A Postcard from Perth

Between the long white shore
and the pillaged hills
the haze of roses
in the aching suburbs

Your mother and I
are keeping well, touch wood.
The garden's looking very nice. It seems
to be getting through the summer
all right. Old Abel has finally
passed away, which was a blessed release
all things considered.
Please let's hear
from you soon . . .

westerly

No. 4, December, 1969

Wong Chu and The Queen's Letterbox by courtesy Weekend Mail.
No Ivied Walls, an address at Tom Collins House, 28th September, 1969.
Cover: *Postcard from Perth* by William Grono.
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westerly

a quarterly review

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University of Western Australia Press

FESTIVAL OF PERTH POETRY COMPETITION

The editors of Westerly are pleased to announce that on behalf of the Festival Committee they have awarded the prize of $200.00 to Mr William Grono for his poem "The Way We Live Now."

Over a thousand entries were received, and the poems from which the final selection was made are printed immediately following "The Way We Live Now." Other poems printed in this issue have been selected from entries for the competition.

THE WAY WE LIVE NOW

". . . at the end of the earth
where existence is most easy.
Snow never falls there and no wild storms
disturb the sweetly flowing days;
only the soothing breezes of the West Wind
drift in each day from Ocean, bearing
constant refreshment for the inhabitants . . ."
(*The Odyssey*, Book IV)

1

Here the talk's of flowering annuals,
investments.

Ah, the *richness* of our soil!

Each morning automatic sprinklers bless
all that's governable and nice;
sleek insects fatten on our ceaseless flowers;
glistening motors roam the land.

In our desirable brick-and-tiles
we dream of real estate.

2

Pursued by industrial suburbs—
"the concrete evidence of our progress"—
the bush has fled to the hills. Those hills are alive
with machines, developers, dust. Beyond,
our country lies, wide
and open.

We are, we often feel, living
on the edge of something good.

3

Nothing disturbs us.

Winds from Africa and Indian waves
bear each day to our long white shore
only what we most admire: fashions,
technology, and rich strangers as neat as
beetles who smile at our
simple friendliness.

4

Yes, we like it here.

Sometimes the shrewdest of us find the time,
after the gardening, before television,
sipping beer on enclosed verandahs,
to speculate on the future.

WILLIAM GRONO

LET CANDID SPEECH AT LAST . . . .

In old age I will learn to use my tongue
And all this babble turn to speech at last.

Until then how can I endure a slack mouth?

I brayed incessantly when I was young.
For eight dumb years words lay beyond my reach

The iron clapper swollen up in my mouth.

Hard, fine and passionate, can language glow
Like ice and fire, both luminous and cool

A benediction falling from the mouth?

And yet there seems no guarantee to know
If, in old age, I still can play the fool

Suck a dry socket in an aching mouth.

And all this endless struggle, all the stones
Of words that trip and weigh upon my tongue

May serve me nothing but an old wet mouth.

Perhaps that braying voice from the bones,
The eight dumb years, the wisdom dry and wrung

Will bounce like polished pebbles in my mouth.

What a rag harvest will I pick over then,
The crazy mirror and the splintered eye

Will all reflect an old woman's wailing mouth.

Well, some grow cataracts and some old men
Rage in a tarnished glass until they die.

Let candid speech at last fall from my gaping mouth.

DOROTHY HEWETT

SUMMER POGROM

Spade-bearded Grandfather, squat Lenin
In the snows of Donna Buang.
Your bicycle a wiry crutch, nomadic homburg
Alien, black, correct. Beneath, the curt defiant
Filamented eye. Does it count the dead
Between the Cossack horses' legs in Kovno?

Those dead who sleep in me, me dry
In a garden veiled with myrtle and oleander,
Desert snows that powder memory's track
Scoured by burning winds from eastern rocks,
Flushing the lobes of mind,
Fat white dormant flowrets.

Aggressive under dappled shade, girl in a glove;
Collins street in autumn,
Mirage of clattering crowds: Why don't you speak English?
I don't understand, I *don't understand*!
Sei nicht so ein Dummerchen, nobody cares.
Not for you the upreared hooves of Nikolai,
Eat your icecream, Kleine, *may his soul rot*, these are good days.

Flared candles; the gift of children;
Love, need fulfilled, a name it has to have—how else to feel?
A radiance in the garden, the Electrolux man chats,
Cosy spectre of the afternoon's decay.
My eye his eye, the snows of Kovno cover us.
Is that my son bloodied outside Isaac the Baker's door?

The tepid river's edge, reeds creak, rats' nests fold and quiver,
My feet sink in sand; the children splash and call,
Sleek little satyrs, diamond-eyed, reined to summer's roundabout,
Hiding from me. Must I dig for you,
Agents of my death? The hushed snows are deep,
The dead lie deep in me.

FAY ZWICKY

GIRL IN THE GARDEN

I

AUBADE

I wander in the rising wood
And smell the stirring field
Odour of leaves and summer grasses
Drenched with warm earthy dew
Waking the virgin sense within me
Longing to become
Big with the ripening fulness
Of burning apricot
With floral petticoat haled high
Lacing its fulsome flesh

II

NOCTURNE

Airs from the old stone wall arise
Whispered with dying nasturtiums
Leaves flat as the spread of supine breasts
Flowers raw as the menstrual shock
    Stones from the rivers
    tones from the sea
    Voices of waters
    Antiphonally
Ghost candles with the blue-flames of love
Burn in the house of motherhood
Among a girl's first flowers
All the sea's harvest
As the moon moves
Wreathing her maiden strewments
Rank as weeds in the seedless bed
The bloom of her body unfertilized

III

EARTH-MOTHER

I see the sun with burning heat
Turn to gold the green-eared wheat
I feel the same
Candescent flame
With quickening fires
Touch new desires
In me

My body is a virgin land
As rich as Adam's paradise
My arms reach out their tender vines
Their tendril fingers softly clutch
My lips are deep sea-purple grapes
And in my mouth the wine is pressed
Like ripened fruits
My round full breasts
Await the reaper's hand

Down upon my rolling flank
Blooms fairer than the meadow's grass
The level of my belly lies
The richest plain of earth
And there below
Soft blossoms lace
My maiden place
Beneath the hill of frankincense
Inside the hive my cells are stored
With summer's sweetest honies

O let him come my husbandman
Divining rod endowed
And let him come his yellow hair
with golden pollens crowned

IV

A touch of summer
  in the limb
Summer sweetness
  in the cell
Generating richer sense
  of glutted fulsomeness
And roots that clutch
  at darker soils
Pack deeper fruits
  with flesh

Sun spills in golden cataracts
Windfalls his waterbeams
Starting laughter down the furrows
Wild laughter in the barren cleft
Ministrant with censer ringing
Sunsurpliced wreathing green
Miracles swing and burst

The river slips within the hill
Slides in waves along the grass
And far off fills
The throat of a bird
Singing above the apple boughs
Songs of love and forbidden flowers
Blest as his liquids drop

V

AMORALIST

The lily of the valley spins
Toils of enchantment
Enticing with exquisite scent
Man's unoriginal sin

So comfortably she crooned
Then musingly resumed

Even the mystic heavenly rose
Soon scorns its candid whiteness
Endures a green unripeness
To glow with crimson hips

So silkenly cocooned

VI

IMMORALIST

I can run here and there
Catch time's unribboned hair
And pluck the rosebuds there
Or where I dote
Sow wild oats
With prodigal unreason
Random carelessness I choose
Winsome blandishments refuse
And care
        less for myself in wilfulness
        in this amoral wilderness
        of quick and passing tenderness
        of short-lived love's effete caress
Say what you will, my pet,
(Now that the honey's pilled)
Love's like the soul of man
Lost with his latest breath

VII

IMMACULATE PHOENIX

i

There in the wood
Beneath the trees
Body to naked body pressed
Under the great white folded wings
The shade of a woman
Alive in his limbs
Caught in the ghostly bird's embrace
Christian dove of pagan swan
Divining the dark descent of man
Felt through her moonlit loveliness
A shaft of frozen lightning shiver
And Dionysus planted in her thigh

ii

There in the morning
Out of the ashes
Flame upon candent flame infolded
The shape of a bird mounted in flight
A bird of the snows
Of the virgin places
Buoyed on the wings of a whispered word
Beyond the reaches of the moon
Among the circling stars

DAVID AMBROSE

T. A. G. Hungerford

OVER THE GARDEN WALL

In the middle of the morning, while Victor Ankatell was absent in the city choosing chrysanthemums for his autumn display, a big red Council truck entered his street and crept quietly along it, searching for his house.

The foreman was hunched over the wheel, nodding right and left at the numbers of the houses as they dropped behind; he might have had one of his men do it for him, but he had set ideas about who should, and who should not, ride in the cabin of the truck. The three men of his gang, Ted, Ernie and George, sat in back and played cards with a fierce concentration, quite happy to leave the trail-blazing to the man who was paid to do it—for all they knew of the streets they had passed through, they might have been in Cambodia instead of in this quiet riverside suburb of Perth.

Eventually the truck reached No. 23—Victor Ankatell's place—and stopped, with two of its wheels perceptibly sunk in the neat lawn between the footpath and the roadway. The foreman alighted and looked around him appreciatively at the massed trees which slumbered in the morning sunshine draped like a warm smile over the whole neighbourhood: dense green cedars, dusty, glittering gums, feathery tamarisk and a hundred varieties of ornamental shrubs stitched and starred with blobs of red and yellow, white, pink and purple.

"Hum!" he said, at length, addressing nobody in particular. "One o' these arty-crafty joints. No fence, and the back of the house at the front, facing the street. Don't you love 'em?"

"I'd have it like that, too, if it was mine," said Ted, the senior among the men in the back of the truck. He was a long, hard, defeated thirty-five with a wonderful eagle nose and small, intensely blue eyes so close that a ruler placed between them must have obstructed at least half his vision: he had been a useful, but never outstanding, League footballer in a perennially successful team, and could never figure out where it had all gone—his pictures in the paper in his sexy little black shorts, his engagement and marriage as headline news, the occasional TV appearance, fidgetting and grinning at the fruity compere—all submerged now, as though he had only dreamed it, in the tray of a Council truck. He swept the cards into a pack, put them in his pocket, and stood up. He began to throw the tools—picks, shovels and crowbars—out onto Victor's lawn, where they kicked up little divots of thick turf, rattled and lay still. "If my joint looked out onto the river, instead of onto a ruddy trainline, I'd have the front room overlooking the view," he said, following the tools to the ground. "But when all you see is flaming freight trains going by one end, and milk carts and hearses the other, what's the difference?"

They all looked searchingly at Victor's house and garden in the light of what he had said. A small, pleasant villa, it stood on a narrow strip of land running from the street almost to the edge of the water, which was visible from where they were as a long pennant of blue behind the trees: further down, where it entered the harbour, they could see a black-and-red, fat tug burying its nose busily in the stream between two long lines of freighters. On one side of the house there was a similar small block of land, unbuilt on and covered with fair-sized gums and undergrowth of bracken and spiny wattle, and bearing a white-and-yellow sign indicating that the owner was willing to sell it; on the other side, there was a villa considerably larger than Victor's, freshly painted, with a double garage and an air of well-being in the quiet, sunny, bird-loud morning. It was obviously a well-to-do neighbourhood.

This inspection completed, the other two men now jumped from the back of the truck, like sailors over the side of a stricken vessel, to the green grass seas below. Ernie, the last to land, stood looking at Victor's garden: a fat, middle-aged man with a widening band of dark sweat already marking where his pants belt bit into his soft waist.

"I'll say this for him, Ted," he commented, at length. "He's some gardener, whoever he is—look at them asters. Got a real green thumb."

"Green thumb, my foot," the foreman grunted. "He's got the dough to buy fertilizer—that's what. Most likely got a couple o' gardeners to do the solid yakka, too—they generally have."

"George!" Ernie spoke sharply to the youngest of the group, a thin, brown, stringy youth with a snowy white T-shirt hanging from his bony shoulders and clean, frayed, light-blue jeans hanging perilously several inches below where, on anyone else, the hips would have been; his hair was artistically wind-blown, and he wore guitar-player's sideburns. "Give us a hand with the gear—we'll lug it up to that wall, there."

He motioned with his head toward a curved, grey stone wall which stood beyond the farthest part of the house, beyond what Ted would have called the "front room overlooking the view". Completely surrounded by grass, it appeared to hold nothing at bay and to keep nothing in. If it had only had somewhere about it the small, stiff figure of a soldier with arms reversed, it would have looked not unlike any of the thousands of little war memorials upon which, on Anzac Day, the citizens of countless small country towns hang their wreaths and the excuses for a beer-up.

"That wall," the foreman said, looking at it speculatively, and then, with his eye, tracing an imaginary line back to where they stood: "That wall looks as if it's got to come down." The others brightened up. "The way I see it, the drain's got to go straight from here to the edge of the water, and it's going to go right through that wall."

"Or under?" George offered. He was young, and inexperienced in the ways of Council gangs in citizens' gardens.

"Under, my foot," the foreman said, emphatically. "I bet there's one'a them stone pay-show outfits on the other side, with stone seats, an' this mob sits there after tea while they have a drink, and look out over the water. An' maybe a statue or two. If you think we're burrowing under *that* lot, you got another think coming. We go through it—it's easier in the long run."

"Well—around it, then?" George persisted.

"Around it, did you say?" The foreman was incredulous. "*Around* it—and alter the engineer's specifications? You out of your *mind*?"

"Well . . ." George said, suddenly abashed by the enormity of what he had thoughtlessly suggested. "Well . . . in any case, the Council's got to put it all back if we dig it up, don't they?"

"That's the Council's lookout," the foreman said sombrely. "Give someone a job, anyway. Let's have a look at it."

As they trailed their gear across the lawn toward the wall, George stared about him, puzzled.

"What's up with you?" Ted inquired.

"There's something queer about this joint."

"Queer? How, queer?"

"I dunno. Queer."

"You're queer." "Queer as a two-bob watch!"

"I know what it is," George said, suddenly. "No garage. Fancy a nice joint like this, and no car. They must have the dough for one, Gawd knows."

"His old woman won't let him have one," Ernie said, definitely. "I bet that's it."

"Oh, come off it," the foreman protested. "This Sherlock Holmes stuff . . ."

"No kid," Ernie insisted. "It's what they call the flaming pattern of marriage. I wanted to keep pigeons, once—well, you should have heard my old woman have hysterics when I took a pair home. I finished up giving them to the barmaid down the pub near where we lived at the time. *She* was happy enough to get 'em."

"I suppose she et 'em," the foreman said.

Ernie said nothing, but looked at him sourly.

By this time they had reached the wall, the sturdy, grey stone wall where on most sunny afternoons Victor Ankatell sat looking out over the water to the harbour, to the ships which at some time in their journeyings had touched all the countries which he had once thought he would visit and know. At the bottom of his land, where a shallow ledge of rock overhung the driftwood-and-seaweed no-man's-land of the little beach below, the water of every ocean in the world lapped at the shore of all the countries he had yearned to visit, and yet . . . nowadays it seemed sufficient that he could see the harbour on sunny afternoons, shielded from the wind by the curve of the wall at his back. He wondered, sometimes, that most afternoons now seemed to be sunny; perhaps, he thought, one didn't demand so much of an afternoon now, perhaps when time had become more precious, the little bit of sunshine vouchsafed by even the worst afternoon seemed interminable, a head-buzzing, limb-soaking eternity of warmth in which to watch the ships, the tugs, the white scatter of sail-boats, the lift and wail of gulls . . . the green, mysterious—still mysterious, after so many years!—come and go of the sea.

"I reckon marriage's got to be a fifty-fifty proposition," Ted observed, as he stopped by the wall. He laid a hand on the warm grey stone, but picked it up sharply as a glittering two-inch green lizard which had been basking there flashed past his fingers to the shelter of a cleft in the mortar. "Cheekly little bastard! As I was saying—a fifty-fifty job. You got to give a bit and she's got to give a bit. Otherwise—bingo!"

"I'll say, Bingo!" George breathed fervently. "Can you imagine how some blokes cut their wives up and shove 'em down drains and into incinerators, and things? Cripes—I saw in the Reader's Digest . . ."

"Clap-trap," the foreman said flatly. "All you need is a bit of common sense and you never reach the stage of cutting up and shoving down drains. That's flaming Hollywood stuff. I go along with Ted. A bit of give and take, a bit of common sense, and you jog along until death do you part. Like it says in the service when you get hitched."

The fat man, Ernie, had taken no part in this exchange. He had been picking his nails with a pre-occupied air, and examining with some distaste and bewilderment the narrowing matrimonial corridor along which he had strayed, aimlessly, to the point at which he could contemplate the mental picture of his wife, as he

did now, with no emotion other than indigation at the memory of her demanding voice and extravagant habits.

"The service when you get hitched!" he said, suddenly. "My Gawd!"

He thought about this for a while, his gaze wandering over the long, narrow garden. Only a few feet away, beside an old grey boulder too big to shift, Victor Ankatell had gouged out a shallow fish-pond where one blue lily reared over a raft of pads at the base of a tall, green bullrush. A frog lived there, too, deep-belled in the night, along with several fat golden carp which kissed the underside of the pool's surface lugubriously and engulfed the ants' eggs and larvae which Victor brought from an ant-hill on the vacant lot next door—or had brought, until, noticing one day that as often as he broke into the nest and ravaged the teeming nurseries, the patient, unknowing little creatures rebuilt the walls and restocked the cradles, he got to feeling pity for them—and thereafter fed the carp a patent food from a shop in the city. They didn't seem to notice. Down one side of his land, between it and the house next door, Victor had planted a dense hedge of ti-tree and hibiscus. Between the house and the river shore, he had terraced the gentle slope with natural grey stone, and on the terraces he had made his garden beds. Here, spring through autumn, poppies, marigolds, asters, zinnias and pansies flamed and smoked; stocks and carnations to breath clove scents when he watered them after sundown, Sweet Alice to foam mauve and white out of the rock borders, yellow sunflowers to brazen it out in the hot, dry corners. Now, on this exquisite morning, when flower heads bobbed at the ends of heat-languid stems or stood hot and erect in phallic stalks of salvia and gladiolus, when tiny banded wrens flickered like air-borne mice among the rock borders, and honey-eaters crawled, gossiping liquidly, in the ti-tree and hibiscus hedge, the mingled perfumes of Victor's garden drifted on the warm air to the group of men around his wall, and made them think of things not even remotely related to the ditch they would have to dig in his lawn.

This, Ernie thought, without understanding what he wanted out of life—or even what he might deserve—is what life should be like: sitting around in a garden and not ever worrying about the old woman bending your ear. He heaved a deep sigh.

"It's like you were dreaming, when you get hitched," he said. "You must be asleep, sort of, when it happens, or how could you *let* it happen? My kid says to me a while ago, 'Dad, when you proposed to Mum, did you go down on your knees?' Must'a been reading some trash or other, or flaming TV. I said, 'No, I didn't—but I been on them ever since.' And, by Christ, I have. On my knees, and never likely to get up, either."

"It's a raffle," George said. He left the wall and walked over to the fish pond.

"You'd know," Ted scoffed. "Wait 'til you get married before you go putting your spoke in."

"You don't have to own an orchard to have an occasional feed of fruit," George replied, imperturbably. "That's what it is, though—a raffle. You're just lucky if you get the right ticket." He spat into the pool; little circles spread out over the surface of the dark water, washing gently against the lily-pads, and a jewelled carp with protruding eyes materialised and nosed at the spittle until it disintegrated in a flurry of shining bubbles and disappeared. "You just got to be lucky."

"Lucky, all right," Ernie mourned. "When the flaming ticket costs more than what you're ever likely to get out of the deal!"

The foreman, whose gaze had been moving around the garden, threw them a hard look. His expression indicated that something had gone far enough—either their dalliance around the wall or their loose talk about an institution for which he entertained the greatest respect. He had been married thirty-seven years, and

was a grandfather, many times over, through the activities of four of his five children. If, perhaps, he had almost forgotten the fire, he was still warmed by the lingering glow of the coals, and nothing could ever convince him that thirty-seven years ago, petrified in his best and only blue serge suit and already worrying about where the money would come from, he had done the wrong thing.

"All right," he urged. "We've been here twenty minutes. We'd better strike a blow."

"We're waiting," George observed, cheekily. "What's to do?"

"We won't be able to do much until we get this wall down, and not so much of your flaming lip," the foreman said ponderously. "You begin digging on the other side, George, in the middle. Ernie, you see if you can get the bar in between the blocks—the mortar mightn't be too hard. Ted—while they're doing that, you come with me and we'll mark out the trench." He walked up to the wall and peered over it at the semi-circle of flag-stones and the stone bench around its inner curve. "As I thought—a pay-show. Burrow under *that*!"

Ernie picked up the crowbar he had dropped at the base of the wall. Ted took a rolled tape-measure out of his hip pocket, and George spat once more in the pool before he walked back to the wall. He stopped a foot or two away from it, leaning forward to examine a bronze plaque rivetted to one of the grey stones.

" 'For Genevieve Ankatell'," he read aloud, and the others stopped to listen. "Gen-e-vieve Ankatell. Pretty name, that—like a bell or something." He stopped nearer the plaque. " 'Who loved this garden'. His wife, I guess. He must've had it bad!"

"He must've, all right," Ernie commented. "I c'n just see my old woman putting up a brass plate for me down the pub. 'For Ernie Wilson, Who Loved This Bar.' Gawd Almighty!"

"His wife must be dead, then," the foreman said.

"Or else run off with some bloke," Ernie suggested.

"Or it could've been his dog," George offered. "Some blokes go nutty about their dogs, and put up tombstones for them. In the Reader's Digest . . ."

"Genevieve, for a *dog*," the foreman said scathingly. "Do some work, for Christ's sake—we'll look silly if the engineer comes round and we haven't even started."

He and Ted began to walk toward the truck. George picked up the shovel and Ernie swung his bar back to test the strength of the mortar between the blocks of the wall. He struck a soft spot, and a large piece flaked out. It was as far as they got. A soft, mellow voice halted them, rather like the courting notes of a dove: *Oo-ooo!*, seemingly from the heart of the hibiscus and ti-tree hedge.

Ernie, who was closest, looked directly at the source of the sound. He saw, at the other end of a neatly clipped circular porthole in the hedge, which up to then had escaped their notice, a pleasant, plump face and something of a matronly bosom under what appeared to be a very fancy pinafore.

"It's our little window," the owner of the voice explained. She thrust a well-shaped arm into the aperture and waved it around, in the manner of a magician proving that it is not all done by mirrors. "Mr Ankatell cut it out, and we pass things through—so much easier than walking all the way round." Ernie continued to gaze at her. Halted in mid-action, his bar stuck on the wall and his hand on the bar, he looked like a nicely carved figure on an animated barometer. "You know —like a custard I make him occasionally, or some cakes," the woman explained. "And he passes me flowers. You know."

"Oh," Ernie said. He took his bar from the wall and placed it at his feet.

George, who had barely lifted his shovel at all, now dug its tip into the lawn and rested one foot on it. Ted and the foreman walked back toward them, craning their necks to see who, or what, had been talking to Ernie.

"My name's Hollis," the woman volunteered. "Mrs Hollis." Ernie nodded. "I'm Mr Ankatell's neighbour. I saw you through the side window as I was dusting, and I said to myself: 'Surely they can't be going to pull down old Vic's—Mr Ankatell's—wall?' So I same out to see—I'm his neighbour, after all. Are you?"

"Not on your life," Ernie said. "I live out Dianella."

"No—not are you his neighbor," the woman persisted. "Are you going to pull down the wall?"

"I'm afraid so," the foreman said, elbowing Ernie aside, and peering into the aperture. "Good morning, Missus. Nice morning."

"Lovely," the woman agreed. "But why?"

"Council's putting in a storm drain. From the street to the river."

"But surely you could go *under* it, or *around*?"

"Nuh." The foreman thrust his lower lip over his upper and shook his head slowly. "Pipes cut to certain lengths, and all. You know how it is."

"We'll be extra careful of it," Ted said, gently easing the foreman aside and peering into the aperture. "Good morning, Missis. Seeing it's a sort of memorial to his wife, the Council'll put it back just as it was. Her ashes in it, or something?"

"Good Lord, no!" Mrs Hollis laughed. It was a fetching sound, full of good humour which made both Ernie and the foreman look more carefully in at their end of the aperture. She seemed a very pleasant woman. "It's not telling tales out of school, and it's all over and done with years ago. And in any case, you don't know him." She peered over her shoulder cautiously. "Jenny—Genevieve—that is, Mrs Ankatell, left him."

