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WESTERLY

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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The Patricia Hackett prize for the most outstanding contribution to *Westerly* in 1979 has been awarded to John Bryson for his story "The Routine" (no. 1, March, 1979).

The editors wish to thank Associate Professor Helen Watson-Williams for her assistance in choosing the prize-winner.

WESTERLY

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Cover: "*The broad liquid fire of the cold moon*" (*D. H. Lawrence*) — see article
by Helen Watson-Williams — Photo by Julian Cowan

PETER CORRIS

The Port-drinking Champion of North Queensland

It was one of those nights that make southerners think Queensland isn't a part of Australia. The air was warm, sweet and sticky, as though the equator was only a few miles away. The bus dropped me in a dark, dusty side-street of Yorktown; I shouldered my bag and headed for the bright lights.

The town had two motels — one advertised a swimming pool, the other colour TV. I chose the swimming pool. The manager wore a woollen shirt and sweated into it; the carpet in the office was thick and hot. I could feel the beer I'd swigged in the bus swirling around in my belly. I wanted to sleep and piss but it's never too early to start.

'Any south sea islanders around here?' I asked as I signed the registration card.

The manager was watching the letters form, mouthing them silently and seemed not to hear. I repeated the question.

'South sea . . . ? I don't get you.'

'He means the darkies, Claude.' A thin, stringy woman stepped into the office from the room behind. I could see the flash of the television screen and hear the canned voices. I wondered if it was colour TV.

'You know,' she went on, 'they useta live down by the creek. In the town now, Sebastapol street and that.'

'Sebastapol street?' I wondered if I should pull out my notebook and write it down.

'Yeah, now I know what you mean. Darkies eh?' He stuck his finger in between his fat neck and the sweat-soaked collar.

'I suppose so.'

'What do you want with them?'

'I'm writing a book about them.'

'Just don't bring any of them back here, alright?' The woman pulled cigarettes from the pocket of her cotton frock and lit up. She challenged me with a plume of smoke blown slowly in my direction.

Christ, I thought, not already. But I was too weary to fight. Kennedy nil, racists one.

The man smiled broadly to restore the happy, white image of his motel.

'Breakfast at seven, Mr. Kennedy?'

'Eight,' I said.

But I slept badly and the sunlight woke me soon after six. I went for a swim in the motel pool; the water was cool, not cold. I stretched my pale, southern body out in the sun for an hour as everything warmed up around me. I ate the greasy breakfast and went looking for Sebastapol street.

The town was a dry, dusty scar on a lush, green landscape. The hills were green all round and the sea stretched away clean and green to the east. The roads were dusty and the gardens in front of the houses on stilts wore a film of grey dust. Sebastapol street was dustier than most. It ran for about a hundred and fifty yards with vacant blocks interspersed with houses on both sides like a gap-toothed grin. The bitumen was a thin strip flanked by twenty feet of gravel on each side. There was no nature strip, no pavement.

Most of the houses were fibro, a couple weatherboard. Only one stood on stilts and had the dignity of a high veranda, the rest squatted sullenly close to the ground. I started down the street and as I passed the first front yard a flock of kids jumped up from their game and ran into the house. A flash of dark legs, white socks and black shoes and they were gone. Three children stood their ground at the front fence a few houses on. They wore shorts and T shirts and were barefoot. Two of them had thick, green mucus clotting their nostrils and the flies buzzed around open sores on their thin, brown legs.

'Giddy,' I said.

The oldest, a boy of ten or so, nodded. 'Got a smoke mister?'

'Sorry, no.' I pulled out the roll of barley sugar I'd bought for air sickness. 'Have a few of these?'

The hands shot out and I doled out the sweets, three or four each. A man stepped out of the house — a double-fronted weatherboard with the wood showing through peeling, blistered paint — and came down the path towards us. For half of its length the path was marked by up-turned beer bottles sunk in the earth. The man was medium height with grizzled grey hair; his skin was nuggety brown. He wore a blue workman's singlet and old grey slacks, no shoes.

'Morning,' I said.

'Giddy. Help you?'

'I wanted to meet some south sea island people — book I'm writing.'

He stuck out his hand. 'You just met one, Jacky Gela'

We shook. His hand was hard.

'You're a Solomon Islander eh?' I said.

'That's right, both sides. Course I was born here and so was me mum, but me dad was a kanaka. That'd be what you're after?'

'Not only that, I'm interested in the Australian end of it.'

'I can tell you the lot.' His smile was warm and he patted my arm. 'Come in the house.'

He steered the kids aside with his foot and opened the gate. The house was dark inside and my eyes were slow to adjust. When I could see, my first impression was of beds, they seemed to be everywhere — a couple of camp stretchers in the narrow hall; bunks inside a room we passed on the way to the kitchen at the back. A couch in the living room had tangled bed clothes lying on it.

A thin, dark, tired-looking woman was sitting at the table eating bread, butter and jam. The flies swarmed around the jam tin.

'Marg,' said Jacky, 'tea for me mate here. That's the wife.'

She got up and flip-flopped in thongs across to the sink.

'How many kids 've you got?'

'Fourteen.'

'All at home?' I hid my surprise.

'Most of 'em, ten or eleven.'

We drank tea and talked. Marg sat down with a cup but a look from Jacky sent her off. I heard her moving about in the other rooms; there was some laughter, a slap and some crying.

Jacky claimed to know everything about the Solomon Islanders of north Queensland. He'd take me about, introduce me around, show me places I'd be interested in. He pushed his cup aside, got up and yelled the woman's name. She appeared in the doorway and avoided my eyes.

'I'm pissing off, we're going visiting a few of the old people.'

'Goin' to work?'

He shook his head. She held out her hand.

'We need a few things.'

Jacky turned to me; his face looked older, more battered when he arranged it in a crooked smile. His nose was flattened and his eyes were red-rimmed.

'Could I bite you for a few bucks? Pay day tomorrow.'

I pulled out a couple of two dollar notes and some singles and handed them over. I had several tens in another pocket and a healthy bunch of traveller's cheques back at the motel. He gave Marg the twos and stuffed the singles into his pants pocket. I tried to nod to her but she turned away. Jacky and I went out of the house. He shoved his feet into a pair of plastic thongs near the front door.

We walked back towards the main street and Jacky wiped his face with his hand after a hundred yards.

'First stop's the pub,' he said.

It was a long stop. We went into the cool public bar at a little after ten and came out at noon. I met three young men, younger than Jacky, also islanders, who claimed to know nothing about their antecedents. I bought round after round of five ounce beers and one of the ten dollar notes was reduced to small change by the time we left.

'Too young those blokes,' Jacky said as we left the pub. 'Don't know nothing.'

'Who does?' I was drunk but I sensed that he was a little uneasy.

'Tommy at Five Mile Creek.' He looked sharply at me. 'You got a car?'

'I could hire one.'

'Yeah, you do that and I'll take you out. Hang on.'

He darted back into the pub and I looked bleakly at the hot, almost deserted street. He came back with a bottle in a paper bag.

'You get the car and I'll meet you here at two' He waved and walked steadily back the way we'd come. I hung on to a post and got my bearings, the motel seemed like ten miles away.

I splashed in the tepid pool, had a slightly colder shower, and drank coffee. I arrived half-sober and clean at the car hire office and got through the formalities. I drove the Morris 1100 jerkily to the pub, parked outside and waited. One of the men I'd met that morning came out, saw me and walked over.

'Jacky's inside,' he said.

I locked the car and went in. Jacky was sitting at the bar talking to the barmaid. She was nodding, he was apparently making sense. A squad of empty five ounce glasses littered the bar in front of him. He gave me the thumbs up and then rubbed his thumb and forefinger together. He pointed to the barmaid and I gave her a twenty dollar note. She pushed change back at me and Jacky plucked out a ten.

'Give us a bottle of rum.' He took the bottle and the change. 'For old Tommy,' he said. 'You might get a couple of cans for us to keep him company.'

I bought the cans.

I was soaked in sweat within a minute of getting into the car. I rolled the windows down and unbuttoned my shirt. Jacky opened two of the cans and handed me one. He sat back sucking contentedly and giving me directions. We left the town and the scrubby houses on its edge got fewer and eventually gave

way to forest, brown and green, thick like oil paint. I watched the milometer, we travelled seven miles. I'd finished the can and my tongue was thick and slow.

'Thought you said this was Five Mile Creek.'

Jacky shrugged. 'Miles were longer in the old days.'

Eight miles out he directed me to stop at a shack by the side of the road. Tall trees, sticking their heads up in a line above the forest, showed where the creek ran. The shack was built of rough weatherboards patched with scraps of different timbers.

Jacky waded through a pack of yapping dogs and banged on the rickety front door with the rum bottle. I stood behind him, sweat flowing down me, carrying the carton of beer cans. Another bash on the door and it was opened by a wizened man wearing a length of cotton around his middle and nothing else. His feet were leathery and there were large cataracts in both his eyes.

Jacky held up the bottle. 'Got any cold water, Tom?'

The old man patted the door jamb, took a grip on it and moved forward a step, peering.

'Jacky is it?'

'Too right, and a mate,' said Jacky. 'We stopped by for a drink.'

The oldster spun about, surprisingly lively, and pattered off into the house. Jacky winked at me and we followed. A veranda ran right around the house and at the back this was boarded and glassed in to make a kitchen. Most of the glass was broken. Tom took a gin bottle filled with water from a battered kerosene fridge and set it on the floor near a couple of ancient wooden chairs. Jacky pulled up a box, squatted and made a gesture to me. I tossed him a can. He gestured again for me to take one and I did. Tom grinned as he heard the cans pop. He took a streaked, cracked glass from the top of the fridge and poured out a rum and water — half and half. He drank it straight off and poured another. He drank three or four before anyone spoke. Jacky finished his can; I threw another one across.

'Tell us about the old days, Tom,' Jacky said, belching, 'me mate here's interested.'

Tom began a long rambling tale about women and fights which I soon lost track of. He talked between long swallows of rum and water. I drank two cans of beer, just for something to do. I thought of my tape recorder back in the motel and wondered why I hadn't brought it along. I thought about how 'Tell us about the old days' would be viewed by my Oral History seminar mates as an opening gambit. Jacky leaned back tilting his box, resting his back against the flimsy partition wall. His eyes were fiercely bloodshot; he kept drinking and put in an odd question. I tried to concentrate on the harsh, stilted voice which was slurring and blurring as the shadows lengthened in the veranda.

My chin cracked against my chest and I woke up. Jacky was shaking my shoulder, not gently. The old man was snoring in his chair; the empty rum bottle and the empty water bottle were on the floor on their sides.

A bird shrilled outside and the sound sent shafts of pain through my skull.

'What time is it?'

'Dunno,' said Jacky, 'you've got the watch.'

It had stopped at six o'clock. The light was failing outside. I walked unsteadily after Jacky as he moved quickly towards the front of the house. Outside I fumbled for the keys.

'Want me to drive?'

I threw him the keys, threw badly, but he bent smoothly and caught them in his left hand. His right hand held a can of beer which he popped open in the car and drank as he drove.

He stopped a hundred yards from the motel.

'Run yourself home from here.'

'All right.' I was too drunk and fatigued for manners.

'Call for you in the morning. Got some places to show you.'

He got out leaving the engine running. I put the car in gear and moved slowly down the street. A quick look in the rear vision mirror showed me Jacky going up the steps from the street towards the fitful yellow light of the public bar.

I got the car in place somehow, fumbled my way into my room and pulled off my shoes and some clothes. Prone on the bed with the walls and ceiling circling gently I tried to remember what the old islander had been talking about. I couldn't recall a word.

I woke up to a gentle, insistent tapping on my door. Everything hurt as I got off the bed. A small boy in school uniform was doing the tapping. He pointed across the street; Jacky was leaning against the fence opposite.

'He told me to wake you up,' the kid piped. 'He said you'd give me fifty cents.'

I picked my pants up off the floor and gave him fifty cents. I flashed ten fingers at Jacky and spent eight minutes under a cold shower. I put on shorts and an army shirt, loading the pockets with money, a small camera and pain-killers. As I loaded I noticed the breakfast tray had been put through the hatch. I touched the coffee pot, stone cold. I didn't have the courage to lift the metal lid off the plate. I grabbed the *Yorktown Mercury* and went out to the car.

'Where are we going?' I asked Jacky.

'Mill.'

'You're going to work?'

'No, quitting, been meaning to for donkey's ages. Show you over though. You be around for a few days yet?'

'A few, yes.'

'Fair enough.'

The mill was a couple of miles from the town — the classic huge tin shed set in the middle of lush, waving fields of cane. Jacky directed me around the service roads up to an office block housed in a quonset hut. He picked up his pay while I waited in the car. He came out after ten minutes putting notes in his pocket and tearing up paper.

'I'll show you what a ratshit job I had.'

I followed him to the mill. Inside the walls looked a hundred feet high and the conveyor belts and other machinery made a steady loud hum. We walked to an opening in the wall where a set of train tracks ended. There was a huge bin, twenty feet by twenty, with a structure like the grid over a stormwater drain for a floor, except that the gap between the bars was wider.

'Cane trucks run up to here,' Jacky said pointing, 'she drops her load into the hopper and the floor shakes. That gets rid of the shit.'

'What's your job?'

'Cleaning out the shit. Show you.'

We went down a set of metal steps under the hopper to a concrete bin about the same size and just high enough for a six foot man to stand upright.

'Shit comes through, some good cane in it. I separate that out and send it on. The shit gets swept through the chute there and off to make fertiliser or something.' A heavy industrial broom stood against the wall, Jacky sent it flying with a kick, turning his thonged foot sideways. A heavy cloying smell hung in the air but the thick, dark dust was worse. I asked Jacky what it was.

'Soot mostly. Cane's burnt of course. All sorts of crap comes through there though. Snakes sometimes. Hard to kill a snake with a broom.'

I looked at him, he wasn't joking.

'Besides, I got asthma. No job for a man with asthma, this.'

We went up the steps out of the pit and Jacky started coughing in the molasses-smelling air to make his point. He doubled up and leaned against the mill wall; the fit bulged veins in his arms and face and made his legs tremble. When it had passed he dug in his pocket for tobacco. A couple of ten dollar notes and some twos and fives fell out as he freed the makings. I handed them back to him.

'Ta. Shit I need a drink after that. Come on, we'll go out by the river, pub's on the way.'

We stopped at a pub by a crossroads. It had had a plastic facelift recently but its solid old colonial lines were still detectable. There was some fine wrought iron on the balcony and the stonework in the foundations was expert.

'Couldn't go in here when I was growing up,' Jacky commented as we went into the bar. 'No bloody boongs allowed. Couldn't tell you how many times I been thrown out since.'

The decor was Los Angeles modern but already showing signs of wear. Long strips had been ripped off the Sunny North Queensland poster that occupied most of one wall. My bar stool was rickety and foam rubber showed through the torn plastic covering.

'Real blood house this place of a Friday night,' Jacky said with relish. 'Lots of our blokes here, we'll drop in.'

Over several small beers Jacky told me about his early life on the river bank — the shanties and the charity clothes, the kids that died. He also talked about some old songs which he couldn't remember and the taro plants and the gardening spells.

'Lotta bullshit of course, those spells.'

'Do you remember them?'

'Nah. C'mon, drink up, I'll show you where the camp was.'

We left the pub and walked down a side road that led to the river bank. The water flowed fast and clean after fairly recent rain. The narrow track ran alongside the river's deeply cut banks, then it went up and we reached a clearing, or what had been a clearing, extending back from the edge of the bank towards the scrub. It was about two hundred feet long and a hundred feet wide. At one end, where the scrub thickened, there were a couple of tall, gnarled trees.

'Mangos,' Jacky said. 'We planted them.'

We sauntered across the river flat. Jacky pointed out discolourations of the earth, slabs of concrete, bits of metal that indicated house sites.

'Whole camp cooked here on special days,' he said, standing over a tumble of bricks.

'What sort of special days.'

'Oh, I dunno, it's a long time ago. Come here, I'll show you the taro patch.'

He did, a murky, sodden hollow down near the water. I took a few photographs but it was impossible to capture any sense of the life that had once filled the place.

'What was it called, this camp?'

'Just the kanaka camp, that's all I ever heard it called. I wasn't here that long, it got broken up in the fifties.'

I had a feeling that Jacky knew more about the camp than he was willing to communicate, even that he regretted bringing me here. He seemed to be hanging back, letting me go about on my own. I decided to take it as a hint.

'Look,' I said, 'thanks for showing me. I might walk up the river a bit to stretch my legs. You look a bit beat.'

'Yeah I am. Alright, I'll see you back at the pub.'

I walked along the track until the scrub sheltered me from the clearing. Then I climbed up a slope to a position where I could get a view back down to where Jacky was standing. He walked to the mango trees by a roundabout route taking care to avoid a section of the clearing off to the left and down a slight incline. He studied the trunks of the trees in turn and then stooped to gather up some leaves. Again avoiding the same depression, he came back to near the centre of the clearing. He knelt down and did something with the leaves, arranged them in patterns on the ground. He sat back on his heels and looked at the leaves and although I was too far away to hear anything or to see his face clearly I could tell from the movement of his body that he was speaking or singing. He did this for about ten minutes, then he got up and moved towards the area he had avoided before. His walk had a studied, ritualistic grace to it quite unlike his usual step. He moved around the perimeter of the area depositing the leaves at intervals. Then he walked away towards the river. I lost sight of him but soon saw a puff of smoke curl up into the still air; he came back into view smoking a cigarette and moving in his normal fashion. A quick indifferent glance around the clearing and he set off along the track. I let five minutes go by and followed.

It was after 4 o'clock when I got back to the pub and the place was filling up with workers from the mill, mostly white men but a good number of blacks and some southern Europeans so deeply tanned that it was hard to tell which they were until they settled down to drink. The blacks and whites drank separately, the blacks keeping to the left side of the room and the whites to the right. I couldn't see Jacky and I was more than half hoping he'd gone. I bought a beer and looked at the social arrangements in the bar as a true student of social science should. The segregation was not complete. Occasionally a white man addressed himself to a black or had a drink with a group of blacks, but no composite groups formed. A couple of dark-skinned women drank in the company of white men. I finished the beer and ordered another. After 6 o'clock, I told myself, I'd assume Jacky had given it a miss and would go myself. I drank. A couple of white women came into the bar; the crowd pressed harder, the noise level went up. It was hot but the daytime five ounce beers had given way to ten ounce pots and fifteen ounce schooners. The barmen sweated to keep the beer up to the customers and to wash the glasses but they fell behind at both jobs.

I felt a pull at my arm and Jacky was there urging me to join his school. I went over and was introduced to six or seven men, all islanders or Aborigines. They weren't interested in me, they were talking work, horses and beer. A round came — schooners — the drinking was infectious. I got my schooner down as quickly as the others and went off to the bar to buy a round.

I ordered and waited.

'Are you a nigger lover?'

The words jerked my head around. She was young, late teens, with short blonde hair, very pretty. Her white silk blouse was open low down and I felt a sudden throb at the sight of her flesh. I was trying to think of something to say when Jacky's voice cut through.

'Forget the tart mate, let's have our beer.'

A mistake. People around us stopped talking and a heavily built man in a singlet and shorts stepped close to Jacky and jabbed him in the ribs.

'Don't call . . .' he started. Jacky hit him twice in the stomach. The girl shouted something, a name perhaps, and another white man threw a punch at Jacky. He ducked and his punch connected. The second man lurched back, collided with one of Jacky's drinking mates and spilled his beer. The Aborigine chopped at the man with his fist. The two bunches of men, one white, one dark,

seemed to sway towards each other and there was a din of shouts, punches and breaking glass. I tried to shield my face with my hands but I took a few punches and one hard elbow to the ear. I felt sick, ready to vomit. Jacky was in the middle of the fight hitting hard with one hand. I pushed my way towards the door which brought me close to him and I could see that he was trying to get clear as well. He punched and a man blocking my way went down. I shoved and Jacky stepped through a gap. We were nearly to the door when the heavy man who'd fronted Jacky loomed up in front of me. He had a broken glass in his hand and he swung it towards my face, I dodged and Jacky dropped him by jabbing his left fist into his face and slamming along the side of the head with a bottle. We got through the door, my knees buckled and Jacky hauled me to the car. He said something about cops. I got the car started and drove off. After a hundred yards my legs shook and I stalled it. I swore and fumbled with the ignition but Jacky grabbed my wrist.

'Leave it, this is alright. Have a drink.'

He held out a bottle of port: I could smell it rich and winey. I refused. He tilted the bottle to his mouth and held it there letting a third of the contents run down his throat. He lowered the bottle and gasped.

'You know,' he said, 'I useta be the champion port-drinker of north Queensland.'

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

The Man who was Wally Wallaby

Wally the Wallaby unzips his suit of fur, and steps out. Or tries to step out. For some reason, his costume seems more difficult to remove lately. Perhaps it's due to static electricity, or maybe just the sweat. He tries to shake his legs free, trips and falls flat on his face.

'Yow!'

Wally is hot and sweaty and angry. His headache is returning, his asthma is bad again. Three hours under the studio lights and his kangaroo suit becomes an oven. Bringing him slowly to boil.

Eventually, he struggles free and heads for the staff canteen. He pours down a fleet of schooners, and starts to relax. Wally finds that most of his feelings are soluble in beer, but especially tension. And he's certainly tense.

A lifetime in live theatre, film experience, a regular in Homicide for years, and now he's come to this. The mute, furry star of the Wally Wallaby Show, five mornings a week. Plus endless appearances at shopping centres, hospitals, birthday parties, charity fetes. Forty hours a week of hopping around with children in his pouch, being loveable. And never uttering a word.

Wally finds he's beginning to dislike children, even to fear them. Their grubby hands on his fur, their runny noses pressed against his snout. He finds he's beginning to fear people of all ages, when he's in his suit. Especially crowds of them. He pushes the children away roughly with his paws, trips them up off-camera with his tail. He knows that his behaviour is being noticed, but he can't seem to help himself. There have even been one or two complaints from doting parents of the little brats.

'What's eating you, Wally?' Docherty, the producer, had inquired a few weeks before. 'Why don't you ease up on the booze a bit? Take a holiday?'

'Take a flying fuck at the moon!' he had told Docherty, and moved further away along the bar. He really can't stand humans getting close anymore. They smell. Like the inside of an abattoirs, the rank carnivorous stench of animal fat.

Wally often takes it out on Docherty. He sometimes wonders how such a door-mat ever succeeded in the jungle of the television. Still, he knows that even easy-going Docherty might be pushed too far. After all, anyone can fill a kangaroo costume.

Maybe if Wally the Wallaby was allowed to speak it would help. Bottled up for hours at a time, mute and claustrophobic, who can blame him if he gets a little worked up. Once he even urinated inside his suit, it seemed the only release. The wetness seeped slowly into his marsupial pouch, where a tot was enjoying the ride.

'You little filth! You've pissed all over me!' he hissed through gritted teeth, and spilled his scape-goat onto the studio floor. Off-camera, of course. But all the time the moronic painted kangaroo smile was all that he could show to the world.

Oddly enough, when he's on his own, Wally enjoys wearing his suit. Pulling it on like a huge, woolly sock. It's become his habit to wear it home on rainy days, it seems easier than taking it off. He feels comfortable lounging in it at weekends, or taking it on long country walks. He wears it to mow the lawn on Sundays, and to sleep in on cold nights.

His wife likes it when he wears it at night. He hadn't seen her so excited for months, the night he mounted her from behind wearing his kangaroo suit. Her pillow muffling her animal grunts. The pouch didn't seem to bother her, perhaps the knowledge that it was a female kangaroo only excited her more.

But despite these diversions, each morning at the TV studio the fears return. The press of children around him, the tightness in his chest. The knowledge that the old Homicide days of wine and roses are gone forever. That his life has become a cage.

He sits at the bar after his liquid lunch, dreaming of vast outback plains and open spaces. As usual, Docherty has to come and rescue him.

'Come on Wally, out to the car. We're late for the crippled children.'

Docherty steers him outside and pushes him back into his suit. It almost flows to meet him, slipping on even more perfectly, just as it will be even more difficult to remove.

At the Crippled Children's Home, Wally the Wallaby lurches drunkenly into the Day Room. A tide of small faces washes around him, shouting and laughing. He feels the claustrophobia rising in him, the hair prickling down his back and along his tail.

The faces have him surrounded, staring at him through a tangle of crutches, calipers and walking frames. The bars of a cage. His hackles rise again and he leans back on his tail. A big Plains Roo at bay.

A grunting bark emerges from his throat, and there is immediate silence in the room. Docherty begins to move towards him, but then his legs kick out, an injured child screams, and all is chaos.

In one bound, Wally is through the window and flying. He feels the glass splinters in his fur and paws, but he's free and racing for cover. A blue flyer. His snout lifts into the wind and feels the pull of the green distance.

Wally the Wallaby, hopping awkwardly through the centre of the city, fails to hear the scream of brakes behind him, or even to feel the thump. And he certainly doesn't hear the astonished voice.

'Jesus, Mavis! You've hit a bloody kangaroo in Hindley street!'

Wally the Wallaby is already far from there, and flying. The braying of the dingoes is fading behind, and the far mallee stretches endlessly ahead.

TERRY TREDREA

The Pros and Cons of Penang

'Hullo Joe.' I sat with a little Chinese with lizard's eyes. He seized my wrist. 'My name Pheu Pong.' Stumps of yellow teeth littered his mouth.

'Not Joe.' I rescued my hand. "Me from Australia.'

'Ahh. O-sea!' He ran an eye over me. Around us, an assortment of Asians were eating strenuously. They filled the little shed with lapping noises. 'You want hit, O-sea?'

'Hit?'

'You know . . . hit.' He tapped his nose and raised one eyebrow.

'Oh yes.' I did the same. 'Er, not before dinner.'

His eyes unfolded with surprise. 'What you want, Joe?'

'Me just looking.' I signalled the waiter, who disappeared.

'Ahh. O-sea tooris. Come, I show you REAL Penang.'

'Where?'

'Ah Hooi Hotel.'

'Well, I, er . . .'

'Why not?'

'My bus is waiting.'

'Sure.' He sneered and leant forward. His breath could have killed nine out of ten household pests. 'You run along to nice bus.'

'All right.' I stood up. 'Let's see this hotel.'

He led me down countless laneways reeking of boiled cabbage. No wonder the locals were so thin. We passed an ancient woman skinning a cat. 'Nice cat,' I said. She hissed at me.

The entrance to the Ah Hooi was lined with girls in sleeping attire. Pong grinned. 'With or without girl, O-sea?'

'Whichever's cheaper.'

We entered a room containing three chairs and a huge man. He looked like someone had scribbled on him with biro. His arms were streaked with collapsed veins.

'My name Ah Ghee,' he said.

'You have my sympathy.'

'I order tea,' said Pong.

Ghee's face went tight. 'We must hurry!'

'After tea!' The two men exchanged little domestic glances. We waited in a strained silence.

‘Have you had Chinese tea, O-sea?’
‘Not really.’
‘How you like it?’
‘With water.’ I took the cup.
‘I afraid it not like good old Blitish cuppa,’ said Ghee. ‘You must pardon our ways.’
It was cold, and tasted like ashtray fillings soaked in urine.
‘Good?’
‘Terrible!’
Pong grinned. ‘Of course.’ He gazed out the window. ‘You know, before War I work for Blitish gov’ment. If I give my Blitish boss cup of Chinese tea, he spit it on floor. “That shit!” he shout.’ Pong’s face crumpled into a silent laugh. ‘You know, that only time boss show feeling. Blitish very good men of business. We Chinese . . .’
I looked at my watch. ‘I must go.’
‘We hurry!’ said Ghee.
Pong glared at him. ‘Shut up!’ Ghee blinked and sucked in his lips. ‘One moment, O-sea.’ Pong dug into a huge pocket and produced what could have been fish and chips wrapped in Chinese newspaper. ‘Half kilo, O-sea.’
‘Oh yes. What is it?’
‘Brown sugar.’
‘Oh great! More tea!’ I slapped my knees and stood up. ‘Well, I’ll show myself out.’
Pong jumped down from his chair and pointed a small knife at my face. I froze. Stainless steel. Made in Taiwan. He’d stopped smiling. I sat slowly, wishing I’d kept with the bus tour.
‘Glad you staying,’ He handed me the fish and chips. ‘Open.’
Inside, wrapped in plastic was a lot of what looked like powdered milk. ‘Five thousand dollar, O-sea. Good stuff!’
‘Er, stuff?’
Pong stiffened in the face. His little black eyes scanned me from their sockets. ‘It smack, O-sea.’
‘Smack?’
Ghee sighed and lumbered to his feet. His body loomed over the room like an odour of boiled cabbage. ‘Bummer, man,’ he said to Pong. ‘He not dealer!’
Pong sneered. ‘Yes! He play dumb! No worry!’
Ghee turned to me. ‘This isn’t your bag, is it, man?’
‘I don’t have a bag. Er, what exactly . . .?’
‘Seel!’ He shook a streaked fist at Pong. ‘Bummer!’ They began shouting in Chinese. I felt in my pocket for a phrase book.
Suddenly Pong turned his knife on me. Ghee flung open the door. ‘Get going, man!’ I escaped into the street. Neon signs blazed over crowds of evening strollers. I joined them feeling angry and confused. People shouldn’t go around pulling knives, even on tourists. It ruins holidays. The police should be told. I spotted a traffic policeman amongst a squadron of cyclists.
‘Excuse me.’
He was swathed in strings of bullets and gun holsters. A pistol hung from each hip. He stared, chewing gum, through dark glasses. The ugly Malaysian.
‘I’d like to report a knife.’ He sniffed and began directing traffic, waving his arms in a graceful semaphore. ‘Hullo?’ A cyclist skidded around me. I ducked back to the pavement and hailed a rickshaw. ‘To police station!’
‘Hokay!’ He sped away, his bamboo legs going like pistons.

⌘

Captain Long sat behind his bare desk. There were sunglasses where his eyes should have been. A negligible chin sloped up to his bulging forehead.

'You say dese men were at de Ah Hooi, isn't it?'

'Isn't what?'

'De Ah Hooi.'

'Oh, yes.'

He tried to twiddle a pencil moustache. 'Look, ol man, everting undah control.' The moustache buckled up at the ends. 'Dese men vork for us, don' yu know.'

