a table napkin because of the noise in the restaurant and we passed it around, reading the names.

A biography of Durruti is reviewed in TLS. He wrote to his friend Cam Perry in Montreal, a professor of hypnosis, and asked him to get the biography of Durruti which was published in Montreal by Black Rose Books and reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement.

He said in the letter to Cam, "... by the way, here in Australia the reviewers are saying that I'm not 'really' decadent. I didn't spend all that money and go through all those squalid situations at the Royal George Hotel to be told by reviewers that I'm not decadent. You were there – write to them ..."

He wrote jokingly to Levine, now back in California, saying that there was a biography of Durruti and that Norton should be informed so that he could make a footnote in the anthology.

The Archbishop. The Archbishop of Saragossa was shot dead in 1923 as an anarchist act – "a cleansing social act."

He was a key figure in the repression of that city. Popular rumor said that he held weekly orgies at a convent which in itself seemed to be something of a redeeming feature of the Archbishop. When he died he left a fortune to a nun who then deserted her order.

At the time of the shooting Durruti and the Los Solidarios (an Anarchist commando group) were blamed – "credited"? – and while they almost certainly planned the execution the actual shooting was probably done by Francisco Ascaso, a close friend of Durruti. But it was said that Ascaso was the stone, Durruti the blade.

In Sydney they always said assassination was ultimate censorship. But things were tougher in Saragossa.

Durruti lived in Barcelona. Barcelona he knew visually from Michelangelo Antonioni's film "The Passenger" and Luis Bunuel's film "That Obscure Object of Desire" and he knew too about the Barcelona telephone exchange and Durruti from his reading about the Spanish Civil War. There'd been no real point in telling Levine or the poets that he did know who Durruti was.

In 1936 Durruti and the anarchists gained control of the Barcelona Telefonica and collectised it. The communists at this time were plotting to destroy the power of the anarchists and the battle for the exchange was part of this power struggle. When calls came to Barcelona for "the government" the anarchist operators would instruct the callers in anarchist theory and tell them there was no "government" recognised by the anarchists in Barcelona. Although it slowed down telephone calls the control of the exchange was useful: a "school" for the anarchists and their callers. And it should be mentioned that, the telefonica aside, most functions run by the anarchists were well run.

"The Passenger" was a special film for him. "The Passenger" is about a journalist played by Jack Nicholson who is approaching forty and who takes on the identity of a casual acquaintance after the acquaintance dies while they are together in a hotel in North Africa. Nicholson lives out the man's life engagements.

It is in Barcelona that Nicholson meets a young student – Maria Schneider – who involves herself with him on his drive along the Spanish coast from Barcelona through Almeria, Purellana, and Algeciras. He keeps the final appointment in the Hotel de la Gloria and meets the other man's destiny – he is shot dead in that hotel.

The film was special because he'd been approaching forty when he'd met a seventeen-year-old school-girl in Adelaide – he'd been there for the Festival. On erotic impulse he had asked her to drive with him to Darwin – 5000 kilometres clean across the continent and back again. She had said without hesitation, "yes."

"Your mother?"

"She'll be OK."

They had driven the first thousand kilometres at 160-180 km an hour hardly speaking, just observation and occasional biographical anecdote, straight across the desert and made love at the small town of Athraroola in a motel which had not yet been cleaned by the staff but they could not wait.

She had been transfixingly erotic for him and the silent interplay was intricate – uniquely so, and he'd told her this. She took the compliment and said gracefully, "my body is young but I know some things about its pleasures." She said she thought she understood "sexual mood."

On that drive across the first thousand kilometres his desire for her had grown unbearable and he had stopped the car out in the desert and suggested they walk for a little, with the intention of making physical connection with her.

They'd stood there in the desert. He had moved to kiss her but received no signal of permission.

"Look," he said, "I can't take this uncertainty, my body, my head can't take it – you will make love with me when we reach the next town?"

"Of course I will," she said, "let's go" and then moved back to the car before he could take her in his arms. He'd felt the pact should have been sealed affectionately. But then he'd thought that maybe she did not go in for "affectionate sealing of pacts."

In the motel they had not drunk alcohol which was unusual for him but he'd felt no need. After their first love-making she'd come to him and coaxed him back into her saying, "Give me more," and he'd had no trouble making love to her again.

Despite the intricacy of their silent interplay she'd had difficulty talking to him at times and he had had to 'make' the conversation.

Though during the drive across the desert before the love-making but after the pact, she had turned to him and asked, teasingly, "have you read Lolita?"

'Yes," he said smiling, "have you?"

"Yes and I like it. I identified."

"So did I."

In Darwin he'd found a copy of Turgenev's *First Love.*

"In this book," he said, "the father competes with the son for the love of a girl."

"Who wins?"

"The father. It is a book which you read firstly from the son's point of view and then later in life you read it from the father's point of view. A male does. I don't know how it reads from a female point of view."

'I'll tell you," she said.

A year later she said, "you know you gave me Turgenev's *First Love* to read and you said you didn't know how it read from 'a female point of view'?"

He said, yes, he remembered.

"Well," she said, "it reads acceptably well from this female's point of view," and she laughed, half privately, and he guessed he was being compared with her young boy friend.

He had continued to see her in the years that followed during her vacations from university and they'd meet in motels somewhere in Australia. They had other long drives in different places in three States. He had not been shot in any hotels. Inevitably he would be at the motel first awaiting her. She would arrive with her sausage bag, which she called her "parachute bag," stuffed with a few things and many books which would never be opened during the trip.

They would always refer to "The Passenger" and recall favorite details.

He had during one of their trips talked to her about a possible journey to Spain as a homage to the Spanish anarchists and to "The Passenger" and to Bunuel.

She had laughingly refused to take the idea of a pilgrimage to Spain seriously. "Why should I know anything about the Spanish Civil War – except to know who were good and who were bad?" He did not know whether it was because she thought the pilgrimage unlikely or whether she didn't want to be too much a part of his fantasies.

"There are the 'real' lessons of the Spanish Civil War," he said, but she did not pick up the question and he refrained from overloading her with his preoccupations.

He on the other hand had taken the pilgrimage too seriously. He said to her a few times that they would do it the year he turned forty and she graduated.

He listed the places they would visit. Madrid University which the Durruti Column had defended and near where Durruti had been shot; the Ritz Hotel where he had been taken to die; the Hotel Victoria in Valencia where Auden and the others drank. The Hotel Gaylord in Madrid from *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. The Hotel Continental where Orwell stayed during the war. The Hotel Christian where Hemingway's *Fifth Column* is set.

"And the Ritz in Madrid is one of the twenty leading hotels of the world."

But she would stop the conversation before it got too far.

In a motel dining room in some Victorian coastal town one night she said, "but if we did that you'd be shot in a hotel room like Jack."

"Do you really think that?" He took her hand.

And then a darkness passed over her face and she said she did not wish to talk about it, as if she had forebodings.

Hypnotic coercion and compliance to it. Instead of the biography of Durruti, Cam sent him a copy of one of his academic papers published in the *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*. It was about the potential of hypnosis to coerce unconsenting behavior. One position asserts that coercion is possible through the induction of distorted perceptions which delude the hypnotised person into believing that the behavior is not transgressive. The other position asserts that where hypnosis appears to be a causal factor in coercing behavior, the other elements in the situation, especially a close hypnotist-client relationship, were probably the main determinants of behavior.

He read the paper with delight from the things people did with their lives and from the way these things entered his life.

Cam said the Durruti book would follow.

Up at the Journalists' Club. Up at the Journalists' Club he met some old friends from his cadetship days and following a joke about the anarchist and the Barcelona Telephone Exchange – a joke they'd been enjoying since those days – they argued over what was the last battle fought in the Spanish Civil War.

He said he was more interested in the 'real' lessons of the Spanish Civil War.

"The Spanish Civil War is not behind us," he said suddenly, "it is in front of us."

"The bitch is on heat again," Barry said.

"No," he said, "I mean that it is not the war with the fascists which is ahead of us but the war between the free left and the authoritarian left."

"Poland," said Tony.

"The real lesson of the Spanish Civil War is that in this country not everyone who calls themselves Left is Left."

"We still have to break the haughty power of capital," Barry said.

"We are breaking capital's haughty power."

"Oh yeah?"

Tony said that Durruti was nothing more than a pistolero.

" 'The anarchists were generous but they were still political gangsters'," quoted Barry.

"Obscure Object of Desire," he and Tony answered simultaneously.

"Correct," said Barry, "I think Tony was a fraction faster."

"There was the defence of the University of Madrid."

"Durruti's Column fled – proving the fundamental unreliability of anarchist formations," said Tony.

"But they were the last days of Simple Anarchism," Barry said wistfully.

"What of the moral bigotry of anarchism – certain unpalatable behavior towards homosexuals and prostitutes," said Tony.

"Admitted," said Barry.

"Sydney Anarchism eradicated moralism and replaced it with Higher Libertarianism."

"Of course." They all laughed.

"Go to the communes for moral bigotry."

"I am still a Friend of Durruti," he said.

"I can't believe this," Robyn said, "Am I in the Journalists' Club in Sydney in the eighties and still hearing this? I can't believe this conversation."

"Durruti was the front man of anarchism in Spain but it was Ascaso who was the theoretician. I am a friend of Ascaso," said Tony.

"Let us drink to the discipline of indiscipline which must guide us all in every action," he said.

"Pinch me, am I dreaming?" said Robyn.

"I drink to Cantwell who was an anarchist shot by the Viet-Cong."

"An anarchist who worked for *Time*."

"There are many anarchist traditions."

Later he said to Barry that he had never quite understood all the ramifications of the "discipline of indiscipline."

"There is much to be said on that subject." Barry said but did not elaborate.

The Tide is High. He received a letter from her saying that in her final vacation she was working with the Elcho Island Aboriginal Crafts centre. "I have been thinking of you big mobs – as they say up here – and the tide is high, as Deborah Harry says, and I have a feeling that it is getting

close to that trip to Spain you talked so much and so often about. And you'll be turning forty soon. I'm planning my Grand Tour now that I'm nearly finished."

He was deeply pleased that she had raised the trip to Spain. He wrote to her asking who was Deborah Harry?

He joined her on Elcho Island and they fished for parrot fish and speared mud crabs and cooked on hot coals.

In a motel in her home city after their return they'd made love, she had said that she had to go soon because her boyfriend was waiting. She had looked at him with her childlike eyes and said, "will you want me again before I go?"

"Yes, I will – now that you have asked me – it was the asking which aroused me."

"I thought it would arouse you," she said, smiling with knowingness.

Searching for Durruti. He wrote to Levine in California, "I'm really writing to pursue the subject of Durruti. I have been planning a pilgrimage to the Spanish Civil War and would like to include an anarchist pilgrimage. My guess is that the poem "The Midget" is set in a cafe that 'could have been' the cafe in which Durruti plotted? Or is it a well known cafe? (I guess I sound like an MA student)."

A curious day. He wrote to her, "It looks as if our Spanish pilgrimage may then be shaping up. I had a curious day. I was working on the Buenaventura Durruti story (which is dedicated to you). It is a long way from finished but it is a collection of references about Durruti, Barcelona, "The Passenger" and you. Last night I met some old mates from my cadetship days at the Journalists' Club and we argued about the Spanish Civil War – today your letter came saying that you might be ready to go to Spain with me. I did not think that you ever took the trip to Spain seriously . . ."

The Discipline of Indiscipline (I). The next week in the New York Review of Books he read a reference to the problems of Durruti and the discipline of indiscipline. Bernard Knox who had been in the International Brigade said, "Madrid in the winter of 1936-37 was a remarkable place. The word epic has often been used of the events of that time but there was also a surrealist quality to it. I have often thought since that Luis Bunuel, if he had been there, would have felt quite at home."

Knox said that Durruti created the idea of "a discipline of indiscipline." He had once talked with the Durruti Column to discuss passwords and patrol routes. Knox said he was plied with cigars, chorizo sausage and wine " . . . needless to say the passwords we had arranged were quickly forgotten and they fired on our supply column that night . . . and when Durruti led his men back into the line he was shot dead and the Column disintegrated . . . the Anarchist columns . . . had shown almost superhuman courage in the fight in Barcelona but facing experienced troops in the field they were soon outmanoeuvered and outflanked, whereupon they ran like rabbits . . ."

William Herrick took issue in the next New York Review of Books. "There isn't a fighting force on earth whether communist, anarchist, fascist or whatever, that has not at one point or another run like rabbits."

Knox replied, "Mr Herrick is quite right about running like rabbits; as anyone who has lived through a war or two has done so more than once – sometimes it is the right thing to do. But only discipline, organisation and a proper chain of command will enable troops who have run like rabbits to reform and consolidate; the anarchists had none of these things, in fact they despised them."

The People Armed. The Book *The People Armed*, a biography of Durruti published by Black Rose Press, arrived from Cam.

"I have just had a real blockbuster of a paper accepted but the title was rejected. I thought the title 'Dualistic Mental Processes in Hypnosis' was quite couthful. Sorry to hear that you are not considered decadent enough. Anytime you want a reference on the unmitigating squalor and depravity of your mind, let me know, I'd be delighted."

The Discipline of Indiscipline (II). Durruti had about 6000 men in his Column. Each group of 25 had a delegate. Each four groups formed a Century. There was a Committee of Centuries made up of all delegates. A committee of Sections made up of delegates from the Centuries and finally a Column War Committee consisting of all delegates of the Sections and the General-Delegate of the Column – Durruti.

A Military Technical Council of experts made the strategic plans and submitted these to the War Committee.

The War Committee had a bureaucracy for services such as statistics, propaganda, intelligence and so on.

There were two commando units known as the Sons of the Night and the Black Band.

The Durruti Column refused to submit to military law imposed by the Republican and Communist forces.

Orwell said that the Column was more reliable than one might have expected. Bullying and abuse were not tolerated. The normal military punishments existed but were only used for serious offences.

Durruti wanted his army to be a model for the society they were fighting to create.

Journalists would sometimes question the men of the Durruti Column, "you claim to have no leaders yet you obey Durruti."

The militia men always replied, "we follow him because he behaves well."

She begins her Grand Tour. He received his first letter from her. "I am in Bangkok wishing you were here with a hip flask full of brandy and some crooked conversation . . . I will be an experienced traveller by the time we meet up in Spain . . ."

It was fine cognac they'd drunk from his flask, not just brandy.

There was a new articulate confidence in her letters.

He remembered once chiding her for what he saw as her negativity and conversational passivity. He'd shouted at her. But then he'd read Henry James' *Match and Ward*

– a novel about a thirty-year-old man who adopts a ten year-old girl to raise as his wife. The narrator finds the adolescent girl "defiantly torpid" but then realises that "her listless quietude covered a great deal of observation and that growing may be a soundless process."

The death of Durruti. There are a number of stories about the death of Durruti – that he accidently shot himself with his own rifle, that he was shot by an "uncontrollable" who resented any discipline including even the discipline of indiscipline. But his chauffeur said that he was hit by a stray bullet during the battle for the University of Madrid.

Durruti was taken to the Ritz Hotel then being used as an anarchist hospital where he died on 21 November, aged forty.

An anarchist funeral. Before the funeral the sculptor Victoriano Macho came with other artists of the Intellectual Alliance to make a death mask of Durruti.

Hans Kaminski, a German journalist, described the funeral. "It is calculated that one inhabitant out of every four lined the streets. It was grandiose, sublime, and strange. Because no one led the crowds there was no order or organisation. Nothing worked and the chaos was indescribable . . . Durruti, covered by a red and black flag, left the house on the shoulders of the militia men from his Column. The masses raised their fists in a last salute. The anarchist song "Son of the People" was chanted. It was a moving moment. But by mistake two orchestras had been asked to come . . . one played mutedly, the other very loud and they didn't manage to maintain the rhythm . . . the orchestras played again and again the same song; they played without paying attention to each other . . . the crowds were uncontrollable and the coffin couldn't move . . . the musicians were dispersed but kept reforming claiming the right to play. The cars carrying the wreaths could not go forward and were forced to drive in reverse . . . it was an anarchist burial – that was its majesty."

In 1981 a pop group called the Durruti Column was formed in London.

The location of the graves. Levine wrote " . . . for me the place to which I make my pilgrimage is the grave of Durruti which sits between the graves of Ferrer Guardia and Ascaso. How to find it? In the Great Cemetery behind the fortress is a small Protestant burial ground. Between the bulk of the Catholic Cemetery and this little annex is a spot at the edge of a hill and there the three graves sit, the gravestones having been removed. But people come secretly and write on these dry concrete slabs 'CNT' and 'FAI', '*Viva anarquista*' and the names. It was illegal to take photographs of the graves . . ."

Two old picnickers directed Levine to the graves.

"Durruti," said the man. "I was on his side."

The old woman hushed him.

Francisco, I'll bring you red carnations. In Levine's poem for Durruti's closest friend Ascaso, he says that Ascaso was a stone, Durruti a blade.

. . . the first grinding and sharpening
the other . . .
in the last photograph
taken less than an hour before
he died, stands in a dark
suit, smoking, a rifle slung
behind his shoulder, and glances
sideways at the camera
half smiling . . .

The card, "I have fallen in love." A card arrived from London showing "Ulysses deriding Polyphemus" by Turner. It showed Ulysses and his men escaping in their ships from the blinded Polyphemus who, silhouetted against the sky, is throwing rocks at them (see Book IX of the *Odyssey*). They were escaping from the land of the Cyclops, "a fierce uncivilised people who never lift a hand to plant or plough . . . have no assemblies for the making of laws, nor any settled customs . . ."

She was now in London on her Grand Tour and the card said with irony, "I am sorry but I can't go with you to Spain. I have fallen in love and decided to 'settle down.' I am, after all, 21 now." She had written in as a second thought "physically yours as ever, please do not communicate."

Once he had bumblingly tried to describe their relationship to her, to give it shape. She had stopped him, saying, "It is a love without definition but not without art."

He studied the card. Was she escaping from him, a blinded Polyphemus?

Spanish Refugee Aid. Anarchists fought not only in the armies of the Spanish republic but also in the Second World War. Some in the French resistance others as regulars in the Division Le Clerc. Some of them are still refugees unable or unwilling to go back to Spain after all these years. The old and the infirm are looked after by an organisation called Spanish Refugee Aid. Contributions can be sent to SRA Inc, 80 East Eleventh Street, New York, NY, USA, 10003.

How did the card affect him? He had often tried to describe to her the distinction between his attraction to her as a "person" and his attraction to her as an "archetype." She had been a perfect example of "the beautiful young girl." And he had seen her growing as a person. She was probably right that the archetype was now left behind. She was right to have had forebodings about him dying in the Hotel de la Gloria. They had talked about suicide. When he had discussed the pilgrimage with her he had thought but not said, that he really might die there in the Hotel de la Gloria, that that might be a good point to conclude it.

Now she had diverted him from that appointment with the Hotel de la Gloria.

Compensation for angst. He had told her once on a beach during one of her depressions that he'd found a lot of good things in life which compensated for angst. She'd said,"oh yeah, what are they?"

He'd told her of the surprises and serendipity of the life of inquiry, infinite, unimaginable twistings of sexuality, about the infinite imagination and its works, about the weary exhilaration of negotiation, the elegancy of the deal, and about the revelations of hunting and of the camp.

"But you once said volupte was the only solace!" she said, laughing at him.

"That too."

What would he be able to tell her now, now that he was forty.

He'd have to say that while all those things were still true, on some days it was only a tepid curiosity and a tired-hearted buccaneering which carried him on. But maybe they could explore the discipline of indiscipline together. And he could show her how their relationship had become two footnotes to a poem.

SIX YEARS OLD

Others were still kept in their sleep
by four angels
guarding the bed's each corner,
but mine it seemed had flown away.
They had flown away with a tempered regret,
right through the ceiling,
out, away into purpose.
I didn't hear their wings depart
but a dressing gown on a door revealed terror.

My work on the earth was to stare it down
and say nothing.
Orphans taste wan distinction,
my work in life was to negotiate
each new regime with its wisdoms about
manners, teeth, education.
Cleanliness in every house smells different,
the kindnesses and cookery taste foreign.

I was used to my mother's ways,
my talisman that one day I could re-interpret
every chance word of hers I would remember.
And it is possible to do
if one keeps to the evidence,
a couple of dozen sentences,
so that, on the whole, I have not suffered
as once I thought.
Memory and fair inferences have helped me to know her
character
and to read no more than is evident
in her needlework or her Hemingway.

I also remember a woman who was childless
who got me alone, a sullen child,
and tickled me on an enormous bed.
How hilarious we were for twenty minutes.

ROBERT HARRIS

MORRIS LURIE

The Night We Ate the Sparrow

It was worse; When I woke up that morning for a moment there was nothing – I was normal, perfect, it had never happened – and then I must have moved or something because suddenly there it was, just as before, that steady painful throbbing. And I didn't need to touch it to know, or to look in a mirror. No, it wasn't going to just go away. It was bigger. It was worse. Somehow I got up, somehow I got dressed, somehow I made myself some sort of breakfast – thin instant coffee on my impossibly slow hotplate, brittle biscuits, crumbly cheese – and then I put on my boxy acrylic fake-fur overcoat and went down to the Finchley Road to look for a doctor. I was twenty-eight years old, an Australian in London in the Swinging Sixties, Carnaby Street, the Beatles, dolly birds, the centre of the world, new excitements every day. The week before I had seen John Lennon climbing into his famous black-windowed Mini, in the middle of Soho, as plain as day. And this week, out of nowhere, I had been struck down by a Biblical affliction, the lowest of the low.

A boil.

A boil on the backside.

A boil on the bum.

It was the day before Christmas. Finchley Road was busy and bustling, people all over the place. Everyone was hurrying, laden with purchases, in and out of the hectic shops. Nobody looked at anyone else. It was very cold. A wind like icy water blew straight into your eyes. On the footpath outside the tube station fir trees were being sold, men shouting, women grabbing. There was barely room to get past. I could just see myself getting bumped. I could already feel the pain. I took a breath, waited for an opening, and then scuttled through like a crab, elbows out, heart pounding. Made it! I found a chemist's, went in and asked could they tell me where the nearest doctor was – a routine enough enquiry, you would have thought, but I stood there fiercely embarrassed, as awkward and uncomfortable as a spotty adolescent buying his first condoms. My eyes, I knew, were red and wet from the killing wind. My boil throbbed madly as falsely I smiled.

It was a five-minute walk, up one of the side streets off the Finchley Road, to the left, a narrow red-brick Victorian semi-detached behind a beaten hedge. The waiting room was the long front room of the house. It had a grand piano in it, with a vase of flowers on top and a photograph of an earnest little girl standing with her dog. The little girl was wearing a Brownie uniform and smiling very seriously at the camera. The piano and the flowers and the little girl in her Brownie uniform standing with her dog made me feel somehow guilty and belittled, as though I had intruded on a private life. Twenty hard chairs lined the two opposite long walls, facing each other across the room like armies. I didn't sit down. There were about six people ahead of me. The room smelled of furniture polish and cold. Someone coughed. I dropped my eyes at once. When it was finally my turn – there was no-one after me, no-one else had come in – I hurried in to the surgery, quickly unbuttoning my coat as I went, that foolish fake fur.

He was standing when I came in, one of those colorless balding middle-aged men wearing a vaguely shabby dark-blue striped suit. I was aware at once of thin lips, long, cold, feely fingers. "Yes?" he said. He looked annoyed even before I spoke. I started to tell him what was wrong, my hands going to my belt. "Piles, is it?" he said, his eyes shooting straight into mine, his thin lips twisting up into an unmistakable sneer. "No," I said quickly. "It's nothing like that." I undid my trousers. I heard him grunt behind me as he stooped, fish-cold fingers touching me sharply, then away. When I straightened up he was already at the basin in the corner, scrupulously scrubbing. "It will burst," he said. "Buy some cotton wool. Clean up the mess." That was all. That was the entire visit. That was all he said. He tore open the door for me to leave. I barely had time to rebuckle and zip. But that wasn't the end of it. I was just going out of his front gate when he pushed past, wearing a black overcoat, pulling on leather gloves. He didn't look at me. He ignored me completely. It was as though he had never seen me before, as though I didn't even exist.

I bought some cotton wool. They were doing it on special at Boot's, a huge display just inside the door. This must have seemed to me like some kind of omen and I over-reacted wildly, toiling back up the Finchley Road with more than enough to stuff a pillow. Alone in my room, I wasted no time. I turned on the light, pulled the curtains, hurried out of my coat and trousers. Then, positioning myself before the gloomy full-length mirror on the door of the massive inky-black wardrobe that bulged out into my cramped and crowded shoebox of a room – my tiny room with its bed, its table and chair, the

long bookcase, the overstuffed armchair, the wardrobe and cupboard and hotplate, my suitcases and trunk – crouched down, corkscrewed around, my neck practically dislocated trying to peer over my right shoulder, I attempted to make a serious assessment of the situation, to evaluate exactly the state of affairs.

Yes. There it was. I stared and stared. To tell the truth, it didn't look all that terrible – a swelling, a redness – but what did I know about boils? I had never had one before, not ever, not once. No one in the family had ever had one either, that I could remember, not the most far-flung relative, the most distant cousin. A neighbor? Someone at school? Nothing. No one. Boils had played no part whatsoever in my life. Up till this past week, that is. Up till now. I bent. I craned. I peered. I stared. It throbbed. And then I began to have doubts. I saw that doctor's distasteful sneer, the thin lips, the malicious eyes. What if it wasn't a boil? What if it was something else? I saw, suddenly, emergency ambulances, plasma bottles, tubes and clamps. Hideous surgery. Hours under the knife. At the very least, I would never sit properly again. Jesus, I said, swept with self-pity. And then I saw myself in this obscene crouch in front of this mirror in this gloomy shoebox of a room, this room where I worked, ate, slept, read, thought, brooded, entertained, made love, and it was all too much. An enormous depression began to settle over me, wave after wave, an endless, leaden rain.

I stood slowly up. And God, look at the time. It was way after four. I had done nothing, no work at all, not a scrap. I hadn't even had lunch. The entire day flown with this cursed boil.

My stomach rumbled. I began to think about making some coffee. And then I remembered – I had to be at Baker Street at five. I was meeting Kate there. There wasn't time for coffee. There wasn't time for anything. I grabbed my coat and was out the door, running. Or what passed for running in my present condition.

I got there on the dot of five, panting from my charge up the escalator in the tube, and of course she was late, but that was fine, it gave me time to recover. And then she appeared wearing a very tailored pillar-box-red suit with a short skirt showing off her wonderful legs and her eyes smiling and her hair swinging and I kissed her and we walked around the corner and slipped into a pub.

"How's the boil?" she said.

We were at the far end of the bar, away from everyone else, that part where they made sandwiches. There was a ham on the bone on a white serving stand, some impossibly red tomatoes. Streamers and holly decorated the mirror behind, a touch of Christmas tat. Katherine sat perched on a stool, I stood awkwardly propped against mine, not quite standing, not exactly sitting either. Katherine took out her cigarettes – her blue Gitanes – and I lit one for her. The boil throbbed grandly.

"Is it all right if I have a gin and tonic?" she said. Her eyes danced. "I always get excited at Christmas."

"Sure," I said. "Whatever you like." I waved the man behind the bar over, ordered Katherine's drink, and a half of bitter for myself.

"Merry Christmas," Katherine said, clinking glasses, and when I didn't look suitably exuberant, "Oh, come

on," she said, "boils are nothing. I used to get them all the time when I had my pony."

"I went to a doctor this morning," I said.

"Oh?"

For a moment she looked alarmed, her eyes serious, searching mine. And then they flicked with impatience.

"Well, go on," she said. "What did he say?"

"Cotton wool," I said. "He told me to buy some cotton wool."

"Exactly!" she said. "I told you boils weren't serious," The concern fled from her eyes. They smiled again. "Come on," she said. "Drink up. I've got to be at my grannie's at six. You can walk me there."

It was just around the corner, a staid block of portered flats, old-fashioned, very proper. You could feel the hush the moment you stepped inside. There was no one in the lobby, no one watching, no one passing through, but when I attempted to put my arms around her, Katherine ducked away. She frowned. She shook her head. "Not here," she said, and kissed me quickly on the cheek. "See you on Boxing Day. Give us a call from the station, I'll come and pick you up." For a moment the concern flicked back into her eyes. "And stop worrying about that boil!" Another quick kiss on the cheek, and then she was gone, whisked away from me up the heavily-carpeted silent stairs.

She was having dinner there, with her grannie, and then going into the country to stay with her mother over Christmas, a thing she did every year. Katherine's parents were divorced. I had been invited up for Boxing Day. I had not yet met Katherine's mother and felt vaguely nervous. I didn't know what Katherine had told her about me, about us.

We had been lovers for less than a month, tall, elegant Katherine and I. Although the first time I had seen her was almost a year ago, when she had danced in to the foyer at the publishers who had just accepted my first novel, danced in to take me upstairs for my appointment with their chief editor, her boss. "I loved your book," she said. Her eyes smiled. They were so direct. I was dazed. I didn't know what to say. I had to look away. I think I even blushed. We rode up in the lift together, this marvellous girl and me, and then the editor had talked to me about this and this and this, a fumbly man with terrible teeth, but all I was really aware of was that marvellous girl sitting so coolly at her distant desk, smoking a tipped Gitane. And then I had gone to Tangier, stayed there six months, lived in this room, that room, wrote, didn't write, stared into space, made plans, brooded, felt joyous, despaired, high times and low, good days and bad, and then London again, more rooms, the same, high times and low, good days and bad . . . and all that time – until finally I phoned her, summoned up my courage, said let's have a drink – all that time I had kept somewhere tucked away in my mind that tall, elegant girl with the smiling eyes and swinging hair who had danced in to the foyer at the publishers and said to me so directly, I loved your book.

I took the tube back to Hampstead but I didn't go back to my room. I couldn't. I couldn't face it. The prospect of sitting there all alone in that furniture-jammed gloom, boil throbbing, mountain of cotton wool at the ready, was too depressing. It was just impossible. Instead, I bought some chocolate from a machine at the station and then I walked down the hill to see a friend.

Actually, there were two of them, Percival and Graham, fellow Australians sharing a bedsitter, a ground-floor front room always noisy with traffic, wide windows facing the busy road. Graham was a trainee editor at the BBC, bored to pieces on some current affairs program, desperate to get into films. He was a rushy fellow, zooming with impatience, on permanent buzz. He edited like a whirlwind, a glass of red wine by one hand, a cup of black coffee by the other, an endless stream of cigarettes flying to his lips. He could work twenty hours at a stretch. He didn't need sleep. He knew what he was about. When he wasn't working he was bored. Percival was the opposite, tall and ungainly, nervous and unsure. He was studying drama at RADA. He had won a scholarship for which there had been over four hundred applicants from all over the world. This had only made him even more nervous. I don't know what sort of actor he was, but he was a wonderful mimic. He could do anyone. A superb James Mason. A flawless Laurence Olivier. A total Fred MacMurray right down to shoulder movements, eyebrows and cheeks. I finished my chocolate and knocked on their door. "Yes!" someone shouted. "Come in, for God's sake! Yes!"

The room was in its usual crazy disorder, its usual loopy mess. The TV was on, a radio was blaring, the Beatles were spinning and shouting on the record player just inside the door. "*Paperback wriiiterrr!*" they wailed. The beds were unmade, clothes were thrown about, wet towels hung limply from the backs of chairs. Everywhere you looked, on the beds, on the floor, on the chairs, on every conceivable surface, were newspapers, scattered, flung open, flung apart. It was as though a gale had just blown through. In that corner of the room that served as kitchen, a narrow cluttered benchtop separating it from the beds, Graham was frying sausages and boiling peas, a pall of steam and smoke billowing out. And in the centre of it all, arms sinuously aloft, eyes dreamily closed, face turned up rapturously to the smoggy ceiling, oblivious to everything save the music of the Beatles, danced endlessly long-legged minuscule mini-skirted Nelly, Graham's recently acquired hairdresser girl.

"Percival's not here," Graham said, barely looking up. He was too busy. In fact, he was positively frantic. He darted and ducked, eyes narrowed, sausages spitting, gulping the inevitable glass of red wine, sucking on the inevitable cigarette. "You had dinner? What about some coffee? Sit down, it'll be ready in a minute, we're going out."

"Hi," I said to Nelly.

A lashed and mascaraed expressionless eye opened then closed, the gyrating pelvis not missing a beat.

I looked at the TV. The sound was off. A shouty face was flapping its mouth all over the screen. Then another face came on, this one against a brick wall, the hair blowing. How crazy it was, all that passion and commitment, when you couldn't hear a word. And boring. I bent

down and picked up some newspaper. Then I bent down and picked up some more. It was really everywhere.

"Will you stop tidying up, for God's sake!" Graham shouted. "We like it just the way it is. Leave it alone. Sit down."

I cleared a chair and sat down. This was now extremely difficult for me. The best I could do was a kind of slumped sideways slouch, a skewered-around sitting on the hip.

Graham came round from the kitchen part into the room proper somehow juggling his cigarette and his glass of wine and two plates of food. He put one plate down on a chair. "Coffee's coming," he said. He took one last quick deep drag then stubbed out his cigarette in a saucer on the floor. "Come on, Nelly!"

He was already eating, before he had even sat down, fingers grabbing at the hot sausages, the peas too, mouth blowing, too impatient for cutlery, gulping wine. I tried not to stare. He really was incredible, the fastest eater I'd ever seen.

"Where are you going?" I asked him.

"East End," he said, shovelling in sausage. "This amaing new place. Great music. Top bands. They've got these fantastic dancing girls in a cage. Mick Jagger goes there all the time. We'll have to hurry."

He finished what was on his plate, drained his wine glass, crossed his legs, lit a fresh cigarette. He really was incredible, in ceaseless motion every second of the time. Now, exhaling, he looked at me properly for the first time.

"Hey, what are you sitting like that for?" he said.

"I've got this boil," I said.

He was still chewing but now he stopped. He stared at me. His whole face stopped.

"On the bum?" he said. "A boil on the bum?"

He couldn't believe it. His eyes popped. His mouth fell open. He couldn't believe his luck.

"Nelly!" he shouted. "Did you hear that? Look at the way he's sitting! He's got a boil on the bum!"

I thought they would be sick laughing.

"All right, all right," I got in finally. "It's not that funny."

The kettle whistled. Graham, still laughing, jumped up.

"Come on," he said, handing out the mugs. "We're leaving in exactly one minute."

"Me?" I said. "I'm not coming. God, I can hardly walk, never mind standing around in some ridiculous crowded dance."

"Shut up," Graham snapped, gulping his coffee. "Of course you're coming. Stop being such a black cloud. I know you. You'll love it when you get there. You're always the same."

We went in Graham's Volkswagen, me in the back. The boil by now was in constant throb and every slightest bump murder. Graham totally ignoring my pleas to for God's sake slow down, Nelly twisted around in her seat laughing insanely each time I rose crying out with pain into the air.

I must have been totally mad to agree to come.

"Nearly there!" Graham shouted. "Hang onto your boil!"

Nelly of course cackled at that too.

The place was dreadful. It was worse than dreadful. It was exactly the nightmare I had most feared, a dark crush of jam-packed jostling bodies, senselessly surging and stomping and elbowing. There was practically nowhere safe even to stand.

"I can't see Mick Jagger," Graham said, eyes shooting in every direction, puffing on yet another cigarette.

Nelly, unbidden, threw herself into her usual gyrating.

I stood where I could, up against a wall.

The boil was really throbbing now, even when I stood perfectly still. Now I could feel it all the time, a heavy pounding presence, impossible to ignore.

Graham raced away somewhere and then he was back. "Come on, why aren't ya dancing?" he said. "There's birds here galore."

"Listen, I think I have to go home," I said.

"Rubbish," Graham said, darting away. "We haven't even seen Mick Jagger yet."

I stood. I smoked. The crowd surged and elbowed. The music screamed. It was interminable. We would never leave. When I lit a match to look at my watch it had somehow got to be eleven o'clock.

"Graham," I said, the next time he darted up. "I really can't stand here any more. I really can't. I can hardly even stand up."

"But what about Mick Jagger?" Graham said.

"Graham," I said, "I think I have to go to a hospital."

It must have been the word that did it, or maybe there was something in my face. Graham shot me a quick look, and then just as quickly away.

"But what about Mick Jagger?" he said, but his heart wasn't in it. "All right," he said. "Wait here. I'll get Nelly."

Any kind of sitting down was now quite out of the question, a completely impossible thing. I crouched in the Volkswagen on all fours, throbbing boil aloft, a whimpering back-seat dog.

"A camera, a camera!" Graham shouted. "If only I had a camera!"

Nelly's mascara ran with tears.

We drove back to Hampstead, there was a hospital there.

And yes we found it and there was a light on in Casualty and it was all going to be all right except coming out backwards out of the Volkswagen I somehow slammed myself against some stupid poking-out part of the door-jamb, a hinge or something, unleashing at once such an indescribable shock of pain all I could do was hysterically laugh.

I roared like a maniac, a red-faced madman.

Graham, for his part, turned instantly white.

And that's how we were, a crimson maniac, a white-faced ghost – with a smudged-eyed doll awkwardly to one side – when the Pakistani nurse or clerk or attendant or whatever he was burst out of his office and demanded to know what was going on here, who was sick, why had we come at such an ungodly hour, was this a joke?

