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VALENTINA HAZELL

The Washing Machine



SHE WAS NOT AFRAID of the ending. She was only afraid of the way that things end: washing machines expiring, microwaves blowing up, planets losing control and spinning wildly out of orbit, time running out of its own endlessness and draining away through a hole in the hourglass. Clouds changing shape, hands raised in farewell from up high on passenger ships, planes leaving, the sun sinking.

She had always wanted to break free of her life; to move out and away from it. But she was frustrated in all attempts and could only wreak her vengeance on the uninitiated. She started riots at supermarkets. She was arrested twice at traffic lights for undressing and disturbing the peace. But her heart wasn't in it. She had a good heart. And it was just as well considering the things she put herself through. She wanted recognition; in fact she wanted to recognise herself. And there was something so innocent in this and at the same time so necessary that the policeman at the scene of the crime would always take pity on her. He would take her home instead of arresting her and sit down with her and have a cup of tea. He would tell her about the cases he was dealing with and she instructed him in the twists and turns of the human heart; she could tell him of the motive, the ideal that might have inspired these crimes. She could see that he thought crime went against reason but she knew that passion and reason are the same things. (Or that at least, they spring from the same source.) Her advice was so insightful that the policeman listened carefully. She knew her day had come when, acting on one of her tip-offs, a policeman arrested his own neighbour for producing counterfeit notes. It had really been her work. But she felt dissatisfied. She didn't want her work to be

used like this. She gave up her association with the police force after that: she had had enough.

When she was thirty-three and still considered herself to be in mid-career she unexpectedly had a baby. It was unexpected for her. Everyone else had read the signs only too well. She wondered for a while how it had happened and then she remembered some vague incident in the place that haunted her dreams with bad memories. The supermarket.

The night before the child was born she had a dream. She was wandering in some dark place that was familiar to her even though she couldn't see clearly. The air was thick and humid and seemed to catch unpleasantly in her throat. She knew she had to walk to the end of something to get a clear idea of where she was, when suddenly she realised she was at the laundrette. The instant this recognition dawned on her she began to hear water rising and to feel it lap around her feet and then her ankles. With sudden shocking lucidity she remembered a story that she had heard her grandmother tell her mother. A young girl had fallen to the bottom of a well and been drowned. The water – and this was the awful thing – was twenty feet over her head. How high is that? the young girl asked. (And in her dream the woman felt the child within her move and turn.) It's as high as the roof in the church, her grandmother replied.

The water in her dream continued to rise and she began to struggle with increasing panic towards a faint light that had appeared to her right. As she walked towards it she noticed that it looked somehow misty – the edges of it were blurred and uneven. But as she got nearer she could feel the light like a hand on the features of her face and she almost fainted with relief.

The water was up to her knees and she was having difficulty walking. There was a distinctive smell in the air too, not unpleasant, but frightening in some inexplicable way because of its tantalising familiarity. It was suddenly very important to name the smell as she felt certain that this act would release something or tell her something important. But she could not grasp it.

With a jolt she came up against a hard flat surface – glass! The water was moving around her thighs now with a sickening regular pattern, trying to twist and turn her and she stumbled and almost fell. She reached out desperately as she could now see the foam on the water rising and she understood that the smell was detergent. Her clothes were being pulled around her: the strength of the water was terrifying and relentless. As she reached out, her hand fastened onto something solid and smooth – a handle! With another sickening lurch of relief she pulled on it with all her strength only to realise that it was the smooth hinge that held the porthole window in place.

She looked out, now calmly, and as though the door worked as a magnifying glass in reverse, she could see in miniature the whole scene of an ordinary day in the laundrette as people she recognised walked around vacantly sorting socks or sat reading the same magazines that were always left on the benches. She held onto the hinge and prayed and suddenly with a searing jolt of pain she was in another equally unrecognisable and mysterious world that was filled with the pain of childbirth.

SHE CALLED THE GIRL Lucia and gave up looking after her when Lucia was only five years old. But Lucia's rough passage into the world had affected mother and daughter intensely. The mother had escaped from the machine but was battered and bruised by the experience and was unforgiving. Lucia had escaped too – she swam like a fish into a hostile and appropriately unforgiving world. They kept away from each other and forgave no one anything. The mother soon returned to her dreams of revolution. And if anyone ever asked her – or if she was forced to tell anyone (the shopkeeper, another traveller on the bus) for lack of general interest – she said that being a mother had changed her. Yes it had – and in ways that

she never would have thought. Now her dreams were more personal ones. I want to change my daughter's world she said. If she had known that the people she confided this to actually doubted the very existence of a daughter – as she herself had lately – she would somehow not be surprised. But she still needed to tell them. Where had Lucia got to and how old would she be now? She remembered that she had been born on an auspicious day but what that day was was no longer clear.

She took to the streets eventually to look for Lucia. At night, late, she would take a bottle or two and go down to the park on the water and take up a position and wait. She knew that if Lucia was to be found it would be by waiting for her to arrive, not by wandering after her. She would sit there all night sometimes during the summer and wait. And her heart – still strong and still as noble – would pound heavily with expectation and anticipated joy. There was no special reason that she wanted to see Lucia. But her heart beat on powerfully, relentless. Later in the morning when the sun woke her she would sit up and push her hand up to hair and look at the water for a while. Then she walked home and waited some more.

But time increasingly drew away from her. She characterised its flight by seeing the washing flap and stir on the old rope hoisted between two sticks out in the yard and in the countless revolutions spinning in the rows of washing machines and the flickering of the television screen. Time dripped and oozed away: not just running out but out and away from her as she had once dreamed of escaping from her own life. She awoke to realise one morning that all the signs of time passing had become meaningless to her. She gave up her plans of one last stand at the supermarket, of finding Lucia, of sorting out the ending, and took her bottles to the park, not waiting, not anything.

Until one day she fainted from sadness – not a terminal disease but deadly none the less. A cloudy swamp of despair, incomprehension closed over her head as quicksand. Tossing up, tossing down. No way to explore, no words to bring into being where sadness springs from. But it was the details, the endless, utterly meaningless train of details that weighed down her back as a funeral pall. Nothing was done or

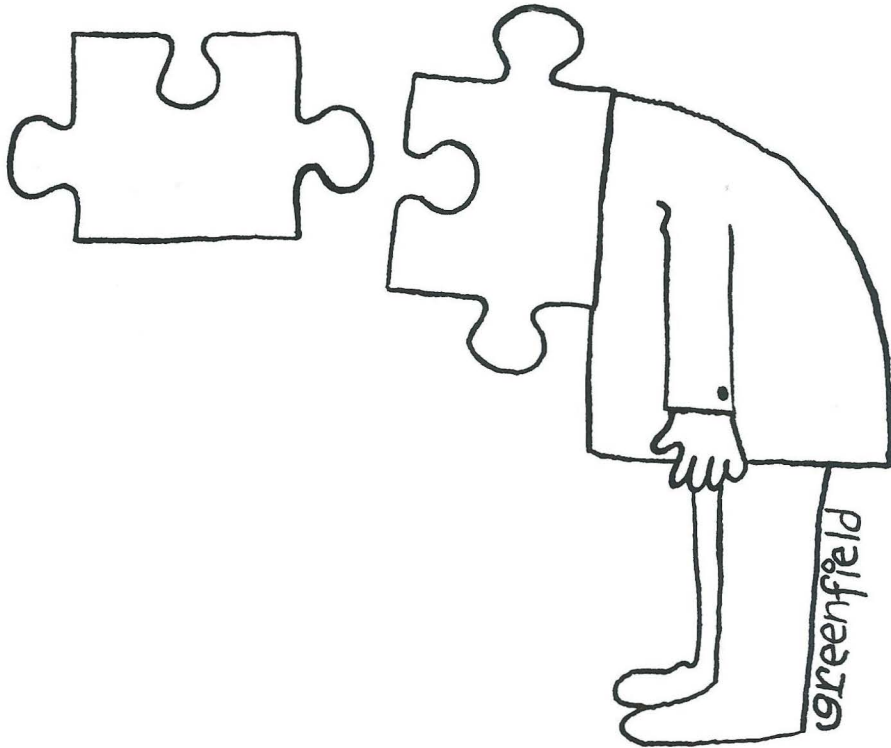
completed as an end in itself. All details were accepted and repeated because ... because of a faith that they were necessary links in a chain that led to meaning. Her faith had now drained away inexplicably so that gaps and chinks appeared everywhere. The chain fell apart. Each detail became unbearable in its separateness. Its unconnection. And without details where am I?

Where was she?

She set herself adrift: untied the washing line, pulled out power cords from sockets, shut down electricity and shredded all the clothing and

tablecloths she could find. She emptied bottles and jars as though she was moving out and packed it all into boxes and smashed the furniture with an axe. Then she sat down and went through her mind in the same way, discarding information that had once been useful, putting aside the pictures and memories that hung like sun-faded posters along disused corridors.

After a long day she was removed and empty. She had averted the need for an ending and she had done what she always desperately longed to do, but she no longer knew it. She sat on the last chair and her dress lifted in the wind. And then it subsided.



Donald Greenfield

KITE

How The Woman Lost Her Power

With tremendous power,
He spread wide his strong wings.
The God put on the mask of the kite,
embracing her supple body with force,
clasping her waist with passion,
kissing her full breasts.

The miracle which the
mortals saw and our immortal
Gods on Olympus marvelled at,
breathlessness,
The sun shone hottest from gasping,
Phoebus sowed the seed.

Greeks Danaides Macedonians Achaians
with Doric harmony.

Mitis aroused full of passion,
free from the bonds of Zeus
Continually giving birth, unrestrained.
Embroided in the insatiable lust,
in the bed of Phoebus.

Without a lawful husband,
intoxicated with love
drunk from pleasure,
and her desire burns,
unquenchable like lava.
Woman ready for the sacrifice
the pain.

Repayment for a sweet moment
with ecstasy
she enjoys the man-god Apollo
Orpheus, Linus, Asclepius, Delphos,
Charon.

Mitis in madness,
with open legs in expectation,
with ceremony offered herself.
Her sighs intoxicated them.
Ah Mitis.

VASSO KALAMARAS

MITIS

How The Woman Lost Her Power

Beautiful Mitis.

Wise one.

Perfect in Mathematics,
Geometry, Chemistry, Physics,
She has at her fingertips poetry, tragedy,
Perfect writer.

Mitis carved marble from Pendeli masterpieces.
Sculptor.

She kneaded on the wheel clay vases best,
They called her a painter from the beautiful
colours.

In drawing no one surpassed Mitis,
The woman's hands were the great creator.

Men grew pale looking at such works of art.
And Zeus the greatest God of all on Olympus,
was watching her, desired her,
to make her his own,
with such indescribable passion, longing.
With envy and determination,
with stubbornness and envy,

he grasped her,
In one moment in the fusion of
passion and desire, passionate love,
He enjoyed her,
She enjoyed him,
But the bodies had no fulfilment.

So the great God devoured her,
took her strength,
the lord of all.

VASSO KALAMARAS

GWEN KELLY

The Late Twenties and The Thirties

Excerpt from *The Years of the Dog*



IT IS 'CARE FOR the animals day'. The announcer pleads, "Spare a thought for animals today."

I push my hair into my shower cap. "Good God", I think. Every day was "care for the animals day" at our house, every year was animal year. We were never dogless for long. By 1927 my father, after many vicissitudes, kept accounts for a cash order firm where one day a week was spent collecting payments. One of the clients, a dog breeder, owned a prize fox terrier who needed a home urgently, because he attacked the pups in the new litters. My father was not concerned he might be aggressive. He only knew *he* was "dogless", one of the undesirable human states. And so Spot arrived accompanied by a sheaf of blue and red ribbons. With joy I read the inscriptions, first prize, second prize, plus the name of the show and the name of the dog which did not appear to be Spot after all.

In fact he was beautiful, with one of those stylishly shaped, dark terrier heads, a lovely muzzle and well placed, sharp, intelligent eyes. He carried himself with an air of entitlement and indeed he was entitled. Having no pups to bite, he bit intruders or even family, if they knocked him out of the way while stretched indolently in front of the winter fire. Who could blame him? My family considered any animal had a right to warmth in the chilly winters that gripped the Hills districts. I was used to statements such as "It's your own fault. You know he always sleeps in that spot", and I accepted them.

It was a world which seemed to spiral inevitably into long warm summers when we ran barefoot with the local kids, exploring the bush within

parameters firmly laid down by my mother. Wherever we wandered, Spot came too, playmate and protector. I loved him. I subjected him to discipline when the sadistic urges of childhood were uppermost, whacking him lightly with a stick for real or imagined misdemeanours. He never bit me for these onslaughts on his person. At other times, I sat on the ground beside him, arms clasped around his neck, staring silently into hazy distances. They were the years of the late twenties. To me they felt eternal. School and Sunday School and holidays at home were brightened with a rare trip to Town or a day at the beach, usually Manly or Coogee. Long trips by train and ferry or train and tram!

On Saturdays there was cricket with my father, an afternoon beside the green, picket-fenced oval at Waitara where Northern Districts played "at home". My big sisters came and went. They wore long-waisted frocks in glamorous fabrics, chiffon frocks with pointed handkerchief hems, backless evening gowns, shoes with straps and silk stockings. Their hair was bobbed or shingled. Whatever problems beset the family at the top, how could the golden ambience in which I lived ever be destroyed?

My little sister snuggled into bed close to me. "Spot was run over on Friday", she said. "He's dead now." Fury shook me. "He was not run over," I said, "you shouldn't tell lies."

"Yes he was."

"I saw him yesterday."

"You saw a ghost then, silly."

I was crying. "Don't say that." I hit her.

"Ask Mumma then." She hit me back.

I did ask Mumma. I ran into the dining room

where she was spreading sandwiches.

"Spot isn't dead, is he?" I demanded.

Carefully she put down her knife. I looked in her eyes and knew the truth. "He was run over," she said, "on Friday. I thought you knew. He was chasing a car. Another car caught him as he returned to the footpath."

I felt uncontrollable grief. How could something I really loved ever die? He was so warm, so living. My mother put her arms round me and held my head against her apron while the tears ran down my face. He had been buried immediately by the roadworkers building a new flight of cement steps to Paling St. Whenever I passed those steps I thought, "Spot's grave-stone." At least he had a grand monument.

HIS PLACE WAS TAKEN by a roguish dog who looked like a white teddy bear with ginger splotches. His mother was a Maltese poodle. He stood a tiny, curly bundle with huge, brown eyes and the longest eyelashes I have ever seen and wet our lounge room floor. "The darling", said my mother. "Get a wet rag, will you? We'll call him Jock."

My middle sister agreed. He was in fact her dog but he became a central part of our lives for many years. He was my mother's last dog, but we did not know that in 1930.

He was undoubtedly a naughty dog. He bit men, never women, whenever the fancy took him. He did not chase cars, thank heaven, but he became the terror of our semi-rural street as he tore along at the heels of horses and the tyres of passing bikes. He was totally disobedient. He followed us everywhere and refused to return home until it suited him. In time, he went to Church, Thornleigh school (where my second sister taught), and the local pictures. He sat beside me in the stalls at Thornleigh cinema and we watched "Gold Diggers of 1929 (or maybe 30)" together. He was a bonny fighter capable of tackling anything, whatever the size. He was probably the finest watch dog we ever owned.

When I was sixteen Jock died. I was staying at the time with my eldest sister and brother-in-law who was now a doctor in the North Queensland town of Bowen. It was a six-month interlude in my life with no school. I was quivering on the edge of adulthood and I found it nervously intolerable. The blue, hot skies, the

curving white beaches washed by rolling, gentle waves, the wooden, louvred verandahs filtering and shutting out sunlight healed my tense life responses produced partly from the strain of coping with the high-powered academic demands of a very selective high school at too young an age. At sixteen I was receptive to discovery and Queensland showed me that life had more to offer than coming first or even tenth in a top high school class. Glimmerings of sexual feelings flickered in this sunny world over and beyond the pleasant mateship encouraged between boys and girls in our Church clubs at home. Yet I resisted many of the changes, dreaming nostalgically of my family abandoned in far-off Sydney. I was sure my absence would be accompanied by death.

Jock was already ill when I left. Someone had finally directed a well-aimed kick at his spleen. Maybe he had bitten his attacker, maybe he was merely on one of his endless searches for a bitch. He died before I returned home. My middle sister foreshadowed her later role as a social worker and wrote the necessary comforting letter. I retreated below floor level to the cool recesses of a Queensland house and wept and wept. My brother-in-law came and took me in his arms, holding me against his chest as my father had held me as a baby against his coat. It was all a long time ago.

WHY DID THE DEATH of Jock produce such a paroxysm of grief? In retrospect, I think it was a grief I had suppressed for almost a decade following my mother's death in 1932. Jock was the dog that linked her to us. She had named him. And he shared with us the disruption of time and space that followed her death.

In the weeks after she died, we packed away our entire life into crates and boxes. My father was out of work, a state which lasted for three whole years. My sister, Una, decided to move to the city where food and goods, not to mention fares were cheaper.

I have written elsewhere of my first reaction to industrial Sydney, its houses pressed one against the other in street after street, its traffic-infested roads, its factory whistles and smoky sky. In time, I thought, I should wake up in my room at Thornleigh as the morning sun lit the trees and reminded me that the bush lay just

beyond the fence. The little dog was oppressed by the same feeling of loss. He fretted. Long, heart-rending howls followed us if ever we left the house. And so my sister Una bought a miniature fox terrier whom she named Tigger. In our hive she was now Queen Bee for my eldest sister had married immediately after my mother's funeral. Most of her meagre salary evaporated through the need to maintain all of us, including Father. Tigger was the one thing she acquired for herself.

Jock was undoubtedly bored. No passing cyclists, no roaming the by-ways with the young, no visits to the cinema in this cinema-ridden area. Two shows a week at Annandale, Leichhardt and Petersham. The poor of Sydney whiled away the tedium of unemployment watching the rich on the silver screen. In between the picture palaces, the dance halls pulsed to the bands and the lagging feet of the marathon dancers desperate to win. They were literally asleep on their feet. No room at these inns for the splodgy ginger-and-white poodle cross.

With the arrival of Tigger life changed. He was a nicely shaped, strongly muscled little dog with a supersensitive nervous system. He succumbed in time to a nervous eczema and smelt constantly of a tar medication applied each day to his back. His other outstanding characteristic was a Houdini propensity for escape.

For the first six months he remained tiny, but later grew to normal size. In that time he developed a life-long devotion to his mentor, Jock. People say animals don't love, but without doubt Tigger loved Jock. Who knows what one animal says to another? I imagine Jock looking at the athletic body of his mate and muttering "Get me out of here". And the little dog did precisely that.

He first mastered a gate kept in place by a revolving piece of wood, pushing the latter, after due consideration, with his paw. My father replaced it with a small bolt. No problem to Tigger. He simply took the knob in his mouth and pulled. Warily my father tramped the streets of Leichhardt in search of the recalcitrant pair, but they usually returned bright and cocky in their own good time. My father strengthened the bolt and placed wire across the driveway to the front fence which the dog had scaled easily.

Tigger sat down and patiently chewed the wire, circle by circle, until it was weak enough for the pair of them to squeeze through. When we moved to a house with a lattice, he went to the far end of the yard, put his head down like a billy goat and literally butted his way through. And so it continued. During the eight years of his life, we changed houses many times. We were part of the wandering population who lived in cheap, rented cottages which landlords reclaimed whenever it suited them. As the depression moved slowly into a minor recovery, we went in 1937 to the Eastwood-Denistone-Ryde area but the pattern of changing houses continued. No problem for Tigger. Whatever the obstacle to freedom, he overcame it. He could by the end of his life, let himself off a chain.

HOLIDAYS WERE a nightmare, or more truly a trauma, from which I have never quite recovered. Some railway stations sold dog tickets, others supplied only a baggage slip. The dogs were meant by NSW Government Railways to travel in the guard's van in either case, but my second sister, Una, was skilled in dialectic. We walked to the nearest station which sold tickets even if it were two miles away. "If they have a ticket", my sister said, "they are entitled to travel as passengers", a view, I later discovered, shared by the London rail system. It was, however, certainly not part of the credo of New South Wales. On one occasion we met fierce opposition from a porter on the platform at Central Station. He shouted at the two dogs sitting demurely on their leads waiting to board the train with us. He lunged in anger and Jock promptly bit him. All hell broke loose. Their muzzles were meant to be fastened over their mouths, not attached loosely by a string to their collars. He pulled up the leg of his serge trousers, then his long, woollen underpants, then lowered his woollen sock. In spite of the layers of clothing, the teeth marks were quite apparent even though the bite had not broken the skin. Our train was due to depart. "I can't wait any longer", my sister said. "What do you expect if you wear all that clothing in an Australian summer?" We pushed into the nearest carriage as the train drew out leaving behind a flabbergasted porter still trying to adjust his socks, his

underpants and his trousers as the carriages moved away.

In real terms, it was a time of stress for myself and my younger sister, Yvonne. Year after year, there were endless arguments with conductors on trains. I have sat legs firmly pressed together to hide two boxes containing cats, pushed under the seat, while Una argued with the representatives of the New South Wales Railways. "Livestock is not allowed in the carriage", they would say pointing at the dogs lying on our toes.

"They have tickets," my sister would reply, "not baggage slips."

"It makes no difference", they would reply. "All animals in the van. It's a regulation. Don't let it happen again."

Only once did a guard defeat her. He stood barring the entrance to the carriage, arms akimbo.

"Very well", said my sister. "I shall travel in the luggage van with them."

The man shrugged. "Please yourself", he said.

She hustled both of us, myself a mere teenager and my sister, two years younger, into the carriage and disappeared. It was a box carriage separated from the rest of the train. My sister was fearful but the occupants were kind. They understood we had been through a distressing experience.

"Where are you going?" they asked.

"Ettalong", we said. "We get out at Woy Woy."

There was a curious silence, then one of the men said, "This train does not stop at Woy Woy. It's the North Coast Mail. First stop Gosford." My younger sister promptly had hysterics. She was hysterical every time one of her loved ones disappeared from a train even for a minute, a state regularly upsetting to my father who could not see the word "Men" without desiring a leak. It had happened ever since she was seven, when my mother went away to hospital. The passengers did their best while I comforted the sobbing child. "Don't worry, little girl," they said, "you'll have to get out at Gosford and catch a train back." I nodded. My own heart was beating in a suffocatingly fast rhythm. What if the guard wouldn't let my sister out of the luggage van? I had a horrible feeling that the train stopped at Gosford merely to pick up, not to set down.

"That is true," one of the passengers said, "but we'll help you out", and they did. The guard, no doubt relieved to find he was not to be accompanied by two vicious dogs and an irate passenger to the far reaches of northern New South Wales, did likewise.

As soon as she saw my sister safely on the platform clutching the leads of both dogs, my small sister recovered her calm. Within five minutes we caught a slow train from Newcastle back to Woy Woy.

LONG, SUMMERY summers spent swimming, boating and fishing, always with two dogs! I can see them still, sitting on Woy Woy station one frightful, hot day in January 1937, two coloured ice-blocks tied to their heads to cool them down after the trip in the bus. The green and orange juices streaked their faces as the ices melted into their ginger-and-white fur to drip into the useless, leather muzzles tied to their collars. In their own way they were unique, or maybe it was my second sister who was unique.

In the more open countryside of the Ryde-Eastwood area they flourished. No one tried to restrain them. Our new friends grew used to them, even if one young man spent at least half an hour at a twenty-first birthday party, bailed up in our linen cupboard during a game of hide and seek. Tigger wandered the streets while Jock courted. Occasionally the patience of the younger dog gave way under constant hectoring by the elder in gargantuan bursts of rage. Their fights were titanic. For many years I carried a scar on my right hand where I was bitten, quite accidentally, in my futile attempt to separate them. But fury did not diminish love. When Jock died, Tigger retreated under the house and refused to come out for a week. Finally my father crawled under the floorboards and brought out the emaciated animal in his arms. When we changed houses yet again, he returned to the house where Jock had died and refused to allow the new owners to enter. Again my father rescued him and them. And so he became the dog with his nose through the paling fence waiting for someone to come home, until he died of tick poisoning at the end of 1940.

Gwen Kelly is a novelist and short story writer. Her first Overland contribution, The Birthday, a story of official tyranny, appeared in issue number five.

JOURNEY

Because the journey
was his destination
he was always and never

where he wanted to be,
the haiku master,
Matsuo Basho,

who set out from Edo
in the spring of 1689
on *The Narrow Road*

to the Deep North.
Now 300 years later
he has set out again,

travelling in translation:
my mind his staff,
my heart his companion.

ANDREW LANSDOWN

THUNDER AND EAGLES

Listen for it: thunder or gunfire
worse than oceans, sky crashing down upon
the man bent over plants on the terrace
opposite, the skinny sinews of the scooters
are nothing in it, the cry of a child just now
nothing in it, and I am pained to note how
thunder and forces like thunder so totally
deny us. Timely, it is the bliss of fascists
who feel it like adrenalin and death, like signs
they dream and wake on us. Thunder in
humans
tends to kill. They stand on the terrace
rumpling words, wedging thunder in the streets
like metal clouds ... No, this is now, no-one
hurt
for all the shiny sounds of traffic, those riders
on scooters, the ambulances wailing illness,
the cries of children with us, in us, always
in us. Thunder, and shortly rain, and signs
of Europe falling ... Left till the last moment,
Mussolini here, Hitler, Pol Pot, these crushed
imaginings. The man is still pottering over
plants, the child has gone silent, the sky is the
colour of soft bones. I see two eagles circling.
The rain is coming on flat heels, like a nurse.

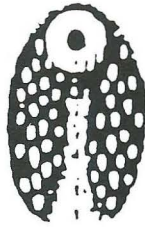
PHILIP SALOM

ETRUSCAN TOMBS

There's none of the passion of death
no gut wrench and awful puncture in the
prayers
from fear or that bastard anguish
we're all born illegitimate, on the wrong side
of the tracks. So after everything, which is
not much, the dying hurts and then that's it.
This is more the kindergarten crib or kiddies'
room where red-skinned figures eat and sing
like murals done by children, or fishermen
lean over gunwhales to haul the rigid net,
the air above them like birds from a burst pipe.
Nothing lives for very long. The ceilings
are geometric as a table cloth and hang
from their starch where the dead
lay pale from life like motion-sickness.

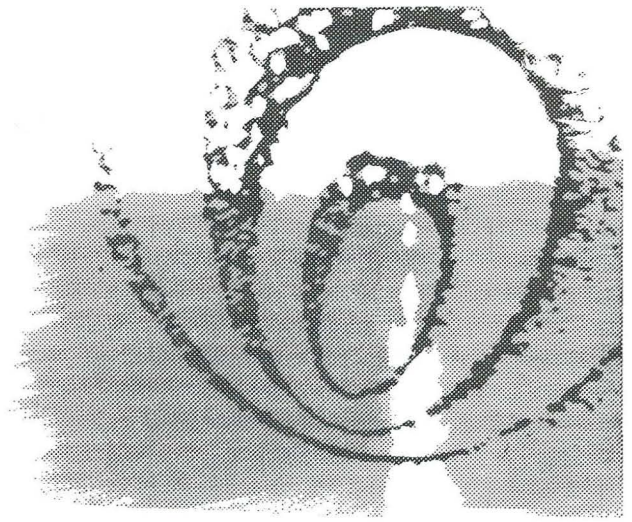
PHILIP SALOM

Vince Dziekan



*The Awful
Disclosures of
Maria Monk*

*On an otherwise ordinary day in 1989, I bought a second-hand copy of James Joyce's **Ulysses** from a lakeside bookshop in the regional Victorian town of Daylesford. Little did I know at the time that contained in its pages was an encapsulated mirroring of my bookshop adventure with that of Leopold Bloom at 3 pm Thursday, June 16, 1904. The significance of this mundane act came to my realisation much later, only after my readings of it had gestated and grown into the project, **Bloom's Books**, which I have worked on between 1992-'94.*

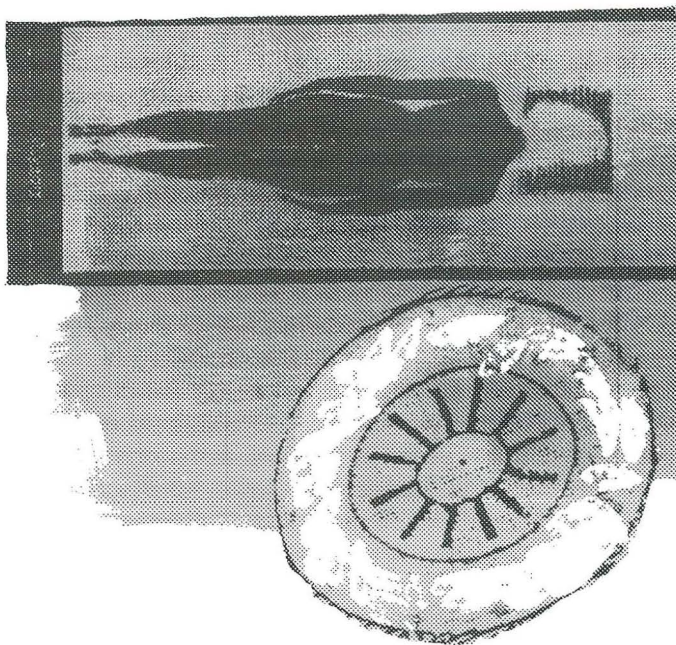
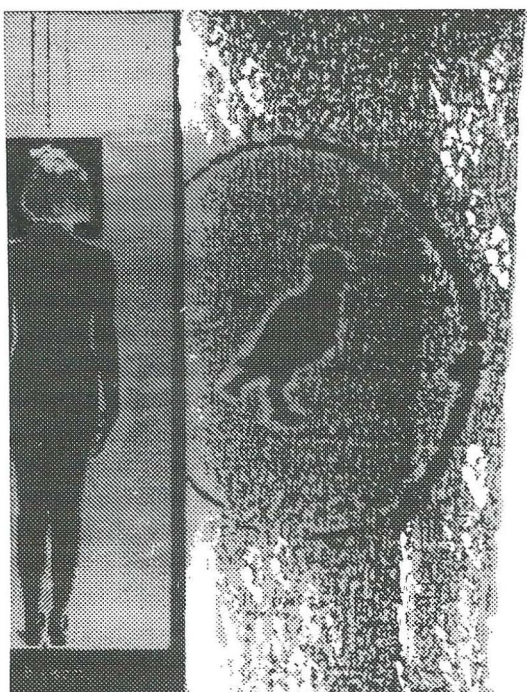


Contrasts of Order within the Larger Project

The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk is one of five bodies-of-work developed as a part of *Bloom's Books*. Inspired by the 10th section of The Wandering Rocks episode of *Ulysses*, wherein Bloom absent-mindedly thumbs through five books in a Dublin book stall on the banks of the Liffey, each work takes on one of the titles and the resulting meandering associations become sub-themes for each individualized part of which

this visual supplement is an annex.