'For you?'

He shook out a handkerchief and blew a cool C sharp. 'Ve ah after some blighters in drug racket.'

'Drugs?'

He nodded, and two windows flashed in his glasses. I swallowed a small slice of fingernail. 'Gosh.'

He stood up and offered a bejewelled hand. 'You may go on your vay vithou' fuss.' I shook his rings. A sudden thought rippled across his brow. 'I trus' yu will keep dis to youself?'

'You can count on me.' My heels moved instinctively together.

I wandered outside feeling more confused than ever. Worse, I was lost. I took out my map, and wrestled it under control with a few karate chops.

'Shoeshine, O-sea?!' cried a little boy built like a stick insect.

I smiled, and offered my foot. 'OK, son.' He set down a box of tools and got to work. I stood watching the passing traffic and musing. I suppose I'd overreacted. It's too easy to be suspicious in a strange country. Below me, my shoe was coming apart under a skilled blade.

LOUIS JOHNSON

Coming and Going

If love is what would make one offer himself
to bear the pains of another, there is so much
the baby does not understand I would gladly
stand in her stead for. But you cannot take
the pang for another or teach
pain quicker than the piercing thorn
any more than explain to the blind
the colour of blood or a bird.

Through glass of the kitchen door she sees
me return through the burning light of the day
and the indescribable sunset; her arms
suddenly wild signalling welcome.
What she makes of my comings and goings
I cannot guess nor begin to explain.
Here one minute, gone another: small wonder
children find fathers incomprehensible
shadows, moon-ruled like tides, undependable.

Which is not why I pick her up from the floor —
but to secure for myself the fact of return
and the weight of the welcome. My fifty-odd
years are so close to a last departure
I know I should have thought harder
about such a new beginning. I tell myself
that love is quite as extreme as any entrance
or exit, and does not come too late. Its colour
glows in the room where I have closed the door.

Fruits of Autumn

Sunday, and a mild morning: set out
under a crisp sky, driving the dusty roads
through farmlands, scrubby gulleys, the hills
greening again; and we, searching for signs —
lascivious blackberry bobbing ripe heads
like crotchets along the stave of the vines
where mustering birds in conclave
gave some of the notes due recognition
chorusing weatherwise words, the warning
of things to come, and a change of heart.

For the moment ripeness was all. Our lips,
stained dark from pronouncing a good season
out of which buckets soon filled, might count
as blessings or passion that sharp-sweet taste
so similar to loving. But I knew that love,
like God, was trivialised and domesticated
to death. From earth's magniloquence, some pounds
of jam and a range of puddings would stand
sole justification. Life can boil down to that —
what we hope for as essence, discover is only dessert.

So the taste was after-taste: the ultimate course.
And then to pay the bill. I wished her dead
beneath the leaves that crackled like banknotes,
useless as confetti. Each taste, each season, must have
its fall. The infant bobbed between us, her lips
bruised from ingesting the sweets of the time, her dress
juice-freckled; yet stood as cement for our building.
I knew that the best was over whatever Spring
or Summer might follow. To underline it, returning
home, the car radio rendered 'Death and the Maiden'.

ELIZABETH LAWSON MARSH

plane trees at crawley bay

there are no seasons here and only race memory
kicks the plane trees to autumn.
I'm glad they know how in the summer-sun
the warm hills-wind with the yachts
tacking past like ghosts in white;
and it's well I think for the weddings they hold—
they try to hold forever in camera
under the planes in full lace glory
all the way down to the bottoms of their skirts
and the bridesmaids
caught out in tiaras
and permanent smiles,
and all of them tripping to a lifetime of summers
high on sailing and sly white wines —
but the papery planes hustle above them
in all their full glory
of russet decay
healthy with sedition and the stealthy
crying from their roots
making comments for the future
whispering with ironic reserve
in a skirl of cold leaves.

KENNETH GAUNT

Sunday Session

I'm whispering on the back seat to nobody, though it seems everyone can hear. Crammed into Knobby's green Simca, we can see the board rollers through a hole in the roof. I can tell Knobby is chewing by the way his hair moves. Dave beside him is rocking out to Neil Young. And beside me Marty looks at Di who is gazing out, tapping her ring against the glass. Knobby and Dave put Clapton into the dashboard two streets away from the Sunday session.

My grandmother died today.

It's a jazz session at the Ocean Beach and we sit on the white tabled lawn, looking out past Rotto. It's been a hot day, the sun is red as it dives into the sea. Only Di watches until that final moment of disappearance. Dave is buying a jug and Knob is trying not to be seen pointing out two damp bikinis coming up from the beach. The beer. The beer is good. Soon I'm whistling obscenities at the group over Marty's shoulder as he tells me about the show I missed last night for being at the hospital.

She loaned me her golf clubs when I first started playing, and kept up with my scores. And during the footy season she'd ring me up when our teams were playing and we'd have a little wager on the result. I must have been ten and broke when that started. My team was always on top, but it was exciting anyway.

Behind Marty she sips on an orange drink. She's laughing with her tanned friends and I'm finding it hard to keep going. There's too much lust in me to keep the flirt facade going. Too much desolation. I want her beside me now, tonight, forever. I don't want to whistle, my moistening eyes can't play. And if I look around I want her too, and her, her.

Di asks what's wrong with me today. I'm just tired. The beach really drained me today. I'm really into this West Coast Jazz Band. Really good for a Sunday avo. Yeah. It's really incredible how many people are here. Knob says he'll probably make it back next week. Might roll along myself.

For a long time Granny ran a boarding house with two giant pines out the front. When I was home from school she'd look after me and at lunchtime make banana sandwiches. We'd watch the war movies together. Once a programme with Diana Ross and the Supremes came on and she hummed along. Ooooh oooh Babylove, my babylove, pleeeeee dont forsake me love . . .

Knobby's Simca is buzzing along the coast highway and they laugh when he manages to pass someone. They break up when Marty says he's really worried about the little green wonder's brakes. I begin making soft noises again, trying to imitate the distant breaking of waves. We pull into a pizza place and there's that chick with the red T-shirt again. I'm pissed.

Eating a slice out of the Ham'n'Pineapple I look at myself in a laminex panel. There's me, the day Granny died. Normal. But what else, where else? She'll never know what I remember. She'll never know her warmth, how she is connected to all these people, every girl I've ever wanted, all my lust.

Dave says we should see what's going on down the Scarborough beachfront. And we're all in the mood so we put on the Beach Boys. We're all singing along and swaying and banging our hands on the paintwork outside.

I'm curled up years ago, in darkness under my blankets. I can hear my sister practising the piano. My mother is there, watching her feeble fingers. I pretend I'm a foal, kicking in the womb. So warm I can hear the world and I'm so warm.

We swerve into the carpark singing so loud if I close my eyes I can hardly make out the tape but it doesn't matter. Knobby's Simca closes us in and we're gently kicking and I'm thinking I can hear a few generations humming keenly behind us . . .

BARBARA GILES

Comestible

What use is this limb, fleshy,
would it fill a fruit bowl,
is it eatable ?

Would you keep me
under glass,
a forced vegetable ?

Watch out, I've taken root,
my leaves engulf you.

In the undergrowth
wolves howl.

Gentleman Jack

The old man was a born liar. When I was a kid I believed everything he told me. He'd manufacture these enormous stories, bit by bit, over a period of time, as the occasion arose, weaving bits of truth into a complex mythology of which he was the central character. And I could never tell when he was putting me on. He was always dead-pan, always serious. He'd have my eyeballs hanging out, jaws slack, tongue lolling, dribbling too probably, in complete fascination whenever he got going. My mother was his accomplice. She was the ultimate authority. I'd be reeling from some fantastic piece of information he'd just passed on, on the edge of actually disputing him, when he'd turn to her, raise his eyebrows, and she'd nod. Always dead-pan, always serious.

For instance, he told me once that he could walk so quietly that even the cats couldn't hear him coming. He was forever tripping over them at night he said, sending them scuttling off in blind panic to have a nervous breakdown. Didn't I know that cats have supersensitive hearing, and didn't I notice that the cats I saw were all pretty nervous? That was him. He even showed me his technique, heel and toe, heel and toe, and he'd emphasize this walking round the kitchen like a wounded emu. I practised that technique with him correcting me until he finally approved. I still find myself walking like it sometimes.

And he was subtle. He liked to vary his technique. He told me on another occasion that his eyesight was so acute that he frightened himself with some of the things he saw. He never said what — and I must have spent a good part of my childhood pestering him to tell me. He'd make a show of telling all, only to falter, saying that he just couldn't do it. He'd have me squirming with frustration. It never twigged that if his eyesight was so good, why he didn't see the cats. I must have been awfully slow.

There was one story my mother told me about him that immediately met with my approval. It seemed something that he would just naturally do. Alone with her one night while he was at work she confided to me that before they were married he had cleaned up some bloke who had made some nasty remarks about her virtue. Knocked him rotten she said, and her eyes shone.

Funnily enough, when I confronted him with it a short time later he denied the whole business. In fact, he seemed quite embarrassed and quickly changed the subject. I didn't press him. I knew about these things. I put it down to modesty.

There was one occasion when the old man's lying caught him out. That is, one occasion to my knowledge. There must have been countless other contradictions in his stories that went straight over my head. I would have been around nine or

ten at the time. It was when I first started going out with him on the paper round on Saturday mornings. I did this every Saturday morning for about three or four years, up until I went to high school. I got it into my head then that manual work was beneath me. I see these mornings now as highspots in an otherwise pretty dull childhood.

The routine was that he'd get me out of bed around two — not that I'd been asleep, or at least not for long, the excitement was too much. We'd then go gliding into the magic night, up the deserted Anzac Highway to the presses in town, eyes peeled for UFOS (he'd seen hundreds) and for headlights, as they usually belonged to the cops, both jabbering away to each other above the clatter of the old Morris van. There was no doubt that the old man enjoyed my company as much as I enjoyed his. We rarely saw each other otherwise. Working nights, sleeping days, the rest of the time doing the books at the shop, he was never home. Such is life.

We'd then load up the van with the fat warm bundles of the Saturday edition, me sweating blood and strutting about under the eye of all the other blokes there, and then go howling back down to the Bay, rolling papers as hard as we could. We rolled them by hand in those days.

The theory was that we would build up a store of papers ready to be delivered, which I would then maintain at that level throughout the morning, thus leaving the old man free to deliver them. Actually I was little more than a passenger. The old man could roll about three to my one while squinting at the alterations to his schedule swinging on a bulldog clip fastened to the rear vision mirror, and at the same time nursing the old Morris through lanes and up footpaths where a pram would be hard put to go. It was a point of honour with him that he never got out of the van unless it was absolutely necessary. He'd back and fill his way into and out of the tiniest courtyards and driveways, knocking over rubbish bins, cursing every bugger and his dog, bundles of papers cascading down around our shoulders, inching the van around by sheer force of will and the muscles in his bum. He reckoned it was a habit he'd got into when he used to deliver the papers in a horse-drawn cart. The horse he hired to pull the cart had it in for him. He was convinced of this. There developed between them a fierce enmity, bitter and unrelenting. One of the horse's dirtiest tactics was to bolt for home if ever the cart was left unattended. Hence the old man's habit of staying put.

He could also hit your milk bottles with your paper at twenty yards or lob it gently on your front door mat — depending on whether you paid your paper bill. I learned then that the rich were notoriously slow in coughing up.

In fact, the old man could do damn near anything.

This particular morning we were just finishing up. We always finished in the same spot, driving illegally on the esplanade, delivering papers and smashing the token bottle along the row of mansions and high-rise flats that glowered down on the beach. By this time the van would be empty apart from the scraps of wrappers and twine and the two or three bundles of papers reserved for the shop sliding around in the back. We'd be stinking of newsprint, our hands and forearms black and shiny with the stuff. We'd also be looking ahead to our customary morning cup of tea and biscuits.

The old man had a mate who opened up one of the pubs along the foreshore and for years, every morning, the old man and the milky would wind up at this pub and this mate would let them into the kitchen for a cup. If the bloke who owned the pub knew about it, he never said anything. The old man reckoned that if he did he'd dob him into the health authorities, because of the cockroaches. The pub's kitchen fairly seethed with the buggers, big healthy specimens thriving on the sea air and holiday food. We all thought it quite intolerable.

As I said, we were just finishing up and I happened to be gazing out to sea. I usually found myself doing this. You can't live by the sea without it constantly drawing your thoughts into it. In the dawn light, if the weather was good, the sand would take on a soft blue glow — like a fluoro tube that's just been switched off. This morning it was bitterly cold, a still, clear-skied dawn and the sea was dead calm. It had an unearthly appearance, a grey syrupy mass flopping wearily on the fluorescent sands. Suddenly, out of the syrup a figure, charged onto the beach and started to cavort wildly, dashing this way and that, slapping its soft blue belly and thighs, jumping up and down on the spot. The old man had seen it too and we both agreed it was what we could scarcely credit — an iceberg.

We had in the Bay in those days a phenomenon known as the iceberg club. It was a group of hardy old fellas who were out to cheat death by defying it each morning by going for a dip, summer and winter. Or so the local paper would have you believe. It regularly ran a story about them when news was scarce, with a photo of them charging into or out of the teeth of oblivion. Actually, these old buggers would chicken out when the weather really turned cold, figuring that all things considered it was better to die in a warm bed.

As I said, this morning was really cold, about as cold as you can get it without a polar bear strolling into the picture. We watched in awe as this figure gradually took shape, jogging stiffly up the beach towards the van. It emerged as a big bloke, someone I'd never seen before, about the old man's age and size — but in much better trim. His chest was enormous, heaving mightily under the terrible scare he'd just given his heart, and tapering down into a pair of old fashioned skirted swimming trunks atop two massive column-like legs. It was obvious he knew the old man. He had a faint smile on his face, what looked like a contemptuous grin of recognition. In the van I sat in a single seat bolted to the floor behind and just to one side of the driver's seat. I had watched the man's approach over the old man's shoulder. Now I swear that as soon as the man's features became distinct I noticed the hairs on the old man's neck beginning to bristle up. I was fascinated. I'd never seen anything like it. They sprung up like the bristles on a toothbrush as you run your thumb across them.

The man came to the open sliding door of the van, hooked a hand on the van's roof gutter, swung his head and shoulders in inches past the old man's face, took me in at a glance and swung out again. His eyes rested on the old man's paunch, which he jabbed at with his finger.

"Getting a bit porky old son," he said. The old man was about eighteen stone. A moment passed before the old man replied:

"Warm enough for you?" I couldn't see his face but I guess, like me, he was looking at the livid blotches which covered the man's chest. Then he said, and I'll never forget this, "Or are you trying to do us all a favour?" I'd heard the old man kidding around with his mates before, the mock threats and abuse they lavished on each other at times. But I'd never heard the tone which entered his voice now. It was icy. It unnerved me. It sounded so strange coming from the old man and if I hadn't been sitting behind him watching his neck bristles I could have easily sworn it was someone else in front of me. I can remember feeling relieved too. I'd never seen the old man treated so disrespectfully. They were like two old street dogs sniffing each other out before a scrap. It was obvious that the old man was giving as much stick as he was getting.

I can also remember being compelled by the man's eyes. They were a very faint blue with thick black lashes, very long, and bushy eyebrows. In the blue of the dawn his irises merged into the whites. It was like looking into two milky pools with a pupil floating at some indeterminate depth in each. At the old man's retort the man's lashes fell in rapid succession. I was so absorbed in the peculiar

appearance of his eyes that I didn't realise at first what was happening. It dawned on me that he was confused. He was literally blinking in bewilderment. With that infallible sense that kids have I knew he was a bit off, a bit simple.

He shot me a glance and then turned to look at the sea. It was just as if he'd rolled over and exposed his belly to the bigger dog.

"H-how's Thelly?" he asked. Thelly, or Thelma, was my mother.

"Not bad, not bad," said the old man. He had become himself again, too much so and too soon for my way of thinking. I was all keyed up for the kill.

"Just down from Whyalla," the man went on. "Did me job there. Had a blue with one of the bosses. You know . . ." He turned to look at the old man, who nodded, as if he did know. All this time the man had been regaining confidence. "Staying with me married sister, Kath. You know . . . Er . . . listen, you don't know of anything going round the place do you? D'need anything doing yourself?" The old man thought for a while.

"No mate, except if you're not doing anything this arvo you might pop round. Got some bamboos I want to pull out. We can have a few beers. You can say hello to Thel too."

"Righto. See you then." We watched him trot off. For some time we were silent, until I piped up:

"Who was that, Dad?"

"Just a bloke, son, just a bloke."

"He was, er, a bit simple wasn't he Dad?" I chose the word carefully. It was obvious that my lust for the man's blood didn't equate with the old man's treatment of him. I didn't want to appear too flippant in case I earned the old man's disapproval.

"Eh? Ar, not really. Bob short perhaps, bob short. Let's go have our cuppa."

And so we did. And I listened to the old man tell the milky and his mate all about this fella we'd seen come plunging out of the arctic while we drank our tea and crunched about on cockroaches. Yet not once did he mention that he knew him. Nor did he tell of their confrontation. I kept silent, although I was intrigued by his reticence. I knew there must be a reason and I decided to raise the subject on the way home.

"Is that his name, Dad?" I said.

"Eh?"

"Bob Short, is that his name?"

Now this is a familiar enough expression I know. Bob short of a quid is as good as saying that someone is a few cards shy of a full deck, which is as good as saying that someone is a bit empty in the top drawer. But for the life of me I hadn't heard the expression before. I noticed the old man's eyes watching me intently in the rear vision mirror.

"Yeah, son, that's his name. Big Bob Short." And then he launched into this inspired epic about the Short family which I forget now, but I know I believed every word of it.

The routine when we got home on Saturday mornings was that I went to bed for four or five hours to get up in time for the football or the pictures or whatever. I was just drifting off to sleep that morning when I heard the old man's voice floating out of the kitchen. It was loud, much louder than usual, and he was complaining to my mother about being ashamed of something. Something about being as ashamed now as he was then. I fell asleep with this titbit floating about in my dreams. I awoke later to an unusual silence in the house — and after straining my ears for the faintest sound I leapt out of bed, got dressed and went in search of life.

Through the kitchen window I saw the man we had seen in the morning. It was as if he'd come straight to our house after he'd left us, stopping only at his sister Kath's to put on a pair of boots. There he was, his whole enormous body streaming with sweat, straining on a crowbar wedged under the roots of a clump of our bamboos. The old man was there, too, his shirt on in deference to this spectacle, hacking away at the dirt with an axe. My mother was standing to one side, obviously as much taken in by the scene as I was.

She had turned and was coming back towards the house as I went down to have a closer look. She seemed curiously self-absorbed and muttered something about lunch as we passed each other. I stood where she had stood and I watched the man lever great tangled networks of roots out of the ground as if they were soursobs. The old man straightened up upon seeing me, his face beetroot, asked the man if he felt like a beer, declined my offer to get them and stumbled off towards the house.

I was left alone with the man. He ignored me, working away in silence and I grew increasingly self-conscious. After a while he paused, tossing the crowbar into the ground like a spear, and still ignoring me, I thought I'd at least announce myself.

"Gedday, Mr. Short," I said cheerfully. He turned his almost colourless eyes on me, his pupils mere pinpricks in the glare, and regarded me for a long chilly moment.

"Eh?" he said.

"H-hello Mr. Short," I repeated, a little frantic. He picked up the crowbar, rested it against his chest, spat on his hands, took aim and plunged it deep under another clump of soursobs.

"Sounds like you've got the wrong bloke, kid." I stifled an urge to flee into the house. Standing there for a few minutes longer watching him work I was just about to beat a respectable retreat when he straightened up and looked along the curve he had bent in the crowbar. "My name's Paine, kid, Jack Paine."

Back in the kitchen the old man was getting a beer or two ahead, sitting slumped over his glass while my mother worked away at sandwiches. They were both silent when I walked in.

"Guess what, Dad?" I said, determined to get to the bottom of it.

"What?" he grunted.

"That bloke — he reckons his name's Jack Paine, not Bob Short." Somebody was lying.

"Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph," wheezed the old man, the awareness slowly catching hold of him. He sat bolt upright. Staring at me with his tongue between his teeth he asked me finally what Jack had said. I told him, while my mother danced about like a girl, impatient of our cryptic conversation.

That was the first time I caught the old man out. After that I always took a lot more convincing. Life seemed to lose a little of its colour from that day on — or maybe that was just getting older.

We saw a lot more of Jack from that day on too. He wandered in and out of our lives over the years, doing odd things for the old man, from wiring up the spare room to putting in a rainwater tank. I never met a bloke who could do so many things. But he always stayed the same. He never said more than ten words to me — not that I went out of my way to cultivate his conversation. He was always as polite as pie to my mother. In fact, he seemed to fawn on her a bit — much to her embarrassment. And there was always the odd tension between him and the old man. The old man always made a point of never letting Jack do a job for him without getting out there with him. The two old buggers were forever trying to outdo each other.

Another thing too: the old man would always slip Jack a note or two whenever he saw him. He had told me that Jack was always broke. He was a bloke who couldn't keep a job for more than two weeks at a stretch. The story went that Jack couldn't take bosses; couldn't stand anyone telling him what to do. After a while on a job he'd either frighten his boss half to death by giving him the evil eye or he'd actually pick a fight and be forced to thump him. Either way, he was always chasing a job. Even my mother, a breath-takingly practical woman, condoned the old man's habit.

I used to think that they did this because they admired Jack's sentiments, or just felt sorry for him. Perhaps it was a little of both. It wasn't until years later that I think I really understood.

It was some ten years after the old man's death. I was on a little nostalgia jaunt, walking about the old neighbourhood after many years' absence, feeling miserable, when I happened to pass an old bloke weeding some council tennis courts. Jack Paine was the last person on my mind, and I wouldn't have recognised the silver headed old bloke as Jack in a month of Sundays. But he recognised me, and calling me over, asked me how I was and what I was doing. An awkward silence fell and finally he said:

"Your old man — not a bad fella. One of the best. One thing I remember — beat him up once when we were boys. Over a girl." It was a funny thing, but as he said this he fixed me with those terribly faded eyes and his lashes, still black and very long, fell in rapid succession, just like they had nearly twenty years before. Again it took me a while to realise what was happening. He turned away then and walked back to his weeding, without a goodbye. Not that I minded. Now I come to think of it, he was an even bigger liar than the old man.

JOHN WRIGHT

Confession of a Sexist Filmmaker

in my film you'll sit on the edge of your floral-covered armchair
your head at an angle quizzically,
your attention focused birdlike on your own image held
nearly an arm's length away in a circular shaving mirror, preening, half-scowling:
I'll have you do this for forty-five minutes with absolute patience

there'll be vignettes: April, coloured leaves right through the back garden
(dare I show one just flicking your henna-red hair?),
dressed in your autumn tones,
you catch sight of the straggly liquid amber slipping
out of its last few leaves, you laugh quickly, point at my hair

July, the sky flashed with rain, lightning lassoes a tree,
you hunched under a giant's black umbrella,
in your tan Humphrey Bogart overcoat, muttering "shit I hate winter";
September, at the Royal Melbourne Show, eating a metre of liquorice,
your arms filled with showbags

November, at the Melbourne Cup with me in my cups
(an irrelevant Hitchcock-like extra, hiccuping on the screen's edge)
and you flushed with gambling, your mascara running, all
your horses running fourth;
January, you wilt behind ludicrous glasses, wear your highest heels through sand

there'll be close-ups in every scene, showing
no additional wrinkles,
refulgent red curls without grey,
unvarying figure through a calendar's fashions,
the expression steady, only the garments different

I'll have mirrors placed judiciously
and cameras at all feasible angles to catch you performing
for daddy, with me in the minor roles
— lover, deserter, rescuer, victim, the straight
man in your unwearying script.

ALAN ALEXANDER

The Guildford Circus

The waste ground grew overnight.
On Saturday, a huddle of vans
And a small tent were perched on it.

And we were inclined to leave well alone.
But daughter saw the elephants
Tossing hay, and this drew us on

To watch the youngsters under the trees.
The two-thirty show, we quickly found,
Was bad luck in matinees,

Trotted out no matter what.
Seedy and tatty and barely there.
'A survivor and the richer for it,'

Spouse said and laughed again.
Daughter climbed between the seats.
The old men barked out a routine,

Picked up their clowns' gear and walked off.
We had seen the lions come out first,
Then the dogs and ponies do their stuff

With the same modest, half-trained air.
With the youngsters up on stools,
Daughter grinned from ear to ear

Then sucked her thumb and turned away.
After the interval, two women
In tights joined the fray,

And the circus music blared again.
One was a hard-faced younger woman,
And the other woman had been seen

As ticket-collector at the door.
She was fifty if she was a day,
But suppleness had stuck to her

And she climbed like a cat to the trapeze.
She was a good anchor partner
With strength intact from other days

And the younger one arched and span.
They took surprise applause and then
Bowed up there and left at a run.

There was a lull, then out they came,
A boy and his skinny sister
In black and white, like king and queen,

To do their duty on the rope.
She daintied up and, working her arms,
Made it across without mishap.

Then he took the balance pole.
She stayed behind him as he went,
An actor quiet in his role

Of stop, sit, stand again,
Taking applause as his due,
His small body in disdain

While the circus people watched him go.
There is little else to say.
We stood up and joined the slow

Prowl-about that stayed outside.
The manager saw my question.
'It's hot upcountry now,' he said.

CAROLINE CADDY

Sanctuary

The summer revellers are bedded now,
the last boat is in.
Beneath steepled tents, shining roofs
their summer colours are folded, quiet.

All day they have plundered the town,
the clear bay.
Their bodies have discovered and filled
the smooth sand, their lines have known

the tug of kelp, their day has turned
to unfamiliar tides.
From incurious shops they have purchased
and carried away the proper tokens.

They have filed through parks, the stare
of strange marsupials;
have read the long names and flocked
to praise a bird's bright plumage.

Now the tall trees lay the woven limbs
of evening down.
The white moon has bent all shape all
colour to one tracery of leaves.

What they have come for almost touches
them at night.
But they are restless and hear in sleep
the sterile call of the caged peacock.

They will break camp in the morning.

HAL COLEBATCH

On the psychology of adjustment

Ominously, the expected second occupation
is much easier: the barriers
fall back into worn grooves at every check-point,
the private soldiers, no longer bent on rape,
find their former mistresses, unchanged in the same apartments.
Poetry replaces pamphlets, shotguns are handed in,
and almost out of sight, the few fanatic
pockets of resistance are subdued. Prisons refill quietly.
The old police dossiers are all available,
and futility becomes a common property.
The prevailing winds resume. Sand
tears up the ambitious experiments of planting.
Luxury goods disappear. Half-luxuries
replace essentials on the market shelves again.
There is a spate of suicides that passes. The parked tanks become memorials.
And yet, uneasily, the occupiers speculate
that this is not all the story.

RICHARD LUNN

the afterdeath

you are a perpetual
anticlimax you are
the night beside me
that never utters
the expected
word

I pour 2
cups of tea
wipe
spotless ashtrays
my house
is littered
with broken habits
you

are the silent
coughing
at the edge of sleep
the empty space
that shambles
behind me

a spectre
intimate and strange
as some old rhapsody
fallen
out of fashion

DOROTHY FEATHERSTONE PORTER

Washington
(from the Nashville Poems)

Through a film
 of fatigue
feeling acutely
astonishingly aware
of a pulled calf muscle
and this mucky food
cafeteria dead
in front of me—

cockroaches are clean
I think
in this state
of near epiphany—

a toothless black
 humming over
 his burger and coke

smells my mood
and lifts his
 cap

life's too short
 to give up
 sugar.

JUDITH WOMERSLEY

Schizophrenia

Her mother said: You're not the only person in the world you know.
Her teacher said: There are always two sides to every argument.
Her husband said: Shut up and hear my side for once.
Her children said: See it our way Mum.

She has learnt very well.
She is now tolerant, compassionate, wise and fair.

Though she confesses to one weakness still unconquered
As the wild world surges by —
A sneaky desire for participation
In the midst of all this balanced objectivity.

I think I've heard this song before

Speaking calmly but firmly to my children
about untidiness, lethargy, hair, dirt,
lack of serious approach to school-work
and other unsatisfactory aspects of their characters

I'm pole-axed by a déjà-vu of me

hurtling through my teenage years
collecting causes, pimply faced,
rebellious, sulky, lacking grace,
my mother in her gloves and hat
stuck to my neck like a flapping bat
shrieking: "change that dress
your hair's a mess
and what will the neighbours
think of that."

ANDREW DONALD

There's a Girl called Brenda at the
Pharmacy ...
I think I like her

Rounding the corner
past the muttering crowds
and the monstrous mumble of cars
Skulls of pizzas in the gutter
I fumbled forward

As an Iceland Poppy twists to the morning sun
you paused
glancing back at me taking me unaware

Your jewel-like eyes
a smile as delicate as small, glass animals
.... girlish and gay

Sunshine welling behind you

Well!:

I raced the cars home
your dark hair blazing away in my mind /
I returned
to my book-bruised study

... enchanted

PETER COWAN

E. L. Grant Watson and Western Australia

A Concern for Landscape

E. L. Grant Watson was spared the urban landscape of late twentieth century Australia. He would hardly have seen it as anything remarkable, being familiar with its European and American counterparts, but the impact of an earlier Australian landscape preoccupied him over many years, resulting in a series of unusual novels which have no real parallel in their time.

Grant Watson first came to Australia as a very young child, with his mother, on a visit to relatives in Tasmania, a journey which was terminated by the sudden death of his father in Europe. He retained some clear pictures of a place and of youthful adventures, from his own account the broken and fragmented memories usual to childhood.

He returned in 1910, at the age of 25, after studying biology at Cambridge, to join an anthropological expedition led by A. R. Brown. Brown was to study the aborigines in Western Australia, and invited Watson to work as a zoologist with the expedition. The two had met at Cambridge, and for Watson the chance to join Brown — Anarchy Brown as he was known — seemed to come at a time when he was undecided on his future after leaving the university. Though the position was unpaid, he welcomed the opportunity to travel, and to work with Brown.

