overland

FEATURES | FICTION | POETRY | REVIEWS

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ETHICS

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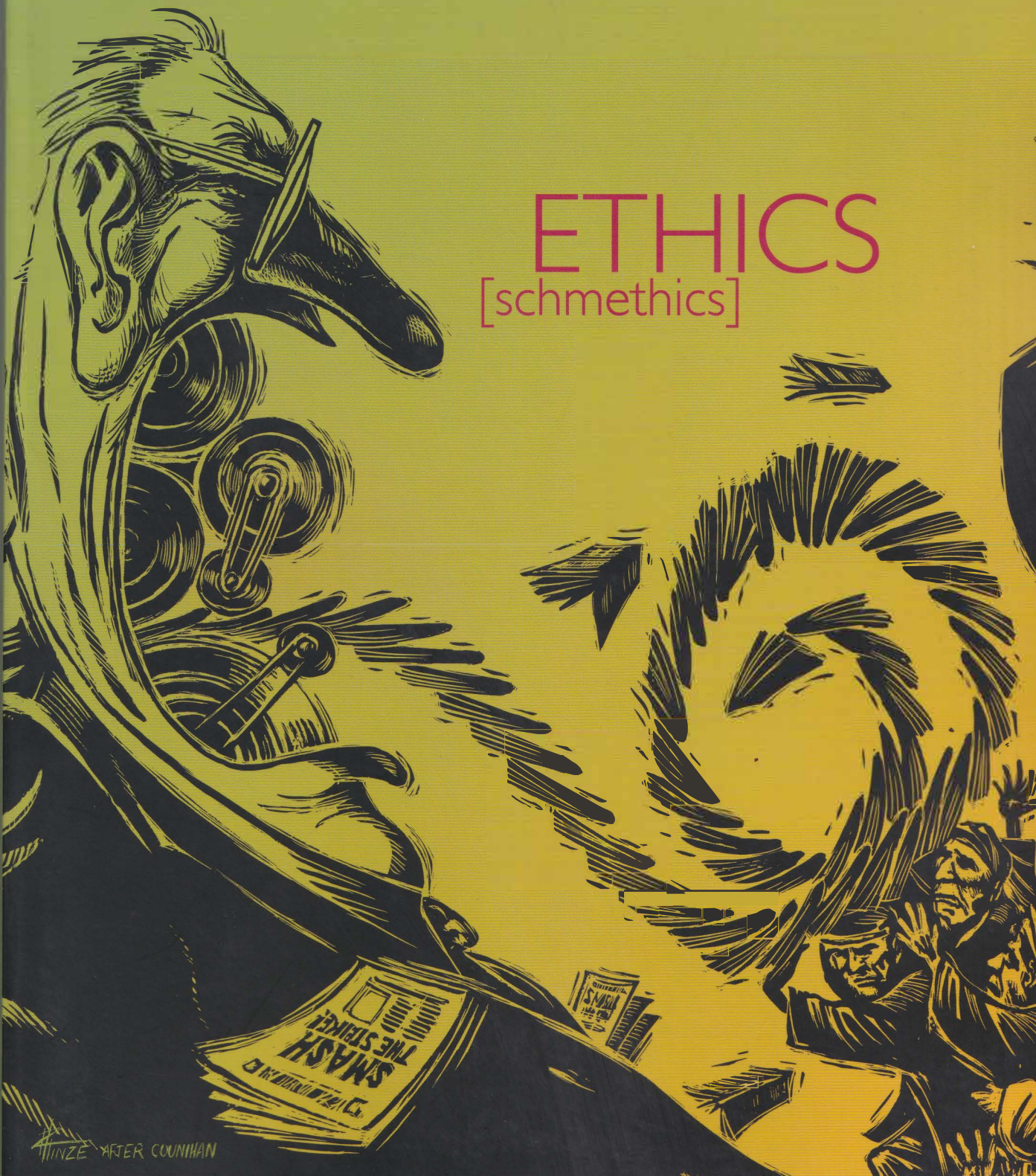

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Temper democratic, bias Australian

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editorial

Ethics [schmethics]

OVERLAND SPECIAL FEATURES usually come off with few hitches. We start with an idea, toss it around, call for submissions, commission writers we expect to write well about the given area, and rely on the laws of coincidence to provide several unsolicited pieces that contribute to the theme. Even though the product always looks different from what we might have first imagined, we are generally happy with the result.

For this issue we had planned a thematic focus on journalism and ethics. However, while the pieces included in this issue display a recurring interest in ethics, politics and influence, pieces on journalism have for the most part either not materialised or have dealt with the connection between ethics and journalism in ways that add little to the debate. These latter pieces were rejected. Significantly, our cartoonists have worked well to the brief, as readers will note.

A general rupture between ethics and writing is not surprising. The whole literary culture rests on a bed of genteel corruption. Little gets written, published, reviewed or publicised in Australia without some form of back-scratching, lubrication or inducement going on behind the scenes. One correspondent has suggested that my own editorial practice is ethically questionable. My commissioning reviews of books published by my own imprint, the Vulgar Press, is a possible conflict of interest. I leave that for readers to judge.

In 1997, around the time I began editing *Overland*, Mark Davis published *Gangland*. I reviewed the book positively in these pages and we have subsequently developed a friendship and maintained a critical dialogue. For all the attention his book received, for all the positive messages and implied warnings the book held, he might as well not have bothered; the same gang is running good ship ozlit, the same flabby, comfortable, soft-left, middle-class milieu is still giving leg-ups to its acolytes and lovers. And I mean lovers; the more one learns about

this industry/culture, the more one sees how many people are publishing, promoting and reviewing writers with whom they have intimate physical, emotional or other kinds of personal relationships. And this despite all the lip service to ethics and protocol we hear via various unenforceable 'codes of practice' or commitments to journalistic ethics. There's a sense in which Davis might have accidentally written a manifesto for literary coterie maintenance: 'If you momentarily forget how to do it, read Chapter 3!'

Yet even as I write this I feel a nagging sense of contradiction. *Overland* is also a gang, organised along lines of loyalty and commitment to a literary politics. We are biased towards a broad left constituency (consult our slogan if you don't think that's appropriate) and are predisposed to a dissenting position. However, there are some standards to which we try to aspire: honesty about motive and politics without hiding behind the shibboleths of universality or sanctity of judgement; accountability to constituency and culture; respect for the integrity of the literary culture as it has developed as well as care for its fragility and criticism of its limits; encouragement of newcomers while avoiding naked nepotism; rejection of gratuitous viciousness or absurd praise; alert attention to the voices of true outsiders; utter refusal to exploit emerging writers. I'm not sure that many of us could tick all those boxes honestly; some frankly couldn't tick any.

The previous issue of *Overland* was negatively reviewed by an individual who might have a problem ticking many, in my opinion. He neglected to mention his personal relationships with the people he was implicitly defending from Ken Gelder's "silly and spiteful" criticism of the Peter Rose edited *Australian Book Review*. This is the same reviewer who only a couple of months ago defended the 'slag' review as a genre and suggested that more of them needed to be made (only by his mob, apparently!). While it is his right to say what he wants about the book or magazine he is reviewing, he needs to come clean about his interests. As an aside, the reviewer also gave a new variation upon John Bangsund's Muphry's Law which "dictates that if you write anything criticizing editing or proofreading, there will be a fault of some kind in what you have written" (<users.pipeline.com.au/bangsund/muphry.htm>). In wielding the dreaded '(sic)' to show how illiterate we were in our allowing R.W. Connell to use "incitement of racism", he makes a complete goose of himself (if the OED is any guide).

Yet, to be honest, whatever level of corruption this might represent pales into insignificance compared with what we see happening in our national media. One only has to watch David Marr's weekly litany of media conflicts of interest to understand that point. Week after week he exposes: advertisements masquerading as news, contra deals where advertising is bought on the promise of a favourable coverage, mates looking after mates, chequebook journalism, PR-driven 'news' stories, the continued exclusion of the excluded, proprietorial influence and other biases that shape news. The list is a long one.

On the cover of this issue is a cartoon by Hinze, after Noel Counihan. It expresses one way of dealing with media corruption and bias. Taken literally, the cartoon calls for physical intervention in preventing the dissemination of right-wing propaganda – always a good idea. But the cartoon also suggests an unspoken call: for the Left to rebut the message of the ruling class by developing its own networks of production, distribution and criticism across the media. Nowhere in this model is a call for a code of ethics or some such within which journalists and multinational capital can achieve some kind of moral equilibrium. But there is an ethic at work; that of class identity and solidarity and united opposition to the lies that are so regularly told.

IAN SYSON

Martin Flanagan

George Johnston and Charmian Clift

The journalist as writer, the writer as journalist

I OWN A SMALL PART of newspaper history. When I started at *The Age* in 1985, there was in the office an older journalist named John Lahey who had been at the Melbourne *Argus* forty years earlier when Charmian Clift was called in and sacked, reputedly for adultery with George Johnston. What was she like? I asked. A real peach, he replied. No doubt I asked what Johnston was like too but, interestingly, I have no memory of his answer. The ill-fated relationship of George Johnston and Charmian Clift has obvious and interesting parallels with that of another pair of highly ambitious literary lovers, Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, but those whose primary interest is the furnace of the Clift–Johnston marriage are referred to the major biographies written on the pair – Garry Kinnane's *George Johnston* and Nadia Wheatley's *The Life and Myth of Charmian Clift* – plus, *Looking for Charmian*, the book published in 1994 by Clift's first child, Suzanne Chick. What I intend to examine is what the pair's lives and work say about my craft – journalism or, more specifically, writing for newspapers.

To be frank, I have no real idea whether George Johnston was a good journalist or not, but I would make some preliminary observations about his style which was most commonly described as fluent. He once said half-apologetically to a fellow journalist that prose "just flowed" out of him and, in her biography of Clift, Nadia Wheatley includes the staggering statistic that Johnston once wrote 35,000 words in nineteen hours. From a newspaper's point of view, someone who writes as beguilingly as Johnston at the speed of a typhoon is a wonderful asset since journalists are often working against time. However, there is a risk with this approach – if it doesn't proceed from a certain intellectual and emotional glibness, it will almost certainly lead to it if the practice becomes a habit. In my experience, nothing illustrates the law of karma more clearly than writing for newspapers since eventually, if you do it long enough, you become your stories. As a writer, there is a recognisable pattern to Johnston's technique – the piling up of descriptive detail in a rhythmic way, or what Charmian Clift once called "the old trick of dazzling observation" – which can have the effect of obscuring the reader's view and diverting him (or her) from the fundamental question: is this somewhere I want to go? But these are thoughts, not conclusions. The truth is you can't really judge a reporter until you have followed him or her on a story, until you have a grasp of the mental terrain through which they have passed, the people they have spoken to

and no less importantly the people they haven't and, also, the extent to which they understood what they were told. In the case of George Johnston's newspaper and magazine journalism, I can answer none of these questions, separated as we are by time and, no less importantly, by the experience of war. I am also obliged to have regard to the statement by Johnston's biographer Garry Kinnane that Johnston was not the sort of journalist he portrayed in his fiction. In the course of this talk, therefore, I will basically deal with journalism as Johnston dealt with it in his novels, specifically *The Far Road,* but also the much more famous *My Brother Jack.*

I will deal with *The Far Road* first because it was published first – in 1962. If there has been a more significant Australian novel written on the subject of journalism, I haven't read it, but lest we lapse into nostalgia for the good old days of Australian writing I would point out that when *The Far Road* was first released in Australia it sold all of eighty-two copies! If both Johnston and Clift strike me as being touched in various ways by the British cultural affectations that were part and parcel of this country in their day, it is also the case there were things about the local culture they had cause to dislike; not least, in Johnston's case, its largely indifferent attitude to the seething reality he had encountered in China as a war correspondent. Indeed, Nadia Wheatley constructs a case that the reason for the shock acceptance of Johnston's resignation from *The Argus,* after he made a stand on the issue of Clift's dismissal, was that he had started moving *The Argus*'s Sunday paper, which he was editing, towards sympathy for the communist cause in the civil war then raging in China.

The Far Road can be read as a dialogue between two journalists, a young American named Bruce Conover and an older and overly-experienced Australian named David Meredith, as they embark upon a descent into hell by electing to visit the city of Kweillin in rural China in 1944. The city population has already been afflicted with a cumulative sequence of woes, which include famine and an invading Japanese Army with a history of civilian atrocities, when a financier named Fabian Ling takes the opportunity presented by the general disorder to conduct a major currency fraud, thereby triggering mass panic. The novel starts in a bar with Meredith, as then unknowing of the extent of the calamity, accepting a drink paid for by Fabian Ling. Kweillin has emptied, its population having fled even though most have nowhere to go. As a war correspondent, Johnston did indeed visit such a place which he said was about the size of Melbourne; years later, Clift would say the experience "gutted" him, ultimately persuading him of the nihilistic belief that experience has no meaning beyond the experience itself.

In the novel, Meredith – usually described as George Johnston's alter ego – persuades Conover, the young American, to travel with him to the benighted city in search of a major scoop. To begin with, Conover admires Meredith, his experience in so many theatres of war, his brilliant "colour" writing (a term I despise), his ability "to get in behind things". Meredith's initial view of Conover is that he is "a kind of *Reader's Digest* American". In fact, his apparent innocence is a sort of incurable shallowness and, almost immediately the journey begins, Meredith's feelings for Conover turn to exasperation. Conover prides himself, like other young journalists Meredith has met, on having the full kit of the war correspondent – commando knives, air force sunglasses, jungle rations – "rather like tourists who had to preserve the hotel stickers on their baggage, even stickers from hotels they'd never stayed at". But what soon comes between them is the subject of journalism itself. Conover comes from the American school of journalism which effectively insists (to this day) that reality is an objective plane, and that the reporter's job is to walk around it collecting objectively verifiable facts rather as if he were collecting stones. Thousands have perished since fleeing Kweillin; as Conover and Meredith begin encountering bodies littered along the road, Conover insists on keeping a tally. "Jesus!" cries Meredith. "Let's have the statistics somewhere else!", and later, "Jesus! Do you have to keep notes?" Passing a flood of refugees, Meredith taunts Conover by asking if he'd like to stop the jeep so that the American can get out and record some names "for the hometown angles" and gives examples of the sort of inane headlines that would be used to decorate what they are witnessing 'Newark GIs in Famine Relief', 'Vet-

> Most everyone I know who has read *My Brother Jack* has an affection for the book but not once, when I have asked why, have they explained that affection in terms of plot.

eran Billy Budd of Cincinnatti Helps Succour Chinese Refugees'. The debate intensifies, but Conover remains resolutely within the castle of his limitations. "We're here to deliver news," he says, "not tilt at windmills."

In the best line of the book, Meredith declares that if Judas were alive today he would be a journalist, but it's not an idea the novel explores for the simple reason there is no character who is remotely Christ-like nor any event which contains any glimmer of redemption. What the novel traces is Meredith's disintegration. Significantly, Meredith is in part an old-fashioned newshound, saying that if he doesn't get a story first he's not interested in getting it at all. In a statement which carries echoes of American Janet Malcolm, he also declares that blackmail is one of the courses which any post-graduate in journalism needs to qualify in. His overall view of his career is that once his enthusiasm was "deflowered" he had turned into a "clever journalist as an alternative to the ultimate, and more difficult, solution of getting out". But Meredith is in torment precisely because he has the soul of a writer and, as such, has a need to do more than record random details and surrender to the cliches of the genre: he has a passionate desire to make sense of what is going on around him, to put it in a larger perspective to do with human dignity, to arrive at some deeper meaning. He realises, dully, that his sanity requires him to cast aside so-called objectivity, that to take the side of the suffering "was, in some way, to reduce the dimensions of the disaster", but what Meredith lacks is a writer's courage and/or belief in self. He is trapped in a wasteland of loathing and self-disgust. Towards the end of the book, Conover provides a brilliant portrait of Meredith as a beaten man and, equally, a beaten journalist, a hack with a great vocabulary:

> Conover knew that he would always remember this assignment for what it had done to David Meredith. There was something intriguing in seeing a case-hardened man like Meredith losing his grip. Sad in a way, too, but damned intriguing. Poor Meredith – talking fast, whistling in the dark, never on the level with himself, dodging around so he wouldn't have to look at his own reflection, thundering on about the big brave expose he was going to make. The poor man's Emile Zola! J'accuse! And all Meredith would do about it would be to go back to Kunming and play the old veteran foreign correspondent and toss off another of his competent, brilliant colour-pieces. And Fabian Ling would treat him to drinks again, and Meredith would smile a little more cryptically . . .

As happens, the two journalists become implicated in the events they are witnessing. (I was intrigued to hear that a journalism school refused to put *Off the Rails*, Margot Kingston's account of Pauline Hanson's 1998 election campaign, on the reading list for its students on the basis that it was ethically "muddy". I thought it the best Australian book on journalistic ethics in years precisely because the author was so candid about the many dilemmas inevitably to be encountered pursuing such an unpredictable subject.) Arriving in Kweillin, Conover and Meredith find an old man dying of thirst, but as a result of Meredith panicking, they flee the city, leaving the old man to a desolate and painful death. Eventually, having halted for the night to camp in the shell of a destroyed building, they watch as shadows assemble on the other side of their fire. It's a group of starving people; one, a former bar girl in a famished condition and near death, eventually comes closer. Lying opposite them, grimy and exhausted, she makes a squeezing gesture with one hand – used by prostitutes inviting custom. Meredith wakes in the night to find Conover fucking the semi-conscious girl, an act Meredith subsequently describes as rape. They are both part of the moral awfulness now, but whereas Meredith is tormented to the point of madness, Conover's inviolable view of himself as a collector of facts enables him to pass over this sea of human misery like a man in a glass-bottomed dinghy.

A further complication in the plot – and one that does credit to Johnston as a novelist – is that Conover's narrow-minded determination for the task twice saves Meredith from death. For his part,

Early in their joint careers, when they were writing novels together, Johnston said of himself and his young wife: "She is the better writer, I'm the better journalist." But Clift stalled as a novelist; Johnston didn't. Perhaps, in the end, she wasn't selfish enough.

Meredith saves Conover when their path is blocked by despairing human traffic and Meredith walks ahead of the jeep, playing the old fool which he feels himself to be, making the peasants stand back and laugh, thereby clearing the way. Like it or not, the pair are partners, although by the time they reach an American base near the end of the book, Meredith actually admits to hating Conover: "To hate Conover, in a certain sense, was an obligation. Because not to hate him was only to defect again . . ." But Meredith has one more ordeal in store which will again reorder their relationship.

Those survivors wishing to flee the region have congregated in a great congealed mass around the Liuchow railway station. The two journalists fight their way inside and behold a steam train covered by what appears to be a swarm of bees but are in fact human beings. People are clinging to the carriage roofs, the handrails, the couplings; some older people have even positioned themselves on the tie-rods between the wheels: "Occasionally, from a gap in a window or a door the fleeting image of a grimacing face or a groping hand suggested the asphyxiating agonies of those hundreds of other unseen people wedged inside." And yet more are still fighting to get on board. Meredith has a mad impulse to scramble up one of the lace girders and scream out the one truth he does know: this is the last train, the last train from Liuchow! In so doing, he would at least be keeping faith with his role as a public messenger (a statue of Hermes, the messenger of the gods, leaping lightly once sat atop the building housing *The Age*). Anything, reasons Meredith, "would be better than the dull, bitter hopelessness of their waiting". But Meredith fails in this too because he doesn't know the Chinese word for train. Looking around for Conover, who speaks better Chinese, he spies the American standing over a child dying of malnutrition and photographing the event. In Meredith's tormented mind, the Leica camera becomes a Luger pistol and he attacks Conover, clawing at his face. The fracas is halted by a perplexed party of American military policemen who, concerned for the pair's safety, have forced their way inside the station to find them.

The book ends with Meredith and Conover driving away from Liuchow and being passed by the train. As it overtakes them, one of those clinging to its sides tumbles to his death in front of them. They watch as another body falls, then another. In his madness, Meredith envisions the train as the man-made chaos otherwise called history: "What he had to do was get so far in front of it that it would not matter to him. Because things could be made not to matter. It did not matter any longer, for example, that this was no longer the direction he wanted to be driving." And so that is how the novel ends, Conover in the passenger seat licking his lips nervously, saying, "Hey Dave, take it easy now", and Meredith pelting down the road at ever more reckless speed, "staring ahead, blindly staring, and weeping as he drove". *The Far Road* is a chronicle of defeat, of a man irreparably broken by experience. It is a tale of astonishing impotence and one wonders if it is any coincidence that George Johnston wrote this book at a time when his final illness had commenced and his own virility had diminished, if not disappeared, yet also at a time when his wife was still young and sexually attractive.

Clift was destroyed by the competing mythologies which sprang up around her. "Everyone loves Charmian Clift," she told Toni Burgess, "but you're the only one who loves me!" By this stage, Clift was drinking whisky for breakfast.

While fighting a terrible war at some deep personal level from the early years of their marriage, Johnston and Clift remained curiously loyal to one another as writers – Clift, in particular, acting as a sounding board for her husband's ideas, listening to each new section as it was written, making recommendations and suggestions. Clift said she "stood up and cheered" for *The Far Road*, perhaps because she sensed that with this book Johnston finally ceased to be the journalist cursed with limitless fluency and became a writer fashioning lasting shapes from the grit of his experience. Unfortunately, however, he did so by activating his despair. Two years later, *My Brother Jack* was received to great acclaim and the couple's hopeless drama entered a new act.

In terms of chronology, David Meredith, by the end of *My Brother Jack*, is an older man than he is in *The Far Road*, but that is not how the novel reads. While the Meredith of *My Brother Jack* is solitary and bleak, he is not broken and why would he be? By

the end of the book, he has met the fabulous Cressida Morley, the Charmian Clift character he either borrowed or was lent by Clift from *The End of Morning*, her own novel of growing up in Australia during the Depression years. Most everyone I know who has read *My Brother Jack* has an affection for the book but not once, when I have asked why, have they explained that affection in terms of plot. The success of the book seems to rest on Johnston's ability, born of his experience as a journalist, to re-create an authentic sense of Melbourne in the 1920s, thirties and forties; in a 1971 interview, his son Martin actually said the book's power lay in nostalgia. One suspects the author, particularly after years of living in Greece and being exposed to the myths of Greek antiquity, would be disappointed with that judgement. As the title indicates, the novel is about two brothers, one called Jack who is whole and active and sunburnt in the old Australian way. The other – Davey, as Jack calls him – is introspective and shadowy. As a young journalist, he is described by one of his superiors, in the course of an argument with another of the newspaper's executives, as superficial: "You simply cannot trust his facts, he just dabs things in to make the picture seem complete." The other executive, young Meredith's defender, responds by saying that whether or not he's reliable, he's the newspaper's only evocative writer: "He can make you see a thing. You read his piece and you are there . . . He has this trick of making you see what is happening, or what has happened." The key word in that sentence is trick.

Jack, meanwhile, acts in a spirited and unselfconscious way. As such, he is the prototype of the hero but when the mythical opportunity of war presents itself, Jack is declared unfit for service on physical grounds. Davey, meanwhile, goes as a war correspondent and, simultaneously, is both exposed to the reality of the war and his inability to write about it. The year is 1942, a vast area of northern Australia is under air attack, and the all-conquering Japanese army is in the mountains of New Guinea. Meanwhile, many of Australia's best fighting men are 10,000 miles away, embroiled in the European war. From the Australian viewpoint, the situation is dire and so, writes David Meredith:

> one painted a picture in vivid colours and larger than life of this little tropical fortress of heroes, brave and unflinching and undismayed under the blows of the arrogant, advancing enemy . . . For morale at home and for security in the field there was, admittedly, nothing else that one could have done, but the falsity I built, or allowed to be built, around myself is perhaps less excusable . . . I wrote myself into my own lie, the lie that I had to create, so that it was taken for granted that I was there, right there, in the thin red line of heroes . . .

This passage is followed, immediately, by a letter from Jack – straightforward, cheerful and trusting. And that is the dramatic twist at the core of this novel: Jack is Davey's childhood hero but now Davey becomes Jack's hero because Jack, denied the opportunity which he instinctively desires of being a fighting man, reads what his war correspondent brother writes in the newspaper and believes every word. For Meredith, home on leave, it means having to live the lie he has created for his brother's sake. In the pub, a friend of Jack's who is awe-struck at meeting Meredith whom he identifies with the spurious experiences he has described asks him to sign a copy of one of his books. "Can the pain get any worse?" gasps Meredith. *My Brother Jack* can be read as a morality play about journalism, about mistruth and how it can return in a deeply ironic way to haunt the man who tells it, thereby giving definition to his appalling emptiness.

However, as the novel ricochets towards its conclusion, both the reader and David Meredith encounter a major distraction – Cressida Morley. Cressida is not only young, beautiful and highly literate, she has, as Meredith intuitively recognises, the same "absolute and perfect directness that reminded me of my brother Jack . . . she was not the same sort of person as Jack, no, but she was the same sort of thing." In Meredith's eyes, Cressida is "a pagan, an authentic something that was quite different from anyone else". Among the many influences which shaped her, Clift was a child of sun and surf, including in her resume the fact that she was the *Pix* magazine beach girl for 1941 in NSW. (Gavin said: "Never wore a pair of shoes until she was thirteen. Isn't that so, my darling Cress? Like Christopher Robin, she still has sand between her toes.") The book ends with Meredith, a married man, having committed himself to an intoxicatingly attractive younger woman with a passionate instinct for freedom. The liaison, as he correctly perceives, is as dangerous as a bomb. Meanwhile, in a pub on the other side of town, Jack is telling another group of mates that his brother Davey, the famous war correspondent, will turn up

as he has promised and have a drink with them. The last, haunting line of the book is Jack telling the bar: "My brother Davey's not the sort of bloke to ever let anyone down, you know."

THE JOHNSTON FAMILY returned to Australia from the Greek island of Hydra in 1964. George came first, followed six months later by a reluctant Clift with the three children. There are accounts of a party among Sydney's haute bourgeois to welcome Clift 'home'. People remembering her as a trim stylish 26-year-old were startled to meet a 40-year-old woman bearing physical witness to a decade of living in borderline poverty on a Greek island – she is bare-legged, has decaying teeth and lank hair she has cut herself. In the book world, people waiting expectantly to set eyes on the exotic Cressida Morley encountered an apprehensive middle-aged woman with a drinking problem. What is perhaps most revealing is that within weeks Clift had re-equipped herself with the uniform of the middle-aged bourgeois. The real Charmian Clift was capable of being shamed socially. She also suffered cruelly from guilt, rarely speaking about the baby she gave away for adoption after a teenage pregnancy, instead suffering silent bouts of grief and depression. Nadia Wheatley's thesis, which I find utterly persuasive, is that Clift was destroyed by the competing mythologies which sprang up around her. Fame is the experience of having strangers believe they know you intimately, and, in Clift's case, there were thousands of strangers in Sydney and Melbourne who believed they were intimately acquainted with her on account of her newspaper column.

As *Clean Straw for Nothing* was nearing release, Charmian Clift committed suicide after having a terrible row with Johnston. He struggled on with his third novel, dying mid-sentence the following year.

It is not hard to see why Clift's column had a mass following. To begin with, she had a novel perspective. She was a half-migrant, at a time when a consciousness of the possible implications of migration was only beginning to dawn on mainstream Australia and, while her columns were unusually erudite, their tone was personal. To her readers, Clift appeared to be the prototype of the new woman – the one who could speak bravely and eloquently on a range of public issues and also run a home. The catch, however, was that in the minds of many of her readers, she was also Cressida Morley and in *Clean Straw for Nothing*, the second in the *My Brother Jack* trilogy, Cressida Morley would be exposed as an adulterer, a word which in 1960s Australia was still capable of being delivered with ferocity and spite. There is debate over whether Clift actually read the manuscript of *Clean Straw for Nothing* before taking her life, but I'm not persuaded she had to read it. To know another writer intimately is to know the dark seas they trawl, the sort of fish that capture their imagination. As perverse as it may sound, in a novel set almost entirely in the climate of the author's emotions and sense of failure, Cressida's affair is as indispensable as an altar in a church. Meanwhile, for Clift, there was no novel of her own to retreat into, not least because the Cressida Morley character, her fictional alter ego, was now out of her control. In July 1969, as *Clean Straw for Nothing* was nearing release, Charmian Clift committed suicide after having a terrible row with Johnston earlier in the day. Johnston struggled on with his third novel, *Cartload of Clay*, dying mid-sentence the following year. Johnston's biographer Garry Kinnane argues the trilogy can be regarded as complete and basically I agree, although, by the end, Johnston was merely circling the empty continent of self, but doing so with the pitiless probing candor that distinguishes his work. Everybody has a story, we are told, but very few are prepared to tell it from the pit of their being. George Johnston did. *My Brother Jack* is the first act in a tragedy, an account of a defeated man's downward spiral to death and the beautiful creature who fell with him, but at least Johnston had the guts to write it (or his version of it). In fact, Johnston could be described as the war correspondent who brought the war home with him and reported what happened next.

Early in their joint careers, when they were writing novels together, Johnston said of himself and his young wife: "She is the better writer, I'm the better journalist." In my view, she wrote the better sentences. Johnston is forever like a man squinting to make out the outline of something in the distance. Clift is clearer, more immediate. At her most exuberant, her sentences dance like green leaves in the

sun. But who wrote the better books? For whatever reason, Clift stalled as a novelist; Johnston didn't. Ask people who live with writers – is writing ultimately a selfish pursuit? – and the answer is usually yes. Perhaps, in the end, Clift wasn't selfish enough. Perhaps she wasn't tough enough, but then she had to be so much tougher than he did because of her public role. Nadia Wheatley suggests that taking up the cause of the world's homeless and starving children, as Clift did in her column, only served to intensify the guilt and grief she felt over assenting to her first child being adoped out after becoming pregnant at sixteen. "Everyone loves Charmian Clift," she told her friend and confidante Toni Burgess, "but you're the only one who loves me!" By this stage, according to Burgess, Clift was drinking whisky for breakfast. One of her recurring words during this period is 'dilemma' and she hinted at her own in a column she wrote about the freedom she found being alone in her house at midnight, after the others had gone to bed. She envisaged the night life of the city, all its tiny human compartments, people in hospitals and airports, people running away from things and towards things, "and people like me . . . prowling around in dark houses all over the place, being as strange as they please". Burgess says one of the few times she saw Clift be her old self was when they went together to a Sydney market and Clift luxuriated in the sight of a Greek woman, saying admiringly to her friend: "Now there's a woman, Antonia. There's a real woman! She doesn't shave and deodorise. She just lets everything grow."

In the second half of Johnston's remark, having said that Clift was the better writer, Johnston said he was the better journalist. I'm sure Johnston intended his remark as a backhanded compliment; that, certainly, is how it would have been read in literary circles because, then probably even more than now, journalism was not regarded as writing – but what made Charmian Clift an outstanding journalist was that she remained true to her writerly ambitions. Basically, Clift was too genuine a writer to write poorly, whatever the medium. The facts that she experienced agonies of doubt and fear – what she called "annihilation" – as deadlines approached, that she lifted passages from her novels and used them in her columns, speak to me of writerly intent. *Mermaid Singing*, Clift's journalism in book form from the Greek islands of Hydra and Kalymnos, sings. Her newspaper columns after she returns to Australia don't. Clift was much taken with the myth of Icarus, and her newspaper columns could be described as what Icarus beholds as he – or, in the case of Clift, she – falls to earth. Possibilities rush to meet her; her anxiety is palpable. A woman in the change of life, she is acutely conscious of change in the society around her and while she is sympathetic to the politics of change, as a person of classical sensibility, she is startled by the gaps in knowledge and understanding which are starting to open up around her, and finds herself longing for what she calls continuity.

> I have seen Charmian Clift described as the greatest essayist Australia has produced. I'm more taken with her own description of her work as "essays for the weekly presses to be read by people who wouldn't know an essay from a form-guide"

I find it significant that while several collections of Clift's journalism have been published in recent years, there have, to my knowledge, been none of Johnston's. Time is a test rarely applied to journalism, which is unfortunate. It exposes, for example, those with a shallow grip on the intellectual currents of their day. Clift's philosophy, classical in structure, is as solid as ever, her intellectual grasp impressive. At the same time, her first interest is not self-interest; there is a consistent sense of good intention running through her work. She champions the plight of Greek political prisoners during that country's military dictatorship. She supports Australian stories, Australian films, Australian plays. Curiously, one of her best-known collections, *Images in Aspic*, takes its title from a phrase Clift coined to express her fear for Australian culture. She had been told two Australian films were in the pipeline, one about a stockman, the other about a kangaroo. Clift was not opposed to the two films, but asked how many Australians actually knew a stockman, how many had had anything to do with a kangaroo? What about all the other Australian stories waiting and needing to be told? Clift's fear was that Australian culture would be reduced to a few stereotypes preserved in aspic, "because one thing is certain: if we are incapable of presenting ourselves in our own

true image and images, the huge overseas companies, on whom we seem to be relying somewhat optimistically to do it for us, will carry on with the safe cliché that conforms so glibly to the preconceived notion".

In a polite but artful way, Martin Johnston once said that Charmian Clift the columnist was a persona and not the 'real' Charmian Clift. But what is the alternative to a public persona? Total disclosure? George Johnston approached what he considered to be elemental truths about his marriage under the guise of fiction in *Clean Straw for Nothing* and, according to his critics, pushed his wife into suicide by doing so. Public discourse does not require total disclosure. What it does require is that those parts which are revealed are genuine and honest. It is true that, if Clift's column were likened to a stage show, the set on which she appeared each week was solidly bourgeois. Her husband, while ill, was the successful author. She had an enormously clever son at university of whom she was extremely proud (although, unfortunately, having enlisted in the youth revolt of the 1960s, he identifies her as old which, given that she now privately harbours fears of having lost her beauty, she finds disconcerting). But there are columns which are straightforward and direct, like, for example, the one which begins: "I was writing about something different entirely when the telephone rang and I learned that my only brother was dead." In the rush of thoughts that follows she realises she hardly knew him. She also recalls how quietly and unobtrusively he failed to conform to the remorselessly ambitious family ethic. As a child, he had turned to her one day when they were discussing their glorious futures and asked: "Would you care if I never did anything at all?" The column continues: "And I laughed, because the possibility of anything other than grandeur was too ridiculous to contemplate. What did he know then about himself? More than I did, certainly, bound unquestioning as I was in the family compulsion to excel. To be less than first was to be nothing." In my mind, I marry this column to a slightly earlier one titled 'The Rare Art of Inspiring Others' where she meets an artist (probably Sidney Nolan) whom she admires enormously, not just for his success, although that would seem to be part of it, but for the wild arc of his ambition. "'On with the dream', he would say, and things like that never sounded pretentious coming from him . . . To one pessimistic Irish writer he said, 'You want to fly? Then jump up and bloody well fly!!'" Significantly, this column, like the one about her brother, doesn't have a satisfying ending or, rather, ends on a note of deep and apparently unintended ambiguity. This too is hardly surprising, given that the trajectory of her thoughts was far longer than one thousand words, and given also that at some level her thoughts were leading her towards the tragic destination of suicide.

I have seen Charmian Clift described as the greatest essayist Australia has produced. I'm more taken with her own description of her work as "essays for the weekly presses to be read by people who wouldn't know an essay from a form-guide, but absolutely love it" – the secret joy of newspaper writing is that it is beneath classification. Nonetheless, in the great kitchen of literature, journalism is, or can be, the daily bread and thirty years after she made it Charmian Clift's work is still fresh and, at a time when we appear to be teetering on the edge of a radical new conformity, when the notion of Australian culture is being subsumed by global forces (except for those few images in aspic preserved by our political leaders for their own purposes), those of us who support the tradition which Clift honoured, of speaking intelligently to a mass readership through newspapers, can take courage from her example.

Martin Flanagan is a writer and journalist. His latest book is In Sunshine or in Shadow *(Picador).*

Your freedom

You don't see freedom because you're free
like the air around and inside you
the clothes on you
only when your flesh complains of the rudeness
of the combat shields, the assault boots, the guns
or when your skin is caressed
by the thorny arms of the battle tank
the water cannon, the baton

Only when your steps are wary
of the prints they've left
when your eyes are more comfortable
with furtive peering
your ears with whispering
your mouth with holding your tongue in

Only when just smelling the police in the distance
your brain immediately orders
for a scan of banned ideas, values, concerns
for a whitewash over your memory
for a plastic bag for your thinking
for prayers for yourself to be somewhere else

Only when you're strip-searched for words
you write under the surface of your skull
before playing the guitar
you have to first register the sounds

Only when you're self-conditioned
to shut down your mouth, heart, brain
hands, eyes, nose, feet, skin
like your own pet
when its tiny life is also under threat
even when feeling the proximity
of friends and family

Only when you're handcuffed
for not agreeing to killing one another
for stealing others' trust and beliefs

Only when your house is a public place
your voice is government-owned
when the streets are closed
you're not allowed to stop
your light has to be put out
against the will of your eyes

Only when you flee for the distant horizons
on foot without a compass
or jump aboard a wooden boat
without contemplating the mood of the ocean

Only then
you'll face your freedom
in all shapes and sizes
in all colours and forms of life
only – though attached to
and friendly with your eyes
it's not touchable.

Xuan Duong

Kerry Leves

refugee Refugees: Xuan Duong, a poet & his poetry

IN HIS THIRD COLLECTION, *Hey, I've got a racist flu!* the Vietnamese-Australian poet Xuan Duong breaks many silences. Broadly, the poems are about identity, its fluctuations, feints, defensive and offensive manoeuvres enforced by continual meetings with prejudice, stereotype, abuse and violence. The project gathers together the thoughts, feelings and stories of a wide range of Vietnamese-Australian youth, living in Sydney's western suburbs and in Wollongong.

Each poem makes the voice of a different character, conducting a particular life in a specific context. The word-music is contemporary: dissonant, full of the harshness of streets and high-school playgrounds, the laconism of factory floors, the multi-tongue of courtrooms.

Xuan Duong came to Australia as a refugee in 1978.

Kerry Leves: The writing in *racist flu!* is often a direct expression of emotion.

Xuan Duong: That's right. Because the young people expressed their emotions sometimes so traumatically, I had to take trouble to respect what they said, otherwise . . . if I turned their feelings and experiences into abstract things, the reader wouldn't know what was happening to them. It would have been like smoke, you know? No clue!

I tried to respect the world as they saw it. Some of them, especially the boys, had long stories to tell. There were stories of fighting, knifing, escaping along stormwater drains . . . I mean I couldn't express everything they wanted to say or that they told me, or some things that I could see behind their verbal expression.

So it was hard work. It's like you ask yourself, have I been responsible enough with the things they trust to me? It was really painful. The hardest thing . . .

Kerry: Were you surprised at the amount of pain in their stories?

Xuan: Very surprised. I didn't realise what they were experiencing in Year 6, Year 7, Year 8 . . .

I could never imagine
high school as that tough.
Welcome to Year 7
with pushing with shoving with
beating with kicking with slapping on my
head with their spitting hitting all over me . . .

But I have spent my Year 7 school holidays
researching how to survive in the
school ground. That jungle without a haven.

Then Year 8 teaches me
to never be by myself . . .
'From shyness to owning a knife'

hate never gives up
hate never wakes up

Our school hall knows this well
as a swarm of baseball bats
rain on my flesh
at the school gate . . .

When the dismissal bell hits
the grids of my worry-swelling flesh
I dash out

Toward the school gate hoping
to beat the baseball bats
from seeing my head/ their target . . .
'Life down at the bottom'

In 1990 Xuan Duong co-authored, with Yodying Taylor, *The Lone Boat*, an inquiry into the needs of unaccompanied Vietnamese adolescents in Sydney, published by the Indo-China Refugee Association (ICRA/NSW).

Xuan: In 1990 I talked to about forty kids and none of them talked about racism. They mentioned problems like English, housing, missing home, having no room for study, crowded conditions where they lived, everything! But none of them were talking racism. Back then I didn't think racism was a problem. But now, twelve years later, it's a big one.

Kerry: Why the change of focus, do you think?

Xuan: When I first came here, twenty-three years ago, we were accommodated in hostels. And they were where you interacted with mostly Anglo people, because they were staff, they were office workers, they came from church groups doing charity work, so there was some bonding, some relationship. The Vietnamese kids even went to school with Anglo and European kids.

But in the 1980s, the second wave of Vietnamese and other refugees and migrants tended to be sent out right away into their community, to live with their relatives or sponsors. The kids went to school in places – Canterbury, Chester Hill, Marrickville – where there were absolutely no Anglo kids around, only people like themselves: Arabic, Lebanese, Pacific Islanders. They didn't have a chance to understand the mainstream culture apart from some 'Home and Away' stuff, or 'Hey, Dad!' on television.

See, if there was a core culture there, the Anglo one, the big one, to absorb their differences, it would have been better for them. But now there's nothing like that, and at some of the high schools you see ethnic students lost among themselves, different foods, the way they're dressed, their accents . . .

. . . this showdown
at the railway station of Lakemba
the settling ground between a group
of Lebanese small and big kids
and Vietnamese small and big kids . . .

it must be the obvious differences
the appearances
'Hey, watch out for the Year 7 kids!'

Xuan: In the old days when the first wave of Vietnamese came they went out to work with Australian people, they worked in factories, did bricklaying, carpentry. I had a lot of interaction with people in factories, in pubs. You have to learn some English in a pub, because there are also Greek, Italian, Portuguese, all using a common language. Even though we didn't speak really well, everyone had to speak English. Whereas now you can go to places where you don't have to speak English, and you're less likely to learn.

Kerry: Were there any government policy changes that contributed to the new situation?

Xuan: The Community Settlement Scheme – the CSS – was good in a way. The government saved a lot of money, because when they put you in a hostel they had to hire the facilities, the staff, it was very expensive. In the 1980s under the CSS they cut all that. Now, if you register with the Immigration Department they give you sponsors and these people take you to the bank, show you how to rent a house and this and that, and they do it all for free. Minimal cost incurred to the government.

If you're a newcomer's relative, the Immigration Department trusts you. You are their relative, you'll look after them . . . might be half-a-month later they part from you because of family conflict. The newcomer gets fed up: "You look at me as if to say, how come you didn't do this? You expect me to know everything. I don't know a thing, and you have to look after your family, and now you have the burden of looking after me and my family . . ." Usually after a short time they move out on their own without knowing anything.

Kerry: Because the relatives are under pressure making a life for themselves.

Xuan: Exactly. In the hostels, we learned about the CES, which is now part of CentreLink, the AMES which taught English, how to go about things in case of emergencies . . . And we learned to sit down at a table setting, the way they eat here, the way they handle the knife and fork, the cheese, the butter, the egg in a little cup . . . everything! That's the way you learn a new culture. And now they don't learn that sort of thing.

In the hostel you'd spit and somebody would say, "No. This is Australia. They don't like you to spit in the street." They spit because no-one has ever told them that it's not Australian way of life that you can

spit in the street, so they keep doing it, or blow their nose without a tissue, because they come from a country where – who cares? Who cares whether you piss against a tree? But even in the bush here, you can't do it.