"What did I tell you?" Ernie said softly to the foreman, and bent again to the aperture. "She wouldn't let him have a car either, would she?" he said, aloud.

"How strange!" Mrs Hollis marvelled. "Did you know them?"

"Nuh—but I know . . ." Ernie stopped himself, and looked at her owlishly for a moment. "I know how it happens," he finished.

"Well—it's not saying anything that wasn't known by everyone," Mrs Hollis confided. "But she was a real tyrant. He was so easy to get on with, one would have thought *he* would have left *her*, but no—she left him. She said she was going on a holiday, one winter and just didn't come back."

"But didn't he try to find her" the foreman demanded.

"When she didn't write for a few days, old Vic—Mr Ankatell—put it in the hands of an inquiry agent, and then the police. They traced her to a hotel in town where she'd stayed one day . . . and that was it."

"No sign at all?" Ernie asked.

"Vanished," Mrs Hollis said succinctly. She hadn't told the story to anyone in a long time. "She had some money of her own, and I think she . . . you know."

George pushed Ernie away from the aperture and peered into it. "But what about the brass plate on the wall?" he demanded. "Good morning, lady. How she loved the garden, and all that junk?"

Mrs Hollis laughed.

"Love the garden? Genevieve? She hated it! Do you know what she did once? It was just before she left, almost as if she'd decided to give him one final dig. She *cut down his prize trees!*"

"Prize trees?" George said. He was still in possession of the aperture.

"His topiary. You know, trimming bushes to look like peacocks and things? Mr Ankatell had been training two of them for three years. Clip, clip, every so often for three years, down at the edge of the land, by the water. They looked pretty, too. They were cypress pines each trimmed into three balls, one on top of the other, with a rooster on top. It looked like a rooster, anyway, although old Vic—Mr Ankatell—said they were emus. Well, one day, she just cut them down

while he was at work, after *all* his clipping. Said they blocked the view from her window."

"Crikey," Ernie said, bending down beside George. "What did 'e do—belt her?"

"Belt her!" the foreman echoed, scandalised. "What sort of talk is that in front of a lady!"

"Maybe she didn't like the clip, clip business all the time," George observed, sagely. "Maybe there was something else she thought he might be doing. How old were they, then?"

Ted pursed his lips sharply at him and edged him out of the way. The foreman put a match to his pipe and sucked on it deeply and noisily. Ernie picked his nails, but at the same time, tried to see through the hedge to the woman on the other side.

"Then why the brass plate, if she was such a dog?" Ted asked.

"Just his way," Mrs Hollis said. "I didn't tell you all of it." She peered over her shoulder again, defying the past to keep what was after all no secret except to those who had not heard it. "It wasn't a year after she'd gone, when the police came—they'd found a woman in the river. It was her—Genevieve. Poor Mr Ankatell had to go and identify her."

"Suicide?" George whispered, edging his face in beside Ted's at the aperture.

"Who knows? The Lord moves in mysterious ways . . ." Mrs Hollis spoke lugubriously enough, but her eyes were sparkling. "Anyway, it was after that that he put up the plaque. I don't know why—he's always tried to interest her in the garden, but she'd laugh at him."

"You've got a nice garden yourself," the foreman remarked. He ignored the aperture. He parted the hedge and looked straight at her. "Your husband do it all himself?"

"I do a little myself, and I have a man in occasionally for the work," Mrs Hollis said, dropping her gaze. "Mr Hollis . . . passed on . . . a few years ago."

"I'm sorry, Missus. I wasn't to know." The foreman, Ernie, Ted and George all studied the grass for a moment. The foreman looked at his watch, ostentatiously. "Well—we were going to start on the wall, but I guess we got time for a billy of tea, first. George, you nip up to the truck and get the billy and the tea and sugar and things." He looked at the woman and nodded in the direction of the river. "Be OK if we light a bit of a fire down there, in the rocks?"

"Why, you'll do no such thing!" she said, warmly. "It'll only take a moment to boil the kettle, and I'll pass it through to you." She waved an arm in the aperture, gaily. "See? Just the thing!"

"Well, if it's not too much trouble, Missus . . ." the foreman said, half-heartedly.

"Not at all!" Mrs Hollis was already moving away from the hedge. "You sit down on the grass—it's been a hot morning."

"Well, thank you very much, Missus—you're a Christian." The foreman waited until he felt their benefactress was out of earshot, and then turned on his fellows. "Not that I notice the heat affecting any of you," he said sourly. "Gawd Almighty—nearly half-past eleven, and not a blow struck. The engineer'd shed his skin if he was to come along, now."

"Ar . . . the engineer," George said, and Ernie grinned sheepishly. Even the dark band of sweat had disappeared from his waistband, and he felt the need to smooth things over.

"You handled that real nice," he complimented the foreman.

"The old dog for the hard road," the foreman observed complacently. "Just like that, we get our morning cup 'a tea made for us—and, if I'm not mistaken, there'll be a cake or something with it." He studied the hole in the hedge for a

minute. "Yeah—a cake, I reckon. You can tell the sandwich type, and the biscuit type. She's a cake. Gawd Almighty . . . the number o' times I've got morning tea . . ." He was silent then, partaking again in memories of morning teas and luncheons he had shared with an army of women whose gardens he had defaced over a quarter of a Council century and more. "So her old man's kicked the bucket?" he said, eventually. "Wonder what happened to him?"

"I suppose she et 'im," Ernie suggested. He was still smarting from the foreman's remark about his pigeons.

"Stranger things've happened," the foreman said, darkly.

"I'll say—like those lady spiders," George said. "I read once, in the Reader's Digest. The she-spider eats him on his wedding night, while they're . . ."

"Clap-trap," the foreman said. He turned again to Ernie. "See—you wouldn't even know she *was* a widow if I hadn't found out for you. As I said—the old dog for the hard road."

"There's someone coming in from the street," George observed softly. "A bloke. It's not the engineer, so it must be this Ankatell cove—the one that owns the joint."

They all turned and watched Victor Ankatell walk across his lawn toward them. At this time, when on a sunny morning he came back from the city and found four strange men grouped around the grey stone wall in his blazing garden, he was nearly seventy years old—thin, but not brittle, sunburned, well dressed, even dapper; upright and alert. More than forty-five years had passed since he had purchased his piece of land overlooking the river, nearly half a century in which he had transformed it, mainly with his own hands and imagination, from a tangled virgin hillside into what he had always wanted. Even at the age of twenty, then a pale youth, quiet, saving, not given much to sport or gaiety, he had known where he would spend his declining years—on this hillside, tending this garden.

Perhaps he should never have married. In any case, he married later than most and disastrously; not to the wrong woman, for they were happy enough at the start, but to the woman with whom things went bitterly wrong for reasons which neither could avoid or overcome—even though one of them, and perhaps both, recognised where the trouble lay. He met her—Genevieve, Jenny—in a curious way. At the time he was nearing thirty-five, was already established, as he had intended to be at that age, as a surveyor, and was making good money by accepting commissions out in the backblocks. As a bachelor, it didn't matter much where he worked, but the money had to be good.

He had spent something like a year in the far western desert, surveying miles and miles of shimmering red mountains and dry watercourses snowy with glittering quartz for a big gold-mining outfit in which, having seen what he saw during the survey, he later invested at a handsome profit. On returning to Perth, fit as a fiddle, bronzed and clear-eyed, a little lonely and perhaps discerning for the first time the very slight difference between living in a tent and seeing practically nobody, and living in a hotel room and knowing nobody of the thousands he saw every day, he fell in love with a voice he heard over the telephone.

Genevieve Mahony, the owner of the voice, worked in the Perth office of the firm for which he had been surveying in the north. The first time he telephoned after his return to the city, and gave his name, she said spontaneously: "Oh—you're the one the boss has been saying such nice things about!" No more, except that she liked the sound of his voice, cultivated, manly, a little lost. He, for his part, had hardly spoken to a woman for nearly twelve months, and her artless praise made her pleasant voice no less pleasant; he thought about her a lot, and found himself in the first few days after their initial encounter wondering what she looked like, and inventing reasons for calling in to the office, although he had

already officially severed his connection with it. After that, it was a short step to meeting, and outings, and to wishing himself into love.

Miss Mahony, although fifteen years younger, perceived much more clearly than he the path along which they were heading. Even after he had made a number of visits to the small apartment which she shared with her friend—she never took him home to the rookery in which she had been raised in a noisesome street at the eastern end of the city, saying her family lived in the south of the State and had cut her off for coming to the city—she felt that she should not go on with the affair: it was as if a hundred generations of her bog-dwelling Irish ancestors cried out in her blood a warning of shaky ground ahead. Even after they had become engaged, and he had taken her many times to the hillside overlooking the river and the harbour, and had lovingly described to her the house and garden which one day would replace the tangled little wilderness in which they ate a picnic lunch and gathered an armful of blue hovea and wattle, she still felt uneasy.

"He's so keen on *gardening*," she confided in her friend over a cup of morning tea in the little cafe they frequented. "I can take care of that, of course . . . *after*. But living right out there, with nobody around, and hardly a road, even. Alone with him!"

"Alone? With *him?*" the friend had demanded incredulously. She would have changed places at the drop of a hat. "In any case—are you crazy? D'you know what you'd pay for a block, there, with a river view? Inside ten years you'll be living right in among the nobs!"

And that was the fatal argument. Genevieve Mahony, ambitious middle-peg of a swarming Irish Catholic family whose breadwinner worked on the wharves at Fremantle and came to table in a sweaty grey flannel undershirt, had left school at fourteen and had worked for her living ever since. With such a background, and the future it almost automatically portended, it would have been madness to pass up a chance to become a nob—a well-loved, married nob, at that—and to live among other nobs in a posh suburb: and Miss Mahony was not mad.

Victor Ankatell married her just five months after he met her. Just fifteen years after he married her, he murdered her—quietly and without brutality, without her even knowing that he intended it. Indeed, the day before she died, he brought her a string of small but beautifuly matched pearls, and she died with them around her throat, not yet used to the thrilling feel of their texture against her skin.

For several reasons, although a little surprised that his sleeve should be tugged so soon, Death had begun to wait for Genevieve only a few years after her wedding—to be exact, when her marriage first began to drift in among the white waters of disaster. In the first place, she had been fooled by a meld of her own instincts, and things she had read in the sort of journals she would read, and the advice of her room-mate who actually knew less than she herself, into believing that she would be able to interpose her body between the world and Victor Ankatell, and make him forget what it had shut from view. From the first she was quite unable to comprehend the attitude of her shy, almost middle-aged husband, who knew far more about theodolites than he did about women, and who regarded as something of a favour on her part what she wanted to give him freely and even wantonly, and to give, and give, and give. Moreover, Victor Ankatell—although he grew in time quite to like his father-in-law, and would clandestinely meet him in the city and buy him beer—never quite got over the shock of being confronted not a year after his marriage by a sweaty, garrulous old man who stood at his front door and swore that he had come to visit the daughter he had not seen since her wedding day and long before, and him living only just across the river, so to speak, although not in such style as he'd freely admit.

Things might have been different if Genevieve had been able then to accept her family, for Victor Ankatell was no snob; but whatever magnanimity or cunning it demanded was far beyond her. Neither, when her husband suggested visiting Hong Kong, or Japan, or Japan, Singapore, Fiji or Honolulu—any of the places he had dreamed of when on desert nights the dingo's lonely howl had driven his thoughts to the seas and the stars and beyond—could she permit herself to accompany him or him to travel without her, thinking that if she cut him off from the world he wanted he would make his world where she wanted it—at her side.

Poor, silly Jenny, who had so many chances: her worst defeat was in her failure to make good her boast to wean him away from his love of gardening. When that came to nothing, she took to attacking him through his greatest pleasure—a rose bush crushed here, a shrub stripped there, a fern that disappeared from the greenhouse . . . and all put down to a stray dog, or a storm, or to the bright-eyed marauding possums from the trees on the vacant lot next door: when all the time he knew who had done it, and she knew that he knew, and he knew that she knew that he knew.

In time, Victor Ankatell, now desperately absorbed in what had once been only a delightful past-time, came to the point reached sooner or later by most enthusiastic gardeners with too little land—that at which he found it difficult to improve his garden further. It was then that he planted two cypress pines near the edge of his land overlooking the river and began painstakingly to train them in a shape he copied from a book on topiary—three balls, one on top of the other, each smaller than the other and all surmounted by a peacock. Whether he saw it in this light or not, he had found an anodyne to the growing petulance and eternal complaints of his wife, and perhaps he saw nothing incongruous in his garden's becoming more than ever a release from the situation his gardening had created; but he spent happy hours on sunny Saturday afternoons, when the blue of the river was flecked with the while sails of hundreds of yachts and the cries of the brown swimmers floated up to him from the beach below, in patiently clip, clipping the two trees, tying them and bracing them into shape. He was quite unaware that from her bedroom window his wife watched him desperately as the sunlight glanced over his brown, muscled back, her fingers plucking distractedly at the fabric of the lounge on which she sat.

He came home one evening from the city and found that his trees had been brutally hacked off close to the ground. When for once his wife admitted having done it, saying that they blocked her view from her bedroom window, he felt merely that a rope which had been too tightly stretched for too long had finally snapped. The next day he brought home with him a train ticket to Sydney, at that time four or five days travel, and suggested that since they were getting more and more in each other's hair it might be a wise thing if she were to visit her married sister there. For once, perhaps uneasy at the calm with which he had accepted the massacre of his trees, she agreed to go.

On the following evening he brought home with him a string of small but beautifully matched pearls for her; on the evening following that, the one before her departure for Sydney, when for two whole days they had been more content with each other than at any time in a decade, he methodically crushed a whole bottle of her customary sleeping pills in a glass of warm milk and gave it to her just as she was retiring for the night, saying she would need a good sleep before setting out on her journey. She took it, and drank it, and went to sleep—with her new pearls around her throat because the woman in the house next door, a pretty, kindly busybody too generous to envy her possession of them, had told her that to keep their sheen they must be worn, particularly in bed, and, more particularly, while making love.

He disposed of Genevieve's body during the night, luckily a dark, moonless one in which a cold wind frolicked in off the river, rattling the windows and shouting in the trees. In the morning there remained only the minor indignity of dressing in his wife's clothes to establish her departure from their home by taxi: he was slender, with small feet, and since it was winter, could wear a voluminous overcoat with a large felt hat, and golfing shoes. He took the taxi to a hotel in the city where he booked in for the remainder of the day, vacating it quietly at about the time when the train was due to leave for Kalgoorlie, en route to the Eastern States. In a secluded telephone booth in another hotel, in another part of the city, he shed his wife's coat and hat, stuffed them in the case with the rest of her clothing, and rolled down his trouser legs over the pale silk stockings he was wearing. Then he went home.

In after years, until he forget even that he had murdered the woman who had been his wife, he used to wonder a little at the ease with which it had been accomplished. He even felt a little smug satisfaction that, without much planning and certainly without experience, he had committed what seemed to be the perfect crime so lauded in the interminable detective stories his wife had consumed while lying on the lounge in her bedroom instead of, as he would have wished, working with him in the harmony and beauty of his garden.

On the day when his wife should have arrived in Sydney, almost a week after she had died, he received a telegram from his sister-in-law, demanding to know when, and if, Genevieve *was* to be expected. This he showed, with a nice appearance of reluctance, to Mrs Hollis, the busybody next door, hinting with some skill, which anyway was lost on the silly creature, that he had felt something was amiss before his wife's departure. For nearly two weeks, acting on Mrs Hollis' advice, he employed a private enquiry agent to trace Genevieve. When finally he called in the police, no evidence could be uncovered other than that she had booked in at the hotel, and that she had not boarded the train. Not long after that, he identified as his wife's the body of a woman fortuitously taken from the harbour in a condition which almost defied recognition by anyone, and the matter was closed . . . until, on this sunny forenoon, still exhilarated from the slow, delightful walk from the bus-stop, he was confronted by four men in working clothes standing around the grey stone wall in his garden: the wall he had built to cover the spot where his wife lay buried.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly, from long habit. "My name is Victor Ankatell. I'm the householder. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Good morning, sir," the foreman said. He belonged to a generation, and to that comfortable lower-middle-class section of society so certain of its own standing that it saw no wrong in giving a man the address to which his approach and standard of living entitled him. "Didn't you get a letter from the Council . . . ?"

"No," Victor said, uncertainly. "A letter? What would have it been about?"

"Storm-drain they're putting through, Mr Ankatell," Ted volunteered. He couldn't quite make the "sir", having spent a couple of years in the Citizen Military Forces, where he had been required to accord it to some rather curious cases.

"A storm-drain?" Victor's eyes fled in consternation to the soft green turf at their feet, and then to the glowing beds of flowers beyond the wall.

"It'll be better in the long-run," George comforted him, sensing the drift of his thoughts. "I read in the Reader's Digest that the weather's getting worse all over the world—the atom bomb. More rain and everything—it's best to be prepared."

"Clap-trap," the foreman observed, out of habit.

"But my garden," Victor Ankatell protested. "You won't do much damage, will you?"

"Your wall's got to come down, mate," Ernie said. It never occurred to him to use any other form of address. All men were born equal, although if pressed, he most likely would not have accorded Victor equality with any of them. He pointed at the road, and then straight down the land to the river's edge. "Straight through, she'll go. But we'll put it back for you."

"Through the wall? You'll go *through* the wall?" Victor said. The sun stood still, the trees hushed, the wrens stopped flickering above the garden beds, the slow golden carp sank into the darkness of their pool; in the silence which all of a sudden seemed to enfold them there stole the long, sad mooing of a harbour tug. It was cut off, and the silence was shattered, by the slam of the kitchen door in the house beyond the hedge, and in a moment Mrs Hollis appeared at her end of the aperture, a laden tray in her hands. She stopped short when she saw Victor Ankatell.

"Why, Mr Ankatell—just in time for a cup of tea with us!" She inserted the tray in the aperture, where it rested firmly on a mat of strong close-clipped leafy twigs. She smiled happily. "We're having a little picnic before these hard-working men begin on your wall . . ."

The hard-working men, who had not done a hand's turn all the morning, looked at her appreciatively.

"On my wall . . ." Victor said, uncertainly.

"They told you?" Mrs Holis asked. "A pity, but they'll put it all back. As good as new."

"Better than new, mate," Ernie said. "It'll be done by experts, and damn the taxpayer. Don't you worry."

"They've been admiring your garden," Mrs Hollis said, turning in the direction of the flowers which she could not see through the hedge. "It certainly is a picture."

"I never *saw* such asters," Ernie admitted graciously. "I've grown a few in my time, but I never saw anything like them. What you use, mate—blood-and-bone?"

Victor closed his eyes for a moment. "I suppose you've got to go *through* the wall?" he inquired.

The foreman nodded.

"Never around it?" Victor's voice took on an edge of annoyance. "There's twenty gardens in this street, and mine's the only one with a wall in it, and there's ten feet either side of the wall . . . but your drain's got to go through this garden and this wall?"

"Well, as I was explaining to the lady," the foreman said. He bent a little to peer through the hedge at Mrs Hollis, who met his gaze with a puckered glance of inquiry. *Perhaps you could go* around *it*? her eyes suggested. He shook his head, and straightened up. "The engineers draw their plans, and we stick to them, Mr Ankatell. I'm sorry . . ."

"Forgive me," Victor said. "I see. You must do what you must do." For the first time, he bent to the aperture. "I won't have any tea, thank you, Mrs Hollis. But you go ahead—it'll get cold, otherwise."

He walked past the foreman, who stepped back politely, past Ernie and George and Ted, rounded the end of the wall and sat on the stone ledge on its inner curve. They could just see the top of his head, the white hair, still thick and vigorous, neatly parted and showing healthily sunburned in the part. Ernie stooped, picked up his bar, and gently pressed it into the hole it had made previously between two of the grey blocks.

"You take the tea," Mrs Hollis whispered. "There's a cake, too, if you like —please eat it all, I've got plenty inside." She nodded in the direction of the top

of Victor Ankatell's head. "He's a bit upset, naturally. He'll get over it. Just leave the tray in the window, if you don't mind—I'll pick it up, later."

When she was gone, the foreman pulled the tray through, set it down on Victor Ankatell's lawn, and stared at it absently. A teapot, not small, silver and elegant, as he had feared it might be, but earthenware, large and deep bellied; four china cups and saucers, sugar and milk in sturdy, sensible bowls; spoons,, one knife and a wholesome looking cake with currants and a plain coconut icing. It was all placed sensibly on a plain white kitchen tea-towel with the initials "H.H." embroidered in crimson silk in one corner. Looking down at it, the foreman remembered other morning and afternoon teas which had been passed through and over other hedges and fences, some of them even partaken of on side verandahs. He felt a warm glow of strange affection for the rather silly little woman who had prepared this one—not only because she *had* prepared it, but because in doing so she had obviously had in mind the men for whom it was intended.

"Aitch, aitch," he said, absently. "Told you there'd be a cake, didn't I? The old dog for the hard road, the pup for the pavement. George—get the mugs out of the truck. We don't want to go breaking her cups on her."

"Break the flaming cups?" Ernie protested. "What you think we are? Animals?"

"I think what I think," the foreman retorted darkly. "And I'm taking no chances."

From where he sat, with his back against the warm stone of the wall, Victor Ankatell could see down the whole length of his garden to where a riot of pig's-face water-falled over the ledge above the beach in a blaze of red and pink and yellow and magenta flowers to form a curtain against the entrance to the shallow wave-hollowed caves below. Heaven-only-knows what shenanigans went on there amongst the youngsters who haunted the river's edge all the long summer days and far into the warm nights. Often, from the glassed-in porch where he slept, overlooking the water, Victor saw the glow of their drift-wood fires and heard softly above the lull of the waves the insinuating harmonies of their fireside songs, and at such times he yearned for the solemn young man he had been, who had never taken a girl into a cave by the river and lain with her on the dry, aromatic seaweed to talk about the shape of the world and what the boss said last Wednesday: felt that somehow he had mistaken for a long rehearsal what had actually been the real performance, before the audience of the world; that in any case, he had never been more than a spear-carrier while somebody else won the war, drove the chariot, established the dynasty, discovered the secret river.

It would have surprised him to learn just how much, during those wasted years, he had become not only a sort of trig point but also the object of a great deal of affection among the householders who one by one had sought out the empty spaces on the hillside around his home and there had plastered their swallows' nest cottages above the ever-changing panorama of the river. He was a gentle old man, and had been alone for as long as many of his neighbours had been alive, and for those reasons was pitied a little and envied a little; pitied by those not long married who could not now conceive of a life unsheltered by the ramparts of wife and children, and chickens to tend and dogs making a bedlam in and out of the house; envied by some long-married who sighed for the untramelled bachelor days they thought they remembered. He must have known, or sensed, all of this, yet it failed to make him objectionable, as it does so many old men who regard themselves as oracles merely because they have survived to an age at which most men have achieved some sort of wisdom, anyway . . . or who because they have seen the passage of a war or two—in which they might not even have borne arms—or have surmounted a depression simply because good

times rolled around again, look on themselves as custodians of the secrets of survival and success.

Most of his neighbours knew that he had been married, and some of them remembered his wife—not many of them with affection, for she had been sharp-tongued and withdrawn, and had seldom been seen abroad. But in the minds of all of them he was indelibly associated with his garden and the glowing seasonal parades of colour his green fingers produced in it, and when they thought of him in his garden, it was almost inevitably as a quiet old man relaxing happily in the shelter of a grey stone wall. They had no way of knowing that it was in this spot, warmed by the sun, sung to by the birds, soothed by the sweet scents of his flowers, that he felt closest to the wife who in the twenty years since her death had shed all her faults and had become once more the pretty, petulant, exciting and rather common girl he had married because she had praised him over a telephone: who for twenty years, ever since that dark night of storm when he had placed her there gently with her new pearl necklace still warm and glowing about her throat, had lain under the flagstones on which his feet rested.

Sitting there now, with the many voices of the river and the harbour about him, and behind him the muttered conversation of four Council employees enjoying their morning tea, he thought a little more objectively of what lay beneath his feet, and realised with some surprise that he was indeed a murderer. What was more, he was a murderer about to embark in pursuit of whatever retribution his old act might hold for him in pickle. Beyond the first flicker of amazed surprise which the realisation brought him, the ghost of his old crime did not disturb Victor much. If, as St Paul says, things unseen are eternal, he had by saving her from an inevitable descent into shrewish, lonely, unloved old age, conferred on his unhappy Jenny the best kind of immortality . . . for already, after only twenty years, he knew that people thought a little more kindly of her than ever they had when she was alive, and certainly a lot more kindly than if she had not by her sudden, romantic disappearance brought to their humdrum round that leaven of the unexpected and scandalous which alone enables most of us to face the deadly sameness of the years.