"It's him, it's him!" I pointed at Graham, turning him an even more horrified white.

A nurse cleaned me up, bandaged me, dressed the wound. The Pakistani was still furious. He fumed and

glared. "Why did you not come here earlier," he bore down on me, helpless on the table, "with such a condition as this? Are you such a madman absolutely?"

He filled out a card. I was to come back the day after Boxing Day. A doctor had to examine me properly.

"Ten o'clock in the morning," he read out the card. "Don't be late. It is in your interest, after all."

So then it was Christmas Day and then it was Boxing Day and then it was ten o'clock in the morning on the day after. The doctor was a woman, very stern, about fifty. She was crisp and brisk. I lay, she looked, then she told me to get off the table, get dressed, sit down.

It was not a boil. It was not an ordinary boil. It was an operation. It was surgery. It was the knife. What I had was a pilonidal sinus, she told me. An impacted hair. Sometimes known as Greek's Disease, she said. The Greeks being a hairy people, she explained. She smiled coldly. Also called Jeepdriver's Disease. Another cold smile. I would be in hospital for ten days. Any questions? I didn't hesitate. My voice leapt out like an arrow. "What if I just ignore it?" I asked. "What if I don't have it done?" "Then the poison in your system will work its way to your heart and you will die," she said. Her smile this time was like a slammed door. I nodded dumbly, my eyes falling like my arrow useless at her feet. She began to flick crisply and briskly through a large black leather-bound book to see when next she was free to deal with my behind.

And the name of the hospital in Hampstead where all this happened? Why, the New End, of course. How could it have been otherwise? How could it have been anything else?

O Swinging London, O miraculous days, everything an adventure, everything brand-new. We shopped for pyjamas, Katherine and I, the curve of Regent Street still hung with its Christmas decorations, trumpets and angels, holly and reindeer, Bethlehem lights, though now what they celebrated was otherwise, the January Sales, all London's big stores solid with plundering hordes. I never wore pyjamas in real life, always slept naked, free between the sheets, but this wasn't real life, this was an adventure, the proper costume required, and somewhere between Jaeger's and Aquascutum we found the very thing, a deep royal blue slashed with scarlet on the collar and the pocket over the heart, oh very elegant, very suave, and when they told me at the New End the following afternoon to get ready for bed, I slipped them proudly on. Then off again, the bottom half, that is, while a male nurse shaved me. The tea trolley came round, but no, not for me, thank you, I'm not allowed anything, having my op tomorrow morning. Dinner the same. I sat up in my bed feeling splendidly well in my classy crisp pyjamas smiling at passing people – nurses, doctors, fellow patients – and read *Chicken Inspector No. 23*, S.J. Perelman's not-yet-out latest book – we shared the same publisher – a gift from Katherine. It seemed to take me hours to get to sleep – empty stomach, unfamiliar bed – but when finally I did I slept soundly, untrammeled by thoughts or dreams, and woke to a pre-med jab and then that magic childlike ride to the theatre, all ceilings and lights and faces smiling down. I was in safe hands. I was being looked after. I was warm. I was calm. I was completely relaxed. It was all a wonderful adventure. From which I woke vilely retching, reeking of anaesthetic, stenched and foul. And then the real pain, when I moved, when I tried to move, the flames and knives.

If Katherine came to see me that night, if anyone did, I was not aware.

But let me describe it to you, this wonderful hospital, or anyway that part of it that included me. It was not new. It was far from new. It was Victorian. The high ceilings were blotched with age, an atlas of ancient stains. The walls ran lumpy with pipes, high-knobbed antique switches, tides of long-ago encrusted paint. The floors were rattling bare boards. And the wards were public and long. We lay, my fellow patients and I, in two inward-facing rows, twelve beds side by side, an identical long ward through the doorway to the right. To the left were, somewhere, bathrooms, kitchens, offices, administration, the outside world.

But the outside world, just then, was hardly my concern. I had been told to go in a bottle in the bed. "Can't I stand up?' I asked the sister. I had been trying for an hour. I was close to panic. "I can't do it like this," I tried to explain.

"Of course you can!" she snapped. "Stop being silly!"

When she was safely gone I struggled up, pulled the curtain around, shakily stood.

"What's this for?" she cried, returned in a flash, ripping the curtain angrily back.

Too late, sister, too late.

Katherine came that night, kissed me gently, held my hand, asked was there anything special I needed, anything I wanted at all. "What about cigars?" she said, trying to cheer me up. I shook my head. I lay. She sat. The visiting hour fled.

The endless night stretched.

Around me, my fellow patients snored, moaned, mumbled, coughed, awoke startled from their dreams, stared upwards at nothing, lost in the night. In the morning, able to sit up slightly now, to move a little in the bed, I began to sort them out

In the bed to my right was a young black who had been stabbed in the stomach, knifed in a fight. He lay there stunned, made old in a second, grey with pain. "And how are we this morning?" the ward matron asked him, sweeping past. "Better?" "Yes, ma'm," he said quickly, looking terrified.

On my other side was a little man with a cherry-red face. He was starving. He had adhesions, something wrong with him inside. He couldn't eat. He wanted to but he couldn't. I watched the nurse snatch away his untouched breakfast, as she had snatched away his dinner the night before.

"Still not eating?" she said, clicking her tongue.

"Naughty boy!"

"He needs help," I said. "I think he's starving."

But she had already spun away.

Directly opposite, across the aisle, an old man lay dying of cancer, wasting away, his head already so insubstantial

as to hardly dent the pillow. I stared at his sunken cheeks, the dry open hole of his mouth. They should have drawn the curtains around. I tried not to look.

Then there was an appendix, a hernia, a perforated ulcer, an operation for kidney stones. But the cast of characters changed rapidly, in and out, come and gone. No bed stood empty for long.

Percival came to see me on the third day. I welcomed him perched high on my bed on an inflated black rubber inner tube, feeling foolish and wobbly. Percival reacted at once. "A *teeoooh*?" he warbled, springing into his Edith Evans' Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. His fingers fluttered. His nose rose in the air. "*A rubbah teeeooooooh*?"

Graham darted in with Nelly. Me sitting up on a rubber tube was just what he wanted to see.

"Hey, let's let the air out!" he shouted, making a mock attack.

Nelly brayed like a hyena.

"Be quiet!" snapped the ward sister. "Where do you think you are? I'll have you all thrown out!"

My editor came, tongue-tied and toothy, bearing books.

My old Australian friend Charlie Hope charged in waving a pineapple. Charlie was in advertising. "If I told ya what that cost," he bellowed, throwing the pineapple onto the bed, "you'd have a heart attack!" He banged me on the shoulder, couldn't think what to say, stood suddenly awkward in his immaculately flashy clothes. "Jesus!" he cried, shooting a look at his watch. "Gotta go! Look after yerself!" He stared hard at the pineapple and was gone.

And Katherine came. She came every day. I counted the minutes. The visiting hour each evening was at six, the staff as usual grumpy, no one allowed in a second before. But finally they nodded, and the doors were flung open, and in danced Katherine, eyes laughing, hair swinging, cheeks gorgeously flushed from the cold outside.

"I've brought you something," she said.

It was a small package, elegantly wrapped. Fortnum and Mason, it said. A quail in aspic, a tiny naked bird in a jar. Ten and sixpence, it still said on the lid.

"For the man who has nothing?" Katherine said, raising her eyebrows.

"Pull the curtain," I said. "I want to give you a hug."

She did, but it was no use. A sister whipped it back at once.

"This is not the Dorchester!" she snapped, glaring at us hard.

I lived for visitors. Visitors were something to wait for, to give you hope. They pulled you through the day. There was nothing else. The food at the New End was appalling – grey meat under gravy, some boiled-to-death vegetable, a runny pudding at the end. At breakfast the tea barely tasted, the porridge was like a watery paper-hanger's paste. And the servings were skimpy, minimal. There were no seconds. The food trolley rattled on the bare boards and was gone. It was Dickensian. It was all over in a flash. I was hungry all the time. Everyone was. But at least there were visitors, there were visitors to look forward to, there was that magic moment at six when they finally opened the doors, there was Katherine, there was always Katherine, flushed and smiling, dancing in.

But how quickly that hour fled. The ward sister rang a bell. "Time!" she shouted. "Seven o'clock!" Katherine left, everyone left, everyone was driven out. She would be back tomorrow, they would all be back, all my visitors and friends, but the thought refused to cheer me. In fact, the opposite. Now was not tomorrow. I stared into empty space, abandoned and bereft.

I couldn't sleep. It was way after midnight, almost one o'clock. I was wide awake. I was hungry. Dinner had been the usual skerrick of bloodless meat, the usual clump of watery cabbage, the usual runny custard with its thin dollop of jam. And all that anyhow more than five hours ago. Sleep was completely out of the question. I was just too hungry. I was starving to death.

I slipped out of bed. I didn't bother with a dressing gown or slippers. I didn't need them. I wasn't going far, only to the toilet, through the doors to the left, at the end of the ward. Except when I got there I kept going, quickly down a deserted corridor, and in a room that must have been some sort of servery – tea-trolleys stood there, trays in stacks – I found in a cupboard a stale piece of cake on a plate. I ate it in the dark, hunched and wolfing, and then fled back to my room, heart beating with shame.

And did anyone notice? Did anyone ever find out? But who would have? And who, in that place, would have cared?

A nurse came to change my dressing in the morning. She stripped off the old, jammed a huge wad of cotton wool between my legs. "Back in a sec," she said, looking over her shoulder. "Just hold it like that." I held it like that for two hours before I acknowledged she would never come back.

They brought in a Pole, a Pole with a broken neck.

This was in the evening, after visiting time, my ninth night at the New End. I watched him being put into the bed directly opposite, just across the aisle, the bed where the old man with cancer had finally died. He lay flat on his back, his neck in a harness from which two weights hung down over the end of the bed, a gaunt man, I saw, long and bony, with thinning hair and a white moustache.

"What happened to him?" I asked a sister.

"Drunk," she sneered.

He has been in a fight. He had fallen down a flight of stairs. He was still unconscious. The weights and harness were to keep his neck in traction. They were not to be touched. I watched him lying there. There was not a sound from him for an hour, and then he began to moan.

"Nurse!" I called. "Nurse!"

He obviously didn't know where he was or what had happened to him. His hands were at his throat, struggling to free himself. I could see the panic in his scratching fingers. He was crying out, in Polish I imagine, slurred, broken words.

Nurses came running, sisters. The matron of the ward bent over him, holding down his hands. "You must not touch that harness!" she lectured him firmly. "Do you understand? You have broken your neck! You have to lie

perfectly still!" The Pole moaned weakly, those same broken words. I think he was still drunk.

His hands were bandaged, made into fingerless paddles. A nurse was instructed to sit by him, he had to be watched all the time. Then everyone else left. The ward quietened down. By now it must have been around eleven o'clock. The nurse sat there for another five minutes, and then she went for a walk.

This was Gloria, this nurse, the little pretty one with the dark eye make-up and the bouffant hair. She didn't go far, just three beds down on the other side of the aisle. There was a business man there, in for tests, a rather smug fellow who had checked in that morning. In the quiet of the ward I could hear every word he said. We all could. He was confessing to Gloria the emptiness of his life. While pretty Gloria, no doubt, held his hand.

"I go to prostitutes," his voice whispered out into the ward. "I have to. My wife doesn't understand me. She never has, not from the very beginning. I don't know why I married her. I think I felt sorry for her. I mean, not for one minute has she given me what I really need." On and on he went and it was all the same, all so predictable and trite, and in the middle of it the Pole, fighting to free himself of the harness around his neck with his useless hands, twisted somehow off the bed and fell to the floor.

He fell like a sack of sand.

Everyone heard it. It was impossible not to. The entire ward sprang instantly awake, bolt upright, wide-eyed. Nurses rushed, sisters, a flush-faced doctor in a dark chalk-striped suit. We saw him kneel by the Pole, rip open his pyjamas, plunge his ear to the thin white chest. The ward hung with horror. We could all see it. We could see it all. Then the curtain was pulled across.

"A cup of tea for everyone!" the head matron ordered, blazing down the aisle in her crimson cape. "Relax, everyone! These things happen! Everything's under control!"

And the tea, of course, never came.

That was my last night at the New End. In the morning I was given a form to sign, my clothes, my bag. No one shook my hand, no one wished me luck, no one even said goodbye. I stepped out through the main entrance – the same doorway through which I had so blithely entered ten days ago – into a cold, grey, January day.

At once I was terrified of slipping, of falling over. The very air seemed too strong for me, too powerful. I felt dreadfully vulnerable, impossibly frail. I walked carefully down the hill, step by step, clutching my bag for dear life.

Passing Sainsbury's I knew I should go in, I knew I should buy food, but I was too wonky, too frightened. I just wanted to get to my room. I wanted to be by myself. I wanted to sit down.

My key still miraculously unlocked the door.

Nothing had changed. It was just the same, exactly the same, the same foolishly cramped and crowded shoebox of a room. All that time at the New End it had been here, just like this, exactly the same. It seemed somehow miraculous, a revelation. I felt my eyes smarting, on the edge of tears.

I made myself some coffee on my impossibly slow hotplate, some biscuits and cheese. I eased myself down into my overstuffed armchair. There was mail to reply to, phone-calls to make, magazines to look at, books to read, a dozen and more things to do.

I sat.

I sat all afternoon, did nothing, wanted to do nothing, barely moved all afternoon. I looked through the window at the garden, the trees, the hedges, the light in the sky.

Just after six Katherine came, marvellous in her woolly coat, flushed and glowing. She flew into my arms, but then she drew back. "How do you feel?" she said. "Are you sure you should be standing up like this?"

And then Percival came, a few minutes later. He looked hesitant when he saw me with Katherine. "Come in, come in!" I told him. "There's plenty of room!"

Katherine ran upstairs to fetch water for more coffee – my room didn't boast that basic convenience. Then we sat around, we joked, we laughed, we talked.

We talked about the New End.

We talked about the nurses, the sisters, how crabby they all were, how the whole place was so rotten, a monument of uncaring, a black temple of stupidity and neglect. "I had to wait two hours this morning," I told them, "just to get my clothes." "You're not at the Dorchester now!" Katherine mimicked, and we all laughed.

"And the food," I said, and I told them how hungry I was all the time, and how I'd crept out of the bed that night and found that stale piece of cake.

And I told them about the Pole, and how he'd died.

"Jesus," Percival said.

We sat in maudlin silence, and then Katherine clapped her hands. "Come on," she said. " I'm starving! What have you got to eat?"

"Well, not much," I said, and then I remembered, and out of my bag I produced Katherine's tiny quail.

"My God, it's a sparrow!" Percival cried. "We're going to eat a sparrow!"

Out of its jar it looked even more tiny, a naked and pitiful thing. Katherine divided it scrupulously, exactly into thirds. It was the merest mouthful each.

"How sad," Katherine said, looking at the fragile bones.

And then we had more coffee and biscuits and cheese and then it was late and Percival went home and Katherine and I were at last alone. I put my arms around her. We softly kissed. For a long time we stood together in the centre of the room. "Come to bed," I said. "Are you sure?" Katherine said, drawing back her head to look at me, to look into my eyes. "Are you sure it's all right?" "Come to bed," I said.

O Swinging London, O miraculous days. In bed I held her in my arms and felt her never closer, never before such need, and in that instant when my heart flew out – my entire life, it seemed, my very soul – for a swooning moment I thought it would never return, I spun in endless blackness, I was surely lost, but then it did, and I felt a great peace settling over me, a wonderful warmth. I smiled, I rejoiced. I was alive.

And In Walked Who?

An Overland Obituary Competition

Australian poetic genius has always made its mark in the obituary columns of the press. (Incidentally, a friend has a cutting from the death notices of a chap called Garlick, embellished with the text "Breathe on me, Breath of God.") Many are familiar with the quatrain said to have been published in a Brisbane newspaper years ago:

> The Heavenly Gates were Opened,
> The Angels shouted "Come!"
> St Peter smiled a Welcome Smile,
> And in walked Mum.

Less well-known is the touching verse that appeared in the Adelaide Advertiser on 3 August 1983:

> When she goes home to receive her reward,
> She will dwell in God's Kingdom and keep house for the Lord,
> And then with the dawn she'll put darkness away,
> As she scours the sun to new brilliance each day.
> So dry tears of sorrow for mothers don't die,
> They just move in with God and keep house in the sky.

But what about obituaries for public figures? We offer a prize (a copy of the *Dictionary of Australian Quotations* and a free subscription or renewal; unfortunately we cannot arrange for a free funeral) for the best obituary verse we receive by 28 February 1985, designed for the public figure you would most like to see go to his or her Great Reward. Limit eight lines.

DAVID WALKER, BETTY ROLAND
and GUIDO BARACCHI

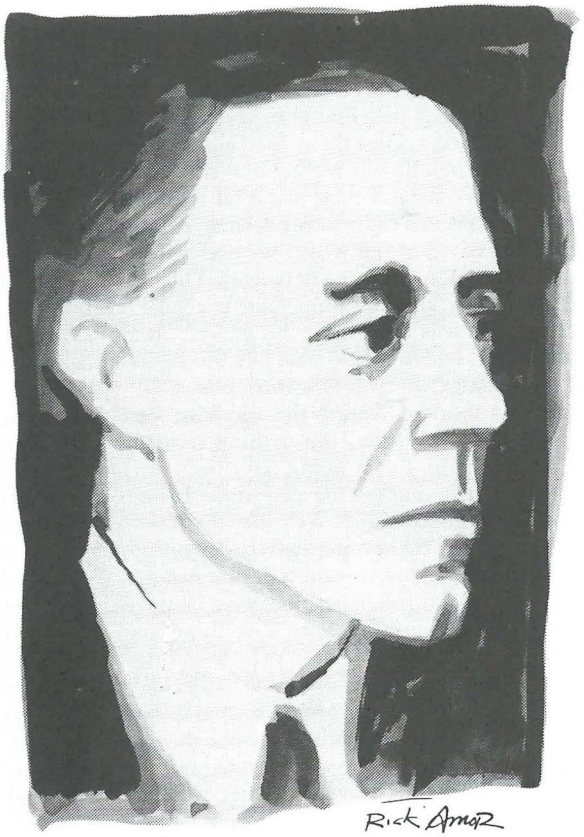
Guido Baracchi

Guido Carlo Luigi Baracchi, great lover and gentleman revolutionary, was part of the Australian political scene for some seventy years. Born in 1887 as the son of Pietro Baracchi, later government astronomer of Victoria, Guido had a flamboyant career as student radical, anti-conscriptionist, foundation member of the Communist Party and much else. He awaits his biographer, but his story is told in part in David Walker's Dream and Disillusion *and in Betty Roland's* Caviare for Breakfast. *He died in December 1975, at the age of 88, as a result of working on the hustings for the return of the Whitlam government. Here we print David Walker's interview with Baracchi in 1969, not previously published, and a farewell to Baracchi by Betty Roland. Betty Roland's study of the Justus Jorgensen community at Montsalvat, Eltham, Victoria, and of her interactions with it, has recently been published by Hale and Iremonger. It is entitled* The Eye of the Beholder, *and is reviewed in this issue.*

David Walker: Interview

I interviewed Guido Baracchi in November 1969, an innocent time, well before the rigors of scientific oral history had struck the land. Our agenda had been set, rather loosely, by a series of questions I sent him a week or so ahead of the interview. Most of these questions dealt with radical groupings in Melbourne towards the end of the First World War. I was then in the early stages of researching what became Dream and Disillusion, *and wanted help of an often straightforward kind about the people who knew Vance and Nettie Palmer around 1917. The result was a twenty-thousand word transcript which ranged from the formation of the Victorian Labor College to the anti-conscription campaigns. In between, Guido filled in on the smaller groups, associations and now distant personalities of that time. Unfortunately, much was not taped, including some brief comments about Christina Stead. Baracchi believed he had been the model for Folliott, the unflatteringly-portrayed radical editor in* Seven Poor Men of Sydney. *None of the taped material was ever intended for publication. Its belated appearance now may be justified by the glimpse it offers of Guido Baracchi, the people with whom he associated and the causes for which they worked.*

During the First World War Guido Baracchi was among the most prominent anti-conscriptionists at Melbourne University. In 1917 an article of his questioning Australia's participation in the war appeared in the student journal, the Melbourne University Magazine. The Argus demanded action, the Professorial Board called upon Baracchi to explain himself, and Robert Menzies denounced him in a letter to the University magazine, an issue later suppressed. Not long after, Baracchi was jailed for making statements prejudicial to recruiting. In the immediate post-war years he was editor of Industrial Solidarity and Proletarian and, in 1925, Communist. He was a foundation member of the Communist Party and, throughout the twenties, was active in propagandist work in Australia, Germany and Britain. In 1926 Guido's father, Pietro, died, having lived his last two years in the Melbourne Club. Guido inherited an estate valued at over £30,000, which helps explain a lifetime untrammelled by the need to earn a living, and the wonderfully overgrown harborside house in Castlecrag where this interview took place. Shorn of repetition and now a quarter of its original length, this document represents a very small slice of a long life lived on the Left.



Guido Baracchi:

The Victorian Labor College was founded in the latter part of 1917 by four people. The four were Frederick Sinclaire, who was the principal, Blackburn, who was a tutor in Industrial History, myself, who was a tutor in Economics, and Earsman, who was the secretary. W.P. Earsman, who was the real founder of the Labor College, was a Scotsman from Edinburgh who went first to New Zealand and then to Melbourne. In 1917, between the two conscription referendums, he got the idea of founding this Victorian Labor College, based on "independent working-class education," as it was called. He got hold of Maurice Blackburn, who was a friend of his anyway, Sinclaire, whom he knew very well through the activities of the Free Religious Fellowship, and myself, whom he met in the course of the first conscription referendum, or earlier than that in 1916. He introduced me to Blackburn and the four of us got down to the business of getting this Victorian Labor College off the ground. It was to be owned and controlled by affiliated trade unions. It was to be a wholly trade-union dominated body, as distinct from the Workers' Education Assocation. In those early days we used to have propaganda battles with the WEA, most of it from our side because they were a bigger and more established organisation.

The Victorian College developed very slowly. There was a friend of mine in Melbourne, called Percy Laidler, who used to describe it as a partial failure, and I think that was perhaps an exact description of it. The classes continued and the tutors shifted around. I was off it for years and then I was on it again later, but it never went under and it got to the stage of starting a bookstall at the entrance to the Trades Hall in Melbourne, which is still there, and they sold quite a lot of socialist literature of one sort or another. Quite a few people who subsequently were prominent in the trade union movement, even if they didn't attend the classes, would go to the bookstall and buy these books and read them, as I discovered in the case of Albert Monk.

Sinclaire I didn't meet until 1916, and by then the Free Religious Fellowship which he founded was well underway. Under his auspices I got married the first time, actually in Sinclaire's little house at Upwey in the Ferntree Gully region. He'd got around and became friends of a whole number of writers like the Palmers and the Essons – people who were not particularly free religious fellowship – but liked and got on with Sinclaire. They liked his magazine Fellowship, and were in his circle just as he was in theirs.

At this time the Palmers had recently come back from England, from Europe, and Vance, both of them, were full of admiration for Orage, who edited the New Age and who was advocating guild socialism in his columns. Vance was taken with this, and he liked the idea of this co-partnership between state and unions as the best form of socialism. He never used words like socialism, except on rare occasions. In referring to guild socialism he always spoke about national guilds. He had this idea of Australian nationality working through guild socialism, but his reasoned choice of words was always for national guilds rather than this more abstract thing guild socialism. So Sinclaire was attracting this group of writers to him. He knew them all well, they liked him and admired his scholarship and admired his wit and they all got on very well together.

Sinclaire got tremendously worked up really over the war. There was a lot of pacifist in him. He was a great friend of the pacifist Dick Long, a very thorough-going pacifist. He was at my wedding and he wrote a poem to the occasion, as one would expect.

Sinclaire's anti-conscription feelings were very strong indeed. He'd sometimes pick up some message from some politician urging conscription or urging this and that. I can remember one particular instance when Willie Watt gave forth a war message. It was printed in one of the papers. Sinclaire picked it up and read it and there was somebody there who knew Willie Watt quite well and he said to him: "Would you mind telling Willie Watt that my message to him is to go to hell?" He was quite worked up.

Have you found out what Sinclaire looked like? He had ginger hair which had gone pale in a way. It was curly. He had a half-critical, half-hostile, sort of look on his face generally, and he had with it all a considerable exterior calm which covered really very strong feelings under-

neath. On one occasion this calm showed itself in what I think is one of the best stories, politically in the broad sense, I know, and one of the most instructive.

In 1917 there was a meeting in Melba Hall, Melbourne University. It was quite a large hall. A meeting at which the anti-conscriptionists were going to put their case to the students. Well the principal speaker was Sinclaire, and the hall was packed. He had in his lapel a red no-conscription button. Well, before he could utter his first word, he seemed in no hurry to do so, the students began to bawl hell out of him, and it was mainly advice they gave until finally it seemed to concentrate itself in them all bawling to him "take off that button, take off that button." Well, this got louder and louder and more persistent, and Sinclaire just stood there in front of them in a half-dopey way with his longish arms hanging down and just looking at them, not attempting to speak a word. This went on for quite a long time. Whether he was waiting for them to tire or not I don't know, but they didn't tire, and then a strange thing happened in the midst of all this shouting. His left hand began to move slowly up the side of his coat, very slowly, and I was watching this absolutely entranced, you know, to see what was going to happen next. Very slowly it got up to his lapel, just behind the lapel for a while, with these roars of "take off that button" still going on, and finally he snatched it out and dropped it in his pocket. Well that silenced the students. They had won their main point.

They gave him a wonderful hearing and I have heard him speak well many times, but I have never heard him speak as well as that, and at the end of it they gave him a terrific reception. I guess he had got some 'no' voters among them who were old enough, and certainly he got a number of supporters who were not his way before. That is a typical Sinclaire story. But Sinclaire operated at this time on a wider field than the war and conscription struggles in Australia, for Fellowship had taken up the advocacy of guild socialism, and each week the notes used to handle guild socialism in one form or another.

Earsman had a strong syndicalist leaning. He wanted the unions to do everything, but he'd sort of accepted guild socialism: "If I can't get syndicalism, well, I can get a good deal of it here in this guild socialism." So, he was sympathetic to it. Blackburn was quite sympathetic to it too. Sinclaire was, of course, and I was to a certain extent, though by 1917 I had gone a fair way towards orthodox Marxism and at the beginning of 1918, when they put me in Pentridge, I was permitted there to read the second volume of *Capital*. I was then working more in the direction of what culminated in the Communist Party really, but in these very early days of the Labor College there was necessarily a certain amount of guild socialism. A little later Orage ditched his guild socialism and took on Douglas social credit and Sinclaire went with him, and from that time guild socialist notes were supplanted by social credit notes.

The news of the second conscription referendum broke towards the end of 1917. Hughes had said, between the two referendums, he would never introduce conscription a second time until the wreckage of the British fleet was strewn upon the waters of the northern sea. All the anti-conscriptionists had gone through the period once already of being terribly depressed with the feeling that they hadn't a chance of winning the referendum, with all the forces arrayed against them, then at a certain stage getting this rather indefinable feeling that there was a change in the tide. We were feeling just a bit that way the second time, though sort of furiously getting on our hind legs, we feared that this thing which we had nearly lost the first time might this time really be lost. This was the sort of first feeling and in our immediate practical reaction as to what to do was the idea of this paper, this anti-conscription paper, which would start like this but might go on to further things afterwards was proposed.

It was mooted among this circle of writers first, by whom I don't know, but I think it might have been Earsman again. But it might have been anyone, because one of them hadn't got the idea I am sure one of the others would. We got together. We were very sure we needed the support of the main organised force against conscription to back us up. That was the labor movement. We wanted however to run the paper ourselves, and we thought we could make it a much more alive thing than if we were controlled directly by union officials all the time. Vance would have been the editor of the paper, and the rest of us would have collected around him and done such work as we were able to do. Earsman became the natural organising force, and it was he who pointed out the importance of getting the labor movement directly behind it. He took the idea to the Trades Hall and got permission for the people associated with the paper to be present at a meeting of the Trades Hall Council in the Council Chamber on the Thursday night, when the Council met, and to put this case to it.

Well a number of us attended, but I am not quite sure who was there. I think that besides Earsman and Vance and Sinclaire and myself there might have been some others like Blackburn there too. At any rate a group of us were there and the case was put largely by Earsman, with some additions from Vance and some from me, for the extreme usefulness of such a paper at this time. We made the point, we made it very gingerly, about the control of the paper. It would not need anything to hold it up, it would not want anything to divert it from its anti-conscription course. We made the point that the control should be in the hands of the people who were running it, but that it should be approved and supported by the Trades Hall Council and the industrial movement. Well they listened to us and they asked us a number of questions in which, in very practical union style, the matter of the control of the paper bulked quite large. Finally they said they would consider it and they would let us know. Well, it was considered by them and they turned it down.

The idea of the paper, anything done in connection with it and its final dropping, was very short and sweet. Then the question arose as to what to do in its place. It was decided to publish a number of leaflets written as well as they could be by members of this group, and also to organise a speaking campaign to go through districts where pro-conscription was very strong and try to swing

some votes our way. Well this was done by Earsman. It was very well done. The leaflets came out in good order and in good time. The one by Palmer, as I said, on "An Appeal to the Farmers," another one "An Appeal to the Citizens" and a very striking cartoon by Will Dyson of the London Daily Herald which Palmer sponsored and some others. They were really quite a good series of leaflets of their kind.

Then the speaking campaign organised by Earsman: it was necessary to hire a car and driver . . . none of us had a car. Earsman was smart enough to get a thoroughly anti-conscription driver who was a returned soldier too, a man called Hedges, who would say a few words though not a practised speaker. We started off. Earsman, Hedges driving the car, Sinclaire, Dick Long, myself, and sometimes some substitutes for one or the other of us. We went through the Gippsland and south Gippsland districts to do our stuff. We had some very, very hostile meetings, one of which we got a whole volley of eggs thrown at us; Sinclaire while he was speaking, dripping from face to foot with egg. In one town, Mirboo North, after holding our meeting in a hall, with a lot of interjections and so on but no fisticuffs, we were chased back to the hotel, got to the side entrance in time and the hotel was then bombarded with rocks through a considerable part of the night. Finally, for the sake of peace and quiet in the hotel, among other things, we slipped away in the car and out of Mirboo North. This perhaps was the most hostile meeting we had.

There were others too that were partly hostile, but in which we managed to win over a lot of support. One of the things that struck me during this campaign organised by Earsman, and with this group participating in it, was that people who under ordinary circumstances were scarcely perfect speakers at all, suddenly blossomed into first-class orators, and it was undoubtedly the spirit that was moving them. I saw this sort of thing happening over and over again. It happened to me among others. I'd start a meeting at some street corner and there would hardly be a soul around, and to my surprise after I had been speaking a bit I'd find a great crowd around me. We had a real case and we worked hard on it marshalling our stuff, and this speaking tour really went very well, because in the cases where the environment was not irreconcilably hostile we managed to develop a lot of support even during the meetings, and this is quite an unusual thing too, but in a way the whole thing was in the melting pot. If the story was a good story and a true story and was manifestly so, and was documented well, you got results from this speaking.

I was not with them all the time. I was with them most of the time but at weekends I had to be in Sydney, because I was secretary of another body quite unconnected with this group of people, called the anti-conscription army, which was formed to protect our speakers. They were getting beaten up on a number of occasions by thugs, and also by returned soldiers and so on. We had a big slaughterman as our working leader, and I was the secretary. This big slaughterman, what the hell was his name, never mind, he should be immortalised, he kept many a meeting in order one way or another. There was one case of a persistent woman interrupter who suddenly stopped talking. Our leader was seen to be apologising profusely to her but he had given her an awful kick in the shin. He said this was accidental. He apologised but, at any rate, she stopped interjecting. He was a very effective leader this bloke. This used to take me away from the little group on the weekends, but I was with them all the rest of the time. So the paper idea was transformed into leaflets plus a speaking campaign. The same writers did very excellent work, not only on the leaflets, as one would expect, but on a very different kind of thing, the idea of digging up a cartoon like Will Dyson's was a sheer masterstroke. It was one of the best things we did. It was talked about all over Melbourne and then in the speaking line, too, the writers blossomed to the extent they took the platform. Sinclaire of course was always in his element and could give a splendid speech on every occasion . . .

After the second conscription referendum was won and lost there were all kinds of ideas in the air of the leftish circles, or liberal circles, for what were they going to do now as the war went to its end – the feeling of being anti-war, which hardly existed in the beginning, became much more widespread. This was natural. And the Russian Revolution had occurred and in November 1918 the German Revolution occurred and the war very quickly came to an end. In these circumstances these people's thoughts were turning in the direction of some sort of constructive approach to the era that was on us and there were all kinds of ideas in the wind.

In the period to the conscription referenda and afterwards the liaison between workers' organisations in Sydney and in Melbourne was pretty good, from the IWW working there on the left, to the right. There was a constant stream of letters passing between the various interested people, which meant that one was pretty well informed about what was going on in both these places if you lived in the other one. One example of this was when in 1919, I was editing the later substitute IWW paper, Industrial Solidarity. This paper published quite a number of Sydney articles. For example in 1919 there was a seamen's strike. Tom Walsh was then a prominent official in the Seamen's Union and at the end of 1920 became one of the founding members of the Communist Party. Tom Walsh, under the name of Sinbad the Sailor, used to write very detailed accounts of what was going on in regard to the seamen's struggles in Sydney, and there were others who did the same thing. On the other hand in Melbourne we spent in this paper Industrial Solidarity a lot of time and space in connection with what was happening to the twelve IWW men who had been jailed during the war for conspiracy to commit arson.

The main informal meeting place for radicals in Melbourne was Andrade's Bookshop. There you could meet absolutely every variety of radical thought, and they'd come in there not just to buy a book. Sometimes they did not buy books at all, but just to talk, and Percy Laidler would be there and would lead them on and there would be quite often very long and interesting discussions and arguments; I'd say to the disadvantage of the actual trade, though there was such an immense variety of socialist

literature there that there was also very large trade despite these interruptions. They really had a magnificent supply of socialist literature. Everything that was of interest from a socialist standpoint, in the broader sense of the word, published in America, and there was a whole lot of it from the publishing firm of Charles Kerr, starting with the second and third volumes of *Capital* for the first time in English, right down to small pamphlets, everything in that way was there. So I'd say that 201 Bourke Street was the place that was really quite remarkable in its way, in a more restricted way it was as remarkable as Cole's Book Arcade. Next door to Andrade's there was a cafe called the Anglo-American Cafe, why I have not the least idea. But this used to be a favorite resort of a very primitive level for numbers of the political radicals, the Wobblies in particular, and when they were thrown out at 11.30 we'd stand in the street continuing our meeting place on the pavement sometimes till 4.00 am bashing each other's ears with what we had long been converted to. Then, besides that quite primitive sort of cafe, there were other places like the Italian restaurants, where the writers would more frequently gather and get together, and there was one in Exhibition Street called the Latin Cafe which was within a few doors of the Socialist Hall. This Latin Cafe was presided over by an Italian called Triaca. The writers like the Palmers, and the Essons, and the painters like those in the Meldrum School which was very active in 1916 and 1917, would meet there sometimes. Some musicians too, would meet there, Henry Tate particularly.

There were two or three of these little Italian restaurants. There was one in Bourke Street called the Florence, and the Latin in Exhibition Street. At that time these were the main ones. Later on more pretentious ones started up and you saw less of the bohemian crowd and more of the *nouveau riche,* but in the war period and after the war these quite simple Italian restaurants used to be favored as meeting places where people would sit, eat and drink the vino to a very late hour. Then of course just immediately after the war there was for a long period every Saturday afternoon this meeting of people who were interested in Ellis Bird's project of starting the magazine Australian Felix, and all sorts of people would blow into it, not only a sort of hard core of people who were really interested in trying to get it off the ground, but all sorts of people would gather there to hear what was being said, to give some ideas and so on, and it became really, rather than a place for getting a magazine started, it became a place to have a good yap on Saturdays for radicals.

Then also, of course, there was the Y Club, that was the Club but it was a regular monthly meeting place for forty people and there it was, in a way, one of the best meeting places for radicals in the sense that it brought all the radical thought, literary and non-literary and less literary together . . . but no women at all.

You could not wipe off either Nettie Palmer or Hilda Esson, who was a doctor, or Katharine Prichard or Lesbia Harford, who was a lawyer, or Jessie Mackie, who was a musician, or Marie Pitt, who was a poetess, or Ida Meeking, whom actually I only met about twice. You could not wipe them off under any kind of theory at all but, in practice, there would be the men and the mates and the Y Club, they would not have any women in it. Bob Ross, in congratulating me the first time I got married, stopped me in the street and said he'd heard that I had got married. I said "Yes," and he searched round for some comment to make, and all he could find to say was, "Ah well, it solves the sex problem anyway." Certainly in the Ross family I never saw any signs of Mrs Ross taking any kind of prominent part, or even being allowed to.

