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Sir Keith Hancock: TESTIMONY

Fay Zwicky: LES MURRAY

Victor Ye: LETTER FROM CHINA

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GERARD WINDSOR

Far on the Ringing Plains

Every year, on the anniversary, Austin wrote to me. He never mentioned that it was the anniversary. He never referred to the event that the family commemorated on that day and, in any case, the letters only started after our parents had both died. My mother and father never saw Austin again after he left for Canada and then Britain at the end of 1940. They had never heard from him since Vince's death three years later. He hadn't disappeared. We knew he was in England. We kept writing to him through the Air Force. But he never answered, and after the war we no longer had any address. No doubt he could have been tracked down, but the family didn't seem to have the will for it. Austin had made it quite clear he no longer wanted communication with us; my parents were both, in a very real way, enfeebled by the death of Vince, and they had swung their affections totally on to what was near at hand, namely myself. And I was still a young schoolboy when the others went off to the war. I grew up and had to go to university, and get started in life, and I couldn't set off for the other side of the world to track down a very probably eccentric brother. Fantastic as it might have seemed to me as a child, families learn to cut their losses. Members are lost but the remainder cauterise themselves and close up and life for all the world as though their diminished state were the original one.

So we had. Till there was only me, and the evolution of a new tribe, that had very little connection with the old.

So the first communication was a totally alien, as well as unexpected, object. And in a variety of ways it kept its own reticent distance. It was a postcard, of the most proletarian and tasteless variety, a John Hinton production, printed in Singapore, of basic, saccharine colors, all overflowing their appropriate margins. The scene was not even identified, but called simple "a typical English village." The address was as notable for its incompleteness as for its eccentricity. At the top Austin had written "Tower House," and then the date. He took up *in medias res*, but without any nod to my complete ignorance of the earlier part of his story, or any hint that he would return to a chronological order. I was made to feel a confidant, but one who had been out of the room while a garrulous, unnoticing old man had delivered his most critical and intimate disclosures.

My very dear young brother,
Retirement here should give me the chance to get things in perspective. The location, leisure and the presence of my books all make for the ideal setting in which to stake out my best view of the matter. The winter was mild, and I feel buoyant about prospects.

With affectionate regards,
Austin

"Who is this man?" said my wife when I showed the card to her. She knew of course, but I took her point. Austin was not in the business of giving much away.

In a manner of speaking he was more expansive the following year.

It has not been a good winter. The Tower does not suit the books. Nor, for that matter, do books suit the Tower. Which was rather against the law of things, at least as I had always been led to believe in it.

I had imagined it was a good stock. It filled the building. I could wander from room to room, and enjoy the tug of interest that held me now in one, now in another place. I could linger over the stacks in the stairwells as my eye caught the titles edging past it. I could use the books to distract or stimulate me as I wished. On top of that they would bring me company, just as much as I needed to stave off complete solitude. A name like Tower House would appeal to the book lover. I would find them dropping in, just as randomly as I was ambushed by the spines and titles of my collection. They would appear and wander unchecked through all my rooms, and I could enjoy the sounds of their steps, and their subdued comments and consultations, and please myself whether I had anything to do with them. And finally they would give me money, for they would feel they had trespassed if they went away without buying anything.

But no, it has not been a good winter. I refused to order my books in any system, and the visitors have tended to express exasperation and summarily walk out. There have been few enough of them in

any case. The Tower is said to be isolated. "You are rather inaccessible," my visitors tell me. "Off any routes, and not quite what we were looking for."

Apart from that, the Tower has become excruciatingly cold. After all it was not designed for residential purposes. Draughts course wilfully up and down the stairwells. I am forced to wear gloves, even to bed, and that impedes my ability to handle the books, to say nothing of caressing or enjoying them. The books, too, have reacted. Overnight, with the universal efficiency of an Egyptian plague, damp has broken out. Books have buckled and curled and taken on a soggy quality, and the flat smell of stale, dusty moisture hangs in the air.

I have tried makeshift fires. The Tower was made without any provision for such comforts. By spooning out declivities and knocking out apertures I created a semblance of hearths here and there. The fuel suggested itself. The earth for miles around the Tower was, of course, completely levelled thirty odd years ago. In any case, distasteful as the Tower can be much of the time, the countryside – if one can call it that – has absolutely no winter attractions whatsoever. So I have started burning the books, those at the lower end of my market. Books make poor fuel, my books at any rate. They provide the flames with little more nourishment than they have given me. They content themselves with behaving like certain animals. Attacked, they give off a stench. In this case it is the rank, rotten smell of smoke.

Wherewith he signed himself off. "A person from Porlock?" said my wife. "I wouldn't presume to deduce anything," I answered.

Twelve months later I felt no more presumptuous.

I am looking forward to summer again. Last year the season was most productive, and if things go on that way, the place should be cleared out eventually. The ideal would be one massive order. I imagine that by now somebody must have come up with a device that lifts off and rolls concrete or tar surfaces in the way that turf is handed. Might there not be a market in Australia, amongst the Returned Servicemen's clubs or similar organisations, for the stuff? I seem to recall that the Imperial Services Club down in Pitt Street always looked fairly flush – the sort of place that could well be in the market? Would you, like a good fellow, scout around, and see what you can come up with. It'd be a favor I'd be grateful for. The idea would never have occurred to me if it hadn't been for the summer rush. A few Canadians at first, and then Australians, in droves – by my standards at any rate. Initially they were very tentative. I watched them from the Tower, checking the area out, getting their bearings, half imagining that all the old security checks still applied. Women and children with them more often than not, looking dismayed. I wouldn't blame

them. Usually they cottoned on to something that betrayed my presence – washing on the line, fresh rubbish, things of that nature. So they sought me out and asked. "Could I just take a lump of the old runway? not too much, just a small piece as a memento, for old times' sake."

"Go for your life," I said to them. "Take all you want. You can have the lot as far as I'm concerned." None of them ever took me up, but the word might get around, and likely as not they'll be back in force this year and start shipping it out in a big way. All the same I'd be grateful for anything you could tie up out there. I don't see much profit in it for myself, but all the same the idea should have commercial attractions. There's no finesse needed in the handling or packaging, and it could have institutional appeal – to War Memorials, clubs etc. – after all we could probably manage some sort of discount for heavy orders – as well as to just the simple returned man.

I made no comment when I showed this letter to my wife. She was, I must say, very tactful. "I didn't know there was any entrepreneurial spirit in your family," she remarked. I suspect she would have left the matter there, but I needed to elicit a more profound reaction. "Do you think he's mad?" She began to shrug at the prospect of venturing herself on that topic. "No, no," I said, "just from your knowledge of him through these letters?"

She considered a moment. "What were his interests?" she asked.

"I've no idea." I told her. "He was an adult and I was a boy." One memory slipped back. "Stamps. At least he had a stamp album."

"I don't know," said my wife. "Maybe there's something of the magpie . . . but not all that much. He seems to be as interested in turnover as he is in accumulation. But why doesn't he stick to one thing? I wonder whether he's got his heart in any of this. Perhaps his attention is really somewhere else. These letters," she said and gestured wonderingly at the latest, "they seem to speak by silences."

The following year I am not sure that what we received from Austin was a letter at all. An envelope addressed to us arrived all right, but the sheets of paper it contained had neither address, date, salutation, introduction, nor valediction. The only ornament to the bald essay – for that's what it turned out to be – was at the end, the particularly carefully written signature, 'Austin Donnelly.'

They returned in quick succession. Breaking through the cloud of silence that stretched from the perimeter of the drome to the heart of Germany, they came back to us. One by one, roaring in, they confirmed the prediction for a quiet raid. Light flak, thin fighter defences – forecast, and realised.

I sat in the Tower, before the great sheet of window, and willed each of them to speak. Out they came, and declared themselves, and the letters of the alphabet marked themselves in, and the shape

of the whole began to emerge again – Nectar, Sugar, King, Love, Jig, Ovo, Abel, Easy . . . But I was waiting. I had to be quite passive. Like a woman on the phone, I had to wait till they rang me. The spoke and I acknowledged, and I beckoned them forward, or I held them back, as gently and briefly as I could, sensing in each of them the animal impatient for its stable. Down they came, Charlie, William, item . . . and still I waited.

Then I heard him. “B Baker, calling Control. Clearance to land?” There was no need to hesitate or delay him. “Control to B Baker. Clearance to land.” I paused, and repeated, “Clearance to land, B Brother.” And then I knew. I heard myself exhale with the release of tension, and I had to yank my concentration back to the rest of the squadron.

Between clearance call and touchdown there were barely thirty seconds, and as I turned my attention to the remaining calls I watched for Vince to taxi past. Yet again I felt the rope between brother and brother, taut and strong, registering its hold at the centre of the clamorous, chaotic enterprise, rendering it not just an adventure, not even just an invincible crusade, but a saga of my own blood and my own tribe. And so the rhythm passed over me, the rope tightening and spelling out my stability, and then relaxing, and I listened for the next call.

And the eruption of sound came. That was it really. There was little more than sound to it. Even as my own words hung in the air, a prolonged call because they were a call to a brother, other sounds reached them, and used them as a bridge. Alien sounds; engines that did not belong to the Halifaxes, roaring at full acceleration; the whoosh and crackle of aircraft cannon; the hurtle of a Junkers 88 as it sprinted past the Tower, hugging the ground, in the path of its own green tracers. And in its wake, the final sound of all, momentarily suspended, the scream of B Baker, already in flames and out of control, taking the full impact of the rearing, concrete earth, and exploding.

“D Dog,” came the call of the next aircraft. “Clearance to land?”

“Control to D Dog,” I managed to say, “intruders, intruders. Get down and get out. Fast.” I took off the headphones and walked away. I wouldn’t say anything else. Already I had said five words too many. The sky has ears, and five words of greeting were an invitation to death. Calling a brother of the night sky, in the brief moment of his own sightlessness, prolonging the caress, to land him, incinerated, at my feet.

“Did you know about this?” my wife asked.

“No,” I told her, she left me alone.

The following year, when the letter came, she had more to say.

Ralph old chap,

I can’t for the life of me remember what I told you in my last letter. So I won’t try and pick up whatever threads there may have been.

We’re in, I’m sure, for an exceptional Spring. I had a most convincing intimation of this yesterday afternoon. This year, for the first time in my experience, green should be the predominant color for miles around the Tower. The shoots are everywhere, in places they have not been seen for over thirty years. The prospects are good, and we all seem to be responding to it. The hunt was due to go out yesterday, and I was in a state of some excitement that I might catch a glimpse of it. I make have said to you before that the world, seen from the Tower, can be drab, even desolating. Such a picture does tend to present itself, I must admit that, but at other times the view can be absolutely splendid. Yesterday, at about three o’clock, I was in my front room – what I think of as both my study and drawing room. I was tinkering with some old equipment that tend to use as ornament. However . . . all of a sudden I heard the horns. A sharp and rare sound in this quiet spot that has perfected its own unvarying rhythm of birdsong and wind. I rushed to the window and stared out, and in a headlong burst they broke out of the bracken on the east side, a whole world of intent and earnest animals – dogs and horses and men, and perhaps somewhere pitifully there, a fox. A vision, a vision it was to me: the desperate clamor of hounds and red coats and steaming hunters, baying and sprinting up the runways.

I was delighted by this letter. That on the previous anniversary might have made everything clear, but such a clarification was of benefit merely to us. This latest signalled a new, healthy man in Austin. Writing that account of Vince’s death must have been the turning point. It must have been what his return to the Tower, and his skirting around its grim associations, were leading up to. Only when he recounted that story, not just by going over it in his own mind, not just by telling someone in the course of conversation, but by putting it on paper and sending it to the other side of the world, could he put it out of his mind once and for all, and regain his balance. Only by himself officially announcing Vince’s death to the family and owning up to his own responsibility for it, could he exorcize that demon of regret and guilt.

“It’s been a bloody strange, long road,” I said to my wife as I handed her the letter, “but he’s got there at last.”

She read it, I thought, quite cursorily. “Poor Austin,” she remarked, “England has got the better of him at last.”

I couldn’t help showing how obtuse and insensitive I thought this was. “What on earth do you mean? Are we reading the same letter? Doesn’t the man’s peace of mind cry out to you . . . or whisper to you . . . or whatever the appropriate signal is?”

“Lobotomised, I’d say. Gone off some deep end into a listless, slobbering awe at the pathetic tail-end of old England.”

I gave her the bewildered look that was all my annoyance and incredulity could manage.

"You must admit," she said, driving home her well-disguised point, "it was not exactly the holy Lamb of God he saw walking upon his green and pleasant fields."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that he's gone into a decline with this second coming and disintegration of poor Vince. I'm not sure that the burden of his guilt . . . no, not the burden of it . . . the baggage of his guilt, didn't keep him tauter, more alive, more imaginative, maybe holier."

"You're terribly self-indulgent," I had to say to her. "For one thing, it's a thousand to one against that he was in any way to blame for Vince's death. And, besides, it's all very well for your romantic notions of the tragic human being, but it's Austin's happiness, my brother's happiness, you're talking about."

That ended the conversation. She had nothing more to say. And of course, a year later, true to my expectations, there was no letter from Austin. I waved it at her. "See," I said.

She waved back. "See," she said.

THE GAME OF WAR

At Percevals' the Norfolk pine
dominated their small garden
even more than did the ash
that each April swamped our own.
At rival ends of our small street
gangs of children formed like water,
flew their standards from the treetops,
each challenging the other's pride.
Battle's end would come with capture:
rules at first were rough and ready
and in anger often broken;
pain, tears, recriminations
drew adult-enforced affirmations
of each leader's love for peace.
In growing years the childish passions
cooled, although the wars continued.
The opposers, suffering no oppression,
honed a ritual game of skill,
a war of science, not aggression.
But still remained those points in playing
at which everyone fell down dead.

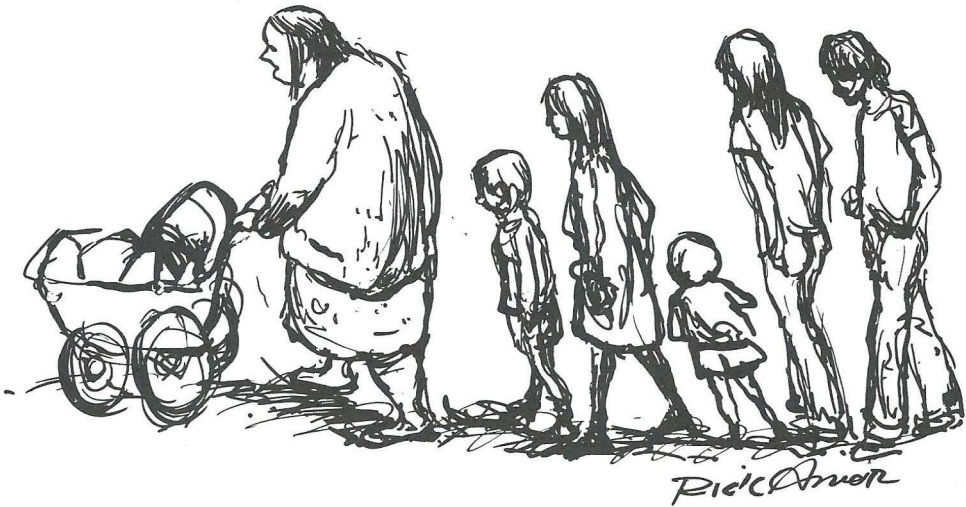
MICHAEL DUGAN

"SOAP'S CHEAP!"

"You could smell her a mile off", so they said,
wrinkling their noses in disgust, "and wouldn't you
think . . .?"

"That's what I say – soap's cheap!"

And yet
I never once saw her snarl at her five kids who trailed her
with blotched faces and torn frocks and pants
through the streets
like fragments of the grubby petticoat which hung
at an angle from beneath the dubious skirt.



Over the red face netted with fine veins,
epitome of effort her hair struggled
down to shoulders all the bulkier for
the several seasons of wool pullovers she had on.
Trudging in shoes with heels abraded down
to the upper on one side as though the wear
came from the long pressure of a life
against the dizzying fly-wheel of mischance
– she bore dilapidation with a bleary
patience that left no place for sentiment, the kids
dutiful and loyal in a way
to break your ignorant heart, holding the sagging gate
open to let mum through with the family pram
loaded with paper parcels of the kind
the poor throughout history are always carrying.

BRUCE DAWE

KEITH HANCOCK

Testimony

The historian Sir Keith Hancock, who lives in Canberra, is the doyen of Australian historians, and one of the country's most distinguished citizens. In October 1984 Sir Keith delivered a series of talks on the ABC's Radio Helicon, a series entitled "Testimony" in tribute to the French historian and Resistance fighter Marc Bloch, who argued that truth would emerge from the testimony of sincere witnesses. Overland has received permission to print a shortened version of "Testimony", a version Sir Keith has approved. Since broadcasting "Testimony", Sir Keith has written a postscript entitled "Perspectives". It is hoped that in due course the complete text of "Testimony" and "Perspectives" will be published.

The Habit of Reading

Here am I, an old man with one foot in the grave and the other on a banana-skin, spending every day at my study table six hours or more, reading, reading, reading. I grew up in the horse-and-buggy age. I was eight years old before I saw a motor car. I was twenty-four years old before I taught myself to type. I was forty-eight years old before I possessed a refrigerator. I did not own a television until my colleagues and friends gave me one on my eightieth birthday. Today, when I'm more than half way through my eighties, I find myself in the middle of the Information Explosion. I cannot cope with it; but I know a little girl called Rebecca. She is eight years old. Not long from now she will be using the computer to tell her own stories – to begin with, I suppose, fairy stories. Whether or not she will illustrate them in line and color I do not know; but there seems to be no reason why not. Rebecca is an individual human. She is taking the initiative.

What Rebecca is doing now, and what she will continue to do when she possesses her own computer, is essentially the same as what my mother was doing with her children in the horse-and-buggy age. She is telling fairy stories and reciting ditties.

My brother Justin and I were the two youngest in our family of five children. The time soon came when mother read to us the adventure stories of Henty, Ballantyne and, by far the most thrilling, John Bunyan. I have today on my table the splendid Nonesuch edition (1928) of *The Pilgrim's Progress*; but I take it for granted that the story we listened to was an abridged and simplified version. We were spared the theological argument, but we met all the

battlers: on God's side Christian, Faithful, Hopeful, Evangelist, Interpreter, those good shepherds and those beautiful girls, Prudence and Discretion: on the Devil's side, Obstinate, Pliable, Talkative, Little Faith, Timorous, Mr Legality, Mr Worldly Wiseman, Mr Facing-Bothways. With bated breath we witnessed all the adventures and misadventures of Christian along the straight and narrow way which leads from the City of Destruction to the City of Zion: his desperate floundering in the Slough of Despond, his safe entry through the Wicket Gate, his ascent of the Hill Difficulty, his fierce encounter with Apollyon, his first sighting of the Delectable Mountains, his passage through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, his imprisonment in Vanity Fair and the judicial murder there of his companion Faithful, his imprisonment by Giant Despair in Doubting Castle, his rest and refreshment in the Country of Beulah, his crossing of the River and his triumphal entry with Hopeful into the City of Zion, when all the bells rang for joy and it was said unto them, *Enter Ye into the Joy of your Lord*. For Ignorance, who had tried to enter the City by an easier way, there was no triumphal ending. The Shining Ones took him up and pushed him through a door in the side of the hill.

"Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven. So I awoke, and behold it was a Dream."

In Gippsland, three quarters of a century ago, my two sisters used to slip away to deck chairs in our garden with *Seven Little Australians*, by Ethel Turner, or *We of the Never Never*, by Mrs Aeneas Gunn. Dora would begin the reading, but before very long would say to Marjorie,

Joshua; but priests led the invading host, bearing on their shoulders the Ark of the Covenant. Then the waters that came down from above stood still and rose in a very high heap, and the priests stood firm on dry ground in the middle of the River Jordan, and all the Children of Israel passed over in good order, ready for the assault on Jericho.

Like all the children in my class at Sunday School, I listened with bated breath to my father telling that story and many other stories of war which he selected from the Books of Judges and Samuel; to begin with, the story of Deborah, a prophetess and judge in Israel and the architect of victory against Sisera, a terrifying enemy, for his army had chariots of iron. In retrospect, I see Deborah as the prototype of two British Amazons, Queen Boadicea and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher; but when I was ten years old Deborah's song of victory thrilled me:

So let all they enemies perish, Oh Lord; but let
those that love Him be like the sun when He
goeth forth in his might.

I also found thrilling the stories my father told us of two gigantic warriors, Samson the Hebrew and Goliath the Philistine. Samson, 'eyeless in Gaza' is bound to a pillar of the heathen temple; but he gathers his strength and gives a great heave. The whole temple comes crashing down and in its fall three thousand Philistines are destroyed. In the second story, the giant is Goliath, a Philistine. He challenges the Hebrew army to produce a volunteer brave and strong enough to meet him in single combat. No Hebrew soldier dares to accept that challenge; but David, the youngest son of Jesse, accepts it. He is a shepherd boy; he has no armor; his only weapon is a pebble. In Chapter 17 of the first Book of Samuel the story of his encounter with Goliath is tersely told.

David's Defiance: Who is this uncircumcised
Philistine, that he should defy the armies
of the living God?

David's Triumph: So David prevailed with a sling
and with a stone.

The prophet Samuel was both a holy man and a statesman. He welded the loose confederation of tribes into a strong monarchical state. Under the rule of King David, this state became imperial, pushing forward its frontiers to the north, the east and the south. King Solomon's frivolous 'wisdom' and his financial extravagance shattered that far-flung power. When Solomon died, two separate states, Israel in the north and Judah in the south, pursued their separate paths. In each of these states nearly all the kings did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. Brave prophets reproved the kings and warned them of the retribution which would surely come, not only for them but also for their misguided and misgoverned people.

By the standards of his time, my father was a scholarly clergyman. He had no more than a smattering of Hebrew, but he knew almost by heart the Greek New Testament

and he had on his shelves the books of the Romanized Jew, Josephus. Three quarters of a century ago no more than that could be expected from a country parson. Today, much more must be demanded. Immense increments of knowledge have shattered the traditional perspectives of place and time.

I reflect upon the achievement of William Faulkner Albright. He was born in 1891 and died in 1971. While I was growing up in Gippsland with gusto, he was growing up in Chile under physical and mental strain. He was born with imperfect sight and he suffered in childhood a severe injury to his left hand. His parents were Methodist missionaries and became in consequence targets of hatred on two accounts; they were gringos, they were heretics. Their small son retained throughout his life an acute awareness of what it means to belong to a minority-group in a hostile society. In Chile he did not go to school; but his home was well supplied with books in English, Spanish and German. He read obsessively – Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe – above all, the Bible.

When he was in his early teens his parents returned to America. By now they had six children to support on a meagre pension – \$400 a year. For William, their poverty was a stroke of good fortune; he had to supplement that income by his earnings as a farm labourer – a wholesome training for the rigors of life. His damaged left hand grew strong. Had that not happened, he would never have been able to sustain the rigours of archaeological excavation.

When he was sixteen he went to school for the first time. To pay his way he still had to earn money in the vacations; but he got a good grounding, especially in Latin and Greek. He won a scholarship to John Hopkins University. In the last year of First World War he served as a laborer in the American army. From 1919 to 1929 he held the Thayer Scholarship and worked non-stop in the Middle East. There he mastered the techniques of archaeology and epigraphy. He made himself expert in deciphering Egyptian papyri and the cuneiform inscriptions of Mesopotamia. He became a fluent speaker of the contemporary languages. He trained successive generations of young scholars until . . . but I must let him speak for himself:

During the decade ending in 1947 a number of my pupils began to pursue research along similar lines, until it became evident that my pupils' work would soon outweigh my own in significance. This is a development to which every original investigator should look forward to eagerly. Only at the moment when his pupils lead him rather than he them can he feel confident that his work has not been largely in vain.

For this statement of the obvious I give three cheers.

According to *Who was Who in America, 1969-1973*, Albright had to his credit 8,000 publications. To his credit? Well, the editors of scholarly journals accepted them. I take it for granted that nearly all of them were reports of work in progress, eagerly awaited by his fellow-workers widely scattered throughout the world. From time to time he published a substantial book which

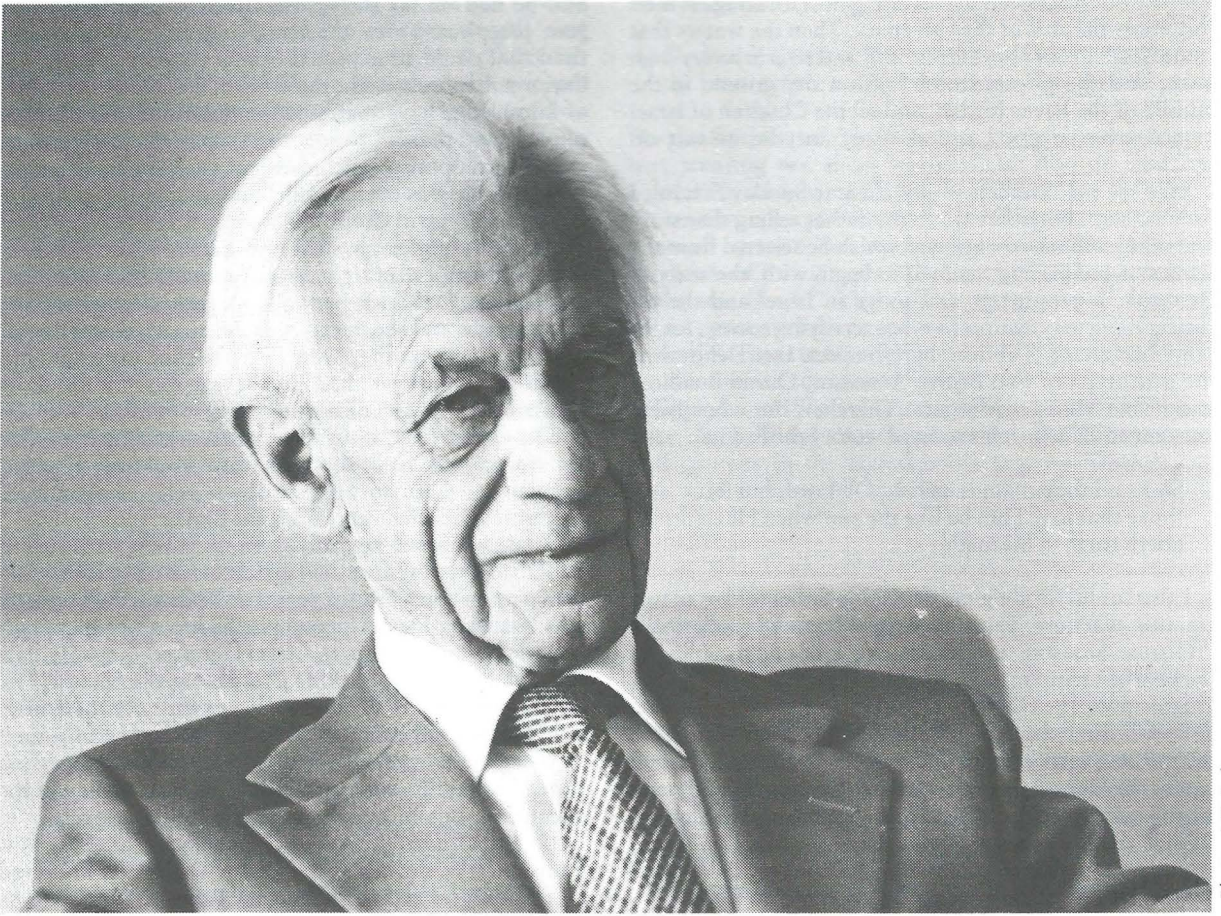


Photo: A. T. Bolton

made plain to the general reader – at any rate, made plain to *me* – the findings of his research, so far as it had gone; its techniques; the faith which gave it motive power and direction. I have read with profit two of these books, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (1940) and *History, Archaeology and Christian Humanism* (1964). These books have taught me much about my own commitment as a student and teacher of history. Albright affirms the following propositions:

1. Historical research may properly be called scientific. Speaking from his own experience, he examines the territory where natural science and history meet each other – the analysis of stratigraphic sequences and the classification of all objects made by the hand of man. “The two principles of stratigraphy and topography are just as basic to archaeology”, he declares, “as they are to geology and palaeontology.”

2. Even where the partnership of the historian and the natural scientist is not so close, the work of each is rational. Here Albright makes a distinction between the logic of the schools, pioneered by Aristotle, and what he calls the logic of experience. He discovers this logic in the dramatic confronta-

tions of Shakespearian tragedy. “The logic”, he writes, “is implicit; it emerges from experience and is not expressed in formal categories”. Its roots are in poetry.

3. In the world of academia, historical study is given a place of honor among the Humanities. Albright does not openly reject that classification, but he calls to mind the warning of Thomas Hobbes – “Take heed of words.” The word *humanism* tells us very little unless it is prefixed by an adjective. There are many discordant variations on the humanistic theme. For example:

- i. Classical Humanism: We think at once of Oxford Greats.
- ii. Agnostic Humanism: We think of T.H. Huxley.
- iii. Atheistic Humanism: We think of Auguste Comte and his three stages of man’s triumphant climb to Science and the Religion of Humanity.
- iv. Theistic Humanism: We think of Moses, Jesus, the Buddha, St Augustine, Martin Luther and Karl Barth.

In making these useful distinctions Albright did not forget his personal experience in Chile as the member of a despised minority group. He wrote a few terse sentences about a distinguished Protestant theologian, Gerhard Kittel, who worshipped Hitler “and thereby achieved the grim distinction of making extermination of the Jews theologically respectable”.

Albright paused for reflection, and then concluded his story with one shattering sentence,

And what happened in Germany can take place whenever the human intellect turns its back on the spiritual traditions which we have inherited from those sources in ancient Israel.

I have been making a brief report upon an immense increment of well-tested knowledge. At the same time, I have been putting to myself a simple question: what truth, if any, still remains in the simple stories my father told to me and to my class-mates three-quarters of a century ago?

My answer is clear and confident. Those stories still “speak to my condition”, as the Quakers say. *Covenant* is the word and the idea which binds them all together. God is sovereign ruler of the universe; but by an act of grace he sets well-defined limits to the operation of his power. His covenant with Noah – never again to let loose a great deluge of water – is valid for all mankind and for all creatures. His covenant with Abraham is more restricted in place, if not in time; “Abraham and his seed for ever” are the privileged beneficiaries. His covenant with Moses is a mixture of the general and the particular. Some of the Ten Commandments – “Thou shalt not kill” – are universally binding; but others – “Remember the Sabbath Day” – are binding upon the Hebrews only. All of them are preserved with religious awe and national pride in the Ark of the Covenant. When Solomon builds Israel’s first Temple, the Ark is carried into the Holy of Holies.

Anticlimax follows. The law is flouted. Prophets take the centre of the stage. The Kings of Israel and Judah do what is evil in the sight of the Lord. Their misgoverned peoples go whoring after strange gods. Heroic prophets – Elijah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah – denounce kings and people as breakers of the Covenant. The Lord God of Israel, they declare, is no longer bound by the promises which He had made to Abraham and to Moses. The Kingdom of Israel is destroyed by the Assyrians; the Kingdom of Judah is destroyed by the Babylonians. By the waters of Babylon exiled Jews sit down and weep.

As a small boy, I found these later stories no less thrilling than the earlier ones. Four or five years later the chance was offered me of more excitement. On my fourteenth birthday my father took me into his study and showed me a big book, Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon. The time had come for me, he said, to learn Greek. A few years later I was reading with growing excitement the tragic drama of Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*. Its theme was not new to me. Prometheus, I told myself, was suffering terrible punishment because he had broken the Covenant.

That explanation, no doubt, was infantile; but it contained a core of sense. In Greek mythology and dramatic tragedy – perhaps even in the historical narrative of Thucydides – I still perceive the confrontation of two words, *hubris* and *phthonos*. *Hubris* signifies a man’s inordinate pride in his own strength; *phthonos* signifies the ‘jealousy’ of the gods and their determination to punish that man. In this dramatic confrontation there is no formal logic; but I perceive in it what Albright has called “the logic of experience”.

We have been warned. *Homo sapiens* in our time is very clever; but he may be provoking the jealousy of the gods.

Calling Lemuel Gulliver

When I turned nine, one of my birthday presents was a little book called *Gulliver in Lilliput*. It told the story of a ship’s surgeon, sole survivor from the *Antelope*, a brig which was wrecked near a small island in the South Seas. By God’s mercy, the surgeon managed to reach shore. Exhausted, he fell into a deep sleep. When he awoke . . . but I shall let Gulliver tell his own story.

I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir. For as I happened to be on my back, I found my Arms and Legs were strongly fastened on each side to the Ground; and my Hair; which was long and thick, tied down in the same Manner . . . In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left Leg, which advancing gently forward over my Breast, came almost to my Chin; when bending my Eyes downwards as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six Inches high, with a Bow and arrow in his Hands, and a Quiver at his back.

Very soon, Gulliver was set at liberty, because the Emperor of Lilliput and his councillors believed that his miraculous strength would deliver them from two dangers: civil dissension at home and invasion from abroad. At home, the main issue in dispute was the proper way of breaking eggs before eating them. According to tradition, the proper way was to break them at the larger end; but the present Emperor’s grandfather had decreed that they must be broken at the smaller end. This decree had provoked a war of books and of arms. The Big-Endians, defeated on the home ground, had fled for refuge to the neighboring Empire of Blefuscu, which was now assembling a great fleet for the invasion of Lilliput. With the aid of his spy-glass Gulliver surveyed the narrow stretch of water which divided the two mighty Empires and decided that he could cover nearly all the distance by wading. He then gave orders – for which he had a Warrant – to prepare strong cables and bars of iron with their extremities hammered into hooks. Thus equipped, he crossed the narrow strait, cut the cables of the anchored Armada, attached his grappling gear and pulled every ship across the strait. Again let him tell his own story:

I came in a short time within hearing; and holding up the end of the cable by which the Fleet was attached, I cried in a loud Voice, *Long live the most puissant Emperor of Lilliput!*

That great Prince received him with all possible Encomiums and created him on the spot a *Nardac*, which is the highest title of honor in Lilliput.

After reading *A Voyage to Lilliput* from cover to cover, I promised myself the pleasure of reading the three other *Voyages* of Lemuel Gulliver. Alas! nearly thirty years went by before my exploration of Irish history brought me into direct contact with the work of Gulliver's creator, Jonathan Swift. He was an Anglican clergyman and Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin. It so happened that I myself was in Dublin in 1934, when the Nonesuch Press published a superbly edited edition of Swift's *Selected Writings in Prose and Verse*. That book soon had a place in my shelves. Today it has a place on my table.

I know each of the four Gulliver stories almost by heart. In the *Voyage to Laputa* His Majesty the King of Laputa, after listening patiently to Gulliver while he sings the praises of his own country, passes judgment as follows:

I cannot but conclude the Bulk of your Natives to be the most pernicious Race of little odious Vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the Surface of the Earth.

In the *Houynimhnms* Gulliver's master, the horse, possesses the teacher's greatest gift – the willingness to *listen*, to draw his pupils out and encourage them to reveal the beliefs, notions and questions that they have in their heads. In four successive chapters Jonathan Swift puts on record the story which Gulliver tells his teacher of the beliefs, customs, laws and politics of his own beloved country, England. These chapters are the high watermark, in any language, of satirical literature. Compared with Swift, Aristophanes is a flibbertigibbet, Juvenal is a thumper.

A question as been put to me – “Why should Swift be read now?” The answer to that question is contained in one terse sentence of a letter which Swift wrote from Dublin in the autumn of 1725, when he was at work on the concluding page of *Gulliver's Travels*: “The chief end I propose to myself in all my labours is to vex the world rather than divert it.”

Today, our need to be vexed is urgent.

War and Peace in Our Time

The issues of war and peace have been throughout the past three-quarters of a century my concern in three capacities: as a human person, as a professional historian, and as an Australian citizen. Let me briefly put on record some chronological landmarks of this concern, or – as some people might call it – this obsession.

Personal Landmarks

May 1900: I am still 2 months short of my second birthday and my sister Dora walks onto our front verandah in Bairnsdale with our dinner bell in her hand. Attached to it is a string which she pushes through the verandah's lattice work. She pulls the string and the bell tinkles. Jim, my eldest brother, asks her – “Why are you doing that?” Her answer is joyful – MAFEKING HAS BEEN RELIEVED!

June 1916: Jim is by now a university graduate in Law. He has held a good position in a solicitor's office. He is engaged to be married . . . but he wears a soldier's uniform. In the first Battle of the Somme he is blown to bits at Pozieres. I had loved him dearly.

When the war ended I was a university student still in civilian clothes – wearing them unhappily; but in some measure, perhaps, defiantly.