Also, as he thought of it, there crept into his heart a warm old foolish pride that he, unthinking and unplaning, had for so long evaded the logical consequences of an action which would have put most men, either very quickly or in time, either behind bars or under the quicklimed sod.

"I've had a damn good run for my money," he said aloud, and smiled.

Ernie, who had been standing closest to the wall with a large mug of tea in one hand and a piece of cake in the other, lost in thought about life, his wife, pigeons, his marriage, this garden and Mrs Hollis, looked up.

"What's that, mate?" he inquired through the cake, which between thought and word he had transferred to his lips. "You say something?"

Victor Ankatell started. He hadn't realised that he had spoken aloud. "Nothing," he murmured, without turning his head. For a little piece of eternity he looked at his garden, at every rock-edged bed, at the blue lily in the pool, at the hibiscus flowers in the hedge, with their stamens like golden chandeliers, at the green lawn and at the flaming pig's-face still crisp and brave on the mid-day blistering rocks: and then at, and at, and at the blue river. He got up and walked around the rear of the wall. Ernie's crowbar jutted out of it a foot from his eyes. He stared at it strangely.

"Talking to myself," he said slowly, as if reconstructing a broken thought. "An old man's prerogative." He tore his gaze from the bar and walked away from them, saying as he went: "I'll have to go in. You go ahead and do as you must. I've something to do, myself."

"Rummy old bastard, that," Ernie commented, as he disappeared inside the house.

In his cool kitchen Victor Ankatell took a small saucepan from the peg on which hung tidily above the sink. He placed it on the stove, half-filled it with milk from the refrigerator, and lit the gas under it. He moved slowly but purposefully while doing this, as if aware that once he stopped, or faltered in any of the simple necessary actions, he would not have the courage to proceed. Going to the bathroom, he took a bottle of white pills from the cupboard and—just as he had done to another bottle of similar pills on that dark night of storm so long ago, he wet them slightly in the bottom of a glass tumbler and methodically crushed them with the handle of a toothbrush. Back in the kitchen he tested the milk with a finger, poured it into the tumbler, swirled it gently for a moment and turned off the gas. Then in one draught he almost emptied the tumbler, pausing only to swirl the dregs and swallow them too.

For a moment, his breath coming just a little more quickly, he stood staring at the empty glass, clouded now with tiny grains of white. He rinsed it at the sink, placed it upside-down on the draining board, and walked out of the kitchen. He took a long, blissful shower, with the chill just off the water. Then he dried himself carefully, put on a clean pair of cream silk pyjamas, and combed his hair.

Like a bridegroom, he thought, looking at his reflection in the mirror. *Like a bridegroom, going to his bride. Which, of course, I am.*

He turned away from the mirror, walked through the open french windows of his dressing room, and lay down on the bed in the glassed-in porch. The windows were higher than bed level, and, as usually, were opened onto the garden. Before long the expected drowsiness began to steal upon him; he rubbed a finger against a thumb, and found them oversize and clumsy, and although he could still move his feet, they felt heavy, enormous, and miles away from him. From outside the window he could hear, muted and far away, the talk of the four men from the Council over their work. Their words crept into his ears soft-shod, like the distant murmur of a city. He heard and automatically translated whole passages of what they said, but it was of no interest. They were reading from a book on which he had already closed the cover.

Out in the garden, Ernie leaned his bar against the wall with a dull clink, and addressed the foreman.

"Look," he said. "Do we *have* to knock down the wall?"

"I said so," the foreman replied, in his slow, deliberate way.

"We could go around it," Ernie protested. "That poor old cow . . ."

"You're going soft," Ted said.

"Balls," Ernie said, flatly. He paused, trying to fit into words the end result of the ruminations which had been disrupted by Victor's departure a while before. "I dunno . . . you think of all the married couples you know, hating each others' guts and snapping and snarling and belting their kids."

"I'm thinking," the foreman said, and added with unexpected, lugubrious humour: "It's killing me."

"Well," Ernie went on doggedly. "Then you meet an old bloke like this—his old woman leads him a dance and clouts out on him, and does herself in, and *still* he puts up this little brass plate to her, when she didn't even *like* the bloody garden. Gawd almighty! He must have . . ." he considered using the word 'loved', but found that he couldn't fashion it on his lips. "He must have thought the sun shone out of her you-know-what!"

Victor Ankatell's listening mind smiled, but the movement did not reach his lips. *Ernie*, it said. *The man who called us 'mate'. We did think the sun shone out of her you-know-what, too—at first, and then again afterwards. We really did.*

It forgot Ernie, and became obsessed with a humming noise which once it would have connected with the wind as it swept up the harbour, driving the sea-water before it to break in opaque, curl-waves on the rocks at the bottom of his garden: now it was reminded only of how, when Victor Ankatell had been a child, he had sat among the sunflowers at the side of his home and made bubbles with a pipe and a bowl of soapy water given to him by his mother, and how he had watched in wonder as the lovely things he had made floated up, and up, and up, until he could no longer see them against the flat blue of the sky. The bubble it was watching burst on a sudden clang of metal against metal from outside the window, and it fled back, momentarily, from its wanderings—this time to recognise the voice of George, the skinny boy who, until he smiled, looked like some dreadful American crooner.

"I've struck a pipe, boss," George said.

"Hell, no," the foreman growled. "That's all we need."

"It's a gas-pipe, I bet," said Ted. "I bet it comes across from the joint next door, and when they put it in they took it around the edge of the blasted wall. You'll see." He took the shovel from George, who surrendered it without quibble, and working at a furious pace for no reason he could think of, uncovered the pipe to where it turned at the wall's end and apparently continued under the lawn to a meter-box against the side of the house. "Told you so!" he panted, triumphantly.

"Well—what you going to do?" Ernie demanded of the foreman. "Looks like your flaming engineer mate slipped up on this one!"

"Engineer or no engineer, there's no sense running a storm-drain under a gas-pipe," the foreman allowed sourly. "We'll have to take the trench around the flaming wall, after all."

Get up! Victor Ankatell's mind said to the unmoving form on the bed.

"Pity we're not going to dig through the wall," George observed. He winked at Ernie, and raised his eyebrows in the direction of the foreman, already retreating across the lawn toward the truck.

"Oh?" Ernie said, grinning. "Why?"

"Because the old boy's wife never run off at all," George said. He had raised his voice so that the foreman would hear. "He done her in, and buried her—right there!" He patted the top of the wall.

"Go on!" Ernie marvelled.

"Yeah—it's like I read in the Reader's Digest, once, about this bloke, his wife gives him the jim-brits . . ."

"Clap-trap," the foreman remarked dispassionately over his shoulder. "You stop talking rubbish and fill in that hole—or by Christ, I'll sack you myself. I won't wait for the blasted engineer to do it!"

Get up! Victor Ankatell's mind screamed once more, but the body on the bed ignored its command. It had already drowned, softly, in the deep, mysterious—after so many years, still mysterious!—come and go of the sea.

THIS

t
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i
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is a lavatory
people drop
concrete
poems
into it from whence
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HAL COLEBATCH

OF MOCKING SLAVES

I wish some codification of the ends.

How unexpected, this landscape that I dreamed!
Childe Roland has no business here, and yet
I walked amid haggard ruins, and it seemed
hardly a sound
or movement stirred the air.
Burnt tanks aimed guns at a grey, empty sky
and the ground
was tortured, blasted as the moon
or a Ground Zero.
Skeletons fell to dust as I passed by.
Waking, I live in a quiet city,
few problems, am no hero.
Here we seldom think of ash or bones.
Somewhere else, I never pushed
a heavy machine-gun over cobble stones.

Waters and sunlight—these are among my friends.

HAL COLEBATCH

A THOUGHT

If you wake one night in a terrible fright
And see above your head
The green fire eyes and dripping fangs
Of a leopard on your bed,

Be still. Don't shout or scream or fuss.
That's NOT the thing to do!
Perhaps it's lonely and it wants
Merely to mother you.

HAL COLEBATCH

A POETIC GEM

(for William McGonagall)

'Twas in the year 1969
On a day when there was not very much sunshine,
That the Apollo-11 astronauts visited the city of Perth
Where of sophistication there is a dearth.

A speech was made by the Premier, Sir David Brand,
Which indeed was easy to understand.
And to add to the welcome for the astronauts
There was a fly-past by the Royal Australian Air Force.

Also Acting Lord Mayor Harris made a speech to the astronauts,
Who had indeed for a long time been present in many people's thoughts.
And Acting Lord Mayor Harris did not fear his speech did bore,
Despite its sentiments' expression scores of times before.

And the astronauts politely tried to look interested in the speech,
Which seemed by no means the least impressive of their feats.
Indeed it was a nice visit, with little agitation,
Despite the ceremonies' total lack of imagination.

The city of Perth by the diminished Swan River,
Is not really a place for a high-liver,
And indeed when visiting astronauts arrive and scan it,
I am surprised they do not plant a flag, for to claim it as another planet.

HAL COLEBATCH

David Ambrose

THE MAKING OF UNMAN

'It is strange,' she read, 'to be writing to you at all remembering the parts we have played in his life. But death seems to make a truce with old animosities, and really they are no more than girlish jealousies kept alive artificially. So many years have passed over us that it is foolish to feel estranged or bitter now.'

I know you, your dulcet tones, designed to seduce me from my hatred. It's all very well for you to come mincing words of sweetness and forgiveness now that he's dead. You had all the years of his youth, his youthful love, his young and ardent heart before you blighted it with disappointment. I've had all the hardship, the long-suffering and the shame of nursing an invalid—and he never loved me. He said he could never love anyone after you, that he could never entrust his soul to another in the same innocent candid way.

'I often wondered after your marriage if you were happy with him especially when he became famous. It was the change I felt in his poems, how sour he had become about the love he and I shared and the renunciation of his creative life, how he anticipated a future barren and unproductive since love had died and the need to sing along with it. "Winter Leaves" he called them—funny, ironical, I mean, how those leaves made his name for him.'

Yes that's what everyone thinks, that way about him his poems, always writing about love or sex or horrible things about women as though there wasn't anything else to think about—like a pariah picking his sores to stop them from healing.

And how would you feel having things like that said about you—it's all very well his saying always talking about Art being impersonal and refined I know where he got his ideas from. And you'd all think I was wrong but who would sleep with a man, husband or not, if he made public to the whole world that going to bed was like going to the toilet

I use her love like a lavatory
Easing myself when I must

It's disgusting and filth there's no merit whatever in such things. Why did people acclaim that rotten muck and it was all lies too or he wouldn't have kept on asking me, begging me to let him, even crying sometimes that he couldn't go on like this, that two human beings couldn't live together without making love it was unnatural and must harm in some serious unseen way the deepest energies of personality, till it got so involved that I couldn't understand what he was talking about and would just go to bed and ignore him.

'It must have been very gay, the life of social celebrity, feted everywhere you went and the fund of wit Andrew revealed—he was so shy and tongue-tied as a

boy, that is a side of him you have all to yourself, living close to him must have been constant fun.'

Remember his good humour! I never saw it except extended to other people, ready to smile and welcome a friend with genial banter. Otherwise he never talked except to scold or to himself. I was better off as Ruth Leslie than later on as Mrs Unman. I was a favourite with all the boys pretty and easy please in any company. He used to sneer at me for that, a social flutterby, fatwit always abusive.

That's when I first caught him, coming home from a Ball, reading in a chair with his hand in his fly feeling himself. Didn't seem to notice what he was doing or didn't care just went on reading half aloud taking no notice of me as usual. And to think of him as a grown man and people thought he was wonderful—the disgusting pervert.

What do you think you're doing sitting there that's what I asked him. Didn't seem quite to understand resented the interruption—but he blushed when I looked at his lap so accusingly.

Just scratching he said and I laughed in his face.

Then he had his first stroke, vagal inhibition the Doctor called it and warned him to be careful of 'straining at stool' ha ha they love to disguise things with fine names, straining at stool, venting his bowels, passing a motion ha ha ha. What a way to die, highly poetic justice—a shit that's what he was in every way filth dung odure all he wrote was too. Dirt and perversion and they praised his Realism the only reality it ever had relevance to was his own private fantasies indulged orgies of onanism. Never read anything without his squirrel in his hand (that was the only joke he ever made to me when I told him as children we'd been taught to call a man's genitals a squirrel—probably he said because a squirrel is a hairy little animal that hoards nuts) and wrote down his feelings in a note-book afterwards:

Verbal eroticism: Have lost all ability to respond to flesh and Blood organs and desires. The actual sight or vivid remembrance of breasts or bellies or parted thighs has no power to stir me. But a single word, even in perfectly innocent contexts is like conjuring and raises the old devil instantly.

Masturbation: The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
Is lust in action, and till action, lust
Is perjur'd, murderous, bloody full of blame

The perfect description of its syndrome alas. Idleness degenerates to self-abuse, which custom or habitual use transforms into self-laceration. The vicious circle everclosing whirls me towards an abyss of degradation while I irresistibly turn the wheel.

Classical Texts: What a wealth of humane learning the footnotes to old editions of classical authors reveals. How richly one is rewarded by annotations, what insight into the editor's Age and personal tastes. My favourite from the Delphin Ovid:
habilesve papillae]: parvae, rotundae et turgidulae; non flaccidae et pendentes.
How truly, how chastely, and withal how sensuously he has depicted their sylph-like beauty, how finely has he admired them! (in the decent obscurity of a learned tongue.)

And he used to pretend it was something to do with cultural continuity, his legacy from past times and peoples enriching the present, his annuity like some received money to live on. I suppose his imaginary sexual achievements were a heritage from that Delphin Ovid.

'It must be a great comfort to you now to read and remember all the tributes paid to Andrew during his lifetime and also since his death. To know that you have shared all the intimate familiar things an author's public long for in vain must, at least when the shock of his death slowly abates, be a source of strength and courage to you—you have enjoyed the secrets of his thought what Wordsworth said was the mind's internal echo of the imperfect sound. Please don't think I am trying to be literary but thinking as I write somehow snatches of verse do come into my head from the days when Andrew courted me with volumes of other men's poetry, and I almost admit I do still feel a jealousy of your life with him—such music revives in their rhythms.'

Certainly I was right to detest that woman she unfitted Andrew for civilized life with that strain of gypsy in her blood. I suppose she taught him all those revolting practices he tried on me calling them passages of love amatory addresses. I'm glad I kept myself clean and clear of her sluttish ways. Some people would couple like pigs in a sty if they could wallowing and grunting snuffling in each other's bodies like ponds or troughs. You would think they had never been made human at all without any sense of their dignity and the purity of the act. If God had wanted us to copulate that way he would have made us monkeys or flies that fornicate on your dinner-plate buzzing and getting into the gravy.

I think he must have been mad already the last time he asked for it. He was rough and angry too rolling me over savagely and chanting 'and like the beasts he took her from behind' and I said to him why do you think it's called a Behind —it's supposed to be at the back out of sight. Abandon that post-lapsarian prudery, I'm with the devil retro tibi, your fundamentalist!

Stop it! I won't have you making a monkey out of me! and I started to cry but he sprang back with such a wild guffaw of uncontrolled laughter that I was sure he would probably kill me but he just went on laughing and laughing all over the house until I felt it would have been better if he had.

I confessed to the priest how he had treated me and he said I was right that marriage was a sacrament and intercourse a sacramental usage to consummate love in the desire of begetting children. Mine was a chaste vessel for the timely reception of a living soul.

I don't suppose he ever confessed his outrages even though at the last he resorted to his religion again. Shame would prevent him and the humiliation of just saying what he lusted for. And even if he did he deserved his death forgetting the words of the prayers and reciting poems in Latin instead love poems Father said benignly smiling at human weakness

proveniant medii sic mihi saepe dies

'I know it will be hard for you especially at first, but later you will take comfort from the condolences of others even from mine for they are heartfelt and do you great honour by the sincerity of their offering. We all in our own limited ways suffer his loss but this sense only suggests the measureless sorrow you know.

Yours very sincerely
Anthea'

Disingenuous bitch—I'm surprised you didn't ask outright for the letters you wrote to him like that man from his publisher wanted to know if there were any notebooks or correspondence surviving from his early years. O I saw through

his concern for my monetary welfare my security and freedom from executive cares. Any unpublished material of a personal kind would be invaluable now since his passing. Students of literature would lovingly pore over these private pensees eager to discover the three dimensional (or should I have said four—Time is so palpably present in his work) man in his real integrity Indeed what a skeleton-key they would provide for the many cruces and arcana still baffling research in the universities. Though he had accustomed readers to his own linguistic innovations his transpositions of signature there was as it were no handbook or grammar of the language of his mind.

Perhaps . . . but no—if he is a great man (in spite of all I know) if he is great then it is my duty to keep him great, my duty to the world, my duty to him as his widow, and my duty to myself who have to go on living by myself with his name.

I shall keep his name clean for my daughter and son-in-law their children and their children after them. It is little enough to give up the money he promised would be forthcoming for such stuff. I have long been used to giving-up and putting up with things. If they want to believe he was great let them for all I shall only be here a few more years and the final sacrifice will be small.

KANOWNA

Here—where men rushed
to dig for all they were worth;
and died—there remains
the accommodating earth.

LOSS

Day night now, I
hug my grief, my troublesome hunger.

A curtain stirs.
Your absence fills the house with weariness.

I can no longer endure
my bed, books, pictures; their calm regard.

Outside in the garden the dark green of the pine
seeps into the evening.

WILLIAM GRONO

LIKE FOR FROZEN WHITE

white is for you.
this poem begins slowly
moving
sideways against cracked
fingers/or thro locked
circuits.
even stretched the full
length of sky.

cold is the nearest word to this page.

white like lace curtains
in spanish villas
& cold like stone
walls of old english castles.

love is for you.
as in tight circles/or fractional
voices. the cold
white friction
holding to phrases.
first one beat/then two.
like speech is
for meaning &
hating for living.
this cold is for you.

love is the nearest tone to this thought.

travelling north by going
south.
then the
words moving forward . . . .
sky tight like
a drum.
& thin pebbles on the
beaches
the sounds of
falling rain
or whispered sentences.
your voice. does that do anything
for you
? or is it only
this one
?
the faraway sound or
even the loud
whisper of
water
on sand
?

KEN HUDSON

Connie Miller

THE STARS ARE ALWAYS THERE

That first night, curiosity sparked off my interest in him. He walked in with my brother Craig, who is six feet tall with shoulders you can rely on.

It was just after the war and they were still in uniform. Craig big and broad and brown; and this little fellow looking white and fragile, his face half hidden under the khaki peaked cap.

"Glen Ferris", said Craig, "I wrote about him."

I took the outstretched hand. It felt . . . no, not like a woman's, more like a child's. Without the cap I thought he was shorter than I. But we Grants are all big. And apart from me we've all done pretty well. I'd just left the university then: being the only girl I expect I've always had things fairly easy. Anyway, here was my eldest brother Craig enlisted a private and come back a captain.

And this frail boy wth him, a lieutenant! He must, I realised, have possessed some qualities of stamina and grit and endurance: some solid capabilities beneath that childish and almost delicate exterior.

I sat with him on the settee that night and I found I could talk with him easily. We went through books and music and finished up with the stars. Astronomy was Glen's burning interest.

Through Craig, we kept in touch. They were both demobbed: Craig went back into pharmacy and Glen took up his old job with the General Trustees. Before the war he'd been learning to fly; now he joined up with the Aero Club again.

"That's strange," I said, when I heard about the flying.

"Strange?" Glen looked puzzled.

"Your being in the army when you all but had a commercial licence."

"Oh, that. Well, I'd been in the C.M.F. for ages when the war broke out. In the infantry. I just carried on from there."

It seemed even more strange, to me, that anyone who looked like Glen should spend his spare time in such masculine pursuits.

And as if he'd read my thoughts, he said, "I guess I was trying to prove something—maybe to force an issue."

I was bursting with questions, but he went on quickly, "I really like flying best, though. It's fun, especially at night. You get . . ." He paused, and his eyes and face seemed suddenly to harden. Then he smiled cheerfully and I gained the impression he'd pushed something unpleasant away from him. "Night flying is great. You get up there near the stars and you can think. Nothing's ugly, away from the earth. All your troubles seem to dissipate, way up in the dark. You're left with just the stars."

"Troubles?" I laughed.

He held up one hand and his face glowed with eagerness as he waved them away. "You ought to come up some night. I know you'd like it."

By then I was getting a good salary, so I joined the Aero Club too. Glen drove me out to Maylands for the lessons. I'd long since got over the feeling of looking ludicrous that I'd had, being seen with such a squib. As time went on a strong, close friendship developed between us.

He was fine, really. Gentle and kind and warm. He'd had less education than I; but he'd read more widely, and his logic and reasoning were far beyond mine.

One weekend we hired a plane, a Gipsy Moth, and took off for Beverley where I'd first taught. We flew on a slightly curved course so that I could pick out landmarks; on a journey that was far too short. The Helena Valley and the Weir, dwarfed and magical, from four thousand feet. Then Mann's farm and "Spring Dell" and the winding Dale and "Waterhatch"—happiness places to be my creditors forever. Then we were crossing the Great Southern Highway, and the railway, and I felt sick when I saw all the rabbit warrens on the strip. But Glen landed perfectly.

We stayed with Iris and Mick, whose friendship I'd valued since I'd lived in the township, several years earlier. They liked him. We sat round the fire talking and drinking beer till two in the morning.

"He's nice. Are you going to marry him?" Iris asked, when the two men were outside.

"Marry Glen? Me, a Grant? Or haven't you noticed us standing together?"

Iris grinned. "You needn't yell," she said, "it was just a passing thought."

Looking at the back of Glen's white helmet, on the way home, I did a lot of thinking. The journey was completely different this time. The eucalypts furring the hills seemed to have grown; they threw long dark shadows, had become menacing. And Glen had given Iris and Mick a joyride and we were short of petrol. However, just after dusk we reached Maylands quite safely.

From then on, although Glen remained just the same, casual and friendly, I began to count the days to our meetings. I'd have given anything to have felt the same myself. So that when Christmas came I forced myself to go to Rottnest with the girls; we'd had a bungalow there for three years, now.

On New Year's Eve Iris landed in. She'd been in Perth on a buying spree, had visited my home, and had suddenly decided to fly over. I knew, afterwards, that she'd come over just on my account.

Because that night, when the bungalow was seething with bodies, she came back to the problem of me and Glen. It was doctors that year; I think every doctor and student doctor in the place had come to number three. They were on a mission, all insisting that we women were repressed and it was bad for us and what were we going to do about it.

Iris glanced at me then, and said: "Well Denny, what are *you* going to do about Glen?"

What with bottles clinking and everyone in the house yelling, no one heard her except me. Outside, sitting on an empty beer case, I said, "Just what am I supposed to do about him?"

"He'll be here tomorrow," she told me. "He didn't want you to know in case anything went wrong."

"And supposing he doesn't want to be 'worked-on'?"

"In that case, just ask him straight out."

"You're mad. Neither he nor I have ever thought of marriage."

"Don't kid yourself," was all she said.

Glen came next day. We swam at Longreach; out to the reef; and later, for fun, in the Salt Lakes.

At night we walked to the dancing in the restaurant; but we didn't go in, the crowd looked hot and bored. We crossed over to the beach and walked along hand in hand, looking at the stars.

"Denny," he said, "it's peaceful, here with you. I'd like life to stop now, this very minute."

We stood still then, and over the wonder of the island sounds through a great silence, I prayed. That stupid cliche "exquisite pain" kept coming into my mind.

But after a while he added, "Only it wouldn't be fair—to you."

"Glen," I whispered, and I gripped his hand.

He swung round to see me. "Denny," he said, "I know . . . It's impossible, that's all." That queer, hard look that I'd seen the first night came across his face again. "Not me. You must find someone big and splendid like yourself."

Splendid? I wasn't, not then. Telling myself there were millions of other women in the world in my position didn't help. But I lied to him. "No," I said, "you've got it all wrong." I made a sweeping movement with my hand. "Look up there." I expect he knew what I was doing, knew that I lied.

The constellations were clear and low and the Milky Way was a broad bright sash across the black void behind them. "It's all so unutterably lovely, it's . . . it's unbearable." Then I broke down and cried like a kid.

Glen tried to comfort me. "When we get back to the city," he said, "you must come and see my little flat. There's something I must show you. . . . Someone I want you to meet."