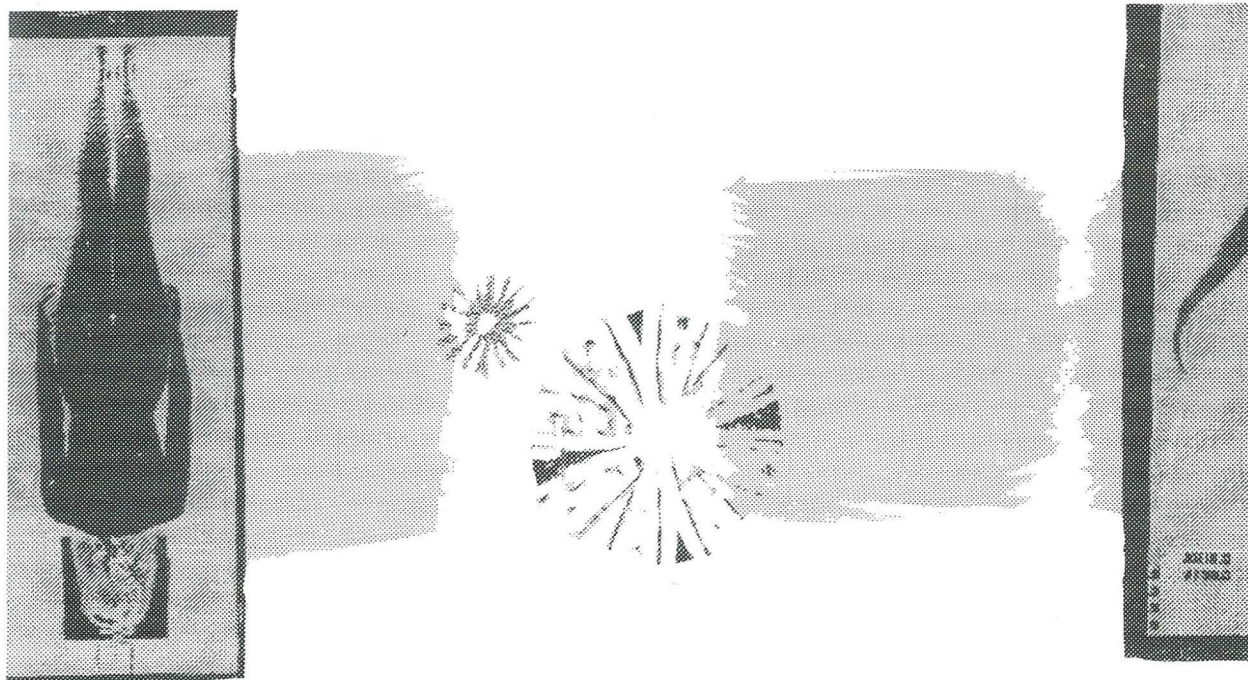
Each project presents an internally structured rationale, offering narrative readings or taking up formal concerns relating to media and method. Inevitably, as only a part of a larger body-of-work, each installment isolates the structural relationship and visual or thematic linkages to other components of the project (this strategy attempts to recall Joyce's own initial presentation



of installments of selected chapters between 1918-19). Literally, then, each work can tell only its side of the story, which by extension can be seen to represent how any visual language is framed by the limitations of its own media, communication context and audience. To elaborate, it is useful to illustrate the contrasting ways of ordering and placing individual component parts within the larger project.

The first of these orders is that of the exposition of the source text in the referred to section of *Ulysses*. Bloom moves through five books in a narrative sequence: "Mr. Bloom turned over idly pages of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* then of *Aristotle's Masterpiece*". From there he "glanced at" *Tales of the Ghetto* by Leopold von Sacher Masoch, "looked at" *Fair Tyrants* by James Lovebitch, and lastly takes purchase of *Sweets of Sin*, "tapping on it. That's a good one".

In turn, between August 1993 and September 1994, I have been presenting the resulting projects in a variety of forms and contexts. In chronological succession, *Fair Tyrants* started the expositions as a window installation as part of the Melbourne Fringe Festival. Next, *Aristotle's Masterpiece* travelled to the University of Sydney's Tin Sheds Gallery, and *Sweets of Sin* along with *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* were installed at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in



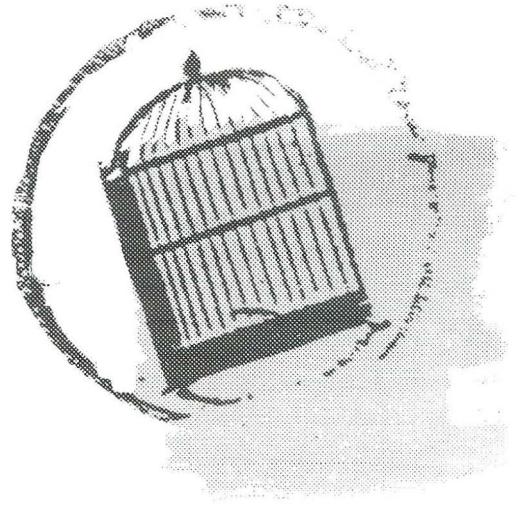
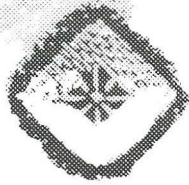
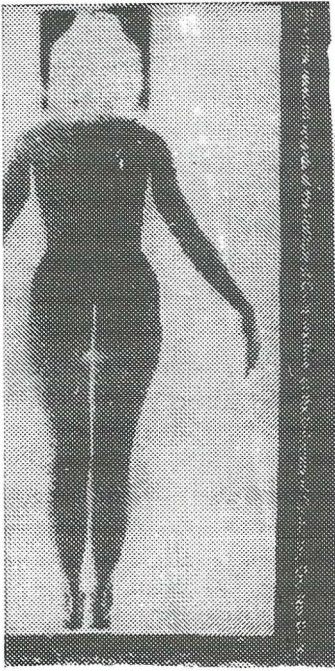
Melbourne. Finally, the project came full circle and ended again in an urban context by displaying five panels from *Tales of the Ghetto* in the streets of Melbourne as part of the City Art Public Spaces project.

In contrast to these two types of temporal orders, my development of a project of correspondances led to the organization of the five titles into a catalogue, and transformed the lateral sequence across a page of prose or its successive

movement through time into a visualisation of them as information on a chart, specifically a graphic table. This change of order from the narrative or the chronological to the hierarchical places *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* at the top of the list with the others arranged in a descending order to *Sweets of Sin* at the bottom. In the CCP installation the relationship of these two pieces is actualised as framing elements by including a transitional work, *The Stains of Sin*, in a corner of the

gallery, which allows both the additional work and this feature of the gallery's architecture to act as a hinge between the two main works, thus enabling them to be perceived as bookends.

Thematically, then, the overall project for *Bloom's Books* develops out of this visual hierarchy such that *Sweets of Sin*, at the base, initiates the movement which culminates in the crowning achievement (attainment) of "Maria". To elaborate briefly, *Sweets of Sin*,



which corresponds to the Joycean technique of labyrinth, represents latency, layers of visibility and chains of association. In ascending order, *Fair Tyrants* by James Lovebirch, taking its character from the oxymoronic nature of its title, escapes from the structure which parallels Joyce's use of symbols to also refer to Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even/ The Large Glass*. The Bachelor apparatus, in particular, is appropriated. *Tales of the*

Ghetto by Leopold von Sacher Masoch, with its reference to citizens, suggests mass as pure production and the possibility of systematic combinatorial play. *Aristotle's Masterpiece* operates upon a structure that enables variability by transforming schematic representations of that structure; which I depict as an exhibition inventory representing stages of transformation from abstract to figurative, analytical to expressive, structure to fleshed-out form (which I have also associated with the

organ of blood). This fleshing out, drawing back upon Joyce's reference to "infants cuddled in a ball in bloodred wombs like livers of slaughtered cows. Lots of them like that at this moment all over the world. All butting their skulls to get out of it. Child born every minute somewhere. Mrs. Purefoy.", betrays the genesis of this project of creative work as a mirror to the procreative. This realisation, this awful disclosure, bears fruit in (literally and figuratively) Maria Monk.



The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk was exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Photography in April, 1994. That installation version took the form of 100 small panels of semi-abstract Polaroid images and negative material presented in a grid arrangement on the wall. Faced by a wrought-iron birdcage stand positioned in the gallery, the vacant space left by the omission of the actual birdcage itself acted as an aperture directing and eroticising the viewing experience. In contrast, this printed supplement applies a much more narrative language, tapping into the sensationalist flavour of the book's title and the pseudo-pornographic innuendo of its contents. Included in the sequential page spreads are images referencing scientific photographs of stages of human growth development, optical devices such as the thaumatrope, and an inventory of Jan Perkinje's illustrations of retinal after-images.

CATH KENNEALLY

What If Vic Warshawski Had To Pick Up The Kids From School?



THE FICTIONAL FIGURE of the female private investigator is intrinsically feminist in that the conventions require for her a mobility, an untrammelled agency which dictates that she shall have no ties. (The female police detective is much less clearly politically readable in being answerable to a male code of justice and hierarchy of authority: note the number of PIs who are ex-cops.)

It's no accident that VI, Kinsey, Anna Lee and Claudia Valentine and the rest are unmarried and either have never had or have disembarassed themselves of children, nor that they have variously-explained 'problems with commitment'. If they were locked into some sort of domesticity, there would – let's face it – be fictional problems with conflicting responsibilities. There is nothing more subversive than the resolutely single marriageable woman, and the simple fact that all these female fictional investigators remain resolutely wedded to their work makes them potent signifiers of revolt.

In her chapter called 'Ain't Misbehavin' in Delys Bird's and Brenda Walker's *Killing Women*, Susan Geason complains that "these feminist PIs are moral absolutists when many of the male PIs are more believable moral relativists". Yet it's easy for the creators of hard-boiled men, even the new ones, chauvinist or crypto-feminist, Mario Balzic or Syd Fish, to allow their heroes unfettered agency. It's no more than we expect, and it passes almost unnoticed. Either they're unattached (perfectly acceptable), they fuck around (ditto), or they're married with children and stay-at-home wives who may or may not have 'issues' centring on how little time at home Balzic/Wexford/Pasco/Quantrill (Sheila Radley) etc., all eighties and nineties men, might be able

to spare. Whatever, no one seriously expects his domestic arrangements to get in the way of a man's doing what a man's gotta do.

Geason feels that the creators of female PIs invented the kind who "don't screw around or occasionally act irresponsibly" out of a reluctance to "hand the enemy ammunition". Actually, it's overstating the case to say that the Vic Warshawskis of the fictional world are good girls to that degree, and my feeling is that the scarcity of boyfriends is due rather to the difficulty of factoring in casual sex for women in such a way that it remains as peripheral to the narrative as it can easily be rendered for the blokes. I agree that Australian writers have come up with less complex-ridden versions of Vic and Kinsey, but the business of having fun and still being taken seriously (as Geason puts it) is, after all, deadly serious in real life for women and it's an achievement for Paretsky and Grafton and Cody and Day and the rest to keep their PIs single and sane. In fact, it's precisely that that keeps me reading even the not-so-good female PIs. If they're somewhat or even seriously mal-adjusted, well, we haven't figured this one out yet. (Check out Meg O'Brien's obsessive, alcoholic and thoroughly mixed-up Jesse James.)

That's not to say Syd Fish isn't a shining star in the PI firmament, or that I actually like VI Warshawski – but I find her neuroses interesting, whereas Syd isn't neurotic, because he's a bloke behaving in one of the acceptable modes (in this case, free-wheeling and lovable and sympathetic to women, but not one of them).

What is interesting to me in the treatment of the new crop of female detectives and PIs is precisely the attempt to substitute a thinkable new web of relationships for the all-too-thinkable old

and ongoing real-world and fictional ones. The Vics and the Kinseys and the Claudias have to be resituated, provided with relationship links that keep the reader (ideally) satisfied that they are female *enough* (when the bottom line for all women-constructed-for-readers, whether of novels or of magazines/newspapers, has always been their affiliative powers or status) and yet not in any relationship that comprises their mobility or free agency. This is a bigger ask than is usually acknowledged, and results are predictably patchy.

Thus Vic Warshawski has an oddly constrained relationship with an old man in her apartment building who is her self-appointed guardian (and who calls her 'doll') but whom she never gets beyond calling 'mister'; and Kinsey Milhone has a landlord in his eighties who is an acknowledged fantasy-figure she admits to being "half in love with". Claudia Valentine has a gruffly understated friendship with Jack, who runs the pub she lives in. Vic has a frighteningly cold and withholding surrogate mother in Doctor Herschel. On the other hand, if we leave blood ties out of the calculations because (for women) they're likely to take up too much time and attention, and any major sexual involvement for the same reason, it's not immediately apparent who might stand in as significant others. (Claire McNabb's Carol Ashton is disappointing in being apparently condemned to repeat heterosexual mistakes in her suffocating lesbian coupledness, notwithstanding the pyrotechnics of McNabb's set-piece sex-scenes.)

If these women seem to lead somewhat bleak lives, it's not necessarily out of Puritan distaste on the part of their creators for kicking up the heels and throwing off the traces. Milhone is twice-divorced and only occasionally gets lucky with her uncertainly-married police sergeant, but is not hampered by scruples when the occasion offers. They *have* thrown off the important traces. And why should we continue to wish them into potentially unsettling new connections? (Liza Cody's *Backhand* has Anna Lee drift into a whole book's worth of cohabitation with a large shambles of an Irishman, and it's a mighty relief when her combination of avoidance-procrastination-prevarication tactics drive him out.)

I HAVE THIS FEELING that new territory both for feminist scholarship and for feminist fiction may be the single woman: not even a single woman looking for another single woman. Women refusing relationships are pretty much refusing to be women, by all our calculations to date. How are we able to imagine such women? Do they seem monstrous, mad, depleted, selfish, would-be men? We've hardly begun this imagining, and I'm intrigued by the advances into this territory of female private investigators.

To reflect further on the significance of such as Claudia Valentine, the nuggety Anna Southwood whose emerging toughness surprises even herself, and, back in a lost liberated past, Phryne Fisher, I need to declare what I imagine is a common reason for reading about women crime busters, and that is the sort of lived experience Sue Grafton sums up in a sentence which appears on the fly-leaf of all her Kinsey Milhone books: "For months I lay in bed and plotted how to kill my ex-husband. But I knew I'd bungle it and get caught, so I wrote it in a book instead."

I need the saving grace of fictionality to allow me to contemplate ... the unbearable ubiquity of violence, especially against women or children.

I'm a member of a not inconsiderable group of females (being myself the survivor of a seriously murderous assault that netted him twelve months away and me some hefty and permanent damage and no compensation) who have giant reservations about the justice system, and use revenge fantasies as a legal means of auto-therapy. I like my fictional acting-out to be done by women, and I like them to start out at least moderately browned-off with Romance and White Knights. This isn't escapism for me. I assume I'm also not alone in finding myself constitutionally unable to read 'real life' newspaper accounts or even decent autobiographical accounts of violence. I need the saving grace of fictionality to allow me to contemplate (as I equally find myself compelled to do) the unbearable ubiquity of violence, especially against

women or children. I must also have company in finding myself implacably resistant to male writers of fiction telling me how it is.

It is perhaps in this connection that – call me philistine – I should say I believe the genre is best suited to naturalistic treatment. The reason *Still Murder* (Finola Moorhead) does not work for me is the lengthy interpolations in the voice of a supposedly unbalanced woman inmate of a psychiatric hospital. The juxtaposing of that indulgent, mannered yet rambling monologue with the conventionally hard-boiled and commonsense musings of Detective Margo Norman make both seem precious. Jan McKemmish describes *Only Lawyers Dancing* as a “sort of film-obsessed visually-drenched prose”, as a “moving away from the authority of the lone detective” (*Killing Women*). It’s having female PIs assume (adulterated and contingent) authority that seems to me the interesting option for their creators.

Susan Geason is right when she says our PIs are less neurotic than their Stateside sisters. Jean Bedford’s Anna Southwood is pretty close to spot-on for my money. I worry about her drinking, but I suppose that’s my hang-up. In Bedford’s new, admirably tight and gutsy story called *Signs of Murder*, Southwood displays an appealing mix of gung-ho go-getting and a sort of strandedness in her newly unattached and well-funded lifestyle. “I felt good for being so decisive, but as I let myself into the empty house, I realised that empty days, too, faced me. There was nothing else on and no McNeath to go running to ...” In this book, her gad-about actor partner stays out of the country for the whole duration, and Bedford spends a fair amount of space, relative to the action, on how Southwood copes with the necessity of filling time.

All the new batch of women detective writers know this is a dimension of the detective-series reading experience not only women readers savour: luxuriating in the details of a familiar character’s day-to-day doings. Intrinsic to series-writing is the elaboration of the lynchpin character’s quirks and habits. The fantastic Phryne Fisher is distinguished by all her money, her flawless beauty and utterly independent spirit. She is a fabulous character in all senses and Greenwood understands her function as an icon

of liberated behaviour, including great physical daring. But she doesn’t spend all her time flying aeroplanes or riding bareback round a circus ring. Greenwood always provides a relatively large amount of detail about Phryne’s clothes and food and furniture and perfumes and bed-linen because these offer that illusion of intimacy. A reader’s affections are more minutely and contemporarily engaged by the loving attention to Sydney locales in Marele Day’s and Jean Bedford’s and Susan Geason’s novels.

In her latest (*Signs of Murder*), Bedford includes information like this:

I put on a jacket and went out to the car, then swore when I remembered it was still in Glebe. It was also raining. It took me a while to decide whether to get a cab straight to Newtown, or to pick up the Volkswagen on the way. Eventually I plumped for the former – I could get a bus to Glebe from Newtown.

This isn’t dispensable filler material. It plugs you in. Geason’s *DogFish* Sydney is so sensually present you can smell it; ditto for the inner city and eastern suburbs in Day’s *Harry Lavender*. It’s missing in the Claire McNabb books, where, for the most part, the author uses unspecific locating devices (“Sybil sat in the beachside restaurant”) or explains over-precisely (“The harborside Eastern Suburbs area of Sydney looked upon the North Shore with scornful superiority, secure in the arrogance that old money and strong connections could give”) what Geason *et al* indicate metonymically. There’s infinitely more of the necessary presumption of ongoing intimacy with a series-character’s life and times in Bedford’s “I got to George Street in time to see them both getting into an illegally parked white Jaguar convertible. ... a 431 bus pulled up beside me and I boarded it in a foul temper, especially as it was immediately clear I’d have to stand most of the way back to Balmain.”

In terms of what Claudia, Anna, and all their cousins have to offer in the arena of the politics of representation, I would suggest the following: that the conventions of the genre allow/require them to be lovingly realised with fictional warts and all. (I do have one gripe: is there no other kind of hair for a feisty PI than abundant and

uncontrollable?) They are also required to be working women ill-defined in respect of constituted authority and professional status, unhampered by rigid codes, whose contract with the individual seeker frees them from any suspiciously overweening Quest (Phryne in *The Green Mill Murder* says: "I'm not the Masked Avenger of the penny novel. I have no particular interest in Truth or Justice. I haven't even got a good definition of Truth or Justice.").

They are observers by profession, able to insert themselves into other lives whose slipstream may sweep them up because they maintain only temporary or undemanding connections themselves. Linda Barnes's Carlotta Carlyle, in *The Snake Tattoo*, brings about the greatly-to-be-desired death of a girl's brutal father, but steps out, as we expect: "Tears were running down her cheeks and I'm not sure she heard me. I hoped they were cleansing tears, but I knew she needed more help than I could give her, help for the rest of her life." They have privileged access to a succession of instances of brutality, venality, misogyny, tyranny, in a succession of other people's lives from which they also have the privilege of being able to extract themselves.

They have privileged access to a succession of instances of brutality, venality, misogyny, tyranny ... from which they also have the privilege of being able to extract themselves.

In being 'private enquiry agents' who are also female, they break bounds primarily in terms of that male-coded agency and in being unaccountable to male authority at home or abroad. As women in the public realm they invite danger, and act as emissaries for real women who imagine inhabiting that realm. As invited guests or paid intruders in private lives, they can call

the play as they see it, grounded in what Dinerstein and co. might call good-enough relational networks that don't involve them in any 'belonging'.

Trinh Minh-ha, in a chapter of a new book (*The Politics of Difference*) titled 'All Owing Spectatorship', discusses 'impurity' – a state "in which the issue of gender prevails", the interval during which "the impure subject is feared and alienated". Women, often impure (as she explains in an anthropological context) are "at odds on occupied territory" and must "situate their social spaces precariously in the interstices of diverse systems of ownership". In such situations, they run the risk of "remaining endlessly spectators, whether of an object, an event, an attribute, a duty, an adherence, a classification or a social process". What they need to do to modify existing frontiers, she says, is to produce "a situated, shifting and contingent difference" where the emphasis is on movement across sexual and political boundaries.

Meanwhile Elizabeth Guild (In *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*), discussing "feminisms of difference", maintains that "however conceptually powerful the function for feminists of Derridean *différance* as a means for fundamentally re-conceptualizing gender identities and relations, the political impulse of these feminisms requires that theories of difference be supplemented by theories of agency, concerned with the ideological, cultural, social and political differences towards which feminisms work." All this may seem a large burden for the female PI to bear, but her impure, licensed impudence, situational options and lack of affiliation/allegiance qualify her surprisingly well as a fictional stunt-pilot.

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POEM FOR ALBERTINE SARRAZIN

*Je suis en partance
Aux jours de l' exile
Aucune importance
Je tiens le bon fil.*

Anne, Anne five years in the can
at the sweet age of twenty
drank enough kero to
turn her skin green
and land herself a hospital bed –
one next to the window

From which she jumped
out over the fence
into the arms of a perfect stranger
who was no stranger

She changed her name and became Annick
sold her wares on the rue Pigalle
under many names to repay
the stranger his kindness
or maybe give him and her a honeymoon
on the Cote d'Azur
he was busy playin' the lottery

It wasn't easy of course
les flics were heavy
so she decided to write her life
in a book to take the weight
off her head
she shed another skin and became
Albertine

Close to the heart she wrote
the story of a girl who went wrong
and was saved of course by the love
of a handsome stranger

Critics called her the female Genet
bestowed prizes and lauded
her special language
she won the hearts of pimps
prostitutes and con-men
Meanwhile the entire police force
kept on arresting

I forgot to tell them you're dead
Anne, Annick, Albertine
at the sweet age of thirty
10th July 1967
you shed another skin
the real one barely worn

MARELE DAY

SUSAN GEASON

Sibylla of the Fires



THEY TUMBLED SCREAMING from the yellow school bus, wearing cowboy boots and new term faces, a bit bigger, more teeth missing, some breasts budding.

The teacher stood in the doorway, away from the dust and the blare of the inland sun. A helpless surge of love welled up in Sibylla but wore thin in the heat under their brown, persistent paws and cockatoo cries. They soon lost their novelty.

The trouble started when the Larsens came. They were the wild cards. The school world seemed to tilt slightly, so that the relationship of one thing, one person, to another, shifted and changed. Their clothes were outlandish, and like their faces, gave no clue to their gender. Their mother was dead of cancer, their father, or fathers, long gone. The Larsens spoke mostly to each other, and their clipped coastal voices concealed more than they conveyed. Their souls were locked rooms.

Afterwards, it was impossible to call their faces to mind: the eyes got in the way, his black and glittering, hers the blinking blue of the Albino. They took in everything and gave nothing back, like quicksand.

The small natives watched the newcomers with secret, sidelong glances. Unafraid of anything that walked or stalked the night plains, they were subdued around the dark boy and his fair sister. Except for Wayne, who mutated from manageable lair to sadistic bully under the boy's unspoken challenge.

Sibylla waited. Drought, patient as an ancient, scaly vulture, stalked the land. Infected by their parents' fear and worry, the children became needy, clamorous, relentless.

In October, the school shed burned down. Nobody was hurt. When a new policeman from

the nearby town came to investigate, the class became agitated and quarrelsome, expecting trouble. With privacy an unthinkable luxury in a one-room school, Sibylla joined him on the verandah. He told her he thought the fire had been deliberately lit. It could have been hoons from the town in hotted-up cars, he said, or a boy on a bike. Did anyone live close enough?

Sibylla was finding it difficult to breathe. It might have been the heat, but it felt more like foreboding. Wayne's mother, Judy, a large gentle woman still puzzled by her husband's desertion a decade ago, was cook-housekeeper on a property about twelve kilometres away. Wayne had a bike and strong legs. He could easily have done it.

The policeman was young, and very aware of the schoolteacher. Her agate eyes gleamed in the shadows, sweat beaded her upper lip, her freckles shone. Under a spell, he touched one of the limp curls that struggled from her ponytail, lowered his face to her neck and inhaled. She shivered.

A crash drove them apart. It was Wayne, grinning, wanting help with his computer game. The policeman looked from Sibylla to the triumphant boy and back. She shrugged slightly – Wayne was Wayne.

Indoors, he towered over teacher and children: Authority.

"Somebody's lit a fire in the shed", he said. "It could be some idiot playing with matches, or it could be worse. You're all suspects, and I'll be watching every move you make. If you know anything, tell Miss."

Fear and excitement moved over the class like wind across a wheat field. "I reckon it was Michael Larsen", accused Wayne, and the children turned and stared.

Sibylla felt rather than saw a surge of energy, a charge, flare between the boy and his sister. They drew together; their eyes hardened and bounced back the light.

"That's enough, Wayne", said Sibylla. "This isn't a kangaroo court." The class laughed and the moment passed.

Ignoring baby June's clutching hands, she watched the policeman stride across the dusty schoolyard, a massive oak on a treeless plain. Heat shimmered around him, turning him for a moment into a mirage. Alone again.

A disturbance drew her back into the swarming room to tear Wayne out from under the Larsens. "They jumped me!" he screamed.

Sibylla pushed him into his seat. The Larsens glared but kept their counsel, though the girl had a nasty Chinese burn on her wrist. The teacher's hand went out, but the girl shrank away like an undersea flower.

"Get out your reading books!" ordered Sibylla, tired of them, and something new in her tone catapulted them into their seats.

And still no scent of rain.

On her way home, she stopped off to see the Larsens' aunt, Lindy Green, a fair-haired stupid girl with a beautiful face. Her husband, a Main Roads ganger, joined them, all brick red and crinkly eyed. She told them about the fire and warned that people might blame the kids because they were strangers, and because they were, well ... strange.

"Do you think they did it?" asked the aunt. Two toddlers and the loneliness and now this.

Sibylla shrugged. "I don't know. But I think you should be ready for trouble."

"The little girl, Rose, she doesn't talk", complained the ganger. "Do you think she's simple?"

"No", said Sibylla, surprised. Complicated, other, frightening even, but never simple. "They're both quite bright. I think they've had to rely on each other, and now they don't need anybody else, that's all."

She couldn't tell them that she sensed something evil in the boy, that the children felt it too, that the Larsens made their hackles rise. It would sound overwrought, and it might frighten these ordinary, good people for no reason.

"It's all their mother's fault if you ask me",

said their uncle.

"Nobody's asking you, Frank", warned his wife, and he fell silent.

Shut out, Sibylla withdrew, and wondered, all the way home, what Frank Green had been going to say. She never did find out.

THE POLICEMAN APPEARED at the farm that night with a six pack of beer and a swag of stories. His name was Adam, and he had skin like honey and a very nice way about him; she chose to forget that she would never have mixed with the police in that mythical place called home. But they were in the same boat, burdened by expectations, becalmed.

They murmured longingly about coffee shops and crowds, rock concerts and pubs, and reminisced about beaches, crashing waves, cool breezes full of ozone and iodine. But it was the blissful anonymity they missed most, that sense of passing unnoticed and unremarked through their territory.

After a few beers Adam relaxed his guard and confessed that these country people made him feel young and green. Sibylla understood. Sometimes, listening to herself talk, or catching sight of her reflection as she patrolled her tiny kingdom, she felt like a little girl play acting in her mother's high heels, and wondered if the parents saw through her but were too kind to laugh.

After a couple of dates, like all schoolteachers everywhere, she began to talk about her pupils. He was so solid, so ordinary, so sane, and such a sympathetic listener, she found herself telling him what was going on in the school – or what she thought was going on. It might simply have been her imagination turning rancid in the heat.

"There's something sinister about the boy, Michael. He controls his sister totally. She won't even speak without looking at him for permission. They pretend to mind me, but I'm irrelevant to them. I'm just another grown-up who has to be pacified. They've gone underground."

Alarmed at her anxiety, he tried to laugh her out of it, but every day from then on the police car would roar up the highway and slow down at the school, keeping an eye on things, and Sibylla would wave. The kids sniggered and nudged: Miss's boyfriend.

Things quietened down a bit after the fire, a

collective drawing back from the edge. Wayne and Michael Larsen circled each other, but kept their distance. Laughter returned to the school room.

THEN THE SCHOOL DOG went missing. A large, mangy mutt which had been abandoned by its owner on the highway, the dog had attached itself to Wayne, who after an initial struggle, had succumbed to the slavering devotion and allowed the dog to follow him everywhere. Though it wasn't allowed into the schoolroom, the dog would lie on the verandah and fix its eye on Wayne till sleep overtook it.

The class was distraught, Wayne stunned. At play time the school yard was eerily quiet without the dog's hysterical barking. Sibylla struggled to deal with the shock, the grief and the suspicion.

A secret schoolyard court convened, tried and convicted the Larsens. With Wayne in the lead, the children ganged up and kicked and punched the two, who fought back gamely before retreating. Now nobody would come near them, so they sat silent and isolated, watchful and menacing. The girl, in particular, gave Wayne a wide berth. It was impossible to guess what the boy was thinking.

Flying along the dead straight empty highway after school with the windows up and the radio and air-conditioner blasting, Sibylla mourned for the plain folk, for their small world. First the drought and now this. It wasn't clear yet who the casualties would be: all of them, probably. But at least she could leave.

On good days, her pupils seemed like any other naughty children: at other times, they seemed unreachable, alien; but apart from the policeman, there was no one Sibylla could confide in. People would think she was losing her grip. As the year ground on and the dog failed to return, Wayne escalated his campaign against the Larsens, calling them names, tripping them, stealing their lunch.

Growing desperate, Sibylla cracked down, and Wayne spent long hours in Conventry on the verandah. It bothered her that she could never catch the Larsens red-handed. The others grew torpid in the claustrophobic heat: even play used up too much energy.

ON PLAYGROUND DUTY one day, Sibylla saw Wayne bail up Rose Larsen as she came out of the lavatory block. It was the only place the girl could evade the watchful eye of her brother. Sibylla could not hear what was said, but Rose came away from the encounter with a satisfied face. She wasn't afraid of Wayne any more, Sibylla realised. She would never know what passed between them, but the result was startling. Defiant for weeks. Wayne abruptly tired of the war, and, mild as milk, announced he'd decided to join the police force. Like her friend, he said, smirking.

At night Sibylla and the policeman sought refuge at the shrinking swimming hole. At the creek, she could watch him, naked and golden, free from the sticky gaze of curious children. Though she found the smell of his sun-warmed skin irresistible, it was his commonsense Sibylla craved.

"Wayne's stopped teasing the Larsens", she told him, lying cool and sated on the moonlit bank, stroking his long back. "I don't like it."

If she'd expected Adam to find it sinister, she was disappointed. "You're never satisfied", he said and laughed. When she bristled, he rolled over and pinned her with strong arms, grinning down at her. "Stop worrying. It might never happen."

Sibylla's faith in his judgement wobbled for a moment, but she decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. After all, he hadn't witnessed the look the Larsens had exchanged one day when Wayne had grabbed their Kraft cheddar sandwiches and held them aloft, crowing.

It looked as if the policeman was right, though. Christmas was coming: peace descended like the doves they'd cut out and hung around the room to catch the faintest breath of breeze. Sibylla decided she'd been hasty, hysterical, heat affected - imagining things. She occasionally intercepted a meaningful look between Wayne and Michael Larsen, but the truce held. Excitement mounted as the class practised for speech night. Rose Larsen proved to have a pure, sweet voice, and loved to sing, but Michael would not join in.

JUST HOME FROM school one day, writing letters on the stifling verandah. Sibylla heard the dogs start up. A moment later, her landlady

appeared at the back door: "The policeman's here, love. The school's gone up."

Sibylla tried to take it in, but could not make herself believe. She stumbed to her feet and stared into the old woman's seamed, sympathetic face, unable to catch her breath. "Wayne?"

Lorna shot her a quizzical look. "You'd better come inside, love. I'll make us a cup of tea." Something in her tone warned Sibylla there was more. She sprang up and ran inside.

The policeman hovered in the gloom of the lounge room, twisting hat in hands. Concerned, but oddly official, he took her hand and held it silently, gazing at her with eyes full of pity.

"Tell me!" shouted Sibylla.

"Wayne was in there", he said. The look on his face told her the rest: burned, dead.

"He was probably setting another fire and didn't get out fast enough", Adam continued. "It's nobody's fault."

Nobody's fault, she thought, hating him for a moment, wanting to slap his stupid face, wake him up. But she was just as guilty, too proud to warn the parents, afraid they'd think she couldn't cope.

"I'll go and see Judy McCormack in the morning", she said, not noticing him flinch at the coldness in her voice. Wayne's mother would take it badly: the boy was all she had. This, Sibylla realised, would be only the beginning of her penance.