At the University of Melbourne I read Latin and Greek before switching to History. I graduated in 1919. The issues of war and peace were already the focal point of my studies. In the 1920s, national struggles in Europe became the immediate objective of my research, publication and teaching. In these studies my close companion was Niccolo Machiavelli, the naughty but endearing Florentine who took it for granted that *power* is the only thing that matters in politics. I respected that stark realism; but I took my stand with the jurist Grotius and the other opponents of Machiavelli. My political dictionary still includes old-fashioned words like liberty, law, and obligation.

During the 1930s, when I was hard at work on the *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, I laid heavy stress on intractable situations and on the shortcomings of British policy – in Ireland, in Palestine, in South Africa, and in East Africa. Nevertheless, I spent some time in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany – watching, listening, talking, thinking. By the mid-1930s I was ready to make two forthright statements:

1. We shall have to fight.
2. The *british* Commonwealth of Nations – *british* with a small *b*, please note – is worth fighting for.

During the Second World War I occupied a room in the War Cabinet Offices of the United Kingdom. There my task was to take the measure of Britain's war effort on the home front and to plan the ‘Civil Series’ of British official war histories. The first volume of that series, *British War Economy* by W.K. Hancock and M.M. Gowing, was published in 1949. Within the next ten years thirty more volumes were published. Quite a lot of people – public servants, statisticians, managers of industries large and small, welfare workers – are still reading them with some profit; but for me they are all dead mutton. Those appalling labors, thank God, now belong to my dead past.

Was I foolish, I sometimes ask myself, to accept in the early 1950s a new commitment – to assemble the widely scattered letters and papers of Jan Christiaan Smuts, to make careful provision for their good order and safe keeping, and to produce for the Cambridge University Press a biography of Smuts which would run – although this I did not then foresee – to two volumes, each containing at the very least two hundred thousand words? No, I was not foolish. Those labors have brought grist to my mill. Smuts has more evidence to give at first hand than any other participant – except perhaps Winston Churchill – on the confrontations of war and peace in our time.

So let me, to begin with, return to Mafeking Day and to my sister Dora ringing her victory bell. There is another side to that picture. Listen to a brief entry from the diary which Smuts kept from August 1901, to April 1902, when he was leading his commando of 340 Transvaalers to wage war on British territory in Cape Colony:

Last night at Zandspruit. Dams everywhere full of rotting animals; water undrinkable. Veld covered with slaughtered herds of sheep and goats, cattle and horses. The horror passes description. But the saddest sight of all is the large numbers of little lambs, staggering from hunger round the corpses of their dead and mangled mothers . . . Surely such outrages on man and nature must move to a certain doom.

Events did *not* move in that direction. They led to British victory in the war which I call, with unimpeachable accuracy, Milner's War.

Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener had not planned those outrages, but had drifted into them. Under the laws of war it was permissible to strike at enemy sources of supply. When Smuts and the other commando leaders were fighting their guerilla war, they were dependent for supply on the Boer farms. Lord Roberts ordered his soldiers to destroy the farms and lay waste the land. The farmers joined the commandos. The women and children scavenged for a living on the desolated veld. Lord Kitchener issued orders to round them up and confine them in Concentration Camps. A name of evil omen! In the event, the death rate in the camps reached its peak at 430 per thousand. This happened, not because British officers and soldiers were brutal, but because the British War Office had never absorbed the teaching of Florence Nightingale.

Before the war ended, the death rate in the camps had been brought below 100 per thousand. Some of the credit for that achievement belongs to Milner, who was – to give him his due – a competent administrator. But the glory belongs to a brave English lady, Emily Hobhouse. When rumors of the horror reached her in England she took ship for South Africa. There she established the facts. On her return to England she reported them in the newspapers and in public meetings. On 14 June 1901 she talked for two hours with Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, leader of the hitherto-divided Liberal Party. That same night he stood up in the House of Commons to ask and to answer

the question: "When is a war not a war? When it is fought by methods of barbarism in South Africa."

Some idiotic members of my profession still believe that human persons have no place in human history. To the day of his death Smuts believed that Emily Hobhouse and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman had changed the course of human history in South Africa. On some issues, his judgement may have been at fault; but it is certainly true that if those two people had not existed, South Africa would never have become a sovereign state within the Commonwealth of Nations. Nor would General J.C. Smuts have commanded a British army in East Africa during the First World War. Nor would he have become founding father of the Royal Air Force. Nor would he have brought his divided country into the Second World War and kept the Cape route open as the lifeline of our forces in North Africa. Yes, *our* forces. If that lifeline had been cut, Hitler and Mussolini would have conquered and controlled all the lands of the Middle East from the Suez Canal to the Caucasus Mountains. What then would have been the situation confronting those latecomers to battle, the Russians and the Americans? . . . Yes: I remain unshakably convinced that in human affairs the decisions of individual persons – even ordinary persons like you and me – really do matter.

Some South Africans accuse Smuts of giving too much of his time and energy to matters which did not directly concern his own country and its people. I think otherwise; but I must stick to my own agenda – the issues of war and peace in our time. I want now to put the spotlight on the problems which confronted the governments and the peoples at the end of the First World War, that confronted them again at the end of the Second World War, and that confront them today.

In mid-February 1919, Smuts was called away from the Peace Conference in Paris to London. There he sorted out the muddles of South African demobilization and there he fell seriously ill. During his convalescence, he studied the papers which came to him from Paris by diplomatic bag. He found them alarming. On Sunday, 23 March, he returned to Paris. On 26 March he wrote to Lloyd George a long, passionate, but closely reasoned letter. Here is the crux of it:

1. We cannot destroy Germany without destroying Europe.
2. We cannot save Europe without the co-operation of Germany.

Writing at white heat, Smuts telescoped his views of the short-term and the long-term prospects. He wanted to stress both the harshness of the punishment now proposed for Germany, and its inevitable impermanence.

In this letter Smuts contributed to the dictionary of politics a new word – *appeasement*. In my book, I have put briefly on record the history of that word. When Smuts coined it in 1919 he was thinking of Campbell-Bannerman. He was pleading for magnanimity in victory. By the mid-1930s the word was turning topsy-turvy. It was becoming the slogan of cowards and idiots who were cringing to Mussolini and Hitler.

Let us take heed of words. Like chameleons, they change their colors.

I shall now take a long leap to the end of the Second World War. Smuts had been privy to the secret of the Atomic Bomb. When news reached him that two of the species had been dropped on the Japanese, he wrote to a friend:

We are now forewarned of what is coming if war is not ended for good. At last a discovery has been made which should put war out of court for good and all.

He spoke hopefully of humanity being coerced *by science* into good behaviour.

That crude notion did not long survive in his mind. Six weeks later he wrote to the same friend:

Even the atomic bomb may not be enough to give us peace. It becomes a rivalry as to who can make the most dreadful and destructive bomb. And so we muddle on the edge of the volcano.

Where Do We Go From Here?

“And so we muddle on the edge of the volcano.”

That terse sentence summarises the assessment by Smuts of the significance in human history of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

How much closer to the edge has *Homo sapiens* moved during the past forty years? I shall call to witness the American citizen Sidney D. Drell and the British citizen Lord Zuckerman.

Professor Drell is a theoretical physicist and director of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Centre. In 1980 he published in *Daedalus* an article entitled “Arms Control: Is There Still Hope?”. I shall quote verbatim his opening statement:

Thirty-five years have passed since the fireballs of the first atomic bombs lighted the dawn of the nuclear age, the age which Winston Churchill called “the Second Coming in Wrath”. Their increase by a factor of one thousand in the scale of destructiveness was followed swiftly by yet another increase – again by a factor of one thousand – in explosive power with the advent of the thermo-nuclear bomb! Since then the world has stockpiled some forty thousand nuclear bombs, about 99 per cent of which belong to the United States and the Soviet Union.

Drell reported in close detail the failure of negotiations for arms-control. In his concluding paragraph he made a statement of impeccable accuracy:

We have no evidence from history to lead to the conclusion that war in the long run can be avoided.

Professor Solly Zuckerman and I were colleagues during the 1930s in the University of Birmingham. He was then in the front line of zoological research. During the war he became scientific adviser to Field Marshal Montgomery. When the war ended he became, and remained for many years, scientific adviser to Britain’s Ministry of Defence. In December 1950 he became the leading participant in a symposium, organised by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, on the crucial issue: “how the community of mankind may be able to live with the atomic bomb”. The evidence he tendered was sombre.

My first point is that one real danger of nuclear war is that we have ceased to understand what we are talking about. How can one imagine the reality? the possible elimination, not only of, say, half the population of the Northern Hemisphere, but also the elimination of the better part of the cultural history of our globe.

Zuckerman and his interlocutors put the spotlight on three shortcomings of prudential wisdom which could lead to thermo-nuclear catastrophe: inadvertence, miscalculation, escalation. They took it for granted that some criminal lunatic, somewhere, would drop a bomb in a supposedly ‘limited’ theatre of war.

Escalation would seem to be inevitable, unless one supposes that the opponent, for some reason, might fail to respond in kind – a highly improbable supposition.

In the light of this factual evidence, the species which has named itself *Homo sapiens* is constrained to confront the question, so clearly formulated in Psalm 8, verse 5:

What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?

To this question a flashy biologist of our time, Desmond Morris, gives answer: *Man is a Naked Ape*. Lemuel Gulliver, taught by Dapple Grey, his adorable Master, gave the answer, *Man is a Yahoo*. I respect those answers. Nevertheless, like General Smuts, even in the bitter afflictions of his old age, I cling to my small spar of hope.

Today in Australia I am still clinging to that small spar. At the same time, I am doing my utmost to identify and measure the dangers which confront my country. I have on my study table a file which bears the label WPC. Those letters signify Worst Possible Case. In March 1941, General Sir Archibald Wavell, commander-in-chief of the British and Commonwealth forces in North Africa, opened a WPC file. Those forces, following the brilliant victories which they had won only a few months earlier, had become widely dispersed over scattered territories which stretched from Thermopylae in northern Greece to El Agaila in western Cyrenaica. Within a few weeks, the German general Rommel, with veteran forces superbly equipped, recovered all the ground which the Italians had lost and drove Wavell’s men back to El Alamein, a defensive position uncomfortably close to Cairo. What would

happen if Rommel made that extra distance? Wavell asked and answered that question in his WPC file.

My WPC file opens with an indisputable statement of strategical fact. Australia today occupies a position in the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Successive Australian governments succeeded for many years in concealing this fact from the Australian people – and perhaps even from themselves; but today every Australian citizen, unless he is illiterate and innumerate, knows something at least about the strategical significance of North West Cape, Narrungar and Pine Gap. My WPC file contains two additional items:

1. The laws of war make it permissible to strike at an enemy's centre of command. For me, this indisputable fact has particular significance. In Canberra I live almost cheek by jowl with the Russell Buildings, which contain the central nervous system of my country's fighting forces.
2. In the American literature which I have already cited, frequent reference is made to *the demonstration effect* of nuclear bombing. That effect was demonstrated thirty-nine years ago at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The American Air Force dropped two nuclear bombs on those two undefended cities. Faced with that demonstration of the wrath to come, the Japanese government surrendered.

Citizens of Melbourne and Sydney, you have been warned.

I rate very low the intelligence and the courage of the successive Australian governments – chiefly, but not only, Liberal-Country Party governments – which have brought my country into the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation, and are still keeping it there. In the concluding chapter of my book, *Perspective in History*, I have briefly told the story of how that happened. Let me now put on record my debt to three books which bear the stamp of probing research and clear-headed analysis: *Australia in Peace and War*, by Dr T.B. Millar; *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate*, by Dr Desmond Bell; and *Rethinking Australia's Defence*, by Dr Ross Babbage. I also recommend for your close attention the book of an author who possesses no academic label. His name is David Martin. His book is entitled, *Armed Neutrality for Australia*.

Let me now confine myself to reporting two indisputable facts.

1. The Anzus Treaty between Australia, New Zealand and the United States did *not* – repeat did *not* – bring Australia into the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation. It was signed on 1 September 1951. Articles III, IV, V and VII constitute its core. Therein the contracting parties pledge themselves to effective self-help and to mutual aid in their preparations to resist aggression; to consultation with each other when aggression is

threatened; to action by each signatory 'in accordance with its constitutional processes'.

For many – far *too* many – years, the majority of Australians believed that the Treaty contained a guarantee that the United States would fly to their aid if ever they were confronted by a dangerous enemy. On 25 July 1969, President Nixon pricked that bubble of illusion in a statement which he made at Guam. Seven years later Mr George McBundy, formerly the Assistant for Security Affairs to three American Presidents, restated the "Nixon Doctrine" as follows: The American commitment anywhere is only as deep as the continued conviction of Americans that their interests require it.

II. In May 1963, a formal agreement between Australia and the United States *did* bring our country into the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation between the two global giants, the USA and the USSR. By this agreement, a United States Naval Communications Station was established at North West Cape, on a coast which had been charted three and a half centuries earlier by Dutch navigators.

A significant number of comparable agreements have been signed since then between the governments of Australia and the United States. I shall not list them, nor report their contents. Instead, I refer you again to the published work of the scholarly historians to whom I have already expressed my gratitude.

I shall now put briefly on record my personal estimate of what may fairly be demanded of my own profession in elucidating the issues of war and peace in our time.

1. Our knowledge will be of no value – indeed, it may be positively misleading – if it is confined within the limits of recent experience. Poor dear Anthony Eden is a tragic example of that shortcoming. In the 1930s he discovered the folly of *appeasing* those rampagious villains, Mussolini and Hitler. In the 1950s he made up his mind not to repeat that mistake. He led his country into battle against Egypt, a country very low on the ladder of military power. That noble gesture collapsed in failure and shame.

2. Let me now shift the emphasis from the negative to the positive, from Thou shalt *not* to *Thou shalt*. Students of *Thou Shalt* must come to grips, I say to the teachers and students of the problems of war and peace, with the great writers who have really understood the politics of power: Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Karl von Clausewitz and – in our time – Michael Howard. This does *not* mean that you must swallow everything they tell you. Old-fashioned words like law, justice, mercy, prudence, still speak to my condition. In 1936 I

spent three hectic months in Palestine, furiously at work on the census papers. A revisionist Zionist, who followed the lead of Jabotinski and Begin, said to me – “Our problem is simple: Either the Arabs will drive us into the sea or we will drive them into the desert”. But I made friends with Jewish members of *Brid Shalom*, which means the Covenant of Peace. I also made friends with Christian Arabs who were the opposite numbers of *Brid Shalom*. Even so, every house and shop in the old city of Jerusalem was shuttered, and Arab guerilla fighters were lurking in the surrounding hills. A shrewd Canadian statistician said to me “The choice is not between the good and the bad; it is between the bad and the lousy”. In that diagnosis I saw quite a lot of truth, but not the whole truth.

Not long ago I was following with close attention the debates of the Labor Party Conference on the issues of war and peace which now confront my country. I found them frivolous. There were so many noble gestures. “Stop the production and export of uranium!” – but no mention of the fact that Switzerland and Sweden, whose political performance in very dangerous situations is well-considered, are dependent to a considerable degree on nuclear power. “Get rid of the American bases!” – but not even five minutes of discussion on a self-reliant policy of national defence. While I was listening to this drivel I had at my elbow David Martin’s recently published book, *Armed Neutrality for Australia*. I should have to do six months at least of hard work before I felt competent to review it; but I do now commend to you the foreword by Geoffrey Serle, whose biography of General Monash is in my judgement the best single volume on the history of my country that has been published during the past quarter of a century.

I also recommend for your immediate study chapter ten of Martin’s book, which is entitled “Australia’s Defence: What it is now and what it should be.” In this chapter conscription is rejected, for political reasons and still more for reasons of value-for-money. A proposal is made for voluntary forces which add up to 250,000 men for the three fighting services. Emphasis is laid on “surge capacity” – rapid mobilization and rapid adaptation to challenges which may fluctuate widely in time and in space. Close attention is given to the logistical realities and to the industrial component of a self-reliant posture in foreign policy and defence.

This chapter demands, and will no doubt receive, the very close attention of strategical and financial experts within and beyond the Russell Buildings. Martin, however, is putting the case for national self-reliance as an ordinary Australian citizen sees it. For many years his home has been in Beechworth, a beautiful Australian township. The concluding words of his book are: “*Beechworth is worth fighting for.*”

From 1909 to 1918 I lived in Moonee Ponds, a suburb of Melbourne now famous in Australian comedy. Please read carefully my variation on Martin’s theme: “*Puckle Street is worth fighting for.*”

Don’t get me wrong. I am neither a militarist, nor a pacifist, nor an isolationist, nor a neutralist, nor any other kind of *-ist*. Forty-five years ago, I watched with satisfaction all the trendy *-isms* of the 1930s rapidly becoming *wasms*. For me, abstract words possess very little charm; but in my rag-bag of a mind the jumble of memories, experiences and observations begins sooner or later to form a coherent pattern.

I taught myself during Hitler’s war to understand the thing which we now call Gross National Product, and its allocation among closely competing claimants. I have published graphs which show how the allocations were made during the Second World War by the leading belligerents on the Allied side (except the Russians, who produced no comparable figures). Today, I feel no doubt at all that my own country is called upon *urgently* to allocate substantially more than three per cent of its GNP to *non-nuclear* national defence. We are called upon to put more of our money where our mouth is. Should we fail in that *duty*, our high-minded professions about nuclear disarmament will be froth and bubble, signifying nothing.

Duty? What an old-fashioned word! Yet I grew up with it. Eighty years ago it was current coin. I recited it in the Catechism; “My duty towards God, my duty towards my neighbour.” Was this formula too vague, too sweeping? Not at all. According to the Catechism, I am called upon “to do my duty in that state of life into which it shall please God to call me.” God has *not* called me to take any part in governing Australia. He *has* called me to play my part as an Australian citizen.

What, let me ask, is the duty of my country’s government, as I, an Australian citizen, see it? Our government is called upon to maintain and defend Australia’s national interests. This statement of the obvious may shock some mealy-mouthed people, so let me add that the Australian government will not perform its duty effectively if it fails to harmonize Australian interests with the interests of other nations – not only the nations in Australia’s Near North, but also the entire community of nations which are now under threat of thermo-nuclear catastrophe. My country’s government failed in its duty – not only to its own people – when it brought Australia into the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation between those two global giants, the Soviet Union and the United States of America.

The crucial date is *May 1963*: the North West Cape Agreement did bring our country into the front line of thermo-nuclear confrontation. In making it, our government *did* surrender to a foreign power a crucial element of its sovereign right and its duty to safeguard Australia’s vital interests. Many similar surrenders have been made since then. In my judgement, the governments which made them acted irresponsibly, unforgivably. I look forward to the advent of a government which will lead us back along the road of national self-reliance and national self-respect.

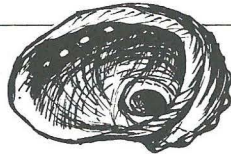
That road may be longer and the going may be harder than I was anticipating a few years ago. Nevertheless there are two decisive steps which can be and should be taken here and now:

1. We must start immediately to build non-nuclear military forces strong and flexible enough to defend our country against nibbling raiders and/or well-organized invaders. In the four books which I cited earlier, the ways and means of achieving this objective have been measured realistically.

2. In fairness to our partners in ANZUS, we must give immediate notice of our firm decision to accept no foreign presence on Australian soil in what are called – or miscalled – the “Joint Strategic Facilities”. The date upon which this decision will

become operative need not now be stated; but our government must make it crystal clear that implementation of the decision cannot and will not be long postponed.

Our American ally will thus be given fair notice that he must find an alternative location for these strategic facilities – either on his own soil, or within one or other of the ‘strategic trust territories’ which, on the insistence of the US government, are recognised in the Charter of the United Nations.



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DRUSILLA MODJESKA

Lesbia Harford and her Work

Drusilla Modjeska has prepared, for publication by Angus and Robertson later this year, a comprehensive edition of the work of Lesbia Harford. Harford's significant poetry has, until now, been known to few. We have received permission from Drusilla Modjeska and her publishers to print a short section from the lengthy introductory essay on Lesbia Harford, together with a selection of the poems.

*Yes, there will come a time when
These clever, friendly,
Angry, hopeful people
Who wrote, sitting on the bare ground
Surrounded by the poor and struggling
Will be publicly acclaimed.*

Bertolt Brecht

Lesbia Harford, poet and feminist, died in 1927 at the age of 36. After her death Nettie Palmer wrote that "her life had always hung on a fine thread, which perhaps made her words seem all the more poignant as if final." In so far as Lesbia Harford has been remembered at all, it is too often in the light of her early death: it has cast a gloss on her life that is far from accurate. Rather than frail and poignant, her poetry is tough and clear minded. Even the softest of her love poems avoid the sentiment of impending tragedy. Living with a heart-condition, she always knew that her life was likely to be short, but she did not trade on it. Rather than finality, Lesbia Harford's poetry insists on the constancy of change. Her voice, unmistakably her own, speaks as part of the multiplicity of voices speaking about social injustice, hope for revolution and the contradictory experiences of women. Far from being final, Lesbia Harford's poetry is partial both in the sense of being unfinished and of taking sides. She lived her life as if she would have seventy years or more to engage with it both politically and aesthetically. There were sides to be taken and she took them; but she did not have the time to finish many of her poems, a task she assigned to the future.

Lesbia Harford graduated in Law from Melbourne University, but she never practised. Instead she worked in textile and clothing factories and joined the IWW, on the anarcho-syndicalist left of the labor movement. As a hard-working woman, her poetry could be seen more as a by-product of her life rather than a centre to it. Yet she

wrote a lot and well. Her clear and courageous voice takes as its subject the factory and the varied experiences of women as well as love, and the painful contradictions between the need for love and the desire for independence. In form her poetry moves from an early emphasis on the lyric towards the ballad and the song; from the personal expression of individual experience towards a more proletarian form of poetry, representing the collective life experience and view point of a group. But conditions in Australia in the 1920s were not sympathetic to a protest poet like Lesbia Harford, who gave voice both to her own silence and to the silence of working women.

Despite the current rather reductive fascination with the lives of women writers, frequently in preference to their work, Lesbia Harford is barely known. She has been anthologized off and on since her death. But until now there has been only one slim volume of her work. She is known more or less dimly to some poets and critics, beyond that barely at all, although one of her poems, "Periodicity", is sung by the Adelaide band Redgum. Her poems, many of them written as songs, raise critical questions of the relationship between popular and literary traditions of writing, the forms of protest poetry and the interconnections between histories of writing, class and feminism. These issues, and the necessary re-readings that accompany them, have become central to contemporary critical debates. Rescuing Lesbia Harford and reconstructing something of her life and experience is not simply an act of feminist restoration. Perhaps the overriding reason for her obscurity for so many years is not that she is a poet who speaks with a woman's voice, though I am sure that has something to do with it, but that her writing does not sit comfortably in the perceived traditions and discourses of Australian poetry.

I first became interested in Lesbia Harford when I was researching Nettie Palmer. Nettie Palmer edited the one slim volume of Lesbia Harford's poetry which has been

published. It appeared in 1941 and was one of the first projects to be funded by the Commonwealth Literary Fund in its reconstructed and expanded form. Impressed by the poems, I was also surprised that the CLF had published in wartime a volume of poems clearly by the hand of a revolutionary woman. As Flora Eldershaw and Nettie Palmers's husband Vance were on the advisory board I put it down to their influence, despite the conservative composition of the rest of the Board. Then I came across a letter from Nettie Palmer to Guido Baracchi, a friend and one-time lover of Lesbia Harford. Guido Baracchi, along with Nettie Palmer and Miss Clark – another friend of Lesbia's who worked in the library at Prince Henry hospital in Sydney – had been pushing to get the poems published since the CLF was expanded in 1939. Nettie Palmer told Guido that the poems were given the grant only because Professor Osbourne, S. Talbot Smith and George Mackaness, "three old gentlemen of the censor type . . . have no time to read, which sometimes prevents them from fulfilling their natural function, which is to obstruct. Professor Osbourne now says . . . that if he had read Lesbia's *Poems* beforehand he would never have consented to their publication. Fortunately Flora is a strong enough character to take all such back-kicks quite calmly and the Board carries on." Nettie Palmer complained that Professor Osbourne was then obstructing a selection of Prince Warung's stories. "You see," she continued, "after the advisory board sits, its findings have always to run the gauntlet of the political committee – Curtin, Scullin, Menzies – and Osbourne's veto (of Prince Warung) seems to have caught their ear. It's a good thing he hadn't read Lesbia in advance, or he'd have passed on his horror to them."

Well might Nettie Palmer have worried about Menzies, for he and Lesbia Harford read law together at Melbourne University during the turbulent years leading up to the first conscription debate. Lesbia had been publicly involved in the Victorian Socialist Party, the anti-conscription campaigns and, after 1916, in the IWW. But the poems slipped through, and just as well, or they might

have met the same fate as her novel. She could not get it published in the early twenties. In 1939, after her death, it was shown again to a publisher. Her mother championed it; but nobody else seemed interested. It was considered "too unsympathetic", and has now disappeared.

Intrigued by this glimpse of Lesbia Harford and at a dead-end with my casual enquiries, I asked Marjorie Pizer what she knew of her. I knew Marjorie would know something. She is a poet herself, a one-time member of the Communist Party who, with her husband Muir Holburn, had edited *Freedom on the Wallaby*, that excellent anthology of Australian poetry. To my surprise she told me that she had the original manuscript books from which Nettie Palmer had made her selection. In the three thick exercise books there were hundreds of poems.

In 1964 Marjorie Pizer sent a new selection of poems to Angus and Robertson but it was rejected: "Of course there's no doubt about the quality of the best of them," Douglas Stewart wrote to her, "but others would be ahead of her on the list for the Australian Poets series, and we don't feel the time is ripe for a general 'rediscovery' edition." Marjorie was discouraged and the project lapsed. As she pointed out, writing about her was not as easy as it sounded: there was very little relevant cultural and political history written in the mid sixties. Ian Turner's study of the IWW, *Sydney's Burning*, was published in 1967, but David Walker's *Dream and Disillusion*, which sets the context of left-liberalism in Melbourne during, and after, the First World War, was not published until 1976. Most of Lesbia's papers had vanished.

What I have made of the available materials is, of course, my own responsibility. It should be said however that few traces remain of the life and even the work of this remarkable woman. My attempt to reconstruct something of her experience is very hesitant. My research has been dogged by silences and dead ends. Yet despite the necessarily unfinished nature of this task, these poems will I hope speak to contemporary interests and contribute to a socialist and feminist re-reading of Australian cultural history.

UNTITLED

He had served eighty masters. They'd have said
He "worked for these employers" to earn bread.

And they, if they had heard him, would have sneered
To brand him inefficient whom they feared.

For to know eighty masters is to know
What sort of thing men who are masters grow.

(1917)

WORK-GIRL'S HOLIDAY

A lady has a thousand ways
Of doing nothing all her days,
And so she thinks that they're well spent,
She can be idle and content,
But when I have a holiday
I have forgotten how to play.

I could rest idly under trees
When there's some sun or little breeze
Of if the wind should prove too strong
Could lie in bed the whole day long.
But any leisured girl would say
That that was waste of holiday.

Perhaps if I had weeks to spend
In doing nothing without end,
I might learn better how to shirk
And never want to go to work.

(1916-17)

LESBIA HARFORD

DAY'S END

Little girls,
You are gay,
Little factory girls,
At the end of your day.

There you stand,
Huddled close,
On the back of a tram,
Having taken your dose.

And you go
Through the gray
And the gold of the streets
At the close of the day,

Blind as moles.
You are crude,
You are sweet, little girls,
And amazingly rude,

But so fine
To be gay.
Gentle people are dull
At the end of the day.

(1915)

FATHERLESS

I've had no man
To guard and shelter me,
Guide and instruct me
From mine infancy.

No lord of earth
To show me day by day
What things a girl should do
And what she should say.

I have gone free
Of manly excellence
And hold their wisdom
More than half pretence.

For since no male
Has ruled me or has fed,
I think my own thoughts
In my woman's head.

(1916-17)

UNTITLED

Into old rhyme
The new words come but shyly.
Here's a brave man
Who sings of commerce dryly.

Swift-gliding cars
Through town and country winging,
Like cigarettes,
Are deemed unfit for singing.

Into old rhyme
New words come tripping slowly.
Hail to the time
When they possess it wholly.

(1917)

UNTITLED

I was sad
Having signed up in a rebel band,
Having signed up to rid the land
Of a plague it had.

For I knew
That I would suffer, I would be lost,
Be bitter and foolish and tempest tost
And a failure too.

I was sad;
Though far in the future our light would shine
For the present the dark was ours, was mine,
I couldn't be glad.

(1917)

PERIODICITY

My friend declares
Being woman and virgin she
Takes small account of periodicity.

And she is right.
Her days are calmly spent
For her sex-function is irrelevant.

But I whose life
Is monthly broke in twain
Must seek some sort of meaning in my pain.

Women, I say,
Are beautiful in change
Remote, immortal, like the moon they range.

Or call my pain
A skirmish in the whole
Tremendous conflict between body and soul.

Meaning must lie,
Some beauty surely dwell
In the fierce depths and uttermost pits of hell.

Yet still I seek,
Month after month in vain,
Meaning and beauty in recurrent pain.

(1917)

VICTOR YE

Letter From China

Overland has made arrangements with Victor Ye, a Chinese teacher recently in Australia, to send us occasional letters on his observations of daily life in China today. This is his first such contribution, though Overland readers will remember his fine story, "The Test", in Overland 94/95. We believe this to be the first arrangement of its nature made by any Australian publication.

The weather didn't help us when we finally embarked on the long-delayed journey. We had three days – the National Day holiday. Our destination was only thirty miles away – a small town called Da-qiao. However, this meant a half-day trip, as it is opposite us across the Yangtze – the number one river in China. With my wife and son, I had to get up at 5am in order not to miss the only ferry for the day.

We have a special sort of relationship with Da-qiao, where my wife once worked for many years. Her friends had invited us to go back to have a look.

Crowds of passengers rushed aboard, like torrents down the mountain slopes. I had to take care of my wife, who was still on sick-leave, and my ten year-old son, conscious that we might be knocked off the gang-plank. The steamer, said to be able to carry five hundred passengers, must have been overloaded: passage-ways and companion-ways were packed. We had no choice but to descend to the lower cabin: stuffy air heavily charged with smoke, and a woman yelling about a broken window and splashes from outside. Everyone was interested, and as a result of the uproar – or maybe because of the climate of reform – a sailor came downstairs to fix the glass.

Most of my companions looked sunburnt and healthy, wearing new clothing. They were mostly country people whose life has greatly improved in the past few years. They lived in the area surrounding Da-qiao. I had boarded the ship and shared the cabin with them countless times. Their clothing, their parcels and luggage, their accent and dialect, their likes and dislikes, everything they talked about and spoke of was familiar. It had been a poverty-stricken area, hired labor and odd jobs. Now the tone seemed different, happier, more hopeful: public-owned land leased to the peasants, income increased, side-occupations like pig-raising and horticulture.

No one protested when the ship arrived at its destination two hours late. We were used to it.

The bicycle-cart bumped us along the uneven, muddy road from the port to the town. There were fewer of these cabs than before; there was now a bus. We had to pay ten times the normal fare on account of the delay, yet it was pleasant to observe the landscape from our seats, and to admire the skill of the riders who zigzagged along with little effort, carrying one or two adults in addition to some luggage. It was harvest-time: peasants cutting paddy-rice in the fields or husking on the threshing-grounds. My rider, a tough and robust guy, told me he could easily make ten or twenty yuan (one yuan is about fifty cents Australian) a day, which means his monthly pay would be five or six times as much as ours. He outpaced most of the riders on the road within a few minutes. Because of the harvest, he told us, he could not devote more time to this cab business.

"Well, you might turn into a millionaire in a few years," I joked.

"I'm not a millionaire. Millionaires are there." I turned in the direction of his finger. It was to the north-west.

"Why?"

"Those tree and flower growers. They earn thousands of yuan a year."

Later on we called on a friend of my wife's, a midwife. She confirmed what the rider had told me: there were some newly-rich peasants who could easily make more than ten thousand yuan a year. Her own story was interesting.

She had to bring up her son on her own from the time she was widowed, twenty years ago. She used to live in a straw-thatched hut, having to support her son, still at school. I remembered the previous visit to the hut about

five years ago, how she lived in a tall, red-brick building, hidden in a verdant bamboo thicket.

The ten-course dinner she served us could compare with any in an urban family, with the vinegar-ginger crab, the first course, wonderfully delicious. Country folk are well-known for their hospitality.

The son, now a teacher at a local school fresh from a teachers' college, wore spectacles and sat opposite us in a decent suit, no different at all from city-bred youngsters. Together with two old people, one her mother and another her uncle, the family appeared prosperous, with their income several times as big as some years ago. Her monthly pay had doubled, and was added to by her son's salary, which was usually given to her. Moreover, she could make extra income by letting her land, now distributed to each family. I had to confess our circumstances, once higher than theirs, seemed relatively poor in the face of their thriving way of living. Daily necessities amounted to almost nothing, since food like grain and vegetables come from their own land. We city-dwellers couldn't expect to compete.

Her story was one of many: country-dwellers whose fortune came from thrift and good management. Sister Li, another widow who also depended largely on her only son, used to live an even harder life, supporting her son and daughter on her twenty-eight yuan a month, earned by working as a washerwoman. It is almost impossible to live on that sum of money in the city. Now she had a small plot in front of her house, to grow vegetables for her own consumption as well as for sale in the market. We were surprised at her red-brick house, which probably cost five thousand yuan to build. A house is of vital importance to a peasant, symbolizing economic status, and peasants would devote all their savings to building a house, especially where there was a son—a symbol of continuation of hope and support.

"My son has taken a job in the hospital". She happily welcomed us with a cup of sugar water as a token of friendship. "I'm retired and take care of my grand-son." The baby smiled in her arms, as if to say hullo to us.

Many people have smiles nowadays, though I wouldn't say all of them had greatly raised their living standards. Yet life seemed hopeful. Confidence, which had departed long ago, has now returned to those of rank-and-file who are big-hearted, hard working and clever.

We were put up by an old friend of my wife's. She was a saleswoman at the town's printing workshop, which enabled her to travel quite a lot. Her apartment was in Da-qiao Middle School, where her husband worked as a physics teacher. Childless, they were both optimistic and capable, enjoying what life offered. She was a native of Da-qiao, born and bred in a local family of six daughters. It may sound ridiculous to westerners that a son-less family in China, especially in the countryside, used to be looked down upon by relatives and neighbors, but the point was the care of the aged. The fashion changes. It is more common nowadays that the daughters, rather than sons, live with their parents. Our friend Zhou actually became the pillar of her family, since most of her sisters

worked outside the town. She recently helped her widowed mother to rebuild her house, involving purchasing and collecting building materials and the organization of builders. Her ability and efficiency in this won praise in a society usually in favor of the male.

Zhou's husband, however did not seem to be involved so much in her family affairs. He was a nice fellow whose concerns were elsewhere. A good table-tennis player, he was playing a game when we arrived. Big and robust, no one would imagine at first sight that he's from Wuxi, a city close to Shanghai. Having lived and worked for twenty years in the town, he had been assigned as a teacher soon after graduation from a teachers' college in Yangzhou—a small city nearby. Nevertheless, you could hardly detect any of his native accent, except perhaps in his casual talk with his good-looking niece, who was fresh from her vocational school in Wuxi. He is also a good basketballer, and adept at repairing TV sets and cutting clothing. His deftness belied his bulk. Only two years my senior, his teaching experience was disrupted by the Cultural Revolution; for reasons never revealed he was a year in jail, an ordeal he put up with more easily than others, owing to his good health. As one of the most experienced and capable teachers in the school, as well as in the whole county of about a million people, his salary has been raised three times in recent years. In spite of that, his income is still modest in comparison with the enormous growth of wealth of the peasant.

Wu Kung, an old acquaintance of mine, seemed older than when we last met. He was an English teacher at the school, though his major was Russian. A graduate in his early fifties, he had been a lecturer in Russian in Beijing Teachers' University before he was designated as a rightist (one who was opposed to the Communist Party) and dismissed from his post. He spent years working in the library and then came here, to join his wife who was a nurse at the local hospital.

Inquiring about my experience in Australia, he expressed his envy. He had a sort of sadness, despite the comfortable position he held—the top of the payroll in the school, after clearing his name and his pride. His daughter, young and pretty, still lost herself in reading and greeted me shyly. She has no worries about the future. I asked him about his recent work and life, trying to avoid sensitive questions which might have aroused unpleasant memories.

"You'd become a landlord with all this." I pointed to his flat and to the front-yard, which smelt of fragrant potted flowers. With only his mother sharing the flat with them, the housing space was more than we can expect in the city. He responded with a smile, a bleak one perhaps. "Well, I'll enjoy their company."