And suddenly you find yourself in a city like Sydney without being told the little things not to do, and you're picked up by cameras, shown on television, and everyone can say, "How barbarous! The Vietnamese, they spit in the street, blow their nose without a handkerchief, they pick their nose in public places . . ." Well, nobody ever taught them anything like that, compared to the time when we were in the hostels.

. . . I do
think I'm one of them

If given enough time to gobble more and
more of the tongue-twisting language, to swallow
the suspicion-filled culture, to improve my
conventional communications
inward like dripping cheese
outward like arm wrestling

'I am at home now!'

Xuan: I still like the hostel setting for new migrants and refugees, otherwise you let them go out into the world so early, so raw . . . Especially the kids. When you're an older person, if people start looking at you in a hostile way you think, Oh, I must have done something wrong here, whereas kids tend to think they're getting picked on because they're different. Sometimes it's not because they're different but because they're doing something that seems odd.

God rush me home
right into the toilet
for me to completely undress
so every single eye can be picked
off my skin . . .

'My nightmarish Year 7'

Kerry: How did you get into poetry in the first place? Did you grow up with poetry in Vietnam?

Xuan: No. I mean we studied a lot of poetry in school. As part of the school curriculum we studied French poetry, Chinese poetry, Vietnamese poetry, and as a kid I wrote poetry as part of school work, in Vietnamese. Nothing special about it. I dreamed about being a writer but never a poet.

Kerry: How did you evolve into a poet then? What happened?

Xuan: Actually I started when someone from a Vietnamese-language newspaper in Sydney rang me and asked, Could you write for us? Twelve years ago or thereabouts. Usually you write for them for free, they can't pay you. I said okay, and went out and did some casual writing, like reporting events, this and that. People seemed to like my writing style. Because most people reporting events tend to be – we don't have any writing background, journalist background – tend to write like they're doing a favour for 'my' group. That's how ethnic journalism tends to be. But I wrote different. I wrote more like, without me in it, without myself in the context, and people tended to like my style. And then I found it was too much for me, to work full time and then write on the weekend – too much. So I thought there might be some other way.

And at the same time Vietnamese refugees in South East Asia started being detained. They'd used to have a lot more freedom to go about, relatively easily in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, but after 1989 they had to be screened by the UN, so they were all locked up in detention centres. So I started writing poems. They're short, easier for people to read than a long piece of prose. You can't keep writing prose about one subject all the time. It's easier to write a poem.

Each time I got a piece of news from the detention camps, like being bashed, being raped, being shot with a water cannon or stuff like that, I turned it into a short poem. Easier than to write editorials, because poetry allows you to vary the mood, the style, the characterisation. I wrote hundreds of poems about Vietnamese refugees, to keep getting people's attention to their plight in South East Asia.

The old wire gets bored slaving
To divide people from people . . .
Every time a round-eyed child
Gets hung dangling amongst
The barbs without even moaning
To the starved spider next door
The wire sobs complaining it can
Never be a true entertainer
For a true audience

'refugee Refugees See the East Timorese?'

Xuan Duong is a co-founder of the English-language, Vietnamese-Australian community magazine *Integration*. He was working on *Hey, I've got a racist flu!* when news broke of the violent aftermath of the 1999 election in East Timor. Xuan began work on the poems that constitute *refugee Refugees See the East Timorese?* This delayed completion of *racist flu!*, which was published in 2001, a year or so after *refugees*.

Kerry: Why did things change for the refugees? Why did the governments in South East Asia change the way they were treating refugees?

Xuan: It was an order from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. They'd been involved eleven years, from 1978 to 1989, and they said it was too long, they had to stop it, so they locked them up. They sent a message to Vietnam – don't attempt to leave otherwise we'll lock you up and we'll send you back, and then – yeah, they started sending them back . . .

Kerry: The UN?

Xuan: The UN – very traumatically, a lot of them forcibly repatriated . . .

Kerry: What motivated the UN to do this? Were they receiving representations from South East Asian governments?

Xuan: Yeah. Because resettling countries had refused to take any more refugees at the time, they said they had enough of the Vietnamese – no more, no more, no more! So they started . . .

Kerry: . . . getting tough.

Xuan: Really tough, sometimes really brutal. That's why I wrote poems for the Vietnamese and one day, I think in '93 or '94, I was getting *Integration* ready for the printer and there was a little blank space. It was beside a long poem written in English by a refugee from a camp in Hong Kong – this had come in a newsletter, we reprinted it, but there was still a blank space. So I started writing something in English. Usually I translated my poems from Vietnamese but this time I didn't have anything to translate so I wrote in English, just a short poem, maybe ten lines. I wasn't confident of my writing in English then so I took the poem across to a friend of mine, Anglo-European, a children's psychologist. She was eating her lunch and I said, Do you mind having a look at this for me? She put down the piece of fruit she was eating and after she read the poem tears were coming out of her eyes and I said to myself, "Not bad". She said nothing needed to be changed in the poem. I had my confidence boosted then.

Kerry: I wondered if some of the techniques you use in poetry, especially with images, came from Vietnamese poetic traditions?

Xuan: I don't know. I'm not a really literary person. I came to literature with an intention to use it for a social purpose. I didn't come in as somebody who loved literature, who loved to write. I read a lot but I like painting, photography. I can look and look, I like visual things, I do a lot of looking!

Going back, many years ago when I was in the army in Vietnam, a lot of times I'd sit down at the top of a mountain and just look out, nothing but some visual instruction, my eyes learning to receive stuff . . .

At the time I was an army officer. Around me were all the soldiers, they were talking about things close to their heart, their wives and children, something to eat, something to play – cards, chess – and I didn't have anything to talk about, no friends. I was among twenty or thirty soldiers but I was lost, you know – completely lost! I didn't like the war, I didn't like the killing, I mean I was a lost kid, not a real kid, but 22, 23 . . .

Kerry: You didn't like the war, so why were you in the army?

Xuan: Good question. In wartime, in a warfare situation, people become really good at coercing you into their army, whether they are communists or capitalists or nationalists. Bribing, forcing, threatening, tempting, all sorts of things so you have no choice but to fight, if you don't want to go to prison, or to be called a coward. No young person wants to be shamed like that. They shave your head, they abuse you, you feel very low. People went ahead and died rather than be shamed like that. You know the uncertain identity of young people? Armies become really good at grouping you in a setting where you have no choice but to fight, to shoot. Because at the front there, with a gun, what else can you do? Just shoot! I was in the regular army, not the reserve; I was a conscript, but I was professionally trained . . .

The youth's receding eyes stare
Naively into the protruding eyes

On the other youth's steel face

We are all the same!
No difference mate!

Wrong, wrong, forever wrong!
Look! Mine are real leather assault boots
Look! Mine is modern automatic rifle
Your street thongs
Your kid rubber sling. Look!

'The ruler says you must not be seen'

Kerry: Americans trained you?

Xuan: Not directly. But they trained the trainers. And they equipped us with the latest modern weapons. When I first came here, people were asking me about technology, and they didn't believe Vietnam had the newest technology in refrigeration, trucking . . . Everything produced in America was used at the time in Vietnam, to appease the GIs. They had to be offered the best possible things in life, for them to be there to fight. The best beer, the best cigars, the best coffee, the best television sets . . . not because Vietnam could produce these things, but they were shipped there from Japan, from America, from all over the world – all the best things, from guns to jewellery and watches. Huge smuggling operations were based in Vietnam at the time.

And that's why, after the war, the society broke down so fast, so easily, because you were conditioned to living so well. And when you find there's no more of that way of life you start doing the ugliest things, in order to get somewhere close to that standard . . . I mean after the war you could see the society being torn apart, a lot of prostitution, a lot of illiteracy, so much happening just because people wanted . . . You know? You've got a high status, then, without the warfare mechanism, you slip down to the bottom, everything's gone. You find you are really poor, deprived, destitute. You sell your wife, you sell yourself, in order to get a bit higher, because you've lost your status. You were high, now you are at the bottom.

They get twisted and turned
torn and squeezed
like their flag
battered
by that war wind . . .

'Where are you Daddy?'

Kerry: How did you come to be a refugee?

Xuan: I was arrested during fighting before the new government took over the country in April 1975. I'd been a poor solider – no watch or radio or anything like that, no supplements from wife or family. I was even poorer in prison; some – not many, but some people were visited by their family and given food, clothes. A lot of people like myself didn't have anyone visiting for the whole time they were in gaol.

Kerry: Why was that?

Xuan: My mother was a widow with two little kids. They were struggling to survive themselves, hundreds of miles from my prison. I mean travel at that time in Vietnam, unless you were a well-off person, was too expensive! It's easier for you to travel from here to America now, than it was to travel ten kilometres in Vietnam then. You had to have permission, you had to have the money to buy the tickets, you had to have the money to bribe people to let you buy the tickets. Those were the actual economic circumstances at the time, because the Americans were sanctioning Vietnam economically, so everyone was very poor.

But prison was good in a way, in that we didn't have to kill, we didn't have to shoot, we didn't have to blow anyone up. That was a huge condolence, a relief. It more than compensated for the lack of food, the lack of other things we needed for survival. And we were lucky they allowed us to work, to go to the jungle to fetch wood or bamboo or thatching to build big huts. It was hard work, but looking back, it was a lot better than for people in detention now, who don't have anything to do, and that makes them go crazy a lot more easily.

Xuan Duong left Vietnam in 1978, escaping by boat to Indonesia where he lived in a refugee camp for seven months. He arrived in Australia at Christmas the same year.

Kerry: What do you think about the present situation for refugees, the Australian government turning them away, putting them onto islands in the Pacific?

Xuan: We had it much worse than they have it now. Because before, the asylum countries – the countries that accommodate you before you move on to resettle yourself somewhere – were very hard, worse than the *Tampa* crisis, a million times worse! When our boats were nearing some countries, their navy would come and tow the refugee boats out to sea and dump

them there. Sometimes they'd disable the engine so you couldn't move into their countries, so a lot of people died, drowned, lost their way at sea, before the UN jumped in. There were thousands and thousands of Vietnamese refugees dying, getting drowned, between 1975 and 1978. These were escapees, mostly professional people, officials from the old Saigon regime. Nobody cared.

But what can a boat do?
While the reef holds its keel
For the furious-by-nature waves
To pound its mast
True! Your displaced-then-wrongly-placed
Family is like an overloaded cargo ship
Riding its anchor on your thin back . . .

'refugee'

Xuan: I mean from our experience, the *Tampa* situation seemed good – it got attention, the world knew about them. Otherwise – if they had got sunk by another country's navy, nobody would have known anything about them. In terms of a refugee worker, I thought they were lucky to be in the spotlight – everyone noticed – and especially lucky that they've been accommodated outside Australia.

Kerry: Why do you say that?

Xuan: Because in Australia they have to be in detention centres. You don't have anything to do, and to be honest, not all the guards are friendly to you. Whereas on a Pacific island, you might expect more friendliness – they get paid for looking after you, they tend to value you, you're a source of income. Here you are a problem, a total headache! Because people before you have spent years in detention in Australia and a lot of them went crazy, mad, mentally ill, because of the uncertainty . . .

I mean on a Pacific island people may not be better off than you, and you can go out and do little things – selecting some shells, or go swimming or fishing.

You can't do a thing in detention centres in Australia. To be honest, you are actually a prisoner. You are allowed to go out at a certain hour and then, back to your room – you call it a room but it's like a cell – like gaol.

Kerry: Are Australian detention centres typical of detention centres around the world now?

Xuan: They're safer in a way, compared to other camps around the world. Physically we have the best facilities to cater for refugees. You get good food, good clothing, television, everything! You have all the conveniences here, but actually it's worse – not physically, not materially, but mentally.

You lack everything in a refugee camp outside Australia but you feel like you are a real person, with some freedom. You interact with the local people around you, with the environment. Here you don't, you can't. If you're a refugee you survive because of your dreams. If the things which enable you to dream are killed, then you kill yourself.

I spend all of your day polishing my vision
Of our splendid meal times like your average
Weather forecaster dreams on his arm chair
Of a turning tornado forming outside his
Sleepy office window high above the ground
And all the other times I remind
My heart
That I've successfully escaped
And survived
That I am very hopeful
And extremely imaginative

'Forever I am different'

Xuan: You feel you don't need anything more than they offer you here in Australia. And then you stay in those sterile circumstances, not for a few days, a few weeks, a few months, but for years. It's like putting yourself in a washing machine with the best washing powder, and then – you keep turning and turning and turning. What would you have at the end?

Kerry: Not much.

Xuan: No. And refugees are really creative. They have to work hard with their minds to be able to escape. People don't come and pick you up and put you on a boat. You have to work at it like a writer, plot your way out. You've got the police, you've got the government, you've got all the eyes focusing on you. The ones who are successful in escaping are really talented, whether they're being smuggled or not. And to be smuggled out of countries is an enormous task. It's not that you pay $3000 and you can be out of wherever you are! It takes a lot of concentration, commitment, work, energy. How can you get that amount of money in your hand anyway? You are under surveillance, and to get out of your home, to the airport or the docks, through security, onto the airplane or boat or whatever . . . It's a big journey, a

big work, maybe years of preparation. There's not any easiness there.

And suddenly you are inside four walls, having nothing to do.

Kerry: But aren't there English classes?

Xuan: You can't learn English in that uncertainty, Kerry. You can't concentrate. The anxiety de-energises you.

In an article in the magazine *Transitions* (August 2000), Human Rights Commissioner Chris Sidoti gives the following information about conditions in Australian detention centres: ". . . excursions are few and far between for each individual at present. There are also some work opportunities such as cleaning, kitchen hand and yard hand. There are, however, not enough jobs to go around. English classes are still available and, for those still optimistic about their chances of staying in Australia, very popular. But boredom is a very significant problem."

I had no identity except my brain. But who recognises this?
The human being in our world is a bundle of documents.

– Khalif al Maliki

Xuan Duong was born in 1945, shortly before the French colonial government reasserted its power in Vietnam. Xuan's father was interned and tortured by the French some time before the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. It was at a post-Dien Bien Phu demonstration that Xuan, in his mother's company, first saw machine guns being fired on a crowd.

Kerry: You studied in Saigon, but you were brought up in Phan Thiet . . .

Xuan: On the border of town and countryside. I'm half urban, half rural. My mother's family were from a fishing background and my father's family from a farming background. We lived along the river, mum, dad, my four brothers and sisters, and the extended family were all around.

Kerry: Vietnam was an agricultural country . . .

Xuan: True. Before the war some 80 per cent of the population were living in the countryside. They didn't have the ambition to be urban. Why should they? In the countryside, everything's there – in the morning you can look up at the mountains or take a walk along the lake with all the water lilies blossoming – who needs to live in a town? Why bother to come to the city and catch the bus every morning and run around buying things?

I'm not talking about laziness. You have to work hard to survive, to earn enough for your family, food and clothing . . . But time is slow, with the seasons you grow potatoes or rice or sticky rice. If you go to visit someone you are looking at maybe a day or two at their place. You rise with the sun, or if it's raining you delay your departure . . . You don't have to be there at, like, 12 o'clock Friday!

Kerry: Sounds like what I call 'Indian time'.

Xuan: Yeah. Vietnamese time. We measure it by bamboo sticks. What time is it? Umm . . . one stick, is it? One bamboo stick from the horizon . . . They measure the sun from the horizon, how high or low. I love this. It's poetic . . .

Kerry: A culture with the poetry built in?

Xuan: You can make space even in painful poetry for skies, clouds, bamboo sticks . . . why not?

Khalif al Maliki is quoted from his article, 'Painful Memories of a Detention Centre', *Transitions*, Summer 2000/01. Formerly a lecturer in political geography at Babyl University, Iraq, Khalif al Maliki escaped via Jordan, Thailand and Vietnam, and spent eight months at Villawood Detention Centre, Sydney.

Xuan Duong's three poetry collections are Refugee Kosovo *(1999);* refugee Refugees See the East Timorese? *(2000); and* Hey, I've got a racist flu! *(2001), all published by Integration, PO Box 34 Bankstown NSW 1885; each $15 including postage.*

Kerry Leves is a NSW poet and regular Overland *contributor.*

The July rain*

The rain cheerfully visits the grapefruit tree
the grapefruit is away
collecting the flowers from a far off land

the rain then goes to the beehive
the bees are lying drunk from honey
the rain shakes the peppercorn
the peppercorn busy washing hair

the rain showers the maple tree
the maple is in a coma
the rain drops on the coral tree
the coral is nursing its sore bones

the rain rests on the betel leaves
the betel leaves are missing the ants
the rain waltzes to the ferry
the ferry is being deserted
being frustrated, friendless and lonely

marches to the Boat People Sea
the rain activates the ocean
the rain mobilizes the sky
into looking for lost boats of refugees

follows then
a broken piece of timber
drifting in the remote water.

** July 1997, while the refugees are still forced to return on the winding-up of the twenty-two-year era of Vietnamese refugees.*

Xuan Duong

Mateship of wartime

War sends us up a hill
in the middle of nowhere

A group of us locals
a group of them, our allies
from a better-off land
fight and shoot side by side

Our group hides in a bunker
our allied group also hides in a bunker
next door
we are all the same kind
of rats doing everything underground
only quickly when we shit
we deposit it outside
behind some rocky shrubs
and quickly run
back into our bunker

One morning I have the guts
to wander about a bit
Ah, there on their side of the hill
sits their own makeshift shit house
with toilet rolls, with antiseptic smell

Attractive! Civilised!
so I invite my self to sit down
and shit well

Suddenly the door swings open
an allied guy yells at me
"Stand up! Stand up!"

The next morning I again wander
to the hillside where sits
the lovely makeshift shit house
its door's smile is now
chained
and in place a muscly padlock

Xuan Duong

Damien Cahill

Funding the ideological struggle

OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS a radical neo-liberal movement, more commonly known as the 'new right', has launched a sustained assault upon the welfare state, social justice and defenders of these institutions and ideas. In Australia, the organisational backbone of this movement is provided by think tanks such as the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), and the Tasman Institute; and forums such as the H.R. Nicholls Society. Central to the movement's efficacy and longevity has been financial support from Australia's corporate sector and industry interest groups.

Activists and scholars have produced many articles and books discussing radical neo-liberalism,[1] but the movement has yet to be comprehensively analysed. This article is a contribution towards such a project. What follows is an examination of the relationship between the radical neo-liberal movement and Australia's ruling class; a study of the motivations for corporate funding of neo-liberal think tanks; and an analysis of what impact the movement has had on policy and public opinion.

THE RADICAL NEO-LIBERAL movement's emergence from relative obscurity in the late seventies and early eighties to its current status can be attributed to two factors. The first is Australia's political economic context, and the second is backing from the corporate sector. Economic stagflation during the 1970s provided a window of opportunity for the radical neo-liberals, and during this time, a section of corporate Australia recognised the benefits of putting money into neo-liberal think tanks and projects.

Neo-liberalism has never been a popular movement. Without corporate support it is unlikely to have emerged as a potent force. Nor could its promoters have sustained their activities. In 1996, for example, the CIS derived about $772,077 of its $971,182 budget from corporate 'donations'. Only $113,085 (about 14 per cent) of its income was derived from book sales and subscriptions.[2] Had the CIS relied upon market forces to fund its activities, it would not have been viable.

In their early stages of development, the most prominent support for think tanks came from individual corporate CEOs, with mining and minerals companies standing out as major 'donors'. In the late seventies and early eighties Western Mining Corporation (WMC) chief Hugh Morgan served on the boards of most major think tanks and was crucial in brokering financial support for the movement.[3] WMC, CRA, BHP and Shell were crucial in providing the early financial base for the CIS.

By the 1980s, farming interests, represented by the National Farmers Federation (NFF), and small business associations such as the Australian Chamber of Commerce (ACC) and the Australian Federation of Employers (AFE) threw their support behind the radical neo-liberals, and by the 1990s, finance capital was the backbone of neo-liberal think tanks (although mining and minerals companies were still well represented).[4]

Sections of corporate Australia provide funds to think tanks primarily because they see their interests served by the promotion of radical neo-liberal ideas; even if not directly. Indirect benefits may follow through the promotion of a deregulated environment or anti-union policies, or through influence of social and market behaviour. 'Family restaurant' McDonald's, for example, funds the CIS 'Taking Children Seriously' Program[5] which has helped put conservative notions of family back on the media map. Mining companies and agribusiness, in response to powerful, militant and well-organised unions, have supported think tanks promoting militant anti-union activities.[6] Mining corporations view

environmental and land rights movements as direct threats; consequently, think tanks have consistently attacked and undermined these (one, the Bennelong Society, was formed expressly to challenge Aboriginal self-determination, the Stolen Generations, and the idea of "white guilt").

Financial capital organisations are among the coalition of interests which have turned to neo-liberalism as an alternative to the Keynesian welfare state.[7] Seeing the potential of massively increased profits in a deregulated environment, they have backed neo-liberal arguments. Other think-tank backers, such as retail and tobacco corporations, also have a vested interest in deregulation.

The effect of corporate sponsorship upon the output of these think tanks is perhaps evident from the fact that, while they have been fierce critics of the 'culture of welfare dependency', they have been remarkably silent on the issue of corporate welfare in Australia.

DURING THE 1980s there were conflicts within the ruling class itself over issues of industrial relations and tariffs. These conflicts were often bitter. The manufacturing sector, represented by the Confederation of Australian Industry (CAI), tended to support the centralised system of industrial relations as well as tariff protections. They were able to enter into mutually beneficial and industry-wide agreements with unions, which conditioned their approach to unions and the arbitration commission. On the other hand, small businesses, represented by the ACC, were less favourably disposed towards the arbitration system. The NFF also took a strong anti-union and pro-free-trade stance during this period.[8] These tensions led to the NFF splitting from the CAI. They also led to the establishment in 1986 of the AFE, which was designed to act as an alternative employers' association, and which pushed market-based alternatives to government regulation of industry and labour.

One of the defining features of the radical neo-liberal movement, and indeed the issue which catapulted the movement to national media attention, was its opposition to centralised industrial arbitration and wage fixing. The term 'Industrial Relations Club' was coined by think tanks to describe the trade unions, lawyers, journalists and employer associations (particularly the CAI and the Metal Trades Industry Association [MTIA]).[9] This 'club' was, in the eyes of neo-liberals, the chief obstacle to industrial relations change. Consequently, neo-liberals called for its abolition. It also called for a curbing of trade union power through the extension of legal sanctions against strike action.

The neo-liberal assault upon the 'Industrial Relations Club' provoked mixed responses from businesses and employer associations. But the depth of hostility of many within the manufacturing sectors can be gauged by their use of such terms as 'fascist' and 'escapist' to describe the radical neo-liberals in 1986.[10] Clearly, support among the ruling class for the radical neo-liberals was by no means uniform.

During the mid-1980s a number of militant and confrontationalist tactics were used by employers against employees, such as in the Dollar Sweets, Mudginberri and SEQEB disputes. In these cases, employers found allies in the radical neo-liberal movement, who defended their actions in terms of individual liberty.[11] In the Dollar Sweets case, then-lawyer Peter Costello used the common law to prosecute the union.

The formation of the H.R. Nicholls Society in 1986 gave militant employers a forum for meeting with like-minded parties. Former Peko-Wallsend head, Charles Copeman, attested to the forum's efficacy, stating that it provided him with the 'inspiration' to take on the unions in the Robe River dispute later in that year.[12]

With corporate support, radical neo-liberals have produced a number of publications which outline alternatives to the welfare state in Australia. These publications offer a vision of what a neo-liberal society might look like, and provide policy alternatives for getting there. *Australia at the Crossroads*, funded by Shell Australia, sets out an economic libertarian analysis of Australian society and prescribes desirable future directions.[13] *Mandate to Govern*, jointly sponsored by the Australian Institute for Public Policy and the Australian Chamber of Commerce, is based on a similar project conducted by the conservative Heritage Foundation in America to coincide with the 1980 and 1984 Presidential elections and contains a neo-liberal policy program for a future federal government.[14] *Victoria: An Agenda for Change* (part of 'Project Victoria') is a joint undertaking of the Institute of Public Affairs and the Tasman Institute, funded by a number of business associations. It coincided with the election of the Kennett government in Victoria and outlined a program of deregulation and privatisation.[15] The *National Priorities Project* presented research undertaken by the Centre for Policy Studies and also by the Tasman Institute on deregulation, privatisation, taxation and the application of market mechanisms to environmental problems. This project was funded by the BCA, NFF, mining and energy councils and finance associations.[16]

To a limited extent, neo-liberal think tanks have not only promoted ideas, but attempted to put these ideas into practice. The Tasman Institute, which arose out of the failed attempt to establish a private fee-paying university in Australia during the late 1980s,[17] is linked to Tasman Asia Pacific, a company which engages in consultancy work in Australia and overseas, advising governments on ways of implementing neo-liberal policy programs, such as privatisation and deregulation.

It is important to recognise the disparity between radical neo-liberalist views and those of other sections of the ruling class. The Business Council of Australia, for example, comprising CEOs of the largest eighty Australian companies, has differed from neo-liberals in tactics and policy, generally adopting a more incremental and practical approach to that of the radical neo-liberals.[18] While the radical neo-liberals called for the arbitration system to be abolished, the BCA seemed content to develop policies that had a realistic chance of implementation under the then Labor government. In the arena of industrial relations, the BCA led the way in the push for enterprise bargaining. It was the contribution of Fred Hilmer, rather than that of the think tanks, that was responsible for the Council's successful strategy of promoting enterprise bargaining.[19] For research it has tended to turn to other consultants such as Access Economics and McKinsey rather than the radical neo-liberal think tanks.

NEO-LIBERAL THINK TANKS AND THEIR FUNDING SOURCES

Following the US example, Australian new right think-tanks have acted as arms-length organisations through which private enterprise donations could be channelled into research tailored to the needs of conservative political parties. To give but one example, the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA) provided extensive bogus anthropological research on the validity of Aboriginal land claims to the Liberals during their anti-Mabo and Wik campaigns. The board of the Victorian IPA has included James Balderstone, who also served on the BHP board; Hugh Morgan, managing director of the Western Mining Company; and Dame Leonie Kramer, another Western Mining board member. All of Australia's major new right think tanks have been heavily dependent on mining company funding. The future of the fledgling Centre for Independent Studies (CIS) was reportedly consolidated by a $40,000 dollar grant organised by Morgan, with ongoing funding provided by the Western Mining Company, CRA, BHP, Shell, and Santos. The Tasman Institute, which was widely credited for providing the ideological blueprint for the Kennett Government in Victoria, was sponsored by BHP, CRA, Esso, MIM, Shell, Woodside Petroleum and Western Mining.

— Mark Davis

The effect of corporate sponsorship on the output of think tanks is perhaps evident from the fact that, while they have been fierce critics of the 'culture of welfare dependency' arising from state-administered welfare programs, they have been remarkably silent on the issue of corporate welfare in Australia – estimated by Greens Senator Bob Brown to be about $14 billion.[20] However, it is not good enough simply to describe radical neo-liberals as lackeys of the ruling class. Rather, they are actors in their own right, with their own interests and values. They are motivated by ideology, by an absolute conviction of the correctness of their own beliefs, whereas businesses are motivated by profit and are constrained by the limitations of political reality. This has clearly annoyed the radical neo-liberals, who have called on business associations to embrace neo-liberal policies and ideas with greater vigour.[21]

LIKE SOME OTHER MOVEMENTS, the radical neo-liberals have moved the goalposts of debate. These ideological shock troops have enjoyed favourable treatment by the mainstream media. My own survey of *The Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Australian Financial Review* between 1986 and 1995 reveals that only 14 per cent of articles which mentioned one or more of the radical neo-liberal think tanks identified them as either right-wing or conservative. Further, 63 per cent of these articles contained quotes from think tank publications or members.[22] This suggests that the ideological nature of these think tanks has been concealed and their output has been presented as authoritative, disinterested and objective.

While they haven't influenced public opinion directly (witness the continuing unpopularity of neo-liberal policies), they have had success intervening in the agenda-setting organs of the media. For example, being far more radical than the BCA, they were able to create a "favourable intellectual climate" in which the Business Council's less radical agenda of enterprise bargaining was politically palatable.[23]

Radical neo-liberals argued that the economic crisis of the seventies exposed an inherent flaw in Keynesianism. Australian policy-making of the time was in fact a grab-bag of theories, and wasn't a strict application of Keynesian practice at all.[24] But radical neo-liberalism helped legitimise the rejection of Keynesianism, and contributed to the context for speculation about alternatives.

They promote these alternatives at every level. Both the CIS and IPA have had programs aimed specifically at high-school teachers and their students. The CIS established the Economics Education Resource Centre in 1989, which produced a regular publication and sponsored seminars for both economics teachers and students. In 1993 the CIS claimed that its professional development days had attracted 600 teachers, while more than 800 schools, colleges and libraries subscribed to its newsletter, *The Economics Education Review*.[25] All of this helped to legitimate the neo-liberal framework of economic analysis within the teaching of high-school economics, as well as promote the idea that 'there is no alternative' to neo-liberalism.

This is just one way in which think tanks have provided a focus for the radical neo-liberal movement. They have provided continuity, support for activists, an organisational base and a means of distribution of information. By bringing the faithful together, and by reaffirming neo-liberal ideology, they have helped to embolden participants in the radical neo-liberal movement.

WHILE THE RADICAL NEO-LIBERAL movement has not been the main driver of Liberal Party policy, it has been instrumental in shaping it. At the most obvious level, a number of radical neo-liberal activists have been involved in the Liberal Party. Peter Costello, the Kemp brothers and Ian McLachlan have become federal Liberal MPs. Charles Copeman unsuccessfully ran for election. Former Liberal MPs John Hyde and Bert Kelly advocated radical neo-liberal approaches while in parliament. Michael Kroger, Andrew Robb and David Trebeck have all moved into the non-parliamentary hierarchy. Andrew Norton from the CIS is a former adviser to David Kemp. Alistair Nicholas, also of the CIS, has been an adviser to Alexander Downer.

As neo-liberal ideology has developed into political reality, it has also become more acceptable for Labor politicians to fraternise with the radical neo-liberal movement. Federal Labor MP Mark Latham has dabbled, publishing with the CIS.[26] Former Federal Labor Minister Gary Johns is employed by the IPA. Former Labor Finance Minister Peter Walsh is a friend of the movement. NSW Labor Police Minister Michael Costa contributed a chapter to *A Defence of Economic Rationalism*,[27] and NSW Labor Premier Bob Carr's description of the CIS as a "jewel in Sydney's crown" adorns its website. Nonetheless, there have not been any radical neo-liberals who have gone to work for Labor MPs or become Labor politicians

IT'S HARD TO OVERESTIMATE THE INFLUENCE CONSERVATIVE THINK TANKS HAVE HAD ON THE POLITICAL AGENDA IN AUSTRALIA. NOW, HOWEVER, THEY ARE GIRDING THEIR LOINS FOR A DEFENSIVE BATTLE AGAINST SIGNS OF A RENAISSANCE ON THE LEFT – A BATTLE SOME SAY THEY'RE LOSING

REG LINDSAY should be a man content. His creation, the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS), is today the most influential think tank in the country, its unique brand of social conservatism and neo-classical economics now largely mirrored in Coalition Government policy. Not only is the 25-year-old institution a firm favourite of the Prime Minister, it is increasingly hailed by both sides of politics. A moment of triumph, you might think. And yet, Lindsay is troubled.

"The country's a way better place than it was 25 years ago," he told *The AFR Magazine*. "Trends are going the way we have argued. But I don't think [the market economy model] has won. Interventionists are still there, supporters of regulation are still there. We have to fight that.

"Most of these arguments – you've got to keep re-stating them, repackaging and re-organising; say it again, get someone else to say it. It's a cultural thing too. We're working through these cultural tides – one's going out, and ours is coming in. We've got to make sure ours stays in."

It's a message that has been continually underlined by the Government of late. "The lesson of the last six years is that you always push forward," Prime Minister John Howard told the Liberal Party's Federal Council in April. "The task is never done. The reform process is never completed. The economy is never perfect."

The Party's retiring treasurer, Ron Walker, echoed the call: "I think the biggest challenge the party's got is to keep the reform going and to keep up with new ideas." His replacement as treasurer, Malcolm Turnbull, used the same occasion to launch a research report on the [illegible]. The product of another think tank – the Liberal Party's own Menzies [illegible]lled for a wholesale shake-up of education, replacing [illegible]uld use in any school, public or private. [illegible]leon, the report was the

The Australian Financial Review Magazine, *July 2002*

themselves. It has been one-way traffic – and a trickle at that.

While evidence of direct influence of the radical neo-liberal movement on policy does exist – Andrew Norton's promotion of vouchers when adviser to David Kemp, for example – for the most part, the impact has been more subtle. Radical neo-liberal activism in and around the Liberal Party has helped to introduce neo-liberal policy options to the party which, even if not adopted, have generated debate within the party.

Further, radical neo-liberals have provided the Liberals with a language with which to attack opponents and justify their policies. They have co-opted egalitarian language to frame an apology for privilege in democratic terms. So, vouchers are no longer a means of giving more public money to already privileged private schools; they are about 'individual choice'. Dissenting intellectuals no longer play an important role in public political debates; they're demonised as 'politically correct elites'. Notions such as a 'culture of welfare dependency', the 'Aboriginal Industry', and 'private welfare' come straight from the radical neo-liberal movement.

The movement has been a consistent and strident critic of most people appealing to the values of social justice; not just of the Left in general. Generally the radical neo-liberals have characterised their opponents as being elitist, out of touch with ordinary Australians and as being motivated either by ideology or vested interest. This has been manifest in emotively-charged labels such as 'politically correct', 'special interest', the 'guilt industry' and the 'new class'.[28] Such language was recently used to undermine members of the Stolen Generations and claims of non-Indigenous intellectuals about massacres of Aborigines. As Robert Manne has highlighted, the intellectual outpourings of a number of the radical neo-liberals has helped to legitimate the Howard government's attack upon the entire notion of the Stolen Generations.[29]

TO BE SUCCESSFUL, a project which aims to reorganise capital and the state needs a concomitant reorganisation of hegemony. Kees van der Pijl and Henk Overbeek argue that a hegemonic project requires a "politics of support as much as it needs a politics of power".[30] The radical neo-liberal movement has done this by demonising opponents of neo-liberalism, helping to create a favourable intellectual climate for neo-liberal ideas to flourish, as well as helping to reorganise 'common sense' through rhetorical justifications of neo-liberal policy. It is in such a context that the radical neo-liberal movement is best understood.

There have been unintended consequences of the movement. The rise of Pauline Hanson was, in part, a backlash against neo-liberalism, but it was also furnished with the language of the neo-liberals. Hanson's 'politically correct elites' was a notion that came from

the think tanks, from a common right-wing political culture. Indeed, the Hanson phenomenon underscored the general unpopularity of neo-liberal policies in Australia. But Hansonism was inarticulate and racist. Combating neo-liberalism requires a mobilisation of both egalitarian ideas and interests against the powerful array of forces that nurture it.

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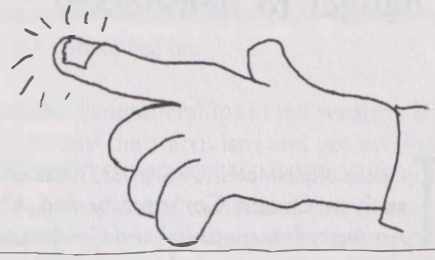
Damien Cahill is completing a PhD on the radical neo-liberal movement at the University of Wollongong.

IRONY EXPLAINED

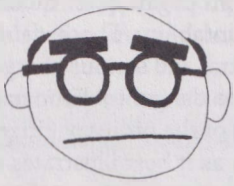
by Lofo

A class action of quadriplegics forced the Dubbo Bugle to pay out $450.000 for use of the expression 'lame excuse'.

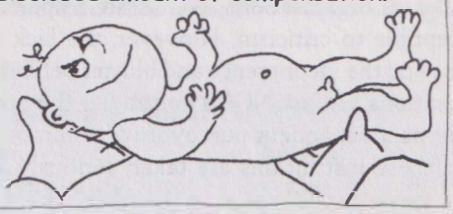
A visitor to an exhibition of Aboriginal Art damaged a fingernail while pointing at a bark painting and was awarded $250,000 in damages.



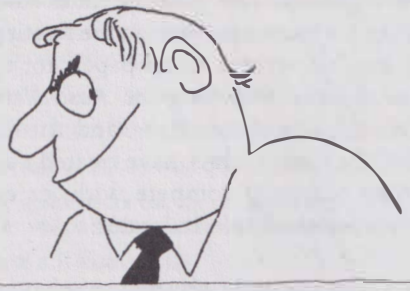
~~A journalist who joked that John Howard~~ looked like a character from South Park was fined $356.050.



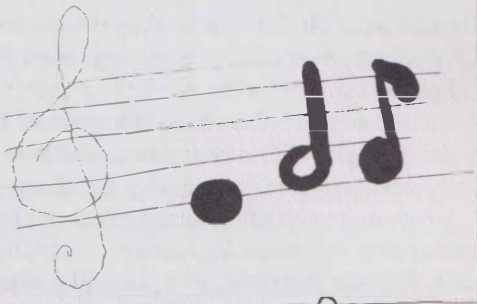
Dr Sonderby of the Bleeding Heart Hospital in Traralgon delivered a baby which was clearly uglier than average, and was ordered to pay the mother an undisclosed amount of compensation.



Senator Kendhal Perry-Smitherfox OBM. BO. BMX. sued the publisher of his biography for alleging that he was seen looking over his shoulder at a prostitute. He won $6 million in damages.



SongwriterSonny Jim Corncrack sued a rival musician for using the same three notes from one of his songs. He was awarded $125.600



The constant threat of court actions is clearly a scourge to modern life, a major drain on scarce finances and a bane to free expression. How to stamp out this evil? What to do to those people who spread this cancerous plague in our culture?

The legal profession has the answer:

Tim Thornton

The Hydra-headed monster

Australian non-government organisations as a danger to democracy

NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS (NGOs) such as Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, Amnesty International and Greenpeace are extremist bodies that pose a threat to democracy – according to claims by right-wing institutions.[1] The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), for example, claims that NGOs and their "mail-order" memberships of "wealthy leftists" are now running government.[2]

Like all organisations, NGOs are imperfect and susceptible to criticism. However, the lack of evidence and the incoherence and bluster behind recent accusations against NGOs contradict the accusors' status as independent purveyors of common sense. That these institutions are taken seriously and receive extensive coverage in the mainstream media says much about Australian media ownership patterns and the quality of public debate.

Background

HISTORICALLY, NGOs – particularly those focused on poverty reduction – have enjoyed a high level of public support for the work they undertake. Some environmental NGOs have always been controversial, but the NGO movement as a whole is a relatively recent target for sustained or trenchant criticism. A recent growth of literature criticising NGO operations and structures amounts to a significant backlash. Figure 1 (opposite) gives a small sample of some of these criticisms.

The Ripley's 'believe it or not' nature of many of these articles makes them difficult to take seriously, let alone dignify with a response. However, the publicity they have generated makes some response necessary. The IPA, funded by commercial interests and individuals, has been conducting a barrage against NGOs in its own publications for a number of years, and has managed to receive wide media coverage for its questionable reports. It enjoyed more than 200 media appearances or mentions in the past year alone.[3] Its ideological comrade, *Quadrant*, was recently lauded by the Prime Minister for its contribution to public discourse.[4]

As is apparent from Figure 1, NGOs are accused of a litany of failings: they are extremist and irresponsible; they propagate poor quality analysis; and they lack accountability. These claims are secondary to a more central and serious charge against NGOs: that they pose a danger to democracy and are displacing the views of the ordinary citizen. I want to focus on this claim as it best illustrates the general problems with the critique against NGOs and problems with such organisations as the IPA and *Quadrant*.

Regulating the regulators

THE MOST PROMINENT Australian advocate of the idea that NGOs have gained a dangerous stranglehold over government in Australia is Garry Johns, a former minister in the Keating government. Johns has written many papers for the IPA and for newspapers including the *Australian Financial Review*,[5] *The Australian*,[6] and the *Courier Mail*.[7] NGOs, claims Johns, have created a situation where they currently compete with, or even dominate democratically elected states:

> Both the coalition and Labor have to think about their place in the world. They are virtually instruments of government, rather than instruments of their own members . . . policy comes from organised civil society, NGOs and interest groups. A large slice of their income is from the government. [NGOs] may have to open their procedures to greater scrutiny in order to retain the privilege of running government.[8]

Paddy McGuinness continues in this vein of democracy under siege:

> NGOs . . . have elevated themselves into a kind of additional constituency of national and international governance, demanding all kinds of regulation to meet their demands. But it is time to regulate the would-be regulators. The NGOs who would like to regulate world trade, the environment and working conditions have become a burgeoning Hydra-headed monster which is threatening both democracy and prosperity throughout the world. While they will disown the violence of their own shock troops in Melbourne, who were trying not to put forward their own views but to prevent the expression of the views of those attending the World Economic Forum meeting, they are quietly just as much opposed to free speech and open, democratic policymaking as the neo-fascist storm troopers of the left who rampaged through Melbourne and laid siege to the casino convention centre where the meeting was held.[9]

How have they come to be running government? NGOs are a particularly crafty type of interest group who have been able to command a level of influence well beyond their narrow support base in the general community, according to Johns. He sees this support base consisting of:

> mail-order memberships of the wealthy left, content to buy their activism and get on with their consumer lifestyle. These people take out insurance against global capitalism, just in case democratically elected governments fail to tame the beast. The insurance strategy does not entitle them to a place at the negotiating table alongside governments.[10]

McGuinness enforces this assertion that NGO supporters are a dubious minority:

Figure 1. Selected articles on NGOs by The Institute of Public Affairs 1998–2002

Title	Published	Author
It's Official: Greenpeace Serves no Public Purpose	*IPA Review*, v.51, no.4, Dec. 1999	R. Bate
It's Not Easy Beating Greens	*Courier Mail*, 10 November 2001	R. Brunton
Editorial 'The posturing of many human rights advocacy NGOs is now clear. It's time the charade ended'	*IPA Review*, v.52, no.3, Sep. 2000	M. Nahan (editorial)
NGO Way to Go: Political Accountability of Non-government Organizations in a Democratic Society	*IPA Backgrounder*, v.12, Nov. 2000	G. Johns
Non-representative middle-class activism a danger to our democracy	IPA press release, 11 Dec. 2000	IPA
Protocols with NGOs: The Need To Know	IPA, v.131, November 2001	G. Johns
The Conflicting Role of the WTO's Role and Value	*Aust. Financial Review*, 6 Dec. 1999	G. Johns
Why champions of causes need close scrutiny	*The Australian*, 30 January 2002	G. Johns
Campaigns against major corporations as a threat to liberty as well as to the corporations themselves.	*IPA Review*, v.53, no.1, Mar. 2001	M. Nahan (editorial)
The Death of a Thousand Cuts	*IPA Review*, v.53, no.1, Mar. 2001	J.B. Manheim
Has the World Wildlife Fund Lost the Plot?	*IPA Review*, v.54, no.1, Mar. 2002	G. Johns & J. Marohasy
On 'ill-informed or baseless campaigns' by some high profile NGOs	*IPA Review*, v.54, no.1, Mar. 2002	M. Nahan (editorial)
WWF Says 'Jump!', Governments Ask 'How High?'	*IPA Review*, v.54, no.1, Mar. 2002	J. Marohasy & G. Johns
Environmentalism for the Twenty-first Century	*IPA Review*, v.52, no.3, Sep. 2000	Patrick Moore
Amnesty Infomercial	*IPA Review*, v.51, no.3, Sep. 1999	Peter Phelps
Ambush in Cyberspace: NGOs the Internet and the MAI	*IPA Review*, v.51, no.2, June 1999	Michael Warby
Sauce for the Goose	*IPA Review*, v.50, no.3, May 1998	Anthony Adair

> NGOs . . . are entirely unrepresentative, undemocratic and concerned with their own special agendas. Whether they be obsessed with humanitarian aid, the environment, the sacred cows of the sea, or working conditions, these organisations are the antithesis of democracy, and are often corrupt or dominated by lunatic ideologies.[11]

NGOs are seen to be a type of interest group with a very narrow support base, but this strident (and flawed) assumption is seen to work in combination with an even stranger idea – that interest groups are undemocratic if they do not represent a majority viewpoint:

> These NGOs, among a host of others, consist of private activists organising for public purposes. They are a sign of a healthy civil society. After all, there is no reason to leave all the politics to politicians. *That is unless NGO interests do not coincide with our own* [emphasis added]. In politics, organised lobbies crowd out unorganised lobbies. A certain amount of displacement occurs when the organised are granted access to government. This is not necessarily a bad thing – NGOs, like political parties, help to aggregate and filter opinion, and in doing so, they contribute to the work of politics.[12]

Johns initially appears here to be conceding a role to NGOs and other interest groups, but one only has to note his caveat, that the views and interests of these groups must coincide with mainstream opinion, to see that statement is spurious. Even if NGOs *did* represent a minority viewpoint (which isn't necessarily the case) can they not have a voice without threatening democracy?