Both men were to travel on the *S.S. Suevic*, but at the last minute Brown had to postpone his departure. Watson decided to go on and wait in Western Australia. It was a decision that was to influence his later writing, and may well have determined his attitude to the country which was to become a central focus of his novels.

At the time of the expedition Grant Watson may not have had any clear intention of attempting a career as a writer. Yet, while he was to work as a biologist, and his training at Cambridge had been in science, his interests were by no means restricted to those fields. He has given some insight into his reading and education in an autobiography published after he had finished writing fiction,¹ and this confirms much that emerges from the novels. His scientific training gives him a viewpoint, a rationality perhaps, evident in his attitude to his characters, and to human life. He read widely, in philosophy, theology, and contemporary fiction. The importance of his discovery of Nietzsche is clear without his own comment.

Nietzsche seems to me today more relevant than ever . . . , yet it seems strange that, in my small microcosmic life, the works of Nietzsche, at that time, should have seemed so uplifting and meaningful, and that the words of the Gospel should have left on my mind, at that time, so light an impression.²

Science, Darwin and Huxley, Nietzsche, and an increasing awareness of the gospels do not always sit easily together, particularly in the later novels. Shaw and Butler he claimed had directed his footsteps, and his reading included

... all Ibsen's plays ... particularly I struggled with his symbolism ... I early discovered W. H. Hudson, and read all his books as they appeared, and perhaps above all, I was at that time enthusiastic about Joseph Conrad. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne* influenced me more than any other novel I have read ... in later years when science was abandoned, and I strove to become a novelist, it was Jacobsen even more than Conrad who influenced me.³

These were admitted influences, from the novels the shadows of Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence seem inescapable. Later, when he was writing his fiction, he knew and was helped by a number of established writers and editors — Edward Thomas, Cunninghame-Graham, Austin Harrison, Havelock Ellis, Norman Douglas, and was familiar in literary groups that included many writers and artists. How little parallel this kind of background had for a writer in Australia is underlined by Vance Palmer's pilgrimages in the early years of the century, and his decision that to write he would have to 'escape' to London. That Grant Watson's main fiction was determined by his own 'escape' to Australia is perhaps the other side of the coin.

The *Suevic* travelled via the Cape to Albany. From Albany the train journey to Perth impressed Watson for the beauty of the flowers, the shrubs and trees, a response shared by many travellers before him. He found an attractive countryside which he was to use later in a number of novels as a contrast to the harsher north. Perth also he enjoyed:

From a public park, above the city, a magnificent view extended itself in the golden sunshine. Such sunshine, such warmth, such happiness, and, everywhere I looked, delight in novelty: the crimson rosettes of the flowering eucalyptus and the shaving-brush tufts of the *Melanenca*, the strange black blossoms of kangaroo's-paw — these all close at hand, and in the distance, the city roofs under the brilliant sunshine, closely beset with the stretches of blue of Perth water, flecked by flocks of birds. Pelicans, as wild and almost as common as seagulls, black swans, which, when they flew, revealed the pinkish-scarlet of their under wings — innumerable lesser birds, ducks and gulls, whose names I did not know.⁴

A town, he concluded, with trams, shops, and overhead wires much like most modern towns, yet presenting 'a quality of its own, an immergent vitality.' At a time when Perth had scarcely found a way into fiction, Grant Watson was to bring his characters back to this city frequently, and they saw it after long periods in the northern desert country as a refreshment, much as Watson himself remembered it.

However, the town offered limited prospects of a livelihood while Grant Watson waited for the expedition leader. He had an arrangement to collect natural history specimens for some European collectors, and began seeking insects for Rene Oberture. In a short time he had two thousand beetles to send him, and decided to continue collecting on the goldfields, where he could also look for work. He went by train to Kalgoorlie, meeting on the train Doree Doolette, the mine owner and company promoter. Doolette took him down to Southern Cross and out to Bullfinch, then a new area for mining, where he was made a guest at the mine camp, free to stay as long as he liked and 'collect beetles and follow any other eccentricity.'

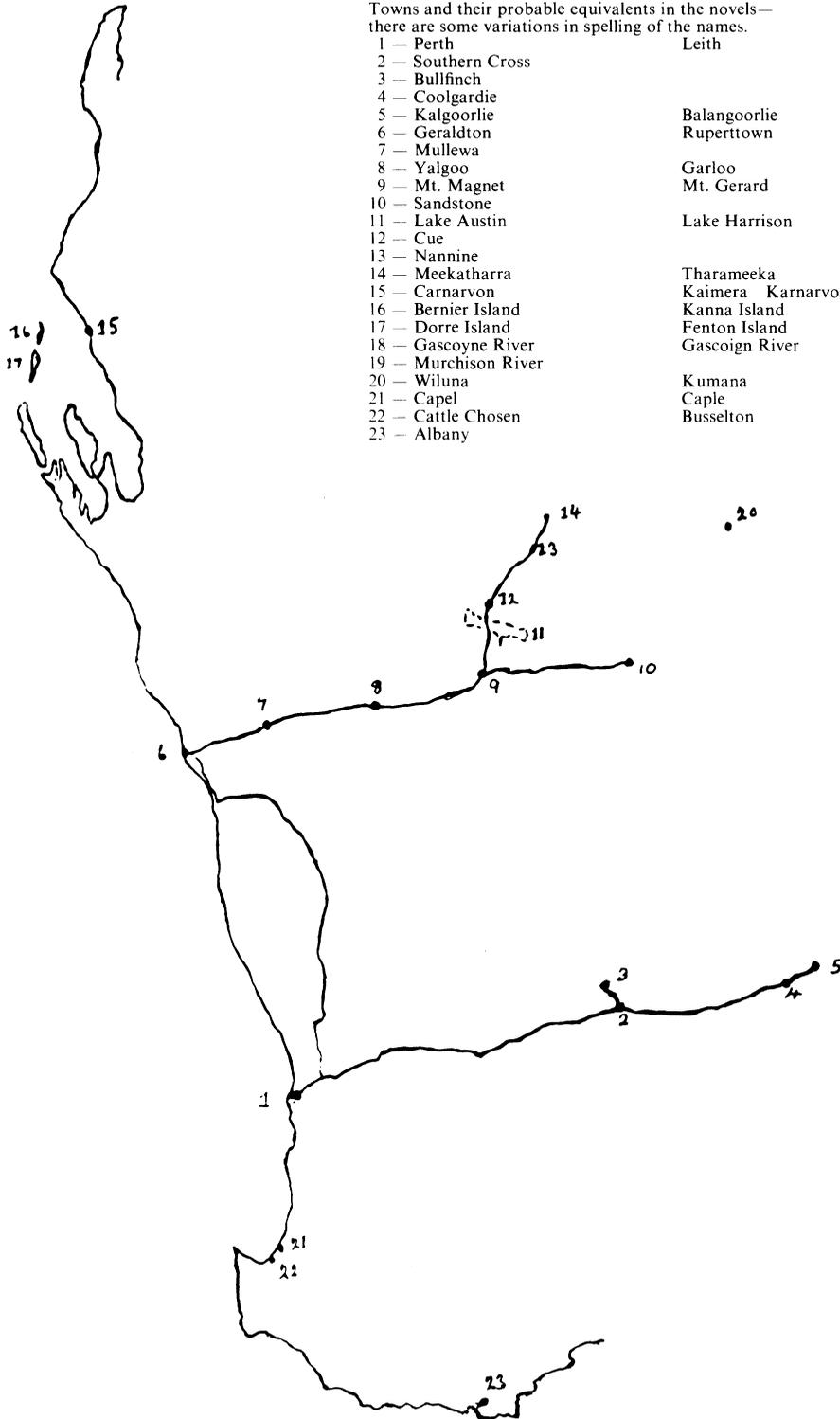
The first weeks here Watson acknowledged 'rich, not so much in outer, but in inner experience,' experience which fixed the vision of the land that was to become more than a background to his fiction, emerging as a protagonist in its own right.



Mount Magnet

Towns and their probable equivalents in the novels—
there are some variations in spelling of the names.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| 1 — Perth | Leith |
| 2 — Southern Cross | |
| 3 — Bullfinch | |
| 4 — Coolgardie | |
| 5 — Kalgoorlie | Balangoorlie |
| 6 — Geraldton | Ruperttown |
| 7 — Mullewa | |
| 8 — Yalgoo | Garloo |
| 9 — Mt. Magnet | Mt. Gerard |
| 10 — Sandstone | |
| 11 — Lake Austin | Lake Harrison |
| 12 — Cue | |
| 13 — Nannine | |
| 14 — Meekatharra | Tharameeka |
| 15 — Carnarvon | Kaimera Karnarvon |
| 16 — Bernier Island | Kanna Island |
| 17 — Dorre Island | Fenton Island |
| 18 — Gascoyne River | Gascoign River |
| 19 — Murchison River | |
| 20 — Wiluna | Kumana |
| 21 — Capel | Caple |
| 22 — Cattle Chosen | Busselton |
| 23 — Albany | |



This simple round, however, did not complete my experience: there was the bush and all that it stood for, and that was no small thing to cope with. I learned, and before long, how many men were distressed and indeed utterly destroyed by its strange power. A surveyor from Perth shot himself dead on the third day of his bush-sojourning. The miners took his death with no great surprise. 'It's the bush,' they said. 'Many men can't stand it. How about yourself, you Johnnie Englishman?' I had been asking myself that question or rather the ambiguous, veiled influences of the bush had been asking me. . . .

So it was that day after day, the bush questioned me, as I wandered looking for beetles. One moment I might be happy enough, intent upon my hunt, but the next, the veil of time seemed drawn aside, and eternity gaped in the sun's glare, or in the cracking of a seed-pod.⁵

The country merged from pastoral and agricultural land out to mining and desert. Grant Watson found here not only the locus of his novels, but characters and events to people them. Aspects of the train journey with Doolette are paralleled in *Lost Man!* The eccentric Gilbert whom he meets at Bullfinch re-appears as a similar character in *The Mainland*, though he seems already almost a prototype for many of Grant Watson's solitary protagonists.

I found in Gilbert a strange and yet most attractive companion, and if ever man could come near to representing what the Australian bush represents, then Gilbert was that man. His humanity had been sifted by so long an experience as to be almost elemental. He was *the bush*, incarnate, and often have I watched him sitting, gazing vacantly at the feathery mulgas, as though his human quality were refined and further precipitated into an equivalent of their aloof and pure vegetable greeting. From such trance-like moods he would stir himself, and his kindly, genial smile would transform him back into a human. He would wink at me, and slap his work-hardened hand on his knee as though aware of his recent departure, and return.⁶

Watson's own search with Gilbert for gold, and their location of an outcrop, forms the basis of similar scenes in *The Desert Horizon*, *Daimon*, and *Lost Man!* The gold seekers, the shopkeepers, the gold boom of Bullfinch, was impressed on his memory and imagination. In his fiction, however, he was to shift all this across country to the Murchison region, which he travelled over with the expedition, and in some respects his novels offer a curiously detailed mapping of the area, though the fusion of the two places produces some oddities.

Brown arrived in September 1910, and the expedition started from Sandstone. It consisted of Brown, Grant Watson, Daisy Bates, Louis Olsen, and two aborigines.⁷ They travelled from Sandstone to Carnarvon, and then to Bernier Island to visit the lock-hospital, a government establishment for aborigines with syphilitic, venereal, and infectious diseases. However terrible the diseases and the plight of the aborigines, it was not this aspect of the island, or the expedition, which became a focus for Watson's first novel. Though he was the earliest of the writers of fiction concerned with Western Australia to come to an understanding of the aborigines and to see them in some real sense as other than detribalised fringe dwellers of the growing towns, he was not in his first novel concerned with the aborigines. In *Where Bonds Are Loosed* they achieve little reality, forming a background to the life of the few characters that people the hospital and the island.

Grant Watson took a good deal from the setting of Geraldton and Carnarvon—the government cutter and its captain, the journeys to and from the island, the rough life of the early ports, the islands of Bernier and Dorre. How close to real people his fictional characters on the islands were remains uncertain, though he seems to have stayed close to an actual situation. Brown and Daisy Bates were very much at odds during the expedition but can hardly have provided models

for the characters. In his autobiography Watson uses the name Gilbert for the man he met and worked with at Bullfinch and for the similar character in *The Mainland*, and he repeats this device in naming Dr. Hicksey as the doctor in charge of the hospital. Hicksey's habit of swimming in the island waters without fear of sharks is also common to personal account and novel. The actual doctor on the island and the stockman — in the novel *Sherwin* — apparently did shoot at one another among the sand dunes. In his selection and perhaps description of characters Watson seems not to have been particularly imaginative, or to have felt much necessity for a range of varied characters. Those of all his Australian novels have a similarity and the feel of people lifted quite roughly from actuality and then honed to fit his fictional needs. His imagination found a wider response in the relationship of people to landscape.

For whatever reason, the fictional islands were re-located on the east coast of Australia, to become Kanna and Fenton Islands off Port Kaimera, where it is Kanna Island, 'a thin stretch of limestone rock, covered partially by sand dunes and swept by the winds' that houses the government hospital. The theme of the novel, which was dedicated to Edward Thomas, Watson summed up in his preface:

In this book a picture is given of a small group of men and women who for the greater portion of their lives have lived in the normal surroundings of material interdependence which we call civilization. They find themselves isolated on an island, completely cut off from the conserving influence of the herd. Their natures under this sudden relaxation cannot adjust themselves until all former habit and prejudice have been burnt away by the fires of suffering, and until they find beneath their feet the primal foundation of individual desire left high and dry in the ebb of all past valuations and beliefs. This ultimate realization of life can come only to the more primitive individuals of the group; the more complex and finely adjusted natures are broken in the process; they crumble to pieces together with all that they have lost.⁹

The novel hardly achieves this. It begins with the first of Watson's figures to come under the spell of the isolated inland, a man, *Sherwin*, who has been prospecting for gold, and is now looking for work. At Port Kaimera in a hotel full of miners, pastoral workers, prospectors, *Sherwin* is engaged in a fight that establishes him as a figure able to maintain his position among men, and which sets the note of the violence to run through the novel.

With the islands as a setting the characters are manouvered in a kind of classic power struggle, or, having regard for Watson's training as a biologist, a struggle of males for territory and the possession of the females — the males being the two doctors, *Hicksey* and *Hubbard*, and *Sherwin*, the female, *Nurse Desmond*.

Dr. Hicksey first fights the other doctor, gaining control of the island.

For two months those five people had been living together confined on one small island. One of them was superfluous, and he knew it, the others wanted him away. In a slightly more primitive society his death would have been assured; as it was they had done all they could to make his life intolerable, and now, as they all gathered under the heat-stricken roof of the verandah, they knew that the savage in each of them was close under the surface waiting to show himself. They all knew that he was there. *Hicksey* felt the primitive danger, and his primitive instinct responded, turning the conflict into a fight of life and death. Before any one knew what had happened *Hicksey* had rushed in and driven his knee into *Hubbard's* stomach and had leapt upon him with all the accumulated fury of the last few weeks. Down they went, *Hubbard* underneath, *Hicksey* with both hands at his throat trying to choke the life out of him and bumping his head up and down on the boards of the floor. *Hubbard* was purple in the face and choking for life. Both nurses screamed and rushed to the rescue. They flung themselves on *Hicksey*, tore

at his hair, scratched at his eyes, and one bit the fingers tightened on the doctor's throat. At last, with James' help, they managed to pull him off, and only just in time, for Hubbard was nearly choked, and lay for some minutes on the ground gasping for breath. Hicksey, scratched and bleeding, had been thrown back against the side of the verandah.¹⁰

Obviously, as Watson states, 'in these people something extraordinarily powerful and fundamental had suddenly leapt to the surface'. But the characters are so completely subordinated to the theme that the events hold little conviction. Hicksey gains the dominant position on the island, and the love of Nurse Desmond. Sherwin, though he would be a passive observer, is drawn into the restricted lives, and he and Hicksey fight in turn. Hicksey is killed. Nurse Desmond has been terrified of Sherwin, and tried to hold Hicksey's fast fading affection. At the death of Hicksey she is confronted by this:

Again a step sounded and a hand was laid on the knob of the door. The next moment Sherwin had flung it open and entered the room. With a short cry, that was half a gasp for breath, she leapt to her feet. White and quivering she regarded him. There stood the incarnation of all her terrors; the murderer, gaunt and haggard, his clothes soaked red with the blood of his victim. All the devilish of our nature, let loose to work evil, yet still contained in human form, was there.¹¹

It is hardly a convincing shift to find her transfer her love to this figure. In primitive terms of animal responses, which is partly perhaps what Watson is suggesting, it might have credibility. In the terms he presents the episode there is little psychological credibility, and the melodramatic prose — stronger than he was to use again in his later work — does little to persuade. The whole shifting of the human pieces on the island is contrived and obvious. Grant Watson had worked over the manuscript at least three times. He sent it to Conrad, who went to considerable trouble to help with a detailed criticism, and suggested essentially that he rewrite the novel to make a long short story, presumably the kind of form Conrad himself used to such effect. But Grant Watson felt he could not again rewrite the manuscript, and as the novel had been accepted for publication in the meantime, he left it as it was.

Civilization under stress in lonely outposts and exotic parts of a world then still strange was a subject predictable for a first novel by someone with the recent experiences of Grant Watson, the kind of novel offered by writers as diverse as Louis Becke, Conrad, or Somerset Maugham, as well as a host of contributors to popular journals like the *Wide World Magazine*. In this case Grant Watson came closer to the standard of the popular magazine than to some of the writers he admired. But from the novel some of the factors that were to distinguish his fiction were established — his feeling for the landscape, the physical environment, and for the power of that landscape, partly felt and defined though it is in this book; his sense of human response to place and to natural things, and of the isolation which that attraction might impose, and which might, as his later books show, be so destructive. Something of this is seen behind Sherwin's commonplace words with which the book closes:

"All any man could wish for," he added after a pause. "I never want to go away, never want to go back. I like this place better than any part I've set foot on."

"Don't you feel lonely at times?"

"No, I'm not lonely now any longer, and what's more, I can't understand how I ever could have been lonely here." Then, as if apologetically, he added: "I've learnt to see and feel so many things."

Keynes was interested. "What sort of things?" he asked.

"Oh, just little things; you wouldn't take much stock by them; the hot sun on the sand, the noise of the waves on the shore and sometimes the feel of the wind, and the red and yellow butterflies clinging to the thorn bushes." . . .

Several times during the slow passage from the shore [Keynes] looked back on the long irregular coast of the island. He saw that Sherwin had climbed to the top of the high sand-hill, and stood there, a solitary figure, watching him out of sight.¹²

The Mainland,¹³ published three years later, is a sequel, or continuation, of the previous novel. The narrative is again straightforward and uncomplicated, but the relationships of the characters are deeper and more credible. There are few people, and they do not so much interact as appear in turn as they affect the experience of the central character. Watson's real countryside held few people, they lived a great deal of the time in isolation, he did not make the mistake, or feel the necessity, in his fictional landscape of complex plotting or too many characters. His method of taking a central character through a series of fairly brief relationships is true to the time and place, and to his theme. It gives his novels a starkness, a simplicity, that might seem limiting, and it is true he never evidences any ability to deal with complex groupings or relationships between many people, but it is a method that allows him to concentrate closely on his central theme.

The Mainland has a natural logic of development from the previous novel. The child of Sherwin and Nurse Desmond has grown up on the island where his parents have lived in isolation, and some fulfilment, but he is drawn to what lies beyond the island, and which he has never seen, the mainland. Sherwin is doubtful, for the sake of his own secret, the killing of Hicksey, and because of doubt of an outer world that seems tainted. Sherwin and the woman had learned to live with their own kind of isolation, and to value it.

John, aged 16 when the story opens, waits for his father's permission and then goes to Kaimera which has recognisably become Carnarvon. Watson drops his pretence that all this is situated on the other side of the continent, though he uses a number of slightly disguised names to indicate the places of his Western Australian landscape.

At Kaimera John meets Arthur Cray, an adventurer with some means, who is on his way to Broome to look for a new pearling ground. Cray agrees to take the boy with him as an assistant on the boat. Here the story follows two strands, one of conventional adventure, the other the relationship of the boy and Cray's wife.

In the first, they are joined by a renegade pearler who plans to rob the pearls they have discovered, which offers a predictable suspense story where the man who would have taken over the pearls and the boat is shot, and one of Cray's seamen revealed as an accomplice.

It is a story that could have been paralleled in any of the magazines of the day which served up popular south sea adventure stories, and indeed many readers might have thought the setting was the south seas. It is the other strand of the plot that becomes Grant Watson's interest, and reveals his real theme, which is never one of simple adventure. The woman and the boy are drawn together, by isolation, by common interests in the beauty of the landscape, she teaches him to read and introduces him to books. And to love. Though Grant Watson did not acknowledge Lawrence as an influence in his writing, it is difficult not to feel here something of Lawrence's sense of natural things, of adolescent awareness, and something of his honesty in the depiction of relationships. Grant Watson is more credible, far more open in his handling of physical relationships, than any of his contemporaries who wrote in, or about, Western Australia, or most of those who came later and who took refuge in a variety of polite evasions that ranged from an

odd belief that sexual attraction was somehow bodiless to a smug coyness about the whole matter. Grant Watson, with American and English publishers, seemed unaware of the long dominance of censorious attitudes, implicit and outright, that held Australia.

As the plot to steal the pearls is revealed and defeated, so the relationship of the boy and the woman is revealed. She denies him to her husband, and the boy learns his first lesson in human relationships. At this point it seems Watson is to develop the symbolism suggested by the island and the mainland, and Sherwin's distrust of an outer world. But the novel seems to go no further with this, if indeed such an ambiguous symbolism was ever intended. The boy, disillusioned, and with very little understanding of what has really happened between himself, the woman, and her husband, goes to Ruperttown, and leaves for the inland mining areas around Garloo and Mount Gerard. He encounters the harsh country that borders on desert and which is to figure so strongly in the novels that follow.

North-east of Garloo a tableland of red granite stretches for sixty miles before it abruptly breaks to the shores of Lake Harrison. In winter the lake, which is thirty miles long, is covered with a thin layer of water, but in summer its thick mud is caked over with a far-stretching expanse of blue-white salt. The upland plateau, with the long, red cliff dipping to the lake is typical of the West Australian bush. The quartz and felspar of the granite have split into the finest dust, which is caked hard on the surface and cracked by the sun's heat. Here and there at intervals dry, blue-leaved mulga bushes break the surface, thin gnarled stems — expressive of a struggle against extreme heat and lack of water. In this desert there is small variety of animal or bird life. The aboriginal natives are now almost extinct and never to be seen in their wild state. Kangaroos and wallabies are still abundant in the neighbourhood of water-holes. Smaller animals there are of various kinds: echidnas, bandicoots and mice, though no species is very plentiful. Of birds there are few. The red and black crows, the wheelbarrow bird, who makes a noise like the squeaking of an unoiled wheel, an occasional parroquet that screams as his green wings flash by, and sometimes there appear larger flocks of tiny birds that sweep from bush to bush with faint chirpings. The stillness of the land is what gives it its quality and its beauty. Here bird-voices do not mingle as in Europe; each sounds separate and alone, emphasizing the silence. The bushes also seem to minister to the stillness. They grow separate, divided by large spaces of sun-baked earth. Their feathery branches, poised in the motionless air, seem like raised hands commanding attention, waiting for some secret voice, guarding with pious gesture the ancient spirit, which by virtue of its external restraint has remained young, while a million generations of such gnarled slow-living shapes, have fulfilled their guardianship, have waited, always hushed for the secret, and have become dust.¹⁴

The boy meets a sandalwood cutter and works with him at piece work, then drifts to prospecting, later meeting Gilbert, the eccentric character who derives from Watson's own experiences at Bullfinch. With Gilbert, John develops a successful mine, and the latter part of the book sees him moving backwards and forwards from mine to city, from the desert country to the south, a pattern Watson was to return to in his next two novels, a man drawn between isolation and civilization, the harshness of the desert and the much kinder southern country. Finally John settles on a comfortable southern property, but the attraction of the northern country still exists.

There are interesting characters — Gilbert, Hilda, a woman with the strength to lead her own life and who refuses the conventions. There is the suggestion Watson continued to develop of the conflict between man and woman, as opposing elements, seen in the comparison of the northern and southern landscapes, the fear of the woman in this and the other novels that the man will be drawn from

the softer, known landscape that represents society and security, to the emptiness of the desert which has for the man some greater challenge. The need for the central characters to come to terms with the land itself and to discover themselves in relation to the land rather than to other people, the theme of the later novels, also emerges more clearly. Though not central to the novel, or important to it, there is an insight into the aborigines and their way of life not suggested at all in the previous book, the description of the corroboree witnessed by the boy is based on Watson's own knowledge, in attitude and observation it is a more realistic forerunner of later often sentimentalised work by other writers.¹⁵

Yet the novel ends rather oddly, as if Watson was not sure how to engage his subject, in essence the land itself, and the characters for the moment seem intrusions the writer has suddenly found himself left with. John's marriage is as contrived as any in the popular fiction of the day, and has none of the realism or penetration of character and motive suggested in the earlier relationship between the boy and Cray's wife.

*The Desert Horizon*¹⁶ follows naturally from these two novels. Grant Watson had published two other novels, *Deliverance*, and *Shadow and Sunlight*,¹⁷ but the real theme of *The Mainland* had so obviously not been fully explored that it is no surprise to find him return to it.

The novel begins like a forerunner of the many pioneering sagas that were to follow during the next two decades, with an English family taking up land apparently near Meekatharra. Wife and husband are unlike in temperament. The woman develops some affinity with the bush, not an understanding of it, the place is too strange and her own background too close, but she is placid, accepting, not seeking to fight an environment. The man is restless, seeing the land as something of necessity to be changed, but without feeling for it. The farm goes badly, there is a run of dry seasons, stock has to be sold, and the man is forced to find work on other properties that takes him away from home.

The children take naturally to the bush, and are fascinated by the natives, though forbidden to go near the native camp by their father, who distrusts the aborigines and perhaps distrusts something of their acceptance of the land and their harmony with it. During one of the father's absences the mother dies and the children are alone at the farm, left with the fact of her death, and the fact of her dead body which they are powerless to move from the water hole where she has fallen. Avoiding the sentimentality possible in the situation, Watson describes the strange and heroic trek the three children make, in the charge of the boy, the oldest, across country to find their father at the distant shearing shed of another property. The journey proves the boy's right to stay in the bush while the other children are sent to Perth for their schooling.

From this point the novel departs altogether from the stereotype pioneering novel. The boy is taken care of by a young man, Alec, who is starting a property in the area. Grant Watson uses a similar method to that of his previous novels: he rejects any involved plot, or pattern of continuing and developing relationships in favour of a flowing story which follows the growing up of the boy, Martin O'Brian. He meets in turn a number of people, Alec; Nance the girl who visits Alec, her lover; Jane, a woman left alone by an odd and vicious man to live her own life running the community store; and later, people the boy meets when he goes to the south-west where the other children are living.

Grant Watson's description of these relationships in the case of Nance and the woman, Jane, is realistic and convincing, more frankly described than in other Australian writing of the time, and again reminiscent of Lawrence. Jane would accept the boy as a lover, indeed expects to take him, but it is Nance who shows him a first experience of physical love, when they are both alone on the distant

property after Alec has been killed in an accident. As with the boy in *The Mainland*, he is left bitter and without understanding when she goes, refusing to prolong a relationship that was temporary and with meaning for her only in the brief time of her reaction to Alec's death.

For Western Australian, or indeed Australian readers, Grant Watson must in a time of artificial reticence in writing have seemed a strong and unconventional voice. A voice they seem to have disregarded, were perhaps uneasy with. But these scenes of the boy's awakening to sex, his unsure relationship with women he does not understand, are convincing and open, strike an adult note that was far from common. Grant Watson's women characters are often strong and vital, determined to lead their own lives, and make their own decisions even when these go plainly against the conventions of their time. And such women stay alone, or have an elemental aloneness that keeps them apart even in close relationships. Less convincing, with an exception in the novel to follow, are the women who marry his protagonists, or are established in society. These tend to come from the south, the softer country, and to be more the conventional wife or mistress of fiction.

The second part of the novel sees Martin back in the north after a few years on the south-west farms where his sister is to marry one of the local farmers. Meekatharra is now grown with gold miners. Martin goes to work with a farmer named Mackay who lives out some distance on new land he is trying to develop. Mackay is a visionary for the development of the country, and a strong propagandist for wheat on mulga land, a dream which in reality seems a little misplaced. But Mackay is the archetypal developer.

"If it were wheat, it would be a different story. A man doesn't feel so lonely where he can see the young, green leaves springing where the rain has fallen. And the rain would come, the climate would change, such things have happened. People would flock here then, there would be railways stretching out to the inland lakes beyond the breakaways. There would be branches from the Murchison to the upper Gascoign, and beyond to the Pilbury district, and beyond again to Kimberley. There could be hundreds of miles of wheat, a wonderful country, rich enough to feed millions. You don't believe it?" he queried.¹⁸

Martin, working much alone, has found his feeling for the land deepen. He cannot agree, or even really comprehend, Mackay's vision of change. To his reply that he would leave the land much as it is, Mackay objects.

"That's just where you make a mistake," said Mackay incisively. "You will learn that in time. It's nature or man, one or other of them must go under. You must do her in her own hard way, or she'll crush you and have no pity. The progress of mankind can't stand still. You'll learn that when you are older."¹⁹

The two foreshadow a debate which in a later time was to divide a society, but they can work together here with tolerance for each other, though Martin's instinct for living in harmony with the land grows stronger, and marks his difference from those about him who saw only a need for exploitation. Mackay's wife, Clara, views the land in a way different from either of the men.

"... It's awful, this country." She spoke with a sudden bitterness. "A beastly, empty, barren country. Why not even grass will grow, and no wonder. ... It's not fit for any white man to live in ... all right for niggers perhaps. It isn't only the sight of it but the feel of it, that's what's so damnable. One can shut one's eyes but not one's feelings. ... It's like a nightmare," she added and seemed suddenly to become relaxed, suddenly flaccid. "It is a nightmare; it's in my sleep, I dream of it ..."²⁰

So the three confront a country and the daily routine it imposes: Martin happy to work alone on outer parts of the property, increasingly aware of the land and an understanding of it, aware too of that which he felt through the land, but could find no words for, 'strange, intangible . . . that promised a beyond greater than life itself . . . the charm, the lure, the pride of life, yet words did not describe it': Mackay sharing in some measure Martin's feeling, but never able to achieve the younger man's acceptance, divided from the land by his wife's rejection of the life it enforced: Clara increasingly bitter and outspoken in her antagonism to the country and to her husband.