The policeman put his hand out as if to touch her, but she shook it away. His face reddened and he blinked rapidly, but didn't question her. Then they got on the phone and took turns ringing the parents. Sibylla would contact the Education Department tomorrow.

Finally, she dragged herself to bed, but the moment she closed her eyes, the film of the fire began to roll. She watched Wayne breaking in through a back window, creeping into the classroom, wadding some waste paper, looking up at a sound – what sound? – lighting a match, turning to run ... Or staying too long to gloat? It was no use; it didn't play: Wayne had a bush-

man's respect for fire. At school picnics, he'd been the one Sibylla had entrusted with the barbecue.

She sat up, wide awake now. The scene at the girls' toilet rushed into her mind. Why hadn't she realised? Wayne had fallen in love with the strange little Larsen girl. That's why he'd suspended hostilities. She could still remember the power of childhood passion, the smuggled notes, the complicity, the excitement, but this infatuation had been different, as secret as an illicit affair. Why? Had Rose Larsen been afraid of her brother's jealousy?

Then the horror welled up and Sibylla climbed down from the bed and ran to the lavatory. She retched painfully, but the suspicions would not budge. There was no possibility of sleep now.

The phone rang very early. "It's Lindy Kelly", said Lorna, haggard at the bedroom door. "She wants to talk to you. She's terribly upset."

Sibylla's gut clenched. She picked up the phone.

Lindy Kelly's voice was fast and high with dread. "They're gone", she said. "I went to get them up, and they weren't there. Their beds hadn't been slept in."

Then Sibylla understood she'd been waiting for this, warned by that ancient, sly look on Rose Larsen's face as she walked away from Wayne, before the first fire, a lifetime ago. She tried to calm the children's aunt, then rang the policeman, setting the machinery in motion: black-trackers, search parties, television cameras. It was out of her hands now.

Later Sibylla went and stood by the back door with a cup of tea, considering the plains. It was seven o'clock, the sky white and unforgiving, hot already. Her life had changed irrevocably. She would leave here now, maybe even return to the city, but she would never be free of this place. Her story would become a legend, a cautionary tale for young teachers, and the past would shadow her like Wayne's faithful, doomed dog. Like Wayne.

JEAN BEDFORD

Nothing Left to Lose



GLENN SHEEDY'S emphysemic wheeze came over the answer machine, the only message. "Anna, Bill Harmon from Missing Persons will probably get in touch. He wants to put a real nightmare onto you, by the sound of it. I'll owe you one. Cheers, Glenn."

Great, I thought, rewinding. But it was a slack time for me. I'd just finished an insurance investigation – bloke who'd set fire to his car, piddling stuff, and there was nothing else ongoing. I took the green folder from the desk and began keying in the last notes, then the invoice. All my records are in duplicate – in folders and on disk – I just can't bring myself to totally trust the computer. It's a wasteful system, but it's mine.

Around eleven Detective Bill Harmon did get in touch. He wasn't very informative over the phone, just said a Mr and Mrs Dancey would be ringing. "Missing kid", he said. "Six months now, and no sign. They call us every day or so, pain in the arse. We've finally had to tell them it's at the bottom of the pile. They asked us for a name in private enterprise and I got yours from Glenn."

I could hear the hanging up note in his voice. "Hold on", I said. "Can you fill me in a bit?"

"Better talk to them first", he said. "You can see everything we've got if you want." Then he rang off.

"Very cooperative", I muttered. But the cops usually were cooperative on missing kids. They had so many on their files and so little hope of finding most of them unless they turned up dead or in a drugs bust that they actually didn't mind 'private enterprise' muscling in.

Paul Dancey rang at twelve-thirty and I arranged to go out to his house in Leichhardt at

six, when he'd be back from work. I didn't get much of an impression of him over the phone, just a well-educated voice and an undertone of the sort of resigned desperation you'd expect in the circumstances.

THE DANCEY HOUSE was double-fronted red brick, with a design of ochre picked out around the bow window, identical to most of the other places in the street. The tall thin man who opened the door introduced himself as Paul and showed me into the living room where his wife waited. She was thin, too, but very small, with a drawn, anxious face. She looked as if she hadn't slept in weeks.

"This is Carla", he said carelessly, as if she didn't count. She smiled nervously and looked away, as if she agreed. I sat down and pulled out my notebook.

"Do you want to tell me from the beginning?" I said. "Detective Harmon didn't really go into any detail."

"It's our daughter, Jenny", he said, while his wife stared out the window. "She was abducted, six months ago. The police are useless, absolutely useless. They wouldn't survive an hour in business."

"Abducted?" I was surprised. Why hadn't Harmon told me at least that?

"From her bedroom, during the night. They cut a hole in the flyscreen. Come on, I'll show you."

He led the way out of the room and down a passage to a built-in porch at the back leading to a small room, more like a sleep-out than anything else. Mrs Dancey trailed us like a self-effacing ghost. The old verandah uprights had been glassed and screened in from slightly lower than

waist height, and outside was a wildly overgrown garden, with uncontrolled bougainvillea branches cutting out most of the light. One of the windows still sported its broken screen, cut along the top and side. The latches were frail and this one had been torn out of the rotting wood of the sill.

He leant on the wall and gazed at the garden. "Our bedroom's in the front", he said. "We didn't hear a thing. When she didn't get up in the morning I came to call her and tell her she'd be late for school again. Her bed was empty, the blankets all over the floor as if there'd been a struggle and the window was ... like this."

I looked around. "How old was your daughter?" There was no way to tell from the room – no posters or makeup or toys, just plain furniture and a rag rug on the floor.

"Fifteen. She is fifteen, not was."

"Did she always sleep here?"

"For the last couple of years, after her brother moved out. She had a perfectly nice room in the house, but she said she liked the feeling of being separate." His mouth twisted with some emotion I couldn't identify, grief perhaps, or regret at indulging her whim.

We went back to the living room and I took down all the details of the disappearance – the smell of chloroform, no clothes taken except what she was wearing – a white nightie, he thought – and they gave me a recent photograph. She looked more like her mother than Paul Dancey, with a small, delicate face and large worried eyes. She was wearing a uniform tunic and blouse and I thought it was an official school photo.

"Do you have one of her in casual clothes?" I asked, knowing how different a teenager could look with a bit of makeup and a low-cut top. He turned to his wife and she went out of the room silently. She hadn't said a word since we'd been introduced. She came back and handed me a polaroid. I was wrong, Jenny Dancey still looked as if she was in uniform, with a buttoned white shirt and pleated skirt, her hair drawn back in a pony-tail and no trace of lipstick or mascara.

I put both pictures in my bag with the notebook and stood up. "I'll talk to the police", I said. "They say I can see their files. Is there anything you didn't tell them that you've thought of since? Any friends, acquaintances that you've

remembered, strange men following her or anything? What about boyfriends – no trouble with boys?"

They stared at me blankly, and Paul Dancey said no, shaking his head. "The police'll tell you", he said. His wife looked round at him sharply and seemed about to speak, but she shook her head too, and went back to gazing at the window. I wondered if theirs had always been such an obviously dysfunctional relationship, or if it had grown that way after Jenny's disappearance. I said goodbye, but Paul took my elbow and escorted me outside.

"Jenny didn't have boyfriends", he said in a low, intense voice. "Nothing like that. She was a child, still a child. She was kidnapped, whatever the police think."

"What do you mean? *What* do the police think?"

"I dunno." He suddenly looked defeated. "They won't tell me anything any more."

I waited, but he obviously wasn't going to say anything further. I told him I'd let him know after I'd spoken to Missing Persons whether I thought there was any point in me taking on the investigation. If not, I'd give him back his retainer cheque, minus expenses.

"It's a while ago", I said. "And the police really are the best equipped for this sort of thing. They don't usually give up until they've pretty exhaustively tried everything."

He gave me an angry look. "If you don't do it I'll get someone else", he said nastily. "There are plenty of you in the phone book."

I shrugged and got into my car, not pointing out that anyone halfway honest would react as I had.

"SHE'LL TURN UP", Bill Harmon said tiredly. "An OD, or dragged in on a raid or something." He was a youngish man who had the eyes of Methuselah, and the tense, strained weariness of someone who was well on the road to burnout.

He'd spent the last hour going through what they'd done, who they'd interviewed. It had all been a complete dead end. "Not a sign", he said. "No forensics, fingerprints, hair, cloth samples, just the faint smell of chloroform. No strangers in the district, no sightings of prowlers, nothing to even start with."

“Why didn’t you tell me it was an abduction?”

He rubbed his eyes. “Because we don’t think anyone took her, we think she went willingly. I said, no forensics. There’d have been something, a drop of chloroform on the pillow or the floor, somewhere, at least. No, we figure she ran away, with or without a boyfriend, and faked it to look like a kidnapping. But we can’t get that across to Dancey. She was pure as the driven snow, never had a disobedient thought, according to him. He’s just about accused every bloke he knows of taking her, from the garbos to the local priest.”

“You checked them all out, though?”

“Of course we did. Nothing. Nah, she’ll be on the street somewhere, the Cross probably. Like I said, she’ll turn up, they usually do. In a shallow grave, some of them.” He passed a hand across his face in a curious gesture, as if he was wiping some distasteful image off a mental screen, then he took me through to the squad room and sat me at a computer console. He called up the files and left me to it.

They’d pretty much covered everything I could think of. Jenny hadn’t had any close friends at school, but they’d talked to all her classmates and her teachers. She’d been a poor student, apparently, given to playing truant occasionally, but nothing too unusual for a girl that age. I thought the school was the only line worth my trying to follow up – truancy can be interesting, either as an indication of unhappiness at home, or perhaps of drugs or a boyfriend in the wings. It can also just mean a kid who hates school. I took notes of names, thanked Bill Harmon and left, restraining myself from telling him to take a holiday before he had a nervous breakdown.

“SHE WAS OK TILL about a year ago”, the principal said. “Never what you’d call a top student, but doing well enough. Then all of a sudden she lost interest. Several of her teachers spoke to me about her and we arranged a couple of sessions with the school counsellor. He said she was a bit depressed, but nothing out of the ordinary. She insisted there was nothing wrong at home, she didn’t have a boyfriend – it wasn’t sex or heartbreak or anything like that.” She smiled, a wise, experienced woman who knew

girls. “We tentatively suggested she might like more systematic counselling, but she refused.” She sighed. “A lot of teenagers are like that, these days”, she said. “They start thinking about the future, how they might never get a decent job, or how they’ll have to keep living at home and never afford to move out. I sometimes think most of them operate at a low level of clinical depression all the time. We do what we can, but it’s not enough.”

She agreed to introduce me to Jenny’s teachers, and led me to the large, airy staffroom, where they were on their lunch break. I spoke to several of them, but they weren’t helpful. I got the impression that if she hadn’t disappeared they’d hardly have remembered her name.

“It’s a pity Clare isn’t still here”, the maths teacher said, laughing through his teddy-bear beard. “She knew everything there was to know about her girls. Miss Jean Brodie wasn’t in it.” Clare had apparently been the art teacher, young and inquisitive, more like one of the girls herself than a teacher. She had taught Jenny the year before but had left to go back to Queensland. No one had her present address, and I hardly thought it was going to be worth an interstate fare to find her. I gave a vague general thanks around the room and went out through the corridors, catching a strong whiff of that unmistakable nostalgic odour – a compound of perspiration, cheap leather bags, day-old bananas and stale vegemite sandwiches – that every school is redolent of.

I was just unlocking the door of the Volkswagen when a young woman ran out after me. She was dark-haired and plump, and out of breath. “You were asking about Jenny Dancey?” she said, gasping and leaning against the car. “I was on yard duty. I think it’d be worth your while to talk to Clare Devon.”

“The art teacher?” I stared at her. There was something malicious sparkling in her brown eyes.

“They were very good friends”, she said. “Jenny used to talk to her all the time, stay in the art room during recess and lunch, real teacher’s pet.”

“Why didn’t you tell the police that?” I knew there was no interview with her in their files.

“I’ve been away on leave, just got back last

week. I only heard about Jenny's disappearance the other day. I've got Clare's address if you want it."

I said I did and followed her back into the school. She didn't head for the staffroom, but instead went into the small office near the front door. "I'm the school secretary", she said. "Just an underling. But I used to know Clare pretty well." I couldn't work out whether the odd emphasis I picked up was her normal way of speaking or if she was being deliberately cryptic. She wrote down a Brisbane address, then stood silently for a moment, seeming to make up her mind about something. "Jenny wasn't the same after Clare left", she said. "That's when she started jiggling school, stopped working at anything. She went into a proper old-fashioned decline."

"You didn't like her", I said, still puzzled by her hostility towards a child.

"No. I didn't." She gave me a defiant look and sudden tears trembled in her eyes. "Clare was my ... best friend till that little bitch started sucking up to her."

I recognised her tone now. She was jealous.

I FLEW TO BRISBANE the next morning, deciding at the last minute not to ring Clare Devon to say I was coming. It was a Saturday, and I assumed she'd be home. She was. I saw the curtain twitch at her front window before I rang the bell, then a tall, slender blonde woman opened the door.

"Clare Devon?" I said. "I'm a private investigator. I want to talk to you about Jenny Dancey ..."

"Oh shit", she said and started to slam the door in my face. I put out my foot and stopped her. I thought I felt several small bones crack, which never seems to happen in the movies when they do that. I was about to withdraw in haste when someone called from inside.

"Clare?" It was a young, anxious voice. "What is it? What's the matter?" Jenny came into view and Clare Devon gave a deep, grief-stricken sigh and held the door wide. I hobbled in.

I SAT AGAIN IN the Leichhardt living room of the Dancey house. Again, Mrs Dancey was

silent, weeping, and Paul Dancey blustered and shouted.

"Filthy dykes", he said. "She's under age. It's illegal. I'll get her sacked, I'll see she goes to prison, that woman."

"I don't think so, Mr Dancey", I said. "I don't know if your daughter is having a sexual relationship with Clare Devon or not, but I do know she's better off there than at home. It's not as if she's got anything to lose in that department, is it?"

He started to shout again, but Carla suddenly spoke, her eyes blazing with hatred. "Shut up, Paul. For once, shut up." She turned to me, tears streaming down her face. "I suppose I knew", she said. "But I couldn't let myself admit it. Do you understand that?"

I nodded unwillingly. I could understand, but I didn't know if I could forgive.

"What do you mean?" He turned towards her, his hand raised. "Don't you say another word, you lying bitch."

"Stop it, Mr Dancey", I said. "There's no statute of limitations on what you did, you know. She can take you to court whenever she feels like it. This year, next year, in twenty years' time. And she will. She told me to tell you that if you every try to go near her, or to harm Clare Devon, she'll go to the police. She was pregnant, did you know that? She's not any more, of course."

He slumped, all the wind suddenly gone out of him, making him look like an old, sick man. He put out a hand to his wife, looking for comfort, and she turned away. I thought perhaps she had always turned away, then was disgusted at myself seeking to excuse him. I stood up.

"I've torn up your cheque", I said. "I don't want your money. I wish she would prosecute you, now, but she seems to have a sweeter nature than you deserve. She said she prays every night that she will never see your face again."

I left him huddled in the armchair and turned to let myself out. Carla Dancey followed me.

"Ms Southwood", she said quietly. "Is she happy?"

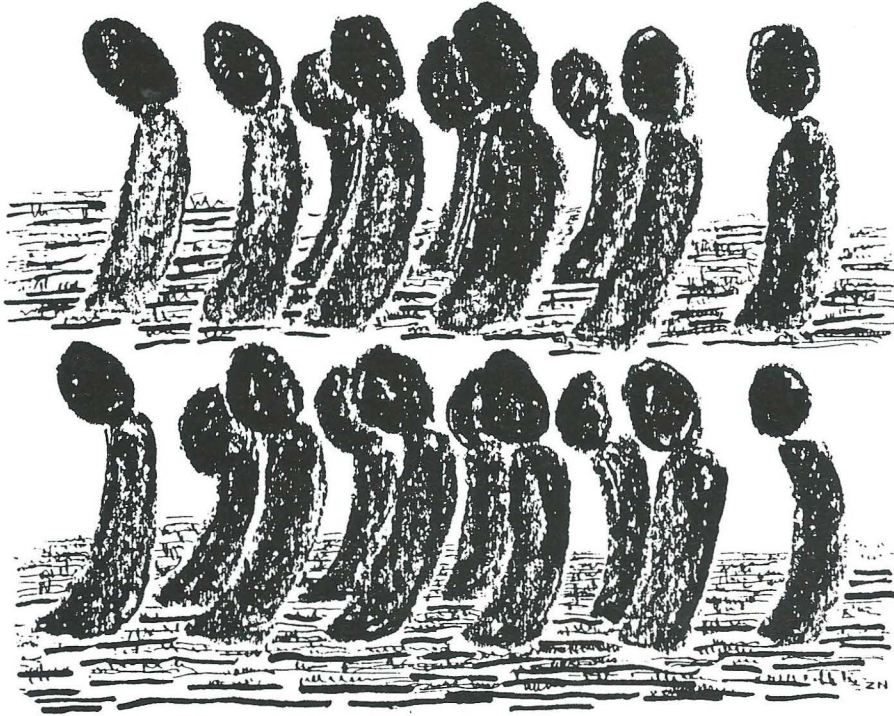
I couldn't help pitying her. "I don't know", I said. "She seems well, and she's working hard

at her new school. But she's very subdued for her age, and very dependent on Clare. But the alternative's some sort of institutional care – would you prefer that? At least I think she's got the *chance* of happiness where she is. Anything would have to be better than what she's used to, don't you agree?"

The image of her white, stricken face followed me all the way home through the traffic. I hadn't meant to be so stern and judgemental, but every time I looked at Paul Dancy I thought of the details Jenny had given of his constant sexual and physical abuse, dating from when she was about three, she thought, and my flesh crawled. I didn't know what I thought about Clare Devon – whether or not she had abused a position of trust and responsibility for her own sexual reasons. I hadn't even asked if they were lovers. All I could see was that Jenny had found someone gentle and understanding, someone she could talk to. Someone who might even help her to heal the dreadful mental wounds she must carry.

But there was no doubt that Clare was a manipulator. The whole thing had been carefully planned from before she'd gone to Brisbane. They'd left it six months so that no one would even think of asking Clare anything, then they faked the break-in and drove back all through that night. I shrugged, pulling into my driveway. If Jenny faced unhappiness with Clare, at least it would be ordinary human unhappiness, I thought, not the nightmare she'd left.

When I went inside there was a message from Bill Harmon asking me to ring. I decided I'd leave it for the morning – I needed to let everything mull overnight before I made up my mind how much to tell him. Probably most of it – I somehow didn't think he'd want to rock the boat. I poured myself a drink, smiling at the thought that he'd be relieved that this was one body, at least, he wouldn't be identifying stiff and cold in a morgue.



Sophie Nowicka

ROBERT WALLACE
The Intellectual



DAY ONE OF the first time I was inside I was leant on by Grasper Turner. At that stage The Grasper did favours for Charles Hooley who made it big in the papers fifteen years ago after some faction of the Labor Party had the prima donna of an opposing faction disciplined in a paddock in western Sydney. The Grasper, a pretty boy with a hard-on for anything with a pulse, played a few games for the Eels I think it was. Two of me wouldn't balance the scales with The Grasper, so when he took possession of me, that first day, I was in trouble. My only chance would have been to cut him up with something sharp. But, you do a thing like that and you can forget about the legitimate life of crime leading into retirement by the sea; write-off altogether an AM. So, my virginity was on the line. A whole lot of guys who ought to have been pals reckoned this was a very funny thing: Nipper about to get shafted. Ho ho ho.

Shafted I would have been, but that Steffano stepped in. Steffano had power inside. The Grasper ditched his project.

I became Steffano's, but we never did sodomy.

We got out one at a time. He went back in, again and again. I didn't. Now I was returning a favour by letting him into a neat heist I had figured out.

"THE BEAUTY OF realised science, say the atomic bomb, comes from the feel of the thing. How it fits. The same with crime." I liked talking with Steffano because he'd done so much time and a man who's done time knows a lot. You can relax with such people. They aren't going to spring some recycled notion on you just to score points.

"Trash will bugger a kid or beat up on the old lady, they will take out their mamma or their

papa, for Christ's sake, the whole family, infants in their cots. That's not crime. There's no intention in acts of that kind."

Steffano was tipping on wine he made on his place, acidic red liquid with a savage edge. Not that Steffano spent a lot of time up there at Stanthorpe – the granite belt, apple trees – but his wife did. Steffano was taking a big gulp of wine and whacking the glass down on the table where we sat, under a pergola.

Steffano: "Art. Crime. Science. You got to have the intention, formed."

I said: "You do open university this time, or what?"

"Mostly I just read. You know ... well you do know how it is. Power is power. You're in the slammer, the instant some buck sees you suffer fear, you're blowing him. Who wants to be blowing a third-hand penitentiary queen? So, yes, I see the joint as an education opportunity. Inside, I am perfecting myself. Which is something you can't do out here, where there is so much shit you got to have in your mind or they are dropping fines on you. You let the insurance go, for instance, or forget to have your driver's licence; I don't know how I manage. I didn't have Roses looking after me I swear to God I'd turn to trash myself, lose out sticking up a twenty-four hour franchise sweat-shop."

"You were saying about crime."

"Writing a book on the subject, Nipper?"

Roses – as Steffano called his wife, even though her name is Janice – sticks her head out through the back door. Checking us out. She doesn't trust Steffano. She doesn't trust me, neither. I show up and Roses turns on the chill.

"Some character with no grip on himself blows away half a dozen mindless consumers in a mall or somewhere; people start to talk about

the crime rate. But spraying a mall isn't crime. There isn't any formed intention there. I read about this character, in a boarding house, he couldn't stand whoever talking at him through the wall. He goes on the rampage at the shopping centre. That's not crime. That is life. It is always going to happen. It's only chaos."

"Let's hope not where I shop."

"You have to admit that where you got ignorant human beings they'll lose it. Say in war where morons, scared half to death, enter a gook village – don't I know about it? What's to happen? You will rape anything that moves, and after that, because your head's full of guilt, exterminate them. If you are into crime you're not gonna do a thing like that. It's the God-fearing, law-abiding citizens that spray anonymous folk they never met in their lives, or waste totally some village."

"Steffano, enough philosophy. Just tell me, are you interested?"

There's Roses at the door again, as though she's got the table wired, she is listening for me to put the question. "If you boys want to eat", she says.

"What's Eddie doing?" I ask as we settle ourselves down at the table inside. Eddie being the eldest. Eddie was born pretty much the correct time after Steffano first went inside for blasting the wall out of the Tenterfield branch of the Bank of New South Wales. Eddie is studying law at Brisbane. Handy. But I got a dreadful feeling that Eddie wants to do good with his degree. Kids come to feel like that for a while – idealism. At puberty I wanted to be a priest.

Inside the house, for Roses I am Mr Invisible. She is dishing out lasagna she's made and there's bread and different pickled vegetables and a freshly opened bottle of wine. Couldn't be better.

Roses doesn't answer me about Eddie, just keeps on dishing out the lasagna and then she's cutting the bread.

Steffano has kind of gone into himself. He'll do that. One minute he is better than keeping up with it, next he's not at home. They can get that way after spending so much time inside. The same as they develop the hard-man look Steffano's got. I reckon fellers who've done time blink half as often as the rest of the human race.

There's something about the inside of prison cells that makes men's facial hair grow at double the normal rate and get tough as piano wire. Cons' ears stick out, too. I suppose that's from all the listening you do inside. There's a kind of jail hum talking to you all the time, the recidivist's connection with the eternal. There is nobody closer to a Buddhist than a recidivist. You could stick gold leaf all over Steffano, shove him in a stupa or whatever, he'd glow.

Then Steffano is eating. People who have been inside do eating in one short concentrated burst because you are vulnerable when eating, so you get it over with as quick as possible, then you shove the dish away and set the mask back into place, wearing your nose, your brow, your chin, your mouth, most particularly your mouth, as a warning to the world.

Next, Steffano is no longer eating. He is telling me that Eddie got a distinction or something, for the law of tort. He says what breaks his heart – Steffano being the father, Eddie his boy – is the young's lack of respect.

Roses is gazing at the ceiling as if trying to make a point.

I don't bother to ask about the daughter, Bernadette, who is at a convent at Warwick. Bernadette is a nice kid with her mother's looks, where Eddie had all his luck concentrated in the brains department.

Even though Roses keeps me at arm's length, Steffano's family I regard as my family: I think of myself as his younger brother. Also I am kind of, what do you call it ... I asked Steffano: "What do you call a guy, Steffano, who keeps tabs on another guy's life, checks it out."

"A snitch."

"I don't mean like that ... more the way I am with you."

"How are you with me?"

"He worships you, can't you see that? But, Steffano, you got to settle down now, accept some responsibility for life. You can't just be in a TV show inside your disciple's head." Roses was talking to Steffano, but she was looking straight at me. She was telling me: "Nipper, get out of our lives."

// ... HAS GOT TO BE ... to have a form. For instance, when ... you'd remember that feller Knapson or whatever his name was. Venturi and

him went up the Gold Coast, going in through windows, being selective with what they took, setting up the resale first. Very businesslike, very professional. The whole thing, you look at it from a distance, it's got form. The way a great crime movie shows us types as being into art."

"They got put away."

"So? I've done lots of time. You know what I think? I think that prison doesn't have to be a negative. Inside, for instance, I get to think, I perfect myself. I kicked smoking inside, not outside. The problem with people, when they're free, they get off on shit that isn't even true, which is when the trouble starts."

We had eaten. We were walking among the vines, where formed grapes were starting to turn purple.

"Okay then Nipper, what is it you got for me?"

"Just an idea, Steffano. You don't approve, we give it the flick. The way I see it there is upside and not a lot to go wrong. The big plus is it is cash. Most probably no police to be involved, either."

We turned around the strainer at the end of a row of vines. It was a great sight, the vineyard rising to the house, except there was Roses standing in the middle of where lawn would be if there was lawn. She was watching us.

AFTER I TOLD STEFFANO what I had worked out he patted me on the back – actually patted me on the back! He told me he felt like Socrates or someone, having a star pupil: I was his Plato. He said it gave him great satisfaction. We stood there, shoulder to shoulder amongst the grape vines. The sun on us. Whenever I looked towards the house, there was Roses, watching.

Steffano said that a plan as good as my plan could still be refined. Rome wasn't built in a day, he told me. Just a few modifications was all it needed. What we didn't want was to go down in history like the Burke and Wills of crime. Jesus, he had a way with words, Steffano. Another time he said to me that rot shows on the top of leaves first. That's what I mean about Steffano, he was a real intellectual. Always seeking for philosophical explanations. An eye for detail, too. When I said: "Guns, small bore, for the look of it." Steffano responded: "It's the

hole they stare at, we must have calibre."

So I procured us a couple of slide action shotguns like almost everyone has seen police jerking off in the movies – holes you can shove your thumb down.

WE WATCHED a bus park outside McDonald's, CITIZENS FOR CHRIST was writ large along the side, and underneath, in red running writing, JESUS SAVES. Bully for Jesus. I hadn't bargained on a bus being there. Not that it made any difference: Steffano and I were watching the petrol outlet and twenty-four-hour franchise next door. The man who'd gone in there ten minutes earlier emerged, clutching a zip-up style briefcase to his chest. With our gaze we followed him into the McDonald's carpark, to behind the Jesus bus. I fired up the engine of the straight six Ford I'd borrowed off the streets of Newcastle a couple of days earlier. My own wheels were still parked directly behind where the Ford had been, awaiting our return, unless some asshole had nicked it – that thought came to me as Nino's car nosed around the front of the Jesus bus and pulled out into the street. I followed. No need to worry about losing Nino, I knew the route. Steffano asked: "You got a cigarette?"

"I don't smoke, you don't either, remember?"

"Now I want a cigarette."

So I stopped at a BP service station, bought a packet off the cash-register nerd, and a dollar block of fruit and nut chocolate for me.

By the time we came to the Fruit Shop That Sells Everything, on Old Canterbury Road, where Nino was stepping into his car, Steffano was on his second cigarette.

"You gotta remember, that briefcase is filling up with cash", I said.

"I am impressed." He lit a third off the second. I hate the smell of cigarettes, but I let him go. After all, this was Steffano, right?

"And," I said, "there's his two brothers collecting at the same time, plus The Grasper, who's working for the family like I told you."

"The Grasper's gone downmarket."

"You could say."

Nino was slowing down a hundred metres along the street. I slowed. He double parked, left the motor running, went into a windscreen and muffler place open late. He popped straight out again.

"Next," I said, "the mall. Takes him half to three quarters of an hour, the mall."

"You'd reckon, malls being private enterprise, the developer would run his own racket, keep types like Nino out."

"You might reckon, but it's an imperfect world – you know who told me that?"

"No, I don't."

"You told me, Steffano, that time in the slammer, right after you saved me from The Grasper."

NINO'S DADDY, Mr Martelli, used to be part of the Charlie Hooley mob till Charlie cleaned up his act to sit on the right hand of God-Here-On-Our-Australian-Soil. Friday night, Nino's daddy was still working the basic plot. Friday night the boys brought him a whack of untraceable cash paid over just so some dick-head didn't have his face kicked in or maybe have to watch Nino rape the family's little princess. Mr Martelli lived on a stud farm west of Fairfield, with fancy gates, flood-lit lawn and portico. Martelli flew the Australian flag from the portico.

I had parked across the road from the entrance, just short of a gap in the median strip that was testimony to Martelli influence. Cars were parked outside the mansion. Steffano was halfway through the cigarettes. I had finished the chocolate. The whole night had gone just like I'd said it would. Except that the collectors were staying on at Mr Martelli's longer than usual.

"You reckon this means they're drinking?"

"Or doing drugs."

"The Grasper would be, animal like that – no class."

Half an hour and more cigarettes, my clothes were going to stink from being locked up with a reborn nicotine head. Nobody left the house. Nobody entered. The cars sat there, the house shone.

"The perimeter security system would be switched off, with people coming and all that muscle hanging about."

"What are you saying, Steffano?"

"The best-laid plans, you got to be able to change them ... to make sure you read life how it is. They are inside, feeling great, piles of cash. They are getting shitface, laughing at life, right? Why don't we just stroll up, say hello."

"Can't do that."

"We've got the guns, remember."

"But, Jesus! Steffano ..."

Steffano knocked off another cigarette with four giant drags. Then he passed me the latex Donald Duck mask with yellow beak. He wanted to be Pluto – sounded like Plato, I guess. But wasn't he supposed to be Socrates?

Steffano's slide shotgun had five shots waiting and one in the breach. When we got to the front door he surprised me by pulling an automatic out of the side pocket of his parka.

I whispered: "You reckoned anything with a big hole would be enough."

"This is insurance." Holding the thing up, kissing it. Back in his pocket with it. Then in we went. Turning right inside the entrance we stepped through a doorway to interconnected reception rooms with parquet floor, mirrors, chandeliers. Martelli's wife was there – she was in the papers a bit since writing a bestseller on being a migrant. Next to Mrs Martelli was an amazing woman disguised as a tuna fish in silver lame. Martelli's collectors were there, but not the old man himself.

"Freeze!" Steffano barked like the Pluto dog he was acting. Then: "Down on the floor."

***"Some character with no grip on himself
blows away half a dozen mindless
consumers in a mall ... That's not crime.
That is life. It is always going to happen. It's
only chaos."***

Already I had sort of drifted in my mind, into glitz, as all of them, in slow motion, went on their knees before sliding forward, hands away from their bodies. The Grasper had gone prone partly obscured by a lounge chair.

Steffano moved further into the room, so he could watch The Grasper.

And I was Donald fucking Duck. Quack quack quack.

From out of nowhere, kaaa-boom. I was the sitting duck in a dream who was hit. After that the room exploded. Going down I had this image of Steffano moving, working the slide action, shooting. Amazingly, my head still functioned. I was seeing. I was witness to those people back on their knees, trying to recover

dignity, six shotgun blasts blowing them away.

Maybe I turned my head, I don't know, but I had this picture of old man Martelli stepping over me, going into the room from the same direction we had come.