We called on Dr Zhang, now head of the hospital, whom we had known when my wife was there. At that time he had worked under a Party secretary who, ignorant of everything in the medical service, was quite a tricky fellow who tried to trap Zhang and disgrace him. Fortunately this semi-illiterate was removed from his post when policies changed.

A new outpatient-department building has been built outside the hospital, but a casual glance at the inside of

the walled compound revealed rubbish, wild grass and piles of bricks.

Zhang was watching TV with others when we arrived. Now one of the senior medicos, he is in a good position to bring some vigor and vitality, freshness and originality to the hospital, as many of the reformers were reportedly doing. Yet he wasn't in a good mood. Perhaps some local political trouble? I did not make any further inquiries.

Another Zhang, an obstetrician in the hospital, seemed more cheerful when we talked to her in her small flat. Her husband used to be an electrician, but now has a job as a manager of a village-run business. With her parents-in-law taking care of her children, she came to work in the hospital, leaving her husband to run his business. Separation didn't seem to disturb them a lot; they were quite close and both satisfied with their work. This is a frequent practice.

"Is it a bit dull and lonely?" I asked, noticing her pet son, just brought from her home village to share her flat.

"Well, perhaps a bit. But you can put up with this if you have something to do. I've got a target." She spoke

quite a prosperous town, which you could see by its design and scale. The cobbled streets and door-to-door houses showed evidence of thriving days. Those moveable wooden doors told us there had been shops in clusters. There are now some tall buildings, but most residents still preferred those old places, some two hundred years old. On the way back from the market, we dropped in at one.

The old lady happily showed us into the back of the residence when she and her daughter-in-law recognized us. This was typical of the traditional style of Chinese housing: the first section serving as the reception-room, which led through an open-air rectangular space and a side room to the next section – the main area for living and bedrooms. Four rolls of Chinese classical paintings, hung high above the valuable mahogany chairs, were opposite the potted orchid and goldfish on a stand at the corner. Even the book-case, inlaid with glass and carvings, was somewhat different in pattern from the usual. The house, outwardly unattractive, was furnished in a mixture of modern and old-style which gave the impres-



smugly, as if my wife were still her colleague (they worked together for more than five years).

"What targets?" This time it was my wife's turn.

"We have rebuilt our house. It is now much more comfortable, and larger. You must come some day and have a look. We have not made lots of money, as we have the two children and the old people to support, but some day we'll catch up with those richer ones." She smiled sweetly and self-assuredly. Maybe she was as right as she had been a few years ago when she, a college graduate and a doctor, chose to marry a part-time electrician, neglecting the social conventions, or as when she chose to have one more child – the pet son – at the cost of a fine.

It was still early in the afternoon when we parted. We decided to have a look round the town. Da-qiao had been

sion of comfort and taste.

I was carried away by the old lady's nostalgic reminiscences of the house and town. She was over seventy, living through three dynasties, still quite healthy; indeed she looked much younger than working-class women would, and she was also more talkative, perhaps because of her education as well as her excellent memory. Homes like hers, she told us, were spread over the town. They once contained some quite rich people: merchants, landlords, influential officials. Some old houses, once confiscated as the estate of the enemy during the Cultural Revolution, had now been returned to the owner or family. The bitter class struggle which swept every corner of the land is seemingly over. Reputations may now be rehabilitated, a new atmosphere of stability and reconciliation opening up the prospect of a national unity, anticipated for several

decades past, but not realized. Before I was conscious of it, I thought of Hong Kong and even of Taiwan . . .

The bustling and packed scene was appealing: in the market a variety of food-grain, vegetables, fruits, fodder, fish and meat on display. Bidding and bargaining, whispers and uproars, greetings and good-byes caught our ears. You were free to choose. The day of long queues is gone.

A businessman joined us, the manager of the country's foreign trade company. Manager Wang was a close friend of our friend Zhou and, because of their friendship, we knew him very well. The moment he learned of our arrival, he invited us to join him on a tour to Yangzhou—a city famous for its ancient culture.

The blue Toyota, glimmering in the sun, assumed an air of importance with its repeated honking in the midst of crowds of passers-by, who cast envious glances. Wang is an energetic and capable fellow, recently promoted. He told us of his booming business, and of a trip to Canton to make more contracts with the outside world. More

Japanese cars would join his transport-team and more foreign businessmen would call on him—perhaps he needed to set up a special hotel for accommodation.

Unfortunately it became overcast, but we pressed on. We enjoyed Lake Shuoxi, with its man-made rocky hills, elegant bridges and old-style pavilions. A festive air was created by many youngsters, who wore suits and carried cameras in a leisurely way. Pingshantang appeared quieter; we found ourselves in front of the Grand Palace, where the pious were paying tribute to gold-skinned Buddhas: now quite a common sight since religion is no longer a forbidden area. The monastery, just next to the lake, is associated with a Buddhist monk called Jianzhen—envoy to Japan a thousand years ago.

We waited only a few minutes for our delicious vegetarian food in the monastery restaurant (service would have taken two or three hours a few years ago). I kept thinking of the dragon I had seen outside the Grand Palace. Newly painted, it seemed about to take off from the roof-ridge where it crouched, full of vigor and vitality.

And in Walked Who?

Report on the Overland obituary competition

After the outstanding success of our "Whatever happened Rosie?" competition of some issues back, we were slightly disappointed at the field entered for our obituary competition. However we had no hesitation in awarding the prize to Stephen James, of Leura, New South Wales, for the following:

The Rev. Fred Nile
Passed over in great style.
He received the nod
From God.

This entry combines the wit and succinctness we were looking for in entries.

Other entries that appealed to us were:

The Wages of Sin is Death,
Sayeth the Lord.

Rejoice: Bob Hawke hath earned
His Great Reward.

JOHN CROYSTON

BARRY JONES
He has drained the Fount of Wisdom,
He has knowledge rare and odd,
But they banned him from Celestial Halls
For knowing more than God.

JOHN GRIFFIN

Frank Costigan has now departed
To check out corruption in Heaven.
"And Jesus Wept!" Exclusive—
Full story next week—
National Times—pages one to seven.

STEPHEN JAMES



JAN SENBERGS

RICK AMOR '84

He was born beyond Riga on St Michael's Day in the year of war which saw Stalin steal his country. Knowing the tiger's expression his family crossed Europe diagonally until in Italy there were no more frontiers. So they went from port to port to a country which wanted them but did not welcome and home was a grey place with a black name. Then, with relief, it became Richmond and life was football, fights and foreign speech. There, until it was time to earn, he learned the two languages of street and school. On the edge of Australia he was on the verge of adolescence.

Nobody knows, not even he, what images he brought from the Baltic, but those the Tech taught him to print were cold and hard and carried their own frost. Although they have been warmed by the sun of acceptance they have not thawed and he would be on strange ground if they did. The narrow change from print to paint might have been delayed and different if the trainee teacher who was already an artist had not relished this tough and gritty talent. With Leonard French these were the days of hardboard and enamel let down with beer and talk which stretched evenly between the passion of Maritain and the third at Flemington. While French glued and gilded and launched an Argosy on a sea of glazes the student took steps to move into a space where the air, if motionless, was breathable. Moving around he nodded to the men from Brussels in their business suits and bowler hats, the brides and bachelors and others of that alliterative company who, like Brack, walked around avoiding the unquiethive of fashion. His landscape of anxiety was without linear perspective to lead anywhere or aerial perspective to soften and console.

When the works went on exhibition he, like every young artist of quality, was put on exhibition himself and began to share their anxiety. To exhibit meant to earn, but he also had to earn to exhibit, so he turned his strength to trucks and the lifting and carrying which bought frames and food and time to think painting. These

concerns were printed on the works but also on his face where they still sit around the eyes which compete too successfully for comfort with the last larrikin grin on the mouth. But the big body is confident and, while never less than intelligent, his painted forms sometimes seem carried through by physical energy which makes it odd that, beyond doors in aluminium and Canberra, he has not projected them (at least in public) into sculpture.

This move into metal, although still unique, linked him with, and was perhaps inherited from, Baldessin, whose short career had long-term effects. Having now gone public he needed to go abroad and the chance came when a queen of cosmetics, inspired by gratitude and publicity, provided him with enough money to take him to Europe but almost stranded him there. This return journey helped to mark out his territory in Australia which gave him more confidence to handle forms and formality. From then on he and his work could go to places as exotic as Sao Paulo and Canberra.

The invented structures which seemed as though they must exist in those fringes of cities and islands which the comfortable prefer not to know unless they are framed, he now found outside the studio door. To his good friends among living artists he added a dead one and explored the port which he had first painted with Wilbraham Frederick Liardet who, coming the other way, had first invented his port and then painted it. Sailing from there he spent days and nights on the bare mountains of Tasmania and returned to tell the tale and illustrate it, and it was there that he came close to providing a cast for a stage upon which he had constructed the decor. These actors may still make their entries if only to provide him and us with a little body heat, and by now he has invented a subtle language which they should be able to speak after a little rehearsal.

Eric Westbrook was Director of the National Gallery of Victoria.

THE TEMPLE, SOMNAPURA

*Choose for your Stone him through whom
kings are honoured in their crowns,
and through whom physicians heal their
sick, for he is near the fire.*

Rosarium philosophorum (1550)

I

Ganesh

Footfall
smooth cool
soothing the sole
arched and released
soundless in
underworld spaces

tread inward
down and
down slow
slow
lightening the arch
press swaying on
smoothness on
oiled pilgrimed
soles softened
to yearning
stone
down

Footfall
released arch
loosed to the
edge
the edge

and down
inward
inward –

Faith is the sound
of a man breathing
alone in darkness
emptied

Faith is his patience
tenure on foot-fastened
stone
prayer to an
absence

*“To learn the Emptiness of the bare mind
Without knowledge and the frost
of knowledge where there is no love.”*

Is truth so smooth so bald
so stark so dumb as temple stone
beneath a foot?

Quick sudden shaft of light
strikes stone, mints
spry slumped corpulent
Ganesh, elephant-crowned
runt of jealous Siva,
the enormous
first parent –

Grant, O Lord, we beseech Thee
won't do here –

Affliction fathers gods and men,
our first shame equal.

Ganesh leans his ponderous bulk
upon the open world, his trunk
ripples with laughter.

Pad slow slow
moulding the foot
to the swell and the fall
of cool stone
breathing –

The ancient ceiling echoes
voices voices
cries and little flames
sacred texts in smoke
half-caught forms
bells incense
dung

Light the tall bronze lamps.
Feed them oil.
Twist the wicks to flicker
on the blue-black hair –

Parvati stationed Ganesh at her
bedroom door, repulsing father's swift
adulterous tread. Even gods uncertain
hate their wives
their children.

Siva's eye beheads his son,
adds Airavata's heavy flesh
and there he sits, docked,
hands folded slyly in prayer,
lips parted like shells
to whispering waves
of stone –

Women kneel in shadow
tracing sinuous whorls
in colored flour,
wisped by incense,
blue-black oiled hair
blackness of skin
and shining white
clusters upon clusters

climbing
festoons of jasmine
white nightshade marigolds
garlands garlands
orange green gold –

Astride a bandicoot
lord Ganesh laughs.
A short fat marvellous child,
bulbous bright, four arms
blistered with bees
three eyes –

Slumbering in stone
he leans upon the whispers
of the dark, night's nursery.
His fine molested grace
remembers Brahma's nickname*,
promises of love towards
his difference:

Indra's goad
Padmavati's lotus
colored inks from Sarasvati
a tiger skin from father Siva
a thread for sacrifice from
roaring Brihaspati. And from
goddess Earth, a rat to draw
his stunting chariot.

Becalmed in stone
his lotus face smiles down
amused and absent –

Retreating from the light
of his now-fathering force,
our human shadows print us small
like crippled children . . .

II

Vishnu

No precepts here
but slow unravellings –

Vish
nu
Kri
shn
avish
nu
krish
na
a a a

pitched against the One and
One forever changeless God
forever swaddling mutinous
childrens' hands –

*"The body and the soul know how to play
In that dark world where gods have lost their way."*

Light air and silence
kiss the lazy lotus lip.
Vishnu, rapt in fleshless
sleep under his curly crown,
once tumultuous –

Sun, a scorching plum in mist,
rolls aside the silvered scarves
wreathing a violet blur,
the distant hills.

Come, lord Krishna!

Green hosts of parakeets
all shriek and blaze and dazzle,
tilting crows cut ever-widening circles,
creaking sway of carts, a steady
bullock chomp of straw.
Well-wheels grinding grinding.
Tiny match-stick forms dot
hazy wakening fields.
The long slow hum of breathless morning.

Pensive wives of cow-herds stir.
Come, lord Krishna!

Listen

"My pillow won't tell me
Where he has gone,
The soft-footed one
Who passed by, alone.

Who took my heart, whole,
With a tilt of his eye,
And with it, my soul,
And it like to die."

All nature pines for him.
Our lord with lotus eyes has
raised a mountain. His body,
dark as storm, makes love to
milkmaid, cowherd, daughter,
goddess, flowergirl all as one.
As one to whore, to wife, to barber's
girl, to delicate lute-player –
his blue-black wing lifts
all of us dark stragglers
to glory. Spending his force
against soft-bellied rush of musk,
dark turns fair
rain turns fire
forms turn to music.
Balm to fissured earth, to
taste and suck and sip, he
shimmers to his flute, filling
fervid lips and thighs that spin

like bowls upon a potter's wheel.
Such tricks! the shattered bracelets,
loosened hair, the scratching rings,
the biting bangles, calms, tempests,
heaven and hail his means.

Honey milk sugarcane
ambrosia aloes saffron
sandal musk –
O lord of gardens, come!

My pleasure lakes are white with lilies
mangoes, plantains, waterfowl,
ganders, ducks, swans and tender-
stepping herons sit and strut and
rock the limpid waters, moon-drenched
waves of music.
Shapes become shapeless
fire takes root and Krishna sleek
as an otter teases his way.
Filling, becoming, consuming
all, the lord of gardens comes!

Honey milk sugarcane
ambrosia aloes fill the
cunning groves of Vrindavan.

Lord Krishna's love drives
headlong like a nail through
a green tree, his eye a forest rage.
The pliant women swell and fret and
foam like indolent water weeds on
stormy seas. "Tell us your name,"
they cry, trying to recall
his face –

Vishnu naps and multiplies.
He has a million million years to go.

Lord of the wheel has shattered shame
in myriad shapes. He smiles knowing
how once a slippery blue-black
boy leaped unswaddled in sunlight,
became fish, wild boar
became a million million . . .
Silence flowers on his lips.
The temple garlands wink in
candlelight on stone, their musky
clusters soaring to a solitary
half-heard flute . . .

FAY ZWICKY

*"Pot-belly."

brief estimate from Clement Semmler's book *Douglas Stewart*:

As a poet Stewart has been more consistently prolific and wide-ranging in subject and theme than any of his contemporaries. His has been poetry of story, description and converse, unaffected by trends and fads and yet conveying every quality of singable and memorable verse-flexibility, a delight in phrasing, a range of tone and feeling . . . Notwithstanding the diversity of his poetic subjects he remains pre-eminent and unchallenged in his country, perhaps during this century, as a nature poet.

The poem "The Cricket" exemplifies this:

I can't get over it,
I pipe and I trill, said the cricket;
And if you should ask me why
A full-grown insect should sit
In a tiny tunnel in the ground
And make a piping sound,
I really have no reply;
I can't get over it.

What is my song about?
I leave it to you, said the cricket.
I know the elders will die

But most of the eggs hatch out;
I know the roots of the grass
And perils that thump as they pass;
I like to announce I am I,
And that's what my song's about.

...

I'd sooner never be heard
On the whole, I think, said the cricket.
My love who has faultless taste
Opines I can pipe like a bird;
And, dank and thorny and brown,
I trill when the sun goes down
And none of it goes to waste
As long as my love has heard.

...

Certainly Stewart's poems of nature range right through Australia and New Zealand and the country of his mind. They comprise, like "The Cricket", small touching lyrics or lyrical descriptions of birds or worms or orchids and, reaching out to wide areas of countryside, carry us with him in their color, variety, fantasy and reality well beyond the slopes of his Mt Egmont.

MARIA LEWITT

Looking After Myself

An extract from the forthcoming novel Australia – There it Shall Be.

I was determined to look after myself. A run-down mother isn't of much use. I was wishing I knew how to relax. Julian mentioned Yoga. And then I thought of Joyce.

Joyce lived near us. On the day we'd moved into our house, she had arrived at the door with a broad smile and a bunch of flowers.

"Hi!" she had said. "Welcome to the district. My name's Joyce." She was tall, big and very well proportioned.

"Hi!" I had responded, though the expression wasn't really me.

From that day on we saw each other constantly. Joyce was full of life and energy. We were the same age. Joyce was wanted, Joyce was needed, Joyce was ready to give and help. She was involved in a thousand activities, ran her home efficiently, looked after her four children and helped her husband in the family business. She had a stop-watch when a stop-watch was required, and a lot of understanding and patience when necessary. She supervised Michael together with her own children in swimming and athletics, and was happy to spend the whole night sewing minute doll's clothes as a part of Christmas preparations.

It was a peculiar friendship. Joyce's background was as remote from mine as Australia was from Poland. A strict Anglican upbringing, a middle-class home, sports galore. She had heard of the Second World War and how dreadful it was. She had been a growing girl then and remembered how difficult it had been to keep clothing her developing body on the ration coupons. She had finished Domestic Science with flying colors. Her husband had been taken prisoner during the Japanese offensive. "He never talks of the war; must've had an awful time. I was told he weighed only eight stone when the war ended. I met him later, at the yacht club."

That was Joyce, easy to relate to, bubbling over with vitality, always-on-the-go Joyce.

"So, what about Yoga, Joyce? We should do it, both of us. Relaxation is very much in demand. It would be good to know how to do it, don't you think?"

"Why not? It's fine with me. Have you heard of any classes?"

"Someone told me that Eemka classes are good. Would you enquire, please!"

"Why don't you?" Joyce smiled because she knew the reason but wanted me to spell it out once again.

"Joyce. My pronunciation, you know."

"Phooey," she said with passion. "Nothing wrong with your pronunciation. I can understand you. You have to start talking to people. No one's going to snap at you."

"Joyce, please. This one more time and no more."

"That's what you always say. I'm too soft with you."

"Don't you want me to learn how to relax?"

"You're impossible. I'm wasting my breath on you . . . Oh, all right. What's the name again?"

"Eemka."

Joyce arrived the following day and told me that she couldn't find any Eemka in the whole telephone book, had never heard of the institution, and wondered whether I would be so obliging as to spell it for her.

"Sure," I said, puzzled. As far as I knew, Eemka was a worldwide organization. "I'd better write it down for you, it's easier for me than to spell the Australian way."

I wrote the name down and handed it to Joyce.

"Good God," she exclaimed. "It's the YMCA! Why didn't you say so in the first place? 'Eemka', indeed!"

"I'm sorry, Joyce, but in Polish YMCA, you pronounce 'eemka'. It's quite simple."

"Perhaps for you, not for me. Why won't you give them a call, then? I'm running late. Have to feed the horse."

"Joyce, it takes only a moment for you. I would really rather you did it."

"You're stubborn, aren't you?"

"What can I do with you," she said. "See you after I've fed the horse. In half an hour. Keep the kettle boiling."

I waited for her and wondered how one could explain to an Australian woman that the Polish branch of the Young Men's Christian Association had been an anti-semitic organization. When the YMCA had been established in Lodz, the people were happy that, at long last, the town was to have a swimming pool in the heart of the city. The good citizens of Lodz had responded to the building appeal, regardless of whether they were Poles, Jews, or Germans. My father had given a donation. Money had

been collected at my school. But, when the complex was finished, it was made clear that Jews wouldn't be admitted. The Jews had accepted their exclusion in the same stoic way they had accepted so many previous discriminatory moves: with passive pain. We tried to persuade ourselves that, after all, it was a Christian organization, and therefore it was only proper that there was no room for Jews in it. What was incredible in retrospect was that the whole event had taken place in 1937, when the world should have been aware of what was going on in Hitler's Third Reich. In two more years the Poles would also be barred from the YMCA in Lodz, a fact they didn't foresee in 1937.

I had been deeply hurt. I cared for Poland. There was no other music, no other poetry, there were no other people, no other national heroes. My language, my landscape. No other forests, no other bread, no other flowers, no other mountains.

A Pole because I was born in Poland and because my mother told me that I was. A Pole because I love Chopin better than any other composer, for the reason I can neither justify nor explain. A Pole because the poetical creativity, which proved to be the pinnacle of my life, could express itself only in the language of my forefathers and proved impossible in any other, no matter how well I knew it. A Pole, because a pine is dearer to me than a cypress, for reasons I can't even explain. A Pole, because my aversion to the Polish fascists is greater than to those of all other nations and I consider this as the best proof that I am a Pole.

A Pole, because, when the time comes, I want to be buried in Poland, so that my bones will nourish the soil.

A Pole, because I feel that I am one.

This is how Julian Tuwim, the Polish poet, felt about Poland. Some Poles called him "a Jew writing in Polish".

As a child, watching a military parade, I had heard shouts of "down with the Jews". My father had said "Never mind" and had smiled sadly. My father, who had fought for the independence of Poland. It had been easy to take my father's advice, because I desperately wanted to believe it was true. Only when the isolated voices gained in frequency and volume, only then did my attitude towards the people change. The trust was gone.

I wondered if Joyce would understand what it had all meant to me. Perhaps the Yoga classes were an excuse to find out for myself whether Australia, too, was going to push me away. I was trying Australia out, not so much for myself, but rather for Joe and Michael.

I told Joyce about Poland and the YMCA as soon as she arrived, even before I poured our coffee. She was astonished. "If it wasn't you who told me, I wouldn't believe it," she said. "One thing is certain, it couldn't happen in Australia. I'm sure."

"I wish I was as sure as you are."

"And so you should be."

"It's not easy. With time you lose trust."

Joyce placed a cup of coffee in front of me. She wanted to say something, she looked at me, once, and then again. In the end, she sat down and said: "What d'you want me to do?"

"Just ring the YMCA, ask them about the Yoga classes and make sure they accept Jews."

"It's not the easiest thing to do on the phone, is it? I have a better scheme. Why don't we both go there together to enrol? And if they object to you, I'll make the biggest fuss in the history of the Southern Hemisphere. And, naturally, I would resign. You know that I'm a member, don't you?"

"I didn't know."

I wasn't absolutely sure how Joyce really felt. She was obviously stirred, though I wasn't certain whether it was because of me, or because the horse hadn't fed well.

We went to the sub-branch of the YMCA after tea. Joyce greeted a few people; I was given a form. Name, Christian Name, Address, Age, Religion. "See?" I whispered to Joyce. I filled the form out and handed it to the receptionist. She looked through it. "That will be three pounds," she said. I wondered whether she had noticed and, if not, whether the blow up was going to follow.

"My friend," said Joyce, "is worried that you won't accept her because she's Jewish."

"On the contrary," said the women. "We're glad to have people with different backgrounds."

And that was that. On the way home, Joyce told me about the horse and that perhaps one day I should come to have a look at him. I said "perhaps", and was grateful to Joyce for keeping the chatty conversation going, without referring to what happened. It was difficult to say, but I was almost sure she did it on purpose.

In the end, she said, "One day, you'll have to tell me more about yourself and Poland. I hardly know of the war and how you survived."

"One day, perhaps. I'm washed out tonight. Tonight was the moment of truth. My greatest Australian discovery. Our children's lives will be less complicated. Thank you, Joyce."

"What for? You're a funny duffer, aren't you?"

Joyce was absent for nearly a week. I was convinced she had decided to end our association. One moment I wanted to go to her and apologise; the next, I decided not to run after anyone. But I spent days re-examining what I had said to Joyce.

When she came to pick me up for the Yoga classes, I greeted her in a typically Polish-Jewish way – I hugged her.

"I thought you were cross with me. The whole week! You never came."

"I had to help my father, it never occurred to you? The simple reason! You're a duffer if ever I knew one. Cross with you, whatever for?"

Joyce told me how strict her parents were and that she hadn't been allowed to go out with a boy till she was seventeen. And I told her that during the war that hadn't been the main problem. When the Jews had known they

were condemned, some had wanted to save their lives, and desperately tried to secure Polish identity papers. There had been a black market for Polish birth certificates and the prices had been exorbitant, so mainly people of means had been able to afford to buy them. It had all been very difficult. One needed to look like a Pole. Black eyes, dark hair, and long noses had been out, while blond hair, blue eyes and upturned noses had been in demand. The main difficulty had been to find a place to live. The German law hadn't helped either. To help a Jew, to offer him shelter, had been punishable by death. Some people had been ready to risk their necks for the sake of money, some simply because they had been appalled by the total destruction of a nation, but those had been but few. Not that I blamed them. Inexcusable were the professional Jew-spotters, who had always been eager and ready to denounce their quarry to the Germans. For their trouble, the professionals were paid handsomely, in money or vodka.

"I didn't have a clue how it was," said Joyce. "I'm sorry. It must have been terrible to talk about it."

"Talk is only talk."

"A thing like that could never happen in Aussieland."

"I wish I could share your confidence; we never believed that it could happen in twentieth-century Europe."

"I see your point . . . What can I say? Listen, if a calamity . . . If a calamity like that would ever happen here . . . Not that I believe it ever could . . . You must know that you and your family would be safe; I'd hide you and save you."

"You don't know what you're talking about. Just think about it. You wouldn't only be going against general opinion, but also against the law. Remember, to help a Jew was a capital crime. A person who was willing to do it, for whatever reasons, was executed together with her Jew. Not only the person, but all who lived in the same house, including children. Did I mention the neighbors? I don't think I did. The neighbors were to die too. A good deterrent, don't you think?"

"I . . . I don't know what to think."

I realised I had hurt Joyce.

"Would you be willing to help us and not only risk your own life, but also the lives of your family and neighbors?"

Joyce was silent; she had tears in her eyes. I knew I wasn't being fair. I was bringing tumult into her uncomplicated, Australian existence.

"How could you," said Joyce. "What you said . . . Just now . . . It's . . . It's almost insulting!"

"Perhaps Australia has loosened my tongue. You have to know how I feel."

"Don't think about it any more," said Joyce. "Perhaps it wouldn't be a bad idea if you started doing something apart from living in the past."

Joyce and I. Southern Hemisphere and Northern Hemisphere.

"John XXIII, I think, was the first pope in the history of the Catholic Church who thought it proper to deny that the Jewish people bore a common responsibility for killing Jesus."

"It doesn't make much sense, does it? Jesus was born a Jew."

"You know it and I know it, but if you'd go to Poland even now and repeat what you just said, you'd be stoned."

Joyce got up. "It's interesting," she said. "Heavy stuff, though. I'd better be going. The horse has to be fed. Steven and his swimming practice, you know."

"Yes, I know."

Joyce left, looking puzzled. Not for long. A vigorous swim might help her, or a ride on her horse.

I wasn't very proud of myself. But I had to do it, and it had to be done.

Maria Lewitt's first novel, Come Spring, was praised by Tom Shapcott for its "wit, irony, style and power." The author lives in Melbourne.

HOSTLINESS

For the Priestleys

It's not, I think, just the vegetable growth
(comely though all that is, and so enticing),
nor yet the music, though one is never loth
to enter where all harmonies invite one:

it is, I think, the perfect courtesy
where any idiosyncrasy of manner
is treated as a thing that ought to be
at home in your grand house that knows no grandeur.

Robert and Marjorie, how shall I ever say
how much I love you, how much you are a model
for what I would like to become in my own way:
benign but not witless, ageing but never addled?

EVAN JONES

JAMES McQUEEN

Hook's Country

We shall be asking a number of Australian writers to tell us something of their attitudes to Place. James McQueen is the first.

Nabowla, with its tiny cluster of houses, its wide flat valley between ranges of wooded hills, is the "Myola" of my novel *Hook's Mountain*; I discovered its landscape, explored it, in company with Lachlan Hook and Arthur Blackberry. For that reason, if for no other, it will remain always a special place for me.

Yet I came to it quite by chance. I can no longer remember clearly the precise reasons, but in 1978 we decided – Barbara and I – that we needed to leave Launceston, that most constipated of provincial cities, and move to the country. In part it was a reaction to a painful divorce; in part a need to find a more solid and natural basis for our lives than we had had in the city.

At the time I was tutoring an Adult Education class – that most scarifying of activities for the indigent writer that transforms him into a kind of lowly-paid one-man floor show. One of the ladies in the class came from a place called Golconda. (I looked, but it wasn't on the map.) I talked to her about the prospects of moving to the country, and within a couple of weeks she told me that she had found an old empty cottage at Nabowla. *Nabowla . . . ?*

We drove out the fifty or so kilometres from Launceston and looked at the cottage. It was tiny, ancient, ramshackle. But it did have a curious broken-down charm, the kind you might find in a slightly tottery, tipsy great-aunt. The couple who owned it – alternative life-stylers – met us there, and we dickered about the rent. In the end we beat them up to ten dollars a week, with the proviso that if we were ever broke then we needn't pay.

We moved in just before Christmas, and a month later Barbara left for six weeks in Europe. So I was left alone in that new landscape through the long dry days of midsummer. I potted about, cutting wood for the winter, slashing blackberries (both jobs that still go on year after year, as much a part of life here as breathing), carting the last of our belongings from the city in a borrowed utility.

During those long summer days alone, during the slow trips between Launceston and Nabowla, I was doing a certain amount of writing in my head. The character of

Lachlan Hook was coming to slow parturition in the painful recollections of a close friend who spent a short but excessively unpleasant war in New Guinea. He and I had been close for years, but only now had he begun to talk about those times.

The character of Arthur grew – sprang almost fully developed, in fact – from random sightings of a tiny creased doggy man who used to frequent the roads of the district. He wandered the roads, never hitch-hiking, never in a hurry, seemed hardly to have any real destination. He was always miles from anywhere. It was impossible to see him without wondering just what kind of solitary life he led among the secret thickets and winding backroads. Someone told me that they had seen him wheeling a television set on a barrow down a track into the scrub. Later I found out his name – which I promptly forgot – only to avoid using it in my book.

Because by this time there was a book. I was almost certain of it. The characters were there, and the landscape in which they would function.

New landscapes, even the dullest, always have some impact. Our Nabowla landscape is far from dull, and now I found that I was seeing it not through my own eyes, but through the eyes of my characters. It seemed natural enough that our old cottage should become Arthur's home; that the land across the valley which we eventually bought should become Hook's land; that my pre-occupation with the rape of the local forests should become theirs.

It was nearly two years before I actually got down to put the book on paper, though. There were all sorts of technical problems to solve before I could begin – problems of structure, voice, shape, tone. When I finally did begin I still knew nothing of what was to come; only that the land would never be quite the same again.

And of course it is not; for me Hook and Arthur still haunt the hill and the gullies, the deep ferny creekbeds and the scarred slopes.

By the time our second summer in Nabowla came round, we had bought our little bit of land, ten acres on

the south side of a hill. The old cottage is halfway between our hill and Blue Hill – Hook’s Mountain – which looms high above the hamlet to the south. It is visible for thirty miles, a kind of blunt bluff at the north end of the Sidling Range, its steep north face, split by narrow creek beds, not a mile from the main road. When we arrived in Nabowla, the gangs of the Forestry Commission were clear-felling the hill slopes, moving like a slow razor, left to right, east to west. The process was routine – clear-fell the native timber (mostly good stringybark and black peppermint), cart off the best for chipping, doze what was left, windrow, burn, poison, plant seedlings of *pinus radiata*. Beyond Blue Hill, to the west of the Sidling Range, the land is already covered with pine plantations, a dull deep green carpet laced with the thread of narrow forestry roads.



It seemed incomprehensible to me then – as it still does – that they should be stupid enough to strip this beautiful hill, particularly when it is so *visible*, such a dominant feature of the land. The act seems almost a salting of malice on the rest of the wounds they have left behind. But their stupidity seems always to have that vicious selfish quality. In quite practical terms, it seems unbelievable that otherwise reasonably rational men should tear out thousands, millions of acres of prime valuable hardwood to plant an exotic weed that produces what must be one of the *worst* timbers in the world; a timber that is weak, soft, difficult to work, and that rots in months if exposed to the weather without poisonous and unsightly preservatives. Their answer? Our neighbor gave it for them. He is a postal inspector who bought a few acres to

park his caravan on, and planted pines. “A crop in my lifetime”, he says. We have an acre of the bloody things, twenty years old, planted by the previous owner, and we can’t *give* them away. There seems to be a glut. Yet they go on clear-felling and planting . . .

But the clear-felling on Blue Hill has stopped at last. The top half of the hill is still clothed with native trees, and that is something. Whether it stopped because the slope grew too steep, or because “some bastard wrote a book about it and it’s on the ABC”, I’m not sure. What matters is, of course, that they are certainly still clear-felling somewhere else . . .

I was born and raised in a small country town, so country ways are not altogether foreign to me; all the same, they took a little getting used to again. Country people are perhaps not so different at bottom from city people; it is just that their tastes are perhaps broader, their vices simpler.

Soon after we came to Nabowla I attended a Progress Association working bee at the Community Hall. Five o’clock on an early February afternoon, the sky hazed with distant smoke, the grass tinder-dry – bushfire weather. There are perhaps a dozen men standing about at the hall, smoking, talking. No one seems in charge, no one gives any orders, but after a few minutes there is a general move towards some old frames left over from a long-forgotten wood-chopping carnival. Without any indication of great enthusiasm these are pulled down, dragged away, stacked for carting. Everyone stops again. Smokes another cigarette or two. Then – once again without any visible signal – off again. But this time the eyes are suddenly bright, the faces taut with anticipation. This time, out come the match boxes.

Within minutes the dry grass between the hall and the railway line is blazing, burning with that sudden horrid crackling gulping sound that summer fires make. More grass goes up fifty yards down the road, claws its way into the small stand of pines and melaleucas, races up trunks, springs from bough to bough. Smoke everywhere. A small breeze drives it towards the hall. That smell – I’m starting to get quite nervous. But the others are smiling now, grinning, satisfaction stamped like a common badge on their faces. My mouth is dry, my eyes are smarting, and my hackles rise. They’re a lot of bloody *firebugs* . . .

Frank arrives, Frank from Lincolnshire, the local voluntary fire warden. He remonstrates. They don’t so much ignore him as just plain don’t see him. She’ll be right. Eyes with a distant glaze. Total fire ban, eh? Oh yeah . . .

Then, suddenly, the flames are licking at the white paint of the hall, and everyone is into the fray at once, beating at walls and grass with spudbags. Frank starts the pump on the fire trailer and begins to spray everything that moves, man, beast or fire . . .

When it’s over everyone stands around looking complacent, self-congratulatory. Good job well done. Have another ciggie. Sniff the rank damp smoke. Stretch, and off home to tea . . .

That’s it. No more working bees for me, I haven’t got strong enough nerves.

A month later, in a roaring north-easterly, someone

decides to burn off. Half a mile away along the crest of our hill. The fire races away, bolts along the ridge, roars along the crest above us. Frank arrives, neighbors turn up. Friends from five miles away see the smoke and hurry over. Hooks, brush-cutters, hoes, bags, water-bottles. The heat is intense as we try to cut breaks, head the fire away from our boundary. It burns steadily into Crown Land to the west. Finally the Forestry Commission gang arrives with the water truck. We hack the last fire-break, beat a few more yards. Then it's over. Black ground everywhere, smoking stumps. But *our* bush is safe. The bloke that lit the fire has a sickly grin on his face. But he is grinning . . .

But it's not all bad, the country life. It just takes getting used to. The pace is different, for one thing.

In our first summer, we arrange with Frank to slash the tall dry grass on our cleared five acres. I have to walk in front and pick up the rocks, so I calculate carefully how long the job is likely to take. I figure two days. On the Monday morning Frank arrives with his Fergie and slasher. Off we go.

Eleven o'clock comes, Frank stops the tractor, climbs down.

"Gotta go home now, listen to the cricket . . ."

Oh well, I think, never mind, maybe we'll finish tomorrow anyway.

The next day it's a puncture at ten o'clock. No more work that day.

On Wednesday his wife sends a message in mid-morning that the peacocks have escaped. Frank has to go and recapture them.

By Thursday I am resigned, more or less.

We finish on Friday afternoon, Frank undercharges me, and it begins to dawn on me that this sort of thing may not be all that unusual out here in the sticks, that maybe I'll just have to learn to relax and enjoy it.

In the beginning I thought that it was only a matter of pace, of slowing down. But it is more than that. It is a matter of *rhythm*, of something deeper, quieter, more profound, more positive; there is nothing of laziness in it, only an accommodation with the unhurried swing of the seasons, with the inescapable cycles of stock and crops and rain and growth.