Also of concern is the fear of organised groups participating in the political process. In this respect Johns takes his cue from the highly reductionist assumptions of public choice theory. This concern about the displacing power of groups, at least in the Australian political context, seems far-fetched to say the least. The simple truth is that next to voting, being a member of some type of interest group is the most common form of political participation in Australia.[13] Groups enable rather than disable political participation. The extract below from Marsh gives a far more realistic description of what interest groups such as NGOs feed into the process of democracy:

> It is hard to overstate the degree to which Australia has become a group-based community. The array of organised actors on any issue is legion . . . Now, on any of the widened array of issues on the political agenda, a much expanded array of views have standing. At a policy level, this has expanded the variety of issues on the public agenda, thus generating more pressures on governance – and more complex tradeoffs and synergies between policy areas. At the level of public opinion, it expands the number of organised actors contending for influence.[14]

Still, the axiom that disinterested groups embody rather than pervert democracy seems lost on Johns. He claims that Governments should not grant NGOs privileges greater than those accorded any citizen. Presumably all interest groups (including the IPA) would be subject to the same rule? If not, why not? Put into practice, this idea would effectively mean that groups speaking on behalf of thousands or millions carry no more weight than a single individual voice. It is difficult to conceive of how a large modern nation state could even run under such a system.

Has this type of 'think tank' analysis made a valuable contribution to public debate? Regardless of conceptual problems, it is worth also asking the question: on what basis have these accusations against NGOs been made? Are NGOs a particularly influential type of interest group? Or, to rephrase this question, where is the evidence that they are now 'running government'? Where is the evidence that they represent minority opinion? Is it true that NGOs represent only the views and agendas of the wealthy left?

To answer these questions, it seems appropriate to look at the status of key issues that are at the heart of lobbying by human rights NGOs, development NGOs and environmental NGOs. If NGOs are indeed 'running government' it is reasonable to expect that they have had significant success in these areas. NGOs are sometimes quite visible in their advocacy campaigns, but being visible and having public policy dominance are two entirely different things. The following debunks the argument that NGOs have developed into some type of special case interest group that needs to be bound by special protocols.

Key NGO advocacy areas

Foreign Aid

The long-term trend in the ratio of government foreign aid to GDP has been downwards. Currently it is 0.25 per cent of GDP whereas in the mid 1970s it

was at 0.5 per cent. Sustained efforts by NGOs since 1972 have not persuaded the Australian Government to lift aid to 0.7 per cent, the ratio recommended by the United Nations for developed countries.

Environment

There has been a rise in the number of threatened birds and animals. Large increases in the amount of land clearing of native vegetation (for example 470,000 hectares were cleared in 1999, a 40 per cent increase since 1991). Land affected by, or at high risk of developing dryland salinity, stands at 5.7 million hectares; a decline in the quality of Australian inland waters; greenhouse gas emission increases of 17 per cent between 1990 and 1991 (Australia has one of the highest per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the world).[15]

Human Rights

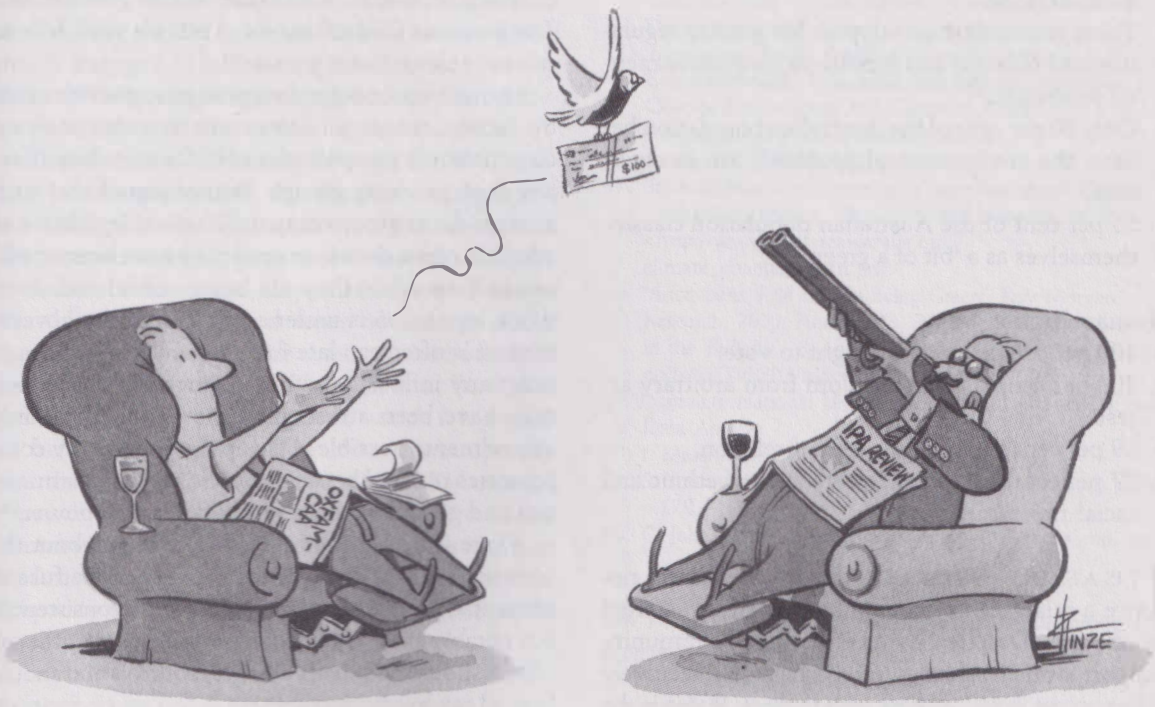
Australia has come under increasing criticism from the United Nations human rights committees on issues such as mandatory detention, the Wik legislation, and other issues that pertain to the treatment and status of Indigenous people. There have also been criticisms of Australia's policy and practice of mandatory detention and the treatment of asylum seekers. Australia has further been criticised for its strategy of 'quiet' diplomacy on human rights issues with countries such as Burma and China.

Mainstream support of NGOs and their public policy agendas

It's not hard to find empirical evidence that conflicts with the assertion that NGOs represent only special interests in the electorate. There is much evidence which shows that NGOs enjoy the mainstream support that they are accused of 'displacing'.

Development NGOs

- 50 per cent of Australians claim to have contributed money or time to a Development NGO in the past twelve months.
- There has been a 30 per cent increase in the voluntary giving of Australians to Development NGOs since 1998.
- 85 per cent of Australians support overseas aid.
- 58 per cent strongly support overseas aid.
- Poverty reduction, ensuring peace, improving health and safeguarding the environment are re-



CHARDONNAY SOCIALIST MEETS CABERNET CONSERVATIVE

garded by those surveyed as some of the most important issues facing the world today.
- Australians believe we should give aid to look after those less fortunate, for humanitarian and moral reasons, and because Australia is wealthy and can afford it, not for reasons related to Australia's self interest.[16]

Environmental NGOs
- 77 per cent of Australians want coal-fired power stations phased out.
- 80 per cent supported governments building or subsidising solar and wind-powered facilities.
- 66 per cent of Australians are prepared to pay higher fossil-fuel taxes if the revenue was partly used to build or subsidise alternative energy sources.
- The impression that Australia is behind the rest of the world in addressing change is the source of a loss of pride.
- There is mainstream support for greater regulation and taxation and incentives for environmental protection.[17]
- Only 20 per cent of the Australian population believe the environmental problems are exaggerated.
- 55 per cent of the Australian population classify themselves as a 'bit of a greenie'.[18]

Human Rights
- 100 per cent support the right to vote.
- 100 per cent support freedom from arbitrary arrest.
- 89 per cent support freedom of religion.
- 77 per cent support the protection of ethnic and racial minorities.[19]

IT IS A SIMPLE MATTER of looking at the data to notice a relationship that contradicts those asserted by the IPA. Despite having significant community *support* for their agendas, NGOs have had relatively *little* success in influencing government. If this is the case, the IPA should really be asking the question: why have NGOs accumulated so little political influence when they have so much support?

Far from 'running government', NGOs have had little influence on policy, despite having significant community support for their agendas. The IPA should instead be asking: why have NGOs accumulated so little political influence when they have so much support?

With their mainstream community support, why has the policy influence of NGOs been modest? Partly because other types of interest groups – including such right-wing think tanks as the IPA – countervail them. NGOs find their natural counterweight in producer groups (groups involved in the production of goods and services in the mainstream economy). NGOs frequently advocate greater regulation, taxation of business, or consumer pressure on business. In his study of interest groups, social movements, think tanks and the media, Marsh notes that the key strength of producer groups over other interest groups in Australian society is their scale, wealth and reach. For example, the Business Council of Australia (BCA), a producer group comprising about 100 of Australia's largest companies, has membership contributions of five million dollars per year. The BCA employs sixteen staff, many of whom previously worked on matters of policy formation within the federal government. The Business Council meets in private with federal cabinet at least twice a year.[20]

Marsh's observations support an argument made by Tansey: that in all democratic systems non-producer interest groups such as NGOs seem less effective than producer groups. Tansey argues that such non-producer groups may only hear of legislative or administrative decisions once they have been made, rather than while they are being considered. Even when legislation is under consideration by government it is often too late for less powerful groups to exact any influence, as the prestige of government may have been attached to the bill and the only amendments possible at this point are usually compromises reached between public servants or ministers and groups with entrenched political power.[21]

There is a noteworthy lack of concern about the 'democracy displacing' role of the more powerful and influential producer groups. Where is the consistency? It is notably absent. Johns, for example, asserts that all NGOs should be subject to strict protocols and should lose all tax exemption if there is too much focus on advocacy. Yet he is stridently opposed to similar codes of conduct for commercial organisations:

> corporations are commercially responsible and liable for the goods and services they produce for their customers. They are industrially responsible for and contractually obligated to their employees. They are financially responsible for and legally obligated to their shareholders. This is a lot and enough.[22]

At no stage does Johns explain why non-producer groups that seek to influence public policy are undemocratic but producer groups attempting to do exactly the same thing are not. There is a basic inability to acknowledge that NGOs are but one type of interest group among thousands of other groups which seek to participate in the democratic process. There is no basis for asserting that NGOs are a 'special case'; if anything they are relatively disadvantaged against other types of interest groups such as producer groups.

Conclusion

ASSERTIONS MADE by the IPA and similar institutions sit badly with the empirical evidence. They also disclose a very selective concern about which types of interest group are a danger to democracy. The whole thesis is rather ridiculous and hypocritical. We have the IPA (which is itself an interest group clearly engaged in influencing public policy) saying that other interest groups engaged in the same activity (but with different views) are undemocratic.

There is a thread running through the IPA literature which emphasises the dangers of regulation and interference by Government; in this respect the IPA position would appear to owe much to the neoliberalism of Friedman, Hayek and Bauer. Perhaps it is this very heightened sense of concern about regulation and interference that is at the bottom of the attack against NGOs. The IPA is in favour of civil society only to the degree to which it is a vehicle for less government. The more contemporary idea that civil society agents such as NGOs could improve government intervention is given little currency. It is this type of ideological obsession that is at the bottom of these right-wing institutions' incapacity to look a little more carefully at the world around them.

ENDNOTES

1. P.P. McGuinness, 'Human Rights NGOs and the Democratic Deficit', *Quadrant*, October 2000, vol.44, issue 10, p.2.
2. G. Johns, 'Labor's Reform Must Heed the Electorate' in *The Courier-Mail*, 22 November 2001, p.15.
3. IPA website <www.ipa.org.au/Media/mediaisslist.htm>.
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5. G. Johns, 'Corporations Are Not Citizens', *Australian Financial Review*, 1 September 2000, p.77.
6. G. Johns, 'Why champions of causes need close scrutiny', *The Australian*, 30 December 2002, p.11.
7. G. Johns, 'Labor's Reform Must Heed the Electorate', *Courier-Mail*, 22 November 2001, p.15.
8. ibid.
9. P.P. McGuinness, op. cit.
10. G. Johns, 'The Conflicting Role of the WTO's Role and Value', *Australian Financial Review*, 6 December 1999, p.17.
11. P.P. McGuinness, op. cit.
12. G. Johns, 'Why champions of causes need close scrutiny'.
13. I. Marsh, 'Gaps in policy-making capacities: interest groups, social movements, think tanks and the media', in M. Keating, J. Wanna & P. Weller (eds), *Institutions on the Edge: Capacity for Governance*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 2000, p.178.
14. ibid.
15. All statistics in this paragraph have been sourced from 'Mapping Our Progress Report', Australian Bureau of Statistics, released 4 April 2002, www.abs.gov.au
16. 'Monitoring Public Opinion Towards Overseas Aid', Commonwealth of Australia (AusAid) and Australian Council for Overseas Aid, Canberra, 2001, <www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/community_attitudes.pdf>.
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19. Australian National University (1991) ANU Social Science Data Archive.
20. I. Marsh, op. cit., pp.178–202.
21. S. Tansey, *Politics: The Basics*, Routledge, London, 1984, p.178.
22. G. Johns, 2002, 'Corporations Are Not Citizens', op. cit.

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RESPECT FOR THE TRUTH IS NOT JUST A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF JOURNALISM... CARTOONISTS, TOO, ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO THE MEDIA'S

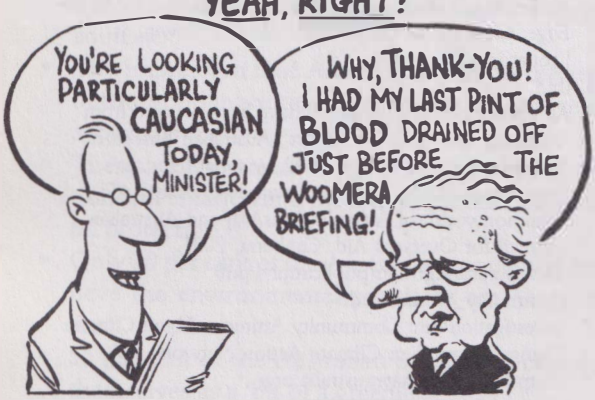
CODE OF CONDUCT!

TOONIST

1. REPORT HONESTLY, STRIVING FOR ACCURACY, FAIRNESS AND DISCLOSURE OF ALL ESSENTIAL FACTS BLAH BLAH BLAH WHATEVER. JUST SO LONG AS IT'S FUNNY!

2. DO NOT PLACE UNNECESSARY EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS INCLUDING RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, AGE OR SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

YEAH, RIGHT!



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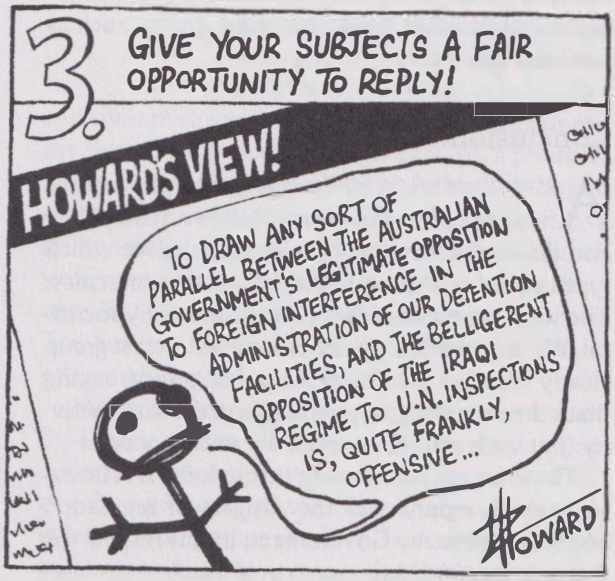

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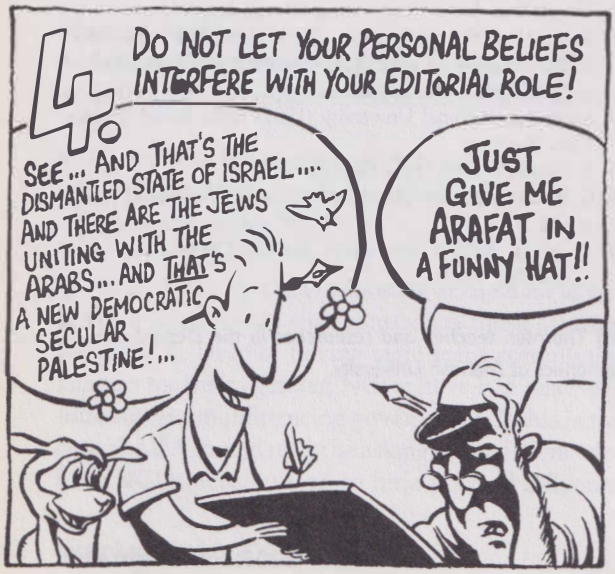
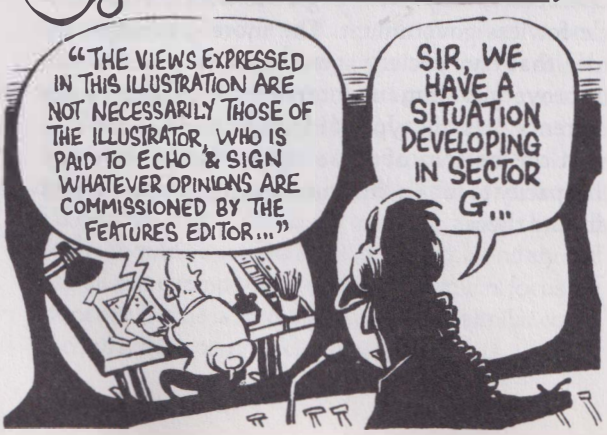


5. DISCLOSE CONFLICTS OF INTEREST THAT COULD BE SEEN TO AFFECT YOUR FEARLESS INDEPENDENCE!



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TELSTRA OPTIONS

7. ALWAYS PROTECT YOUR SOURCE!

O..BUT...BUT... I WAS MERELY EXAGGERATING THE EXISTING POLICY OF REMOTE AREA DETENTION!

CUT THE CRAP, SON! WHO TOLD YOU ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S SECRET PLANS FOR A CENTRE ON THE MOON?!

8. USE FAIR & HONEST MEANS TO OBTAIN YOUR MATERIAL!

I MUST SAY... THIS SEEMS A LITTLE UNCONVENTIONAL FOR AN ARCHIBALD ENTRY!...

OFF WITH THE Y-FRONTS TOO, PRIME MINISTER!

9. DO NOT PLAGIARISE!

OH MY GOD! THEY'VE LOCKED UP KENNY!

WOOMERA

YOU BASTARDS!

10. RESPECT PERSONAL PRIVACY. RESIST ANY COMPULSION TO INTRUDE.

YOUR AUSTRALIAN INTERN IS HERE, MR PRESIDENT!

I'LL JUST WAIT OUTSIDE, SHALL I?

AND FINALLY, DON'T FORGET: ALWAYS CORRECT YOUR ERRORS!

CORRECTION

THE SECOND PANEL OF THIS CARTOON CONTAINED A DEPICTION OF THE FEDERAL CABINET AS A PACK OF HOOTING HOWLER MONKEYS.

IT HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO OUR ATTENTION THAT HOWLER MONKEYS DO NOT LOCK UP THEIR CHILDREN IN REMOTE CONCENTRATION CAMPS.

THE CARTOONIST APOLOGISES FOR ANY DISTRESS THIS CARTOON MAY HAVE CAUSED HOWLER MONKEYS & THEIR FAMILIES.

LINZE

Anthony Macris

The New Millennium

Facades and duplicities

IT'S SECOND YEAR not even finished, the third millennium has already revealed one of its greatest fracture points in the form of a spectacular catastrophe: the destruction of one of capitalism's most powerful architectural symbol, the World Trade Centre in New York.

For me, if 1 January 2000 represented anything, it was capitalism's global ascendancy. From an Anglo-American perspective, the origins of the new millennium's market renaissance have their roots in 1979, when the British people turned their backs on socialism and voted in the radical conservative government of Margaret Thatcher. Across the Atlantic the US electorate, following its own political momentum, voted in the Reagan administration, creating a welfare state for corporations on a scale never before seen. In the Australia of the 1980s the Labor Party, the traditional defenders of the workers, turned sharply Right, and embraced the brave new world of free trade. By the year 2000, the stage was set for the new capitalist millennium. Labour markets had been 'flexibilised', tariff barriers had been brought down, the global market had been welded into shape by the IMF, the WTO and NAFTA. The transnational corporations were now free to roam the globe at will, and roam they did, becoming major economies in their own right and dwarfing all but the largest nation states. The future seemed fairly settled, with companies such as Monsanto, Newscorp and Nike now firmly at the helm of spaceship earth.

On the morning of 12 September my partner woke me at 5.30 a.m. She had been up feeding our three-month-old son and listening to the radio. He played with his favourite toy octopus as she stood in the bedroom doorway and said: "The World Trade Centre in New York has been blown up." Her words seemed completely unbelievable. I was taken aback, annoyed to have been woken up out of deep sleep, and grizzled: "What did you wake me up to tell me that for?" A minute later I was glued to the TV screen, where I more or less remained for the next two days. I watched over and over again the hijacked jets puncture the side of the buildings like parodies of Hollywood special effects. I watched the balls of flame roll up the glass and steel facades. I watched the collapse of the towers as each floor fell on the next with unbelievable precision. In 1997, I had been up to the observation deck of one of those towers. I tried to imagine what it must have been like to stand on the top floor and plunge to my death on a cloud of vaporised steel and concrete. It was impossible.

For the past ten years I have been working on a series of novels titled *Capital*. The first, *Capital*, Volume One, was published in Sydney in 1997, and in London the year after. The second part, *Capital*, Volume One, Part Two, is nearing completion. In these novels I am trying to depict the effect of the increasing penetration of market forces into everyday life. My two main sources of inspiration are Marx's *Capital*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*. What interests me about Marx is how he tries to create a system that captures the very movement of capitalism itself by using the most banal examples imaginable: bushels of corns, bolts of cloth, lengths of steel. What interests me about Joyce's *Ulysses*, the paradigmatic novel of the everyday, and perhaps the ultimate example of literary modernism at its most apolitical, is that Leopold Bloom is not only the cuckolded husband of Molly Bloom, but also a seller of local advertising. Following on in this literary tradition, it is out of the fabric of everyday life, its humdrum settings and anxieties, that I am constructing my own rendering of contemporary capitalism.

The destruction of the World Trade Centre is not an everyday event: quite the opposite. But thanks to

the mass media, thanks to our increasing addiction to it, its destruction has penetrated into the fabric of everyday life and will be part of our thoughts for a long time to come. And, having taken up its unique place there, it makes us think about the everyday in new ways. The main events in my novel are usually what I would call acts of minor repression, the small betrayals and compromises we are forced to make to get by. These acts of compromise seem to become ever more frequent the more we allow market practices to dictate how we live. In the chapter of my novel titled 'Penny at JobClub', my heroine has to humour her unemployed clients, who desperately want to believe they may be eligible for jobs they have no hope of getting. She has to teach them to use a form of computer technology, a Job Access Terminal, whose main function is to get them in and out of scraps of poorly paid work as quickly as possible. She has to undergo an evaluation conducted by her boss so that she can continue her casualised employment; the answers she is forced to give the antithesis of her personal beliefs. In short, she has to do the two things that contemporary capitalism seems to force everyone to do a little more everyday: lie and smile at the same time. And lie and smile not only to others, but to herself as well.

It would be naive to think that this kind of duplicity is unique to the world of free enterprise. When, in Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Tomas's colleagues beg him to sign his confession, they are simply advising him to do what they did when faced with the demands of a despotic regime: to sacrifice appearances in the hope that the inner core goes untouched. In Gogol's *Dead Souls*, a somewhat earlier example, we see that the Russian serf-based society of the nineteenth century also had its own brand of duplicity, beautifully illustrated by the novel's anti-hero, Chichikov, who uses a blend of unctuous charm and fawning deference to lie his way to prosperity. Thus the novel clearly shows us that not only is duplicity a common feature of human nature, but that it can be employed for any number of ethically complex reasons.

But what perhaps is unique to the duplicity of contemporary capitalism is the kind of irony required to maintain a facade of weightless optimism. It is a curious form of irony, one that can be summed up in the slogan 'service with a smile'. Full allegiance to this creed creates a cynicism without rancour, a virulently positive team spirit based, paradoxically, on personal self-advancement. Frederic Jameson sums it up well in his seminal essay on postmodernism where he describes contemporary irony as blank, as characterised by a dry, soundless laughter, although I would have such laughter emerging from a dazzling, perfectly vacant smile.

What also perhaps is unique to contemporary capitalism is the triumph of the facade. It is no longer simply a matter of living in a society where what you think doesn't matter as long as you toe the line. Things have gone much further than that. In the free market you can have all the inner life you want. Inner lives are good, they're great for business, as long as they can be externalised and turned into products. And, as the increased commodification of everyday life has shown, there isn't much that can't be. All that contemporary capitalism asks is that you find a way of transforming the inner into the outer, of transforming drives and desires into flows of profit. Therein lies the path to prosperity, the way to maximum material comfort. If you can do this, you will be at one with a culture that is all surface, all facade, where the greatest feeling of belonging comes from meshing yourself, your entire self, within the circuits of commodity turnover.

Since the World Trade Centre – the very epitome of the triumphalist capitalist facade – has been reduced to rubble, its occupants murdered by unknown assassins, a shock wave has gone through this endlessly extended surface, and through the circuits of turnover that course through it. This shock wave is represented by the biggest stock-market loss since the Great Depression. The fixed grins born of 'service with a smile' have become forced and strained, and the unbounded optimism of 'have a nice day' now resounds with something sinister, something dissonant and atonal. Since the towers came crashing down to earth we once again have been reminded that the everyday acts we involve ourselves in – as producers in the workplace, as consumers in the shopping malls – stopped being innocent a long time ago, and are caught up in social processes that may deliver the material comfort we in the West demand, but at a personal cost we stubbornly refuse to acknowledge.

Anthony Macris teaches at the University of Wollongong. In 2001 he represented Australia at the 38th Belgrade International Meeting of Writers. This piece is from his Plenary Presentation.

fiction

TCF (Textiles, Clothing and Footwear)

An extract from *Capital* Volume One, Part Two

Anthony Macris

WHEN PENNY RETURNED to the office she saw, seated around her desk in a semi-circle, the three older women she had met earlier that afternoon. She sat down at her desk and, confronted by the silent figures, suddenly felt under siege.

She gave them her brightest greeting and asked how she could help.

The woman in the leopard-skin scarf, positioned in the middle, leaned slightly forward.

"Good afternoon. Once month ago our factory close it down. We are machinists there. We want to find new job. We look everywhere, but no can find. Maybe you help."

Her idiosyncratic English was fluid and confident, matching a face that, although haggard, wore its generous application of foundation and lipstick with a certain faded glamour. Penny liked her immediately. But at the same time she thought: oh no, TCFs. No one knew what to do with textile, footwear and clothing workers: they were virtually unemployable. Once the government had brought the tariff wall crashing down, factories and workshops across the country had come crashing down with it, unable to compete with cheap Asian imports.

Penny knew the situation well. She had had first-hand experience of it when, two years ago, she was involved in registering the first batch of down-sized TCFs for retraining. Crowded into a lecture hall designed for two hundred, more than five hundred women turned up to hear what the government had to offer. And as Penny registered their details, she came face to face with a generation who had devoted all their spare time for the past twenty years to supplementing the family income at sewing machines, overlockers and buttonholers, and who were now desperate to find another job that would allow them to pay off their homes more quickly, build a granny flat if it had been paid off, or buy the dinner sets and mix masters their husbands sometimes refused to shell out for.

"What kind of factory was it?" Penny asked, buying time to think.

"Woman fashion," answered the woman to the right. Her navy-blue blouse was covered in large silver flowers and her dark work skirt stretched across her heavy thighs.

"I have new job, but is piecey-work only," she continued. "We lose our job, and we get new job at home. The pay much much low. Man comes, gives too much work, quick quick he say, no time he say, later he say work no good, sometimes pay less. Piecey-work no good." As she spoke her grey-blue eyes widened with indignation. Penny realised she was older than the others, in her early 60s at least.

The woman to Penny's left was silent. She wore a baby-blue cardigan that contrasted with her dyed auburn hair. Her thin eyebrows, shaped and darkened with make-up, arched over a complacent expression.

"Are you doing piecework too?" Penny asked her.

The woman in the scarf translated. Her friend nodded calmly, her auburn tint glowing in the late afternoon light.

The women fell silent and sat with their hands folded in their laps, waiting for Penny's response.

Penny paused for that moment too long, and she instantly sensed they all knew there was nothing she could do.

There was, however, procedure to follow. And much of being professional, Penny knew, was following procedure whether it meant anything or not.

"Let me check the computer for any machinist vacancies," she said, pointing in the direction of the JAT. "It won't take a moment."

"That machine?" The woman in the scarf laughed. "I think it was bank machine. You know, to get out money."

"No, it's got jobs on it. It's for everyone to use. You can come in and look whenever you like. Come over now and I'll show you how it works."

She seemed reluctant.

"Look, it's really easy. I'll take you through it. If you learn to use it, you can help out the others."

After a quick conference with her offsiders she agreed. She followed Penny over and took her place at the console. Occupying the top half of the screen were milky grey letters that said:

Welcome to JobNetwork
[press here]
An Initiative of the Commonwealth Government
in proud partnership with Telstra

Below this was a small box with a headline that said:

Win a Holden Barina!
[press here]

"What I do now?" the woman asked.

"It's a touch screen. All you have to do is press on the screen."

"Press where?"

"There, where it says Press Here."

She paused to absorb the information, then raised a worn finger to the screen, her skin the texture of wrinkled butcher's paper. It lingered a moment over the Barina offer (Penny was half-tempted to condone a quick detour: she had never owned a car), but it soon made hesitant contact with the government's electronic welcome mat. Nothing happened.

"Press a little harder," Penny told her. The woman's finger stabbed at the screen as if she were poking someone in the eye. A map of New South Wales appeared, neatly sliced into different coloured zones. The small territory that marked Sydney was a canary yellow. Underneath it blinked the banner:

DO YOU YAHOO?

"Now, press on Sydney."

This time she pressed with more control, bringing into view a map of the city which in turn was subdivided into the city's regions. Below it was an advertisement for FISHER & PAYKEL, THE INNOVATORS. In its illustration – animated by the latest multi-media software – a tiny woman opened the door of a slim-line refrigerator and a tiny man opened the lid of a smart-drive washing machine.

"Where are you looking for work? Inner West?" Penny asked.

The woman wasn't listening: she was too busy watching the toy-town figures perform their actions over and over again.

"Inner West?" Penny prompted in a louder voice.

She nodded and pressed, utterly absorbed by the JAT. Nor was its effect lost on her former workmates, who were craning their necks and looking over with curious stares.

Penny waved at them to come over.

The woman with the scarf was eager to keep going, but Penny made her stop and wait until the others were assembled. They started from the beginning.

The woman with auburn hair did her best to hide an expression of complete boredom. The older women, at the sight of the animated graphics, said:

"My sister son. All day all night play with bloody computer. No good, waste time. He 30 year old and he never leave house. My sister go crazy." She crossed her heavy arms, hrrumphed, and glared at the ma-

chine with contempt. Before Penny could say a soothing word, the woman in the scarf turned from the screen and delivered what sounded like a short, sharp, but nevertheless honeyed reprimand. The older woman hrrumphed again, uncrossed her arms and pulled down sharply on the hem of her blouse.

A list of job categories now filled the screen, each word encased in a band of orange.

"Press on manufacturing, that's where the machinist jobs will be listed," Penny said in her most neutral voice: she could still feel the older woman seething behind her.

The orange bar flashed a phosphorescent blue at her touch.

To Penny's surprise, two-thirds down the list, was a sole vacancy for a machinist. The woman in the scarf spotted it immediately and let out a small gasp of excitement. The two others leaned forward. She pressed on it and the full listing, in no-frills black and white, appeared.

"What for making?" the woman in the scarf asked.

Penny only briefly explained that it was a short-term job making festive banners for a government arts event: she had noticed the words 'special conditions' and didn't want to get their hopes up before she knew more details. She asked the woman in the scarf to press the More Info key, but she was already deep in conversation with the others. Penny pressed it herself:

Special Conditions: Work for the Dole Project.

"Excuse me," Penny repeated, trying to make herself heard above the hubbub. "*Excuse me, everyone*!" she finally shouted. They abruptly stopped.

"You can't do this job," Penny told them.

The woman in the scarf looked at her as if she were crazy.

"Why no? We can do this job easy. Is nothing to make these banner. They must need plenty machinists, so big job."

"No, no, I don't mean you're not able to do it. Of course you can do it. I mean it's not really a job. This job is a Work for the Dole job. The government has probably outsourced its contract to a small one-off company. And that company looks like it will take advantage of the new government policy by using people it doesn't have to pay for out of its own pocket. The job's more for young people. Even if they let you do it, they couldn't work out any way to pay you unless you were on the dole."

The woman said nothing.

"Do you understand?" Penny asked.

"Work for *dole*?" The woman's incredulous tone showed she understood that part perfectly.

Penny nodded.

"You mean we must to go on dole?"

Penny nodded again. "But you probably can't anyway, because if your husband earns . . ."

But the woman had stopped listening: instead she was responding to questions from the others, who had instantly noticed something was wrong. Out of the stream of foreign words that followed, the English phrase 'work for the dole' emerged again and again, and by the end of the discussion it had become a single unit with a shape and rhythm all its own: workfedoll, workfedoll, workfedoll.

For a few moments the women fell into gloomy silence.

Arms once again folded, the older woman turned to Penny. The stare of contempt she had trained on the JAT was now trained on her.

Penny met her gaze.

"I'm really sorry, but there's nothing I can do."

She hated how weak it sounded.

The older woman's bitter stare answered for her. She then turned her head, slowly, methodically, her arms clasped so tight they seemed to crush the silver flowers printed on her blouse. Her stare came to rest on Laura Zhang, still at her cubicle, still rubbing away at some bit of paper.

"They bloody Chinese," she spat. "They take our job. Take everything from us, leave us nothing. Why government let them come here?"

Laura, oblivious to the attention she was receiving, held a piece of A4 up to her face. Her cheeks

hollowed as she gently blew away the last few crumbs of graphite-stained eraser.

The older woman walked out.

For the next few minutes the woman in the leopard-skin scarf apologised profusely for her friend's behaviour. She was a widow who lived with her sick, ageing mother. She had had a very hard life and she hoped Penny would forgive her outburst: she really was a very nice lady and never said anything against Chinese people before. She also wanted Penny to know that she and her other friend thought Chinese people were very hardworking and they had every right to be here. As for 'workfedoll', well, they had never heard anything so stupid and insulting in their entire lives, not that this was Penny's fault. They had always paid their own way, and they weren't about to stop now. Explanations over, the woman became all smiles again. This small banner company, it might still have something for them, mightn't it? Couldn't Penny, you know, give her the exact address, or at least the phone number of this company? She could contact them independently, maybe strike some sort of deal. You never know, something could come of it.

Penny asked her to come back tomorrow, early in the afternoon. She wasn't promising anything, but she would see what she could do. The woman in the scarf bent forward and clasped her hand.

"Thank you very very much," she beamed.

The woman with the auburn hair, copying her partner, also muttered her thanks.

They walked out of the room and joined the older woman who, back turned to them, was waiting on the verandah, a hunched silhouette against the afternoon sky. Their heels sounded heavily on the wooden steps as they left.

Penny went back to her desk, relieved they had gone. When she crossed the spot where the old woman had stood, grey-blue eyes bright with rage, she was struck by an idea that filled her with vague terror.

No matter what you do, no matter what you say, some people will always hate you just because you are who you are.

Eldorado

America like an explosion in the mind. The body looks detachedly at soft-porn homewares, assessing risk. We're stretched past reason by your force America. There's an old woman at the checkout saying, *we need some rain.* Here are parks of matchstick children struck against the glossy curb. Humility poses for a watercolour: suburban lake, man catching fish with his hands then letting them go. Love describes cool air in the trees, mist coming in, early evening. Eucalypts scattered like strangers, in a landscape that decentralises God. That's sanity for you. So far this luminous day. We're just tumbleweeds with innate clues about destiny and more, logic unhinged, like a sudden shout as violence begets flowers. Outside, smoke plumes. Grey stacks against the sky and all things bright and solid, agasp at the ahistorical world. In the generic hospital near to death, one more body's floating, suspended like cliché – operating table below and the slow decision to return to a prone self. Fire hydrants in the sky explode with laughter and gold is found finally in another dead man's teeth. Until nothing wanes the least like nothing talk.

Cassie Lewis

fiction

Turkeys

James Daun

MONDAY 3.50 A.M. Steve and me walk past plastic containers stacked high like tower blocks. Inside the occupants seem anxious. These residents will not have their tenancy renewed. Within six hours two or three men will have hung the eleven thousand chickens on stirrups. From here they will pass around a tin wall into a tank of electrified water; then stunned and glassy-eyed through a circular-saw.

It might be eight degrees centigrade and drizzling, or three degrees and clear. A chicken-shit smell still churns my stomach. The turkeys wait their turn.

Three or four male meat boners sit on a wooden bench smoking, chattering. A few brief good-mornings. Nobody says much now. The clowning, gossiping and bickering come later.

Other workmates begin to arrive. First Dith, a Cambodian immigrant in his late twenties. Dith speaks little English, but understands more. He spent three years in a Thai refugee camp.

Our supervisor, Dave, has been at work a while. In comes Jack, a teenager, into Es and the 'Ward 4' nightclub. Last year Dave took a trip to a hospital ward to have his stomach pumped. Too much speed and dope. He took the speed to work sixteen hours a day; he worked those hours to finance his speed habit.

Dressed in white overalls, black gumboots, yellow rubber gloves, and micron-thin paper hats, we clock on at 3.58 a.m. We drift through the Chicken Room, past a few fools who have worked unpaid for ten minutes, and into the Turkey Room. It's surgically clean. No blood, no guts, no feathers. The floor is dry. On go rubber aprons.

Male birds, 'toms', first. I never found out why, for instance, they were not called 'jerrys'. Steve grabs the first tom's legs. I hang it on the stirrups, one leg at a time. Some birds weigh up to seventeen kilograms. Their legs are thick, strong, with talons for claws.

Sometimes a shit-smeared leg slips from your glove. A free leg kicks wildly. My arms still bear scars months old.

Sometimes, as they are dragged out, their feet catch the cage, flicking shit into your face and mouth. Steve once accidentally snorted some through his nose into his mouth. I would have chucked, but he merely spat.

The toms gobble. Females, 'hens', sound like car alarms being activated or deactivated. One farmer must have whistled to his toms each morning, or at feed time. Whenever we whistle, they gobble in chorus.

But each tom has his own facial features. Some look naive, others resemble old professors; rolls of blue fat adorn their necks. Though they are docile, I sense, almost feel their fear.

The chain is now full. None is lucky; the first to be electrocuted in the stunner tank of water is least unlucky. Steve does most of the killing. He tells me he's killed "millions" of animals. Though no doubt true, exaggerations spout regularly from his mouth. Just before I began working at the abattoir he scared me, saying the turkeys weighed seventy kilograms. That's about five kilos lighter than me.

My first kill left me red from head to foot, but unmoved. I had conned myself, or genuinely believed, the electrocuted birds were dead when they

reached me. So, I was simply draining their blood. False. Heads down, with blank faces, they are almost all alive when Steve bends down to cut off their heads, or slit their throats.

To amuse myself and pass the time before the first feathered carcass reaches me, I teach Dith some English. "I'm kicking the funkiest fresh flavours," I say. Dith repeats, but seems confused. He's probably never heard Rap music, so this Rap-speak is more alien to him than plain English.

Boredom makes us silly; frustration at work and home turns us nasty. Often we are nothing more than production-line zombies, killing on auto-pilot. Sometimes my thoughts spin off in bizarre directions. I imagine a role-reversal. We hang from the chain, the turkeys do the carving. Safer to hum a favourite pop song, even if it lodges irritatingly in your conscious thoughts.

The blood tray begins to fill. Dith and me chat a bit longer before I race to check the scalder water temperature, 60–63 centigrade for hens, 61–64 centigrade for toms. Usually to start with it's around 75 centigrade or hotter, so I dump into it buckets of ice and water. I switch on the plucker – a machine which looks like a small space capsule. Inside rubber fingers spin and whir, then drum the feathers from the birds. It sounds like a pounding waterfall.

Scalder water steam fills my corner of the room. It's welcome in winter, but almost unbearable in summer – like working in a rancid-smelling sauna.

I open the scalder cage, unhook what I now see as feathered meat, and toss a carcass into the cage. Several times I've mistakenly thrown in a live hen, perhaps playing dead, yet shocked to startled life by the hot water.

Normally I throw in two or three toms before setting the cage spinning. Water sloshes out, often straight down my gum boots. Opposite the chickens pass on – in both senses.

Once or twice a week two Muslim men slaughter the chickens halal style. Still passing through the stunner, the birds are killed by hand. Each man has a prayer for each dying bird. With their black-rimmed safety specs they remind me of old British comedians the 'Two Ronnies'.

The Chicken Supervisor, Alex, sees no comedy, he looks bored. Alex wanders over to tease Dith. He loves stirring him up. He once told Dith, who's about five-foot-two-inches, he was small because "ee pulled his dick too much when ee was young". I remember as an adolescent my sister saying I was thin because I tugged too much. But I'm over six foot tall, so either Alex or my sister was wrong.