There was, of course, something in the revolt against the drawing room doll, and this would apply, I think, to all these writers, men and women. In the case of the Essons I would say that it was very obviously present. I've seen Hilda Esson, who was quite a good actress, playing Nora in Ibsen's "Doll's House," and certainly all these writers had at some stage been very interested in Ibsen, and had come to the more socialist standpoint through the passages of Ibsen's plays and so there was certainly this element of revolt against the drawing-room female.

Another meeting place was the Yarra Bank on Sundays, which was not only a place where there were earnest speakers and singers of songs like the songs of Bill Casey. He was an old fireman and subsequently he became Secretary of the Seamen's Union in Brisbane. In the meantime he was a member of the IWW, and he was known as the philosopher of the proletariat and he had a great liking for a German philosopher called Joseph Dietschau. They used to put him alongside Marx and Engels. Casey used to quote him at great length. He'd buttonhole somebody and say "Stable motion and mobile stability constitute the reconciling contradictions that enable us to reconcile contradictions." This philosopher of the proletariat also used to compose songs, the tunes of the songs were old ones, the words Casey's. The most famous of them was 'Vote me into Parliament.' The last verse goes:

I know my bible off by heart
And Jesus justifies me,
The man who will not vote for me
By Christ he crucifies me.
Bump me into Parliament,
Bump me any way,
Bump me into Parliament,
On next election day.

He used to compose these songs at the other end of the Dietschau philosophical stuff, and they used to be printed in a hurry on a handpress by Freddy Holland, who was a son of Harry Holland who became the leader of the New Zealand Labor Party. He was always running late with them and I used to collect them on a Sunday and hurry down to the Yarra Bank with them still wet, you know, right off the handpress. Some people used to come to the Bank just for some sort of community singing, and it was a real sort of social gathering. Faction fights there used to be largely forgotten, and so occasionally a man like Tom Tunnecliffe, the Labor leader, would speak off the IWW platform alongside his brother-in-law, Percy Laidler. It was there that Fred Riley in the conscription days used to collect £100 at a time.

Betty Roland: Last Lunch With Guido

He wanted to take me to his favorite restaurant (French) in Penrith, but I said: "Can't we stay here quietly in your house?" and he agreed. Irma, his German daily, fussed around a bit and then she left.

There was soup, cheese and wholemeal bread, and Guido drew the cork out of a bottle of Hunter River wine. We ate facing each other across the table.

When Guido looked at you with that wrapt expression so peculiarly his, he made you feel that, to him, you were the only person of importance in the world. It was a subtle form of flattery and, I think, was the secret of his charm – both for men and women – and at the end of the next hour-and-a-half I was as much in love with the old spell-binder as I had ever been.

But had I ever been out of love with him? For instance, take the poem I wrote after we had spoken on the telephone after a silence of several years. We had quarrelled when he refused to legalize Gilda's position by adopting her. I was very bitter about it, and with good cause, as time was to prove.

I was in Italy when Gilda wrote to say that Victoria, his last and best-loved wife, had died. Although there had been some bitterness between us for the past few years I felt genuinely sorry for the poor old chap. He had really loved that woman and her death, I knew, would be a heavy blow. I wrote and he replied.

Two years later I had occasion to visit Sydney and talked to him on the telephone. Suddenly, in the middle of some quite trivial remarks, I heard myself say: "I still love you, Guido."

There was a startled silence on the other end of the line, and then: "Thank you, Jenny, it is good to be forgiven," said the well-remembered voice.

"I still love you, Guido!"
whose voice spoke those words?
Not mine. Impossible!
Not after all the years,
The tears,
The bitter days, the barren nights.
The hate
Alternate
With anguish and dark fears.

Strange
How the heart betrays the will.

Whoever thought to hear
My tongue articulate such words?
Not I!
Yet, they were said so clear
I hear them still.
Do you recall them too?
You, who will,
Despite the intervening pain,
Forever hold me captive.
"Guido, I love you still."

I wrote it out and sent it back to him.

A year later, I was once more back in Sydney and we had our lunch together. As we lingered over the wine he thanked me for my poem and his eyes were tender, like a lover's, as he did so. And then I asked a question I had often asked myself. "You've loved many women, Guido. Which one did you love best?" He did not hesitate. "Victoria. *Unquestionably,*" he said.

It was not the answer I had hoped for but I let it go at that and we returned to poetry.

Picking up a little book, he opened it and read me Cafavy's "Ithaca."

As you set out for Ithaca
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure and discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
Angry Poseidon – don't be afraid of them:
You'll never find things like that on your way
As long as you keep your thoughts risen high,
As long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Lystrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon – you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul
unless your soul sets them up in front of you ...

Keep Ithaca in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

"I feel that poem expresses you," he said. "That Montsalvat is going to be your Ithaca." At the time, I thought so too.

Cafavy's poem led us on to talk of books, and I reminded him that he had promised many years ago that, one day, I could have my choice of some of his books. "Tell me which ones you want, and I will get them for you personally. As you know, they're all stored in the house at Castlecrag." He never kept his promise.

His two pug dogs, Petunia and Kiniki, were pestering us to take them for a walk. We took them along the path beside the river and, as they frisked ahead of us, he remarked: "I've made provision in my will for them to be cared for after I've gone."

He omitted to add that the new will he had made a few weeks previously made no mention of any of his four wives or three children but bequeathed his entire fortune to a woman whom he had recently met and fallen madly in love with. He was then 87 years of age and died a few months later, after campaigning for the Whitlam governmet in a heat of 104° Fahrenheit.

DAVID MARTIN

Parsifal in Eltham

A discussion of Betty Roland's The Eye of the Beholder
(Hale & Iremonger, $19.95)

I suppose the reason why I was asked to review this book, which tells about the Meldrumites and the Jorgensenites, and about Montsalvat near Eltham in Victoria, is that I've never seen the place and only caught a glimpse of Justus Jorgensen one evening in the Mitre Tavern, boozing with his mates.

The editor may have reasoned that if a person like me, not a born mixer, could enjoy Betty Roland's intimate testimony about these people and their doings, and about Betty Roland herself, then so might many others who know no more about them than I do. After all, a good writer does not write solely for readers with long memories.

So, did I enjoy the book? Yes, in parts. It is a bosomy, heavy-bottomed thing which leaves out nothing, save what could be libellous. A good old shopping-bag of a book, out of which spill love affairs, name after name, gossip, some pretty shrewd observations and a few political asides, pen portraits, and – what else? Nothing much else. But that should be amply sufficient for those archetypal Victorians (I mean belonging to our State) who madly love grouping together and seeing what goes on in other, more or less similar, groups. Who sleeps with whom, when and why, and how it links with painting and writing and building, or cooking... For that there is always a public, because you can't nail human interest to a board like asphyxiated butterflies.

Betty Roland's human interest is the genuine article. She would hate to be called it, but she is also a genuine primitive, not like Grandma Moses but like the marvellous Douanier Rousseau. Perspectives and shadings she cares nothing about. She appears in every frame, directly or by proxy. She likes bright colors.

What she has not managed to do, perhaps because it was impossible, is to explain whether or not something creatively important went on, up there, in the *pisé* and mudbrick *Schloss* named after Parsifal's unapproachable abode. Bohemia is only interesting if the Bohemians are exceptionally talented, otherwise it remains an undistinguished neighborhood. Judging by his work, Meldrum was a master – a wrong-headed master. But of Jorgensen you now hardly hear as a painter, which of course doesn't prove much. As a romantic architect Walter Burley Griffin is preferred by both their peers. It is not a fair comparison, perhaps, because the point about Justus (JJ henceforth) was that he was so essentially an amateur. Montsalvatism is the passionate dilettante's protest against hermetic professionalism, a form of high counter-culture. (Very Australian and especially Victorian, this almost neurotic distaste for professionalism.) Seen in the context of his time, JJ and the tableround over which he lorded it so brutally must have had a certain significance, nevertheless.

Betty Roland also fails, which is odd, to make those people live. At least she misses with JJ: she is better with the women, whom she treats with a tender and painful regard, even when they are her rivals. Her own best-loved lover, Guido Baracchi, comes out breathing and sneezing. You can feel his presence as you did in *Caviar for Breakfast*. But JJ is seen as in a mirror, and Meldrum just a phantom. This is because the writer stands so close to her canvas; she wraps it about herself like a dressing-gown.

She must have filled dozens of diaries. I am puzzled, though, by her total recall not only of conversations but of other people monologues. Enviably Shakespearean! For the rest, her style is robustly fluent, popular and unfastidious. (I am not saying that you can't be both, popular and fastidious.) She just seems to pour it out, which is not evidence that she skipped revision.

I guess she enjoys human contact. Touch therapy! As a writer she shares one great virtue with Dorothy Hewett. She has lived a lot – a hell of a lot – and knows about struggle, suffering and love. The men who were dearest to her deserted her. She got no help from her mother and most of her family. She lost a beloved child, and didn't even find what she was looking for at Montsalvat, a place of spiritual belonging.

Some notes about JJ. He was born in 1893, the son of an heroic Norwegian sailor. His siblings turned out conventional. He studied art at the Melbourne Gallery, was bored, and became a Meldrumite, working in the master's studio. Imbibed Max's hatred of the moderns, but not so quixotically, which eventually led to strain between them. As a youth he was shy. Allegedly still a virgin when, aged 29, he married the well-off and well-connected Lily Smith in 1924. They went to Paris, then London. There JJ committed his first infidelities. Later he was to sire, and have gambol about at Montsalvat, a few

little extramaritals. Lil suffered from multiple sclerosis, but lived until 1977. In the author's approximate words, she was at Montsalvat what in a traditional Chinese home would have been the Number One Wife.

In 1928 JJ's first exhibition was a near flop, but it brought him the friendship, among others, of Mervyn and Lena Skipper, whose daughter, Helen, was to become Number Two to Lil.

If I have it right (not easy, because the book sweats names like an address book in a heat-wave) Betty Roland

met Guido at the Jorgensen's house in Brighton. Now we are in the 1930s. There are some interesting pages about Molly Dean, and how she was murdered, and how respectable Melbourne used it to have a go at the Meldrum circle. Max, however, was a ramrod Puritan, entirely unlike the very deliberately anti-puritanical Justus.

Now comes a long interval in London, with Guido and Betty, and later, undescribed here, a longer one in Moscow. When they return in 1935 the Jorgensenites are in bloom and JJ is happy, building a house for his grail.

The book gives me no feeling for what the structure itself is about, or was meant to be about, symbol and substance, except as a handsome setting for JJ's rulership over his disciples. It probably had a larger purpose, though the smaller one, too, has its complexities. A good deal of domination-surrender was involved, an unusually undisguised father search. That is no denigration. Sado-masochism has its low and its high reaches, like most experiencing. It cannot, for instance, be separated from the story of Christ.

Not that in the eye of the narrating beholder JJ reflects the image of Christ. Rather more that of Satan. What actually did she seek at Montsalvat? Stability of life form, to allow her life content its prodigal expression. The eternal contradiction: the collective never really does liberate the individual.

Other figures appear fleetingly, as marital partners, unaccoladed knightlings, or visitors. Among survivors are Glen Tomasetti, Max Teichmann, Macmahon Ball and Rosa Ribush and Laurie Short; and, among the dead, Aaron Patkin, Bill Cook, Dolia Ribush, the Palmers (not approved of) and Alan Marshall (approved). In a cast of scores there are many whom many readers will remember better and would prefer to see noticed, but they don't happen to swim inside my net.

One should be generous to a generously conceived book, but it can jar. Betty Roland, outlining the background to her first departure with Guido, writes that only her husband, "the unfortunate Ellis Davies," was surprised. The marriage had deteriorated

> not on account of my infidelities, but because of total incompatibility. He had become repulsive to me and I refused him the rights a husband normally expects. I had grounds for doing so.

The passage is either too long by one sentence, or too short by four or five. The former, I should say.

From 1937, for six years, the author did not see JJ and his companions. This absence yields the best segment of the story. (Yes: what we actually have are two books, which just blend at the edges. As an autobiography in instalments it is arresting. As witness to a social and artistic experiment it is so only in bits.) A long Sydney interlude has the qualities of *Caviar for Breakfast*, and the authentic heartbreak. Loving and slowly losing Guido. A *menage a trois* which makes all the other menageries look pale, because those involved are truly involved, not merely watched and dwelt upon. The birth of a daughter. Routine work for radio and newspapers, and a reaching out for something better. Sydney occupied by foreign soldiers, with a woman's moving rounding out of Xavier Herbert's account.

In the background is Montsalvat, as a fall-back. Which takes place in 1947. In the stifling emotional hot-house JJ only desires subjects who are in despair, a fact of which he makes no bones. And Lil tends to find only desperate subjects for her efforts in therapy. There is the weeping and accusing and beg-pardoning (and drinking?) and sad trouble about kids. At last Betty can take no more and is off again to England, without a bloke. Her work settles

down, she herself settles down. A humble, humiliated friend kills himself. Good reading, all this.

She returns in 1972, but now she plans to write a book about the Montsalvationists. The focus changes. Around the round table there now sit only five. One after the other the heroes pop off. Guido dies, aged 88, much in love, but not with Betty, who of course still loves him. In his will he forgets their daughter, but not the daughter's dog. Lil is in a geriatric home where, one morning over breakfast, she hears on the radio that Justus Jorgensen has eaten his last supper. And even Betty tells an ageing comrade that she fears she is past it. To comfort herself she has 64 sexual encounters to look back on, of which 62 were, she assures us, unmemorable.

Is there a better way of reviewing the book? There are still critics alive who knew the actors in the play, the making of the stage, and what the play intended, if that can be defined. Period pieces have their charm, so long as they meet one or more of three conditions. The people in them must be personalities – not just 'characters' – of exceptional force, remembered for exceptional achievements. Or something of value to another generation must be extractable from what they did; not necessarily something big but something universally valid. Or the piece itself must seduce us not with its truthfulness alone, but also with its subtlety and resonance, with its art, like a novel.

Betty Roland feels like a novelist but she does not think like one. Yet the book is more than raw material. It is a finished product of the more haphazard (but not careless) kind. It will delight people of her own provenance. To them Jorgensen's Montsalvat, fake castle or bold metaphor, means more than the affirmation of craftsmanship in a mass age, and more than an outsider may understand.

Perhaps a second critic could tell us whether the spirit of Montsalvat produced something that outlasted the builder, and, if so, what it might be.

David Martin's Armed Neutrality for Australia *was reviewed in our last issue. He lives in Beechworth, Victoria.*

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

Thanks in considerable part to our readers, the current Overland subscription campaign has been going very well – in fact for the first time in many years we had to reprint our last issue. We haven't done a firm count yet, but it looks as though we've gained several hundred new subscriptions, and have increased our bulk sales by 400 copies. The extra revenue will produce economies of scale in our production costs, and seems to prove what I have always suspected – that if we can break through the information barrier, if we can in fact get Overland into people's hands, there's a big new audience waiting for us out there.

I made a point, during the elections, of asking as many as I could how they were going to vote in the Senate. It will come as no surprise to many of you to know that I found a big shift away from traditional Labor allegiances, even – or perhaps especially – amongst those I saw as firm Labor supporters, even card-carrying Labor Party members. One of these said: "I wouldn't trust either the Hawke mob or the Socialist Left with a majority in both Houses." As others have suggested – and I write this just before December 1st – we may be seeing a historic break in traditional voting patterns.

Sadie and Xavier Herbert, probably in the 1950s.

There may be some significance in this for magazines like Overland. One rather gifted chap I know got me to talk to him the other day about what I thought of the climate for a new weekly or fortnightly of opinion and ideas he wants to launch, with fairly substantial backing. Perhaps we are entering a period of supermarket politics, where more and more voters will be shopping for ideas and, if necessary, new parties and groups to promote them. Yet against this is what a film-producer friend of mine calls "The Australian rejection of thought." One is expected to have a firm and uncompromising stand *for* or *against* the major issues: Blainey, feminism, land-rights, nuclear politics, abortion, you name it. "Try to *discuss* the issues," says my friend, "and see how far you get." A far cry, I suppose, from the view of that famous teacher and tragic figure William Cory, one-time Eton master, who said that one of the hallmarks of a civilised education was "the capacity for graduated response."

We would wish to mark the recent deaths of Hal Porter and Xavier Herbert. Both were very considerable artists in any context, and great artists in the Australian context. I wonder how many of the present great regiment of Australian writers will achieve their stature. In Porter's work, Leonie Kramer wrote (Melbourne Herald, 31 October 1984), "The learned and the familiar, the refined and the vulgar, the formal and the colloquial live together as they can only do in writing of the most intelligent kind." Porter and Herbert had this in common: they rejected the idea of a collegium of authors, they stood by and for themselves, they rejected, even resented, any notion that they were 'intellectuals.' They saw themselves as simple men. With Hal Porter there was a considerable element of affectation in this, as in much of his behavior. With Herbert it was much closer the truth. Both struggled with great courage in hard times to make their art. Both could be intensely difficult men to get on with, Hal searching to locate and exploit weakness in others, Herbert resenting admiration when he got it, and resenting its absence when he didn't.

I met Robyn Pill not long ago: a remarkable Cairns woman who gave up a good job to act as Xavier's amanuensis and literary major-domo. Not, she told me, because she had any particular interest in his literary

work, but because she liked the man. To me there is something both tragic and noble in the way Xavier handed over everything to Robyn, asking only for funds if available to stay on the track, and set off at the age of over eighty years to write something which would set the capstone on his achievement. In a specially-equipped 4WD, complete even to solar panels. It was a great way to go, especially when one thinks of the long drawn-out tragedy of Hal Porter's death. There was a rage in Herbert, a rage against the pretty obscenities of civilized life which, together with his real sympathy for common humanity, and his deep love for his wife, makes him an attractive man.

I believe that one of the great threats to society lies in the burgeoning of 'professionalism' and 'credentialism', and I am not proud to have been part of a profession, the education profession, which has done so much to foster these developments in its own interests. Although a member of the Society of Editors, I see dangers in the development of 'professional' editors and the like in the book world; and of course one hears many horror stories, some no doubt unfounded, of ignorant (but determined and 'professional') editors bullying writers or mutilating their intent. At the same time any editor worthy of the name is aware of the vast amount of his or her own time that goes into silently improving other people's work: for which they, not the editor, get the credit!

Barbara Jefferis was pretty scathing recently (Australian, 29 September) at the liberties taken by Angus and Robertson with the new edition of Miles Franklin's *Up the Country* ($14.95). The novel was first issued by Blackwood's in 1928. In 1952 Angus and Robertson issued it in an edition based on the Blackwood edition but, they claim, hastily and confusingly amended by Miles Franklin. Now the same firm has brought out a new edition again, this time based on an early manuscript version of the book found in Miles Franklin's papers. This manuscript has, the publishers confess, "been edited more severely than Miles Franklin herself would ever have allowed." Amongst other things Miles Franklin's "long, anti-climactic ending" has been deleted, and fifty pages removed.

Barbara Jefferis denies that the ending is anti-climactic, and states that "the emphasis and the direction of the book have been changed, by editing, thirty years after the author's death." Franklin wrote, Jefferis continues, a "peculiar mixture of soap opera and social document"; she did so because she was "a strongly feminist woman who had pressing things to say about the nature of Australian country life in the mid-19th century but found romance a necessary cover both for her radical views and for her contradictory idealisation of men." Jefferis concludes by asking if it is not a poor sort of culture "that allows changes to be made to its classics – even its minor ones – to make them more 'acceptable'."

Helen Spence's novel, *Handfasted*, has also been retrieved lately from the limbo in which it lay as a nineteenth century manuscript. It is published by Penguin Books at $7.95. Anthony Thwaite, in the London Observer (5 August), calls it "a real find, a notable addition to Utopian literature." It had to wait over a century for publication because of its treatment of the theme of 'trial marriage'. It has been edited by a member of the English department at Monash University, who admits that the work as presented "is not a reproduction of the manuscript." Apart from relatively minor changes, a large part of Book One ("unnecessarily wordy and immaterial") has been dumped, and later one entire chapter ("unnecessary prolixity"). Maybe so, maybe so. But this kind of handling does add, for the writer, a new terror to death.

The question of the appalling state of texts in Australian literature is taken up by the report of a committee of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand, printed in that society's Bulletin for the first quarter, 1984. The report states that "the serious study of major literature is not a subject for triflers," and draws attention to the sorry state of materials available here. Marcus Clarke's *His Natural Life* is most often read in debased texts. There is no complete edition of his "elegant, ironic" journalism. The published state of Henry Handel Richardson's work "is little less than scandalous." *Maurice Guest* lacks 20,000 words of sexual reference and exploration of character. The 1979 Angus and Robertson edition of *The Adventures of Cuffy Mahony* is hopelessly corrupt, with six and a half pages of vital text dropped, apparently accidentally, from one story alone. (It is a pity that the Bibliographical Society people themselves cannot get simple titles straight: they refer to "Cuffey Mahoney.") No adequate text of Shaw Neilson has ever been available . . . and so on.

"Between the written and the published texts," writes Anthony Burgess (London Observer, 8 July), "fall several shadows – pedantic typists, and copy editors who silently correct the author's deliberate errors (ascribed, naturally, to his characters); the undeliberate errors of the printer, which may not be mere misprints but inadvertent omissions of whole lines or even pages of text; the dilution of obscenities or removal of the possibility of libel by timorous publishers." Burgess is reviewing the new, and supposedly definitive, text of James Joyce's *Ulysses* which costs, incidentally, £163 sterling. Both Burgess and Craig Raine (Sunday Times, 12 August) take a quizzical look at attempts to achieve the 'perfect' text, especially with Joyce; and Burgess suggests that a century or so might now be spent on the definitive text of *Finnegan's Wake*. And he adds that we are still waiting for good – and available – texts of H.G. Wells, so the problem is by no means purely an Australian one.

There is a connection, I believe, between the increasing self-confidence and status of publishers' editors and the absence of authoritative texts. Driven by pride in their own skills, and the commercial incentives of marketing,

editors become partners in the production process. If in doubt, they side with the sales manager. Carefully researched critical texts of the classics, such as the *Ulysses*, are not only time-consuming and expensive to produce (though, in the long run, likely to become permanent additions to the publisher's backlist), but involve a faithfulness to the author's original intent which runs counter to much of what passes for 'professional' editing. We may note, especially as the bicentenary approaches, scores of valuable Australian historical manuscripts lying around waiting for skilled and loving editing by scholars who will respect the text, and for mainstream publication. In the present climate they are likely to lie around a long time.

In the Overland before last I wrote an Adelaide Festival diary, in the course of which I said that I heard David Thomas, in an extract from *The White Hotel*, say that there is no memorial at the Russian massacre site of Babi Yar, and that the notorious ravine has been built over. Both Judah Waten and Desmond O'Grady, from Rome, have been in touch with me to point out that there is a monument there, and that the ravine at that point is untouched.

A thought for the times, from Jonathan Swift: "Party is the madness of many for the gain of the few."

DOWN UNDER

Someone goes walking over my grave
And I can't quite tell who.
They have filled my eyes with sandy loam,
A bloody thing to do,

But I suppose I wore them out
On scenes of little cheer –
Chicane, the jobless, grasping greed –
Before I fell down here.

The sons of god are lurking
Behind that pittosporum hedge,
Their haloes and their sandals
Heaped on a window-ledge.

Some snooper has come to a shuffling halt,
Treading the bone-dry fescue
Above my belly, my cock, my feet
As though he considered rescue

Or she did. Doesn't matter much;
My lips are long unkissed
And safe down here I think of myself
As a flat geologist.

Tectonic plates slide silently
Between here and Peru;
That scungy pub just over the road
Is called The Drop of Dew.

Whoever is walking over my grave
Through Bathurst burrs and hay,
Leave me. Turn your key in the dash
And quickly drive away.

CHRIS WLLACE-CRABBE

FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH A FADED JUGGLER

In those days she was lapsing rapidly
Into liquidation. You see – and here
The voice dropped – she'd make me fumble silly
With impatience half the night, my fever

Rising crude within me, then she'd pipe
The need for an *imperatif* before the usual course
So I'd splosh the glass again (she wiped
It clean in one enormous gulp) and toss

The bottle, wait, until she'd done
Sketching yesterday's fresh sign of early
Menopause, so by the time we'd finally begun
I'd feel the grim morning's surly

Tap on shoulder, but still squeezed the last drop
Of night into the paling pillows, while
My none too canny at best of times timing flopped
Once more, and she'd destroy me with a smiled

Alas my love you do my wrong, to the tune
Of the original. And my flushed quick try to link
Wit with revenge by some keen countercoup soon
Would evaporate absurd, would sink

Her merely to such lusty fits of silent piercing
Laughter that it tore my blood adrift
As day finally cracked the curtains, kissing
Her black velour piano-seat with a grey mist

That somehow always scared me. So, as before,
A vow: the last time, this. But listen: then
It was the lastness of it moved me more:
And I knew I'd be returning to her, maybe when

My funds ran low again (I rationalized).
And so, despite succeeding daily wrestlings
With myself, where gingerly I clean surprised
The Id of me, started to glean caressings

Of a wisdom more autumnal, perhaps some clear
Approach to purge the woman, I understood
What no-one in his righter mind would know – here
He cocked his face: She was rich food

For a glutton soul so frail and poorly travelled . . .
Thus disexcused I'd hoist the phone and blithely start
Afresh; and all that day I'd dream the sweet Devil,
Greedy old whore after every man's heart

And after mine after all.

ALEX SKOVRON

THE PERFECTIONIST

The right hand holds the cane:

through the window, it is summer people sitting,
walking
over the lawn the sound of children laughing.

Whenever the left hand moves, it is beaten back.

As seen through the same window but from outside
both the right hand & the left seem vaguely, almost
impossibly

attached to the outline of the artist seated before
the piano in the room.

Sunlight falls blindingly in a mirror.

Whenever the left hand moves towards the keyboard, the
right
hand moves: the tip of the cane blurs, slashes –

until stunned helplessly inert, the hand falls away again.
Observe the hand lying on the carpet

at the end of that oddly twisted & distended arm: that with
each new thrashing it is becoming more of an appendage,

more like a lump of flesh.

Old cuts, bruises the joints of the fingers so swollen into
each other that the oedema bulges over the nailbeds

themselves blackened & chipped.

Meanwhile, however, very softly, quietly very tirelessly
beautiful the third & fourth hands of the artist play on

(whenever the left hand moves, it is beaten back:
the cane swings & smashes mercilessly)

For hour after hour –

afternoon moving through the windows into dark as
people
depart & the first stars appear over the trees –

the figure plays on with the terrible perfection
of its own appassionatas rippling & silvering in the
mirrors.

As the artist listens to his own hands.

As moonlight fills his mouth.

PETER LLOYD

GULBARDIE

sitting still
alone in the asphalt yard
his lunch homed in his shirt
no matter what they may insist on here
might be informing the silence
of a tribal meeting keeping
his eye off the paddy wagon's
tight-lipped doors he
might be sitting out miners or
blockading
with his lean black bum another
road that drains the hush away from
dreaming here
the little light-legged flies still
stick to his back late afternoon
is glossed with crows he signs
papers with a name that is not
his name nor anything like his name
no matter what they may insist on here
feeding
the rats at night his
bare feet creak on concrete cold as sand.
by morning he may agree to ease his belly
with hot coffee every hour
the guard's eye licks his face

JOANNA HALL

PICASSO AND VASE

I cut this picture out with the kitchen scissors –
raggedly, couldn't resist it: a huge vase
with female figure darkly massed on it:
the swell of the vase accommodates
her fine swelling hips. She's very female.

And there's Picasso, old and lined, leaning into
the belly of the vase. Says the photographer,
'Seeing his image in the lens, he moved
to match the curve.' His gaze – pure force.

This high-domed skull, firm mouth, used hands,
soon to go down to death. Here's spark enough
to kindle a whole race of makers. Is there
wind enough in us to blow small flames
to fury? Come, crack your cheeks and match him.

BARBARA GILES

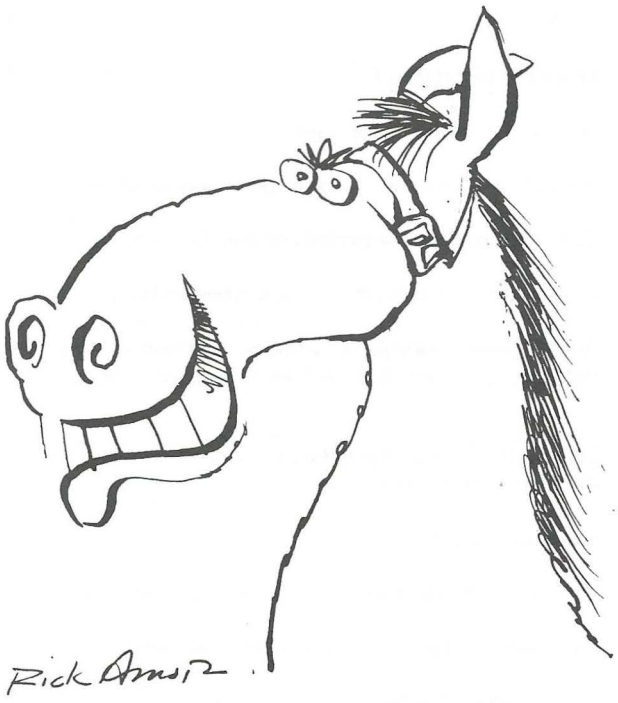
PICNIC DAY AT THE DROUIN RACES

The day was fifteen bright balloons
and Tulips, Les the Butcher and I
sail in, fat grins on our lips.
We've got twenty bucks between us
and we're determined to win.
First cab off the rank, the bar,
slake the thirst,
then off to the ring where the serious punting's
about to begin.
Tulips and Les study the form,
bright students of some arcane law.
They confer, then Tulips turns to me and says:
'The one with the ribs, Shelley,
the one you wouldn't feed to your dog,
we want a Drysdale not a Clydesdale.
Don't go for the meat, go for the bones'
So I picks this nag that up and fronts it in,
us having laid a spin on its nose
and around us the women are jumping for joy
having bet the same way,
their hats like soft clouds in the air,
their pastel dresses swaying
silk along the rails,
and opposite, on the grassy knoll
a fusilade of butterflies
and, whoops, there's Ambulance Bob
wearing top hat and jeans
with a mob that're drinking champagne
while their children run screaming with joy
and some of the adults bob a jig.

In the second race our money got done.
When the starter's gun rang out
the bloody horse fell to its knees
which went down like a brick fart.
Well, back to the ring
where the jockeys' silks whap gently at their skin
and the horses are humping and snorting,
raring to go,
bobbing their heads like drakes in heat.
'So' Les the Butcher turns to me and says,
'We want meat on its arse like twin boston buns
or the back end of a bus.
It's got two thousand to run, needs heaps of haunch.'
So I picks this fine mare
and we watch from the rails
as it launches from the starting gate like a bullet from a gun.

We just can't lose.

In the sixth I decide to punt on my own.
There is the mill and the throng,
the supreme delicacy of a crowd on the hoof
and Slipper McDonald, horse number six
stood there alone and aloof
not champing, not dancing, somehow serene.
I flee to the bookie and pants
Number six to win
He hands me my card and I go back to the track



and of course the horse gets up and romps it in.
I go back to the bookie's humpy where I wait in the queue.
God, what a lovely day.
Bright children, laughter, a song in the breeze
and a winner in hand.
What could go wrong?
Then comes my turn.
I slap my slip in his hand and say *Pay me my man,*
when as bland as can be he says *That's the wrong ticket son.*

Next please, he said.
Hang on a sec, by now I'm getting grim.
I takes back my ticket and checks his unfathomable scrawl.

I asked for number six in the last.
That's not what it says here son.
You dodgy bastard, I yell.
By now I'm surrounded by jacks all looking stern.
I suppose I gets mad
rips up my ticket and says
Well shove that up your Lionel Rose,
and stalks off to find Tulips and Les.
Well, we've had a good day, our pockets are full,
I refuse to let berks throw a pall on things,
so it's off to the Railway Hotel
to spend some cash
play pool and drink to the moon.

After all, the day was fifteen bright balloons.

SHELTON LEA

BOULEVARD

for Ben

Plane trees vault above the street floor
as death goes arching over
all my poor exertions.

Leaves like a cake
made of heaped, watery hands:
they bury us all in viridian.

A church or half a balcony
may peep through this mound of greenery
saying, Do this, do that,

as we go on with our failing among these patchy trunks
under a clenched green sky.

Desires akin to this foliage
are blown away by the years
but the drizzle of spring returns.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

SCARS

Today the scars over my stomach are one year old.
This day, then, I slept while the surgeon's rubbered hands
parted the yellow folds of my fat to map out
the journey of his knife. I travel the same journey
over updated charts – wound, suture, scab, scar.
They had trouble doing-up my belly-button. Now
I delight in the large ball of fluff that unfolds
from my navel. I have given birth to another year of Me.

I don't mind anymore if your eyes wander all over
my topography. Indulge. Here, let your fingers trace
a new watershed, a jagged coastline. I am not who I was.
There is a lot of jungle unexplored, but the beginnings
of a path. Pain. You can only travel by foot, and slowly.
Always to the right side of a foothold, death. There is
someone ahead making the way clear; I can only catch a
glimpse of a garment, a sandal, footprint, sweat-bead.

One year. I watch my layman hands shave, the blade
felling one
day's blue stubble. I praise all things that grow, like skin,
all things that are made, like steel, and given, like stone,
and all
things revealed, like the taking of steel to stone before
skin.

TERRY HARRINGTON

MARU, or: THE ORIGIN OF FAECES

Based on a post-colonial Fijian fable

While emptying a slop-pot one fine day
into the village cess-pool, Maru fell
head-first in, and, being mortal clay,
almost died from the stupefying smell,

But gradually his senses reasserted
their customary control, and from that time
he cried, he shouted, swore, and even blurted
for rescue from the ordure and the slime.

Nobody heard; though many a villager came
to empty pot-slops on his dripping head
(who is there, after all, would care to blame
their neighbors for not looking down instead?)

Time passed – in fact, *days* passed – and Maru still
stood neck-deep in the excremental mire,
and, while the gorge rose, something in his will
rose, as his hunger deepened, even higher,

For Maru found that he had little choice
(faced with his isolation and his need)
– rather than use his mouth for giving voice
he must first slake his thirst, and, later, feed . . .

From where he stood, or rather, *slithered*, he
saw no more dignity in death, and so
he chose to *live*, and who indeed are we
to remonstrate, being never brought so low?

And there he stands today, O you who pass
with pots of tourist dollars, on the spree
– pause if you will a while, kneel on the grass,
peer over the cess-pool's rim and you will see

A figure human still, despite the stench,
the foulness, and the purulence, doomed to be
sustained by that would make a hero blench,
and obliged to cry forever: 'Shit on me!'

Maru, his memory blurred, cannot recall
less ambiguous manna from on high
– and how shall we, who have the wherewithal
to keep him fed, ignore that piteous cry?

Ah, wondrous taxonomy of all that lives!
What philosopher can plumb the depths of it?
Blessed (so runs the text) is he that gives . . .
Maru cries: 'Shit on me!', and so – we shit.

BRUCE DAWE

TURTLES

We drain off time and strength and wealth each year
to force our education on the sus-
urrating young, but are they ever told
what they might wish, or need, to hear?

Item: that ego is the poison we
are given for survival in the jungle,
love is the unguent for living with each other.
They mix like oil and water. The jungle still
is with us. Slowly, earth-worm slow, the paddocks
push back the wild. Tigerishly fast
the jungle can return. The danger comes
where paddock and the jungle meet. Clear head
and cool warm heart are needed there to grasp
which of our love or ego is the weapon
we should use. With each mistake the cause
or user is knocked down or quite destroyed.
Ponder the neophyte, the Emperor Ashoka.

Item: that we do not possess the earth,
but are the ones possessed. Earth gives suffic-
iently to those who nurture her and honor
all living things. One generation may
grow rich on greed: their children's children are
deprived of what they need. Ego or love again...?
Ponder the deserts of Sahara, and the spirit.

Item: no matter how much sex pretends
it is not love, though sex can lift one kind
of love beyond the stars. Sex seeks its own
delight. Love yearns to find the loved one's good.
Ponder what Paul wrote in Corinthians.

Item: extreme indulgence of a sense
destroys the very pleasure it provokes.
Can the exquisite sensualist be
any but a person of animal
self-discipline? Remember the downward slide.

Item: that when the young believe they know
what they would do with life, let them be care-
ful then to visualise it through, for what
they formulate and follow, passionate
in strong desire and assiduity,
they will get. So ponder on Tithonus.

Item: that greatness is not what the me-
dia think, achievement over men and things:
rather, achievement over self, the ego
spurned, controlled – to live at peace within,
to know the harmony the ecosystem
of the spirit has whose ego is no more
than robe. Not many great are ever heads of.
Consider Patrick White and his confession.

Item: and Item: and Item:

Uncountable millions of turtles hatch each year.
They have not training or protection. Enough,
they say, survive. How many die does not appear.