Rain. To move to the country is to enter into an entirely new relationship with rain. It is no longer just rain, just a nuisance, but *water*; it fills the tanks, swells the streams, makes the grass grow, the cattle fat. Live through a single dry season, and you will never feel unmoved again by the gentle sweep of December rain across a dry hill slope.

One of the saddest things to see is someone who comes to the country intent on re-arranging its habits to his own desires and conveniences. There is a weight of native conservatism here, of human inertia as well as the sometimes brutal force of nature, that blunts idealism, destroys ambitions that are too quick, too trite, too febrile.

It can be heartbreaking for those who don't understand the natural and social mechanics of country life. There is always some cold eye watching from behind the curtain, some steely key ready to turn in a lock. In a very short

time a newcomer can cease to be merely a nuisance, become a cool joke.

And, once that happens, no matter how long he stays, how much he mends his ways, the judgement has been given, and will stand.

The truth is that no one should move to the country who is not happy with his own company, occupied with his own activities, certain of his own inner resources.

Yet, for all that, the rewards can be great.

The seasons swing past, and life – slowly, gently – becomes less complicated, less cluttered with trivia and ephemera. When we came to Nabowla we brought with us an old black and white television set. This soon gave up the ghost and has never been replaced. For a time a neighbor passed on her day-old newspapers. Then she moved, and the supply stopped. We have never got round to subscribing ourselves, and now probably never will. Occasionally, when we visit the rubbish tip to collect old papers for firelighting, we spend half an hour reading a week-old or year-old tabloid. Sometimes someone gives us a current issue. I manage – usually – to get to the second page before boredom sets in. No paper that I can think of, today, is worth my twenty-five cents.

We have an FM tuner, a good hi-fi, lots of music. Lots of books. And not as much time to read as we would like anyway. All we have lost are the paranoias that city folk must assume in self-protection if they are to survive. And we have gained a certain distance from the trivial, the space and time and incentive to think more, and more deeply, about things that matter to us. The cycles of the years themselves seem to lock us into a deeper and quieter and kinder routine than the artificial schedules which used to govern us. The seasons move regularly in their courses; one summer is drier, one winter colder, one spring frostier than another; but the variations are only ones of minor degree – the wheel turns, and with each revolution awareness grows of the repetitive process of life, of procreation, of growth, fruition and death. Even death seems easier, somehow, to contemplate – no more than a minor but necessary part of the pattern. The meaning? Perhaps there *is* none but the pattern, and besides, the question seems less important nowadays, anyway.

For each new season, each cycle, brings with it the distraction of its own discrete pains and pleasures. Spring begins, and the valleys and river banks turn to clear pale gold as the silver wattles bloom; the starlings build their nests in the roof that we fondly believed was birdproof; the bracken rises in miraculous green crooks, and must be slashed yet again; the first snake appears in the garden, and spare shells must be put out for the shotgun; the level in the creek falls from its winter high, and we must pump more often; the shadows change their stances, creeps slowly up the hill; higher up, the greenhoods bloom in the shade, and as the days brighten the sun orchids open, pink and blue and sometimes cream . . . Summer begins to buzz at the edges of the land, and distant tiers of smoke are no longer the signals of burning-off, but of something much more threatening. The tomatoes ripen, and if there has been good summer rain the blackberries are heavy

and juicy by the top dam, and it is jam-making time, bottling time; and the fruit trees are stripped and the Fowler's simmers night after night and the tiers of multi-colored bottles rise on the shelves and we have dessert for another year. In March the summer hangs like old smoke for a week or two, then dissolves into river-mists and crisp mornings; the shadows begin their march down the hill again, and the first rains come; and suddenly we are in the brief glory of autumn again, and it is mushroom time, and it is gumboots and buckets on the flats beyond the old post office; and then the squalls begin to roll in from the west, and suddenly winter is close again.

And then there is the rush to top up the woodheap, to clean the chimney, to caulk the draughts we have forgotten in the warmth of summer; a new roof for the pumphouse, a new overflow pipe for the bottom dam, or our road will be washed out again; culverts to be cleaned, fruit trees to be ordered, new doormats to be bought, the spouting to be cleaned, the mailbox to be repainted, new boots to be broken in . . .

And before any of it is properly begun, it seems, winter is on us. The stove in the living room – 250 kilos of steel and firebrick – will be kept alight for months on end, and on the coldest nights it will be crammed full with slabs of dry peppermint and the draught will be open, and the gentle roar will fill the room. The frost will lie on the slopes till late in the mornings, and walking down the hill to collect the mail will be like walking into a deep-freeze. The slope is steep, and in patches slippery; but who would live on the flat when they can live on a hill?

From our big living room window we can see Blue Hill with its cap of forest, the long ridge that sweeps toward

Golconda, the creek-bed thick with wattles and dogwood and whitegum, the swell of the ridge beyond crowned with tall old stringybarks, and beyond them, far beyond, its high rock faces etched in indigo, the peak of Mount Arthur.

And snug and warm, then, we wait for another spring. And if death is a year closer . . . well, why not? There is still that smug feeling of having voyaged through another year in the small ark we have built ourselves . . . and soon there will be – again – daffodils and silver wattle, and golden whistlers down by the creek, and the slow beat of black cockatoos across the ridge, the blue cranes silent and ghostly in the mist . . . and summer blackberries . . . and autumn . . . and winter . . .

The swing is so sure, so sweet, so comforting, that it is easy enough to believe – or at least to half-believe – that death is more a beginning than an end, that to become part of the earth is to do no more than embrace its continuing life.

There is a spot up the steep slope beyond the vegetable garden, beside a big old wattle tree, where the view of the whole valley opens out, mile after mile of rich river flats, gentle wooded hills that rise slowly and easily towards the distant line of the mountains. It's the spot where I expect my ashes will go one day. And that is far from a maudlin thought; there is more than a little joy in it, a sense that, rootless no longer, I have been welcomed to a place that offers the promise of some final unity with the whole living world, a place where death is no more than a simple rite of passage.

I have come home.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE

I populate
your womb with
I's

and call you
mother,
you are

content to be
a factory.

Big boy I's
grow in you –

production's up – don't stop
now you're under
contract.

MICHAEL SAMARCHI

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH

swag

AN OPEN LETTER TO PROFESSOR DONALD HORNE AND PROFESSOR DIANA YERBURY.

Dear Professors:

Donald Horne is the chairman of the Australia Council, and Di Yerbury is General Manager. Both of you are relatively recent appointments. It may be said that both of you are still in a honeymoon period. What's wrong with the Council can not be sheeted home to you – yet. The hopes of a great many people in the Australian artistic and cultural community are centred on you, and on the reforms we hope you may bring.

I heard Donald Horne speak to a Melbourne audience recently on the arts and the economy. As one would expect from Donald, it was an elegant, informative and sane talk. Three aspects of the rather grand occasion intrigued me, apart from the fact that it was a rather self-conscious attempt to show dissident Melburnians that the people in Sydney had in fact heard of them, and were even prepared to do a spot of welfare visiting from time to time. My first observation was that Donald was talking to the wrong audience. He was stressing the importance of *general community involvement* in the arts, i.e. that the community gets good value from the arts and should be prepared to pay more for their support than they are doing. Everyone there agreed wholeheartedly with him (though of course we learnt from what he had to say), and in many ways the speech would have been better made in the City Square.

My second feeling was that both of you had set the topic partly at least to prevent discussion on the other issues that a great many there wished to raise. These were, overwhelmingly, the menace of the Sydney-based Australia Council bureaucracy, and the imbalance in funding as between New South Wales and the other States. Because of the way the meeting was set up, these issues could not be aired.

My third impression was that, of the people there at the meeting, perhaps 250 of them, only a fraction were identifiable by me as persons actively involved in the practice of the arts. I would guess that somewhere between 150 and 200 of those present were representatives of a new and well-paid breed: the ministerial, corporate

and trade union 'advisers' and 'consultants' in the arts, and similar go-betweens. If the annual salaries of those present in these categories were divided amongst the actual practitioners, I mused, many problems would be solved.

We move now to the ABC Pressure Point television program on the Australia Council on 21 March.

Donald Horne, you fronted up, with some apparent unease, to a small mixed group of critics, weighted towards drama and music, which included from Melbourne the conductor Richard Divall and the playwright Jack Hibbert. Again I felt the weight of tactical decisions presumably taken beforehand by you and Diana Yerbury. Your major tactic was to avoid or, if that were impracticable, to divert criticisms and questions on what many see as the most urgent issues (bureaucracy, Sydney-centredness, where the grants actually fall) to issues of what you called "policy" – for instance, the problem of how to balance the support of "established" areas (the Australian Opera, the Melbourne Theatre Company, perhaps even at a lower level such magazines as *Overland*) against the demands of the innovators, the experimentalists, the groups aiming at a special clientele.

I am not suggesting that your concern with "policy" is just a front. Far from it. These very issues, for instance, emerged very clearly at gatherings of literary editors during the Canberra Word Festival in March, and the Literature Board is clearly greatly exercised by such issues as "Should the big-league magazines like *Quadrant*, *Overland*, *Meanjin* be looked at as presenting quite different issues to the smaller, claimant magazines?" "How can we identify the small magazines that really have something going for them from the small magazines that represent nothing but a coterie interest?", "Should we be pointing out more firmly to the scores of editors and would-be editors present that the tax-payer does *not* necessarily owe them a living?"

So I sympathise with the very real issues of policy that both of you must be facing. Yet for you to say, Donald, as you did on that program, that the issue was "not locations but policies", and that proposals as put forward by Jack Hibbert, for the dispersal of Australia Council boards through the various States, were "fanciful", sug-

gests to me that you are both becoming prisoners of your own organization.

Let me go further. Let me start with a disquieting issue which has not, so far as I know, surfaced in public in this country before. I am not sure whether Francis Oeser, the very distinguished Australian architect and designer, at present living in London, was actually appointed last year as Director of the Design Arts Board, after his visit to Australia and no doubt adequate interviews. I do know two things: that he would have made a fine Director, full of ideas for new directions in the design arts in Australia; and that he was offered the position. I also know that in November last Diana Yerbury telephoned Oeser, who by this time had closed down his London offices, farewelled his clients and disposed of many of his belongings, to lean on him heavily to withdraw from the appointment, apparently on the grounds that it would upset too many people.

One would have hoped that Directors of boards would have been expected to be stirrers, for a start. What is wrong with an organization that lets "I dare not wait upon I would?" What is wrong with an organization that in effect makes an appointment and then tries – successfully, in this case, unfortunately – to get out of it? What is wrong with an Australia Council that apparently, in this case, allows a Board, set in its ways, to defy attempts to energise and develop its significance to the Australian community? A disgraceful episode, and even more disgraceful the cover-ups that went with it.

I am sure you will wish to comment.

And now, perhaps, some comments in another direction. I have spoken to two of your Board chairmen lately. Both have said to me "I see no longer any point in holding Board meetings, bringing people at great expense from all over Australia to rubber-stamp decisions already taken by the Australia Council itself or by the bureaucracy. We are now told, not only how much money we will have, which is to be expected, but also in great detail how we will be allowed to spend it. If that's the way they feel, why don't they just do the whole bloody thing themselves?"

We, editorially we, are not surprised. We have been aware for years of the accelerating growth of the central bureaucracy of the Australia Council. Those of us who regard the Literature Board despite its faults as a paragon of Boards, always close to its writers and editors and always responsive to their needs, were dismayed when a year or two back the admirable project officers attached to that Board were withdrawn and told they no longer had a specific literary responsibility. The effect of this, which I presumed was intended, was not only to undercut the authority of the Literature Board and the Director of that Board, but also of course to undermine the capacity of the writers and editors to "relate" to their own Board. It was a crude and insensitive action on the part of a Chairman and an Australia Council too big for its boots, and it was defended passionately by your predecessors as a necessary and desirable reform. Fiddlesticks!

Well, at least we have got those project officers back, I trust with the full support of both of you. But what about

those Chairmen's remarks I quoted a few paragraphs back? What have you got to say about that? The Chairmen and the Boards themselves cannot go public on this issue – presumably it would be un-British. People like me you can easily ignore. But are you even aware of the problem? If not, why not? Why can't your chairmen talk to you as they talk to me? If you do know about this, why in two major public sessions, which I refer to above, has not this issue at least been referred to in passing by you?

Surely not because you regard such issues as – what was your word, Donald? – yes, "fanciful"?

"Australians," as the political scientist Alan Davies has said, and as I am sure you yourself have often said, Donald, "have a characteristic talent for bureaucracy." The issues raised with you on the television program, and raised by others including me on a number of occasions, are not going to go away. It is clearer and clearer that the "policy" questions you talk about are indivisible from the "bureaucracy" and "centralism" questions you seek to avoid.

Indeed many of the policy questions *can* only be solved by the two of you making your period of association with the Australia Council the period in which the insidious growth of a self-nourishing bureaucracy over and above the Boards is cut back and dispersed. What are the figures for the growth of this bureaucracy? In 1975 how many people worked directly for the key bodies of the Australia Council, the Boards, and how many for the top floors, so to speak? And what are the relative figures for 1985? How many statisticians and accountants and liaison officers and research officers and consultants and chief assistants to the assistant chiefs have gone on the payroll in the last ten years? And what proportion of your overall budgets, in 1975 and 1985, were or are involved in servicing the *organization* rather than the arts community through the Boards?

I repeat what you have now been told on a number of occasions. You must work to close down the Australia Council in Sydney, and transfer a much abbreviated central administration to Canberra. (No doubt, like ASIO, many will refuse to transfer. So much the better. It will be one way of reducing.) Then get the Boards back into Australia. If, for a start, you put the Music Board in Hobart and the Literature Board in Brisbane, for instance, the "policy" issues will become more identifiable and more able to be handled by the Boards themselves.

I have been told that where, in fact, you have had private discussions on these matters, you have expressed yourself as distinctly unimpressed by the arguments, and have held, in effect, that since there is an Australia Council sitting over and above the Boards, it must have something to do. Certainly, I think there are things that the Council has to do, and first among these is to ensure that the Boards are effective bodies with high morale and important decisions to take in their own fields of expertise. This is precisely what you are *not* doing. If the process of undermining and humiliating the individual Boards continues, a process which was not initiated by you two and which you have the power to stop, then the political demand will grow for the dismantling, not of the

Boards, but of the Council itself. These demands will, if the present position continues, eventually succeed. So what I am asking for is not the dismantling of the Council of the Australia Council, but that it and you should re-examine your roles, in the interest of the preservation of the *useful* things the Council can do, and of the Council itself.

Indeed, my dear Donald and Diana, what cause – it might be asked – have you to be wandering around the country talking about “policy” issues at all? Your “policy” issues should be worked out by the Boards who were originally established for just that reason. No doubt you should retain some general rationalizing, advisory, moderating influence, more by discussion than by ukase. I have indeed suggested, in my remarks on the Oeser case, that there *are* times when the Council *should* intervene with the Boards. *But it is not your job to be laying down policy from the top.* It *should*, however, be your policy to be worrying about the “fanciful” issues that the idiots out there seem to keep on raising, despite your belief that they should not be rocking the boat.

Unlike Francis Oeser, they will not go away.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Murray-Smith

With public attention now directed to the enquiry on the Maralinga tests of 1956, it is appropriate to mention that the first evidence published in the Australian press on ‘what went wrong’ appeared in *Overland* in issue no. 77, 1977. Material we were then preparing for publication, documenting the incidents now under public scrutiny, was seized from a secretary by two anonymous visitors, without consultation either with *Overland* or the authors of the article, which was based on first-hand knowledge. The authors then declined to proceed, but we told the essence of the story in *Overland*.

The Maralinga inquiry, I am told, has been very interested in this early initiative of *Overland*’s, and apparently will refer to it in the report. I am also told on the grapevine that the inquiry is of the opinion that the documents seized from *Overland* on that occasion were in fact taken by ASIO officials.

Substantial donations to *Overland* are now eligible for tax deductibility, but a special procedure has to be followed. Details, if required, are available from the Editor.

The award of the medal of the Order of Australia to Bob Cugley, who took this magazine under his wing and printed it for many years, was received by us with delight when it was announced in January. Bob is now 83, and living in happy retirement with Marie, but he’s still capable of giving as good as he gets over a lunch. “I must find out what bastard put me in for that award,” he was heard to say the other day. “I can’t spend the rest of my life going around being nice to everybody, on the off-chance that they may have been responsible.”

The twenty-sixth Meanjin-*Overland* cricket match was held a few weeks ago, and your Editor hit a very stylish four in the course of it. For all that, this magazine lost, by 142 runs to 156. Our top scorers were Peter Fitzpatrick, of the Monash University English department (38), David Salter, director of the Ararat Art Gallery (29) and Jack Clancy of RMIT (22). So far as *they* were concerned, Don Watson (of the Gillies Report, and author of the recent *Caledonia Australis*) retired at 50, and that’s enough of that.

The first of the tests was held at Eltham in 1959, in a searing heat which must surely have affected the life expectations of Vance Palmer and Brian Fitzpatrick, both of whom played. Thirteen matches have been won by Meanjin, eleven by *Overland*, with one tie, one draw and one missed year. This year’s match was played at a delightful oval in Melbourne’s Domain. We should have liked more friends of both magazines there, and suggest those interested should contact us for details early in the new year.

Generous prizes, of £5000, £2000 and £1000, are offered in the Commonwealth Poetry Prize Awards for 1985, entries to be in by 30 June. Details from the Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High Street, London W.8.

We are still continuing to get mail at our old and discontinued GPO box number. Would our correspondents please note that our address is PO Box 249, Mount Eliza, Vic. 3930?

Language or Speech? A Colonial Dilemma.

FAY ZWICKY

A discussion of Les Murray's poetry and of his The People's Otherworld (Angus & Robertson, \$8.95).

Perhaps it has something to do with being Australian after all, despite Joseph Brodsky's comment (quoted from the American edition of *The Vernacular Republic*) on the cover of this volume. Says Brodsky: "It would be as myopic to regard Mr Murray as an Australian poet as to call Yeats an Irishman. He is, quite simply, the one by whom the language lives."^{*}

Unlike so many luminaries of the American poetry circuit, it can't be said of Murray that he is fettered by a desire to please. In stalwart adherence to his own code and its public manifestations, like Patrick White he wears his intractability like a war decoration. And, while one may respect the hero for his stoic posture, upright stance and dedication to the task *pro bono publico*, one may equally hope for some symptom of mortality, a twitching jaw muscle, a missing button, a token that passing out on parade isn't an impossibility.

Of late, Murray has staked out a turf in the Australian poetry half-acre with rather numinous authority, an area in which he is barely challenged. In the process, certain critical decorums seem to have undergone an unhealthy attenuation, given the largely adulatory reviews that have greeted this book's appearance. Several are burdened with the delusion that solemnity equals seriousness and obscurity equals respectability. None has really given me a genuine sense of what this book is about. It isn't particularly helpful to the poet or the state of poetry to say, as

many have said or implied: "This is a very fine collection of poems but I don't really understand what he's saying." If readers are to be truly readers and not simply members of a captive audience spellbound by established reputation, there has to be more critical precision brought to bear.

Most Australian poets worthy of the name, attuned from youth to expectations of indifference or failure, must know, given the sorry record of their American counterparts, how overpraise can unsettle talent. How it can destroy self-criticism, and lead to sloppy habits, some of them hard to put right. Murray's poetic armory contains so much to admire – learning, a curly intelligence, craft, serious commitment. Why, then, after wrestling long and hard with many poems in this book, have I come away feeling excluded, mystified, and defeated? Why do so many bring to mind a remark made by William James staring at an octopus in an aquarium – "such flexible intensity of life in a form so inaccessible to our sympathy"?

Even to ask such a question is to whistle against prevailing winds, *pace* Brodsky, Porter, Keneally, Nuttall *et al.* But Murray's reputation is sufficiently secure to withstand investigation in a good cause, and I want to examine those impressions of exclusion and mystification in the hope of finding some answers about their source. I have a hunch that it has something to do with tone of voice, behind which lies the broader Australian cultural context that nurtured the speaker and his mode of address.

The best poems speak for themselves, deserving the attention and delighted response in the act of discovery that the truest art asks of us. Don Anderson notes that Murray sees Jackson Pollock as the spiritual godfather of some of his poems and comments: "In Pollock there is no perspective, no hierarchies – rather there is untyrannical form."¹ Attempting to describe Murray's conception of poetry in relation to painting presents the usual difficulty of distinguishing between form and content.

Form first, then. To anyone who is not a transcendentalist the notion of form without boundaries (their very existence define them as 'tyrannical') is a contradiction in terms. Although there has been no Emerson in Australia's past to play John the Baptist to poetic libera-

^{*} Brodsky may be neither an habitual echolalic nor in the business of conferring Master of Universality degrees on colonial poets, but I draw readers' attention to the concluding paragraph of his essay on Derek Walcott's poetry in the *New York Review of Books*, 10 November 1983. Protesting against the regional view of Walcott's talent, Brodsky quotes Auden's lines from "In Memory of W.B. Yeats":

Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and innocent,
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,

Worships language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives.

Brodsky continues: "There are few indeed who fall into that category; Derek Walcott is one of them. He is the man by whom the English language lives."

tion from older conventions,* Murray's work seems to start from Emersonian convictions of the superiority of nature over art, of idea over the vehicle of its containment. Where visible non-human facts are at stake, Murray can effect an admirable reconciliation between the object observed and its embodiment in language.

His most arresting moments are visual, impersonal. The voice, predominantly toneless, speaking to nobody in particular and everyone in general, contains a distancing blend of prodigal rhetoric and the impartial authority of an explorer mapping new territory:

These lagoons, these anabranches,
streets of the underworld.
Their water has become the trees that stand along
them.

Below root-revetments, in the circles of the water's
recession
the ravines seem thronged with a legacy of lily
pads.
Earth curls and faintly glistens, scumbled painterly
and peeling.

Palates of drought-stilled assonance,
they are cupped flakes of grit, crisps of bottom,
dried meniscus
lifted at the edges.

Abstracts realised in slime. Shards of bubble,
shrivelled viscose
of clay and stopped life:
the scales of the water snake have gone to grey on
this channel.

(“The Craze Field of Dried Mud”)²

No perspectives and no hierarchies – just a steady, almost obsessive accumulation of precise impressions kindling a primaevial landscape into flaring life, the very process of its creation inseparable from the sure-footed linguistic transformation. As if in response to Emerson's prescriptions, Murray's escape from the determinations of European history is effected by acts of Adamic perception, through the relation and connection of observed detail to its right naming. According to Emerson, if the poet is unable to establish rapport with and control of external nature through language then “Nature is the tyrannous circumstance, the thick skull, the sheathed snake, the ponderous rock-like jaw; necessitated activity; violent direction.”³ Emerson persuaded that man must confront his primitive dominion with corresponding energy rather than bring it to an emasculated vocabulary that diminishes the muscular actuality “in a clean shirt and white neckcloth of a student of divinity.”

Murray's energy doesn't slacken in his pursuit of the

mysterious environment, the process of discovery by the alert retina:

The lagoon-bed museums meanwhile have a dizzy
stillness
that will reduce, with all the steps that are coming,
to meal, grist, morsels.
Dewfall and birds' feet have nipped, blind noons
have nibbled
this mineral matzoh.

(“The Craze Field of Dried Mud”)⁴

Perfect. If only he'd left it at that. But, in the foreground, the white neckcloth of the divinity student intrudes its Puritanic lines against the background of uncultivated nature. Although one senses the urge to synthesis, because of the absence of mediating images of man in community linking the one to the other, one is left with confused and disabling opposition:

The warlike peace-talking young, pacing this
dominion
in the beautiful flesh that outdoes their own
creations
might read gnomic fragments:
corr lux Romant irit

or fragmentary texts:
*who lose belief in God will not only believe
in anything; they will bring blood offerings to it*

(“The Craze Field of Dried Mud”)⁵

Strong foreground and stronger background, but no middle distance. When the poet starts speculating and commenting, the poetry turns into a structure of dos and don'ts, mocking the intelligence and pointing up the lack of a spiritual refuge (as opposed to warmed-over theologizing) in which to shelter from the restless sophistications of the ego.

In a self-portrait that owes more to Dobell than to Pollock, the human being in the foreground isn't always required to carry such burdens of ambiguous religiosity even if perspective and hierarchies refuse to be completely shelved. Accretions of cultural meaning and historical significance arise naturally out of the cumulative value of fidelity to visible facts:

The hair no longer meets across the head
and the back and sides are clipped ancestrally
Puritan-short. The chins are firm and deep
respectively. In point of freckling
the bare and shaven skin is just over

halfway between childhood ginger
and the nutmeg and plastic death-mottle
of great age . . .

(“Self Portrait from a Photograph”)⁶

* “Best swallow this pill of America which Fate brings you & sing a land unsung. Here stars, here birds, here trees.” (*Journals*, VIII:398, Cambridge, Mass. 1961).

Yet with the delineations of physical matter so mastered, the sense of exclusion and mystification remains. Why? One can't put aside the cultural context that surrounds a poet. His use of language is the most sensitive touchstone to social history we have, since a man can articulate only what he is and what he has been made by the society of which he is a willing or unwilling member. As F.O. Matthiessen wrote, introducing the method and scope of his *American Renaissance*:

Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, and Melville all wrote literature for democracy in a double sense. They felt that it was incumbent upon their generation to give fulfilment to the potentialities freed by the Revolution, to provide a culture commensurate with America's political opportunity. Their tones were sometimes optimistic, sometimes blatantly, even dangerously expansive, sometimes disillusioned, even despairing, but what emerges from the total pattern of their achievement – if we will make the effort to repossess it – is literature for our democracy. In reading the lyric, heroic, and tragic expression of our first great age, we can feel the challenge of our still undiminished resources.⁷

The Australian writer has never been either so fundamentally politically or artistically challenged. Nor has there been a sufficiently clear definition of a democracy in this country to ensure that there should be an artistic determination towards a unity between art and other functions of the community. Australian painters may have solved the problem of organic union between culture and labor, but writers seem less sure about what to repossess and what to discard. Their gifts are frequently distorted in reaction against a society whose tenets preclude willing membership.

Whitman's work provides a valuable point of comparison for Murray's imagery with its primarily visual and tactile values, his self-conscious attempts to achieve resonance in the collective consciousness, his audacious and often problematical raiding of esoteric etymologies to describe the uniqueness of his homeland, his vatic inclinations, all call to mind the disturbing and illuminating complexities and paradoxes inherent in the egoism of the poet who would embrace multitudes. But, whereas Whitman wooed his audience with affection and androgynous inclusiveness, Murray's voice doesn't seek to befriend but to distance. He doesn't celebrate his country as Whitman did. He tries to record it, assimilate it, to find its echoes in his own fertile energies. Where Whitman had identified himself with his country from a radiant sense of kinship, with a confidence made possible by his temperament and his time, Murray's passion for accumulation is sustained by reaction against the degeneration, weakness and cynicism of his society. His own personal struggle or quarrel with contemporary life becomes, by extension, a moral prescription for a counterpoise to chaos.

A brief look at the use of the catalog as a poetic device

by Whitman and Murray may further explain my meaning. I have chosen a cityscape from "Song of Myself":

The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of
boot-soles, talk
of the promenaders,
The heavy omnibus, the driver with his
interrogating thumb, the
clank of the shod horses on the granite floor,
The snow-sleighs, clinking, shouted jokes, pelts of
snow-balls,
The hurrahs for popular favorites, the fury of
rous'd mobs,
The flap of the curtain'd litter, a sick man inside
borne to the hospital,
The meeting of enemies, the sudden oath,
the blows and fall,
The excited crowd, the policeman with his star
quickly working
his passage to the centre of the crowd,
The impassive stones that receive and return so
many echoes,
What groans of over-fed or half-starv'd who fall
sunstruck or in fits . . .⁸

New York seen through the eyes of a poet who has retained the unjudgmental purity of response that we associate with the child. The "over-fed" and the "half-starv'd", with all that those terms imply of social stratification and inherent opportunity for doctrinaire condemnation on the poet's part, are seen with the same devout eye, transformed by a linguistic vitality that disarms us into communion.

Murray's view of Sydney puts away childish things and becomes an emblem of approaching Armageddon:

Ingots of shear
affluence poles
bomb-drawing grid
of columnar profit
piecrust and scintillant
tunnels in the sky
high window printouts
repeat their lines
repeat their lines
credit conductors
bar graphs on blue
repeat their lines
glass tubes of boom
in concrete wicker
each trade Polaris
government Agena
fine print insurrected
tall drinks on a tray

("View of Sydney, Australia,
from Gladesville road bridge")⁹

The case against upward mobility and its fragile underpinnings is detailed with exultant irritability; nor does the surrounding "old order" with its hapless reminders of

man-made ugliness offer hope of redemption. Shot through with the urge to chastize and subdue, the tone is hypnotically bitter, the catalog a brilliant compression of lost idealism. The self-mortifying gap between the real and the ideal intimated in the title of Murray's book emerges often enough in a rhetoric of lofty rejection that offers absent man no saving grace. Whitman's "otherworld" didn't set him apart from his fellow men. For better and worse, he was in it up to his neck along with the rest, rejoicing in the immersion.

To be able to invoke death and despair in the accents of the living has been proved possible in the twentieth century. Two writers who have done it are Philip Larkin and Saul Bellow. If I start looking for reasons why writers like Murray and Patrick White seem to exclude rather than welcome their listeners, I'd be obliged to range deeper into the cultural situation in which the Australian artist works than space permits. I have a hunch that it has something to do with the difference between "speech" and "language" – a distinction of which Murray is keenly aware, and which he turns to his advantage in the "Self-Portrait":

. . . The large ears suggest more
of the soul than the other features:

dull to speech, alert to language,
tuned to background rustle, easily agonized,
all too fond of monotony, they help
keep the eyes, at their sharpest, remote,

half-turned to another world
that is poorer than this one, but contains it.¹⁰

This is a poetry arguing for the virtue of difficult ambitions in a cultural context artistically and intellectually unfavorable to thinking about this world or any other. It places the poet in an ambiguous and often self-defeating position – does he want an audience or doesn't he? Language may function in a vacuum, but speech requires a listener. Murray's occasional obscurities don't seem to stem from an effort to be understood. They appear to arise out of an almost ostentatious and paradoxically-motivated determination to stand out against easy options, clearing himself of the charge of courting facile acclaim while revealing himself famished for it.

The problem surfaces where the subject is either explicitly Christian or when language starts drawing attention to itself in the articulation of abstract argument, becoming prosy and ungainly. At such moments one wishes for more rather than less 'tyrannical form', fewer reflexive pieties and more trust in the expressive connections between concrete particulars. Perhaps this is a necessary handicap which readers of poets investigating great absolutes have to live with, reminding me of Wilfred Sheed's comment on Evelyn Waugh: "He found God where he could . . . but he shouldn't have tried to name Him."

It's when Murray starts naming both his absolutes and his friends in that aloof, prescriptive tone that he loses me. And, just as Yeats's swing between self-dramatization

and exuberant sadness place him distinctively outside the Anglo-Saxon nuclear family, so Murray's combination of emotional frugality and prophetic afflatus define him as a colonial stoic with messianic intent, both protecting and reducing his humanity through language, and aware of what is being reduced.

"The Romantic Theme of Ruins" (p. 21) is a case in point. Its uncertainty of direction is hard to spot because of the intensity of its tonal conviction expressed in toughened sinuous syntax. After the solemn (mock-solemn?) organ note of its opening stanza, it moves into something like a comic-strip record of history's wasteful propensities. He seems to be cocking snoots at dynastic privilege either in the shape of genteel aspirations or primitive acts of conquest. Moving from a Western image of a posse of pre-Christian serfs ("The workmen clinked their steel, trudging;") through satirical social diagnosis ("the neighbour heiress . . . bored with church and luncheon") towards a Star Wars apocalypse with more farcical overtones ("Hey, off with your gentilities!/we're your new ruins,"), the end result is extremely puzzling.

Is Murray, I asked myself, mocking the insubstantiality of man's remains, ironically undercutting the rhetoric summoned to convey his disapproval? Or is he trying to show us the tentative process, step by step, by which an attitude is shaped and of which the final cryptic line may be supposed to be understood as a resolution ("*Lies and the truth, said Nine there, the truth and lies*")? The assurance of tone with which traditionally evocative elements in this poem are so precisely named leads one to imagine that one has understood what's going on. Approximately, that is. But (second reading), were the images which one acknowledged en route as frequently striking, even arrestingly vulgar ("his face like matted genitals") anything more than clues to a cryptogram whose meaning has eluded the poet? My feeling, finally, was that, for all the ingenuity of their transitions, they failed to throw light on those rhetorical questions about the nature of ruins that comprise the poem. There's no way of knowing for certain where the centre lies; intimations of piety pull the rug out from under hints of mockery and vice versa. Hence the mystification and sense of exclusion, and, ultimately, a doubt about the worth of making all that effort.

The last two poems in the book, "The Dialectic of Dreams", and "Satis Passio" left me similarly disquieted. "Too verbose to be memorable and too intellectual to be moving", as Larkin said of Auden, post-1940. In fact, one often wishes that the disabling spectres of Auden and Wallace Stevens didn't hang around quite so insistently to nudge those among contemporary poets who are out to give advice rather than present a case.

Which leaves me to conclude with a few general thoughts about tone and the colonial voice. Writing about American language, Tocqueville gave a compelling account of the ways in which the new democracies had transformed the English tongue. He linked the American tendency to vanity of erudition and its concomitant ambiguities with the great passion for general ideas that pervades democratic communities. Developing this idea, Tocqueville

sought to explain the presence of those intrusive abstractions which "both enlarge and obscure the ideas they are intended to convey":

Democratic nations are passionately addicted to generic terms and abstract expressions because these modes of speech enlarge thought and assist the operations of the mind by enabling it to include many objects in a small compass. A democratic writer will be apt to speak of *capacities* in the abstract for men of capacity and without specifying the objects to which their capacity is applied; he will talk about *actualities* to designate in one word the things passing before his eyes at the moment; and in French, he will comprehend under the term *eventualities* whatever may happen in the universe, dating from the moment at which he speaks.¹¹

Concluding his chapter with the thought that "democratic nations prefer obscurity to labour", he goes on in a later chapter to analyze why American writers and orators often use an inflated style:

In democratic communities, each citizen is habitually engaged in the contemplation of a very puny object; namely, himself. If he ever raises his looks higher, he perceives only the immense form of society at large or the still more imposing aspect of mankind. His ideas are all either extremely minute and clear or extremely general and vague; what lies between is a void.¹²

Reverting to the analogy with painting, with which I began: strong background, strong foreground, but no middle distance, and there is the problem in a nutshell. America had its Tocqueville and, eventually, its Whitman who, at his greatest, revealed the energy and concentration of an imagination that could bridge the void by making the specific richly symbolic of the universal. Australia has Clive James, who touched on the problem presented by Murray in a review of *The Vernacular Republic*. While saluting Murray's "acute sense of what is alive about language" and his "sharp eye for nature", James goes on to say:

The question of where a unique Australian literature is to come from, like the question of where a

unique American literature is to come from, was answering itself before it was posed. There can be no such thing as a unique Australian or American literature. But the question of a unique Australian culture is something else. To begin with, it is not just a question but a problem. The example of America has not yet been sufficient to teach many Australian writers that such a problem has to be lived through. It can't be hectored away.¹³

It is Murray's occasional hectoring that makes the question of the poet's audience a pressing one. To want to write for The People, yet to view the democratic audience as opposed to and incapable of understanding his attitudes, means that the gap between 'language' and 'speech' will be hard to close. Perhaps, as James says, we just have to live through it. This doesn't mean, however, that we shouldn't question the timbre of a poetic voice expressing itself with energetic and skilful rhetoric in order not to be coerced into a false identity, or be persuaded to accept that voice as if it were the sound of our own.

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Notes

1. Don Anderson, "On His Selection", *National Times*, 4 May 1984, p.30.
2. *The People's Otherworld*, p.2, 11.1-12.
3. R.W. Emerson, "Fate", *Complete Works*, VI:20 (Riverside edition).
4. *The People's Otherworld*, p.3, 11.30-34.
5. *Ibid*, p.3, 11.35-41.
6. *Ibid*, p.44, 11.17-24.
7. F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, p.xv (O.U.P. 1979).
8. W. Whitman, "Song of Myself" 8:11.7-15 in *Leaves of Grass and Selected Prose* (Modern Library College Editions), p.30.
9. *The People's Otherworld*, p.13, 11.9-26.
10. *Ibid*, p.44, 11.24-31.
11. A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Modern Library College Editions), p.363.
12. *Ibid*, p.373.
13. Clive James, "His Brilliant Career", *New York Review of Books*, 14 April 1983, p.32.

POEMS FROM PANGAI, 'EUA'

A village on the island of Tonga

In the village nubile girls
Talk of marriage as they sit

Combing their long black
Hair: their iridescent eyebrows are
A concatenation

Of rainbows. The fragrance of
Orange-blossoms permeates the air.