A brief silence when I wasn't feeling much pain was followed by another gunshot and then a burst. I shut my eyes and rolled onto my side.

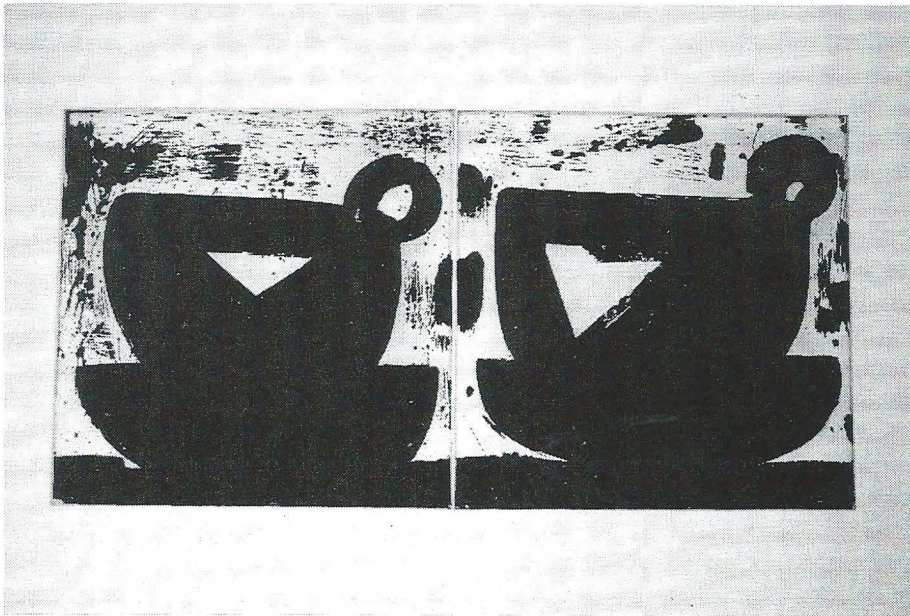
Wait a minute Mr Duck, you still got your shotgun.

I opened my eyes on dead people. Alright, the

tuna fish was flipping a little. Steffano's face was shot away. Weeping, on his knees beside his wife, one hand gripping an assault rifle, Martelli was bringing his head down close to hers.

I lost consciousness while trying to concentrate on blood oozing across my thighs where I'd been hit; a final thought trickling through was of trash bleeding.

Hospital lasted a lot time. The slammer is forever. There's no way I can graft better memories onto my brain.



Wes Placek

LIONS, ETC.

I hope death
Might cut me short as,
Whistling, I

Flip an egg
Sunny-side down, or
Prise the cork

From my last
Dusty claret. Quick,
Like that, as

A gull drops
In mid-ocean flight
Or, if it

Must be slow,
As a lion, his jaw
Cracked by a

Zebra's hoof,
Who squats by a pool
Three days but

Never thinks
Of sorrow. For him
It's a time

For changing
Kingdoms. But we are
Obstinate,

We hang on
Hard, wishing for the
Reprieve of

Just one more
Birthday, as if to
Fool death with

Candle-light,
Faustian bargains,
Dreams. Listen,

Good daughters,
Should my luck fail and
My brain-pan

Go fut, should
Fresh words stop tumbling
From my tongue,

Should I stare
Daylong, nightlong at
The ceiling,

Kept pulsing
Only by tubes and
Dials, please –

As I would
For you – pull the plug,
Send me on,

Where I can
Go on changing. There's
A time, let

It be clean
And sharp, for grieving;
Then rejoice:

I have known
Riches beyond my
Deserving.

By then I'll
Have had my share of
Summer, and

As a dumb
Vegetable thing
Not be worth

Preserving.
Remember, the dead
Have nothing

To tell you:
Their lingua franca
Is black dust.

You must blow
Hot breath into the
Sockets of

Their mouths, tread
Hard on their bones. Death's
A bummer.

Steadfastly
Refuse their frequent
Offers to

Bring you down.

KEITH HARRISON

BIOPSY

slowly
she bends
rubs nivea
onto her legs
thinks of the appointment
today
and her skin
dry

then
just before she leaves
hurries
brushes teeth
washes again
down there
and shakes
fragrant rose powder
about her

later
afterwards
blanket wrapped
and legs together
tight
the roses
dead
she sits on the edge
of the examining table
and says
now
you do bulk bill
don't you?

SUSANNE LUTHERBORROW

MATTRESSES – RUFUS HUT

for Kevin Hart

The candle shows them spilling
from the roofbeam,
a waterfall of soiled, padded dreams.

They are brown with use,
or from months in this hut
without a voice.

Across the valley
moonlight probes weeks
of rock and forest.
Father and son,
we tease a fire out of darkness,
cup soup, pull down
the smoky bales
and sleep beside our boots.

Morning – and snow paints
pandanus, tussock, log.
The hut is carried to the sky
on silence fixed in white.

So close to the edge of ice,
my son is jittery.
But, snowed for a day
away from paper, digits, words,
I long to be sentenced
to these legs, this breath,
that salmon light, far over, rediscovering
crag I should attempt,
that seethe above me
with the old disdain.

GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH

TWITCHING

I accept birdsong as one of the sounds of
silence.

The odd chirrup and tweet do not disturb
my quiet reading, my click-keyed writing.
I draw the line, however, at Eltham.

In this suburb full of trees and arboriphiles,
where weeds are nourished and cats belled,
there are birds whose noises alarm and irritate

like fire engines drawing near
like babies unsafely-pinned
like head-bangers banging heads
like hot ovens twisting cold trays
like ageing cars.

There is one that pings
over and over like a minimalist windchime;
they say it's a bellbird.
Another croaks 'Gurr' all day, and its mate –
it must be its mate, it couldn't have friends –
gurrs back at it from a distant tree.

The black and white one sounds like a diva
with a tough role and a tight corset.
A brown one coughs and puts me in mind of
death.

I am not cheerful here in Eltham.
There are few cars, and many trees.
I see no people, only birds,
and mostly I only hear them.

I am back to nature, and deafened by it.

DORIS LEADBETTER

PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

It's about journeys, migration,
playing it tough at airports;
collar up, hat brim down,
flying in all directions
leaving family in one place
and you, love, in another.

Now, married, unlike the celluloid
instructors of our scene
we construct a domicile amidst
the figs and dripping vines,
Acacia hills, but sometimes pause
about the candled table

to recall the dramas of our story,
the hard edge of severance blunted
by a smile. We might be Europeans
at Rick's *Cafe Americain* having made
our shady deals for exit visas
forgetting the politics of dispossession.

We script our romances in foreign places,
and sing the Marseillaise or of Mathilda's
waltzing through lands where indigenous
people tell black stories of how
our ancestors butchered theirs and wrote
neat histories, clean and white.

This is where fictions end,
we glimpse the weakness of our plotting.
Our frail devices fail at parting,
more at death. We cannot cleanse
the bloody knife or bullet with a word,
less so with moving pictures of self-sacrifice.

Our gory inheritance unravels as time
goes by. What should we do,
living the marginal suburban terrors,
but cut and splice, re-make
the oldest and the truest stories?
A kiss, my love, is really just a kiss.

ADRIAN CAESAR

PERHAPS THE APPIA ANTICA, OR NOT

A metal roof leans among the trees
like a cat's face.

Twists of old Marri
stumble down the granite outcrop
curved as ancient books
held open on the lectern: in the Greek
or Latin, bled with rubric,
florets of

lichenography
the verticordia

like yellow nerves on paper
the hillside's stammering pink.
Unmade city

there is nothing mourned
here like Islamabad

or Rome

but these inksplot
lichen or xanthorrea racks
are older than the vaults of Chartres
or Notre Dame.
From here you see the city
under the pressure of air, the making worry
any of us wakes to

where the hours of two large centuries
must have something to show for them:
the unmade places
don't exist unless we walk in them
with ideas from the universe

like nerves
along the face of sundown
tremble with flame.

PHILIP SALOM

BUSHFIRE – JANUARY 1994

Ladybirds

they say you are encrusting the beaches
in your lacquered black and orange millions
like exotic jewels –
a foreign territory for you
how strange to hear ocean-boom
taste salt.

I see you, in normal times,
faithfully attending to the fat thrips
that suck my roses.
Are you afraid?

I squat, too, in foreign territory,
air-conditioned, cushioned
from the inferno heat outside,
the flames brought in, unreal,
only by the television screen.

From the wide windows
all looks deceptively serene
out there across the bay –
blue water, white boats, green grass

but don't look up –
the sky swirls Van Gogh crazy black
the sun, just visible, glowers
a terrifying psychedelic red.

All my roads home are closed,
by fire, ladybirds,
I cannot fly.
Though I have no children at home
I am afraid, are you?

ROBIN LOFTUS

ON GARDENS, HAVING ALREADY PASSED AN AGE

Well past the day marking the fortieth year,
future or past, I was not conscious
that I should be Byron, Rimbaud
or Emily Dickinson, there was no room
to be locked, no room to think about
the past that makes up those
neverending, spinning moments, the twists
of spiral gravities, sucked to the sides
of the body and rushing out
of your brain, the moments
of invention, as if you didn't
change the past everyday
in the messy notebooks in your head.
At least, mine.

And now I've headed
down this path, strolling through
another era, that sounds more like
rage than age because
you've got no say except to invite
a few friends round for a drink
each time the calendar betrays you,
and curse that ancient Babylonian
or whoever it was that invented time –
no wonder you end up getting fat
on sweet and sour recall, or regretting
the occupations you've never tried.

I've discovered no affinity for gardens,
they grow and curl brown
without any muscle or thought from me,
I could call a spade a spade,
but the thin earth in its shallow bed
surrounding the courtyard looks
too near the end for me.

Even
at this advanced stage there are
a few bird noises I haven't catalogued,
drinks yet to be had, and words,
not as red as the rose, black wines
that still pump the inflated veins
you notice on the hand that writes.

JILL JONES

READING WALLACE STEVENS IN MELBOURNE

Even as I receive a message in which
the would-be has-been believer lets it slip

that he would, did, could, can't believe, I
thought,
He's naked as that brick chimney which I
caught

through white lace curtains, standing free. On
top,
sheltered by the antenna's umbrella sticks,

was it a figure? no, a cowl – *a hood-
shaped covering to increase the chimney draft.*

This one stood high enough to be *the hooded
robe of a monk* – in cemetery white,

and as I watched, it smoothly wheeled and
stared
directly through me with its hollow gaze,

then turned away as if to say, *More fire.*
The wind did somersaults. The message flew.

JOHN RIDLAND

IRINA SULIMA

Semenov

Translated by Jim McIntyre



SEME NOV, a big, languid truck driver nicknamed Sem, was driving his childhood friend Victoria to Pskov for some reason important to her, though he was completely uninterested in Pskov. There was quite a distance yet to go, but they had known each other so well and for so long that ordinary travel conversation never flagged. Nonetheless it dropped away after they left the petrol station. Semenov wanted to talk very much.

"Now, when I cheated on my former wife ..." he began.

"Shut up, Sem! She's my friend, I like Lidka very much – I don't want to hear about it. And anyway, I want to eat."

"Okay. But you don't know what I want to say."

"I know. You want to talk about how you ruined her life."

"No. I remembered that after Lidka, all my girls had fat arses, and this was especially sweet after Lidka."

"Shut up, Sem! It makes me sick just listening to you."

"I don't know what I'm talking about? ... I haven't said anything wrong. You're sick from hunger."

"No, I'm sick from us having to look for you all those nights, idiot! Look how long the fence is – you can't see the end."

"It's a cemetery."

"God, is it really that big? No, it isn't ... What swine you men are!"

"Do you really think that?"

"In relation to women – that's all you are. Bastards, pure and simple. My girlfriend longed to go to Paris. Montmartre, Louvre – how fantastic! She decided to holiday, to familiarise

herself with European culture. But she didn't know the language well enough, even how to ask directions – everything was a trial. Her only compatriots she met were hucksters in the bazaar. What could she talk about with them? Finally, she met a quite reputable and famous person, an influential publisher. He offered to show her around Paris, and she trusted him completely. She could hardly take it all in; he pulled her down on the grave and raped her. She was in shock, he was repulsive, fat, the cemetery was all around her, it was dreadful, shameful. She couldn't even cry out. France was like a bone in her throat after that. God, when will this cemetery finish?!"

"It goes for a long way."

"Is this the cemetery they wrote about in the papers? About the people living alongside it, who have found an original means of survival, in the midst of our economic cataclysms. They feed minks and sables on corpse entrails."

"That's the one."

"Brr ... anyway, I want to eat. I didn't have time for breakfast this morning."

"Here's a canteen."

"Alongside the cemetery?!"

"Alongside the road. And there won't be anything after this for ages."

Turning left from the white concrete highway fence, he pulled up slightly with sweeping turns, and continued towards the horizon. The low, white-grey concrete canteen appeared like a bump ahead. Its rear facade clearly led to the cemetery grounds.

They entered a stuffy hall space with a dirty floor and burgundy tiles. Yet this exceedingly mediocre canteen passed itself off as a cafe, since there was no bar for serving drinks, and menus

were placed on the aluminium tables. The cafe had the same name as the cemetery: 'Long Pond'.

A large-chested blonde approached them, wearing a black dress and white apron fastened just below her low, ample cleavage.

"Why is she wearing black, for God's sake?" Victoria asked her old friend in a whisper, after they had ordered two serves of pork cutlets.

"Maybe someone close to her has died", Sem answered.

"Listen, it's just occurred to me – it's indecent to bother people you don't know who are grieving. Don't you think it doesn't tally very well with a waitress's job in a state canteen?"

"Why is it a bother? There's a cemetery here. Maybe that's why things are done this way."

"I don't like all this."

"Oh, don't worry about it."

The waitress brought them cutlets with buckwheat porridge, spiced with sticky brown sauce. There was nothing more appetising on the menu. Only black bread, since there was no white, or even a glass of stewed fruit.

"What a look she's got! Did you see the way she was staring at you?" Victoria would not pipe down.

"Now that's the look of your typical slut. Who works the roadside. You know, I've come across quite a few of them. Eat! And don't whisper, people are already staring at us."

IT WAS STRANGE, but in childhood, when they clambered together over trees and fences, to him she seemed older. And when they were young, travelling around the country with people their own age, intent on traversing only what was most unconquerable, inaccessible – forests, mountains, caves, catacombs (they flew over all this at such speed) – she seemed so adult, unruffled, strong ... and now ... when they were almost thirty, a time when many things happened, passed by: weddings, funerals, children, endless job changes, divorces ... now, when she was officially his boss, and he her subordinate, more and more often she reminded him of a little girl – the same girl he had not noticed before.

Victoria fixed her gaze on her plate, silently carving pieces of cutlet at all angles with the curved aluminium fork, broke up the second;

and her face froze.

"Now what is it?" he asked, chewing his cutlet with relish.

"Hairs."

"What hairs?!"

"Look, lots of them! Small and white."

"Yes, that's meat filament."

"And the meat's a bit white ..."

"It's pork. Eat."

She put the second piece into her mouth and spat it out onto her palm.

"No! It isn't filament. It's decomposed hair. Human hair. Look, they're short, just like the ones on your arm!"

"So you can see them under a microscope? They are ordinary cutlets. Look, everybody's eating them."

"They're eating them because they don't know better."

"And you know everything?"

"I know. I can see it. It's the flesh of a dead person, soaked in vinegar, ground through a mincing machine together with the skin."

"If you don't like it, don't eat it, and don't ruin my appetite." Sem hissed quietly, but his eyes softened towards her. "If you don't want it, give it to me, and I'll polish it off."

"I want to."

"Well eat then."

"I can't."

"Give it here, if you can't."

She tossed the cutlets on his plate with a ghastly grimace, as though spitting them out.

"Well, here we are. I decided to feed you, and I stuffed myself instead. Have some of this porridge, if you like."

"I can't even eat that."

"So when will you?"

"All right, don't get excited. I'll try some black bread."

"Of course, you were always prone to fantasise, Tori, but you're not fifteen now." Satisfied, he leant his whole weight on the table. And she, absently tugging at the curls on her forehead, answered accusingly:

"You're you, and I'm me. And I would never do that to myself. Eat up yourself, and don't carry on. You think I made it all up."

"You did. These are just cutlets. It's just that you've never eaten in these places. But I only wanted to get you a meal, and head off ..."

"Okay. I don't need much. Just enough to stave off hunger."

THEY HAD TRAVELLED less than an hour from the ill-starred canteen, when suddenly she cried out in a choking voice: "Stop! Stop the car!"

"What's happened?" Sem started, slamming on the brakes.

"I feel dreadful", and she jumped out into some bushes beside the road. When she returned, he noticed that her face was shining with pallor in the early-evening twilight.

"Give me some Narzan*."

He opened the bottle, pleading in bewilderment: "What is it? What's wrong with you? What?!"

"It's okay. I've thrown it up. It's all because of that piece of cutlet I had."

He tried to amuse her with recollections of fat asses, but she didn't respond. Overtaking everything at tearaway speed, he hoped that the fear of an accident would make her pull herself together, but she kept a limp silence, turning sharply from side to side with each turn, like a doll. He was completely flummoxed. It was already dark. They would return late. A gloomy fir forest stretched along the road.

"Sem, I'm freezing. Sem!" Her words could barely be heard.

"Tori ... Victoria-Toria-Tori ... It's only your imagination."

"No, it's real. Feel my hands. It's warm in the cabin, but they're cold. They're already numb. And my feet ..."

"Remember when we ate frogs, on that trip near Mozhaisk? And we were the only ones who shouldn't have. And how you were then? Compared to you, all the other girls seemed boring."

"Yes, but the French eat frogs."

"And the water-worms? We fried them in oil like straw, just as you showed me."

"I'm dying. As for worms – that's Chinese cuisine. That was an interesting experience."

"Yes, and you concocted that too. You weren't scared of anything. Never backed off."

"Because ... that was then. Now I'm dying. Dying. My temperature has already dropped."

* Narzan – mineral water from the Caucasus believed to have curative properties.

"It's what? Not gone up, but gone down?"

"Down."

"Now you're making things up. And what's this big act, like a rag doll? Cheer up, Tori! What will I do with your dead corpse in the middle of the road? I'm only joking."

"I'm not joking. I'm dying."

He felt her limp hand. She really was cold. He turned on the light in the cabin, and examined her. Her icy state alarmed him: "What is it, Victoria? What's causing this?"

She sat on the seat, curled up in a ball, hands tucked under her, as though freezing. The cabin was hot.

"It really is poison", she whispered quietly.

"Rubbish! I ate it, and I'm okay."

"You've got a different constitution – you could cope with it."

"What are you talking about? Look, even if someone ate someone else, he wouldn't get poisoned anyway. It's just like you fantasising about those worms. What do you mean, your constitution can't cope? With what?"

"With poison from corpses."

"What poison from corpses? You're making it up. Everything!"

"You're wrong. My temperature isn't falling from my imagination."

"It isn't even doing that. You only think it is."

"Wrong."

"Now here's a camping ground, with a medical room. I bet you it'll be 36.6."

DESPITE THE freshly washed walls of the camping ground, and its large windows like shop displays, he could not resist comparing it to a bomb shelter. Either the elms around it were too tall, or the building spread too far. It seemed that the whole foundation of life was not here, but underground, in halls below the earth, and in labyrinths. It was as though there was under the earth an abode of rare magnificence – gambling halls, cabarets, public houses, the headquarters of this same unseen Mafia, of whom everyone was terrified, on whom all troubles were blamed – this spider's nest down there. And here, to divert the eye, strangers of an indistinct kind, people from the Caucasus, would bustle about, as though expecting scraps from the master's table. There were too many Volgas around, and various other private auto-

mobiles. Sem's Kamaz was quite incongruous amongst them.

"Let's go", Sem said, and having opened the door on her side, reached his arm across. "We'll go to the medical room."

"I can't. I've no strength."

"I'll carry you. Not to begin with. Remember how I carried you across that field? It was autumn. We were going across a muddy field. We were sixteen. You had inflammation of the lungs, and all of a sudden you wanted to warm yourself on Plakhov's stove, remember?"

"It wasn't Plakhov's."

"And we tottered back, you were burning up, you lost consciousness ..." (he attentively followed the expression on her face, and noticed with satisfaction that it became animated with this childhood memory). "I staggered about for three kilometres with you in my arms ..."

"That was you ... you were so big then."

"Yes, but you weren't so slim then. Come on, jump down. I'll catch you."

"No need for that. It wouldn't be decent. Everyone will wonder what I'm doing."

He went into the medical room by himself. The nurse, fatigued either from drink or chronic lack of sleep, did not hand over or lend anything to him, but instead, without any questions and in full view of everyone, simply sold him the last thermometer.

"And so she sells off the medical room bit by bit", he noted to himself. "You can't expect any help from her."

He inserted the thermometer under her arm, holding her shoulders and clasping her arm so that she could not sham anything. The mercury stopped at 35. And no matter how long he waited, or squeezed her shoulders, it did not go any higher.

"Maybe the thermometer's defective", he surmised, and took his own temperature: "36.6. Just as normal."

"What am I going to do with you?" Sem lamented.

"I don't know", she answered quietly. "I feel like I've got poison running through me."

"What poison?!" He groaned with all his strength, and held his head. "That's it! I know what to do. But look, this infection – I'm worried about you, Tori ... really I am."

"Why?"

"Because to me you're not just some tart. You're a friend, comrade, sister, brother – everything, except a tart."

"I'm nobody's tart. I'm simply a woman."

He waved his arm, looked away, stayed silent for a while, then jumped from the cabin. In the car park, as though somehow all together, yet at the same time as though each was by himself, some Caucasians were gathering. Why were they lining up against his Kamaz, in their Volgas and Zhigulis? Why were they standing opposite him, pitting their small knives against his brute strength?

"Listen, friend," – he approached one respectable-looking man, who didn't look Muslim – "over there in my cabin is a girl sitting, she wants a man, and I'm completely tired out. Exhausted. She's over that way. The truck's open."

And Sem set off. Without turning back, Semenov walked across the carpark and sat on the edge of a ditch not far from his truck, and dozed off. A blow on the spine woke him up. He responded almost automatically, for either the blow was weak, or his subconscious was alert; looking behind him, something made him spin around sharply, with all his strength.

"Prick!" she cried, striking him with her fists, her feet, again and again, as though he were a padded wall. "Prick! Oh, Sem, what a slime you are! I'll show you!" She struck and struck, a volley of blows, kicks and tears.

He silently endured the blows, almost without retaliating, while she kept it up. Then he picked her up like a rag, and carried her to the truck.

"So why did you play this joke? What did I ever do to you?" Her words reached him from behind.

She was hot, distraught, her temperature was surely going up; she cried on his shoulder.

"My little girl ..." Sem murmured, kissing the dishevelled hair at the back of her head. "Of course I was joking. Would I really give you up to him? I was right alongside you. Why would I do that? Because I ... because I love you so much! ... so much ..."

She hugged his neck, and kissed him on the lips for the first time, a brief, tender kiss.

They drove a short distance to some birch saplings on the edge of the fir forest. They got out of the truck and embraced. He kissed her face,

hair, neck. He couldn't stop. They fell to the ground; he spread out his jacket and took off her jeans. He could never have imagined that one day he would be doing this with her.

"Ow!" She knocked her head on something hard.

His groping hand found a stone; it looked like the remnant of a gravestone. And on it was written 'Semenov' – or so it seemed to him. It would be a fitting stage for the final act; he laughed to himself, and suddenly buried his face in the grass. Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed how, groping for her jeans, she pushed her feet into the legs, and they clung to her like her own skin.

"That's it. And you can't change anything in this life." He stood up, took a step as though

rising from his own grave, towards the field that was visible behind the white stems, wanting only to breathe, to drink in unlimited space.

She sat on the edge of the forest, pressing her chin against her knees. Just like that, in that very posture, she remained in his memory a long time back, fifteen years ago, but everything about her since was erased from his memory.

"Let's go," he said, "or we'll be late."

She stood up, and they walked away together, barely touching one another.

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Bev Aisbett

ANNE McLAREN

Gu Cheng: Hermit of Waiheke Island

*Has it been decided then
By some Celestial Court (to the sound of lutes)
Exile this man! To bring him back to men.
Uproot him! So that he may find his roots!*
(Yuli Daniel, 'I'll Snap No Longer Like a Wolf')



THE GREATEST PAIN for the poet is the pain of exile. The fate of those Chinese poets forced by circumstances into exile came into prominence in the west in October 1993 with the dramatic death of Gu Cheng, one of China's most innovative young poets, on a remote island off the coast of New Zealand.

On the tenth of October Gu Cheng attacked his estranged wife savagely with an axe near her home on the island of Waiheke. He then returned to his own home, washed the blood from his hands and hanged himself from a tree, watched in desperation by his sister, Gu Xiang. It was Gu Xiang who alerted the authorities. The wife, Xie Ye, was found unconscious and taken by helicopter to a hospital on the mainland but failed to respond to treatment. Gu Cheng was cut down from the tree by his sister who did not attempt to revive him.

The final act of savagery and tragic end of this most gentle and imaginative of poets is explicable as the culmination of intense isolation from his cultural roots, an isolation which severed him not only from his own race and people but also from the human community and intimate family ties.

In the final months of his life, Gu Cheng wrote a poem, 'Hermit of the Island' for a friend which he sent together with a sketch of the same title. The poem can be interpreted as a malediction and an augury.

The old man who lived on the island gazed at the sky,

At the original creation, the mountains, years
and months,
The sea and its passions.
So what if the ozone layer breaks over the
Antarctica,
The icebergs once melted
Will cause the seas to rise
And truly strike down the one we love.

In accord with the Chinese poetic tradition, the poet added this 'response' from an unknown reader: "Someone sighed saying, 'In the sky there are clouds and on the earth mankind/ Those without money hasten without cease'."

In the margin of the sketch he added these prophetic words which chilled his Chinese reader: "two feet kicking at the sky!" In his final role as hermit and seer, Gu Cheng foresees destruction and his eventual death while the mundane world hastens about its quotidian chores.

GU CHENG was born in 1956 in Beijing to a literary family. His father, Gu Gong, was a well-known poet of the conservative realist school of poetry. In 1969 during the tumult of the Cultural Revolution his family was sent down to the countryside in Shandong where he revelled in the beauty of the countryside and wrote his first poetry:

the wheels roll over
 a fragrant lawn of weedblooms and wild
 chrysanthemums
 crickets hail me
 with harmonics on a chord
 I dissolve my hopes in the fragrance of flowers.
 (Gu Cheng at age 15, 'A Fantasia to Life')

When the worst of the confusion was over he returned to Beijing and came to attention as one of the talented poets publishing in the *samizdat* journal of the avant-garde *Today (Jintian)*. As the son of a poet, Gu Cheng, more than most of his young contemporaries, was struck by "the anxiety of influence". His father, Gu Gong, whether from personal inclination or political pressure, wrote a public denunciation of his son's work, castigating him for the mordant negativity of poems such as 'An Ending': "A schooner draped in mourning/passed slowly by/unfurling its darkened shroud."

But his poetry gradually won acclaim from quarters receptive to the new Obscure (or Misty) Poetry, as it came to be known. In 1982 he was accepted into the Beijing Writers' Union. His early attempts to accept invitations overseas were foiled by officialdom but by 1987 he was able to gain a passport to visit Europe and Hong Kong. In 1988 he accepted an invitation to teach at the University of Auckland where his son by Xie Ye was born.

Gu Cheng retired quickly from academic life to the remote island of Waiheke, where he and Xie Ye lived a life of primitive simplicity (or as some see it, of hardship and poverty). Friends reported that at times they lived off wild grasses and an edible fungus called mu'er. (Gu Cheng was so fond of this fungus he called his son Mu'er.) Gu and his wife raised chickens. Xie would take them to the market to sell until the neighbours complained about them to the authorities. Gu then slaughtered all the chickens. The couple clashed over the raising of Mu'er, who was ultimately given into the care of Maoris living on the island.

In 1992 he was invited to visit Germany together with Xie Ye. It was here that he completed his autobiography (unpublished). It was also in Germany that Xie Ye met a Chinese man, now a German national, who was to pursue her

to the hermitage on Waiheke Island and precipitate the final climactic events of her and Gu Cheng's life. In the months before his death, Gu had become estranged from Xie Ye, who now lived separately on the island. Before the arrival of the friend from Germany, he had been gradually readjusting to the prospect of life without his wife and, according to his sister, had plans to return to China once a divorce settlement had been reached.

The circumstances of Gu's death indicate a man deranged by jealousy, a poet in extremis who sheds his poetic sensibility to commit an act of barbarism. There is another way to assess Gu Cheng, however; a way which goes beyond the individual act of seeming madness to an understanding of the context in which he sought to fulfil his poetic aspirations.

Gu Cheng was heir to one of the most stubborn burdens of the Chinese poetic tradition – the burning need of the poet for recognition, the search for the sympathetic listener or *zhiyin*, literally one who understands the tune, which Stephen Owen has noted as the overriding characteristic of the Chinese traditional poet.¹ Granted recognition of a limited nature in the land of his birth, Gu Cheng, like so many other Chinese writers now living in the west, sought the recognition of foreign sinologists and foreign literary foundations. It is sadly ironic that his quest for recognition resulted in a virtual self-imposed exile on an island in the remote south seas.

Gu's early poetry is replete with images of a young man struggling to express his individuality in a world of drab conformity:

just one small boat
 seduced by the murmur of the sea
 tries a thousand ways
 to loosen its moorings.
 ('By the edge of the dream sea')

He was marked by a precocious sense of poetic destiny. These lines from 'One Generation', written when he was twelve, became the leit motif for a whole generation of Obscure (Misty) Poets: "The dark night has given me dark eyes/ Yet I use them to search for light."

In his twenties he had fully adopted the persona of the poet of sensibility:

The smooth perfect dome of my skull
 harbouring fire and spring water
 harbouring amber-yearning
 nectar of poetry, incense of dreams
 misty wishes and entreaties ...
 I will at last unleash all my cries
 in that brief pause
 to dissolve the starry night and the blue sky.
 (‘Huadiao’s Apologia’)

The final explosion of poetic violence is reminiscent of Walt Whitman in ‘Song of Myself’: “I too am not a bit tame, I too am untranslatable/I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.” (Whitman was an early favourite of Gu Cheng’s.)

There are many poetic personae open to the poet in the Chinese tradition: concerned critic of social mores, lover of nature, recluse, protester at injustice and so on. Gu chose the pose of the child-seer which he made visible by wearing a shepherd-like turban of rolled cloth. He called this his “thinking cap” and said it protected him from evil influences.

As child he was free to pursue images of his own imagination: “I want/every moment/to be as gorgeous as crayons are” (‘I’m an Obstinate Child’). As child-like poet he enjoys a symbiotic relationship with nature: “I can breathe like green grass on very high riverbanks” (‘I can breathe like green grass’).

He can walk amidst the squalor of the city and still maintain unsullied innocence:

from the northern grasslands
 I walked out, followed
 a chalkroad, walked into
 the town piled high with cog-wheels
 walked under lean-tos
 in the narrow lanes
 – into every trodden heart
 wrapped in indifferent smoke
 I still tell green tales ...
 (‘Curriculum vitae’)

ALTHOUGH GU CHENG by and large eschewed overt political comment, his intense introspection and failure to delineate the promised goods of socialism constituted an affront to the authorities. His works were eventually published in China but never became mainstream.

Gu Cheng discovered that many of his *zhiyin* or sympathetic listeners were in fact foreign. The moment when he first won an overseas invitation was a highlight in his life, as he explained in ‘Autobiographical Montage’: “1983. Shanghai has winters as well, but it has no quiet. With a letter of invitation from Stockholm University in my pocket, I wandered the streets, blessing mankind.”

Gu began his life as overseas wanderer in 1987. The irony of his quest for recognition by a people other than his own is that he inflicted upon himself a period of exile which was as much self-imposed as state-imposed. As poet in the west, Gu lived out unconsciously the ancient paradigm of the poet as frustrated exile, the recluse who communes with nature and retreats by degrees into either stoicism or madness and death.