I'd never been to Glen's flat, and this had puzzled me, a little. But I'd never imagined anyone else. He'd always seemed so open and sincere about everything. Besides, he'd spent so much time with me. Now I tried to reason it all out and I saw that it could be explained very easily: there was someone who'd been away.

Well, I met him in town one day and he drove me out to where he lived. I expected a bright little flat in a big modern building. I knew it was in the sort of area with big blocks of flats. . . . But his was the odd one out. It was a tiny, three-roomed place in a ramshackle old place half hidden with peppermint trees.

"It suits me," said Glen, unlocking the door, "because of this private entrance."

We entered a modest living room. It had oldfashioned paper on the walls, and —my heart fell—I noticed a pile of fashion magazines on a small table near the door. He'd seen my glance and my cheeks burned when he looked at me.

"Denny," he whispered, and the colour had washed out of his face, "wait here, I won't be long."

After an eternity he came out of the bedroom; and when I'd got over the first shock of indescribable horror, compassion came flooding in. But behind the compassion, tainting it, a sickness remained.

Was this Glen?

He wore white, high-heeled sandals, a belted frock of pale green crepe, and earrings. He'd applied face powder thickly and his mouth was plastered with lipstick. He had a blond, mussed-up wig on his head. There was the mustiness of stale perfume on his clothes . . . I could smell the male sweat of his armpits and it seemed evil.

Dear God, I could hardly breathe!

"Denise," he mumbled, "I couldn't tell you."

"You should have," I whispered. "Oh, you should have." I put my hand on his and had to force myself to keep it there. "I'd have understood," I added, seeing the tears well into his eyes.

"Perhaps it's not," he said, "as bad as you think. It's just that I like to dress in women's clothes."

Without being aware I did it, I had backed away from him.

"Please," he begged. "don't do that. I've been terribly, terribly lonely."

"Someone . . . you said you wanted me to meet someone." But I knew whom he'd meant.

He smiled. You could see the long shape of his mouth, a man's mouth, under the lipstick. "Only me, Glenda. I'm Glenda Ferris now." He moved towards the little gas-stove. "I'll make some coffee."

"No Glen, don't . . . I don't want any." I couldn't have swallowed it.

He smoothed down his wig with a sickening movement. "Don't drop me now, now that you know. Please keep on seeing me."

I didn't drop him. Pity and a sense of duty saw to that. Once he called at our house in a preposterous outfit. Mother didn't recognise him. Once, against all my emotion, I went to a picture show with him, and was terrified all the time. . . But there was nothing I could do about it.

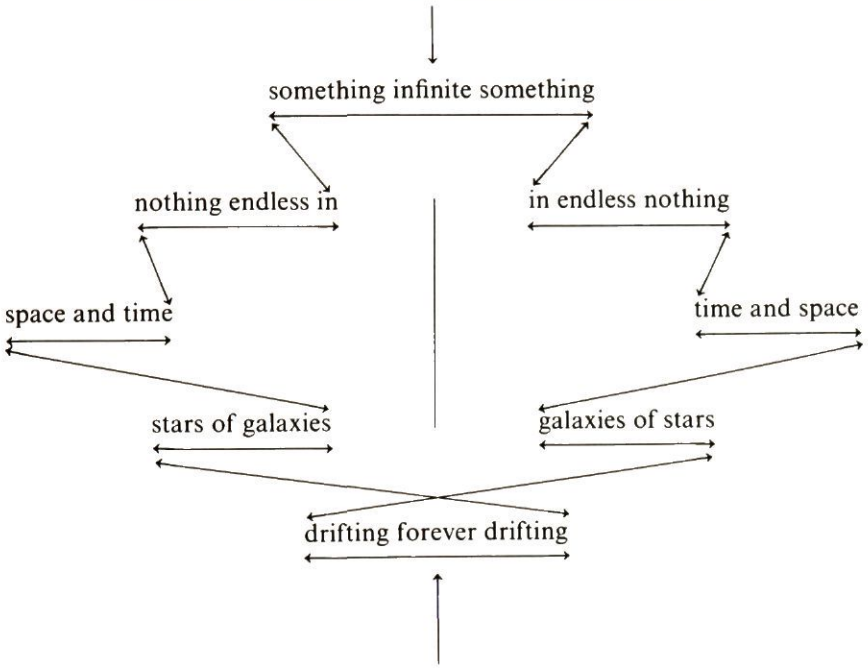
Later he told me he planned to let his hair grow, and leave the state. I was glad, and began to feel more human. When he *did* leave I was so relieved it was like life starting all over again. There was nothing I could do. Sometimes I'd stand at the bedroom window late at night and look at the stars. They would always be there.

Soon, I didn't even do that.

THE UNIVERSE:
LATERAL-RETROGRADE SYMMETRIC

infinite something
in endless nothing
time and space
galaxies of stars
drifting forever drifting
stars of galaxies
space and time
nothing endless in
something infinite

The Universe: lateral-retrograde-rotational symmetric



JOHN POOLE-JOHNSON

Joan Williams

THE PASSENGER FROM ROEBOURNE

Immediate take-off for Roebourne. The instructions would have been a relief if it hadn't been for the cargo. Unpleasant, but impossible to back out. After all, it was what he was paid for—to be on tap for charters. Anyway, work would get his mind off Olga. Typical of her all or nothing attitudes that she had left him so angrily after the showdown. Too long on the beach in the half-world between flights led to a situation getting out of hand. He wasn't ready to settle into anything permanent. But he hadn't expected her to carry out her threat of finding a typing job in one of the construction camps up north—probably full of sex-hungry men who would rush anything in skirts. He had an unexpected twinge of jealousy. If he hadn't got to sleeping with her, this sense of responsibility wouldn't be nagging him.

He removed the back seats from the Cessna and hurried over to Control to fix the flight plan. When he returned, the undertaker's man was waiting in a utility drawn up at the gate to the tarmac. He had prepared himself for the ominous shape, but not for the garishness of the freshly stained boards, the raw timber smell, the hollow noise each bump produced as they manhandled it to the plane, juggling the unwieldly thing inside with the help of a grinning mechanic.

Fastening the safety belt over it, he said: "Well, I don't like the idea of it poking me in the back up there."

"Never mind, it's not your funeral," the mechanic wise-cracked.

Belt up, he wanted to say. I haven't seen a bloody coffin before, let alone the body of a dead man. Bad enough now, while it's empty. Everybody must feel it, the first time. Alone up there for so many hours with that sort of passenger. A man's nerve could crack, just thinking of the things he might be called on to do, things in which you were not initiated because no-one near you had died in your twenty years of existence.

The take-off switched his thoughts away. Lifting easily into a clear sky, he wheeled onto course, heading north, suddenly eager for height, the clean unworried calm of the upper air. He watched the attenuated suburbs draw back like released elastic, felt an intense pleasure looking down on the solitudes of the coast. The vast blue depths that swallowed the foam of breaking seas silently, gnawed the stubborn carcases of wrecked ships, dragged tangled white ribbons of surf to the shore. The same beach where he had sun-baked with Olga. It would be empty back there without her.

Then the box with its weight of questions took over, misgivings about the return journey that eddied like the water lapping over the lizard-green promon-

tories below. Just as well he hadn't had time to get any of the gruesome details, how his passenger had died.

Control's familiar stutter came as a relief, ordering him into a higher corridor. He didn't mind getting out of the way of those treacherous little Vampires on military training flights. He got a weather report, wrote up the log book and watched the landmarks drop away under the prop's sweet and steady drone. Geraldton, a flash of iron roofs and ships herded into shore; then across the plains towards Carnarvon where he would refuel for the hop over the desolate Nor'West shoulder.

Shark Bay stretched treacherous arms across the wide expanses of deeps and shallows, the beds of rivers branching out under the sea like enormous trees fallen from the land. The Gascoyne lying in dull and viscous pools, as if its life-blood had been drained into the plantations that bandaged its banks. A smooth landing, a wallop of hot air. Barely time to relieve himself in the white-washed toilet behind the deserted rest room, while the ground attendant refuelled and no doubt squizzed the cargo.

In the cockpit and starting to taxi before the startled attendant could get his breath to ask questions. Heat peeling off him like a dirty skin as he went up. The most god-awful country in the world, he thought, settling into the monotony of the next five hundred miles. But it got you in, looking down. You didn't need to be a geologist to recognise the agonised convolutions of cooling magmas at the beginning of the world, the ragged jaws of faults standing the country on edge for fifty miles at a time, the iron-fanged mountains, the strange sugar-loafs left behind from some ancient plateau. Not a place to land in an emergency. Only half a dozen strips on the route, one on a deserted station. Christ, was that a tremor in the engine? He listened intently to reassure himself. Showed how jittery you could get if you let your imagination go.

The sun fell like a red-hot ball over the horizon as he neared Roebourne, a green cross on the rusty plain. He turned into the wind and plummeted into the skin-plucking heat of the land. It was an unattended strip, so he rang the police. They would be out in half an hour.

Hungry now, having avoided breakfast and missed out on lunch, he waited impatiently, flicking the dust off his shorts, wiping away dribbles of sweat and feeling the roughness of sprouting stubble.

What was the correct way to behave to the police? Show keen interest in the passenger, or not ask questions? Something all your education couldn't tell you. Better let them make the going, say as little as possible rather than expose the rawness of your nerves. Something he would have to get used to. Bound to be plenty more of these flights as greenhorns poured into the north and the big construction jobs took their toll.

The cops arrived in a station-wagon exploding puff-balls of dust. Both in khaki shorts, the tall one with sergeant's stripes on his sleeve, the other dark as an Abo under curly black hair. Their greeting rasped an exposed nerve.

"Boy, are we glad to see you! Thought we'd never get rid of this stiff." The sergeant shook hands, introducing Curly.

"Leavin' early?" Curly seemed equally anxious.

"First light."

"This one's frozen hard—should last the distance. Plastic bag in the box?"

"Dunno." He tried to be nonchalant. "It's screwed down."

With easy strength they transferred the box to the station wagon. Curly found a screwdriver, prized up the lid and eyed the interior critically.

"H'm, the last one was lead lined."

"Perhaps because it was a rush job . . ." Wondering if it would make things worse.

"Haven't even emptied out the shavings. Don't give a stuff, these fellers."

The sergeant frowned at his offsider and drew a tarpaulin over the coffin. "No need to give the locals any more to talk about. Hop in, we'll drop the box at the hospital first. We'll have everything ready for you in the morning."

"Pretty crook sort of work for you to do. You handle everyone who pegs out here?"

"Hell no. Only aliens—or murders. Got a thriving cemetery—been going since pearling days. The shire buries the locals, thank God."

They drove down the side of the sprawling hospital where an engine throbbed in a small brick outhouse.

"I'll get the key from matron," Sarge said considerately.

While he was away, Curly continued in the same tone. "The way I figure, death is only a part of life. Some of your cells begin to die the day you're born. It's something that comes to all of us, bloody natural, bloody inevitable, so why worry?" As if sensing his greenness. "When your number's up, that's it."

"So long as your number doesn't come up before it's time."

"So long as you've got a perspective on it."

"Makes sense." He must remember this conversation on the return flight, he thought, watching Sarge unlock the door, Curly helping push the box into the dim interior as a wave of cold sour air flowed out.

"We'll take you to the pub. Might be hard to get a bed, place is booming, mobs of tourists."

"My company's got an arrangement . . ."

"Good. We'll show you the police station—you'll have to knock us up in the morning."

He listened politely to their commentary on the town, counting the hours before he could leave. Taking in the landmarks from force of habit—churches, drive-in, anti-cyclone ties on the roofs, straggling poincianas, ruins of the old Jap pearlers' brothel. Native reserve, police station, pub.

By unspoken consent, there was no discussion of the purpose of his visit with the publican. In the rough dining room big wooden fan blades clumped overhead like tired propellors as an obliging waitress brought him food and told him to get his own coffee from the sideboard. Afterwards in the lounge, over a single drink, he watched the procession of oil men, tourists, fishermen, truckies, all easily identifiable, queuing thirstily at the bar. A fat motherly woman beckoned him to a group of locals—must be lonely by yourself, she said. The waitress from the dining room, now out of uniform, joined them.

"Think you'll stick out yer six months love?" the woman asked.

"Have to get our fares paid south, somehow. We took up waitressing when we couldn't get a job as typists," the girl explained to him.

"I thought there were plenty of openings up here." He was wondering how Olga had got her job.

"Only if you apply in Perth. We worked our way across from Sydney through Darwin, like a lot of others. Lucky to make it, the way the roads are."

"Marvellous how they smash themselves up—even on the good roads," said the woman. "A girl rolled on the black top last week—company car she drove in from Tom Price. Went out one night to have a look at Cossack. Musta' died instantly, they said."

"Tough luck." But he needed sleep so badly now that he was only half listening. "Think I'll turn in. Have to take off at first light."

There was only one bed vacant on the verandah, next to a snoring drunk. He took it, hoping it was the one he had been allotted. Despite the drunk, the wheezing fans in the nearby rooms and the whine of mosquitoes, sleep soon engulfed him.

His eyes opened at first light as if from some inbuilt mechanism. The cops were harder to wake, but appeared eventually, reasonably cheerful about the early start. They dropped him at the plane before going to the mortuary.

"We screwed it down—you shouldn't have any trouble," Sarge said, still considerate, when they brought the coffin back.

It took all three of them to lever it into the Cessna with the extra weight of the body making it awkward. He thought he could feel a coldness through the wood.

"As soon as you get back, tell them to ring the coroner—he'll have to give a certificate."

"O.K. Thanks for the help." Locking the door, thinking well, this is it, we're alone now, me and my bloody passenger. We'll have to work it out between ourselves; determining to get up to ten thousand and stay there. This was one stiff that was going to be delivered in the pink.

Feeling the bite of the invisible sun as he taxied along the strip, steadying the craft before unleashing her for take-off. Circling over the sleeping town, he saw the black top and followed it to the coast to have a look at the broken ruins of Cossack, then set a heading, gave Port Hedland a search and rescue time and started to climb. The mile-long ore train crawling out from Tom Price shrank to a blur, spinifex and ghost gums became dark veins outlining buried rivers. Soon there were only the ridged mountains, desolate as another planet.

Soon, as he climbed, the air was as cold as a sword laid across his shoulders. Remembering the passenger, he glanced down uneasily, as if expecting to see something seeping across the floor, some horrible emanation from the box behind him.

He wished now he had found out more about the passenger, how he had been killed, whether he was young or old. A boy no older than himself perhaps, driven north by the urge for adventure; or a chap trying for a quick quid because some girl was prodding him into marriage. Like Olga. He realised suddenly that it was only his own assumption that the body was a male. No-one had actually said so. It could be a woman. Even a girl. Oh God, what had they said at the hotel in that awful hot haze before he went up to bed? A girl smashed up on the road to Cossack. The shadows of memory moved as swiftly as the shadows of the clouds on the earth below. Just her form, a mad moonlight ride out to a ghost town.

He tried to take his mind away from the worming suspicion, forced himself to do a few jobs, entered the log book, got a forecast, welcomed the grey veils of cloud now streaming around him as something tangible to contend with after the mindless blue. When the soft wool had closed around him like a dim grey sarcophagus, he became certain it was Olga. Olga achieving in death the tie he had refused in life. Then he told himself coincidence could not stretch so far, even while watching the doubt swinging in front of his eyes as tangibly as the needle of the balance. Thoughts turning back to that last night, their bodies flowing together in the soft cool air; the milky glow of her skin; caresses that woke every nerve. She had given him more than any other girl; it was just that he couldn't stand the thought of being tied down, trapped on the ground after the careless freedom of the air.

Then he tortured himself with her disfigurement, picturing those long smooth limbs snapped into grotesque and cruel angles, her hair, like honey flowing over his arm when he held her, now matted with blood, suspended with him in this grey and dreadful world.

The clouds broke and the sunlight cut in with sudden awful clarity, as if clearing the way for what he had to do. The torment could only be ended by looking on the face of the passenger. Even if it was the sudden tropic heat, lack

of food, fatigue, that had made him a little mad, he must find out if it was Olga.

Putting the plane's nose down, he scanned the bare and terrible country for a landing place. There were clear patches on the dry river bed, but they were probably sandy and soft enough to bog the crate and tip her over. Then he remembered the strip at the abandoned station. The map showed it only a few miles east of his course. He headed down and after one low pass, feathered the engine for a landing. He felt the flaps curl like obedient fingers, glad that he had come down softly, thinking of Olga. Feverishing searching, he found a screwdriver, undid the safety belt, loosened the screws and lifted the lid. Through the plastic film, the glazed blue eyes of a man gazed back at him, above the abrupt drop where the chest caved in. The poor bastard. But he felt the weight lift from his own heart. Replacing the lid, tightening the screws, he was whistling now. He would have to get onto control quickly or he would be overdue and there would be a devil of a stink. But the cloud had gone, there was little wind and he could make good time.

Airborne again, he radioed Carnarvon, more from the need to talk than anything else. Not that ground staff were chatty, but they didn't mind listening to a fellow.

"I'll want a quick refuel, no mucking around. My passenger mightn't last the distance—I'm taking back a stiff," he said, and laughed.

AWAY

Big and huge vast high blue.

Huge.

Sky.

And far the thin high but not so high rippling
unmonotony of wide mauve hills.

Soft.

And near, the leaping red black brown of tortured
rock.

Hard.

But softened by the flow of round humpy clumps
of green spini-ouch-fex.

And hot.

AWAY. Then back.

From high wide free to clipped tailored distilled and high narrow cramp.

Concrete and wood-tin.

Little blue sky straight up.

BACK.

SCOTT HENDERSON

IN PISSING ALLEY

My house is cramped, there is no space to sit,
My brain is reeling from some ague or fit
Of words, all borrowed, wrapped in cloth
Of flannel to preserve the riddling moth.

Not Twickenham, and yet Pope's madmen scrawl
In excrement around my madhouse wall,
Blake's tiger stalks the thickets of my mind,
I sit at Milton's knees, my sockets blind,
And that impatient, marvellous man, John Donne,
Throws me upon my back beneath the sun
To ravish me here on the self-same bed
Where Lucy, Countess Bedford, laid her head.
Beyond my window Marvell's garden lies,
Ten gentle fingers probing at my eyes,
Hopkin's cliffs of fall and Christ the hawk
Are waiting for me on my morning's walk;
Out there, beneath dark trees, the flit and run,
The muslined shade of Emily Dickinson,
And Lucy's in my garden safely dead,
Yet rocks and stones and trees whirl in my head.

There's nothing for it but to take my stick
Where Lowell rages like a lunatic,
And cast about and exorcise the lot.
God's in his Heaven, Pope is in his Grot,
And Willy Yeats' foot upon the floor,
Gives me the signal, "Up, and bar the door."
I clasp my head against a new despair,
A pause, a cough, a step upon the stair,
And passing through the keyhole, wry and thin,
That spectral man, Tom Eliot, enters in.
Well, warm your ghostly shanks around *my* fire,
No execution equal to desire
Can plague my pen, I abdicate a throne,
And piddle in a gutter of my own.
No need to dig my ribs, of course I know
Great Sappho died three thousand years ago.

In the black mirror shadows pass, repass.
The raging gardener screams, "Keep off the grass".

DOROTHY HEWETT

THE CHILD

When first she came
we were afraid,
for moving she displaced the air,
as if some small glittering shade
had from the fields of heaven strayed,
and circling in her hair,
upon the dull earth gravely played
her magic game.

But since she came
she passes by
so often that we've grown hard;
yet like a dust mote in the eye
her beauty troubles us, her cry
still shakes me: in the empty yard
I tremble that all things must die
and call and call her name.

DOROTHY HEWETT

DON JUAN AT THE RECORD BAR

Glass-pure drops of sound
Hang fresh in the morning air.
Mozart and his death come
Face to face in the
Saturday supermarket.
Put a Requiem under
Your own roof! You idly twirl
The stand, finger speculates
On sideburn styled by Mr Troy.
Will you
Have it in mono? Stereo?
Whatever you decide, we guarantee
Its positively final efficacy.
Look sideways at her long blue-frosted
Eye, alien frieze of narcissistic lust;
Come, you'll play with me, sir?
You strain, and drown.
Your minted heads discuss the tone:
You don't have this on stereo? Shame.
Amadeus rolls his chambermaid
In bed of flame.
Braced,
The Commendatore waits behind the door.

FAY ZWICKY

THE CHOSEN – Kalgoorlie, 1894

I. THE ESCAPE

His father said: Marry her. She's had a hard life—
With you lighter it can't get. She cooks,
Breathes, a little ankle, eyes not bad . . .
What more do you want? For your mother's sake . . .
Her heart won't beat for ever . . . a grandchild, a family!
And he ran away. He ran, from that
Abrasive calico breast, virgin ankle, clumsy
Menial hands, his heart heavy with crimson sunsets.
(O grandmother-mother! Hands that moulded love in me
But passive lay in his impatient palms) Thin,
Spectacled, sixteen, he fled the fatherland across
The Nullarbor. His mother had her heart-attack and Yahweh,
Rhadamanthine Yahweh (blest be He!) galloped
Snorting after the little puffer. The bobtails blinked,
Smiling among grey stones to see
God go off His Head.

II. RETRIBUTION PLOTTED

And Yahweh the Extravagant,
Prodigal Yahweh swore revenge,
Stamped in a desert way off His patch:
A Desert-Dweller all My life!
Don't they know of Me? The trumpet-tones
Shatter on flat stones; ant-hills heave,
Turn over in a dreamless sleep:
My Chosen do not stray far! My Ways are wondrous,
Perilous; I am the One (no other shalt thou have)
Who does the choosing here!
Braying maniac, brewing cataclysms.
Antediluvian mouths yawn
Under the unshriven sun.

III. THE PLAGUE

They handed him a key:
This is your house. A sagging box,
Smoke-licked pane webbed by
Sleepy crab-spiders.
He had read in the old country,
Talmud-ridden fly, 'In hot climates, Spiders
Are able to produce a certain amount of
Local pain.' His skin bristled with small spiked crowns.

Pain's antidote in a peeled tub—a pink geranium,
Stationmaster's ward, barren season's suckling.
Weekly, his charge gnawed the track
To the flat horizon, covered a hemisphere in his
Kindled sight, gabbling caterpillar.
But came the Day of the Scorpion;
Clanking, thundering scales, buckling linkages,
From its final poisoned segment descended Yahweh,
Mighty polyphemal ruby eye searing spider, flower
And stripling stationmaster, belching plague
Through flared nostrils, scattering dybbuks through the land.
I CHOOSE; HEIR TO ASHES! Squeaking demons metal-winged
Buzz and swoop, pegged within the confines of His breath.
Ten days he lay reflected in his death,
His bowels curled limp beside his shoes.
Next train his grieving father brought him home.

IV. RETRIBUTION ACHIEVED

She said: This is the station key.
Your grandfather watched trains as a young man.
I waited.

FAY ZWICKY

Tom Hungerford

WONG CHU AND THE QUEEN'S LETTERBOX

You mightn't think there'd be a very strong connection between an old Chinese market gardener and a pillarbox owned by the Queen of England—but there was: A long and intimate, and in many ways a romantic one, too.

Both the pillarbox and the Chinaman first knew South Perth as a rushy riverside retreat of cow-paddocks and market gardens and bush, where the settlers along the river's bank had their own jetties and flat-bottomed boats for travelling to and from Perth, and horses leaned thoughtfully over every second fence along the one main road through the suburb.

Both were associated, for nearly an entire biblical lifetime, in the same quiet little coign of it; saw it grow, saw gravel give way to bitumen and roadside trees to electric light poles, saw the bun give way to the bingle and the bingle to the wig, the cart to the car and the backyard grapevine to the telephone. Both became so much a part of it as not to be missed until they departed, which they did within a few months of each other.

The pillarbox used to stand on the corner of Suburban Road and River Street —now Mill Point Road and Douglas Avenue—where youngsters who are now grandparents used to turn down, still munching on the morning toast, to take the ferry to town and their first jobs.

I don't know when it was put there, but it bore a florrid "VR" and the date 1857, so it might well have begun its long office only about 30 years after the first settlers ventured up the swan-haunted river.

A solid single-towered little castle of reaction, it was in some ways not unlike the dumpy queen-empress who owned it, and under the shield of whose power it took delivery of letters to be sent all over a world which then existed almost solely as an appendage to her Empire.

It was six-sided, about five feet high, and it was painted that wonderful imperial shade of red common to pillarboxes, fire brigades and the jackets of Guardsmen. On top it had a Germanic sort of spike like the one which used to surmount the Kaiser's helmet—perhaps not as sharp, but sufficiently so to make the box completely unsatisfactory for sitting on top of . . . I know, because I used to try, and so did several generations of South Perth children before and after me. Thinking about it inevitably brings back the childhood it presided over, a period now as remote and strange and in a way as unbelievable as life on a quasar.