ROBERT CLARK

MARY

Massaging soil, shyly,
she's planting bulbs: too old to trust
too young to shrug, she hopes
they'll grow. Stunted –
so much in her self
frost-damaged, too much malformed
she suspects her touch
guilt-crippled hands, regret's constrictions
a timid stroke, paralysed smile
she once reached out, so fiercely
it jarred. Affection backflipped
and broke its spine

ELLY McDONALD

THE VIEW FROM THE NON-MEMBERS' BAR

She's got this little note-book see and it's got NAMES see
and I'll have one more then I hear the turkey's quite good
how's the snow look for the weekend let the bastard write
his own Adjournment speech he's only a bloody
backbencher
what do y'mean not news the prick's sending a boatload
of
the poor buggers back my chief of staff doesn't understand
me academia you're going back to academia how's the
snow
look for the weekend back to Pinochet's firing squads and
you won't fucking run it oow that Herald bird with the tits
lowest form of political life backbenchers scuse I because
academia's fucking irrelevant I've got tennis with the
Minister at two same again thanks Cedric how's the snow
look for the weekend and some of the NAMES are mealy-
mouthed Defend the Family sons of bitches is the censure
coming on today what do you mean there's no strictly off
the record see you seven tonight then when the wife's got
classes gets enough in here to write his column if he isn't
too pissed of course cost of reneging on the French
contracts
call you Whisper if you don't shout soon is he having it off
with his MO2 or what lookout it's that boring Mining
Council
turd and how's the snow look for the weekend and listen
sonny don't even tell me anything about your poor old
granny
you aren't willing to read about under my by-line
tomorrow.

P.R. HAY

PREJUDICE

The driver-guide on our bus was mostly kind enough, but
almost self-parodyingly prejudiced against Aboriginals:
maybe
he had reasons. The rest of the tourists were from the
south,
listened with interest and a touching credulity to his
whole
spiel. I knew enough to know he was wrong a few times,
mostly
about plants or birds. In general, though, he'd done his
homework: I learnt a lot of local history, heard of
occupations
that were new to me. But I couldn't stand him: his
prejudice
was bad enough, but he was so manifestly a bloody pom.
It's
galling indeed to sit and be told things you didn't know
about what is almost your native countryside in a
Southern English – Royal Navy, Officer Class – voice.

R. G. HAY

IF & THE MOVABLE GROUND

If
you see
'modernity'
as a bridge
between the past & the future
on which the troops
of those countries
fight a war

you will need
to go to classes
in destruction

every house that is built on it
every support it is arched upon

even those twigs
your words lay as if rough mat/ over a
moving pit

for a moment
to stand to fight from

a contiguous moment
will call you out
to knock down

you will be a newer/ demolition expert/
existing/ in the field of that instant/
as instant follows instant
each with its instant's fighter

as the war goes on . . .

J.S. HARRY

INVESTIGATOR'S REPORT

The house is a mansion so big
that only at night can the mind take it in
and then again not completely
because its exact outline
and its position
relative to the points of the compass,
the hanging terraces and the outhouses
amid the thick foliage,
the vaulted buttresses and the approaches
overflow and mingle
in this impenetrable country
where semi-darkness guards the traps
and a man's mind is seized by fear.

No one knows how many rooms it has,
how many stables and kitchens.
It's been years since smoke rose from the chimneys
and the owners have been gone ages now:
one because he was constrained by necessity
and sold his share to the state,
another to avoid the maintenance costs
in these difficult times,
and another because there are occasions
when you tire of everything and go off
searching who knows for what.
The testimonies few and vague
since those who remain are scarce
and most of them exceedingly ancient,
and there usually settles on the past a dust
as if of old light; which is strange
since nobody remembers the house
having windows.
Indeed, they doubt if it even had doors –
judging from their uncertain tone at least.

We enquired if these things might not have some relation
to Kafka's investigations.
But those who've studied the structures
and imaginings of his fevers
maintain that this is not
a question of nebulous guilt,
snares and closed labyrinths,
distortions of perspective or twists of the imagination.

On the contrary, the survivors –
ordinary men who do not lack for
those things which make life agreeable –
are not troubled by doubts. Except
perhaps, every so often, this image
of a child in Sunday-best among the furniture,
the piano, the armchairs –
everything covered, everything ready
as if for some summer absence.
The child with large eyes,
a blue balloon in his hand
motionless
on the end of a taut string,
and nobody knowing
how the child remained so,
how he managed to remain standing so many years.
And then this too, which
they mention always with a certain haste
as if it wasn't worth mentioning:
the voice. Something you can see
uncoiling from the house
towards the horizon, an enormous
sleeping snake,
a python fallen into winter sleep,
and at other times, depending on the light,
a tunnel linking the skies beyond
to the basements of high-rise flats.
Now and then they think they are about to hear it
and brace themselves. That's all.
They do take these things lightly though,
as if they were strange intruding presences
in memory's general vagueness.

We asked too if these things did not perhaps
have some connection with –
how can we put it? – with God:
the child's innocent age,
the inconceivable bulk of the house,
the latent voice, the tunnel
and the python.
But those who concern themselves with such matters
say that God does not dwell in great houses,
especially those without doors and windows,
but inside us, and it is we who hold him
captive, and not he us.
And anyway, what business has a child
with such bondage.

We arrived with the photographer late.
Not without reservations, naturally,
for voices cannot easily be photographed,
nor children behind walls.
But how to convince the public without proofs and testimonies?
Let alone that we couldn't find a guide.

A curious place. The passers-by
curt and in a hurry, although
it's hard to say for where
because only hillocks could be discerned,
bald, with a few wild carobs
and the occasional prickly-pear.
Inexplicable haste. At any rate, after repeated attempts
we cornered an old man whose mule
had suddenly turned stubborn on the uphill
and learnt that yes, there were
rumours but he himself,
even if from these parts, had seen
no such thing. And at night,
when he lights the cow-dung
and the impudent local mosquitoes
allow him at last to close his eyes,
has other things to think about.
But maybe it was pulled down
in the old days
when they levelled the area
with all kinds of plans in mind
and left it as you see.
Ask elsewhere.

And we will indeed, that I promise.
It is a matter of great urgency
though the public does not realise.

DIMITRIS TSALOUMAS

Translated by Pavlos Andronikos and the author

WALLAGA DAYS

2.15pm Vic's discharged from hospital
with eighty kilometres to hitch-hike home,
with a couple of smokes, nearing fifty.

The road climbs out of town around Mumbulla mountain
and onto the windy plateau.
If you stop for him, you find him far along it,

walking toward the purple hills.
The cars that pass him float across the rises.
The day is open as a palm and glitters.

6.30pm Eileen and Jo-anne are in Tilba
playing pool with a couple of whites
and Teddy and Frank from Deniliquin,

they're visiting for a couple of weeks
Eileen explains in the back bar
reserved for tentative friendships

like these. Everybody does his best,
there are a couple of good cues,
there is another bar you mustn't go in.

11.00pm or sometime thereafter
poking along the river's floor
comes torchlight. Behind it wait

spears at bow and stern,
behind the spears are memory,
fire bedded on pebbles in bark canoes,

behind the fire torches, men.
In the rocking boat that hunts for a knife
is an eel around a spear, hissing.

ROBERT HARRIS

PLAYGROUND

Swings

The glistening river the kids notice
tilts back and forth, caught
nevertheless between familiar banks.

They would make the landscape
swing to and fro even faster,
swing it off into space

or make it do a double-flip
and restore itself with the perfect
equipose of a gymnast.

But they keep stuffing
stubborn air into their mouths,
banging it against their ears

as they swing, push, swing
as if they could also fly above this ground
tricked into suspension by a rigid frame.

The Long Slide

The first downward
plunge was the worst
or best, that imaginary
letting go of something
holding her back
from coming out
of herself like daring
to be reborn for instance
which is a long way
with no escape
once she's going
down all that polish,
falling, falling
insubstantially
to a remarkable thud
on sand. And it's OK.
She climbs trustfully back
up the slope again and again
to make sure she can
let herself go,
thrillingly swoop down
and discover, on her feet again,
she's ready to continue.

Roundabout

When the trees are spinning so rootlessly fast
that they become a dizzying blur, a film

fast-forwarded, and the houses are also whizzing past,
he has corkscrewed to the centre of everything

where colors merge. *Faster! Faster!*
Scooting with his foot simply isn't enough.
Faster! Faster! He leans over the edge.
Later, he will slowly spin to a standstill, focus,

collect his bearings: trees, houses, roads
and, running off, disappear into the periphery of himself.

See-Saw

In this game of weights and measures
it will be proven that he has more kilograms

on his rump. He is grounded; he could shift
and let her plunge down with a shuddering thud.

Oh, the suspense is killing her!
He shifts his bulk nearer the axis

and she floats down so gently, a featherweight,
remains suspended, a counterbalance.

This will go on for a while, shifting
back and forth, the tease, the suspense

of tendencies; trying to give the slip
to the dogged persistence of gravity

in its disguise of grass and daisies.

ANDREW SANT

JOHN HEROUVIM

A Communist Life

A discussion of Audrey Blake's A Proletarian Life
(Kibble Books. $7.95)

Spike Milligan once published a compilation of his writings under the title: *A Book of Bits or A Bit of a Book*. At one level – and this is not said disparagingly – Audrey Blake's *A Proletarian Life* is such a book. There are sixteen pieces, ranging between four and nineteen pages in length. They supply a window on the experiential and intellectual influences which, over six decades, have shaped the life of an Australian communist woman.

A Proletarian Life is well worth reading. Audrey Blake traverses matters of politics, culture, philosophy and that ever-relevant cliche, the human condition. The style is thouroughly readable, the content very interesting, and the insights occasionally profound. The book is a political autobiography, equally divided between 'Stories' and 'Documents.'

I

The stories are engagingly written. The author uses fluent and economical prose, and succinct and evocative imagery, to relate with feeling and humanity both the humor and the poignancy of life. The class backdrop is unmistakeably, though generally unaffectedly, Proletarian – with a capital P. Children afflicted with whooping cough are taken by their fathers for a walk around the nearby gasworks, "so the fumes would stop our whoops." In the 1920s Audrey Blake and her siblings play footy in the streets, "with a 'ball' made of tightly-rolled, dampened newspaper tied with string . . ." There is a weekly bath in a backyard bathroom, to which water is brought bucket by bucket. When a girl reaches puberty she is provided with "a bundle of large, old, unhemmed rags." When she turns fourteen her formal education ceases, because after that age school costs two pounds a year "which, with five kids to keep, was beyond my mother's means." Even before they reach fourteen, children can "get a permit" and go to work in a factory.

But Audrey Blake's life has not been that of your common or garden variety proletarian. She has run the gamut of communist experience, including the watershed year in 1956 in which, along with so many others, she underwent a crisis of faith which set her feet onto hitherto heretical paths.

In her stories Audrey Blake provides a sensitive rendering of real people and situations, some familiar, others uncommon. We meet the Austrian-Jewish owner of a small shop in which she was employed; the decent TB-afflicted representative of the Young Communist League of Great Britain in Moscow; the sceptical and warm-hearted New Zealand woman who becomes a close friend after sharing a journey on a passenger boat. Her prose possesses that rare capacity to transport the reader, almost palpably, into an atmosphere and surroundings with which one is utterly unfamiliar. (How many of us have any idea what it was like to live in Moscow in 1937-38?)

Still her view of humanity is a bit too optimistic for this reviewer. We do not get to meet, close up, the more unattractive and vexatious characters who do find their way into the stories. The unfriendly, anti-communist workers whom Audrey Blake tries to address at the factory gate are largely faceless, as are the impatient and demanding customers who swarm into her shop in the week before Christmas.

The people who hold our attention to any significant extent resemble the goodies in Steinbeck novels. To be plausible they must not recur too often and must be contrasted with unattractive characters who are drawn in comparable depth. Audrey Blake furnishes no such contrasts. This vitiates the impact of the good people to whom the book introduces us: the kind and impecunious Italian flower lady who realises the importance of world peace; and the enlightened ship's captain who declares himself "interested in it all: philosophy, politics, literature."

II

The documents do not seem to have been selected as thoughtfully as the stories. They are a rather inchoate *potpourri* of papers, speeches, letters and travel notes. They do, however, address a central theme. (The exception is the article on the Eureka Youth League, which is largely a brief but valuable historical account of communist youth organisations in Australia, republished from the journal Labor History.) The documents pivot on the attempt to formulate an effective socialist response to post-war life and politics, a response which will accommodate the socio-cultural changes witnessed in this period and assimilate the contributions of feminism,

Gramscian theories of hegemony, and the socialist humanism unbottled in 1956.

In the documents, Audrey Blake grapples with the sort of praxis demanded by this new situation. One is not sure that her purpose is best served by the chosen format. The documents are essentially variations on a theme – the strategic re-thinking in which Audrey Blake has been involved. Therefore they tend to be repetitious. They could probably have been re-worked, without too much effort, into a deeper and more cogent treatment of their concerns.

The author interrogates the problem of how socialist theory and practice are to make any headway in Australia. She rejects doctrinaire and prescriptive notions, such as the vanguard party, but recognises that such a rejection does not, of itself, overcome the fragmented and floundering condition of the Left.

She argues: "... The contemporary socialist movement ... in a society distinguished by its lack of a political culture, needs, pre-eminently, a discussion culture." This is to misunderstand the crux of the conundrum facing the Left. The sort of culture (or, more accurately, sub-culture) desired by Audrey Blake already exists. We have a bevy of socialist intellectuals casting about for answers to the prickly problems which she raises. But the sub-culture, which fluent in generalities, does not seem to be getting any closer to the translation of its stated objects into a political praxis.

It would be unfair to expect Audrey Blake to succeed where so many others have failed. And it's early days yet. But the most disappointing aspect of the documents in *A Proletarian Life* is that they do not even try to go beyond the ground which the New Left has already ploughed up, time after time, without unearthing any new *practical* clues.

> The question really is one of advancing a new hegemony against the old hegemony of the capitalist class ... We need to promote hegemony in an open way, open to the future and to the new ... [T]he vanguard party concept ... needs to be replaced by discourse on every level.

Yes, yes, yes, but it's all rather abstract. The vagueness, of course, is a reflection not of Audrey Blake's limitations, but of the intractibility of the problem which confronts Australian socialists of every hue. In "Old Places Revisited" she touches, all too fleetingly, on the approach which alone holds real, practical, counter-hegemonic promise. She notes that "the overwhelming need is for the workforce to project another path for the nation, to project other visions of the good life ..." And she adds:

> The time is coming when the workforce need not be submerged by that form of nationalism which is a facade for capitalism; a time when national forms can be just and legitimate ones for the workforce, unifying the people and isolating the capitalist pretenders who exploit national images. We should take this unifying potential out of the hands of reaction, and dispute at every turn the reactionaries' version of Australia and Australians.

This is the prospectus for a socialist revival in Australia, the marriage of Gramsci and Radical Nationalism. Such a fusion can look unlikely only to the politically unimaginative. It could well provide the key to the hegemonic imbroglio. The key will certainly *not* be provided by even more discussion within the existing sub-cultural framework.

III

In explaining her decision to use the word 'proletarian' in the title, Audrey Blake says, *inter alia:*

> I wanted to turn away from the fashionable Left thesis of the death of "class" as a concept for today. I wanted to affirm the centrality of class; to counter the decline of the Left amongst the workforce ...

In this respect the book fails to seriously undertake its set tasks. Its class analysis, indeed the whole exposition of class, is at best fuzzy. Apart from the now standard genuflections towards E.P. Thompson, the English Marxist historian and political theorist, the book does not explain the sense in which class is understood or used. Moreover, what Thompson said about class has no connection with the little that Audrey Blake says about it. Pages 112-116 are subtitled "The Working Class," but say next to nothing about it.

In a note to the English edition of the *Communist Manifesto* (1888), Engels wrote that the proletariat is "the class of modern wage-laborers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labor-power in order to live." This, I think, is Audrey Blake's proletariat. The term involves the implicit understanding that white-collar workers, since they too work for a wage, are part of the proletariat. The terms she most commonly (and interchangeably) uses are "working class" and "workforce." For some unexplained reason she subsumes, under the umbrella of class, a host of socio-political developments which have transpired in the last two or three decades: the women's movement and its institutions, resident action groups, conservation groups, the blacks, the unemployed, and "anti-establishment views ... on abortion, homosexuality, the family, marriage ..." This impermissible transposition is an unfortunate and theoretically ridiculous hallmark of the New Left. It represents a hopeless miscegenation of disparate phenomena. Actually, it is self-defeating. In the name of bringing together 'the proletariat' and the radical and/or marginal issues of the day, it perpetuates the gulf between them. It does this by unthinkingly associating two adjectives – 'radical' and 'working-class' – without examining the extent to which that association is warranted.

This association operates, sub-textually, throughout the book, and this buried message is the book's major flaw. The reification and fetishing of the concept 'proletarian' has been a trademark of the communist movement. In her early teens Audrey Blake applied to join the young

Communist League (YCL). When she presented herself to be examined by those appointed to adjudge her acceptability, the following scene took place:

> He asked me: 'What is your father?'
> I replied: 'A sheetmetal worker at the South Melbourne Gasworks.'
> Then someone said: 'Ah, a proletarian.'

Approached at the level of its title, *A Proletarian Life* embodies the welter of fallacies divulged by the comment, "Ah, a proletarian." Marx assigned to the proletariat its historical mission as the gravedigger of capitalism and liberator of humankind. Lenin appointed the communist party as the agency which would lead and oversee the proletariat's realisation of its destiny. This was the vanguard party, "whose world," as Audrey Blake recognises, "is not that of the class." In fact, by appropriating 'proletarian' to itself, the communist movement largely emptied the word of any objectively meaningful content. In its communist usage 'proletarian' is an abstraction. A revolution becomes proletarian because it is led by the communist party. A political line is termed proletarian because it is the line of the communist party; any other line is , *ipso facto,* bourgeois.

But the proletariat of the English-speaking world is not, today, the proletariat of the first new decades of this century, when there was at least some force in the communist use of the term 'proletarian.' The cultural, economic, demographic and technological ramifications of developed capitalism have seen to that. My own parents are proletarian, in the old-fashioned, blue-collar, factory-worker sense of the term. So are a few of my ex-students whom I still see, and the parents of many of the children I teach. Their world and values are not Audrey Blake's world and values. In the realm of politics their outlook is far more cynical, more insular, more pessimistic, resigned and indeed conservative, than hers. And despite my own proletarian pedigree (migrant parents to boot – an added bonus) I am much closer to Audrey Blake's views than those of the proletarians I know. (Except on the related questions of cynicism and pessimism.)

At the age of fifteen Audrey Blake joined the Friends of the Soviet Union and the YCL. At seventeen she was a full-time YCL activist; at twenty-one she was the YCL representative to the Young Communist International in Moscow. Later, along with only one other woman, she sat on the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Australia. Hers has been, and is, a rich, full, varied and committed life, a communist life, but not a proletarian life.

IV

Fifty-five years ago, while still in primary school, Audrey Blake attended a talk on the Russian Revolution. She recalls that it "revealed to me much of the truth of my own existence." From this event she dates her commitment to the communist movement.

The attachment to the USSR, it appears, is deeply embedded. Unlike many of her former articles of faith, which she has re-examined and rejected, the basic commitment to the Soviet Union stands. "Now, coming to the end of a long and difficult life . . ," the vestigial fidelity to the communist Mecca prevents her from following through her socialist humanism to its logical conclusion: a rejection of the shackled society in whatever manifestation it appears. Indeed, the mystical Communist-Proletarian-Soviet trinity still exercises its influence. She chose the word 'proletarian' for the title, "... to challenge anti-socialist marxism and an anti-Soviet socialism . . ."

If the persistence of such atavistic loyalties is sad, its co-existence with professions of commitment to democracy is baffling. "One thing I've learned: whatever is necessary in the upheavals of the early days, socialism moves to democracy after the shift of power or it deforms itself." Is the Soviet Union moving in such a direction? Audrey Blake went there in 1982, and came away convinced that it was. Her remarks to this effect will not persuade anyone with doubts. No evidence is offered. Instead we are left with that most threadbare of arguments, an appeal to faith.

She asserts that the USSR is not a warlike state because "the profit motive is not the motor of Soviet society." This is a *non sequitur.* Even if "there are no economic reasons for war" in the USSR – which is itself a debatable contention – it is far from clear that there are therefore no *other* reasons. The barbarity of the USA in Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Vietnam is rightly castigated. The use of napalm and other frightful antipersonnel weapons by the USSR in Eritrea, Kampuchea and Afghanistan is not. This familiar selectivity is disappointing, and it undermines, for me at least, the author's overall credibility.

If the USSR is, as Audrey Blake maintains, "still the bastion," the question which demands a closer examination is "the bastion of what?" The sort of society which exists in the Soviet Union is a subject that cannot be pursued here. I will restrict myself to this observation: by associating socialism with the Soviet Union, you give socialism a bad name.

A Proletarian Life will help fill a baneful hiatus in Australian political biography: the absence of the experiences of Australian communists. I hope that the autobiographical part of the book will be read by all sorts of people, though I fear that it won't. In a country where to be a communist is akin to being an extra-terrestrial being, Audrey Blake's stories have an important function.

I remember the old lady next door asking my father in the mid-1960s, over the side fence, if it were true that communists ate people. (She figured that, as an anti-communist Greek, he ought to know.) The priest had been frightening their flock with diabolical stories, yet our neighbor's credulity was a measure, not just of the priests' own credulity or mendacity, but of the level of political culture in this country. Those for whom a communist was, and is, some sort of cloven-hoofed and alien being, and not simply a person with a particular political viewpoint, would profit from knowing that the Audrey Blakes of this world were and are human. This message

comes through, loud and clear, in *A Proletarian Life.*

In some ways this book is really two books. The stories make the communist experience accessible to those outside the Left. The documents are a discussion of issues in which only the conscious Left is interested. It would have been better not to combine the two, and it is to be regretted that so few stories were published. For it is the stories, much more than the documents, which will endure.

John Herouvim is undertaking post-graduate research at Latrobe University into the Australian Maoist movement.

comment

Stuart Macintyre writes:

This *Quadrant* business is becoming silly. The issue in dispute is not whether the Congress for Cultural Freedom was supported by agencies of the United States government – its leading figures admitted the fact in 1967 – but precisely who among its Australian officers knew this to be the case back in the 1950s. I presented circumstantial evidence that Richard Krygier, at least, did. I obtained that evidence from Humphrey McQueen, who briefly enjoyed access to the records of the organisation when they were first deposited in the National Library, and from my own reading of the Latham papers in the National Library.

Points 1 and 2 of Richard Krygier's letter seem simultaneously to accept that evidence and seek refuge in obfuscation. Point 3 accepts the use made by his organisation of the United States Information Service, point 4 is a half-hearted apology for the idea of vetting membership applicants with ASIO. The final part of the letter, scrambling for higher moral ground, appears to suggest that after Kronstadt no Communist should defend his or her civil liberties. That position, I am pleased to say, was rejected by the Australian people in the 1951 referendum.

To prevent this outbreak of Cold War recidivism proceeding indefinitely, I have a positive suggestion. Let those who closed access to the records of the Congress open them. That way we can resolve a petty dispute once and for all.

[This discussion is now closed – Editor]

ROBERT BIRRELL

The Social Origins of Australia's Immigration Debate

Why has the immigration debate become such a highly-charged public issue? Since it focusses primarily on the question of Asian migration, does it follow, as many commentators suggest, that it is basically racist in origin? Given the history of Australian attitudes towards Asians this might seem a reasonable working hypothesis.

There is, however, an alternative view: that current opposition to Asian migration owes more to the unemployment situation. There is some support for this in the opinion polls, in that they show a close correlation between the level of opposition to Asian migration and to migration generally. This view could be supported by evidence indicating Australians were, by the 1970s, much less likely to respond to Asians on racist grounds than in earlier years.[1] By racism I mean the propensity to evaluate an individual or group on the basis of stereotypes derived from color or nationality.

My primary purpose here is to explore the relative significance of these two factors in shaping the immigration debate. This should give a better basis for understanding the causes of public concern and perhaps help in forming of immigration policy. To what extent and in what form the Australian government should take account of any hostile public attitudes towards particular racial groups is another matter, which I address briefly later.

Certainly by the 1980s Australians were particularly concerned about Asian migration. There has been consistent opposition to the size of the Indo-Chinese refugee intake, and this has now been generalised to all Asians. Thus a poll, taken early in May 1984, before the debate initiated by Geoffrey Blainey reached its peak, showed nearly two-thirds of Australians were opposed to the increased proportion of the migrant intake drawn from Asia then evident.[2]

It may be that both racist and economic factors are operative. It is often argued that depressed economic conditions generate tensions within the host community, thus arousing fears about competition from minority groups and helping to bring into focus latent atitudes based on racist stereotypes. Australian concerns about Asian job competition do seem to have contributed to the intensity of the debate. But there is much more to it than this. The build-up of Asian migration is occurring at a time when many Anglo-Australians already feel under threat from Australia's ethnic movement. The theme developed below is that, whether justified or not, the multicultural movement is regarded by many as challenging the primacy and worth of their identity as Australians. The Asian intake, being so visible, has sharpened this, especially since prominent politicians like Mr Hayden talk about Australia becoming the first Eurasian nation. Asians appear to be being perceived as a threat to an important component of Australia's identity, that is the easy-going non-competitive 'Australian Way of Life.' In this sense economic and ethnocentric-based fears are mutually reinforcing each other.

By ethnocentrism I mean the pride individuals feel in the characteristics of the community they identify with. One response to this may be that a challenge to Anglo-Australian ethnocentrism is just what is needed. But it could stir up further resentment, and may be counter-productive. A strong sense of pride in a common identity, expressed in feelings of shared citizenship, can be important in facilitating social reform and aiding with the integration of migrants into mainstream institutions. The problem is to identify and build on the most positive aspects of the Australian identity.

The Comparison with Canada

In considering these issues I have found it productive to compare the Australian situation with that in Canada. Canada has much in common with Australia, in that both are small settler societies, with each having received large numbers of migrants since World War Two, including in recent times many Asians. Both have taken Indo-Chinese refugees, Canada absorbing 90,860 between 1975 and 1984, compared with Australia's 86,656 over the same period; though Canada, with near 25 million total population, has taken a lower per capita share of this refugee flow than Australia. By 1983, even though the Indo-Chinese inflow to Canada had fallen below the level entering Australia, 38.3 per cent of Canada's settlers were still being drawn from Asia and the Pacific, and another 17.5 per cent from the Americas (including many blacks from the Caribbean). This is a higher proportion of non-whites than is currently entering Australia. Those of 'visible minority' origin (the Canadian official term for

non-whites) now constitute some 7 per cent of the total population, well above the 3 per cent level in Australia.

Despite this situation there has been no parallel public concern about immigration or the 'visible minority' component. Immigration policy is not currently a significant public issue in Canada. Yet the Canadians have experienced even higher unemployment since 1982 than have Australians, and opinion polls on immigration show that when asked most Canadians do not support an active immigration policy.

How can this quite different Canadian response to changing immigration patterns be explained? The hypothesis explored here is that, though immigration is of concern to Canadians, it is not seen as a threat to the nation's cultural identity in the manner suggested for Australia. In part this seems to be because the ethnic movement in Canada has not developed the political weight of its counterpart in Australia and thus has not really challenged Anglo-French domination of Canada. In addition the vigor of the debate in Australia appears to be related to the relatively stronger sense of ethnocentricity amongst Anglo-Australians as compared with Anglo-Canadians (though not, of course, French Canadians).

We are dealing here with changing and interconnecting variables. Indeed, the boundary and form of Australian ethnocentrism appears to be tightening in reaction to the ethnic challenge. But despite the complexity I think an analysis in these terms does shed light on both the Canadian and Australian situation.

The Evolution of Australia's Migration Policy

Australia's migration program through the 1950s and 1960s never posed a significant threat to the Anglo-Australian majority. Although some one-third of settlers were from southern and eastern Europe, with cultural orientations different from the mainstream, this did not become a major issue, because of the strong consensus amongst Australian opinion leaders that these migrants should and could assimilate to the 'Australian Way of Life.' Nor was there much challenge in the labor market, since these migrants primarily entered lower-skilled areas largely vacated by Australians, who readily found work elsewhere in a labor-short market economy.

But by the 1970s this situation began to change. For reasons to be explored shortly, 'ethnic' migrants in Australia began to organise themselves as an effecive political force. By the end of the decade they had won major concessions concerning the maintenance of their cultures, and were becoming influential in migration policy. With regard to culture the Fraser government took a number of initiatives, including the establishment of separate media, and the granting of financial assistance to community-based welfare services and ethnic schools.

Though these hand-outs had an obvious pork-barrel flavor the government came under pressure to justify them ideologically, in the face of ethnic claims for more and emerging Anglo-Australian opposition. The ideology of multiculturalism was increasingly used for this purpose. It helped limit initiatives to the apparently innocuous cultural area, but did involve a major concession to ethnic communities in that it officially declared their cultures should have long-lasting legitimacy in the Australian context. This abandonment of assimilationist doctrine, even though it involved little direct challenge to the 'Australian Way of Life,' nevertheless further aroused the fears of some Australians, especially when it was followed by significant changes in migration policy.

Migration policy has been of great interest to ethnic leaders in Australia, partly because of practical concerns about family reunion, but also as a symbolic issue, in that concessions in this area have long been regarded as central in the fight for recognition of the status of ethnic groups. By the end of the 1970s Australia's ethnic communities were able to put considerable pressure on the Fraser government for concessions in the family reunion component. Though reluctant to make changes (because of worries about an influx of low-skilled non-English-speaking migrants), the Fraser government capitulated to this pressure following ALP statements that, if elected, it would make the required concessions. In May 1982 the Fraser government implemented a new family reunion scheme extending major concessions to Australian residents sponsoring their brothers and sisters. This in effect doubled the family reunion intake from some 25,000 to 50,000.

This change, when combined with the maintenance of a sizeable refugee intake, plus a sharp contraction in the skill program (forced by increased unemployment in 1982 and the accompanying fall in skilled job vacancies), subsequently led to an increase in the proportion of Asian migrants. The effects of these changes have still not been fully reflected in settler-arrival statistics. But in essence what has happened is that Asian communities in Australia have shown a higher propensity to sponsor their relatives than have European-origin communities (including the Italians and Greeks, those most vocal in calling for policy changes in the first place). The result has been an unintended increase in the migration intake of Asian origin.

This has added to the fears of those concerned about larger questions of Australian cultural identity, and to their perception that migration-policy issues are now very much tied up with such questions. While the debate over the government's multicultural policies and migration selection rules did not (until 1984) generate major community debate, it increasingly gained the attention of organisations concerned about Australia's traditional identity. These include the Returned Servicemen's League, and various fringe patriotic groups and individuals. Though largely outside the mainstream of contemporary Australian politics, through energetic efforts in letter writing, talkback radio and so on, they do appear to have reached many ordinary Australians. This has helped lay the groundwork for a more energetic public reaction in 1984.

Suggestive of this is an Age poll which asked a parallel question on Australian atitudes towards assimilation in 1977 and 1981. Despite (or according to the analysis, because of) the emphasis given to multiculturalism over this period, an increased proportion of respondents took

the hardest line on assimilation offered to them by the poll-taker.

Attitudes to Migrant Assimilation, 1977 and 1981

Migrants should:	October 1977 (2000) %	November 1981 (2000) %
Be encouraged to fit into the Australian Community as soon as possible	54	65
Be left to fit into the community at their own pace	14	16
Be assisted by government funds to maintain their own cultural traditions	31	17
Don't know	1	3

Source: The Age, 18 January, 1982.

The Canadian Experience

The contrast with Canada is substantial. During the 1970s the Canadian government did make some concessions to ethnic interests in widening family reunion. However its reactions in 1982 when the recession began differed from those of the Australian government. As in Australia, there was a sharp cut in the skilled migrant intake. But rather than expand family reunion the Canadian measures had the effect of cutting the "Assisted Relative" category – a category which had given concessions to sponsored relatives (including siblings), outside the immediate family (parents, dependent children, spouses and fiances).

This policy change caused little controversy within Canada. Unlike Australia, the ethnic movement has played only a minor role in recent policy changes. Canadian migration officials interviewed in June 1984 indicated that ethnic leaders have generally been inactive on the issue. The result is that, though the family reunion program is now the main source of migrants in both Canada and Australia, in the Canadian case the field of eligibles is at present much more restricted than in Australia

The Canadian comparison suggests that an important element in explaining the controversial nature of migration policy lies in the relative vigor of the ethnic movement here. Subsequently we also need to examine why the Anglo-Australian majority has reacted so strongly to ethnic claims.

The Ethnic Movement in Australia

Ethnic politics in contemporary Western societies is largely about attempts to reallocate societal resources (including wealth, power and status) on the basis of ethnic criteria. As such it often crosscuts divisions based on class, occupation, region, and so on. The communities most likely to pursue claims on the basis of ethnicity are those whose aspirations have been aroused through contact with the lifestyles of the host community, but who have found difficulty gaining material success or social acceptance within mainstream institutions.

In this context what seems distinctive about Australia is that since the Second World War the nation has received larger numbers of relatively low-skilled migrants from cultures 'different' from the host society than has Canada. This is partly because the Canadian selection criteria were tougher on skill and language factors than were the Australian, particularly during the 1960s and early 1970s. The Canadian intake of rural background, non-English speaking migrants from Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey and other middle Eastern countries during this period was much smaller than the Australian. Conversely the Canadians began to recruit Asians in substantial numbers from the 1960s, with a high proportion of these being well educated.

These low-skilled communities have found it difficult to break out of lower-level Australian occupations, and partly because of their isolation in lower-skilled jobs have not been accorded much respect by the host society. Ethnicity has obvious appeal to such communities, in that it promises increased financial resources, increased power to community leaders and, especially, increased status to all who feel their culture and origin is not respected by Anglo-Australians.

There are communities in Canada too, which have been somewhat isolated from the mainstream. The two largest are the Ukrainian and Italian communities. The former has been in the vanguard of the Canadian ethnic movement. But an important feature of the Ukrainians is that they arrived in large numbers prior to the Second World War and have been able to establish themselves economically, particularly in the prairie states. The Italians too, though mostly post-war arrivals, nevertheless had also established substantial communities in Canada prior to the war. Community leaders, therefore, tend to be older and successful, thus relatively conservative in their views about the legitimate scope of ethnicity. For example they tend not to be sympathetic to welfare handouts allocated on the basis of ethnicity.

In comparison with Canada, therefore, it seems that the sizeable flow of non-English speaking, low-skilled migrants to Australia since the war has laid a relatively fertile base for ethnic politics. In the event, however, it took some time for a formal ethnic movement oriented towards Australian politics to get started in the face of mainstream assimilationist views, and the limited number of educated and experienced ethnics capable of dealing with the Australian political system. Australian social workers and educationalists dealing with migrants in the 1960s were the first to draw government attention to migrant issues. They were important in gaining public acceptance that such issues deserved special treatment. Subsequently, as ethnic leaders emerged and took over the public advocacy of the migrant cause, the focus became more that of the status of ethnic cultures in Australia. By the 1970s the acceptance of ethnic cultures in

Australian society had become the key symbol of this claim for recognition.

Once the ethnic movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s won acceptance from influential segments of Australia's intelligentsia, it grew with remarkable speed. By the mid 1970s both major political parties appear to have concluded it was in their interests to compete for ethnic political support. Under the Fraser government there was a significant reallocation of welfare, educational and, particularly, cultural funds into ethnic-based institutions. This process has gone much further than in Canada, where there is no federal parallel to Australia's establishment of the Special Broadcasting Service, or federal funding for ethnic schools (full-time, part-time or Saturday schools).

Once this process of funding to ethnic communities begins, it feeds on itself, since these communities subsequently have a much greater incentive to organise collectively, both to compete for funds and to increase the solidarity or boundary consciousness of fellow-countrymen. State support has also opened up a range of new career opportunities for ethnic professionals in social work, education and cultural fields, thus helping to build up a self-conscious ethnic intelligentsia. Such persons are well placed to give more articulate leadership to their communities, and have a strong interest in promoting a multicultural ideology supporting ethnic-based institutions.

Neither the Liberal/NCP or ALP parties seem to have anticipated these self-reinforcing processes, though there are now some who regret how far the process has gone. But the 'cat is out of the bag.' As the current Minister, Mr West, often puts it to his Parliamentary colleagues, "we live in a multicultural society ... Whether we like it or not, it is here."[4] Both parties now have to live with a situation in which pressure for further concessions to multiculturalism is inevitable, as is the critical response or backlash from the Anglo-Australian heartland.

Nevertheless there have been pressures, even if less vigorous, for parallel developments in Canada. The Canadian government responded to these with a commitment in 1971 to support ethnic cultures. The level of commitment, however, was cautious, since it occurred in a context of great concern about Anglo-French conflict. The French, in particular, have been anxious that their status as one of the two founding communities not be challenged. They fear a vigorous multicultural policy could relegate their position to that of just another culture in an overall ethnic smorgasbord. (There are obvious parallels in the reluctance of organised Aboriginal groups in Australia to be lumped under the 'ethnic' umbrella.) This has had important political consequences in Canada since the Liberal Party, which has ruled Canada through most of the post-1971 period, depends heavily on Quebec support. The French caucus in the party has opposed federal support for multiculturalism much beyond the 'song and dance' level. Also, although the Liberal Party has been the main recipient of ethnic votes, its dominance of electorates in the main ethnic centres (Toronto and Montreal) hasn't given the opposition Conservatives much incentive to compete for ethnic votes. The Liberals have been able to take the ethnic vote pretty much for granted. Their leader during this time, Pierre Trudeau, personally gave little support to ethnic initiatives. As a result there has been slower development of practical multiculturalism in Canada than in Australia, and less opportunity for the self-feeding process described above.