In the final years of his life Gu did not escape this tragic transition. On the one hand he posed as a babe of nature: “A large straw hat on my head, hiding the sun, my heart is sweet, the summer is sweet, the sky is clear, it reminds me of the sea when I was young, just like a baby, it is good to be a baby ...” (May 1991, essay to Li Ying).

In the same essay he spoke of premonitions of danger and death: “Heaven knows whether there is a God, but I believe there is. Step by step, I go towards the forest, walking towards the dusk. When I go towards the mists I pray in my heart.” And finally: “Will it soon be extinguished? This fire like a lamp.”

Gu Cheng was an artist as well as a poet. He sent sketches to friends and painted incessantly on walls. His intricate line drawings of self-interconnected with nature and fantastical beings recall the cosmological paintings which the famous poet Qu Yuan discovered while in exile and which inspired his poem ‘Questions Asked of Heaven’. In one such recent sketch he wrote on the side: “His fate like silk/his heart like a cocoon./One turn of Heaven and Earth/It is cut in half.”

It is Gu’s Chinese friends who have responded most promptly to the challenge of his extraordinary death. The woman poet Shu Ting, a member of his earlier circle of young poets, seemingly exonerates him as a poet sent to tragic

exile in a remote wilderness. In the days following his death she wrote this poem in tribute:

Sent in exile to a bleak isle
In the manner of your childhood
You renewed intimacy with the warm earth,
Gathering firewood, cutting wild grass,
Sowing two rows of meagre corn.
By chance you raised your head
And farewelled a flock of birds migrating home,
But at this moment on the sea of New Zealand
no wind blows,
Your eyes fog over ...
("Sent in exile to a lonely isle")

For the Chinese reader of the above poem, Gu Cheng is mourned as the paradigmatic poet in exile. The migratory birds returning home (to the north) recall the migratory geese of the Chinese tradition who are said to carry letters to loved ones far away. But the wind is still off the coasts of New Zealand and does not assist the birds in their return. Gu's isolation is thus complete.

IN ANOTHER poem which Shu Ting wrote for Gu Cheng, the tragedy of exile is made explicit: "Living with another people is a dark hell." In 'The Smashed Kaleidoscope' Shu Ting draws an implicit analogy between the image of Gu Cheng in his tubular turban and the fractured beauty of a kaleidoscopic image. (In Chinese the word 'kaleidoscope' is literally 'myriad patterned tube'.)

A life of beauty is nothing but fragile flakes of
ice,
Living with another people is a dark hell.
For himself
It was a protracted struggle
his left hand striking his right.
When at dusk he went to the shore to wash his
hands, the water
Refused to wash away his shadow,

Only his writings, speckled seeds of opium
poppy,
Scattered
Beneath his swing.
A
straight-tubed
cloth cap
Quietly sitting centre-stage
The lights turn off.
He
has not
returned
home.
(Dawn, 13th October, 1993.)

Another sort of Chinese response is less sympathetic: "No matter what poetic language one uses as his elegy, what you throw at his coffin is nothing but vicious flowers" (Luo Fu).

As for this western *zhiyin*, Gu Cheng's act of violence and suicide is at once the despairing act of a revenging husband and the unconscious return to the ancient Chinese paradigm of the poet in exile for whom suicide is the ultimate glory. As Yuli Daniel wrote of his own period of exile in Soviet prisons: "Uproot him! So that he may find his roots!"

NOTE

1. On the poet in exile and the importance of the *zhiyin* or sympathetic listener in the Chinese tradition see Stephen Owen, *Traditional Chinese Poetry and Poetics: Omen of the World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1985), pp.251 ff.

The translations of Gu Cheng's poetry quoted in this article come from *Selected Poems - Gu Cheng*, an anthology edited by Sean Golden and Chu Chiyu (The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Renditions Paperback, 1990), except 'Hermit of the Island', essay to Li Ying, 'His fate like silk' and poems by Shu Ting, 'Sent in Exile to a Lonely Isle' and 'The Smashed Kaleidoscope', which were translated by the author. The information about Gu Cheng's life, the circumstances of his death and responses of Chinese readers derive from a special review in the November 1993 edition of *Mingbao Monthly*, a Chinese-language periodical from Hong Kong, pp.82-108. Gu Cheng's sketches 'His fate like silk' and 'Hermit of the Island' are reproduced from the above.

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MICHAEL ACKLAND

Honour or Shame?

*Reflections on D-Day and
National Identity*



THE GUNS OF D-DAY, and more recently of the fifty-year commemorations, have now ceased firing, and the beaches of northern France have been returned to holiday-makers. But the past has not been laid entirely to rest. Germany was excluded from among the participants and from the celebrations of honourable action, thereby drawing attention to a lingering spectre of guilt which may yet haunt European peace. For the seemingly absolute categories of honour and shame are in fact two sides of one coin whose boundaries threaten to crumble or blur on closer examination. The ease with which we use these categories depends usually on unquestioned assumptions which underpin standard readings of history and ultimately many forms of national self-understanding. The cost of these self-congratulatory recitals can, however, be high.

The victorious Allies in 1918 painted Germany as the unprovoked aggressor in World War I, and we know the fruits of this self-serving interpretation. Similarly biased readings were offered by the belligerent nations on the outbreak and course of World War II. After the war, the defeated Germans were forcibly reschooled by the victors, but what steps were undertaken in the Allies' home countries to correct the excesses of their own propaganda? This issue of continued, unmarked bias goes to the heart of national self-perceptions and affects nation-states' capacity to undertake credible international action. Less globally, it colours the way we read historical events, whether dealing with Normandy, POWs or convict servitude, and closes as well as opens crucial lines of individual action.

Apart from eyewitness accounts, the bulk of the media coverage of D-Day in Australia was

American in origin. This is in part because Operation Overlord (the official code name for the Normandy invasion) was to a large extent a US-financed and orchestrated event. Even at the time, American camera crews were given ring-side seats to the action – foreshadowing on a small scale the later interaction of media and military interests which brought us the Gulf War 'live', and which turned the massive UN deployment in Somalia into a prime-time event. Also the preponderance of US-produced D-Day documentaries represents media actualities and dangers, both here and in Europe.

Increasing American dominance of local television programming threatens to render interchangeable the US and Allied versions of joint operations, as well as to produce the kind of subjective or partisan record, masquerading as universal truth, which Blake targeted in a comparably war-torn age when he asserted that "One Law for the Lion & the Ox is Oppression".¹ The consequences of this standardising, morally absolute process are most apparent for the newly united Germany, but they are also of direct relevance to a distant and minor Normandy participant, Australia.

Colour, action footage and human interest shots aside, what was perhaps most interesting in the US coverage of D-Day were inaccuracies and an unacknowledged, unresolved burden of unease. At times Europeans have sweepingly accused Americans of historical naivety and a lack of factual knowledge, and a typical program entitled 'Normandy: The Great Crusade' confirmed these stereotypes.² In the opening minutes it heaped error upon error as it set about enlightening the generations which had not lived through 'the longest day'. A still

of a haggard German 'Landsr' ('Tommy') was flashed on the screen as an example of a prisoner taken after the fall of Stalingrad (January 1943), his clothing highlighting how inadequately he had been equipped for the rigours of the Russian winter. Apparently the scriptwriters and background researchers had not heard that the German armies spent two hard winters deep within Russia, and that, although they suffered terribly from a lack of winter clothing in 1942, this was not the major predicament faced by von Paulus's encircled Sixth Army at Stalingrad, nor was it a key factor in its defeat.

In the next breath, the TV commentary introduced us to the Allies' opponents in Normandy: former members of the *Hitlerjugend*. This group was presented as an élite – instead of as a compulsory national formation for all persons between the ages of ten and eighteen – from whose ranks Nazi Germany drew its crack units intended to repel the would-be liberators. The epic and heroic stature of Operation Overlord was thereby assured, and the way cleared for the next step in the logic of propaganda: emphasis on the enemy's ruthlessness and crimes as an implicit justification for all forms of Allied violence.

We are so familiar with this version of events, and that of other chapters in the standard history of World War II, that we rarely note hidden motives and repeated omissions. But their effects, once remarked, can lead to unsettling observations. For one thing, it was noticeable in 'Normandy' that the only German deed to be presented at length involved the cold-blooded killing of twenty recently captured Canadian soldiers by an SS unit whose commander had ordered that no more prisoners were to be taken. No effort was made to explain the reasons behind these decisions. Here as elsewhere the conventional script was shaped by the imperatives of propaganda rather than those of objectivity. Consequently stress was laid on the asserted bravery of the Canadians as they were taken out one at a time for execution, and, by implication, on the barbarity of a war-hardened military machine whose crimes against humanity had to be stopped. Nor was this 'documentary' alone in fostering and perpetuating a crudely biased image of the 'Waffen SS'.

When has any reader of this essay seen a tele-

vision program which pointed out that the SS did not just run death-camps or commit atrocities, but in fact came to rival the *Wehrmacht*, or German standing army, in numbers, weapons and massed operational deployment? That the SS units were particularly endowed with those qualities of heroism, devotion and self-sacrifice which often seem an Allied monopoly is, of course, passed over – though it does occasionally emerge in unguarded statements, as when an SS officer was described as a Nazi "fanatic, popular with his men". What passes for factual reporting typically insists on a categoric apportioning of honour and blame to the opposing armies.

THIS 'OFFICIAL LINE' has been seconded by powerful shapers of German opinion, although for different reasons. Lurking behind the US account is, one suspects, a recurring wish to forestall adverse commentary on its military interventions. Programs on D-Day or the Gulf War are often motivated, at least in part, by American awareness that its actions allegedly in defence of democratic and humanitarian rights may, to ill-informed (read critical) eyes, assume the characteristics of what it ostensibly opposes: a ruthless regime bent on promoting the unimpeded sway of its power and interests. The German response to the recent past has been dictated by *Realpolitik* and ideology. A primary concern of the nation after World War II was to regain international respect and acceptance, as well as to live down Nazi excesses. This tendency was most pronounced among the natural political opponents of National Socialism, and among a post-war generation which sought to distance itself from its parents' burden of shame. The German Democratic Republic (former East Germany) led the way in publicly condemning militarism and fascism, followed closely by the Bundesrepublik and committed writing there.

Typical of the latter has been the influential Hamburg weekly, *Die Zeit*, which has consistently repudiated the actions of the Hitler regime, as well as the beliefs and sentiments of ordinary Germans of the epoch. A recent and representative article focused on what it saw as a fatal mixture of "spiritual stupidity" and obscene sentimentality which played into Nazi hands:

This embarrassing amalgam of pride and obsequiousness, of uppishness and sobbing, recurs throughout all four volumes [of a detailed account of German life in January and February 1943] and makes for painful reading. Mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, neighbours and teachers, secrete in unison ritualistic phrases about the "hopeful son", "the golden youth", "the bold fighter for his Führer", "the defender of home, who protects our existence by laying his life on the line". Your stomach turns as you wade through so much disgusting trash [bei so viel unreinem Schmalz].³

This is dissociation with a vengeance, and is registered in each part of the reviewer's body for his readers' approval: "So viele Haare hat man gar nicht, wie sich einem sträuben möchten angesichts dieses stumpfsinnigen Heroismus" ("All your hair and then some has to stand on end when confronted with this obtuse heroism"). Whereas war-time heroism can still be celebrated uncritically by the victors, for certain Germans it has become a dirty word and their immediate past a subject of ridicule.

Such one-sided accounts must some day call forth countervailing forces and interpretations. *Deutsche Welle* (the German equivalent of Radio Australia beamed to us by courtesy of SBS) reflected accurately the currently approved reading of 1944 when its June news coverage of the Normandy landing and commemoration concluded: "By the end of the first day [of the operation] Allied forces were already storming fortified German positions along the coast, and the dawn of European liberation was at hand". But what will happen when Germans begin to question aspects of this imposed legacy of shame and seek evidence of national honour, as they inevitably must? Will this be met by incomprehension among the Western Allies, and interpreted as the resurfacing of overweening German pride or revanchist sentiment? And where will the young, who are less shackled by a sense of personal involvement and shame, look for political support? Will they be forced into the arms of the Far Right because the traditional mainstream parties, as part of the nation's post-war drive for international rehabilitation, have

unquestioningly accepted the Allies' interpretation of events?

Between extreme versions which focus on or deny the existence of the death-camps, there is little sign of an emerging viewpoint which can embrace grounds for honour as well as guilt, and with it a measure of self-respect based on the country's history and not simply on its economic success. With national consciousness still split and uncertain, the Bundesrepublik finds itself midway on a path which could lead to enduring stability or, at the opposite extreme, to desperate acts of self-assertion of the kind which precipitated Imperial and then Nazi Germany into European conflagrations.

Nor are Australians untouched by these issues. Not only do they form part of the international community which will be affected by European developments, but they too have accepted uncritically the official script of World War II, which attributes blame squarely to the Axis powers and honour to the Allies. Such stereotypes, apart for absolving Australians of guilt, also in no way threaten a carefully cultivated belief in our own innocent and morally unblemished state. War and atrocities are supposed to be something enacted 'over there', which leaves us in a detached, supporting role and, most importantly, with a clear conscience. But should it be?

Narratives of Australian involvement in World War II have been largely the preserve of a single, unmarked reading position. Thus, for instance, writers have focused on the ordeals undergone by 'our boys' as POWs, rather than on the sufferings which they, as guards or occupiers, may have inflicted on others. Similarly, local accounts of racial violence, like those of D-Day, are primarily told from the victors' point of view, while our proud self-projections in terms of honest, hearty mateship, tolerance and equality are no more incontestable than a whole range of sustaining myths – though to find them questioned we must normally move beyond allegedly factual accounts to the realm of fiction.

Patrick White in *Riders in the Chariot*, for instance, punctures national complacency and problematises the absolute moral categories enshrined in the victors' versions of international and racial conflicts. Conventional certainties are banished as his pen reveals how white

can shade into grey or even black, as in the following passage:

"Sometimes I have to tell myself that success, even of the acceptable, the almost honest kind, was never unaccompanied. Inevitably, it trailed a certain shadow of shame. The favored one became always just that little bit contaminated," said Konrad, who had climbed to the room beneath the roof, carrying an extra lamp and a bottle of *Kognak*. "I wonder whether the pure aren't those who have tried, but not succeeded. Do you think Himmelfarb, atonement is possible perhaps only where there has been failure?"⁴

This "certain shadow of shame", as I have suggested, appears in our emphasis on Nazi atrocities, just as it emerged in early accounts of the convicts as the irredeemable scum of English prisons.

Contamination has been acknowledged in the case of transportation, but not in the Allied cause, as was witnessed in the recent commemorations of 'Bomber' Harris – the British officer responsible for the systematic annihilation of countless German cities and their civilian populations. Himmelfarb, of course, is not fated to die in the Nazi holocaust but to undergo modern-day crucifixion in Australia, the sunny land of warm hearts and largesse, by his work-'mates'. Why is their anger vented on him? Because he is different and fails to conform to local norms of behaviour ("To some it is always unendurable to watch the antithesis of themselves", and because they are able to dehumanise him: "he had become by now the abstraction of a man. The eyes of the talkers lingered only absently on the construction of ribs. These had no connection with the life of brick homes and washing-machines which is led by human beings". The black protagonist Alf Dubbo, who helplessly watches from afar how the Jew is beaten and lynched on the mutilated jacaranda in the factory yard, is all too familiar with a mindset which made it "possible to practise all manner of cruelties provided the majority might laugh them off as practical jokes".

White's portrayal of our shared humanity, and inhumanity, should give us further cause to reflect more closely on the D-Day celebrations. For brutality is not the prerogative of certain races. It dwells in the ordinary Australian heart as well as in those of supposedly less innocent Europeans. Similarly, what the recent media fanfare proclaimed is at best an incomplete account, or another example of Konrad's insight "that success, even of the acceptable, the almost honest kind, was never unaccompanied". We as a nation are still far from acknowledging this to be a likelihood, or from achieving a critical dialogue with our own past. Mabo, however, has underscored the need for a more complex historical awareness, much as re-evaluations have also become imperative in Germany to counter the current claims of the Far Right.

But countless examples from this century give little cause for hope that a middle ground will be found between political and racial extremes: a situation not helped by our present state as the passive consumers of popular histories, still shaped by largely war-time or imperial propaganda. All are likely to suffer from these impasses. The sway of uncontested prejudice and unrevised myths ultimately affects not only states but even the most clear-sighted individuals.

Patrick White's Konrad disappears at the hands of the Nazis, and Himmelfarb survives their genocidal intentions to be martyred by 'untainted' Australians, in a chilling reminder that none can be absolved from blame, and that each nation has committed acts which require personal and public atonement.

ENDNOTES

1. *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 24, rpt. in David V. Erdman (ed.), *Poetry & Prose of William Blake* (Doubleday, New York, 1988), p. 44.
2. Hereafter referred to as 'Normandy'. This was screened on ABV-2 on Sunday 5 June between 8.30 and 9.30 p.m.
3. My translation is from 'Die Hauptsache ist der Sieg fürs Vaterland und die Gesundheit unseres lieben Vatis für uns', Fritz J. Raddatz, *Die Zeit*, 10 December 1993, p. 76.
4. *Riders in the Chariot* (Viking, New York, 1961), p. 171. Future references are to this edition.

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RICHARD GEHRMANN

The Rising Sun of Australian Japan Bashing?

*Racism, American Cultural Imperialism
and Australian Popular Images of Asia*



“WE ARE GIVING this country away”, remarks an American in Phillip Kaufman’s cinematic success, *Rising Sun*. An Australian cinema audience murmurs instant approval at such sentiments. The images in the film version of *Rising Sun*¹ might reflect both the legitimate socio-cultural concerns of the United States, and the populist appeal of that segment of the popular and academic community prone to ‘Japan bashing’,² but it is disturbing to observe the reactions of Australians to an American film, made for a specifically American popular market.

The reality and significance of Australian popular images of Japan and Asia differ from those images that belong to the United States, and the screening of this culturally inappropriate film has the potential to do much to develop and reinforce popular Australian attitudes towards a culture with which we historically have had poor relations.³ ‘Asia’ is also a culture that we see as a homogeneous generality, and this refusal to acknowledge Asian diversity means that all negative images and negative realities from anywhere in the Asian continent coalesce in one image.⁴ While *Rising Sun* is about Japan, its images will be appropriated by many Australians, and will be applied to ‘Asians’ as a generic group. Australia’s future culture faces the prospect of becoming subjected to American populist culture in this context. So the issues raised in the film must be addressed to place *Rising Sun* within the framework of its specifically American anti-Japanese narrative.

To review the Australian response to *Rising Sun* we must initially consider Australian perceptions of that misunderstood geographical

conglomerate, Asia. To paraphrase Metternich, Asia is but a geographical expression. Despite pleas that we accept the realities of the diversity and individuality of Asia, pleas most recently made by Jamie Mackie in the *Asian Studies Review*, and Pierre Ryckmans in *The Australian*,⁵ we continue to perceive ‘Asia’ as a coherent whole, and attempt to discuss ‘Asian’ investment, ‘Asian’ food, and ‘Asian’ culture, all of which are meaningless terms when placed against the immense reality of the diversity that constitutes Asia. But for Australians this ‘Asia’ is a construction that becomes a reality, albeit usually one seen in negative, threatening terms.

The early artistic imagery of the British convict settlement, placed in a dark and threatening environment, posited the new colony against a hostile backdrop, with the sombre ‘savage state’ of its position contrasted with the shining utility of the new convict civilisation.⁶ This tiny colonial beginning set on what was culturally the wrong side of the globe, metamorphosed into a provincial-minded group of middle-ranking colonies with negative perceptions of their environment, of hostile and untamed Aborigines, avaricious and morally corrupt Chinese gold diggers, ambiguous Japanese and Malay pearl divers, and other non-Europeans such as Melanesian plantation workers, all threatening an emerging white, British Australia.⁷

These fears, specifically those of the 1900 Bulletin’s ‘Mongolian Octopus’, are echoed in the sexual manipulation of ‘white’ women by evil, morally corrupt, cocaine-using ‘Asiatics’ in *Rising Sun*, a text whose very title evokes the war-time threat to Australians. While fascination

with Asia did co-exist with fear,⁸ the primary emotions of fear, xenophobia and a sense of isolation dominated.

In addition to the historically specific Australian trepidation about a non-specific Asia, pre-Federation Australia was part of a broader western culture that feared and despised 'the orient'. From the Kaiser's evocation of a Japanese-led Yellow Peril in the years before World War I⁹ to the fantastical machinations of Sax Rohmer's evil Dr Fu Manchu, popular western imagery presented an Asian other that was adopted by Australian popular culture. Literary gems in the *Boys Own Annual*, the *Empire Book for Australian Boys*, the *Monster Book for Boys* and other mass-circulation books, papers and magazines, propagated in the school-aged youth of the Empire an image of the evil, degenerate and racially inferior Asian.

This image actuated a much stronger meaning in the culturally and physically isolated outpost that constituted Australia than it did in the European homeland. Servile, treacherous and evil Asians were presented in "dehumanising racist stereotypes" for generations of youth,¹⁰ a depiction that was to be of particular significance to those who came after.

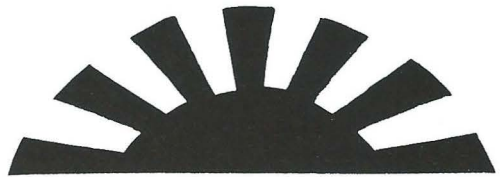
Australians prominent in civil life in the 1980s and 1990s such as Bruce Ruxton and Geoffrey Blainey were born in 1926 and 1930 respectively, and were products of a generation imbued with the perceptions of a paramount British empire and an advanced, superior Australia.

Such a powerful emotional belief came from this dominant paradigm of racism, in which there is an underlying supposition that Asians are inferior and should respect and look up to the civilised, dominant Europeans, and a consequent resentment and insecurity in countries with long histories of cultural attainment, such as Japan. These images have been dramatically challenged in *Rising Sun*.

KAUFMAN'S FILM adaptation of Michael Crichton's novel depicts a familiarly shadowy world of threat and evil, but with the important and aberrant distinction of Japanese superiority. The mastery of the Japanese is everywhere evident. For Americans such superiority might be problematic, but for Australians this is the ultimate nightmare from the dark days of Feb-

ruary 1942, returning to haunt.

In the opening scenes of *Rising Sun*, Japanese business negotiators calmly face their American counterparts across a table, with the essential distinction that the Japanese are operating electronic spying equipment and are listening to every whispered conversation of their American opponents. The wily, devious orientals are everywhere breaking the rules of the game of fair play, even spying on their own (American) security guard. As the detective in the lift remarks that "the Japs are taking over", his very words are recorded in the electronic hub of that tower of corporate evil, the Nakamoto Corporation building.



Furthermore, some Americans have been suborned by the forces of Nippon, and work to betray the United States to their new masters. Even the American police are seen as inferior and incompetent outsiders in this Japanese world, a world that exists in some bizarre form of extraterritoriality in downtown Los Angeles. When good cop Web Smith searches for the guru (or sensei) John Connor, he locates him in a darkened world of oriental mystery.

The ubiquitous Chinatown ghetto image is played again in the film, as Smith and Connor enter the atmospheric underworld that is familiar to any reader of *Fu Manchu*. The denizens of this world may wear suits rather than oriental robes, but Connor's words – that "this is not America" – send an unequivocal message to the cinema goers.

Far from being the servants and inferiors of our culture's childhood fiction, the Japanese have become our masters, in our own (western) land. "Don't fuck with these guys", warns the (black American) Nakamoto security man, sweating with fear, while the hidden camera observes his every move.

The sellout of America motif is also apparent. This is expressed in numerous ways, with the

protagonists admitting that (presumably treacherous) fellow Americans are helping the Japanese establish "competition against our own companies". The companies, being American owned, are clearly part of the birthright of all Americans everywhere, and are constituent parts of 'America'. Presumably Columbia pictures, when purchased by 'the Japanese' (rather than Sony) in the late 1980s, became the loss of all Americans, despite the fact that the vast majority of Americans owned no shares in it before its purchase.

Rising Sun is peppered with references to the new Japanese economic mastery of what was previously the world's premier industrial power. Our occidental heroes visit the Donaldson Corporation, or rather, a piece of ambiguous foreign ground that has changed from the happier times "when this was Donaldson Corporation ...", before the takeover. Only the Japanese-oriented Connor sends a message of sanity and reason in this maze of xenophobia, by pointing out that if the owners of companies don't want 'Japan' to buy them, don't sell them.

Again the Japanese are portrayed as a homogeneous mass, as 'them', as one people headed for some form of economic and political world domination.¹¹ Japan as Evil is posited against America as Good. The Japanese are united, the Americans are divided, with traitors in their midst.

In the compassionate society of *Rising Sun*, the white Americans accept black Americans as their equals, and the Japanese reject a woman suffering from a deformity whose father was Afro-American. As a member through her mother of the ethnically Japanese, but outcast, burakumin group, she is pushed further to the margins when in Japan because her father was black and foreign.

The bizarre picture of an American film promoting America-the-melting-pot, as a racially tolerant society within the setting of Los Angeles, the city of riots and Rodney King, is deliciously ironic, but such irony is presumably lost on American audiences, on the film makers, and on Crichton himself. As threatening music sets the scene, corporate America prepares to sell their nation to the new evil empire.

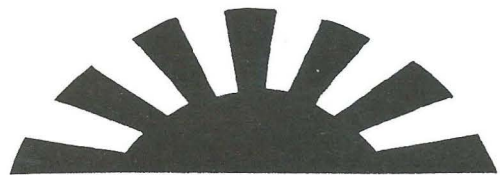
The selling of America goes further than the selling of mundane and essentially uninteresting

corporations to the fiendish orientals. The very bodies of American womanhood are served up for the inferior race as corporate tribute, with this taking place literally when the depraved, coke-sniffing murder suspect Eddie Sakamura consumes sushi and sake off the nipples, breasts and naked bodies of two blonde sex slaves.

With the threat of racial and sexual pollution, the Japan bashing of *Rising Sun* reinscribes racist stereotypes, evoking similar messages entrenched in western culture one hundred years ago. Short dark Japanese men continually seem to have tall, voluptuous blonde women fawning all over them, whenever the director needs to titillate the voyeur, or perhaps infuriate the racial supremacist.

The racism of this film is only equalled by its sexism. Women's motives for becoming the sex slaves are not examined – this is presumably the natural, receptive role of universal womanhood. They just drape happily in the background like the bimbos in a 1950s beach movie, but in this case they drape for the wrong reasons, for the wrong men. Elvis is replaced by Sakamura.

But back in the harsh reality that constitutes the 1990s, we repeatedly see on the security videos the blonde, semi-naked body of American womanhood lying on her back on the corporate office table, being systematically (and symbolically) fucked and then strangled, all by an anonymous and faceless man, who the audience presumes to be Nipponese.



SO WHAT IS THE Japanese-American relationship, and where does *Rising Sun* fit in the discourse of US-Japan relations? In recent American popular culture, Japan as an economic superpower has become the major enemy. While powerful industrial America did not suffer the same feeling of isolation in the pre-World War II era that Australia did, national confidence was shaken by what was seen as the treachery of Pearl Harbour.

This jolt in confidence was short lived, to the extent that the later making of a film about the Pearl Harbour defeat was possible. After all, the United States did indubitably win the Pacific War, and therefore need suffer no national trauma or shame over initial defeats, because MacArthur *did* return. Indeed, the treacherous behaviour of Japan, and the essential rightness of the United States are reinforced in the war film *Tora Tora Tora*.

But with relative industrial decline in the past two decades, and the military and political failure of the United States in Vietnam, American culture makers have been forced to re-assess America's position in the world. Typical of these assessments was the reaction in popular circles to Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*, an academic book which in other times would perhaps have excited interest only within the ranks of university students in Departments of International Relations.

Kennedy's essential argument, that all great powers decline and will always eventually decline,¹² struck a chord in the psychic memory of the post-boom, post-yuppie United States of the late 1980s, with Americans being confronted with the inevitability of the eventual decline and fall of their empire. Chapter headings such as 'The United States: The Problem of Number One in Relative Decline' could be guaranteed to terrify readers, especially when absorbed in conjunction with van Wolferen's *The Enigma of Japanese Power*¹³, and other offerings of the suddenly fashionable Japan bashing school.

Rising Sun places itself firmly within this recently developed and extremely marketable cultural tradition of Japan bashing, a cultural tradition which while it reflects echoes of the past, represents a new present reality of perceived American weakness and vulnerability. It is all the more vicious for this. American politicians know that at any time they can attract electoral support and media attention by smashing a pile of Japanese electrical appliances, an anarchistic expression of jingoism.

The film *Rising Sun* may have been sanitised from the virulent book to attract a wider public audience, and to deflect accusations of racism, but while it is a toned down version of the book,¹⁴ it still is centred firmly within the Japan bashing tradition. Americans need an enemy to

assault, and now that the Soviet Union is an item of pity rather than dread, does Japan take its place?¹⁵

AUSTRALIA'S JAPANESE phobia differs in many ways from the phobia which coexists in the United States. Despite earlier paranoia about a tiny number of Japanese pearl divers in the north, our fear became evident with the frenzied and hysterical reactions within Australia to the arrival of the American Great White Fleet in 1908.¹⁶ This was of course linked directly to Japanese success in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–5, where Japan, an Asian country, had clearly demonstrated military superiority over a major European power for the first time.

Australian support for the American fleet can also be linked to the strong naval alliance developed in 1902 between Great Britain and Japan. At a time of fear and perceived threat, imperial concerns were excluding Australian interests. Despite the palpably obvious fact that the Japanese were thousands of miles to the north and were attempting to carve out an empire in China, and were thus in no way threatening Australia, we were threatened enough to feel saved by the arrival of the Americans.

While Australian popular culture was influenced by past racist traditions and a feeling of unity with 'fellow Anglo-Saxons' against the 'Asiatic hordes', the greatest base for anti-Japanese feeling comes from the experiences of World War II, and in particular from the Malayan campaign, and the subsequent fall of the 'impregnable' fortress of Singapore.

This is a feeling deeply embedded in the popular culture of an older generation of Australians, and largely lay dormant until Japan's economic success in the 1980s, combined with the collaborative activities of Australian business, caused an influx of tourists and capital, forcing us to confront Japan again.

The act of suffering defeat is one humiliation. For male and female Australians raised on a tradition of the Anzac as an Australian hero, military defeat in itself involved shame, failure and emasculation. As Beaumont points out, defeat can be and is conveniently explained away in terms of failure on the part of allies, but an essential shame remains, indicating failure to be a 'true' Australian.¹⁷

A far greater humiliation is implicit in defeat at the hands of the Japanese, an inferior race. Australian and other Allied captivity narratives are replete with references to the racial inferiority of the Japanese, in conjunction with references to atrocities and barbarism. Thus the shame of capture was linked to the uncivilised behaviour of the captors, who by going beyond the bounds of convention set themselves up as the ultimate other. Betty Jeffrey's perception of 'bandy-legged monkeys'¹⁸ reflects both the horror and the tragedy of the atrocities she experienced and was witness to, as well as an underlying belief of racial superiority.



This prisoner-of-war experience was strengthened by the effects of wartime propaganda, and by the real sense of a fear of the ultimate Australian nightmare, an invasion of White Australia. The high percentage of those in the services in what was total war, and the close community networks of wartime Australia, spread the news of those captured or killed in war, and makes the breadth of feeling of hatred against the Japanese understandable.¹⁹ This universalised an experience, and transformed the horrific suffering of more than 22,000 prisoners of war and their families into the empathetic suffering of a nation.

The Australian war experience of Japan therefore differs from that of the United States, because we suffered and lost, where they suffered and won. As in the United Kingdom, the war experience of the United States was too global, and both countries were too far removed physically from the zone of conflict for the similar sufferings of British and American POWs to become a crucial part of the national myth.

Our Japan phobia was reactivated by the perception of physical invasion by Japanese tourists. Because of the nature of tourism, enclaves such as the Gold Coast and the Cairns region are developed and attract concentrations of

highly visible overseas tourists. Perceptions of the 'Asian Invasion' are heightened by the increased numbers of Australians of Asian descent who until spoken to and identified appear to be foreign. Even those of Australian nationality but not upbringing find it hard to be Australian in the eyes of their fellows.