NOCTURNE

The moon is full-blown
Tonight . . . the dark majesty
Of still palms delights.

TAU'OLUNGA

Village girl transformed by
The traditional dance.
Her stunning
Performance
Enhanced by
The flashes of lightning.

PARADISE

Awake to a grey
Morning and black rice. Find mice
Have gnawed at my heels.

POWER LINES

Power lines entwined
By morning glories . . . a modern
Eyesore gloriously concealed.

FAMILY GRAVEYARD, SOPU

Three grave mounds adorned
With shells, empty beer bottles,
And tinselled banners.

IVAN RANDALL

OSTEOPATH

The pelvic floor, he says, manipulating muscles.
Old man osteopath. Time-glazed eyes
like flat grey oysters. So frail,
all shrouded skin and crumbling
bones, that yet bear down; hard.
Cracking and willing mine into place.

The pelvic floor, he says, as I lie
high above his winter garden of
netted branches. When I came in I
saw the brown humped soil, littered
with cabbage slime and walnut black.
Greying daisies, and spidered leaves.

A pearly place, wistful toned in frost,
Yet so tightly held, so stiff with cold,
seemed the trees were straining
all their nerves to hold the twigs,
in case a wind should come from
outer space, and smash the glass
that held this specimen frame –
this ribbed and sinewed winter view
of what holds up the corpulent summer.
Thin tense webbing. Soft decay. Stellar silence.

The pelvic floor he says.
Old winter man muttering
charms against disorder.
Each day rising and kneading flesh,
Cracking bones above the waiting earth and
its thickening beneath his room.
Dark density of pelvic floors
that have willed the ages.
Layer upon layer of spring and summer
embracing the thorny scaffold.
Defying the touch of frost.

MARGARET SANGSTER

THE PATTERN

I am reminded of some distant city, different to this
yet alike, the same banks of buildings
stacked against the sea, the dark stream
of mountains running behind, but a city for other people.
Dawn, like this one, equally marmoreal, impenetrable,
whole parks of trees standing stiffly to attention.
But the movements are different,
the pattern that train-tracks leave, the pattern
of random lights in a block of flats – the same
lonely burning as the broad light breaks, but a different
shape crossing before the window.
I would change my shape if I could.

JOHN HAWKE

MARKS OF DISRESPECT

It's a tragedy for the Empire, *almost* said Mrs Thatcher.
Mrs Gandhi was a woman of great courage,
Mrs Thatcher almost *didn't* say, thinking
how *she* was a woman of great courage too – although
now she'd transfer even her *Northern* Irish bodyguards.
Could she be deeply shocked yet *again* –
looking & sounding so unshocked, unshockable
you could see her in her coffin in the same makeup
(or at least on the video resurrection) saying
how deeply shocked she was. How shocking.

If she denounced the dastardly deed in New Delhi in
London

the *dastard* got away like an escaping convict
on the way to the colonial Antipodes where
no-one (particularly not two *politicians*)
would stoop to score cheap political points
over his or his opponent's or for that matter
someone else's bullet-ridden dead body
(even if she *were* a politician
& even if they *were* electioneering)
but Bob did manage to mention yarning with her
at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference
& Andrew remembered once when he was Foreign
Minister

she, well, if she didn't actually cook for him
she at least *supervised* the cooking.
Bob was sorry. Andrew was sorry. They were *both* sorry.
How tragic for India, for the non-aligned nations
for the Free World, for the Soviet Union. (No.
No, they couldn't go as far as that – not
even for the Gandhi dynasty, er, family.)
Both felt they should go to her funeral – pyre.
Everyone who was no-one would be there from
Bangladesh.

Even Pakistan would be there in person. But
both the Prime Minister & the Leader of the Opposition
as *private citizens*, mark you, in this great democracy of
ours

(yes, not as *large* as India's but just as *great*)
had to accept invitations from Sikh communities
as a mark of disrespect for Mrs Gandhi &
respect for, well, good marksmanship &
recognition of the legitimate aspirations of
almost the population of this just-as-great
but not-as-large democracy – although
1,000 less after the Golden Temple after Gandhi
& how many hundreds more (less) also after Gandhi –
not forgetting, of course, the handful
here, in swinging electorates.

Professor Geoffrey Blainey called a news conference
to warn against this sort of multiculturalism
on Australia's very own doorstep. *However* –
he denied *categorically* the poisonous & paranoid rumor
that Mrs Gandhi's two Sikh assassins had ever
enrolled as post-graduate students of his
at the University of Melbourne. Wasn't
there enough strife in the world
(but especially on Australia's own doorstep)
without *him* stirring it up, he said.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

BEETLE

Ovate bronze like an antique bed-warmer,
the jewel beetle whirs into a somersault,
slams against a gum tree,
jerking the barbs on its fish-hook legs.

Grappling through December's sticky flowers,
it twists on the edge of a leaf,
claws upward to the black-tipped spike
of a butcher-bird's beak.

JAMES CHARLTON

RICHARD CRASHAW DECORATING THE CHAPEL

I am something gothic, something
left behind, on a bent stool which is called god,
I am god's decorator, I paste god paper
on red walls papering god I stick him up.
Because I have spoken to no one nothing today
delirious papering & painting with bright
rings where god is little rings. To me
nothing has opened its burning;
before god I am blind, unable to scale
the still sea's height. I have not met with
the dancing shadow all stuck together with string,
because death is a name which gives order,
which strings its words to a dainty pattern I think
as my decorations. I am a bride in my white net.

JOHN HAWKE

AUSTRALIAN RULES

Buying a football
I put my hand onto
a red leather ovoid
in a supermarket.
Then they all fly back,
spinning
from a torpedo punt,
slippery,
dry, slowly
tumbling down –
they snap
to hand, they dribble,
they waft.

They fly back like sudden blows to the chest
saying
we remember, us,
at this pivoting
bounding leader over lino
lifted into play
from a wire basket
to make the girl on checkout
smile.

And I, yes, follow
through a thin cloud,
a thin cloud made
by notes and change,
glimpsing as it ducks about
the pavement
the first woollen toy
I kicked around
a back yard
east of Eden.

Gold sash on black.
The sweatshops in '04 in Richmond
during grandmother's young womanhood.
Red on white
York and Lancaster
White on blue, maroon and gold
St Francis Xavier and the Duchess of Bedford
Essendon
Footscray St Kilda Geelong
Blue black red white
Tricolor, vertical, sash or horizontal,
the rules are a moral statement,
the colors compete abstractedly about pattern.

Not a bad game for Italian boys,
for Protestant boys, for immigrant boys,
for Catholic boys, for the iceman's son.
Weidemann, Buhagiar,
DiPierdomenico and Daicos,
each brings onto the oval his personal imprints
larger at last than the Celtic past
or allegorized conception,
his task of hope and burden of aggression.

At the final siren fans sweep onto the oval
to follow this brilliant battle
that passes by so richly in color and earth scents,
but if Collingwood makes the grand final
laugh the C.I. detectives, they'll all be there!

ROBERT HARRIS

INDIGENOUS CHILDREN

This boy learned how to read
This boy learned how to write
This girl learned how to add
This person learned how to speak
This child learned how to count
This boy says A B Cs up to Q
This child eats pencils – no breakfast
This child says “yessir”, says “no sir”
This one lost her book
This boy is 35%
This girl still can’t read
This boy erases

These people have a word for this,
one word;
translated, it means:

“O me! How my spirit grows short!”

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

MEMO

at the very least, uncle mallarme,
 a bell,
 a resistance; or
to be more local:
 (smoke
 around a clap stick), and
the pounding
 of air
 across a tongue,
a throat.
 the word is worker, first –
 (and then
 custodian)
to make the object action:
the paint falling
 from the dancer’s body,
the fire,
 ticking away, making
 its mulga gossip
keeping time
 with the singers.
there is kinship between us
and the flames.

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

LANDLOCKED

In this hazy day, godforsaken place
where as children we gathered on melting tar
(called playgrounds) to drink milk, baking
under box gums, to sing songs from over
the seas and swim in the oceans of bluebottles
between the flags. And the teacher asked,
“Do you think this country is poor or rich?”
We all answered “poor” and he said “wrong”.
How did we know what he meant?
That we all ate ham and extra-large eggs,
that beggars and manic depressives are
malingers, dazed and don’t make their beds
in this big, brown country,
or are we poor because we can’t make rugs
or carve phalluses or dress in national costume
of our own? How did we know at seven years
that we would long for books and coffeeshops
and wildness on the streets? When we answered “poor”
was it because we wanted more?
Consume, consume,
breathe in that coal dust
and thrust your chests out, girls.
The mountains are calling me
where I discover that village and forest
are not the language of the bush.
Oh, the bush! We learned to catch snakes
in honeyed air and chase each other in blue gums
and stare at explorer’s graves but where
were our causes?
Did they come from losing swimming races or
being in peculiar places behind railings,
looking out to gorges?
Even in the shadow of magical sites,
we have accustomed ourselves to bells of the night,
hearing the screeching of madmen parrots
in this land of guilt and gaiety,
land of teabreaks and men with crooked,
broken noses and hoses on summer afternoons.
We stood at attention for hours to cheer
the Anzacs who exposed their guns to us.
We lined the streets for queens and princes
but now we look inside ourselves
for a brand of greatness that fits, and starts
in academia or mission stations
and even in our private caves.
Heavens open up again, and again
we reassure ourselves that we are on the edge
of a new existence, that downcast eyes at the hint
of origins open, look out, upwards.
These skies that stretch forever
will be drawn and redrawn
on the chambers of our hearts
and the throb of many shuttered people
comes forth and thunders in our ears.

MANDY THOMAS

NIGHT SWIM

our voices continual in
baptismal dark

and if bodies recall
that previous wet grasp we
slipped from, perhaps here's proof
of a want to elude all embrace in
recoil at absorption or loss
or, suddenly, being

our miming, mythic descant,
tohu bohu, the big drums and
death-plash
and trilling of infants
or bird-throats

drawn down into
sharktooth cold for subtle
tongues to scratch
our phantom limbs

uncanny, to be again
seduced to fancy
our bathing's as
endless as this expanse of lotions
that leave our muscles euphoric,
our thoughts
adrift
beyond witness

taste of salt and oil and nectar
and blood tides break
we are buoyant
still
in chaos'
mouth, mouth of water

the pliancy of our flesh
is repeated over and
again in a lens bloated
with radiance
refinement cooler than any night

and the unuttered self
fixes a totem
fast in the onrush a point
to look from and glimpse
our souls, now pure,
swimming in a fire on the beach

PAUL HUTCHISON

"WHISPERINGS, THUNDERS . . ."

After Jean Grosjean

Whisperings, thunders, voices, fitful silence
infolld and proceed from the summit,
seen first from points at fifty miles
along coastal hillsides
the mountain moves unbudgingly into thinking,
although ignored in the frame resorts
it influences everything.

It gathers and redistributes skies.
The turbulent spring cracks with sporadic treefall,
the slopes shake and dance as many yelling spearmen
protecting the hidden rocks, the old satisfactions:
women's places, secrets men keep about fishing.

Down there, a four-hour walk,
the energetic fight lassitude, car batteries fail,
humiliating gold towns are snap-frozen.
When the rain's lofty squadrons have finally softened
resistance
Summer moves in and he shows the sea below sapphire,
touching, touching the unsigned shore
but leaving his luminary fingerprints.

Live at its foot as long as you can;
drab green gradually separates into color,
scarlet, blue and purple specks, the flowers
no larger than fingernails
bear Love their modest witness.

The path to the teaching rock is apprehensive,
generations of children sung towards circumcision
have printed the air with fear, determination,
the same path as it leads down is, in the pride and mystery,
unclamorously adult. They have padded down
by the purple, blue and scarlet
under whisperings, thunders, voices, fitful silence.

ROBERT HARRIS

"A PIECE OF CAKE"

(In Memoriam August 19th 1942)

No, the murders left no traces on this shore,
no, the murders left no traces
on these bright and murdered places
where the murderers were active long before,

and the sun shines bright on this bright promenade
where the slayers crouched to slay them,
with such massacre and mayhem –
because, to tell the truth, it isn't hard

(though there are hundreds in the landing craft)
if you know you'll be invaded
and you have them enfiladed,
to mow them down at leisure, fore and aft.

Just one accidental skirmish out at sea
and they went to Action Stations.
All they needed then was patience,
like the spider in his web – you must agree

it wasn't hard, with strong points on the cliffs,
you could do it sitting, standing,
even though the tanks were landing
you could knock them out without the 'buts' and 'ifs'.

No, the murders left no traces on this scene;
where there once were blown-up bodies
kids with eyes like silly Noddy's
run in joy as though that war had never been.

August 1984, after a visit to Dieppe

GAVIN EWART

The Dieppe Raid of 1942 had as its centrepiece a frontal attack on the town by Canadian troops. The left flank of the convoy was sighted by a German patrol, who opened fire, and the element of surprise was lost. If communications had been better, the whole mission might have been aborted. Air support was intermittent. The operation depended for success on very exact timing and the timing went wrong. The Canadians lost 56 officers and 851 other ranks. One army officer at the briefing is supposed to have told the regimental commanders that the raid would be "a piece of cake". The official Canadian army history describes the promenade as "dedicated once to fashionable idleness and pleasure".

BURNING TOAST

The azure-blowing box
is frozen at the moment

before it bumps to flame.
Curtains cataract without a sound.

Umbrellas on the hatstand
hang like sleeping bats.

Six months' papers and magazines
sandbag the hall.

The indoor sunset
wears a baseball catcher's mask.

The swing-top phallus
wears its condom on the inside.

Teaspoons marry midst an orgy
in the cutlery draw.

The vacuum cleaner tries
to shake off the fatted leech.

Being so full of food
the fridge has indigestion

and gently burps and farts.
The dunny roars but has no teeth.

Double adaptors and electric leads
fan out in a family tree.

Reading lamps yield in arcs
like supple gum trees in a gale.

The telephone handmilks
into an empty pail.

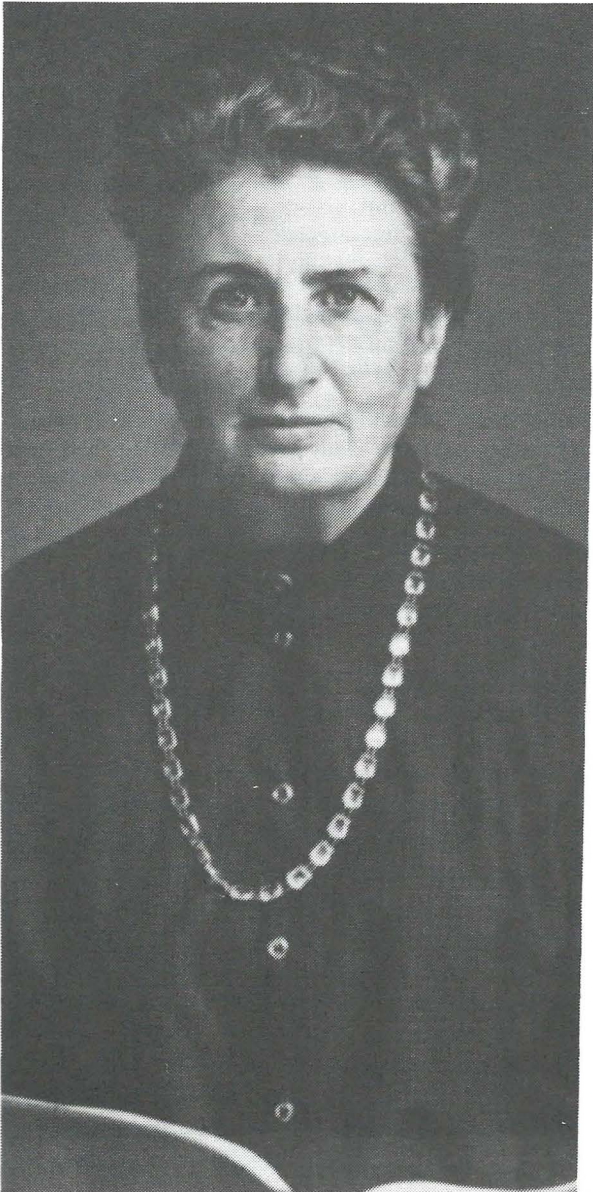
The sky has come inside.

PHILIP HODGINS

ELIZABETH RIDDELL

Rosemary Dobson

A discussion of The Three Fates and Other Poems (Hale & Iremonger, \$7.95 and \$15.95).



I have known, and know, some poets to the extent that we sometimes meet for coffee or lunch or a film, but I do not recall that we ever discuss anything as personal as our own poetry. What is there to say beyond a confession that you thought of a couple of good lines that might lead to something, that you intended to write them down (because you have had this idea for a poem going round and round in your head) but you delayed, and the two lines are now lost forever? If the poet kept talking along these lines, which is unlikely, he or she might go on to say, "Tomorrow or the next day, anyway, I will write down what I can remember, and then type it, and if I type it there is a chance it will grow and take shape, and what I have been pondering will become a poem." What boring conversations about poetry one could have! If poetry is to be the subject of discussion it had better be the work of poets not present. Preferably, dead ones.

These thoughts came to me while I was reading Rosemary Dobson's new collection, *The Three Fates*, and had also been reading something by Philip Larkin, who is a very straightforward man. In a piece called "The Pleasure Principle" in his recent collection, *Required Writing* (a Faber paperback), he says: "It is sometimes useful to remind ourselves of the simpler aspects of things normally regarded as complicated. Take, for instance, the writing of a poem. It consists of three stages: the first is when a man becomes obsessed with an emotional concept to such a degree that he is compelled to do something about it. What he does is the second stage, namely, construct a verbal device that will reproduce that emotional concept in anyone who cares to read it, anywhere, any time. The third stage is the recurrent situation of people in different times and places setting off the device and recreating in themselves what the poet felt when he wrote it. The stages are interdependent and all necessary."

Back to Rosemary Dobson. In her presence I have felt obscurely justified, almost comforted, almost persuaded that writing poetry is not such a sad and hopeless business, because you never get it quite right. I am talking about her as a poet, not as a woman, though she does in fact have a rational, handsome and engaging presence. One of her attractions is that she is among those poets who are simply poets, who do not combine poetry with performance or fiction or even teaching. Of course she is subject to some accretions of what can be called the

literary game, that is, she may do some sporadic book reviewing, or chair a panel of judges giving awards to other writers. But she is essentially a poet and, as she told Stuart Sayers of the Age, she takes poetry very seriously. Her commitment was effectively expressed in a poem called "The Tiger" which she wrote when she was in her early thirties:

The tiger paces up and down
 Behind the black bars of the page,
 He pads on silent angry feet,
 His heart is smouldering with rage.
 Captive within the lines of type
 He seeks, and yet can never find
 The world where he was free to range:
 He is the poet's furious mind.

Larkin's statement, and hers, say essential things about poetry, which is rare. I have often thought that poets, and indeed painters and other practitioners of the arts, would be well advised not to look for or submit to interviews when they have a new book, or painting, or musical composition. It is easy to understand how the interview happens. The artist feels an urgent need to be read or viewed or listened to, and there is the other enormous need of the more or less serious press to fill the yawning columns between the advertisements while at the same time polishing its image as supporter of the arts.

Poets may experience another kind of visibility that is less painful. Universities and colleges of advanced education are often anxious for poets to appear in their lecture halls, believing that hitherto unpersuaded students can be convinced of the value of literature by the presence on a platform of the living, breathing flesh. So poets are invited to bring along poems in manuscript to show the various stages – a few lines on the back of an envelope; a set of verses on a foolscap sheet, worked and re-worked, the margin crammed with additions, ornamented with coffee stains and crumbs, creased by the many times it has been put aside as too hard; the final page or pages, properly typed and 'finished' – at least temporarily. I remember attending one of these sessions at the University of Sydney when David Campbell was the star. I am not sure what the assembled students learned about the art and craft of writing poetry, but they certainly learned something about that excellent man, David Campbell, and responded with enthusiasm; and perhaps bought a book of his poetry, or at least borrowed one.

In *The Three Fates* there is a sequence called "The Continuance of Poetry: Twelve Poems for David Campbell", which includes some of Rosemary Dobson's most delicate and moving poems. In a footnote she says: "I refer to some of the places that David wrote about: for example, the original rock carvings found in the Ku-ring-gai Chase; the east coast of NSW; urban Canberra and its environs and the university. I also refer to the project of making imitations or versions of poems from the Russian in which we were jointly involved for a number of years."

These Russian "imitations", which for the average reader must stand on their own merits, have been

published in two volumes, *Moscow Trefoil* and *Seven Russian Poets*. The methods of translation and imitation have been described elsewhere. These two untitled verses of Osip Mandelstam give some idea of the flavor:

On the rough paper the police provide –
 Well – night has a mouth full of prickly bones,
 Stars sing, and busy official birds
 Are endlessly scratching their little reports.

And the stars – they want to twinkle. No matter,
 They still must apply for written permission.
 And written permission is always given
 For shining, writing, or simply smouldering.

The first five poems in *The Three Fates* are about death, or about that tag-end of life leading up to death. There is nothing defeated about them. For instance, part of "Ravines and Fireflies":

People in distant countries
 Wakeful at night
 Count me among the missing

And I too lie fretful
 Knees straight, feet crossed,
 Palms pressed together.

Oh to get off this damned slab
 To gather my long gown
 And run through the churchyard . . .

Poems three, six and eight, in an extraordinarily evocative sequence called "Daily Living – Visiting, The Letter and The Nightmare", are among the finest in this collection. Although controlled in form and restrained in expression they convey powerfully the changing climate of love and friendship, with a freedom that was not always present in the poet's earlier work. For example, the poem "The Nightmare":

I sit beside the bed where she lies dreaming
 Of phyrnic victories and sharp words said,
 She will annihilate the hospital

She will destroy the medical profession
 And, kicking her feet free, walk into the world.
 She moves her fists to her mouth as a child does.

Suppose her smouldering thoughts break out in
flame
 Not to consume bed, nightdress, flesh and hair
 But the mind, the working and the making mind

That built those towers which the world applauds,
 And leave upon the bed this breathing body
 Scarred with the rage and trouble of her time?

I have dreamt her nightmare for her. She wakes up
 And turns to smile with quick complicity,
 'I wasn't asleep. I watched you sitting there.'

Patrick White's award is given to a writer who in the opinion of the donor and his judges has been underrated, or insufficiently appreciated, by critics and that great body of Aust. Lit. which rules the waves. It is true that Rosemary Dobson has at times been placed, you might say, too reverently on a shelf, and there have been some notable omissions of her work from 'important' selections. She did not make it, for instance, into Thomas Shapcott's *Contemporary American and Australian Poetry*, but then few women did.

In *The Literature of Australia*, edited by Geoffrey Dutton (1973), Evan Jones, himself a poet, wrote the section on Australian poetry since 1920. He says, "The best-thought-of of our women poets after Judith Wright" (a singularly infelicitous way of putting it) "is Rosemary Dobson." He quotes two lines from her second collection:

This calling-up of souls, in confidence
Is sometimes – well, I find it rather trying . . .

and neatly turns this against the poet, remarking that "there is indeed an air of lassitude about her poetry. Generally fine in detail, and sometimes very fine, its characteristic starting point is from Miss Dobson's appreciation of painting, and in the long run the effect of this is to put her subjects behind glass; life always seems to be at two removes, and this effect perhaps outweighs one's sense of the perfection of her work." This is a splendid example of reverent shelving, and points missed.

In my own case, Rosemary Dobson's painting-poems do not interest me as much as her other work, though I have never felt she was showing me people at two re-

moves or behind glass. If there was a remoteness, that period is over. The detail of her writing does not now disguise the meaning, or reduce it.

The trouble with writing about Rosemary Dobson is that I want to keep quoting. A poem in *The Three Fates* called "Waiting for the Postman" anticipates the arrival of a new queen bee for a neighbor's hive:

Will she come along the road in splendour
With outriders, chamberlains?
No, she will be brought by the postman.

She will come in a small container, latched with
wax and candy.

The bees will eat it to free her.
So she will enter her kingdom.

And the bees are festive in anticipation, infesting
the fallen

Plums; rising at times to look for the postman.
Their merriment is excessive.

And the postman? Round here he appears
unexpectedly.

Travels fast, rides a Yamaha.
Is faceless, wears a protective helmet.

For my neighbor's hive a queen
Maybe Monday, Tuesday.
For me, some day, a message.

Elizabeth Riddell, poet and critic, lives in Sydney.

floating fund

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH writes: Another splendid donations total of \$1237, for which much thanks to all. Grateful though we are for the larger donations – which can now be claimed against tax, incidentally (see Swag) – it has always been the flow of small donations, often from persons who are feeling the pinch, that has been the characteristic of this Floating Fund. Our gratitude to: \$200 V.L.; \$120 N.K.; \$54 J.H.; \$50 H. & P.F. (USA), A.F.C.; \$38 C.C.; \$34 J. & W.McD., R.M.; \$25 P.A.; \$24 J.C., J.C.; \$20 B.B., J.B.; \$14 M.M., R.C., I.M., J.L., D.O'H., P.M.; \$10 K.M., S.O., C.T., J.R., D.N., M.K., P.N.; \$9 C.N., E.C., D.B., R.M., M.M., R.F., I.I., B.G., K.F., G. & P.B., H.H., K.R., J.B.; \$8 J.H.; \$5 J.J., P.F.; \$4 M.L., E.W., N.B., K.B., L.M., K.A., J.S., R.C., J.B., G.McD., P.G., A.H., R.C., J.L., J.H., J.H., R.W., J.W.McC., N.C., D.P., T.S., P.McB., M.R., J.B., E.C., V.B., T.S., D.B., H.H., C.R., D.W., K.H., B.B., A.E.B., M.P., T.D., R.W., C.C., D.H., J.W., F.J., J.P., M.G., G.S., J.S., G.E., M.R., D.M., A.B., R.N., V.T., T.K., T.K., C.W., B.A., J.B., J.J., M.S., N.S., T.M., C.H., L.McK.; \$3 J.S.; \$2 L.D., T.B., P.S., M.J.

JONATHAN DAWSON

The Barbecue

Cooking and eating meat in the open air has both a celebratory and a ritual function. The ritual is one far removed from the (increasingly cosmopolitan) daily performance of the 'wife' in the kitchen. It has not been unnoticed by sociologists that the barbecue is a male-centred activity where certain ineptitudes (the charring of the meat, bursting sausages) are prized rather than criticised.

The barbecue is the occasion where culture and nature meet, and the basic necessities of the bushman and explorers are turned into things of play. It is worthy of note that even damper has enjoyed a return to favor, and several recent television commercials have shown the best-dressed of outdoor eaters gaily sampling the end-product of the bushman's inability to carry around live yeast.

That most typical of visitors to Australia, Prince Charles, has never been let go before being filmed at the fireside. Japanese and American tourists expect (and find in their brochure at least) a barbecue. The ritual symbolizes not a colonial past, but the very forefront of settlement: the tribe acquiring power over land as the frontier is pushed further out. No wonder, then, that the United States is that other centre of the open-air cookout, and that to sell Australia in America the final lure is another shrimp on the barbie.

Like a sun dance, the barbecue defies bad weather; it celebrates and asserts the elements as kindly (at meal-times at least). The barbecue and the sun are coeval.

But also perpetuated through the ritual are certain embedded attitudes: the ideology of a male-centred society where the man is hunter and provider and the meat is communally shared. The primacy of this vision of Australia as a rugged frontier society is demonstrated by the number of press and film advertisements that associate more 'civilized' products with the primordial pleasures of burnt meat: cigarettes, wine, beer, and of course, the technological developments of the barbecue – gas, wood, electrical and hibachi-style.

Although the barbecue has undergone many moments of cultural instability (the 'witty' aprons, the assorted and supernumerary toys such as oiled teak sets of 'tools' for cooking, designed as playful versions of implements for real work: axes, hoes, spades and machetes), the core of

the activity remains the same. Food and drink are taken out into the open and exposed.

The semiotics of the barbecue, then, are those of the signs of frontier life turned to play. Open fires (real or imitated), tubs full of grog and handrolled cigarettes. One of that old colonist Holland's last great colonizing acts is the success of Drum, smoked by *men* and *women* in *jeans* and, more to the point, by stockmen at their open fires.

The reiterated barbecue as a field of signs has made it ideally available to the needs of advertisers, but its mythology was inscribed on the Australian consciousness well before the civilization of suburbs. Whole sides of lamb, spitted suckling pigs, recall other cultures, the civilization of the feudal castle, the fellowship of the Knights of the Round Table, a meal before the walls of Troy. The connections between barbecue and battle are still present, as is the notion of the appropriation of nature for the uses of humans.

All these connotations convert the civilized garden back into the paradigm of the bush, safe now except for the expected flies. Aerogard, as the name suggests, offers protections against the invasion of genuine nature, warning against any insect attempt at participation.

The contrast with the European upper-class picnic is absolute. The *picnic* (exemplified by the royal excursions to the grounds of Balmoral) involves the display of crockery, wines, prepared and unrecognizable meats – all conveyed into the 'garden', a subdued and tame natural world reorganized for human pleasure.

The barbecue, on the other hand, offers, through its congregation of signs, the illusion of a raw natural world barely kept at bay. It puts the male briefly, but firmly, back into the role of hunter and leader, by privatising the end of the communal hunt and suppressing the suburban realities of prepacked meat in order to suggest the individual's potency as provider.

Television commercials in particular show this suppression at work. For instance, 'Big Country' (meat products) commercials began with images of thundering herds of beef on the hoof, intercut with shots of careering stockmen and of whips cracking. A dissolve takes us, not to the abattoirs but direct to the freezer where, in preparation for a barbecue, the prepackaged 'Bar-B-Q Beef' is removed to thaw. Instantly we cut to the barbecue, the



presiding cook dispensing patties like a tribal chief.

Without threat or the nastiness of killing, beef on range is constantly civilized to meat packages, then by magic, released into the open air again. Even the salads are well-dressed. Rituals celebrate an ideal, mythological order. Nowhere better than at the Australian barbecue is

the ideology of the tribal Australian male painlessly celebrated.

Jonathan Dawson teaches at Griffith University. He is also a film producer and director. A number of his short stories have appeared in Overland.

BLUEY BLOOD

From "Days of Violence Days of Rages" in Dorothy Hewett's forthcoming collection *Alice in Wormland*.

I.

Alice cut her wrists
& joined the Party
read *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*
& *Ten Days that Shook the World*
Japan was flattened
white shadows on a wall
shaping the outline of a man
the dead returned
yellow with *atabrin*
The Burma Road
the fuzzy-wuzzy angels
the Cold War hotted up
3 years the Revolution
the comrades warned her
you'd better cut your hair
her mother raged
& she was disinherited
her father said
I was a redragger at 21
the Jewish Secretary
was a Spanish Brigader
his leather coat
blazed on the Esplanade
he laid her back on the desk
in the District office
but couldn't get it up
Never apologize he said
I'm old enough to be your father.

II.

she lived in the ranges
full of strontium 90
hitched a ride with the wheat trucks
revving up the hills
sold the *Workers' Star*
at *The Railway Workshops*
when Bluey Blood drove in from *Iron Knob*
his *Humber Snipe* was boiling
he used his boilermaker's shoulders
to storm the Council Chambers
bursting through the Town Hall doors
like anarchists red-headed laughing
she saw him there beside her

they crossed *The Horseshoe Bridge*
to little Italy
shacked up in a single bed
with the light bulb dangling
he said *I'm beginning to smell like a woman*
the Party members sent her to coventry
outside the Chinese cafe
old friends cut her dead
he bought her a hock-shop ring
With this ring I thee wed
in true Communist marriage

the Party Secretary said
We have reason to believe
he works for ASIO.

III.

she walked out
of the Saturday matinees
leaving behind Hepburn
in *The Philadelphia Story*
the ragged coconut palms
the trolley buses sparking
down Riverside Drive
she was Garbo in *Anna Christie*
meeting Garfield & Jean Gabin
on the waterfront
Bluey Blood bought her a ticket
on *The Trans-Continental*
they played pontoon & poker
across the desert

the glass dome of *Central*
swarmed with light
at Mansion House
a metho-drunker raged
with a cut-throat razor
in the Coal Strike
& the coldest Sydney winter
she read *The Poor Man's Orange*
typed up the strike stencils
in *The Henry Lawson Hall*
& lost her baby
the Control Commission told him
She's only a flash in the pan.

IV.

Squatting in Marriott St
the rats behind the icebox
mildew traced varicosed curliques
on the walls
embroidering bibs by the coal fire
the slag exploded
her first born tore her apart
between the pains she read
The Fortunes of Richard Mahony
raw from elbow to wrist
with a breech-birth boy
Bluey walked down the ward
a branch of almond blossom
dropped on the white bed

the Referendum to ban the Party
was lost won lost again
smoke from the illegal literature
darkened the autumn air

at *The Pensioners' Hall*
they sang *The Red Flag*
& danced the tango
the pensioners' piss
rained through the ceiling
the second baby
had infant eczema
(he swore it wasn't his)
at *The Petrov Commission*
Alice was called a spy
the Hungarian Revolution
split the Party
the Revisionists slipped
Krushchev's speech
through the letterbox

pregnant pushing a pram
under the flags & banners
she marched on May Day

two old men by the Moreton Bays
Why don't you go home
& get married?

V.

at night on the back step
he plucks at the ukelele
his heart breaking
the light touches
his red hair
the sun cancers
flake on the backs
of his hands
in bed he sleeps
without touching

DOROTHY HEWETT

JOAN LINDSAY

Student Days

Joan Lindsay, who died last December at the age of eighty-eight, was a witty and delightful companion who never relinquished her interest in the life around her. Her most famous work of course was Picnic at Hanging Rock, but her contributions to art and literature went far beyond the one book, and in her younger days – and despite her disclaimers here – she was no inconsiderable painter. We print, in tribute to Joan Lindsay, a manuscript she gave Overland some time ago. This is an edited version of a talk she gave, probably in the 1960s, to the Melbourne Catalysts' Society.

In a few more years, nobody will remember, as I do, how Sir Keith Murdoch, that prince of Victorian National Gallery Trustees, would come running up the perilous little spiral staircase to the Director's office, with the light of battle in his eye. Nor the Staff Superintendent, Bill Morphett, grinning from ear to ear as he hurried to hoist the Union Jack at half mast on the death of a universally-detested official. Nor the unfortunate French polisher, who cared for the antique furniture in the Art Museum, and lost his job through a fatal addiction for drinking from his own professional stock of methylated spirits? And is there any record of the summer morning when the Director entertained a party of jockeys' apprentices in his room, sitting enthralled on the floor while he told them of some of the great horse painters of the past and present? Or of that wonderful head teacher of the Carlton State School, who used to bring a selection of children up to the Print Room to choose their own color prints from our School Loan Collection? I remember a little bullet-headed boy whose choice, without a moment's hesitation, was Fragonard's charmingly romantic "Lady on a Swing". All of these human beings played their parts, great and small, in the unofficial history of our first National Gallery, which will never find its way into the public service files.

The rather forbidding classical building, whose continually-leaking copper dome still rises in almost Turkish bravado above a rambling tin roof, was originally the home of at least four separate institutions, all of them bursting at the seams: the Public Library, the Natural History Museum, the Science and Technological Museum, as well as the National Gallery and Art

Museum, which included the coin collection and various sideshows stuck away in odd corners, such as Ned Kelly's armor and a mummy in a dark little room like a boot-cupboard upstairs.

The Art Gallery, at the turn of the century, was far from a place of popular entertainment it is today. There were few important new acquisitions to keep the public aware and interested. Year after year, the same old pictures – many of them second- or even third-rate works – remained hanging in the same positions on the dingy ill-lit walls. Oil paintings, watercolors, drawings: sometimes all mixed up together in double rows behind a solid brass railing.

My mother was a conscientious parent who believed her children should be given regular doses of culture at an early age, in much the same spirit as we were given regular doses of cod-liver oil. I was first taken to the Gallery in a cable tram, at the age of four or five. A visit mainly memorable on account of the tram ride, and the toasted buns we ate in a tea shop on the way home.

My first childish impressions are of vast echoing rooms in which we spoke in whispers. Of ceilings high as the sky. Of acres of slippery parquet floors, over which I was dragged by one reluctant arm in my little soft kid shoes. Of being suddenly jerked to a standstill before some work of art considered suitable for infant eyes.

The only picture that made the slightest impact was close to the front entrance – an enormous painting almost as long as a tram, with a lot of people in fancy dress, and an old man in the middle called Moses, in a red dressing gown, holding up something that looked like a cricket bat. Adults taking a child to an art gallery would do well

to remember that a child only sees about half of a picture anyway.