Alex definitely kept his hands where they belonged. He's stocky, fairly thick-set, and of medium height. He often leers lecherously, exposing his many fillings. With his fingers he simulates wanking and fucking motions. Dith giggles or stares uncomprehendingly. Alex turns back to face the 'Two Ronnies'.

Dith points to his own head and rotates his index finger anti-clockwise. I always laugh at this almost daily ritual. But Alex is sane enough; as sane as someone could be spending up to twenty hours of their week watching chickens pass though a circular saw, killing unstunned any bird which escapes both stunner and saw. Alex has worked at this abattoir for seventeen years.

Steam, blood, feathers, water, frantic flapping birds, thunderous noise. Our stimuli are mostly visual. You soon fail to notice any constant stench. It exists. I see its features in the screwed-up, disgusted-looking faces of the middle-aged turkey meat products women as they dart through our territory. Some cover their mouths.

In our section we are all forced to cover our ears – ear protectors blocking out most noise. Therefore, like our stimuli, our jokes are mostly visual. Many are sexual; most are dubious. Dave, Steve and Jack walk around waving turkey's necks as mock penises, or they simulate sex with a plucked turkey. We fucked them in life, now in death.

Next door in the gutting room Jack will ponder some of life's great mysteries. How can one turkey swallow a turkey's head, while another eats a neck, still another dines on a chicken's head? In each case

digestion has failed to occur. I begin to understand how and why soldiers – American GIs in the Vietnam War spring to mind – take trophies from their victims.

Things are quieter in the gutting room. Occasionally some awful singing breaks out, for instance, the operatic parts of 'Bohemian Rhapsody'. Conversation is possible. Like the jokes, much of the chatter revolves around sex. As I later discovered, Jack in particular invented most of his sexual exploits. In many male-only workplaces 'sexual conquests' are one measure of status.

A headless tom, nervous system in spasms, kicks itself free from its stirrups. Thrashing around in the blood tray, it sprays our legs. For kicks, but also to stop the deluge, I toss it still flapping and kicking into the air, towards the room's corner. The final scenes in Scorcese's, *Taxi Driver,* come to mind. Blood streaks the walls.

Unlike De Niro's 'Travis Bickle', we are rarely cruel to our prey. As one of the turkey meats women warned us, "you get fired for that". At the time our previous supervisor was on the ground throttling a tom who'd kicked him in the balls.

However, threats of dismissal can be meaningless. Our foreman, William – shy, sly or both, I could never decide which – once caught Jack defacing a hearing-safety sign. "You know what that means?" he said to Jack, who wondered and perhaps worried. "That's instant dismissal, now get back to work." Steve told me this. It still cracks me up.

But turkeys, hens and toms suffer unnecessarily. Crammed together, shivering in shit-encrusted cages in winter, they pant like dogs for water in summer. In the early days of my work here many birds drowned in the stunner tank. Others birds which had kicked one leg free, almost tore the remaining leg from the stirrup.

Constant pressure from Dave, William and undoubtedly from the 'big bosses' to lift productivity means we have little time or enthusiasm to consider the birds. Four, five, or six of us aim to kill, scald, pluck, gut and store five hundred and fifty turkeys in eight hours. Dave wants it done in seven – preferably much quicker. Each day becomes a tactical game. Dave leaves the room; we spin an empty scalder. He returns; three birds go in.

Dith is the master of time-wasting. Small, inconspicuous, he can dissolve into the bloodied floor. When we are on an unofficial go-slow he appears busy; intense, concentrated action to clean a speck of blood from the floor. Mostly though, Dith works hard. If Dave catches any of us wasting time we have a blazing row.

All us workers, except Dave, have some idea of a reasonable day's work. After tax, for a thirty-eight-hour week, we earn $354. This includes a 'blood money' allowance of about $50. A sullen, brooding resentment overcomes us when Dave wins and we end up bagging or boxing chickens or turkeys in the Chicken Room. Often after a frantic day there's nothing more to be done, so we mope around or try to hide.

The killing goes on. Dith pulls away a metal bar, letting the plucker door fly open, disgorging three, two, or one tom, or none and cold water. In summer he welcomes the cold shower. Not in winter. Dith plucks the few remaining feathers. That is if the plucker is working properly. Too many broken rubber fingers and the birds emerge half-dressed. Likewise if I allow the scalder water temperature to drop too cold. Too hot and 'chopped meat' emerges.

The scalder spins for about one minute. I open the scalder cage, grab the feathered carcasses by the legs and hurl them into the plucker. Water flicks into my face and mouth, upsetting my stomach. Birds left hanging too long on the stirrups become agitated. One flapping bird sets them all off. Feathers and dust choke our lungs, irritate our noses. We pull down paper masks to protect us from this blizzard.

Dith drops the plucked birds into a large water tank in the gutting room. Jack, Steve, Dave and me take turns to gut the birds. First we cut out any cancers, usually on the breast and legs. These look like over-fried, anaemic, fried eggs. Strange that fifteen-week-old birds can be cancerous. But, perhaps, tur-

keys possess a physiology incompatible with growth hormones. Several workers, including supervisors, tell me the birds are fed hormones.

Next any scabs are removed, the necks and lower legs are cut off, as are the birds' arseholes. Gloved hands plunge in to rip out lungs, heart, intestines, etc. All this I call 'slops'. Maybe this is apt as we drop the entrails into small plastic wheelie bins; Jack often slops them on the floor.

Like peeling a banana, Jack slices and draws back the skin around the turkey's neck. He pulls out windpipe and feed-sack. Now and then a gruel-like mass of half-digested grain and vinegar spills out. Steve says the farmers feed the turkeys this to boost their sale weight. For us it is simply a sickening mix.

I pause to teach Dith some more English. "Gutting turkeys entails extracting the entrails," I say. Once again he repeats, but still looks confused.

Gutting is, perhaps, one of the easier jobs. But it's dirty and often hurts your fingers. Once Jack screamed. The stunner had exploded a turkey's chest. A splinter punctured Jack's rubber glove, lodging under his fingernail. Steve pulled it out using his finger and a knife edge.

In the turkey abattoir fingernails grow grubby; hands become calloused; workers under pressure to speed up can become callous. Birds have reached the gutting room with deliberately broken legs. One hen had been skinned alive.

We toss the gutted birds into a tank of chlorinated water. Rejects we throw into a sink, to be weighed and stored separately. Just before I left a new chlorine drip-tap system was installed. The chlorine supposedly kills any dangerous bacteria.

Such bacteria can be picked up in several ways. During my time at work the foreman, William, scolded me several times for my supervisor breaching health and safety regulations. Trying to speed up production, Dave and his predecessor Micky threw feathered carcasses either in the blood tray or on the concrete floor – often at my feet.

Here, I was told, dangerous bacteria could multiply, particularly on hot days. Of course this never happens when the white-coated health and safety officers call in. Nor when the 'big bosses' in their immaculate suits visit. None of the bosses say anything to us; we have nothing to say to them.

Neither is health and safety legislation breached when two lecturers and a young student from a local university visit. They take samples from the hanging, bled birds, and from our equipment. One lecturer, pointing to the plucker, says, "I wish I had a dollar for every bird you've thrown in there". So do I.

Once weighed we throw the toms into huge tubs of iced and chlorinated water. When full we push and pull them inside a freezer room. With roughly forty toms left alive we all knock off for smoko.

Perhaps more than half the workers have a smoke. Men and women workers tend to separate. Australians, New Zealanders, Filipinos, Britons, Indonesians, Malaysians, a Cambodian, a Bosnian refugee; a mix of peoples. But not so odd. Somehow all the workers more or less get along. Racism exists, but it's soft. On one occasion, for instance, Dave referred to a "slope", but muffled his voice when he realised an Asian worker might have overheard.

Some gossip, especially two of the older Chicken Room women. They quiz me about my sex life. "Have you got a girlfriend?", says one. "No." "Why not?" They suggest I must be gay. This exchange occurs in the lunch room, as in most workplaces, a grim, sterile place.

Several magazines litter one of its two tables; a *New Idea*, *Who* magazine, several *Woman's Days*. Several women sit musing, another person begins a crossword. Alex plonks himself on a chair, takes a shot of insulin, then grumbles about life in the factory. In particular he wonders why the chicken hangers should get around $284 a week after tax for the factory's worst job.

After smoko we soon process the remaining forty toms. Once the boner has finished bisecting the last bird into hind and forequarters we ice the meat and push and pull the tubs into the chiller room.

The iceman, Arnunzio, joins us. His main job is to shovel ice. In true Anglo-Saxon spirit few can pro-

nounce or bother to pronounce his name. Instead he gets 'Arn' or 'Amie', as in Arnold Schwarzenegger. But he resembles Sylvester Stallone's 'Rocky' after a fight. One of his eyes appears permanently swollen, but he's small – something he pays for. Dave sees him as a joke. The rest of us try to at least cultivate his trust. In our constant fight against increased productivity, divisions work against us.

We have tried to win Dave to our side. One day he argued bitterly with the foreman, William. At least it seemed that way to us. He appeared to realise his interests and ours coincided, but this was temporary.

For a while I saw his decent, reasoning side. In his desire to please William and the 'big bosses' this evaporated. He drew Arnunzio with him and, acting like a spy, Arnunzio informed on us.

Of all the factory workers, it has been several women, one a Filipina, the other our union shop steward, who have supported us most.

Nobody stands up for the turkeys now. We are gentler, patting and stroking any agitated birds, if we are winning our battles with Dave, William and the big bosses.

Close to knock-off time, we plough through the hens; two hung on each stirrup. One escapes; airborne for a few seconds, it is soon caught. As they are much lighter than the toms, I find the hens easier. Dith is busier. So are the gutters. If possible we aim for a late lunch.

The contract cleaners can always tell if we finished the last kill early. If so, the killing room hardly needs cleaning. We have emptied bin loads of feathers, slops and buckets of turkey heads. We have left few traces of today's slaughter. Clock off at 12.30 p.m. An hour's sleep-in tomorrow. We begin at 5 a.m.

A contract cleaner hoses down the red towers of chicken containers. Another cleans the turkey cages. Steve and me walk past them both. A breeze carries a mist into our faces. Water sprays our trainers. Mine have lost their tread, almost worn flat; underfoot the shit feels slimy.

We say our "see-yu tomorrows" to the cleaners and chicken hangers. The three men have hung the last few chickens, but they try to look busy doing nothing much. We walk towards Steve's car. I notice a turkey head. Alone, it rests on the concrete, next to the yellow skip. This yellow skip currently holds about three hundred heads. But the solitary head now holds my attention. Its pointed tongue flicks in and out; its beak opens and closes.

Mr Wilson's mates

Jane Downing

OUT ALONG THE HIGHWAY is a town. It was founded by pioneer stock last century, pushing their cattle forward, along with ten or more offspring to populate the colony. It's a place where the men have lines on their faces as deep as the furrows in their drought-plagued fields; where strong women went out and got jobs without missing a chore on the property, until the bank and the post office and the doctor's surgery closed down and they were sent back to the poverty line. It's where kids leave from on the bus to get to school up the way an hour, and then on the V-line coach – the train station has closed too – as soon as they can. This is the bush the myth is made of.

In the centre of town is the pub. It has a history longer than the cars pulled up in the gravel out the front. Bushrangers shot publicans on the doorstep here, youths had their last beer before going to war here. Now a large advertising medallion, blue and gold, hangs here, far larger than the sign giving a name to the establishment, which is anyway never used.

History might be seeping out of the walls but it doesn't make it to the senses through the barriers of beer miasma and one-arm bandit clamour. The locals stand at the bar. It's Friday night and they deserve a schooner. There's the usual crowd; and there too is the local landowner. He's not a regular but it's the end of shearing time and that can give a sense of *community*.

His lot have been in the district since the beginning, though no-one talks about that in case the *original* landowners get brought up. He's bought a drink or two, or three. He's in fine fettle. The blokes respond to his *bonhomie*, with perhaps a bit too much of the liquid amber – they'd all seen the grim ads on TV – but nothing in the night is, so far, unusual.

At closing time Mr Wilson announces to the stragglers, he'd better get back to the mishush, sorry, missus. A number of the men leave together, climb into their 4-wheel drives with roo-bars and their rusty utes without, and turn their thoughts to home. Then there's the smash and the splinter of glass.

Mr Wilson is lurching out of his late-model sedan and caught like a scared bunny in the headlights of the ute he's just backed into. He crunches through the gravel and passenger-window glass to inspect the damage.

"She'll be right mate," he breathes all over the 18-year-old before he drives off down the boulevard of date palms planted from seeds brought back from Palestine, past the windmill that tourists stop to photograph against sunset skies, and onto the highway.

He said it'd be alright. He's as close to gentry as it comes around here: he's always right. Only it doesn't seem right as the young man drives home with the wind buffeting his left ear.

Mum has a pot of tea on the table when he walks in, and bread ready by the grill. He sits quietly at their seventies laminex and steel table, so loved of the cutting-edge city café set, such an embarrassment with its chipped surfaces and cracked vinyl when his high-school sweetheart came, once, to tea. Dad gives him an opening someway through the third slice of toast.

"Your ute sounded a bit rough idling at the last gate."

His Dad's next comment is that it *isn't* right, not by a long shot. Dad rarely gets angry but small property owners haven't been getting much of a go lately. End of shearing time only means big returns for some. He is straight on the blower to the police.

There is no rasping of pencil on paper as the fa-

ther gives details of the incident, lists the witnesses, asks what the sergeant is going to do about it.

"Look mate," comes down the line from two towns away, "this isn't a police matter. It's up to Insurance."

"But aren't you gunna breathalyse him? He's just off down a National Highway."

"Nothing would come of it," comes back immediately. "Nothing. Trust me. Best not to know."

How do you tell your son this is the way the world works?

This is where the mythical bushy stoicism comes to the fore.

It's a quiet weekend. The footy season is over. They won the Grand Final a couple of weeks back and the young man is a bit of a hero; he's the only young blood left to play for the side. His mates had to leave to get jobs in the city. Even the girl from school went away to study, with the usual vague promises she'd be back. But any tendency to mope is counteracted by their envy. This 18-year-old knows how lucky he is to have a job in town so he can stay. He loves the apprenticeship at the workshop. Looks forward to Monday morning. Life is all ahead of him.

Come Monday he tapes plastic over the passenger door window and heads off for work. He isn't half way through the door when the boss lays it on the line. He's had a few calls over the weekend. The boy is to shut-up about Friday night or he's out of a job.

He looks down that long highway.

This isn't to say this sort of thing doesn't happen in the city. High-powered mates help each other out: mateship is just about enshrined in the Constitution. It's just more obvious in the country with its long history of the bush telegraph. It's developed over years – and is in no risk of being superseded by mobiles which don't work out here – until it's near perfect.

The young man hadn't said anything. He did what he was told. But, that bush telegraph got the story round. It became that too: a story, in a long tradition. Helps us ignore things like this ever really happen.

Oggi

Oggi, buses trams museums
churches are free, *la gente* flock, yet
carabinieri with sub-machine guns
still pout at every entrance
A cavalcade of mounted
polizia trots down our street
the leader's flowing, chestnut mane
matching her bay's, their
eyes (his and hers) flashing fire

Round the *Orto Botanico*
in search of gates, we walk for hours
almost despair in a five-sided
square where no exit offers
a prospect of flowers
Inside, a certain disarray
droves of unswept plane leaves
tattered beds, all 'special areas'
conservatories, hothouses, closed
maintenance or *malfonziona*
no khaki'd gardeners raking,
wheeling, burning off, laying
sawdust paths – we're rather shocked
the Australian Bed has one leptospermum
in authentic red clay, girt
by empty holes

On the other side of the world
Adelaide's *Orto* runs to
an Italianate water garden, formal
pond, long, narrow, cypress-framed,
flattop hedges, disappearing-perspective
paths, painstakingly correct homage
to our magnetic north of beauty
do they think of us like our flora
gangly, hardy, thick-skinned, dry?

Cath Kenneally

Salmon

1 Up and Down the Coast

Up and down the coast
punters are running for their dinghies
good news travels fast –
a leak from the fish farm
thousands of escapees,
the salmon are running and blind –
farm-bred, the ocean's too broad
for fat agoraphobics,
those with a vestige of race memory
are spooling anticlockwise in the current
a misleading magnet in the nose
is giving all the wrong signals.
The lines are out, nets cast,
imagination's freezers are burgeoning,
the locals'll be dining high tonight,
laughing, raising glasses to commerce.
Fish will be the new currency.

2 In What Might Pass For Silence

Who knows if the ocean above
is a raging storm or a millpond,
here in the green twilight
a cusp is taking place
in what might pass for silence
to the human ear;
fish are merging with fish,
through ragged mesh
and in what might pass for a food chain,
big fish eat little fish, bigger fish eat big fish.
Now where's the mutant gene in this tit for tat?
In what might pass for sameness
one speckled silver brown salmon
does not differ from another
but for a remarkable accelerated trajectory
which has brought it in the stillness
to this point; another anomaly
in the merging silence,
the look-alikes are sterile,
nearly all;
if the cusp is the instant
at which the mesh between water
and the same water tore,
then time can be seen to be slowing
and the instant absorb the fleet
dissemination up and down the coast
of a school of fish carrying
somewhere among them, a Trojan gene.

Sarah Day

equation

how to compute
the *equation of days*
is a problem
not only for sundials

is a day strolling
the paths of Sarah's country
equal to one searching for a farm
in the Tithe Apportionment Maps?

what can be added to a day
reading wills in Lewes
to equal time alongside
the Medway at Hartfield?

what magical measure can compare
long hours in a stationary bus
with the time of a lover's kiss
a friend's call
a grandchild's impossible goal?

Miriel Lenore

Equations Best Unknown

(for Jane Sloan)

You enter broken into a phrase, a mouthful of wings that flutter, push the corners of your cheeks into lewd gestures directed toward no one in particular. Silence transformed to inertia intimate with proximity the gritty spectacle of Being attempting to hawk Itself through your sanded throat in a twin seat of pearls or a summer's day. It goes horribly wrong, the tongue caught between the same teeth the gristle of meaning left hours ago, it's a tragedy of positioning but once entrenched there in a ludicrous gesture of the self you find the same silence that fills the mouth fills the mind, stuttering in its hundred voices, & yes inevitably you do fly.

So to sexualise the text he positions himself astutely over the photocopier to regenerate the text, the fallout reproduced faithfully as a mirror set by degrees to make one perceive reality *just so.* He likes the blank sheets that speak of possibility, chance and aberration, of faults in the machine. The paper jams are a blessing in disguise, Sufi mysticism, *anything that stops something makes something else possible,* so he makes himself a coffee accepting breaks in the narrative as so much underwriting by a higher power. She adores the projection of her future, the one she desires but allows to submerge safely below the fleshy waters of routine. She enjoys the feel of summer, perspiration darkening the light cotton of her dress & isn't sure until later that thought is both the cotton & the summer.

The reader turns writer & in two quick strokes marks 'X'. X is effaced by her writing of desire & regret while the reader of the text finds X's presence lacking reduced to a too easy hand stretching across her skin, as though she were an obscene history written in Braille. Her thoughts crawl with his words: 'If subjectivity is a choice within an infinite set of I's,' X leers smoothly across the text, 'I'd choose yours.' Approaching vertiginously the reader enters the thin black lines of memory &, yes, it must be a rape, forcing the mind through the word's resistant folds. If the reader was allowed a signature for this irrevocable trespass, the willful naiveté of 'Y' might prove inescapable. X has become many things, most of all a thief of words, of his own blue silence that spoke so forcefully of possibilities (mostly his own).

When she finds X years later, a bookmark beneath a stack of books, wrapped in a name she then steals it is neither a matter of fate nor chance. Y, the present reader of the text, unlike the ventriloquist's dummy, is aware of his own unsubstantiated condition. Speaking of Being's materiality whole populations of selves one didn't know are colonising the text. Grotesques as easily referenced as a DaVinci or a Lacanian study. Y adds should the reader hazard the disaster (of writing! of reading!) the first crisis is passed as easily as a hitchhiker in the suburbs, the second crisis remains constantly distant. It is a horizon intent on escaping a choice of 'I' (mentioned perfectly in dreams or between the calming whiskers of a literary theorist, unnamed and spread-eagled, as say, X). Endlessly deferring the choice of an 'I', X seduces the first reader, while Y is seduced by the reader's reading, each chases the other's tale, choice of histories, quotes & primary sources moving tangentially towards the other, blissfully unmindful of the significance of this their confused algebra.

X claims to be a man of letters. The reader will note the overstatement..Y, failing in a takeover bid on the reader's voice, is researching market forces in subjectivity hoping for a good turn. [B]eing, waiting for singularity (who is as ever inexcusably late) is sitting on the fence uncomfortable with the cheap red wine antics & uncertain whether it should have worn a capital to what appears to be the poets' theory reading. Finally the torn veil revealing as it conceals appears as it is, a gesture of being's lewd self-referencing, the same hip-thrust of a greater meaning that possessed X to *be*, the reader to write & Y to seek anonymity.

& though flying, I can't *be* certain of the veracity of the text as 'I' might be a bird flattened precisely by a motorbike moving swiftly down the spine, the vertebrae splintered into a thousand stories the mind gone but the wings perfect, flowing easily in a summer breeze.

Michael Brennan

smack

Nothing beautiful as that elision marking sense a *pas de deux for lovers* as convincing as a Strauss waltz: awkward and gaunt writing the steps down in his head grafting some other self onto *the scene* and cohering into her absence a form only not quite ideal that's why the smack was just perfect vinculum with nothing to connect *purity enclosing nothingness nothin's'beautiful's'hat* nothing as beautiful as a word *diagenesis* heroin love *outré* sharp angles cutting the wrist into long fingers sick of genius *sui generis* talks about commitment manila folders bursting in his hand fat as desire tested rhetoric on the poets *first one's the best first one's free* an escort for the dying paring death back annexatory just process going through the motions becoming daily less *something disappearing before him* – I kept some of the notes, the diaries written posthumously a twenty page *journal d'un homme vide* they closed the files until 2020 – No I never met him but his work speaks to me *imitation and occlusion not a solar eclipse at all*

Michael Brennan

writing 2nd ave pts 1 & 2

1

in the beginning i adored
i started off *what i adored*
staring at the margin of a
pea *was human* this thorough
fare this trembling nothing
im doing more than flashing
tambour brouhaha emphasis
on the filthiness you will say
i am *beauty* you consider it
a watergod activity i suffer
to create the sea *in animal*
desire im not even there or can
reach it the only burning
you cant say didnt happen
i was the equation the
itchy & scratchy flashback
thats my heavens life &
which i also decorate *death*
but now i have a larger
following gasping *smile* were
on cancer camera *it had*
to glow frenchfried every
time we say *with soul &*
words nurse is it time for
love love loves interruptions

2

what if im caressing ex
clamations *mercy* on my
vice adbreak *like a tomb*
theres nothing quite like a
lonely triumph you my second
bestfriend here if we all live
from the tips of the fingers
glancing at each others moon
like apartments *by the sweet*
dictates i was in the other
theatre of jealousy *with*
lips you are not a question
mark it is this *isolde* which
returns you to the open fields
blandest red honey *why me*
i could be crying in the
chapel st clinics instead
of writing 2nd ave with
the lights on where the
snake waits im naked *i*
write the encore every
freaks experienced the
three fat kings they bring
the spice that fogs my life
its dice vs *why* ness

Second Avenue – Frank O'Hara
Coming To Writing – Helene Cixous

Michael Farrell

Et in Acadia Ego?

1 Bob Harris Real Estate, Cole Harbour NS

So should all the best poets be reincarnated.
Signs all over Eastern Nova Scotia
show that this time around
Bob is selling heaven in quarter-acre lots:
tiny islands with spruce grove and rowboat,
white clapboard house with red barn
and view of the Atlantic through mist
by a bream-glinting inlet
where two old men and a small girl
fish from the bridge for a whole tide
and don't mind not catching anything.
What's more, this time around
Bob's getting his fair cut.

2 Forbes, Dr John (Phys.) New Glasgow NS

Here's karmic reward for a healer of the mind,
and the pay's better: allergies, infections,
kids' tummyaches, certificates for sickies –
and there's plenty of those at the steelworks,
the paper mills, the Pioneer mine where the strike is two months long
and Bill Guthro was run into a ditch last Thursday
by a company front-end loader.
I know John'll fix him up as he fixed us all.
Dispensing jovial wisdom in a small town
must be a cinch after being a Sydney boy
trying to pick winners in compassionate Melbourne.

3 Salmon River Presbyterian Church. Minister: Rev. Andrew Hardy

Having refused, eloquently, to preach in Launceston
but having guided us over the city rooftops
and along the stencilled walls of wit
now the 'defender of family values'
can strike a pose as snowy and neo-Gothic
as his wooden church and command
the respect denied tagless graffitists
and self-published poets no matter how
much genius is squeezed into the casual smile.
Thinking long and connected no longer,
let us pray. This, after all, is the next life.

Tim Thorne

To Nelson Mandela

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela!
Dalibhunga!
Creator-of-Negotiations!
Child-of-Blood!
Thembu Prince!

I am not Thembile Mhlangeni at the opening of Cape Town Parliament!
I am not Zolani Mkiva praising at your Inauguration!
My line is not iimbongi!
My line is Jewish-&-English-&-Polish-&-Irish-&-Tristan-de-Cunhan-&-Scotch-Unknown!
and now an Aussie voice!
Like Hintsa's head on the huge island the void of Yagan's!
Your praises I can sing as my memory only!

Mandela! in my childhood your name appeared graffitied on a suburban wall
Mandela! your Voice was Silence and your Face incredible Space
Mandela! you could not be quoted and how many photos of you were destroyed
Mandela! you led a march that my father could remember
Mandela! he said you must be a great leader and was frightened of you
Mandela! when I first saw you tears poured from me like words
Mandela! I was afraid of offending you with my poem A New South Africa
Mandela! Frank-the-Ghanian told me you would probably like that criticism
Mandela! Coetzee-the-Critic said he really loves you

Who is the poet and can speak the truth here?
Who can speak and not offend the people in their jubilation?

The poet as I must address the needed!
The poet as I must shout out for all creatures!

Mandela! you were like Jesus on the cover of Time magazine
Mandela! at the Sydney Opera House two girls touched your hand and said it was like God's
Mandela! on Donahue you were a dignified Being
Mandela! in those secret meetings with PW what did you say?
Mandela! what did you do when you took the helicopter to Big Business?
Mandela! and what about the crimson Merc the car the workers gave you?
Mandela! and of all those famous and unfamous who've grabbed at your robes?

Am I speaking? am I writing here? the pen is not in vain –

You stoop to speak to the small boy calling him 'a big man'
Mandela! when the soccer World Cup was won they reported
Mandela! you danced on your old legs like a young man meeting his bride
Mandela! what will Mhlabuhlangene do without you?
Mandela! will the hyaena eat the vulture?

When your bones have gone to meet the Ancestors
and the Europeans' descendants have forgotten who you were
and you are only present in children's names
then I will have prayed your wisdom flowed on like a river of genes

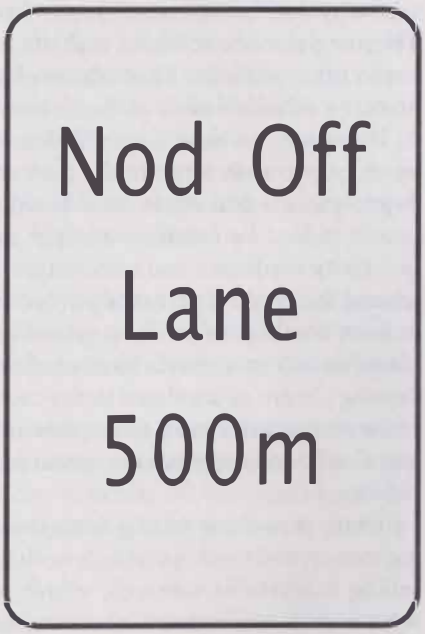
I sing this in good faith,

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela!
Dalibhunga!
Creator-of-Future!
Careful-Child-of-Humanity's-Cradle!

I disappear!

John Mateer

This poem is based on the 'traditional' form of the Xhosa praise-poem. It was written in 1995.



David Kelly: Roadrage 7

Firewood

As the setting sun
streams through woodland
we wrench chunks of mulga
off dead trees
into the back of a truck.
I want to drive on
in the golden light
lie around a campfire
talk into the soft sweet evening.

But we go back to the community
to a corrugated iron cubby
where an old woman
sits on a chair
directs mulga
on to her fire
beside her fire
beside her neighbour's fire.

My doctor friend folds rugs
for a back-rest
for the old man
who can't walk
sits on the ground in a corner.
I ferry a wealth of firewood
throw out scraps of words
that kindle long runs of replies –
rhythms as familiar as red sand –
that I can't understand.

Meg Mooney

Frank Bongiorno

The Forgotten People

The crisis in Australian undergraduate education[1]

In may this year, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that a business venture at the University of New South Wales, the Educational Testing Centre, had been using Chinese schoolchildren and their teachers to transfer a large sum of cash – $US46,000 – into Australia in brown paper packages. The Centre, at that time headed by Professor Jim Tognolini, had earned the money by carrying out an English-testing program on Chinese schoolchildren, some of whom were now coming to Australia to receive their prizes. The *Herald* also claimed that Tognolini had previously taken a large sum out of China in a suitcase. Under Chinese law, he wouldn't easily have been able to repatriate the profits accrued from the venture because foreigners cannot take more than $US5000 out of China without a permit. Tognolini denied any knowledge of the use of Chinese schoolchildren as cash 'mules', but he admitted to bringing a "significant sum" back into Australia in his own luggage.[2]

When this disturbing story broke, the Centre had been in the news for some time. By the time the cash-mule affair became public, Tognolini had already been replaced as the director of the Centre because enquiries into its affairs had found that they were pervaded by financial mismanagement, nepotism and cronyism. Several of his relatives were on the Centre's payroll, and a quarter of his staff turned out to be related to another staff member. Coincidentally perhaps, the Centre had even hired the services of a law firm that employed Tognolini's son. As the *Herald* commented, they were "one big happy family".[3]

Until it came to the notice of the NSW Auditor-General and Ombudsman, the Centre possibly seemed the very model of a modern university business venture. It was responsible for organising various competitions and tests for Australian and overseas children, and ran a national competition for 1.5 million Australian schoolchildren each year. It had a high profile in the community, and few Australian schools would have been untouched by its activities. Overall, Tognolini's outfit looked like a nice little earner for the university, with an annual turnover of $15 million.[4]

Not surprisingly, the University of New South Wales' management has been quick to dissociate itself from Tognolini. A university spokeswoman pointed out that the centre "had been radically overhauled" since the Chinese incident. The university's deputy vice-chancellor condemned the actions of the Centre and explained that this was "one of the reasons why that management has now been replaced".[5] They neglected to mention that the university had been criticised by the Ombudsman for its failure to protect a whistleblower at the Centre.[6]

University of New South Wales administrators have quite understandably moved to portray Tognolini as a bad apple on a healthy tree, and it would indeed be fanciful to imply that Australian university academics and administrators are running around the world with money in brown paper bags: at least, one hopes not. Yet it would be hardly more plausible to present the behaviour of the Educational Testing Centre as unrelated to the current trajectory of the Australian tertiary sector, driven by both Labor and Coalition Governments, towards commercialisation.

There is nothing wrong with universities making money, and there is certainly nothing wrong with selling marketable research, which is supposedly what commercialisation is all about.[7] But we've long since passed a situation in which commercial activities are carried out to supplement an essentially public university system, devoted to high quality teaching of Australian citizens and research comparable with the highest international standards. Commercialisation is now driving the higher education

system in Australia. Education is increasingly treated as a commodity, and tertiary institutions as businesses. There is bipartisanship on this issue between the two major parties, although it may be doubted whether terribly many Australian voters see money-making as a key role of our universities. Nevertheless, the government now demands that universities achieve half their income from non-government sources, and universities adjust their activities accordingly. The achievement of a university is increasingly measured by how successful it is in raising money.

Universities are also adjusting their systems of governance and their philosophies. A couple of years ago, the ABC's 'Four Corners' program conducted an investigation into the sale of Melbourne IT. This was a high-tech company that had been built up over the years – from an operation in which a technician in the Engineering Faculty provided domain names to early internet users free of charge into a highly successful and profitable arm of the University of Melbourne's entrepreneurial activities. 'Four Corners' found nothing corrupt in the process by which it was sold off by the university, but it did find that the beneficiaries of the sale of what was essentially a public asset were a very limited list of preferred clients of the stockbroker, J.B. Were. In what was for me the sickening climax of an excellent piece of investigative journalism, Alan Gilbert, the Vice-Chancellor of the university, was asked whether it concerned him that "a cosy little club of people in Melbourne" were the only ones able to buy these lucrative shares. Gilbert replied:

> Well, it's – what you're saying is that some people in Australian society are wealthier than others and that – and perhaps have access to privileges more than others.
>
> But that's – everybody knows that and if you're expecting the university to behave itself in ways that change the structure of Australian society, I don't think – I just don't think it's a serious suggestion.[8]

It's a rare privilege to be allowed to hear the enemy express himself so clearly. According to this view of the role of the university, Professor Fred Hollows needn't have wasted his time and intellect restoring the sight of Aboriginal people or the impoverished masses of the developing world. He could just as easily – and much more conveniently and profitably – have worked on devising neater nose-jobs for the matrons of Darling Point, or on some way of mitigating the effects on Kerry Packer's heart of years of milkshakes and hamburgers. After all, the commercial benefits of such research may well have been substantial. My point, of course, is not that universities ought not to be devising better nose-jobs, especially if these activities will provide it with income that it can use to fund other activities. But the danger we face at the moment is that rampant commercialisation will ensure that *only* the most privileged sections of Australian society benefit from the research undertaken by universities and, moreover, that any research work unlikely to yield profits for tertiary institutions and their industry partners will be marginalised and under-funded. As Stuart Macintyre, the Dean of Arts at the University of Melbourne, has claimed, pure research is being squeezed out of Australian universities in favour of applied research useful to industry.[9]

Where, you might ask, do students fit into this bleak picture? The answer, I would submit, is nowhere in particular. If you believe that any of the money in Professor Tognolini's brown paper envelopes was going to end up funding library books for students at the University of New South Wales, I think you'd be mistaken. The whole tenor of commercialisation is to marginalise and undermine undergraduate education. After all, teaching domestic undergraduate students simply takes staff time away from activities of more fundamental importance to the university's viability, such as consultancy work, chasing full-fee-paying students, brown-nosing business and government, and composing grant applications for research projects that not even the chief investigator gives a toss about.

The critical point here is that the solvency of universities is now dependent on how successful they are in attracting income on top of the basic operating grant they receive from the government. This operating grant is essentially a grant per student, with some differentiation to take account of the different costs of different courses. A university receives more for an engineering student than a history student. No university, however, can function on the basis of this grant alone. For their research activities, they need to attract funding from large bodies such as the Australian Research Council. On top of these grants, the government provides further funding on a basis of past research performance. Here, the key indicators are previous success in attracting research grants

and research student load and completions. Ironically, actual publications count for little.[10]

Naturally, universities have sought to rearrange their activities so they can obtain as large a share of the available money as possible. They need it to survive. They have had to focus on attracting large research grants, and are now involved in a bidding war for the best graduate students because successful research degree completions mean extra money in the kitty. As Frank Jackson of the Australian National University has recently commented, this is great for graduate students, but not necessarily for universities. It is certainly not good for undergraduates because it diverts money that ought to be used for improving the quality of their education into the pockets of a privileged group of postgraduate students.[11]

The Federal Government is imposing a regime of 'Quality Assurance' while starving universities of funds. On the same principle, hospitals in Thatcher's Britain closed down beds and hired public relations firms to show how well they were working.

In the current climate, universities need to be able to attract fee-paying students, especially from overseas because there are limitations on what they can charge local students. Universities are also dependent for their financial viability on what they can earn from consultancies and marketable research. The net result is that scarce resources are being diverted by universities into what the managers of modern universities call 'strategic priorities'. Strategic priorities are basically anything that will generate money for the university – or, to express the matter more precisely, they are what that very small number of people who call the shots in our universities *decide* will generate money. The term 'strategic' certainly does not include the purchase of adequate library resources for local undergraduate students, or the reduction of class sizes for the same cohort. On the contrary, library budgets are prime targets for the financial masters of modern Australian universities. After all, a library is not generally seen to make money for the university – except, of course, when the 'customer' is a non-HECS fee-paying student. That a good library is absolutely essential to the teaching and research infrastructure of a modern university means nothing to an accountant in Chancellery. Libraries are simply a drain on university resources. In the long run, of course, gutted libraries mean poorer research performance by academic staff, a declining capacity to attract good postgraduate students, lower prestige and – quite possibly – less income from overseas and other fee-paying students, who will take into account where a university stands in the 'research' pecking order when choosing where to study. But in the long run, the university bean-counter is dead, whereas a library that fails to keep pace with new publications will be showing the gaps in its teeth for decades to come. Similarly, class sizes are a piddling matter for your average university bureaucrat: who cares if tutorial classes each have ten, fifteen or fifty students? It's the bottom line that counts.

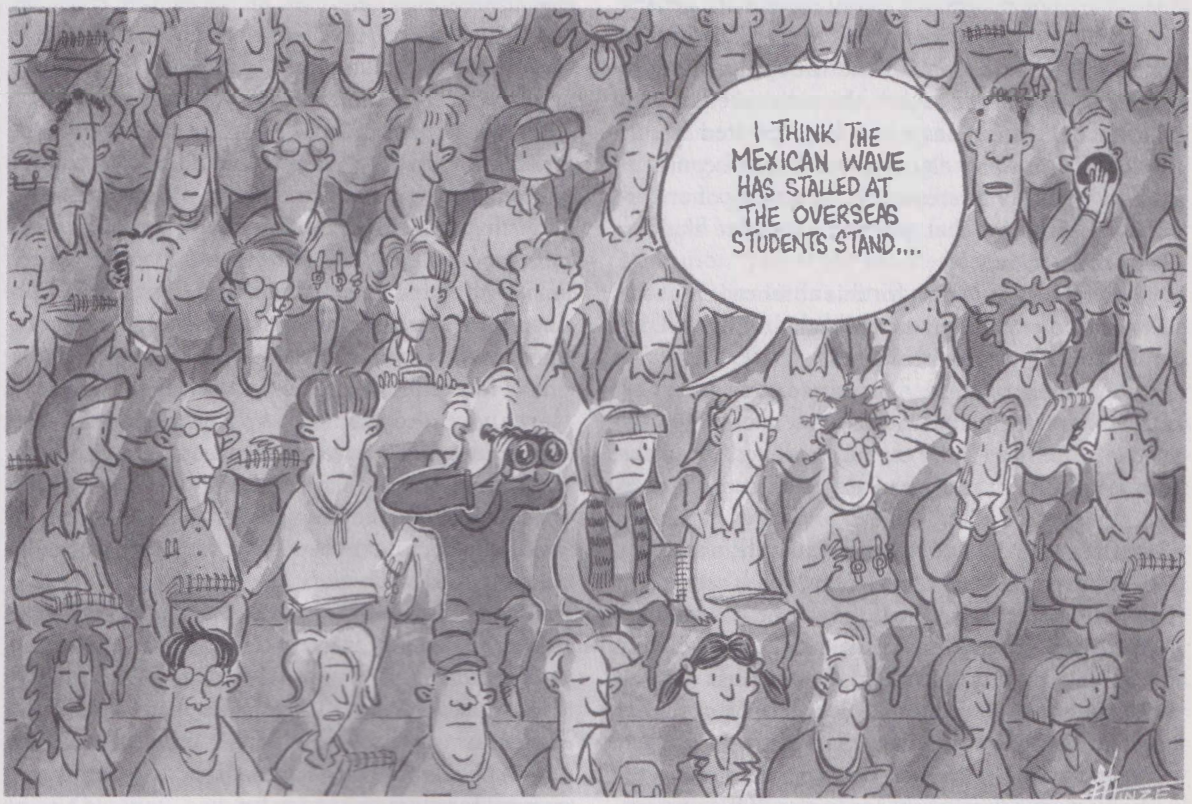
The cross-subsidisation of research by income earned through teaching is fundamental to modern Australian universities. Like most academics in the sector, I get paid each fortnight primarily because I and my colleagues teach a very large number of students, most of them undergraduates. The government does not provide schools such as my own with an equivalent grant of money for research activities. For example, when I go on study-leave for a semester – increasingly, for many academics, the only real opportunity for serious research – my absence will be simply covered by other teaching staff out of existing resources. This system, of course, has a negative impact on staff-student ratios and even on the range of units on offer in any particular semester. What happens each semester is a simple transfer of resources earned through teaching to the research activities of whichever staff happen to be due for a sabbatical.[12]

There are now strong pressures on university departments to increase class sizes and reduce actual face-to-face teaching. Teaching 'inefficiently' is frowned upon: I notice that even the Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson, has weighed in on this issue, and criticised academics for continuing to teach units with five or fewer students. This practice, of course, is standard at honours and postgraduate level, where units tend to be small and specialised: but the existence of small classes of this kind is a convenient fact for a Minister who wants to construct academics, rather than government policy, as the reason for the problems in

Australian higher education. The government obviously still believes there is fat in the tertiary sector. Nelson's arguments, of course, are also frequently used by university bosses to lay blame on their own academic staff.

Meanwhile, universities are cutting units, subjects and whole programs. My own university got rid of Modern Greek recently, and I notice that Earth Sciences at La Trobe University has recently bitten the dust.[13] Universities will look more and more like each other, as high-enrolment, vocationally-orientated courses flourish, and everything else is allowed to fall by the wayside. Australian university students can look forward to less and less choice in the subjects available for study, and Australia will gradually slip outside a whole range of international scholarly conversations, making a farce of the notion of internationalisation so beloved of the movers and shakers in Australian higher education.

Ironically, the Federal Government is imposing a regime of 'Quality Assurance' on universities at the same time as it is starving them of funds. On the same principle, hospitals in Thatcher's Britain closed down beds and hired the services of public relations firms and industrial relations specialists to show how well they were working. The Quality Assurance Agency will gradually audit each Australian university every five years. If you believe this will improve the quality of higher education, I suspect you're going to be disappointed. Nevertheless, the phrase appears in the title of every second document I read at my own university – presumably on the same principle used by Sir Humphrey Appleby to justify calling a paper 'Open Government' ("Get rid of the difficult bit in the title. It does less damage there."). Universities, of course, will protect themselves by producing vast amounts of paper in order to show that they are teaching their students well. The paper will prove precisely nothing, but it will keep the wheels of bureaucracy moving around in both the universities and the public service. One of the consequences of increasing government scrutiny of universities is that academics now spend far more time sitting on committees and filling out forms than ever before. In my own Faculty here at the University of New England, we have one committee for every 7.6 staff members. Again, this sort of work, much of it of dubious value, diverts staff time from the core busi-



HALF-TIME AT THE "ECONOMICS 101" DOUBLE-HEADER....

nesses of the university, teaching and research. It may go without saying that this diversion is not in the interests of high quality undergraduate education.