The conflict between the couple affects Martin at first only as an observer, embarrassing him when he is forced to see Mackay's humiliation, and it is unresolved when he decides to return, drawn back for a time to 'the town, the undiscovered lives of men and women, the contact with his own kind'. In the Perth of the early years of the century he meets two newly arrived immigrants from England, Maggie Linton and her father. Martin is drawn strongly to the girl, and she is glad of friendship in a city and a land she finds strange and difficult. The developing relationship is more fully realised than in the previous novel, but is in some respects a repetition, with the same factors at issue. Martin's restlessness is too strong for him to remain in the town, he is indeed in this sense John Sherwin moving backwards and forwards between city and desert. Maggie is aware that the country, the desert itself in some way she hardly understands, is her rival.

Maggie re-read the letter. She mused over the lines. "I should like to get your letter while I'm here. That would be the next best thing to seeing you." She understood their import; the desert and herself were his two loves; he wanted them together, then he would know which one he loved the most. Had he not shown that already? The desert had moulded him, made him what he was, given him his confidence and his power. She dreaded this alien rival so remote from her own experience. She looked at the faint-scented, fragile flowers. If this country that he loved so much had produced these flowers it would not be difficult for her to give it her love. His country, might it not be her country too?²¹

Her later experience reveals how superficial that hope is. Martin, explaining to Mackay his own hope of buying land and bringing Maggie to live in the north, finds himself puzzled by the old man's silence. Mackay's large plans have never matured, and his life with Clara is disastrous, yet he will not denounce the land that is the symbol of his failure. In new understanding Martin sees him 'as a humble old man with eyes bent upon the earth. He was a child of the desert, grown old in its service . . . who would neither appraise nor betray with words, his mistress.' Martin is in fact looking upon himself as the years ahead are to mould him.

Martin and the girl marry, but the conflict of the land has not been solved for Martin. He takes Maggie north with him, in effect uniting the two elements of conflict, to manage Mackay's station at Quinn's Springs. Clara, unable any longer to face her life there, has killed herself. Mackay cannot live on the property but does not want to dispose of it. Though Martin refuses to see the clear parallel of Mackay's life, this provides a tension that lifts the ending from being an echo of the unconvincing conclusion of the previous novel. Yet it is no firm conclusion, and Grant Watson's postscript is hardly needed to suggest he will return to the same problem.

He returns with a direct continuation of the novel in *Daimon*.²² Martin and Maggie have been two years at Quinn's Springs. The division between them is plain. For her the new country is difficult and unsettling, she values the confines of the homestead which she feels she has made in some way her own. Though in



Lake Austin. In the mining region one area was named The Mainland, another The Island



Breakaway, Cue

the early period before their child was born Martin has taken her about the station, camping out, working, trying to enable her to share his own enjoyment for the place itself, she cannot find his enthusiasm. She does respond to the physical strength and appeal of the man and the elemental quality of the life. But she is aware of the division, and she knows the source of that division. She is afraid of his hope to buy the property.

To be in possession of these plains of mulga scrub and the far-reaching expanses of salt bush: they loomed before her as a challenge and a responsibility. It would be something irrevocable and perhaps final if Martin were to buy the farm, and it came then in a flash that the men of the bush never really possessed the land. It was the land that possessed the men.²³

The presence of this land impresses itself on her, not as something she can articulate, rather as a fear.

If you once come to know [this place] as I do, you won't want it any different from what it is." As if moved by some impulse to give emphasis to his words, he checked his horse and gazed into the ghostly and pearl-coloured haze that hung in a thin veil over the land. The salt-bush was like a thick, grey moss growing upon the plain. Silver and grey and neutral-tint mingled and merged together; it was a strange and desolate scene, possessed of beauty which caught at the heart and held it fluttering in a magic power. The girl also paused and looked, at first inquiringly, but in a moment held and awed by that oufy radiance. The horses lifted their heads and with ears forward gazed intently. They drew their breath deeply, snorted and quivered a little, and it seemed that they saw, moving in that desert-emptiness, things that the eyes of the humans could not see. Suddenly the mare neighed with short, high-pitched neigh; both horses sprang sideways, shying. They shook their heads excitedly and pranced.

"Martin, they have seen something. What is it?"

"Eh, steady there, what's the matter? What have you seen? Nothing to be frightened at. Have a good look at it then; it won't do you any harm." Martin was patting The Camel's shoulder, soothing him.

"What was it, Martin dear; they saw something?"

"Yes, they see things we don't see, but there's nothing to hurt or be afraid of."

"What was it. What *is* it?"

"I don't know. I saw nothing. I can't see as they do."

She laughed with a rather shrill high laugh. "I felt it, didn't you? It's rather frightening, I think."

He put out his hand to hold her arm for a second, but the horses pulled them apart. "There's no need to be frightened. I know there's nothing to hurt you."

"There was something there that they saw and we didn't."

"Yes."

"You believe there are things like that in the air invisible?"

He nodded. "They don't have anything to do with us, so far as I know."

Her eyes were wide open and bright, and he could see her face very pale in the moonlight. "Oh, Martin, I've felt it and half known it, though I haven't believed it till now. It makes me frightened. What is it. Where are they?"

She was grateful to him that he did not seem at all moved, that he did not catch her excitement. "How can I tell? I don't know any more than you. But there are things in the bush that we don't see. *That* I've known for a long time. But they don't do any harm. When I'm alone I rather like to feel that they are there."

She paused and laughed again, taking this in. "You mean that there are *real* things there that we can't see?" she questioned.

"There must be . . . You know I've told you that there are some fellows that can't stand it out here. Well, I expect that's why. They feel there's something and they are afraid. You simply mustn't be afraid."²⁴

While this may be reminiscent of Lawrence, it has been part of Watson's vision of the land before Lawrence thought of sighting Australia.²⁵ For Martin the awareness has grown since the days of his trek with the children to find his father. He tries to explain to Maggie that this sense of the land is to him like love. He lacks the words, but both are conscious that his feeling must divide them. For Martin this response to the land is perhaps more fundamental, more himself, than his response to the woman.

Martin hesitated; he was aware of her sudden distress, and felt the wave of her unhappiness. Should he remain inflexibly himself, hard in the quality of that inner exultation which was the core of his life. Remain . . . no strive to be himself: that unsubstantial and evasive something, which fluttered upon the borderland of the great unknown. Or should he be the simple fellow and loving husband, that he was so familiar in meeting in his wife's eyes? It was easy and kind to come close to her again, to be human, all-too-human, and to use those words and caresses which are a sweet anodyne to the pains of growth and the conflict of personality, to use those words and caresses, those mild influences which can kindle smiles in the eyes of beloved and lover and bring comfort to their hearts.

He hesitated but for a moment, then chose the easier path.²⁶

When Maggie's father comes to visit them he offers a relief from the loneliness and fear she now feels strongly. She tries to explain the obsession the desert can become for men, and for women, an obsession she fears is a madness. She shows her father the dogs that herd sheep, and how one dog is so devoted to his work that when released he will round up any of the farm animals, he works even on the puzzled fowls. It is a macabre illustration, forceful, from the woman's view not an exaggerated analogy, though she tries to evade the truth of it. 'You see how the dogs get', she says. 'Not that the men are like the dogs, I didn't mean that.'

She does mean that, and she tells her father of her fear of the country itself, that Martin loves it more than he loves her — 'he could do without me.' She forecasts clearly what, years later, is to happen.

He'd miss me, of course, and I wonder sometimes what would happen to him without me. He might get like what they call the bush-groppers, men who go wandering about in the bush. They get *swallowed up* in it, lost, bewitched by its strange monotony . . .

Her father tries to reassure her, suggesting that for Martin the country is 'a kind of symbol. We all look for symbols sooner or later.' But for all his limited understanding of the land, he shares his daughter's fear, and is aware that her fate, as Martin's, is bound up in this land.

His eyes rested upon the desert, upon that empty land, open under the stars; its one great eye open and unwinking, its soul exposed. There was a kind of finality about it. It was all-embracing, a symbol not easily to be escaped. Both the heart and brain of the civilized man shrank from that finality, yet there was some other undefined element which was attracted by the completeness of that consummation. He could have wished for his dearly-loved daughter another fate.²⁸

One of the human equivalents of the incident of the dogs is seen in the instance of the Camerons, two women who live alone at Bell Hill, another isolated property some distance from Quinns Springs. Mother and daughter, they hold each other prisoner, the girl in revenge for her mother's killing of her own illegitimate child many years earlier. To Maggie, the fate of the women is one more evidence of the madness the bush enforces.

"Father, it's this awful country. It makes people like that. Nobody can stand against it. The isolation, the strange, awful feeling. There's something. . . . Can't you feel it even in a short time? The Camerons and Mackay, in their different ways, you see they are strange and different from other people. Nobody is just happy and normal. They all get changed; it's a sort of madness. . . ."²⁹

Time widens the division, reinforces the attitudes of husband and wife. They are held in 'the confined and ever-contracting circle of a bitter and ineffectual pity', in a 'love which was no longer love as he had imagined . . . a warm and bitter love . . .'. In the American publication Watson used the title *The Contracting Circle*, and it is this figure he exploits in the latter part of the book. For the woman, the situation brings a recognition of 'the antagonism of woman to man', something which has lain behind the relationships of all Grant Watson's characters, and the insight offers her some freedom, leading to a brief affair with a young man, Carey, who works for Martin. She has now a hardness of her own, and moves to obtain her own freedom — ' . . . as her deeper self had always known and recognised, men were only means to an end. She was shocked at the hard logic of her mind, which could regard young Carey . . . as a mere instrument towards deliverance.'

With an irony reminiscent of Hardy, their plans to go away together are undercut by Martin in good faith, unaware of their intention, offering Carey a responsible position to manage part of the property. Martin saves her life in an accident with the horses, and her attempt at decision and escape is abandoned.

With the illness of her father, Maggie goes south to see him, but is too late, and the bitterness of her life is focussed now on the desert itself.

I have tried to find a way out, but the more I try the worse it becomes . . .
In the desert is all that is most evil in life. I didn't know it at first, but now I cannot doubt it.³⁰

Her position is the same as that which had faced Clara. Her decision to leave this country is formed finally when Martin evicts a man and woman who have farmed land as his tenants, but failed, as Mackay failed in part, by asking more from the land than was possible with their crops. To Maggie the Johnsons' desire to remain at a life which offered them only desperate poverty is another evidence of the power of the land, the obsessions it could enforce. But behind Martin's decision she and the Johnsons are aware that he covets the land for himself. What they see as greed and lack of compassion is in fact more complex.

. . . and the land was safe. Could it be changed? Never. . . . It had been like that for all time, and so it would remain. He and the land were one; they were expressions of the same impulse; they both responded to and took their shape from the same mystical promptings; they drew their life, the subtle and delicate quality of their being, from the same source; they wore the same mask; each lived withdrawn, with attributes flowing into the unknown; in the dim night of their withdrawing they were sufficient unto themselves and to each other. As he rode further through the darkness, lit only by the stars, he became aware of a sweet harmony pervading body, mind, and soul. In this his senses were sustained . . .³¹

In one of their now profitless arguments Maggie says her lot is to stay here until she dies and he buries her in the red dust. Without any clear plan she runs away, to Bell Hill, learning the secret of the two women who live there. Though they are never quite convincing the scenes at Bell Hill have a dramatic quality withheld from the rest of the novel. In the three women imprisoned in lives they have been responsible for but feel they cannot escape, a vision akin to that of Hardy is reinforced and expressed as unequivocally.

What remedy was there for the tragedy of being? None, none whatever was possible. In all existence, suffering was the only unquestioned reality; everything else was like the desert twilight, an unsubstantial limbo . . .

Some hope does appear for Maggie. Martin is forced to a realisation of her hopelessness, and an awareness that he cannot abandon her. They leave the desert for a property in the south, Sea Orchard, near Albany, which for fifteen years they develop.

It is a period of truce, not solution, as in their different ways both understand. Distance and time bring to Maggie a deeper awareness of what they had faced, and may still have to face.

. . . She had been wrong when she had said that the northern country was evil. It most certainly was not good in any human sense, and in the absence of good, evil manifested itself. That was somehow different from saying that it was evil. The desert was *beyond* good and evil, something aloof and opposed altogether to human love and sympathy. And if human love and all that went with it, all the attributes of mankind, the greatness and the limitations of the human heart, if all these were *one* part of life, then the *other part*, the mysterious, the uncomprehended, the aloof, was symbolized by that virginal land, which gave, even in memory, a sense of expectation, as though it waited, still clothed in the primal innocence of creation, for some ordained, though unguessed event. It was that other part, the unhuman, the ungauged, which gave to Martin his distinction. His spirit had touched and had been, though perhaps only for rare moments, on equal terms with that further part of God which was *not* human, which often seemed opposed to what humanity strove for, but which, in its depths, went deeper, colder than human love could go, and, in its heights, transcended to a thin and empty nothing.³²

When Martin returns to the north to help his son, who farms there, the truce is strained. Martin, as Grant Watson's other protagonists before him, for a time moves between the two poles, north and south, ostensibly seeking for gold in the desert country, in reality returning to what he has never left.

For Maggie the long struggle has been lost. As the circle contracts her conclusion is bitter. 'In life there was no victory; but only a long-drawn-out and unrelenting denudation.' The implications of Hardy are inescapable, as in the admission she is forced to make.

' . . . Can't you believe that I love you, but that I still *have* to go?' She was about to answer in anger, but her sincerity checked her. "Yes, I can believe that," she said sadly, "but I find it painful and perplexing."

They stood looking at each other for a while in that painful and perplexing silence; he came to her and took her by the hand and then put his arms about her, and there seemed a harmony grown unexpectedly out of their struggle. For a short time they sat together side by side, she holding his hard, brown hand in her white hands. Thus they remained in silence while the twilight darkened; it was an hour remembered for happiness, as happiness goes in this life.³³

A more conventional novel might have ended here. But it is in the last pages that Watson gives some human feeling to what is often in danger of becoming an abstract discussion of ideas. The symbolism is deepened and made more complex. Perhaps Watson tries to impose too much on this figure of the land, is asking that it contain too varied a flow of ideas, yet in essence his desert landscape does exist in its own right and as an embodiment of the ideas he suggests in his spare narrative.

Now, at the end, Maggie goes back to the country she has so long feared, to find Martin. Both of them are reduced to elemental figures, their clothes tattered,

dirty, covered with the red dust, short of food and water, becoming slowly indistinguishable from the land itself. Oddly pathetic yet heroic figures. They are re-united briefly, before she dies and he buries her as she had foreseen. The man, stripping from his body the last of his clothes, turns away into the desert to die.

This is the most forceful, and the most moving expression of Grant Watson's theme, of his attempt to engage his characters and the landscape against which he sees them. He expands and deepens his theme, the land becomes a symbol of the separateness of man and woman, of the impossibility of fulfilment of love, yet an affirmation of its existence, and of the division of the self. At times an overload of ideas, a metaphysical over-kill perhaps, seems imminent, and always Watson's characters tend to exist rather as concepts than breaking through to some reality as people. But it is a rich and ambitious novel, with a power in keeping with its elemental concern of landscape and natural things. Grant Watson found in it his fullest expression of what might be seen as his own obsession with the strange and harsh landscape he had become aware of so many years earlier.

Indeed he was no more able to escape this landscape than his characters in their movement between desert and civilization. He returned to it in *Lost Man!* in 1934.³⁴

All Grant Watson's novels have had an essential spareness, a concentration of event, of character, and description, but this is more marked in *Lost Man!*. The framework has more in common with short story than novel, and might have been more effectively handled as such. While the earlier novels have moved over long periods of time, here the span is brief, and forward moving, the plot structure very simple. The style has a terseness, and while Watson has always been relatively free in his depiction of scenes and human relationships, he has here an even greater freedom, a starkness, at times a brutality, more to be found in the American fiction of the period than English, and not at all in Australian writing. It may be significant in this respect that the English edition was published under the name of John Lovegood.

The narrative begins in that favored conveyance of Grant Watson, the Perth-Geraldton-Meekatharra train — the names no longer disguised, where Sam Lawson is travelling north to look at a gold strike his partner has made. His wife, Vera, is to go with him, not with much enthusiasm for the journey, or for her husband's company. Looking from the window of the train, she reflects that 'surely it was an accident that she should have married Sam Lawson. She didn't quite understand how she had ever come to do that . . . or why she had such a shrinking from his touch . . .'

She had learned to control that response, and during the journey, and at the hotels where they stay, Sam makes his usual demands on her, without understanding or concern. He is a strong, sensual, direct man, with little regard for other people's feelings. The girl sees him and the fellow passengers he engages in a card game as:

. . . just like so many different sorts of animals that had happened to have got into the same stall together. The farmer was like a horse with a long face, Sherringham was like a bull; the other man was like some sort of a bird with a long neck, and Sam? Sam was like a big sort of monkey with a hairy belly.³⁵

The novel accepts something of this sort of view of the characters, and the imagery is developed.

At Geraldton Sam goes inland for a day or so to look at a property, while the girl remains at the hotel, unwilling to accompany him. She walks down to the beach, glad of her freedom, liking the dunes and the thickets that fringe them.

Here she meets Tim Kennedy, Lawson's partner, who like herself is waiting for Lawson's return. They are attracted to one another, and without evasion she accepts him as a lover.

The scene is overlaid with a heavy symbolism. The couple become aware as they lie on the sand of a snake close to them, on the warm ground, unhurried, within striking distance if they move. It goes, and later Kennedy finds and kills it. Its significance in this scene where the couple unashamedly enjoy their brief Eden seems clear enough, and is part of a pattern of imagery. The girl feels like 'a frog or a bird fascinated' as the snake lies close to them. Kennedy is 'like a dog, fawning on her, beseeching her caresses'. The couple bite into the fruit and skin of the melon they eat. However, Kennedy is also seen in terms of the snake, 'lying on his side . . . his brown eyes were watching her.' 'He had told her he was waiting. Well, he *was* waiting . . . That was just the sense he gave her: he was lying there and watching her, waiting for something.'

Kennedy is more at home in the bush than among his fellows, drawn to solitude. By comparison with Lawson he is thoughtful and attractive, the girl's feeling for him, open and physical as it is, stems partly from the contrast he presents to her husband. Yet the undertones of something if not menacing, at least indifferent in him, is felt by the girl — 'she kissed his eyelids that she might not see the unfeeling depths of his eyes.' She agrees to come to his room at the hotel that night, though she 'knew again he was waiting with that cruel and seductive patience that claimed all things.'

As they resume the train journey, Kennedy now with them, she tries to regain her own identity, feeling herself lost between the two men, 'both of them, how she hated them both.' The earlier image of Kennedy is now elaborated.

She knew that Tim, in particular, had no mercy, for there was something cold in his passion; his very beseechingness and yearning sprang from a deep, cold source . . . A curious thought, not to be put aside: there was something of the snake about him, and was it altogether an accident that they had almost lain together on a deadly snake?³⁶

This pattern of imagery seems likely to become deeper, more complex, or simply a little confused. Perhaps wisely, the novel does not really develop it.

Like some of the earlier women characters Vera Lawson would claim her own freedom and identity and it appears the novel is to explore this more fully.

The girl sees, as the train travels slowly, the destruction of the country, the kind of landscape that had resulted from exploitation, and which Martin O'Brian had feared. 'The land had been violated, first by the sun, and then by men, and by their hideous starved animals.' Yet in the desert flowers, the white and gold everlastings, she sees also the beauty of this exploited land. At Yalgoo she observes a gross scene when the donkeys from the teams are turned out for the night, 'a wild orgy' which she wonders might be 'the expression of Australia.' The scene is like a climax to the journey, desperate yet farcical.

First Sam, then Tim, then Sam again, and now this immense and inexorable continent . . . its station-yards violated by men and goats, as she was violated, the great open eye of its plain, its scorching sun, its flowers, its lusting donkeys!

The tension passed, though the donkeys continued to scream and fornicate. Now she was inclined to laugh. They were so funny, not unlike men, she thought.³⁷

Though there is one effective scene where she plays cards with the two men in the carriage, and is able to combine with and against each of them as the hands fall, retaining her own independence of judgement and sense of freedom, the

novel moves away from her more sensitive awareness and the problems which face her, to concentrate on the search by the two men for the gold reef.

This section, and it is half the novel, is too long. The tension built up in the first part is lost. The two partners travel out to the desert country. Kennedy becomes aware that out here Lawson is helpless, out of his own world, and that he could lose him as if by accident. Alone, Lawson would not survive long. The desert forces both men to introspection, Lawson to admission of the significance of his personal relationships, their inadequacy, Kennedy to try to analyse his need for the woman who is his partner's wife. Ironically Lawson is forced to look out beyond his usual self absorption, Kennedy is driven to look back towards men, to the life he has abandoned: Lawson becomes aware of the country, Kennedy of the problems of living with his fellows. Kennedy finally has to face his doubt that he can deliberately lose and so kill Lawson. At the point of decision he is bitten by a snake, dies in agony, and Lawson is left in the desert which is to destroy him.

The novel shows a change in style, is more direct in analysis of thought and motive, and indicates a difference in the way in which the land, the desert country, is viewed. The style, crisper, often telling in the early part of the book, is less suitable for the introspection of the last portion. The symbolism seems uncertain, and the religious implications of the last few pages are forced indeed. There are some effective descriptions of the desert in the last section of the book, but the land is seen less in terms of reality than as an allegorical setting. While this has always been part of Watson's concern, the change is marked here, and he is providing a concept later to engage both Stow and White.

*The Nun and the Bandit*³⁸ followed a year after *Lost Man!* Set later than the other books, there are motor cars, fine houses established in the goldfields — in this case at Balangoorlie, not one of Watson's better disguises — there is a police force and better communications, the vast mine dumps are a feature of the landscape, and there is evidence of American influences on Australian life.

The novel begins uncertainly, with something of the brashness, the schoolboy adventure attitude of some of Boldrewood's narratives. Grant Watson relies more on dialogue than in his previous novels, and some of the initial awkwardness is due to unconvincing speech, and to the events being reflected largely through the thoughts of the main character, the young, aggressive and inarticulate Michael Shanley. The initial interview when Michael confronts his uncle, George Shanley who owns the mine and property Michael feels is at least partly his, since his grandfather was its early discoverer, is oddly melodramatic. It is as if Watson, trying to gain greater pace and impact, has lost any ability to suggest credibility of character or incident.

The plot that develops when George Shanley refuses the youth's claim is also melodramatic, and seems likely to be little more credible. The young man plans to kidnap the daughter of Shanley's son, take her out to one of the distant out-camps on the run-down station left to Michael and his brothers by their father, and hold her for ransom. Michael's two brothers are subservient to him, one retarded and mentally a child.

The brothers take the young girl when she is visiting an area out of the town in the late afternoon. With her is her companion, Sister Lucy Sheldon, a young woman who is taking orders, and who is visiting the Shanleys. She refuses to leave the girl, and is taken to the outcamp with her.

From this point the novel begins to gain some form and credibility. Grant Watson remains remarkably true to his location, to its barrenness, its isolation, its sheer loneliness. Above all, he refuses to falsify the limitations it imposes on action, events, or twists of plot — something novelists before and after him were

less scrupulous about. The novel concentrates about this very limitation of place, this simplicity. In a sense, all Watson's novels have shared something of this, but his characters have been free to move and to provide some variety of place, event, and time.

Time itself is limited. Only some four days are spent at the outcamp, a few more days at the pool further out where Michael takes Lucy Sheldon after the other characters have left them.

Through the brothers, and the woman Michael has lived with at the homestead, such as it is, and who was forced to live as his father's mistress before him, the gross lives that have been forced on them are revealed. The boys had killed their father, a brutal tyrant of a man, Michael being mainly responsible, and the picture of this crude early life is like that of the poor whites of American writers like Erskine Caldwell, some of whose violence and sadism it shares, and seems to share some of the same social concern. The novel seeks to establish some belief in this early life of the brothers, and of the woman, Sorrel, who has suffered with them, and the effect it has had on stunting and brutalising them all. As the other characters fall away, Michael is left with Lucy Sheldon, stripped now of her veil and habit, dressed in the clothes given her by Sorrel. To possess her physically has become his obsession, by force if necessary, in the kind of brutality he has been used to, but he agrees to let the young girl go free, forfeiting the ransom, and any future for himself, if Lucy Sheldon will stay with him for a time, and accept him as a lover.

She has no real possibility of avoidance, but there is the choice of agreeing to his demand or having it forced upon her. That they have come to this point at all indicates an awareness of one another and of themselves neither had expected or was able to understand. She does agree, and they travel out to a distant rock pool, a place idyllic in its way, and there camp for some days until, inevitably, they are discovered.

As in the pattern of the other novels, isolation enforces an introspection and re-valuation. Lucy Sheldon must come to terms with revulsion and fear as qualities within herself, and not simply as provoked by her strange companion. And as she achieves self awareness she achieves compassion. He learns something of consideration, and glimpses the possibility of a relationship with someone in every respect different from anyone else in his stunted and brutal world. Grant Watson does not falsify this, he retains his sense of the limitations possible in the encounter, and resists sentimentality.

The last chapter seems an unnecessary concession to the reader, but once beyond the awkward opening of the book itself there is a greater ease in the writing, a greater naturalness between the characters, grotesques though they may seem, and, more easily than in the earlier novels, a fusion of the identity and symbolism of the landscape.

... behind her there were the stores and the blankets and the glowing embers of the fire. These things were still a part of the accustomed world. These things that they had brought with them out of the past, and besides these, there were the natural features of the landscape, the pool and the bare rocks with their sharp, dark shadows, but not as in other landscapes ... they were in some way enchanted and made unreal, or else more real, by the silence and by the bright ocean of air, warm and impregnated through and through with sunlight. A buzz of insects, but so monotonous as to be but an emphasis to the silence which lay behind.

The silence was like a blow inflicted, but not one to stun, but rather one from a piercing, poisoned weapon, planting a toxin in the blood to make her restless. Such tremendous peace could hardly be endured.

Here, as she gazed, all things grew stranger and more changed. The substance of the rocks, which gleamed with a faint, translucent purple, and the grey-blue foliage of the mulga bushes were alike pierced and made almost transparent by so much brilliance. Here in the desert was the presence of an all-pervading light, but how different this from that other light which, in her soul, she had imagined about the presence of The Saviour. This light had existed before any imaginings of man. God without man: a thought both terrible and strange. Around her, on all sides, sky and earth met in a purple haze, and nearer, the earth was but the reflected sky; the light would penetrate right through. Amidst this blending and piercing, chaos was in conception. The silence was a vacuum. . . . Only the tiny lives of insects: a faint indeterminate humming, to which accompaniment all things were fused.³⁹

The reflection of the woman's conflict against the loneliness, the strength and silence and light of the landscape, is more convincing than anything in the previous novel, more economically managed than in the earlier books, though it remains a novel that never quite manages to fuse its often bizarre elements.

Grant Watson may finally have laid at rest his long concern with the Western Australian landscape. *The Nun and the Bandit* is the last of the novels. Considering how much they offer it is strange how little they seem to be known, novels that appear to have been not so much forgotten by Australian readers as never discovered.

NOTES

1. *But To What Purpose*, London, The Cresset Press 1946.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 73. For his opinion of Lawrence, and of a book important to him, and it would seem to the novels, see Weiniger *Sex and Character*, also Freud, p. 244-5.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
The power of this landscape could be felt by such a level headed observer as J. H. Curle, whose book *The Gold Mines Of The World* (1899) offered a distinctly cynical appraisal of the mines of Western Australia and those who ran them. His comment on the country is unusual, even out of place, in the book, as if his reaction was forced from him, but of the area about Coolgardie he wrote:
This scene, which confronts the traveller the morning after leaving Perth, and which remains continually with him until he again leaves the gold fields far behind, creates a temporary depression so long as it lasts, and leaves in the memory an impression that can never be blotted out . . .
At night, in the West Australian bush, a glamour weaves itself over this terrible country. As you drive or ride along the sand tracks which lead from one water-hole to another, the full moon, shining in a cloudless sky, tinges the gum trees with silver. You hear the tinkling of bells, and presently a long train of camels, the front one led by an Afghan driver, passes silently by, bearing heavy loads to some distant mine.
A cool breeze springs up, obliterating the impression of the heat and dust and of the past day, and as you at last lie down to sleep, under the shadow of silvery trees, the prosaic realities of life in this strange country, with its dishonesty and greed, and its hundreds of terrible failures, are all forgotten.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
7. For an account of the expedition see above, also Grant Watson, *Journey under the Southern Stars*, London, Abelard-Schuman, and Elizabeth Salter, *Daisy Bates*, Sydney, Angus & Roberston 1971.
8. *Where Bonds Are Loosed*, New York, Knopf 1918 (London, Duckworth 1914).
9. *Ibid.*, preface.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 285.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
13. *The Mainland*, New York, Knopf 1917.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
15. *Ibid.*, p.134.
16. *The Desert Horizon*, London, Cape, 1923: New York, Knopf 1923.