This situation may change since the recent increase in non-white migration to Canada has led to sizeable newer communities, some of which have found difficulty gaining acceptance, particularly the Indians (most of whom are Sikhs). They are pressing the ethnic cause more vigorously. In 1984 a federal report on 'visible' minorities recommended the creation of a new Ministry of Multiculturalism, with greatly increased powers to act on behalf of minorities.[5] The Conservative opposition is also now showing greater interest in tackling ethnic support for the Liberal Party, and appears to be contemplating increased bargaining for the ethnic vote.[6] It remains to be seen how far this process will go.

Ethnocentrism in Australia

The foregoing helps to explain the vigor of the challenge Anglo-Australians have encountered. But the sharpness of the debate is also due to the nature and strength of Anglo-Australian ethnocentrism.

No elaborate analysis of these attitudes can be attempted here. However there is ample evidence that by the post-1945 period Australians had evolved a strong sense of 'peoplehood,' rooted in Australian experience and expressed in distinctive values, attitudes and cultural style, that is the fabled egalitarian, easy-going, 'Australian Way of Life.' Though many in the business and professional elite distanced themselves from this (and instead sought to maintain British links), there seems little doubt that the lesser orders were conscious and proud of this Australian identity.

It is true that the fringe patriotic groups referred to above have typically appealed to remnant 'British symbols,' notably the British component of the Australian flag, in seeking to mobilise popular opposition to changes in migration or cultural policies. However I believe these symbols are increasingly being seen as representative of the 'Australian Way of Life' by the Anglo-Australian public, and need not involve a desire for revivified British links. Rather, one response to the 'ethnic challenge' within the Anglo-Australian community has been to attach more significance to symbols which express their sense of identity as Australians. This identity, as suggested above, revolves primarily around the 'Australian Way of Life.'

Feelings that this is under attack seem to have shaped the response to Asian migration. A brief digression on the issue of ethnocentrism may be useful at this point, in order to get it into perspective. Ethnocentrism has become something of a dirty word to the Australian intelligentsia – though more when applied to Anglo-Australians than to Greeks, Italians or other ethnic communities. But self-consciousness and pride as a 'people'

can have positive social consequences. For instance, without some shared identity no society can hope to win widespread support for welfare measures which are based on compassion for other members of their community, or build support for collective projects such as preservation of the nations's environment.

The problem with ethnocentrism comes when it is defined in exclusive terms, such as to limit the entry of newcomers into mainstream institutions, or devalue them in the eyes of the host community. In this sense Australian ethnocentrism is less exclusive than that of the Greeks, Chinese or Germans. For instance, West German feelings about the uniqueness, solidarity and superiority of their society are such that citizenship is not currently granted even to the German-born children of foreign workers who have lived in Germany for years. The high valuation in Australia placed on egalitarianism and mateship makes any blatant excursion hard to justify. However it must be acknowledged that this openness has depended on migrants adapting to Australian terms. This has required their acceptance of Australian definitions of appropriate behavior. There is a willingness to accept the individual migrant (including by the 1970s those from Southern Europe and Asia), as long as the migrant makes an effort to meet Australian expectations. But when migrants are seen to be forming residential or social enclaves, or worse, pressing for exclusive migrant-based political objectives, this tends to be regarded as an unwelcome challenge. When accompanied by a multicultural ideology claiming that all cultures have equal legitimacy, this is interpreted by many Anglo-Australians as an attack on the 'Australian Way of Life.'

This process can be seen most explicitly with the Indo-Chinese. They got off to a bad start in Australia in that they were widely perceived as unwelcome 'invaders.' At no stage since the 'Boat People' arrived unannounced have more than a small minority of Australians supported the expanded Indo-Chinese intake which followed.[7]

Once in Australia they faced a difficult situation. Most were non-English speakers and their qualifications were not recognised in Australia. They have had to enter low-skilled occupations. This has segmented them occupationally, and given impetus to residential segration in industrial areas. This has evolved into very visible Indo-Chinese enclaves as new arrivals have taken up residence near friends and relatives. Employment problems have further promoted this process, since many have had little choice but to eke out a living providing services to other members of their community.

These developments have aroused fears about Asian migration in general since unlike Canada, where many well-educated middle-class Asians are now established, when Australians think of Asians they relate to the Indo-Chinese experience. A major point of concern relevant to Australian fears about challenges to the 'Australian Way of Life' is that Asians are perceived as ruthlessly success-oriented. To quote from attitudes expressed in a recent inquiry into the way Australian's view Asians, "They take life too seriously. They upset the way things are done, have always been done. They don't 'balance' their lives between work and recreation as mandated by the 'Australian Way of Life'."[8]

Thus we have a combination of mutually-reinforcing elements generating animosity against Asians. They are seen to be 'clannish' or 'separate' as well as aggressively ambitious. Given the current job scarcity plus concerns about the multicultural challenge they are seen as a particularly potent threat to many Anglo-Australians' very identity as Australians.

Geoffrey Blainey, by calling attention to migration policy changes implying further increases in the Asian intake, and capsuling his case in the language of cultural challenge, has hit a now well-established but rather raw nerve in the Anglo-Australian psyche.

Ethnocentrism in Canada

The comparison with Canada is again instructive. Anglo-Canada's ethnocentrism appears not as sharply developed as the Australian variant. This in turn seems to have facilitated a smoother integration of 'visible' minorities into Canadian society. The French in Quebec are of course highly conscious of their separate identity. But elsewhere in Canada there has been no parallel to the emergence of a distinctive, Canadian-based culture like that in Australia. Though the attachment to Britain has diminished, there is some despair about what is distinctively Canadian which could replace this. Unlike Australia, there has been no comparable working-class, nationalist-oriented movement capable of articulating a distinct identity, or powerful enough to influence the wider society. The unimpeded flow of US technology, ideas and popular culture across the border is an additional obvious handicap to the emergence of any distinctive identity.

Whatever the causes of this situation its ramifications can be readily observed. An Australian visitor can't help but be struck by the relative absence of visible signs of popular identification with Canadian symbols. People do not show their feelings publicly as many Australians now do with the wearing or display of Australian insignia.

Some prominent Canadians (including Trudeau) have argued that this lack of strong ethnocentric identity is a good thing in a society made up of diverse cultural communities. It is asserted that Canada can gain a new and worthwhile identity by prizing diversity. In a sense Canadians haven't much choice, since the French have refused to participate in the Canadian federation except on the basis of preservation of their local identity. It is a short step to suggest that ethnic communities ought similarly to be accommodated into a new Canadian culture prizing cultural diversity. Canadians do seem to be sympathetic to this. Opinion polls show greater support for, or tolerance of, diversity in Canada than in Australia. For example, a 1981 government-commissioned poll showed 56 per cent of Canadians agreeing to the proposition that "A culturally diverse country is a strong country" and only 19 per cent disagreeing.[9]

This seems to have contributed to the relative ease with which Canadians have absorbed 'visible' migrants. In the case of the Indo-Chinese the Canadians took 60,000 in

1979 and 1980, more than double the Australian intake in the same two-year period. There was opposition to this, but in contrast to Australia almost half of all Canadians seem to have approved of this intake.[10] Popular support was also manifested in sponsorship efforts. Some 38,000 of the 60,000 were privately sponsored by Canadian communities, despite the fact that this involved the sponsors in accepting significant housing, employment and social responsibilities for the migrant.

This analysis indicates that Australian ethnocentrism, along with labor market conditions, has contributed to public opposition to Asian migration. There is an element of racism in this, in that the reactions described above seem to have led to a tightening and hardening of attitudes towards those defined as outsiders, and a greater propensity to stereotype these in negative terms.

One might conclude therefore that there is something to the arguments of Australian cultural pluralists that Australia would be better off with greater popular acceptance of the ideal of cultural diversity, and that multiculturalism should continue to receive official backing. The Canadian experience supports this argument. Where entrenched and diverse cultures exist, some kind of integrative value system supporting diversity does seem essential. Such values do seem to have won some acceptance in Canada and to have helped with the acceptance of non-white migrant communities.

But it is not a simple matter to apply this to the Australian context. First, there is the reality that at least 75 per cent of the Australian population is of Anglo-origin, and a significant proportion of these seem to have a clear conception of themselves as Australians, derived from Australian traditions. The challenge of multiculturalism and of Asian migration has accentuated this identity rather than modified it, as was hoped by multicultural theorists. The upsurge in Australian nationalist sentiment, though aided and abetted by commercial interests seeking to exploit it, is based on attitudes that cannot readily be dislodged, even in the face of overwhelming government intelligentsia endorsement of multicultural ideas.

It follows that to persist with aggressive multicultural programs, or with a policy of high migration involving an increased Asian intake, can only accentuate this process. It is not reasonable to insist that Australians should pay greater respect to migrant cultures and accept increased resource allocations based on ethnic criteria, yet at the same time cease to regard ethnic Australians as ethnics rather than as Australians.

It is idle to accuse Professor Blainey of responsibility for the present troubles. He certainly helped bring the issues into focus. But the ground was well and truly prepared in advance and ready for political exploitation, especially given that long-standing public opposition to continued high migration intakes had been ignored by the federal parliament. Mr Hodgman, the Opposition spokesman on migration issues, and some of his colleagues, had begun to cultivate this constituency well before Blainey spoke out. As early as May 1983 Hodgman spoke of an "anti-English speaking" bias in the ALP migration program.[11] In November 1983 the government's policy was likened to taking a "stock whip" to the British.[12] On 7 March 1984 Hodgman spoke of the "radical and dangerous turn to the left which has occured in the area of immigration and ethnic affairs," and of the Minister having "failed to persuade me, and I suggest, the people of Australia that he is not pursuing immigration policies which are, without doubt, anti-British and anti-European in bias."[13]

A second reason for questioning the strategy of encouraging cultural diversity can readily be deduced from the Canadian experience. The lack of a strong national identity in Canada has meant that regional loyalties tend to be stronger than in Australia. This has greatly hampered the federal government in gaining support for national solutions to many of Canada's problems – including how to allocate fairly the wealth generated by minerals located in particular provinces. Economic and social policies addressed to the needs of all require as a precondition a shared sense of citizenship. This is more prevalent in Australia at present, and is something to be prized and developed, not dissipated. For instance it is hard to imagine the present 'wages accord' succeeding in the absence of values drawn from Australia's union traditions endorsing a fair, living wage for all.

An alternative to present migration and multicultural policies might be to take a more positive attitude to Anglo-Australian ethnocentrism, focussing on elements like the ideal of a 'fair go' and mateship. These are values which are potentially universalistic, and offer better long-term prospects of integrating peoples of diverse backgrounds than does an emphasis on ethnicity.

The trend towards allocating welfare and educational funds on the basis of ethnicity is a blunt approach, since in practice it tends to reflect the political weight of the ethnic groups involved, rather than need. Emphasis on the individual needs of deprived Australians, whatever their origin, would lead to a fairer allocation of resources, and diminish the unwelcome side effects. As long as ethnicity is used as a criterion it encourages the erection of boundaries between communities through the stimulus it gives to intercommunity political bargaining. A similar argument can be made against official support for ethnic cultures, despite the repeated claim of advocates of this policy that it leads to greater mainstream respect for ethnic cultures and facilitates intercommunity interaction. Though a worthwhile ideal, this advocacy ignores the reality that at present Anglo-Australians aren't in a responsive mood. For their part, many ethnic leaders wish to use such funds to bolster the *separateness* of their communities. Their fear is that, in the absence of intervention, they will lose their community base through the assimilationist attractions of the mainstream culture.

In regard to migration policy it follows from the above that this too should be implemented on a universalistic basis. Any use of quotas on racial grounds would be inconsistent with this, and would justifiably be interpreted by Asian Australians as devaluing their racial origin. Recent migration policy can be criticised (a) because the intake has been too high given the unemployment situation, and (b) because the selection process has increas-

ingly been shaped by sectional interests remote from the larger community interest. As argued above, ethnic concern to raise the family reunion intake has become the dominant factor in immigration policy. It is not in the interests of other Australians for this to occur, since the expanded family reunion program is proving to be a major source of workers ill-equipped to enter mainstream employment, who are thereby forced to compete in the most overcrowded and competitive lower-skilled labor markets. It is hard to see what moral obligation Australia has to provide priority rights of entry to brothers and sisters of migrants, especially when most of these sponsoring family members have themselves only recently arrived here.

If the family reunion program was reduced to immediate family members (that is like Canada, giving no special privileges to brothers and sisters) it would be no more racist than the original decision to expand the program in this direction. Australia is a sovereign nation with the right to determine its own entry criteria. As long as these do not incorporate any reference to an applicant's country of origin, race or color they cannot be considered to be racist.

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floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: I report good news from the circulation front in Swag. This will not solve our financial problems, especially as we (alone, I think, of the literary magazines) offer half-rates to students, pensioners and the unemployed. The least, I am sure our readers agree, that we can do in these times. So your continued generous support, the envy of other journals, is as helpful and as appreciated as ever. A handsome total of $1055 this issue. Thanks to: $400 V.L.; $100 B.D.; $50 J.B., J.C., J.M.: $25 R.S.; $15 V.H.; $14 D.D. J.B. D.B. B.N-S. J.G.; $10 C.W-C. R.J.H. R.D. J.P. L.B.; $9 J.L. D.W. E.B. M.S. J.H. L.C. M.&B.B. F.R. A.H. R.H.; $8 R.G.; $5 S.A.; $4 G.S. Z.N. R.G. A.L. C.R. D.D. M.N. C.S. M.G D.W. T.M. D.A. J.F. S.O'S. G.S. R.K. J.G. B.B. M.T. B.H. S.P. E.D. J.F. F.L. J.S. J.C. J.S. G.S. J.G. A.M. C.P. E.M. B.F.; $2 D.T. M.L. D.H. K.P. R.A.

A.T. YARWOOD

Ending A Taboo

A discussion of Geoffrey Blainey's All for Australia *(Methuen Haynes, $5.95).*

In the second chapter of this little book Geoffrey Blainey tells the story of his recent St Patrick's Day speech to the Warrnambool Rotary Conference which gave rise to one of the most passionate controversies of our post-war history. I had already heard most of it from Blainey when I visited him at Melbourne University last August, desiring to learn at first hand what he had said on the fateful occasion. Had he been fairly reported? (It seems not, at least on one vital point, of the alleged $1000 bribe to dissuade intending immigrants.) What were his views now about the government's program? I was concerned to get it right, as I had agreed to take part in a talk-back program with Kel Richards of 2GB Sydney, in which the centre piece was my recent book with Mike Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia. A History* (Methuen 1982). Richards had made it clear that he did not want to engage in a witch-hunt. In any case, I had admired Geoff's work for more than twenty years, and felt anguish for him as the victim, as it appeared, of his own somewhat incautious honesty.

It is a measure of Blainey's success that in reading *All for Australia* I have slowly moved from opposition to qualified support. Not that the book itself is vintage Blainey. He writes here as he spoke to the camera in his recent television series, as a plain, blunt man, of transparent honesty, seeking to convince rather than to charm or entertain. What he does is to explain, in fuller detail than is permitted in newspaper articles and television interviews, why he came to make a stand on immigration. The book will win no literary awards, but it makes a sane and courageous contribution to a subject that has a great significance for the future of this nation.

Arguing for a reassessment of the volume of immigration, especially from Asia, at a time of heavy unemployment, he concludes:

> Each generation must find its own new answer to the questions, where does Australia belong? and to whom does it belong? But if we ourselves are not realistic towards the complexity of our contacts with Asia, and if we are too eager to become 'part of Asia,' we could easily create, in our own cities, tensions and troubles that restrict the options open to the next generation of Australians as well as souring permanently the quality of our nation's life.

The chief merit of this book is to demolish the belief that immigration policy is a taboo subject. Tom Keneally, his old friend and colleague from the Australia-China Council, addressed to Blainey an open letter, acknowledging his "massive contribution" to Australia-Chinese relations and to Aboriginal studies, but warning him, as many others did:

> I urge you to be aware of the fact that your imprimatur could be used by dangerous radical movements within this country and that you may well influence Australian history in a way I know you never intended, by unleashing a latter day Lambing Flat lunacy. (Sydney Morning Herald, 23 June 1984.)

Dealing at length with the suggestion that his words had unleashed a surge of dormant racism, Blainey makes the point:

> The essence of democracy is that no subject is too hazardous to be discussed. The essence of democracy is that, through discussion and argument, feeble ideas are usually defeated and more valid ideas are usually accepted. Once a democracy concedes that at certain times certain topics – whether abortion, nuclear armament, or a new religion – are too dangerous, then it is ceasing to be a democracy.

Perhaps the best news we have had, since the controversy was publicised by an eager press, is the report that the coalition parties have backed away from the idea of using immigration as a vote-catching issue in the coming federal elections. According to Amanda Buckley, the Opposition leaders decided that there were no votes to be won here because the main threat from Asian migration is felt by working-class people in traditional Labor seats, who would not change their votes on this issue. (Sydney Morning Herald, 19 October 1984.)

Which brings us to an aspect of Blainey's case that best reveals his sensitivity and compassion. Remember, to

begin with, that he is not calling for an end to Asian immigration or a return to the White Australia Policy. Rather, he wants a recognition of the economic and social dangers inherent in a strong flow of migration at a time of severe unemployment. It is not the academics, politicians and professionals who feel threatened by the influx from Asia: it is felt most, in terms of competition for jobs, and changes in the texture of localities, by working-class people. Quoting Charles Price, the demographer, himself a long term reformer of immigration policy, he writes:

> Historically, social tension has nearly always developed where immigrants from a very different background – whether that be of race, language, religion or custom – have arrived in large numbers and in a few years completely changed a neighbourhood's character.

As one of the hundreds of Blainey's correspondents wrote, from the front line Sydney suburb of Cabramatta, "How can anyone not be upset at the falling standards, the deterioration of our way of life and a feeling of being a stranger in one's own town." The more affluent localities are not at risk in this respect.

I have been much impressed by Tom Keneally's argument that:

> Since the Gold Rushes we have had a succession of ethnic shocks which we thought would not be to our benefit but which have proved to be. The Irish we denied jobs to in the post-war era have added their peculiar richness and ruggedness to Australian life. The 'reffos' we cursed in the 1940s have delivered us from being a stultifying sectarian nation on the model of New Zealand.

The same point was restated by Robert Haupt four weeks later in the Sydney Morning Herald (21 July 1984), in explaining that the confrontation of Australians with waves of migrants from central and southern Europe after 1950 transformed this society and gave it the maturity to respond fairly comfortably to the effective abolition of the White Australia Policy by the Whitlam government. Blainey warns, however, that that was in a period of almost full employment. Unemployment makes for resentment, and the Asian migrant, standing out from the white community, can readily become a target for abuse, as he did at Lambing Flat 123 years ago.

At a number of points Blainey writes as a debater rather than an historian. He refuses to give credit to the Immigration Department, even when it seems to be on his side (p.105). And he shows insufficient awareness of the great changes that have occurred during the past thirty years in the shape and character of our oldest ethnic minority, the Melbourne Chinese. As C.Y. Choi pointed out ten years ago, these people, long resident in inner city enclaves, have moved out into the suburbs, intermarrying with whites, and participating in a full range of professions and occupations. In time, that will happen with the new wave from Asia.

Blainey does well to insist on a proper and consistent rendering of statistical accounts by the Immigration Department, which does tend to treat the Australian people much the same as the proverbial mushroom. It is extraordinary to contemplate the *volte face* that has occurred in the past fourteen years, so that at the moment, "our Asian population of some two or three per cent receives about 40 per cent of the migrant places" (p.172). I see merit also in his call for a return to the use of the English language *as an element* in the assessment of a migrant's acceptability, as a safeguard both to the migrant and to the community he is entering.

Above all, this book is sensitive, moderate, and courageous. It disposes of a number of taboos, and reminds us that all people and all governments, of necessity, practise discrimination, just as our government does, in choosing, for example, from which countries it will accept refugee migrants. Blainey wants the Australian government to consider the fears and wishes of the majority of the people, and shape its policy more to the interests of its present citizens than to the assumed benefits to be gained from a large inflow from Asia.

One feature of the book that I find unsatisfying is its attempts to explain why the present government, the trade unions, the media, and academia, have so largely closed ranks in defence of the present immigration policy. In watching the response to Blainey this year I have been reminded of the flavor of Macarthyism in the 1950s. Not a pleasant thought at bedtime.

Sandy Yarwood, who lives on the southern Queensland coast, is known as perhaps Australia's foremost authority on non-European migration to Australia. His books include the standard biography of Samuel Marsden and several works on Asian migration to Australia, including the recent Race Relations in Australia.

CECIL HOLMES

A Day with the Priestleys

J.B. Priestley died last August at the age of 89. He was a man, said J.W. Lambert in the London Sunday Times, "whose politics were almost entirely based on compassion." We print Cecil Holmes's memoir as a tribute to a great Englishman and grumbler, remembering Walter Murdoch's words: "Mankind may be divided into two races, those who acquiesce and those who growl. I am on the side of the growlers, always and everywhere; because I remember what I owe to them."

I had taken a train which would give an hour or two to spare, before the luncheon appointment.

It was a Wednesday and Market Day, in Stratford, and the fat contented farmers, the latter-day yeomen of Warwickshire, were buying and selling their cattle, sheep and pigs, sinking pints of beer, swapping jokes.

It was one of those showery summer days in May. I had forgotten to bring a raincoat, so I retired to a pub for a while, after poking my head into Shakespeare's school.

I was increasingly nervous about the forthcoming encounter. Neville Cardus, who knew the Priestleys well, warned me that J.B., now 79, was becoming cantankerous and short-tempered.

I had met Priestley's wife Jacquetta Hawkes when they came to Australia for a peace conference (they were both amongst the founders of the nuclear disarmament movement) and she had expressed a desire to see some films about Aboriginals. At that time it wasn't a very impressive collection.

Jacquetta, I knew, had a formidable reputation as an archaeologist; her speciality the Mayan civilisation. Tall, willowy, gentle-mannered, quietly spoken, she could be a fire-brand on the public platform.

We fell into a desultory correspondence over the years, I sent her material put out by the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, for whom I had been making some ethnographic films. And in 1973, when I turned up in London, she asked me to lunch.

I could tarry in Stratford no longer, and hopped in a taxi to Kissing Point Road in the village of Alveston.

It was a Regency mansion, in a surround of immaculate gardens. A long gravel drive wound to the front door. A housemaid ushered me down a long hallway glowing with eighteenth century prints. A door opened and there he was, grasping the famous pipe and, oddly, much smaller than I had anticipated. He stared at me bleakly, tendered a limp handshake and said: "I may as well warn you that I don't care for Australians much. Now what do you drink?"

Priestley went to a cupboard and poured a couple of hefty gin and tonics while I examined the study. Large, but not as intimidating as its occupant, neatly and vastly booklined, of course, French windows revealing an agreeable if damp view, and in the corner a desk on which rested an ancient Remington, through which had poured millions of words.

We moved into the dining room. Over the fireplace there was a large Nolan – one of his desert scenes. And J.B. continued on the dreaded subject of my homeland. "I found Sydney and Melbourne utterly boring, even distasteful. So Americanised. And as for the press, God knows it's bad enough in this country. Yours treated me disgracefully. One chap in particular, a so-called columnist, what was his name, yes, Jim McDougall. I'd like to give him some payback one day."

I had always thought McDougall a mild fellow myself, but decided to endure all this wordlessly.

"At my last press conference I spoke about the status of women in your country – in no so-called civilised society have I known them treated so shamefully. Needless to say, no word of this was ever printed."

Jacquetta decided to take some of the heat out of the situation. "We went up to Alice Springs. I wanted to spend some time poking around a few sites and, however

superficially, try to acquaint myself with some Aboriginals."

I said that I thought her piece in the New Statesman, "The Dispossessed," perhaps the best thing I had read for many years on the social condition of the people. It was too, but in 1959 this was a subject not yet fashionable.

J.B. chimed in, "We rented a car and drove to Darwin, didn't we? Now that was a splendid journey. Wonderful

material, rich distinctive characters – the real Australians, who had almost eluded us. Is old Noel Healy still at Dunmara?"

I was delighted at this recall. Noel, whom I knew and whom I had written about, was one of the redoubtables. He and his wife, Betty, ran the Pub and Petrol Pump and so-called Store – which was all Dunmara was. I guessed that Noel, a great yarn spinner and leg puller, would have not been aware of his transient guest's fame. And they would have enjoyed perching in his rough little Tavern, letting the old chap chatter away.

"And in Darwin we were well met by a local journalist, Doug Lockwood. He guided us about with some zest, I must say."

I decided to take some initiative. I told J.B. that my favorite novelist was the American Thomas Wolfe, and I'd heard he had been helpful to him back in the thirties, when Tom was struggling.

"I did know him quite well, we both had the same English publisher, Heinemann, at one time. Can't say I *helped* him much."

I knew in fact Priestley had used his standing to get Wolfe published in England, something very important for American writers in those times.

"He was a man who carried a great pain, an agony within him. He always seemed so desperate. As though he had little time to live. As you know he died of a brain tumour in 1938, at the very young age of thirty-eight ... Unlike a couple of his contemporaries, he neither relished nor sought fame and fortune ... perhaps it eluded him anyway ... Tom Wolfe could use the language like a Shakespeare or a Milton. Apart from his editor, Perkins, I suppose his most loyal friend was Red Lewis. A terrible drunk but a wonderful American."

I recalled the account by Wolfe in his book *You Can't Go Home Again* of his journey about England, after Sinclair Lewis had won the Nobel Prize, hilarious yet desperate.

The social climate was now quickly improving, and the wine flowed liberally.

I mentioned *Journey Down a Rainbow* which he and Jacquetta had jointly written in 1955, a kind of travel book about America. She had examined the Indians in New Mexico, and he the other kind of savages, in Dallas.

He brightened now, a small smile even appeared. A great composer of comic words he may have been, but hardly the jovial conversationalist.

"Ah, yes, that's when I invented the word Admass – I hinted at the dangers and power of advertising, its corrupting influence through and on the mass media."

We now removed ourselves to easy-chairs for coffee. I mused on the fact that currently J.B. was writing a column for the New Statesman, "The Uneasy Chair," in which he grumbled about the 'modern' theatre and, for good measure, castigated the current Tory government.

"You know that I have no more in common with that wretched little man Heath than you would. I hope the miners bring him down." They did, too.

I recalled that during the war in the navy I had often, as so many millions had, listened to his wartime radio talks. The sailors took more interest in them than they did in Churchill's polemics.

"The old man hated them – even once tried to get me off the air. No luck."

For my benefit Priestley turned the talk to films. I told him I had just finished a screenplay with Frank Hardy, "Call Me By My Proper Name," a melodrama, an Aboriginal manhunt yarn.

"And how is Comrade Hardy these days?" (My God he must have met Frank, probably in Melbourne, and I

knew he had little taste for Communists.) "Still one jump ahead of the bookmakers? He took me to Flemington one afternoon. What a disaster. Still, I wouldn't have minded putting my name to a book like *Power Without Glory*. Undistinguished style, but an important work."

J.B. continued: "I did some film writing from time to time, years ago. But such vulgar people, producers and directors that fiddle at your work, inconsequential actors wrecking lines. At least in the theatre you are more or less your own man." Then, brightening: "My son Tom is a very good editor you know. He cut that wonderful picture "Deliverance"; he's working now on "The Great Gatsby," in New York."

I knew of Tom Priestley's reputation. It was considerable, and his father was right to be proud of him.

Then, apropos nothing: "I'm under some pressure to have my plays put on in South Africa. Do you think I should relent at long last?"

He was actually asking my opinion, and genuinely it seemed. I thought no, not really.

"Still *The Inspector Calls* might shake them up a bit, eh? Now, if you don't mind, Mr Holmes, I've got some work to get on with."

We shook hands and he left.

I had brought a quantity of my stills, taken over the years in Arnhem Land, to show Jacquetta, and we settled down to a discussion about matters Aboriginal.

Then J.B. reappeared. He had a copy of *Journey Down a Rainbow,* had autographed it, asked Jacquetta to do similarly, and handed it to me – he had taken the book from his own library.

Jacquetta drove me to the station in the Mercedes, said to keep in touch, and I always have.

JONATHAN DAWSON

The Tyranny of GMH

In a country where distance prevails so effortlessly, it was inevitable that the car would become a central icon in the life of mobile Australia.

When Henry Ford announced that owners of T-model Fords could have their car in any color – provided it was black – he was dignifying the little flivver with the color of Wall Street and the bourse: the black suit and homburg of business-as-usual. So, within a few years of the birth of the car, the most popular was to be the paradigm of Babbitt's life, neat, unobtrusive, clad in a metallic grey flannel three-piece. By the 1920s in Australia, Ford had a third of the market and the car was as natural a desire as sex.

Tariff protection on car bodies saw the conversion of saddlers and carriage repairers like Holden into body shops – the shell became all, and from this period on, the clothes a car 'wore' were the focus for advertising.

In 1951 the Commonwealth commissioned and issued the "Jubilee of the Commonwealth of Australia" and in it celebrated the now palpable wishes of the Australian way of life: " . . . a home . . . a garden where he can potter and a motor car." The Australian way of life was suburban, but the image of the bush remained, now a sort of British garden, a place for recreation and play.

The first Holden (Australia's own car) was produced in 1948 and, in 1950, the 'single spinner' Ford was released and would set the style of Australian car design for the future – American style, but smaller, more homely – a bungalow rather than a mansion. Like the fast-growing Canberra, the car became in the post-war years a symbol of growth and democratisation.

As competition grows in a market, so will the process of 'separating' and nominating differences between producers. Yet there was a curious similarity between the names given to cars that revealed yearnings and nostalgic gropings more coherent than different. The 1960s saw a strange sort of stability settle, the car as civilising agent became, itself, civilised.

A taxonomy of car names shows how 'difference' was in fact suppressed in favor of Robert Menzies' view of Australia as still culturally British. Where, in the fifties, Holden and Ford had been content with their product brand names (FJ, Custom) which connoted nothing in particular (excluding the popular British Ford imports; the stable "Prefect," the evocative "Anglia") competition brightened in the late fifties and the names reveal all.

> *Falcon:* not just the power of the bird, but the heralded symbol of nature tamed for display.
>
> *Brougham:* (named after a lord, naturally) – a one-horse closed carriage.
>
> *Kingswood:* the commoners gain access at last to the power of feudal kings, the woods tamed and possessed.
>
> *Charger:* echoes of the Light and Heavy Brigades, the heritage of British imperial power.
>
> *Pacer:* thoroughbred, natural power harnessed yet again.
>
> *De Ville:* connotations of town and country seats, again the province of those holding power in a rigid class system.
>
> *Valiant:* not just a virtue but an archaic adjective attaching itself naturally to the fighting qualities of the leader, and so on (not to forget the Regal, Premier, Royal and Commodore).

This process of naming cars and, simultaneously, housing estates (Oaktree Park, Heights, Woods, Clubs, Estate and so on, always signifying a British heritage) therefore brought into play the whole system of feudal and hierarchical power relationships, and desiring or possessing a car so named means that the owner participates in the myth of aristocratic lines of descent that omit Australia's rough and convict past from history.

The history of cars, of course, is saturated with the discourse of aristocratic land possession: small wonder that racing cars come from 'stables,' that cars possess a 'lineage,' are 'thoroughbreds' and indeed who can avoid the meanings implicit in the power of horses? In so ignoring or mythologising material history, cars indeed become magical objects, dissolving the actual in the cause of a series of closely related images of nature subdued and appropriated.

The car then, can be 'woman,' like a "magic uniform" (Gillo Dorfles, *Kitsch*, 1965) offering both protection and an assertion of a spurious heritage of power. In this way a classic disjunction is revealed between the car as

designed object and product, and its poeticising by publicity into something other. Jencks and Silver (*Adhocism,* 1973) have demonstrated in a very pragmatic way what a car *is*: but how cars are then rewritten into society's dreams is another matter.

All this would seem to suggest that cars as advertised and mythologised serve a normative function. This conclusion seems inescapable, though clearly some cars are defined as outlaws, not Babbitts:

> . . . the world has been enriched by a new beauty – the beauty of speed. A car with its bonnet draped with exhaust pipes – a rattling along like a machine gun is more beautiful than the winged victory of Samothrace.
>
> Marinetti: *Futurist Manifesto* (1909)

Small wonder that the futurists became Mussolini's favored contemporary art movement. Here the car is depicted as 'seeing off' a spurious classical past – its attraction *is* its threat, as with the sinbin van of the 1980s, its plastic furred beds, and sci-fi murals threatening conventional moralities with images of the down-market massage parlor. But Marinetti's manifesto is still a form of advertising – and what is being advertised is cultural as well as petrol-driven power.

Hardly surprising then, that surface design often takes on a rhetorical function itself (all that saves the Rover/Honda from totally losing its culture-specific identity is the plastic wood dash strip with its echoes of British 'craftsmanship').

The car then has become more than a tool, but a rhetorical system in itself and seen thus, the *difference* between mass-produced vehicles is dissipated and, through the naming process, the associations constitute an authentic language of socialisation, a way of seeing the world.

Recession, however, has led to a new way of seeing the car. Though once, in Australia, Statesman and Caprice ruled, the narrative satisfactions of science fiction have revived. Those older voyages of Iliad and Odyssey as well as the imperial pushes of the colonising powers in the last five-hundred years have led to another grouping of names, connoting newer colonies, sustained by the technology and wonder of Meteor, Pulsar, Laser and Starion. All the names signify the inaccessible world of future science, transcending that older tradition of Estates and Kingswoods but still dealing with narratives of conflict, and the righteous maintenance of power, on Earth or in outer space.

A taxonomy of the rhetoric of cars could then look something like this:

Feral	*A Classical Tradition*
Jaguar	Gamma
Lynx	Beta
Cougar	Lambda
Nighthawk	Phoenix
Leone	Velox
Mustang	Firebird
Bronco	Pallas

The Rich at Play or The Expedition	*Science and Myth of Progress*
Corniche	Pulsar
Camargue	Laser
Dolomite	X-17
Golf	X-9
Targa Florio	Metropolitan
Virage	Astron
Capri	Starion
Floride	

And, in Australia, the appeal of a mythical descent from a particularly British aristocratic tradition, of nature tamed, cultivated and turned to privileged use: Statesman, Regal, Valiant, Falcon, Kingswood, Charger, Commodore, Landau.

Publicity and advertising have never been on the left, but here the socio-political implications are very clear: the car is the very image of bourgeois aspiration and false history.

See also: Philip Adams, *Adams and Added Enzymes* (1972) on animal namings; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), "The New Citroen."

Jonathan Dawson, whose stories have appeared in Overland, lives in Brisbane.

MANNING CLARK

A Man For Liberty

Last July the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties held a most successful and well-attended dinner in honor of the memory of Brian Fitzpatrick, who died twenty years ago. Brian Fitzpatrick was a close friend of this magazine, was indeed a contributor to its first issue, and we regard it as particularly fortunate that we have been given the opportunity of publishing this statement in Fitzpatrick's honor by Manning Clark, another long-term friend of Overland's.

I suppose that you might expect that a person like myself who has been roaring round Australia for the last twenty or thirty years, telling people who write and teach history, to stop writing what Carlyle calls a "soliloquy for unpeopled vacancy" or, as I put it myself, to stop singing an aria for unaccompanied statistics, might be expected to speak about Brian Fitzpatrick the man. I don't propose to do that, entirely, because there's a fine biography of Fitzpatrick by Don Watson. What I propose to do is to have a look at how Brian Fitzpatrick responded to what I see as the three great questions of his age.

First of all, Brian Fitzpatrick belonged to what Nietzsche called the "God-is-dead generation." All those who accepted the proposition that God is dead had to decide a very simple, but very difficult, question – if God is dead, then does this mean that we are all engaged in what Dostoevsky called a "vaudeville of devils"? Are we all involved in a great lie, with the whole of human life no more than this vaudeville? Or can we say, yes, God is dead, but men and women can become God-like and steal fire from heaven? Every generation has a brief moment in which to state its faith, and what I've just said was presumably the faith of a great number of people who belonged to the "God-is-dead" generation.

In Brian Fitzpatrick's case, the God-is-dead position was grafted onto the optimistic belief in human perfectibility, and to the old bush culture, the folk wisdom of inhabitants of the mighty bush of Australia, their belief in mateship, their belief in equality. I suppose the first point I want to make is that in Fitzpatrick, as indeed of all those in his generation who took life seriously, there was both a Don Giovanni blended with the Man from Snowy River. There was Don Giovanni rising side-by-side with the Man from Snowy River on his small and weedy beast. There was in him too the Magic Flute, that marvellous statement of hope, and side-by-side with the Magic Flute was that live, magnificent boaster and vulgarian, Flash Jack from Gundagai. There was in Brian, as a man who thought deeply about life, a Jude Fawley of Hardy's *Jude the Obscure,* and side-by-side with that of course, as he is a simple boy from the Australian bush, was Joe Wilson – Henry Lawson's Joe Wilson. Do you remember that Joe Wilson found it difficult to talk to women? There was also a man who's responded, as we all have to respond, to the weird scribblings of nature in Australia, responded to the melancholy of the Australian bush and what it seems to give out, namely that we must not expect too much from life, so that in him (as indeed, I believe, in all those over fifty), there was great optimism side by side with great pessimism.