Mill Point Road was then a ribbon of red gravel flanked by twin ribbons of deep, red dust between a double line of the loveliest treees . . . planes and kurrajongs, gums and cape lilacs, lillipillis from which, on the way home from

school, we stoned the tiny, tart "Chinese apples", moreton bay figs trimmed meticulously to the shape of opened umbrellas that, nevertheless, kept out far less rain than the straggly old gums.

It was the spine of a suburb which then didn't stretch as far as Fremantle Road—there was still a lot of almost virgin bush even beyond Angelo Street. Our home was on it, and most of my childhood centred between that home and "the shops" where the pillarbox was—Mr Rogers the butcher and Mr Faddy the grocer and post office; there was hardly a day when I did not pass the box on my way to get a reel of white cotton forty for my mother or a twist of hundreds-and-thousands for myself, climb on it or wait at the base while my Lion or Towser or Barney ceremoniously completed the lustrations which, stoically, it bore from a thousand generations of South Perth dogs.

Why, when I look back on my childhood in South Perth is it always summer? I see the urchin who was myself, with other urchins, chuffing happily through the roadside dust past the pillarbox being either trains or flocks of sheep, as the mood takes us, but either way enveloped in a red cloud that eddies up to the dense summer foliage above us. Or I stand transported, every time, as Colonel Le Souef in his open carriage flashes past, at 15 miles an hour behind four of the zoo's dinky little shetland ponies: The council watering cart sloshes through the burning afternoon, and we spin like drought-maddened frogs in its spray: Scarecrow "blackies" and their stick-insect children, whose tangled black hair and blazing black eyes I can still see, all these long years after they have gone to their dreaming, trudge past our front gate hawking their clothes-props through the streets of the quiet riverside suburb which they used to own. From far off the tinkling bell of the tiny ice-cream cart calls, no louder than the sobbing of doves in the trees by our side fence, but more imperative than the voice of God . . .and throughout the long summer evenings in the shadows of the shop verandah, the laughing and chiaking and softly winking cigarettes of the dread "corner-boys" affronts the righteous. "D'you want to grow up to be a *corner boy*?" my Mother threatens me again, over some old misdemeanour: And although nothing could enchant me more than an invitation into that raffish circle—there is a jockey and a fisherman among them—I can hardly tell her so.

The old pillarbox saw it all and heard it all, through childhoods long before mine and long after, meanwhile taking into its stolid care letters written by South Perth parents and lovers and children and wives to men fighting in the Boer War, the Great War and the World War, in Korea and Malaya and Vietnam . . . and, no doubt, because he worked in a garden just down the road, it received whatever letters Wong Chu sent back to his family and friends in China during the 60-odd years he lived in South Perth.

Looking back, it seems there never was a time in my childhood when no Chinamen padded along the shady, oyster-shell footpaths of our neighbourhood, waved grinning from their big, hooded carts, appeared at the back door with fruit and vegetables—lome bleauties were our favourite apples—sat quietly in the ferry or stood quietly in the shops, a part yet apart in the friendly everyone-knows-everyone affairs of the suburb.

They lived and worked, maybe as many as 50 or 60 of them all told—on the broad strip of superb black soil which fringed the river, behind a dark belt of trees and rushes, almost without a break from close to Mend Street to the edge of Victoria Park.

The gardens, those of "our" Chinamen, anyway, were as much our play-ground as the river or our own backyards. Then, of course, we didn't know how beautiful they were, with their patchwork of green carrot-tops and pale green lettuce and milky green cauliflower in season, the blood-red of beetroot and the purple of egg plant, and the gold-flecked lakes of melons and pumpkin

at the damper, lower end of the garden. Armoured gilgies dozed beside their holes in the square wells scattered among the beds for watering and dipping the vegetables, and in the slow moving waterways by which the run-off of a score of bubbling springs converged on a mysterious underground tunnel leading to the river, bright constellations of red goldfish exploded in all directions as we took after them with—had we but known it—utterly harmless "spears" from the thicket of bamboos down by the river.

Wong Chu—"Charlie" like all the others—worked in the garden below my home. A small, bird-boned man with flesh as brown and hard as sheoak wood, he wore the clothes common to all the "Charlies"—a rough working shirt and dark blue cotton trousers which folded over at the waist like a sarong; never boots or shoes in the garden, and only, in the worst of weather, the big "umbrella" hats of their homeland . . . they seemed to prefer instead the Australian-style tucked-in cornsack in which bobbing about their gardens with another sack tied apron-wise around the waist, they looked like an industrious company of monks, or perhaps dwarfs.

Generally they slept in galvanised iron huts at the drier, top end of the garden, having in the middle of the cultivation an open-fronted shed in which the cart was housed and gardening implements stored along with great bunches of seedheads of most of the vegetables they grew; often they cooked and ate in these sheds too. We were fairly free of the garden shacks, but rarely ventured into the sleeping quarters. There were about those, curious shifting shadows, pungent scents and unexpected shapes which evoked all the strangeness and menace of that vast, distant and ancient China where they ate puppydogs and drowned baby girls in the yellow rivers. In their recesses, our friends' everyday eyes were darker and more oblique, their dark hair more uncompromisingly dark and lank. They smoked long hubble-bubble pipes of bamboo, in the little spouts of which they ignited—with a long taper—tiny pellets which we all were then certain was opium, but which, before I grew up, I had realised was only Champion Flake Cut from Mr Faddy's irreproachable coffee-smelling shop. In those sheds, moreover, they conducted orgies . . . everyone knew *that*. Most Saturday evenings they dressed in stiff blue serge suits and unaccustomed black shoes and went into town . . . to play fantan down in James Street: everyone knew *that*, too. They rarely came home until Sunday morning, and when they did they were often followed at an interval by white ladies; up from the ferry, past the fluttering disapproval of Jubilee Street front-room lace curtains and so to those mysterious galvanised-iron living quarters. And orgies.

But if those ladies were somewhat less than kin and more than kind, who is now to blame Wong Chu and Sun Kwong Wah and Ah Kim and all those hard-working, lonely Charlies separated by long years and half the wide world from the much more satisfying loves they had known in their villages in distant Yunna, or Kwangsi, or Shantung? They were up and working long before the first ferry—then the criterion for early rising around our way—and the fire-flies went to bed before them. The gardens were turned over spadeful by spadeful for every new crop, and were fertilised by great heaps of straw and manure brought from the stable up on the dry ground. Planting, weeding and harvesting was all done by hand, and in the musky summer evenings of frog-croak and bittern-cry from the swamp by the river you could trace the passage of the softly effulgent cascades from their huge watering-cans—one on each end of a yoke across the shoulder—as they wove backward and forward over the parched beds. Nobody worked harder in South Perth, few were more law-abiding, and none was kinder to the flocks of grasshopper kids—who in the fond belief that they were unobserved as they crept through the rushes at the bottom of the garden —stole their melons and harassed the goldfish in their ponds.

I have two very clear recollections of old Wong Chu. One was of the day when, having caught several dozen crabs from the now unimaginable bounty of the river, we gave most of them to him. He appeared utterly staggered by the gift; he stared around the shed, obviously looking for something to give in return, and finally thrust on us two enormous cauliflowers fresh from the garden. The other time was when he returned from his trip to China, I think in about 1924—I was about ten years old. Before going he had promised he would bring back a present for me. He did—six magical Chinese kites of feather-light bamboo and flimsy red and green rice-paper, in the shape of some legendary Chinese bird. As you set them on the air they floated off: If I close my eyes, I can feel them in my hands now, and feel too beneath my bare feet the cool damp path of black soil on which, when he gave them to me, we stood in the middle of his now vanished garden.

Suddenly both Wong Chu and the pillarbox are gone. One day late last year some men came with shovels and a truck and a bulldozer and before you could say knife a century and more of South Perth history had been obliterated . . . to be replaced by a hideous functional one-legged red box like a disgruntled oomfah bird with whatever head it might possess tucked under a wing inscribed, not with the lovely florid monogram of a great Queen, but with a legend in white, mean paint suggesting when the citizens of this diminshed day might deposit their mail in the expectation that it will be delivered between strikes.

Not long after the pillarbox disappeared, I was not a bit surprised when a friend, whose family had been looking after old Wong's affairs for twenty years, told me, without preamble: "Old Wong's going back to China."

I had been seeing the old chap, a few times a week, ambling down Jubilee Street to the shop—to the shop which long ago had replaced Mr Faddy's burnt-out emporium, along the street on which, those far-off Sunday mornings, the ladies had walked behind him up from the ferry. I don't think he ever connected me with the larrikins who snatched his melons, but he would always pause and say: "Welly ni' day!": Or, squinting up at the sky, knowingly: "Maybe lain, eh?"

All the years while we played by the river, outgrew our childhood, left school and found jobs, went to war and came back, got married or went roaming, grew to middle-age and beyond . . . all those years the pillarbox stood on the corner and Wong Chu worked among his vegetables . . . in the finish, with all the other Charlies gone and the gardens destroyed, on a little plot at the end of my street, in his old shack, with his old horse for company until that died, too.

And now both he and the pillarbox are gone, I don't know where the pillarbox is, but the old man is in Hong Kong among the family he had not seen for half a century. I hope he is happy. I hope that Kwan-yin will send a great big celestial dragon with flaming eyes and scales of jade to watch over him, as long as he lives.

SEA-TREADER

Pebbles spinning into the blue in an endless turn of water.
Ships that pass in the knockout grind of night
And gulls that cry their passing.

It was summer on the island when first I dreamed the northman
to the crash of the old sea
and a page unrolled somewhere far above.
The whole blue sky of myths was in his eyes;
he the ashy-haired sea-treader
but I was bland as milk, the child who stared
and ran away.

The sea rolled with the years. Again he came,
this time a grey-gold giant. That same deep dream
came over me. But the winds had caught his sails already,
the winds that blow forever; the sky read winter and the sea told
you had no right to him.

Time spilled and gulls claimed the island, nesting high,
while I lined my dead shack beneath the cliff.
From sun to sun I drifted, slept with strangers,
till the sea turned again—
                the sea turned
and left upon the sand another boat,
another northman. Even then I saw his going.
I know it for I've seen it all before;
the wind, the same great wind must come

But till that time, still is our island,
gone to heavy summer.

SHIRLEY KNOWLES

John K. Ewers

NO IVIED WALLS

It is our privilege each year to celebrate the birthday of Joseph Furphy in Tom Collins House, the house which he built with his own hands, and which we hold in trust as a memorial to him.

I want to suggest, however, that for a writer his writings are his own memorial.

Mind you, I am not sure to what extent Australians honour the memory of Joseph Furphy by the practice of reading his books. I am not sure to what extent Australians honour the memory of any of their writers of the past by reading their books. I don't think we're a nation of thanksgivers where our literature is concerned. We're not even given to wild huzzas when a good Australian book turns up on the contemporary scene. There may be reasons for this which this paper will slantingly touch on presently. But at least of one thing we can be sure: wherever Australian literature is studied or discussed the name of Joseph Furphy will sooner or later crop up.

It is timely to our purpose today that this year has seen the publication of *The Writer in Australia*, edited by John Barnes. He calls it "A Collection of Literary Documents". It might also be regarded as "an anthology of literary attitudes". Its central theme is the degree of "Australian-ness" that is to be found in Australian literature, and the various writers debate in their own way what is "Australian-ness" and to what extent it is desirable. The general conclusion, if we may find a conclusion in a book of so many diverse points of view, seems to be that "Australian-ness" is not the ultimate in literary virtues, that—if it has any virtue at all—it is a kind of incidental virtue. Its presence doesn't make for a major literary work; its absence doesn't deny the literary value of any work. In short, it is something "other" than the final arbiter of literary quality, but not by any means something to be entirely ignored when we are looking specifically at Australian literature.

Two items in this book intimately concern Joseph Furphy. The first is the correspondence between him and A. G. Stephens from April, 1897, by which date Furphy had finished his first draft of *Such Is Life*, to July, 1897, by which date he was, at the suggestion of A. G. Stephens, revising it and shortening it, hammering it out on the New Franklin typewriter which is on display in Tom Collins House. The second is the review (or synopsis) of *Such Is Life* which Joseph Furphy himself wrote at the request of A. G. Stephens. This appeared in two sections published separately in *The Bulletin* as advertising material for the book they had just published. It is here published as a whole for the first time and it begins like this:

> Nowhere is literary material more copious in variety, or more piquant in character, than in legendless Australia. Off the well-beaten tracks of the spurious-picturesque and the unconditionally hoggish, lie spacious areas of subject matter, irreverently challenging the Biblical axiom, that 'there is no new thing under the sun'. And countless types of characters, evolved by the industrial, social and terrestrial conditions of heretofore inarticulate activities confront the seeing eye and await the graphic pen. For tragedy, humour, pathos, fancy, however indissolubly linked with human nature, must assume unhackneyed aspects in a continent which resembles Europe or North America only inasmuch as there is a river in both.[1]

I hope that everyone present will read these two bits of Furphyana which Mr Barnes has rescued from obscurity and included in his admirable collection. And I hope that those of you who haven't read *Such Is Life* or *Rigby's Romance* or *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga* will make the effort to do so. I have purposely said "make the effort", because Furphy is not the easiest of writers to read.

I don't want to dwell on that point, but to look at the quotation which John Barnes has seen fit to place at the beginning of his book. It is by Henry James, the famous American expatriate writer, and comes from his study of the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne, published under the title of *Hawthorne* in 1879 in the English Men of Letters Series. It reads:—

> The moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.[2]

In his book on Hawthorne, following this pronouncement, Henry James spends some pages showing how shallow was the cultural soil of Salem where Hawthorne was born and lived during his formative years, as also was the cultural soil of the other towns in Massachusetts where he later lived and wrote. Nevertheless, from that shallow soil came Hawthorne's inspiration for novels and stories that are now recognised as distinguished literary works. All this before he went abroad and liked what he saw.

Here I digress a little. It so happened that earlier this month, while I was preparing this paper, I was also reading George Johnston's very fine new novel, *Clean Straw for Nothing*—a novel I should like to hope all thinking Australians will read. Here I found two writers, Henry James and Nathaniel Hawthorne, fortuitously cropping up. We have the central character, David Meredith, reflecting that for him London had not turned out wholly to be that "palpable, imaginable, *visitable* past" that could delight such a writer as Henry James. In part perhaps, but certainly not wholly. A little earlier in George Johnston's novel is the reference to Hawthorne. We have Stephanos, a banker from Athens, being entertained by a group of expatriates, mainly American and Australian, who are living on a Greek island. They have been talking about their reasons for being there and how long they propose to stay there.

Then Stephanos says:—

> I was reading Hawthorne the other day, his memoirs and notes. I was interested in what he wrote while he was in Rome and could feel himself falling into the thrall of the place. He was wise enough to see that by staying on in a foreign place he would have to exchange reality for emptiness. The realities of living would always be deferred, pending the return to one's native air. A future moment. But gradually there would be no future moments, because of the fear that the native air would no longer be sufficiently satisfying. So a substitute reality would have to be transferred to the temporary alien shore. And one would end up by having not a choice of two countries but no country at all, or, as he put it, only that few feet of either in which one finally would rest one's discontented bones.[3]

Henry James saw it differently. He couldn't be happy in the new world of America. He sought and found some personal happiness in the old world of Europe. But should we be beguiled by Henry James's decision to exchange reality for empiness—a decision made because of his own peculiar temperament—into accepting without query the quotation Mr Barnes has placed at the beginning of his book? Let me refresh your memory by repeating that quotation from Henry James:—

> The moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion.[4]

Taken literally, this quotation could imply some disparagement of Australian literature. It could also act as a deterrent to those in Australia tempted to take up their pens and begin writing. In particular, how might it perhaps have affected a writer living and writing when Joseph Furphy lived and wrote? If Furphy had read James's essay on Nathaniel Hawthorne and, goodness knows, he might have —he was a pretty avid reader—would he have downed tools and said, "It's no good trying to write anything significant about Australia; its artistic soil is too shallow, its history is too brief, its social machinery is not complex enough." In his case, it mightn't have been a matter of downing tools; he might not even have picked his pen up. But I don't think that would have been his reaction. He held a different point of view. In the opening of his review (or synopsis) of *Such Is Life*, from which I have quoted, while admitting that Australia is comparatively "legendless", he finds a "copious variety" of literary material, and claims that its treatment must assume "unhackneyed aspects in a continent which resembles Europe or North America only inasmuch as there is a river in both".

Let us look at these two men—Henry James and Joseph Furphy.

Henry James was born in 1843.

Joseph Furphy was born in 1843.

In 1879, when Henry James wrote the words John Barnes has used, he was already two years into his self-imposed exile from his native country. He was to remain in exile, except for a few unhappy trips to his homeland, and shortly before his death he was to become a British subject.

By that same year, 1879, Joseph Furphy had abandoned his farm at Colbinabbin where the soil was poor, and had joined what he called the "adventurous and profane occupation" of bullock-driving. Remember, please, that Henry James and Joseph Furphy were the same age.

In 1888, Henry James, always relishing the "great deal of history" which he found all about him in the old world, was able to write of England:—

> The dim annals of the place were sensibly, heavily in the air—foundations bafflingly early, a great monastic life, wars of the Roses, with battles and blood in the streets, and then the long quietude of the respectable centuries, all cornfields and magistrates and vicars—and these things were connected with an emotion that arose from the green country, the rich land so *infinitely* lived in, and laid on him a hand that was too ghastly to press and yet somehow too urgent to be light.[5]

In the same year, 1888, Joseph Furphy had long since been forced by drought and an outbreak of pleuro-pneumonia among his bullocks to give up bullock-driving. He had settled for a steady job with fixed hours in the Shepparton foundry owned by one of his brothers. Here now, for the first time in his life, he had some sort of regular leisure time after working hours and was spending, when he wasn't reading, it dabbling in the writing of paragraphs, articles and verse, some of which were published in *The Bulletin* which had been founded

in 1880. This was to whet his appetite for the beginning of a major work, something which he probably had wanted to do ever since, many years before, a young school-teacher, Kate Baker, captivated by the flowing eloquence of his spoken words when she heard them for the first time, expressed the almost banal, but nevertheless very sincere hope: "You ought to write a book!" He did and the book was *Such Is Life* in which he was to write:—

> Our virgin continent! how long has she tarried her bridal day! Pause and think how she has waited in serene loneliness while the deltas of Nile, Euphrates and Ganges expanded, inch by inch, to spacious provinces, and the Yellow Sea shallowed up with the silt of winters innumerable—waited while the primordial civilizations of Copt, Accadian, Aryan and Mongul crept out, step by step, from paleolithic silence into the uncertain record of Tradition's earliest fable—waited still through the long eras of successive empires, while the hard-won light, broadening little by little, moved westward, westward, round the circumference of the planet, at last to overcome and dominate the fixed twilight of its primitive home—waited ageless, tireless, acquiescent, her history a blank, while the petulant moods of youth gave place to imperial purpose, stern yet beneficent—waited whilst the interminable procession of annual, lunar and diurnal alternations lapsed unrecorded into a dead Past, bequeathing no register of good or evil endeavour to the ever-living Present.[6]

That last is a whale of a sentence, isn't it? Henry James, too, was fond of great long cumbrous sentences and sometimes critics have deplored his "suet-dumpling" style. But I don't think you can ever level such a criticism at Joseph Furphy. That boy from the land which had *not* been infinitely lived in was no slouch when it came to manipulating his thoughts into massively architectured prose. He then goes on to say:—

> The mind retires from such speculation, unsatisfied, but impressed. Gravely impressed. For this recordless land—this land of our lawful solicitude and imperative responsibility—is exempt from many a bane of territorial rather than racial impress. She is committed to no usages of petrified injustice; she is clogged by no fealty to shadowy idols, enshrined by Ignorance and upheld by misplaced homage alone; she is cursed by no memories of fanaticism and persecution. She is innocent of hereditary national jealousy, and free from the envy of her sister States.[7]

You will notice that he writes of "our virgin continent" or of "this recordless land" when Australia was still a number of self-governing States. But Federation was in the air and Furphy was thinking of the country as one and whole. And, however he was thinking of it, he seems to be relishing the fact, not that it was old like Europe to which Henry James had given his heart, but that it was young like the United States from which Henry James had fled. Other Australian writers also relished the newness of this country. O'Dowd saw it as

> ". . . . the scroll on which we are to write
> Mythologies our own and epics new,"[8]

adding, with mixing metaphors, that

> ". . . . she shall be as we, the Potter, mould:
> Altar or tomb, as we aspire, despair;
> What wine we bring shall she, the chalice, hold:
> What word we write shall she, the script, declare:
> Bandage our eyes, she shall be Memphis, Spain:
> Barter our souls, she shall be Tyre again:
> And if we pour on her the red oblation,
> O'er all the world shall Asshur's buzzards throng:
> Lovelit, her Chaos shall become Creation:
> And dewed with dream, her silence flower in song."[9]

Whatever choice we might make out of all those alternatives, Furphy and others were of one mind that her silence was going to be broken at last, some way or another. And, undeterred by the kind of warning uttered by Henry James and his kind, they set about breaking that silence.

The peculiar difficulties facing Australian writers were recognised by Frederick Sinnett, an early Melbourne journalist. His essay, *Fiction Fields of Australia*, the opening contribution in John Barnes's anthology, was published in 1856. In it he writes:—

> No storied windows, richly dight, cast a dim religious light over any Australian premises. There are no ruins for that rare old plant, the ivy green, to creep over and make his dainty meal of. No Australian author can hope to extricate his hero or heroine, however pressing the emergency may be, by means of a spring panel and a subterranean passage, or suchlike relics of feudal barons, and refuges of modern novelists, and the offspring of their imagination.[10]

This, then, has been the predicament of all Australian fiction writers, but it doesn't seem to have deterred them from writing. They haven't looked at this "recordless land" and decided, because it has *not* been infinitely lived in, to put away pens and paper and write no more. Instead they have been remarkably active and the absence of the time-honoured props of ivied towers, deep subterranean passages and spring panels has not deterred them in any way. What it has produced is something different from other literatures, something that has come from the breaking of new soil. Writers of an older country may be too reliant on "ivied walls" and an ancient past, so that their outlook becomes jaded and touched by the decay that lurks beneath the ivy. If all American writers had been moved, as Henry James was moved, to escape from the rawness of their country, how could there have arisen writers like Dreiser, Faulkner, Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway and Steinbeck—to stay safely in past established writers? If Joseph Furphy had retreated from the prospect of a continent about which no one had yet written significantly, with real penetration of mind or spirit, if the absence of ivied walls and a storied past had daunted him, we would not today be celebrating his birthday in the house he built.

Let us look more closely at the ingredients which Henry James named as indispensable and the lack of which drove him to the more congenial literary climate of England and Europe. Let us see to what extent these were available to Joseph Furphy or to what extent they were denied to him.

The flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep. This is a generalization in somewhat rhetorical terms. *The flower or art* seems to apply to the whole of art and does not confine itself to literature. *The soil is deep* may mean any number of things, but if it means that a country needs to have a rich background in all the arts and should have opportunities for discussion and appreciation of all art forms, then indeed these opportunities were denied to Furphy. A. G. Stephens who met Furphy only on his rare visits to Sydney describes him as "a lean, shrewd, proud, modest, kindly man". He was also a lonely man. His lot was cast in places where men were engaged mainly in physical activities. Now and then he met a fellow writer or corresponded with one, and these were to Furphy stimulating contacts. But for the most part there was little opportunity for this, so he had to fall back on himself and on the books that were available to him. As time went on he became the repository of a vast fund of literary knowledge. Tilly Aston, who later became known as Australia's blind poet, spent some of her vacations as a schoolgirl travelling with a concert party round the country. In her *Memoirs* she recalls meeting Joseph Furphy.

We had arrived at Shepparton by train, just in time to start our concert at eight o'clock, and were rushed up to the hall, changed into our stage frocks, and the performance went on right away. At the close of the programme my mate and I were handed over to someone named Furphy, and taken to his house for the night. I was very tired and even now do not forget that I wanted to go to bed. Soon, however, we were seated at a table for supper, as there had been no time for tea. A gentleman with a rather sharp, brusque manner sat with us and did the honours. The first surprise he gave us was to bid us try eating cheese with plum cake. I objected, and he said, "Have you ever tried it?"

"No."

"Then don't say that you do not like a thing until you have tried it first."