The insularity of Australians who have never travelled overseas to foreign tourist enclaves such as Kuta Beach in southern Bali means that any sign in a shop in a foreign language is intrusive, as is the sound of any 'Asian' speaking in their own tongue. This magnifies the Japanese presence out of all proportion to the actual numbers of Japanese in Australia, who are here due to the invitation extended by an economically rationalist Australian tourism industry.

THIS FINAL ISSUE of objection to Japan as a culture is based on a sense of economic invasion, and here again the generalised image of one Asia is paramount. The Australian media tends to treat Asia as an indivisible whole, using headlines such as 'Think-tank to boost trade with Asia', 'Ansett joins Asian frequent flier push', 'How to win in Asia without really trying', and 'Chance to network with Asia'.²⁰ Therefore the activities of 'the Japanese' as economic competitors who are buying in the peace the Australia they failed to conquer in the war, become merged into the totality of homogenised, threatening Asia.

For Australian audiences watching *Rising Sun* there is an unseen irony implicit in their approval of the racist image directed towards America. In a country that has historically been dependent on foreign capital investment, why is Japanese capital more repulsive and objectionable than British, American, New Zealand or, more significantly, German capital? If one claims there is little difference, one risks being labelled an apologist for the Japanese. Yet the opposition of many Australians to Japanese ownership of Australian land is only paralleled by their opposition to Aboriginal Australian ownership of Australian land. Unlike the perfect white Americans in *Rising Sun*, many Australians will clearly feel unable to enlist black Australians as allies.

Australians possess a sense of weakness in terms of the possibility of Australians becoming

what Lee Kuan Yew called “the white trash of Asia”, but this does not equate to the American sense of a loss of global empire. After all, we have tended to operate as subordinates for so long, why should this bother us? Or is the threat of our American ally turning Japanese a threat to our colonised selves?

The United States based negativity of *Rising Sun* matters to us more, because we already have stronger negative images of Japan, and of ‘Asia’, in our national consciousness. While the success of *Rising Sun* continues into the video outlets, and interested viewers turn to Crichton’s far more anti-Japanese book, Australians will continue to see themselves as being in the same position as the former cheerleader Cheryl Austin, lying back on the board-room table. However in this case there will be no mystery about the national identity of the sex partner, and we will continue on the path of analysis taken by the Los Angeles police, and continue to blame Japan for any problems, while far worse is being done to us by the United States.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael Crichton, *Rising Sun* (Arrow Books, London, 1992).
2. For further information on Japan bashing in Australia see Allan Patience, ‘Confronting a Terrible Legacy: Australia’s Japan Problem and the MFP’, *Policy Organisation and Society*, 4, Summer 1991, pp. 25–7.
3. See Alan Rix, ‘Cry Havoc? Public Opinion and Recent Australia-Japan Relations’, *Policy Organisation and Society*, 4, Summer 1991.

4. This is a common perception in the west, although there are Australian variations. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, New York, 1978), Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992).
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6. Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-classical Culture in New South Wales 1788–1860*, (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986) p. 54.
7. The Queensland version of this is presented in Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders & Kathryn Cronin, *Race Relations in Colonial Queensland: A History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, (University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1975, 1988).
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9. Michael Balfour, *The Kaiser and His Times* (Penguin, London, 1972), pp. 143, 248, 260.
10. John Springhall, ‘Healthy papers for manly boys’: imperialism and race in the Harmsworths’ halfpenny boy’s papers in the 1890s and 1900s’, in Jeffrey Richards, *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989) p. 177. See also John Mackenzie (ed), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986).
11. Humphrey McQueen notes that the Japanese are not and were not all the same, a point that is even made by Rohan Rivett in his most bitter work. See Humphrey McQueen, *Japan to the Rescue* (William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1991) p. 28, and Rohan Rivett, *Behind Bamboo: An Inside Story of the Japanese Prison Camps* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1946).
12. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (Fontana, London, 1989).
13. Karel van Wolferen *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (Macmillan, London, 1989).
14. This point is made by McGregor, who however seems to fail to realise the far greater potential of the film to incite racist feelings. Richard McGregor, ‘The darker side of Rising Sun’, *The Australian*, Weekend Review October 30–31, 1993.
15. John Creighton Campbell, ‘Japan Bashing: A New McCarthyism’, *The Japan Foundation Newsletter*, Vol. 18, No. 4, March 1991.
16. Philip Bell and Roger Bell, *Implicated: The United States and Australia* (Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1993), pp. 56–7.
17. Joan Beaumont, *Gull Force: Survival and Leadership in Captivity 1941–1945* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988) pp. 2–3.
18. Betty Jeffrey, *White Coolies* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1954).
19. Libby Connors, Lynette Finch, Kay Saunders, Helen Taylor, *Australia’s Frontline: Remembering the 1939–45 War* (University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992), pp. 65–7, 197–9.
20. *The Australian*, 25 February 1993, 22 February 1993, 7 April 1993, 10 November 1993. For detail on specific anti-Japanese issues, see Paul Summers, ‘Yellow Peril Revisited: stories on Japan after Hirohito’s death’, *Australian Journalism Review*, 12, January–December, 1990.

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ALTHOUGH VILLAGE VOICE crowed that the recent Congressional elections marked the death of the left in the United States, the results could more accurately be understood as marking the end of hope for a democratic polity as certainly as the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the end of Soviet power. This is not to say that America is about to disintegrate as has the Soviet Union, although there are signs that it does not intend to use its military strength abroad as it did during the Cold War. Whatever the changes in politics or policies, the economic and military strength of America is too vast and the structures of power too solid for the state to disintegrate. The economy of California alone is greater than that of Canada and Australia combined, and that state has no intention of leaving the Union, even if that were a possibility, as it may be possible, for example, for Quebec to defect from Canada. Rather, the expansion of free trade areas, and the integration of electronic communications and computer technology, is likely to give Californian industries and culture even greater chances to dominate the rest of the United States and its neighbours.

Yet this spectre of expanding American power conceals a weakness at its heart. America has never been multicultural, but has pursued the myth of the melting pot. Groups that could assimilate

to European patterns have benefited. Asians, although maintaining a distinct cultural identity, have taken advantage of economic opportunities to achieve parity with the majority of the people, or better. In turn, they are changing American culture through both their artistic activity and their investments. The same has not been true for blacks who, although they have generated much of the labour power and cultural energy of America, have never been integrated in its social structures. Now Hispanics are suffering the same fate. California, which produces the nation's fruit and vegetables at the cost of its water resources and the labour of its illegal migrants, refuses to charge for the former and has just voted to exclude the latter from a share of the taxes produced from their labour.

Australia's multicultural policy was deliberately adopted, under Al Grassby, as an alternative to the failed ideal of the melting pot. Unlike multiculturalism in the United States or Britain, it is not a policy of separate development, but follows logically from the recognition of the separate sources of the Australian people and therefore of the possibilities of a varied culture and an open form of citizenship. These possibilities are by no means achieved, but are immanent both in the present forms of Australian society and in the hopes of a truly republican

commonwealth.

The threats to the commonwealth do not come from misplaced fears about the loyalty of groups of varied national origin nor from anxiety about scraping the last royal vestiges of the colonial cringe. The idea of royalty is alien and profoundly undemocratic. Symbols are important, and the crown symbolises subjection to the authority of force. In a republican commonwealth, sovereignty clearly stems from the people. But if sovereignty is to be effective the people must be free to exercise it. This is not a matter of formal political rights but of the opportunity for people to work together in the creation of their own communities.

Racism, domestic violence and repressive bigotry are all products of a society that thwarts the growth of its individual members. The true community gives its members room to come together in shaping their lives and finding meaning in their experience. This is the ideal of multiculturalism. But in Australia today it is threatened by the rampant consumerism in the marketplace and its economic rationalist counterpart in the workplace. Both ideologies atomise the community, leaving individuals, in the name of individualism, unable to take any effective collective action to build their own lives.

The recent announcements of bold new arts and cultural policies

by the Australian and Victorian governments have properly been welcomed for the promise they offer of freeing the creative spirits in our midst and offering us all a life enriched through the latest technologies. But neither policy shows any sense of the arts as an expression of collective experience, or of the way that art works by inviting the audience, the reader or the viewer to share the experience it offers and to produce their own meanings from it. Both policies speak of the need to market Australian arts, and thus reduce them to just another consumer good.

This attitude to culture and the arts corresponds to the prohibition by state governments of the collective activities of student guilds and unions, the economic definition of trade unions as mere providers of service to their members, and the federal government's similar attempts to destroy universities as coherent institutions and reconstruct them as providers of specified research and teaching services. While each of these measures serves to strengthen the state, it weakens the polity.

Ironically, even conservative commentators are starting to insist on the need for autonomous institutions to shore up the civil society. In Australia, unlike America, we have had such institutions, particularly in the arts and education. It would be tragic if governments that are at last taking the arts and national independence seriously were to destroy the collective institutions that make popular sovereignty possible. This would be to follow the worst example of the nation that first recognised that "We, the people" are the source of the only free sovereignty. I hope that our community of readers will make their own contributions to the debate over sovereignty and civil society in succeeding issues of *Overland*.

CIVIL LIBERTY, THE NEWSLETTER of the Victorian Council for Civil Liberties, is both a report on threats to personal and public freedoms and a forum for lively debate on the nature of rights and liberties. The current issue includes Hugh Stretton's remarks at the launch of Peter Cook's *Red Barrister: a biography of Ted Laurie Q.C.*, in which Stretton dispells some myths about people on the left; a piece by Rodney Croome who made Tasmania's repressive gay laws a national issue on the politics of euphemism; and an article on the erosion of the right to intellectual property and hence of free criticism in the universities. Two articles debate the issue of laws attempting to ban racial vilification. One describes the refusal of governments and courts in New Brunswick to prevent an advocate of "racist anti-semitic ideas" continuing to teach in a public school. The other, by Robert Richter QC, questions the effectiveness of legislation to combat such ideas. "Racism is an old and ugly feature of human society", he writes. "In Australia we have our share of it, though not as much as in many other countries. Racism needs to be exposed and opposed in public and in private, in learned journals as well as in the popular media. Repression of speech, however, is more likely to consolidate racists in their pernicious views, make them potential martyrs (to free speech!), and create confusion in the essential area of public debate." The Council of Civil Liberties has an enviable record, since it was founded by the late Brian Fitzpatrick, in both opposing doctrines of hatred and keeping open channels of speech. Readers who want to join in its work should send \$35 to VCCL, 601 Bourke Street, Melbourne 3000, or \$3.00 for a sample copy of *Free Speech*.

John Zuccardy, a young writer who spent some of his recent stay in Australia reading fiction for Overland, writes on his return to the U.S.:

AFTER LEAVING Australia, I spent two months in San Francisco editing all I'd done and beginning work on another project. When my money ran out, I took a job with a travelling arts and music festival called Lollapalooza. Initially, I drove a truck for a coffee vending company, but they were poorly organised and couldn't pay me what they had promised, so we parted company in Detroit. Stranded there with \$600, I decided to take a train to New York. I had a few hours before morning and went to a diner to pass the time reading. At the diner, a fist fight broke out between the cook and a waitress and when the police arrived everyone was thrown out. On the street and exhausted, I climbed to the top of a parking garage to search out a place to sleep. I saw a small playground a few blocks away, went there and curled up with my luggage under a jungle gym. I had a horrific nightmare about drowning and woke up in a cold sweat to find my money missing from my boot. Panicked, I retraced my steps to the parking garage and there found my money in small piles spread out over the course of a block. I had been trailing it behind me. Once in New York, I found myself at a well-catered closing party for a TV movie. My friend and I met a wealthy lawyer sympathetic to my cause as a starving artist, and offered to let us stay for a few days at his beach-front mansion in the NY Hamptons. I spent three days there relaxing. There was a heated pool, hot tub, sauna, tennis court, the works. The refrigerator and bar were completely stocked.

Even the closets were full of clothes meant for guests to borrow. When the festival caught up with me in NY, I was rehired by another vendor as a pizza maker and found myself on the road again. They paid me well but stipulated that I would have to provide my own accommodation. Usually, it consisted of the front seat or roof of our truck. One night, I found myself sneaking into the Atlanta Park Plaza to sleep in their laundry room and the next cruising around Miami Beach in a convertible with two gorgeous women I'd known in college and run into by chance. The entire summer was full of these incredible mountains of good luck and deep valleys of bad.

But, now I've finally landed. Well, at least for awhile.

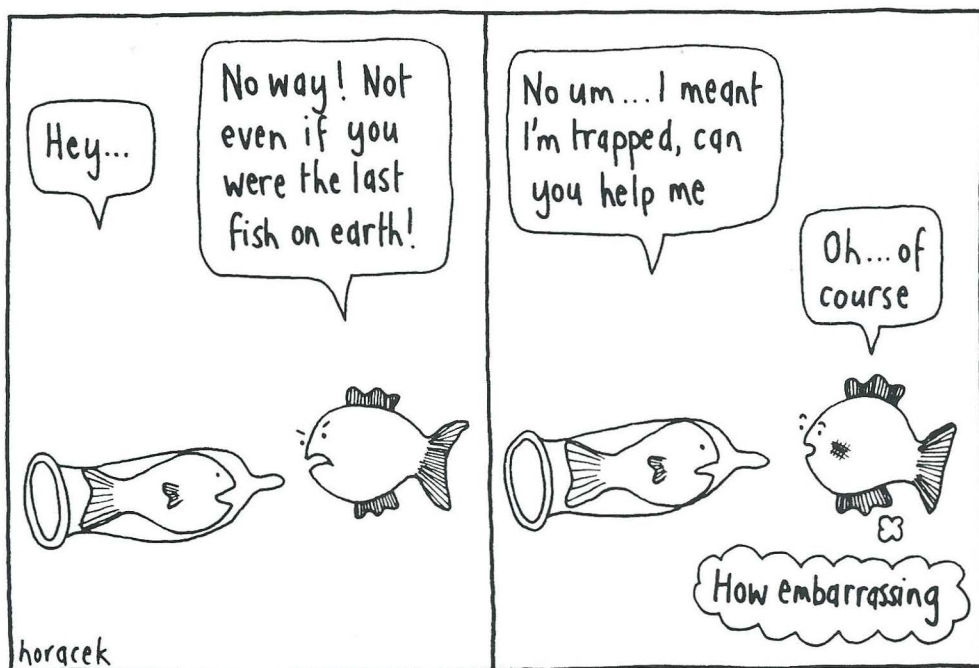
After a month of unfruitful job hunting in San Francisco, I decided to follow the path of least resistance and move back to New Haven to regenerate my body and bank account. My friend, who used to be the singer in the band I played with in college, is doing very well for himself. He has a four-bedroom house in the suburbs and was glad to have me move in. There's a fully equipped digital recording studio in the basement and a powerful Macintosh complete with laser printer and scanner. I even have use of a car. What more could I ask? For now, I'm waiting tables seven days a week at two restaurants and thinking about taking on a third. In April, I'm moving to New York with another friend, Aaron, who is quickly becoming a phenomenal painter. I may go to

graduate school in England in September, but we'll have to wait and see about that.

Do I have time to write?, you may ask. Yes, in the wee hours of the morning, but it's pretty difficult and reiterates the fact that I'll have to create my own niche and soon. One that allows me to pursue what I please and still get paid. I'm working on it.

THE INDEX that is produced for each eight issues of *Overland* is now published separately. Copies have been mailed to libraries and overseas subscribers. Other subscribers who wish to receive a copy should write to PO Box 14146, MMC Melbourne 3000. A \$1.00 donation to cover postage would be welcome.

John McLaren



from "Life on the Edge"

THE *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, for more than 30 years a well-known reference work, remains a solid and useful monument to 'alphabetical scholarship'. The first edition of 1964 was the fruit of extensive research by its author, Alan McCulloch. The second, of 1995, departed from a purely historical approach and included many living artists. The new edition, released in 1994 by Allen & Unwin to much fanfare, moves much further in this direction. It is still more inclusive, but still – in my opinion – has a little way to go. Thoroughly updated and revised by the author's daughter, Susan McCulloch (Alan McCulloch died in 1992), there are now 'skeleton' biographies of around 1800 artists, plus much additional information on art prizes, publications, societies, galleries, curators, organisations and so on. These new pages are dense with information, allowing extensive cross-referencing. Of course, with any dictionary that has encyclopedic ambitions, some controversy is bound to attend its omissions and allocation of space to those who *are* included. Artists get a guernsey if "their work is represented in a national, state or regional gallery or they have won a major prize." But what about artists who are difficult to collect? (To be fair, Joan Brassil, Stelarc, Christo and Tim Burns *are* included.) Or artists who shun prizes, or work in inter-media,

photography, concrete poetry, film, or sound sculpture? In these latter (*still*, it seems, illegitimate!) categories, I noted absent friends too numerous to mention. Sadly, *Overland* stalwarts Peter Lyssiotis and Jiri Tibor are not included, but Vane Lindesay, Wes Placek, Andrew Southall and Rick Amor *are*. Even with this book's conservative criteria for inclusion, it remains *the* reference, and is both handy and absorbing, clear and well-organised. At an rrp of \$150, you could expect a lavish production, and the book is beautifully bound and printed on gloss paper, and illustrated with a wealth of mono and color reproductions.

Mallee: Vision and Memory

LIFE IS LIKE THAT is the title of a (near three-hour) video and booklet documenting European settlement of the Mallee region of Victoria. Produced by Robert Newton at the Department of Media Studies at La Trobe University, this is a fascinating account of the clearing of the land at the turn of the century, the evolution of rural economies and transport networks, growth of local communities and invention of a unique way of life in the bush. Some aspects of the story are particular to the Mallee – such as use of large, bullock-drawn iron rollers to flatten the scrub – but many are universal to the settlement of other far-flung pockets of

Australia. The video is based heavily on memories of two Mallee pioneers – the 88-year-old Bill Boyd, who is interviewed by Weston Bate, and the 99-year-old Stanley Billing, who talks to *Overland's* editor, John McLaren. Both interviewees are articulate and concise. Both have excellent memories and relish a good story or salty anecdote. For example, Bill recalls dismantling the family weatherboard house, "including the brick chimney" and putting it on rail trucks to Nandaly, "twenty miles up the line from Sea Lake". It was then taken by wagon to their Mallee farm – a 12-day trip that now takes just a few hours. "My mother, she drove behind with the horse and buggy and had the sewing machine roped on behind. She wouldn't trust it on the wagon because it didn't have springs," says Bill. The oral history is illustrated with maps, historical drawings and photographs, footage of the Mallee, and by Bill Boyd's own extensive collection of photographs, taken on a vest pocket camera he bought in 1920 specifically to record "how the Mallee was being changed". Many of these photographs are superb, and those also interested in photography for its own sake will find them absorbing. Bill's images are crisp, insightful and beautifully composed. The photographer's point of view and ambitions are explicit in every frame, for you to accept or reject as you

please, while the rest is a sort of artful artlessness – a sense of light and space, of precise framing and the *exact* moment. A useful booklet contains an indexed transcript, with subject areas organised under headings – such as Women's Work, Aborigines, Moving House, etc. – so they can be directly accessed on the tape. Costing \$45.00 and attractively packaged, copies can be obtained C/- Lyn Clark, Media Studies, La Trobe University, Bundoora, 3083, or telephone (03) 479-2499.

Less is more

MANY OF THE new Australian composers who emerged during the past decade have become involved with music theatre, the musical and electronic setting of various texts, and the idea that speech is a form of composition. Some of them also write purely instrumental pieces – including David Chesworth, Rainer Linz, Richard Vella, Warren Burt, Jeff Pressing and Ernie Althoff – and appear on an outstanding new CD, *Australian Piano Miniatures: forty-two miniatures for piano* (Red House Editions, 1994). The longest of these short pieces, by Andrew Schultz, runs a little over four minutes; the shortest, by Cuong Nguyen, is just 21 seconds. Many more are around the minute mark, including Ann Carr-Boyd's *Maladies of Love* and Ross Hazeldine's *Elastic Fog*. For anyone who wants to very quickly explore something of the range and flavor of local contemporary composition, this is the ideal sampler. All pieces are performed by Michael Kieran Harvey, who is fast emerging on the world stage as our latest wunderkind of the keyboard. It is a tribute to his skill and musical insight that he so systematically masters the great diversity of styles, musical ideas and notational systems that these pieces

involve. Recorded by the ABC Studios, Melbourne, the sound quality is excellent. Copies are available for \$27.00 from Box 2123, Footscray, 3011 (add \$2.50 for postage).

Event horizon

THE 1966 ADELAIDE BIENNIAL OF AUSTRALIAN ART, curated by Christopher Chapman, will be a headline event of the 1996 Adelaide Festival, and will include a huge exhibition of recent art as part of the opening of the Art Gallery of South Australia's new \$25 million extension. For further information, telephone project manager Nat Williams on 207 7009.

Heaps

A BEWILDERING array of periodicals covers my desk. Some have a national, some an institutional, and others a local feeling and focus. All in some way contribute to our 'literary culture' – which is an atomic and cohesive polity, not a top-heavy monolith – and all deserve your support.

Brave New World is the magazine of the Northern Rivers Writers' Centre in Lismore, NSW. "Something special is happening," we are told, "where the great rivers flow and the rainforests meet the sea." These things include poems, profiles and other pieces emerging from the region and its Centre, and information about the latter's aims and activities. If you live within cooee, drop a line to PO Box 1111, Lismore, NSW, 2480, or telephone coordinator Jill Aitken on (066) 212266.

Struggle, thrive and strive? Can a literary magazine do all three at once? Of course it can, in spite of Les Murray's recent assertion in the *West Australian* that "The little magazine ... is a relic of the era of literary modernism ..." Les might not like it, but Tasmania's *The Famous Reporter* is not dead or

even playing dead. It is preparing issue number 11, due next June. Meanwhile, Number 10 has poetry by Peter Bakowski and Doris Leadbetter, stories by Bruce Roberts and an interview with one of our most interesting novelists, Amanda Lohrey. Move along Les, you've had your go at the 'Completo'. Don't kick over the bucket for the rest of the herd. Subscribe, instead, to *The Famous Reporter* for \$12.00 for two issues, from PO Box 368 North Hobart, Tasmania, 7002. (Incidentally, thanks to Arts Tasmania support, *TFR* is now able to offer "modest payment for material published in 1995".)

Aphrodite Express represents instant and small-scale publishing at its most, well, *instant* and *small-scale*. It's the journal of Victoria University of Technology's Literary Studies Class of 1994: self-published, self-edited students' work, photocopied and held together with a single staple, then passed around to friends and relations, and to fellow students at the Uni. Cafe. You couldn't get much closer to grass roots than that. Humble? Yes. But such often is the nature of democracy, and of participation.

Four W is the odd title of a magazine published by Wagga Wagga Writers Writers (no error), a group associated with the Faculty of Arts at Charles Sturt University. (Like *Overland*, it has nothing to do with 4-wheel-drive and off-road vehicles, but does include work by well-known writers from all parts of Australia.) Issue No. 5 includes Dorothy Porter, Tim Thorne, Kate Llewellyn and many others, as well as prose and poetry by locals. *Four W* is well-produced and printed on good-quality paper, and the editors are seeking contributions for No. 6. Write to David Gilbey, PO Box 796, Wagga Wagga, 2650, telephone 069 33-2688.

The Hawthorn Readings (of poetry) are held monthly at the

Lower Town Hall in the Melbourne suburb of Hawthorn. Closely associated with these readings is *Bystander*, edited by Earl Livings, "a literary magazine published twice yearly" which pays a small amount for prose and poetry and welcomes unsolicited work from writers. The annual subscription is \$20.00, from PO Box 1246, Kew, 3101. No 2 (Autumn 1994) contains writing by Phil Brown, Laurie Clancy, Ian McBryde and much more.

Some good student writing appears in *Inkshed*, the annual magazine published by the Professional Writing Department of Box Hill College of TAFE, Victoria. No. 5 (1994) is edited by students, with help from teacher and writer Carolyn Lee. It contains an interesting interview with John Hanrahan and much else, all attractively printed on good paper. For information, write to PO Bag 2014, Box Hill, 3128.

Otis Rush magazine, edited by Ken Bolton and named after the great blues performer, has been described (by Ivor Indyk) as a sort of more relaxed *Scripts*, or its funky heir. Actually, its immediate precursor, *Magic Sam* (edited by Bolton in the 1970s and '80s) occupied similar ground long before *Scripts* came along. Like *Otis Rush*, *Magic Sam* also published the brightest of the new Australian writers, while illuminating and discussing work from cool-school New York and Paris. *Otis Rush* is at once local and national, international and grungily grass-roots. There is an agreeable air of risk about its pages. At its best, it is refreshing and life-affirming, coolly intellectual and dryly perceptive, often very sophisticated yet jokey, and always edited with a light touch,

always fresh and surprising. My cards on the table: it is my favorite Australian magazine of new writing, and worth every cent of its annual \$40 for four issues. (From PO Box 21 North Adelaide, 5006.) Issue No. 10 includes Jyanni Steffensen, Jenny Bornholdt, Gregory O'Brien, George Alexander, Peter Bakowski and (just to show you just how deeply objective I can be) great collaborative work from Jenkins and Bolton – the second installment of our verse novel *Gwendolyn Windswept*. (As in all our collaborative work, the good bits are all by me; while anything dopey, actionable or tasteless should be attributed to Ken.)

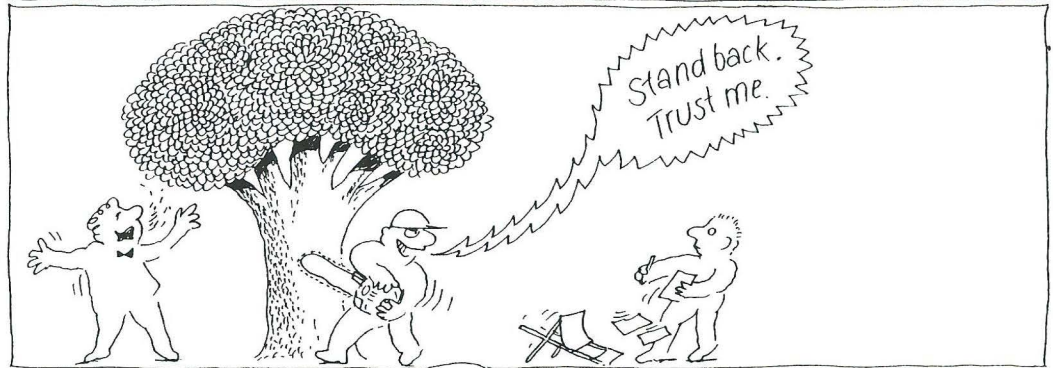
Z is for *The Zone*, edited by L. L. James, Ainslie Girdwood and Nigel Spence, which immediately makes me think of Andrei Tarkovsky's tortured 1979 sci-fi film, *The Stalker*, which is about an area of Russian post-industrial wasteland (also called "The Zone") in which the laws of nature have suddenly become capricious, hinting at deeper mystical or moral imperatives. *The Zone* (the book) also carries the ponderous subtitle: *an assemblage of contemporary writings*, and is published in an attractive book format by *Kangaroo* magazine, vehicle of the University of New England, Armidale Students' Association (PO Box U248, University of New England, 2351). The back cover declares "*This book is not to be sold!*", and explains on the flyleaf: "(It) was produced without the assistance of the Australia Council and is NOT FOR SALE ... Copies can be obtained by contacting the publishers. This book seeks to uphold the spirit of solidarity that has enabled writers internationally to preserve the integrity of their art in the face of

commercial and political pressure." Hmmmm. I ponder. *The Zone* is big on enigmas. Here's another one: can fish swim in air? One can no more opt out of the circulation of capital, than one can from that of language, meaning and of signs. Indeed, in our society, they share a common locus. Secondly, there is nothing compromising about supporting the taxation system. Writers are tax payers, too! Does the partial redistribution of wealth through taxation amount to 'political or economic pressure'? I think not. In a social democracy, it is one of the few means of assuring some minimal form of equity. *The Zone's* Introduction, titled 'The Decomposed Urn' – which conjures odd echoes of Sir Thomas Browne's 'Urn Burial' – does not dig in far enough to launch a polemic, but nods elusively to Ern Malley (another Urn), Jacques Derrida, Les Murray (saluted as a mentor) and (interestingly, in the context of nutty economics) Ezra Pound; and ultimately extols a stale and chiaroscuro-laden form of Surrealism, albeit with a Derridan gloss: "Our intentions are ... evasive, they decompose before your eyes ... If beauty is to be convulsive, it is also *strange*. Decomposition requires that the work of art be continually unfamiliar, indeterminate, kinetic – but erotic, desirable, mysterious. *The Zone* conceals everything, and reveals everything ..." Resisting the impulse to rake over my compost heap, I read on. *And* am rewarded with quite a few entropy-resisting gems amidst the heaving crawlies, banana skins and general slough (*Pathol.*).

John Jenkins

Once there were 3 brothers.

by Lefo



Harry was right. Soon the paper arrived. All in A4. It was a time of plenty!



Meetability

JENNIFER MAIDEN

Gary Disher: *Cross Kill* (Allen & Unwin, \$11.95).

Michele Nayman: *Jetlag* (Serpent's Tale, \$14.95).

Marian Eldridge: *The Wild Sweet Flowers* (University of Queensland Press, \$16.95).

Amy Witting: *A Change in the Lighting* (Viking, \$19.95).

Laurent Vitel: *Recollections of Ludowyck B.* (Meanjin, \$11.95).

Joanna Murray-Smith: *Truce* (Penguin, \$14.95).

Jessica Anderson: *One of the Wattle Birds* (Penguin, \$14.95).

WHEN ASKED BY *Overland* to review a gaggle of contemporary Australian female fictions, I tried at once to include something by a bloke – preferably Bob Hawke's memoirs. It seemed the latter might crystallise freshly the Novelist's Compulsion to create an attractive moral persona, and any consequent artistic inhibitions.

I suspected that the central female personae I'd been sent would all be attractive: plucky, perhaps, or wayward and moody (translate: sexually normal) or wryly given to self-critical PMS and various versions of the I'm-Not-a-Victim Syndrome (in its extreme, this can involve the female hero insisting that she's still in charge of her own fate after learning her train is headed for Auschwitz) ... but attractive, oh yes. And sharing an extraordinary amount of biographical data with their authors. Yes. I was tempted to aphorise: never continue to read a book once you've decided that you'd like to meet the author. Or to be more exact: that you wouldn't

expect the author to have a bossy, wanton, irritable, unpredictable personality: the sort that makes great novels.

The fault of many contemporary novelists seems to me to be the fault of the Middle Left in general – a mistrust of wild, individual personality when wild, individual personality is absolutely the only medium through which one's ideology can survive.

At any rate, *Overland* offered me Disher or Vitel to offset the women (Hawke was outside, as often). I decided on Vitel – as the Disher, whilst workmanlike and interesting, seemed to me lacking in individuality and evasive in its need to build up elaborate self-defence justifications – such as when the hero bloodily beats up a female villain. The author's mood feels dry and uninvolved, as if he feared he might seem unsafe to meet otherwise. He doesn't. The book is like an obliging shrug: whatever the customer wants.

The Vitel persona is more involved and even more self-consciously 'fictive'. Ludowyck is an Ern Malley-style ghost. But he is a whimsical, discerning, aphoristic, well-read phantasm. His European literary culture, perhaps like his author's, nags in him like an oyster's pearl. Its gleam, however, is as real as its jab of sedentary restlessness:

During the winter of 1958 he decided to ... avoid working in libraries. This was not so much out of a feeling of the aimlessness of it all, "This business which consists of trying to add a book to the already unlimited ocean of books"; he did not really suffer from such inhibitions. But, as he explained, " ... I realized that members of the staff, and some stu-

dents too, were convinced that I was ... plodding along ... dedicated to Knowledge, I had accepted the burden of a long-term research project, the completion of which I might not live to see. Now this is partly true – I will never see the end of it – but I could not stand the respectful looks and attitudes they felt compelled to reward me with in advance. What I am at heart trying to do is tear apart the layers of awe under which the written thing threatens to choke.”