A few years later I really began to enjoy looking at some of the pictures. Especially the dying agonies of the frozen sheep in the snow, called "Anguish"; likewise "The Brigands", about to murder some travellers on a mountain road. (Like most nicely brought up little girls of six years old I was a natural ghoul, and I hope none the worse for it.)

In the year 1904 a single ray of light had begun to illuminate the twilight atmosphere of the "Morgue", as the old National Gallery was known to generations of the uniformed staff. With the death of Alfred Felton, the whole course of Gallery affairs started, at first almost imperceptibly, to change. Mr Felton's magnificent bequest within a few years was to put the Gallery, once a little known colonial art museum, into the international limelight as an important body able to compete with the great collectors of Paris, London and New York.

Although my father was in some degree associated with the Felton Bequest as their legal adviser on the terms of the huge complicated will, I can't pretend that his children, playing in the garden in East St Kilda, were aware of the momentous happenings then taking place at the National Gallery. But I *do* remember certain elderly gentlemen, mostly in top hats, who came to visit my parents on Sundays, vaguely referred to as "trustees". Heaven knows what we children thought they were!

Actually, they were some of the first trustees appointed by the Felton Bequest: "To consult and purchase works of art in close contact with those of the Melbourne Gallery". All were men of public standing in the Melbourne scene: John Mather, the water-colorist, who had his house and studio opposite us in Alma Road – rather alarming – small black beard, beaked eagle nose and piercing dark eyes; Dr Alexander Leeper, frankly terrifying to the young, even as seen at a safe distance taking afternoon tea in our drawing room; Sir John McFarland, who sometimes came to Sunday lunch – a chatty old gentleman with a strange manner of pronouncing certain words – probably a strong Scottish accent? and Dr Charles Bage, who had the kindly brown eyes of a gentle dog.

A standing dish at Felton conferences for over forty years was Mr A.J. Levey, a little pink-cheeked Rip Van Winkle, always referred to as "old" Mr Levey. Incidentally, it was "old" Mr Levey who cabled to the Felton from London in 1907: "Why not Corot's Bent Tree? Lovely! Famous!" "The Bent Tree" was an instant popular success and must have sent up the attendance at our Gallery by leaps and bounds.

I don't remember at what age I began to regard a visit to the Gallery as a treat – not to say a deep and secret source of joy. But I do remember standing agape in front of "The Bent Tree" – by this time I had outgrown Moses and the Dying Sheep – although my taste was far from sophisticated. I remember thinking that artists must be the luckiest people in the world. I am inclined to think so still. Many years afterward, when I was walking past "The Bent Tree" with George Bell, he stopped dead in his track to

deliver a tirade of contemptuous abuse, surprising in a man of George's wide aesthetic sympathies: "Chocolate box . . . pot boiler . . ." and so on. As this was towards the end of his life when George suffered from a nagging gall bladder, I can only think this was the reason for such a vitriolic outburst.

As a starry-eyed schoolgirl I was lucky enough to be introduced to some of the finest works in the Gallery by our old family friend Professor Sir Baldwin Spencer, then a Gallery trustee. An anthropologist by profession, Sir Baldwin's sensitive nose for color and line made him one of our few connoisseurs of Australian art. I can see him now, standing before a favorite landscape, bending so low over the canvas his head nearly touched the frame, a lock of white hair falling over one blue eye, while a tobacco-stained finger traced the lines of the composition in the air. He was the first person I ever heard using the word *quality* in the sense that painters use it. He also told me that it took a genius to paint a foreground. Many of the pictures I enjoy with a special pleasure today – Courbet's "Forest", Lambert's "Lottie and The Lady", Pissaro's "Boulevard Montmartre" – were first revealed to me by my dear old friend.

Although my far from brilliant career in the arts began by going out sketching at the age of five, armed with a sixpenny paintbox with flat cakes of paint that had to be licked good and hard to make the color come off on the paper, I was no infant prodigy. But I did have a devouring passion to try and learn to draw. And perhaps, some day, to become a professional painter. Accordingly, soon after leaving school, was enrolled as a drawing student at the National Gallery Art School. The Master of the Painting School was Bernard Hall. Beyond his own domain he was something of a social figure, who attended Sunday afternoon parties in yellow gloves, carried a little cane and was made quite a fuss of by the Toorak Establishment. He wore a small clipped moustache and walked with the upright carriage of a military man.

Although "Barney", as he was known to the students, had some serious shortcomings in his triple role of Director of the Art Gallery, Curator of the Art Museum, and Master of the Art School, he was a conscientious man. Precise and humorless, he did his best on a miserable salary – at one stage I think it was seven hundred a year. As Curator of the Art Museum the Director was supposed to be an expert on antique furniture, lace, costumes, silver, china and glass. In the Print Office upstairs he had some slight assistance from one Gilkes, under whose roving eye the priceless prints, etchings and drawings remained in a heartbreaking muddle during his reign as Keeper of the Prints, from 1927 to 1939. The whole institution in Mr Hall's day was run on a shoe-string and altogether he had a difficult row to hoe. About the only plum in the pie was the Director's right of private practice, in a quite pleasant studio at the end of a corridor in the Painting School upstairs. How Mr Hall ever found time to retire to his ivory tower is a miracle.

The Drawing School in my time was quite literally housed under a hot tin roof, in a ramshackle part of the building running parallel with Latrobe Street, long since demolished, on the site of what was later the Lending

Library. It was reached by a short flight of wooden steps at the north end of the main building, whose handsome classical facade suddenly petered out in the shade of a magnificent old Moreton Bay fig tree, which some of you may remember. I still have some photographs of students eating their lunches on the grass under that tree. Between bites of sandwiches and the ever popular “cream slices” from a dirty little cake shop opposite, we discussed Art with a capital A. Impressionism, Meldrumism, Cubism, much the same kind of conversation you would hear amongst art students today.

On the morning when I arrived at the Drawing School with my mother (who had insisted on bringing a few of my feeble little sketches to show with pride to the Drawing Master, McCubbin) I could feel my legs trembling as we mounted the steps to the students’ classroom. With the unconscious arrogance of youth I imagined that every eye was focussed on the new arrival. Actually all sorts of eccentrics, duds and deadbeats in every walk of life were forever coming and going – the fee was only a pound a term and nobody took the slightest notice of a newcomer until he or she had settled down and become a regular attendant with serious intentions of completing the course.

Before reaching the door of the Drawing School, it was necessary to pass through the students’ so-called clubroom – a dingy room reeking of turpentine and stale frying-fat. There were two or three long wooden paint-stained tables at which we sat to eat our indigestible lunches from paper bags, a few hard-backed chairs reserved for the hierarchy of the Seniors of the Painting School, some backless wooden benches and a perpetually leaking gas ring and rusty griller, reserved for the frying of ‘senior’ chops and eggs.

The Drawing School, where I was henceforth to spend five days a week for I forget exactly how many years, must have run more than half way along the block – a long lofty badly-lit room lined on both sides by plaster casts from the antique – the Parthenon Frieze, Michelangelo’s Moses, the Dancing Faun, as well as a few anatomical figures with white plaster innards ruthlessly exposed. As these absurd and hideous figures had no relationship whatever to the living models I later drew in the life class, I never learned anything from them in all the years I was there. And nor, I imagine, did anyone else! Now and again a Dr Wood gave us some perfunctory lessons in anatomy, but as the doctor had no knowledge of drawing, all we did was to memorise a few names of the red and blue veins and muscles on his charts.

The regulations governing the Art School were inflexible – probably laid down by the Trustees, or the Civil Service, in 1870, when Eugene Von Guerard became its first master. Von Guerard used to live for a time in Lady Casey’s little East Melbourne house, walking to the Gallery through the Fitzroy Gardens. No new student, however experienced, was allowed to attend the painting and drawing-life-classes upstairs until he or she had completed the prescribed course of meticulously-copied drawings from the antique.

The school as I remember it always had a strong smell

of mice, who lived well on the pieces of stale bread we used for rubbing out on our drawings! We drew on large sheets of white Michalet or Double Elephant paper tacked to heavy wooden drawing boards on our easels. Drawing with a pencil or pen was not permitted, and anything in the way of a strong line was frowned upon. My brother-in-law, Lionel Lindsay, once publicly dubbed the National Gallery Drawing School “The school of smudge”.

It was an unhappy state of affairs both for the students and the teachers that the Art School was run by two men – both practising painters – as utterly opposed in temperament and training as Frederick McCubbin and Bernard Hall. To make matters even more difficult, Hall, as Head of the whole School, was supposedly in authority over McCubbin, who ran the Drawing School. So that such scraps of knowledge as we managed to glean below in the Drawing School became virtually useless when one made the ascent to Olympus and began all over again under Bernard Hall. Neither Hall nor McCubbin were good teachers in the sense of being able to show us how to handle our tools of trade.

McCubbin, however, was a delightful personality – witty, human, garrulous, widely-read. I remember him as a rather shrunken little old man with very bright eyes and a bald nut-brown head, usually dressed in a very long shabby overcoat. He would stand there talking to us informally for hours: about Shakespeare, gum trees, Buvelot, music, the theatre, a favorite picture in the Gallery – anything that happened to crop up in his lively mind. Unfortunately, when confronted with a student desperately in need of some practical instruction, the dear old man would just stand there for a few moments looking at the drawing on the easel, and then walk away muttering “Feel it . . . feel it . . .” This frequently happened to me. But if we didn’t learn much about drawing, he taught us a lot about life and literature and art in general, which is probably more useful. Once in a blue moon he would take us into one of the galleries and, as he stood before a favorite picture, with the assistance of a few apt comments and an explanatory turned-out thumb, would give us a fleeting golden glimpse of an artist’s inner vision. I realize now that dear old Frederick McCubbin, himself an artist to the tips of his stubby fingers, must have been in purgatory. The Drawing School, as he was obliged to conduct its stifling curriculum of examinations, prizes and photographic accuracy, was a sinking ship, far beyond his help.

Bernard Hall, both as a man and a teacher, was an entirely different cup of tea. Trained in the Munich School – exact, academic – McCubbin revelled in a foreground of bracken fern trembling in evening light. Hall’s idea of beauty ran to shiny pink nudes and shiny brass trays. One attribute they *did* have in common – both our masters became inarticulate when it was a matter of practical instruction in the classroom, although Hall’s insistence on the Munich recipe – of giving the model’s nose an underpainting of rich crimson before placing a shining highlight fair in the middle – gave most of the students’ portrait heads the appearance of male and female alcoholics. Sometimes – I suppose in despair –

he would simply pick up the nearest paint rag and wipe the whole thing off the canvas, sniff, and walk away. We thought the sniffs were of scorn . . . although I now think it likely he suffered from hay fever. And I'm sure, though we didn't think so then, the poor man was painfully shy.

As several years of my stay at the School were during the war, the students were mainly females. An exception was Godfrey Miller – a New Zealander who had just come back from the war. Miller was desperately withdrawn and hated anyone to see his work. I became rather friendly with Miller and was once allowed to see some of his water-colors. I remember I didn't think much of them; but whether I was right in my judgement, or the art collectors who today pay immense sums for a Godfrey Miller abstract, I wouldn't know. He was a solitary soul who never joined in any of our student activities, lived very simply in modest lodgings, and we naively put him down as hard up. When Godfrey Miller died in Sydney a few years ago, even his intimate friends were amazed to learn that he was a very rich man – always had been – apart from the successful sales of his work.

One of the odd fishes in the male line was Les Wilson – a type which flourishes today, generally with long hair and a scruffy beard. Les was a half-baked intellectual with a long red nose and pale watery eyes, who liked to gather the girls together for a nice cosy talk on what was then called in hushed whispers “Bolshevism”. A quiet likeable student, who afterwards became quite a well-known painter in a traditional manner, was Roy Thompson. Roy at this time was really hard-up, and used to drive a hearse for an undertaker in the summer holidays so as to be able to continue his studies at the Gallery. A lovable female eccentric was my friend Mrs Louise Fairley, a woman of real taste and a good deal of knowledge, who had studied under James McNeil Whistler in Paris. Louise Fairley first showed me the subtle beauty of our Fantin Latour flowerpiece in the Gallery. She was no chicken, even then, and I remember her sitting on a high stool, looking rather like Daisy Bates, with her high collar, flowing skirts, lace-up boots and wide-brimmed hat with a gauze veil jabbed with long hat pins. John Farmer was a renegade from the then fashionable Meldrum School – a tall handsome youth with melting black eyes and a silky black beard. I first remember seeing Jack when he was engaged in wordy argument with a girl called Eileen Fitzsimmons. Eileen was then the champion woman-rider of Australia, a real character – brave as a lion, bow-legged and as strong as one of her own horses. Sick of arguing with the opinionated Jack, she had simply picked him up, thrown him over one shoulder and carried him into the clubroom. I saw Jack Farmer in Frankston the other day and wondered if he remembered! When Eileen wasn't down at the St Kilda Road Police Barracks helping to school police horses, or gossiping with horsey friends at the now defunct Kirk's Bazaar in Bourke Street, she did quite competent little paintings of thoroughbreds as commissions.

One morning – probably for a bet – Eileen turned up at the Drawing School perfectly turned out in breeches and top boots, mounted on a beautiful white police charger.

The well-trained animal, accustomed to city traffic, picked its dainty way right down the length of the room between the rows of students agape at their easels, while poor old Maloney, the attendant on duty at the School that morning, who saw everything through a permanent haze of cheap spirits, anyway, stood helplessly wringing his hands and almost weeping. If Barney Hall had paid the School a surprise visit at that moment, Maloney would have lost his job and Eileen Fitzsimmons been expelled.

At last the day came when I was admitted to the Upstairs Painting School. The studios where we worked have long ago been demolished. In my time, they had a certain charm – if you could stand the reek of linseed oil and turpentine, and the almost complete lack of ventilation. The walls were encrusted with the scrapings of generations of palettes, and former students were sad when the trustees decided the fire risk was too great and the flimsy painted partitions had to go. I remember a lifelike giant spider painted by some genius on the ceiling. And a painted umbrella, leaning against the wall, shadow and all. And of course signatures of the famous and not so famous, entwined with hearts, arrows and appropriate sentiments.

There was a cold water sink on the landing where we washed our brushes, and two or three chairs. No toilet. All very primitive by contemporary standards.

The painting students were expected to work to regular hours – mornings and afternoons, as well as attending life classes on certain nights of the week.

However, we found plenty of time for entertainment out of school. Once we were given permission by the trustees to hold a fancy dress ball in the McArthur Gallery, with a slap-up supper: trestle tables with flowers and candles, and a three-man orchestra. We danced in a dim mysterious light, smoked cigarettes, drank cheap red wine, and no doubt trod the jellies and trifles into the lovely parquet floors. A lot of past Gallery students turned up: Esther Paterson, then a blue-eyed beauty with glorious golden hair, was easily the belle of the ball. Others were Dora Wilson, Louis McCubbin, Penleigh Boyd, John Longstaff – first winner of the National Gallery Travelling Scholarship in 1887 and always a beautiful dancer – all of them to us, as professional artists, exalted beings from another world.

On Saturdays and Sundays we often went for picnics or informal sketching expeditions. A favorite sketching ground was the Yarra bank, under one of the bridges, where we could sit on the grass and imagine ourselves in the country. We went everywhere on foot, or by train, humping our paintboxes. I can't remember any of the students owning a motor car.

It was easy enough to run down to the Victoria Market for sixpenn'orth of fish, or a pumpkin, for a still-life, but the finding of suitable models for the life-classes was always a problem. The pay was wretched – as far as I remember half-a-crown an hour for the head only. More, but still very little for posing in the nude, or half-nude.

The Senior Monitor of the Painting School used to

haunt the Public Reading Room of the Library where homeless old men, and sometimes women, would spend long days dozing over an unread newspaper by way of entertainment. There were no Elderly Citizens' Clubs in those days. Other models were recruited from the inmates of the Salvation Army Home in Little Lon so that we rarely had a chance to try out our talents on anyone young and beautiful. My own masterpiece, with which I scraped through one of the drawing tests, was an old Dutch or German seaman whose furry black beard appeared to be tacked on from one huge red ear to the other, like a fringe. This unbelievably cheerful old party told me with a grin: "I'm no Sleeping Beauty, Miss". Strange to say, no matter how truthfully we drew their squints, bulbous noses, cauliflower ears, wrinkles, warts and all, the living model invariably appeared delighted with our efforts, when he or she climbed down off the Model's Throne and wandered amongst our easels during the ten minute rests.

The life-classes at night were held in an unlined barn of a room at the far end of the Drawing School. Once again I found myself under a hot tin roof – on winter nights, a bitterly cold one. Here we drew very large nude figures in charcoal. Nothing as frivolous as quick sketches: the pose was only changed when everyone was sick to death of

trying to make our drawings look like solid human beings instead of blown up balloons.

One of the few youthful models who posed for us was a sickly looking youth of about sixteen. It was a cold night and I can still see the awful greenish-white pallor of his skin stretched tight over a skeleton frame. This poor boy fainted in front of the class and never came again. He was not the only one who failed to turn up at the appointed time. No wonder! Our models were often too much occupied in slowly dying of starvation to make the grade.

On a day so long ago now that I can only remember it was a warm sunny afternoon, I was stuck in front of an easel, struggling with a portrait head, when we heard Barney Hall's door slam at the end of the corridor as he said goodbye to a visitor. This particular visitor was a tall young officer smart in khaki slacks, carrying a portfolio of drawings under his arm. As he passed the open door of our classroom, the student next to me remarked – "That's Daryl Lindsay – just come back from London with some war drawings".

I liked the look of Daryl Lindsay and made up my mind on the spot that some day – somehow – I would meet him. Sure enough, a few weeks later I was having tea at M.J. McNally's Bourke Street studio with some student friends, when I walked my future husband.

comment

Helen Thomson writes:

In your 'Swag' in the most recent issue of *Overland* you comment on the poor state of literary texts in Australian publishing, and refer amongst others to my recent Penguin edition of Catherine Spence's *Handfasted*, in which some of the original text has been deleted.

Originally rejected on so-called moral grounds which had nothing to do with the novel's literary merits but everything to do with its judges taking fright at its radical ideas, *Handfasted* was never edited by a publisher. My Afterword in the Penguin edition makes it clear that the cuts to the first section consist of the abbreviation of some of old Mrs Keith's conversations. This unmistakable portrait of Spence's mother, Helen Brodie Spence, is an affectionate tribute which takes up a disproportionate share of the novel, is an impediment to the plot, and a distraction from the novel's main purpose and ideas. The structure and balance of the novel has in my opinion been considerably improved without diminishing the character or robbing the novel of any of its ideas. The Salt Lake City chapter is largely, but not wholly, repetitive, and while I do not think it can be defended as strongly as I would defend the earlier cuts, I do not think its absence is in any way damaging to the novel as a whole.

Ideally, the novel's first appearance should have been in its complete form, preferably with scholarly appendages, indicating for example, as the manuscript itself does, just where Spence had made later additions. This was never an option. Penguin's offer to publish the novel was dependent on its being shortened, and it was to appear in an uncluttered 'popular' format with an Afterword rather than an Introduction. Since this represented in fact *Handfasted*'s first and only offer of publication in 105 years, I barely hesitated. Bruce Sims, Penguin's house editor, accepted my quite modest cuts without demur, and is as delighted as I am at the interest this so unjustly neglected novel has aroused. Far from pre-empting a scholarly edition, the success of the Penguin edition may now make this possible.

I am quite sure *Handfasted* is better in print as it is, than intact, sacrosanct and unpublished in its box in the Adelaide Archives. Neither editors nor publishers see themselves as entirely free agents. In this particular case – faced with the never-edited manuscript of a dead author – I am convinced that there has been an appropriate conjunction of aesthetic and commercial considerations.

books

Ordinary People

Judith Brett

Janet McCalman: *Struggletown: Public and Private Life in Richmond 1900-1965* (Melbourne University Press, \$19.50)

In 1954 a woman who failed to stop after a car accident gave as her defence "My only thought was to get home safely ... I just kept on going, wanting to get out of Richmond where the bandits seem to live." Richmond, one of Melbourne's oldest industrial suburbs, was a place of poverty, hardship and struggle for most of its residents during the first half of this century. For the middle class outside, as seen from the train window, it seemed like a slum; to the people who lived there it was their life. Janet McCalman's *Struggletown: Public and Private Life In Richmond 1900-1965* depicts that life by following the generation born around the turn of the century from their Edwardian childhoods, through school during the First World War, work, marriage and parenthood during the Depression, the Second World War, and into middle and old age in the more affluent years after the War. This narrative strategy enables McCalman to organize a wealth of detail and observation into a highly readable book which should appeal far outside both Richmond and the historical profession.

The book draws on both conventional historical sources, such as demographic statistics, newspapers, court records and City Council papers, and on interviews with old residents. This combination of documentary and oral sources allows McCalman to put people's remembered experiences in the wider context of population shifts, the vicissitudes of the economy, changes in legislation, and so on; it also enables her to attend with sensitivity and care to the emotional quality of people's lives. This includes the quality of their relationships with their parents, their friends, their spouses and their own children. She notes how the demands of bringing up children on very little money, in a dirty and unhealthy environment, made it hard for some women to show affection. A woman who has had to deny herself all her own desires does not always find it easy to relax and play with her children. Men and women locked in conflict

over money do not always find it easy to sympathize with the stresses and demands on each others' lives. But some do. This is not a book which merely fleshes out stereotypes with lively anecdotes, but a book which asks about the ways people made sense of and gave meaning to their lives.

Despite their varying personal circumstances, all Richmond residents had to deal with their Richmond origins. The word 'slum', often used by well-meaning reformers wanting to improve Richmond's amenities, has always drawn an ambivalent reaction in Richmond. The one small word seemed to rob Richmond people of the dignity and respectability for which many of them fought so hard, and make them ashamed of conditions over which they had little control. The lives remembered in this book are full of stories of petty humiliations and gross injustices. The section dealing with the schooling of this generation shows just how little commitment the society had to the education of working-class children. All that many of them took from their school years was the sense that they were inferior. Some see this lack of confidence which began at school as the psychological hallmark of being working class, and have had to struggle hard for self-esteem. It is this need for a sense of personal significance which McCalman sees as partly explaining the corruption and intrigue which have marked Richmond's political life. Commenting on one man's memories of sly grog shops and SP bookies, she writes:

This minutely remembered world was the essence of the masculine community in Richmond. It thrived on gossip, legends, secrets, boasts, schemes and lurks. And it was the cradle of the conspiracies and petty corruption that cast a shadow over working-class politics. If you were considered to 'belong' to Richmond you were a somebody: you had an identity and a role that helped mitigate your insignificance in the eyes of the outside world. And although the number involved in serious crime remained small, the proximity to big crime gave an edge of excitement to life.

Inevitably there is much in this book on the Richmond City Council and the ALP. McCalman is judicious when dealing with the accusations of violence, corruption and

electoral improprieties, but has little sympathy for a Council which spent £30,000 in the middle of the 1930s on refurbishing the Town Hall and the City Baths when the roads were in sore need of repair, drainage in some areas was appalling, and many Richmond families were still dependent on sustenance. She follows the tensions in Labor politics between Catholics and Protestants from the First World War anti-conscription campaign through to the Split of the 1950s.

The sub-title of the book is "Public and Private Life in Richmond", and the focus shifts back and forth between people's personal and domestic experiences and the civic world of Labor politics. There is, however, little on people's experiences of work. Perhaps because of women's greater longevity, elderly women predominate amongst the informants, and their experiences are centred on the maintenance of the home and the raising of their children. Married women generally did not work until the Second World War, and then many of them worked only briefly. There is little in the book on the experiences of the workers in Richmond's factories, businesses and sweatshops, and what there is, is as much about women's experiences as men's. The tensions over drink and money which are described again and again, and the separateness of men's and women's experience which comes through the book, call out for more detailed exploration of the dangers, tedium and humiliations that were part of many working men's working lives, and of the way such men coped with enforced unemployment. The feckless husbands of these women battling for respectability remain shadowy figures, seen mainly through the eyes of their wives and not in their own terms.

As I mentioned earlier, the human life span provides the book's narrative strategy; the potential of the human life also provides its moral framework. McCalman brings to the lives of this Richmond generation a set of beliefs about the capacity of people for emotionally, sexually and intellectually fulfilled lives, and while she admires the resourcefulness and courage with which many of these people lived their lives, she continually reminds the reader of the wasted opportunities for happiness in both love and work in these lives. Generally her observations are perceptive and based on widely shared values, but occasionally one hears the preoccupations of a tertiary-educated middle-class woman a little too loudly, as when sugar is compared with alcohol as the curse of non-drinking classes.

This book might, at first glance, seem of merely local interest. That it will be of great local interest is without doubt. The book is written clearly, directly, and with a simple, often colloquial, vocabulary. This achieves a sympathy of style with the oral testimony, and ensures that those who have contributed to the work so generously from their own experience will be able to read the book without feeling intimidated. But the book deserves a much wider readership. The lives of most ordinary people will always be local, and though Richmond is not presented as some generalized Everytown (the persons and events of its civic life are here in great detail), there is much in this book to illuminate the way ordinary people

experienced the first half of this century. And the sense of stigma so many of them felt has not gone from contemporary society even though some of the worst material poverty has been alleviated. The boundaries and taboos of class relations shift, and while many of the increasing numbers of middle-class people who now live in Richmond get some pleasure from the remnants of its industrial past, they are likely to have little first-hand knowledge of the lives of people living in the newer working-class suburbs.

Janet McCalman started writing this book when she was on the dole and continued it while working part-time as a bookkeeper and later while caring for her young son. She did not hold a university job for any of this time, with all the benefits of a steady income and research assistance which that entails. Yet she has written one of the best books recently published in Australian history. It must make historians wonder whether the way the profession is currently organized in the universities is the best way to produce good history.

Judith Brett is the Editor of Meanjin.

Australian War Poetry

Gavin Ewart

Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Peter Pierce: *Clubbing of the Gunfire: 101 Australian War Poems* (Melbourne University Press, \$14.95).

"War poems are part of the account we give of ourselves and our kinsmen as warriors."

If you look in an anthology of twentieth century war poetry, such as Oscar Williams' famous one of 1945, *The War Poets*, you will be hard put to it to find an Australian writer. There are, in fact, only two. John Manifold has nine poems, one of them the very accomplished piece of light verse (always in short supply during a war) about basic training in England, and another, the famous "The Bunyip And The Whistling Kettle" – not really a war poem at all. The only other Australian is Lance Bombardier Elgar Owen, who has one poem "Maturity", Kiplingesque and nursery-rhymelike but good. This is in the anthology under review; so is Manifold's "Five Tune".

The situation with the most recent collection – Jon Stallworthy's *Oxford Book of War Poetry* – is even worse. The only poem here by an Australian is Peter Porter's "Your Attention Please". There is also, I think, too much willingness to pick 'names' (particularly American names) whether the poems have much to do with war or not. Worst perhaps are those by poets who have heard of war, but only heard of it (Geoffrey Hill, Galway Kinnell). David Gascoyne's "Ecce Homo" is justifiable as a philosophical consideration of war; moreover, it has the

feeling of despair so common among civilian intellectuals in the early Forties, and at least Gascoyne was *there*, in the wartime miasma.

Clubbing of the Gunfire has a very detailed historical Introduction, which serves as very helpful background reading for the 101 poems the Editors have selected. The book is divided into four sections: Imperial Wars 1885-1902 (this includes the Pacification of New Zealand, the Sudan, the Boer War, the Boxer Rising in China); the Great War 1914-1918; the Second World War 1939-1945; and the Asian wars 1950-1972. Some of the Boer War poets very neatly turned Kipling's argumentative style against him. They certainly wrote this kind of polemical piece as well as he did. The Great War, with Gallipoli, gave Australia one of its great myths – not in the sense of something untrue, but in the sense of something forever remembered as a passage of arms. The sinking of the *Emden* by the *Sydney* was in the same category. The best verse, considered as poetry, came from the Second World War. The Korean And Vietnam Wars, widely regarded as useless and inspired by American anti-communism, produced the most ideological verse and the highest proportion of poems by non-combatants.

I used a schoolmasterly method and divided the poems into my own four categories: Very Good, Good, Bad and Very Bad. In the first category I had eleven poems, with three borderline cases. All of these could, and probably should, be in any all-inclusive anthology of war poetry (to put it another way, only editorial ignorance could keep them out).

The Very Goods were as follows: "The Rhyme of Rudyard K." by Randolph Bedford (the bitter bit, see above), Les Murray's elegy "Visiting Anzac in the Year of Metrication" (more like Lewis Carroll than Kipling, a fine reconstruction of the 'feeling' of the Gallipoli operation), "Casualty" by Harley Matthews (how wars are semi-inevitable), "The Dream" by M.B. McCallum (the best possible use of surrealism for war's unreality), Kenneth Slessor's "Beach Burial" (death is neutral; one of the best poems of the Second World War) and "An Inscription for Dog River" (Sassoon-like comment on military vanity) and John Manifold's "Fife Tune" (see above), his two sonnets on the Bren and the Oerlikon (a variant of Keith Douglas' theme in "Vergissmeinicht" – "and mocked at by his own equipment / that's hard and good when he's decayed") and "The Tomb of Lt John Learmonth, AIF", one of the best of the lot:

That's courage chemically pure, uncrossed
With sacrifice or duty or career,
Which counts and pays in ready coin the cost

Of holding course. Armies are not its sphere
Where all's contrived to achieve its counterfeit;
It swears with discipline, it's volunteer.

Manifold and Murray, in their different ways, show as the most accomplished writers of verse.

Other Very Goods were James McAuley's "Compan-

ions" (the strictly political, anti-Hitlerians in Germany; McAuley was one of the two noble progenitors of the Ern Malley poems), David Malouf's "The Year of the Foxes" (the war seen by a child on the home front), "Poem" by Bruce Beaver (enigmatic and telling) and Bruce Dawe's "Homecoming", one of the most directly moving of them all.

On the borderline between Good and Very Good I put Chris Wallace-Crabbe's long, atmospheric "The Shapes of Gallipoli", inspired formally (I guessed) by David Jones' "In Parenthesis", showing a few signs of being a 'manufactured' poem, and in its presentation of horrors a bit too coincidental (stepping on the rotting face of the village draper). Craig Powell's "Wedding Feast" ("A day to the north of me there's a war / with neither side worth cheering for") was much more like it. Jennifer Strauss' "A Just Cause" (the Old Testament slaughter of Jezebel, an example of how causes don't seem equally just to one and all) and David Campbell's "My Lai" (GI attitudes to the Vietnam war) I also found excellent.

The category Good also held 'Banjo' Paterson (old-fashioned rhetoric directed against "England's degenerate generals" in the Sudan), Henry Lawson's "Who'll Wear the Beaten Colours?" (the Boers were right), Christopher Brennan's "Reflections of a Retired Symbolist Poet 1916" (satire on old poets cashing in on the First World War), Harley Matthews' "True Patriot" (narrative and less constipated in its rhythms than most poems of that time), Vance Palmer's "The Camp" (also metrically free), "The Trenches" by Frederick Manning (free verse with an old-fashioned tinge), and Geoff Page's "Christ at Gallipoli", an example of how a short sharp poem (satire on the clergy who maintained that God was with the Allies) can be more effective than a long straggly one (see the Wallace-Crabbe poem); presumably, because it's easier to make one point than several.

Other Goods were "Soldiers" by David Martin (traditional marching song, promoting the view that the Spanish Civil War Republicans really had a cause worth fighting for), "The Recruit" by Geoffrey Dutton (Thirties Auden left its mark), W. Hart-Smith's "Night Picket" (atmospheric and non-violent), David Campbell's "Pedrina" (nearly a Very Good and better, I thought, than his "Men in Green"), Kenneth Mackenzie's "The Tree at Post 4" (love visually present in war, a very original thought), Francis Webb's "The Gunner" (more concentrated than his "Dawn Wind on the Islands" and not concerned with abstractions like life and death), John Millett's extracts from "Tail Arse Charlie" – almost the only verse about Air Force experience. The Royal Australian Navy, it's interesting to see, produced nothing – a truly silent service. In Britain the silence was broken by Roy Fuller and Alan Ross.

Verse by women in the Good category: Elizabeth Lambert's "Wartime Capital", Mary Bell's "Horizons" ("I at this damned desk / Only a shadeless globe to dazzle my eyes") and Judith Wright's "The Trains" (war as a menace somewhere to the North) make the Home Front their subject. All this is sharper than, for example, British women's poetry of the First World War, which was mainly elegiac or celebrating the adventurousness of be-

even get into the Forces, if they can help it; they go into the black market and make some money.

Nevertheless, there is a kind of solidarity among servicemen. A fellowship of suffering, as it were, a tolerance of people fairly different from oneself who are equally subject to the whims of chance and of authority. My training platoon certainly had this quality. The attitude could be summed up in the very well-known RAF motto (which I learned much later): *Nil carborundum!* (Don't let the bastards grind you down!).

Gavin Ewart is one of the best-known of British poets, and his name was frequently mentioned recently as a possible Poet Laureate. Editor of The Penguin Book of Light Verse, he has been numbered by Philip Larkin as among "the three great eccentrics" of modern English poetry, with Betjeman and Stevie Smith: "because they are funny and moving."

Staying in the Reserves

Gerard Windsor

Nicholas Hasluck: *The Bellarmine Jug*, (Penguin, \$5.95).

Laurie Clancy: *Perfect Love*, (Hyland House, \$14.95).

James McQueen: *Uphill Runner*, (Penguin, \$5.95).

Alistair Skelton: *Bill's Break*, (Champion Books, \$5.95).

Literary periodicals do not, as a rule, review books hot off the press. In this case, the rule is certainly at work. *Perfect Love* and *Bill's Break* were published in 1983, and *Uphill Runner* and *The Bellarmine Jug* are almost twelve months old. What's the point of this kind of late review? It has little justification unless it uses the perspective that extra time has given, and perhaps asks more general questions than the instant newspaper review usually tries.

Bill's Break is the odd bod out here, but otherwise the three other works provide matter for a case study in literary reputations. *Perfect Love* is Laurie Clancy's fifth book (he is forty-two), *The Bellarmine Jug* Nicholas Hasluck's seventh book (he is also forty-two), and *Uphill Runner* is James McQueen's seventh (he is fifty). In productivity terms this is remarkably fine going. Hasluck is a solicitor, Clancy an academic, and McQueen only took up writing at the age of forty. Yet, I would suggest, none of these authors has achieved the kind of name that is tripped lightly off the tongue when there is talk of what is happening in Australian writing. Each of them may have had good reviews, fair sales, and continuing interest from publishers, but they are not being set on courses, not climbing into the canon. Why not? Is it because that all-knowing (if unknowable) god who determines the literary hierarchy inexorably separates quality from mediocrity? Or is it due to other factors of timing, sex, geography, subject matter, age? Why, for example, should Elizabeth Jolley have become almost a household name – whereas James McQueen might be obscurely recognized as some long-lost brother of his Uncle Humphrey? After all McQueen also started publishing

late, he has been equally prolific, he has mixed his output between novels and short stories, he lives in one of the more isolated states . . . So many of the same external factors are working for both himself and Jolley.

Quality? Or other? I am surprised to find myself concluding that quality might be more relevant than I'd expected. The acclaim and awards for Hasluck's novel *The Bellarmine Jug* are not just the luck of the draw this time around, not just Penguin achieving hitherto unimagined penetration. It is a big leap forward from his previous work. Hasluck is a highly cerebral author, he is still practising as a lawyer even when the ostensible occupation is fiction. The pitfalls of this manner have been an absence of light and shade, an undifferentiable mass of characters and too obvious a moralizing. As though aware of these dangers Hasluck has tried to counter them by his excursions into the bizarre and the mysterious. And in *The Bellarmine Jug* he has triumphantly succeeded. It still has too many characters, and it finds and then repeats, far too formulaically, a routine for some of its umpteen denouements. But it's a fine novel. Its last line sums up so much that's good in it. "Ideas. Words," one of the characters says, "One floats them out to sea. And on they go, and on." They do too. They never stop short in truisms or shibboleths or prejudices. And their ripples reach out and cross and crisscross the historical, the philosophical, the legal, the political. The narrative tension of this mystery novel is provided by its inquisition into what happened to Pelsaert's ship *Batavia* on the Arolhos Islands in 1629, and that event's relevance to Holland and the world of international espionage first in 1948 and later in some unspecified present. But the same rippling effect works with the characters and their causes; they are continually being turned round, being shown in a new light, always pre-empting final judgments. This is a mystery novel that has never heard of goodies and baddies. "Time and chance happeneth to all" as the epigraph from Ecclesiastes has it. The irony of Hasluck's steady, keenly rational exposition is to point up that nothing under the sun is orderly, predictable, or rational.