17. *Deliverance*, New York, Knopf, 1923.
18. *Shadow and Sunlight*, London, Cape, 1921.
19. *The Desert Horizon*, p. 169. Paging from the N.Y. edition. There is a difference in the text between the N.Y. and London editions. First names of some characters are also altered, and the spelling O'Brian in Cape edition is O'Brien in N.Y.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 254.
23. *Daimon*, London, Cape, 1925 (N.Y. as *The Contracting Circle*, Boni and Liveright, 1925).
24. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.
26. See Bennett, B. ed. *The Literature of Western Australia*, Perth, University of W.A. Press 1979, esp. chapters on Diaries, Letters, Journals; The Novel; The Short Story. Also the article by Helen Watson Williams in this issue of *Westerly*.
27. *Daimon*, p. 31.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
31. *Ibid.*, p.171.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 192-193.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 256-257.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
35. *Lost Man!* New York, Harper and Bros. 1934 (London *The Partners*, by John Lovegood, Gollancz 1933).
36. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 140.
39. *The Nun and the Bandit*, London, Cresset Press, 1935.
40. *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

HELEN WATSON-WILLIAMS

Land Into Literature

The Western Australian Bush seen by some Early Writers and D. H. Lawrence

When Anthony Trollope, visiting his son in New South Wales in 1871-72 and Western Australia in March 1872, wrote of the establishment of the Swan River colony, he was noticeably unenthusiastic. As he coolly observes:

Western Australia arose after another fashion. She was colonised because she was there — not because she was wanted for any special purpose, either by the community at large or by any small section of it.¹

He does not say that there were also cruising French in the South seas at the time² nor that the Dutch voyagers had passed that way; though he willingly reports that the early Dutch who, under Peter Nuyt, landed on the South West coast were frightened away by the roaring bull frogs, as he might easily have been himself.³ However, Captain Stirling in 1827 had taken home news of a “salubrious climate” and was sent South to found a colony on the 1st of June, 1829, and settlement followed. For our purposes let the Mediterranean climate determine the fact.

This essay will consider what some writers have thought of Western Australia, the place, its landscape, and more particularly the bush characteristic of the south of the immense State.

At first sight it was not beguiling to English eyes as indeed it is not to Europeans today. As the Reverend J. R. Wollaston, who described himself as “the first of Christ’s ordained ministers who (has) officiated in this extensive district”⁴, comments in 1841:

The appearance of the coast of Western Australia as you approach from the sea, is most uninviting . . . white, sandy beach with dingy looking forest in the background.⁵

Nor does closer inspection modify this unprepossessing impression. The Reverend Wollaston is a close and conscientious observer but he does not like what he sees at close range:

All the trees, although evergreens, want freshness: their foliage is of the most sombre uniform hue imaginable and the paucity of it causes their trunks and stems to bear a very undue proportion compared with the leaves.⁶

At long range it is little better:

From a very high hill on Point Casuarina there is a view extending for many miles into the interior . . .; but to me it is rather distressing than agreeable. Apparently an impervious mass everywhere presents itself of one uniform

colour, a dark dirty green, over which on a hot day, the hazy, African-looking atmosphere hangs like a pestilence.⁷

All in all, he reluctantly admits of his new land that "the general aspect of the country, on this side of Australia at least, is by no means inviting."⁸

Others' first impressions are more cheerful though it is worth noticing how far past experience governs their expectations if not, like the colonial artists, their records. One young man, arriving a year after the first settlers, reports in his *Diary* of 29th (October 1830):

We are now advancing towards the coast, which has an undulating and very pleasing appearance, like gentlemen's parks.⁹

But the illusion of "gentlemen's parks" did not survive closer scrutiny. Two months later George Fletcher Moore, for all his optimism, had to confess that

The country is most singular, but does not possess those features of extreme interest which I expected; there is . . . great sameness in the scenery.¹⁰

Rather as we ourselves, lacking perceptive praise, fall back on a neutral term, he takes the easy way out some three months later when he assesses it thus:

(its) character is that of an interesting landscape, rather than of sublime or grand scenery.¹¹

A later colonist, E. W. Landor, who arrived in August, 1841, accompanied by brothers, servants, dogs and rams with curling horns, records a similar fluctuation of feeling. As his ship moves past the island of Rottnest into the port of Fremantle his account has an exultation in nature that markedly echoes the eighteenth century sensibility of the Northern hemisphere:

It was a clear, beautiful, sparkling day, and there was a sense of enjoyment attached to the green foliage, the waving crops, and the gently heaving sea, that threw over this new world of ours a charm which filled our hearts with gladness.¹²

Yet the country cannot match the climate:

The first impression which the visitor to this settlement receives is not favourable . . . This unfavourable . . . soil (of granitic sand, with which is mixed a small proportion of vegetable mould) is covered with a coarse scrub, and an immense forest of banksia trees, red gums, and several varieties of eucalyptus¹³

But the banksia is a "paltry tree", only good for firewood.

Nevertheless, on a bright day, the spring wild flowers and flowering shrubs "gave to the country the appearance of English grounds about a goodly mansion . . . It was impossible to help being in good spirits."¹⁴

Yet Landor, the aspiring "Bushman", as he describes himself, shows a sensitivity to the country in its other aspects that the cheerful Mr. Moore does not feel or in any event acknowledge. Even before he sets foot on land he catches a glimpse of what experience of the bush may be like. Night falls on his ship hugging the coast towards the port where a few twinkling lights are the only signs of life:

All beside, on the whole length of the coast, seemed to be a desert of sand, the background of which was occupied with the dark outline of an illimitable forest.

It was into this vast solitude that we were destined to penetrate. It was a picture full of sombre beauty, and it filled us with solemn thoughts.¹⁵

Sometime later, while visiting the home of an established settler and following a pleasant evening of music, he unexpectedly experiences a moment of extreme loneliness and threat arising from that "illimitable forest." As he contemplates ring-barked trees in the clearing by the quiet river, he quite irrationally feels that the visible forest trees are "advanced lines . . . of the vast wilderness which lay beyond" and he is profoundly disturbed by emanations from the unknown land stretching far around homestead clearing and the drawing-room:

The air was balmy, but there was something in the mournful aspect of the scene that weighed upon the spirits, and made one feel inexpressibly lonely in the midst of that boundless wilderness of forest.¹⁶

Others are to know something of the same experience, notably D. H. Lawrence as we shall see. But in Landor commonsense and no doubt the morning sunshine soon take the upper hand and he dismisses such intuitions:

Time soon takes the edge off novelty (he declares) and long ago I have learned to feel perfectly at ease and cheerful, whilst lying in the midst of much deeper solitude, with no companions but my horse grazing near me, and the fire at my feet.

Reducing all threats to the known and the explicable, he briskly concludes:

There is no country in the world so safe for the traveller as Western Australia.¹⁷

However, such was not his mood as his ship sailed along the darkening coast towards Fremantle. The "solemn thoughts" filling him and his companions were natural enough in their circumstances. After some four months at sea and about to enter into a new life in a little known land, Landor's awed response would doubtless be common to all.

Landfall, in anyone's life, is a pivotal experience, marking, as it so obviously does, transition to a new phase of life. Landfall in Western Australia to the colonists meant not only relief after the long journey round the Cape of Good Hope but introduction to such unfamiliar conditions and surroundings that not surprisingly it figures in many journals and works of imagination.

The following passages illustrate the importance of the event to the *personæ* involved and the individuality of its presentation. Two of them are works of fiction, the third an autobiography written by a novelist nearly fifty years after the occasion; it may justifiably be compared with the ostensibly fictional narratives although clearly the line of demarcation between autobiography and fiction is never very rigid.

In what has been called the first West Australian novel, *Moondyne*, a convict ship, its decks crowded with prisoners, slowly approaches Fremantle:

The shore of West Australia is quite low, and the first sign of land are tall mahogany trees in the bush. The ship passed this first sight-line early in the night; and next morning, when the convicts were allowed on deck, they saw, only a few miles distant, the white sand and dark woods of their land of bondage and promise.

The sea was as smooth as a lake, and the light air impelled the ship slowly. At noon they passed within a stone's throw of the island of Rottenest, and every eye witnessed the strange sight of gangs of naked black men working like beavers in the sand, the island being used as a place of punishment for refractory natives.

An hour later, the ship had approached within a mile of the pier at Fremantle. The surrounding sea and land were very strange and beautiful. The green shoal-water, the soft air, with a yellowish warmth, the pure white sand

of the beach, and the dark green of the unbroken forest beyond, made a scene almost like fairyland.

But there was a stern reminder of reality in the little town of Fremantle that lay between the forest and the sea. It was built of wooden houses, running down a gentle hill; and in the centre of the houses, spread out like a gigantic star-fish, was a vast stone prison.¹⁸

That this is well observed, carrying conviction in its detail of landscape and human habitation, is natural. For its author, John Boyle O'Reilly, a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, had made the same landfall in October 1867, as a transported convict who was to work some two years at Her Majesty's pleasure until he escaped in an American whaler to settle in Boston, U.S.A., and write his colourful romance about Western Australia's only bushranger, Moondyne Joe.¹⁹

O'Reilly's experience had served him well: the low shoreline backed by the bush, the green shoalwater, the smooth sea and light air of morning before the wind rises, the pure white sand and the unbroken forest: these are elements of every newcomer's arrival. But these are convicts, not free settlers, so their's is a "land of bondage and promise"; they are aware of the island they pass as "a place of punishment for refractory natives"; and any illusion they might have of entering into "fairyland", like Moore's "gentlemen's parks", is dissipated by the sight of the little town of Fremantle dominated by the prison. Indeed, that is their only focus of attention; the "wooden houses", the "gentle hill", are passing allusions but there in their centre (and both simile and syntax reinforce its primacy), "spread out like a gigantic star-fish, was a vast stone prison". That is what they all, heterogeneous lot as they are, see in a common absorption: "what every eye witnessed."

This general vision of the new land points up the contrasted impression given by D. H. Lawrence when his "Boy in the Bush", Jack, arrives in his turn at Fremantle in 1882, forty years before Lawrence and Mollie Skinner wrote his story:

Not far off among the sand near the harbour mouth lay the township, a place of strong, ugly, oblong houses of white stone with unshuttered bottle-glass windows and a low white-washed wall going round, like a sort of compound; then there was a huge stone prison with a high white-washed wall. Nearer the harbour, a few new tall warehouse buildings, and sheds, long sheds, and a little wooden railway station. Further out again, windmills for milling flour, the mill-sails turning in the transparent breeze from the sea. Right in the middle of the township was a stolid new Victorian Church with a turret: and this was the one thing he knew he disliked in the view.

On the wharf everything was busy. The old wool steamer lay important in dock, people were crowding on deck and crowding the wharf in a very informal manner, porters were running with baggage, a chain was clanking, and little groups of emigrants stood forlorn, looking for their wooden chests, swinging their odd bundles done up in coloured kerchiefs. The uttermost ends of the earth! All so lost and yet so familiar. So familiar, and so lost. The people like provincial people at home. The railway running through the sand hills. And the feeling of remote unreality.

This was his mother's country.²⁰

Here is the same attention to detail; the same recreation of setting, the hurly burly and confusion that O'Reilly remarks. But this is a personal response to the immediate experience. It is one boy's arrival; the houses he judges to be "ugly" as well as "strong and oblong", the "stolid new Victorian church" he dislikes; the "old wool steamer" looks "important" in dock, the curious amalgam of the familiar in the shabby, bewildered folk lost in the "ends of the earth", of the familiar railway running through strange sandhills. And the whole scene, for all its exotic-

ism, is no "fairlyland", as O'Reilly thought the coast, but a noisy, active, Victorian township bathed in the light of his mother's oft repeated tales. To Jack, a free settler, the prison is but one building among many. To O'Reilly's convicts, moving into "their land of bondage and promise", the "vast stone prison" is "a gigantic star-fish", a monster from the deep.

Jack, at not quite eighteen, is an acute observer, with a fine eye for detail. Description indeed reproduces the movement of the eye, running over the township casually, including the "huge stone prison", moving in to new buildings and the station by the harbour, out again to the windmills "turning in the transparent breeze", and settling, with distaste as the convicts did with dread, on what dominates his personal vision of the town, "the stolid new Victorian Church with a turret." His story will show that the grounds of his dislike are not merely aesthetic.

The final account of arrival at Fremantle is the return this time of a native-born Australian. In 1900 Mollie Skinner, after twelve years in England, recovers her country with joy. It was written in the mid 1940s when Miss Skinner was in her seventies. It is thus the account of a youthful experience recollected in an age where pleasure transforms details less precise and far less personal than Jack's in a similar situation:

We tied up at Fremantle and there lay my fairlyland in reality again. The new harbour had been completed two years before and the Establishment, as the prison was then called, still gloomed like a great stone fortress near the seafront. White-washed cottages, moss-grown and homely, side by side with more pretentious houses, lined the streets. Along the tree-dotted south shore were mercantile houses, business offices and a club and over the bar across the mouth of the Swan River the old wooden bridge, the sky and the sea like an iridescent bubble, and away inland the quiet grey-green of the bush. Fremantle, sun-drenched on its bed of silver sand, reminded me of . . . Lewis Carroll.²¹

This experience of Fremantle evokes mood more than it recalls details of the situation. What comes through the general description ("mercantile houses" instead of Lawrence's "warehouse buildings, and sheds, long sheds"; "white-washed cottages" and "more pretentious houses" instead of "strong, ugly, oblong houses . . . with unshuttered bottle-glass windows) is greater familiarity with the place and its history (the "new harbour", "the Establishment", "a club"), none of which would be known to Jack — or to Lawrence; but above all the recreation of joy:

And the air . . . the air was indescribably pure and sparkling with colour as if reflecting hidden jewels. It was air that healed sick lungs, brought joy to saddened hearts, lifted care from burdened minds.

which justifies the "fairlyland in reality."²²

Such comparison may have some bearing on the process of collaboration which produced *The Boy in the Bush* in 1924, in many ways Lawrence's more impressive novel about Australia than *Kangaroo* of which he was the sole author.²³ From his letters to her we know that he transformed her novel, *The House of Ellis*, which he thought unpublishable, into the one we have, entitling it *The Boy from the Bush*²⁴; that he demanded a "free hand" to "re-cast it, and make a book of it"²⁵; that he entirely re-wrote it, "following (her) MS almost exactly, but giving a unity, a rhythm, and a little more psychic development than (she) had done"²⁶; that he dramatically modified the character of Jack (suggested, as she records, by her own brother.)²⁷ As Lawrence wrote to her:

Your hero Jack is not quite so absolutely blameless an angel, according to me. You left the character psychologically at a standstill all the way: same boy at the beginning and the end. I have tried, taking your inner cue, to make a rather daring development, psychologically. You may disapprove.²⁸

She did. Lawrence had drastically modified the end, "twisted its tail, even adding a new character", Miss Skinner reports; but she was far from pleased:

I was dismayed, however, that he had altered the construction and pulled it out of focus towards the end. Jack, the hero I had drawn, would never have ridden a snorting stallion amongst the old shellbacks, intent on seducing their daughters.²⁹

But Lawrence's Jack would and did and her appeal for restoration of the simpler hero was, fortunately, made too late in the process of publication. When, in our last view of Jack, he rides alone into the "silent grey bush, in which he had once been lost"³⁰, the incident fulfills a principle of construction that demonstrates one of Lawrence's most important imaginative uses of the Australian bush.

For Lawrence's response to the Australian bush was, as every critic has observed, exceptionally sensitive. When he first encountered it in the hills above Perth it is as if he walked naked in it. In his eyes it recalled no "gentlemen's parks", no "English grounds", certainly no "fairyländ." His first impressions, as he expressed them to a friend in 1922, were a complex apprehension of place, its people, and its spirit felt on the pulse:

It's queer here: wonderful sky and sun and air — new and clean and untouched — and endless hoary "bush" with no people — all feels strange and empty and *unready*. I suppose it will have its day, this place. But its day won't be our day. One feels like the errant dead, or the as-yet-unborn; a queer feeling. It is not. And the people are not. And there is a queer pre-primeval ghost over everything.³¹

The failure of the present white inhabitants to relate to each other and to their land, that land's primacy and its total independence of human beings: these themes run through *Kangaroo* and *The Boy in the Bush* in different degrees of importance. The inadequacies of human relationships dominates the first book where the nature of the land itself and its place in human experience shape the second; as such, it is our chief concern here.

That experience is one of a single consciousness; *The Boy in the Bush* is one man's experience to a quite remarkable degree. Despite Jack's affection for the Ellis family to whom he is attached in many ways, as friend, lover, husband, the story is his alone. Indeed, at the heart of his final attitude is total rejection of society and recognition of his own essential solitude.³² Mollie Skinner's proposed title, *The House of Ellis*, could never have been applied to this record of an un-deviatingly single consciousness as it registers and interprets its physical situations and moves from boyhood to manhood on its journey towards self-knowledge.

The spiritual journey is made in Australia. Indeed, so imaginatively has Lawrence used the environment that physical details, vivid and fresh as they are, are always brought to bear on the psychic development which informs this story of farming, fighting, loving and dying. This hero's journey could only be made in Australia. The qualities Lawrence noted in Darlington, "new and clean and untouched", "strange and empty", its day yet to come, are elements of Jack's introduction to his new home. On his first coach ride in the bush, accompanied by magpies and wallaby, he realizes the strangeness of his surroundings and, at the same time, their potentiality:

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It was a new country, after all. It *was* different. A small exultance grew inside the youth. After all, he *had* got away . . . Where you could do as you liked, without being stifled by people. He still had a secret intention of doing as he liked, though what it was . . . he did not know. Nothing very definite. And yet something stirred in his bowels as he saw the endless bush, and the noisy green parrots and the queer tame kangaroos: and no man. (p. 38).

In this confused glimpse of freedom promised by the very strangeness of creature and country, Jack responds at the level of simple instinct; by the time he goes camping with Tom in the timber country of the South West in spring, "the short, swift, fierce, flower-strange spring of Western Australia, in the month of August" (p. 94), he consciously appreciates the gulf that lies between the old life and the new. The past is identified with his father, the future with the present:

The weird silent timelessness of the bush impressed him as nothing else ever did, in its motionless aloofness. "What would my father mean, out here?" he said to himself. And it seemed as if his father and his father's world and his father's gods withered and went to dust at the thought of this bush . . . he felt as if the old world had given him up from the womb, and put him into a new weird grey-blue paradise, where man has to begin all over again. That was his feeling: that the human way of life was all to be begun over again. (p. 95)

Jack's experience imaginatively embodies his author's in several ways. Lawrence's initial encounter with the bush sensed the antiquity of the land and its "queer primeval ghost", Jack feels its "weird silent timelessness"; Lawrence noted the insubstantiality of human habitation in its failure in self-establishment ("this place . . . It is not. And the people are not") where Jack at this moment recognizes the "motionless aloofness" of the bush and elsewhere glimpses the power of the "aboriginal bush" and the ephemerality of human lives in country towns; as night falls on Sundays, churchgoers, pub-drinkers, home-riding farmers, all seem make-believe to him:

It was like children's games, real and not real, actual and yet unsubstantial, and the people seemed to feel as children feel, very earnest, very sure that they were very real, but having to struggle all the time to keep up the conviction. If they didn't . . . the dark strange Australian night might clear them and their little town all away into some final cupboard, and leave the aboriginal bush again. (p. 189)

The bush may survive its settlements; settlements and settlers seen as children's toys: the metaphor judges the relative strength of the land and its people. But Jack's impression of the bush shares with Lawrence's the image of birth. Lawrence felt like the "as-yet-unborn" in a world with its future to be made; Jack emerges from the womb of the old world into another world to be recreated. And how Jack behaves in this "new weird grey-blue paradise", how he transgresses against the transplanted human moral code, how he finally takes his solitary way to found a dynasty in the North, lends Miltonic if not archetypal overtones to his individual story.

So powerfully does Lawrence integrate the bush with human experience, his own and his protagonist's, that it is never seen as simple setting. When Jack on his arrival climbs the Darling Range he sees

the wonderful clean new country spread out below him, so big, so soft, so ancient in its virginity . . . And in his heart he was *determining* to get what he wanted. Even though he did not know what it was he wanted . . . To get it out of this ancient country's virginity. (p. 40)

The country may seem, to the eighteen-year-old boy, simply a means to an unknown end but the imagery, "so big, so soft", so virgin, makes its own suggestions as to the fulfilment. Jack will make the land his when he makes his life his own, in the physical and psychological freedom he finally achieves as his own master. In his mother's advice, which puzzles the youth but becomes clear to the man, he needs to:

Earn a good opinion of yourself and never mind the world's opinion. You know when there's the right glow inside you. That's the spirit of God inside you. (p. 17)

It is, of course, no accident that Jack's mother is Australian born. At the level of plot the connection with Western Australia justifies Jack's banishment to Australia rather than any other colonial settlement available to an Englishman in the 1880s. It introduced him to family and friends within the Swan River settlement and its expansion. But Jack's mother transcends plot. She who never enters directly into the narrative proper endows her only child with both a formulated quest in life and a fundamental attitude to life in which to undertake it, although Jack himself never acknowledges it. Indeed, his childhood, so often abandoned by his military service parents, would leave him unaware of hereditary traits of character. The importance of Jack's mother may well be suspected by the long and admirable description in the novel's opening pages; it deserves full quotation here:

(Jack) liked the warm, flushed, rather muddled delight of his mother. She was a handsome, ripe Australian woman with warm colouring and soft flesh, absolutely kindly in a humorous, off-hand fashion, warm with a jolly sensuousness, and good in a wicked sort of way. She sat in the sun and laughed and refused to quarrel, refused also to weep. When she had to leave her little boy a spasm would contract her face and make her look ugly, so the child was glad if she went quickly. But she was in love with her husband, who was still more in love with her, so off she went laughing sensuously across seven seas, quarrelling with nobody, pitching her camp in true colonial fashion wherever she found herself, yet always with a touch of sensuous luxury, Persian rugs and silk cushions and dresses of rich material. She was the despair of the true English wives, for you couldn't disapprove of her, she was the dearest thing imaginable, and yet she introduced a pleasant, semi-luxurious sense of — of what? Why, almost of sin. Not positive sin. She was really the dearest thing imaginable. But the feeling that there was no fence between sin and virtue. As if sin were, so to speak, the unreclaimed bush, and goodness were only the claims that the settlers had managed to fence in. And there was so much more bush than settlement. And the one was as good as the other, save that they served different ends. And that you always had the wild and endless bush all round your little claim. And coming and going was always through the wild and innocent, but non-moral bush. Which non-moral bush had a devil in it. Oh, yes! But a wild and comprehensible devil, like the bush-rangers who did brutal and lawless things. Whereas the tame devil of the settlements, drunkenness and greediness and foolish pride, he was more scaring.

"My dear, there's tame innocence and wild innocence, and tame devils and wild devils, and tame morality and wild morality. Let's camp in the bush and be good."

That was her attitude, always. "Let's camp in the bush and be good." She was an Australian from a wild Australian homestead. And she was like a wild sweet animal. (p. 5-6)

The physical woman is certainly present: warm, "flushed", "handsome", "ripe" (with all that that epithet suggests of appearance, texture, even moral maturity);

with her characteristic attitude to living "humorous", "offhand", good-tempered and well-balanced; subject to distress in leaving her child but "in love with her husband" and so accepting the lesser inevitable separation. But Lawrence's chief interest here lies in the fundamental nature of the woman, "a wild sweet animal", lacking any sense of sin inculcated by civilized humanity, represented here by the "true English wives" who do not know what to make of her and also her military husband "to whom it mattered very much what you did."

The dominant attitude in this woman is very effectively expressed in the extended image of Australian bush and pioneering settlement to contemplate the relationship between human nature and social morality³³: "as if sin were . . . the unreclaimed bush, and goodness only the claims that the settlers had managed to fence in." But this woman questions the current concepts of sin and morality; as her acquaintances are uneasily aware, she ignores fences and feels most at home in the "wild and innocent, but non-moral bush". It might hold its own wild devil but a "comprehensible" one, far less frightening than the "tame devil of the settlements, drunkenness and greediness and foolish pride." In theological terms, fundamental human nature may be subject to Anger (though this woman quarrelled with no one) but should never be subject to the other deadly sins of Gluttony, Avarice, and Pride. The attitude summarised in her request: "Let's camp in the bush and be good", gradually defines and confirms itself in her son until he becomes fully conscious of his own needs, his own path to salvation. As he travels in the North with Tom, moving

further and further, geographically, mentally, and emotionally, from Wandoo and all permanent associations, Jack was glad. He loved the earth, the wild country, the bush, the scent. He wanted to go on for ever. Beyond the settlements — beyond the ploughed land — beyond all fences. That was it — beyond all fences . . . where a man was alone with himself and the untouched earth. (p. 239)

Without acknowledgement or perhaps realization of his mother's influence, Jack is clearly her son.

Jack's mother, warm and sensuous, joyful and loving, totally careless of social convention, may well be thought an idealized character; she is surely what every woman might like to be or, better, what every man might like her to be. The character is built up not only by the fullness and concreteness of detail; not only by the imaginative use of the bush and settlement to establish a philosophical attitude; but also by the shifting angle of presentation. We learn to know this woman through her son's appreciation of her "warm, flushed, rather muddled delight", and again through the eyes of the "true English wives" whose despair she is yet they cannot condemn her; their judgement of her is reported in their own words ("you couldn't disapprove of her, she was the dearest thing imaginable") however disturbing her impact on them may be. And finally we see her through her conventional husband's eyes whose antithetical standards of behaviour are subordinated to his devotion. Indeed, as Lawrence suggests, her very carelessness of convention may represent one aspect of his own orthodox character and conduct:

Perhaps her easy indifference to English rail-fences satisfied in him the iconoclast that lies at the bottom of all men. (p. 6)

The generalization authorizes us to see Jack's mother as the embodiment of a basic human drive, if we wish to do so; but in Lawrence's imaginative world she is the product of a particular place, "the newest, wildest, remotest colony" (p. 7) and her origin, ambience and attitudes lie in the bush.

To pass from Lawrence's identification of the bush and its "great, unfenced spaces" (pp. 6-7) with fundamental human nature uncorrupted by the conformist demands of the community of men to his vision of the dread god it holds is a natural step. Where Jack's mother embodied the spontaneous, warm attitude to life of instinctive innocence and affirmation, as boundless as the bush itself, Jack moves towards more precise focus on the meaning of life the bush holds for him. He sees it as the very origin of the universal power that governs human nature and the natural world alike. This manifestation of the dark god Lawrence so often sought is defined here as the secret life-source that he encounters in the depths of the Australian bush:

... In the wild bush, God seemed another God ... vaster, more calm and more deeply, sensually potent ... A dread God. But a great God, greater than any known. The sense of greatness, vastness, and newness in the air. And the strange, dusky, grey eucalyptus-smelling sense of depth, strange depth in the air, as of a great deep well of potency, which life had not yet tapped. Something which lay in a man's blood as well — and in a woman's blood — ... in the Australian blood. (pp. 239-240)

The bush therefore, in a moment of illumination, can be apprehended as the origin of life, as the dread God informing nature, the relationship between man and woman, and human consciousness.³⁴

It may also be understood, and this is Lawrence's allegorical use of the bush as a structural principle of Jack's story, as representing Life itself, the life to be led by each individual human being. After a night of watching by the dangerously ill Herbert, the young Jack suddenly appreciates the inevitable death that awaits him and the unknown way that will lead him to it. He desperately asks himself, "Oh, God, what sort of a life have I got between me and when I die?" (p. 83) And in his own personal "selva oscura" he finds himself in a predicament reminiscent of Dante:

He was afraid of the thicket of life, in which he found himself like a solitary, strange animal. He would have to find his way through: all the way to death ... He only knew ... that he was in a strange bush, and by himself. And that he must find his way through. (p. 83)

That the Dantesque echo is intentional is confirmed by an allusion to Don Rodrigo of *Inferno* (p. 357) in Jack's final silent monologue after Mary has refused to become his concubine. Realization of the destructiveness of others, even those who love him, once their distrust is aroused by non-conformity, is accompanied by recognition of his essential freedom and self-affirmation:

They would all like to kill the non-conforming me.
Which is me myself (he thinks). (p. 356)

Such recognition fulfills his mother's advice of so long ago and offers him total independence of the human race:

I can ride out of Perth (he says to himself) without leaving a vestige of myself behind, for them to work mischief on. (p. 356)

With the shift in perspective given by such a point of view he can not only gladly ride out of Perth alone, as he ultimately does, but he can fearlessly enter the "silent grey bush, in which he had once been lost". His journey inland and alone is the one he must take willingly; as he metaphorically enters a new phase of his life, Jack has, in fact, at last found his own way through the thicket of life "all the way to death" (p. 83)

So admirably has Lawrence welded the allegorical level of meaning with the realistic that it is remarkably unobtrusive. Jack could take no other way although according to the Hon. Dorothy Brett, Lawrence intended Jack to die but was overridden by Frieda Lawrence who insisted on his survival into "ordinariness"³⁵ However, Lawrence felt that "It runs on to its inevitable conclusions."³⁶

But the bush has many meanings besides the allegorical in this novel, as we have seen: location for "that book about the settlers" and "what went on in this empty country", as Lawrence urged Miss Skinner to write it³⁷; testing ground for physical and moral courage, as Mr. George says to the boy on his arrival: the country "must have *men* . . . If they're lazy derelicts and ne'er-do-wells, she'll eat them up. But she's waiting for real men . . ." (p.17) And Jack himself sees the virgin land as means to his own personal fulfilment. It is a strange world, origin of a way of life antithetical to all he has known before in England, obliterating "his father's gods".

As symbol of human nature the bush functions at different levels: it makes manifest a code of behaviour, a philosophical attitude to living, as in Jack's mother; but it is also subject to the cosmic influence of sun and moon, as the human being undergoes the power of masculine and feminine drives. At mid-point of his experience, in what is to become a key image of the novel, Jack undergoes the powerful influence of the Southern sun and moon. For he sees the sun in Australia with new eyes, "as all men may see it if they go there:"

In England the sun had seemed to him to move with a domestic familiarity. It wasn't till he was out here that he had been struck to the soul with the immense assertive vigour and sacred handsomeness of the sun . . . this immense sun, fierce and powerful beyond all human considerations, glaring across the southern sea . . . (p. 182)

And the "glory of the sun" is matched by "another glory of the moon", beneath which, before which he fled in terrible fear through "the empty bush, in Australia, in the night . . . for

the broad liquid fire of the cold moon would capture him . . . and destroy him, like some white demon that slowly and coldly tastes and devours its prey . . . The immense gleaming, liquid, lusting white moon, following him inexorably, and the bush like white charred moon-embers." (p. 182)

The identification with male and female principles is an easy one³⁸ to make and the final incident renders it explicit. In the conclusion which so disquieted Miss Skinner, Hilda Blessington whose mare has just mated with Jack's stallion, promises to join Jack in the North:

She glanced from her blue-grey mare to his red stallion, and gave her odd, squirrel-like chuckle.

"What a *contretemps*," she said. "It's like the sun mating with the moon."