Now, as a man of the God-is-dead generation Brian Fitzpatrick became a follower of John Stuart Mill. I take it, Senator Evans, people do know nowadays about John Stuart Mill. Mill made the point about liberty's being the essential condition for the fulfilment of the human personality. My God, what a paradox was there. Here was Brian Fitzpatrick, a man through whom the gale of life blew very high, taking as his guru a man whom Thomas Carlyle, I believe quite rightly, called "the author of the autobiography of the steam engine." History is full of great ironies, isn't it? There was another irony, that this puritan from London – I'm not talking of Fitzpatrick here, I'm talking of Mill – this puritan from London was to become the patron saint in the twentieth century of the libertarians of Balmain. I wonder what Mill would have thought of that!

But, of course, to make a more serious point, there was a puritan in Brian Fitzpatrick. He inherited that from his life as a bush boy. He was the inheritor of the folk wisdom of the inhabitants of the bush, and as such an inheritor of their puritanism. He came to belong to a society of people who were creedless puritans, a society of people who'd lost their faith but went on with their morality. Australia was unique, with New Zealand and part of North America, in witnessing the coming together of evangelical Christianity and Irish Catholic Jansenism. It was unique in having the light of the sun and yet, in the mind, this extraordinary view about the human body and about the omnipotence of a person called God.

Now, this puritanism planted monsters in the minds of those who were influenced by it. Take for one moment Norman Lindsay. All those who are dominated by or influenced by puritanism wanted as quickly as possible to be liberated from it. But when they came to express their liberation they generally showed just how deeply they were chained to it. So Norman Lindsay, who wanted to celebrate the beauty of a woman's body, painted instead women as devourers and destroyers. And Fitzpatrick, I believe, was haunted all his life, as we all are of that generation, and hunted by similar demons. His drive was to be liberated – from those demons. This meant, as I will try to show in more detail in a moment, that first of all he had to understand the past in Australia, he had to try to find out who he was. He was like William Charles Wentworth – he turned to his generation and said "Please won't somebody tell me who I am?", as King Lear also says. And he wanted to know what we Australians were and are. That made him into a historian. But his motive, you notice, of finding out about the past was so that we might know some liberty. So he became a historian and defender of the liberties of the people of Australia.

Secondly, Brian belonged to the generation of 1914 and 1917. The horrors of 1914-18 provided evidence, if evidence were needed, that human life *is* a vaudeville of devils. The other, the Russian Revolution of 1917, held out the promise of better things for humanity, of the dawn of a new era in the history of humanity. That meant looking at Karl Marx. That raised the very difficult question, if you accept an ideology, what about liberty? If you believe there is only one truth about life, you are going to be prepared to concede the right of the individual to decide for himself or herself? Secondly, they had to ask, was too high a price being asked by 1917 for human harmony? Were those who proposed to create a heaven on earth requiring human blood to manure the soil for the future harmony of humanity? And thirdly, in relation to the Russian Revolution, for Brian's generation there was the ever-occurring problem, why was it that the Australian working-class did not develop a revolutionary consciousness? Why did the crisis of 1916-17 end with a great conservative victory? Why was it that the promise of 1929 – when those old Labor men sang "Solidarity Forever" and so on in the caucus room in Canberra – why did that end with that terrible scene on Canberra railway station of that old Senator running beside the train calling out to Lyons, "Don't do it, Joe, don't do it"? But Joe did do it. Why did it end in defeat and in failure? Does this

happen because our society is ineluctably chained to its bourgeois past? What was the giant which stood between the Australian people and the fulfilment of their dreams?

Well, thirdly, Brian, I believe, belonged to the generation which was debating vigorously who Australians were. Were they Australian-Britons? Or were they Australians? Why was it there had never been a Boston Tea Party in Australia? As a believer in the cultivation of Australian sentiment, Brian Fitzpatrick belonged to the Henry Lawson tradition. With great cheek, with great irreverence, with great wit he urged us all, for God's sake stop grovelling to the British governing classes, for God's sake stop it once and for all. They're still around, aren't they?

Now, this question, are we Australian-Britons or Australians, took him also back to history and his response to the three problems I have suggested – the God-is-dead, the Russian Revolution, and what-is-Australia, led to what I'd call his flowering time. There will be great differences of opinion on which was his flowering time, but I believe his great flowering time was approximately 1937-1945. During this time he produced his two momumental volumes on the history of Australia. It is extremely important to note that they both have references to the British Empire in the title. The first volume is *British*

Imperialism and Australia. The second one is *The British Empire in Australia*. They were both the confessions of a passionate heart. They were both the confessions of a man who believed that he had a truth about the past and that this truth would help to set men and women in Australia free. At the same time in this flowering time he conducted his campaign for individual liberty through the Council for Civil Liberties. It was a period of the great pamphlets by Brian Fitzpatrick, and if you haven't read them, let me urge you tonight to read them before you die. I happen to like the one he did with Mr Justice Barry – *Six Acts Against Civil Liberties* (1937). I am deeply indebted to it because it gave me two lectures when I was a junior lecturer in political science at the University of Melbourne. But the one on Espionage is just as good.

So, you had the histories from this flowering time, the pamphlets, the work for civil liberties, his speeches, his committee work, his correspondence, his lobbying, to allow the Australian people to know some measure of liberty. All his activity was designed to stop those people in power chaining Australians more and more securely to their past. But, and here you may well disagree with me, somewhere between 1941 and 1949 the world he'd grown up in crumbled. The British imperialist was no longer the one that one should really have in mind. He'd been replaced by the American. There was a holocaust in Europe. There was the dropping of the atomic bomb. There was another defeat for Labor in December 1949. By then, it seems to me, and I am saying this in a general context of an enormous praise for his achievement, that his stage in our public life was gradually drawing to a close. From 1949 on he was to enter what I call the years of the ravaged face. There is a question for all of us Australians as to whether people like Lawson, Fitzpatrick, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Henry Kendall and so on are the products of something that came up from inside them, or whether the ravaged face came from their living in Australian society.

Now all performers for humanity – parsons, priests, professors, poets, playwrights, politicans and judges – are on a revolving stage. They only have a very brief period in which to address their audience. My impression is that after 1950 Brian Fitzpatrick was in the wings. The rest of his life was often very fruitful. Like Henry Lawson, he wasn't done, he was a mighty spirit. But, that was the years of Fitzpatrick the tragic figure. And it was during those years that I had the enormous pleasure in Canberra of introducing Brian Fitzpatrick to Eris Michael O'Brien, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Canberra-Goulburn. Eris O'Brien said they shook hands. Eris O'Brien said "Mr Fitzpatrick" and looked him in the eyes and Brian, clicking his heels and bowing, said "Your Grace." It was a magnificent scene because, after all was said and done, possibly Eris Michael O'Brien, considering what would happen at Vatican II, also belonged to the past.

I am suggesting that Fitzpatrick had become by then a tragic figure, and I would suggest that tonight in coming here to honor him and to thank him, we should be very grateful to those who helped him when he was visited by his strange infirmity. We are all in the debt of those who stood by him. They came from all walks of life. It's important to acknowledge that publicly. In politics, there were people as wide apart as Harold Holt and Herbert Vere Evatt who were good to him. There were men in Melbourne such as Bill Dolphin, a maker of musical instruments and a small publisher. There was Hume Dow, there was Judah Waten, short-story teller and keeper of the faith, there was Ian Mair, one of the best librarians Australia has ever had, there was Noel Counihan the artist, there were the historians such as Noel Butlin, Keith Hancock, Geoffrey Blainey and others who were good to him. These I've mentioned are all men and I mention the men because Brian moved in a man's world. That was his ambience. But there were of course women. I don't propose to mention them by name. There were women who inspired him in his great creative period, the women – or the woman – who understood the point made about letting the tares and the wheat grow together. I like to think that at least one of them had pondered that very strange exhortation: "to make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness."

Above all, it is very proper I believe that we should all gather here at the University of Melbourne, which was one of his great stamping grounds, gather here in a mood of high solemnity to acknowledge that work and how much we owe to it. The work is his great memorial. All the stories about him as a man will disappear – they don't matter in the long run. What does matter is that body of work. It's a great good fortune and I am sure you'd like to know that some of it has been carried on. His son is already writing books of stature. His daughter, Sheila, is praised highly in the Times Literary Supplement and the New York Review of Books. So that lives on.

But I am trying to emphasise, probably rather inadequately, that his life, his tragic life, evokes in all of us the pity, the terror and the catharsis which helps to make our own life more bearable and to make our living and our dying a little easier. To have known Brian Fitzpatrick was rather like knowing a great piece of music. It wasn't like the music of Bach, it wasn't like, say, Prelude no. 24 in B minor, Book 1. What it was more like was Sibelius. It was a stormy, tempestuous, wild life ending, though, on a resolved chord, and a chord of great beauty, like the chord of the double bass at the end of Sibelius' Seventh Symphony. I insist to you that Brian had a faith. He believed, and I hope that I believe it myself, that the Australian Labor movement and others would one day make a genuine creative contribution to the debate on the ownership and distribution of wealth; that the movement he believed in would create a society here in which there would be no collision between liberty and equality, where there would be equality without mediocrity and without spiritual bullying. He also believed that if we Australians had the courage to face the truth about who we are, then we had a chance to rescue ourselves from being doomed to go on repeating our past. He had a great faith in the Australian people, and no great writer can ever write unless he has a great faith in the people he's writing for. It was because he had this flowering time, both as a lover and a believer, that we should, I believe, tonight drink to Brian Fitzpatrick, a historian of the Australian people and a defender of their liberties.

PETER STEELE

The Only Johnsonian

December 1984 marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the death of Dr Samuel Johnson. Overland would not like it to go unremarked in Australia.

A well-known engraving of Johnson shows him in his travelling dress, booted, heavily wigged and coated, expostulating as he drives forward on a formidable staff. A dozen other pictures of him tell their own tale, but this one sums up a good deal about the man. Walter Jackson Bate, in his study of Johnson, points out shrewdly that he used of himself such tags as "rambler" and "straggler," and that his favorite books were *Pilgrim's Progress, Don Quixote* and *Robinson Crusoe*. The trope of the traveller governed his imagination to an extraordinary degree.

This gives a clue as to why he has remained a central figure in English literary consciousness. It is Johnson on the move who engrosses the attention of many, and looks like continuing to do so. Boswell's picture of him is largely that of the aging and the elderly man, but Johnson's oblique self-portraiture in his own writings gives us, as do Rembrandt's self-portraits, the self in its various stages and shifts. It is "the ages of man" that emerge from fugitive pieces as well as from the classic, central documents; paradoxically, they are all the more ages of man for being the ages of Johnson.

But ages may be perceived as those things which fall upon us, or as those things which we embrace, or as some compound of both. In Johnson's case, it is the third that is emphatically true. Johnson insisted equally upon the inevitability of things and on human freedom in their midst. So handsomely sombre a piece as the *Vanity of Human Wishes* rears a monument to the freedom even while it delineates the constraints. The effort may be called classical if Vergil is the classic: a self is being accomplished, as in the *Aeneid* or the *Divine Comedy,* whatever else – and on occasion whoever else – is being lost in the process. The old-fashioned word for this is "heroism," and it is not too old-fashioned for Johnson.

His vanity was slight, his pride great, and his humility greater. Like the Swift whom he travestied, he was an uncommonly passionate man. In saying this, I notice at once that I am drawn, as he always was drawn himself, to speak of the man when I have the author in mind. And this too is central to any account of Johnson. He will not stay in books, and he will not stay out of them. In this respect he is like Swift and unlike Pope. Pope has little interest (except as a curiosity) where he is not very obviously *lettering* life; I hope that he will always have readers, but he can scarcely have followers. Swift's case is more complicated, since he was capable of being a popular hero, while at the same time making in his writings for that incised condition which his bitter epitaph represents. Johnson wrote to live, and not the other way around, but that writing is itself full, notoriously, of hulking, distinctive life.

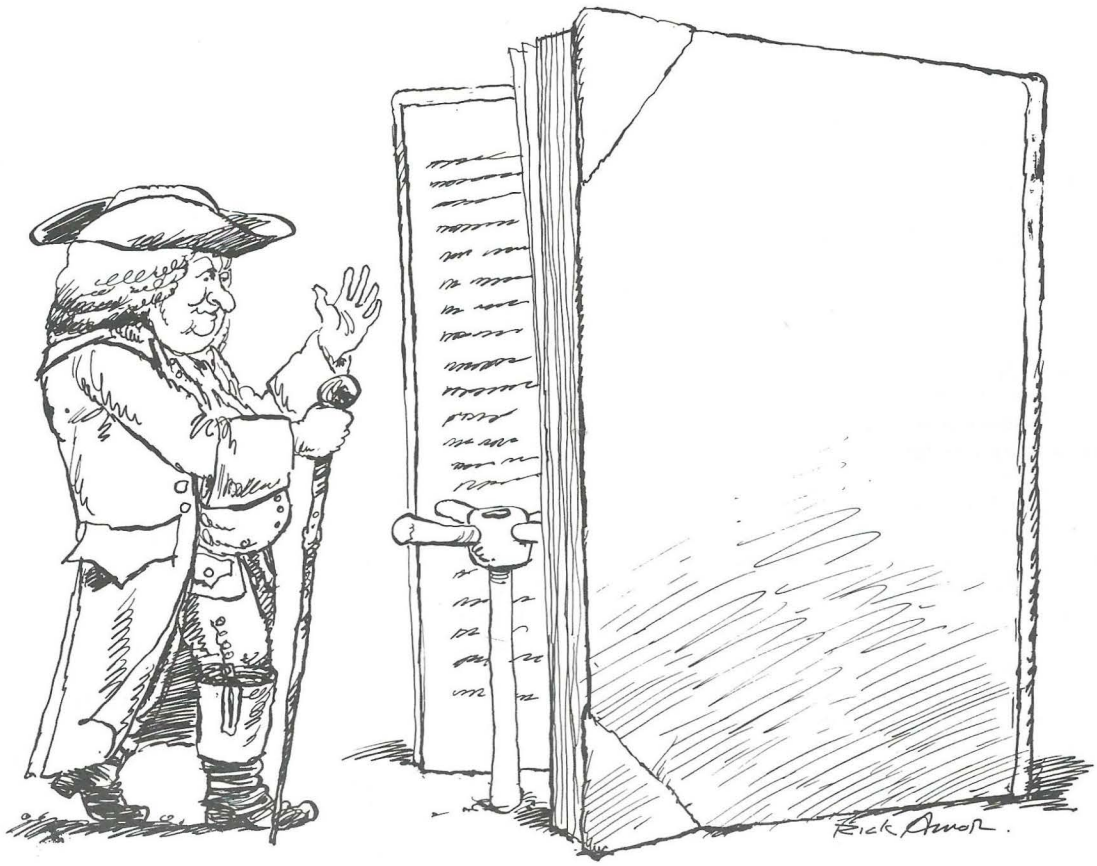
Perhaps, if we were to convert the engraving of the traveller into a cartoon, we should show him as walking, as through a gateway, into a book, which would also allow egress. When he deals with a writer, be it Shakespeare or Shenstone, there is always some attention to the way the personality is substantially but not totally captured in the poem or play or other writing. Johnson, in other words, for all his habitual trenchancy of address to his topic, and for all his judicial, summary nature, finds thought, communication, and the writing which is their often over-weening instrument, as curious an affair as any human pursuit – indeed, as one of the best tokens of that larger human curiosity. Paul Fussell wrote a book called *Samuel Johnson and the Life of Writing,* and the title could do as well for the life Johnson investigated as for the life he lived. It is happy, too, in that once again we are reminded of a process as well as a predicament.

What do we think of as his characteristics when he is about his work? In *The Oxford Book of Aphorisms,* published last year, the entries for Johnson far outstrip in number those for anyone else there. This might not be

significant if Johnson's metier were solely that of the aphorism – if he were bonily thoughtful rather than having thought fleshed out. But in fact (to change the metaphor) in his writing as in his speech the aphorism was driven eruptively to the surface by a subterranean power of cogitation, exposition and colloquy which seems to have moved his mind night and day. He was that great rarity, not a wit alone, nor a broker of ideas, but a real intellectual: and since he was those other things as well, it had to show.

Take a couple of his best-known dicta: firstly, that "The natural flights of the human mind are not from pleasure to pleasure but from hope to hope." We are back with process: we have one instance of the celebrated sombreness: and there is all the periodicity and poise that the doctrinaire rhetorician could wish. But look at "flights," a word which in its context has all the ambiguities of "fugue," with its elevation and its plangency. When you get an aphorism from Johnson, typically you get a drama in little. Or again, "It is not sufficiently considered, that men more frequently require to be reminded than informed." This works so well not only because it is true, but because one's having to be stirred back to the realisation is itself an instance of what is being said. Whatever the strengths of the two sayings, though, and however happily they stand as sapiential fragments, in both cases they emerge from matrices of insight and argument which both give to them and take from them new authority. This is indeed the drama of the mind. Johnson's one play may have been, to use a telling word of his, "frigid," but he knew what it was for the intelligence to be fully mobilized. Indeed his knowledge of this provided the norm for much of his judgement of others, and virtually all his fierce judgement of himself.

He is celebrated as a moralist, by which is meant more than that he gives verdicts on right and wrong. He moralizes as a way of analyzing and summarizing human conduct as a whole. Moralizing is for him an articulation of the principles amongst which his mind has play, as well as of the terms under which human beings have play. It is of course, possible, and has often been done, to summarize Johnson's specific moral – and political and aesthetic – principles. What we do not so easily catch by doing that is the steely elasticity of his mind, the sort of thing that led a friend to say, "In general you may tell what the man to whom you are speaking will say next: this you can never do with Johnson." Novelty as such would probably not hold allegiance for long, since to be predictably unpredictable and nothing else is wearisome and trivial. We have to remember that Johnson looms uniquely large in English letters as the very figure of what we call "common sense." Once again, this ought not be taken reductively. It is a rarer commodity than the title might suggest; if it were not so, we should not so often



need to seek it out, piecemeal, in others. Johnson is in one important respect an anti-modernist figure; for all his love of vitality and process, he believes in the constancy of natures, including human nature, and although he finds much bad news in the world, he does not think it unintelligible news.

To some degree of course this is because he believes that the world is given its warrant by God, who redeems and retrieves it in the midst of all its follies and frailties. We cannot tell what Johnson's attitude would have been had this not been his belief, and it is hard to see why we should want to. What we may conjecture is that even then one crucial element of his personality would have perdured – what could be called, summarily, his hospitality. It is a literal, social hospitality, which would have him take in daily the friends and acquaintances whose company he also needed, and lodge with him dependants of various sorts. But it is also an intellectual hospitality in the widest sense. He could entertain ideas and perspectives which would seem outrageous, or at least mutually incompatible, to others. More deeply and simply, he liked to like things, thoughts and people. Bate, again, has pointed out that this very often did not come easily to him: he was a psychically racked man for most of his life. But under the pains was the readiness to be pleased – the thing that led him to scorn what he called "the stare of petulant incredulity." He lost early the illusions which many of us take a lifetime to lose, but their place was taken not by bitterness but by generosity.

Reading him today, one grows the more grateful for the fact that there is so much of his writing, and that it is so various. He has often been travestied by the commentators, but he has also been served magnificently. None will ever serve him so well, probably, as Boswell, nor serve us so well. For all of Boswell's carefully-catalogued limitations, he gave us this leonine man, if not absolutely in the round, then full-face and in profile. It is to Boswell that we owe in large measure the portrayal of Johnson's mettlesomeness, his vivacity, his momentum. The dictionary-maker, the beater-out of the Lives of poets, the wrestler with Shakespeare – all cede here to the man talking with his friends. Literature has many glories, but it does not have many greater than that.

Peter Steele, senior lecturer in the department of English at the University of Melbourne, has recently been appointed Provincial of the Jesuit Order in the Australian region. His book on modern poetry, Expatriates, *will be published by Melbourne University Press in 1984.*

WHY I LIKE MEN

mainly i like men because they're different
they're the opposite sex
no matter how much you pretend they're ordinary
human beings you don't really believe it

they have a whole different language and geography
so they're almost as good
as a trip overseas when life gets dull
and you start looking for a thrill

next i like men because they're all so different
one from the other
and unpredictable so you can never really know
what will happen from
looks alone

like anyone else i have my own taste with regard
to size and shape and color
but the kind of style that has nothing to do
with money can make you bet
on an outsider

lastly i guess i like men because they are the other
half of the human race
and you've got to start somewhere
learning to live and let live
with strangers

maybe it's because if you can leave your options open
ready to consider love
with such an out and out foreigner
it makes other people seem
so much easier

EDITH SPEERS

NANCY KEESING

Letter from Sydney

Sydney literary conversations still simmer about the Miles Franklin Award debacle this year. I have particular reasons for pondering what went, or may have gone wrong, because I intend soon to donate or bequeath money to assist Australian writers in some way. This I can do because of a legacy from my mother, Margery Keesing, who died last year. She was a generous financial supporter of the Fisher Library of the University of Sydney and the library of Macquarie University. I want to think of some initiative that accords with my own career and interests, but would also pay honor to her memory.

Would I donate a prize? No! If after my death its administration had to fall into the hands of a trustee company, no matter how good their intentions or impeccable their management of funds. As to the aborted Miles Franklin Award it is true that it was not awarded once before, in 1973, when only some four novels were published in this country. But it is widely believed that some twenty-five novels were submitted this year, and many of them were very good. I'm blessed if I can follow the reasoning of those publishers who are coy about supplying actual titles of books entered.

Richard Walsh (Australian Book Review, October 1984) of Angus & Robertson has spoken up and said that Peter Kocan's *The Cure*, and a very fine novel it is, was certainly entered. We all 'know' that novels by Elizabeth Jolley, David Foster, Nigel Krauth and Brian Castro were also submitted – and any one of those ought to have been a potential winner. Walsh further spoke of the "rebuff" to writers, but I'd use a stronger word: "insult," for the situation does insult authors, publishers and also those established, and often distinguished, critics who praised the books concerned.

Very well. Some judges are fallible. Some are capricious. The Franklin panel is too academic and too old overall (which I can say being, at sixty-one, no chicken myself). So how about a popular vote method? Oh no! Not after the National Book Council's recent peculiar 'ten best' list without a woman's name thereon. No Cato, Durack, Jefferis, Jolley, Hanrahan or Hazzard.

Next problem: how to word an endowment or bequest so that in the future it can be interpreted sensibly and in accordance with changed times, techniques and even aspirations. If I go ahead and specify a prize for a 'book' what happens, in the quite probable and imaginable future (even if printed books as we know them persist), what happens if all the really innovative talent turns to creating for some form of domesticated holograph, or for works transmitted direct to the reader by computer or, for that matter, works incised on clay slabs? Or any other changes that might make twenty-first century nonsense of my wishes and intentions?

One thing I'd not expect to alter is human fallibility, so I'd stipulate rotation of any judging panel and limited terms for its members.

I own many Australian books and have a handy reference collection, and am always pleased if they're useful to careful visitors and borrowers. Last week my 'library' was put to especially welcome use when Kate Llewellyn and Susan Hampton spent a day looking at reference and poetry volumes. They are working at all the infuriating loose ends that bedevil compilers and editors as publication deadlines draw near. The book they've assembled has a working title of *Here are the Women*, and is an anthology of works by Australian women poets from Aboriginal singers to 1984. I listened to some of their collaborative discussion and had moments of nostalgia for the time, over thirty years ago, when Douglas Stewart and I worked together collecting bush songs and ballads. Successful collaborators should not and will not always agree with each other, but mutual respect and friendliness are essential – Kate and Susan have plenty of those qualities.

Their collection staunchly avoids being an anthology of previous anthologies, and contains some surprises. All unwittingly they've destroyed a good percentage of one of my proudest boasts. Since the Stewart/Keesing research I've maintained that I was the only person who had ever looked at every title in the Mitchell Library containing the words 'poems,' verses,' 'songs,' 'ballads' and even 'whimsies.' Now they've done just this (though confining the books consulted to those by women) and can share with me the full horror of much privately printed, and some commercially produced, nineteenth century pious, prim, didactic, Temperance, and usually just plain awful outpouring.

How unobservant of me. I've had the 1959 edition of the Australian Encyclopaedia on my shelves since it was published, and consulted it often, but have never noticed the wording on the spine of volume 6. Thanks to Stephen Murray-Smith and his *Dictionary of Australian Quotations* I can report that it reads: "Marsupials to Parliament." Is that prophesy or threat?

books

An Understanding of our Times

Rowan Cahill

Roger Milliss: *Serpent's Tooth* (Penguin Books, $9.95).

Roger Milliss, born 1934, briefly and unforgettably entered my life at the start of the 1960s. He was a state-school English teacher - "a congenial way of bringing in a quid" as he puts it; I a student, haunting a half-light world between the Latin and French academics at one end, and the basket-weaving raffia workers at the other. I was caught, like many other kids, in a vacuum of adolescent guilts and the desperate panics of being directionless; he strode into my world and helped develop a desire to write, a love of literature, and nourished my battered self-confidence. Milliss became a model of the man I wanted to be like when I grew up; and still in my head, a model of the teacher I should be.

All too soon he left our school and headed abroad for adventures in journalism — two years with Moscow News; one year editing Pan Africa, a left-wing magazine, in Nairobi. Towards the end of the sixties we met again; he a journalist and sub-editor on the Tribune (Sydney), me a new-left student radical contributing anonymously for the Communist press under a variety of by-lines.

Adolescent perceptions are often protected from the existential realities of life and the nature of the Razor's Edge. Perhaps this is how we survive as human beings. The irony is that the Milliss I perceived in my youth as self-assured, self-confident, calm, was anything but. Part of him was an actor, and in his dealings with we students he projected himself thus; at the time he was teaching us he was active as an actor/director in Sydney's social-realist New Theatre. Reedy River days.

In reality, as Milliss shows in his autobiographical *Serpent's Tooth*, he was a confused, questing young man who had been caught up in the whirlwind of the fifties, reading and thinking and *being* in a way that was regarded by the authorities as at least akin to being un-Australian; constituting heresy in the minds of would-be Torquemadas in outfits like ASIO, the Liberal and Country parties, and amongst their hirelings in the capitalist press.

For not only was Milliss a communist (he joined the CPA in 1952), but his head was filled with the perspectives and insights current amongst a significant number of Australian communists at the time, gleanings not only from Marx, but from Sartre, Brecht, Mayakovsky, Lorca, Neruda, Tolstoy, Kafka, Kierkegaard, Dostoievsky, as he sought answers to the perennial big question — "What is the Aim of Life, the Purpose of Existence?" In a Rip-Van-Winkle Australia which still dreamed of Empire and Mother England this was enough to set Milliss and his fellow left-wing intellectuals apart. Not just the fact of their communism but the substance of it: a substance that was un-Australian to the extent it was excited and nourished by European intellectual traditions that were largely strangers in the antipodes.

There is a sense in which the Cold War in Australia was not only a political phenomenon but a cultural rearguard action: a conflict between the hegemony of an old, doomed, one-dimensional Waspish Australia, and an emerging New Australia of which the CPA was in many ways in the vanguard ... an Australia that by the seventies would be aware and proud of its own traditions, multi-cultural, multi-racial, aware of Asia, aware of the world, socially angry, no longer innocent. *Serpent's Tooth* is both a manifestation of this loss of innocence, and an insider's account of the process as he knew it.

The beginning and end of *Serpent's Tooth*, King Lear's term for a thankless child, centres on a psychological and spiritual dilemma: a human problem that cannot be solved in the physical sense, but one that has to be overcome emotionally if one is to keep on living and loving. This dilemma occurs when people who love each other are parted by death without having acknowledged their love. It is this tension that sets Milliss writing.

Estranged and distanced politically from his father, Milliss learns his father has died, and too late realises the debt he owed the old man; he wants to declare his love. But this cannot be, and Milliss temporarily turns upon himself, an adult ridden with a host of guilts. A human response, for when a parent dies the child we once were is liberated in our memory, and the parent that once was haunts us afresh. There is anguish because we can see and feel and smell again that childhood past, and realise clearly the love past; yet physically it is gone.

The Milliss solution is to seek to expiate his guilts by trying to understand himself, his parents, and to explore the relationships of a family. He begins by sketching the family's history since its convict beginnings in 1792; his parents are developed as characters; the life of the autobiographer is traced from a happy boyhood in Katoomba, to Sydney University in the mid-1950s; then teaching, the Communist Party of Australia, New Theatre, Russia, marriage, Africa, left-wing Sydney in the 1960s, separation, work in radio and TV ...

Realising that if we are to understand ourselves we have to also deal with the times which helped create us, Milliss deftly weaves autobiography with social, political, and intellectual history. Not the mere cataloging of ideas and influences and movements, but the recreation of ideas becoming flesh, and of *thinking* and *being* in the context of crucial periods of Australian history (the 1930s through to the 1970s).

The result, which will be raided by all manner of researchers in the years ahead, is a convincing creation of an awareness of being Australian; it stands also as a testament to love — love for two parents, a father in particular.

Milliss terms his book "an autobiographical novel"; no doubt it suited him to regard it as such. It is a courageous, honest, and vulnerable work; Milliss does not flinch from detailing his own mistakes, stupidities, cruelties, and the hurts he has both experienced and caused. H. G. Wells called his own autobiography "an experiment in autobiography"; so far as *Serpent's Tooth* is concerned this hits the nail on the head with greater accuracy. Milliss has dispensed with paragraphs in order to achieve a stream of consciousness effect; inverted commas have been eliminated and bold and italic type substituted to denote quotes from documents (family letters, diaries, etc) and conversation. These are not trendy gimmicks; the effect is like sleight of hand as the reader immediately tumbles into the author's world, unprotected by the forms and fashions that traditionally distance the reader from the printed page.

Central to *Serpent's Tooth* is Bruce Milliss, the author's father. A pious Catholic, a prosperous self-made businessman, he was shattered psychologically and financially by the Depression, became an atheist and joined the Communist Party. He is shown as a warm, loving, strong human being, a socialist battler whose inspiration and visions of a better world led Roger to tread in his footsteps. That is until 1956 when, following Krushchev's denunciation of Stalin, father and son became estranged; father turned to China and the inspiration of Mao Tse-tung; son sought the 'human face' communism characteristic of younger post-war communists, in love with the Dream of Socialism, forever angry at its betrayal by legions of cynical bureaucrats, ruthless power-brokers, war-mongers, opportunists, ego trippers ...

Milliss shares with his reader the bitterness of this father/son estrangement, a division symbolic of the civil war amongst Australian communists at the same time. His purpose is not only to recreate these divisions, but also to disentangle himself from them. In the process we understand the embattled, courageous rank-and-file socialist Bruce Milliss was, campaigning for social justice and a better world at great personal expense and suffering. During the Petrov Royal Commission Milliss senior was one of those forced to appear before the inquisition in the hope that he could be shown to be tied in some way to the non-existent Russian spy ring promised by Beria's drunken henchman.

What Milliss has done, in recreating his father, is an important object lesson. By looking beyond the Stalinist and China-liner tags he has reached for, found, and largely understood the rich human being and the wealth of human experience they concealed. As I've said elsewhere, the tendency for people on the Australian Left to categorise themselves and their fellows into ideological groups, and then to snipe at, criticise, dismiss, and deceive each other, is wasteful, destructive, and in the long term counter-productive. And the Dream will always remain a Dream.

Reviewing Bernard Smith's autobiography *The Boy Adeodatus* Humphrey McQueen (Sydney Morning Herald 28 July 1984) stated:

> Ample accounts now exist of the kinds of people who became communists and it is time for a general appraisal of the qualities that led Australians to take that step. Such a survey would not sit easily with the current image of bureaucracy and terror. How did an organisation that attracted so many of Australia's noblest people behave so contrary to their values? Or did it?

Serpent's Tooth, released a few weeks after the Smith autobiography, strengthens McQueen's point and the insistence of his questions.

Rowan Cahill teaches at Bowral (NSW) High School. He is the co-author of A History of the Seamen's Union *(1981), and is working on a biography of Rupert Lockwood.*

Art's Energies in Two Volumes

Murray Bail

Alan McCulloch: *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* (Hutchinson, two volumes, $85.00).

Alan McCulloch's revised *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* runs to some 1400 pages, double the 1963 edition. It speaks volumes on art's energies and the infrastructure supporting it, and demonstrates among other things the difference between art and literature.

It is difficult to imagine such a vast enterprise devoted to Australian literature. There wouldn't be enough writers for one thing. Today especially artists in Australia outnumber practising writers by an enormous ratio, even after the minor poets and critics are tossed in. There appears to be a dotted line connecting a young, unformed nation flexing its muscles to some deep hankering for image-making and the consumption of images. Accelerat-

ing the condition is a prosperity of the middle and upper classes, not to mention the long hacienda walls of the filthy rich, just crying out to be decorated. Prices now paid for certain Australian paintings — that is, paintings without any international standing — would cause a Frenchman to throw up his hands in disbelief. Museums are the growth industry. Art radiates such rude good health and power. It offers to the consumer a kind of instantaneous connection to the body politic. Some paintings such as Whiteley's Lavender Bay interior, reproduced in the *Encyclopaedia*, are informed by and proclaim the sybaritic good life. Just about every major Australian artist, and many more minor ones, have had monographs devoted to them, sometimes two or three separate treatments, many of which have run into several editions. It's difficult to think of another country where the artists have been as well served. Yet it would take a brave soul to claim that our achievement in art has attained the level of literature. There is no Patrick White or Christina Stead in painting.

Documentation has become a crucial part of the production process. With a novel or a biography a few lines on the author are enough, and often not needed at all. Literature comprises its own documentation, or largely so. But an artist these days is compelled to list in the exhibition catalog a detailed biography, a history of exhibitions, and if at all possible bibliographical details. Sometimes it can go on for several pages. Lists of prizes are useful; even an obscure, one-horse-town watercolor award of twenty years back is worth mentioning. The real clincher is the list of public galleries which have demonstrated their faith by having already acquired samples of the artist's work, although it is never declared whether it is merely something on paper, as it often is with the Australian National Gallery, and invariably is with our artists in foreign museums, such as New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Part of the need for documentation is due of course to the portable, exclusive nature of an artwork or an exhibition; in a sense, proof of existence is dismantled after the work is dispersed from a gallery's walls. A list of exhibitions can give shape to a career, can underline an artist's endurance. But the prime motive is the cash-factor and the cut-throat nature of the business. No problem buying a novel for $10; if it's no good it can be tossed away. Whereas a would-be purchaser needs all the available support before writing out $2000-$3000 for an artist's work, such as a Dale Frank, not listed in the *Encyclopaedia*, who already has — according to ample documentation — something of an international reputation ("lives in Vienna, New York and Singleton"), although he is only twenty-five. Things move so fast these days even curators need the reassurance of a little documentation to avoid being caught flat-footed.

Now all that's needed — at least in theory — is for exhibition catalogs to merely state under biographical details "refer McCulloch".

The new *Encyclopaedia* is an enormous improvement on the original, single-volume edition. Much has been added, expanded, refined. The first edition can now be seen as essentially a tentative, pioneering work.

Aside from artists, major and minor, the sub-industry — that which feeds off the body of artists, is listed and described: all those museums and curators and Fine Arts Departments, the government-funded boards, the main commercial galleries, journals past and present, the critics, prizes and trustees — complete with addresses and telephone numbers.

In many ways the expansion traces the recent reinterpretations in our art history. Many more women are listed, for example Dorrit Black now has an entry — it's almost as long as Charles Blackman's — as does the interesting painter from Perth, Elise Blumann (b.1897). Both are given color reproductions. Still absent though is the 1930s Sydney printmaker, Vera Blackburn; missing too is Queensland's Davida Allen, and two representatives in the recent "Australian Visions" at the Guggenheim, Susan Norrie and Jan Murray. Enlarged and improved entries are accorded to Ethel Carrick Fox, Preston, Hester ("who came to understand, as few Australian artists of her generation did, the ways in which poetry and drawing are linked through metaphor") and Grace Cossington Smith — although she should be listed under "Smith" rather than "Cossington".

Additional space and respect is given to Aboriginal art, while mural painting, which has experienced an upsurge in acreage in direct proportion to the general increase in government funding, deserves at least something of a summation.

Photography in Australia is sketched out in a brisk essay; but while Dupain and Moore have separate entries, Mumford and most other photographers are left out. If photography is included with understandable caution it may have been better to draw the line and not cover architecture at all; for if McCulloch has chosen, perhaps wisely, not to have an essay on the subject, why give entries to Greenway and Burley Griffin, Utzon and the Opera House, but nothing to the dozens of other contributing figures? Verge and Blacket come to mind, and Robin Boyd and Murcult of corrugated iron fame, and especially Grounds and Colin Madigan, architects of the nation's two main art museums.