Laurie Clancy can't be applauded for any similar breakthrough. The reference on his blurb to "devotees of Laurie Clancy's work" seems wishful thinking, and in this case the wish is unlikely to produce many real offspring. *Perfect Love* is his third work of fiction. His other books, and any amount of occasional writing, has been literary criticism. And I am forced to say that the criticism is his stronger suit. His own generosity as a critic might make strictures against his work seem ungracious, but the existence of *Perfect Love* seems to me pointless. It is the biography of a little Aussie battler, from her birth in 1901 to her death in 1951, told (we learn on the last page) by her paraplegic son. And that's about it. As the product of an academic in English literature the novel is remarkably unsophisticated – a washed-out, watered-down imitation of a Victorian family saga, by "The Drover's Wife" out of early Ruth Park. The device of a 1980s narrator who happens to be a son is the only gesture Clancy makes in the direction of modern literary craft, but as it happens he never finds a meaning for the gesture and the narrator is

submerged and lost beneath the authorial voice. Otherwise the novel just plods on in its flabby, stodgy way, feeling itself bound to a historical naturalism, but being half-hearted and even clichéd about it so that the result sounds corny and predictable. There is too much of the recipe book here, too much of the lightly fictionalized historical documentary. Make a list of what every young girl must go through, what every young girl of those days must have gone through, and what every young Catholic girl of those days must have gone through, and you have largely written *Perfect Love*. Add to that the formula made sacred by Irish male writers, such as O'Casey and Frank O'Connor, of the commonsensical, martyred woman dealing with the feckless, ever-childish male, and you've done the rest. (But don't make egregious howlers like having your characters listening to "Blue Hills" in the 1920s when in fact that cliché of Australian background color first went to air on 25 February 1949.) There is simply no imagination here to get this book aloft.

James McQueen is the real daddy of a problem. His one undeniable success has been in literary competitions. In the few years after he started publishing in the late 1970s it seems he had only to enter a short story competition to win it. His ability to write exactly to the judges' taste has been uncanny – but the anthologists and course setters seem to prefer a different product. He is no self-publicist, lives in rural Tasmania, and is not very deferential towards critics and arts-funding bodies. But he has any number of writerly skills. His blurb quotes Overland referring to him as "assured, controlled and brilliantly perceptive". It's not hard to agree with that – and then to add various other qualities. McQueen writes a brisk, no-nonsense prose, his command of technical and circumstantial detail is superb, his consistently bleak pictures – above all of soured hopes – nevertheless make racy vacation reading. In fact McQueen's popular appeal should be more widely promoted; his short stories contain more zappy variety than, say, those of Peter Corris.

But they still remain unsatisfying. For fertile-minded as McQueen is – and some of his situations are wildly imaginative – he is in the last analysis earth-bound, constricted. There is nothing interesting about the shape of the stories; they move along a strong narrative thread, and that thread is cut and tied at the end with a sentence or two of generalized reflection. But these reflections or morals are too pat, and too infrequently have they evolved gradually and naturally from within the body of the story. As a result the stories are mechanical, not organic, and they rarely either surprise or resonate.

So I am led to the conclusion that the literary canon's inflexibility against these writers can be rationalized. What will it do to Alistair Skelton, a completely new writer whom his publishers have made every effort to keep shrouded in darkness? On the strength of this book will he take off or will he linger in the antechamber of literary celebrity? More likely the latter, at least for a while yet. Skelton undeniably has literary skills. In this novel, *Bill's Break*, he sustains a first person female narrator very convincingly, his motivations and psychological explorations are intelligent, he paints a canvas of small

farm life that is vividly detailed, and he has a theatre full of varied and imaginative characters. In brief, no small list of accomplishments.

The problem is that all these qualities are rather in search of a substance they can shape and unify. *Bill's Break* is a tale of a young couple trying to make a go of a farm, but failing – and the marriage failing when the farm does. Or perhaps vice versa. But the account is shapeless – a long string of incidents without pattern, or rise or fall, but with numerous themes emerging, finding nowhere to go, and disappearing again. Skelton seems to anticipate the criticism, and has his narrator say that "the whole idea of plot and the unities of time and place and what-have-you is an arbitrary one . . . Life's not like that: it's much more untidy." The reader might well accept most of that, but fighting words by themselves do not justify or explain unadorned chaos. Skelton makes no attempt to convince us that his undifferentiated chronicle of the farm is integral to any point he is making. *Bill's Break* displays literary sophistication, certainly much more so than *Perfect Love*, but Skelton still to deploy it in a controlled way. There are advances he must make before he comes into canonical contention – but there's a lot that his publishers can do too. For a start, give Alistair Skelton some kind of local habitation, less dreadful titles, and even mildly attractive designs. That way, at least the selectors might see him.

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Literary Guardian

Martin Duwell

Dorothy Green: *The Music of Love* (Penguin, \$7.95).

Dorothy Green once commented that "a review of reviewers is long overdue." She was thinking only of a specific instance, a hostile review of one of the Angus and Robertson annual poetry anthologies which she had edited, but the proposition is also true in a more general sense. One of the things this excellent collection of essays and reviews from forty years in harness does is make it possible for other reviewers to evaluate the principles, practices and achievements of one of our betters.

The book's first accomplishment is simply to be the kind of book it is: a collection of literary pieces by a scholar and critic rather than by a major poet or novelist. It is true that reviewing is often disparaged and even first-rate reviewers speak slightly of the activity, as though it were something done in breaks between more significant tasks and for slightly offensive reasons such as ingratiating, money or even free books. There is a lot of snobbishness in this attitude. Reviewers are the second

serious readers most books have (after their editors) and good reviewers in any field are precious and should be treasured as a valuable resource. Collections of reviews and essays rescue these pieces from magazines, and expose readers at some length to a voice they might previously have only heard in passing.

What does this collection tell us about the work of one of Australia's leading writers about literature? The first thing, I think, is that for all the impressiveness and consistency of her achievement, her range is rather narrow. The bibliography at the end of the book shows that her published work is almost entirely restricted to Australian material, although it's true that the first and last pieces included in *The Music of Love* deal with Theodor Adorno and Tolstoy, and I can remember a review of Carlo Fuentes' extraordinary novel *Terra Nostra*. This limiting of material to Australia may of course be a deliberate decision, a matter of choosing to put your shoulder to the wheel which most needs moving, but it does create an impression of narrowness. This is compounded a little too by the author's points of reference within the reviews and essays, often an area in which breadth can be suggested. Although one of the problems of collecting individual pieces is that editing has to be done with an eye to preventing too much repetition, the same names and works recur throughout *The Music of Love* almost as touchstones: Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*, *Religio Medici*, William Morris etc.

At the same time Dorothy Green is not a good reviewer of contemporary poetry. The degree to which this narrows her range depends on the significance you ascribe to the reviewing of poetry, but for my own part I've always found it a useful measure of a reviewer's ability. Reviewing is a matter of balancing what you want from a book with what the book wants to give you, and poetry of all modes requires that the former never obliterate the latter. It requires, in other words, an ability to suspend cherished opinions (often masquerading as standards) and to try to intuit the area in which the poetry is attempting to work. Dorothy Green's poetry reviews from the Canberra Times (one of which is included here) seemed to be nothing more than the ruthless application of 'standards'. They seemed to be built on the formula "After being disgusted by long exposure to the _____ (fill in a vice) of modern poetry, it is a relief to turn to the simple virtues of _____".

The review of *Australian Poetry Now* in this collection fully reveals the inadequacies of this sort of reviewing. Setting out to be a comprehensive piece of hatchery (one suspects that A.D. Hope's review of *The Vegetative Eye* is the model she aspires to emulate in this kind of work) the review shouts so loudly that you can't hear the book. And the book, as we can now see, had a lot to offer, ushering in as it did, in its uncertain and groping way, an important decade in Australian poetry. No one expects reviewers to be psychic, but a receptive and sensitive poetry reviewer would have perceived the significance of the book even while registering its obvious vices. The same can be said for the four works of contemporary fiction attacked in another review. History has judged them a little more

favorably than Dorothy Green, and her review in retrospect looks cold and unpleasantly clever.

All that this carping about narrowness of range really means, I suppose, is that Dorothy Green, as a reviewer, has strengths. In her case her strengths are undoubtedly in the area of works with a pronounced ethical dimension explored in an extended and satisfyingly complex way, and which require great textual delicacy of response in the reader. She is a brilliant reviewer of Patrick White (her understanding of the concerns of, particularly, *A Fringe of Leaves*, demonstrates how good the result is when the right book meets the right reviewer), and this collection includes an excellent essay on Martin Boyd's novels as well as an introduction to the novels of E.L. Grant Watson, explicitly compared with Boyd, for whom she makes a good case. None of her copious published material on Henry Handel Richardson is included here, presumably because *Ulysses Bound*, her major work on that author, has subsumed most of this and brought it into book form.

It is too crude to describe her simply as a moral critic of literature. She knows that liberal studies don't make people liberal or the humanities make them humane, but her approach to literature and society does have a recognizable stamp to it. She fears that Western civilization is in a decline brought on by the mechanization and commercialization of all activity. A result of this is alienation (as Heracleitus said rather earlier "Man is estranged from all with which he is most familiar") and the corruption of intellectual activity. It distorts personal and social life as well. Literature's task is to expose this corruption and act as a force of correction, a critic of its culture. Presumably the task of the literary critic is to guard this guardian. She seems generally to hold, with Orwell, that a high degree of sensitivity to language (something to be fostered in schools) is inimical to clichéd thought, and thus a useful weapon in the battle against manipulation.

One of the ways to foster good, cogent writing is to write well yourself, and Dorothy Green's prose is always lucid and elegant, perhaps towards the waspish end of the spectrum of elegance rather than the bland end. Her tendency towards a 'stuff and nonsense' tone sometimes produces a confused attack, as in her treatment of Clark's *Christopher Brennan* and Cantrell's *A.G. Stephens: Selected Writings*, but her hatchet work on Manning Clark's prose style (she describes it as "hectic rococo") is delightful and accurate. Also delightful is the review of *The Thorn Birds*, which successfully adopts the technique of reductive description but at the same time convinces us that this is not a matter of breaking butterflies, because *The Thorn Birds* can serve as an example of the literature of the production lines of the future.

The great virtue of Dorothy Green's style at its best is that it remains forceful and clear while at the same time retaining a quality of explorativeness. In fact one's final impression of the book is that its assembling is an explorative act on the part of its author, an attempt to make sense of her own career. This final impression is heightened by the book's introductory essay "Not Pollyanna", for the most part a review of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* but being, in fact, an exploration of many of the issues

which appear more fragmentarily in individual essays and reviews.

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Keeping up with the Small Presses

Graham Rowlands

Barbara Giles: *Earth and Solitude* (Pariah Press, 101 Edgevale Road, Kew 3101, \$6.95).

Peter McFarlane: *My Grandfather's Horses* (8 Carlton Street, Highgate 5063, \$6.95).

Jeri Kroll: *Indian Movies* (Hyland House, \$5.95).

Laurie Keim: *The Colour of Modern Desire* (Queensland Community Press, P.O. Box 36, South Brisbane 4101, \$5.50).

Dane Thwaites: *Winter Light* (Black Lightning Press, 53 Hill Street, Wentworth Falls 2782, \$6.50).

Philip Mead: *This River is in the South* (University of Queensland Press, \$9.95, \$4.95).

Poetry may not be special; poetry publication, however, *is* special. It's suited to self and small press publication. Sometimes the "self" and the "small press" are synonymous. Australian small presses continue to publish poetry collections that are as good as collections from the major publishers. Indeed, it can be argued that major publishers continue to publish poetry collections that are as good as collections from the small presses.

Very different from twenty years ago. Although there are many specific reasons for the change, two general reasons are worth noting. Firstly, printing technology has changed and is changing dramatically. Secondly, the Literature Board funds the major publishers *and* some small presses. Moreover, State governments sometimes assist the latter. What a change from the days when Kenneth Slessor – and Slessor alone – determined the old Commonwealth Literary Fund finance for poetry!

To include quality small press poetry, then, I've been forced to exclude several collections from major publishers. Although I've alerted *Overland's* readers to this trend before, I'd not previously realized its extent and implications. Clearly, from now on any literary editor who allocates poetry to reviewers on the basis of the publisher's status is simply incompetent. Moreover, from now on a poetry anthologist's neglect of small press poetry amounts to dereliction of duty. Strong statements? Yes, but consider the evidence.

Barbara Giles' *Earth and Solitude* from the new Pariah Press contains poems about Europe, immigration, Australian landscape, pioneering, old and new suburbs. Most importantly, it contains poems about the poet. They take two forms: her views of other women and self-revelation. The wide range of other women is exceeded only by Giles' changing moods and attitudes. They're well-crafted poems full of psychological insight.

Giles doesn't aim for isolated stunning images; but rather for useful imagery that evokes, dramatizes or embodies units of meaning. When a poem works the whole poem is working.

"Morning Song" simply describes a farmer's early morning rising for milking, ending effectively, "The sun is up". The controversial "Under Quamby Bluff", however, is a deceptively simple poem. Farmers converted natural land to a farm that they later abandoned. Moreover, they brought the purely aesthetic foxgloves – "acres of aliens" – which have spread through the area. They "shake their spears, defend the invasion". The use of "spears" brings in the Aborigines. There are, then, *four* phases of history and meaning. Similar historical perception enables the poet to write an intellectually sophisticated dramatization of Giordano Bruno's execution.

Other women? Giles notes the importance of pioneer wives. Ho hum, you think? Well, in "Do I Mean what I'm Saying?" she seems to endorse surviving women who couldn't care less about a particular women's suicide. In "Beck and Call" she uncritically notes Toulouse Lautrec's view of whores while depicting a *Hausfrau* who genuinely enjoys her domestic labor. In one part of "Black Holes" she *implies* sympathy for a manipulated woman supermarket shopper with her "trolley full/ of hard facts" while in another part she evokes the obvious presence of *absent* male theft, violence and repressions:

Who shall dance him away, exercise the tattoo,
unspill the blood, calm the frantic who travel
with him in their luggage? Who can
walk backward, talk forward?

Not forgetting two year-old girls. "Learning All the Words in the World" includes an unsentimental learning of the words "nuclear war".

When Giles speaks for herself it's for herself alone. These poems benefit from being together. In "Limited Liability" she mentions the kinds of pleasures she continues to enjoy while referring to herself as a "cardboard angel" who patches wounds only with paper. In "Circular from the Bank" she notes various friends who don't need her help and the bleaters who'd send her bankrupt. She'll settle for something secure, low risk and dull. Money parallels life generally in these two poems. Sex is specific in others. Whereas in "In the Park, Looking" she regrets male lack of sexual interest in old women, after "Reading an Erotic Novel at a Late Age" she decides to fob off any potential lover with kisses. In "Illusion" she'd have continued to enjoy a relationship if she hadn't *met* the person. In "Come to Grief" she comes to hate mirrors and gives them up. Too much time has been wasted looking for her image in men's eyes. And in the last poem she pulls out all the stops:

Ah, if you knew, I am in my second childhood,
each flower incandescent, the sky bluer and bluer,

Spring is a star-burst, the trees whizz up like rockets,
the children are jumping-jacks, girls are fountains.

Such colour and sound, I shall shatter with joy,
leach into rivers, blow on the wind.

You can sweep me up, walk through me.
I am winning, I am becoming invisible

The absent full stop is deliberate.

Giles' second collection is free of the strained rhyme, rhetoric and didacticism that marred her first collection. Moreover, it would be ungrateful to dwell on the few examples of residual banality and sentimentality in *Earth and Solitude*. The poet's age is part of the subject matter; not something to be taken into critical consideration. Barbara Giles' writing and publishing these poems at an advanced age is a bonus.

Peter McFarlane's first collection *My Grandfather's Horses* has two main features: optimism and a public voice. They explain his successes and failures.

McFarlane's optimism is so strong it allows him to write numerous poems about marriage break-up, violence and physical pain without bitterness and cynicism. He's shocked and puzzled by such phenomena – particularly because of their effect on children. Indeed, the poet's optimism allows him to enjoy the inevitability of his marriage break-up and allows the reader to at least *consider* a comic reading of a poem about acute arthritis.

Although "Sanctuary" is a completely realized lyric about an unborn child, other lyrics are marred by sentimentality. The poet's 'realistic' fantasies are the successful side of his affirmations. In "The Breakaway" he imagines his way out of a traffic jam via a "Save the Yeti" sticker:

Yet Teh
Old Big Foot
sometimes seen on the slopes of the Himalayas
on the edge of mist
an enormous blue clown on stilts
silken legs crossed
resting above the carnival
on the roof of the world

In "Circumstantial Evidence" he imagines an actual 20¢-a-turn bunyip to have blown the "tiny rubber windsock" of a used condom into the high school yard.

Even in descriptive sequence McFarlane finds it difficult to resist public voice repetition. For example, in the attractive "Second Valley Sketchbook" a water spring pushes and bubbles repeatedly through his words. He uses repetition successfully in both "Lament" to a separated daughter and in the physical pain poems. Moreover, some repetition sounds like dialogue from a play, as in the savage "Phone Call" and the witty "Registry Office".

With its fine and finely reproduced photographs by Robert McFarlane, Peter McFarlane's *My Grandfather's Horses* is an attractive book. Unfortunately, it's too long to sustain the quality of the above poems. If sentimentality is the book's main defect, there are also examples of banality, slightness, poetic exercises in repetition and one

piece called "They Shoot Gift Horses Don't They" that can scarcely even be described as a poem.

There are superb poems in all four sections of Jeri Kroll's second collection *Indian Movies*. They reach this quality when the voice or imagery concentrates on a single subject, state or place. When this concentration is absent the poems are less successful.

"Trees" is a rhetorical fantasy about the importance of trees, containing political, moral and humorous comment as well as ecological statement. "On Losing My Voice" includes fine one-liners such as, "Is there life after voice?" "Leaving You" is a triumphant discovery of continuing body functions despite a dead feeling after loss. "Walking Scared" conveys the final stage of this discovery:

and heart, that old piece of gristle,
reliable muscle, hard-thumped timpano,
marches you down the street to the tune:
he's gone he's gone he's gone

"The Towers of Silence" is a sort of Dylan Thomas "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night", where vultures replace earth or fire in funeral rites. Another Indian poem "Noon at Duladeo Temple" is equally unforgettable.

The sunbeams flicker. Swallows ride the light,
beat back the shadows, cling to the walls like prayers.
Now it's never silent,
only the temple drum of infinite wings.
At dusk, the portal swallows its mouthful of sun.
My midnight, the air quivers still.

Kroll is incapable of sentimentality. Her language is neither turgid nor outmoded. Why, then, are her other poems unfortunately less successful than the above? The answer lies in the poet's imagery, its nature, placing and timing. Moreover, placing and timing are a general problem throughout her book. She seems to feel compelled to use simile and metaphor when bald statements would be better. The last image in "Translations" is better than the rest of the five part poem, just as the first lines of too many other poems are better than the rest of the poems.

Misplacing and mis-timing apply to Kroll's statements as well as to her imagery. Too often the one or two-liners are thrown away. "I've been careful all of my life / not to say I love you" *must* be a major statement. However, it's lost in a penultimate stanza. The third last line of "For Jeff" should have been the last: "We press / into that space where there's no word for words". Jeri Kroll undervalues her statements while over-valuing her imagery.

Laurie Keim's first collection *The Colour of Modern Desire* repays second and third readings. The vivid imagery can be distinguished from the deliberately arbitrary. The clear poems from the obscure. And the puns from the careless proofreading.

The first three sections contain middle-brow contemporary poems. There are rural childhood memories, political pieces, dedications and descriptions. Keim's

political intentions are often complicated by the observer's or commentator's predicament. "Night is an anaesthetic" from the political section ends:

to be political with your worst fears
is the first sign, the next is falling
through your own reflection.

By contrast, "Gregory Mine: Sunday" from the childhood section is Keim's most political poem:

monday makes martyrs of us all.
the impetuous machinery snapping
our boredom, breaking our backs,
heating up the profits in utah.

The most important quality in Keim's first three sections is the dazzling brilliance of his visual imagery. The other two sections take us into a world or a language of intentionally-contrived imagery, intentionally-clashing abstractions and comic despair. Yes, *comic* despair. All is relative, constantly relating back to the point and means of perception. Call it Modernism. It is, however, refreshingly free of the usual Modernist *literary* allusions. I don't pretend to understand every word of every poem. Even so, I've persevered long enough to see that "The notebook gets seasick" and "Electrons of meaning" are fine poems of their kind.

Unfortunately, they're indistinguishable from well known poems by other contemporary Australian poets who mistakenly claimed to have taken over our poetry in the 1970s. Fortunately Laurie Keim has other irons in the poetic fires.

The best poems in Dane Thwaites' first collection *Winter Light* view landscape and weather from various angles and/or through various lenses. Moreover, his physical perspectives are as important as his microscopic coverage of native and imported trees. His moods often reflect or are reflected by the quality of light. Hence, the apt title for this well-produced book by the new Black Lightning Press – despite its having no connection with Ingmar Bergman's film.

Here are lines from the superb title poem:

The children run like ink. Into the sky.
One by one the processional adults
are cranked off. A single
box kite hovers.

Oversight? Sign?

A thread so thin it stings
runs down to the hill.

This poem is equalled by "Hangover & Aspro", "Something Making Itself Clear" and "The Whisky".

Unfortunately, Thwaites is less successful in oral-type poems and in his childhood and adult relationship narratives, which lack vividness and lapse into banality. His

few political references only serve to confirm his sensible avoidance of this area.

Despite the defensive blurb, obscurity isn't a major problem. Although "Explorer" and "Mirage" are obscure and "Liquidambar" is pretentious, Thwaites has written two witty, ironic pseudo-didactic poems I've already re-read many times. "Walnut" and "A Vanishing Species" may be obscure. However, they're brimming with enough immediate brilliance to convince the reader that Dane Thwaites is in command.

This River is in the South is Philip Mead's third collection. Although only fifty pages it includes work from his two previous collections. The poems are clear, well-made and written in contemporary tertiary-educated English. They explore the relationships among the natural world, the human psyche, time and language. Momentous subjects. Mead considers them with feeling and intelligence, but without much historical sense. I wish I liked them more.

I'm most persuaded by Mead's work when he's specific, in "Revisiting Monaro" and here in "The Roses":

It is true, there never was

a time when we weren't together within the shared
incarnation of the body and it will be the same

because I am saying it, where the trajectory of the
seasons;
vanishes into that various country, diminishes and
recedes

into rose-folds and the golden light of icons, where
our major
words unravel in enriching speech like scrolls from
the saints' mouths.

I'm puzzled by the way the poet won't let the natural world exist apart from his love for it and his arguments about it. He doesn't evoke nature vividly in away that *implies* his love. He *uses* nature imagery as part of his love statement. Moreover, he *uses* aspects of nature as counters in his didactic generalizations. I was repeatedly reminded of Wordsworth.

I don't deny the complexity of Mead's philosophical aspirations to optimism. Given his 'great' subjects, however, it's not surprising that he can't manage a withering insight a line. Perhaps it's remarkable that he achieves poetic synthesis as often as he does. Even so, one or other of his subjects always seems to be *abstractly* penetrating the other. Or specifically *not* doing so. Moreover, the reader is often pointed in the direction of *abstract* journeys from the inner to the outer. Or vice versa. "The Facts" exemplifies Philip Mead at his most ponderous and pretentious:

The light of the world is falling around us
in great flocs of benediction, but we stay
within the darkening house of being.

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Lucky Young Bastard

Chris Wallace-Crabbe

Bernard Smith: *The Boy Adeodatus: the portrait of a lucky young bastard* (Allen Lane, \$19.95).

We are all accustomed to autobiographies beginning with radiant memories of childhood, vivid images or screen memories at once declared lost and miraculously restored. Most readers tend to like the early chapters of autobiographical writings best, because we all like to participate vicariously in those gardens, meals, bedrooms, embraces, games and smells which the author has hauled back out of the vast darkness into which everything goes. We believe that these recovered images are relatively few, valuable and often prophetic. As readers, we warm our hands before them before marching on through the narrative of yet another self.

Bernard Smith's remarkable new autobiography, *The Boy Adeodatus*, is rich in images of early childhood – the fruits regathered – and even rich in the tapestried oral history of his forebears, but his narrative is unusual in that it does not open out like a fan from these treasures onto the broader tracks of mature life. Its form might more truly be described as the reverse of this. This is rather like the question of how we envisage family trees: as a narrow top branch widening down to a proliferation of roots, or as a host of twigs and branches tapering away down to the taproot of single self?

The convergent shape of Smith's book has very good reason: the kind of reason that few of us could lay claim to, even had we his artistry to shape it into a compelling story. As the sub-title insists, the author was illegitimate. Hence the story opens with a host of ancestors, foster-parents and foster-siblings among whom the boy, bastard son of the Irish immigrant, Rose Anne Tierney, must gradually emerge, finding himself a name and a stable identity.

Thus the opening chapters of *The Boy Adeodatus* are crammed, vivid and confusingly overpopulated in ways that bring to mind oral history as much as sentient memory. Chapter two, entitled "Celtic Twilight", is a compelling and, to me, very strange account of the lives of the Tierneys and McEntiers in the farming country of East Cavan and Derry, a countryside rich in rumor, hearsay and long tangles of familiar memory. The following sentence is typical: "In the end Maisie died of cancer and Micky, some years later, in a condition of loneliness and dejection, hanged himself in an old deserted farmhouse on the land he had inherited from Aunt Rosie."

The Irish theme also gives rise to a major bifurcation in the book, the split between Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, Catholic and Protestant ways of feeling. Since the young Bernard's foster-parents were actively Protestant, this is something he felt at his nerve-ends, especially when, grown older, he would travel up to visit his mother and cousins in Queensland. In the way he records the pressures of his religious division, he presents his young self as something of a microcosm of Australian

society at large. Unlike that society, however, his growing up squeezed him away from both these ideological formations into an allegiance to Communism. Indeed, the book ends with the young schoolteacher going through a series of *rites de passage* – sexual initiation, the art-world struggle between Marxism and surrealism, and the outbreak of war.

It is intriguing to see what a celebrated art critic does with the complicatedly reflexive business of self-writing, how he copes with the war against time, with those attempts to reconstitute past selves in order to constitute a present self more fully. Smith's success here is remarkable; his dense, busy prose recaptures the adoptive world of little Benny in the western suburbs of Sydney in memorable detail. Trees, fences, roads, passers-by, pin-striped suits, pince-nez glasses, even "the stale droppings of cockroaches and woodlice, and the dark, rotting garments of another century" are gathered up in a rich web of childhood, adolescence and then young manhood (where he becomes a country schoolteacher in "Murrulgudrie, or the Progress of the Soul"). And these perceptions are set down without the narrative's diminishing the figures of friends and relations. Few Australian autobiographies have allowed so much dignity to other people surrounding the protagonist.

Like that entirely different work, *The Waste Land*, Bernard Smith's memoir is haunted by *The Confessions* of St Augustine. As a Marxist cultural critic, he seems quite free of any urge to lash out against the faith of his forebears. Perhaps the halfway house of Protestantism deflected any such revolt. Indeed, the book is marked by a wide capacity for acceptance.

Such tolerance was partly learned in coming to terms with his differing backgrounds, with his two mothers above all. As the book declares and reveals, it was also learned at Murrulgudrie where, in the traditional Australian way, the clever young teacher from the city was sent to find his feet in a small community of farmers and foresters. Of the children there, he writes, "All as shy as native bears. Few had ever even seen the sea." Where the prose in earlier chapters was very dense, even demanding, here it speeds up as the young man socialises, teaches, sways vertiginously towards conversation, discovers surrealism and kills his first brown snake.

The Boy Adeodatus ends open-endedly, as autobiographies are very apt to do, and then Smith closes the self-story, as he opened it, with a quotation from the old Irish legend of the Nuts of Knowledge and the marvellous salmon which devours them. It is fascinating to set this passage beside the young Smith's bizarre picture of a sexual God, thirty pages earlier.

There is much else one could say about this flexible and compelling book. I wonder how much freedom the author secured for his telling by deciding to write about his younger self in the third rather than the first person. Surely this makes it that much easier for the author to write such a disconcerting sentence as, "In any case his slight build and pretty round girlish face were a continuing temptation to them". And to depict his later experiences with the randy maid, Annie.

Let me conclude by putting my money where my

mouth is and offering the opinion that *The Boy Adeodatus* is one of the finest of all our autobiographies. I have no doubt that it is made of the kind of timber that will last.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe teaches English at the University of Melbourne. His anthology of Australian war poetry, Clubbing of the Gunfire (with Peter Pierce) has just appeared, and a collection of his own poetry will be published in England in 1985.

Water and Muck

Robin Gollan

David Dunstan: *Governing the Metropolis: Politics, Technology and Social Change in a Victorian City: Melbourne 1850-1891* (Melbourne University Press, \$24.50).

As cities become more and more ungovernable, scholarly interest in how they function, or fail to function, has increased enormously. *Governing the Metropolis* is a history, but it is written with an eye to the present. Thus Dunstan in his introduction writes:

political authority in Melbourne, and by virtue of the metropolitan impact the state as a whole, remains a confused, and confusing, tangle of municipal and state departments, and a jumble of other special purpose, or *ad hoc*, authorities.

He adds:

Quite apart from the fifty municipal councils that purport to rule the metropolis, there exist another score of different, and distinct, extensions of the state, many of them deliberately avoiding the public gaze.

His description of how this came to be is a clear and coherent account. The second half of the nineteenth century is treated in detail, and the twentieth century is sketched in a postscript. This gives a more than adequate picture of the whole process, because the main structures were in place by 1891. The twentieth century story is one of confused and often contradictory modifications to the existing institutions as new needs pressed themselves on the authorities.

The main forces which determined the shape of Melbourne's government were both socio-political and technological. They included the conflict between local interests and the metropolitan interest, and between both of these and the central state. Because Melbourne, like the other major cities in Australia, comprised from the beginning a significant part of the total population of the colony, the dividing line between matters of metropolitan, as distinct from colonial, concern was hard to draw. Equally difficult was the determination of areas of responsibility between the Melbourne Corporation, set up in 1842 to govern the city, and the municipalities which

were declared as the city spread to accommodate the flood of population of the gold decade and the steady stream which followed. Under the 1842 Act, power was given to the Corporation to deal with roads, markets, water, sewerage, and so on — areas of responsibility assumed by British provincial cities. The problem arose with the need to develop these services in the suburbs. Rationally, developments in city and suburbs would be co-ordinated, but, in the absence of any overall metropolitan authority, and with perceived conflicts of interest between city and suburbs, rationality did not prevail. Two crucial areas of local government responsibility, water and sewerage, illustrate the point. Since there was money to be made out of water and muck, another factor was who was to get the profit.

As the Yarra, the original source of city water, became so polluted that it was unusable, even by the standards of the time, and as reports came in of cholera in Europe, and what would now be called communicable diseases spread in Melbourne, the need for an adequate supply of clean water became urgent. The only authority capable of providing it was the colonial government. So the Yan Yean project was a colonial government job, but with the prospect held out that it would ultimately be handed over to local government. For most of the century it remained a matter of controversy between the central and local governments, aggravated by the fact that it was a profitable enterprise.

In the 1850s, when the water system was being constructed, it was recognised from English experience that water and sewerage go together — but they didn't go together in Melbourne for a very long time. The state of medical knowledge, inter-district rivalries, the profits to be made from the disposal of human excreta, engineering problems (e.g. fear of underground sewers leaking into water mains), together with the absence of any overall authority capable of financing and carrying out the work, conspired to keep Melbourne without an underground sewerage system in the time of its flowering as "Marvellous Melbourne". The story of sewerage is also the story of the protracted gestation of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, conceived in the 1850s but not born until 1891. Based on the London model, it was set up shortly after the London Board was superseded by the London City Council. The Board remains, with a revenue expenditure in 1981-2 in the order of \$400 million, as, in Dunstan's words, "a state within a state".

Governing the Metropolis covers a lot more than water and sewerage: roads, tramways, gas, electricity, the building and control of the port, to name some of the more important. It is primarily a work of political and social history, enlightened by an awareness of technical and scientific matters, and a knowledge of the growth and problems of comparable cities. This is a good book, which reveals a great deal to those, like this reviewer, who know little about the history or present state of Melbourne. It is also, I think, an important contribution to the study of cities in general.

Robin Gollan, who until recently held a chair of history at the

Australian National University, now lives at Bermagui. He is the author of Radical and Working Class Politics, Revolutionaries and Reformists and other works.

The Lessons of War

Alex Sheppard

Peter Charlton: *The Unnecessary War: Island Campaigns of the South West Pacific 1944-1945* (Macmillan, \$17.95).

D.M. Horner: *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century* (Allen & Unwin, \$20.95).

In a strange review of Charlton's book published in Australian Book Review in October 1984, we find the following: "if we accept Charlton's own description of the lack of political direction provided by Australia's political leaders towards the end of the war, it was not necessarily a bad thing for our military leaders to attempt to fill the vacuum". In other words, if military leaders are dissatisfied with the political directions, they may make their own decisions instead of asking for better directions.

This is a dubious doctrine but the question as to whether the politicians gave sufficient directions to the military is not, in fact, established beyond a reasonable doubt in Charlton's book. It is true, as Charlton points out, that "Curtin was putty in the hands of MacArthur and Blamey" and it is true that an exhausted and ill Curtin "maintained his trust in MacArthur and Blamey, both of whom used him for their own purposes". It is also true that a reading of War Cabinet minutes reveals that there was not unanimity on the question of leaving Blamey in command and allowing him so much influence. But what is also true is that, as Charlton says, "The soldiers in the islands thought they were fighting a politicians' war. They were not. They were fighting a generals' war."

MacArthur cannot be blamed for this unnecessary war, because he specifically repudiated the campaign, although Blamey claimed that it had MacArthur's approval. In a letter to Chifley, who had different views to those of Curtin, probably because Curtin was too sick and tired, MacArthur wrote: "You are in error in construing such routine action as approval for the undertaking of the operation. I and my headquarters never favored it . . . I regard its initiation as having been unnecessary and inadvisable". Chifley, in a reply dated 21 July 1945 said, *inter alia*, "the Government is greatly embarrassed by your reply. It has publicly defended the wisdom of these operations". In other words, Blamey had lied and had received government support to which he was not entitled. MacArthur in fact, approved of only one aspect of the Australian campaigns late in 1944-45, that in Borneo; but Blamey did not share that view.

Put briefly, the cause of the unnecessary fighting which cost more than a thousand Australian lives, and thousands of wounded, was Blamey's inability to harness his own ambitions, work co-operatively with MacArthur and give truthful advice to his political masters whom everybody on his staff, as I was, knows he despised. The opinion is not vitiated by the fact that MacArthur was also in error for, as Charlton shows, "the operations in Borneo had no strategic value in hastening the defeat of the Japanese forces". Once Okinawa had been captured only islands to the north had any importance.

One of the problems was that there is rarely in Labor ranks a politician, or even a strong supporter, with experience of senior rank in the Army and therefore, as Charlton says of Curtin, "he was compliant and acquiescent" in dealing with the generals and they, of course, knew how to build on that compliance.

If it is true that the generals lacked political directions, it is not possible for them not to have known of the criticisms of their actions in Parliament or in the newspapers. Later, probably at the suggestion of Blamey's political adviser, Alf Conlan, liberation of the native peoples was given as a reason. As Menzies said in Parliament on 22 February 1945, "the question as to where the Australian forces should be sent is not merely a technical military question but is in the best sense of the term a political question".

As the author says on page 132, "the question of military commanders making 'politically desirable' decisions is fascinating. Blamey was assuming for himself powers and responsibilities that properly belonged to elected politicians, not to selected generals". This might have been acceptable from a general who had the complete confidence of his government and his troops, but even then only in an emergency. But Blamey had neither.

Australians are a war-like people who willingly engaged in six wars this century. Given that until recently we had practically no regular army, it is not to be wondered at that more has been written about citizen-soldiers than about regular service officers. Of recent times the balance has shifted, and Major Horner's latest offering is a series of informed studies of sixteen Australian service commanders. One, Vice Admiral Creswell, will not be known to many, although he was really the founder of the Royal Australian Navy. One is an airman, Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger, who many airmen think has never been given sufficient credit for what he did, particularly in the post-war period; and the other fourteen are soldiers who served in World Wars I and II and Korea.

One cannot be sure of the financial cost of turning a cadet into an officer, even before this became a degree course, but it is unlikely to be less than the cost of making a doctor of medicine; and even the most dyed-in-the-wool citizen soldier supporters must agree that without Duntroon and its graduates the position of Australia in the Second World War, at least, would have been very dark indeed. It is worth noting that it is only since the Duntroon training has become a degree course that it has turned out such military historians as Horner and

Coulthard-Clark (author of *Heritage of Spirit*).

The Commanders was written by experts, seven of them graduates of Duntroon, one a graduate of the US Naval Academy. Of the fourteen soldiers covered, nine were Duntroon graduates.