. . . .

He mounted his horse.

"We go different ways for the moment," she said.

"Till Christmas," he answered. "Then the moon will come to the sun, eh?" (p. 369)

And ultimately, at the deepest level the bush can be understood as the source of vitality itself, its mystery as strange as the springs of human potency:

A strange, dusky, gum-smelling depth of potency that had never been tapped by experience. As if life still held great wells of reserve vitality, strange unknown wells of secret life-source, dusky, of a strange, dim, aromatic sap which had never stirred in the veins of man, to consciousness and effect. (p. 240)

In all of these aspects of Lawrence's consideration of the Australian bush the focus has been on the light to be thrown on the fictional character's development or, by extension, on human nature in general. But the bush has its own peculiar character to which Lawrence responded in a very personal way. Just as his first impressions written to friends from Western Australia were vivid and individual so were the impressions expressed within the novel re-worked some eighteen months later during his travels in California and Mexico. Half a world away, his response remained fresh and intimate. Admittedly he had the experience of the weeks on the New South Wales' coast to deepen his first impressions but it would seem rather that the impact of the bush on him took time to define and comprehend. Nothing in *Kangaroo*, written on the spot as it were, in 1922, has the immediacy of the bush passages in *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), except the record of "that glimpse of terror in the Westralian bush"³⁹ under a full moon, which was already distanced in space and time.

There is one such experience in the later novel in which I would contend that Lawrence records his own response to the physical environment with a perceptiveness that no other writer, to my knowledge, has demonstrated. Jack, after killing Easu, goes into the bush in search of his horse and realizes, in alarm, that he is lost:

Yet it was impossible . . . He was so near to everywhere.

There is something mysterious about the Australian bush. It is so absolutely still. And yet, in the near distance, it seems alive. It seems alive, and as if it hovered round you to maze you and circumvent you. There is a strange feeling, as if invisible, hostile things were hovering round you and heading you off.

Jack stood still and coo-eed! long and loud . . . he . . . was afraid of the ringing sound of his own cry.

The changeless bush, with scattered, slender tree-trunks everywhere. You could see between them into the distance, to more open bush: a few brown rocks: two great dead trees as white as bone: burnt trees with their core charred out: and living trees hanging their motionless clusters of brown, dagger-like leaves. And the permanent soft blue of the sky overhead.

Nothing was hidden. It was all open and fair. And yet it was haunted with a malevolent mystery. You felt yourself so small, so tiny, so absolutely insignificant, in the still, eternal glade . . .

Jack collected his wits and began to make a plan. (p. 301)

What is remarkable here is the changed relationship between man and nature. While the bush elsewhere represented an aspect of human nature or experience, at whatever level it may be, it always remained dependent on the dominant, recording human consciousness. But here the bush has its own life, its own will, and that an antagonistic and malevolent one.

Lawrence, speaking, as he seems to do, in his own voice, most unexpectedly and unusually, uses the present tense to explore the mystery of the bush, to appreciate its own peculiar existence with its emanations and effect. When we recall the response of the early settlers who sought either to re-capture their native countryside in an alien land or draw on its resources for their own livelihood or even, in the case of the Reverend Wollaston, moralize it⁴⁰, Lawrence's subjectivity is the more noteworthy. At first sight it bears a superficial resemblance to Landor's contemplation of the clearing in the wilderness with its "mournful aspect that weighed upon the spirits" and the inexpressible loneliness it engendered; but Lawrence analyses his apprehension more closely. When Landor is content to define the observer's experience of the impressive but inanimate land Lawrence restores life to the bush itself and admits the feelings of bewilderment and rejection it produces.

Lawrence's personal experience, dovetailed as it is in Jack's narrative, falls into three phases, as if it develops naturally from the circumstances. There is the general statement: "There is something mysterious" . . . and the reaction to it: "And yet . . . it seems alive." This is followed by detailed examination of the particular setting, as if to furnish reasons for such sensations in "the changeless bush." Only the images, "dead trees as white as bone", "burnt trees with their core charred out", "dagger-like leaves", suggest the threat lying under the "soft blue . . . sky". And finally analysis of the mystery already sensed reveals the nature of man's relationship to the bush and his discovery of his own absolute insignificance. The experience moves through an instinctive response to physical surroundings, to the recording of the evidence of the senses, to the interpretation of human relationship with the land. Syntactically, return to the past tense while retaining the colloquial and generalising pronoun bridges the Lawrentian and the fictional account.

Within Jack's story he must refuse to accept such a revelation of insignificance and bring back into focus, as he ultimately does, the paramount importance of human life lived sensuously, consciously and independently. Within Lawrence's imaginative treatment of the Australian bush which serves him in so many memorable ways however, this contemplation stands as an unforgettable apprehension of the land expressed with unrivalled immediacy and resonance.

NOTES:

1. Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1876, p. 87.
2. See, for instance, Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance: how distance shaped Australia's history*. South Melbourne, Macmillan, 1975.
3. Anthony Trollope, p. 125.
4. Rev. J. R. Wollaston, *The Picton Journal*, 1841-44 (1948), p. 6.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 4.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
9. G. F. Moore, *Diary of Ten years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia*, Perth, UWA Press 1978, (1884), p. 20.
10. *Ibid.*, 6th December 1830, p. 29.
11. *Ibid.*, March 5th 1831, p. 31.
12. E. W. Landor, *The Bushman or Life in a New Country*, London, Richard Bentley, 1847, p. 36.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.
18. J. B. O'Reilly, *Moondyne*, Seal Australian Fiction, Rigby, 1975, p. 203, (first published 1879)
19. Alexandra Hasluck, *Unwilling Emigrants*, Melbourne, O.U.P., 1959, p. 70: "The real Joe . . . (was) a bit of a rogue, a man of considerable ingenuity, with a likeable personality."
20. D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner, *The Boy in the Bush*, London, Martin Secker, 1924, p. 2.
21. M. L. Skinner, *The Fifth Sparrow* An autobiography. With a foreword by Mary Durack, Sydney University Press, 1972, p. 22.
22. *Ibid.*
23. D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, London, Heinemann, first published 1923, re-set in the *Phoenix edition* 1955.
24. M. L. Skinner, *The Fifth Sparrow*, p. 122, (D. H. Lawrence, 2 Sept. 1923); p. 125 (D. H. Lawrence, 1st Nov. 1923)
25. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

30. D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner, p. 369.
31. D. H. Lawrence, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. Aldous Huxley, Melbourne, London, Toronto, Heinemann, 1932, p. 547, (15th May, 1922)
32. D. H. Lawrence and M. L. Skinner, p. 360: "Even with his wife and his dearest friends. Withheld, unyielding, exacting even in his silence, he kept them in a sort of suspense." All page numbers within the text, except where otherwise indicated, will refer to *The Boy in the Bush*.
33. J. Heuzenroeder, "D. H. Lawrence's Australia", in *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4, October 1970, p. 332: (Lawrence requires) "of his fictional environment a suitably convincing arena in which to allow his spiritual forces the freedom of action they need. There is no doubt that Australia initially looked promising to him in this regard. The freedom, the absence of historical conditioning and civilized direction, are insisted upon. *The unfenced bush provides a very apt arena both as background and symbol*. It is a pity that he falls short of the concrete realization his intention demands, and that one's gratitude to him must be tinged with disappointment." (my italics).
34. Cf. D. H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo*, pp. 271-2, where a similar concern is debated in abstract rather than imaginative terms and is consequently far less effective.
35. See E. Nehls, *D. H. Lawrence: A Composite Biography*, Vol. 11, 1919-1925, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, p. 355.
36. M. L. Skinner, p. 132.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
38. See *Kangaroo*, pp. 8-9.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *The Picton Journal*, pp. 4-5, "The 'bush' presents a most striking and instructive picture of life and death. An immense timber tree is often seen with half of its trunk and branches, black, ragged and hollowed out by fire; while the other half is supported by a strip of bark, and sends forth more than the usual quantity of foliage, as if the destruction by fire of one half infused more life and vigour into the remainder."

RUTH JOHNSTON

The Printing Industry: Before and After Automation

The aim of the present study is to tap workers' attitudes to their jobs before and after automation. The printing industry has been taken as a test case and one plant employing around 500 employees was selected for the purpose of the current research. The subjects of the study consist of compositors and linotype operators of whom there were 34 persons. Half of them still worked in their original jobs, while the other half was transferred to a computerised form of operation, the details of which are too technical to analyse here.

BEFORE AUTOMATION

Taking the first group first it emerges that nearly all workers therein have been initially trained for their job for five years, with the exception of two British immigrants whose training lasted for six years in the country of their origin. Ten of the men left school at the age of 15 years, while five stayed on to the age of 16 years and two finished schooling at the age of 14 years. Three of the men were over 51 years of age, the rest being divided equally between those who were between 21-30 and 31-40 years of age. All respondents were married with the exception of two who were single and one man was divorced. Regarding ethnic background most employees were Australian apart from the two British immigrants and one New Zealander.

When asked how well they liked their jobs on a three point scale reading: very well, in between, and not at all, ten subjects selected the position "very well" while the rest chose the middle of the range denoting "in between." The interviewees were then allowed to state reasons for job liking and the following three reasons appeared with almost the same frequency, and they were: job interest, good pay and the friendliness of co-workers. Much further down the list was the quality of the foreman. In relation to job interest one of the interviewees remarked: "Money does not worry me, when you have an interesting job. The interest in the job covers the whole thing."

Looking into the future we asked the subjects if they envisage any problems in connection with pending automation of their jobs and one respondent put the matter in the following context: "I surely don't like the idea of the new technology as I will lose my trade and will be too old to learn another, even if given a chance. I can't see that they will find jobs for us all, so it will be hard and bleak. They promise you the world, but you can't trust them."

Another subject was more concerned with wider ramifications and in his opinion: "This is the end of the printing industry as we know it." Uncertainty, displacement, loss of earnings and more importantly, loss of job pervaded almost all of the answers given. One man explained: "I dread it as I don't know what they will do with me. I am not trained for anything else. I have been in the job since I was 15 and it is now 23 years since I first started. It is a lifetime of experience and it is sad, really sad just to throw it away."

Another worker shared the opinions of those already mentioned but added extra light to the situation by saying: "Even if I am given a chance of being retrained, but I have been in the job for so long now, how could I adjust to another position? Somehow I feel I will be retrenched and that is just too hopeless to think about."

Still more workers, somewhat confident about finding another job in the company, were depressed about being downgraded and having to perform jobs not commensurate with their training. One remarked in this context: "We might become cleaners or messenger boys. Our trade is on the line. It is phasing out. I am worried about losing my trade, about not doing a job in my own trade for which I have been trained and to be put somewhere to do work I might not like."

Older workers were less pessimistic about their own future but were deeply concerned about the young men and this is explained by one worker over 51 years of age: "Mass unemployment, no other possibility. I retire in two years time so I am indifferent as automation will not be completed by then. But I have great sympathy for the young people. Management, they are not honest, they will kick us out when automation becomes full. It happens elsewhere."

A rare optimistic note is struck by one young man in his middle thirties who obviously does not see his future as bleak as his co-workers did: "This kind of a job has been my bread and butter ever since I left school. I have applied to be retrained in this firm and I have youth on my side. I am indifferent really. I am not dreading it. Automation had to come, but I will not be out of a job. I'll just wait and see what happens. The greatest worry would be if you got a job with nothing to do usefully."

It seems from responses received thus far that apart from the preoccupation with financial matters, which would be endangered through the loss of the job, the job itself means a great deal to the interviewed workers. They emphasised time and time again the high value they placed on their training and the general meaning the job itself had to each individually. To them the job was part of their personality and a base for self-esteem. They strongly identified with it and in psychological terms a threat to their occupation implied a threat to their self-identity. Similar attachment to a job by workers in other occupations regardless of automation are to be found in Johnston (1979). In view of the deep attachment of trained people to their job and acquired qualifications, the severe drawbacks of automation seem to be mounting in addition to those already known, e.g., spreading unemployment and job dislocation.

The Workers and their Union

Since Unions in Australia have been actively engaged in the automated dilemma facing the Australian labour force, we tried to investigate the views the respondents held as to the role the printing Union played in their case. All interviewees belonged to the Printing and Kindred Industries Union and according to them membership in that Union is compulsory. In fact 14 out of the 17 members declared that they joined the Union in the first place because they had little

choice in the matter. The other most frequent reason for joining was the protection that Union gives to the individual and ten members expressed that particular belief. Family tradition was next in frequency and one respondent explained in this connection: "My father is high up in the Union movement. I was brought up to it." Family tradition of unionism applied in five of the 17 cases and in two instances the motivating factor for joining was a firm belief in unionism.

Given that the majority of the members joined the Union because of compulsion, they were asked a hypothetical question whether they would relinquish their membership, if this were possible. Almost one third of the members would withdraw their Union membership and the reasons were as follows: "The Union got away from the members, they have gone political, running the country," or "They are becoming to political and powerful." At the more personal level, some members would stop their membership because of their negative perception of the Union's performance as far as they are concerned. One member said, "I don't believe they are doing all they can for me now, for the money I put into it."

A different vantage point is taken by another member who accused the Union of an authoritarian manner and of exercising pressure on members to follow a certain path of action, which is disagreeable to them. The member in question stated: "I would stop being a member to be able to say and think freely and not to follow the sheep type of thing." Fear of repercussion prompted another member to say: "because you would be called a scab." Another respondent looked at the matter in a purely pragmatic way when he said: "If I had a secure job as it was before automation, I would stop being a member because I wouldn't need the protection of the Union."

Notwithstanding the fact that compulsion was a condition of *sine qua non* for being in the Union, two thirds of the members were all in favour of compulsion, claiming that it would be almost impossible to run the Union efficiently with "some to be in and the others not," or as one member put it, "One in all in." Expressions such as "It is a good thing," or "I am all for it, you get the benefit of the Union so you should pay" were not uncommon. Members were complaining about the Union fees being excessive and were demanding some streamlining of Union procedures, but were convinced about the necessity of compulsion and based their arguments on additional reasons: "I think it is essential to protect the worker from capitalist minded people" and, "I think compulsion is a must to keep the strength of the work force together."

Those who disagreed with compulsory membership simply said that they were against it, but were unable to dissolve the problem of benefits gained by the Union as far as non-members were concerned. Many were adamant that non-members should not be entitled to such gains without payment.

Uniquely, the printing industry operates two systems of worker representation. One of them is known under the name of the Chapel and the other is just an ordinary Union. The Chapel has a long historical origin and it stems from the fact that in Great Britain all printing was initially done within the enclave of Churches. Later when printers sought protection against employers, they organised themselves into Chapels which laid the foundation for future unionism in that country.

In Australia, printing followed the same pattern of development as in England, starting first with Chapels and leading eventually to the formation of a number of proper Unions. When the various Unions covering the different aspects of the printing industry merged in July 1966, the now well known Printing and Kindred Industries Union was established.

The Chapels, however, continued to exist and in a form best described by Hagan (1966) who states, "... their ancient Chapel had steadily acquired characteristics in common with the ordinary factory shop committee" (p. 294). The shop steward of that committee is called the Father of the Chapel and he is the person who represents the printers on the shop floor. If matters of controversy with employers become too complicated he then passes unresolved problems to the Union proper.

In the real life situation, therefore, printing workers have a two-tier body to represent their interests, unlike any other Union in Australia. The workers studied, quite clearly made a distinction between the two and expressed quite divergent opinions on both. In global terms their opinions about the Chapel were by far more favourable than that of the Union. In drawing a comparison between the two, one compositor under the age of 30 remarked: "The Chapel is doing a much better job on behalf of the members, the way they handle automation and the things they are doing about it, also in what they have achieved." Of all the 17 members, ten of them were by far more appreciative of the Chapel than of the Union, especially regarding the situation of automation.

The Chapel apparently has been able to reach an agreement with management on a non-redundancy clause, thus assuring job security for the members. The Union has played a negligible part in the necessary negotiations and one member is obviously annoyed about this, when he states: "I don't think the Union is doing its right job. The Chapel is trying hard and the Union is not. It has done nothing about redundancies and left it all to the Chapel." Another member accused the Union of not pulling its weight in many other areas as well and argued: "I am a bit disappointed in the Union. I think the Chapel are doing extremely well under the circumstances. The Union does not communicate with us. We do not get regular newsletters. I would say the Union is complacent because most of the increases we gain are automatic, so the local Union sits back and does very little on its own. The Chapel could work much better but it is the apathy of the members, they never come to meetings and take no interest in the Chapel's affairs which concern their own interests." Incidentally, the point about poor attendance is mirrored in quite an obvious way, showing that only one of the members studied attends meetings regularly, five never attend and the rest attend sometimes.

Repeatedly, the Union was accused of the lack of contact with rank and file and of an attitude of little concern for the members' needs. This lack of communication with members appears to be typical of other Unions as evidenced in a study by Johnston (1977), covering a wide spectrum of industries. Although some Union officials have become aware of the necessity for more frequent contacts, the lack of financial resources to engage more staff made improvements impossible. Printing workers interviewed shared their Union's dilemma and a few suggested an increase in Union membership fees to improve the situation. Others, however, were against such a proposition because of their lack of confidence in the Union's operation. One of them had this to say on the matter: "The money we pay to the Union you can just as well chuck into the rubbish bin, they are just wasting it and we see nothing for it. The Chapel is doing a good job but not the Union. If you have a complaint large or small, the Chapel would look into it, but not the Union. The Union should concentrate more on the men and what they need and we would be much better off."

Far less animosity was expressed by five of the members studied, who praised the Union and the Chapel for their activities on behalf of the members regarding pending automation. Nevertheless, two rather embittered members saw little merit in the activities of the Chapel or that of the Union, and interestingly both were fervent opponents of compulsory unionism.

Opinions on Immediate Supervisors and Top Managers

Of all the people likely to play a vital role in colouring workers' attitudes to their jobs, foremen and managers seem to be the most important. Both are crucial in determining the worker's orientation to his work and in the situation of pending automation their importance is exacerbated.

Overall, the members interviewed did not hold their foremen, also called immediate supervisors, in very high esteem and many were contemptuous of their performance. Exactly 11 members were greatly displeased with their foremen and one had this to say about his supervisor: "In our particular section supervisors are usually selected from the friends and relations group. People supervising others are generally not as well qualified as some of the others. This has always been the case here. They are certainly not the right people for the job, have little concern for the workers and the relations are far from harmonious. Communication is generally one way only."

A dire lack of constructive exchange of ideas has been stressed by almost all respondents and some accused their supervisors of negligence and apathy. One member remarked in this connection: "I have against them this, they are not doing anything. They seldom discuss matters of work with us on the shop floor and when they do, they get in the way and slow up production, otherwise they just sit in their offices." Unwarranted intrusion into the daily routine of work was certainly not favoured and was looked upon as a camouflage for an otherwise inactive existence.

Complaints were also voiced about the lack of a genuine interest in the workers' lot, particularly in view of imminent automation. A young worker explained: "Things could be done better. All the supervisors are interested in is their own job and they are in it to get the money. They are little worried about the people under them. They are just there to climb the ladder and automation of our jobs will help them to get there."

Unfair treatment of workers, discriminatory behaviour, lack of competence and suspicion about the standards of supervisors' qualifications were expressed in one instance in the following way: "If you don't conform you are lost. You must belong to their 'club' so to speak. In this they are ruthless. Unfortunately, they are also inefficient, useless. I would like them to have more education and be able to cope better with the men, machines and higher management."

Looking at the few respondents, holding more favourable opinions about their supervisors, it is clear they too were not grossly impressed with their quality. To describe the supervisors they used cryptic, laconic answers, poor in repertoire, as if they found it difficult to have something really nice to say about them. Like their counterparts, they also insisted on better communication between workers and supervisors especially in the area of future work threatened by automation.

As for higher up management and the chief executive, four of the 17 workers could not pass comment because they have never had contacts with any of them. Half of the interviewed members thought that they were fair, reasonably efficient and quite capable. The rest, however, had serious reservations about the various levels of management. Their main point of criticism was directed to the background of the managers best expressed in the words of one respondent: "All of them come from industries other than printing and know little of what goes on on the shop floor." Others accused managers of the lack of concern for the workers' lot and as being primarily involved in monetary gains at the expense of the employees' welfare. A verbatim answer of an elderly worker summarised the situation: "All they want now is to make big profits, regardless of how they do it."

In view of the general conditions of work, as they prevailed at the time of the study, it was pertinent to investigate the global feeling the workers possessed about the company. Despite uncertainty about jobs, the threat of losing one's trade qualifications likely to be caused by automation, and the fears of new retraining schemes, most of the members studied were highly committed to the firm.

Commitment to a firm has been conceptualised in many ways, but for the present purpose the idea put forward by Steers (1977) is considered as the most suitable: "Organisational commitment may be defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation." (p. 46).

In the present case 11 out of the 17 members felt committed to the firm and answers such as the following were not unusual, "I feel a commitment." Some feel this to be reciprocal and added: "They do too, they have shown this to me." Others said: "They always played the game with me" or, "I know they would not harm me." If such consensus existed on the part of these workers, there was serious doubt in the minds of the rest as to the loyalty of the firm to themselves. Almost half of the loyal workers certainly did not feel convinced that the firm would do the "right thing by them."

One third of all those interviewed was highly sceptical of the firm's attitudes and they in turn felt little commitment to the firm as such. Looking back one member concluded: "I used to be loyal to the firm, but I am now dispirited because management is dishonest. They promise us anything until automation becomes full, then they will kick us out, the lot of us. You can't trust them."

AFTER AUTOMATION

Demographically speaking, this group of workers differs slightly from the pre-automated group just described. In terms of age they seem to be older, since nearly one third of them were over 41 years of age, over half were in the 31-40 age group and two were between 21-30 years old, while the respective figure for this last group was much larger before. Educationally they were of a somewhat lower level since twice as many than in the pre-automated group left school at the age of 14 years. They were also more homogeneous in their ethnic background, having only one member born outside Australia and he came from Great Britain. Regarding marital status, all but one were married.

The attitudes of members after automation were investigated in a two-way approach, asking first how they liked their present job and then they were invited to cast their minds back to their previous job and draw comparisons between the two. The same scale was used as for the pre-automated group denoting positions of: 'Very well, in between and not at all' for job liking. It is found that well over half of the respondents liked their job very well before, but only two of them found themselves in the same position in their new automated job. A shift also occurred in relation to the midpoint of the scale. If before only a small number of workers liked their job "in-between", in the automated situation, however, the majority described their job in the same way. There were also more workers not liking their jobs "at all" than was the case previously.

Strongly related to job liking was the problem of training. For the previous job the workers studied spent five or six years in apprenticeship, but the time of training for the new automated job was measurably reduced. Their present job entailed the positions of a typist compositor, a teletype setter for the computer, or

a photo compositor. Some of the workers interviewed received no training at all, while for the others the time spent at training was three months of a typing course on an electric typewriter, and for the others training lasted between two weeks and two months.

Comparing now the attitude of these workers with the attitudes of those still in their ordinary jobs, it may be remembered that ten of the latter liked their jobs very well, and seven of them neither liked it or disliked it. There were no cases of workers in that group completely disliking their jobs. It could be argued therefore that on two counts the level of satisfaction with a job is lessened in the automated printing industry studied. Evidence gathered by other researchers in different industries highlights the same point, e.g. Chadwick-Jones (1969).

Of interest are two workers who found their automated jobs more pleasant. To them belonged a man over 51 years of age who left school at 14 and who held a supervisory position, enabling him to switch jobs whenever he felt like it. He was impressed with his present job because of the challenge it afforded and the variety of activities it contained.

The other person was a man between 31 and 40 years of age who stated: "I am happier now, the job before was dirty working with ink and standing up all the time." Improved physical conditions of work and less physical strain have been emphasised by workers in other automated industries as found by Vamplew (1973).

To repeat the reasons for job satisfaction as they applied to pre-automated workers, it may be remembered that job interest, good pay and the friendliness of co-workers were the most frequently mentioned items (pp. 73-4). For the workers in automated jobs, however, the distribution and the frequency of these factors are quite different.

Lowest in frequency was job interest and the highest was good pay, followed closely by co-workers' friendliness. Taking the last item first, it seems that in a great number of Australian studies, friendly relations at work exert a vital influence on generating positive attitudes to work. In this respect immigrant workers do not differ significantly from their Australian counterparts as shown in Johnston (1970, 1977, 1977a, Johnston, 1979).

Remarkably, this factor acquires additional importance for some workers in the automated printing industry studied. One young respondent remarked: "Without the friendliness of my work-mates I would be like a robot, no sense to it all. Before, management was personally interested and I was a skilled worker. I don't feel this way any more. I am losing my skill and so feel as not really being needed any more." Apart from the deep appreciation of work-companions' friendliness, the respondent also strongly underlined the acute sense of loss regarding his skill qualifications. Workers on the threshold of automation previously expressed grave fears about possible personal degradation associated with the diminution of their skills in the event of automation. These fears seem to be fully justified, given the comment just cited by workers in a job already automated.

As for pay being a factor in job satisfaction, the controversy around it is far from being settled (see Johnston, 1975), but many researchers found that attention to pay accelerates, when all other conditions of work leave much to be desired (e.g. Argyle, 1972). This compensatory mechanism is certainly applicable to workers under study as evidenced from some verbatim answers: "Money is now the main thing, since the job offers no incentive, no chance of promotion, no interest, nothing . . . Before it was much of a team spirit and this too is now all gone. Nobody cares except for their own pocket."

In fact the idea of compensation is all the more plausible when the respondents tried to describe the grave disadvantages of their job. They used such adjectives as "deadly", "monotonous", "boring" and "endless in repetition." A more telling point is made by one worker: "Before you had to think, to get involved, to solve difficulties. Now you don't have to think. It is just the hands that are doing the work, one is not in it."

Despite a high level of alienation from the job and suffered frustrations, nearly half of the respondents felt quite committed to the firm and were interested in its welfare. The rest, however, had grave reservations and answers like these were not uncommon: "I feel no loyalty to the enterprise, no commitment. They have none to me either", or "I distrust them now. I am becoming less important as time goes on. I still have a job of a sort and it will become more and more boring and more meaningless. I can see it coming." All this stands in a vivid contrast to attitudes held by the majority of the previous group.

As for attitudes to the Union, workers in automated jobs did not differ greatly from those held by the pre-automated group. If for the latter, compulsion to join was the main reason for joining, the same applied to this group, and to both the protection the Union offers to its members was second in rank. A reason pronounced before, and having to do with family tradition in unionism, was more frequent for the automated workers than for the ones in the pre-automated jobs. As was also a socialist political orientation expressed by one member in the following manner: "Socialism is my philosophy and with it goes a deep commitment to unionism. I believe in it implicitly."

Naturally, these members would on no account relinquish their Union membership and for the rest, being less ardent supporters of their Union, the question of withdrawal from the Union did also not arise. They were convinced that the Union must continue to exist and this was best expressed in the words of one member: "Unions are a necessary evil in our society for the workers' protection. You would find it very hard to fight the bosses on your own." Overall, this group of workers was by far more pro-Union oriented and none would relinquish his membership whereas in the pre-automated group one third would do so. Possibly the age difference between the two groups may account for this.

Also, unlike the pre-automated workers, the current group was much more in favour of compulsory unionism, claiming that it is absolutely necessary so that the "freeloaders", that is non-members, would not reap benefits gained by the Union without payment. Others contended that having two lots of workers both members and non-members would create unnecessary difficulties at work, and some members openly declared that they would not work side by side with people like that. Opinions were also voiced that having a fully unionised work force is of benefit to the employers who are assured of a uniformity necessary for the smooth running of their enterprise. There was only one member who strongly disagreed with compulsory unionism and his cogent point of view thus reads: "I think compulsory unionism brings in anti-Union card carriers. They carry a card to get the job. If it was voluntary, you will get a stronger Union with people who believe in it, but it may have smaller numbers. Isn't it better to have a small and good Union than large Unions with many hostile members?"

Having already suggested that the members in automated jobs appear to have far more positive attitudes to their Union than those in original jobs, more evidence is available to support this contention. It is found, for example, that more of these workers attend Union meetings regularly, all attend sometimes and that nobody never attends. The members interviewed went to meetings "to find out what is going on". They also were sure that the only way to assist the Union in

its functioning is to attend meetings and participate in the decision making process. In fact, some argued that it is no use having a Union unless members are prepared to run it by coming to meetings and discussing issues at hand.

In their criticism of their Union, these members were also by far, more lenient. Although they agreed, as the previous group has done, that the Chapel is doing an excellent job on members' behalf, they did not denigrate the Union to the same extent as the previous group has done. They conceded that the Union is not a very dynamic organisation and that it should streamline its procedures. It was described as "lax" and as poor in vitality, leaving almost all problems to be solved by the Chapel. One member disfavoured the Union and being most critical of it had this to say: "The Union people are never there when you want them. The Union officials are overpaid and under worked."

In defence of Union officials nearly all members agreed that they are selfless people and have the welfare of members at heart rather than their own personal interests. Some officials, however, did not fit this category as evident from the answer of one member: "The Secretary does not create a good image. He gives the feeling that to him it is just a job which gives him a living." At the more global level and casting the net much wider one respondent remarked: "We get the Union leaders we deserve. We could do better, but nobody is prepared to tackle the job, so we must be satisfied with what we have."

The trend towards a less critical stance is also evident among these workers as far as their immediate supervisors are concerned. They conceived their supervisors as efficient, hard working men and as being interested in the workers under their care. They were full of praise for the approachability the supervisors displayed and one man stated: "You can go and talk to them at any time and they always listen to you." The protection the supervisors provided against the tedium of work was deeply appreciated by many respondents, and these remarks stand in vivid contrast to the opinions expressed by the workers in the the pre-automated jobs.

It could be conjectured that having a dull, dreary job without any real challenge induces these respondents to seek some bright light in their work environment. This may well be the reasons for their favourable opinions of their foremen as well as of their Union officials. Needless to say that the beliefs held might be in fact quite genuine, but it seems odd that two groups of workers represented by the same Union officials should have such divergent opinions about them. The same applies to their supervisors who have been transferred together with their men from non-automated jobs to the automated jobs. Could the supervisors, realising the extra difficulties of their charges, suddenly change their approach to them, or may be they too suffer discomforts in their new positions and inadvertently gain greater understanding of the men in the same unenviable situation? Much more research with more sensitive measures may give answers to the speculations raised.