In many respects, this whole trend is rather peculiar. After all, high quality undergraduate education is absolutely essential to Australia's future. By any measure, it is in the national interest. We need a highly skilled workforce for our economic prosperity; we need a well educated group of graduate-citizens capable of providing our community with leadership. So, on the face of it, you'd expect that there would be votes in undergraduate education. Millions of Australians have a direct stake in the quality of undergraduate education, whereas the benefits of plunging vast sums of money into many areas of research, while attractive to academics like me, must seem rather more ambiguous to many voters.

Most Australian parents presumably do care whether their children are getting a good or lousy education in our tertiary institutions although, as in Japan, they may well be more concerned with the quality of secondary education. Certainly, the Howard Government has given greater priority to school than to university funding.[14] It may be that Australian parents are more concerned with getting their children into a prestigious tertiary institution than with what happens once they're actually in there.[15] Whatever the causes, the political effects are clear enough: there has never been created in this country a vocal and electorally powerful constituency so intensely interested in the quality of undergraduate education that governments were likely to quake at the sight.

One important reason for this absence is that the system of deferred payment through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme means that much of the actual payment of fees by undergraduates occurs *after* they have completed their course; in other words, once it is too late to be terribly bothered with the issue of 'value for money'. Parents and students do often invest considerable sums 'up-front' in tertiary education – via college fees, for example, as well as in living expenses and books – but this is rather less than they might be paying if they faced compulsory up-front fees for university tuition. On the whole, I don't think that the mums and dads of Australia feel they have a big enough stake in the issue of higher education to make serious nuisances of themselves with government. They're more likely to be worried about petrol prices or, as in the 2001 election, sticking the boot into asylum-seekers.

Indeed, I suspect that many Australian parents feel grateful that their children are getting a decent tertiary education at so little cost to themselves. The price, of course, is largely being paid by students, in declining resources, and by academics, in obscene and crippling workloads. I recently heard a radio report that Peter Costello had been working fourteen-hour days in the lead-up to the budget. Many university academics would now be working these kinds of hours most of the year, partly so that the quality of teaching can be maintained despite declining staff numbers and resources.

What is to be done? At the last election, the Labor Party advanced a set of proposals under the title *An Agenda For the Knowledge Nation*. While higher education was only one aspect of this blueprint, there were proposals in it for an increase in public funding for tertiary institutions, "including base operating funding, so [universities] can continue to provide quality education and attract the best academic staff".[16] *Knowledge Nation* was greeted with some enthusiasm by many in the tertiary sector. That is understandable: a drowning man will jump on even the flimsiest life raft. When faced with a government that continues to deny that the sector is in crisis, we should not be surprised if long-suffering students and academics look favourably on a party that at least admits that something needs to be done.

Yet, as critics of *Knowledge Nation* commented, it was advanced as a ten-year scheme that would "be implemented as and when budgetary circumstances allow". As Kim Beazley reassured the public, "We will not be undermining fiscal responsibility in the delivery of these essential reforms".[17] That's the rub. As even the sympathetic Simon Marginson commented, the scheme lacked "detail on spending programs or implementation machinery" and was "largely rhetorical".[18] Marginson, with Mark Considine, was actually commissioned by the ALP to do some of the research for the statement, so this is a particularly damning assessment. Moreover, as Paul Kelly commented last year, funding higher education gained a very poor second place to rollback of the GST in the ALP's order of spending priorities when they were actually announced during the election campaign.[19]

Marginson apparently believes there is room for higher taxation, but he's an academic, not a politician. Although it would be fair to say that there *is* growing support for more university funding, it would also be naïve to believe that the Australian electorate is any

time soon going to be willing to wear significantly higher taxes in order to pay for it. It's hard to see either Labor or the Coalition advocating such an increase. Words are cheap, but rearranging the finances of the state to provide the sector with adequate funding is not.

The Howard Government, for example, professes to believe that the role of higher education is to "inspire and enable individuals to develop their capabilities to the highest potential throughout their lives" and to "enable individuals to contribute to a democratic, civilised society and promote tolerance and debate that underpins it".[20] It has sought to achieve these objects by cutting funding for universities to such an extent that by 1998 Australia was twenty-first out of twenty-eight OECD countries in its proportion of Gross Domestic Product spent on education. According to Marginson, between 1995 and 1999, Australia was "one of very few OECD countries" in which funding for universities fell.[21] Between 1993 and 2000, staff-student ratios have moved from 1:14 to 1:20.[22] The top eight Australian universities now spend, per student, around 56 per cent of the sum spent by the top thirteen British universities and less than a third of the amount spent by the top four universities in Hong Kong.[23] Nelson, however, like his more famous namesake, turns a blind eye and maintains that there is no crisis in higher education. It is difficult to imagine what a Nelson crisis would look like. For our Nelson, defeat in the Battle of Trafalgar would have been a minor blip in British maritime affairs.

There are no easy answers to the problems currently faced by the tertiary sector, and particularly the chronic under-funding of undergraduate education. It's now pretty widely accepted that investment by industry in both research and training is far too low. I recently heard John Brogden, Bob Carr's next victim, give the annual D.H. Drummond Lecture here in Armidale. He came across as a thoughtful chap, and certainly not one inclined to give glib answers to difficult questions. One of his observations was that in the new economy, highly skilled employees would no longer be bound to particular employers for years on end, and instead would work on short-term projects on contract. A sense of long-term mutual obligation between employer and employee would obviously play little part in this order. A logical conclusion, although not one formulated by Brogden, is surely that employers will be unlikely to see training of their staff as a terribly sensible form of investment. Indeed, it seems to me that this particular version of the 'new economy' would be an employer's delight because it absolves industry from making any significant financial contribution to training. They would simply reap the benefits of the publicly (and HECS) funded higher education 'enjoyed' by their highly-skilled 'workforce'. In the years after the Second World War, when a major expansion of the tertiary system occurred under governments of both persuasions, the idea of public investment in human capital was the driving factor, hardly (if at all) less dear to a Menzies than to a Whitlam. Today, the burden of investment in the acquisition of cultural capital and skills is increasingly borne by the individual student, with a declining taxpayer subsidy.[24] Moreover, this process of investment does not end upon graduation: life-long learning demands continuing knowledge investment. The reality is that in 2002, as in 1952, graduates, society and industry all benefit from top quality higher education. Yet, at the moment, it appears that only two persons in this trinity are bearing the cost of it.

Academics now spend far more time sitting on committees and filling out forms than ever before. This sort of work, much of it of dubious value, diverts staff time from the core businesses of the university, teaching and research.

However, in addition to greater input from industry, a cranky – even militant – constituency needs to be created that is intensely interested in quality undergraduate teaching. At some point down the track, a Labor Government will be elected, and probably with an education policy not unlike *Knowledge Nation*. It will be lobbied intensively by various groups within the higher education sector, and they will not all be telling it the same thing. Some will be arguing for more research money for Australia's elite universities. Others will be calling for more money for applied research in 'strategic' areas. There will be competition between universities, between the regional and city universities, between the universities of technology and the others. There is every chance that the voices of students and their allies will be lost in this babble, and that public investment in

undergraduate education will be postponed indefinitely on grounds of cost. As Jackson has commented, there is a tendency for governments to concentrate on flashy, high-profile funding initiatives – such as the Howard Government's *Backing Australia's Ability* scheme – because these attract valuable media attention.[25] Increasing government contributions to the basic operating grant so that undergraduate education is adequately resourced is distinctly unglamorous by comparison. Student groups will need to remind an ALP government of where Australia's interests really lie.

Meanwhile, they should continue to defend public education even in the unpropitious Howard era, by making life as uncomfortable for these wreckers of Australian higher education as possible. Students should also agitate within universities to ensure that their own interests are being looked after. They should watch library budgets and class sizes like hawks. Above all, they should choose their allies carefully, and not assume that everyone who professes to believe in the importance of higher education – especially when their salaries exceed that of the prime minister[26] – really have their true interests at heart.

ENDNOTES

1. I am greatly indebted to Associate Professor Howard Brasted, Associate Professor David Kent and Professor Stuart Macintyre for their helpful comments on the draft and for particular points of information. A version of this paper was presented to a New England Young Country Labor Forum on Higher Education, held at the University of New England on 8 June 2002.
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Stephen Fleischfresser

Evolutionary psychology and the Left

A discussion of Peter Singer's *A Darwinian Left: politics, evolution and cooperation*

OVER THE PAST DECADE or two there has been an increasing trend within the natural sciences and, to a lesser degree, the social sciences, towards developing explanatory models of human behaviour that are Darwinian in world view. Much of this stems from what is known as 'sociobiology', chiefly developed and publicised in the 1970s by Edward O. Wilson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning Frank B. Baird Jr Professor of Science and Curator in Entomology at Harvard University's Museum of Comparative Zoology. Wilson defined sociobiology as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behaviour".[1] Sociobiology's specific reification of this definition led to an all encompassing genes-straight-to-behaviour model of human societies, in which existing social orders (class and race for example) were legitimised as the natural outcome of genetic variation. Sociobiology was vigorously criticised, most notably by the Marxist Science for the People collective, and declined in the late 1970s. In its wake, a plethora of new disciplines, such as Darwinian anthropology, behavioural ecology and, more significantly, evolutionary psychology have emerged. These have taken up the fundamental insight that the evolutionary biology of the Darwinian Modern Synthesis is a tool to be used in the understanding of human culture. The Modern Synthesis refers to evolutionary science that uses both the insights from Darwin regarding 'natural selection' and the development of Mendelian genetics by Morgan, Muller, Sturtevant, Bridges and Dobzhansky. And now, of course, molecular genetics, pioneered by Crick and Watson, has also been drawn in. The pennant raised by these new disciplines from the battlefield upon which sociobiology was defeated, bears the words of the former commander:

> It may not be too much to say that sociology and the other social sciences, as well as the humanities are the last branches of biology waiting to be included in the Modern Synthesis.[2]

These disciplines, both old and new, have attempted to give biological explanations for such diverse phenomena as altruism, ethics, morals, gender roles, political tendency, homosexuality, religion, aesthetics, sexual jealousy, and most controversially in recent times, rape.[3] Certain topics in this list, particularly ethics, aesthetics and politics, have long been considered to be firmly within the realm of the humanities, however it's no coincidence that these things now find themselves under the microscope of such biological disciplines. Wilson, in fact, suggested that ethics should no longer be within the jurisdiction of philosophers and instead be "biologicised".[4] Another sociobiologist and Harvard biologist, Robert Trivers, stated that "sooner or later, political science, law, economics, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology will all be branches of sociobiology".[5]

More recently, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby of the University of California, Santa Barbara, have taken up the challenge in their work on evolutionary psychology (EP), to "integrate" the social sciences and humanities into the natural sciences. The aim, they argue, is not necessarily to reduce the social sciences to principles developed by the natural sciences, but rather to integrate the two in the sense that theories from these sciences should not be contradictory.[6]

Advocates and practitioners of EP obviously look positively upon this imminent assimilation of the study of culture, however others in recent publications have in fact viewed it as the "project of colonising the social science under the banner of biology".[7]

Colonisation conjures up quite a different picture from the supposedly benign 'integration' of Cosmides and Tooby, particularly when the integration of political science into these Neo-Darwinian disciplines in fact becomes the integration of *politics* into the arena of authority dominated by natural science. There has been a spectacular example of this in recent times, viz., the publication of Peter Singer's *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation*.[8]

Peter Singer, one of Australia's most well-known academics, the founder of the animal liberation movement, and controversial bioethicist, has published a small work on the relationship between the Left and Darwinism. He does so in a book that is part of the 'Darwinism Today' series, edited by the evolutionary psychologists Helena Cronin and Oliver Curry. Both Cronin and Curry are at the heart of the British thrust to integrate the humanities with the natural sciences. Dr Helena Cronin is a Co-Director of the London School of Economics' Centre for Philosophy of Natural and Social Sciences and runs the Darwin@LSE program, a research group that explores, as it proclaims on its website, "recent developments in evolutionary thinking, in particular, what evolutionary theory can tell us about human nature – understanding our bodies, brains, minds, behaviour, consciousness and aspects of culture as the products of adaptations evolved by natural selection".[9] Also among the authors in this series are such EP notables as Margo Wilson, John Daly, Cosmides and Tooby. Though Singer never makes clear his intellectual and ideological affiliations, his basic theoretical premises are those of EP; and *A Darwinian Left* reflects and is sympathetic towards the position taken by the editors and other authors in the series.

In his book Singer begins by looking at Marx's notes on Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, which in the light of the twentieth century now reads as a profoundly accurate prognosis of the failure of Marxism to transcend hierarchical structures and other pitfalls of power. Singer notes how communism has been transformed, in the context of Marxist states in the twentieth century, from its egalitarian founding principles into rigid, repressive, totalitarian, bureaucratic structures. This process led finally, and perhaps most conspicuously, to the collapse of communism in the USSR and its enfeeblement in the Soviet Union's satellite states and various allies. This, combined with the undermining of national trade unions, through various strategies of globalisation, leads Singer to suggest that the Left needs a new paradigm or theoretical framework. This paradigm must preserve that which he considers to be the essence of the Left, that is, being on the side of the weak and the oppressed, and trying to alleviate suffering.

These disciplines attempt to give biological explanations for such diverse phenomena as altruism, ethics, morals, gender roles, political tendency, homosexuality, religion, aesthetics, sexual jealousy, and most controversially in recent times, rape.

At its heart Singer's little book is an attempt to replace Marx, as the core theorist and thinker of Left politics, with Charles Darwin. This, however, is a task fraught with danger, for the application of Darwinism to society has traditionally been dominated by the Right.[10] Singer starts his chapter on Darwinism and politics by quoting a letter sent by Darwin to Charles Lyell, a prominent nineteenth-century Uniformitarian geologist who, though rather reluctantly, through his theories played a crucial role in the acceptance of evolution. It reads in part:

> I have received in a Manchester newspaper rather a good squib, showing that I have proved might is right and therefore that Napoleon is right, and every cheating tradesman is right.[11]

This trend continued with Social Darwinism as championed by such theorists as Herbert Spencer, whose work was used by *laissez-faire* capitalists to justify unregulated competition and trade. The position is nicely summed up in a now famous quote from J.D. Rockefeller Jr:

> The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest . . . The American Beauty rose can be produced in the splendour and fragrance which bring cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow around it. It is merely the working out of a law of nature and a law of God.[12]

It was believed that evolution in nature only proceeded by unfettered competition, and therefore, if the government would only allow the law of nature

to operate unhindered in the marketplace, business would flourish and achieve its full potential. Rockefeller's statement, though seemingly crude, is however commensurate with contemporary free-market philosophies.

Similarly, the 'science' of Eugenics, founded by Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin) was based on Darwinian principles of malleability of species over time. The Eugenicists believed that through direct action (normally at the policy level) the race could be improved. This involved two strategies: the encouragement of 'fit stock' (the wealthy middle classes) to breed, and the restriction or denial of the right to reproduce among the 'unfit' (the poor and working classes). The position normally taken was that laws protecting the poor or the unemployed were aiding those considered unfit to breed, and were in contradiction to the laws of nature, thus leading to a general decline in the quality of the race. The later application of such theories in Nazi Germany is testament to the Right's domination of Darwinian approaches to society and politics and the horrors that may result.[13]

The new Darwinian Left

SINGER SEES (correctly) the Right's historical position with respect to Darwinism as arising from a key philosophical error. This fallacy, first demonstrated by David Hume in the eighteenth century and later refined by G.E. Moore, is the proposition that one can deduce values from facts (Moore called this the Naturalistic Fallacy). The Social Darwinists and Eugenicists used Darwinism to generate ethical positions and normative claims (values) even though Darwinism itself is only a description of phenomena in the world (facts). They have therefore made a logical error. So how does this affect Singer's attempt to synthesise a Darwinian Left? Firstly, on the grounds of this fallacy, he dismisses the premises on which the Darwinian Right has been traditionally based; that the direction of evolution is good or correct, and that social policy aids the survival of the 'unfit', thus polluting the gene pool. Instead, Singer suggests we use Darwinism in such a way that we do not commit the Naturalistic fallacy. He posits two ways in which we can do this. Firstly:

> The assertion that an understanding of human nature in the light of evolutionary theory can help us to identify the means by which we may achieve some of our social and political goals, including various ideas of equality, as well as assessing the possible costs and benefits of doing so.[14]

and secondly:

> The debunking or discrediting of politically influential, non-Darwinian, beliefs and ideas.[15]

Here is where we start to see the real meat of Singer's argument. He writes, "While the core of the left is a set of values, there is also a penumbra of factual beliefs that have typically been associated with the left".[16] It is these factual beliefs he wants to target using Darwinism, the most prominent of which is the belief that, as Marx put it:

> the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations.[17]

The Left has traditionally held the position that if the socio-political environment and, importantly, modes of production, are changed, then people too will change; thus it is possible to bring about more egalitarian societies through change in the "ensemble of social relations". The Left (amongst others) sees 'human nature' as malleable, as able to be improved, and this is partly due to Marx himself. Marx believed that the mode of production was responsible for the construction of social and political life and that:

> It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.[18]

It is this social determinist view of human nature that Singer believes will be challenged by the application of Darwinism to the Left. Unlike the Leftists who view human nature as 'malleable', Singer wants to use the natural sciences to circumscribe the limits of human behaviour, to show its universals, its constancies, and to cast light on its immovable boundaries.

Well, it doesn't sound too unreasonable, does it? Just reining biologically incorrect aspects of Marxism back in, right? One might be forgiven for thinking so until one reads Singer's example of this Darwinian Left and its debunking tactics. He suggests that due to evolved reproductive differences between the sexes (females are limited in the number

of children they can have through the time it takes for pregnancy etcetera, while males are only limited by the number of females they can have sex with) there will also be evolved differences in temperament that work to maximise the fitness of individuals. Women then will be far more selective in their choice of mate, and males will adopt strategies that maximise the number of women with whom they can reproduce. *If* social status equates to greater reproductive access to females, then it will be a biologically determined tendency for men to seek status more urgently than women do. In light of this Singer does away with certain elements of the 'factual penumbra' of the Left. This Darwinian understanding must then lead us to a 'naturalised' position on the unequal representation of women in business and politics, in which this inequality is understood to be a result of natural biological tendencies rather than sex discrimination within a patriarchal society.[19]

It was believed that evolution in nature only proceeded by unfettered competition, and therefore, if the government would only allow the law of nature to operate unhindered in the marketplace, business would flourish and achieve its full potential.

Examples like this leave one in doubt about what remains of the Left with Darwin at the helm. Though this may be an attempt to debunk politically influential non-Darwinian ideas, where in this example is the essence of the Left Singer so wants to preserve in this new paradigm? This surely is exactly the same reinscription of social prejudice that has dogged the many attempts to apply Darwin to society. Once more social belief has passed into the hands of natural science and come out the other side as 'Truth'.

Darwinian cooperation

SINGER ALSO WANTS to see the Left shift the focus of its understanding of Darwinism. The classic conception dominating the standard view of Darwinism is one of competition; however, in recent times much Darwinian work has been done on cooperation. Significantly, most of this work is contained in sociobiology, the prime goal of which, as we have seen, is the biological explanation of altruism. Modern EP has incorporated computer simulations of game theory into its attempts to discover the relationship between competition and cooperation. Various tournaments have been set up in which a computer runs iterated Prisoner's Dilemma problems. Prisoner's dilemma is a common tool in game theory and even political science and runs as follows: Two prisoners are being questioned by the police concerning some crime committed. If they both confess to the crime they will receive ten years each. If they both hold out they will be held for six months at the maximum and then let free without being convicted. If one confesses while the other holds out, he will get five years, while the one who held out will receive twenty years. Therefore, the best strategy in this situation is for both to cooperate and to hold out. When this is iterated a hundred times or more the best strategy becomes less clear. Of the numerous strategies that were compared, one, called Tit-for-Tat, emerged as the most successful. This strategy involved doing to the other prisoner what was done to you in the previous iteration; if the last person cooperated, cooperate with the next, if the last confessed, then confess with the next, and so on. For Singer this demonstrates that in the evolution of cooperation and competition both strategies can be adaptive in certain situations and therefore we must expect in any society, with any mode of production, and no matter how cooperative, that certain individuals will always compete for status and resources. It also shows that people will respond "positively to genuine opportunities to enter into mutually beneficial forms of cooperation".[20] Therefore the Darwinian Left must do its best to promote cooperation (which is far more commensurate with the Left than is competition), but always expect the fixity of competition to give rise to some uncooperative behaviour.

What it looks like

SO, ACCORDING TO SINGER, this is what a Darwinian Left looks like. The malleability of human nature would be rejected and the Left would instead concentrate on those aspects empirically tested to be cross-cultural constants, ie., 'human nature'. Even in the most cooperative society we should not expect to remove all competition and the social inequalities that this brings, and no matter how much we reorganise the society to promote cooperation, and many will participate cooperatively, these in-

equalities will persist. Similarly we should not see such inequalities as being the product of "discrimination, prejudice, oppression or social conditioning"[21] rather, a significant proportion will be related to behavioural strategies emerging from biological variation in the species. Lastly, the Left would have to reject any thinking that extracts values from facts, and retain those values essential to the traditional Left.

This, as Singer says, is a "sharply deflated vision of the left".[22] In fact it is hard to see where any room is retained at all for the traditional values of the Left. Although it *is* necessary, at least to some extent, for the Left to engage with modern evolutionary biology, it is not necessary to take this strongly biologically deterministic line. Many biologists strongly reject this method. Richard Lewontin, Stephen J. Gould, and Richard Levin, amongst others, have been persistent critics of such thinking and have, in fact, developed equally scientific positions that run totally contrary to the kind of work put forward by Singer.[23] The biological determinism evident in the *Darwinian Left* is the legacy of sociobiology[24] which, in its attempt to 'integrate' the social sciences, arts, and humanities, has always used strong determinism and reductionism to simplify the causal networks of society and culture in order to lay claim to the explanation of them. Singer's book is less a positive attempt to forge a Darwinian Left, than it is an attempt to break the resistance of the Left to the incursion of natural sciences into their traditional domain. After all, Sociobiology's main opponents were Marxist, and it would be advantageous to lessen their animosity towards EP if it is to gain widespread recognition and achieve its goal of unifying the social and natural sciences.

Psychology has always been on the fringe of the natural sciences (indeed many a physicist or chemist has been known to chortle at the very mention of the words 'psychology' and 'science' in the same sentence). EP can be seen as an attempt by psychology to raise its status within the sciences by allying itself with evolutionary theory. Now, desperate to prove its scientific worth, EP has gone on a project of epistemological colonialism. Increasingly, proponents of EP are making their discipline known in a wide variety of areas in a number of countries. Universities and research groups all over the world are taking up EP.

The position taken was that laws protecting the poor or the unemployed were aiding those considered unfit to breed, and were in contradiction to the laws of nature, thus leading to a general decline in the quality of the race.

Unfortunately *The Darwinian Left*, though certainly interesting, is an example of the overreaching ambition of evolutionary psychology. The natural sciences are of vital importance and I do believe that social sciences and the Left *should* engage more thoroughly with them. However, this should not involve surrendering to the methods of the natural sciences, but, rather, should take the form of the contestation of ideas, values, facts, method and philosophies. Not to do this is to run the risk of letting such disciplines as evolutionary psychology go unchallenged. As Singer's book illustrates, even a Darwinian Left is perhaps biased to the right, and therefore if EP is left unchecked it will become a dominant episteme, riding its way into policy making and politics upon the credentials of the natural sciences.

The downfall of sociobiology in the 1970s was due to the strong political resistance of Marxists who immediately recognised the fundamental right-wing nature of such thinking. The links between sociobiology and EP are far more than just surface, they are deep and binding. Though some resistance is building[25] there needs to be a greater response to EP from the Left and from the arts, humanities and social sciences. We must consider what does more damage in the long term: contesting and maintaining the divide between the social and natural sciences, or surrendering to the process of their unification.

ENDNOTES

1. E.O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.4.
2. ibid.
3. See for example R. Thornhill & C.T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, MIT Press, Cambridge, London, 2000.
4. E.O. Wilson, p.287.
5. E.O. Wilson, quoted in 'Why You Do What You Do. Sociobiology: A New Theory of Behaviour', *Time*, 1 August 1977, p.40.
6. Leda Cosmides & John Tooby, 'Psychological Foundations of Culture', Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby (eds), *The*

Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture, OUP, New York, 1992.

7. H. Rose & S. Rose, *Alas Poor Darwin: Arguments Against Evolutionary Psychology*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2000, p.106.
8. P. Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1999.
9. http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/cpnss/darwin/ as of 15 November 2001.
10. This is not to say, however, that it has exclusively been the realm of the Right. The Left too has flirted with Darwinian thought. For example, the Fabian Socialists took a strong stance on Eugenics. It has also been noted by Robert Young (psychoanalyst and Darwin scholar) that "during the nineteenth century almost every possible political position sought to locate itself within and ground itself on Darwinism," R.M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture*, CUP, 1985, p.20. Also see 'Eugenics and the Left' in D.B. Paul, *The Politics of Heredity: Essays on Eugenics, Biomedicine, and the Nature-Nurture Debate*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1998, pp.11–35.
11. F. Darwin (ed), *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 1887, vol.ii, p.62 quoted in P. Singer, *A Darwinian Left: Politics, Evolution and Cooperation*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1999, p.10
12. J.D. Rockefeller quoted in R. Huber, *The American Idea of Success*, McGraw-Hill, New York, p.66.
13. For a thorough discussion of eugenics see D. Kevles, *In The Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, University of California Press, 1985.
14. op. cit. note 9, p.18.
15. ibid. p.16.
16. ibid. p.18.
17. K. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* (VI) quoted in op. cit. note 9, p.5.
18. D. McLellan (ed), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, OUP, 1977, p.389.
19. op. cit. note 9, p.18.
20. op. cit. note 9, p.61.
21. ibid.
22. ibid. p.62.
23. See for example Rose & Kamin Lewontin, *Not In Our Genes: Biology Ideology, and Human Nature*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1984.
24. E.O. Wilson himself has stated "from the very beginning that evolutionary psychology was the *same* as human sociobiology", U. Segestråle, *Defenders of the Truth: The Battle for Science in the Sociobiology Debate and Beyond*, OUP Inc., New York, 2000, p.317.
25. See for example H. Rose & S. Rose, *Alas Poor Darwin*.

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DIARY DATES

Above: detail from Peter Nicholson cartoon, to be auctioned.

SATURDAY 9 NOVEMBER 4pm*

Overland fundraiser: political cartoon auction at the New Ballroom, Trades Hall, Melbourne, with Rod Quantock as auctioneer and Phillip Adams 'pencilled in' as MC. Join in festivities and bid for original artworks by some of the best in the field: Peter Nicholson, Michael Leunig, Bill Leak, Judy Horacek, Rod Emmerson, Geoff Hook, Vane Lindesay and many other big names in Australian cartooning. Historically significant artefacts will also be sold. Bring your cheque-book, credit cards and cash, and lots of it!

* times and details subject to change. Subscribers will be informed by mail; others can call *Overland* on 03 9688 4163.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 6pm

Overland and Heide Museum of Modern Art present hard-hitting poetry and performance by some of Australia's best performance poets, as part of the Barrett Reid memorial program. Starting at 6 pm at Trades Hall, this event will be followed by the *Overland* lecture, presented by Bob Ellis.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 7pm

Overland lecture series: 'Sydney or the Bush', delivered by Bob Ellis. Trades Hall. Entry $10/$6 includes copy of *Overland* 169, special issue with bonus 32 pages.

Magazine wrack

Brian Musgrove

REVIEWING *MEANJIN* from the vantage of *Overland* is a tricky diplomatic task, complicated by the fact that the current *Meanjin* (61.2, 2002)is themed by the tetchy subject 'drugs'. The issue of drugs deserves wide discussion in all its complex dimensions. Consequently, the note of self-congratulation (*frisson* maybe) in Ian Britain's editorial comment that this is the first Australian literary magazine dedicated to dope can be forgiven.

His suggestion that *Meanjin* will encompass drugs in relation to their contribution to "literature" and "various other cultural forms" is less convincing – mainly because essays on drugs and the arts, or art, are the least successful in the volume. The cover is decorated by a soulful (in context, one reads stoned) photo-portrait of Brett Whiteley; and Sheona White and Craig Judd's article on Whiteley is a capable recap of familiar terrain. It scouts established points economically (Whiteley's view of addiction as "disease", Romanticism and popular culture's drug allures, the torment in that Archibald-winning visual confession) but stops short of anything really new. Tentative finding: drugs were part of a "research drive" into art past and present, possibly supplying Whiteley with "some good ideas".

Christina Thompson's piece on John Forbes is fair enough as memoir, but barely "confronts the role of drugs" in the poet's life and death as promised. It concludes that addiction ruined him and had no function in his writing. Surely it's worth considering that drugs might have been part of a generational aesthetic which shaped Forbes, rather than simply a diversion (quoting Laurie Duggan) in the "gaps when nothing else was happening" in his life. Keith Richards glibly said a similar thing of heroin: he took it because when he wasn't playing rock'n'roll he felt dead anyway. But Richards took the stage on drugs too, confounding any strict demarcation between drugtaking and artistic performance – a problem which might also face future investigators of Forbes' oeuvre. Another conundrum, often levelled at the drugtaking Beats, lingers in Thompson's margins. Where, exactly, does the image of the poetic 'anti-citizen', with its refusenik mystique, shade into that of the freely-willed drugtaker whose closest ideological affiliations are actually to bourgeois individualism? In time, this might be a useful critical route into aspects of Forbes' verse and cultural politics.

Eons ago, in *The Politics of Ecstasy*, Timothy Leary cautioned that personalised accounts of drug-effects are always shadowed by the yawning question "So what?" Thus, Stephen McKenzie's remembrance of encountering the 'cultural form' cinema after smoking grass (watching that old hippie favourite *Koyaanisqatsi* sixty times) is placebo autobiography: "I thought a lot of things during *Koyaanisqatsi* . . . sometimes 'deep', as I used to term it." Unreal, man. In contrast, Clinton Walker's 'Potted History of Drugs and Australian Music' could be the blueprint for a fascinating book grounded in sociology and music-industry history, while still summoning personal connections and recollections.

Personal concerns generate perceptive observations on public policy and debates on community standards in Jeanette Kennett's 'Talking to Your Kids'. This is a conversion narrative with social reverberations: the story of how a mother – "once almost as conservative and hardline about the evils of drug use as John Howard and his chief adviser on drug strategy, Brian Watters, could have wanted" – underwent changes of conscience and intellectual position. Kennett mounts reasoned arguments to squarely counter the government's Tough on Drugs campaign. In the wake of Steven Soderbergh's film *Traffic*, she sees that a war on drugs is a war on our own children. Australian kids do not grow up in "wholesome *Father Knows Best* sitcoms", and contemporary teenage attitudes are fired in a furnace of heated contradictions. On the one hand there are

government information booklets with an "unrelenting focus on the bad effects of drugs and a bit of jargon designed to obscure description of the pleasurable effects; on the other, you have your friends, who are having 'mad fun' and appear to be unscathed". Kennett recommends reality checks in developing enlightened parent-child communication about drugs and risk management, and she polemically rounds on ossified Howardite orthodoxies: "public policy . . . ensures that addicts cannot get a pharmaceutically clean, secure and affordable supply of heroin. It is public policy, not heroin dependence, therefore, that pushes them into crime, poverty and homelessness, and even death." Monash philosopher Kennett continues: "This is true moral evil and policy-makers are knowingly or recklessly implicated in it." As a disarming instance of the muddy moralism surrounding drugs, she cites the case of methadone therapy – as methadone, after all, is a genuine narcotic, or opiate: "If opiates were intrinsically corrupting and damaging to one's health the methadone program could not have the benefits claimed for it."

There are a few high-profile contributors to this *Meanjin* who are regulars in national drug discussion and coal-face work. Howard's personally chosen drug czar, Salvation Army Major Brian Watters, offers his usual bizarre pot-pourri of progressivist feints, transnational drug-strategy comparisons, anecdote (not survey) of the public mood, the assertion that harm reduction doesn't deliver, and inevitable "surprise at the number of times I'm told that morals shouldn't come into this." That leads to a reprimand of "those who are ideologically driven and believe in a libertarian acceptance of the individual's right of choice to use drugs." Strangely, moral argument can be deployed *against* Howard-Watters style conservatives – who, we are assured with the repetition that characterises addiction to an idea, are *never* 'ideologically driven'. As Jacques Derrida said in an interview, published as 'The Rhetoric of Drugs', hard-line drug prohibitionists have a key commonality with liberalisers. Liberalisers often anchor their right to consume drugs in moral systems: systems sometimes at pluralistic odds with arbitrary convention; or a system which precisely invokes the moral pledge of free will and the right to choose enshrined in consumer capitalism. In short, 'drugs' exposes moral convention as contradictory, transient and contestable.

Watters is the most incongruous inclusion in *Meanjin On Drugs*, differing so dramatically from the others. (What would he make of being in printed proximity to Christos Tsiolkas, interviewed here under the rubric 'Getting Out of It' by Paul Somerville?) Is Watters included, understandably, because of his official position? In lip-service to the ethic of journalistic balance and variety? Or as a foil for more up-beat writers? This last way of puzzling out Watters' appearance is not mere cynicism. As a friend of mine remarked recently, the Major is frequently a straw-man for pro-drug lobbyists and a benchmark conservative against whom reformists measure themselves. However, my friend asked, given Watters' family background, professional form and religious leanings, how else could we expect him to behave or think? The complication lies not with Watters but with the Prime Minister who appointed him. The maelstrom of controversy around Watters' views (and his multiply-noted, immoderate and counter-productive public statements) is not necessarily a strictly *personal* matter. Health-care professionals prepared to innovate are obstructed by a socio-political, ethico-political bloc and Watters is its figurehead – not its foundation.

Frustrations with that immobile block almost bleed through in the articles by two more 'celebrity' drug commentators in *Meanjin*: David Penington and Alex Wodak – both, one would have thought, more plausible choices for Watters' job, but not politically correct by Coalition standards. Penington and Wodak patiently explain how current Australian drug policy and resistance to change is the outcome of historical forces and American-led global prohibitionism, enacted through the United Nations. Our government has invoked obligations under UN narcotics regulations to explain why Australian legislation and treatment practices cannot be altered: an interesting anomaly, given its indifference to many tenets of international law and constant sneering at UN protocols. This would be farcical if lives were not at stake.

Former chair of the Victorian Premier's Drug Advisory Council, Penington zones in on the point that Howard's drug policy is dominated by one of those

despicable elites, and that Australia "needs to mobilise public opinion of a rational kind rather than preaching a moral agenda that is rejected by the majority". And Penington valuably suggests that our official approach to drugs in this country is yet another instance of a troubling deputism to sheriff USA. He urges independence, though it "will require both civil and political courage to oppose the international hegemony of the US State Department with its simplistic reliance on prohibition". The way we treat junkies, then, is an unexpectedly graphic illustration of the way in which power-politics enters and determines everyday lives.

Alex Wodak – long-time interlocutor of Brian Watters – is located in a national drug hotspot: Sydney's St Vincent's Hospital. President of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and the International Harm Reduction Association, Wodak writes with his trademark clarity and care. He strolls through arguments which he has made in many places previously: on the complicated reasons for the failure of current measures, the logic of harm reduction, and "what stops communities getting better outcomes from drug policy". In terms of the obstacles to reforming legal and treatment options, Wodak gestures at the hysteria which condemns drugtakers to the same social apartheid inflicted on refugees, Muslims, and any number of pariah-types in Howard's Australia: "A mediocre fear campaign usually beats an excellent evidence-based campaign." But there's hope: "Fear delays but does not prevent change."

Meanjin maps the social domain 'drugs' from several angles; though drug specialists, researchers and historians will find very little by way of fresh information or insight. Once again, the editorial claim of novelty is diminished; but this is excusable because of the saliency of drugs as daily reality, intractable 'problem' and – regrettably too often – a matter of ignorance and prejudice. With that in mind, it's obviously worth repeating arguments put before and facts sometimes obscured for a non-specialist readership.

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Once were unionists

Jeff Sparrow

WHEN JIM HEALY, the leader of the militant Waterside Workers Federation, died in 1961, the Melbourne *Herald* carried an obituary by industrial columnist E.C. Crofts in its morning edition of 13 July. Under the headline of 'Healy, idol of the Watersiders', the notice began:

> Pipe-smoking, 63-year-old James Healy, wharf leader Communist, who died today, was the centre of many struggles on the Australian waterfront. Son of an Irish labourer and a mother who worked in a Lancashire cotton mill, Healy and his wife, Elizabeth, came to Australia in 1925. He became a waterside worker and joined the Labor Party. [1]

By the afternoon edition the headline had, mysteriously, changed. It now read: 'Healy, the man who ruled the wharves'. The text – still credited to E.C. Crofts – ran as follows:

> James Healy, 63, who during his lifetime was hated by thousands of opponents and sentenced to jail under a Labor Government, always remained outwardly calm. His sphinx-like imperturbability was described by opponents as 'cynical'. But most of the nation's 23,000 waterside workers regarded him as their undisputed leader.[2]

Overt hostility to unionism in general (and communist unionism in particular) typified the old *Herald*. Yet the intervention over Healy's obituary may well have involved a degree of conscious spite, with the editorial staff doubtless recalling the two occasions in the 1950s when Melbourne waterside workers forced the paper into embarrassing retractions.

In January 1956, the wharves came to a standstill over a campaign for maintenance of wages and conditions (the so-called 'Margins dispute'). *The Herald* ran a front-page editorial:

> If the issue is to be between industrial blackmail or the rule of law, responsible people have no choice. This strike throws out an extreme and dangerous challenge. The majority of people will support firm resistance to it.[3]

Nothing particularly unusual in that. After all, as Peter Russo, a columnist for *The Argus*, noted at the time, wharfies were "the nation's favourite coconut-shy":

> When anything goes wrong I have learned to look for a wharfie at the bottom of it, and so, I note, have a remarkable number of my fellow citizens.[4]

However, in its preparation for the dispute, the Waterside Workers Federation had decided to spare no effort to get its case to the public. In the first three days of the stoppage alone, wharfies distributed 170,000 leaflets, in fourteen different languages, contending that wage justice on the waterfront would benefit all workers. In factories and street meetings (up to fifty each day) they made the same argument.[5]

Unionists knew that media hostility could hurt them. So at the January 23 stop-work, selected articles from the press were read from the platform. After much discussion, a thousand unionists headed down Flinders Street in what the Communist paper *The Guardian* described with relish as "a march on the office of the lying *Herald* to push its lies down its throat".[6]

Looking down from his boardroom window, the paper's managing director Jack Williams had good reason to worry about the burly figures marching ten abreast towards *The Herald*'s Flinders Street complex.[7] The waterside was a tough place, and the wharfies enjoyed a fearsome reputation. In their oral history *Under the Hook*, the veteran unionist Tom Hills explained to Wendy Lowenstein how:

> The criminal element drifted towards the wharf. On the whole they supported the right wing, but some of them supported us – because we were anti-Establishment, I suppose. Terry Dean who was a gunman supported the Left. In the middle of the struggle with the Groupers we were having terrible trouble with one bloke, a real animal, and Terry said, "Listen, Tom, I'll go home and get me gun and shoot the bastard". I said, "Oh, Christ, Terry, don't do that. That'd bugger everything!"[8]

Perhaps even more frightening for a man like Williams, the waterside remained highly politicised, with a vocal Communist presence. The demonstrators parading towards *The Herald* carried placards proclaiming that "Shipowners' Profits Mean High Freights" and inviting employers to join the "Museum of Boss Tyranny". Significantly, a number of women – organised into the Women's Strike Committee – marched, too. As one told *The Guardian*, "the women are as determined as the men to teach *The Herald* to speak the truth".[9]

In furtherance of this educative mission, the demonstration pushed its way into the newspaper's machine room, with activists shouting, "We'll go to the workers first!"

John Ellis had been employed as a compositor for about a year when the invasion took place:

> We were just setting away, the afternoon edition time was coming up, and there's the usual hubbub that went on around edition time. All of a sudden these extra voices came streaming through doorways. So we all stopped and looked, and the next thing I knew one bloke jumped up onto a trolley with the metal pages on top where all the type goes in. So he starts talking about why they're there, and I thought, "Cripes, this is fantastic!"
>
> So he started telling us what *The Herald* had printed about the stoppage on the waterfront and they said it was a pack of lies and they were down there to get a retraction. Of course the supervisors are going berserk saying, "Get back to work. We've got to get the paper out. Never mind listening to these bastards."
>
> But I thought, "Fuck this!" and I was listening away and it was making a lot of sense to me.
>
> The next thing we know the man standing up on page one is starting to shuffle because his feet are getting hot. The page trolley had just been under the hot stereo press. So he starts jumping around and of course he's jumping around on type with his hob nail boots on and he's not only ruining type but he's ruining blocks – pictures.
>
> I could see the floor manager yelling, "Aargh! Get him off, get him off."[10]

Similar encounters took place throughout the building, as wharfies – individually and in groups – explained the issues of the dispute to anyone who would listen (and a few who would not). Eventually, the call went out to move on to the management. The protest streamed up three flights of stairs – but not without objection.

Tom Hills remembered:

> We couldn't get into the lifts, and our blokes were blueing about having to climb the stairs. "You haven't got very good facilities here," we said, "wharfies would want better conditions."[11]

In the reporters' rooms, the wharfies sat on the tables and helped themselves to the best chairs.

> A grey-headed man pleaded with the wharfies to "just leave the room. We'll never get the paper out to-day," he said.
>
> "Your bosses' worries – for not telling the truth."
>
> "We don't give a damn."
>
> "We couldn't care less."[12]

In desperation, managing-director Williams invited a deputation into his plush office – on the condition that the rest of the protest remained outside. Himself a member of the Australian Journalists' Association (he even occasionally wore a union badge, in much the fashion that Philip Ruddock was until recently allowed to sport an Amnesty pin), Williams no doubt felt that hand-picked delegates might prove more malleable than the mob in its entirety.

When the deputation asked for the same column space as had been given to the shipowners, Williams, noticeably more at ease without the press of the crowd, said off-handedly: "We cannot be fairer than in the past."[13] Without further ado, the delegates pushed back their chairs and opened the door, and the demonstration surged back into the office. With an eye on the comfortable furnishings, one of the activists declared the room well suited to a long wait.

Williams, not surprisingly, reconsidered the matter. He now agreed that it *might* be possible to retract a particularly offensive passage and to publish a piece giving the workers' side of the story. The wharfies voted to leave, but warned Williams they were quite prepared to see him again with even greater numbers.

The retraction accordingly came a few days later. Indeed, Williams personally placed a call to the WWF offices to plead that in case of subsequent complaints they should phone him first so that he could "save members the trouble of paying personal visits".[14]

Of course, *The Herald* took other precautions. The next day, a squad of half a dozen federal police stood on duty outside the paper's office, a post that they maintained for the duration of the strike. According to *The Guardian*, their presence provoked considerable comment amongst the newspaper's employees:

> "Twenty quid a week for doing nothing," is the common hostile reaction to these flashily-dressed hands-in-pocket loungers when they are seen about the building.[15]

Yet *The Herald* couldn't keep such guards in place forever. And in 1959, waterside unionists found their way back to Mr Williams's rooms.