Would you happily meet someone who gazed at you with a floppy seabed opaqueness and thought shiny, sharp thoughts like that? There’s hope in one’s hesitation. The Vitel also has that static, sensuous, Gallic existential lyricism best celebrated in the Australian literary idiom by Anna Couani. At times one could be reading cognac or essence of Arpège. The accompanying concept-play seems more dated, but still worthy.

And now; these women. Five of them. And every female persona a moral mine-canary. Like most mine-canaries, of course, they have a talent for survival (to paraphrase the immortal Mandy Rice-Bubbles of a politician who had denied blame in another context, “Well, they would, wouldn’t they?”) and a desperate energy to endear themselves to all. The lyricism in all five novels is as remarkable as it is in the Vitel, but often more relentless and therefore less pure. Which is not necessarily a problem: negative lyricism is very much part of the Australian female literary tradition.

When we meet a lady called Lucy Phillips in Nayman’s *Jetlag*, we’re told she

had a face like a pale exotic moon. It was creamy skinned and almost perfectly round, with large blue eyes and a plump pink mouth ... Her breasts and hips were heavy and round, too.

After this, Lucy’s only strong function is to show the persona’s ability to rationalise her jealousy and to illustrate the central theme that the persona’s male lover is sniffing the wind. The wind-sniffer (Steve, a glumly delineated control freak) finally decides,

If I felt I loved you as much as it’s possible to love someone ... I wouldn’t think twice. But I just don’t. I wish I did.

It is such tragedies of inadequacy which animate the book. Finally inadequate too, are the big software corporation for which the persona works in Asia, and its petty politics. Of which the ethical persona refuses to admit herself a victim. She uses her considerable analytical skills to succeed as an academic and business journalist in the USA. The effect is incisive, informative and wistfully restrained. The persona is consistently modest and attractive (very meetable) but this is a first novel and one senses that, like Steve, some Zeitgeist is sniffing in secret for the wind.

The lyricism in Murray-Smith’s first novel, *Truce*, is powerful and beautiful, but it is characterised by the alternating numbness and surging detailed sensuousness of deep grief. The effect, perhaps appropriately, is oddly anonymous. The persona grieves for her idealised father, for half-committed lovers, for her childhood. But she remains civil, logical, sensitive and obedient throughout, even as her mother observes, “She is breaking down.”

There is not the sense, as in Caitlin Thomas’s magnificent memoir, *Leftover Life to Kill*, that grief transfigures women into heroic barbarians, greedily entranced by any distracting bauble, frenzied by existential defiance and despair. It would be unfair to use this untypical quote against Murray-Smith: “Sometimes Mama attempts to re-enter the person she once was. She talks to me about love and sex; I skirt the themes”, but I do suggest that love and sex remain in skirts here. Skirts of the best, most accurate and poignant words, certainly, but I felt, like the Queen of Sheba, that only the half had been told to me.

The final achievement of psychic balance – a truce with grief – on a lonely island once shared with her father, did not reassure me that Prospero had at last allowed Miranda – let alone Ariel – to go.

Anderson’s *One of the Wattle Birds* is her eighth book and most certainly not her first novel. Reading it is like watching someone at a piece of elaborately patterned knitting: quickly but calmly rhythmical, apparently a little absent-

minded but always firmly directed to a carefully useful and very pretty conclusion. The persona is a convincing, inquisitive, insistent and charming girl in late adolescence. She is in quest of the truth about her mother, on the verge of marriage and exams, and well on top of casual postmodernism, even remarking sensibly,

“And if this image is a bit of a concoction, I shan’t quibble. Only conception is pure.”

One wouldn’t just want to meet this author – in desperate domestic moments, one would wish to be related to her.

Witting’s *A Change in the Lighting* is about a sympathetic middle-aged lady left by her husband and renegotiating her life, family and projects as a result. Like Anderson’s, its lyricism is not in profound sensuous detail but in deft, light, measured, waltzy accumulation of characters: life still sustains you if you keep your wits about you. But again the effort to be reasonable has a price. The persona’s daughter complains, “You just make it worse, being noble.” But there is a real dispassionate nobility in the tone which one should not disparage.

Eldridge’s *The Wild Sweet Flowers* is a collection of endearing fictions about a persona called Elvie Skerritt. It is also about family politics, with a lyrical, convivial atmosphere. The usual girlhood difficulties – monsterings by teachers, gropings by uncles and embarrassed sexual stirrings – are treated lithely and convincingly. You feel you could put your arm around this book, pat its buxom bottom and tell it everything-will-be-okay-just-you-wait-and-see in full confidence of a sensible, sensitive and grateful response. Gwen Harwood loved it. And I do feel warmly towards it, and impressed by its author’s skill.

Maybe my first aphorism was too Draconian. There should be a place in art for Austen as well as Brontë, for Audrey as well as Katharine. It’s just that I fear that in all this beauty, the sublimity may be crowded out. Still, you’d be quite safe to ask all these fine authors to a party – and you’d have a wonderful time.

Jennifer Maiden is a much-published poet and novelist. Her most recent book is Acoustic Shadow (Penguin, \$16.95).

Murder, Guilt and Persecution

JO KINNANE

Rodney Hall: *The Yandilli Trilogy: The Second Bridegroom, The Grisly Wife, Captivity Captive* (Picador, \$19.95).

David Malouf: *Remembering Babylon* (Vintage, \$12.95).

AS THE EUROCENTRIC view of Australian colonisation has been discredited, writers have looked for ways to explore the different voices and the clash of cultures of the Australian past. One way to take up the intersection of black/white culture is to consider a white who lives with the blacks, and both Hall and Malouf start with this idea, although what they do with it is very different. Each wisely does not give the Aboriginal perspective for this experience – Aboriginal culture is shown through the learning of the whites – but find other ways to explore the multiple voices of our past.

Hall’s trilogy starts with the story of the convict who escapes and lives with the Aborigines. Because Hall’s character is written in the first person, his disorientation as his memories try to cope with the chaos of this new world can be confusing for the reader. Malouf’s Gemmy returns to white society after living some years with the Aborigines, having fallen overboard from his ship as a boy. We get some idea of his background, and his experience with the blacks, but the third person narrative moves beyond Gemmy’s perspective and takes the reader inside a number of characters to analyse the reactions to his difference.

All three characters in Hall’s trilogy tell their stories from a single perspective – a seductive way to get involvement from readers in characters we might find unattractive. After the disoriented escaped convict of *The Second Bridegroom*, the second book *The Grisly Wife* shows the attempt to impose a rigid imported culture, cracking its patriarchal nature. The third, *Captivity Captive*, shows a complete breakdown of imported cultural values in its picture of the incestuous family, strong in relation to the outside world but decaying within. This book was written first and builds on actual events; but

the themes of guilt and murder recur in all the books.

The nameless convict in *The Second Bridegroom* feels guilty not for the forgery done when an apprentice printer, for which he was sentenced, but for the murder of the convict chained to him, even though driven to it by desperation. He lives in fear of the white men, so surrenders to the chaos of a world he cannot describe. The loss of words affects him deeply; he does not even learn the language of the blacks whom he does not see as individuals but as "the Men". Yet he realises that he will never become part of them when they spear the Aboriginal girl for accidentally seeing him. From that time, and once back in captivity, he moves into madness, his perceptions of reality conflicting with the knowledge and views of others – given in the two letters which end the book.

The Grisly Wife, written last, fits neatly between the other two books, tying together the themes and bringing back the black/white man as an important part of the story. Like the central characters of each of the books, Catherine has moral reactions which are surprising; she is heavily laden with guilt, as part of the demand of her husband's cult for public confessions of individual responsibility, yet her attitude to murder is unexpected: "Murder may not seem so very out of the way if once we have the privilege of looking into the souls of quite ordinary folk." She suffers persecution from the prophet and his band as well as the people of Yandilli, who see her as the witch.

The process of persecution is analysed by Malouf from the perspectives of different characters. Gemmy has been able to fit into the black world because his previous life had been so harsh that his survival demanded adaptation to others; he is a kind and gentle person, acutely aware of how his presence affects others, and eventually realises that he must return to the land where he feels he belongs. His attempts to fit into white society are seen as unmanly and the community begins to split over his presence. After a nasty attack on Gemmy he leaves the McIvors, and their deep hurt must be hidden so that life can appear to return to normal. Janet and Lachlan, brought together at the end by the persecution of German connections during the First World War, experience again the destruc-

tive nature of prejudice.

Each writer has his own techniques for exploring the multiple voices of our past, and shows the importance of language for expressing these differences and offering an understanding of their cruelties. Hall's vision is perhaps bleaker; whereas Malouf suggests the possibility of survival as Janet reflects: "So it had been *that* that had saved her, the power of her own belief, which could change mere circumstance and make miracles."

Jo Kinnane teaches at the Victoria University of Technology, and is working on a Doctorate on 'The Language and Literature of Concepts of Home in Australia.'

Implications of Mabo

JUDITH WRIGHT

H. C. Coombs: *Aboriginal Autonomy: Issues and Strategies* (Cambridge University Press, \$25).

EVER SINCE THE High Court's judgement in the Mabo Case in early June of 1992, the Australian public, its governments and all its institutions – financial, educational, legal and the rest – have been reacting and failing to react to its stunning implications; and their various bureaucracies have certainly not yet readjusted their eyes to the new perspectives the judgement has opened.

For white Australians, whose own battles for self-government and freedom from British rule are after all not far in the past, it has ever since that time been an accepted fact of life that Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders were subject peoples, whose rights and whose title to land or self-government were not on any agenda. This view was only partially altered by the new United Nations post-war declarations and treaties, which did not result in Australia even in allowing full citizenship to those peoples until the referendum of 1967. Their incapacity for self-government was a basic tenet for both Commonwealth and States and their title to own the land we had wrested from them, let alone the minerals and forests we were so eagerly 'developing', was an unthinkable concept. The doctrine of *terra nullius*, under which our takeover

was complete was, said legal authority, unchallengeable.

Hence the astonishment with which the High Court's majority judgement was received in all influential quarters of government and bureaucracy, and certainly of industry and its established priorities. Among those most involved with 'development', the pastoral and mining industries, resistance to the principle of 'native title' took the form of a remarkable and well-subsidised campaign of resistance and disinformation which has left the Australian public either bewildered or with much-reinforced prejudices.

We have not reacted well to this basic challenge to our preconceptions. More voices have been raised in dissent from the judgement than in acceptance of the challenge, at least until recently; the Australian government's Native Title legislation had been among the most controversial ever introduced, even though it has given little to the peoples now accepted as the original occupants and owners of the land.

The problem we now face is that the long-entrenched view of Aboriginal rights and capacities, and the bureaucratic bodies through which that view has been expressed, as well as all the industrial interests, national and multinational, which have profited from it, stand in the way of our acknowledgement of those rights and of the self-government they imply.

This book, written by the man who was appointed by Prime Minister Holt after the referendum as chairman of the Advisory Council for Aboriginal Affairs, charged with the job of readjusting governmental views to take account of the status of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as citizens, covers most aspects of the problems of that readjustment and the needs of the peoples themselves – which, since the Mabo judgement, have become even more urgent for the white-dominant community.

Says Michael Dodson, Social Justice Commissioner for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, in his brief foreword to Coombs' book: "The bureaucratic apparatus which shrouds Aboriginal and Islander affairs precludes a solution. It is the bureaucracy that obstructs and hinders indigenous development and in particular indigenous self-determination and autonomy." But as Dodson acknowledges, there are many excep-

tions, and among those who have "struggled to turn around the mindsets that have restricted Aboriginal and Islander aspirations" perhaps the foremost and certainly the most experienced and sympathetic has been Nugget Coombs.

We should therefore study this book most carefully, for it embodies insights and knowledge acquired over the twenty-six years in which he has worked for and with Aboriginal people, both in his early years with the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and in later time as a friend and advocate, subsidised only by grants for research.

Coombs' own preface to these collected papers sets out his motives for this long devotion to the cause of the rights of the indigenous peoples he has worked for: they include a deep affection as well as a "conviction that they share a rich heritage important to the human race" and "a profound concern that the society to which [he] belongs continues to perform so badly in its relationships with them, that we are, all of us, shamed in the eyes of the civilised world."

THE DEBT WE OWE to those whom we have deprived – illegally as the Mabo judgement in effect acknowledges – of land, languages, rights and even life itself, is not easily acknowledged, or possible to pay; and as Coombs points out, is exacerbated by our recent realisation that Australian and world resources such as oil, minerals and timber, as well as land, are not unlimited and are rapidly becoming in short supply. The struggle for resources which underlies the struggle over land is becoming the chief factor in our relationship with the peoples we have deprived, and will increasingly rule any attempt at repairing our past and present injustices.

No one recognises this more thoroughly than Coombs, whose earlier book *The Return of Scarcity*, though neglected by economic pundits, early drew attention to the looming decrease in resources. But the facts before us do not justify neglecting our newly recognised responsibility to the original owners of the land. In this book, the question of how to respond to the new recognition of Aboriginal rights in native title is dealt with from many angles. But the present struggle for resources and control over them has now become the ruling factor in the relationship

between all industrial nations and Third World countries and colonised peoples.

As Coombs writes, the polarisation between those who seek "a dramatic reform" in our relationships with nature, and those who see the limits to resource exploitation as a mere "challenge to increase their exploitation for greater short-term profit" is now a major factor in the policies of those who "desire to control the world's resources". In this cleft stick the indigenous peoples of former colonies all over the world are caught, Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders and Papua New Guineans as much as any.

This bleak summing up belies the positive attitudes and hopes Coombs expresses elsewhere in his book – those reports and articles in which he sets out his experience of Aboriginal life, resilience and strength and his confidence in the capacities of Aborigines for self-determination, and for resuming control from the governments and bureaucracies which have so long ruled and exploited them. This attitude – profoundly revolutionary from our viewpoint – will be the sticking place at which we and our governments and institutions are challenged, perhaps beyond our capacity.

Yet the Mabo judgement places the responsibility for change squarely where it belongs, with us and our governments. Coombs instances in his section 'Aborigines, Law and the State', proposals made by the Yirrkala community in East Arnhem Land for the embodiment of Aboriginal law and principles of social behaviour in the control and administration of law and order within Aboriginal communities. These have been examined by the Law Reform Commission, which took a questioning view on them in its later report but urged that the proposals be tested in practice.

The recognition of Aboriginal traditional law is not yet accepted by white administrators of justice – (the recent 'spearing' case is one example) but in Coombs' view, as in that of the Yirrkala Council, imprisonment with its enforced separation from kin and land and the loss of support that results is a wholly unacceptable alternative – as is clearly shown by the 'deaths in custody' issue.

In other areas such as education, in which white prejudices and priorities override Aborig-

inal needs, Coombs' long experience and involvement allow him similar insights. But perhaps the most relevant and important part of the book is that written on the effect of the Mabo judgement, under the heading 'The Recognition of Native Title'.

These pages survey the background of the judgement, its limitations and their basis, and the clear 'fiduciary duty' of the Crown towards indigenous colonised peoples such as Aborigines, as set out in the Treaty of Waitangi – perhaps more honoured in the breach than the observance there also, but implying that such a duty is as imperative in Australia as in New Zealand. It is this duty, which the High Court did not clarify, but which is an essential implication of 'natural justice', which lays on Australia and its governments responsibilities towards the colonised peoples which we cannot in conscience continue to shirk.

As to our response so far – as embodied in the Keating government's Native Title legislation – Coombs concludes that it is clear that the legislation "responds to the agenda of powerful corporations in the mining industry ..." and to particular State interests, to which other issues – economic and environmental – have been "subordinated". Only in a properly concluded Treaty or Act of Self-determination, asserting indigenous rights of self-government as well as of territory and resources, he considers, will the judgement be expanded into its proper functions.

These will, or should, include our international as well as national, responsibilities in the light of those international treaties we have signed on human rights issues – now so hotly debated after the event by interested parties – as well as those imposed by our own fiduciary duties to the colonised and dispossessed peoples.

Coombs points out that so far the Commonwealth has not conducted negotiations with Aborigines and T. S. Islanders which can be seen as "providing for the Act of Self-determination which at some time the United Nations Charter may require". This must flow from the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and must recognise the entitlement of Aboriginal people "to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social

and cultural development" (as Dodson has stated).

In any such process, this book will provide an indispensable background and guide, produced as it has been over years of deep and sympathetic involvement in the issues and with the people concerned, by a man of unrivalled expertise in most of the issues it discusses. The book is not comprehensive in its coverage of the newly emerging changes and readjustments between the two societies – unofficial approaches such as the Pay the Rent movement are not mentioned, for instance – but because of the depth and breadth of Coombs' involvements, particularly with northern Aboriginal communities and organisations, there is much more to the book than economic, legal or educational issues. As a vital observer and participant in such questions, he has much to say that should reach beyond the governmental and bureaucratic levels and contribute to our emerging new relationship with the people we have so long scorned and wronged.

Judith Wright is one of Australia's best-known poets.

The Nature of Time and Generations

BILLY MARSHALL-STONEKING

Bain Attwood, Winifred Burrage, Alan Burrage and Elsie Stokie: *A Life Together, A Life Apart* (Melbourne University Press, \$24.95).

Christine Stevens: *A White Man's Dreaming – Kitalpaninna Mission, 1866–1915* (Oxford University Press, \$39.95).

Ruby Langford Ginibi: *My Bundjalung People* (University of Queensland Press, \$16.95).

Kathie Cochrane: *Oodgeroo* (University of Queensland Press, \$16.95).

THE AMERICAN EDUCATOR and philosopher, Edwin R. Field, once described history as "an account of and by people who are afraid to be happy". It is an idea that is predicated upon the notion that human beings are capable of happiness; and that, in some way,

the past – fueled by memory and selective emphasis – drives out the sense of peace and wellbeing that one sometimes feels in those rare moments of self-forgetfulness. Considered in this way, history is the expression of anxiety – an ontological anxiousness – without which the ego cannot thrive.

This may seem a rather naive view, but it is far from being a hollow observation. On a grand scale, history is, after all, the pastime of victors who would rearrange the symbols and events of their lives in order to make their present more manageable, orderly and secure. One does not usually equate the drive for security with the expression of contentment, though contentment may, indeed, be its ultimate goal.

The four books under consideration – all of which deal with Aboriginal life and culture – are interesting, not only because of their subject matter, but because they remind us of the essential subjective nature of historical investigation. Each is an attempt to reclaim something which has been lost; and each, in its own way, exposes the intellectual habits, values, and cultural conditioning of its author or authors.

A Life Together, A Life Apart is an intriguing and highly personal account of cultural confrontation told from multiple viewpoints by a variety of methods. In particular, the book focuses on the lives of two sisters and their brother – Winifred, Elsie and Alan Burrage – whose early life was spent living with their parents on Aboriginal reserves in New South Wales. Letters, oral histories, recorded conversations, and straight narrative are combined to create a picture of the life that is remembered, providing an important first-hand record of how one family of Europeans was affected by its relationships with the Aboriginal people who surround it.

Unlike other histories which tell of the atrocities and mistrust occasioned by cultural confrontation, this book delights in vivid memories of happy times and genuine sharing, highlighting the respect and friendliness that existed between the Burrages and the Aboriginal people with whom they were in daily contact. The various viewpoints and methods employed in reconstructing the past, make this book a significant contribution to our understanding of the nature of historical discourse. The book also

presents a much-needed counterpoint to the all-too-familiar chronicling of 'whitefella' prejudices and acts of injustice.

A White Man's Dreaming is such a chronicle. Being the work of a professional historian, it demonstrates the classic, 'outsider's', well-researched view of historical experience.

The book traces the progress of German missionaries who travelled into the hinterland of Australia in the 1860s to establish a Lutheran outpost for the purpose of saving the souls of heathen blackfellas. The ensuing confrontation between the zealous Germans and the Diyari people of northern South Australia, whose age-old customs and beliefs proved all but indecipherable to those who sought to save such simple-minded people, was not a happy experience for either the Germans or their Aboriginal charges.

To her credit, the author allows the missionaries to speak for themselves, often to their own detriment. At one point, one of the Germans develops a virulent fever which he attributes to "the perspiration of the natives, which seemed like poison".

The moral outrage that would've seemed so reasonable in 1885, appears petty and mean-spirited by today's standards. One cannot help feeling that, though this is most certainly a book about savagery, the savages in question are not black. Unfortunately, the Diyari people are not as vocal as their white overseers, or, if they were, their comments have gone mostly unrecorded.

Stevens' book is fascinating despite the fact it contains all the old stereotypes of missionaries and mission life that we've come to expect from someone who lacks first-hand knowledge.

ABORIGINAL WRITERS have made, and will continue to make, their voices heard. Books as diverse as Sally Morgan's *My Place*, and Mudrooroo's *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World*, have enriched Australian literature immeasurably. Now, more than ever, Aboriginal women and men are telling their own stories in their own way. It is a process that, ultimately, will change the way in which Australians identify and understand the history of their country.

Ruby Langford Ginibi's latest book, *My Bund-*

jalung People, is the third instalment of an intriguing life-history that started with her now-classic work, *Don't Take Your Love to Town*, and was followed, in 1992, by *Real Deadly*. Ginibi's latest offering closes off the trilogy in a highly satisfying and thoroughly engaging way, being an account of the author's return to her native country, and the reconstruction of her life there, as she is reunited with family and friends.

This is truly a tale of tribe, a tale that draws upon both contemporary and mythic knowledge. In Ginibi's world, schoolgirl memories sit very easily beside the stories of the exploits of the ancestral spirits. And what makes it all the more satisfying is the refreshingly simple and straightforward style of writing that she employs. "No bullshit", you can almost hear her say. How else to tell a love story? There is no way one can dress it up, without it losing its poignancy. This is a book that reclaims the territory that was once wrested from its author – a book of hope, and courage, and adventure, told by a true survivor.

Unfortunately, the biography of Kath Walker – *Oodgeroo* – is another matter. If one had to choose its biggest strength, one would have to resort to the collection of archival photographs that trace the life and career of Australia's greatest Aboriginal poet.

Unlike Ginibi's book, *Oodgeroo* seldom, if ever, rises to the heights of drama, which is a shame, because Oodgeroo, herself, lived a highly dramatic life.

This is not to say that the author disrespects her subject. One feels the respect and the love hovering constantly between the resume of biographical facts and details. But the life as told must be more than a resume of dates, names and places. What one misses is the personal, intimate side of this remarkable woman. The anger, the love, the poetic soul that struggled to give voice to an era that assigned no power to her people or to their sacred places, is nowhere to be found, apart from the few snatches of poetry that are quoted herein.

This lack of personal detail and insight is surprising given the fact that author, Kathie Cochran, was one of Oodgeroo's lifelong friends. One is left wondering about the nature of time and generations. Perhaps this is another kind of world we are looking in on, a world where it

would've been impolite to pry too much beneath the surface of the poet's life.

Billy Marshall-Stoneking is a poet, playwright and filmmaker. His most recent play, Sixteen Words For Water, will be produced by the Melbourne Theatre Company later this year.

Unaipon Award Winners

JOHN McLAREN

Phillip McLaren, *Sweet Water—Stolen Land* (UQP, \$14.95).

John Muk Muk Burke, *Bridge of Triangles* (UQP, \$14.95).

ABORIGINAL writing in Australia is a recent and still much-debated phenomenon. The writers themselves debate whether they are writing for their own community or for readers in general, and whether they are telling individual stories or speaking for their people at large. Among critics, there are those who say the attention given to Aboriginal literature is just the latest form of appropriation and those who regard it as just another passing fashion or symptom of white guilt.

Like writers from South Africa under the apartheid regime, Aboriginal writing and commentary on it is inevitably political. Even the term Aboriginal is fiercely contended, with commentators like Eve Fesl saying the term itself is a symbol of colonialism that reduces a variety of people and cultures to a single European category. Yet colonialism, the struggles for land rights and for their recognition as the first people have all served to produce the Aborigines as a single group with common interests, even if they are neither the monolithic political entity that their critics perceive nor the single community that some of their supporters would want.

Recent novels by black Australian writers suggest some of the differences within the community. Sam Watson's 1990 *The Kadaitcha Sung* is a sprawling work that reactivates Aboriginal mythology in present-day Brisbane in order to answer the question of what has gone wrong

with Aboriginal lives. The answer the novel suggests involves the betrayal of Aborigines of the land entrusted to them as well as the cruelty to land and people brought by the white invaders. The politics of the novel is not merely one of struggle against injustice but also of struggle within the native community.

The novels that have won the latest two David Unaipon Awards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are very different. The first is an invocation of the savagery and violence that characterised the white invasion. The second is a sad account of the alienation from the land that destroys the lives of whites and blacks alike. Yet while both implicitly call for recognition by whites of the realities of their history as a prerequisite of reconciliation, neither appeals to white guilt.

Phillip McLaren's *Sweet Water—Stolen Land* takes incidents from the nineteenth century to build a story of two families who share, or appear to share, the value of nurture but are irreconcilably divided by their mutually incomprehensible cultures. Their lives are both blighted by a series of threats of violence that culminate in murder and lead in consequence to brutal massacre. The novel is partly a mystery, hinging on the identity of the person responsible for the threats. The solution to the mystery does not, however, restore justice or even balance, but exposes white missionary values to the test of their real relation to the land and its people.

John Muk Muk Burke sets his *Bridge of Triangles* in a present characterised by drink, poverty and futile dreams, by courts and social workers helplessly prescribing misery as a cure for wretchedness and prison as penalty for those who find in crime the only way of escaping the fate inflicted on them. The life of its central character, Christopher Micky Leeton, is a metonym for the condition of his people.

Yet, although the characters find no escape within the novel's bounds, the book itself escapes these limits and suggests a kind of hope. Chris from the beginning of his life knows he is an exile in a land that has lost its past, but also knows that "one day the missing people would return" and complete his picture. In this is his hope.

Burke invests the social realism of his narrative with a metaphoric significance that keeps

alive this other dimension, "the other world than this", as a truth from the past – a time when "people had lived amongst the trees and hunted on the plains forever". This dimension becomes a measure of failure when people no longer know their present or their place in it, and suggests a hope for the future, when Chris finds the connections that will make sense out of chaos, when from the 'is-ness' of an experience that leads him to the depths he learns that "the idea of nothingness brought into inseparable being the little that was everything."

This discovery of the patterns that bring order to chaos is left outside the novel, which begins with Chris's birth and ends as he leaves his father and his hometown, returning to his mother in Sydney and preparing to "knock on the door into whatever waited ahead." The narrative's perspective is from this time ahead, and identifies the narrator with his central character, so that the novel becomes the answer to its own question.

This perspective is established early. "The boy quite possibly was the first of his mob to speak of the exile. It was strange that those who seemed furthest away from their roots were the ones who searched the hardest to find them again. Chris early knew that he was possibly the weakest link in a chain he had to ensure he was not the last." The novel is the story of this search, as the narrator recovers his particular past, and so his part in the whole history of his people.

His people are not only black. They include the drunken white grandfather who named him and then drowned in the channel, the white father who wants to be responsible but is unable to understand others, and his flash white uncle who promises easy living but only drags his family further into poverty. Like Old Granny in her tent by the river, or Grandmother Leeton with her unyielding morality, or his mother and aunt who want nothing to do with other blacks, they are all caught in a world where "the townspeople had cleared the land and made their streets in a grid pattern". There is no room for lives to move outside the pattern, yet the trees and the river remain as a guarantee of the past and the sky as a promise of a different future.

The promise is both existential and political. It depends on people recovering themselves, but

this recovery depends also on changing society to give people space, on returning the land to its people and so restoring people to each other. The novel shows that the future of white society depends on its ability to return to Aborigines their place in the land. This is not a matter of expiating guilt, or even of acknowledging responsibility, but of finding our own place in the land. Without black land rights, we must remain an alien people.

John McLaren is editor of Overland.

Wonderful Good Sense

ALLAN PATIENCE

Hugh Stretton and Lionel Orchard *Public Goods, Public Enterprise, Public Choice: Theoretical Foundations of the Contemporary Attack on Government* (London, Macmillan; New York, St Martin's Press \$39.95).

HUGH STRETTON is a giant in Australian social science. But he is too infrequently read by his colleagues, and by bureaucrats, politicians and journalists (apart from Peter Ward who does appreciate Stretton's immense intelligence). His wisdom, blunt style, and humility (e.g., he doesn't have an Australian honour and travels on none of the gravy trains which are crowded by lesser intellectuals) make him an outsider in the Australian academy. This is despite his having written on more themes than many of his peers put together. His writings address issues in social and political theory, historiography, the epistemology of the social sciences, the history and development of Australian cities, urban planning, environmental policy, housing, social welfare, ethics, economics, and politics.

Now we have from Stretton another major work, co-authored by Lionel Orchard, a former doctoral student, now academic, who displays similar virtues to his mentor. The volume covers at least three domains, one explicit and two implicit. The explicit domain is the most detailed

and brilliant defence of a mixed public/private economic policy yet attempted in contemporary public policy analysis. The two implicit domains are a passionate defence of the human capacity for altruism (which acknowledges and accounts for human selfishness) and a stinging and devastating critique of the epistemological and methodological foundations of modern economics. All three domains play into each other, informing and enriching a complex, erudite and subtle piece of scholarship.

Part One of the book is didactic in the best sense, laying out clearly the values guiding the argument. It also provides a literature review of public choice theory which is both scrupulously fair and unequivocally engaged. Part Two looks at the ways in which public goods and public enterprise have been politically compromised by the ravages of public choice theory. Part Three offers an outline of a synthesised political theory of public goods and public enterprise in a mixed economy oriented to social justice and a range of other civilized and human ends. The Parts can be read separately to advantage; together they make a seminal contribution to the contemporary political theory of public policy.

Parts One and Two cover great tracts of post-war scholarship – economic theory, public policy, political theory, management theory – with a lucidity unmatched even by the authors in those fields. This post-war scholarship is perilously neglected in so many recent silly adventures in post-modern analysis. These adventures have been as distracting as the 1970s doctrinal rows on the left in taking people's minds off the real issues. How else can we account for the way in which intelligent citizens have been morally and intellectually sandbagged by the bullies of the New Right into voting down great public institutions and vandalising public policies which can be made to contribute to *everyone's* welfare?

Part Three is of necessity tentative. But the authors must ultimately themselves confront the metaphysics of the post-liberal communitarianism with which they are challenging political philosophy. It is not enough to empirically demonstrate and admire human altruism and civic virtue. If it is not going to be blown away on the first economic rationalist wind that blows chillingly down the corridors of power and academe,

communitarianism has to be grounded metaphysically in a theory of ethics. In Part Three we are brought up to the very wire dividing the authors' version of communitarian realism from metaphysics. The realism they seem to cling to – like all realisms, including positivistic economism – contains a range of largely unexplored but influential ontological and epistemological assumptions. The great positivist error is to believe that you can escape metaphysics. You can't. In a later volume the authors should step over the wire. They have brilliantly prepared the ground for doing so.

A reviewer of Stretton's 1969 book *The Political Sciences* thought it might be a work of genius. It is tempting to use similar language for aspects of this volume. It will of course be as a red rag to a bull as far as many hard-line economic rationalists are concerned. But this is the rationalists' problem, not Stretton and Orchard's. The book mounts a formidable – probably overwhelming – case against the contemporary attacks on government that the rationalists have engineered with such crudeness and cruelty. It also explores the possibilities of a post-liberal theory of social and political democracy, going way beyond the fashionable exercises in interest-group peddling (e.g., feminism, environmentalism) that have held the centre stage of late. The volume ends with sketches of how a communitarian theory holds out new possibilities for thinking about a socially responsible, just and hopeful democracy. As the authors note: "[...] our social experience does much to constitute our individuality, reasoning powers and ideas of good, which in turn constantly reshape our social arrangements and the ideas of good which they incorporate" (p. 276). It's been an awfully long time since we heard such wonderfully good sense in public policy analysis and political theory. The book should be read by every bureaucrat, politician, voter and student of public affairs all over the world. It is that impressive.

Allan Patience is visiting Professor, Faculty of Law, Kobe-Gakuin University, Japan.