Unlike immediate supervisors, top management came in for as much severe criticism from the workers in automated jobs as that received from the workers in their original jobs. Managers at all levels were accused of being inefficient and were described as helpless people, causing demoralisation throughout the work place. Nepotism was apparently ripe in the firm and one man explained: "Well, the place is riddled with friends and relations and because of this I don't think much of the managers." For others, who do not belong to the managers 'in-group', life is rather dull and the only way to get on, according to some, is to "crawl" to the boss and beg his favours. Lack of competence due to the lack of experience in the printing industry were reiterated time and time again and this is

clear from an answer of one worker: "I feel they are making decisions in matters they are badly versed in. No wonder they blunder." Managers were also accused of being too far removed from rank and file and as "living in the ivory tower", refusing to communicate with employees on the shop floor. Owing to the distance separating the two parties, over half of the workers interviewed could not pass an opinion on the managers, because they have not known any of them. Failure to become involved in the difficulties facing the workers, and failure to recognise their efforts to overcome them, leave little alternative for the workers except to accept their managers as heartless people, completely unconcerned about the fate of their employees.

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CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN AND AUSTRALIAN WRITING: SEMINAR PAPERS

DON ANDERSON: Contemporary American and Australian Short Fiction

I realised, when I was invited to write the lecture on which this article is based, that if I were to speak on the riches of contemporary American fiction *and* on contemporary Australian fiction, then I would have to radically and arbitrarily limit my scope. I therefore chose to speak about Barth and Barthelme because they are among the most distinguished contemporary American writers of imaginative prose. I might just as easily have talked about Stanley Elkin, or William Gaddis, or William H. Gass, or . . . Then I had to choose my Australians. It is not merely that I stayed close to home and decided on two writers who live in the same suburb of Sydney that I do. Moorhouse is a distinguished writer, and his attention to the uneasy connexions between Australians and Americans made him a natural choice. Murray Bail's tastes and sensibilities are international rather than parochial, in ways that suggest it is natural to talk about him in the company of Barthelme. I trust that what I have to say about each of these four writers will justify my decisions.

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John Barth, perhaps best known as a mammoth novelist, has published two volumes of short fiction, *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968), and *Chimera* (1972). Barth's short fiction is an excellent introduction to contemporary American fiction at large. The short pieces are as much essays in a particular kind of literary criticism as they are works of fiction. Indeed this might be said of much recent American fiction, the narrative of which is, among other things, a series of reflections on the principles of fiction and narrative that underlie it. In recent American writing, the conventional distinction between "creation" and "criticism" has disappeared. Which makes it hard going for the so-called "literary critic", as much of his province has been pre-empted.

John Barth is an acutely self-conscious writer; but he is also a comic writer. In an interview in 1972 he spoke of these two features of contemporary writing:

I myself like a kind of fiction that, if it's going to be self-conscious, is at least comic about its own self-consciousness. Otherwise self-consciousness can be a bore. What is more loathsome than the self-loathing of a self one loathes?

So it is important to stress that Barth's "self-consciousness" is not personal, not concerned with John Barth "himself", but artistic and formal; that is, directed at the "self" being created, at the literary text. As an author, Barth exposes what he is writing to a highly sophisticated comic analysis of its own principles of being.

This and the next two contributions are abridged versions of papers delivered at a Seminar on Contemporary American and Australian Literature, 15-16 September, 1979, at the University of Western Australia.

Thus there is a prominence of theory and abstraction in Barth's work — albeit, filtered through comedy. His fiction endorses the Primacy of the Word (“In the beginning was the Word . . .”) as the prevalence of wit and puns attests. As a post-Jamesian author, Barth has full knowledge of “point-of-view” theories of fiction, and is in a position to suggest that all statements, literary or existential, are reflections of one’s “point of view”. Thus the world may be a fiction, and the author may vie with God who was, as Barth says, unfortunately a Realist. Suffusing all these aspects of Barth’s work is his comic vision, and his distinctively twentieth-century point of view — an all-embracing Irony.

Barth has had to address himself to the problems of “knowingness”, of “sophistication”, of “self-consciousness”. Thus the narrator of his first novel reflects:

Good heavens, how does one write a novel? I mean, how can anybody stick to the story, if he’s at all sensitive to the significance of things? As for me, I see already that story-telling isn’t my cup of tea.

While that may seem a particularly modern crisis of narration, Barth knows it is as old as fiction itself. It is the principle that generates the form of Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*; it surfaces in *The Odyssey*, in Book VIII, at the court of Alkinoos, when the blind harper sings the story of Odysseus, to Odysseus. Barth has claimed that in the earliest known ancient Egyptian literary text, the scribe begins by lamenting that all the possible stories have been told. Nothing new under the sun indeed. Now *there’s* a subject for a self-conscious fiction.

Given the problem posed by the Egyptian scribe, how *is* the late-twentieth century author to free himself from the dead weight of the past? Remember Stephen Dedalus in Joyce’s *Ulysses* stating that, “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” How *is* an author to awake from such a nightmare? Barth addressed himself to this problem in his essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” (first published in *The Atlantic*, August 1967). By this he did not mean literature that exhausted the reader (though some of the less stalwart, or less charitable of the readers of his novels may have taken it so), but “the literature of exhausted possibilities.” Barth used the Argentinian author, Jorge Luis Borges, to indicate how a writer might employ the “old” to “make it new”. He considers Borges’ story, “Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*”, in which Menard, an “utterly sophisticated” *fin-de-siècle* Symboliste actually *composes* several chapters of *Don Quixote*. Barth comments:

The important thing to observe is that Borges *doesn’t* attribute the *Quixote* to himself, much less recompose it like Pierre Menard; instead, he writes a remarkable and original work of literature, the implicit theme of which is the difficulty, perhaps the unnecessary, of writing original works of literature. His artistic victory if you like, is that he confronts an intellectual dead end and employs it against itself to accomplish new human work.

Similarly, Barth describes his own work as “novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of Author.” Anticipating accusations of decadence, he argues that that is where the novel began, with *Don Quixote* imitating *Amadis of Gaul*, Cervantes pretending to be the Cid Hamete Benengeli, or Fielding parodying Richardson. “In my beginning is my end”. To make it new, one must be quite literally radical, and go back to the roots of letters. Thus Barth and Borges are in the vanguard of the neo-Baroque, “that style which deliberately exhausts (or tries to exhaust) its possibilities and borders upon its own caricature.” The reason it must border on its own caricature is that what it *is* is so fully known.

So, the fictions that constitute *Lost in the Funhouse* read like commentaries on the craft of fiction, like literary criticism — which seems only fair, given that

so much literary criticism reads like fiction. In the story titled "Title", the narrator reflects on what might be done with the novel. The story sounds like a commentary on "The Literature of Exhaustion":

The final possibility is to turn ultimacy, exhaustion, paralyzing self-consciousness and the adjective weight of accumulated history . . . Go on. Go on. To turn ultimacy against itself to make something new and valid, the essence whereof would be the impossibility of making something new. What a nauseating notion.

Not surprisingly, that story dates from one year *after* "The Literature of Exhaustion". The next paragraph echoes Beckett, whom Barth admires:

Silence. There is a fourth possibility, I suppose. Silence. General anaesthesia. Self-extinction. Silence.

But Barth, like Beckett's manic monologists, cannot hold his peace; like them, he is committed to self-creation, not extinction. An examination of the story "Night Sea Journey" will demonstrate these assertions.

At some stages in our reading of this story — I can hardly bring myself to say at its "climax" — we realise that it is an allegory, an extended joke, a reflection in a jocoseroious funhouse mirror; that is, it is an account of a successful spermatozoon's passage to the uterus. ("Womb? Weary? He has travelled.") "Is that all there is?", as a dear friend of mine asks of any new experience. Well, no, is the answer. For, once we get the J-O-K-E and the jokes, once we have played with the parodies, once we have unravelled the allegory, something is left. And that something is the tale's true achievement.

That achievement is found in the form, is entwined in the utterance (as anyone who has, as I have, heard Barth read it will attest). The success of the story is secreted in the shapes of the sentences. It is not merely that Barth can perform it brilliantly; the story, without Barth's presence, is a triumph of performance. What does it perform? Itself.

We can go beyond it, find what it parodies (Tennyson, Homer, Ginsberg); we can point to the philosophical propositions it uses and abuses (e.g., "phylogeny recapitulates ontogeny"); we can mount mythic parallels (the wanderings of the aforementioned Odysseus); we can talk about grammar and ideology, that is, about the solipsistic assumptions of the first person pronoun, but . . . But, after we have been so scholarly and so serious, these things disappear, the cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces of this insubstantial pageant fade, and we are left with tail that wagged this dithyrambic dog. We are left with? The *tales*. We are left with the story, the narrative, whose own performance of itself contains all these possibilities and contains their rejection and uselessness. It is a virtuoso piece whose delight is virtuosity performed by a virtuoso who is both instrument and player. Room is left for an audience. Us. *We* recognise that the performer's name is — *PROSE*.

Donald Barthelme has been variously described as "one of the great resources of contemporary American literature"; as "the most imitated fictionist in the United States today"; and as being "in the center of the modern consciousness." Barthelme has published several volumes of short fiction. One of his characters has said — and Barthelme has taken pains to assist that a character said it, and not he — "fragments are the only form I trust". Even so, Barthelme has published, in addition to his six volumes of short fiction, two volumes that he called "novels"; these are *Snow White* (1967), and *The Dead Father* (1975). Despite notions of bulk we may associate with the term "the novel", I subscribe to Michael Wood's suggestion that Barthelme may one day write "the great American fragment."

In Barthelme's *Snow White*, the dwarfs are engaged in the production of plastic buffalo humps, of which it is observed: "They are 'trash', and what in fact could be more useless or trashlike? It's that we want to be on the leading edge of this trash phenomenon, the everted sphere of the future, and that's why we pay particular attention, too, to those aspects of language that may be seen as a model of the trash phenomenon." That is where Donald Barthelme is, "on the leading edge of the trash phenomenon." Not that *his* work is trash, or dreck, or modish; rather that those are the categories on which his creative and parodic imagination plays. His particular attention to those aspects of life and language that may be seen as models of the trash phenomenon means that he writes in a form that imitates cliché, trendiness, and intellectual banality, for to do otherwise would be to elevate, to celebrate, to vivify, those features of our *vie quotidienne*. Barthelme has a wonderfully and wickedly accurate ear. In his writings, wit and judgement come through juxtaposition; the principal principle is collage.

It is trash or dreck (to employ the wonderfully evocative Yiddish word) that provides the content as well as the style of Barthelme's fiction. If we go to the endlessly delightful work of contemporary scholarship, the *Supplement (A-G)* of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we will find dreck defined: "slang. Yiddish drek. G. dreck: filth, dregs, dung. Rubbish, trash, worthless debris." Barthelme's dreck may be the objects with which we clutter our lives; or it may be our ways of looking at the world, as when he asks in his book *Sadness*, "Can the life of our time be caught in an advertisement?" Or it may come through in outrageous puns which reveal the trashiness of political slogans, as in "Daniel, run and buy a barrel of herring from the herringvolk"; or it may be cultural trendiness and the tyranny of the new. In *Sadness*, King Kong appears at a party, and we are told, "I am aware that roles change. Kong himself is now an adjunct professor of art history at Rutgers, co-author of a text on tomb sculpture; if he chooses to come to a party through the window he is simply trying to make himself interesting." In our sophisticated world in which so much is known, how can one make it new, as Ezra Pound insisted the artist must. After such knowingness, what forgiveness?

Barthelme's great achievement is a triumph of style over the tawdry; and the style achieves its victory through an utterly poker-faced parody. The victory over the tawdriness of his content is reached through the brilliance of the *form*. It is, to take a phrase from Richard Poirier, a triumph of "the performing self." As with Barth, and William H. Gass, and other contemporary American fiction writers, the triumph of form is often found in the shape of the sentence.

Barthelme is not a satirist, as Swift was, but an ironist, who has no object but his subject. He is very much of that school of American writers heralded by Richard Poirier in his 1968 essay, "The Politics of Self Parody", in which he defined a new mode of parody which "proposes not so much the rewards as the limits of its own procedures, shapes itself around its own dissolvents, calls into question not any literary structure so much as the enterprise, the activity itself of creating any literary form, of empowering an idea with a style."

Barthelme does question it, and then triumphs over the question by performance. I hope I am not misunderstood to suggest that there is anything *mere* about performance, that it presupposes an absence of content. After all, the performance may *be* the content. On the other hand, William Gass has properly insisted that Barthelme concerns himself not only with dreck, trash, and stuffing, but with war and suffering, love and hope and cruelty.

I think it useful here to talk about the publishing of Frank Moorhouse's story, "The American Poet's Visit", as I was involved in it. In 1968, the editor of *Southerly*, Professor G. A. Wilkes, was away from Sydney on study leave, and the acting-editor saw fit to ask me if I could help him out by recommending some

younger writers who might be asked to contribute to an issue. So I sought out Robert Adamson, John E. Tranter, and Frank Moorhouse. Frank submitted the story "The American Poet's Visit". The acting-editor liked it very much, and was curious to know if an American poet had visited Sydney and, if so, *what was the real name of the poet who appeared in the story under the fictional name "Kenneth Rexroth"*. The point of that story is not to make fun of the acting-editor, but to cite the editorial relation to the tale as an example of the very cultural isolation that the story was using as a dramatic focus. Nature imitating art yet again.

The story is dated 1968. That was a momentous year in recent Western history. It was the year of student revolution in Paris. It was the year in which the Children of the West renounced their Fathers. And, of course, with the Vietnam War raging in South East Asia, the most egregious Father of them all was the USA. The youth of Europe were storming United States Embassies and denouncing the Cocacolonization of their European heritage.

Now this gives Moorhouse's story an added ironic dimension, for his Australians want to connect with America, want to imitate the students at Berkeley, California, and one of Moorhouse's finest and most sympathetically treated creations, Becker, not only markets Coca Cola, but likes it, and *believes* in it. (He is, I allow, an American exiled to Australia. But he *is* sympathetically created.)

You will have noticed from the story how dependent Moorhouse's late-60s Australians feel themselves to be on America. They want to impress Rexroth. Given that the only recent social protests the narrator can think of are a sit-in about library fines and a homosexual rights demonstration (we may reflect on how different that would have seemed in 1978), he is acutely conscious of how far that must be seen by his American friends to fall short of the Berkeley riots and the actions of the Provos in Amsterdam. The Australians are dependent on the American media for their view of the world. Thus, the narrator says with what he thinks is a "good natured smile", "I'm not suggesting that it didn't happen simply because it wasn't in *Newsweek*." And his intellectual gurus (*that's* a 60s expression), while not Americans, became popular in Australia after being all the rage on campuses in the USA. I'm thinking of Marcuse and McLuhan. And the Australian consciousness of what is fashionable — even in dissident circles — is determined by what happens in the world elsewhere. So, when the underground film-makers arrive, the narrator is relieved because, "At least, I think, they look something like the *Newsweek* photographs of Berkeley, Amsterdam, Haight Street, and Carnaby Street."

If I've made Frank Moorhouse sound like a mere social commentator, offering his *critique de la vie quotidienne*, then I'd like to correct that impression. For he is a consummate writer of fiction, whose very great achievement in this story lies in conveying, through his narrator's unease, Australia's sense of national inferiority and insecurity in the larger world.

Of course, if we consider the story's dramatic structure, we may see that its irony resides in the fact that the visiting Americans have to lecture the Australians on the need to be culturally independent. "You should do something of your own." Rexroth says. "Do your *own things* as the kids say in Haight-Ashbury," says Rexroth's secretary. (This injunction being, of course, a marvellous double irony; telling Australian to be independent of America by following the injunctions of American kids.) It is the complexity of these ironies that leads the narrator to his gloomy conclusion: "I have yet to see evidence that the meeting between people of different cultures brings any enrichment." He could be re-writing Forster's *Passage to India*.

The pervading tone of the story is derived from that complex of attitudes I have been calling "the narrator". He has a typical Moorhouse voice, which I might characterise as inept, discomfited, a voice of someone who will be an outsider, anywhere. It is for this reason — that he would not be at home anywhere in this world — that I reject any suggestion that Moorhouse is merely a chronicler of Australian social mores, and that his narrator's discomfited voice may be taken simply as an emblem of Australia's insecure position in the world. I find myself, rather, in agreement with Peter Cowan, writing in *Westerly* in 1969 who said that Moorhouse's "external environment is the modern city, contemporary urban life, and it is featureless, anonymous. The stories are set nowhere, yet everywhere."

I would like to refer to Moorhouse and "fragments", as I did with respect to Barthelme earlier, for I think both reflect a contemporary consciousness that extends beyond national boundaries and beyond any question of "influence". In the *National Times* in 1974 Moorhouse affirmed what many of us had long suspected, that his "discontinuous", "fragmented", structure was an objectification of how he saw the world. "It's got (he said) a lot to do with seeing life as a series of fragments. I don't see any underlying harmony or unity in life."

Murray Bail is among our most distinguished younger imaginative writers. I would like to stress the word "imaginative", for while Bail offers us a volume of *Contemporary Portraits*, it is an enormous pleasure to find a prose writer offering us a first book that is not yet another Portrait of the Antipodean Artist as a Young Man. Bail is an extremely intelligent writer; a most precise craftsman; a skilled shaper of sentences.

In his story "A,B,C, . . . Z", Bail cites the American Philosopher William James as asserting that "the word 'dog' does not bite." A wonderful point, analogous to William H. Gass's observation that though we may write the word "breast", we can never stroke Lolita's breast, however Nabokov may shape his seductive sentences. Now, one of William James's most famous students at Radcliffe at the turn of the century was Gertrude Stein, whom Gass says understood sentences better than any other twentieth-century writer. It was Stein who saw, studying Cezanne's portrait of Mme Cezanne, that what was crucial about the portrait was that *the reality of the composition had superseded the reality of the subject*. Stein carried this principle over into her own stories, her "contemporary portraits"; into, for example, her *Three Lives*, published in 1909.

For Bail, as for Stein and Gass and many other American writers of recent years, words serve as brush strokes did for Cezanne. They are not referential; they do not presume an object. His fiction is not mimetic. Words serve to create mass, shade, and texture; and the reality of this composition succeeds the reality of the subject. It perhaps is relevant to mention that Murray Bail has an informed interest in the visual arts, and is a member of the Council of the National Gallery in Canberra.

Let me try to illustrate this by talking about the story "Zoellner's Definition." Here we have a story that *begins* with the *last* letter of the alphabet; a letter that Roland Barthes suggests as being the castrating symbol *par excellence* (see his essay on Balzac's "Sarrasine", in his book *S/Z*.) The unbridgeable gap or "cut" between word and object may be a paradigm of linguistic castration. The title of the story may (should?) provoke us to ask: "definition of what?", "definition by what?". After all, "definition" is transitive. The answer I suggest, is that the story "Zoellner's Definition" *is* Zoellner's "definition". The story is the only "precise statement on the essential nature of the thing" that we have. Zoellner exists only in words, in the words of the story. Thus, the story, like the title, is circular, ending as it does, in words, with the definition of the word "WORDS".

As Bail writes in "A,B,C, . . . Z", "other letters are placed alongside until a 'word' is formed. And it is not always the word WORD." I suspect I have said sufficient already to indicate that in Murray Bail's writing I find another manifestation of qualities I located in Barth and Barthelme; and we might recall that it was claimed for Barthelme that he is "in the center of the modern consciousness." That center would appear to exist also on its own peripheries, being found not only in New York, but in Baltimore and Balman.

Let us return to our definition of "Zoellner's Definition"; we are still in the second item, "NAME". You will note that whenever Leon "thinks of the shape of himself he sees the word *Zoellner*." And rightly so, for he exists only in letters; in the letters z.o.e.l.l.n.e.r.; and in the world of *belles lettres*, that is, in this story. It would appear that he does not appear in Basil Cottle's *Dictionary of Surnames*.

Bail's story, of course, is composed of sentences; and sentences, as William Gass and Gertrude Stein insisted, are what literature is made of. Bail doesn't merely have sentences; he has exquisite sentences, and it is the quality of his sentences that distinguishes a distinguished fictionist from the rabble of lapsed journalists and displaced confessors. Consider three sentences from the "EYES" section.

- (1) Positioned in fluid his eyes move in his head.
- (2) Juggled by soft wires apparently, they move freely without pain.
- (3) His are the colour of wet nuts.

Note how in both (1) and (2) the full principal clause comes in the second half of the sentence, while each sentence begins with a past participle, and verb and subject are suppressed. I think the effect of this is to place more stress on the "eyes" than might have happened in a so-called "conventional" syntactic structure; and underline the foregroundness of the style, which we readers see, through *our* eyes.

This inversion is doubled in sentence (2), where, in the first clause, the adverb comes last, instead of being in its expected syntactical position at the beginning. (Is it possible that Bail's syntax is demonstrating the "circularity" that I suggested characterises both title and story?) Consider the difference between:

- (2) Juggled by soft wires apparently, . . .
- (2a) Apparently juggled by soft wires . . .
- (2b) Juggled by soft wires, apparently, . . .

I want to suggest that the difference between Bail's clause (2), and the more conventional syntax of (2a) points to the fact that Bail is drawing attention to the word "apparently" by placing it in a slightly unconventional position. Having thus isolated the word "apparently", he invites the reader to contemplate it, to think about its meaning. Well, we use it loosely all the time, don't we? Apparently we do. But if we want to be more precise about it, we might go to our Dictionary (now, there's another arbitrarily arranged collection of "definitions"), and we find that the primary meaning of "apparent" and thus of its modifier is "exposed to sight; visible". Which is why, apparently, the word "apparently" appears in the "EYES" section, and why attention is drawn to it in that exquisite variation on "normal" syntax. Words beget words. Oh, yes, I included (2b) ("Juggled by soft wires, apparently, . . .") because Bail's decision to exclude the first comma (I *do* hope it is not a printer's error) makes my conjecture even stronger. Had that first comma been there, then the sense would have been the same as the "conventional" (2a). I think it is a tribute to Bail's artistry that his text invites such close consideration.

It is also impossible to miss the arresting imagery in these sentences. Who before ever suggested that someone's eyes were the "colour of wet nuts."? Think

of the sheer intelligence behind the adjective, even if one had conceived of the noun. And let's not forget how the eyes are, apparently, juggled: by "soft wires." What are soft wires? We might care to think of *Lear's* "vile jelly", or Gertrude Stein's "tender buttons", or . . . or . . . The stunning collocation is all Bail's

One could go on, go on, singing the praises of Bail's art. But I, too, have to observe the arbitrary conventions of my fictional form; in this case, the article. So, let me end by taking up my possibly provocative, if not puzzling, remark about "castration." I was thinking of the slash of the metaphorical knife that cuts words off from objects, men off from women, humans off from Eden. Like Barthelme, like Barth, like Moorhouse, Bail, through words, suggests a central consciousness of our time; that is, to quote Samuel Beckett, "the only Paradises are lost Paradises". Or, to take a Barthelme title, we live in a world of *Sadness*. And so, Zoellner, under the entry "PENIS":

Inserting himself into the body of a partner, and striving, he is suddenly filled with profound melancholy and pointlessness, or he thinks of other women, fragmented problems, words.

And that word, "words", is my last word.

FAY ZWICKY: Seeing and Recording a Local Ambience

The two major poetic contributions by America to the early part of the 20th century were the ground-breaking achievements of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, and the absorption of Imagism. Up until the mid-20s, the colloquial and vernacular aspects of American poetry, the side which valued "experience" more than the traditional civilizing responsibilities of art, had been largely neglected (although this strain had been around in fiction for much longer).

In the first decades of this century, American poets might be divided into the expatriate category, and those who chose to stay at home. At the same period, Australian poets were all, with one or two unexceptionable exceptions, firmly on home soil grinding out tales of the outback in rough-hewn ballad form in the language of boys speaking to boys, or imitating Tennyson, Swinburne and Kipling. In America at this time, poets like William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, e. e. cummings and Hart Crane, with little in common except talent, energy and daring, were at least experimenting with the use of common American speech in their poetry, attempting to forge an indigenous language divorced from the concerns of history and traditional learning that preoccupied Pound and Eliot.

Immediately after the second World War, the orthodoxy of the well-made poem, the poem of control and conventional form and metre, the poem of analogy, of wit that sidestepped passion and depth, began its process of disintegration. Despite brief upsurges of surrealist and Marxist verse, two lines of development persisted throughout. One was what might loosely be termed the colloquial — the line of Frost (via Hardy) and William Carlos Williams (via Pound and Imagism). The other was the more elaborate, more elevated, sometimes dandyfied and sometimes vatic style of Wallace Stevens and Richard Wilbur (via Yeats and Romantic symbolism). In fiction, the parallel would be the Twain-James dichotomy. Although the strains are rather more blurred in this country and their timing is different, I believe there may be parallels worth looking at. For the purpose of this seminar, however, I shall focus on the colloquial strain, the work of William Carlos Williams, and its repercussions on poetic perception in America and Australia.

In 1950, the English critic B. Rajan, seeking to isolate peculiarly "American" elements in the work of certain contemporary American poets, sent a questionnaire to (among other significant figures) Wallace Stevens, James Laughlin and William Carlos Williams. Stevens did not think it so easy to distinguish an American from an English poem, but added: 'Even if a difference was not be found in anything else, it could be found in *what* we write about. We live in two different physical worlds, and it is not nonsense to think that that matters.'

James Laughlin felt the break with conventional English verse showed itself in rhythm, diction, but, above all, in the conception of what a poem is. That what may be legitimately "literary" in one context may appear as pretentious artifice in another. He went on to say that 'This typical American poetry is different from English poetry simply because Americans are very different in their feeling about life.' He considered that this hinged on a question of environment and

intellectual climate, and included examples of poets who had broken entirely from England and created a "purely American poetry." Chief among these were William Carlos Williams and e. e. cummings. About the former, he said: 'It is interesting to note that English readers can never "get" Williams though he is one of our greatest living writers. He is so American in sensibility that the English simply cannot understand what he is saying.' Williams himself, bent on his dusty capture of the American vernacular, characteristically converted what, for others, amounted to relatively minor differences into a major schism. He said: 'I do not wish to belabor the point of a possible relationship between a prosody and a corresponding political-social make-up but, in one aspect the British social fabric and its prosody are identical — both are, for us here in America, useless . . .'

Australian poetry has not, until fairly recently, felt free enough to dismiss the British social fabric and its prosody as "useless", however true this may be in conjunction with the local environment. Australia has never really severed the traditional ties in the way that America has, and because of this our poetic grasp of the physical world has been blurred and constrained. The fact remains, as Wallace Stevens reminds us, that we *do* live in different physical worlds, and this difference must inevitably be reflected in our literature, however distorted by rituals of an alien parent culture.

If you compare the Australian and the American product of the same period, the thing that strikes you is the "bookish" hangover in Australian poetry. A quality we term "literary", an adherence not merely to traditional metric patterns, but to the conventions and imagery which go with a "poetic" vocabulary (usually of the late 19th century). This has dogged our adaptation from Harpur to the present day. The obscurity of our diction has been closer to vagueness of perception than to the obscurity of the complex consciousness. It embodies an uncertain grasp of the relationship between language and feeling, and of feeling and the natural world. Our poetic speech has lacked that edge of hardness and truth which enables us to forgive an obvious clinging to the conventions which we do in the case of Hardy or Frost. What has been missing is the personal tone, the adjustment of the individual to the physicality of things.

William Carlos Williams has had (for better and worse) a great impact on contemporary American and Australian poetry, and his catch-cry, 'No ideas but in things!' has produced interesting responses on both continents. The focus on the *thinginess* of things (rendered better by the German '*ding an sich*') is fundamental to the American psyche with its driving passion for facts, for objects, for the charting of a continent, the naming of the heterogeneous detail of the new-found land. From Williams's conscious attempt to map the American landscape, poets learned a conscience of the eye rather than of the ear.

Williams concentrated on getting facts into his poetry with the most harsh exactness while trying to keep his own responses out of it, aiming at directness of communication without frill or ornament. Like Chris Wallace-Crabbe's ambiguous description of Australian poetry in his 'Wintry Manifesto', Williams's song is often unambiguously "intolerably sober." There is no rhythm other than the sound of the spoken voice. Read aloud, his poems fall often enough with the inert thud of inert prose. The poems reveal an unsweetened, unheroic world of clean-cut images, and the poet's eye is relentlessly on the object. His is a visual rather than an auditory imagination: the words don't often tune into the mind's ear.

It seems not without significance that Williams confessed to a life-long inclination to have been a painter: 'Under different circumstances, I would rather have been a painter than bother with these goddam words.' An attitude which many Australians would find congenial. A prevalence of carefully-chosen images in

carelessly-chosen words in contemporary Australian poetry would seem to tell something about the national leaning to the visual as against the auditory sensitivity to linguistic nuance.

As far as subject-matter is concerned, the drive to record the ordinary in less than elevated diction goes together with a superficial concept of democracy shared by Americans and Australians. In the rural heartlands it is common to find a keen distrust of language tempered to ritual occasion. Distrusting sentiment, contemptuous of open displays of emotion, enthusiasm, rhetoric, a graceful style, the citizenry sniff around a magniloquent phrase like a dog sniffing bait. And, of course, villainy and articulateness have always been linked in the democratic mind. The move to plain speech (not a bad thing in itself), the excision of the nightingale's tongue (a sad thing in itself) often signals a move towards parochial bigotry, a prejudice against a culture which is equated with solemn gestures of reverence for a despised and envied heroic dimension. Hence the isolation of poets like Stevens and A. D. Hope, shoved unceremoniously into that cant category designed to house that which attempts to confront more than mere physical survival — *élitist*.

What Williams wanted was 'an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from "reality" — such as rhyme, metre as metre and not as the essential of the work.' All the old familiar devices and poetic forms were to be rejected in favour of rhythms and diction arising solely from the rhythm of American speech.