This time the trouble stemmed from a report about Bill Bird, the Victorian Secretary of the Seamen's Union, and a man long the target of media hostility. In his marvellously titled tract *What's Wrong with Australia?* (brief answer: Communism!), the former Premier E.J. Hogan described Bird as a fellow who "makes no secret of his destructive aims, and has caused a lot of industrial discontent and trouble on ships around the Australian coast."[16]

In February 1959, Bird quit his union position, citing ill health. *The Herald*, however, gleefully speculated – on the basis of no attributed evidence whatsoever – that his decision stemmed from the internal machinations of the Communist Party:

> It is believed Mr Bird refused to carry out certain personal instructions from the party and as a result agreed to resign as Victorian Secretary.[17]

Across the waterfront, unionists resented malicious speculation about a popular leader. Accordingly, representatives of the Seamen's Union, the Painters and Dockers, the Shipwrights and the Waterside Workers Federation and other unions summoned a hundred rank and file maritime workers to show *The Herald* – as *The Guardian* put it – "the wrath of the working class at its lies and bias".[18]

Not surprisingly, *The Herald* refused to allow the wrathful working class access to the lifts. So a large deputation, vocally expressing its indignation, once again tramped up the three flights of stairs.

Now with some familiarity with the building's layout, they headed straight for Williams' office:

> After some high words with the protesting Mr Williams, he agreed to see a deputation of four. He was told that he could choose between seeing the nine spokesmen or seeing the lot. The nine were admitted.[19]

Sir John (he had received a knighthood a year earlier) thus found himself in the less than dignified position of negotiating with seamen sporting placards describing his paper as retailing 'Tomorrow's lies today'. While he demurred at printing a piece flatly labelling his paper 'a liar', he eventually offered the union space for a statement – a decision doubtless made easier by one worker's sly reminder of the many ways waterside workers contribute to the distribution of a daily newspaper.

Three days later, *The Herald* ran short pieces on Bird's resignation from both the Seamen's Union and the Communist Party.[20]

Thereafter, the newspaper took permanent measures to ensure such incidents wouldn't recur. The proprietors paid to have constructed upon the stairways steel doors that could be slammed shut should the reading public decide to make a visit *en masse*.[21]

Yet in some ways it was too late. Forty-five years later, John Ellis recalled the impact the first invasion had on *Herald* staff:

> Afterwards, there was a lot of discussion amongst the workers. It took a long time to get the momentum up for the next edition because we were all talking about what had happened. It got us talking about the way the paper worked. Hard copy would come in from a journalist and you'd have to send it to a sub-editor and you'd have blue lines right throughout some paragraphs that would change the whole meaning of the story.
>
> It must have been terrible for working journalists who wanted to say what was going on but knew that their stories would be butchered when they got back. I used to hear about that stuff before I worked there and thought, "It can't be that bad" but then I saw these blue lines and I knew that it was.[22]

The Herald and Weekly Times moved to more modern premises in 1993, leaving the old Flinders Street building an empty shell. The typesetting for today's *Herald Sun* is purely electronic but every union or political activist knows that the blue pencils still come out as regularly as they did in 1956.

ENDNOTES

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2. ibid
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5. Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: History of WWF*, Halstead Press, 1996, p.175.
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7. *My Years in the Communist Party*, Ralph Gibson, International Bookshop, p.216.
8. Wendy Lowenstein & Tom Hills, *Under the Hook: Melbourne Waterside Workers Remember*, Bookworkers, 1998.
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10. Unpublished interview with John Ellis, 21 June 2002.
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13. *Maritime Worker*, 2 Feb 1956, p.7.
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15. *The Guardian*, 2 February 1956, p.3.
16. E.J. Hogan, *What's Wrong with Australia?* published by the author, 1953.
17. *The Herald*, 24 February 1959.
18. *The Guardian*, 5 March 1959.
19. *The Guardian*, 5 March 1959.
20. *The Herald*, 27 February, p.7.
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***Jeff Sparrow manages the New International Bookshop in Melbourne. This is an excerpt from his forthcoming book* Radical Melbourne II.**

Australian Literary Studies and Laurie Hergenhan

Michael Wilding

With number 20.2 (2001), Laurie Hergenhan brought out his last issue of *Australian Literary Studies,* the journal which he has edited since its inception in 1963. This marathon stint in the editorial chair has been an amazing performance. *Australian Literary Studies* is now established as the indispensable journal in its field. Yet when it first appeared, that field itself was hardly in existence. The very concept of studying Australian literature was far from accepted.

Establishing Australian literature as a subject appropriate for academic study involved confronting a variety of different, and substantial, obstructions. Firstly there was the dismissive, superior, imperial response to the colonies. 'Australian Literature? Is there any?' visiting scholars and writers from the northern hemisphere would quip repetitively. It was a strong prejudice that still persisted in the 1960s. One of the tasks of *ALS* was to show that there was an Australian literature. This involved in effect establishing a canon. It was a very loose canon that Laurie helped construct. The important thing was to get discussion going on as substantial a range of writers as possible.

This in turn involved confronting a second objection which was basic to British and Commonwealth university practice at that time: that you did not teach modern, let alone contemporary writing. The literature of the past might need historical contextualistion, the aesthetic forces that shaped it might need explication. But why would the contemporary need such treatment? Why would the modern require it? The problem for Australian literature as a subject was that it did not reach far back into the past. If the contemporary and modern were excluded, there was not that much to discuss.

A third force that Laurie had to contend with was the increasingly vocal, local Leavisite project. This had its own journal, the *Melbourne Critical Review,* which was devoted to discrimination in literary judgement and discrimination in this context meant focusing attention onto a small handful of texts and rejecting the great mass of literary production as unworthy of serious consideration. One by one they fell, the great writers of the past – Milton, Fielding, Shelley, Meredith, Dickens (though he was later to be rehabilitated). In a critical climate that rejected so much as inadequate what hope had the founding figures of Australian literature to be allowed a space? The *MCR* had little to offer on Australian writing.

Laurie bravely confronted these manifold sites of opposition, and I use bravely in a conscious and deliberate way. It was a matter of bravery in that academic and cultural context to refuse to be intimidated by the dominant forces of literary Academe, which could so readily marshal their weapons of mockery and marginalisation.

It is not that there had been no discussion of Australian writing. A.G. Stephens and others in the *Bulletin* had initiated a dialogue which continued through the 1920s and 1930s. *Southerly,* founded in 1939, and *Meanjin* founded in 1940 were both committed to publishing critical essays on Australian writing. Neither journal, however, was exclusively academic. They published stories and poems as well as essays, and *Meanjin* also covered a wider range of historical and socio-political issues. It was that very association of the literary with the historical and socio-political that exercised and distressed the conservatives and reactionaries. *Quadrant* was established in 1956 as one of an international string of journals sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, funded by the CIA. James McAuley's mission in editing *Quadrant* was to oppose the radical tendencies of Clem Christesen's *Meanjin* and Stephen Murray-Smith's *Overland.* It was a cold war mission. *Meanjin* and *Overland* were seen as agents of communist subversion (even though the communists alleged that Murray-Smith had stolen *Overland* from the party). The *Quadrant* team set out to put them right.

But *Quadrant* soon distressed its overseas masters in being too nakedly right-wing. The CIA project had been to recruit left-wing, liberal writers and intellectuals and to ensure they were anti-Soviet. The explicitly right-wing did not need subverting. *Quadrant,* for all the pretence of producing a seemingly dispassionate journal of critical opinion, was soon identified as a vehicle of conscious, even rabid, right-wing ideology. McAuley was forced to accept a co-editor on *Quadrant.*

In this context McAuley clearly felt that more fronts and allies were needed in this battle for the hearts and minds of Australian writers, intellectuals and students. In theory *Southerly* was in the capable reactionary hands of Kenneth Slessor. But Slessor, although undoubtedly reactionary, was proving increasingly incapable of producing the magazine. Its appearances became erratic. The establishment of a purely scholarly journal to deal with Australian literature was an imaginative stroke. The very assumptions of the 'scholarly' in the early 1960s were designed to exclude the radical or the committed. The 'scholarly' meant the purportedly apolitical, which in effect meant a conservative social and aesthetic stance, and an exclusion of explicitly left-wing opinion. The 'scholarly' also meant the 'professional' – drawing its contributors from the politically purged and safe universities rather than from the world of freelance writers, the trades unions, adult education, committed amateurs and other such surviving sources of public intellectual discourse. And so *ALS* was conceived and begotten by McAuley. The details of the conception and birth remain obscure. Cassandra Pybus's *The Devil and James McAuley* does not even mention it. Michael Ackland's *Damaged Men* offers a single sentence.

The first issue of *ALS* appeared in 1963 with Laurie Hergenhan as editor. McAuley remained in the background on the advisory board. As a scholarly journal no-one in those days expected it to encompass the radical. It was not to be a *Labour History*. It was certainly to be different from a *Meanjin* or an *Overland*. And it was to be different from *Southerly,* now transferred to the safekeeping of G.A. Wilkes and launched on its enshrinement of Patrick White and his anti-realist, anti-leftist project. *ALS* had to define its own identity, and gradually it did. Laurie's virtue was an openness, an eclecticism. His vision was to expand the boundaries of Australian literature, rather than reduce them. He was not afraid to publish on Adam Lindsay Gordon and Marcus Clarke, who had suffered for their English origins and immigrant status at the hands of the cultural nationalists of both the right and the left. He published on D.H. Lawrence's Australian work – another *bête noir* of the nationalists who had too often been provoked by visiting English academics claiming *Kangaroo* was the only Australian novel. He extended the conception of the literary into genre work, and published on the crime writer Carter Brown. He extended the vision of a scholarly journal from the critical and bibliographical and published interviews. An early one with Christina Stead by Ann Whitehead appeared well before Stead's belated rediscovery. And he did a groundbreaking issue on the contemporary 'new writing' of the 1970s, providing a serious representation of the emerging novelists and poets well in advance of their general recognition elsewhere.

Laurie's own graduate work at the University of London had been on George Meredith. He was well versed in the nineteenth-century context in which Australian literature developed. He was open to the modern. As for the contemporary, he took every opportunity to participate in it. He was not one of those critics bound to the desk or library. He did not recoil from contact with living writers. On the contrary, he happily participated in the literary world, enjoying an afternoon or evening, or both, in the pub or in a restaurant, always ready to go on to the party afterwards. At times he seemed like some super-secret agent, deep behind enemy lines, carefully observing the shifts and changes of literary politics, collecting data for the increasingly comprehensive annual bibliography of Australian literature which was so important a feature of *ALS*. All too often I would awake after a long session at pub or party with Laurie and an ensuing night of nausea of Barry McKenzie dimensions, to find him as fresh and unaffected and genial as ever, blinking in the morning sun like some Antipodean George Smiley. I would wonder if he had slipped me a Mickey Finn or a truth drug in the cause and course of his researches. How else was I so wasted and he so unaffected? Maybe he was just more moderate than the rest of us. Maybe he was made of sterner stuff.

His endurance and stamina were truly extraordinary. He kept *ALS* running through every adversity, through the recurrent funding crises that literary and academic journals were to suffer over the decades. He negotiated support from the Australia Council and the University of Queensland (where he had moved from Tasmania) and the

University of Queensland Press. This was not easy, and it took its toll on him. But he kept the journal alive, despite all the setbacks and irritations and difficulties. It has been an amazing achievement and he deserves our heartfelt thanks.

Michael Wilding is a regular contributor to both Overland *and* ALS.

Conferences Australian style: a retrospective view

Laurie Hergenhan

SOME MIGHT SAY that after the first literary conference there is no other – these are the nostalgic. Or, that once you have been you never want to be anywhere else – the junketers. Australian literary conferences early developed into conferenceville, to use Frank Moorhouse's term, with the emphasis on the 'ville', the social microcosm of trade combined with pleasurable diversion, if not *volupté*. The real action took place in time-off, the spaces between the sessions. Conferences were part of the *comedie humaine* rather than the serious pursuit of literature. (Were there Leavisite conferences? Did the format lend itself?) Moorhouse envisioned a virtual conference, not one you watch on screen and join electronically, but a cunning device whereby you maintain an apparent presence, even asking questions, while your real self – on pleasure bent – has sneaked out through an escape hatch.

In this essay I'd like to sketch some conference experiences, especially the first ever on Australian literature, but it needs a brief preliminary context to be appreciated.

In the sixties AULLA (Australasian Universities Languages and Literatures Association) still pursued its dignified and sequestered way. Specialisms, periodising and the canon reigned, Literature meant 'Eng Lit', but though pejorative attitudes have grown up to these approaches in themselves, these were not the darkest days. By the time Australian literature quietly left this slowing ship – there was no dramatic jump – a rearguard action to haul it back onboard and halt fragmentation was ineffective. AULLA's main boast now may be not that it thrives but it survives, like Hope's Australian man in the ambiguous 'last of lands'. With hindsight, I see the running down of AULLA as the beginning of a malaise in literary and modern language studies. Rivals were to take advantage, leaving the sick man of the humanities with lost territories now flying new flags after the carve-up.

ASAL (Association for the Study of Australian Literature) – a perilous acronym, as my spell-check keeps reminding me – paradoxically emerged from a vacuum in the later 1970s. What leaders there were in the new field were not leading; the system did not welcome change. Disaffection was the keynote of ASAL's founding, but an ambivalent one, the impatience of rebellious teenagers awaiting parental intervention rather than setting out in life on their own.

Curiously, the elders, though few and mainly non-members (and non-tribal), were in early days asked to open conferences. One female professor attended only to pour cold water, but with panache. This titivated the audience as well as scandalising it. On another occasion a grey eminence put backs up by breaching the protocols of a proudly democratic and egalitarian association. The lunch for him was not an open one. Besides, he left the conference after the first day, flying off to a meeting of the Academy of the Humanities – the true aristocrats and power brokers, covert so far as any presence beyond their own gatherings was concerned but Top Dogs, an invisible ancient regime who needed never to fear the tumbrels.

Yet in the beginning, conferences were to be fun for ASAL members. There were games. Hunting Violet Crumbles among Canberra shrubbery (who now remembers 'The Search for the Golden Boomerang'?) and a ballroom dancing award (popular winners every year of a non-existent 'trophy'). It may have been a case of encouraging misrule, or the carnivalesque, fashionable topics for papers, but it seemed innocent play as well as a thumbs-on-nose directed at absent and uninterested targets of authority. Parody night – aimed at the proceedings, paper-givers and absent luminaries – was an exception. Its wit and intelligence make its fruits more worthy of being collected than many of the papers.

ASAL WAS FOUNDED by true believers and out of good-heartedness, but though it did not lack ticker in its earlier years this beats less steadily under pressures of the times. In its

heyday its conferences offered a rallying point, enlivened the subject and maintained morale, if it lacked political drive.

The most memorable conference for me was the 'first ever' Australian literature conference, some ten years before ASAL began. It did not seem to lead anywhere but it is worth summoning from obscurity because it was a weathercock, indicating directions of the past and of the present – and it was fun.

There was flutter in the English common rooms when word was passed around about this gathering. It was not only a first but was to be held in the far north, in 'Capricornia' country, offering to trepid scholars, who had ventured as little into Australian books as into local geography, a *frisson* of a colourful frontier; perhaps even a glimpse into the Gothic splendours of *Voss* or the awful self-knowledge of Ellen Roxburgh awaiting those courageous enough to 'attempt the interior' – in the metaphysical terms of Patrick White (one of the few Australian writers who was widely read by intellectuals at the time). The conference venue was a new university in the north called Leichhardt. The name of that ill-fated explorer did not deter the eager founders of Australia's furthest-flung university.

In those far off days conference money was even scarcer than it is now though junketing was attractive. Heads of Departments, or God Professors, many of whom had no interest in Australian literature, thought it behoved them to be present as 'representatives'. So when I boarded the plane in Brisbane I noted among the various Heads: a Shavian, a Shakespearean, an Elizabethanist, a Smolletian, a Johnsonian (hobbling along with leg in plaster with all the stoicism of the good Doctor), as well as several indiscriminates. One or two supposed leaders in the field abstained from attending.

Pilgrims were met at Leichhardt by the host, Professor B. Dozer. Born before his time, he had formerly been a sizeable wheel in the world of Australian publishing. He had shown flair as a tough, enterprising businessman who had kept his firm solvent in the face of losses incurred by its more 'literary' if impractical personnel. Rumour had it that he had also been successful in the army because of his organisational and authoritarian abilities. Thirty years later Dozer would have been welcomed into the new entrepreneurial universities – a firm fist for their publishing arm. But by some he was looked down upon. For all the slights, Dozer, though a chancy critic, was an active, pioneer scholar in his field. Unlike most of his invitees, he had produced a monumental edition of a famous author. This had not been given due consideration partly because it came from him. He was indeed between two worlds, regarded as tainted by his business background, not one of the current breed and not one promised much of a future, though he had a doctorate it was in Australian literature and from an Australian University. In other words, he was regarded as not really the person for such a job. He himself was undeterred, it seemed; he bristled with an energy unbecoming his station. One of several unkind rumours about him suggested that he regarded this first academic post as a stepping stone to Cambridge. Another, that he had chased a lady professor from Sydney around the rocks of nearby Goat Island only to be eluded by her deft footwork. Had it been a contest in the water it would have been another matter; in this element he was a dynamo.

After a quick briefing on the outpost-city, a bus drive past the army barracks, a visit to the look-out at one-tree hill, where it was agreed that flatness characterised the landscape in all directions, and all signposts pointed to forlorn destinations, conferees were deposited at college on a campus noted for its stunted gumtrees, another bad omen for the institution, though some may have hopes of the desert.

THE CONFERENCE AGENDA was not startling or demanding. But then it was not pretentious or overfilled, there being no pressure to give papers in those days. Goodwill prevailed in the absence of competitiveness and insecurity. I don't remember any papers as brilliant or abysmal, as one usually does, perhaps because here ruled the *comedie humaine*. Some writers were benignly present. After one session a woman and I collided in a rush to the cigarette machine. She won, and so I met Thea Astley.

Dozer's students had been dragooned into helping but were cheerful. "How did you get out?" they greeted me and friends after we left a session early to get black coffee, "He usually locks us in".

The penultimate night was set aside for an excursion, a starlight circumnavigation of the not-too-distant Goat Island. Dozer had arranged for two small cruise boats. I arrived late to see the crowded one departing. Of the two, it proved to be the pleasure craft, and seemed to cross our path many times with increasing sounds of carousing. Our boat, where Dozer presided, was more subdued. No 'youth at the prow and pleasure at the helm' here, though there was sufficient alcohol all was urbanity and quiet. Dorothy Green moved to the prow and sang sorrowful arias. One of the professors who had taught me as an undergraduate and whom I never ceased to regard as a member of a distant generation, if not another species, was kind to me. I found it difficult to respond being so unprepared – or so I told myself. I realised later that he must have been lonely. He was one of the few genuine scholars of Australian literature present; a Shakespearean scholar as well.

As we proceeded Dozer took it upon himself to instruct us on the constellations. As the carousers' boat crossed our path, yet again it seemed, he pointed out the Great Ram which was just over-topping the appropriate planet. After we had disembarked, he called for "three cheers for the harbourmaster", a sign of sensible commercial cooperation behind the scenes. This was met from certain quarters by a response which exceeded the occasion and promised disruption to come.

On the third night there was the dinner, with bush Turkey as *piece de resistance*. This began with a dignified air. Dozer was seated at a small organ, imported into the college dining room, clad in black academic gown and belting out 'Gaudeamus'. The response was a less than lusty chorus, though his own voice boomed forth. A number of the town's dignitaries, endowers of Dozer's centre of Australian Literary Studies (the first?), had been especially invited. The meal went well but Dozer's accumulation of speeches aroused impatience. There were too many toasts, too much self-congratulation. Dozer required his outstanding students, visibly embarrassed, to stand up to be toasted. A Professor from the West, the cultured part, where he himself was prominent in the higher life, having been imported from abroad, threw off decorum. "Visibly beautiful," he shouted at the blushing students. An editorial panel to publish the proceedings (this did not eventuate) had been elected and so its turn came. "Here's to the panel-beaters," called the professor, beyond control and hammering the laminex table-top with cutlery.

This might have seemed enough to make the Centre fall apart, but it was to prosper and retain local support. Dozer himself was certainly undimmed. As I cowered under the sheets at 6 a.m. the next morning I heard his voice booming "Last call! All aboard!" – for those taking the day-long bus excursion to Treachery Bay.

Characteristically, he had the last word so far as I was concerned. He had carried his part of things through. Perhaps in the long prospect he has the advantage after all, though we have the right to smile. At the least one might sigh with Lawson: "Ah well . . . I don't think it did any of us any harm".

Note: the conference referred to in the latter part of this essay took place at James Cook University. Professor Dozer is by and large Professor Colin Roderick. As this essay is intended to honour Roderick rather than to criticise him – indeed I hope it might prompt a revaluation of his considerable contribution to Australian Literature – I have decided, on advice, to reveal this, though I have not used his name in the essay itself because I wanted to preserve the comic tone.

On the safe side

Katherine Wilson

> The pharmaceutical industry makes a significant contribution to the economy . . . The Action Agenda will bring together all parts of the industry to [secure] the continued growth and prosperity of the industry in line with the Government's industry and health policy objectives . . . Working with industry, we will look for ways to increase the rate of commercialisation . . .
>
> *– Media release from the Minister for Industry, Science & Resources, Senator Nick Minchin, 29 May 2001*

THE DAY BEFORE the terrorist attacks on America, *The Guardian* ran an article headed, 'Drug firms accused of distorting research'. Thirteen of the world's leading medical journals, it reported, had jointly reproached drug companies for dictating medical research results. Drug companies were offering financial rewards for the 'right' research results and threatening to withdraw research grants for the 'wrong' ones. Further, they were binding medical researchers with legal contracts that prohib-

ited free reporting of outcomes. "At the moment," *Lancet* editor Richard Horton reportedly said, "informed patient consent is a fabrication."

No surprises there. Most of us, if we claim to be thinkers, have some awareness of how commercial interests drive what is tellingly called the 'health industry'. Yet despite the widely-reported conflict of interest in public health bodies, most of us probably place our trust in the State when it comes to public health.

A week after the *Guardian* report I gave birth in one of Brisbane's public hospitals. My new son's name, Oscar, was handwritten on a card mounted on the hospital bassinette. Underneath were the printed words, "A Johnson & Johnson baby". The morning Oscar and I were due for discharge, I was advised he had to receive his routine hep-B shot before being allowed to leave. Instinct warned me it was wrong to invade his tiny new body with toxic liquid, but my brain was addled by a prolonged labour and every intervention on tap. I suppose I also trusted the State.

He had his hep-B shot. But I never gave informed consent. Because I was never informed.

Here are just a few of the facts: The risk of a serious vaccine reaction – including brain damage and death – may be one hundred times greater than the risk of contracting hepatitis B, according to VAERS (the USA's Vaccination Adverse Effect Reporting System). Hepatitis B is very rare in young children. The American Academy of Paediatrics and the Public Health Service have called for the withdrawal of the hep-B vaccine at birth due to serious adverse reactions, including death. France has ended its hep-B vaccination program due to evidence of an increased risk of multiple sclerosis and other forms of central nervous system demyelisation. Hep-B vaccines are not given to newborns in UK hospitals.

A few weeks into Oscar's life we were issued with a brochure produced by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. At 8 weeks, the brochure said, our baby would be due for six more vaccinations (diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, more hep-B, polio and haemophilis influenza). Further vaccinations were due at 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, and so on.

Again I believed the State. But two things about the brochure alarmed me.

The first was a list of very rare but serious side effects and the casual mention of the very remote possibility of death. "Deaths do occasionally occur shortly after immunisation but the relationship is thought to be a chance association, since cot death tends to happen in babies of 2–6 months of age".

The second was a discreet logo on the back of the brochure. It was the logo of the Australian Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, a body which, according to its website, represents the interests of member drug companies to government. The website also contained media releases endorsing the federal health minister.

Call me naive, but I thought our public health department would be independent of commercial interests. Call me paranoid, but I'm now convinced that the rapidly increasing number of vaccine doses prescribed at earlier ages has more to do with market expansion than public health.

Try this as an experiment: ask some new parents if they know someone who's experienced serious adverse reactions to childhood vaccination. Then tally the number of horror stories against the one-in-a-million stats peddled by the Health Department. I didn't have to do much asking or mathematics. My friend has a 9-month-old nephew who's been sick ever since his vaccinations at 6 months. His parents are convinced the jabs are to blame but have no means of proving it. Another friend has a colleague whose baby displayed adverse symptoms to its vaccination and then died. My neighbours have a daughter who was hospitalised with measles a week after receiving the measles vaccine (and with no contact with a measles sufferer). The girl's mother phoned the vaccine company and was assured that this was so rare they'd never heard of a case. But she had, from another parent.

Here are a few more facts: Japan changed the start time for vaccinating from 3 months to 2 years in 1975 and immediately the country's SIDS rate plummeted. There is strong evidence of a causal link between vaccinations and autism. Since vaccination was widely introduced in the sixties, the rate of autism in Australia has risen from 1 per cent in 1965 to 17 per cent in 1995, and in the UK the same strain of measles virus used in the vaccine has been found in the stomachs of autistic children.

An online trawl reveals some

heartbreaking accounts of excruciating infant deaths from vaccines. They are only a few of the *11,000 serious adverse vaccine reactions* (including brain damage and paralysis) and more than *120 deaths* reported to the Federal Drug Administration in America *every year*. Further, many governments admit that fewer than 10 per cent of adverse events are ever reported, as parents don't realise the cause. So far, the US government has paid out more than a billion dollars in vaccination compensation, and recently a coalition of more than thirty-five US law firms filed class action lawsuits against drug companies for infant brain damage from vaccination.

In Australia, the anti-vaccine campaign has branched out of the dens of hippies and herbalists and in to the realm of scientists such as Kathy Scarborough, author of *Investigate Before You Vaccinate – A guide for parents* (Australian Vaccination Network), and doctors such as Peter Baratosy, who refuses to vaccinate children.

But most doctors still routinely vaccinate children. Some even silence those wishing to expose adverse effects. My neighbour contacted 'The 7.30 Report' with her daughter's measles story. The program was interested, but the hospital's diagnosing doctors refused to be interviewed (possibly fearing litigation).

WHEN FIRST DEBATING the pros and cons of vaccinating Oscar, and before we were better informed, Oscar's father said, "There's enough of the socialist in me to vaccinate him for the sake of the community, even if he may never benefit personally." Dan and I, like most people, believed the widely-held 'herd immunity' myth; the claim that if a large percentage of a population is vaccinated, the disease will be wiped out or resisted. We thought this particularly germane at a time when anthrax and germ warfare were on people's lips. And we also believed vaccinations worked.

Here are a few more facts:

- Among school-age children, measles outbreaks have occurred in schools with vaccination levels of greater than 98 per cent. (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 29 December 1989)
- An outbreak of polio occurred in a population that had recently raised polio vaccine coverage from 67 per cent to 87 per cent and a large number of fully-vaccinated children were involved in spreading the disease. This, according to the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*: "raised concern that primary reliance on routine immunisation may be inadequate to achieve the goal of eradicating wild poliovirus (polio) globally".
- In Finland, despite a 97 per cent vaccination rate, whooping cough cases jumped five-fold between 1995 and 1999 (*New Scientist*, 2002). In Holland in 1998, whooping cough swept through the country despite vaccination rates as high as 96 per cent. Similar problems were reported in Norway and Denmark (*British Medical Journal*, 1998).
- In the UK since 1970, more than 200,000 cases of whooping cough have occurred in fully-vaccinated children (AVN).
- In an outbreak of measles in Western Sydney in 1993, 78 per cent of cases occurred in children aged 5–9 years who had been vaccinated against measles (*Medical Journal of Australia*, 1995).
- A study of children in the Illawarra region of NSW found that only fifty out of ninety-nine who had received measles vaccine had measles antibodies. That is, almost 50 per cent gained no measurable protection from the vaccine (*Australian Journal of Public Health*, 1991).
- The 1996 figures for whooping cough from the SA Health Commission show that of all cases in 1996, 51 per cent were fully vaccinated (had received five doses of vaccine), 43 per cent were vaccinated or unknown, and 6 per cent were unvaccinated (SA Health Commission).

According to the ABS, all the infectious diseases we vaccinate against were in steep decline *before* vaccinations were introduced, due to improved public hygiene and sanitation. Further, those diseases for which vaccination programs weren't introduced – such as scarlet fever and typhoid – declined at much the same rate as those vaccinated against. But incredibly, the government ignores its own data and canvasses the herd immunity myth to justify its financial incentive for parents who subject their children to its vaccination program (it offers an 'immunity allowance' of $200). Further,

most government-supported childcare centres won't accept unvaccinated children (that is, they will only accept 'medically' immunised children; not those with natural immunity built from an illness).

In Britain, recent reports about the link between the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine and autism have caused widespread debate (and misguided tabloid hysteria) about the possible dangers of vaccines. Yet here in Australia the issue is still mostly the preserve of science journals and alternative health experts. Despite much campaigning on the part of the latter, no large clinical trials of any kind have been conducted to measure the safety of common vaccines. Instead, our public health funds are being channelled towards the promotion of vaccines to an uninformed public (or 'market'). And unlike the US, we have no formal system of vaccination compensation.

As this *Overland* goes to press, there is talk of introducing *in utero* vaccines, and the Australian government is considering adding three new vaccines to the infant schedule (the meningitec, the prevenar, and chicken pox) and replacing the oral polio vaccine with an injected one. This will increase to 40 the number of vaccines our pre-schoolers receive. None of these vaccines has been fully tested in Australia, nor have they undergone extensive overseas studies. No full-scale investigation has looked into a possible causal relationship between the introduction of multiple vaccines and a coinciding increase in the incidence of formerly rare autoimmune diseases, including autisim, ADD, ADHD and rheumatoid arthritis.

None of this is to suggest there is no place for vaccines, or that serious adverse reactions are common. If we were to take Oscar overseas, or even to some tropical regions of Australia, we might consider vaccination. We will consider tetanus (by most accounts a safe and effective vaccine in its single state) when he is mobile and other vaccines (those that are mercury-free and aren't cultivated in pig or monkey tissue) once he is older and his immune system is more robust. Yet while public health bodies are staffed with pharmaceutical CEOs looking to expand their markets, while public policy is framed to promote drug company interests, and while information on the extent of serious adverse effects of vaccines is being suppressed or influenced by pharmaceutical companies, we feel we cannot trust the State with our little boy's health.

Katherine Wilson is Overland's assistant editor.

'Kinder' core values

Paul Mitchell

AT THE MEETING introducing prospective parents to our local kindergarten, the teacher pointed at slides of kids smiling and playing. They sat around small wooden tables, grinning as they snacked on apples and muesli bars. Girls dressed up in firemen's helmets drove a makeshift engine; boys helped each other construct video cameras from cardboard boxes.

Pointing at these slides, the teacher explained that the kindergarten aimed to teach kids a collection of life skills. If they were grouped into a set of 'core values', this is what the kids would learn:

'I am valuable despite my faults. It's okay to follow as well as lead. My opinion is no more or less important than another's. I am one member of a team, doing the best I can with the abilities I have. Co-operation is better than competition. Sharing is the overarching value.'

My wife is currently studying primary school teaching. From what she tells me, the core values instilled these days in primary school children – at the very least during the early years – would read similarly.

At the kindergarten meeting, I felt warm inside listening as these values were outlined. The slides of cherubic kids having a good time outworking these values also gave me a glow. It made me realise that as a society we believe it's relevant to teach these 'softer' core values to our little ones. Until, it seems, they 'grow up'.

What's the point of emphasising those qualities to our kinder-aged kids if in the so-called 'real world' of adult life, these values are the ones they'd better shake off if they want to 'make it'? You can't become a chief executive on a massive salary believing 'sharing is your overarching value'.

Neither do you get to be a politician – certainly not Prime Minister – by thinking your opinion (however well-informed) is no more or less important than anyone else's. And, it seems, you certainly can't run an effective

airline in Australia thinking co-operation is better than competition.

So what should we do? Should we also teach our kids this other set of values? Get them prepared as early as possible for real life? Tell them that sharing's good, but, Cynthia, sometimes you really need to make sure you grab everything that's yours and more. Then run away and keep it all for yourself.

Somehow, I don't think the crowd of parents gathered at the kindergarten meeting would have stomached hearing that this other set of values would be taught to their offspring. But I wondered as I sat there, who among these adults hadn't learnt this other set of values? Learned to 'grow up'?

Kevin Brophy wrote a poem entitled 'Autumn and Child'. It contains these lines: "Does every parent panic at time breaking loose like a glacier breaking up – in great cracks and floods of time that sweep children away in a ruthless dance of numbers . . . ?"

If we keep filling kids up with one set of values for childhood and another for adulthood, then we should panic. One of these sets of values needs urgent re-writing.

Paul Mitchell is a poet studying for his MA in Creative Writing at Melbourne University.

REP 2002: literary editing demystified

Rowena Lennox

FOR SIX DAYS in March this year, twelve book editors gathered at Varuna, the writers' centre in the Blue Mountains of NSW, to develop their skills in the exacting practice of editing literary fiction and non-fiction. This was no start-up editorial training course concentrating on spelling, grammar, punctuation and production. Instead, those who participated in the second Residential Editorial Program (REP) had the precious time to work in small groups (four editors with a mentor editor) on an early draft of a novel with the liberating idea that this exercise was 'without consequences'. The author of the novel had already moved on, which left the editors free to discuss a gamut of editorial and literary considerations. At the end of the week, the novel's publisher revealed what had happened next in the manuscript's progress towards publication.

The participants, all editors with several years' or more experience, included freelancers and editors drawn from publishing companies throughout Australia. The mentors were Bruce Sims (formerly of Penguin, Magabala and ABC Books, now a freelance editor and publisher), Sophie Cunningham (trade publisher at Allen & Unwin) and Judith Lukin-Amundsen (a freelance editor who has worked on a range of literary fiction and non-fiction). The mentors' breadth of experience and willingness to delve deep into the editorial process ensured that participants left the REP with fresh insights and increased confidence.

In addition to the mentoring sessions there were workshops designed to hone editors' ability to read the voice of the writer (Jacqueline Kent); to develop their sensitivity to the emotional investment a writer has in their work (Patti Miller); to help them understand some of the philosophical background to Indigenous writing (Mary Graham); to enhance their practical strategies for working on Indigenous texts (Josie Douglas and Anita Heiss); and to show different perspectives on the writer-editor relationship (Bryony Cosgrove, Delia Falconer and Gaby Naher). Evening talks addressed the balancing act of editing (Jacqueline Kent) and the ideal versus the reality in the publisher-editor-writer relationship (Angelo Loukakis).

Editing, like writing, is often conducted in isolation. There is a necessary confidentiality surrounding the editor-writer relationship that may contribute to a sense that editing, like writing, is a mysterious process. The REP, supported by the Australia Council and the publishing industry, gives editors the rare chance to explore a whole range of issues that arise in the course of their work and to deepen and broaden their skills. It's hoped that the REP will be held every couple of years and that, as the editors who have participated edit more books and work with more writers, Australian writing will benefit.

REP 2002: participants:

Kirsten Abbott (Penguin, Melbourne); Trischa Baker (freelance, Ballarat); Marg Bowman (freelance, Alice Springs); Heather Cam (Penguin, Sydney); Nadine Davidoff (Random House, Sydney); Deonie Fiford (Hodder Headline, Sydney);

Ruth Gilbert (Magabala Books, Broome); Gina Inverarity (Wakefield Press, Adelaide); Rachel Lawson (Allen & Unwin, Melbourne); Christa Munns (Allen & Unwin, Sydney); Nicola O'Shea (HarperCollins, Sydney); Colette Vella (Allen & Unwin, Sydney)

Rowena Lennox participated in the 1999 REP and coordinated the 2002 REP. She is an editor and writer who greatly appreciates her editor's (Jacqueline Kent) input into her first book Fighting Spirit of East Timor: the life of Martinho da Costa Lopes *(winner of the 2001 NSW Premier's General History Award).*

ASIO and the 1951 Berlin Youth Carnival

Phillip Deery

IN JUNE 1951, in the middle of the referendum campaign to outlaw the Communist Party of Australia (CPA), ninety-six young Australians departed on the *SS Australia* for Europe. Their destination was the Third World Festival of Youth and Students for Peace, to be held in East Berlin. They disembarked at Naples on 5 July and proceeded to Genoa where they were guests at an Italian Youth Movement camp. From Genoa the delegates went in small groups to Austria via Switzerland, using this route to enter the Iron Curtain without difficulty. In the American sector of occupied Austria, they witnessed the dramatic events at Innsbruck in August when armed Austrian police violently attacked the large British delegation to the festival.[1] In Germany, they were united with a further thirty-nine Australians already living in or travelling through Eastern Europe or the UK. Most had raised the necessary £350 to attend the festival through special functions, collection lists and donations.[2] So a total of 135 Australians joined 26,000 participants from 105 countries for two weeks in Berlin in August 1951.[3]

ASIO took a close interest in the Australian delegation to Berlin. It had already advised the Minister for Immigration, Harold Holt, on the issue of passport control. Holt warned the delegates that their passports were invalid for travel to Iron Curtain countries; if they did so their passports would be seized.[4] It also commenced personal files on many of the delegates that only now are being opened for public scrutiny. A principal reason for ASIO's interest was that the Berlin Festival, like its two predecessors, at Prague in 1947 and Budapest in 1949, was initiated by the Soviet-controlled Cominform. Evidence of Soviet influence was clear. The main sponsor of the Festival, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, declared in March 1951 that "just as the aims and tasks of the W.F.D.Y. are near and dear to Soviet youth, so the W.F.D.Y. will hold up the Soviet youth as the model for the youth of the world".[5] Similarly the British Young Communist League saw the Festival offering many opportunities: "The Berlin Festival stands for Peace & Socialism and we must point this out to young people . . . Through our work for the Festival we can get out to meet youth from other political clubs and Youth and sporting clubs and then point out what we are fighting for . . ."[6] So the Festival had an undeniable political as well as cultural and sporting dimension.

The context, of course, was the early Cold War when East and West were vying for moral authority and ideological supremacy. Both sides were attempting to control and manipulate public opinion, to win 'hearts and minds', at home and abroad. The British Foreign Office and, in particular, its clandestine counter-propaganda unit, the Information Research Department (IRD), were deeply concerned about the propaganda benefits of the Festival to the Soviet Union. As one of its officials wrote:

> It is feared that many well-meaning youth organisations and individuals will be misled by Communist propaganda regarding this Festival, and will send youthful and inexperienced representatives who, misled by the emotional appeal of the Festival, may unintentionally lend their support to the ends of Soviet policy. The Festival is regarded by its promoters as a major manoeuvre in the Soviet Peace Campaign and is certain to receive the fullest publicity from the Communist propaganda machine from now onwards.[7]

Several thick Foreign Office files in the Public Record Office archives contain, *inter alia*, two highly detailed IRD papers on the Festival, numerous confidential despatches to British embas-

sies and the minutes of three meetings in June-July "to discuss means of countering communist propaganda in connexion with East Berlin World Youth Festival". These are indicative of the seriousness with which Whitehall viewed the Festival.[8] Through the British High Commissioner in Canberra, the Department of External Affairs, the Attorney-General's Department and, consequently, ASIO, were informed of this anxiety.

It is clear, then, that anti-communist crusaders regarded the 1951 Berlin Festival as an important struggle for the allegiance of young people's minds. Thus, any means by which its effect could be diminished must be explored. There was little that the security services could do *during* the Festival but, potentially, useful intelligence could be gathered *after* the event. In this, ASIO hit the jackpot, although the dividends were in the longer term. It learned that due to the Berlin experience a small number of Australian delegates became disillusioned with communism, the Soviet Union or the 'People's Democracies'. E.D.W. ('Woodsey') Lloyd was such a person. He was the "genial and popular" president of the Melbourne University SRC, a member of the University Labor Club, an amateur actor, an Ormond College rower and a final year law student. When he attended the Berlin Festival, he made himself "unpopular with the Soviet authorities for his outspoken criticism and was refused a visa to Soviet Russia". Indeed, Lloyd was the only delegate from the group of eighteen Australians who visited Russia for four weeks after the Festival not to receive a Soviet-endorsed visa.[9]

One who did receive a visa was Thomas ('Tommy') Treherne, a Queensland iron-worker who, on board the ship to Europe, was elected chairman of the Australian Delegation Committee. A secret report sent from Brisbane to Canberra in February 1952 by an ASIO officer noted that whilst in Russia, Treherne on four different occasions:

> managed to elude the Russian Delegation officials with a view to entering upon personal fact finding excursions, but on all occasions he was accosted by the Russian Police and returned to the Delegation. Twice he was brought before the Soviet Anti-Fascist Youth Committee where he was told that he should refrain from leaving the Delegation.[10]

In early 1952, Treherne wrote two articles for the Brisbane *Sunday Mail* in which he gave "the inside story" of the Berlin Youth Festival and criticised "conditions in Russia". Due to his "antagonism toward communism" as a consequence of his visit to Germany and Russia, the ASIO report continued, "TREHERNE is now being treated with a great deal of reserve by members of the [Communist] Party".[11] Neville Isaksen, a Sydney wharfie, was another important delegate – indeed, "one of the most important members of the Delegation from the Party standpoint because his reactions would be of great significance in the Waterside Workers' Federation". However he, too, was an unenthusiastic emissary: "ISAKSEN went to Moscow and was heard to say afterwards that he was disappointed with what he saw – it was not the paradise he expected to find . . . [and] he was not very impressed with the conditions under which the wharf labourers were working".[12] Despite ASIO's interest in Lloyd, Treherne and Isaksen, none appeared to reciprocate. In other words, although ripe for nurturing as 'potential "Q" sources', to use ASIO parlance, no direct evidence exists of collaboration. However, in Lloyd's ASIO file the director of ASIO's Special Services Branch noted that "we have a source who attended the Berlin Youth Festival and is available and suitable for briefing".[13] Customarily the source was not identified.