I did try it and found it good. Next he said, "I hear you want to be a scholar! What kind of a start have you made?" I did not know; in fact, I was ashamed, shy, puzzled, for I was still in my early teens.

"What do you read?" he asked. Books were very limited, but we had the Bible and many of the plays of Shakespeare.

"I see! What story in the Bible do you like best?"

I told him that of the Prodigal Son.

"That will do," he remarked. "And now about Shakespeare? Which play do you like?"

The last I had read was *As You Like It*, and I named that at once.

"Come on then; give me a bit out of it."

I started "The Seven Ages of Man", but had to be helped over a few slips or omissions. That ended, he began to recite, and gave me many fine selections, some familiar, some quite unknown to me. Suddenly he stopped and said,

"Do you know that I write poetry?"

Actually I did not know, and in my shyness could only say that I did not remember.

"Now you do not know anything about it," he said teasingly. "Listen to this!" and he was off again.

I wish I could say that I heard him recite this or that poem from his own compositions, but the hour was early morning and I began to hear his voice through the mists of Morpheus, so the lady of the house rescued me, and saw my dozing mate and my drooping self safely into bed.

I reckoned I had met a queer individual, and it was not until in later years I read his wonderful book, *Such Is Life*, that I realized the honour I had enjoyed, and that my host of that night in Shepparton was the famous contributor to Australia's literary treasury.

Often as I read him I recall his incisive questions, his playful teasing of a bashful young girl, and the delicious rolling of his words as he declaimed "Henry Before Agincourt", or described in Portia's words the quality of mercy.[11]

You will notice, in this account of her meeting with Joseph Furphy, that Tilly Aston does not tell us what he looked like. She was, in fact, then quite blind—had been since her seventh birthday. A queer individual, indeed! Certainly an unexpected one to turn up in the little town of Shepparton. As it then was, it must have been much smaller than Salem where Nathaniel Hawthorne was born and spent his boyhood. But if Furphy (and Hawthorne) were out of touch with circles where the soil was deep and the flower of art bloomed, both had by the time they reached maturity developed within themselves their own depth of soil. Which makes some sort of nonsense of Henry James's first requisite!

It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature. Set against the comparatively thin history that Australia could claim as its own to the end of the nineteenth century, this would seem a valid point. Joseph Furphy was a native-born Australian, but only just. He was born two years after his parents arrived in

Victoria from Ireland. He was the inheritor—as, indeed, are all Australian writers (and as, also, was Nathaniel Hawthorne)—of a vast field of English history and of English literature. Furphy's writings are full of traces of both, as this brief extract shows:—

> And should some blue-blooded insect indignantly retort that, though his own ancestors have borne coat armour for seventeen generations, and though he himself was brought up so aristocratically useless as to have been unable, at twenty years of age, to polish his own boots, yet he is now, mentally and physically, a man fit for anything—I can only reply, in the words of Portia, that I fear me my lady his mother played false with a smith.[12]

To his inheritance of English history and literature, he added a wide knowledge of world affairs and there are many references to writers of the old world and the newer world of America that was just beginning to be articulate. I can find no reference at all to Henry James. Furphy might well have admired James's elegant and fastidious style, but I rather fancy his fondness for the drawing-room society of England and Europe, Furphy would have found repulsive. It was so contrary to his own temperament. He hated all idlers. Into the mouth of the loquacious Rigby he puts these words:—

> I hold the idler as being already in the nethermost pit of infamy—not so much the idler under the bridge, as the idler in the drawing-room at Toorak or Potts Point.[13]

And, as for being tempted to immerse himself in the cultural richness of the old world, as Henry James was able to do, how could this have been possible for a man who could toss this sentence quite casually into a piece of bush description:—

> But time, according to its deplorable habit, has been passing, and the glitter had died off the plain as the sun went on its way to make a futile attempt at purifying the microbe-laden atmosphere of Europe.[14]

It needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion. That is Henry James's third point. Furphy had the social machinery. How complex it was could perhaps be debated, but he saw in the struggle between the squatters and the bullock-drivers for grass—a struggle in which he had participated and been deeply involved during his eight years of driving his own team—the wider issue between the haves and the have-nots. This has in no way diminished since his time. It goes on within countries and between countries and we in Australia today would be foolish if we were blind to it.

There were other social aspects of which he either chose to be unaware or about which his awareness had not been developed. Some thirteen years before he was born, Sturt had returned from his journey to the mouth of the Murray and back and had reported the presence of large concourses of natives. Half a century later in the very country through which Sturt had travelled Furphy drove his bullock team. By this time settlement had dispersed or destroyed these large concourses, and Furphy's reference to aborigines are always of the most casual kind. We do find him extolling their virtues as trackers in his story of the child lost in the bush, but there is no awareness of a social problem. He probably had given them very little thought—as a social problem; indeed, the aborigines were not then vividly in the Australian consciousness as they are today; they were a dying race, so let time look after their inevitable demise. Of other social injustices he was very much aware: the growth of monopolies, the denial to the worker recognition of (and therefore payment for) his manual skills. He realized full well that although the "virgin continent" about which he enthused was "committed to

no usages of petrified injustice", it might very well be if we were not ever watchful. She was "clogged by no fealty to shadowy idols" and cursed by "no memories of fanaticism and persecution". But she might very well be. He said she was "free from the envy of her sister States". She *was*, at the turn of the century, but he probably would have seen it differently today. He certainly showed no lack of awareness of a "complex social machinery". Indeed, to a very large extent this triggered off his writing.

To the extent that his work was "offensively Australian", to quote his own words, he has no doubt lost some admirers. But we should ask to whom he is in any way "offensive". I don't think we have yet had a study of the effects which successive waves of migration have had upon Australian attitudes and the recognition and appreciation of Australian literature. And not all migrants come here to labour in the fields; some go straight into academic halls. To one such I lent my copy of *Such Is Life* many years ago. He returned it with the remark that he preferred *Tristram Shandy*. As you know, some critics have seen a certain structural resemblance between the two novels. But of the two, I prefer *Such Is Life* —and probably for exactly similar reasons that he preferred *Tristram Shandy*: that is to say, one book appealed to the Australian background in me, while the other appealed to the English background in him. On another occasion, I lent a copy of the poems of Judith Wright to an educated Englishwoman, but a few years in this country. She returned it without comment. Had she found anything to like or understand in these poems, I'm sure she would have mentioned it. She said nothing, and I asked no questions. Now, Judith Wright is not "offensively" Australian, but there is a great deal in her work, as in Furphy's, that doesn't get through to a newcomer.

I am here reminded of a story Eric Rolls tells in his fascinating book, *They All Ran Wild*. Frederick McCoy was a Dubliner who in 1854 was appointed Professor of Natural Sciences at the University of Melbourne. He watched with interest the breeding of thrushes, blackbirds, larks, starlings and canaries at the Botanic Gardens. These had been liberated and were living in the grounds, breeding freely without care from the attendants or any food being given to them. Addressing the Victorian Acclimatization Society in 1862, McCoy said there could be no doubt

> that these delightful reminders of our English home would even now have spread from that centre over a great part of the colony, and the plains, the bush and the forest would have had their present savage silence, or worse, enlivened by these varied touching, joyous strains of Heaven-sent melody which, our earliest records show, have always done good to man—which in all times have been recognized among all varieties of nations or taste, as sweetening the poor man's labours, inspiring the poor with happiest thoughts and softening and turning from evil even the veriest brute that ever made himself drunk or plotted ill against his neighbour.[15]

Eric Rolls's comment on this nonsense was that "McCoy was obviously Professor of 'English' Natural Science. He had little knowledge of Australian birds or animals. The plains, the bush and the forest are full of sound, day and night."

Mr T. T. A'Beckett, London-born member of the Victorian Legislative Council, in a vote of thanks to Professor McCoy said that the English song-birds which had been released were being persecuted by native hawks. He thought that the extirpation of Australia's hawks would be a decided advantage!

Later Professor McCoy was knighted and became Sir Frederick. I don't know what happened to Mr A'Beckett, but I hope someone extirpated him!

In certain circles of this country the shooting down of Australian literature has been a blood-sport for many years.

Of course, migration waves are essential to our national well-being; they contribute also in their own way to our cultural enrichment. And, in the final analysis, even those of us who boast that they are third, fourth, or even fifth generation Australian are not so very far removed from being migrants. But in a country with a relatively small population like Australia, large-scale migration, such as we have seen in post-war years, has the effect of throwing things just a little out of balance. At the present time, another popular blood-sport is shooting down Australian tradition, Australian values, and the Australian image. Time alone will show whether, indeed, the Australian tradition is really lost, whether the new values are really permanent, whether the Australian image is substantially changed. Only when all this has settled down and our society has become stabilized or numerically large enough to absorb subsequent waves of migration without going into a cultural tail-spin, will we be able to recognize those of our writers who have made a permanent contribution to our literary tradition. And when that time comes, Joseph Furphy will have an assured place.

Joseph Furphy died in 1912.

In 1912, were born Kylie Tennant, Patrick White and George Johnston.

Can you not feel a splendid continuity in this?

1 *The Writer in Australia*, ed. by John Barnes (Oxford, 1969).

2 *Hawthorne*, by Henry James (English Men of Letters Series, 1879).

3 *Clean Straw for Nothing*, by George Johnston (Collins, 1969).

4 Same as 2, above.

5 *The Tragic Muse*, by Henry James (1888).

6 *Such Is Life*, by Tom Collins (The Bulletin, 1903).

7 Ibid.

8 *The Bush*, by Bernard O'Dowd (Thomas C. Lothian, 1912).

9 Ibid.

10 *Fiction Fields in Australia*, by Frederick Sinnett (1856), reprinted in *The Writer in Australia*, ed. by John Barnes (Oxford, 1969).

11 *Memoirs of Tilly Aston*, by Tilly Aston (The Hawthorn Press, 1946).

12 *Such Is Life*, by Tom Collins (The Bulletin, 1903).

13 *Rigby's Romance*, by Tom Collins (C. J. De Garis, 1921).

14 *Such Is Life*, by Tom Collins (The Bulletin, 1903).

15 *They All Ran Wild*, by Eric Rolls (Angus & Robertson, 1969).

Dorothy Hewett

THE WRITER IN AUSTRALIA

The woman doctor at the Moscow Writers' Polyclinic looked at me across her consulting desk:

"I have met many Australian writers, and it seems to me that you all have something in common, a simplicity, which is not the same thing at all as being simple . . . a profound and wise simplicity."

A profound and wise simplicity, untouched by guilt or the complexity of Europe, or a mindless, dangerous innocence?

It was Henry James' theme, that destructive appealing innocence; the American, the new world, confronting the age-old layers of complexity that made up the European consciousness.

The Australian abroad has taken up the mantle. We are like so many archetypal Isabel Archers strutting across Europe like noble savages.

But are we so noble? Has the rot set in already? Were the seeds of it always imbedded in our brutal innocence?

It could be a fascinating theme for an Australian writer, a theme just skirted, but never really confronted, in Geoffrey Dutton's new novel, "Tamara", the story of an Australian agronomist from Kangaroo Island who falls in love with a beautiful Georgian poet at a writers' junket in the USSR.

But of course Henry James would have done it all before. It seems to be the fate of Australians always to be the men who come behind, the copyists, all of us without any real sense of national identity, since we've lost our old simple chauvinism . . . mateship and the Anzacs.

"Europe carries identity and continuity in its stones and mortar. The Americans go through from the Pilgrim Fathers to the moon landing," said George Johnston, returned expatriate novelist, in a recent Sydney Morning Herald interview.

"Not so long ago we were huddled together in safe communities on the fringe of a savage and implacable country. The interior was so immense and so savage it seemed impossible that man could subdue it.

"Now suddenly with the great leap forward in technology the unconquerable has been conquered . . . not by man but by machines . . . There is no long tradition like the conquest of the American west to provide continuity.

"We are thinking now in terms of G.N.P. and not of the happenings of the soul. We are in a glorious golden afternoon but will it last forever? It is up to

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**The Writer in Australia* . . . A Collection of Literary Documents 1856 to 1964, edited with commentaries by John Barnes, Oxford University Press. Melb. 1969

the writers to explore what is happening, to find again a national identity of the soul."

"To find again a national identity of the soul!" What does it mean? Why is it important? Who cares anyway? How are the writers going to set about exploring IT and why is it "up" to them? What is an "Australian soul" for God's sake?

Why can't Australians borrow their values and their inner explorations from Europe? Nationalism, always suspect, seems downright reactionary these days. More than ever we live in one world.

Anyway, if we have finished exploring our outward island continent, is there anything original left to say about us? Are we indeed "the last of lands"?

Any serious writer has tried to grapple with the questions "Who am I?", "Where do I live?" Before he can hope to make a microcosm of the world he lives in he must have some sense of identity, an identity which is both a sense of place and a sense of man in a place.

Innocence and emptiness are not enough, particularly when the innocence has become a bully-boy psychosis, and the emptiness is only filled with the ripping paraphernalia of technology and the rattle of the one-armed bandits in the RSL and Rugby League clubs.

"The moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep, and it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion."

The writer is Henry James again, writing on "Hawthorne" in 1879, and John Barnes has used it as a pertinent comment on the flyleaf of "The Writer in Australia . . . A Collection of Literary Documents 1856 to 1964" published this year.

"The Writer in Australia" is a collection of critics with opposite and complementary points of view from A. G. Stephens to Nettie Palmer, P. R. Stephensen, Arthur Phillips and Alec King, and a collection of poets and novelists commenting on their own and general problems of literature in this country . . . Lawson, Furphy, Vance Palmer, Vincent Buckley and Judith Wright.

The role of John Barnes as Editor is to provide informed commentaries on the various historical periods, and to give us a brief but illuminating introduction with the title "Art and Nationality".

He sees as the touchstone of his collection, a central theme . . . "the struggle of the local writer to be 'Australian'." This "problem of national identity" has resulted in a "confusion of the process of criticism". . . i.e. judging writers on their Australian-ness or lack of "a state of Australian grace" (Miles Franklin), "exchanging one form of provincialism for another" (The Bulletin school), but the central struggle has been, and he suggests still is, "to achieve an independent literary tradition", to see "a vision of ourselves in the country".

There is one way to solve the problem . . . believe that it does not really exist. Alec King in his article "Contemporary Australian Poetry 1964" maintains that the only major difference between English poets and Australian poets is a regional one; exactly the same kind of difference that existed between Wordsworth in the mountainous English north and Keats in the pastoral south.

It seems to me that this is rather begging the question. Faulkner is not an English writer writing about the southern states of the U.S. He is a regional American writer writing about the south. Robert Frost is not a regional English poet writing about New Hampshire. He is a regional American poet. Robert Lowell is not an English poet writing in America. He is as American as the Nantucket graves of his ancestors. On the other hand these men write in English, as we do, and as such have certain elements in common with all English writers, not the least being a rich heritage of literature in that language to draw upon.

But there is an authentic American voice working through American literature

which has nothing to do with "local colour". One can hear it all the way from the rolling convoluted sentences of a Faulkner to the truncated, close lipped Hemingwayese.

There is a tone, there is a style, there is a sensibility working here which is American.

I think there is also a tone, a sensibility which is Australian . . . but I would be hard put to define it. Is it just a romantic abstraction I carry in my mind when I, a third generation Australian, try to imagine Australia, something I would like to think is OUT THERE. Why when I try to grasp it does it dissolve like a mirage under my fingers? I think that if I was forced to define it I would have to say that Australia is for me an emptiness . . . both physical and emotional . . . in other words a space. It is hard to identify with a space, it is hard to write about a space.

Some Australian artists have made myths out of our desert places, and some of our more sophisticated writers have created Voss and Tourmaline, Sarsaparilla and an Empty Street.

Are these the mythological flowers that bloom when the soil is shallow?

A. D. Hope, one of the more sophisticated of Australian poets, has written:

> They call her a young country, but they lie:
> She is the last of lands, the emptiest . . ..
>
> Without songs, architecture, history:
> The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
> Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
> The river of her immense stupidity.
>
> Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
> In them at last the ultimate men arrive
> Whose boast is not : 'We live' but 'we survive',
> A type who will inhabit the dying earth.
>
> And her five cities, like five teeming sores
> Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
> Where secondhand Europeans pullulate
> Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet Hope too takes the Isobel Archer way out and opts for the corruption of innocence, only one lonely step removed from O'Dowd's "last sea thing dredged by Sailor Time from space".

> "Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
> From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
> The Arabian desert of the human mind,
> Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,
>
> Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
> Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
> The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
> Which is called civilization over there."

James Macauley takes the tougher line of an uncompromising emptiness, comforting himself only with stoicism.

> "Where once was a sea is now a salty sunken desert,
> A futile heart within a fair periphery;
> The people are hard-eyed, kindly, with nothing inside them,
> The men are independent, but you could not call them free.
>
> And I am fitted to the land as the soul is to the body,
> I know its contradictions, waste and sprawling indolence . . ."

It is much the same stance used by Donald Horne in "The Lucky Country . . . Australia in the Sixties", published by Penguin in 1964. But Horne popularizes, softens and vulgarizes it.

"Australia is a lucky country run mainly by second-rate people who share its luck.

"What is lacking among Australians is a real feel for the history of the human race, and a sense of belonging to a long-lasting intellectual community that reaches its great moments when it seeks out in wonder towards the mysteries of its environment . . .

"It has been the Australian style to deny the intellect! sometimes its only social acceptability seemed to lie in some professor clowning on a television panel, displaying his ordinariness. This suppression has meant that one thing wrong with many individual Australian intellectuals is that they rust away or freeze into postures that are years out of date. A self-pitying loneliness becomes the intellectual's style. They contract out.

"Australian intellectuals tend to shelter from the major challenges and ideas of the twentieth century. It is usually not possible to conduct in Australia the kind of conversation that would be immediately acceptable in Europe or New York."

"The moral is that the flower of art blooms only where the soil is deep."

Yet some of our writers see signs of a renaissance, or at least a stirring of the human spirit. John Barnes himself presents an optimistic view of the future of Australian creative writing and criticism, in his commentary to the final section of "The Writer in Australia". Titled "New Maps for Old", it outlines the existence of a range of magazines in Australia publishing critical and creative work, the new interest of the universities in Australia writing with a resultant range and depth of criticism, emanating from the universities, that we have not seen before, "the 'discovery' of Patrick White whose fiction and drama, by its creative example, has made irrelevant much of the discussion of Australianness".

Barnes sees Patrick White's decision to return to Australia, not made because of any "commitment" to a Palmer or Louis Esson vision or dream of an Australian National Art or National Theatre or any view of himself as a member of an Australian community of writers, as "of major historical importance for our literature".

He believes that Patrick White "hostile to cherished notions of the Australian character, owing nothing to the Australian tradition" has gone furthest towards giving twentieth century Australian readers a "vision of themselves".

Vincent Buckley in his "The Image of Man in Australian Poetry", a fascinating and challenging view, sees the way out of our dilemma as a "mutual adjustment of the objective and subjective . . . the world of Australian landscape and manners with the world of European morality and art and spiritual values.

He sees the essence of modern Australian poetry as self-discovery as well as world discovery, although we are "still scared of the final spiritual dimensions and of the interior experiments necessary to reveal them. We are still not quite modern, as other literatures understand modernity. Yet we are on our way to being mature."

Arthur Phillips sees the Australian's limitation as "an obstinate bondage to the positive . . . He turns aside, scornfully, and yet timidly from the glories and terrors of the incertitudes, from the exaltations of the mysteries.

"Only when the contour-smoothing erosions of time have reconciled us to the acceptance of mystery will the colonial dilemma be finally solved."

"It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature" . . .

Judith Wright in her fascinating discussion "The Upside-Down Hut" sees our problem as one of reconciliation . . . and the death of the European mind. She

quotes D. H. Lawrence on Australia. "What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here. You couldn't."

"Before we could become hers (Australia's) we had to cease to be Europe's—all that had to die in us. Now we mark time. What next?" writes Judith Wright.

And, surprisingly perhaps, Alec King brings us full circle by taking the Isobel Archer alternative:

"We experience a kind of willing seclusion in Australia today, not an enforced isolation as heretofore as far as the world of ideas and imagination is concerned," he says. "Communication is so quick that we can be as much citizens of the world as any community anywhere. But our physical isolation gives us a kind of freedom, not to be naive and ignorant, but to be unfashionable—to be unaffected by the pressure of schools and allegiances that are sophisticated and temporary. I think that 'unaffectedness' is a genuine quality of contemporary Australian poetry."

"It seems to me that you all have something in common, a simplicity which is not the same thing at all as being simple."

I am reminded sharply of the visiting Canadian poet, Earle Birney, whose predominant impression of Australian poetry was its conservatism in form and subject matter.

The cloak to cover our nakedness seems to me to be full of holes. I do not think that Australians are citizens of the world. I do not think our physical isolation gives us a kind of freedom, or, if it does, it gives us freedom at too high a cost. Anyway Australians are not free. They are amongst the most conservative and puritanical people on earth.

I remember the words of one of our young, and eminently successful writers as he left Perth for London, once again.

"Australia is a shit of a country."

Western Australian writers are in a particularly central position to evaluate the doubtful virtues of physical isolation. They live in the most isolated portion of Australia, in a place where a community of informed minds to strike sparks off is singularly lacking.

One can, of course, have the opportunity of being a big frog in a little puddle, but as Mary Durack once noted—in our community a writer is praised and known for being everything else but a writer . . . a speaker at functions, a teacher of creative writing, a lecturer on Australian literature, a book reviewer, a free critic of movie scripts, a sitter on boards and committees. No wonder the poor writer finds it difficult to know who and what he is in our community.

I always get the impression that some of our Eastern brothers have the impression that writers in Western Australia live in some kind of Arcadian innocence, a kind of perpetual Thoreau's Waldon, a refuge from the rat race of Sydney or Melbourne. Instead we live in one of the most (second only to Queensland) backward, unsympathetic and parochial regions in Australia.

The Western Australian University has no academic study in Australian Literature. Australian academics generally are peculiarly unsympathetic to the creative writer. He seems to be generally an embarrassment, rather than a source of fruitful discussion. Western Australian writers live in a state that we are told is "on the move". We have ample opportunity here to watch the takeover of a relatively simple and primitive culture, parochial and bush orientated, by a mediocre, money grubbing, destructive, but still primitive institution. It is rather like the Australian story told again in miniature.

And I am back again at the beginning of my list of questions. Where does the writer fit into such a world?

How does he fill the West Australian emptiness with something more than

the latest model Valiant, a boatarama, high rise housing, and Poseidon share bonanzas?

Americans have made a great literature out of their violent contradictions, their sense of their own guilt and anguish, the destruction of their dream of the great society. In the American experience seems to be embodied all the tragedy and comedy of twentieth century man. They sit in the cockpit of violence and history.

Australia limps along behind with her mediocre society, her lack of any real conflicts, her copyist mentality. Her recognized younger poets create flat, cool, mediocre statements. Her novelists struggle on the edge of a metaphysical desert to find themes with any relevance to the twentieth century reality. And who cares anyway? It seems already too late for us.

In a recent survey conducted by the Australian Society of Authors it was discovered that fifty-nine per cent of authors who filled in a questionnaire earned less than ten dollars a week from their work, eighty-five per cent earned less than a shorthand typist on approximately 50 dollars a week.

"If it were not for the evidence of publication," the Society of Authors lamented, "the society would be justified in believing it represented a group composed in the main of amateur writers who might just as well spend their time collecting stamps or chasing butterflies."

In an unconscious reflection of Australian priorities an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, discussing the survey, headed it, "Authors bent on joining the Affluent Society".

"I did not see any Australian theatre. By the time I had located the tin sheds in the far-flung suburbs where it was playing, it had closed." (Ray Taylor reviewing Sydney Theatre 1969 for "The Australian".)

"Among the young there is said to be a retreat from ideology, a vogue for Orwell and Camus; the adoption of a kind of existentialism, a particularly apt world-view for Australians." (Donald Horne in "The Lucky Country".)

Who am I? Where do I live?

FAMILY-TREE

i

WOOD
grained like the hand
of man
Time's watermark his manuscript
cryptic scripture of his labour
STOOD
like the limbs of an
EVERGREEN
lifting on branching rafters
its load of iron leaves

ii

Leaves
from the leafless tree
of endless branching
Leaves
filling interstices
between
sentence of death
and generation
in the living-room
—the curtains drawn discreetly—
leave to the march of time
the man-made tables
inscribing history
His tree
thymeleaf signature
frondaged spandrels
Of the dateless palm
Or cipher's hand
of palmless date
unripening
The sun
has blanched
the capitals
time-worked
in fine leaf-gold

iii

I have seen the gardeners
in the parks
vacant—after the children's games
raking the fallen leaves apart
damp in wintry weather
long drifts of leaves
rolled together
windrows combed from summer's green
and stoop
to warm
their knotted hands
bleakly above
dead leaves
they burn

DAVID AMBROSE

Geoffrey Drake-Brockman

SOME MEMORIES

I don't know why, but the town of Geraldton has frequently played an important part in both our lives—Henrietta's and mine.