The Politics of Paranoia or The Comradship of the Reviled

JOHN LEVI

David Greason: *I Was a Teenage Fascist* (McPhee Gribble, \$16.95).

THE RABBI NOTICED THAT the little old lady, who was his most faithful congregant, seemed strangely pleased with life. Previously, she had often complained to him of chronic insomnia and deep depression. Had she changed physicians? No. She had changed her reading habits. She had cancelled her subscription to the *Jewish News*. She no longer endured sleepless nights worrying about the future of Judaism, about rampant assimilation and menacing neo-Nazis, Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein. She had become a subscriber to the publications of the League of Rights: *The New Times*, *Intelligence Survey* and *On Target*. Week after week, just before bedtime, she could now read how the Jews controlled Parliament, the United Nations, the World Bank and the CIA. "Rabbi," said the little old lady "after just one of those articles I find I can sleep like a baby."

There is something strangely comforting about grand conspiracy theories, especially if life appears to be inexplicably disappointing. Racism is endemic and for two thousand years anti-semitism had a powerful religious sanction. Nevertheless, historical Australian suspicion of dogma and ideology has hobbled the politics of paranoia and relegated our religious and political ratbags to the fringe.

The teenage Greason's odyssey from a caravan park in Queensland to become an exciting and respected journalist and analyst is, in itself, a tribute to the Australian political process. *I Was a Teenage Fascist* has enough shlock horror to entertain a wide audience and yet it is also a serious portrait of the anti-democratic forces to be found within any society. During the depths of the Cold War this curious symbiosis of bigotry from both political extremes was illustrated most vividly in their respective anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish rhetoric.

Greason's passionate account of his life between the years of twelve and twenty hovers

between the zest and humour of a (heterosexual) Joe Orton and the awkward agony of Adrian Mole. Monsters lurk along the way in shabby bookshops, in the leaflets of the Riley Collection of Political Ephemera at the La Trobe Library, in encounters with Britain's National Front and in our own home grown collection of drunken fascists. Greason's emergence with mind and wit intact is little short of miraculous.

His turbulent adolescence has provided us with some unforgettable and candid portraits of a small band of extraordinary characters, many of whom feature in David Harcourt's book *Everyone Wants to be Fuehrer*. We meet 'Uncle' Eric Butler and his wife Elma who turns out to be a great cook though endowed with a "death-ray glare". There are long, earnest conversations with Rosemary Sisson and Jennifer McCallum of Australia's own National Front; both "slightly dazed" by their public role. Greason gets to know the notorious Ross May in his "smelly little backroom in Redfern" and Graeme Theo Royce, the proud recipient of the Order of Adolf Hitler from the late George Lincoln Rockwell. The Holocaust revisionist John Bennett is "different". Greason senses that he actually believes his theories. "I even felt sorry for him, having sacrificed his reputation for us. I mean, imagine being stuck with us for the rest of your life." We meet the tragic Nick Mania of Greek extraction who campaigns against European and Asian migration in the mid 1970s. "'But Nick,' I said patiently, 'you're a wog. On that logic you'd have to deport yourself.' His voice cracked with patriotic fervour. 'If I had to, I would ... I love this bloody country so much.'"

At the end of 1981 David Greason begins to emerge from his own ideological nightmare with the assistance of a boring job at the *Jewish News* and a conversation with a professor from Vietnam who is driving a taxi. The few weeks spent at the Jewish newspaper proves that the Jews don't know everything and the taxi driver's mastery of English interferes with dogmatic racist suppositions. Totalitarianism gives individuals salvation, certainty, friendship and a paradoxical involvement with power with its abuse of the political process. Greason comments "And fascism, particularly post-Auschwitz, is your best bet for delivering the comradeship of the reviled."

Greason has written a courageous and captivating book.

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Conventions and Traditions of Women

MARY-ELLEN RYAN

Drusilla Modjeska: *The Orchard* (Macmillan Australia, \$24.95).

DRUSILLA MODJESKA'S book *The Orchard* strikes a deft balance using the elements of intimate memoirs and scholarly text interchangeably. It is a story of stories, a narrative structure which incorporates a collection of tales, some disturbing, some macabre, in which women are the primary characters and which women tell each other to counsel, console or advise.

The controlling metaphors are of gardens and of art works; particularly portraiture featuring a woman, or executed by a woman. Having established the primacy of the visual, the narrator's eyesight is 'compromised' in the course of the story, and as a result, she is forced to 'view' aspects of her own life and the lives of others, differently. The reader is locked closely into the perspective of the narrator, so closely that, so far as I can tell, the reader never learns the narrator's name.

The Orchard is a study of changing perspective, especially through the process of ageing. The group of contemporary women, friends of the narrator whose lives form the narrative base, use the stories, some of which are fully footnoted, some of which are personal accounts, to interpret themselves and their lives. Each is conscious of inheriting the conventions and traditions of millions of women who have gone before them, but whose history and experience went largely unrecorded. *The Orchard* illustrates the importance of conserving women's knowledge by using the convention of story-telling, traditionally the only way most women had of preserving knowledge.

It is from my position between Clara and Ettie, with one hand reaching back and the other hand reaching forward, that I offer the three pieces that form the centre of this book. If I had to name them I would call them essays, for although they contain as much story as fact, and nudge towards fiction, they proceed with the spreading movement, horizontal and meandering, that the essay – porous, conversational, sometimes moody creature – makes its own.

The way in which the stories are told is as important as the contents of the stories themselves. There is nothing clear cut in what the teller actually intends to convey in her story. Ideas of 'masculine certainties' and socially accepted notions of ownership of knowledge are challenged. Ways in which information is received and interpreted and the importance of stories which are *not* told are other aspects of communication between women which are explored. A series of portraits tells Clara more about her true origins than all of Ettie's stories. When Clara finally makes the move her friend, the narrator, anticipates she must, Clara does so without offering any explanation.

Having established a comfortable dialogue between women of history and contemporary women, *The Orchard* then calls into question the universality of notions that women are necessarily better educated and nurtured in an all-woman environment and that women in the 1990s are generally better off than women at any previous time. Modjeska does this through her narrator's return as a middle-aged woman to the private English school she attended as a boarder in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As well as providing Modjeska with an opportunity to examine issues of education for women, the fictitious school, Carn, also allows her to explore complex issues of conquest and occupation, colonialism, class and gender.

On her return, the narrator finds living conditions for the girls improved but the overarching educational institution, and by extension, the system of government which supports such a school, to have become radically conservative. Thea Linton, head girl during the narrator's school days and now Carn headmistress, is the

personification of this vision of regression presented by the narrator.

But where the Dame had been a woman who toured foreign countries as a representative of British education, who awed parents and debated with bishops, Dorothea Linton seemed somehow transparent. While it may once have been that schools like Carn offered an intellectual environment for women who might otherwise have had lonely lives as single professional women, Thea Linton went back to Carn as a young woman in 1968, to a town and an institution whose rigidity she had made her own. Where earlier headmistresses were forging a brave new world, she is defending a conservatism that depends for its identity on a discredited moral authority. Her girls with their bright futures were in danger of becoming a parody of all that Virginia Woolf had hoped.

However, there are of course no certainties and the narrator's school chums again present different perspectives of their life at Carn. The final tale, a traditional Eastern European story for which *The Orchard* is named, is retold with the inclusion of a footnote, so that the final words of the book offer an alternate version, as well as reasons why some people prefer a different reading.

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Australia and its Great and Powerful Friends

GRAHAM CHEESEMAN

Coral Bell *Dependent Ally: A study in Australian Foreign Policy* (Allen & Unwin, \$24.95).

Philip Bell and Roger Bell *Implicated: The United States in Australia* (Oxford University Press, \$19.95).

Gareth Evans *Cooperating for Peace: The Global Agenda for the 1980s and Beyond* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, \$17.95).

THE FIRST TWO BOOKS in this group are important additions to the already extensive literature on Australia's relations with its 'great and powerful friends'. The third edition of Coral Bell's *Dependent Ally* extends her earlier analysis of Australia's foreign relations with Great Britain and the United States since World War II to cover the important post-Cold War period.

It remains a straightforward, slightly folksy, but nonetheless engaging account of the time, populated by personalities and key events such as the war in Vietnam and the fall of the Whitlam Government in 1975. Not surprisingly, given the focus of her work, Bell concludes that a key factor shaping the nature of Australia's strategic and diplomatic relationship with its major allies has been the personalities and assumptions of Australia's chief decision-makers and their principal advisers. These have tended to assign a high value to Australia's alliances.

This view, which has always enjoyed broad public support, has been motivated by a heightened sense of vulnerability and generally pessimistic assessments of Australia's strategic circumstances. It has led us to become 'comfortably dependent' on our perceived benefactors which, while understandable, was seen to be unfortunate as it limited Australia's efforts to develop the kind of independent foreign policy stance that would befit an aspiring middle power. Bell argues that Australia's best option has always been to be an 'independent ally' and notes approvingly that we now appear to be moving in this direction.

One of the limitations of Bell's work is that it (purposely) ignores the economic, social and cultural dimensions of Australia's relationship with its principal allies. These considerations form a central component of Philip and Roger Bell's book *Implicated* which examines "how cultural relationships have formed the substrata on which the more public and visible connections encoded in treaties and in economic arrangements have been built".

Interleaved into their story of Australia's formal relations with the United States, are fas-

cinating (and sometimes fond) accounts of the formative effect of American ideas and examples on early Australian intellectuals and politicians, the 'friendly invasion' of Australia by American servicemen during the war in the Pacific, and the 'Americanisation' of succeeding generations of Australian teenagers and their habitats by Hollywood, advertising jingles, popular music and the mass media.

In contrast with many of their conservative and critical colleagues, the authors argue that we have not become a clone of the United States. This is due, in part, to Australia's continuing ties with Britain, Europe and, increasingly, Asia. A second, important factor has been the tendency for Australians to be repulsed as well as attracted by America and what it stands for (as seen in contemporary debates over republicanism, violence on television, and the growing drug scene).

This tendency to see the United States both as a model for and a prospective threat to Australia's future has encouraged Australians to "negotiate, resist, modify and accommodate" the incursions of American values and ideas. Thus, American ideals have not so much displaced the local lexicon as supplemented and changed its components. Australian culture today may be "a distinctive sub-set of American-accented culture", but it is "not its colonised or disempowered victim".

As importantly, the authors argue that Australia and its bilateral relations are also affected by wider, systemic changes; in particular, the globalisation of the international political economy and the corresponding shift from industrial to 'post-industrial' societies. Thus Australia's culture has been 'modernised' as much as 'Americanised'. Such a view reflects a more complex reality and is seen to have less negative connotations than the simpler idea of cultural imperialism.

These broader developments are also challenging the assumptions and prescriptions of many earlier analyses of the relationship. As the two Bells note, "so much historiography accepts that the two nations, despite obvious differences in size and power, are sovereign states able to pursue their separate national interests successfully under the conventions of international law and diplomacy".

This is much less the case today. The process of modernisation – which has seen the nature of the global political economy shift from a system dominated by discrete trading states to a more homogeneous, transparent and interdependent variant in which multinational and transnational actors play an equal and in some areas a predominant role – is undermining the capacity of individual states, even ones as powerful as the United States, to impose particular prescriptions or values on others. Indeed, in an increasingly interdependent world, the whole notion of state sovereignty, national interests and alliance management are becoming increasingly problematic and irrelevant.

THESE LATTER CONCERNS inform Gareth Evans' book *Cooperating for Peace* which looks beyond Australia and implicitly challenges the place of alliances in international relations. Assisted by members of his Department and the Australian National University, Australia's Foreign Minister surveys the problems that are likely to confront the international community in the post-Cold War era and offers some thoughts on how they may be dealt with. He argues that although the prospect of major military conflict has subsided, we will continue to witness a range of localised disputes, conflicts and tensions caused, in part, by the decline of superpower hegemony and a resurgence of ethno-nationalism.

The security and well-being of nations and their citizens may also be undermined by a range of non-military threats arising from the combined effects of pollution, population growth, and uncontrolled resource usage. These latter threats – threats without enemies as the Secure Australia Project* has labelled them – transcend existing state borders, require enormous resources to manage and are beyond the capacity of individual states or even groups of states to resolve.

Evans argues that a new approach for dealing with these problems is required, and advances the concept of *cooperative security* as "the appropriate central sustaining idea" for international efforts to secure peace. The notion of cooperative security borrows from the rationalist and internationalist traditions of international relations.

Unlike earlier, realist prescriptions, it is "multi-dimensional in scope and gradualist in temperament; emphasises reassurance rather than deterrence; is inclusive rather than exclusive; is not restrictive in membership; favours multilateralism over bilateralism; does not privilege military solutions over non-military ones; assumes that states are the principal actors in the security system, but accepts that non-state actors may have an important role to play; does not require the formation of formal security institutions, but does not reject them either; and, above all, stresses the value of creating 'habits of dialogue', on a multilateral basis."

For Evans, the principal vehicle for advancing international security is a rejuvenated United Nations. The bulk of the book is concerned with spelling out the range of responses available to the UN and other regional forums for dealing with emerging threats, disputes, armed conflicts and "other major security crises". These responses are grouped under the categories of "peace building", "peace maintenance", "peace restoration" and "peace enforcement".

The first two categories encompass preventive measures such as preventive diplomacy, arms control agreements, economic aid, and, as a last resort, the deployment of police or military forces into the region or country in question. The second two are concerned with resolving existing crises or conflicts through a combination of dispute settlement or peacemaking procedures and peacekeeping operations, where the parties involved agree to a UN-sponsored intervention, and economic sanctions and peace enforcement where they do not.

While Evans does not shrink from the idea of using military force to protect the international rule of law, he clearly favours preventions over cures, arguing that the peace-building process, in particular, which focuses on the international community's social and economic agenda "deserves to have a much higher priority in peace and security policy". Whatever we think of the details of Evans' proposals – and these can be criticised on a number of grounds – the ideas that are advanced are very big ones indeed and are both welcome and worthy of the author and his advisers.

* Gary Smith and StJohn Kettle (eds), *Threats Without Enemies: Rethinking Australia's Security* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1992).

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The Risk of Sermonising

AMANDA WILSON

Veronica Brady: *Caught in the Draught* (Angus & Robertson, \$24.95).

Stephen Knight: *Freedom Was Compulsory* (Minerva, \$16.95).

STEPHEN KNIGHT, in his role as eclectic sleuth of Australian culture, at one point makes an observation that bears, somewhat ironically, on my initial impression of both these books for review. "A remarkable number of thrillers", he writes, "brandish on the jacket a dagger, a cut-throat razor, a killing kitchen knife ... As a selling point, a long incision will curve across the cover, with blood welling out in what is ironically called relief. This unrelieved malice has largely displaced the little swastika and heap of gold bars that were popular on airport bookstalls through the mid-1980s."

Funny, but the covers of Knight's *Freedom Was Compulsory* and Brady's *Caught in the Draught* seem to leap – no, not from an L. L. Bean catalogue – but from an airport bookstall, their capitals stamped on the viewer's eye like sensationalist buy-me 'facts'. Knight's name, in lurid orange, has its own relief in the chain that drags over it, attached to a balloon that hangs behind the slightly warped, huge blue title. The jugular red lettering of Brady's book is plonked over an ugly, grey flaking wall, overlaid with a photograph of desert, scored by windtracks.

Could it be that the authors, both highly critical of mass-marketing ploys in consumer-riddled culture, both champions and providers of imaginative critical awareness, are themselves victims (and, by proxy, supporters) of mass-media culture which, Brady writes in her title

essay, "flows around us and through us, persuading us to consume, compete and console ourselves with mostly mindless pleasures"?

The irony is marked, especially in Brady's case, for whilst lamenting the dominance of technological rationality in contemporary white Australian culture, its lack of faith, its unholliness, its rejection of the 'sacred values' – elsewhere named as community, otherness, mystery – her book, in its external format and, to some extent, I would argue, in its content, perpetuates what it so eloquently rues. Brady herself is not immune to the kind of language – apocalyptic, sensational – that tends to reduce complex cultural realities to monolithic terms:

Far from being secular, this culture is organised to the worship of the unholy trinity of Mammon (God of money), Moloch (God of struggle and violence) and Marilyn Monroe (the human sacrifice to the God of mindless pleasure).

This trinity finds its most potent expression in the Gulf War, the central issue of which is 'ideological' or 'religious', based on "a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, persuasive and long-lasting moods and motivations ..." Brady's analysis of the war is actually a critique of the various assumptions embedded in the kind of 'faith' (dream, myth) called 'the American way of life', and 'the new world order', its ideological roots in the logic of war and empire, of what Edward Said calls 'Orientalism', and of what Abdul Jan Mohamed calls 'the Manichean allegory', associating non-Europeans with "not only inferiority but also with evil." In one sense, then, her rhetorical excesses serve to highlight the 'blasphemous' nature of much that passes for 'faith' in the west. But Brady's habit of relying on 'key' concepts and sloganistic phrases as explanations of culture, produces a cumulative dulling effect. "Power today no longer grows out of the barrel of a gun but out of the cathode-ray tube ... Computer language ... is merely instrumental language."

Such repetitions (the Manichean allegory is particularly over-used, appearing many times as the basis of white colonisation, justice, and

belief, against which the essays are pitted) are curiously inattentive to the experience of reading the book as a whole. It's as though the essays are culled from separately published papers; yet neither David Brooks's foreword, nor the author's introduction, accounts for this failure of 'dialogue'.

Nevertheless, Brady is well aware of the risk of sermonising, and prepared to take that risk in order to pose the overriding questions: what will suffice for a genuinely new world order and a genuinely just Australia? I'm not, therefore, going to accuse her of 'falling into' faith, in the 'holy' manner by which some poststructuralist thinkers accuse humanists of 'falling into' essentialism. The humanism that Brady seeks is fused of a belief that is able, at least in part, to question, interrogate, reflect on itself; a theology that "involves a social critique" and commitment to politics; a love of literature's "passionate attentiveness" to "the duplicities of language and symbols", to "the dialectical interplay between the seen and the unseen, the actual and the possible."

This belief, distinguished, importantly, from both the narrower term 'religion' and the institution of Church it implies, and informed by literary theory which is in turn positioned by politics, creates a compelling, if at times problematic matrix. I cannot, for instance, agree that "poetry is, or ought to be, a kind of theology", whose ultimate reference point is a male God. Yet I concur with Brady's allegiance to ambiguity and paradox, to the polyvocal and open-ended in art. The struggle Brady envisions is not the struggle for power over others or the natural world, but the struggle for acceptance of otherness, of creation-in-relation, as articulated by Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling*:

Our scientific and technological culture not only tells us ... that we are the primal self-referent of all language but makes us act as if we were. *Story About Feeling* however, weaves language into the whole of reality, seeing everything as textual, ourselves a part of a cosmic story, or dance rather than its author, investigator or master.

The feminist aspects of this kind of thinking become clearer in Brady's essays on Les Murray

and Rosemary Dobson. Taking Murray to task in a spirited, anti-patriarchal critique, Brady questions *The People's Otherworld* for its univocal, bullyish and moralising tendencies:

It feels good. It feels right.
The joy of sitting high is in our judgement.
The marvellous brute-force effects of our
century work.
They answer something in us. Anything in us.

As Brady notes, quite rightly I think, Murray's professed allegiance to "the religious dimension" is belied by his poetry's allegiance to conquest. "Ambiguities and paradox are not for him." I have to say, though, that Brady is far more generous-minded in her readings of Patrick White, whose personal dislikes and disgusts, whose willful or sentimental or stereotypical moments she accepts as a necessary part of his "difficult passion".

For my money, the Dobson essay is the best. 'Over the Frontier' is a critically acute reading of work that "attempts to express what has been repressed or censored out by dominant definitions of reality and value". Tracing the difficult, measured steps of Dobson's fascinating oeuvre, from a sense of self "refined out of existence" to "speaking one's self as a woman", and weaving, as she goes, her text with the writings of Hélène Cixous, Simone Weil, and others, Brady gives us Rosemary Dobson's poetry as "the economy of the gift" rather than of "classification, system and hierarchy". Celebrating birth and death whilst refusing to worship nature, Dobson, argues Brady, invites the mystery that is other than, rather than the same as nature, language, self. "The articulation of silence", she writes, "may spell the end of the humanism which implies a coherent, continuous and rational subject." But it "brings us in touch with who and where we are".

Stephen Knight is also concerned with "who and where we are". Though he travels without Brady's persistently earnest faith, Knight brings the weight of historical and religious meanings to bear (quite literally) on the 'futuophilia' of contemporary Australian culture. The essay titled 'Never Mind Your Aim, What's the Goal?' gives more attention to the "atemporal tempo-

rariness" of post-modernism than Brady's book, making similar points but developing them both further and closer to home. Knight, too, notes the dangerous consequences of a 'new world order' that is said to achieve, in Francis Fukuyama's words, "the end of history". "Fukuyama elides all coming change", writes Knight, "into an imperial present" which has "neither forgotten nor learnt a thing." For Brady, this signals a return to the fascist aesthetics of the '30s, whilst for Knight "it curiously resembles a heritage replay" of the Eisenhower era.

The term 'heritage' is crucial here. "Heritage fixes as consumer items elements of what used to be history and deprives the human context of a visible path to the future." As Knight argues, the Japanese-built Daimaru emporium in Melbourne, with its shot-tower enclosed in a glass cone,

strikes visitors as a top-quality package, heritage and self-adornment welded together as is consumingly correct. The shots fashioned here in the past of course, fired mostly at the Japanese ...

According to Knight the "dying technicolour city" is the literal inheritor of Fernand Léger's futurist dynamics. "Massive housing loans and facile card credit are financial forms of rampant futuophilia, and many round the world have only a bitter present for their faith."

But there are problems with Knight's analysis. He tends to read the postmodern consumption of history in purely sinister terms, forgetting that cultural artefacts from the fifteenth to the twentieth century evidence a similar drive to consumption. Given the overwhelming 'corporate' nature of this argument, it is surely unfair of him to designate "those young folk with faces so pale" as the tribal perpetrators of this "disposable" attitude. Who are they, I wonder? Undergraduates? Computer hackers? Dismantlers of "formerly reliable entities such as the author"? Not that the author was ever so reliable. But I haven't noticed its demise. Cyberspace may be virtual, but its producers, writers, commentators – from William Gibson to R. U. Sirius – are not. And each demands either patent or copyright for material and 'authorial' ends, even in this post-modern age. Upon what other basis

is Knight able to begin this sentence: "In an influential essay Meaghan Morris has described ..."

"What next" rather than "what if" should be our focus, claims Knight. That's fine, but what exactly is it, this 'what next'? For it certainly isn't belief. Indeed, 'belief' is a kind of daydream in Knight's lexicon:

Mobility is a matter of belief rather than any real sequence of personal transition. When Australians do finally cross the road, they're still only going through the motions.

Well, speak for yourself, mate. But then, Knight rarely does. He's too busy writing about 'them', the Australians, or the blandly inclusive 'we'; strategies which seem contradictory but have a common ground in the author's focus "at something of a deliberate distance" in exploring "the structures of anxiety, obsessions, contradictions and courage through which this culture responds." The witty and eclectic author who rejects "the simple notion of community" in favour of "the complex concept of society" sees nothing ridiculous in his penchant for the plural pronoun; whilst his equally safe 'they' allows him to "ave a go" at various groups from which 'he' is always excluded: environmentalists, whose main interest is apparently a "sophisticated selfishness"; women with pre-school children, "pressing for change on their single interest ... without any strategic concept of society as a whole". Mind you, none of these generalisations is as gross as the title of Knight's previous book – *The Selling of the Australian Mind*. Whatever 'it' is, this monolith, I wouldn't buy it.

Knight is, though, an often sharp and entertaining writer. I like a bit of the ludic – as Barthes would say – and Knight tends to invite the reader to move, rather than wallow. His style has its own rewards, in the form of the strange yet apt connections his detective's nose sniffs out. The seven deadly sins provide historical patterns of access to contemporary language and behaviour:

... we take pride in personalising our basically uniform possessions. Mass-produced cars are differentiated at the factory with stray

strips of silver and mysterious sprays of letters here and there. Equally gauche are 'customised' plates, strange logos of the self, tricky arrangements of letters and numbers that provide a costume for each customer.

Knight cruises between medieval England, colonial Australia and contemporary America. His imaginative historical sense generally makes very good sense, and gives a pleasure by no means trivial. His aim is to discriminate and analyse, a necessary step towards change, though no substitute for it. Given the "dysfunctional interchange between a belief in liberty and a fascination with many forms of binding legislation" explored in his title essay, it is perhaps not surprising that Knight's conclusions generally reinforce a sense of deadlock, ironically flourished. The text sits, at times, too easily on its satiric-cum-earnest mode, by turns dismissive and inclusive, haphazard and acute. Somehow it doesn't come off.

I suppose the abiding problem for me is the author's desire to explain Australians to Australians in the first place. The ghost of 'the Australian mind' hangs, like the balloon, on this book's horizon, recalling those airport bookstalls, rather than entering my imagination and being fueled there; a feeling I have with Brady's book, too.

Why is it that both authors, from their different positions, are unable to imaginatively embrace the positive aspects of contemporary, postmodern culture? Why do their formats reflect the dominant, 'corporate' face of this multi-faceted phenomenon? Why, in an essay on education, does Knight omit to even mention the interactive possibilities of computer technology; why does Brady see only the cathode-ray tube and the passive-receptive public?

Notwithstanding the problems of a "specifically manipulated future", there are also human agents within the politico-techno realm, who do not merely dream, but also act. But also dream. Versions of the Heavenly City – in Brady's theology, in 'the new world order' or its professed undoing on the internet – suggest a more complex, pleasurable, dangerous dreaming that neither Brady nor Knight acknowledges – and one that is far from mindless.

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Cogs in the Wheel: Women and the Labour Process

MARGARET DEERY

Raelene Frances: *The Politics of Work. Gender and Labour in Victoria, 1880–1939*. (Cambridge University Press, \$29.95).

He [Law] went on to explain the more subtle benefits of his [Taylorist] scheme, admittedly with some exaggeration:

"We have at the present moment a very happy and contented staff. Although about 500 hands are employed in the business – the majority being girls. We have never had a strike, and we have never had any slowing down of work. Our employees are producing more and more, and they are as happy as the day is long."

There was little room for unionism in this cosy scheme.

THE THEME OF TAYLORISM and its impact on the predominantly female industries of clothing and footwear, and the male-dominated printing industry is a recurring and binding one. In *The Politics of Work* Raelene Frances has sought, successfully, to explore the relationship between theory and gender in current labour process. The author investigates Harry Braverman's thesis expounded in his 1974 *Labour and Capital Monopoly*, testing the concepts of the degradation and fragmentation of work and the impact of technology on labour processes. The site for these investigations is Victoria; the period is 1880–1939.

Frances's treatment of the gender issue is rigorously academic. Her account of the working conditions of both males and females within the industries is balanced, devoid of rhetoric and always supported by *prima facie* evidence. Her basic premise, stated in the introduction, remains clear throughout: "the biological and cultural association of women with childbirth and child-care place[s] them at a disadvantage in the labour market." The author proceeds to demonstrate that women are placed in weaker bargaining positions than their male counterparts because of their necessarily lower participation rates; women's lower wages then

provoke 'exclusionary tactics' from male workers.

This theme of women workers as a crucial yet thwarted segment of the labour market is a continuing undercurrent of the book. Frances's interpretation of the predicament of women in the workforce in the fifty-year period covered by the book is punctuated by character portraits which permit empathy, and incidents which evoke atmosphere. For instance, the stimulating account of the tailoresses' strike of 1882 is followed by a poignant analysis of the effects of the strike on those "helpless girls" (as *The Age* termed them). Similarly, the discussion of clothing manufacturer James Law's experimental forays into scientific management leaves the reader with the impression of the women workers as mere pawns in the industrial games.

The analysis and application of Braverman's thesis is, concurrent with the issue of gender, the *raison d'être* of *The Politics of Work*. Frances states that while Braverman's concepts are recognised as flawed, there has been little effort to refine them. The historian, it is argued, is best suited for this task. The author concentrates on Braverman's concept of degradation: the deskilling and fragmentation of work processes; the introduction and impact of scientific management; and the development and use of new types of technology. In each era and in each industry, Frances attempts to evaluate the impact of these three elements, together with the influences of the state, the economic conditions and the social mores of the time. It is an ambitious project, but one which, by and large, succeeds.

In the discussion of women in the boot industry in the period 1911–1939, for example, Frances investigates the role of the Federal Arbitration Court, the size of the Australian market for the product, the lack of Taylorist processes in the industry and the rigid demarcation of men's and women's work. Frances concludes that, in maintaining the existing gender arrangements in the industry, there was a cost, not only to all workers but also to management. In her final chapter, the author argues that it is too simplistic to apportion blame/credit to a single factor in management strategy for the labour process. Instead, the ingredients are many and include labour and product markets, technology, the supply of capital, racial and gender orders, and

the activities of the state. Her final paragraph leaves the reader with the notion of the labour process in a constant state of flux, a much more dynamic interpretation than that of Braverman.

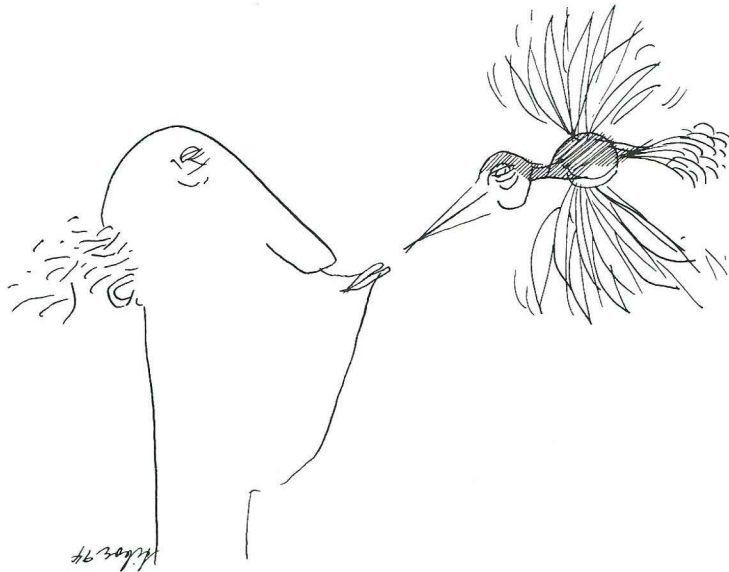
One of the key strengths of the book is its structure. The chronological and thematic division of the clothing, footwear and printing industries shrewdly draws together the prodigious research in a concise and compelling manner. This structure, together with the theoretical underpinning of labour process theory in the introduction and the perceptive concluding discussion, provides the reader with a sound conceptual framework. The overview presented at the beginning of each of the sections, 'Before the Wages Board', 'Under the Wages Board' and 'The Era of Federal Wage-Fixing' firmly locates the three industries examined in their historic and economic contexts. It is this strong structure, however, which determines one of the few weaknesses of the book: a frequent overload of detail of the operations of the industries studied.

Frances is bound, perhaps imprisoned, by her organisation of the book to present consistent descriptions of the industries, even though some periods are intrinsically more interesting than others. For example, Chapter 5, 'The Workers Baffled: The Boot Industry 1897-1910' (a rather turgid account to this reader's eye), could have been abbreviated to the length of the following

chapter which gives a lively synopsis of the sexual politics of the printing industry which, according to Frances, played an integral role in shaping work processes and work practices. Thus, the vast amount of detail – exemplified by the appendix, notes and bibliography – occasionally weighs heavily on the reader.

The conclusion to *The Politics of Work* deftly ties together the central arguments of Braverman's thesis as applied to the female workforce of the period. It successfully addresses the issues of the increased feminisation in the industries examined and the degree of control women possessed over their working lives. This last issue draws together several concerns of the book: the effect of scientific management on the sexual division of labour (which sharply increased) and the scope for collective opposition to management (which decreased). Frances does not provide prescriptive conclusions, but does leave us with a series of thought-provoking alternatives to Braverman's thesis. This work is an impressive example of the integration of industrial relations with history; it deserves a wide readership in both disciplines.

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