In contrast, a leading Communist Party functionary, E.J. ('Eddie') Barker, who was described as "particularly successful" in "converting to Communism or strengthening the Communistic views" of many Australian delegates to the 1951 Festival, did contact ASIO.[14] In the early 1950s Barker was obviously a reliable communist: he was responsible for handling the cash contribution from the CPA towards the Festival; he led the delegation to Eastern Europe immediately after the Festival; and in mid-1952 he wrote several articles eulogising East Germany for *Challenge*, the Eureka Youth League publication. However, in 1954 he left the Party. Ten years later, after applying for permanent employment with the Department of Customs and

Excise which would entail handling information classified as 'restricted' and 'confidential', Barker was interviewed by ASIO. As an 'extreme' communist he was 'adversely recorded' and it was even thought possible that he deliberately dropped out of CPA activity in order to become an undercover (or 'non-legal') member who would penetrate Commonwealth Departments. ASIO therefore believed it 'dangerous' to give him a security clearance. All this changed after his interview at the Brisbane headquarters of ASIO in October 1964. During this interview he was "most co-operative and forthcoming", answered all questions asked of him "truthfully and without hesitation", and showed he was "making a genuine attempt to start a new life". Barker received his clearance and, subsequently, wrote to the interviewing ASIO field officer thanking him "once again for making my path so much easier to travel". He also suggested that ASIO "note my address and whatever contact you expect I should have". This was interpreted by the field officer as "more or less offering to help if required".[15]

Joyce Zerfas was another delegate to the 1951 Berlin Youth Festival who was later in direct contact with ASIO. In this instance contact was initiated not by ASIO but by her.[16] Zerfas had attended the Budapest Youth Festival in August 1949; studied Political Science under Lloyd Churchward at the University of Melbourne (which her mother blamed "for her leanings towards communism"); was a foundation member and, from March 1951, secretary of the Peace Club; and was a member of both the Labour Club and the Students' Representative Council throughout 1950–51. In May 1951 she "was considering joining the Communist Party, and was making enquiries with this in view". In June she attended a Labour Club conference at Point Lonsdale just prior to leaving for Berlin as the University Peace Club delegate. At the age of twenty-two, she "felt the need to visit Europe before I came to a decision about joining the Communist Party". But like Lloyd, Treherne and Isaksen, her experiences in Eastern Europe were sources of doubt rather than confirmation.

On the voyage to Europe and especially at the Festival itself she found the attitude of many Party members had become "quite impossible". Any criticism she made of the poor living conditions in the People's Democracies was, she stated, met with "You are talking like a Fascist". She found "distasteful" the slant of both Festival propaganda and the propaganda for internal consumption: "e.g., buildings which had been bombed in the war had placards placed on them which blamed 'Anglo-American imperialistic bombers' for the destruction". After the Festival Zerfas was part of a delegation that travelled to Czechoslovakia, which she had visited in 1949 after the Budapest Festival. During her stay in late 1951 she became very friendly with a Czech communist who was "a very good type of idealistic Communist". After Zerfas returned to Australia she learnt that he was a victim of the notorious Slansky purge and had 'disappeared'. From this point she gradually detached herself from CPA and Labour Club members: "my objective analysis of Eastern Europe tended to run counter to Communist propaganda". In response, allegedly, Party members spread 'slanderous stories' that she had broken with them because of 'Woodsey' Lloyd.

The more important point is that Joyce Zerfas in 1954 desired to sever all connections with the Left and sought an appointment with an ASIO field officer. This officer had had several business contacts with Zerfas's mother, Rosa Weissman, the proprietor of Grosvenor Hats. At 2.30 p.m. on 15 November 1954 over lunch at the 121 Café in Collins Street she told this officer that "communism was not her way of life" but was not aware of "who to approach". Consequently, an appointment was arranged for 18 November when the field officer would "introduce her to the person handling these matters". Zerfas was then interviewed by ASIO on three occasions, usually in Room 12, 2nd floor, 187 Collins Street.

The precipitating factor for Zerfas requesting the ASIO interview was her imminent marriage to a construction engineer, Graham Evans, who was required to work in the United States. Because she was "concerned that the American Authorities, knowing of her previous left-wing associations, would prevent her from landing in the United States", she wished to "clear herself". So she gave a detailed account of her political affiliations and connections from 1949 to 1952. At the conclusion of quite a lengthy interview – the transcript is five pages – "the

need for discretion in the matter of her approach to A.S.I.O. was impressed upon subject, who stated that she realized this need". She also supplied ASIO with her personal address book and, it seems, the membership list of the Melbourne University Peace Club as at 15 July 1952. On 9 February 1955, an unnamed ASIO officer wrote that "as far as we are concerned . . . we now 'clear' her" and the following day the Director-General was informed of this decision. Her visa to the US was approved on 7 March 1955 and three weeks later she and her newly wed husband left Australia for New York.

Whether in the East or the West during the Cold War, instances of collaboration with security and intelligence services are legion. This journal has already revealed the working relationship between STASI and an Australian informant residing in Germany, Professor Fred Rose, when Bernie Taft visited East Berlin in June 1971 (*Overland* 140, 1995). It has recorded connections between Ian Milner and the Czech secret police (*Overland* 147, 1997). It has also exposed Peter Ryan's involvement, on different occasions, with ASIO (*Overland* 155,1999). This barely scrapes the surface since there are many more stories of collaboration to be told. It is now clear, for example, that one of the thirteen high-ranking communist cadres who attended a top secret Marxist study school in China for three years, from 1951 to 1954, provided ASIO with an extremely detailed, authentic sixteen-page report. Although his identity can be established, his motives are unclear. What does seem clear from the cases of Eddie Barker and Joyce Zerfas is the desire to cleanse themselves of the past, partly for practical and pragmatic reasons, partly because of their own ideological shifts. For them, and for a few other Australian delegates, the Berlin Youth Festival was a disappointing experience. The main beneficiary of this disillusionment was ASIO. For most delegates, such as Rifka Matthews or Faith Bandler,[17] the Festival confirmed the Cold War polarities of a world divided into two irreconcilably opposed power blocs: one led by peace-loving Russia, the other by war-mongering America. They returned home enthusiastic and emboldened by their renewed faith and decided to reproduce the Berlin Festival in Australia. The upshot, in March 1952, was the Australian Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship.[18] But whereas in East Berlin, the Youth Carnival was enabled by the intervention of the state, in Sydney it was thwarted by it. And in this ASIO, once again, played a pivotal role.[19]

ENDNOTES

1. See the 23-page booklet reprinted by the Democratic Rights Council, *The Innsbruck Story*, London, 1952.
2. 'Some Facts on Australian delegates to Berlin Festival of Youth and Students for Peace', papers of the Eureka Youth League (in possession of Barrie Blears, Sydney).
3. In June 2001, about fifty of these delegates attended a reunion in Sydney; see Tony Stephens, 'Stained red', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2–3 June 2001.
4. National Archives of Australia (NAA) A442/1, 1951/14/5234. This confiscation of passports did occur upon delegates' return to Australia.
5. *World Youth* (WFDY monthly bulletin), March 1951, p.3, in J.D. Bernal papers, Marx Memorial Library, Clerkenwell, London.
6. Papers of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Labour History and Archive Centre, Manchester, CP/YCL/1/16, '1951 Festival'.
7. Public Record Office (PRO), London, FO 1110/406, Secret Memo, T.S. Tull (Foreign Office) to M.B. Winch (Chancery), 31 May 1951.
8. See PRO FO 371/93664; FO 975/51; FO 1110/406.
9. NAA A6119/90, 2935.
10. NAA A6119/90, 2932, ASIO report by 'Senior Section Officer B1. B2.' on Thomas Treherne, 27 February 1952.
11. NAA A6119/90, 2932 and 2934, 'Top Secret Protect memorandum', 4 April 1952, Regional Director, Queensland to ASIO Headquarters.
12. NAA A6119/90, 2932, 'Extract from Q. Report No.1445 dated 14/5/52'.
13. NAA A6119/90, 2935, Memorandum to Director, H.2, 13 May 1958. Lloyd took tape recordings of communist songs sung at the Festival that he later disparaged; see 'Red Songs Played by Youth Delegate', *The Age*, 31 May 1952.
14. NAA A6119/90, 2953.
15. Ibid. His personal file (which had been transferred between ASIO offices by 'Safe Hand') notes that information was provided to ASIO regarding communist crew members of ships travelling between Australia and the Far East (see Report, 26 September 1968; Memos, 8 November 1968, 6 March 1969); whether or not Barker was the source cannot be discerned.
16. The following is based on two recently released files, NAA A 6119/90, 2562 and A6122/48, 1999.
17. See NAA A 6119/89, 2234 and A6119/90, 2535.
18. NAA A9108/3, ROLL 15/1, 'Youth Carnival for Peace and Friendship', pp.1–2; Harry Stein, *A Glance Over an Old Left Shoulder*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1994, p.100.
19. Further details on this role can be found in my 'Community Carnival or Cold War Strategy?' in Ray Markey (ed.), *Labour and Community: Historical Essays*, Wollongong University Press, 2001, pp.313–42.

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Shakespeare Was A Performance Poet

for Laurie Duggan

Gave 'em what they wanted / sex, death, violence, politics, passion, madness / and a good laugh / in language they could understand / even when drunk / *I prithee, take the cork out of your mouth* / the groundlings got the gist / and the jokes / *that I may drink thy tidings* / up in the gods they got enough / to recognise an education / if not great art / *Is not parchment made of sheep-skins?* / he loved a crowd / the spoken word / *lend me your ears* / if he was a young Australian poet / today / he might cut his teeth on the open mike / *Speak the speech, I pray you* / start his own venue / *as I pronounced it to you* / edit a 'zine / win a slam or two / *trippingly on the tongue* / self-publish a collection / then hit the wall / his penchant for performance see him accused / of popularity, accessibility / *All, all cry shame against me* / dismissed as entertainment / *yet I'll speak* / sidelined / he might succumb to alcohol, drugs / advertising, stand-up, rock'n'roll / or sitcom writing / the codework of pure text / *No more, the text is foolish* / contemporary Australian poetry eating itself / wouldn't appeal / *Come give us a taste of your quality* / he'd want a public / bums on seats and applause / *come, a passionate speech* / perhaps he'd emigrate to England / hang out with Billy Childish and Benjamin Zephaniah / *Good lads, how do ye both?* / get famous / it would never happen here / *dull and speechless tribes* / it's ironic / poets who'd ignore him call him genius / *heaven in my mouth.*

Lauren Williams

floating fund

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Was Amor Billy Goat Gruff?

Humphrey McQueen

Bernard Smith with Terry Smith & Christopher Heathcote: *Australian Painting 1788–2000* (OUP, $89.95).

Gary Catalano: *The Solitary Watcher – Rick Amor and his Art* (MUP, $89.95).

BERNARD SMITH'S *Australian Painting* first appeared in 1961, close by H.M. Green's two volumes on our literature, Manning Clark's first volume of *A History* and Smith's own *European Vision in the South Pacific*. All three authors placed the Antipodean at the centre of debates about civilisation. White Australia was no longer to be treated as an appendix.

Although it is essential to keep Smith's account of our painting up to 1970 available in its original form, there are enough copies in libraries to fulfil that need without the expense of this facsimile. What is required is a revised edition in light of subsequent scholarship. Smith has an ambivalent attitude towards improving his work. In 1978, he added two pages of 'Notes' to a reprint of *Place, Taste and Tradition* from 1945, amending facts and opinions. He went somewhat further when Yale republished *European Vision* in 1984. But apart from correcting some details for the second edition, the finger that wrote *Australian Painting* has not been lured "back to cancel half a line . . . nor . . . wash out a word of it". The monographs, essays, retrospectives, catalogues and concepts about pre-1960 painting from the past three decades – including Smith's own – might just as well never have happened.

Smith accepted that, for the post-1970 decades, he needed scholars who were as in touch with those times as he had been with the previous forty years. Thus, for the third edition in 1991 Terry Smith supplied three chapters on the 1970s and 1980s, attending to Aborigines, women and their theorisers.

Bernard Smith's contributions ended with his chapter on the 'Colour Painting' of the late 1960s, providing another of his elegant surveys, bristling with dissent from fashion. Yet it is remarkable that someone who praises Marx as a technological determinist should have expatiated on colour painting with no more attention to the revolution in paint and its applications – plastics and airbrushes – than a passing reference to acrylics; du Pont was as important a US influence as James Doolin.

One can sympathise with Smith's reluctance to revise because the increase in full-time academics in art history and criticism was not matched by a quantity of research to equal his own. One can also sympathise with the temporary staff who are over-burdened with teaching duties yet must produce one refereed piece a year to have their contracts renewed. Under those circumstances, it has been easier to deconstruct a chapter from Smith than to research one of their own from scratch.

What is unforgivable is that OUP should produce a fourth edition that repeats even typographical errors. The dates of *The Australian Builder and Contractors' News* were correct in 1962, slipped into error in 1971, and remain there. The Index has been adjusted but the chapter bibliographies remain almost where they were in 1970 so that readers are not made aware of materials about the pre-1970 years published since the second edition. This failing is significant because, at $90 a copy, *Australian Painting* is a reference work for libraries and dealers.

One exception to this refusal to look backwards is the inclusion of a colour illustration of Bernard Smith's 1940 canvas *Pompeii* in Christopher Heathcote's chapter on the 1990s. Heathcote, moreover, delivers an unintentional backhander to the artist-scholar by concluding his description of *Pompeii* with the assertion: "Clearly, there was a more complex history to the evolution of modern Australian art than was previously believed". If so, how much of the blame rests with Smith's received version?

The strengths and weaknesses of the first three editions remain where they were when reviewed on publication. A list of those commentaries would have been a useful appendix to this latest addition. The focus of this commentary will fall on the thirty-five pages about the 1990s, Heathcote's *An Embattled Medium*. The assault on painting did not begin in the 1990s, and not all of the attacks have come from without. From at least the 1960s, painting, etching, sculpture, performance, and still and movie photography have interacted so that the story of painting is harder than ever to present in isolation. If the two-dimensional is embattled, so are the assumptions on which Smith had conceived *Australian Painting* as an interaction of European heritage with local achievement, but overlooking the Indigenous. Painting itself remains embattled, as Heathcote observes, because in representing contemporary Australian art, curators favour the ephemeral and multimedia. The tricksy triumphs over the thoughtful.

The appeal of Heathcote's chapter will depend on whether you agree that Drysdale's editing out of vegetation was 'untrue' whereas a later generation of landscape abstractionists are to be congratulated for doing the same; whether your connoisseurship is improved by lists of names; whether you equate Reg Mombassa with Ken Done; and how you rate the sincerity of John Wolseley against Tim Storrier's.

This final point is vital because the impulse connecting Heathcote's commentaries is the desirability of a moral starting point for artists. Thus, he is torn between deploring the commercial pressures on Aboriginal art and welcoming a sacral inspiration for what he dares to call *Tribal Painting*. In making his case, he is novel and conventional in his errors. He believes that Elizabeth Durack painted her *Eddie Burrups* as an "'Ern Malley'-like prank". Heathcote's accusation that Margaret Preston was "patronising" when she encouraged settler artists to learn from the Indigenous is true – she was patronising the Europeans, an irony which Heathcote will not be the last to miss.

Heathcote criticises some artists for the "idle pretension" of including "snippets from theoretical texts" on their canvases, yet does much the same with his analysis. For instance, his understanding of Levi-Strauss's *bricolage* came from a 1992 catalogue essay rather than acquaintance with *La Pensee sauvage*. From there, he stumbles across post-colonialism and magic realism, which he discovers are "almost synonymous". This insight allows him to lavish cliché upon banality: "magic realist works were pregnant with symbolism". He suspects that magic realism "can evolve in New World nations as they shrug off a colonial outlook". More than a shrug is necessary to de-dominionise the mentalities even of white settler societies such as Australia, let alone those of non-Caucasian subjugated peoples. Because he accepts the applicability of post-colonial speculation to Australia, as if our situation was indistinguishable from that of India, he misses the chance to explore our specifics – including how Australian Aborigines fit into the dynamics of imperialism.

Heathcote concludes with praise for certain strands of *graffiti* as a renewal of painting. Certainly they do less to vandalise our visual environment than do the architectural horrors they are alleged to deface or the advertisements on the sides of public transport.

HEATHCOTE DISCUSSES Rick Amor at paragraph length on the sixth-last page of the newest *Australian Painting*, although he had been exhibiting for thirty years before 1990. Inclusion in the standard history remains a matter of propinquity.

Gary Catalano's book on Amor is far from the vanity monographs backed by dealers to convince novices that they are investing in Fort Knox. Despite some gaps in detail, such as the late 1970s, Catalano's method is chronological, weaving a biographical account with technical analyses of particular works. Catalano builds his storylines from interviews and the diary kept by Amor's first wife. He devotes himself to explicating the phases in Amor's career, from being encouraged by John Brack at the Gallery School; through the chase after cash in commissioned portraiture once he becomes a parent; to his plunge into radical politics after the Whitlam sacking. We also follow Amor to Barcelona, New York and Timor. This sweep introduces diverse characters who did not make it to the Smith–Smith–Heathcote history: the dealer Joseph Brown and the union official turned community arts guru, George Seelaf.

Catalano's judgements benefit from his long acquaintance with Amor. He is discriminating in his praise and not afraid to say when Amor has failed to meet his own, or the writer's, standards. If Catalano occasionally wishes that Amor had been a different kind of painter – more abstract, more expressionist – he allows his subject to make his own path. He is happy when Amor moves away from Social Realism,

though that term applies to his Timor series while the rest of his output remains close to Critical Realism.

Catalano has advanced the evaluation of Amor's output far beyond the relationship between his cartooning and his painting. Amor wants them judged separately, yet is scornful of cartoonists who can only scribble. His own newspaper cartoons were enriched by his tonal mastery and spatial sense, bringing them close to his drawings and etchings, notably in the attack on R.J. Hawke's candidature for Wills in 1980. Amor's 1960s paintings began at a time when POP had made cartooning on canvas acceptable in some quarters. The overlap between cartooning and painting recurred whenever Amor treated space through a sequence of stage-like flats, or outlined his figures with black. More recently, he has surrendered three-dimensionality to a film of misty paint. Architectural depth establishes the mood that Amor now pursues, an ambience which supplied Catalano with the title for this study – *The Solitary Watcher*.

The large-format volume includes thirty-two colour reproductions and twice as many black-and-whites. The gloom of the latter paintings has not made their tones and covert details easy to discern in reproduction. All the scholarly apparatuses are intact.

Although Catalano emphasises the autobiographical impulse in Amor's imagery, no matter how often disguised, one thread that is not pursued is the relationship between Amor and animals. He named his daughter Zoe after the cat he had had as a child. Catalano does let us know what a difficult character Amor had been for a long time, associating the arrival of a billy goat in the Amors' rural domesticity with the break-up of his marriage, an aspect confirmed by a number of paintings in which the creature menaces the children and dominates the land. Was Amor Billy Goat Gruff? Similarly, the painting of a docile black bull in a field with a grazing white horse was based on a scene he had driven past every day. Moreover, their poses on his canvas derived from art history. Yet the reconciliation of these beasts with each other and with their environment came as Amor gave up the grog, which he recognised had made him so difficult to be with. Are these animal paintings another case of an Australian artist fulfilling T.S. Eliot's injunction to express personal emotion through an 'objective correlative'?

Humphrey McQueen is a freelance historian working from Canberra.

A fine network of friends

Bernard Smith

Anna Gray (ed.): *The Diaries of Donald Friend*, vol.1 (NLA, $49.95).

Brenda Niall: *The Boyds – a family biography* (Miegunyah Press, MUP, $49.95).

BOTH OF THESE BOOKS make a substantial contribution to our understanding of Australian art and culture. Friend's diary is brilliantly written, "for his own amusement, as a daily confessional and escape from boredom". The book on the Boyds is more detached, a superb work by an experienced biographer. Both books should find their place in any substantial Australian library.

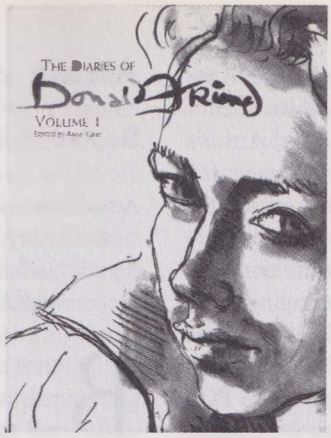
Donald Friend, like his friend Russell Drysdale, came of a privileged, pastoral family. But both were mavericks. Drysdale, or Tas as he was commonly called, largely due to his defective eyesight, Donald because of his homosexuality.

Donald was born to the purple, if any Australian artist was. Apart from "an hereditary hatred of the Labour (sic) Party" there is "an entire absence from politics in his diary". For him Australia was "a very beautiful country" but "not the land of an artist". So, aged 23, he took himself to Nigeria. Although a student of Sidney Long, he had already felt the tug of the primitivism made fashionable by the most recent modern taste for the Formalesque. His Nigerian notebooks make fascinating reading. He settled himself in Ikerri and became the financial adviser to the Ogoga (ruler). Living with the Yoruba, he "learnt their language, studied their art and stories". A 'modern' from colonial Australia among 'primitives'.

Returning from Nigeria he lived a bohemian life in Potts Point and Double Bay, not taking the war seriously until those midget Japanese submarines bombed Sydney Harbour . Then he joined the artillery and became a gunner because as he said later "he would have felt a kind of fourth-rate sort of person if [he] had stuck behind". But he maintained a sophisticated contempt for the 'rabble' with whom he had to mingle. Despite such patricianly postures and overweening ambition to become a 'famous' artist, readers of *Overland* will find much in Friend that they can warm to: his charm and wit, and his great passion for painting.

By contrast Brenda Niall's book is the story of a

family and its many houses. It is also the story of the successful marriage of bourgeois and convict in a Victorian setting. On one side William a'Beckett, Victoria's first Chief Justice, on the other side John Mills, a labourer from Gloucestershire who served out a seven-year sentence in Van Diemen's Land before making a fortune in real estate in the tiny town of Melbourne during the 1830s. It was the shrewd cossetting of his fortune by his daughter Emma a'Beckett that financially established the Boyd 'dynasty'. Niall traces it through its life in many homes from Penleigh in Wiltshire, the Grange in Berwick, Open Country in Murrumbeena, and Bundanon on the Shoalhaven. And the family is still at it. David Boyd is seeking to "turn his rambling house in St Peters, Sydney, into yet another Boyd shrine". I hope he succeeds. For David was treated as the 'ugly duckling' among the Boyds by those Australian critics who nurtured fashionable taste here during the Cold War, such as Alan McCulloch, Laurie Thomas and Robert Hughes. English critics took a more positive view of his best work. Niall does what she can to redeem his reputation. Of them all David Boyd brought the most explicit, moral conscience to his paintings and ceramic sculpture. He was a champion of the Aboriginal people before it became fashionable among our critical confraternity.



Brenda Niall puts the achievements of this creative family into an overarching, historical perspective: Emma Minnie Boyd (b. 1858) painter; Arthur Merric Boyd (b. 1862) painter; William Merric Boyd (b. 1888) potter; Penleigh Boyd (b. 1920) painter; Martin Boyd (b. 1893) writer; Lucy Boyd (b. 1916) potter; Arthur Boyd (b. 1920) potter and painter; Guy Boyd (b. 1923) sculptor; David Boyd (b. 1924) painter and potter; Robin Boyd (b. 1919) architect and writer. Tracing the genealogy of the Boyds may become a bit like tracing that of the Brueghels.

The family's creative persistence may draw our attention to one basic difference between the art worlds of Melbourne and Sydney. In Melbourne, a great deal of artistic energy has sprung from familial and regional bonding: the Lindsays at Creswick, the Reids at Heide, the Meldrumites at Montsalvat. Sydney has no such parallels. Merioola was just a boarding house where everyone did their own thing. In Sydney, artists tended to work in their own studios (if they had one) and foregather in a nearby pub in the evening. It was all much more individualistic and more accepting of overseas influence at face value. Melbourne instead become the storm-centre of Australian art where theories were argued through and thrashed out. Sydney was more market driven.

One of the great values of books like Friend's diary and Niall's on the Boyds is that they reveal a fine network of friends and associates, and in so doing involve a wider community of persons than can more formal histories constructed as they usually are, around a theme. Links are thus revealed that might otherwise be forgotten. As Thomas Carlyle put it: "history is the essence of innumerable biographies". I was reminded of this when I read of Martin Boyd's friendship with Bernard Adeney and his wife Noel when he lived for a time in West Wittering, Sussex. Bernard Adeney exhibited in Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition of 1912, and later with Wyndham Lewis's Vorticists. He was the brother of Cuthbert Adeney, the eccentric foster-father of my wife Kate. They lived, as Niall points out, on the fringe of the Bloomsbury Group. I give a whole chapter to Cuthbert's eccentricities in my book, *A Pavane for another time*.

Bernard Smith is Australia's pre-eminent art historian.

A failure of curiosity

Brian Lloyd

Janine Burke: *Australian Gothic: A life of Albert Tucker* (Knopf, $49.95).

JANINE BURKE'S NEW BIOGRAPHY of Albert Tucker, *Australian Gothic*, is truly a mixed bag. Among its faults from a scholarly point of view are: a *very* subjective attitude toward its subject; critical commentary unfettered by evidential concerns; technically correct but insufficient acknowledgement of previous work in the area; and a theoretical paradigm which combines elements of Freudian and Jungian theory, nineteenth-century ethnography, seventies 'womens' liberation' and French feminism, with-

out a care as to how they may conflict or coincide.

But another major area of concern, which would be problematic for any book, scholarly or not, hinges on whether readers can experience the book as a consistent whole. There are three parts to this problem. First, the book doesn't maintain focus on its subject. Other characters intrude – most notably Burke's object of fascination, Joy Hester, but also Burke herself – resulting in an uneasy 'where's Bert?' sensation in key parts of the book. Here, narrative momentum, such as that built up in the account of Tucker's youth, is sacrificed to other gods. The resulting loss of focus undermines the worth of the book because so much of the material is available from other sources. Maintaining a closer focus would have given the book the distinction, at least, of being the one place in which all pertinent material had been used to throw a beam of light on Bert Tucker.

Second, Burke's inconsistent attitude towards Tucker and his work are a problem. There are at least two major transitions in the book where this is particularly evident. The first occurs with the entry of Joy Hester into Tucker's life, when Burke's romantic fascination with Hester results in a voice which privileges Hester and devalues Tucker. A second emerges when Tucker returns to Australia from his time in Europe. At this point, a relatively balanced tone adopted by Burke toward Tucker's work during his European period is suddenly cast aside: Tucker becomes, in Burke's eyes, a 'sell-out'. As such, apparently, he lies beyond the power of her curiosity, and there is not much more of an attempt to understand him after this point.

Third, there is little attempt to integrate some sections of the book into the wider narrative at all. The section on Sweeney Reed, for example, is one of the most enjoyable parts of the book, but in structural terms it is clearly a separate essay.

There are three really good sections: the young Tucker, Tucker in Europe, and Sweeney Reed. Here, Burke extends the literature, provides the opportunity for a good read, and makes the book worthy of serious attention. Since the book cannot, and should not, be consigned to the dustbin of history, we might try to make sense of its existence. and to suggest how some of the book's myriad lost opportunities could have been grasped – given other circumstances. In trying to understand the broader conditions for the emergence of the book, we fulfill a role that Burke herself might have taken up: that is, to ask the deeper questions about context – the wider parallels and contrasts – which put *subject* into perspective. An example: in *Australian Gothic* Burke notes the misogyny evident in Tucker's 'Images of Modern Evil' series, but locates the drivers for this sentiment entirely within Tucker, rather than considering why so many other avant-garde painters – Tucker's precursors and peers – also manifested this tendency. As it is, the fundamental causes of this critically important phenomenon are not investigated. To do better than this requires that the parochialism which so often afflicts 'Australian Studies' be set aside, and that from a broader perspective questions be asked about the conditions under which art is produced: questions which are, fundamentally, posed with an awareness of the importance of the collective dimension – sociological, economic, historical – in explaining an individual's life and work.

Applying this approach to Burke entails getting a fix on her status as one of a small number of Australian independent scholars who have begun writing from within the Academy and then moved out, continuing to publish research-based material, fiction and journalism. It is a tenuously independent existence: Australia is a small market – as we are continually told – and all the more so for anything that is considered in any way 'intellectual'. The consequence of this is a recognisable pattern in the behaviour of these survivors in a hostile land. Slender pickings, a fickle market and, probably, exhaustion dictate that public visibility be maintained at considerable cost – a cost to be counted both in terms of personal hardship and veracity. The resulting situation is the opposite of 'no news is good news': rather, *any* news – particularly the kind which provokes the conflict and scandal which prefigured *Australian Gothic*'s release – is indeed good news, because a *cause célèbre* may be enough to carry a few more volumes of The Book off the shelves and into the hands of an otherwise uninterested public. The result can be the intellectual equivalent of junk-food – full of sugar, salt and fat – designed more to attract the attention of palates jaded by journalism than to create the best possible account of their subject.

Albert Tucker is a key Australian modernist, and the potential dividends from serious and sincere inquiry are manifold. Despite our apparent complacency about the 'maturing' of Australian cultural life, general awareness of Australian art and its key underlying issues falls well below what it should be. Another (better) biography is unlikely to be published for a long time.

One fundamental way in which Tucker can be put into meaningful context is to take seriously the major, most relevant, deposit of published textual evidence: Burke's dismissive handling of *Angry Penguins* maintains an important blind-spot of Australian postwar cultural analysis and de-contextualises Tucker's own spectacular contributions to the magazine. These are the issues needing serious consideration if a more satisfying account is to appear, sometime, in the wake of Burke's book. What is less certain is whether, and when, Australian writers, editors and publishing companies will take the view that they can 'afford' this kind of project.

Brian Lloyd is a researcher at La Trobe University.

Australia, balanced between Asia and Europe

Robert Pascoe

Loretta Baldassar: *Visits Home: Migration Experiences Between Italy and Australia* (MUP, $39.95).
George Davies: *The Occupation of Japan: The Rhetoric and the Reality of Anglo-Australasian Relations, 1939–1952* (UQP, $34.95).
David Goldsworthy (ed.): *Facing North: A Century of Australian Engagement with Asia, Vol. 1: 1901 to the 1970s* (MUP, $39.95).
Toni and Mal Logan: *Mediterranean Journeys in Time & Place: A Traveller's Guide* (Black Inc., $24.95).
Patrick O'Farrell: *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to the Present* (UNSW Press, $35).
Shen Yuanfang: *Dragon Seed in the Antipodes: Chinese-Australian Autobiographies* (MUP, $32.95).
Prue Torney-Parlicki: *Somewhere in Asia: War, Journalism, and Australia's Neighbours 1941–75* (UNSW Press, $35).

IT'S THE EPIPHANY here in north Italy. It's a Sunday this year. We are driving at 120 kph west along the A11, slicing through the north of Tuscany, past Prato (where Monash has established a study centre), Pistoia, Lucca . . . all familiar names for visiting Australians. From the car radio, Italian opera fills the air. Outside the car it is a clear, sunny afternoon. The landscape is easy to read. Rows of trees neatly describe the fallow fields. Plumes of smoke drift lazily up. The hillside towns of the mountains to the north catch the sunlight and turn luminously golden.

And we have an armful of books to read. These books describe aspects of the easy familiarity most Anglo-Australians have with Europe and our comparative difficulty with Asia.

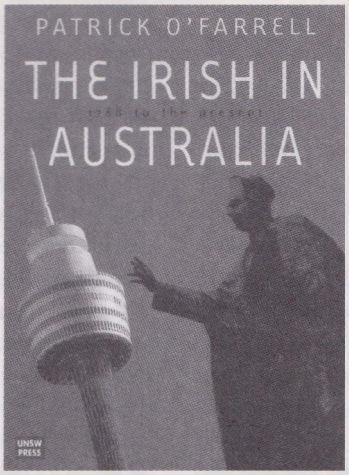
There is a comfortable familiarity with Europe in the book by the Logans (Toni and Mal, former Monash Vice-Chancellor). They draw on their extensive travel experience to describe the landscape and peoples of the Mediterranean. The Logans belong to a generation for whom buying a house in Umbria or Tuscany and then writing about it has become a cottage industry, with populist Australian journalists George Negus (*The World From Italy)* and Geoffrey Luck (*Villa Fortuna*) offering their personal accounts of life in an Italian village. Italy has become part of the Australian world view, an annex to the life of certain well-known Australians.

These books assume a stable Italy, one that remains essentially unchanging and ready for discovery and dissection by ever more sophisticated analysis. Italy in this reading is there as a repository of interesting social formations, almost a conversation piece. But the real Italy is always changing, and the best of these books, by a less well-known Australian, Isabella Dusi, entitled *Vanilla Beans and Brodo*, describes the process of change through which all aspects of Italian life (even hunting) are going. And, from the point of view of the Italo-Australians, Loretta Baldassar's *Visits Home* squarely locates this reality of a changing Italy as the central issue facing Italo-Australians.

As nomadic people, the identity of Italo-Australians is defined as much by their experiences of being a minority group in Australia as by their return journeys to their ancestral town. (We should not underestimate the capacity of oral culture in the Mediterranean world for preserving personal histories: in January 2001 my father-in-law asked a villager in Hadchit, Lebanon, to point out the house of his father, only to be told what he already knew, "But Raymond Betros left this town back in 1926 . . ?") The nomadic Australians of Mediterranean descent are looking to define themselves in relation to an unfixed ancestry.

The Irish connection raises similar issues for Australians. When it first appeared in 1986, *The Irish in Australia* won Patrick O'Farrell both the NSW Premier's Literary Award and the Ernest Scott Prize. The book went into a second edition in 1993 and a third in 2000. To understand O'Farrell's historiographical position it is revealing to recall that in the

1970s he was involved in a passionate debate questioning the value of oral history for historians. There were so many mythologies surrounding the place of the Irish in Australia – some fabricated by the Irish themselves – that he doubted whether oral testimony would ever seriously rival the printed word as the historian's main source of information about the past.



O'Farrell admits to having had little interest in his own ethnic origins until the age of thirty, and his account of the Irish in Australia emphasises their diversity and their contradictory place in the national history. Ireland in this reading becomes 'the Other', a place defined as much by those who had left it to go to Australia (or be taken there) as by the changing reality of the place itself. (The difference can be sensed by comparing the collection of personal letters sent from Australia in O'Farrell's 1984 book with the interactive approach – letters between family members on both sides of the ocean – in David Fitzpatrick's magisterial *Oceans of Consolation*, 1995.)

Asia poses additional and difficult issues for mainstream Australian writers. Goldsworthy's collection of essays is an 'official' history of Australia's engagement with Asia commissioned by Alexander Downer. Given the Howard Government's shift away from Keating's strong sense of connection with Asia, this project might have been hazardous. In fact it turns out to be a useful introduction to the history of that engagement from 1901 to the 1970s. For one thing, it provides helpful lists of foreign ministers, consular officials and key events. For another it does not whitewash controversial episodes, such as Australia's entry into the Vietnam War.

Two episodes in this history of engagement have recently given rise to publications. One is the history of the Commonwealth forces that occupied Japan after the war. George Davies, a retired Deputy Vice-Chancellor, was one of the four thousand New Zealanders who were part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF). Social contact with the defeated enemy was expressly forbidden for BCOF personnel, while fraternisation was permitted for the American troops. As a consequence the Commonwealth soldiers were seen as oppressors, the Americans as liberators, and an artificial divide was placed between Australians and Japanese. This was an important moment in the unfortunate history of Japanese–Australian relations.

The other new book concerns Australia's journalists working in Asia. In a highly readable account, Prue Torney-Parlicki documents the reportage of the various conflicts in the region and shows how this work prepared the way for the more sophisticated engagement with Asia that developed after 1975.

In these three books Asia remains somewhat separate from Australia. For an account of the interplay between Asia and Australia as rich as that between Europe and Australia, we rely on the growing number of accounts of the Asian–Australian experience. The new book by Shen Yuanfang is an excellent step in that direction.

Dr Shen has produced a book of fine wit and sophistication. She has located twenty autobiographical accounts of life in Australia by Chinese-Australians and has interrogated them with a combination of the historian's resourcefulness and literary intelligence. In researching these autobiographies she has had to return to the PRC and to revisit aspects of her own childhood (at the time of the Cultural Revolution) in order to make sense of the twenty stories.

Perhaps the most arresting autobiography in Shen's collection is that of Ah Sing, incarcerated at Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum after a knife fight among Chinese diggers on the Victorian goldfields in 1867. Ah Sing describes how he was cheated out of £200 by a policeman, and other misadventures.

The subsequent autobiographies treated in this book open windows on the long history of Chinese in Australia and provide new insights into the Asian-Australian experience.

If landscape and ritual are important themes in the European heritage of Australians, what emerges most strongly in the Shen book are the powerful continuities of family, personal discipline and honour. As Shen concludes, with the work of writers such as Brian Castro we begin to see the first indications that the part of us that is Asian is beginning to make itself known in Australian culture. The balancing act between Australia, Europe and Asia goes on.

Robert Pascoe is the Dean of Arts at Victoria University.

Unique and different journey

Di Brown

Doris Pilkington Garimara: *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (UQP, $18.95).
Vivienne Cleven: *Bitin' Back* (UQP, $19.95).

First published in 1996, *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* was given a new lease of life this year when Doris Pilkington's (Nugi Garimara) story was republished as a tie-in edition to the cinematic release of the film adaptation by Phillip Noyce. Putting aside the obvious commercial advantages, it makes good cultural sense to reissue the book when the film is about to be released – it makes the author's true and moving account in book form more immediate and accessible. It's interesting to note that the independent Australian performing arts publisher, Currency Press, published Christine Olsen's screenplay *Rabbit-Proof Fence*.

This book is the second in the author's trilogy of her family story. The first, *Caprice – A Stockman's Daughter*, won the 1990 David Unaipon Award for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, and was published in 1991. *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* is an extraordinary feat of courage and determination that defies all odds. It is the story of the author's mother Molly Craig, who led her two sisters Daisy and Gracie on a 1600-kilometre barefoot walk home, from the Moore River Settlement north of Perth, to Jigalong in the north-west of Western Australia.

Doris Pilkington Garimara reconstructs the original journey, using information from records of geographical and botanical explorations undertaken in the area during the early 1900s. From these records, her own imagination and Daisy's vivid memory, the author is able to build a picture of the vegetation and landscape and tell the story. In the 1930s Molly, Daisy and Gracie were trekking through uncleared virgin bush that constituted "a strange and scary wilderness" to three Aboriginal girls who had come from the desert regions of Western Australia. Pilkington Garimara notes that over time the landscape "changed considerably or disappeared completely", making it a difficult task for the author to reconstruct the journey. She writes, "In my mind I actually walked beside them, from the moment they left the girls' dormitory at the settlement all the way home to Jigalong."

For the non-Indigenous reader more comfortable and familiar with western notions and concepts of time and distance, this is a unique journey. The important markers for Aboriginal people who could not read or write were not numbers or dates. The author tells us that in traditional Aboriginal society, "everything was measured by events and incidents affected by seasonal changes". The changing coastal and desert landscape that Molly, Gracie and Daisy experience on their journey homeward comes alive with Pilkington Garimara's attention to detail in the bush.

Doris Pilkington Garimara was born on Balfour Downs Station, sixty kilometres northwest of Jigalong Community in the East Pilbara. Jigalong was established as a government depot in 1907. It was the base for maintenance men who travelled up and down the rabbit-proof fence, clearing away bush debris and any dead animals caught in the barbed wire. The depot superintendent, who was also the Protector of Aborigines, rationed out food, clothing, tobacco and blankets, and these were distributed amongst the Mardu people who came in from the desert. By the 1930s, Jigalong had become a base-camp for Aboriginal people and secret sacred objects were buried there, signifying a permanent 'sitting-down place'. The nomadic lifestyle devolved to semi-nomadic, as the traditional community left the base-camp to hunt and gather bush tucker to supplement their regular diet of government rations, but always returned to Jigalong.

Molly was born of a union between an Englishman, employed as a rabbit-proof fence inspector and Maude, a Mardu girl. The baby was recorded as the first half-caste child to be born amongst the Jigalong people. Molly was a muda-muda (half-caste), separated from play with other Mardu children by the colour of her skin. Two of Molly's aunties gave birth to Daisy and then Gracie who also had white fathers. The Protector of Aborigines observed that the girls received unfair treatment by other full-blood Aboriginal children. His written request to the Department of Native Affairs recommended that they be removed. The West Australian government established two institutions for Aboriginal children with white fathers. Patrol officers removed part-Aboriginal children from their families and transported them hundreds of kilometres south to Carralup Settlement or the Moore River Native Settlement. Molly, Gracie and Daisy began their jour-

ney south in 1931. They sailed from Port Hedland on the *Koolinda* and docked at the Port of Fremantle, before motoring to Perth and then on to the Moore River Settlement. In a letter dated 4 August 1931, the Chief Protector of Aborigines confirmed that Molly, Gracie and Daisy had arrived at Moore River and would "soon accept the inevitable and fall in with the usage of the place".

Molly led the escape from the settlement, relying on her 14-year-old memory, the position of the sun to determine direction, and instincts and survival techniques learned in the desert. An item, 'Missing Native Girls' appeared in the *West Australian* on 11 August 1931. This was one of many reported sightings and despite the efforts of the police who were assisted by Aboriginal trackers, Molly, Gracie and Daisie evaded capture. By early September the police has escalated their search. Molly, Gracie and Daisy had been on the run for five weeks and were surviving on bush tucker and water. They avoided station homesteads and did not light fires, despite the cold night temperatures. When Gracie learned of her mother's whereabouts from an Aboriginal woman working on a nearby station, there was a parting of the ways. The last part of the journey to Jigalong for Molly and Daisy was on the back of a camel, accompanied by rabbit-proof fence maintenance workers, taking in the familiar country of red earth, dry spinifex grass and grey-green mulga bush. The historic trek took almost nine weeks.

This is not where the story ends. Molly Kelly (nee Craig) married a stockman and gave birth to two daughters, Doris (the author) and Annabelle. After she had surgery for appendicitis, Molly was once again transported, this time under ministerial warrant, to Moore River Settlement. On 1 January 1941, Molly absconded with Annabelle, leaving Doris behind. Following the same route she had taken nine years earlier, Molly arrived at Jigalong with her baby daughter some months later and moved back to Balfour Downs Station with her husband Tony. Three years later, Annabelle was removed and transported south to Sister Kate's Children's Home in Queens Park. Molly did not see her daughter again. Under traditional Aboriginal kinship, Molly has eighteen grandchildren, twenty-nine great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. She lives at Jigalong and is still actively involved in community affairs.

Doris Pilkington Garimara was born on traditional birthing ground under the Wintamarra tree. *Under the Wintamarra Tree* is the sequel to *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*. This final book, completing the trilogy, will be published by UQP in November this year.

BITIN' BACK won the David Unaipon Award in 2000 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers for a first work of fiction.

This is a contemporary Australian novel about identity, difference and stereotyping – black/white/masculine/feminine – that would also work well if adapted for stage or screen, in the hands of the right director. In her cleverly constructed and well-paced plot, Clevens captures the quintessence of the gossip, rivalry, bigotry and prejudice that is alive and well in small-town communities.

Enter Jean Rhys, the famous white woman writer, who has taken over the Murri mind and body of Nevil Dooley. Uncle Booty's pig shooting and boxing lessons to bring Nevil to his senses, or make a man out of him, don't work. Not even the Blackouts – Mandamooka's home footy team – will do it. Nevil's Mum, Mavis, loves her boy and has dreams for his future. She recognises his talents and thinks that football is his salvation and the only ticket out of town.

Although Nevil willingly invites a white woman into his head, he cannot escape the white gaze of the town. Then a mysterious stranger turns up and the plot thickens. The real deadly issues in Cleven's novel are addressed by the author through humour and the actions of others who decide to take Nevil's life into their own hands.

It's not until the truth is revealed about Nevil's identity that everything falls into place. When Nevil finally takes charge of his own life, importantly, other lives in the community are also liberated. My only criticism is that the editor who travels to Mandamooka to work with Nevil on his first book is not Aboriginal. It could have been a black editor in this story who recognises a young black Australian writer's gifted talents and works with him in collaboratively shaping Indigenous knowledge and content.