Entries on artists should provide the essential hard facts, sharply-drawn assessments of individual achievements, and additional reference where the curious reader can turn for more detailed information. In most cases this is splendidly filled — although Alan McCulloch is often too generous in his aesthetic assessments — and any missing bibliographical sources can only testify to the encyclopedic difficulties of the project. Worth mentioning here are omissions of essential monographs: Gibson's Charles Conder, Turnbull's Rupert Bunny, Margaret Preston's *Recent Paintings* (1929), Wallis' *Thomas Baines: Explorer and Artist*, Robert Smith on Counihan's prints, Thomas Woolner by his daughter, Rodney Hall's Sibley, Dundas on Conrad Martens, Patrick McCaughey's slender volume on Elwyn Lynn.

There is also the strange case of the convict artist Thomas Wainewright. So fascinating was his character it prompted Lytton to use him as the original for Varney in *Lucretia*, as did Dickens with Slinkton in his

melodramatic novel, *Hunted Brown*; Wilde also devoted an essay to Wainewright in *Intentions*. It would also be worth mentioning Hal Porter's treatment in his novel *The Tilted Cross*, and Wainewright's main biography by Jonathan Curling.

Many interesting artists are not interesting enough to warrant a monograph, let alone a biography. Others such as Passmore, Phillips Fox, Ramsay and Cossington Smith await the full academic publishing treatment. In the meantime, exhibition catalogs assume the role of small books. Until Roland Wakelin or Roy de Maistre are given monographs — and they must be interesting borderline cases — the student is left with Wakelin's Art Gallery of NSW retrospective catalogs (where it is mentioned he named his Sydney home Cezanne — which says it all), and de Maistre's Whitechapel document of 1960. These should be required listing in an encyclopedia of Australian art; so too Arthur Boyd's and Nolan's Whitechapel retrospective catalogs. Kemp, Hester, Dundas, Tuckson have been given comprehensive catalogs — in the case of George Baldessin, as thick as most monographs — and so these too deserve listing as references.

Of the expanded entries on major artists the example of the late John Passmore is exemplary. In the first edition Passmore was rapped over the knuckles for not shaking off "the bonds of eclecticism". This criticism may still be valid; but the longer, revised entry centred around Passmore's marvellous 1959 "Jumping Horse Mackerel" is altogether more subtle and perceptive. To anyone needing quick information on this strange and difficult artist McCulloch's one-and-a-half pages are ideal.

As for omissions — other than those previously mentioned — Thomas Cleghorn, the much publicised Juan Davila, and Paul Boston are glaring, all the more so when Harris, Rolf is allowed entry ("mainly known as an entertainer but also a painter"), who apparently won the Hotchin prize for watercolors, Perth, 1949. It is pleasing to see the inclusion of the late Mervyn Horton: all those years of editing *Art and Australia*.

Here and there small details can give added force to an entry: that Balson's 1941 Exhibition was the first one-man show of abstract painting in Australia; or that the Macquarie Gallery is Australia's longest-running gallery. Such facts have a place in an encyclopaedia along with painter marriages, early deaths and court cases.

Supporting the artists are many more reproductions, and it is a relief to report they are no longer lumped under the old sub-headings, "Expatriate Expressionism", "Celtic Connections" and so on. Interesting examples of an artist's work have invariably been chosen, often from private collections: the splendid Arthur Boyd dog painting, the good-looking Orban (though he is later given a weak drawing in black-and-white), Blackman's Alice painting from his own collection, the rarely-reproduced "Portrait of Captain Cook" by John Webber, and the Peter Clarke and Cossington Smith paintings, both singing their colors. It is good that provincial museums, although mostly Victorian, have been ransacked for reproductions; for it would be difficult to show Frater better than with Benalla's "Flinders Ranges" (though surely a date could have been assigned), or Martens by his watercolor from Ballarat.

Understandably perhaps, Alan McCulloch has chosen an inordinate number of reproductions from his own gallery, Mornington, where better examples of an artist's work could have been found elsewhere: the Perceval and Williams drawings, and Powditch instead of Joe Zikeras. Elsewhere, Fairweather's "Group of Figures" from Castlemaine Art Gallery is one of his most insignificant drawings.

It is arguable whether in such a wide-ranging reference work any one artist should receive more than one of the rationed color plates. And where it is done here the extra plate is wasted. Drysdale has two portrait-type paintings, and Preston two flower paintings of the same year. In each case the second example could have been a landscape. Williams is similarly shown with too many portraits in color and in black-and-white.

Such criticisms are inevitable in a bulky two-volume encyclopedia. Searching as I have for flaws and omissions among the 1400 pages has given me an awful feeling of fatigue; a glimpse of the arduous and worthwhile labor undertaken again by Alan McCulloch, with the assistance of Charles Nodrum.

Murray Bail served for some years on the council of the National Gallery, Canberra. His highly-successful novel Homesickness *was published in 1980, and more recently a study of the artist Ian Fairweather. Bail lives in Sydney and is working on a novel.*

Against the Orthodoxies

Geoffrey Serle

John Docker: *In a Critical Condition. Reading Australian Literature* (Penguin, $9.95).

As the blurb says, this book "will entertain and annoy".

One of the conspicuous weaknesses of Australian academics is how rarely they openly discuss in print the condition of their particular disciplines. In the absence of such a context, they are highly exposed when someone like John Docker makes a swingeing attack on prevailing orthodoxy. I hope the academic Aust. Lit. practitioners will not just ignore him or attempt to brush him off, and that there will be many constructive replies. Harry Heseltine has made a good start in Southerly.

Docker's book is a hotchpotch, a very mixed bag, in turn objective and personal, varying from impressively sober chapters on the world context of literary criticism to rumbustious pamphleteering. There are many jagged edges: it reads rather as though he had to abandon a too demanding or time-consuming major analysis.

He is concerned primarily to attack the dominant New Critics and Leavisites and their textual, formalist cricism of Australian literature, to the neglect of the contextual. The wicked Professors Kramer, Wilkes, Buckley and Heseltine (none of whom, arguably, is strictly a New

Critic or Leavisite) have imposed a "metaphysical ascendancy" – a "gloom, doom, alienation and horror thesis" – which excludes many of the best Australian writers from the canon. They have subjected their departments to "a continuous process of institutional repression," and they were linked with the New Right in Cold War politics.

Much of this is exaggerated, oversimplified and distorted. But there are many grains of truth and much good fun. Docker attacks not just Manning Clark but also Humphrey McQueen for their unwitting right-wing contribitions to Australian cultural history – this is not just a teasing lark. He is amusing on the colonels and traffic police controlling criticism, and on the prison-governing editor and most of the contributors to the *Oxford History of Australian Literature*. (Well, really, they did ask for it. I was not the only one who was angered when we reached for the volume when Alan Marshall died and found only two derogatory references to him, and no mention at all of *I Can Jump Puddles*, arguably the most world-famous work of Australian literature. To put it as mildly as possible, how foolish they are and what a crippingly limited range of sympathy and experience of life and humankind they display.)

Docker is bold enough to attempt to debunk Roland Barthes, the semiotician, and blasts some of his local supporters as "elitist, arrogant, intimidating, verbally bullying." He is sometimes spot on, as when he remarks of the formalists:

> . . .you have to have a high degree of specialised knowledge of the body of conventions, myths, references, allusions, of how these function in different texts. You turn your knowledge inward, away from other disciplines, and build up your own discipline as separate and distinct – as 'professional.' You then find yourself, after a short while, talking only to other critics. Intellectual interests narrow and narrow: critics become massively and embarrassingly ignorant of everything except their own inturned discipline.

The long-prevailing orthodoxy, Docker asserts, is now increasingly perceived as "narrow, exclusive and debilitating." And he concludes, reasonably, with the pluralist plea: the tectual and contextual "have always to be combined in analysis, held in a difficult balance."

Some people will think Docker hasn't been tough enough. Creative writers in general are fed up with what Martin Boyd termed "the peevish and censorious tones of modern criticism." So many academic teachers and critics seemingly cannot celebrate the virtues of the work, or realize that every masterpiece has its flaws, or refrain from dwelling on what they think is wrong with the work or express their love for literature (if they ever had any): whippersnappers "in a rage to set things right" (Browning), indeed. What effect have they on their students? We miss you, Ian Maxwell.

How many Australian academic critics have we had with a broad enough approach, relating the subject to the human condition, to command any sort of public? When critics do attempt to use a historical context they are usually superficial, sadly so by American and British standards. (Probably, like the rest of the community, they consider that anyone can be a historian, without special training. Yet they probably have not been as narrowly maleducated as economists or sociologists whose constricted range so often vitiates their work.) What mites, after all these years, have the structuralists, semiologists, etc., contributed? Again, they are usually grossly overspecialized, massively ignorant of the world, engrossed in largely irrelevant intellectual games: they remind me of very bright children playing Dungeons and Dragons.

How can we explain the contrast between the intelligence, humanity and love for Australian writing of so many of the younger generation gathered in the lively Association for the Study of Australian Literature, and the frequent deadness of their critical writing in Australian Literary Studies and other journals (not in Notes and Furphies). To the outsider they seem to be inhibited and debilitated by, presumably, supposed professional standards of academic criticism. Their suppressed unrest at the state of their discipline and discontent with the performance of many of their seniors, one hopes will take creative form.

As against all this (and Docker should have acknowledged it) there is much fine old-fashioned scholarship coming from English departments where – thanks be – there are still many teachers and scholars of all generations who are not ideologues but humanists, are not bogged down in the grey mud of theory, are teaching with love and enthusiasm on what the author has to say and the magical way in which it is said, and who preserve the traditional language of discourse.

Docker's case is a challenging one for the Overland school of thought which he broadly supports. Are Prichard, Palmer, Davison, Dark, Waten, Barnard Eldershaw, etc., as grossly undervalued in the critical canon as he claims? Have we been conned by the solid weight of orthodox academic opinion?

Geoffrey Serle is editor of The Australian Dictionary of Biography. *A new edition of his* From Deserts the Prophets Come *will appear shortly.*

The Grotesque and the Innocent

Lucy Frost

Elizabeth Jolley: *Palomino* (University of Queensland Press, $14.95).
Elizabeth Jolley: *Milk and Honey* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $12.00).
Kate Grenville: *Bearded Ladies* (University of Queensland Press, $14.95).
John Hooker: *The Bush Soldiers* (Collins, $17.95).

Elizabeth Jolley's first published novel, *Palomino*, deserves better luck this time around. During the late seventies it languished in the Melbourne office of Out-

back Press, struggling into print in 1980 just as the publishing house was on its last legs. It reached few bookshops, and in most parts of the country was totally unobtainable. Its re-publication by the University of Queensland Press is therefore in real ways a first publication, and most welcome it is, for *Palomino* is a remarkable book.

Its intriguing heroine, Laura, is a doctor whose passion for ideas embedded in life has led to murder and prison. Having served her sentence, she retreats from town to a remote valley with no neighbors except her ne'er-do-well tenants, the Murphys, whose defeatist attitudes blight the potato crop before it is even in the ground. The life of feeling has drained away from Laura. Then, on a sea-voyage, the passionate self re-awakens. From behind the glossy pages of the British Medical Journal, she secretly watches another woman with whom "there exists an indescribably delicate possibility of a friendship, something deeper than an ordinary friendship. It needs to be approached cautiously and with a tender gentleness." *Palomino* is the story of that approach and of the fullness of Laura's life brought into sharp, if painful, focus by the love she comes to share with Andrea.

The love is as complex as the women themselves. Elizabeth Jolley writes particularly well about its physical moments, capturing their idyllic sexual pleasure in a prose of great tact. There is none of the prurient revelling or ideological palaver which so often mars fiction written about the love between women.

In *Milk and Honey*, Elizabeth Jolley's fifth novel, she is again treading on dangerous ground. This time she writes about musicians, a notoriously difficult subject for fiction because the links between the music they play, and the people they are, can easily sound platitudinous or pretentious. Elizabeth Jolley avoids these traps.

Hers is an imagination too subtle to countenance cliches. She begins with the detail, seen clearly for whatever it might be in itself. Then, gradually, connections come until finally everything fits together and her prose is radiant with metaphor. This is why the prose comes to resemble poetry and yet is never coyly "poetic".

The connections she makes are primarily in the art of her prose, however, and only rarely within the fictional worlds. There, life threatens to fall to pieces, and often does. *Milk and Honey* begins with reference to a disintegration beyond all art: the Nazi sweep across Europe. Leopold Heimbach, Viennese musician with a Jewish wife, has fled his homeland in fear and come to Western Australia, but as his sister Heloise says in her single moment of candor, "It is not easy with one's needs and refinements to adapt to a new country."

The Heimbachs in fact do not adapt, although they do settle. *Milk and Honey* has some very disturbing and salutary insights into the psychological dangers which displacement poses to these Europeans. They have become, in Elizabeth Jolley's words, an "absorbed household". The novel is the story of how they try to absorb a young musician into this household which has become their private world run according to their own rules.

Jacob's family, too, are European migrants, and when he arrives from his father's vineyard in the country to study the cello under Leopold Heimbach and live in the teacher's home, he speaks with "the exaggerated Australian accent of the Central European who is trying to fit in." Without noticing, without consciously choosing, Jacob gradually relinquishes all effort to fit in with anyone or anything except the Heimbachs. They love him, teach him, feed him, and tempt him with their care, as he will later tempt them with his money.

They are a most peculiar lot, to say the least, the two maiden aunts, the obedient daughter and idiot son, the suave *pater familias*. At the beginning they seem deceptively familiar, European migrants who hold on to their own domestic routines, their particular if peculiar habits of cleaning and eating, the language and culture. Always, however, Jolley manages to suggest that the familiar hides the unfamiliar, and that the unfamiliar is sinister. One waits expectantly for dreadful things to happen, and they do.

The novel ends on a surprisingly serene note, nevertheless. Jacob gives up all pretense of being a virtuoso in a small Australian orchestra, and takes on a job as cleaner in a mental institution where as a boy he had paid disconcerting visits to singing classes, and as a man he is now returning to ask question about a murder. This resolution sounds ridiculous, and in a sense it is, and is meant to be, but it also makes sense. Jacob has for years been in a position much like that of the draughts in the games he and Leopold play, those pieces which "stood in innocent readiness to be moved by forces outside themselves from one place to another on the board and of the board." In his menial job at the hospital he has released himself from the "absorbed household", and for "the first time in my life I am not living on or through somebody else. It's cleaning up after people, but it's work I can do and it is necessary work and that makes all the difference." The images of entrapment by self and others have gone. Jacob no longer needs to fear that, like a bee, he may find himself struggling, dying, in the sweet stickiness of, irony of ironies, honey.

In the short stories of Kate Grenville's first collection, *Bearded Ladies*, things never turn out so well. Although, like Elizabeth Jolley, she has a penchant for the grotesque, she never places it within a larger metaphysical dimension. Its location is basically social and sexual. In "The Space Between", two of the "banana-shaped" tourists lolling around the swimming pool of a Madras hotel decide to be "kind" to a young woman travelling solo, and try to pair her off with a male of very little brain, though much given to brawn. The story is an amusing satire and has its biting moments.

Kate Grenville's most memorable stories are those charged with a current of dark sexuality. In "A Summer Aunt", a woman menaces her sixteen year-old niece with sexual ardor masquerading as family feeling. A brilliant French physicist turns out to be an Oedipal basketcase, with a Maman who takes partly chewed bread from her mouth and throws it across the table towards the luckless Australian girl who has unwittingly walked into the jaws of degradation in "Meeting the Folks". Sexual corruption

spreads to Italy in "Country Pleasures". This is a longer story, with a greater range of perversity, from the tomb-violators of the opening sentence to the closing fantasy of the wife who imagines cutting into her husband if a snake should bite him. She excites herself by going over in her mind the range of knives available to her, trying to decide whether to use a long zucchini knife, a slim flexible one, or the serrated knife with its deep bite, "whose tiny teeth would penetrate the flesh like a chainsaw through sappy bark". In these stories, unlike the fiction of Elizabeth Jolley, grotesquerie is the central pleasure. Hence, presumably, the title's reference to side-shows with their bearded ladies, where people come to see freaks. To Elizabeth Jolley, people are never freaks, whatever dark secrets they may hide.

John Hooker's second novel, *The Bush Soldiers*, seems a rather innocent affair after the fiction of Jolley and Grenville. It offers straightforward physical adventure in a world where things are what they seem, and men are doers, not thinkers. The time is World War Two, the Japanese have invaded Australia, the regular Army troops are fighting elsewhere and, while the civilian population treks westward, Colonel Madigan's ragtail troops in the Volunteer Defense Corps spread out over the eastern states with orders to scorch the earth.

Geoffry Sawtell, who had been initiated into manhood in the No-Man's-Land at Passchendaele, is gathering to himself a small expeditionary force to go south from Bourke to Broken Hill, blow up the main shaft of the Zinc Corporation Mine, and then turn towards the inhospitable centre to escape pursuit. Sawtell begins with a working class Irish-Australian, Frank Counihan, and his Luger submachine-gun. They are joined by a fastidious English major, aged fifty-three; an English chaplain three years older; and the eighteen-year-old Kevin O'Donohue, an inarticulate loner who knows horses.

The Bush Soldiers is the story of their "lean and hungry trip", and it makes for engrossing reading. Hooker's narrative has pace, his prose is skillfully controlled, and the novel's final pages are poignantly moving. The novel's vision remains anachronistic, with its Australia of men's men, where war is the touchstone of reality, and pubs and football are the best things going. Hooker has re-inflated the stereotyped Australian male, but when he goes so far as to make Geoffrey Sawtell the centre-half forward for Richmond in the Grand Final of 1921, kicking two goals in the defeat of Carlton, I wondered whether the celebration of Australian manhood might have slipped towards parody. Perhaps it is simply that the possibilities for such heroes are few, their range of action peculiarly curtailed in spite of the vastness of their land.

Lucy Frost teaches in the English department of La Trobe University. She has recently published No Place for a Nervous Lady, *an anthology of women's experiences in the Australian bush, and is working on the papers of Annie Baxter, one of the most remarkable of such women.*

Resurrection of a Poet

David Headon

Elizabeth Perkins (ed.): *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* (Angus & Robertson, $39.95).

If you travel a few miles along Potato Point Road to Eurobodalla, near Narooma on the south coast of New South Wales, and walk up a rather steep but nondescript hill overlooking the Tuross River, you come across two graves. Both are overgrown, weathered and rust-colored. What looks like the original paint job on the headstones is peeling so badly that, in another few years, the inscriptions will be indecipherable. One reads: "Sacred to the Memory of Charles C. Harpur Died March 2nd, 1867" (Harpur's beloved son, Charley, who died in a tragic shooting accident); the other, "Sacred to the Memory of Charles Harpur Poet Died June 16th 1868." The neglected state of the grave site is a curiously apt metaphor for Harpur's literary reception in his own country for a full hundred years after his death.

While the last decade has seen renewed interest in Harpur, far more work on him needs to be carried out before it could be fairly claimed that his reputation was based on adequate scholarship. The barrier, of course, as with Harpur's combative contemporaries, John Dunmore Lang and David Deniehy, has been the absence of an authoritative text. The Elizabeth Perkins-edited *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* is not the complete edition we have been waiting for. As Perkins states in her Preface, *Works* is a "non-definitive, first collected edition". Yet the volume does go a very long way towards rectifying the most embarrassing oversight in Australian letters.

Until the publication of this volume, Harpur enthusiasts had been forced to confront a pitiful assortment of his works: two slim volumes published in the poet's own time; a corrupt text (1883), published some fifteen years after Harpur's death, intended to adequately reflect the poet's best work, but in reality seriously marred by the emendations and distortions of an editor determined to shape a genteel English poet; a 1944 collection culled from the 1883 text; and a 1973 compilation of Harpur's poetry, prose and correspondence, responsibly edited, but far from a definitive collection. With a sense of relief, one can now proclaim that we do have, in the Perkins volume, one version of almost all Harpur's poems. Some justice has finally been done.

At last, we have easy access to the wide variety of Harpur's poems utilized by J. Normington-Rawling in his biography, *Charles Harpur, an Australian* (1962) — verse which centres on issues as diverse as temperance, love, kangaroo hunting, the Crimean War, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Homer, land legislation, capital punishment, the anti-transportation movement, George Washington, New Zealand and Polish politics and the rights of man (not to mention the dry, at times Melvillean humor of his satires and "Bits"). At last, we can give due emphasis to Harpur's place in the lively tradition of nineteenth-century radical thought in Australia, particularly in the

1840s and 1850s, and to his connections, as a result of this activity, with American writers from Jefferson and Paine to Channing and Emerson. Harpur, in fact, put these writers to a stricter ethical test than any of his Australian contemporaries. Like them, he battled to establish native pride in order that an identifiable local literature might be realized. Further, he was attracted by certain American transcendentalist principles: the poet as seer, nature's luminous qualities, the brotherhood of man and self-reliance. The editor of the 1883 *Poems*, striving to elicit "some sympathetic recognition from the sons of song in England", totally ignored Harpur's fighting side. Thus succeeding generations of Australians, who refused to undertake the arduous task of sifting through box upon box of manuscripts in the Mitchell Library, got watered-down Harpur. The Bulletin's Red Pagan, A. G. Stephens, was one. In an 1896 review, he labelled Harpur "a very dull stick". And, perusing the 1883 edition, one is tempted to agree.

Perkins' *Works*, however, enables us to assess the Harpur poetry virtually entire. In 1845, W. A. Duncan's Weekly Register sought to encourage the kind of local readership it felt Harpur deserved. Almost a century and a half later, the Register's hopes should finally be realized. A new and perhaps more stubbornly Australian generation of readers can, courtesy of this 1,013-page volume, carefully trace the fluctuations in the battle between Harpur's New-World ideas and Old-World verse forms. As a political agitator, social commentator and literary theorist, Harpur was destined to be close to his countrymen most of his life; as a serious practising poet, he would achieve this ideal position less often.

In addition, one can now carefully trace Harpur's sad spiritual journey, from the brash confidence and optimism of his early poetry, to the anger, resignation and defeat of his last years — that is, from energetic poems such as "Australia's First Great Poet", where

> all brave and wise
> And beautiful spirits, 'neath his native skies [are]
> Breathing his influence from age to age.

- and "To the Lyre of Australia", which finds that

> our songs, though unstudied, are high,
> When the glory of Future Australia's the theme . . .

– to the bitterness of footnotes added in the despair of later years. The note to "Lyre", for example, illustrates the point: "But, alas! neither then nor since did my country *deign* to award one smile of encouragement to the endeavours of her Poet. *Her* best and only gifts to him have been hunger and rags ... C.H." Even more pointedly, Harpur appends to his "To the Spirit of Poesie" these embittered words: "... I am not of the present men of Australia; nor could I mass myself down, endeavour to do so as I might, into the dead miry level of their intellectual grossness. I speak strongly; but if I do so, it is from feeling as strongly how much all that is immortal in me has been wronged by the society I have been compelled to herd with, during the best years of my life. C.H."

Works, in fact, whets our appetites for more. We can be thankful that in this edition we get the comprehensive notes to "The Kangaroo Hunt", crammed full of intriguing snippets of flora and fauna facts and folklore, local black and white vocabulary, and social commentary. But the Preface and notes to all six parts of the poem only serve to emphasize the immediate need for a companion Harpur prose volume. To assess the man's full contribution, scholars need access to *all* the notes accompanying the poems, and to other seminal prose works such as Harpur's Sydney School of Arts lecture, "The Nature and Offices of Poetry" (1859) and his Sydney Times article on Emerson (1864). Presumably, Angus and Robertson have already approached Elizabeth Perkins to begin compiling the edition.

A few final points about the *Works*. First, print size and layout are bold and attractive, despite the publisher's odd decision to begin poems, occasionally, right at the bottom of a page; secondly, Perkins' long introduction is informative, especially the section contrasting Whitman and Harpur; third, one regrets both the decision to give only the most general contents pages at the book's beginning, and the inadvertent omission of a manuscript location section. Fortunately, the Department of English, James Cook University, acted immediately to overcome the latter, and a supplement with a manuscript index and additional bibliography items is already available (free) to anyone requiring it.

The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur confirms Harpur's significant role in the development of Australian literature. All that remains now is a wider public recognition of that role. With luck, between now and 1988 the Eurobodalla gravesite might even receive the beautification treatment.

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Militant Unionist

John Sendy

Stuart Macintyre: *Militant. The Life and Times of Paddy Troy* (Allen & Unwin, $19.95 and $9.95).

To walk down Fremantle streets with Paddy Troy and have a drink with him was quite an experience. And to evacuate in well-ordered fashion afterwards proved arduous. He seemed to know everyone. Blokes continually chiacked him, asked questions, whispered little asides into his ear, cracked jokes, insisted on shouting a round.

On one such occasion a character sidled up to me and said, *sotto voce* out of the side of his mouth: "In Fremantle they reckon Paddy's as well-known as the town clock but he doesn't strike as much." The fellow's eyes twinkled with dead-pan mirth.

Paddy Troy was Western Australia's best known communist. When he retired as secretary of the Maritime

Workers Union in 1973 the Fremantle City Council gave him a reception at which ALP State Premier Tonkin was the main speaker. His union members gave him a new car. He became the first life member of the Western Australian Trades and Labor Council, which he'd worked so hard to form.

When he died in 1978 at the age of seventy 1,500 people attended the funeral. And now, posthumously, the Fremantle Port Authority's new pilot boat is named after him, and a new shopping area is to be called the Paddy Troy Mall.

Such public recognition of a prominent communist is quite unusual. Stuart Macintyre's biography advances the reasons why Troy earned it and traces his life as worker, unionist, husband, father and communist.

Paddy Troy was one of the army of communist trade-union officials that emerged in the 1930s and 1940s and which is now almost forgotten by all except the most rabid reds-under-the-bed exponents and a few of the faithful who remember.

Jim Healy, Bill Orr, Ernie Thornton, Tom Wright, E. V. Elliott, Bob Wells, Bill Parkinson, Ted Rowe, John Hughes and J. J. Brown were some of the most outstanding, but there were hundreds. Self-made men with little formal education, they were battlers from the depression days with too much spirit, pride and ability to take meekly whatever was doled out to them by employers, government or anyone. They were colorful and often flamboyant, marvellous orators, and rarely out of the limelight of industrial and political action. They were loved and hated passionately, subjected to adulation by members and friends, and to constant attacks by newspapers, employers and governments. They battled for their members and led fights for higher living standards and stronger unions. They opposed the sending of scrap-iron to Japan prior to World War Two, supported the war effort, assisted Indonesia to shed Dutch overlordship and, later, opposed Australia's aggression in Vietnam. As communists were politically unpopular and the cold war developed, they had to fight tooth and nail to hold support and win through. This determined, to a great extent, their strengths and weaknesses. Some were domineering, brooked no opposition and could be unscrupulous in dealing with opponents. At the same time most introduced democratic elections and ballots into their unions and strengthened rank-and-file activity.

Eventually most were voted out of office due to their excessive zeal and political impatience or to anti-communist prejudice. Some died with their union and political boots on. Others simply faded away with the decline of the Communist Party.

Little has been written about these important figures and their achievements, actions and failures. They spearheaded the most significant and memorable accomplishment of the Australian communists. While never achieving substantial electoral support, communists won a huge following in the trade unions for a period of some twenty years. The reasons for this incongruity have been canvassed often by communists here and overseas. They proved incapable of providing a convincing answer. The answer, of course, would reveal the grand CPA error of importing blueprints of strategies and methods for social change which demanded the opposing and defeating of the indigenous mass working-class party, the ALP. This borrowed strategy failed, and not only earned the CPA enmity but also side-tracked important sections of Australian socialists, at least to some degree. In the trade unions, on the other hand, the communists sought to unite and strengthen, to work *for* rather than *against*. Remarkable success followed for a long period, despite the political suspicion of most unionists towards communism.

Stuart Macintyre does not delve into these matters very deeply but his biography, it is to be hoped, will be the forerunner to more works on the subject.

From a national viewpoint Paddy Troy was not a major figure among communist trade union officials but, in a limited way, he proved to be one of the most successful and remained union secretary for twenty-five years. He worked in a small union in a confined area, intimately, sensitively, and with honesty and courage. Fremantle was very much his home town. He completed his schooling there. On the day the police fatally wounded Tom Edwards in 1919, Paddy was on the wharf. He lived in Fremantle for most of his life. In 1940 he served a three-months' prison sentence in the Fremantle gaol for communist activities. Under his leadership his Fremantle union members, mainly casual workers, won paid sick leave, annual and long service leave and a guaranteed weekly wage.

Troy never down-graded his political affiliations. At early morning pick-up meetings of members he commented on the radio news. He sold large numbers of Tribune on the waterfront and on the streets each Saturday morning, his record sale being 238 copies in three hours. He stood as a CPA parliamentary candidate on many occasions.

He became gloomy about the prospects of the CPA. At the 1967 Congress his voice alone argued for fundamental changes in CPA attitudes. "Where are the thousands of our members of other years?" he asked. He talked of the communist need to become attached to and united with the ALP. He claimed correctly that the CPA engendered deep-seated distrust and suspicion from the bulk of Australians, contributed to ALP election defeats and stood apart from genuine socialists in the ALP. He got no support, yet nearly twenty years later those same issues are still debated within the remnants of the CPA, and yet another split has centred on such matters in Victoria.

Stuart Macintyre has covered many of these questions in great detail. He reveals some of Paddy's warts, too: his rather obvious patriarchal, egotistical, authoritarian characteristics. For Paddy, like most of us, was a mixture: modest and vain, tough and soft-hearted, humane and dogmatic. His cockiness and ego stood out; a lot of it has been about for a long time. And women contemporaries have complained of his male chauvinism. Few men born in 1908 escaped it, of course, but Paddy seemed to possess more than his fair share. Maybe his biographer let him down lightly on some of these matters. But perhaps

the historian could have relaxed sometimes to let the story-teller take over.

Paddy Troy was a memorable person who contributed much to his community. As Stuart Macintyre says: "Whether as an ally or an opponent, there was a vitality and sincerity about him that struck an immediate and lasting response."

Macintyre labored well to produce this unusual tribute to a militant unionist. More such biographies and works on unionism are needed.

John Sendy has held a number of leading positions in the left-wing movement. He now lives in the Victorian countryside and is a freelance writer. His work on Melbourne's radical bookshops is reviewed in this issue.

Mrs Noah's Quarrel with the Skylight

Graham Rowlands

Judith Rodriguez (ed.): *Mrs Noah and the Minoan Queen* Poems by Jennifer Strauss, Fay Zwicky, Antigone Kefala, Judith Rodriguez, J. S. Harry, Jennifer Rankin (Sisters, $8.95).

John A. Scott: *The Quarrel with Ourselves & Confessions* (Rigmarole Books, $7.95).

Robert Gray: *The Skylight* (Angus & Robertson, $9.95).

Judith Rodriguez's clear, logical and well researched introduction to *Mrs Noah and the Minoan Queen* is a rarity in recent Australian poetry editing. Even so, I'm sorry that she still feels the need to anthologize women without men. Her defence, of course, is impeccable. Those recent anthologies full of men without women — well, almost without.

A large anthology of all Australia's women poets based on quality alone would show how far they have come since Kate Jennings sacrificed quality to make a necessary ideological point in *Mother I'm Rooted*. After this whopper women's anthology perhaps Australian poetry editors could return to publishing updated versions of Rodney Hall's already outdated *The Collins Book of Australian Poetry*. Contemporary coverage necessitates more and more women.

A reader unfamiliar with the editor's six poets could easily categorize Jennifer Strauss, Fay Zwicky and Judith Rodriguez as the 'intellectuals' and Antigone Kefala, J.S. Harry and Jennifer Rankin as the 'emotionals'. Moreover, a reader beginning at the beginning and tiring towards the end could define the anthology as more intellectual than emotional — the opposite of the female stereotype. Such a reader could be excused for questioning the placing of Kefala, perhaps even her inclusion.

It's not, of course, as simple as this. The editor has chosen the least verbose and sentimental of Strauss's work. And the best, in my view. She's hard-hitting in this selection:

> They don't like you acquiring
> The power of machines.

Fay Zwicky is hard-hitting too, but with an intellectual agility that includes all sorts of wit, puns, irony and allusions. Rodriguez's poems are metamorphoses of sheer willpower where poolfish think lines like these:

> Three generations from now
> I may have created mud
> and I expect to have a godlike body.

All three poets exhibit analytical, moral and psychological insights.

Kefala, Harry and Rankin rely on imagery and emotion. They also have ideas, of course, but the meaning of their lyrics and description can't be separated from their rhythms and landscapes. Using the word broadly, both Harry and Rankin are surrealists. Psyche and landscape interfuse. Rankin's fluent style undulates mood towards revelation while often deliberately not spelling it out. Her rhythms are marvellous. Harry evokes and realizes insights. She's able to bathe the most painful subjects in beauty. There *can be* "a terrible beauty" — although it can't be suttee, foot-binding or chattel marriage.

I'm unsure of Kefala's quality beside Harry's and Rankin's. The editor has unwittingly created a real problem for Kefala's reader by placing her after the editor's sociological introduction, Strauss and Zwicky, and following her with Rodriguez herself. An uninitiated reader could assume by the last of Zwicky's poems that the editor was determined to display the opposite of the Mills & Boon woman. And, for that matter, the opposite of even Judith Wright's lyrics from the 1940s. That, however, proves not to be the whole story. And Kefala has to bear the brunt of the changed directions. I don't envy her.

It's a fine anthology. I agree with the criticism of males. I value the female revelation. Still, I found it heavy going. Perhaps I should have just dipped into it when I failed to understand a woman or understood a man only too well.

John A. Scott's poetry and prose poetry has become clearer with each collection. In *The Quarrel with Ourselves & Confession* the opening section consists of well-made contemporary poems. The "Pandora" sequence is humorous science fiction. *Confession*'s three parts are obviously three ways of seeing a 'murder mystery'. There remain, however, some obscurity and problem writing. What to make of these?

The answer is that they're surely deliberate. Not only has Scott structured his book carefully; he seems to have structured it for the reader rather than for himself, or even because of the demands of his material.

No doubt someone steeped in Rimbaud for a lifetime could unravel the obscurities of "H" section. I can't.

Confession, however, is problematical in another way. Part One quotes Robbe-Grillet and proceeds to enact slippages, decentralizations and displacements. The prose poems are visual and psychological. Part Three quotes Noel Burch and proceeds to enact *involvement with* voyeurism. These poems are biographical, sociological and dramatic. Section Two, however, quotes W. D. Snodgrass' very old-fashioned measure of a poem's worth - "the depth of its sincerity". I *think* Section Two is

supposed to be as funny as Mark Twain found the name Snodgrass. Nearly all of its twelve pages consists of banal retrospective generalization. How could a poet as talented as Scott write "an unknown forever swamped by the/dead rapidity of the known" and many other equally atrocious lines? Well, as a hoax! I'm confirmed in this view by Part Two's last three pages where even Scott seems to tire of the hoax. "SE" ends strongly and "OC" is deliberately funny.

The rest of the book consists of poems that Overland's poetry readers should find clear and stimulating. The first nine poems cover tattoos, phone-calls, advertising language, studying Hopkins, multiple penises in vertical flats, the combination of Scotch and Valium — and various attendant complexities. Some are serious, some funny. Several are conscious of being art. One is about language as a lie. The issue of art and language recurs throughout the book, although it's never allowed self-indulgent dominance. It's a scrupulously fair introduction to the book.

The texture of Scott's lines repays close attention. His sparing but vivid visual imagery doesn't evoke emotion. The imagery is *attached to* emotion which, in any case, is controlled by thought. Moreover, I suspect that his whole creative process is controlled by his desire to be one frame or angle of the reader:

> Muscles as they appear, flexed and monstrous
> beneath an elastic skin, saying *I love you.*
> As fools do, "forever", as ink does.

And it can be very funny, as in "A dying star and the domino theory of barking".

My pick of the book is, in fact, the comic sequence "Pandora". Scott tunes us in to a sort of science-fiction radio drama where obscene dialogue is juxtaposed with high tech. From the start, where Klee finds himself underwater looking after dolphins when the oceanic black hole starts its deafening collapse, to his final descent/ascent as Christ into the "Caribbean cocktail" or "vast seltzer", I found the sequence hilarious.

Robert Gray's visual imagery equals the best in English. When he uses it to express emotion and/or evoke scene or portrait, it's his means to worthwhile ends. Hence, superb poems. On the evidence of his fourth collection, however, Gray has no idea of his limits.

The least of his problems is imagery used for its own sake. He could get away with that. What he can't get away with, however, is the abandonment of his central facility for contentious over-generalizations, banal political comment, pretentious references and general intellectual confusion. Moreover, he sometimes abandons his imagery for narrative dullness.

Where praise is due I can't praise too highly. Not only can Gray link thing with thing in land, farm, town, sea and cityscapes. He can link landscape with cityscape in dazzling combinations and permutations. Indeed the connection between natural and human-made is central to his appeal. There are hundreds of images as vivid as:

> And rain went on rushing smoothly into the earth
> through one street light,
> the way the gleaming sides of an express train enter
> a tunnel.