My first visit to Geraldton was in the horse-and-buggy days, nearly 60 years ago. R. J. Anketell, a wonderful pioneering engineer, was constructing by day labour (or 'daily' labour) a railway from Mullewa towards Wongan Hills. He was going on leave and the department posted me as his relief. Six years or so earlier I had been his junior staff engineer on the Trans-Australian Railway Survey from Kalgoorlie to the border 500 miles away.

It excited me to be relieving a senior engineer and one I so much admired. Anketell himself drove me over the works in progress. There were hundreds of horses harnessed to drays and scoops. The rail bed was being graded and tanks excavated for locomotive water supplies. Anketell's buggy and threehorse team was a fine turn-out. We travelled 100 miles in two days. To my surprise, there were some camels employed in bringing timber for culverts across-country from the Midland line.

When my relief period ended, I was sent to Brookton for the construction of the railway to Corrigin, and there fate seemed to take a hand. A chance remark of mine in a Perth suburban drawing-room brought Dr Roberta Jull and her 12-year-old daughter, Henrietta, to my camp for the May school holidays—Henrietta, a blue-eyed and fair-haired long-legged tomboy. She did everything that a boy would. She rode on the construction locomotive and returned covered with smuts and coal-dust. She photographed everything, even my Kelpie dog. When she went in the bush on foot, she would leave a trail of fired blackboys behind her; she liked to watch the spectacular blaze they made, but which, surprisingly enough, did no harm to the blackboys.

Fortunately, my camp was pleasantly placed among Wandoo gums, half a mile from the main construction camps and sidings. My cook was good, as were the groom, buggy, and horses. The paymaster shared my mess; the assistant engineer, being married, had a camp of his own.

My visitors seemed to enjoy the experience of camp life, but I never told my departmental chief that Dr Jull—who was also the Public Service Commissioner's wife—and her daughter had been guests in my camp.

Some months later, we were at war with Germany. By then, rails had been laid to Corrigin and construction was nearing completion. But instead of completing the line, I became a private in the 10th Light Horse. After service with that famous regiment in both Egypt and Gallipoli, I was transferred to the Engineers and so was sent to France instead of Jerusalem.

Whilst living in those awful, frozen or muddy trenches on the Somme, a very welcome parcel arrived—a knitted woollen cardigan from my schoolgirl visitor, Henrietta, of five years earlier. I wore it under my tunic day and night. Somehow it always seemed to have one button too many; years later, I told Henrietta that its buttons and button-holes did not match, and only now do I wonder if perhaps it was a leg-pull.

Again fate took a hand, for on the very day of my return from the war I met Henrietta—a strikingly beautiful girl, even fairer and more blue-eyed, or so it seemed to me. She was then a University student and a fully trained artist.

We soon began to meet and then to write. And after my return from China, where the government had sent me on sandal-wood problems, we were married—a week after Henrietta's twentieth birthday.

For her twenty-first, we were at Marble Bar. The matron of the hospital, hearing of the occasion, gave us a dinner party. We dined on turkey and champagne—quite a contrast to our usual tucker-box food and billy tea!

The date of our marriage almost coincided with that of my new job—looking after government activities north of Shark Bay. So we went out together to learn of the responsibilities which Sir James Mitchell had outlined to me, with special emphasis placed on the Works programme.

We overlanded thousands of miles by car long before roads had been made fit for that mode of travel. We camped on banks of creeks or by water-holes. Sometimes there were no tracks at all, but generally we could follow the animal dirt-tracks wandering through the bush or over the plains. We had frequent hold-ups with car trouble, and at such times Henrietta would first of all produce her paints to record our predicament, the scenery around us, and perhaps even her thoughts on the matter. But paint soon hardens and paper crumples, so she eventually exchanged brush and colours for pen and words. I believe her first published sketch was sent from Marble Bar.

Henrietta soon became an expert camper. She could roll a swag or boil a billy with the best of them. On one occasion, when serious car damage delayed our progress, tucker became short; Henrietta supplemented the rations by cooking a damper on the shovel and boiling a pink-and-grey galah.

Our frequent journeys from north to south in our early days provided many brief but happy visits to Geraldton. But after some years, conditions were altered, Perth became my head office instead of Broome.

We made our home in Cottesloe, and Henrietta's trips north became infrequent. She had by then embarked on longer and more serious writing, and her published works—short stories, plays, novels—began to fill up our bookshelves.

Henrietta's work always interested me tremendously, and I was very proud of her achievements. This suddenly became even more exciting. I was to go to Sydney for an engineering conference and, just the day before my departure, the Sydney press rang to interview Henrietta, saying that she had won the Sesqui-Centenary Australian Full-length Play Competition with her "Men Without Wives". It was staged as part of the festivities and was a great success. After Henrietta's exciting news, we immediately decided that we would both go to Sydney.

Even after her many literary successes, Henrietta never lost the urge to write of the mutiny and wreck of the Dutch ship *Batavia* among the Abrolhos Islands. It had first fascinated her when she had been only a schoolgirl. To collect material for her historical novel "The Wicked and the Fair", Geraldton came into our lives again, for we went there together to spend a delightful holiday while she collected local colour and some of her material. We also went to a splendid tourist camp on the Abrolhos Islands. Our frame-tent was set up on coral sands only a few yards from the sea. We swam, collected crayfish from

shallow reefs, fished, and gathered specimens of coral. We marvelled at the bird life; there seemed to be at least two nests to every diminutive bush.

The novel was a success, going almost immediately into a second edition. Some years later—after we had gone to Europe for a holiday, and she had undertaken a lot more research in Perth, Batavia and Amsterdam—she published the history "Voyage to Disaster". This work is already much referred to and being quoted from by scholars abroad. It was her last major work.

In my early visits to Geraldton, the town—full of horses, squatters and miners —had a charm of its own. Now, even in this noisy and bustling mechanical age, the same charm still manages to come through, especially when the traffic eases in the evening. As I say, Geraldton has played quite a part in our life together. Now, an old man, I sorrow that fate has ended this pleasure.

Lyndall Hadow

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF MRS. AUBREY CAMPBELL

I could not be bothered to go up to the station for Christmas. In that country the heat often comes in above the century; at Karalyee Peaks I've known it to be one hundred and ten degrees over the roast turkey and plum pudding flambé. Aubrey never seeming to flag in it, did nothing about air conditioning; why should I bother to make the journey, two days' driving, to be with him? Besides, he had the gins, he always had the gins, he didn't need his wife. So by a slow process of osmosis over the years I had lost interest in the long acres of the Peaks and its inhabitants until at last my life had become static here in my garden-encompassed home down on the coast with Marina.

Marina, our daughter, at no time achieved identity with the Peaks. The juvenile excitement of conducting less fortunately placed school friends to admire its half-a-million acres palled with repetition. In her adolescence it became clear that her father, while manifesting the superficial social graces expected of a fourth generation Campbell of Kooralyee Peaks had little else but those surface gentilities to offer her; there was not any place in his life for a daughter. The working of the family acres made no demands on her; even their history seemed to provide only a negative sense of involvement.

At university she made her own decisions about her studies. She would major in anthropology. At her age I had chosen drama; or had the aunts chosen it for me? *We wish for her to take an Arts degree and the Dean thinks Drama as a major subject*, though my interest in the subject was permitted in theory only, its practice too fraught with pitfalls to be allowed any part in my life. But with Marina it was anthropology or nothing and that is what led to her conversion course on me about the gins.

"*Australian Aborigines*, Mother," she would correct me after being exposed to the fiat of the lecture room, "or *Aboriginal women*. They're people, they're human flesh and blood, they're real, they live, they're women, they belong to a proud people."

"They're gins!" I would stop her flow of somewhat incoherent protest, I would make my stand. "A gin's a gin in my language . . . and in your father's."

It was shortly after that period, following what turned out to be her final visit to the Peaks, that she wrote her last letter to her father, described by him as "the uninformed meanderings of a brash university student, one moreover who fails to discern on which side her bread is buttered." You understand, our daughter would not identify.

This Christmas I had arranged a party for the American women here. They're a dull enough lot, not because of their nationality but because they're women. All

women, a conclusion I have long held, are basically negligible. The American woman here exhibits only one factor of interest to me . . . her transience. She has been domiciled in other countries, has acquired a different set of recipes for living in comfort wherever she has been, small conversational compensation for her being a woman; but at that, inordinately dull.

"I've arranged a sundown party for Christmas Eve," I told Marina. "They're bringing twelve men from the Cape. You'll help me with them?"

"There's only one way of dealing with the American male adrift from his Mom. Feed him and forget him. Don't try to provide the Mom substitute. He'll find that at his own level. The lads from the Cape won't be looking for it in these rarefied surroundings, Lori dear."

Marina was twenty, so the wisdom of the world was hers. It had not taught her, though, to identify. Take this matter of our friends from the States. Visiting Americans are very popular here, since this part of Australia got on the move. Beside the capital to invest, they have the knowledge and techniques we need; the astute accept them, welcome what they have to give; but not Marina.

She hosed down her Holden. After last week's tour of the South-West, calling at various native missions with Rusty (fiancé the term for his relationship though they didn't use it themselves), the Holden needed it. A beat-up ten years old, it was not the car I liked to see her driving. She could have matched my Cadillac with an Aston Martin or maybe even a small Toyota if instead of using a negligible legacy from my aunt she would have taken what her father offered. "I've no objection to his feeding and housing me," she often asserted. "He's responsible for my being here, I didn't ask to be born; but I won't take any more than basic necessities from Karalyee Peaks; and then only until I can earn them for myself . . . or until Rusty can."

"Welcome what the Americans have to give," I repeated, as she moved to the rear of the dusty Holden.

"Give?" She sent a vicious stream of water over the roof so I had to dodge to avoid the shower. "Sorry! Give? What does the predator give when it pounces on its prey?" Obviously Marina interpreted the American male only as a mom-mistic figure of fun or an acquisitive peril. With the disability of youth seeing the proposition in terms of chiaroscuro, "I'll settle for the Australian", she would say.

"Chacun à son goût."

"You're right. But don't make it so clear, Lori dear, that in this case this one's taste doesn't coincide with yours."

On Christmas Eve morning T.A.A. telephoned to say a cancellation was available for Miss Campbell on an extra flight to Adelaide at 6.30 that evening. Marina took it up, her apologies to me, their perfunctoriness masked in a verbal graciousness reminiscent of her father, failing to gild the inflexibility of her decision. "Rusty had to shift mountains to get a pass for me to go on the Reserve with him, I mustn't let him down."

"You and Rusty could have spent the whole of your vacation together at the Peaks. Surely there's enough nigger material there . . ."

"*Aboriginal*, Lori. And we'd only see woodheap stuff there, the Campbell of K.P. doesn't encourage anthropological studies on his place. Besides, you know Rusty's not working on the Mandjindas. It's already established that the Arandic group languages stand apart from all other Australian languages with regard to most of their word structure; you know that. And that's why it's the Centre or nothing for Rusty."

"A gin's a gin, whatever the tribe! Oh well, look after yourself."

"*Australian Aboriginal woman*, Lori. And Rusty'll look after me."

"When will you be back?" How could I stem the words from flooding into the empty days ahead?

"I've got to be here to enrol, first week in Feb. Rusty'll be tutoring again, they're taking him on for another year." She turned to the telephone. "I must let him know he's meeting me in Adelaide tonight."

She sent her telegram to Rusty, had lunch with me in civilized and sustaining fashion and went upstairs to pack, or as I knew to be her practice, to throw a few things into her zip. If she had known then that before the New Year she and Rusty would die beneath their upturned Land Rover on the road from Alice Springs, would she have left me so gaily?

After lunch and on the heels of the caterers, came the telegram boy. Rusty must be in funds for the moment, I thought; a tutor doesn't rate much in dollars at our university; maybe he expected to be worth more when he could add a doctorate to his degrees. They had spent little on their tour through those God-awful missions in the South-West and Rusty had made it then to Adelaide on a packet of cheese and a pound of raisins, side-kick as he called it, on an interstate freighter. He evidently kept his loose cash for wires and presents; he'd left lavender water for Marina and *Je t'Adore* for me. I told Marina I suspected an error or a joke but she was adamant that was as he'd meant it. "He says you're instinct with feminine allure, you don't know it and nobody tells you; so as one intimately connected with the family, it's up to him."

I was not sure that I appreciated the compliment, coming from him, gave the perfume to my housekeeper and sent him a bush jacket; to finish in the flames of the overturned vehicle, I suppose. (What was Marina wearing then? And did she have that soft, milky, girl breath about her; and the breeze of lavender on the dusty air?)

After the telegrams, two that afternoon, my guests arrived, summer colours kaleidescoping with the extravaganza of my gardens already aglow with agapanthus shimmering regally above lavishly flowered hydrangea beds, roses massed along flagged paths and lawns contoured to river vistas. They made their entrances, poised, calm, cool, effectively integrated with their fellows and the set. They spoke their lines and drifted, I was pleased to observe, into groupings consistent with their relative dramatic importance. You might remember it was a garish season, Summer 1967, loud, harsh colours dictated by milder northern summer psychic needs; but on my lawns the brashness of their dressing understated here and there by the soothing suavity of white coated waiters, my guests complemented Nature's good taste and my gardener's skill in presenting the setting in its seasonal perfection. To my intense gratification. Can you blame me for my moment of triumph? *Poor Lori, used to be one of the bright young things* (or pretty or sought after), *young enough still and look how she's left alone, while that husband of hers stays up in the Never-Never with his sheep and his gins* (or Australian Aboriginal women). *Poor Lori!* Can you blame me?

A waiter came to tell me that Miss Campbell's taxi was waiting; my moment of triumph passed. (Would she have left me with so fleeting a farewell?) A difficult moment, clashing with the arrival of the Consul's wife and daughters. "I've left your present on my desk," Marina whispered, skilfully avoiding seeing any of my guests.

"Don't forget your pill, Marri darling," was all I could think to breathe as she kissed me, the cool, unemotional, meaningless kiss of the twenty-years' old with her life, all that was left of it waiting to be lived, every pulsing, shattering moment of it, two thousand miles away on a native reserve with Rusty, not here in the elegance of our riverside home with me, but with Rusty that bearded creature from God knows what suburbia. "Don't forget to keep tag of the dates." My final maternal contribution to her welfare.

"Bang on!" she assured me; and was gone. Would she have left me so casually if she had known?

The aunts who brought me up were, I know now, I didn't during the process, fearful creatures. In order of magnitude they feared to be thought not ladies (because they weren't); visible poverty (because their father had left them little but an old family name); illness (they could not afford it); and they feared sex. Perhaps sex came first on the list. They knew nothing about it so, first or last what matter? To them. To me, their fear of this unknown covered everything I should have heard about, everything that later, too late, Freud and the professors unveiled for me in the lecture room. At twenty I married Aubrey Campbell. Any one of my year who went on to drama school would have given her chances of a neon-lit lead role abroad for the reality of the support role in Aubrey's life here in the Antipodes; any one would gladly have taken my place beside him at the altar of his school chapel. Would she have done so as happily in bed at Karalyee Peaks when he came at night from the gins' camp?

He was one of the sought after young men of that season, he had the money, the position, he didn't even need to marry into a name, his family had arrived in the colony as early as mine. And, it appeared so early in our marriage, he had the urge to offset the wrongs he imagined had been done to the original inhabitants of his lands, by making their women happy now. Aubrey Campbell Esquire of Karalyee Peaks, God's gift. Understandable in the light cast by my reading on such compensatory excesses but in my aunts' book and my own, a gin's a gin and always was, so with the arrival of Marina entente came to an end, the master bedroom at the homestead came to function merely as a sop to the convention that despite evidence to the contrary of separate, mosquito-netted rooms on the verandah, we, like other young marrieds, slept together. My dream of a garden by the riverside, undefiled by his presence or his beliefs, soon became a glorious reality, effective setting for me and my daughter at all times; especially when surrounded by my friends at sundown on Christmas Eve.

The maidens made their duty appearance with their mothers, appropriated in their turn the relevant man from the Cape and disappeared discreetly to continue their international goodwill mission in less peopled surroundings. Emila Jane Jasphard, stupendous jaws moving rhythmically on filets of smoked salmon. gossipped that Arndt's friend Gunnar had made a mistake when he married Pansy-San. Pre-marital months under the cherry trees (that's only metaphorical she explained, they did have a luxury flat all the time, of course) had led him to believe that the Japanese wife was docile, compliant, submissive. And look at this one, now. She's brought her hard headed business woman's bargaining attitudes into her marriage and Gunnar can't make a get-away. Such understanding laughter, guarded because Pansy-San was standing in full view beside an urn of sculptured acalypha and one was never sure just how acute the hearing of an Oriental might be.

The waiters were handing the finale, local prawns fresh from the cookers, served on delicate sea shells (from the deep waters of the Sea of Japan, introduced to our community that year by Pansy-San whose family back home had export rights of that particular item). Now, fed and full of goodwill again, Emila Jane moved her intimidating mouth in my direction and hands ready to appropriate my life at least for an hour or two, "Come and help Arndt and me with the Christmas tree. You shouldn't be alone on Christmas Eve." (*Poor Lori-girl, neglected like this while her husband lives his own life up country. It's pitiful.*) And her mouth ready to gobble me up, right there in front of my friends, "Come, share our jollity, see a happy home sharing its happiness, we have a grab bag of happiness spilling over on this blithesome night of the year." And so on, gobble, gobble. If those weren't the exact words, that was the impression I had of her intent. Could you have gone along with it?

The last heel had spiked the night-shadowed turf, the last sandal whispered

away across the flags; finality marked the moving off of caterers' vans and waiters. I left a note for Mrs Lander who always takes the Christmas weekend off; and one for the gardener. I unleashed Bruno . . . *Good dog, mind the place until I come home*. I was hitting 80 as I moved down the freeway. There was a place at Riverbend I'd heard of. Nobody would know me, nobody would see the cool lawns, glimpse the white house glimmering in the moonlight, abandoned; no one would conjure up the arid, tedious plains of Kooralyee Peaks, none would see the wife dispossessed, none know my daughter had taken wing out of my life, none would know that even my housekeeper had deserted me. I would spend Christmas Eve in the company of people who might, without knowing or caring, help me forget.

It was deadly dull at Riverbend; how had she thought there could be anything there for her? The too loud band, clammy bodies in overtaxed air conditioning, drinks with no edge, overbright lighting when the moon would have been sufficient to illumine so bucholic a revelling; there was nothing of comfort there for Lori Campbell, in need of solace as she might be. "I'll go abroad again when Marri finishes her degree," knowing she had no further hold on the girl. "I might try Tibet, that transcendental meditation." She made her exit with what dignity she could muster, her drink untouched, the management's corsage (wilted) unpinned, the singer unapplauded, carols unrewarded; automatically set her course for the ocean and at West Beach pulled in off the road to a dip in the sandhills, sure that as usual such minor irritations as her garden could not quiet would be soothed by the gentle murmur of the water, now heard above the susurrus of cars streaming by, its moonlit placidity unmarred by the hysteria of passing headlights. But tonight the ocean magic failed.

Petulantly she backed out into the stream of traffic heading away from the city and at the specially-licensed brilliance of the Indiana Hotel she came to a stop. This was a place she knew. She would spend the night here, not as at her first false stop, for amusement, diversion, entertainment, but now for sleep. Here would serve as well as any other to take a Soneryl, maybe a couple if the upper corridors resounded as she expected they would to the frenetic rhythm of the band in the Starlight Court; she would sleep in a cocoon of safety afforded by the anonymous presence of hundreds of sentient beings around her (not cherishing her, merely standing between her and desolation); but people making no demands on her. Any hotel would suffice now, any place away from the loneliness of the empty house, any place away from the sympathy of the Emila Janes.

She parked at the Indiana beside a copper top in a Corona, vaguely aware that she'd seen her before. The booking clerk asked nothing further than her signature, any name would have been acceptable but she used her own; and payment in advance for the night. He told her the room would be needed after breakfast, the hotel was booked out for the season; and asked if she wished to make a reservation for Christmas dinner. She did not. Luggage? No luggage, thank you. (You can believe if you wish, that my night attire is in my handbag along with the pill; and that I'll be meeting a man here. Your guess would be wrong on all counts.)

She took her key. "And send up a bottle of Scotch and plenty of dry." She turned to the lift. The swinging young copper top with the notebook said, "Good evening, Mrs Campbell. I'm Hilda Berman from Women's Forum. I reported your pool party last month. Would you talk to me for a few minutes? About sex. Could you give me your views on some aspects . . . ?"

"My views on sex? My dear young woman, I have every objection to being questioned on such a subject. So private, you must agree. And here. In public. How can I formulate my ideas?"

"You talk, Mrs Campbell, I'll get them into form. Would you tell me . . . what do you think about . . .?"

"Why choose me?"

The young woman shrugged. "You *are* the type, you know. You're sophisticated, you should have a fairly well baked philosophy by now. And you're the only woman on her own here, the only one I can pin down in the crowd. Sure, I'll get plenty on it from some of the kids, later, down at the snack bar, they're not very articulate, really; you just get an idea from them and build on it. But I could do with something more mature to start."

They went up in the lift.

"This is one of my most interesting assignments," the girl said. "I'm going on holidays tomorrow. The lass who had it in hand went sick, I think she's just had a scrape, anyway I copped this at the last minute. Big deal. That's why I'm on the job tonight."

"Where do we start, then?"

"Say . . . what do you think of Australian men as lovers?"

"I can only give hearsay opinion on that . . . one man doesn't provide a case."

"We can skip it, then. The kids 'll know more. What do you think about teenage sexuality?"

"I prefer *adolescent*. In any case, I have no first-hand knowledge. I was a virgin at twenty."

"At twenty? You've got to be joking."

"No. My maiden aunts must have been. But my daughter, now . . ."

The pencil flew over the pad; the woman poured the drinks. "Cheers!"

"Good health! Marriage, Mrs Campbell? One young woman said to me *I'm a great believer in marriage. But you must have honesty and trust.* Sounds like Sunday school to me."

"Maybe. I didn't go to Sunday school. My aunts left that to the servants. Church twice a day for the upper classes. Yes, I believe in marriage. Always did. As a sacrament, at first. And as a contract. Now it's only a contract, a legal and binding contract. One must have security."

"Security? What kind of security? Would you care to enlarge on that?"

"Financial security. Above all. Some say it's the most important factor in marriage. I agree. Financial security. Otherwise, you're sunk!"

"I . . . see!" (I'll put that aside and work it out, later.) "Well, could you help me on this one? Many women believe a man can sleep with a woman and not have any feeling for her. For *sleep* of course read *have intercourse with*."

"As you know, my experience is limited. But I'd say . . . yes, I believe that could be so. Now I wonder . . . ?"

She poured herself another double. The girl's glass was untouched. "Help yourself." She walked the length of the room and back, finished off the glass, left it to resume her pacing. The copper top suggested "Let it ride" but the woman waved her aside. "This leads me to a particularly intriguing line of thought. I must get this straight. Is it the same with the gins as it was with me? Has he any more feeling when he has intercourse with a Dolly Wheelbarrow or a Pansy-San? Oh, sorry Pansy-San, I'm getting my colours mixed, you're a Jap aren't you and you've never met Aubrey. The question is, does he have any more feeling when he goes to the gins' camp than when he went to bed with me?"

She poured another double. The girl's was still untouched. "Help yourself. And don't look so round eyed. I'm not communing with myself, you can hear what I have to say. It's general knowledge about town, isn't it? *Lori Campbell's husband is a gin lover. She couldn't have been much use to him.*"

"I haven't heard it. But I don't get around. In any case that's a non sequitur, surely?"

"Been going on a long time now, in the circles he moves in. Breeding their own labour. Yes, old hat. Have a drink, girl."

"Could we talk about male freedom, Mrs Campbell? They say it's a man's world in Australia. You know, beer, sport, women in that order. Do you think women should try to alter that? Should they break up their group and join the men? Round the keg, at parties. Metaphorically speaking, I suppose . . ."

"My dear young woman, I can't imagine myself at a keg. But I'll say this. Not only have I disposed of women in my life, I've even refrained from joining the men."