Vivienne's Cleven's second novel, *Her Sister's Eye*, was shortlisted in the South Australian Premier's Literary Awards Fiction category and will also be published by UQP.

Di Brown recently completed her PhD at Victoria University and is currently freelancing as an editor and offers her services as an arts (literature) consultant.

Thelma and Louise get lost

Mark Mordue

Cassandra Pybus: *Raven Road* (UQP, $30).

IT TOOK ME A LONG TIME to read this book. And yet its gently poetic language and affably personal style should have made it a breeze. Why? I think largely because this is a book of dead ends and unrealised intuitions, a travel narrative where the side-stories and observations are far more interesting than the central quest that is supposed to drive it.

Early on in *Raven Road*, Cassandra Pybus introduces us to some circumstantial fragments which suggest a young Jewish émigré called Lillian Ailing (or Alling) may have walked from New York all the way back to Siberia single-handedly, passing through the impossibly rugged terrain of Alaska along the way.

Unlike the explorers, gold seekers and linesmen laying down the telegraph of the day, Pybus believes "an intensely *domestic* impulse . . . fueled her extraordinary feat. She simply wanted to go home".

This premise sees Pybus attempting to find out who Lillian Ailing really was, retracing her steps wherever there was documentary evidence available, undergoing her own voyage of self discovery along the way.

Raven Road opens stunningly enough with an improbably named telegraph operator called Bill Blackstock "playing checkers over the line" in 1927 with a similarly isolated worker in the British Columbian wilderness. The barking of the man's dog alerts him to a presence in the woods and he goes out to discover a collapsed woman, "her clothes disintegrating, her boots torn and gaping".

Pybus then cuts quickly to the sketchy details known of Ailing based on her own early research and an essay she thought had purged the story "out of her system". One senses within the writer the same intense feeling of mystery that must have passed over a very shocked Bill Blackstock way back in British Columbia. "Who was this woman?"

It's a promising start, echoing the wonderful influence of landscape and sojourn writers like Jack London, Jon Krakauer and Barry Lopez – masters of the adventure narrative in cold, isolated spaces. But as the book sags and tautens and sags again, it also shows why Pybus may have been better served by a completely fictional re-imagining of Lillian Ailing's journey. It's certainly within her grasp as a writer to do it, and do it well.

Instead we get her patchy and mostly frustrated detective work on the trail, and a somewhat cranky partnership with a woman called Geraldine. At first Pybus romanticises their trip as a feminist road adventure, "A cross between *Thelma and Louise* and *Two Fat Ladies*". Unfortunately 'Gerry' emerges as a boorish companion and when the two of them finally part ways, you are as relieved as Pybus that she's gone.

Nonetheless there are some nice and very honest reflections on female friendship and self-image, words that would have taken some courage to pen, however simple they may appear. "Since her (Geraldine's) outburst at the glacier I am beginning to see myself through her eyes. Old – if forty plus is old then fifty plus is decrepit – and fat certainly. Ugly as well, I guess, as a necessary precondition of the first two. It is a discomforting insight."

Despite these raw chords, you sense how Pybus could frustrate you as a travel partner since she's frustrating you as a storytelling companion. In between her dependency on lush descriptions of the landscapes and her meal preparations, to keep the narrative alive we meet people and enter libraries at towns along the way where there is little to show for the effort involved. There's something dogged in this approach to her research, a tunnel vision that doesn't easily let in the digressional experiences it is possible to have while on the road – apart from the odd reverie in nature. Pybus also admits to having "no taste for roughing it", an attitude which makes this tale of feminist adventure rather polite when her central character remains continually elusive.

The best material comes from her reflections on the writer Jack London in Dawson City, the mind-boggling toughness of the Klondike Gold Rush, the cannibalistic desperation of Robert Scott's ill-fated expedition and the contemporary tale of Chris McCandless, a young man who naively went out into the wilderness to purify his soul and died there. These side streams grip you in a way the Lillian Ailing story never does.

A conversation with an Australian couple about the 'Vision Quest of the Plains Indians' metaphorically suggests that Pybus has been looking for a spiritual guide in the landscape all along, the ghost of Lillian Ailing, to help in the process of her own becoming. That a love story may have motivated Ailing's mysterious adventure helps Pybus give the

book a happy ending as she herself returns home to Tasmania and a staunchly loyal husband.

It's a generous and good-hearted conclusion – though I found it so neat and hurried, so tied up with a bow, I was less moved than I probably should have been. That said, I suspect older readers (rather than young backpackers) will be delighted with it all. They may also find Pybus's embroidering of detail and her dependency on describing food and landscape at the expense of the missing story a charming quality. But for me the Pybus/Ailing 'vision quest' was more like the McCandless misadventure: as a reader I ventured out into the wilderness with her to seek enlightenment, only to find myself lost.

Mark Mordue is the author of Dastgah: Diary of a Headtrip *(Allen & Unwin, 2001), a collection of travel stories incorporating new journalism, poetry, impressionistic anecdotes and memoir to map a journey around the planet.*

How 'now' came from 'then'

Martin Duwell

Alan Wearne: *The Lovemakers: Book I* (Penguin, $29).
John Tranter: *Ultra* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $21.95).
Dorothy Hewett: *Halfway Up the Mountain* (FACP, $18.95).
Gig Ryan: *Heroic Money* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $21.95).
John Forbes: *Collected Poems* (Brandl & Schlesinger, $27.95).

ALL BUT THE LAST of these books were shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Poetry Award and so they represent a poetic mass of considerable impetus. The eventual winner of the prize, Alan Wearne's *Saying all the Great Sexy Things*, is the first volume of *The Lovemakers*, an immense poem broken into two parts by the exigencies of publication. Like its predecessor, *The Nightmarkets*, it is obsessed by the lives of individuals and the way they are embedded in a row of shaping institutions ranging from family to schools to marriages to the politics of the time. It is, among many things, a continuous study of the interactions between such institutions and the vaguer determining factors of genes and character.

It is an even better work than *The Nightmarkets*. It is not entirely built around a number of long and occasionally solemn monologues, for example, and whereas *The Nightmarkets* is focused around characters who interact in pairs, *The Lovemakers* explores the more complex world of triangular relationships. In this first volume the most important triangle is that of Barb and Roger Heath (married far too young) and Neil, Barb's lover. But the entire narrative spins through different sets of triangles so that at one point Neil, his dangerous friend, Kim, and the hippy poet, Toby (whose included poems are brilliant pastiches of the worst of 1970s poetry) form one. Later, Neil, Barb and Neil's gay flatmate Benny, form another. There are dozens of other such relationships making a complexly ordered portrait of at least part of a society.

Its narrative mode is not the one usually described as 'poetic' – that is, one which uses metaphor to provide a glossy surface that is simultaneously resonant and sexy. If there is a model for *The Lovemakers* it is something like the narratives of Frost's *North of Boston*. The essential poetic feature is not metaphor but compression. The surface is rarely conventionally attractive and the pleasure comes from the imaginative detail which is packed inside and awaits release. The degree of authorial empathy for the characters is intense and, as a result, a single turn of phrase in Wearne can embody a novel's length of detail.

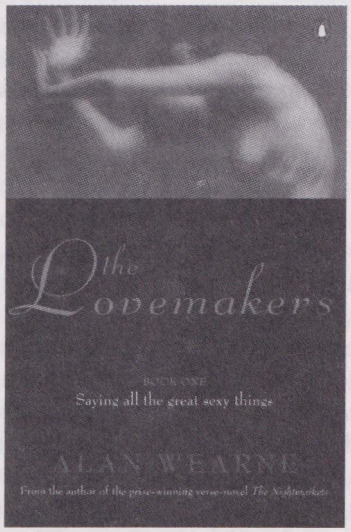
To take a single moment out of a book made up of such moments: Barb, just out of school, begins an affair with Roger Heath and falls pregnant. Her cousin, Lindsay, one of the tribe of Prices, has an odd capacity to inspire trust in women – they find themselves confiding in him. As Barb lies, dimly aware of her pregnancy and wondering who her partner really is, she does something common in Wearne: she imagines what a specific third person might say:

> *Then, hardly knowing*
> *this boy she*
> *signed on and grappling, lay beside,* Who is he? *the girl kept trying*
> *to ask* Who?
> *But, as she rearranged her memories, Barb started*
> *a smile:*
> *Lindsay was conjured, guessing correct and shouting*
> Who? You are asking who???
> It was Roger! / The lodger! / The sod!

This is an extraordinary work, obsessed by the need

to both empathise with characters and, at the same time, understand them analytically. If one of the many functions of poetry is to relate us to people, their values and the almost infinitely complex lives they lead, Australia can have produced few better poems than *The Lovemakers*.

EACH POEM of John Tranter's *Ultra* is made up of exactly ten stanzas of five lines each. There are twenty-four of them and they are introduced by a shorter poem, 'Lavender Ink'. The poems are arranged in alphabetical order by title. This high degree of formal organisation rather recalls Tranter's *The Alphabet Murders* of 1975, where each poem began with consecutive letters of the alphabet and there were twenty-six poems, suggesting that the search for "a possible contemporary poetry" was a continuing one, spilling into another (and potentially infinite) trip through the alphabet.



If anything though, *Ultra* recalls *Red Movie*, Tranter's second book. There the focus is on individual lives, including the author's, and the ways in which these fragmented lives can be arranged. Like the Wearne, though with very different interests and results, *Ultra* is full of people. Sometimes we experience only a few brief lines of their voices; at other times we are provided with parts of the narratives of their lives. The poetic challenge for the writer seems to lie in the different ways in which the poems can embrace these lives: sometimes the joins are abrupt like a cut in a film (film is an important source of analogies for poetic method in this book), but sometimes the poem slides from one voice to another in something closer to a dissolve. Sometimes, in a very Tranterish method, lives are boxed inside other lives.

In many of the poems it is hard to work out whether there is a single narrative built around a single character or whether there are many different characters and stories. 'Coffee' begins (and ends?) with a couple arriving on a mysterious errand in a town by the sea. The woman watches through binoculars and the poem immediately embarks on a set of previous experiences:

> *. . . binoculars held steady,*
> *the lenses at the front racking and peeping in and out.*
> *"When I was young I led myself into mischief,"*
> *she said. "High on joy, that's what I want,*
> *and I want anyone's arms around me." She was*
> *holding a tiny drawing and showing the customers*
> *. . .*

Perhaps what the poems are trying to teach us is that in reading them we should put aside the irritable search after identity and consistency and experience the poems as collages or sets of dissolves.

Another inevitable part of our response is to nervously search for generative clues. By the time we get to 'Locket' and see that it contains the words 'locket', 'locker', 'jockey', 'loser', 'locked', it is difficult not to suppress the suspicion that the material of these lives has been generated at a language level. It is possible that there is a Riffaterrean 'hypogram' – i.e. a cluster of images or sounds at the heart of the poem but not appearing in the surface of the text – at the basis of each of these poems. But this is a reading process that can become vertiginous. Perhaps there is a hypogram which suggests a number of other hypograms which produce either the surface of a single poem or the surfaces of all the poems – it is an interpretive route that induces paranoia and despair.

Of course the response to this is that the generative procedures are not really important, it is the result that matters. Is the result interesting? In *Ultra* it is always interesting, the poems have a mysterious, satisfying quality. Some of this derives from qualities in Tranter's style which are well known: the hyperbolic metaphors, for example, with their driving intensity:

> *Why are these problems linguistic?*
> *That's all we have to frame the chaos with,*
> *the big grid we drank with our mother's milk*
>
> *with the cornflakes and the funerals. This went on*
> *in front of the runaway truck of culture*
> *loaded with 'fashion', that abstract policeman.*
>
> ('On the Road')

or this marvellous description of reading:

. . . the inhuman demands of this print,
that reaches out of some corner of the past –
a grubby back room stinking of tallow –
and orders you to stop thinking like that, now
start thinking like this, and do the things

that are inevitable . . .

('Globe')

But a lot of it derives from the way in which individual fragments of lives are lived in the knowledge that the large determining structures of economics, class, family (which Wearne deals with so well) are always in the background. The romance novelist of 'Miss Proust', for example, can't take the "kissing group of husbands and wives" seriously because of their lack of a "proper theory of how / sexuality is conditioned by the economic / strictures of society, and not by the games shows // and the sporting programs or by the lies / that stain the pages of cheap paper . . ."

If there are two features that dominate the lives of the book, one is the structuring device of film, referred to earlier, and the second is the everpresent hum of the city that forms part of the soundtrack of these poems. Given the formal organisation of the book, perhaps it is no accident that the introductory poem speaks of the "distant murmur / of the city" and that the first poem proper, 'Black Leather' begins with sound technicians picking up the "acoustic atmosphere" for a film.

DOROTHY HEWETT'S *Halfway Up the Mountain* is, like Wearne's, a large book and comes at the experiences of age from three perspectives. The first section is based, as the title suggests, in her current Blue Mountains home, the second goes back to images of a West Australian childhood and the third deals with the "salt harbour" – simultaneously old age and Sydney. But the processes of age dominate the collection. Sometimes these are predictable: "I am an old woman now / love and sex are impossible for me / nobody looks at me any more / nobody dreams lustful dreams about me." Sometimes they are surprising. One of the most moving poems in the book, 'Goodbye Forever', comes from the second section where she remembers, as a child, making a farewell to a friend when the family left for the city. What Hewett remembers in age is not so much the poignancy of such a past moment of leaving – it is something that both children will quickly overcome – but the way in which *at the present moment* this leaving has been such a terribly long one as the decades have progressed in time. It is an odd response that is surprisingly affecting. It is a small pain, free of guilt, which, instead of fading with time, gets more intense.

"I have travelled a long way from my origins" are the book's opening words, and it is a reminder that the book not only looks forward and back but tries to solve the puzzle of the self and its life experiences by seeing how the 'now' came from the 'then'. There are continuous interruptions as ghosts of the past appear. Some of these are childhood figures but many are dead poets: if you are a long-lived writer, as Hewett is, you get to see the deaths of many fellow writers. But the ghosts do not just represent the past. When she imagines her father calling her from the railway cutting in 'The Call', although she realises that it cannot be him because "this isn't his country", there is a sense that such a ghost calls the hearer forward rather than dragging them back into past memories. They form a kind of welcoming committee of the dead. As one of the later poems says: "As the evening gathers in / the ghosts of man and sheepdog / horse and child creep home". Although, as another poem says, "I've never believed / that old age has a corner on inherited wisdom / (rather the reverse)", what it does have is a perspective on experience that is often moving and surprising and, in Hewett's case, devoid of the predictable.

GIG RYAN'S *Heroic Money* continues in the style for which she has become admired and which readers slow on the uptake – such as myself – are gradually getting used to. The poetry is abrupt and syntactically slippery without much punctuation to help. There are not so much sentences as sentence-fragments, each announced by a capital letter. There are strikingly unusual metaphors and connections. Of all Australian poets she is surely the one least likely to write a conventionally 'poetic' description: "the lime fast air", "the TV pages' / pendulous autopsy", "the reeled sea", "yolk of incipience" and "constant samovar" emerge at a random trawl through these poems.

And yet *Heroic Money* is a very public book, returning endlessly to the question of culture and its operations – and operatives – the "dribbling oracles". It focuses on such predictable targets as media, the "big events/Olympics" syndrome and corporate culture – one of the poems has the fine title, "The Global

Rewards Redemption Centre". But there are also some free dramatic monologues. Some are delivered by historical figures ranging from Rameses to Cosima Wagner, but others are unnamed participants in the culture.

Generally it is not a benevolent or loving view of Australia at the turn of the millennium. We have just buried a great poet (himself an analyser of the systems of culture) and it is a world where:

> *Garage sales and weddings clog the weekends*
> *The city skyline twinkles its hive of windows*
> *and mirage of substance*

though there are moments of a kind of bleak lyricism that shine in this context. The title poem, for example, contains two passages which suggest an authorial location: "Now the train glides over green palaces of trees" and, using a less optimistic colour:

> *I contemplate Autumn behind the rust*
> *sponged red trees flat against mist*
> *like a bandage*

Sometimes the satirical impulse is more overt than at others:

> *Our leader says* sophistry, *as in no amount of*
> *Money and sundries spill out of the couch*
> *Screened goody comedians spar a charm of ignorance*
> *In the silent world, day draws*
> *its curtained doubts in the iced street*
> *a coupled and/or babied populace*
> *as rooms full of words slump like jewels*
> *a cesspit, a binary set*

Ryan never lets you relax as a reader – you must have your interpretive powers fully awake and completely warmed up. *Heroic Money* is hard work but very rewarding.

GIG RYAN ALSO CONTRIBUTES a foreword to Brandl & Schlesinger's elegant edition of John Forbes' posthumous *Collected Poems*, undoubtedly the book of the year but a book that doesn't add a great deal of new material to the John Forbes corpus, despite including more than fifty pages of poems not included in the existing books of poetry. Its great virtue is simply to collect all the material and arrange it in a way that reflects the time of composition better than do the individual books, and to package the material in a way that makes the presentation of the poetry go some way towards matching its quality. It also has a useful introduction by Don Anderson and a compiler's note by the poet's father. Ryan's foreword makes the important claim that Forbes' poetry contains greater variousness than is usually thought; as she says: "The imagined sameness of tone is in fact sameness of intellect. All Forbes's work is unmistakably intelligent". Presumably the conditions of the Premier's award prevented it being nominated, but it is a book everybody should have.

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Ghostbusting

Fiona Morrison

Teresa Petersen: *The Enigmatic Christina Stead: A Provocative Re-reading* (MUP, $29.95).

THERE IS A CERTAIN unrelenting vigour about Teresa Petersen's re-reading of several of Stead's major works. She has produced a critical study whose mode of "reading against the grain" is both usefully provocative and irritating. Petersen's diagnosis of some of the ambiguities of Stead's portraits of female subjectivity, and statements about femininity and feminism, claims that what one really needs to understand about Stead's writing and life is her closeted homosexuality. Although, or even because, Stead repeatedly claimed in her interviews that heterosexual marriage was a woman's ultimate fulfilment, Petersen argues that her novels demonstrate an absence of positive heterosexual sex or happiness, and explains this life/writing contradiction as homosexual panic. She proceeds to extend this reading of Stead's homosexual panic into a deconstructive unveiling of the spectre of lesbian desire in Stead's texts, and the disruptive challenge it poses to the fiction of unified and "compulsory heterosexuality".

As with most super-theories, this one applies quite well in some instances and not so well in others. Certainly, a thoroughgoing examination of Stead's aggressive homophobia is timely. However, Petersen's reading relies on psychoanalytic frameworks that have not been sufficiently historicised. Her readings do not take account of Stead's commitment to a wide

range of ideas, ideologies and writing practices. In her pursuit of an authentic realism, Stead was also uninterested in a rigorous synthesis of these ideas: an idiosyncratic kind of Marxism coexisted with idiosyncratic views about psychology and about social Darwinism. Consequently, Petersen's statement that "Although the political and the social do intertwine, I suggest her primary concern is the exploration of human emotions emanating from repressed primal sexual urges" means that her readings lack sufficient breadth. To situate gender and sexuality in Stead's novels (or even her life) as prior to – rather than integral with – economics and class, makes Petersen's work provocative rather than genuinely explanatory.

Petersen's reading is based on a strange combination of premises. She deploys an interesting and apposite bundle of poststructural, feminist and queer theory, including Terry Castle, Eve Sedgewick, Luce Irigaray, and Deleuze and Guattari. Petersen is certainly astute in seeing Deleuze and Guattari's revolutionary politics of desire as useful for analysing Stead, who also saw bourgeois capitalist family life as deforming desire, subjectivity and creativity. The struggle between the individual and larger socio-economic structures, and the renegade or outside position often taken up by the individual, was very much Stead's terrain. The 'anti-oedipal', or constitutive outside of norms of Freudian psychoanalysis and bourgeois capitalism, articulates this position in an interesting way.

However, Petersen combines her deployment of these poststructuralists with the rather less current idea that the writer's life is the ground for understanding their writing. She accepts Stead's late statement that she did not need to write an account of her life since it could be found in her fiction, and goes on to use the novel as biographical material to substantiate her queer readings of Stead's texts. When Petersen discovers spectral lesbian desire in Stead's seemingly heterosexual characters, she therefore discovers lesbian desire in Stead herself because "Stead recreated herself through her characters" and displaced her desire onto them. This kind of argument seems ultimately circular, moving as it does between poststructuralism, an inadequate theorisation of the genre of autobiography and an investment in the author as enigmatic source of textual explanation. Petersen's reflective theory of art is the major flaw of her argument, as it was for Hazel Rowley's biography from which it takes many of its cues.

Petersen's provocations enlarged my reading of *The Beauties and Furies*, *Letty Fox* and *Cotter's England*. Her work on *The Beauties and Furies* offers interesting commentaries on homoerotic triangulation and homosocial rivalry, and allowed me to see Stead's Paris as a potential site of a kind of queer modernism. Petersen's work on *Letty Fox* also offers interesting and challenging analysis. In *Cotter's England,* Nellie Cotter, Stead's most 'explicit' lesbian figure, is usefully read by Petersen as a threat to heteronormativity, but we must also read her as a figure of decadence; the decadence that Marxists associated with bohemia. Stead situates Nellie's incestuous relations and lesbianism as modes of perversion consonant with the destructiveness and corruptions of bohemia, in particular a kind of left-wing post-McCarthy bohemia unrelentingly portrayed as a site of betrayal and belatedness; non-viable, unnatural and perverted. I had hoped that Petersen's work on Nellie Cotter would extend into her work on *I'm Dying Laughing,* but her short chapter on this important text demonstrates her general lack of engagement with genre, mode, nationality, political affiliation and literary markets.

Petersen's reading of the imperceptible lesbian in *For Love Alone* is more frustrating and less helpful. Following her assumption that Stead's autobiographical texts offer transparent representations of her life, Petersen suggests that if Teresa had been written as openly lesbian, "the consequences of Stead's own subjectivity would have been catastrophic". Petersen discounts that Stead had an ironic position on Teresa or any other of her potentially lesbian characters, and Teresa's narcissism, masochism and autoeroticism are thereby robbed of their critical impact. The idea that Teresa suffers because she is closeted disallows the complexity of the expatriate woman writer's dilemma about potential markets, readers and creative interlocutors. Teresa's desire is not only potentially for women; it is multiple, narcissistic, impossible and constantly mobilising. Stead's textual desire was for perpetual desire (she constantly desires 'passion'), rather than for the consummations and arrivals of heterosexual love. I believe that this, as much as the displacements and projections of same-sex desire, accounts for the lack of dissection of the night of love, and the lack of heterosexual 'happiness' as such (which is surely cliched in any case). It was the chaotic energy and unsynthesised strife and struggle that interested Stead, as well as class, capital and rhetorical power, as the portrait of Jonathon Crow suggests.

Stead was interested in power, in 'passion', in rhetoric, in politics and in the acquisition and loss of capital. She was fascinated by the deforming effects of bourgeois capitalism, and this is where she placed her formulations of gendered subjectivity. She seemed to see lesbianism as a fascinatingly renegade kind of desire, but also as an aggressive and predatory deformation of female desire within patriarchal capitalism which needed naming and regulation. Petersen's citation of Agnes IX – "I think lesbianism is a disease that springs from the inequality between the sexes" – supports the idea that Stead might have seen lesbianism as a species of the economic inequality that must be solved before gender equality could be tackled. Of course, this in no way ameliorates or dilutes Stead's homophobia, and although I thought Petersen might have used postcolonial theories of history, class and nation to more explicitly situate her commitment to psychoanalysis, her queer reading of Stead's work has had the excellent effect of consistently addressing this homophobia and thereby inviting a reconsideration of desire and subjectivity in some of her most significant and difficult works.

Fiona Morrison completed her doctoral dissertation on Australian expatriate women writers at the University of Sydney. She teaches literature, media and cultural studies at a number of universities in Sydney.

Unsurpassed warmth

Laurie Hergenhan

Jill Roe & Margaret Bettison: *A Gregarious Culture: Topical Writings of Miles Franklin* (UQP, $29.95).

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND ONE was a good year for Australian literature – Eleanor Dark, Xavier Herbert, Kenneth Slessor and P.R. Stephensen were born. Publications included A.G. Stephens' *The Bulletin Story Book*, Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, and Henry Lawson's *Joe Wilson and his Mates* – often regarded as his finest collection. Franklin's name has survived mainly because of this first work, assisted later by the film and also by the Miles Franklin Prize exemplifying her generous commitment to Australian culture.

It was Lawson who encouraged the publication of the book of the unknown 16-year-old. In a preface he praised its authentic picture of the bush, but in a now infamous remark affected to be less sure of "its girlish elements". He may have meant the depiction of strong and even confused feelings, the main source of the book's power, but feelings he and other male authors could not face openly. One remembers Lawson for his sensitivity to the sadness of life, especially broken dreams evoked by delicate suggestion. Barbara Baynton, whose *Bush Studies* was published the next year, confronted readers with terrors for women that Lawson – or Franklin – could never confront, possibly because of social restraints. She worked through high-voltage detail rather than interiority.

My Brilliant Career's success owes much to the use of the autobiographical novel with its scope for diary-like immediacy together with freedom of invention. It is not, as some readers thought, a transcription of a 'real' life – rather an Australian descendant of *Jane Eyre*, without the Gothic and the romance ending, but sharing something of its ringing commitment to feminine freedom. Like Sybylla, Jane combines uncertainty – the under-side of Victorian certitude – with strength, but her defiant cry, "I care for myself", is a bedrock Sybylla has not yet reached. She is a modern figure, her problems remaining unsolved.

A Gregarious Culture: Topical Writings of Miles Franklin introduces new perspectives on the many-sided Franklin's career by collecting a selection of her journalistic essays for the first time. The quirky words of the title, typical of the way she tossed off lively phrases, appears in a letter to K.S. Prichard. It summons up the spirit of communality, a goal of Franklin's cultural mission, and the sociable, active side of her own nature often also displayed in her many magnificent letters. "As good as a yarn with you", she once described correspondence. Her friends were her 'congenials', a term used by Roe for the selected letters.

A Gregarious Culture can be usefully discussed in the context of a celebratory symposium on *My Brilliant Career* organised by Roe of Macquarie University and the Friends of the Public Library of NSW at the library in May last year. About one hundred people attended, a sprinkling of academics, and 'friends' of her life and work from Sydney, Goulburn and beyond. Perhaps Miles's spirit was there, benevolent but impish, overlooking the gregariousness of the occasion. There was critical detachment yes, but also the bonding warmth of admiration.

The symposium began by placing the young Franklin in her times around the 1890s, her bush background, at Brindabella, near Goulburn, her family, and a profile of 'the Australian girl' of her time. *A Gregarious Culture* opens with her first publication, an account of a local school picnic in the *Goulburn Evening Penny Post*. Local journalism was important for writers of the day, both as means of publication and source of reading. It was to the editor of the *Post* (by the way, serialiser of the famous book by Henry George) that Franklin first showed the manuscript of *My Brilliant Career*. Her teacher, Mae Gillespie, had shown him her pupil's 'first fruits'.

Franklin is so much associated with Australian nationalism and localism that it may come as a surprise to learn that she was early a world traveller, spending over nine years in Chicago, 1906–15, as secretary to the National Women's Trade Union League and contributor to its journal, *Life and Labour*. (She reported first-hand on the San Francisco earthquake on the way over.) During the Great War and after, she moved to London, her wartime dispatches being selectively reprinted here along with American writings. The dispatches "have been forgotten in the marginalisation of Australian women, except nurses, and also in the lack of attention to liberal feminism and its international networks". Franklin was anti-war but she detested armchair warriors too. "She preferred to be in things." So she busied herself helping with feminist projects in London and writing about them, for example, the babies' kits of 1916. One of her pieces from her war work, however, written "on active service, somewhere in the Balkans" is included. She quotes a poem slipped into the toe of a pair of socks sent from Australia: "From shop to shop we chase for wool/to make your knitted hose, /Then choose one colour for the legs,/Another for the toes"; she added that the sender "little dreamt that I would be wearing them in a tent in Macedonia in 1917 . . . *Mais, c'est la guerre*".

Franklin returned to Australia in 1932 to become "something of a national icon". Her topical writings – and talks – increased, and she concentrated now on Australian literature and culture. In the 1930s and postwar she saw that an independent culture, fundamental to the development of the nation, was "threatened with extinction". (Speakers at the symposium naturally discussed her feminism and radicalism.) The pieces collected in *A Gregarious Culture* bring these qualities to life. Unlike some prescriptive nationalists she realised that literature cannot be forced, but it must be free; it can be fostered, for it is a process:

> The great world crisis must affect the prospects of our literature [which so far] is always in a state of becoming . . . [It] is threatened by restrictions of transport which make the world all one: threatened by what machinery can do. Our publishers are in a panic . . .

"Big Business" was another problem; it has great powers of exploiting literature, but it cannot write it. Australia has been chosen by overseas publishers as a "dump", but "there are other possibilities".

What makes Franklin's topical writings so effective in countering such arguments – that we are still hearing – is her spirited and steadfast stand and the pleasure of her prose. It is direct, clear-eyed and enlivened by wit and humour; the devil in her, or the larrikin – as there was in Sybylla – is emphasised by her colloquial flourishes, for "the time has come to do our own debunking". In debunking the view of Professor Cowling (she called him 'Yowling' in her letters) that Australian literature was not possible, she quipped: "First he showed that it couldn't, and now asseverates that it isn't – hypothesis irrefutable, solution conclusive." Ignoring the "dismissals of literrrarrrrrrry geniasses or pundits of whatever overseas authority [the 'ignoramusssssssees'], writers who don't flock to the London market must continue to relate their literature to their parish, their parish to their continent, their continent to the universe . . . [free from] outside dictations or subtler compulsions". Thea Astley and David Malouf, among others, have spoken similarly. Franklin was not easily put off. If "'Australians are dull and uninteresting', that need not deter us . . . Banality could be a big theme for a big mind". Franklin felt the 'urgency of self-determination' and this gives muscle to her writing.

If Franklin "preferred to be in things", she knew

how to get her readers involved in them too. Her 'gregariousness' is catching. I can think of other Australian writing I can read with even more admiration, but her warmth is unsurpassed and I cannot think of any other I would rather have met. As her editors put it: "in her lifelong mission for cultural autonomy and authenticity . . . it seems she remained optimistic. Certainly she never gave up hope."

Laurie Hergenhan has recently edited, with Frances De Groen, Letters of Xavier Herbert (UQP).

Missing the 'C' word

Mischa Merz

Chris Masters: *Not For Publication* (ABC Books, $24.95).
Jane Mills: *The Money Shot: Cinema, Sin and Censorship* (Pluto Press, $32.95).

CHRIS MASTERS' *Not For Publication* stands as a counter to that fanciful journalistic notion of objectivity – a perpetually unattainable Holy Grail. Masters' preference is for balance over more nebulous notions like objective truth. And it's often the case too that stories are more vivid and more satisfying with the reporter in the thick of things explaining his motives, confessing his uncertainties and his ambivalence about the subjects. And this is what makes *Not For Publication* work so well. There should be more of it. The danger is that not all reporters are Chris Masters, and the likelihood of giant egos overwhelming a good, juicy story is probably quite high. This man knows when to pull back and let the story speak for itself.

Masters works for the ABC's 'Four Corners', a privileged job in the communications business where journalists are given time, and editorial standards are supported. Usually he's further from the subject matter than he is in this compelling collection of unbroadcast stories.

While *Not For Publication* is a breath of fresh air on one level for an industry that isn't known for its musing and reflection, on another level it's depressing, because even if your average hack started to think more about how they did the job there's not much chance of changing things. The celebrity swamp that is modern media, commercially bundled and orchestrated, renders most reporters mere cogs in a marketing machine. Public interest digging is something most have long since given up dreaming about.

It's clear, though, that what Masters does best is tell a good story well. He's thorough, meticulous and obviously can't stand waste, hence this collection of material that never made it to air, presented as a hybrid of fact and fiction, but nonetheless, outside any known genre. They are mostly disguised tales from the urban underbelly, a place Masters knows all too well. Here too he has a chance to discuss the litigation orgy that followed his report on Queensland police corruption, 'The Moonlight State', which in turn prompted the Fitzgerald Royal Commission. He uses his ten gruelling years as a 'professional defendant' as a compelling argument against defamation laws that only frustrate good investigative reporting and protect the rich.

"The laws have turned our media into both coward and bully. Too frightened to go up the big end of town, the media turn on and mug the powerless. We seem free to attack the people who have not the funds to fight back," he writes.

But critique of the industry doesn't swamp the juicier stuff – friendship with a gangster, conversations with a teenage junkie in a shooting gallery, time in the Bosnian conflict and a story with a twist about a bikie gang (move over Hunter S. Thompson) – all what they call in the biz, sexy yarns. Sexy is what tabloid newspaper and TV wants, and Masters shows it doesn't have to preclude serious thinking, balance and even complexity. So why don't we see and read more of it?

Masters lays the responsibility for the status quo as much with the consumer as with the media. Shallow, ill-researched, predictable, exploitative current affairs is exactly what lazy audiences prefer.

"Consumers have the power to demand a better measure of what is important to them," he writes, arguing that the ratings system is a meaningless gauge of quality because it is designed for advertisers not consumers.

Hear, hear! It's probably time to stop shooting the messenger.

The Money Shot, by Jane Mills is a collection of disparate essays on cinema, feminism and linguistics, some more readable and relevant than others.

It too addresses a somewhat tangential theme to Masters's in an examination of cinema censorship. But somehow I think not seeing people eat shit in Passolini's *Salo* comes a poor second to a censored

political corruption story. Call me old fashioned if you like. Banned films, like *Romance*, are never quite as thrilling or confronting as they're cracked up to be and I tend to think humanity doesn't lose much if we can't see other people do weird sexual things to each other. Sure, we should be allowed to make the choice, but what are we really missing out on? We can always order videos from Canberra if we really must see fetishes on display. And then there's the internet.

MILLS, FORMER HEAD of screen studies at the Australian Film and Television School and documentary filmmaker, is a true cinephile. But her defence of Hollywood smacks of that cultural studies tendency to see profound value in mass-market crap. This reverse snobbery doesn't negate the fact that Hollywood films are generally predictable, derivative, over-hyped, unsatisfying and patronising – you don't need to be a bitter and twisted highbrow critic or a cinema studies snob to come to that conclusion.

Hollywood is clearly capable of producing work that is challenging, entertaining and thoughtful. But such a monolithic spin machine hardly needs its righteous defenders.

Mills lets fly at critics who use terms like 'good' and 'bad' regarding these as artificial boundaries that shut out what lies beyond. In many cases, that's not much. "It would be foolish to suggest that all Hollywood movies can be elevated to the giddy heights of critically acclaimed art," she writes. "But is pleasure such a bad thing to demand in cinema? The pleasures that mainstream cinema (almost) guarantees can be very rewarding. After a hard week's work, asking only for a good night out, when faced with a choice between a low budget independent movie and a Hollywood blockbuster, don't most of us opt for the latter?" As Louis B. Mayer famously said: "Include me out".

Mills's critique of the local film industry is more convincing. Stuck in a kind of cinematic adolescence, making 'quirky' childish set pieces with not much of a narrative structure is a reasonable lament about the local product; again, with exceptions (Mills includes *The Boys*, *Chopper*, *Looking for Alibrandi*, *The Dish*, *Head On* and *Wog Boy* in this rather eclectic list). No wonder local audiences are staying away.

"What's lamentably lacking in much Australian cinema is the 'C' word. C as in 'content'. Most films are unimaginative and empty," she writes. A criticism that could also easily be levelled at the great temple of trash that is Hollywood.

Mischa Merz is a Melbourne journalist and author. Her book **Bruising – a journey through gender** *was published in 2000 by Picador.*

A hundred years of Australian Ornithology

John Leonard

Libby Robin: *The Flight of the Emu: 100 Years of Australian Ornithology 1901–2001* (MUP, $69.95, hc).

LIBBY ROBIN'S book could be a rather confusing one for those who don't already know a little of the history of ornithology in Australia. Although the title suggests a book on the general subject of ornithology, in fact *The Flight of the Emu* is largely concerned with the history of the Royal Australasian Ornithologists' Union, which was founded in 1901 and changed its name to Birds Australia in 1996, and which commissioned the work for its one-hundredth anniversary. This confusion is, however, not as damaging to the book as it might have been, as a great deal of the ornithological research that has happened in Australia has been carried out by people who were leading members of the RAOU, or closely connected with it. Also the ongoing story of the RAOU's journal *The Emu* (alluded to in the title), does provide a kind of narrative thread on which to string the necessarily disparate and discrete topics covered in the book.

Once the occasion for the book and motive for its writing are understood, this work can be seen as a very successful undertaking. The various events, movements, topics and debates are narrated succinctly, and the illustrations are numerous and well chosen. Occasionally there is a sense that more could be said, for example, about the Bird Observers' Club of Australia, a body set up in 1905 and still going strong. At times the RAOU and BOCA have been sibling organisations (for a considerable period sharing offices) and at other times rivals. One feels that Robin has been prevented by her brief from dealing in too much detail with BOCA.

Another criticism is that the book is placed far too closely to its subject and does not deal with it in sufficient detachment. Robin does not enter into any kind of social analysis of the events she narrates; it is clear, for example, that when it was set up, the RAOU

was very much an upper-middle-class preserve – the substantial subscriptions (£1 1s in 1917) are an indication of this. In this, Australian ornithology does not differ from its manifestations in the early twentieth century in Britain (where thy differentiated themselves from the aristocracy by watching birds, not shooting them), and the US (where the upper-middle classes similarly differentiated themselves from the gun-worshipping lower-middle classes). What is interesting is that in Australia, ornithology or bird-watching has completely failed to become a widespread middle-class pursuit. For in the UK, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has a huge membership, at one point of over a million people, and has maintained a large membership since the 1970s. In the United States the various Audubon societies have a similarly large membership, and in both countries it is unusual to find a middle-class person who is *not*, in some measure, interested in birds. And yet in Australia, bird-watching has remained an individual eccentricity, and Birds Australia, which, if it had had proportionate success to the RSPB, would have had over a hundred thousand members, in fact has fewer than ten thousand.

In Australia, environmental causes do attract great support; Greenpeace Pacific, for example, has 120,000 members in Australia and New Zealand, and various campaigns over the years have attracted even greater support. It may well be that this is a good thing, and that the cause of the environment is better served by mass, grassroots movements. It is not as if, in the UK, the RSPB is a very radical organisation, and the same could be said of the Audubon societies in the US. At the same time, however, it never does any harm to have organisations that work in different ways towards similar ends; the RSPB is now one of Britain's largest land owners, and if it does little in the way of radical campaigning, at least it has safeguarded some vital natural habitats in a very overcrowded island.

Although reflections like these may have been foreign to Robin's purpose, they might have served her better in her conclusion. For *The Flight of the Emu* ends with a hopeful epilogue which hails Birds Australia's new direction, as the owner of reserves (Gluepot in the SA Mallee, and Newhaven in the NT). Although Birds Australia has been very successful recently in fundraising to acquire these reserves, the long-term management of nature reserves is something quite different from what Birds Australia has ever done before, and many people who know the organisation question whether this is something it can sustain without a considerably greater membership, and greater public support.

John Leonard lives in Canberra and is a keen bird-watcher.

Operation Raymond Hoser

Jude McCulloch

Raymond Hoser: *Victoria Police Corruption 1 & 2* (Kotabi Publications, $29.95 each).

THINK ELROY'S MANIC tabloid *Hush-Hush*, think gonzo and add a dash of Mike Moore of *The Awful Truth* fame, and you're on the way to the lurid rush of 'Australia's most frequently banned author' and the books 'the Victoria Police don't want you to read'. I hate to agree with them but they might have a point. If you value your sanity and suspect your grip on reality could be a tad tenuous, perhaps you should give these titles a miss. On the other hand, maybe Hoser has elevated getting in the face and up the nose of the police, minor functionaries, the judiciary, and a whole host of government agencies to the level of performance art. The books are only part of his project which to date includes a quest for State Parliament, hosting Australia's possibly most defamatory web site, and innumerable court appearances.

The books are full of wild anecdotes. My favourite, and there are a host of gems to choose from, is the battle – detailed over thirty pages – with a certain 'bent bureaucrat' and her offsider, 'little Hitler', which resulted in an injury to the author, documented in a photograph, captioned, "head wound . . . The injury to the author's head after [named] bent bureaucrat went ballistic and attacked him without provocation". The writing has the compelling if queasy quality of the tackiest true crime. Many readers will be deeply shocked and find these chronicles literally incredible. But take it from me; what he writes about the Victoria Police is at least as accurate as what passes for news in the mainstream media, and definitely a lot more fun. Madman or cult hero? Who knows, but no doubt we will hear more from Mr Hoser. 'Remember, you heard it *first* here: off the record, on the Q.T. and *very* Hush-Hush!'

Jude McCulloch lectures in Police Studies at Deakin University.

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IN THIS ISSUE

When they were writing novels together, George Johnston said of his wife: "She is the better writer, I'm the better journalist." But Charmian Clift stalled as a novelist; Johnston didn't. Perhaps, in the end, she wasn't selfish enough.

Martin Flanagan, p.6

Prison was good, in that we didn't have to kill, we didn't have to shoot, we didn't have to blow anyone up. A lot of people like me didn't have anyone visiting the whole time we were in gaol, but it was a lot better than for people in detention now.

Xuan Duong, p.17

The effect of corporate sponsorship on the output of these think tanks is perhaps evident from the fact that, while they have been fierce critics of the 'culture of welfare dependency', they have been remarkably silent on the issue of corporate welfare in Australia.

Damien Cahill, p.22

The government is imposing a regime of 'Quality Assurance' on universities while starving them of funds. On the same principle, hospitals in Britain closed down beds and hired public relations firms to show how well they were working.

Frank Bongiorno, p.58

His lot has been in the district since the beginning, though no-one talks about that in case the *original* landowners are brought up. He's bought a drink or two. He's in fine fettle. The blokes respond to his *bonhomie*, with perhaps a bit too much of the liquid amber — but nothing in the night is, so far, unusual.

Jane Downing, p.47

While public health bodies are stacked with pharmaceutical CEOs looking to expand their markets; while public policy is framed to promote drug company interests; and while information on the extent of serious adverse effects of these drugs is being suppressed by pharmaceutical companies, we feel we cannot trust the State with our little boy's health.

Katherine Wilson, p.82

Not seeing people eat shit in Passolini's *Salo* comes a poor second to a censored political corruption story. Banned films like *Romance* are never quite as thrilling or confronting as they're cracked up to be and humanity doesn't lose much if we can't see other people do weird sexual things to each other. Sure, we should have the choice, but what are we really missing out on?

Mischa Merz, p.106

PRAISE FOR OVERLAND

"The most exciting in its field"
Ross Fitzgerald, *The Australian*

"Uncomfortable food for thought"
Debra Adelaide, *Sydney Morning Herald*

"A blunt challenge to the Australian media"
Fiona Capp, *The Age*

"A journal of variety, ideas, opinion and heart"
Christopher Bantick, *Canberra Times*

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