Although it does not avoid the controversies that surrounded most of the subjects, it is not a "warts and all" picture but dwells on important issues showing up the mistakes and results of personal idiosyncrasies. It establishes the inaccuracy of the prophecy by Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Berryman who said, when the first senior officers of the Second AIF were appointed, "We, the professionals, the only ones who know the matter, are to be hewers of wood and carriers of water to the weekend soldiers". It is true that after the First World War the regular officers were badly treated by reversions in rank; but the Staff Corps was able to ensure that nothing like that happened the second time by making sure that their own people occupied all the important staff and command positions, and they looked after their own with decorations and promotions.

The editor has some very perceptive views on previous books about the same subjects. For example, "Coulthard-Clark has hardened his views on Bridges since he published *Heritage of Spirit* in which critics think his account is too favorable". He, Horner, has changed his position on Blamey since he published *Crisis in Command* in 1978. For example, he accepts that Blamey insulted the men of the 21st Brigade in New Guinea and it is time that this was recognised as a great mistake. Sayers, he thought, was not critical enough of Herring, who really must carry nearly all of the responsibility for the mistakes at Lae. He thinks that Hopkins has played down "Robertson's ambition and lack of tact". This is a complete understatement; and many who served with Robertson in the Middle East would accept the statement that he might have been a good brigadier but was useless as Commander of the occupation forces in Japan. More than one officer in his command in the Middle East will remember the braggart who declared "give me two stout ships and a bearing on Rome and I will dine in the halls of the Caesars tonight".

Monash is brought down to size although his bad mistake and costly capture of Montbrehain is still not generally accepted for what it was, and in saying this I am not overlooking that in judging a commander one should think less of the situation at a particular point of time than what the commander thought it was.

Two commanders who are given their due here, but were badly treated by the government, are Lavarack and Sturdee, both of whom were shunted off to Washington. Lavarack's only mistake was in not being strong enough to make Wavell cancel the unloading of three thousand Australian troops from the *Orcades* when it was obvious that the Japanese could not be stopped in Netherlands East Indies. If he had stuck to his point many lives would have been saved. A citizen forces officer would have been better able to handle the political situation than one steeped in loyalty to senior British command. Sturdee fought the first battle against the Japanese when the AIF was still overseas, and in doing so made bricks without

straw. It was he who insisted that either the AIF be brought back from the Middle East or the government must accept his resignation. He did his duty, not by defying the government but by giving strong advice and being willing to back it up.

Other commanders whose careers are traced in this book are Sir Brudenell White; Sir Harry Chauvel (he gets higher marks than does Monash); Gordon Bennett (without any praise); Sir Leslie Morshead (no bad marks); Sir Sydney Rowell (adds nothing to his excellent autobiography *Full Circle*, and is far too soft on Blamey's dismissal of this excellent soldier); Sir Edmund Herring (no bad marks, not even for attacking Lae, after it was obvious that the Japanese had withdrawn or were about to do so, a very costly amphibious exercise). Major-General Vasey (the only one apart from Bridges who was killed in war) does not get sufficient mention and one can but wait for a good full biography which has been promised. Vasey was probably the best soldier Duntroon has produced, and not only because his troops admired or even loved him.

The history of a people is not the history of its military commanders; but such history is an important part of general history and this book performs a great service. Read carefully, it tells of many errors to be avoided in the future. I hope that both are studied at Duntroon.

Alex Sheppard served in many arms of the Australian Military Forces, achieving the rank of colonel and being awarded the Military Cross. He is more familiar in recent decades as a dedicated Sydney bookseller and as an author (of books on Greece) and publisher.

Iconoclast and Idealist

Dennis Pryor

Francis West: *Gilbert Murray: a life* (Croom Helm, \$35.95).

"Cusins is a very nice fellow, certainly: nobody would ever guess that he was born in Australia." The Professor Cusins of *Major Barbara* is Shaw's version of Gilbert Murray. We know that Shaw greatly admired Murray, though he is clearly puzzled about his colonial origin.

In *Gilbert Murray: a life* Francis West works hard to maximise the Australian connection, but he can squeeze only one short chapter out of it. He claims that "his Australian childhood shaped his emotions, fired his indignation about life, remained an affectionate memory and a yardstick for his achievement." A surprising claim this, particularly since West goes on to say that when Murray paid his only later visit to Australia (in 1892) "he was a slightly contemptuous and disapproving stranger."

This is a painstaking, well-documented biography. It takes no risks and indulges in few speculations. It is a

model official biography, and as a result is an unexciting read. Its primary sources are handled in the manner of a careful historian, and doubtless the family will have no regrets at having entrusted Murray's papers to Professor West. What is missing is the sort of personal evidence provided by recording the opinions and memories of his contemporaries about this curiously glamorous figure.

Murray was a scholar who shot to the top, with a chair at the age of twenty-three. We are told that at Oxford he was the brightest student of his generation. Yet the rapidity of his advancement is still surprising. His scholarly output is of mixed quality. He established the Oxford text of Euripides. Two surprises here. Euripides is the Greek tragedian who appears to have most to say to the contemporary mind. Yet when Murray began interesting his Glasgow students in Euripides he was dealing with an author "generally thought to be a bore – 'a tissue of depressing commonplaces' as Hubert Murray once told his brother." The second surprise is Murray's attitude to the editing of the Euripides text. He described it as "a disgusting task". Set against this was his influential book *Euripides and his Age*, which was probably responsible more than any other book for starting the Euripides boom which still continues. Yet this outstanding philhellene published in 1933 an appalling book on Aristophanes. He could not conceive of those fine white-marble Greeks sitting in the theatre of Dionysus enjoying Aristophanes's unrelenting procession of farting, shitting and buggery jokes. If you spend much of your life praising Greek democracy, it is hard to accommodate a comedian for whom the democratic figures of the post-Periclean period were to be portrayed as gaping-arsed pathics.

West is good on Murray's hugely successful translations from the Greek tragedians. You still find these on the shelves of bookshops in spite of a steady, acid flow of criticisms of them. Certainly they read very strangely now, an outpouring of soulful, romantic schmalz, weepies that could fill theatres with an audience convinced that at last they had access to the Greeks. West is much fairer than many of the critics have been. He manages this by stressing that the translations were for the stage and not for the study. It was from his theatrical career that Murray gained wider fame. Here was a scholar who moved in theatrical circles and was revered in those circles.

He was, we are told, remarkably handsome, his appearance mirroring the lofty sentiments of his philhellenism. It is therefore surprising that the only picture we see is on the dust jacket, a dreadful picture with bleached highlights and giving the impression that it is almost a posthumous photograph. Murray led such a busy public life that any photo-researcher could have turned up a complete visual record of him.

Professor West skirts delicately around the Murrays' marital problems. It is not the kind of biography that intrudes into private life. So too with the disappointments (and tragedy) of his children. But Murray's private life is of some significance. He married into the Howard family of Castle Howard. This leap into the British establishment made him an odd figure within the British class

system. While West documents his family life and the atmosphere of upper class do-gooding, he avoids interpreting the effects this influential connection may have had on him and on his work.

The second half of the book traces Murray's political life as a Regius Professor who had little time or inclination for college life but a lot of time for attempting to save the world through the League of Nations Association. The impression is of a man frustrated by quarrelsome foreigners (he always retained a very English irritation at the ways of foreigners). Again West works thoroughly, carefully and boringly.

Murray is a strange figure, at one moment a scholarly iconoclast, at another a proper Victorian idealist. He seduced the minds of several generations of students. Even in the 1980s the odd student 'discovers' him and carries on alarmingly under the influence of his rhetorical charm. His life is a series of paradoxes. So are his written works (West's bibliography shows how productive a writer he was). But I still feel no closer to the man than before reading Professor West. It is probably asking too much to require the official biographer to penetrate deeply into the man. Murray is such a theatrical character that it may only be possible to come near to him through some thoroughly unscholarly play or big BBC television series.

Dennis Pryor teaches in the Classics department at the University of Melbourne. He is well known as a television critic.

Nether Lands Expressed

Alexander Buzo

Peter Nichols: *Feeling You're Behind* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, \$29.95).

Howard Jacobson: *Coming From Behind* (Black Swan, \$5.95).

The titles of these books provide further evidence that nothing will wean English writers from anal or mixed imagery, so I won't try to pop the hatch. Both books are autobiographical efforts from regional Englishmen, Nichols from Bristol and Jacobson from Manchester. The first is a straight memoir from a playwright who has given up the theatre for prose; *Coming From Behind* is a fictional autobiography by an academic who has taken up the novel.

Peter Nichols wrote in "Forget-Me-Not Lane" what I believe to be the British "Death of a Salesman" or "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" – a dramatic insight into the hopes and realities of a fair number of people for a good part of this century. He has written other successful plays, such as his first, "A Day in the Death of Joe Egg", which was staged in 1968, where Nichols ends this book with the protagonist turning forty. In an interview published in *Plays and Players* (June 1984) Nichols announced his retirement from the theatre: "I've had enough of sacrificing my work to directors' whims, trusting it to inexperienced actors and trampled on by philistine managements."

In the preface to *Feeling You're Behind*, Nichols speaks of his conversion to prose and reaffirms that his theatrical career is over:

However this book may strike the reader, it has been a pleasure to write. No vainglorious director rewrote it, no manager talked about Bums on Seats or last trains, no numbskull actors told me it wouldn't stretch them or thanked me for what they called "a vehicle".

In the early chapters, which deal with the writer's adolescence in Bristol in the thirties and forties, there is a grim, even moving struggle to come to terms with prose. Handling dialogues seems, ironically, to give Nichols the most trouble. He is further handicapped by having an irresistibly quotable father, a naturally theatrical figure who was the admitted model for the father in *Forget-Me-Not Lane*. After a while, the author simply gives up and renders whole paragraphs of the old boy's speeches:

Your good lady – what's-her-name? – Stella, Zelda, Velma – had the great good fortune while still a nipper to meet Yours Truly. Sad to say, I had by that time already donned the old Ball and Chain but young Bella knew a good thing when she saw one and, on arriving in Bristol many moons later, tried to get her hands on your young brother Geoffrey. He, alas, preferred young whosit – Mary? – so Velma turned as a last resort to the only unmarried Nichols male, to wit Piecan. A booby prize, what, boy?

After grammar school came national service, which was a bit anti-climactic as Nichols turned eighteen in 1946. A constant theme in the book is that this generation missed a lot of opportunities, being too young for the war and too old to take real advantage of the freedom and prosperity of young people in the 1960s. So the author spent two unproductive years in India and Malaya, where he proved a very average soldier and gravitated to the Combined Services Entertainment unit. Nichols retains the good playwright's chameleon-like ability to absorb other people's idiom, and the national service chapter is written as if by a national service-man:

My education at Nee Soon was now in the hands of [Stanley] Baxter and his friend Edgar Williams, who'd been on Leave In Advance of Python when I first arrived. He'd studied the violin at Trinity before the army and joined CSE as the first member of a symphony orchestra Lawson was recruiting – perhaps to play the Tobruk Rhapsody as well as it deserved. No other musicians were found so Edgar stayed on as an orchestra of one. To avoid RTU, he made himself I/C Make-Up and sat all day in a room like a cupboard commanding some sticks of greasepaint and a quantity of crepe hair.

After an unsuccessful period as an actor, Nichols became a teacher and married Thelma (not Stella, Zelda,

Velma or Bella) and they had a severely handicapped child. The experience took Nichols to the point where the only way he could deal with his despair was to joke about it, and so his characteristic style – fusing pain and comedy – was born in "A Day in the Death of Joe Egg", which deals with a teacher and his wife whose child is a "human parsnip". As in the play, Nichols handles this subject with strength and taste, so much so that audiences and readers may find inspiring what could well have been distasteful. One opportunity not missed by Nichols is the one to put the case of the lower middle-class regional Briton, a case that has been put increasingly over the last thirty years, but never with more theatricality. It all goes to make a superb book.

Not all regional Britons can deliver, however. *Coming From Behind* is that most awful of literary adventures: a comic novel by an author who lacks a sense of humor. The humorless 1980s have seen the rise of comedians and comedy producers like Mel Brooks and the Zucker brothers who specialize in that increasingly popular genre, that of creating comedy for those who lack a sense of humor. The difference between Brooks and Jacobson is that Brooks has genuine comedy talent that has proven itself over a long period, whereas Jacobson belongs in the audience for a Brooks film. *Coming From Behind* is a dreadful, pandering comedy in which we learn that the hero, Sefton, has taught at "the Coryapundy Swamp Institute of Technology and then at the University of Woolloomoolloo [sic], New South Wales." I can't find a better example of satire as attempted by a writer with no talent for satire, or a better example of a book that aims unsuccessfully at the "good loo read" market.

Alexander Buzo's play "The Marginal Farm" has recently concluded a Sydney run. His "Rooted" is being filmed for television by the ABC.

Australia's Colonial Past (and Present)

John Herouvim

Michael Dunn, *Australia and the Empire: From 1788 to the Present* (Fontana/Collins, \$7.95)

Australia and the Empire opens, appropriately enough, with a symbol both Australian and imperial: General Motors Holden. The author gets to the point immediately: "Like GMH, Australia is foreign-controlled."

It's a timely reminder. In recent years, radical nationalist perspectives have not been advanced with much vigor; nor does a resurgence seem to be in the offing. Perhaps the issue of foreign control – like corruption, the CIA and air pollution – has become too commonplace to rouse our indignation.

The author sees the imperial link as "commerce carried on by another means". The purpose of the book "is to investigate how foreign ownership of and competition for Australian resources have shaped the history of Australia."

The author's purpose is achieved. He has produced a tightly-, occasionally tersely-written outline of the anatomy of Australian dependence, showing how the foreign link has structured, and often arrested, Australia's development. *Australia and the Empire* is largely a closely-argued synthesis of secondary material, but it also draws on original research. The author's desire (or commission) to keep it short probably explains the book's tendency to assertion rather than adequate evidence.

The author says, for example, that "Australian efforts made to help solve British economic problems in the interwar years completely skewed Australian economic structure and performance." Yet the picture offered is, rather, one of Australia encountering problems because it *belonged* to the empire, not because of any overt efforts to help solve Britain's problems. In a similar vein, Dunn suggests at one point that the Eureka rebellion's most important feature was its proclamation of independence from the empire. Australia's dependent position is also used to explain its low labor productivity, and its failure to establish a solid manufacturing base during the propitious circumstances afforded by the long boom of 1860-1890. Again, the connection is asserted, not demonstrated. Other things are also shoehorned into the imperial framework, such as the 1926 amendments to the Crimes Act, the government's attempts to stop Egon Kisch from speaking in Australia, and its determination to compel the loading of scrap iron for Japan.

In such cases the explanatory net of imperial relationships is cast a bit too wide, resulting in an oversimplified and unqualified account of some issues. Moreover, countervailing forces within the imperial relationship, which led to wrangles between Britain and Australia, are generally overlooked, although chapter four does supply a good illustration of how Australian capitalists were more attached to their economic interests than to the empire.

For the British Empire, Australia was a very important place, and Dunn reveals the reality behind the imperial/loyal cant. Australia was a place to which surplus Britons could be siphoned off, thus relieving social tensions in the mother country; it was a profitable field for investment and a vital source of raw materials for metropolitan industry; it furnished a supply of cannon fodder and provided a place to explode atomic bombs.

The British colonization of Australia is explained in terms of rivalry between the colonial powers of Europe in the eighteenth century and the importance of new trade routes. The title of chapter one described Australia as "A Mercantile Convenience". Britain harnessed Australia's wealth and population to lift itself out of the doldrums which attach to declining empires. The Imperial Preference scheme and the exactions wrung from Australia during the great depression are two examples among many.

Eventually, of course, the sun set on the British Empire.

It happens to the best of them. However, Australia's gradual but decisive disengagement from Britain did not represent, as a reviewer of the recent television series "The Last Bastion" suggested, "the beginning of self-realisation". What happened, rather, is described by Dunn in a very matter-of-fact subheading as "The Switch From Britain to America". General MacArthur told his British liaison officer that "Curtin and Co. more or less offered him the country on a platter."

The switch, of course, was prefigured by increasing economic links between Australia and the USA. Important business figures in Australia had 'turned' to the USA some years before Curtin made his famous appeal to America, uninhibited by "any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom." During the war the US checked out "Australia's political and economic structure from within." Chapter six is a powerful and concise account of the factors which ensured that there would be no return for Australia to the imperial *status quo ante bellum*.

A brief but very valuable part of the book is the account of Australia's economic dealings with the USA's foremost imperial rival, the Soviet Union. Not many people are aware of the extent of Australia's trade dependence on the USSR. Oddly, however, the author makes no mention of Soviet indications of interest in the mineral-rich Pilbara region of Western Australia, nor of the Moscow Narodny Bank's real estate investments in Woolloomooloo and Brisbane's Samford Valley.

Michael Dunn provides a useful rundown of trade, tariffs and economic history in general, and on the whole avoids being too technical. Over half the book concentrates on economic matters. This is understandable, as trade and access to resources are the substance of international relations. As the British Foreign Secretary explained in 1904: "... the main business of the Foreign Office is to assist in the expansion of British investments in foreign lands, and watch over, foster and protect them." In 1929, when Britain was frustrating American attempts to gatecrash Middle-Eastern oil, "American military leaders went so far as to prepare contingency plans for war against Britain."

The book's concentration on economics does however pose a problem. Economic facts must be fairly graphic if they are to assist an argument about foreign control directed at a general public. A lot of the economic discussion in this book will not, therefore, make a great impact on the general reader, or will serve to limit the audience.

There are exceptions: "the quiet achiever", British Petroleum, was built on the proceeds of the Western Australian goldrushes; the enormous profits and tax-dodges of multinational mining companies are outlined and we are shown how the depredations of the 1890s crash were aggravated by Australia's dependent status.

However, there is already an abundant crop of specialized economic literature dealing with Australia's neo-colonial status. If this status is to become more than an academic issue, its impact on the Australian people has

to be discussed in more tangible terms. This is ultimately a political question, not brought into focus until Dunn comes to consider the American takeover of Australia, an excellent description of which is provided in chapter seven, "Down Under".

One of the terms of the Four Power Treaty between Britain, America, Japan and France in the 1920s was that Britain's fleet (which included all the empire's ships) would not contain more major battleships than America's. As a result, "the Australian Government agreed to sink HMAS *Australia* outside Sydney Heads to make Britain's fleet level with America's."

What a marvellous piece of symbolism! The good ship *Australia* callously and needlessly scuttled as a product of wheeling and dealing between the imperial Mr Bigs.

Australia and the Empire is opposed to Australia's subordination to an imperial metropolis. The author appears to suggest that we have continued to suffer under the imperial yoke because, as a nation, we lack the political will to break the shackles. He hints that the problem lies in our colonized minds, but nowhere does he confront the 'why' of it all. (Why, Ralph Nader asked when he toured Australia not long ago, does Australia sell its minerals more cheaply than third world countries? Why indeed!)

In a very brief conclusion Michael Dunn offers some prescriptions for how Australia could begin to extricate itself from the empire. Without intending to be harsh, it must be said that they are rather uninspiring. The suggestion that the Commonwealth centralize the pricing and marketing of our mineral resources is a progressive one. The real problem is to explain, and seek to overcome, the reasons why such an obviously beneficial measure has not been introduced. Dunn also proposed that Australia seek to narrow the research and development gap separating us from other western nations, and reverse the rundown of our manufacturing base. He juxtaposes Australia and Japan: "Unlike the Japanese, Australians have not had the political will to be independent." He also argues:

In recent years, Australian forces have participated with the United States and with Japan in the RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) military exercises as part of our defence. Yet if defence means safeguarding one's resources, environment and people against seizure by foreign powers, Australian governments have systematically mistaken enemies for allies.

The point is made in a restrained yet compelling manner, which fits the whole tone of the book. If Australia is not foredoomed to go on replicating the dependent relationships in which it is entwined, then a revival of radical nationalism is a minimum requirement. *Australia and the Empire* might play a part in prodding such a revival.

John Herouvim is completing a post-graduate study of the Maoist movement in Australia. He lives, and teaches, in Melbourne.

Immigrant Pain and Pleasure

June Factor

Michael Dugan and Josef Swarc: *There Goes the Neighbourhood: Australia's Migrant Experience* (Macmillan, \$24.95).

The endpapers of this important (but oh so large and heavy) book are decorated by a Geoff Pryor cartoon, first published in the Canberra Times in January 1983. They show the conventional "Foundation of Australia" scene: Captain Arthur Phillip et al. raising the British flag at Botany Bay, while two supposedly bemused Aboriginals look on from an adjacent hill-top – except that in Pryor's scenario the Aborigines are saying, "There goes the neighbourhood!". This shift in perspective suggests the purpose of the book: to consider the experience of immigration to this country from the point of view not only of the immigrants, but also of the indigenous inhabitants whose lives were irreparably and grievously damaged by the newcomers.

In 200 pages Dugan and Swarc trace the history of European, Asian and American settlement in Australia. Each chapter is prefaced by a succinct account of a particular period, followed by richly illustrated extracts from letters, memoirs, short stories and other sources which the compilers believe will exemplify the fortunes and misfortunes of new and old Australians alike. The book also contains a chronology of immigration patterns from 1788 to 1981, suggested "Further Reading" on the subject, and more than three pages of tightly printed acknowledgements of the sources of the material used. The casual reader won't bother with this section, but it is here that the treasures lie.

What makes this book a browser's pleasure, and a credit to the many researchers whose names are listed on the last page, is the diversity of what historians call "primary" material – cartoons, photographs and written pieces which originated in the periods under discussion. It is a book for the dipper as well as the sequential reader, and offers much to delight the eye. Thus the section on the gold rushes of the 1850s includes reproductions of paintings by contemporary artists of Chinese and other goldminers, and early photographs of innkeepers and farmers who made a living from the miners. It contains a sad and bitter letter from a Swiss-Italian miner written in 1855, and two mordant cartoons on goldmining from the Melbourne Punch of the same year.

However, the accompanying photograph of a *successful* Swiss-Italian family, taken in the 1890s, points up the central contradiction of the book: the poverty, hardship, loneliness and discrimination faced by so many immigrants (and the even fiercer injustices inflicted on the Aboriginals) is somehow ameliorated, even diminished, by the smiling faces of the successful, grateful, eager-to-adjust. Channel 0/28's circle of friendly multicultural bodies entwined arm in arm represents the hopeful what-might-be, what-should-be, of immigration and integration. Such images – and parallel narratives – do not

always lie comfortably alongside the words and pictures of struggle and defeat.

That, of course, is the dilemma for all who wish to speak or write about the experiences of immigrants and Aboriginals: how to portray the suffering without turning the subjects into pitiful victims, powerless child-adults? The makers of this book (no doubt after consultation with their employer and part-publisher, the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs), by choosing to present their material in so lavish and large a format, have emphasized the energy, resourcefulness and optimism of their subjects.

But there is something about a glossy coffee-table size book which negates the anguished love of the mother kissing her son's hand through a ventilator at Essendon airport – a son not seen for 19 years, the humiliation of needing a "Certificate of Exemption" to live a normal life if you were an Aboriginal in the Northern Territory in the 1940s. It is a variation of McLuhan's famous "the medium is the message" (an insight reworked with ingenuity and obscurantism by structuralists, post-structuralists, etc.): the way the text and image are presented profoundly affects our reception of their content. In the case of *There Goes The Neighbourhood!*, we read and see toil and trouble, but we feel confidence, optimism. Somehow the Lucky Country has triumphed again.

June Factor, her parents immigrants, teaches at the Institute of Early Childhood Development in Melbourne.

A Garden of Words

John Sendy

T.R. Garnett: *Stumbling on Melons* (Lothian, \$24.95).

After reading the "Melbourne Living" pages of the Tuesday Age, a naive stranger could be excused for concluding that Melburnians, *en masse*, spend their time gorging exotic foods, guzzling expensive wines, pursuing elusive antiques and renovating extravagantly-priced dream-houses.

However a more discerning reader will flick through this kaleidoscope of hedonistic grandeur to find nestled there T.R. Garnett's elegant and useful column, "From the Country".

Stumbling on Melons – the title a quote from Marvell – is a selection of these Age articles, but those who have read them before will still find the book a treasure. Exquisite drawings of flowers, plants and birds, by Jenny Phillips, enhance each double page. An informative foreword by former Age editor, Michael Davie, always an absorbing writer, adds another bonus. The articles are divided into a dozen subject sections: local tales, gardens of the past, philosophy and design, birds, gardens overseas, and so on.

Regular Garnett readers never fail to share their enthusiasm for his pieces. Scholarly, practical and caring, they are a *pot-pourri* of gardening and botanical information, slices of history, literature and philosophy, intriguing anecdotes, none of them lobbed in like a poor return from the outfield but deftly placed, compassionately expressed and utilized to illustrate, instruct or amplify.

Launching the book last November Age editor, Creighton Burns, gave his opinion of Garnett's writing: "Most weeks of the year, the best writing in the Age is in Mr Garnett's column."

He's right. The reader often soars away from Broome to the Atherton Tableland, through Sarawak, Gloucestershire, the Seychelles or British Columbia. Garnett's characters range from Vita Sackville-West, Field Marshal Earl Wavell, Lewis Carroll and Thomas Keneally to humble and not so humble Australian gold-diggers, plant gatherers, parsons and lovers.

My own debts to Tom Garnett are many. His piece, "Medlars and quinces", encouraged me, belatedly, to read Saki; he guided me to *An Australian Gardeners' Anthology*, *Kilvert's Diary*, and other gems of literature and plantlife.

Writing about the scents of Australian native plants he contrives to quote the description of Sheriff Petersen in Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*: "... a living testimonial to the fact that you can hold an important public office for ever in our country with no qualifications for it but a clean nose, a photogenic face and a close mouth. If, on top of that, you look good on a horse, you are unbeatable." Hmm!

About insecticides Garnett writes: "Undoubtedly, the best controllers of the baddie in the garden are the goodies, particularly the larvae of ladybirds, hover-flies and lace wings. The trouble with using any sort of insecticide at all is that you are likely to kill the good (including bees) as well as the bad. Using insecticides is a bit like watering plants or taking drugs of addiction: once you have begun, the consequences of stopping are as unpleasant as the condition which they remedy."

Garnett deals with many of the every day things of gardening: digging, frost protection, de-bugging, snail-ing. He often takes seed merchants and nurserymen to task about misinformation or nomenclature, and it is wise, before buying books about botanical, ornithological or conservation matters, to recall his estimate of them.

"It is not easy to write memorably about gardens," observes Michael Davie in the foreword. "It is still harder to write memorably, or even sensibly, about the open air in general." Garnett overcomes these difficulties so easily. Perhaps his background and experiences explain the reasons why.

One of his forebears helped found the Manchester Guardian. Related also was the famous literary family consisting of Constance Garnett, the first major translator of the Russian classical writers into English, her husband Edward Garnett, the talented publisher's editor, and their bookselling-writer son, David, of some Bloomsbury fame. Strangely, Edward doesn't rate a mention in Michael Davie's foreword, yet Edward contributed much to English literature: among other things he "discovered"

Joseph Conrad. (He has the distinction, too, of rejecting *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and advising James Joyce to take more "time and trouble" with it, after Joyce had spent ten years on the work!)

After occupying responsible posts in English schools and colleges Garnett was headmaster of Geelong Grammar School from 1961 to 1973. From 1974 he served as secretary of the Royal Australian Ornithologists Union for several years.

The Garnetts have now established a magnificent garden at Simmons Reef, near Blackwood, Victoria: the Garden of St Erth, which is named after the birthplace of the Cornish stonemason who originally owned the property in the 1860s. The Garden of St Erth is open to the public and is still being developed. It is a credit to its founders, a sight to be seen, and ample proof, if any more were needed, that Tom Garnett is not only a distinguished user of words.

John Sendy lives near Ingleburn, Victoria.

The Good Intentions Road

John Herouvim

Andrew Milner: *The Road to St Kilda Pier: George Orwell and the Politics of the Australian Left* (Stained Wattle Press, \$6.50).

George Orwell was many things. A socialist to name one. Extremely quotable to name another. Milner's book is organised around these two aspects of Orwell.

The Road to St Kilda Pier is "an attempt to conjure up from the grave the shade of Eric Blair [George Orwell] in order to ask him what he would have made of us, had he happened to live here, now." One is tempted to say that if Orwell were here and he were asked what he thought of the Australian socialist movement he might not even bother to answer. Never mind, there are plenty of others only too willing to think and write about this topic. Milner is one of them and unless this review is a mirage I suppose I'm another.

If you're interest in a quick canter around the New Left and the various left-wing streams in Australia between the 1960s and the present then you will probably both enjoy and benefit from this very readable and very short book (90 pages). It is often light-hearted and contains quite a few turns of phrase which will tickle some left-wing funny bones and jar others.

Milner argues that the socialist enterprise divides, historically, into two streams: emancipatory socialism, exemplified by the anarcho-syndicalist Wobblies and the 'liberation' emphases of 1960s youth radicalism; and regulatory socialism, exemplified by both Labor socialism (welfare states, government enterprise etc.) and the totalitarian socialism of the countries ruled by com-

unist parties. For Milner the latter models are not really socialist at all.

However, he does not consider the conclusion which his argument would seem to suggest, that since 'real' socialism has been unable to actually establish itself anywhere, there might, after all, be something in what Mark Twain said when asked what *he* thought about socialism: "I can't even hope for it. I know too much about human nature."

Still, you can't really criticize someone merely for being optimistic. Just because something has never happened before doesn't necessarily mean that it can't happen. And there is nothing outlandish in the suggestion and the belief that societies could and should be run in a more reasonable, equitable and human way than they are at the moment.

There are, however, some more concrete shortcomings in the book. In a work which touches on so many components of the Australian Left, "This strange, and unruly, collection of parties and sects, movements and journals", the absence of an index is both surprising and disappointing. Also, he surely underestimates the strength of socialist feeling in this country when, after defining the term socialist "in the loosest possible fashion", he concludes that there are only about 8000 such beings in Australia. Further, his historical account of developments in the Australian socialist movement sometimes goes astray, especially when he touches on the Maoist strand which achieved some prominence in the late 1960s. He overestimates significantly the influence of Maoism among Melbourne's New Leftists. Moreover, his optimism about the future is often built on sand, as when he forecasts the collapse of consensus politics, "if for no other reason that that Abraham Lincoln was right: you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." Sure you can't; nor do you need to. A majority will do just fine. Anyway, the exercise of power relies, ultimately, not on the ability to fool (though that helps) but on the ability to rule.

On the other hand, Milner makes some interesting and, as far as I know, original points about the peculiarities of Australian socialism, partly I suppose because he only came to Australia in 1977 and thus has a fresh perspective on the matter. He also reasserts some familiar notions. On the ALP he is both withering and convincing, rejecting outright the notion that it has anything to do with socialism or that socialists should have anything to do with the ALP. He writes: "It is a case not so much of socialism without doctrines as of doctrines without socialism."

Milner believes in the sort of socialism after which Orwell hankered, "a socialism which smells of revolution and the overthrow of tyrants." He has certain basic articles of faith about how socialism will be brought about, and some fairly uninspired suggestions about what Australian socialists should be doing in the short term. The people to whom the book is addressed – Australian socialists – will judge these articles of faith and suggestions according to their own preconceptions, i.e. in the same way that most people judge most things. One of Milner's suggestions, that of a monthly, non-sectarian

socialist magazine, illustrates the fundamental weakness in his proposals. Such a magazine might strike the odd blow against capitalist ideology. But its main effect would be to provide yet another arena in which lefties could jockey for power and kudos, accompanied by the sound of knives thudding into backs.

Editor's Choice

We draw special attention to the following list of books received for review which space does not permit us to cover more fully.

The Sydney waterfront over six decades is covered in splendid photographs, admirably reproduced, in Graeme Aplin and John Storey's *Waterfront Sydney 1860-1920* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95). Literary Sydney, in extracts from twenty-eight writers, is found in Patricia Holt's *A City in the Mind* (Allen & Unwin, \$17.95).

An important work of historical record is *Victorian Squatters*, compiled by Robert Spreadborough and Hugh Anderson (Red Rooster Press, \$55 and \$40). The work gives detailed lists of landholdings and landholders over approximately the first fifty years of squatting expansion in Victoria.

The most ambitious of recent stage publications is *On Our Selection* (Currency Press, \$8.95), a discussion of, and printing of, the dramatisation of Steele Rudd's books. Edited by Helen Musa, the book throws much light on the Australian theatre in the early years of this century, and material on the Steele Rudd films is also included. Currency has also published Robert Hewett's *Gulls* (\$5.95), while in association with the State Theatre Company of South Australia the same publisher has issued Stephen Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (\$4.50) and Louis Nowra's *Sunrise* (\$3.50).

A republication of 'Duke' Tritton's famous bush reminiscences, *Time Means Tucker* is most welcome: it has entered the Australian canon as a minor classic (Akron Press, 26 Atkinson St., Arncliffe NSW 2205, \$19.95 and \$9.95). Happily Red Rooster Press has published John Meredith's *Duke of the Outback* (19.95 and \$12.95), a biographical compendium of material supplementing *Time Means Tucker*, which fills out Tritton's later life in particular, and includes the words and music of his songs.

In literature we welcome Terry Sturm's edition of the work of *Christopher Brennan*, in UQP's 'Portable Australian Authors' series (\$25 and \$14.95). This is the only selection to draw on the whole range of Brennan's work: poetry, criticism, autobiographical writings and letters. Les Murray has published a selection of his prose articles: *Persistence in Folly* (Angus & Robertson, \$9.95). Covering poetry editing, Aboriginal influences, Australian Scots, the Australian language and the virtues of non-fiction writing, amongst many other topics, this fresh and combative collection follows through in more detail some of the issues raised in *The Peasant Mandarin*,

and establishes Murray firmly as the most intellectually versatile of our poets. A. D. Hope looks wisely and reflectively at the past, present and future of Australian poetry in *Directions in Australian Poetry* (James Cook University, \$4.50).

An unusual work of many literary and social interests is *Tasmanian Literary Landmarks* by Margaret Giordano and Don Norman (Shearwater Press, 15 Ratho St., Lenah Valley, Tasmania 7008, \$13.95). Twenty-nine Tasmanian authors, including Angela Thirkell, Alan Villiers, Cynthia Nolan and James McAuley, are discussed both biographically and topographically. Peter Love's *Labour and the Money Power* (MUP, \$9.95) is a discussion of the evolution and the development of the labor movement's elaborate conspiracy theories about the capitalist financial system: 'Although it was an easy matter to identify the enemy, it was much more difficult to abolish him.' Margaret Hazzard's *Punishment Short of Death* (Hyland House, \$25) is a well-researched account of the penal settlement on Norfolk Island from 1788 till 1856. It is likely to remain the standard account, and is written by an island resident.

Phillip Law's *Antarctic Odyssey* (Heinemann, \$35) is an account, by the man chiefly responsible, of the establishment of an Australian presence in Antarctica from 1947 onwards. This is a vividly-written history, none the worse for being told very largely in personal terms, and includes an important section on Antarctic organisation. There is, in fact, nothing like it in Australian Antarctic literature, and it will certainly remain one of the keystones of a modern library on the subject of the sixth continent.

Welcome reprints include Michael Wilding's *Living Together* (UQP, \$7.95), a comic novel of urban sexuality first published in 1974, and William Dick's *A Bunch of Ratbags* (Penguin, \$6.95), one of the first and still perhaps the best novel of the gangland fringes of our culture of youth. John Morrison's *Stories of the Waterfront* (Penguin, \$7.95) collects his classic stories of the Melbourne docks. Eugenie Crawford's delightful recording of the reminiscences of her mother, *A Bunyip Close Behind Me*, has a welcome sequel in *Ladies Didn't* (Penguin, \$4.95).

Lucy Frost's compilation, *No Place for a Nervous Lady*, is published by Penguin Books at \$12.95. Subtitled 'Voices from the Australian Bush', it is a marvellously spirited and intimate bringing-together of unpublished letters and diaries from thirteen pioneer Australian women: gentlefolk, decayed gentlefolk (governesses, a sad class) and some near-illiterates. An important new perspective on our social history and a work of considerable literary fascination.

Finally, the University of Queensland Press, maintaining its reputation as one of the most innovative of Australian publishers, has issued nineteen of Steele Rudd's novels on country and city life in three handsome and convenient volumes: *A City Selection*, *The Old Homestead* and *The Rudd Family* (\$50). Rudd will certainly be rediscovered before long in terms of the hidden significances of his novels, and the ground has been well prepared by his publishers.

Three outstanding new books

The Moon Man: A Biography of Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay

by Elsie Webster

A triumph of modern biography — the story of this strange
Russian explorer of New Guinea **\$33.00**

Australia through the Looking Glass: Children's Fiction 1830–1980

by Brenda Niall

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