She sat suddenly, hands clasped around her glass, the liquid steady as she gazed into it, then swung to the girl. "And that, moment of truth in a whiskey glass is why you see me now, alone, deserted. Hear that? Moment of truth for Lori Campbell, alone and deserted. Thankful for your temporary interest. But 'rallying', there's always Tibet." She fell back on the chaise longue, asleep and snoring and the glass bounced on the carpet.

"Moment of truth. There's no truth in her. Moment of pot valiance more like it." The girl let her pencil drag on the page while she inspected the sleeping figure. Rather a beauty, bone structure and colouring. As one copper top to another, I must give her full marks there. Grooming and dress, one hundred percent of course. And plenty of money. She didn't come up like my mother from a suburban state school on a scholarship to High; and on to teaching year after year with time off to have us kids; and on supply after Dad died; and my mother's older than this woman but she seems younger. There's a different aura about my mother. Something human. That's what's lacking here. "Humanity." The girl shivered. "Yes there's a coldness here, a lack of warmth I mean. She'd be an implacable enemy. She'd never forgive."

She put her notebook away. "Watch it, George! Not to get fanciful. She's just another interview. But let's get out of here." She dragged a cushion under the sleeping woman's head, replaced the glass, switched off the lamps, closed the door behind her. She let herself be grabbed and kissed hilariously under the mistletoe in the lift, made her escape to her car and cruised off, looking for a snack bar. So that's the naked Mrs Aubrey Campbell? Hope she doesn't phone and scrub it when she sobers up. But, parked by a *Be Tidy* bin, Hilda Berman tore the leaves from her book, stuffed them into the gaping mouth of the horrendous gnome and went on her way.

I came home early in the morning of Christmas Day to the peace of my garden and the uncomplicated welcome of Bruno. I intended to telephone the editress of that glossy to scrub the talk I'd had with the young copper top. I couldn't remember what I'd said or how it had ended; too much Scotch, I should have stayed with the vodka. I scribbled a memo on my desk pad but in the drama of the following week it was one of many such reminders overlooked. My present from Marri was on her desk, as she'd said. Also the first of that week's telegrams. I vaguely remembered it had been delivered on Christmas Eve just as my guests had begun to arrive; I'd dismissed it as another from Marina's Rusty. But it was to me, this one, from Aubrey's manager at the Peaks. Marina had opened it and left it flattened under an ash tray. I read it at a glance, then word by word. *Mr Campbell seriously ill. Injured in accident. In coma in Carrington hospital. Doctor Jagger holds no hope of his recovery. Come at once.*

There was a note from Marina. Lori, old girl, don't grieve for him. No one else will. Even the aboriginal women won't wail for him. See you in the New Year. But she didn't.

I asked the people next door to look after Bruno until Mrs Lander should get back. One of the sons offered to drive me. "I'll do it in less than two days", he boasted.

"Wouldn't it be quicker if Mrs Campbell chartered an aircraft?" his mother

asked, conscious that her son might miss his event at the regatta if Aubrey should take a long time to die. There was nothing available at the moment. Anyway, the boy worked it out that he'd come back in my car as soon as he'd delivered me at my husband's death bed and the manager could drive me down when Aubrey was buried. We had reached some sort of an agreement on this point when my phone rang. The manager to say Mr Campbell had passed away. (He meant died.) There was a breakdown in the town electricity supply, no ice or refrigeration, the thermometer nudging one-hundred-and-ten degrees in the shade; and no aircraft to fly the remains to the coast. (He meant Aubrey's dead body.) As I said, the heat often comes in above the century in that country on Christmas Day.

I told the manager to give the turkey and plum pudding to the gins but he said he couldn't catch what I was saying, there must be interference on the line. He said the funeral would have to be very quiet, most of the Peaks' neighbours were away up at the picnic races at Blantyre and the Carrington townspeople on holidays, mostly. After the funeral he would come straight to the city and would call on me directly he arrived. He had left the overseer in charge at the Peaks.

I thanked him. "But tell me, Mr Fairbrother, do you think the gins will wail for him tonight?"

He said he didn't catch what I was saying: there must be something wrong with the line.

Collin O'Brien

ABROAD THOUGHTS FROM HOME

In this article it is my intention to give some indication of the state of health of the English theatre, relating it to the system of subsidy which operates there. This gives rise to some thoughts on the theatre here in Perth and what lessons we might perhaps take from the English experience. The idea is not to provide a panacea for our ills but rather to reconsider, in a somewhat personal and haphazard way, professional and semi-professional theatre in Perth in relation to its English counterpart.

Your theatre buff crosses to London agog with anticipation. Things, he has been told, were rarely better. Nor is he in for disappointment: theatre in London is quite as good as he has been led to expect. Further, this healthy state of affairs is not confined to the capital. Provincial repertory, with a new face and doing better plays, is undergoing a renaissance.

All this at a time when the general climate in post-Empire Britain is anything but cheerful. Devaluation didn't quite bring the rewards hoped for: a favourable monthly balance of trade has for two years been cause for tentative rejoicing. Then there has been Rhodesia, Anguilla, Northern Ireland and Gibraltar, to say nothing of the moral question involved in selling arms to Nigeria. But at the same time there exists a sensible system of subsidy for the arts, under the aegis of the Arts Council of Great Britain. True, the £8,000,000 available is only the equivalent of that set aside for the bands of Her Majesty's Army or Navy, but judging by results the money is being wisely distributed.

Contrary to its frequent 'they can't teach us a thing over there' stance, Australia has been quick to learn from the British experience, and we too now boast an Arts Council modelled on the British pattern. In the case of the Old Tote and the Melbourne Theatre Company signs are encouraging, although elsewhere in Australia there is still probably more hope than actual achievement.

Let us now take a brief look at the subsidy situation in the British theatre today.

Firstly there are the two big national companies, The National Theatre at the Old Vic (a new building consisting of two theatres is being built for them near the South Bank complex) and the Royal Shakespeare Company operating at Stratford and the Aldwych in London. Both companies receive healthy subsidies (£180,000 to the RSC in 1969) and are committed to both the classical repetoire and the presentation of new plays. In addition to the classics, one can see, at the RSC, a programme of two recent one act plays by Harold Pinter, 'Landscape' and 'Silence', or at the Vic Charles Wood's 'H' and 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead'. Both companies work on the repetoire system, presenting a series of about

five plays over a season of about two months, usually alternating the plays every three or four performances. The advantages of this system will be discussed later.

The RSC also conducts Theatregoround, which 'takes actors and directors from the RSC out to audiences, playing in theatres, schools, colleges, and community centres throughout Great Britain', and runs a World Theatre Season each spring at the Aldwych, presenting ensemble companies from other countries.

Apart from the national companies, both of which tour, and the Royal Court which also receives a subsidy, there are in London a number of smaller experimental companies, such as the Hampstead Theatre Company and Charles Marowitz's Open Space Theatre, which also receive help from the Council.

At the same time as backing the national and London companies the Arts Council is committed to aid the provincial repertory movement, and cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool and Nottingham all boast fully professional high quality repertory companies. These now also present plays in repetoire as opposed to the weekly or three-weekly repertory system whch was at one time common. Over and above their local work, major successes such as the Nottingham Playhouse's production of 'The Irresistible Rise of Arturo Ui' (said by some critics to be the best Brecht yet produced in England) and Manchester's Theatre 69 Company's 'She Stoops to Conquer' move to London.

While chiefly concerned with fostering the national companies and provincial repertories, the Council is also prepared to give financial help to other viable schemes. Thus in addition to its annual subsidy to Manchester's long-established resident repertory, The Library Theatre, the Council was prepared to back, to the tune of over £30,000 per annum in the first instance, the Theatre 69 Company operating in the University Theatre. This Company was founded by a number of artists anxious to present, out of London, worthwhile plays which would not be likely to appeal to a repertory, such as Ibsen's last play 'When We Dead Awaken'. It is worth noting that the Arts Council will only provide money for professional theatre, although amateur drama can look for some help from local and regional bodies.

Apart from direct subsidy to companies the Council offers help in other ways. It occasionally underwrites the presentation of new plays, or helps toward commissioning them from authors, or contributes toward the salary of a resident playwright. It will also contribute toward the salary of other positions with a company, on a more or less resident training basis, in fields such as design and management. Independently of the Council the BBC and Independent Television Authority each offer annually six two-year assistant directorships with repertory companies. The scheme is of obvious advantage to both young would-be directors and the companies for which they work. The television authorities offer these positions completely without strings, it does not form part of the training programme of either. They obviously take the long-range view that the future health and continuing high standard of television drama depends on well-trained legitimate theatre directors.

Although not in line for subsidy, the commercial theatres are also looking to a method of making the future less risky and uncertain. There is a scheme afoot to set up a fund from which worthwhile ventures may borrow to finance shows, thus avoiding the pressures and haphazard risks to which, say, major Broadway theatres are subject.

Financial stability and subsidy are far from being the whole explanation of the current health of the British theatre. Two trends have contributed to a consistently high standard: the repetoire system of alternating plays and the development of an ensemble approach to acting. A play in repetoire has the advantage of improving over a large number of performances without the disadvantage of the staleness which accompanies a continuous long run. The concept of ensemble involves a

team approach to theatre rather than a collection of stars and bit-parts. Actors become familiar with each other's work over a number of plays simultaneously, and act in the context of a group of equals rather than a hierarchy. Directors too are working with known quantities. A major advantage of repetoire/ensemble is that actors of calibre are prepared to take smaller roles along with the major ones, and the overall standard of performance rises as a result. One must remember however that a company running in repetoire generally requires a larger body of actors than its straight-run counterpart and faces the problem of storage of scenery for the concurrent plays.

In this context one cannot but marvel at the organizational difficulties facing the RSC. It has two companies running simultaneously in repetoire, one at Stratford and the other at the Aldwych, as well as Theatregoround and the making of films of its major productions; there are the problems of organizing the casting of plays, the storage of scenery and the transport of scenery, properties and actors from one theatre to the other, as well as arranging tours and the World Theatre Season. Nevertheless, the Company could boast that in 1968 a total of well over a million people saw their productions, and that the '£180,000 subsidy represented less than a quarter of the Company's cost, the rest being met from the box office'.

Still other factors affect the high standard. It was once feared that first the cinema then television would kill live theatre. But the reverse has proved the case. Not only with straight television drama, but in their classic four-part series ('Nana', 'Pere Goriot'), serials ('The Forsyte Saga'), and weekly series of the 'Softly, Softly' and 'Dr Findlay's Casebook' category. Britain shows an expertise in script-writing, direction and acting unmatched elsewhere. Over and above the experience that an actor gains from television and film work the situation is such that he may earn good money in these fields and then devote himself to the stage. Tom Courtenay and Vanessa Redgrave are examples within my own experience of actors choosing to work in this way. Nor does exposure on film and television seem to affect an actor's stage career adversely, or to keep people from going to the live theatre to see them. On the contrary, actors known for their film or television work are often bigger drawcards than their less exposed counterparts.

Before finishing with the English scene I would like to draw attention to four aspects of the presentation of plays which struck me as rewarding and exciting.

Firstly there is the repetoire system. As I have already mentioned, the system militates against the boredom and staleness which afflict actors during a long run, and at the same time allows a play to develop and grow in performance. I saw this borne out with two plays presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company. Both 'All's Well that Ends Well' and 'Troilus and Cressida' received reasonable but guarded reviews when first presented at Stratford; by the time each reached London some six months later, the critics raved. Ideas which had been only partially realized had achieved clarity, and some awkwardness and idiosyncrasies had been ironed out. Each had mellowed into powerful, unforced clarity.

Secondly I would like to comment on the approach to acting. I was vastly impressed by the way in which plays seemed to unfold before the audience rather than be pushed across to them. It is difficult to communicate the effect of this phenomenon, but I feel it has its roots in the Stanislavski notion of finding the action of the play rather than trying for effect, and I guess it to be the direct result of ensemble and repetoire work. It is most noticeable in the two major companes, the National and the RSC.

The third aspect which struck me—and I feel it is one from which we have much to learn—was the approach to design. The way in which design, however realistic, symbolic or emblematic, underscored the action was a revelation. Directors in Australia, it seems to me, are too prone to view the designer as someone to build the set or as merely carrying out visually the ideas of the

director. The attitude I found in England was more one of designer and director working creatively together. Months before the first rehearsal the designer and director get together, and the designer then goes off with the script and an idea of the director's basic approach to the play. He later presents the director with ideas suggested by studying the script in the light of the director's approach. By the time rehearsals commence the visual approach to the play has been broadly decided and the actors can be given an immediate idea of the visual aspect of the production. This is not purely a question of detail—indeed the design may undergo drastic modification under creative rehearsal conditions: the designer must be as adaptable as actors and director in rehearsal—but one of giving as much care and artistic consideration to the design as to other aspects of the final work. In this context designers worked creatively and made a more profound contribution than I generally find to be the case here. I was surprised at the degree to which the impact and meaning of a play is dependent on design, as opposed to the 'dressing of the stage' to which I had become largely accustomed.

Lastly there was the changing approach to presentation itself, the flight from realism toward more symbolic and emblematic use of scenic devices. I assume that the major reason for this is that television and film are much more effective in the realistic mode. Audiences, used to the comparatively sophisticated brand of realism which close-up and scene-cutting allow, find the limited realism possible in the theatre restricting. So too, of course, do directors. The move away from realism has let a lot of fresh air and imagination into the theatre and taken us back to the more imaginative forms of earlier modes, notably the Elizabethan. One cannot but note how the repetoire system has reinforced this trend: with the enormous problems of scenery storage which the system imposes, there is just not room for box sets and clutter. The change serves to remind us that in Shakespeare's day the system was comparable. Remembering that the Globe stage saw a different play each day, and in the light of our current experience, one ceases to wonder at the fewness of properties and scenic devices mentioned in the Henslowe diaries.

So there we have it: a sound and intelligently-directed system of subsidy, flourishing national companies, provincial repertory improving in both standard of presentation and the quality of plays presented and the encouragement of new and experimental work. What have we in Australia, with our own theatrical traditions deriving from the British, to learn?

First let me reiterate the good sense and foresight shown in setting up an Arts Council in this country. The onus is now on those interested and active in theatre to see that the subsidies are well used. But there are some attitudes still current which need to be revised.

For a start there is the confusion which still exists as to what is and is not 'good' theatre. To my mind it is helpful to draw a distinction between commercial and what I shall call artistic theatre. It is a question not of standard of performance, but of aim. The commercial theatre, as I see it, has as its primary aim to entertain, to divert. The object of the people presenting this type of theatre, of which 'Girl in My Soup' is a topical example, is to provide entertainment and incidentally to make money. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong or evil in this. On the other hand the aim of what I have called artistic theatre is to present plays which pretend to comment, whether seriously or comically, on the human condition.

The distinction is necessarily arbitrary, and of course the categories overlap. Nor is the classification meant to imply that commercial plays do not require artistry to perform, nor that artistic ones should not be enjoyable. But if we as a community are to subsidise theatre we must ask ourselves whether we are underwriting the entertainment industry or attempting to foster an art form.

As far as the Arts Councils both here and in Britain are concerned there is no question that their function is cultural. Neither subsidise the commercial theatre.

But it is all very well to talk of 'artistic theatre' in the abstract. The directors of the Playhouse understandably wish to see their theatre patronised. The temptation to 'give the public what it wants' is strong. One could be forgiven for gaining the impression from much that has been presented in recent years that the Playhouse has opted for an entertaining rather than a cultural role. But even as I write the winds of change are blowing. I understand that in 1970 the Playhouse is to offer the public a higher proportion of plays of some calibre.

As a society we have long accepted that our culture is enriched by certain institutions which cannot support themselves: art galleries, libraries and museums are prime examples. It is only in this century that Britain, let alone Australia, has accepted the fact that theatre comes into this category. The setting up of the Arts Council—and indeed the Elizabethan Theatre Trust before it—was a clear indication of our awareness that artistic theatre is a cultural necessity which requires the support of public money. We must at the same time be aware that something of an educative role is called for. We cannot argue that the plays we present in the first instance will be in response to widespread public demand, but take the long range view that we must present good plays at a high standard and build audiences over a period.

At the time Edgar Metcalfe was producing plays of the calibre of 'Marat/Sade', 'The Caretaker' and 'The Physicists' the Playhouse was building an Australia-wide reputation. Apart from such notice, such a policy has the advantage of attracting the best directors and actors to the State. We can overcome the disadvantages of isolation, with its attendant dependence on the odd visiting company for really top-class theatre, only by offering artists the opportunity of doing work here which will give them satisfaction. As is the case with artists in other fields, theatre artists prefer work which offers them challenge, in short they prefer good plays. Actors and directors of calibre are prepared to accept lower incomes and comparative isolation, at least for a time, for the sake of the opportunity of doing challenging work. Entertainment work they can do anywhere, it is no inducement to cross the Nullarbor, let alone the world. If such were not the case the RSC and the National in England, let alone the provincial repertories, would not be able to command the quality actors they undoubtedly do.

Even apart from the Playhouse, theatre in Perth is somewhat of a curate's egg, but signs are encouraging. The most exciting development for some years is the addition of the Octagon to the scene. The first production, the Melbourne Theatre Company's 'Henry IV', showed that a well-mounted classic, with money and expertise behind it, can be a major success with the public. The recent season commencing with 'Mandragola' demonstrated that there is a public for quality plays. There is no question that, following a policy of professional work and plays of calibre, the Octagon will become one of the significant theatres in Australia.

In the early days of the Hole in the Wall Frank Baden-Powell and John Gill showed that they have noses for plays that are both popular and of some substance. 'The Knack', with which they opened the theatre, 'Entertaining Mr Sloane' and 'The Anniversary' are examples of plays presented in the Hole which were both artistically and financially successful. There have, I hear, been some rumblings of discontent among members at the signs that the theatre, with its incredibly long run of 'Girl in My Soup', may be turning strictly commercial. In the past however Mr Baden-Powell has followed the principle that lightweight, successful plays can alternate with, and indeed pay for, more solid fare that might not prove so generally popular, and there is every reason to hope that such a policy will be continued at the Hole. One must also give credit to Mr Baden-Powell's contention of 'the more theatre, the better', that people who go along

to merely enjoy themselves may get the theatre-going habit, and are potential audience for more serious plays. It is, in short, silly to be snobbish about commercial theatre.

I have not considered here the question of amateur theatre or the need for adequate training of theatre artists. The contribution of the amateur theatre has been in the past, and still is, of major importance in the growth of drama, but its consideration falls outside the scope of this article. But a word is called for on the teaching of drama.

Growing interest and rising standards follow on the study of drama at both secondary and tertiary levels of education. The stimulation of the latent interest most young people have in drama not only provides the base for future audiences of some knowledge, awareness and sophistication, but releases ability in young people who might well make the theatre their career. In the teaching of drama—and indeed the recognition of it as a respectable discipline—we lag far behind both Britain and America.

A vital theatre also depends on our providing adequate training facilities for theatre artists at the tertiary level. This involves theatre training schools such as the National Institute of Dramatic Art, as well as programmes and departments at universities and technical colleges and institutes. Some progress is being made, but the money provided by the Arts Council will be of limited long-term use if we do not provide people with the expertise and knowledge necessary to use it effectively. We cannot continue to depend on imports from England (nor, for that matter, lose our own potential artists to them) or 'the school of hard knocks' to give us the artists the Australian theatre needs.

David Hutchison

KALGOORLIE OF THE THIRTIES

View from Kalgoorlie, edited by Ted Mayman. Landfall Press. $3.50.
A collection of short stories by Gavin Casey, Ted Mayman and Walter Wynne.

These stories were mostly written during the Thirties when the goldfields responded to the general economic depression with a boom as gold prices rose. This is probably the principal reason why, although occasional tragic notes are sounded, a general air of robust optimism infuses the collection. The stories were also written by men who belonged to a generation that could still be touched by the 'mystery' of being born in, or of living in Kalgoorlie. Only occasionally—as in Casey's "Short-Shift Saturday" are we reminded that life on the goldfields could be the torment of some, particularly the women who are rarely mentioned.

It will be interesting to see whether a group of writers arises in the new nickel towns of the Sixties and Seventies. It is likely that the themes and the moods will be different. Some of the reasons for likely differences are physically evident in the substantial ghost town of Coolgardie when contrasted with the new Kambalda. The mining towns of the Nineties were built in the certainty of wealth outlasting the generations. They still provide some of the State's nobler buildings and a large proportion of its noble ruins. Kambalda, neat and efficient, but largely built of asbestos cement looks temporary by comparison. In the new nickel towns the big companies and the huge investments are there right at the beginning and the new towns will lack the wealth of tradition and story left by the individual prospectors and miners of the early gold rushes. This is clearly a largely romantic view, but it is such a view that inspires many of the stories in this collection. They were written in the context of the optimism of the Thirties and could minimize the hard times between in looking back to origins while celebrating the contemporary scene.

Some of the themes are inevitable: mateship, the making and the losing of fortunes, the schemes that go awry and gold-stealing. In the Nineties gold-stealing would have been considered a serious offence, because the crime would have been committed against a fellow-miner—an affront to mateship. By the Thirties gold-stealing from the companies was a popular pastime, one of several ways of pitting oneself against the distant bosses. However, probably because Ted Mayman's and Walter Wynne's stories will be largely unknown to many, the stories have a fresh impact belying the familiarity of their themes.

This view from Kalgoorlie, more properly a view *of* Kalgoorlie, is also a limited view. The three writers tend to look at the same situations and at the same kind of people. The scant mention of women has already been noted. The aboriginals practically do not exist. What happened to the Italian and Yugoslav miners and to the tensions that erupted in the riots of 1934? Within the limita-

tions however this is quite a rich collection, touched with humour and occasional pathos, but rarely going very deep into the psychological mainsprings of action.

Having read the collection once, I reread most of them again, taking each author's set in turn. On first reading differences between the authors were submerged in the common elements of theme and mood and in the similarity of dialogue. *Sans* tape-recorder each author must have been steeped in the oral tradition of Kalgoorlie because each is adept at recreating its cadences. Re-reading reveals differences—tendencies rather than sharp distinctions.

Gavin Casey, the one life-long professional writer of the trio, is overall the most impressive. He can handle the longer story more confidently and, as in "Rich Stew", does not have to rely on a somewhat tall story for humour. His work will be familiar to most readers and though, in performance, he probably excels, the other two authors show that they had much potential.

Tew Mayman tends to be the tersest of the three and more often treats the pathetic or tragic. "The ringing of the bell" reminded me a little of one of Lawson's stories about 'Arvie Aspinall, although not directly derivative. It appears that Mayman may have been the one more conscious of the influential American writers of that time and one can speculate how his writing would have developed had he too become a professional. Discussion of potential should not overlook the substantial achievement.

Walter Wynne, had he not chosen to retire from the world, setting aside writing as one of its vanities, may have become a considerable writer. He is more wordy, more consciously attempting a style than the other two. There are flashes of that verbose, self-denigrating 'philosophizing' of Tom Collins, and signs of a potentially more complex writer. His Simon, hero of several stories, deserves to be remembered alongside Lawson's Mitchell. Simon, like Mitchell, never lacks a scheme for making good, and just as often fails. His generally laconic, occasionally involuted, speech and optimism, qualified by a sardonic awareness of the pitfalls, belong to an outback tradition. Wynne and Lawson created two memorable minor characters out of that tradition.

The tendency to find humour in the tall story is more marked in Walter Wynne than in the others, but at least none of the writers becomes tedious in the Speewah style. Like good science fiction most of their taller stories lie on the edge of possibility. Take, for example, Ted Mayman's "Gold Comes to Sunrise". When the boom finds Joe Royal and Mickey Flynn wealthy, Mick's long-forgotten son of a brief marriage, arrives in hope of sharing the wealth. The gilded Gilbert soon becomes resented by his father, his father's mate and the town in general. He is disposed of with disarming casualness:

> He gently pushed his gilded son, Gilbert, head first into the ore bin.

Gilbert is thoroughly pounded and mingled with the mullock and a surprisingly rich crushing results. Gilbert's mates turn up just in time to be convinced and the mine is sold to them. I can hear the authentic voice of many an old digger in this passage:

> "A little mullock we put through," said Joe, idly weighing in his hand what had once been Gilbert's front tooth. He reckoned Gilbert had assayed, complete with teeth, watch and tie-pin, a couple of ounces over the plates."

Unless you have no sympathy with stories of the goldfields, and provided that you do not insist on profundity in everything that you read, there is much to enjoy in this collection.

DAVID HUTCHISON

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