His best poems work through the imagery into erotic scenes, anti-erotic scenes, urban beaches, country towns, harbors, discovering corpses, rounding up cattle, childhood memories and thinking through another person's dying.

Gray's statements, however, are distracting. In "Walking in an American Wood" we hear that there's no more "innocence", but a "frightened insistence on sociability" and that the U.S. is "sentimental". That's about two hundred years new — and in prose.

His grasp of politics and philosophy is either inappropriate or confused or both. A poet who has just described a storm senses that his image is "about the superficial nature of the Revolution". French? American? Russian? Chinese? Who knows? In "Aphorisms: On Politics" he enjoys chopping the head off a Nietzschean rooster. How this squares with No.7 I've no idea: "Our vision of nature and of society is one". Later, the London poor are poetically described as "Capital's Stalinism". "The Red Flag's" better written than that.

Having endorsed Aristotle via Pound, Gray sees no contradiction in endorsing Plato as well. In an otherwise moving poem about his parents, his mother unfortunately has to fit one of Heidegger's categories — despite only reading the Women's Weekly. I'm not advocating stupid or ignorant poetry; only the assimilation of learning.

Perhaps even more disturbing is the four-page "Mr Nelson", where even Gray's facility with imagery deserts him. The description is *only* description. The narrative lacks drive, drama and timing. It's *only* narrative.

Twice Gray refers to the irksome chores of reviewing and editing. Moreover his own reviewing and editing suffer from the same problems that I've outlined above. Perhaps he should give them up and concentrate on his imagery. There's no reason why the possession of a particular poetic gift equips a poet for anything else — not even for other kinds of poetry.

Graham Rowlands lives in Adelaide.

An SF Autobiography

Nancy Keesing

George Turner: *In the Heart or in the Head* (Norstrilia Press, $16.95).

George Turner is a fine novelist, a good book reviewer and an almost obsessed apologist for, and chronicler of, science fiction. For the Australian record his chroniclings are, I should think, definitive and the record in this book will be valuable, not only to present day fans, but as an historical record.

But this volume does not contain only literary discussion; Turner offers autobiography concurrently too. Sometimes both strands weave well together, sometimes they don't. The autobiography is quirky but always interesting. I found some of the preoccupations of SF fans with the genre only partly comprehensible, and often hard to follow.

Despite that let me first outline the Keesing/SF connection as a kind of statement of credentials and evidence of good will.

In the early 1970s, when I edited the Australian Author, I had considerable correspondence and one very enjoyable meeting with John Bangsund, who figures largely in every way in Turner's pages, and deserves to do so. A good writer and fine editor is John. Bangsund sent me a number of SF fanzines, including copies of his own Australian Science Fiction Review. I read them, marvelled and put them away.

In 1974, when I was Chairman of the Literature Board, an application arrived for funding and support for an "Aussiecon" to be held in 1975 in Victoria. I rely on memory for the wordage, which included some of the weirder language of fandom. The organisers also applied for funds to help bring Ursula Le Guin to this, in other words, Australian Science Fiction Convention.

Because of my respect for Bangsund and Turner and Le Guin whom I'd read, I was sympathetic to the proposition but fearful for its reception by the board, which in those days was strong, but not on science fiction. (Later the board had to find, and did discover, good and reliable readers for SF manuscript submissions, but that time had not then arrived.) I had visions of the strangely-worded application being received with derision and then ignored. Fortunately I'd kept those fanzines safely and, after a brief homily, distributed them to my fellows. They were persuaded, and the board did support that convention and Le Guin's visit - and what a day of exploring Sydney and the Opera House sails I had with her! Turner fully and generously acknowledges the immediate and longer term benefits of those grants to many writers and readers.

However, having said all that "nor you nor I nor anyone know", so far as I can tell, what SF really *is*. It is, according to Turner, books like *Brave New World* (Huxley), *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (Barnard) and *Canticle for Leibowitz* (Miller). These I've immensely admired, but I've also attempted what I regard as piffle. I'm not, even by Turner, persuaded of the reasons and necessities for the special and specialist treatment SF demands and receives. It, and its fandom are phenomena, and there I leave it.

Of George Turner's life story the chief point I want to make is that it joins a growing collection of male autobiographies that yield, in a paradoxical and unintended way, invaluable insights into women's history. Turner burned his mother's diary "unable to live with it". That I can understand, if not condone. "But over the dead", he writes, "even the beloved dead, weeping is finally for the weeper."

> Her diary told how the world combined against her, how her mother grew to be a mischievous hag and her sister a social-climbing snob, how her father deserted his children, her husband became first a failure and then a moral coward, her elder son wanted no life with her and the younger, 'the brilliant one' — it was there for me to see — had become a mean-spirited drunk.
>
> Indeed she had deserved better than fortune gave her.
>
> If it was a raging against unearned catastrophe, it was also a cry of pain, and its echoes are not yet dead. The furious, astonished vulnerability will not go away. It frightened me because I recognized the same towering, ill-judged, impermeable egotism in myself.

George Turner was born in 1916 and, as a young child, lived in Kalgoorlie where his father was a mine official. Life was, for the time and place, comfortable and middle-class. Father did at least one good turn to the child George — he introduced him to *Alice in Wonderland*. Soon, however, he disgraced himself, lost his position and apparently deserted his family. Mother, with George, went to Melbourne, where lived her "just a little mad" mother and sister. She found work as a live-in housekeeper, and drudgery it was. Thanks to her George was placed in several not-too-bad boarding houses and entered the Choir School of St Paul's Cathedral; its headmaster was the legendary Dr A. E. Floyd, whose regular ABC music programs many of my generation still remember with affection.

Turner enlisted in the AIF at the outbreak of war and served in the Middle East, Greece and New Guinea. War service apart, he has held a wide variety of jobs. For much of his life he was an alcoholic and, one gathers, a fairly solitary man. He sets forth his story unsparingly, but sometimes I suspect he is a bit too tough with himself. Some of his present-day criticism of his own earlier published novels, at least for those I have read and admired, is unduly harsh.

People who like reading about authors' authorial vicissitudes with agents, publishers et al. will have a field day. There must be many such readers, as witness the Australian Author or any newsletter of any writers' group.

So what, in essence, have we, and the Literature Board who subsidised the writing and publication of *In the Heart or in the Head*, got for our money? For one thing something as impossible to define as SF itself. Something not really an autobiography in the sense that "Not the Nine o'clock News" is not the news. A one-off original is what we have, and writing, talking and reading about it is no substitute for tackling the whole.

Nancy Keesing's forthcoming book is to be published by Penguin, and concerns superstitions and strange beliefs about the weather. It has the working title of Just Look out of the Window.

Malouf and Stow

Jim Davidson

David Malouf: *Harland's Half Acre* (Chatto & Windus, $17.95).
Randolph Stow: *The Suburbs of Hell* (Secker & Warburg, $17.95).

The question in many people's minds, as they pick up David Malouf's fifth novel, *Harland's Half Acre*, is whether he will be able to pull it off. For it is a big book, in the way its predecessors have not been: wide-ranging, sprawling and ambitious. The subject, as in Patrick White's *The Vivisector*, is the life of a painter. We follow Frank Harland from his upbringing in a tightly-knit family in rural Queensland, to his artistic apprenticeship in Brisbane, through his years on the road together with his periods of productivity in scratch studios, and so to his final period as hermit — living and working, somewhat like Ian Fairweather, under an A-frame covered by a tarpaulin on an island in Moreton Bay.

Apart from the imperatives imposed by his painting, Frank Harland has an additional ambition: to win back for his family their ancestral land, in its entirety. But the family crumbles away as the aim is realised; Harland's most important real-estate achievement, evident in the retrospective which closes the book, is his half-acre of canvases. One cannot help feeling that a similar fate has overtaken this novel. Malouf seems to have been driven by a need to recapture an older Australia before it fades from memory forever: his canvas includes Aboriginal boxers, fruit displays at the Royal Show, a clutch of maiden aunts living together under a matriarch, an empty picture palace on a pier, and such disconcerting irruptions (based on fact) as the discovery of a mob of elderly tramps chained up in a Brisbane suburban timber yard. In order to cope with this extraordinarily rich material — made even richer by Malouf's desire to extend the range of the novel to take in, at the other end, all the glitter of contemporary Sydney — he decided to include a first-person narrator. So *Harland's Half Acre* alternates, in its six sections, between the novelist's exposition and the narrator's reminiscence. While a bourgeois, Protestant milieu, itself threatened, is thereby placed alongside the 'Irish' Harlands, barely emerging from rural poverty, the result is to fatally weaken the impact of the novel: the disjunctions are so marked that at times it seems as though one novella has been succeeded by another. It would not have helped even if Phil Vernon, the young lawyer and narrator, had been a bit less wet. *Harland's Half Acre* is strongest in its cameos.

These work because they gain energy from Malouf's careful exploration and elaboration of emotional tone. There is a profound respect for the autonomy of each character: hence the exchange between the elderly Frank Harland and his solicitous surfie acquaintances is captured beautifully, in all its verbal reticence and unstated affirmations. No less persuasive is the rendering of family relations, with their affinities, complementarities, occasional gusts of withering hostility, and — more usually — the different concurrent *tempi* of unspoken interaction. Plainly, David Malouf is a kindly writer: the cheerful gratitude of a senile aunt has been chosen to close the book. It is heartlessness that he cannot abide — "She was still holding my hand", Phil Vernon remarks of the matriarch, "as if she had forgotten what it was." Malouf seems to be saying that evil is present in the world, and indeed can erupt in the most unlikely places; but by decent and honest emotional transactions it can be pushed to the periphery of everyday life.

The writing in *Harland's Half Acre* is, as we have come to expect from David Malouf, of a high order throughout. Just as you might begin to be bored, an unexpected change will materialise — such as when the matriarchal grandmother is discovered quietly weeping. Where the writing is not wholly effective, as in Phil's account of his complicated relations with a young couple, this can be sheeted home to the novel's divided persona. Usually, however, *Harland's Half Acre* is marked by a constant sense of alertness: the descriptive passages are worked over in a kind of painterly brushwork in an attempt, invariably successful, to recreate a sense of texture. At the same time the elegance of Malouf's writing prevents these strokes from becoming daubings; his capacity to follow emotional logic also serves to discipline the tendency to excess in his writing.

> Often ... I would feel his skin against my own as no longer quite human, as having the scratchiness of bark or the papery quality of an insect's wing. This too seemed part of the process. As the body began to change for death it would naturally reveal, it seemed to me, what it shared with other creatures or with the earth. I saw nothing frightening in it. Touching my grandfather's skin and thinking, *he is close to death*, seemed much like bringing my fingertips into contact with the scribbles on a tree trunk. It was uncanny, that was all. Mysterious.

But such a superbly recounted scene has nothing to do with Frank Harland, except when the lawyer-narrator recalls the memory of it at the painter's death. There are altogether too many interventions for him to come fully alive — or rather to remain so, since the importance of his upbringing and of family to him are amply demonstrated. We learn of Harland's solitariness early, see little exaltation, and find that his greatest emotional experiences — except for one rather brotherly relationship — seem to be his fade-outs following disasters, when he reconstitutes himself even more sparely than before. (In fact his brother Tam is more convincingly delineated.) Even so, the recounting of Frank's discovery of drawing, and how through it he can impose order on what are otherwise intractable materials, is very well done; as is the way the horrible fortuity of friends' blood spattered across a painting becomes technically suggestive to the artist even as the experience is seared upon his brain. Even when eclipsed, as here, emotional logic is rarely absent from Malouf's writing, no doubt accounting for its extraordinary geniality.

Once Australian, always Australian. So seems to run the general belief, which still claims Sumner Locke Elliott, and which claimed Christina Stead — who after all did reward us with a late return, if not with a further Australian novel. But what can be made of Randolph Stow? After a silence in prose which extended for fifteen years, suddenly his English period has yielded three novels. None of them is set in Australia, although one was located in Papua-New Guinea under Australian rule. It is quite plain that Stow now thinks of himself as an English writer:

> In a different place, in a bay of the estuary, a plain of sea-purslane and sea-aster carved with shining brown runnels, he watched mallard waddle and swim, and flocks of dunlin skitter away like blown white smoke over the sculpted, sky-mirroring mud.

Apart from the dedication, there is nothing in *The Suburbs of Hell* to suggest Australia: even the title owes everything to *The Duchess of Malfi* and nothing to Edna Everage. Indeed, so great is Stow's affinity with his ancestral East Anglia that he is able to weave a Constable painting of boys fishing in the neighborhood not only into the fabric of the story, but its subject matter into contemporary life.

The Suburbs of Hell is *very* contemporary. There is a marriage in stalemate, drug smuggling, an unemployed Ph.D., an uncentred trendy woman, and an Ipswich-born West Indian taxi driver who has struggled to make the best of it. Saturday night rituals in an English pub have rarely been caught so effectively. The ebb and flow of life in an English fishing village is rendered in a crisp, pliant prose that enables the plot to advance like a melody spelt out by cleanly played notes on a piano. Not here the Maloufian sprawl: everything is disciplined, focused — and considerably less affectionate.

There is a shell-shocked soldier in Malouf's novel, and murder; although the power and unpredictability of evil is acknowledged, there is the feeling that a good deal of it can be palliated by human sympathy. Stow's view is bleaker. No-one in *Harland's Half Acre* is as amiable, or as full of common sense, as Harry, the cheerful ex-fisherman in his late forties now employed in building the town's sea wall. But he too is swept away in the tide of murders that overtake Old Tornwich. While the demise of a popular character follows the formula of the *whodunnit*, Stow's epigraphs suggest another, deeper antecedent: Jacobean drama. The piling up of corpses interests him as the wages of evil; and part of the power East Anglia exerts on his imagination is the way it provides a bridge between culture acquired, far more satisfactorily than Western Australia could ever do. The modern *whodunnit* and Jacobean drama can there be paired, suggesting recurrence of aberrant behavior; taken together both forms indicate nothing so much as the persistence of evil.

The preoccupation becomes plainer when, each time before he strikes, we are treated to a soliloquy from the murderer. They are dream-like, fantasy passages; he wafts and hovers, this murderer, while carefully discharging his rifle with the utmost detachment and precision. Throughout the story the murderer always holds the initiative; is clearly the most intelligent presence in the book; and, as if to strengthen his symbolic if not supernatural character, is given one or two slightly contradictory characteristics. But at a purely mundane level, the tale works well. (*Hi there. I'm Randy Stow. I cover the Night beat for the Daily.*) Indeed we never suspect the murderer as he goes about the town because he seems so obvious — itself a point to be made about obsession and evil.

Both of these novels shift in persona: Malouf from the novelist to the lawyer-narrator, Stow from the eternal murderer of the soliloquies back to the novelist, who has so many murders on his hands that he even apportions one of them to an accomplice. Whereas the changes in narrative stance weaken the impact of *Harland's Half Acre*, as the novel itself attempts a panoramic retrospective of Australia, Stow's novel is altogether more modest, and achieved; its cameos of present-day England are masterly. To remind ourselves of how exceptional this achievement is we have but to think how few contemporary English novels deal with a generous slice of English life; or of the venture into such territory by another, better-known expatriate writer, V. S. Naipaul, whose *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* is virtually forgotten.

Jim Davidson, former editor of Meanjin, lives in Melbourne. He is completing a biography of Louise Hanson-Dyer.

Families and Fantasy

Kerryn Goldsworthy

Olga Masters: *Loving Daughters* (University of Queensland Press, $14.95).
David Ireland: *Archimedes and the Seagle* (Viking Press, $16.95).

Not the least intriguing, ambiguous thing about Olga Masters' first novel *Loving Daughters* is the title itself; each of its two words is a referent to something outside the title, indicative of relationship. Daughters of whom? Does that word "loving" function as an adjective or a participle? Who loves the daughters, and/or is loved by them? The epigraph from Coleridge's "Christabel" indicates that the ambiguity of the title is entirely deliberate. Masters could have subtitled her novel "Births, Deaths and Marriages"; all of these things provide the action for *Loving Daughters*, punctuating the lives of various members of a small community near the south coast of New South Wales. In this book, as in *The Home Girls*, her first (a collection of short stories), there is something almost Jane Austen-ish about Masters' way of writing — both in the way that its domestic details and small unnoticeable physical gestures are fraught with charm, or consequence, or both, and in her choice of subjects: family life, country life, women's lives, marriage.

But where anything Jane Austen might have known or

wanted to say about sex lies deeply buried in what her characters do *not* think, or say, or do, the sexuality of Masters' characters is what directs the interactions of their lives. Her interest as a writer seems to lie largely in that great foggy grey area between the point at which love and jealousy are not sexually based and the point at which they become so.

As the title suggests, the governing social principle in this novel is the nuclear family — the Herberts of Honeysuckle — and the relationships that comprise it. But the Herbert clan as a nuclear family is both incomplete and perverse: the mother long dead (the novel is haunted, in fact, by various dead or absent mothers, as well as childless women); the sisters in competition for the same potential husband and, with their aunt as well as with each other, for the same surrogate son — actually their semi-orphaned nephew; and the father lusting after one of his own daughters, as she after him, although neither of them ever allows this thought to rise into full consciousness. There's no telling what Jane Austen would have thought.

The overall impression, though, is that Masters knows all about families but likes them anyway; on that level *Loving Daughters* is a gentler, simpler and more forgiving if no less sharp-eyed version of *The Man Who Loved Children*. (The other comparison that will keep sneaking up in spite of persistent efforts to shoo it away is with *Women in Love*, what with pairs of sisters and preoccupations with sexuality; the three titles all point from different places towards, again, that patch of boggy ground between sexual and family love.)

Reading this book is a bit like looking at a domestic interior by Vermeer. It's full of *objects*, all of which are full in turn of eloquence about the kind of human activity that goes on around and with and through them:

> Enid had the stove stoked and the fountain, set into the side of the stove, filled before seeing the teapot under its cosy. She poured tea into a kitchen cup, one of her favourites, thick and wit, remembering Nellie's hot tan tea that tasted wonderful after the blue grey stuff at boarding school.
>
> It was just light enough to see the garden through the window and she stood watching the beds take shape and the shrubs separate from the fog.
>
> When she returned after refilling her cup, she could see the yellow of the wallflowers, and the sight made her eyes fill with tears.

Again like Vermeer, Masters lingers over the details and the folds of clothes, over what those draperies say about the person inside them (and about the observer):

> ... a girl's slim shape had cut itself into the shadows. He shut his eyes, but it returned. The blouse it wore had dark spots on white. Or was it all white with fine pleats gently stretched where the buttons ran from neck to waist?

Masters, like Elizabeth Jolley, began to publish fiction relatively late in life. If, like Jolley, she spends the next few years making up for lost time, Australian writing will be so much the better for it.

David Ireland laid his writerly cards on the table at the outset of his literary career; his first novel *The Chantic Bird* (1968) was divided into short sections with long titles and written in the first person, the story told by an apparently psychopathic youth. *Archimedes and the Seagle*, sixteen years on, is divided into short sections with long titles and written in the first person, the story told by a gentle and sociable red setter. A preoccupation with narrative structure and narrative voice has been the most consistent feature of his work throughout his career as a novelist.

In some of his previous novels, and again in this one (I'm thinking especially of *The Chantic Bird* and *A Woman of the Future*, although it's true of some of the others as well), Ireland uses a structure which allows his first-person narrators to express, unmediated, their philosophies of life. Archimedes and the Seagle, like the earlier novels named, consists of short sections of something that isn't exactly narrative; they are like little mediations, in which various daily events in the life of the narrator provide starting points for his, her or its thoughts on literacy, parenthood, power, sorrow (these four seem to recur) or whatever.

There's nowhere near as much visible black in *Archimedes and the Seagle* as there is in most of Ireland's previous books, but to say that he has gone off at some wild tangent would be to miss the point. Like his two previous novels (*City of Women* and before that *A Woman of the Future*), this one has an unreliable narrator: unreliable even in the basic sense that all first-person narrators are unreliable — the reader must perform constant acts of inference and deduction in order to work out what's 'really' going on — to say nothing of the fact that here the narrator is also a dog. One looks, if one is female, with a certain amount of depression at the narrators of Ireland's last three novels — aggressive young woman, deranged old woman, and finally a sane, well-adjusted dog — and wonders if he regards this as some kind of logical sequence.

But I digress. What happens in all three books is that the unreliable narrator produces the radically unstable text; the way the reader interprets the utterances of each narrator — Alethea, Billie, Archimedes — depends almost entirely on his or her interpretation not only of what these narrators say, but also of what the relationship is between the writer and his various narrator-puppets. What this means is that different readers of these novels tend to come up with completely different and usually conflicting readings of them. Ireland's novels, at least the three most recent ones, are invitations to narcissism; trying to actually *say* something about them is like barking at your own reflection in the water. (This is something, incidentally, that Archimedes is much too smart to bother with.)

By his own account Archimedes is "a speculative dog", and much of his discontinuous monologue concerns itself with the qualities that living creatures, human and other, ought ideally to possess. The fact that his heart appears to

be in the right place tends most of the time to lull the reader into a false sense of security about his reliability, but what is one to make of the complex play of ironies in his straight-faced (Archimedes is never ironic; he is much, much too nice) definition of "the Spirit of Australia" ... "the people ... would rather enjoy being best in the world, as long as it was for something important, like sport ...?"

That's the kind of thing I mean by "the radically unstable text". Even if the writerly ironies could be unravelled there still remains the problem of what to do with one's own readerly ones.

How to begin to describe the book? It's an intermittently surrealist fantasy written by a man who (clearly) loves dogs and Sydney. It is full of seagulls who behave like human beings and vice versa. "The Seagle" is Archimedes' name for a special seagull, the one who flies high as an eagle and never talks. (He is Archimedes' hero, but I, for one, read into that he is actually none too bright.) Like *City of Women* it is full of seductive lyrical bits and very funny bits. Like all of Ireland's novels it deals with the tensions between necessary forms of social organisation and necessary freedoms.

What I'd like to know, though, is this: will the people who pronounced *A Woman of the Future* a "bad" book on the grounds that it wasn't a "convincing portrait" of an adolescent girl now adhere to their unspoken assumptions about the nature of literature and consign *Archimedes and the Seagle* to the same bin, on the grounds that it's not a convincing portrait of a dog?

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Christesen's Meanjin

Geoffrey Serle

Lynne Strahan: *Just City and the Mirrors. Meanjin Quarterly and the Intellectual Front, 1940-1965* (Oxford University Press, $25).

Clem Christesen has been fortunate in this sympathetic unofficial history of Meanjin's first twenty-five years from 1940. Lynne Strahan's work, based on the extensive Meanjin archive, has many virtues. She understands the potential role of a literary-based journal of ideas and the significance of what Christesen achieved in providing a forum for discussion of the Australian cultural situation and the state of the world, and publication for poets, short story writers and scholars.

She brings out very well Meanjin's main strength: "committed equally to a broad national awareness and a cosmopolitan openness to ideas." Resisting the temptation to analyse closely the editor's strengths and frailties, she displays him in action, leaving the reader to judge. She eschews literary gossip, despite the rich evidence available. Perhaps she does not make enough of Christesen's freakishness in devoting his life so worthily to so crazy an enterprise, or of his sheer skill in technical editing, or of his extraordinarily wide reading which made him in general far better informed on literary history and current affairs than his critics and academic colleagues.

About half the book is devoted to the Cold War period of the late 1940s and early 1950s — scarifying in retrospect, not least with regard to the ordeal the Christesens suffered before the Petrov commission. Meanjin's editorial campaign against McCarthyism and American foreign policy was brave and honorable; there were few such voices to be heard — the Australian press was supine then. Lynne Strahan argues powerfully to justify Christesen, especially in refuting Vincent Buckley's extensive criticisms of 1959. This suits my prejudices very well and the case needed to be made. Some will say, however, that her approach is too much that of an advocate.

I do not greatly demur from her treatment of the University of Melbourne as Meanjin's grudging and frightened host. But I suggest the university was rather more lively and had more sheer distinction about it than she allows. (Where are the modern equivalents of those engaging eccentrics like Joe Burke, Ian Maxwell, Maurice Goldman and Manning Clark?) Sir George Paton, the vice-chancellor, under extreme pressure to knock Meanjin on the head, was a genuine liberal — despite everything it was allowed to survive. Those two impossible characters in Registrars' eyes, Christesen and Gwyn James (manager of Melbourne University Press), did more to put Melbourne on the international cultural-scholarly map than anyone else.

We have become accustomed to the frequent failure by inexperienced historians of recent events to interview surviving participants in order to thoroughly cover possible additional sources of information and to get things straight. It is very curious that Lynne Strahan failed to consult nearly all Christesen's surviving advisers, assistants, secretaries and opponents. It should have been obvious that a gap in the archive was the face to face communication with Christesen by Melbournites. Melbourne is faintly groaning with voices unheard. As a result of this failure in historical method, the story is not quite as authoritative as it might have been. Like others, I had useful information to convey and some relevant papers.

The author's ambitious style is one of the book's main points of interest. How welcome it is in the this era of embattled literary standards to meet a writer with such powers of expression! Her love of language and poet's experience provide many superb images and lively encapsulations; and, blessedly, the writing is jargon-free. But the style is also highly undisciplined: sometimes she does not readily communicate, and some images are mediocre or worse. The metaphors, intermittently delightful, become mechanical — far too much ruins the flavor. It is a pity: this might have been a distinguished contribution to Australian letters. It remains, however, a basically sound account of a gallantly conducted and invaluable literary institution.

Geoff Serle, editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, *has been associated with Meanjin for over thirty years, and was acting editor in 1957.*

Counter-Current

Michael Dugan

John Sendy: *Melbourne's Radical Bookshops: History, People, Appreciation* (International Bookshop, Melbourne, $6.96).

John Sendy takes the opening of Andrade's Bookshop in 1898 as his starting point for this series of short sketches about Melbourne's radical bookshops and their booksellers, although his chapter on earlier days discusses the claims of E. W. Cole and others for consideration as forerunners in the field of radical bookselling.

Will Andrade's interests appear to have been divided between anarchism and the stage, and his business reflected both preoccupations in a manner that seems more idiosyncratic than determinedly radical. However, when labor activist Percy Laidler took over the shop's management, shortly before the First World War, it became much more politically directed. For some years it was a publisher of editions of Marx, Lenin, Engels and other authors of Bolshevist interest, as well as publishing pamphlets by writers of the Australian Left.

Sendy outlines the histories of ten businesses. Some were founded by individuals, others began as outlets for organisations such as the Victorian Socialist Party and the Labor College. A couple of them, Ellis Bird's bookshop and Gino Nibbi's book and print shop, belong less securely to the tradition of radical literature dissemination than the others. Their owners were, perhaps, political radicals, but their bookselling interests were more general.

Like Andrade, most of them published as well as sold books. Most of their publications were translations of communist or left-wing literature from overseas and Australian pamphlets on issues of leftist concern. Some of the sales figures claimed for these publications seem extraordinarily high, and I find it hard to believe that the Dean of Canterbury's *Socialist Sixth of the World* really sold the two hundred thousand copies in Australia that its distributor claimed. Similarly, the 19,000 reported as the sale for a pamphlet about charges brought against communist leader Lance Sharkey seems very high.

It may be that the exaggeration of sales figures was considered a legitimate act of propaganda. The only figure I have been able to check is that claimed for Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, which in the longer term proved not to have needed such boosting. Sendy reprints the Socialist's claim in 1915 that "ten thousand copies sold the first month". However, according to its publisher, "in its first three months it sold in England 1752 copies; it sold 1400 copies in the Colonies apart from Canada, where the sales amounted to 250. Then it died."[1] I suspect that other figures were similarly inflated to add credence to the cause.

Sendy reprints other booklists and advertisements issued by the shops and their related journals and these make fascinating reading, bringing back the names of writers once important but now forgotten, such as the "dangerous" novelist and commentator W. L. George, and the eccentric Ernest Belfort Bax, intimate of William Morris and uncle of Arnold and Clifford Bax. (One reviewer said of Bax and Morris's only collaboration, *Socialism, its growth and outcome*, that "each of these authors must have consented to send this work to press solely for fear of offending the other."[2]) Some of the novelists whose work was then of shattering impact have maintained a higher regard than most of the socialist commentators and polemists. As well as *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, novels such as Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* and Frank Norris' *The Pit* all sold well at Andrade's in 1920.

The socialist movement and its bookshops had their ups and downs. Among the former was the large expansion of party membership and interest in socialist alternatives in the late 1930s and 1940s, when branches sprung up all over Melbourne and the Left Book Clubs became vital centres of discussion. The latter included financial problems (alleviated for some booksellers by voluntary or near-voluntary labor), bannings of books and stock seizures and the wartime banning of the Communist Party of Australia by Prime Minister Menzies, as always insecure about what might lie beneath his stout sleeping form.

The longest profile in the book is of the International Bookshop, founded in 1933 and the only one of Sendy's subjects still in operation. This volume marks the fiftieth anniversary of the International's trading and is a fitting tribute to the distinguished role it has played in providing an alternative bookshop in Melbourne.

In recent years even the International has had to generate a more wide-ranging appeal and increase the 'general range of its stock. In his Afterword Sendy looks at the decline in both membership of working-class socialist organisations and in the readership of the literature promoted by their bookshops in the past. A general improvement in education has not reinforced the nineteenth century image of Australia as a nation of working readers that economist T. A. Coghlan held. Sendy attributes this to the rise of television as the main form of popular culture, and he may well have a point. However, he might also have looked at the more positive aspect of development in the general bookselling trade. There has been a recent proliferation of booksellers offering alternatives, such as the Whole Earth Bookstore, Readings and several smaller businesses. There has also been an increase in the number of general booksellers who maintain a range of 'radical' literature on subjects as various as education, feminism, the gay movement and environmental and health issues. Radicalism has attained greater respectability than it held during the lives of most of the booksellers he writes about.

However, with the two concluding paragraphs of his enjoyable and informative book I can only agree.

> Neither the shock of economic crisis nor the greater availability of education and increased leisure-time have led to an upsurge of searching for new ideals, visions of a better society or strivings to raise values, sensitivity, beauty and thought.
>
> Therefore books, readers and radicals are more

necessary than ever. All are needed in far greater numbers.

1. Grant Richards, *Author Hunting* (Unicorn Press, London, 1960) p. 223.
2. Arnold Bax, *Farewell my youth* (Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1943) p. 13.

Michael Dugan is a Melbourne poet, anthologist and editor. His collection of writings on the migrant experience, There goes the Neighborhood, *has recently appeared.*

Hard Times

Dave Davies

Ralph Gibson: *The People Stand Up* (Red Rooster Press, $22).

In December 1931, Ralph Gibson turned his back on a promising academic career and made a lasting commitment to the Communist Party. As he wrote in a letter about that time, "The present world situation permits of no delay on the part of socialists, no delay and no compromise."

They were times when people went hungry because there was too much food. Miners' cottages were unheated in winter because there was too much coal. Unemployed ex-soldiers were rewarded by their country by being put to work, for a pittance, on building a mound for a Shrine of Remembrance. By the end of the decade, a new and more terrible world war would engulf the globe.

With the capitalist world wracked with crisis, the Soviet Union appeared as a beacon, lighting the way to the future. Had not socialism proved itself in one-sixth of the world, with the workers and peasants now masters of their own destiny? Would it not rapidly defeat capitalism on a world scale because of its economic superiority? Had not communists, armed with the theories of marxism, predicted the capitalist economic crisis to the derision of the orthodox theorists? Did not these same theories give one a feeling of inevitability of victory as the contradictions of capitalism sharpened to breaking point?

As if to confirm the prospect of impending upheavals, professors, politicians and bankers were expressing fears of chaos and revolution on a mass scale.

So Ralph Gibson plunged into the struggles of the 1930s, the subject of this important contribution to the writing of Australian history.

The most lively chapters are those in which the author writes in the first person about the organisation of the unemployed, the improving of dole conditions, the attempts to prevent evictions and the new upsurge of Australian trade unionism which occurred in the 1930s, with some emphasis on the often unacknowledged contribution of the communists to such struggles.

The Friday night street meeting was one way for the communists to get their message across. It was a popular night for shopping and "a speaker with a loud voice and something to say could usually gather a crowd to listen." Gibson believes that the then Police Commissioner Blamey was responsible for the decision to stamp out such meetings. In any case, communist street orators, including the author, were arrested on spurious charges of "obstructing traffic".

The communists decided to make a stand on the issue in Phoenix Street, Brunswick. Gibson's account of this episode, in which a man was shot in the leg by a policeman and Noel Counihan addressed the crowd from a cage, is one of the many examples of first-hand information on the period.

The author earned respect well beyond leftwing circles for his work in the Movement Against War and Fascism. His recollections of its activities, including the visit of Egon Kisch to Australia, are of special interest.

International events of the 1930s often led to political clashes in Australia. The best-known political nickname in Australian history, "Pig-iron Bob", stuck to R. G. Menzies for the rest of his life after his attempt to force waterside workers to load scrap-iron for a militarised Japan involved in aggression against China. The Spanish war was the subject of heated debates, and the signing of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact led to a damaging chopping and changing of Communist Party policy.

Several chapters are devoted to these international events and the responses to them in Australia. Other issues include the rise of Hitler in Germany, the 'Popular Front' in France, the early stages of the Chinese revolution and the anti-colonial upsurge in India. Nearly all of Gibson's accounts are controversial, and they would be of no value if they were not. Some points, however, would seem to be open to more serious challenge.

On a matter of fact: the Scottsboro Boys were certainly framed on rape charges in Alabama in 1931 and served long jail terms, but they were not, as stated in this book, "executed". An example of a matter of judgement: could the building of the Baltic to White Sea canal be described as a positive feature of the Soviet Union in the early 1930s, or as a "rehabilitation project" for the prisoners who worked it? We still do not know how many died in the appalling conditions on this project, carried out under the auspices of the GPU and its notorious chief Yagoda. The book by a number of prominent Soviet writers praising the construction (which Gibson quotes) was written on the basis of a conducted tour when the canal was virtually completed and with the writers themselves under some pressure. In any case, the book of praise did not last long in circulation in the USSR, as many of the leaders mentioned in it were soon condemned and shot as "enemies of the people."

The Communist Party grew in Australia during the 1930s and began to establish its most durable base in Australian society in the trade-union movement. But in the early years of the decade, most members were unemployed. Gibson records a membership of 300 at the beginning of 1930, over 1000 in early 1931, over 2000 by January 1932 and nearly 3000 by 1934. (The population of Australia was about 6.5 million in 1930.)

Yet, despite the hopes of some and the fears of others, there was no great social upheaval. Many of the unemp-

loyed were dulled and broken. Some went off each morning in working clothes with Gladstone bags to give neighbors the impression that they still had jobs. From 1931, when the Scullin Labor Government was defeated, conservative governments were returned in Federal and most State elections.

Ralph Gibson's book provides some information and analysis to explain this phenomenon; for example, the lack of courage and coherence of the Scullin Government and other sections of the Labor movement. But it does not adequately explain the enormous gap between the objective contradictions and the response. Indeed, the choice of a title which is scarcely justified by the content of the book (*The People Stand Up*) indicates a certain glossing over of the question.

Ralph Gibson almost invariably looks on the bright side. Pelted with tomatoes by a hostile crowd, he says that they are soft and don't hurt as much as do eggs. He is no doubter. He critically re-assesses individual policies and attitudes to particular events when he thinks the communists could have done better, but tenets he regards as fundamental remain largely intact.

These qualities have earned him sincere admiration in the political environment where adherence to principle is pretty rare. At the same time, such a virtue can inhibit necessary questioning, doubting and use of hindsight, particularly in an historical situation in which the expectations of the protagonists did not eventuate. One might expect that such a questioning would be sharpened by a realisation that socialism as a political trend has declined in Australia and the Communist Party has dwindled to a size which, taking population into account, is less than that of the 1930s.

Alongside examples of courage and self-sacrifice, Gibson to his credit describes in some detail those aspects of the Communist Party's own behavior and policies which limited both its own growth and a greater response to the crisis. In particular, he devotes self-critical attention to 'sectarianism', which unnecessarily and often disastrously placed barriers between the communists and their natural allies.

It was in the late 1920s that the Communist International coined the expression "social fascist" to describe Labor and Social Democratic parties. Stalin advanced the theory that communists should direct their "main blow" against them. The alacrity with which Australian communists took up these theories indicates how deeply ingrained certain attitudes were, and how they would persist through later disasters such as the 1949 miners' strike, adopted by the Communist Party as the occasion for a showdown with the Chifley Labor Government. It is not surprising that communist calls for "united fronts" with Labor Party forces were not exactly welcomed in the 1930s, particularly in those cases (described by Gibson) in which the term "social fascist" was included in the appeal.

One aspect of the book that is not worthy of the author's efforts is the foreword by Jack Blake, a communist of the same generation as Ralph Gibson. Some prospective readers may be put off by his heavy-handed attack on "anti-Sovietism". Others may see some irony in Blake's reference to "the working class of the Soviet Union as the leading force in Soviet society", knowing that this book would be forbidden reading in the USSR because of its discussion of such tabooed topics as Stalinism, Trotsky, the Moscow trials and Khrushchov.

Gibson's story and assessments will be of interest and value to students of history as well as the many people involved in politics who have come to have a warm personal regard for him.

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