There is a considerable amount of Williams' work which is as meanly documentary as this theory seems to urge. The surface of some local experience is trimly denoted and then left, merely accessible. An endorsement rather than an illumination. The endeavour is quasi-scientific and does not aim to bewitch. Much of the time he shows those powers of observation that one expects from a middle-brow novelist. It is in these, the most taciturn and deadly literal of his poems, that the incongruity between the aspirations of his theory and the trivial effects of its practice is most acutely felt. His prescriptions can produce, in less gifted hands, poems of the most punishing banality, and one sometimes hankers after some of that disdained "lyrical interference." Like Coleridge objecting to the dullness and garrulity of Wordsworth's demotic *persona* in 'The Thorn', one wishes that Williams might have had a similarly perceptive friend to remind him that in order to esteem a tree the poet does not have to be wooden. As it is, his catalogue of suburban icons gives us the low-down on what he arbitrarily had available, but scarcely reaches the nub of that "hard sardonic truculent mass" that he reckoned the core of America.

His poem, 'The Red Wheel-Barrow', illustrates a moment of insight where words are equated very precisely with perception of the forms of an observed reality:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens

The interest here is not so much in the setting of a scene or the rendering of external description, but in the process of perception itself. And if there is one single factor I would single out as especially "American", it would be that acutely detached awareness of and absorption in the process of perception.

In trying to define this factor in more detail, I am indebted to certain ideas put forward by Vincent Buckley in a paper entitled '*Ease of American Language*'.* Broadly paraphrased, the introduction of his thesis suggested that the process of perception starts with and is defined by the idiom of sensation, revealing a consciousness in which "sensation replaces verbal articulation". The overall effect is not one of "an absence of reflectiveness, but of a reflectiveness which can't be divorced from the sense-stimuli which provided its subject and occasion." Given this point of definition, Williams's poem seemed, for my purpose, an interesting example of the means by which a poet may create a feeling by paying scrupulous attention to its origins in sensation.

What depends on the red wheel-barrow for Williams is that fact its existence can be realized in language. That the perception of the object can be slowed down and meditated upon by regulating, line by line, the measured revelation of those words. The imagination then accurately pursues whatever facets of reality catch the poet's attention by not allowing an emotional identification with them to occur. The poet keeps his responses to the details observed out of it. But he also directs the train of our perception in a very pointed fashion with the first line which resounds like a gong while the visual image is taking shape in the mind's eye. Without that critical line, 'So much depends', the poem would indeed be a piece of reportage, an isolated vignette. In addition, there is that hint of American urgency and excess achieved by that "So": the British or Australian poet would probably admit to no more than "Much depends" and leave the intensifier to the politicians. Williams asks us to reflect on the objects in the process of observing them, but he wants the thought preserved immaculate. While he is undeniably selecting the objects, the principle of selection has no connection with any notion of beauty or truth vested in the objects themselves.

What most clearly distinguishes a piece of free verse like this from prose is the lining on the page. Even in the dreariest piece of writing that aspires to be free verse, the fact of its being set off in lines has some import. For one thing, its distinction lies in the fact that it aspires to be distinctive. We are compelled to linger on the line as a unit even if, by ordinary criteria, we can find no unity. The visualized line is more significant in free verse than in formal verse where the *heard* or *felt* metre determines the significance of the line. The very wilfulness of rupturing the prose sentence may be important. The line thus cut across, whatever its content, is brought into special focus. The words clamour to be freshly accommodated: the whole composition makes what might be termed a significantly negative claim — the affirmation of not being prose. Thus forced to focus attention on words in such a concentrated way, we may learn something about the puzzling portentousness that any object, however mundane, will assume once we fix our regard exclusively upon it. Nowhere in the poem does Williams explicitly state that the painter's art heightens the quintessence of an object. Rather than asserting it, he attempts to *do* it. Words are therefore called upon to fulfill the condition of visual art so that the reader can observe visual properties in the individual particularity of these words.

The question of pace is involved, for the poet is controlling the expounding of sensation, the uncovering of sensation of noticing the objects by his line-lengths

* Delivered at a Conference on American and Australian poetry at Macquarie University, N.S.W., in May, 1979, published in *New Poetry*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 1979.

and the placement of his objects. The question of idiom arises in that the undertaking is, to quote again from Buckley's paper, "to a certain extent, mimetic." Its success hinges on the availability of language closely approximate to the physical particularity of objects and of their local names. The question of rhythm is involved in that the rhythm of the speaking voice will manipulate the idiom, and the definition of the object contained within its circumference. Such a poem involves the reader in a kind of hypnotized concentration, and goes together with what I think of as a peculiarly American emphasis on sensation and its accurate registration — in this case, visual. It is a registration that takes place sequentially, slowly, and patiently, and seems to point to some national mystique of the connection of the human being to the natural world.

An Australian poet with something of William's scrupulousness for the exact rendering of local detail is William Hart Smith. His work sets out to portray observed natural facts in terms of a quietly responsive vision dependent on that conscience of the eye. He is not interested in his observation of himself as an observer of nature. His poems become the expressive structure of his own feelings while actually in the process of making his observations. A good example is his poem called '*Kangaroo-Paw*':

You are parsimonious
with your
pollen.

Such a vivid signal
in the drab grey scrub,
a furred flower

green and scarlet.
Some feather-weight
bird

deep-throats you
and when you say Ah! —
you dab

delic-
ately a morsel
of pollen on his pate.

The plant exists in its own right. The poem's movement embodies the bird's lightweight descent, the brief yawning moment of pollination caught as by the flick of a camera. The delicacy of that moment is beautifully regulated by the alignment, the enforced rhythm, the momentary break with the stress on the "Ah!", the breathing space allowed for like the gasp of the plant itself. There are no wedges driven between the objects and the words in which the poet chooses to describe them: the senses are acutely alert, the observation keen and accurate. This kind of poem implies that "So much depends", but it does so tactfully and without didactic pressure. It implies that man may know and understand his place in the scheme of things if he observes the world around him attentively. It emerges from a perceptive honesty, an empathy and sympathy with the natural world, and an alert and muscular identification with its phenomena.

It has more charm, less earnestness than the Williams poem. You do not feel the weight of a manifesto lying behind it, yet it fulfills those conditions of response

to the environment that Williams was looking for. It certainly bears out the truth of Ruskin's well-known defence of the responsive eye:

'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way . . . To see clearly is poetry, prophecy, and religion all in one.'

JIM LEGASSE: The Voice of the Form and the Form of the Voice

For the past week, now I've been hearing these two voices, both of which hit me in much the same way. One is an Australian voice; the other, American. And I can't determine if the Australian voice is typical of the land downunder, or if the American voice is peculiar to the land uptop. I think in terms of pitch, volume, duration, timbre, intonation, register, even reverberation and echo. I consider the possibility of difference in terms, too, of accent, rhythms and vocabulary, as well as of pregnant pauses and abortive stabs. But I'm at sea, seeking help.

I find myself searching the supplement of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* glancing at the final three entries: "Zulu poetry"; "Yoruba poetry"; "Voice". The Voice behind the entry on "voice" (a certain F.G.) tells me that modern critics use "voice" in a metaphorical and extended sense, not merely to refer to the aesthetic experience of vocalized sound. "That pleases me," I say to myself, as I choose to read on. "A work of literature" — let's say a short story — "is regarded as a human utterance or an imitation of a human utterance. Voice reminds us to place some emphasis on the extent to which the reader's consciousness of the quality of mind and feeling of a speaker determines the kind and intensity of the response that is made to what he says". Walter Ong, an American phenomenologist confirms this, saying as he does: "The voice is the key to the I- Thou world where, through the mysterious interior resonance which sound best of all provides, persons commune with persons, reaching one another's interiors in a way in which one can never reach the interior of an 'object'," say a verbal icon or a well wrought urn.

At the end of the entry, F.G. says: "for voice, also see vision." "At this rate," I say to myself, "I'll be working my way backwards through the *Princeton Encyclopedia* until I get to its first entry: "absolutism in criticism"; see "criticism, types of". Nevertheless, even though Bail and Barthelme may have to remain mute for a while, I persist in my search of "voice" in "vision". Vision, I learn, in short, is the articulated shape of one's beliefs.

All this may seem like an equivocating, logic-chopping, clap-trap, song and dance, but it's not meant to be that. Rather, it's an attempt to offer a theoretical framework, to suggestively define a few terms, and to set the record straight in my wanting to argue that current fiction, whether American or Australian is, well, it's, for the most part, simply similar. And the basis on which I want to offer suggestions about more sameness than difference is to look at two stories; the one by Murray Bail, entitled "The Drover's Wife"; and one by Donald Barthelme, "See the Moon?". The criteria I mean to work from in suggesting sameness, the pointing out difference, will involve the notion of voice as form and form as voice, or the way I am invited, in each instance, to enter the structure of another's feeling and to relate to the immediacy of another's cry.

"The Drover's Wife" invites us to listen to a voice heard contemplating an object already existing, an object which suggests an attitude, a personality and a system. That object, of course, is the painting by Russell Drysdale. The narrator of the story, who, by the way, does not mean the story to be a story, reads the picture and interprets it subjectively. He places the not-so-transparent transparency of his

own life upon the object and, in so doing, inadvertently reveals more about the inner chaos which continues to beleaguer him even after the long separation he's suffered from his wife who left him thirty years before. He discovers, in other words, a narrative structure in the picture, thereby allowing him to lend meaning to his hurt. With caution, Bail leads us into the structure of his narrative, just as the dramatic narrator is led into the structure of the picture. As the title of both the picture and the story suggests, the picture is the story, though the story, alone, is the full picture. I say "with caution" does Bail lead us into the structure of the narrative because the reading of the painting, as our reading of the story, forces us to question the mysterious relationship between object and meaning and precariousness of assuming, as the narrator assumes, that we can readily get from one to the other. What prevents us from traversing the same route of interpretative overreaction that the narrator is following is irony. From the start of the work, thus, we appreciate the check-and-balance mechanism of irony: the story, after all, is not so much about the Drover's wife as it is about the Dentist, whose voice is the painful cry emanating from the unfathomable depth of would-that-it-were-not-so.

But before I explain this further, allow me to state the obvious. To begin with, "The Drover's Wife" is obviously Australian. Its subject matter, its setting, even the language of the piece — colloquialisms like "fair enough" and details such as "asbestos toilets" — clearly identify the narrative as peculiar to this country. Another feature which may suggest country is syntax, or, more specifically, sentence length, even punctuation. A few years back, while attending a literature conference on the subject of *The Australian Voice*, I heard an editor from Angus and Robertson argue that manuscripts which are replete with simple, declarative sentences are distinctly Australian, reflecting the succinctness of the people here who, according to him, are wary of the compound-complex structures which the British particularly are enamored of. The simple declarative sentences, he maintained, reflects the straightforward, no-nonsense attitude fitting a people whose heritage is with the soil. He said, too, that as a result of this habit of mind, the so-called sophisticated marks of punctuation like the colon and semi-colon should be used sparingly in manuscripts attempting to provide the resonances of Australian talk; and exclamation points, moreover, should not be used at all! In fact, all punctuation, except the full stop and the hyphen, is taboo, if the writer aims to provide the notation necessary to reproduce the music of the people. For whatever that's worth, it's interesting to note the preponderance of simple sentences in Bail's story, and appreciate the absence of colons, semi-colons, and exclamations points while, at the same time, to consider the function that the hyphen — used often here — serves in allowing dialect to reflect idiolect. But the story is obviously Australian for another reason. Its subject, after all, is part of the mythology of the land and it not only draws upon that mythology as depicted visually by Drysdale, but it also echoes its treatment by Lawson whom, as you know, has a story carrying the same title. Whereas Lawson aims at social realism, however, Bails reaches for psychological realism.

And it's the psychological realism of the story which I wish to emphasize, since I suspect that it is the modernity of the story; it's this interest in the complex matrix of emotion as defined and confined by and in art that allows it to transcend the regional or national ambiance. The manner in which the story is told, then, the sense of event which the narrator conveys is foremost in evidencing "The Drover's Wife" as new writing — even as experimental fiction. Thus we have a sense of plot and no plot.

In the conventional story a certain curve of action is usually discernible. Since the time of Aristotle that curve of action has been described according to the

demands on narrative for a beginning, middle and end to the story. If the story is in the dramatic mode, as most stories are, then to this is added the formal features of plotting of which there are five: exposition, complication, turning point, climax, and denouement. The conventional structures of fiction, too, it is assumed, are usually worked out so as to resolve conflict and effect change. However, those conventional structures suggest the unreality, if not fraudulence, of plodding plots, all of which achieve closure by bringing about change — “change”, I should add, as in change-for-the-better; “better,” I need not add, as in an improvement upon the state of affairs, whether social or psychological. Thus the art of comedy, the first of these four structures, manipulates the facts of life for the sake of the happy ending. Thus the art of tragedy, the second structure, credits the purpose of pain so as to move us, through catharsis, to the belief in the possibility of order being restored. Romance, the third structure, similarly, acknowledges the pain, or obstacles placed in the path of the journeying hero, but it implies that these obstacles can be overcome and that, if the hero endures, runs the good race and fights the good fight, then he will be exalted for his efforts. Even satire, the fourth structure, turns evil about on all its sides, exposes the reality of it, only to argue for the practicability of its displacement not merely by the good but by the ideal.

My point is that these conventional structures — even comedy — may posit the possibility of pain and evil, but they work to assuage the hurt and to exorcise, some more ritualistically than others, the demons, the realness of the demons, and the pain for that matter, in us. They are fraudulent, then, because they encourage us to not only participate, but also to believe in, the wish-fulfilment dream. And the conventional narrative sense of event reinforces that belief. Event means turning point, climax, denouement. It means movement — both spatially and temporally — towards closure controlled by the desire for joy: joy experienced in the symbol of marriage or the feast, as in comedy; joy implied come order restored in tragedy; or joy felt come the exaltation of the hero in romance or the displacement of the real for the ideal in satire. Joy is the false hope conditioning us to view life optimistically. Joy is the experience of literature reshaping reality. It is literature transmuting reality and not necessarily being reality. The fraud perpetrated by these structures has its basis in the desire for art but to imitate life; not wanting to sound too much like Plato, I say that, imitation is, after all, but a poor copy of an original. Thus imitation can lead to an artistically false sense of event which, given the rigors of generic demands, or the strictures of conventional structures, finds a logic which is not readily even discoverable in life. It may be the logic of cause and effect or of problem/solution or of question/answer, but it, again, it is the glossy logic of art of conventional structures, not that of life . . . at least it's not the logic of raw life.

But I mean to offer all of this as but background to an identification of current narrative structures which are forms which minimize the conventional sense of event and ignore or subvert the wish-fulfilment certainty of Aristotelian logic associated with beginning, middle, and end, with cause and effect, and with all the principles dishonestly conditioning us to perceive life as we want it to be and yet know it isn't and can never be. The new structures, then, listen not to the logic of desire for logic, but echo the voice of panic, of desperation and manic despondency. And all this brings me back to Bail and makes me anticipate Barthelme. “The Drover's Wife” creates the sense of event by privileging psychology over action in its attempt to render honest that experience which art should be. Not that we have no action here, because clearly we do. Nevertheless, the action and the episodes which constitute the action are but faintly drawn. The narrative line follows the pattern of a human voice behind which is a paradoxical person of

feeling and yet no feeling. In his fashion the details of action are volunteered but never elucidated. The reader, thus, is engaged, in the most elementary of ways, by the felt need to know the whole story. Bail controls our response to the piece by alerting us to overtones and undertones to the speaker's voice. The narrator's voice is the form of voice. Bail's voice is the voice of form.

And now a transition. What I like about Bail is what Michael Wilding likes about Henry James; Wilding says: "his writing was a mode of expressing obsessions."

Barthelme, too, offers a mode of expressing obsession. (See how the transition works?) And the unnamed narrator of "See the Moon?" is certainly obsessed, haunted as he is — like Bail's narrator — by a fixed idea; he is an individual compulsively preoccupied by Gog. He apparently freely associates throughout the story in a desperate attempt to displace the uneasiness he suffers in anticipating the birth of his child by his second wife. The story, then, is a cry — the cry of a man needing to calm the anxiety of a moment. And the form that voice assumes takes its logic from the knowledge, however limited it may be, of the fears, however limitless they are, binding and dividing parents and offspring. The logic informing the story is this. The will is stronger than the reason. What characterizes the will is emotional. Emotional uneasiness determines the actions of the will. Uneasiness is desire, which may be pain of body or disquiet of mind. A person acts to assuage that pain or to quiet that disquiet. As Izak Dinesen has said: "All sorrows can be borne if you put them in a story or tell a story about them."

But don't get me wrong. Although I acknowledge the anxiety which is the speaker's, I don't see the story as tragic — even sad. Rather I respond to the piece as a triumph of the creative imagination over the pressures of a real situation. It's the formlessness, the erraticism, the "fragmentariness" of the story which, for all its comic confusion, releases the anxiety of the speaker and allows him to articulate the touching remark with which the story concludes: "Hello there Gog. We hope you'll be very happy here." This is a beautifully sincere welcome and wish announcing, as it does, that the trauma of the child's birth, experienced by the child's father, is over. Anxiety has been overcome by the therapy of the story and this liberates the speaker and makes the authentic statement of love not only credible but also acceptable to an audience needing to be reminded of the legitimacy and the value of sentimentality in the unbeat context of woe.

I suppose that this is unmistakably an American story. Certain details are surely distinctly U.S.A. Australians make paper darts; Americans fold paper aeroplanes (Americans always think big). Australians munch Mars Bars and Violet Crumble; Americans eat Baby Ruth, caught up, as we are, with the stuff of our folk heroes and trapped, as we are, by the subversive hype of Madison Avenue advertising. What's more, Australian kids play with leggo; American kids, called "little persons", play with Procreative Playthings from Princeton. Sure, the language of the piece licks up the odd Americanism but, more importantly, that language also spits up the ethic of the place; paradoxical as it may seem, the language simultaneously suggests acceptance and rejection of both ethic and place. The story overall, then, rejoices in the American habit of mind, and at the same time criticises it. Moreover, it's comfortable enough with both nervousness and sentimentality, with tough-mindedness and tender-heartedness, to accept and use both in the service of a hurtful helpful serious joke.

If I'm forced to identify a peculiar American voice here, then, I think I'd choose to describe it as a 20th-century voice calmed by the delight it takes in its own inventiveness, in the way it copes, not by silent stoicism but by tight, chatty creativity.

Let me explain by being personal and American and by quoting my father's reaction to my birth a few years back. In 18 months, after a stretch of 10 years between children, my mother expressed herself for the third, fourth and fifth time by bringing three kids into the world: three kids in 18 months! In having asked my father several times what it was like having a second larger-than-life family after all those years he repeatedly said: "It was like being at a Sunday School picnic in June on Lake Mohunk. There you are eating hot dogs with relish and milk-and-honey ears of corn, and, sniff, sniff, the skunks have come. Yep. You three were as wanted as skunks at a Sunday School picnic in June." Both from my point of view and from my father's, this analogy was all too funny and all too sad. To structure it as the joke, nevertheless, was to take delight in invention, thereby to protect both the teller and the listener from the full and potentially hurtful implication of the bald statement behind it. And it's in that context that I respond to the voice of Barthelme's speaker who carries on like mad in his effort to accept what he calls his "light-mindedness" which is but a cover-up for heavy-heartedness. Like my father, Barthelme streams forth with the jokes as he holds back the tears.

But I refuse to say that Americans have learned to laugh when they want to cry and Australians haven't or that Australians, like Americans, have not learned the magic of mumbo jumbo. All I want to say, really, is that, yes, each of these stories may be as different as asbestos toilets and Procreative Playthings from Princeton, but each, like most short fiction these days, has an urgency about its voice, a voice which articulates the desperation and disorder of now, both here and there. So my final word on form and voice in the works of Bail and Barthelme, come from Bathelme and it's about contemporary fiction generally: "We like books which have a drek in them, matter which presents itself as not wholly relevant (or indeed, at all relevant) but which, carefully attended to, can supply a sense of what is going on." To get that sense of what's going on, listen.

BOOKS

David Ireland, *A Woman of the Future*, George Braziller, New York, 1979; Allen Lane, Melbourne, 1979, 351pp., \$9.95.

David Ireland's latest novel, *A Woman of the Future*, his sixth to be published in only a little more than a decade, is a large, handsome production and it seems significant in terms of the growing critical recognition of his prose fiction that its initial release was in America. Is *A Woman of the Future* projected towards a kind of *Thorn Birds* success in a more exclusively literary sphere? An important novel, both in terms of Ireland's literary development and for Australian fiction, *A Woman of the Future* confirms Ireland's particular talent for the creation of a narrative voice, establishing it as he does through an idiom and tone by which the narrative is directed and focused, as well as reaffirming his preoccupation with the social and political bases of Australian life and the necessity of autonomy, political and economic, for Australia.

The 'woman' of the title is Alethea Hunt, and the novel is the story of her life from her conception to the age of eighteen, when she disappears. Alethea's story is told in her notebooks, diaries, and papers which include retrospective reminiscences and social comment, collected and published after her disappearance. A prefatory Editor's Note establishes that the material of the narrative has been reproduced without alteration, and another concludes the novel, confirming Alethea's staggering success-potential — she has gained 490 marks out of a possible 500 in the final High School exams — and verifying the mystery of her disappearance: her father "has offered a reward of one hundred thousand dollars if Alethea Hunt, or a female leopard, is captured painlessly and without injury". This authorial confidence trick of asserting the realism Ireland seeks for his character recalls the letters and notes which preface and conclude Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and is indicative of the elaborate characterisation of this heroine-narrator, Ireland's most successful and complex to date.

From the time Alethea is established in her mother's womb to the time of her voluntary disappearance on the brink of maturity, she does nothing that is not superlative. In popular psychological jargon, Alethea is a high achiever: she is more intelligent, more imaginative, stronger, has a greater sporting ability and a more insatiable sexual nature than any of her peers. Her only minor failure, for which she is momentarily regretful, is that she cannot play Beethoven as well as a local prodigy. For a writer who has hitherto depicted an almost exclusively male world, in line with the myth which is part of Australian literary heritage that Australia is a masculine world, Ireland's adoption of a feminine consciousness is a startling narrative change. And this change is a calculated one: for Ireland: "the poor 'ol metaphor of the sun bronzed Anzacs was quite rotten and contained nothing. So I decided I would attempt to form a new image of the country".

This creation of a character who is also a feminine image of Australia as a young, growing, promising girl, questing for fulfilment, is achieved through the metaphors of growth and change which make up the novel's intricate figurative structure. Alethea grows literally from birth to maturity. Her growth is also part of a fecund, natural image pattern which at the same time characterises Australia's potential: she is "an Australian adolescent, a healthy girl-plant growing in the sun", while her sexual promiscuity denotes her innate promise, which is Australia's: "what could be more natural to such a plant than generosity? I had things others wanted, why shouldn't I give?"

Ireland's narrative method is rarely subtle, and the connections he establishes between his heroine and the country she represents are insisted upon. Alethea's search for self is equated with an Australia which for David Ireland still awaits discovery. Alethea and Australia, both enigmatic, are most explicitly conjoined in a section which is given greater prominence by its appearance on the dust jacket of the novel:

Who was I?

I had grown from the soil of Australia; its promise of greatness was my own; it was unique, as I was; in a sense it too was an outcast, like I feel I am; it is alone in the world in a special way, as I am alone; it has a strength which has not yet been tested, not

yet been developed; it is young, like me; it has resources in its body; like me it doesn't quite fit the world as it is, though it may yet do; it waits, gathering its strength, which is its enormous silence, about it like a coat, waiting for an ideal friend, a lover, a spouse — who does not come.

The country is a virgin, as I feel I am, essentially. The hidden place in me has not been touched; my trivial adventures have not touched it. Besides, in a larger sense I am not the person who did those things; I am different.

Am I perhaps Australia?

Alethea's persistent questioning, both of herself and of the meaning of the world around her, points to Ireland's urgent social purpose. Always concerned with man in society, more specifically with Australian society, Ireland writes to stir national pride and awaken national feeling. A teacher who is a foreigner recognises Australia's social and cultural immaturity: "You have no dream, just a national sleep". Insecurity is the Australian characteristic responsible for this lack of national pride, and Alethea's recognition is Ireland's: "He was really knocking us, but we knew how to take criticism. We were Australians: we'd knocked ourselves for two hundred years". Alethea's pride in herself, carefully fostered by her parents, who constantly assure her of her superiority and potential greatness, is the national pride Ireland seeks to initiate, and Alethea's active sexual life, undertaken as soon as she reaches puberty and described in endless, clinical detail, becomes a repetitive image for the need for awakening and fulfillment, which is Alethea's and Australia's. Sexual images of entering, filling and withdrawing, of Alethea exploited and despoiled, yet curiously unsatisfied and untouched, empty, become Ireland's vision of Australia as a land of fringe dwellers, its vast centre an untapped, fearful potential, analogous to Alethea's:

The land itself tries everything to keep them away from its sacred inner self: It floods them, drowning everything under vast tracts of callous water; it denies them that water; it burns them from their bland fields which have laid waste the original and proper soil of the country.

They take refuge in tight settlements on the least inhospitable edge of the continent. The interior remains unsubdued and empty because they don't know what to fill it with;

they have neither the energy nor the fierceness to subdue it.

Alethea dreams of a lover who will match her potential, but her real love is reserved for Australia, which is seductively described: "I knew its rocks and mossed stones, its courageous twisted trees pouring themselves over rock ledges, its sudden pools of white sand on bush tracks, its valleys opening with tall straight gums marching downward towards creek beds and up again the other side. I loved it". This natural beauty contrasts with the squalor of social life, ironically described as "Our Culture": "Around the large shoppingtown center a few kilometers away, was a lot of Australia's culture: car cleaning, car tinkering, car selling, car insurances, printing, young girls in ballet tights, wealthy shift-workers, big plumbers, the knighted rich, knighted public servants, the subservient poor, working-class conservatives . . . Hope was catered for: lotteries proliferated, attractive new multiple choice betting opportunities expanded to fill, as they opened, the gaps in the employment structure".

A Woman of the Future is set at an unspecified time in the not-too-distant future, and social change is part of its concern. Life seems not very different from Australia, 1979 — there is no imaginative realisation here of a *Brave New World* or even a *1984* — but the social structure has become rigidly bipartite: Ireland's future Australia is a meritocracy. As children leave school, they are graded for life in one of two divisions, and become a member either of the Serving Class or of the Free. Paradoxically, servants are the leaders of society, a professional class who, we are told, "took Dostoevsky's advice and . . . became servants in order to be free", while the others live meaningless, idle lives: "The trivial occupations of freedom are their whole life". That this social structure is undesirable and distorted is immediately made clear through the dominant metaphors of growth and change and an associated image of sight: as this world is depicted its blemishes are clarified: "the seeing begins to interact with the seen, the eye with the object: aberrations blossom."

Alethea is a supreme watcher, and it is through her eyes that we see the world of this other Australia in which the unhealthiness of the social structure is made evident by grotesque manifestations of physical and natural

change: the aberrant growths reflect the aberrant society. Ireland's imagination always delights in the surreal or the bizarre. Extraordinary physical change was thought in the Middle Ages to indicate stigmata and Ireland marks his Australia by populating it with similarly changed characters. Some sprout branches or leaves, one has his intestines outside his abdomen, a family of children must move continually to avoid being rooted in the earth. Among others, a girl has a proliferation of exquisitely described vulvas in her armpits; a coffin, which grows relentlessly but stops when it is complete, extends from a man's side, and a child's arm erupts from its mother's belly. Endlessly inventive, these growths are dear to those who produce them and envied by those who cannot: significantly, only Frees, whose potential for change is denied by the rigid social structure which condemns them to a futile life, can grow in this way. Although Alethea sees so clearly, there is none of James's solidity of specification in *A Woman of the Future*. Glimpses of a grotesque world and assertions and comments about its political, economic and social life create only a kaliedoscopic impression which has no depth or thickness: Ireland's central character is his concern in this novel.

Potential for change in this strange world is not only perverted but held in check by its denial. Alethea's father, the most important man in her life, is an actor whose play which lasts for a whole day and has been running since before Alethea's birth, and is ironically called *Changes*. In it, he dies and is dissected night after night. Alethea's mother is a writer whose creative activity is similarly endlessly negative: she disassociates herself from the world and her continued output is carefully hidden, stored in an increasing number of sheds: the first is named Proust.

True metamorphosis is achieved only by Alethea, and her final transformation is suggestively indicated throughout the novel. As a baby, she is photographed bare-bottomed on a leopard-skin rug; as a child at the zoo, she and the leopard share a mutual recognition: "The leopard looked at me . . . I thought she was saying we had secrets, she and I . . . I went home . . . with the proud, tenacious leopard in my heart"; as a student she can see out of the corners of her eyes and is described as having a slouching walk, and she paints St Francis

curing the leopards. When her projected change becomes physical — her eyes glint yellow, she grows hair and her voice changes to a guttural cough — Alethea gathers all her papers for posterity and begins to write her memoirs, and another question points to Ireland's view of Australia's future: "Was I a fabulous monster, a mythical beast that would be a symbol for future females, an archetype for the future?"

Names are always used to type characters in Ireland's fiction, and Alethea's name, he says, is "a whole clue to the book". The meaning of 'Hunt' is self-evident, while Alethea's name derives from the Greek noun for truth. If this Alethea, in her youth, her strength and her beauty, is Ireland's truth for Australia's future, the affirmation in this recognition of potential is very different from the persistent iconoclasm of earlier major satiric novels: *The Flesheaters*, *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and *The Glass Canoe*. As she leaves civilisation, her metamorphosis nearly complete, Alethea's lyric vision of central Australia, revived, emphasises the optimism which makes this novel a watershed in Ireland's fiction: "I see a vast lake . . . grazing land and cultivated land. And a network of water channels bringing life . . . I see the sun rising on it in the morning and setting in a red blaze before the dark wheel of night returns the sky to its deepest blue".

A Woman of the Future is an ambitious novel in which Ireland's technique is similar to that of his earlier novels. Small, headed sections create a dislocated, discontinuous structure which ignores the literary conventions of time, space and action. Ireland likens his narrative technique to a camera, constantly changing focus, and it enables him to build up a composite picture of a social world, or, in *A Woman of the Future*, of a character. As he so often does, Ireland uses a romantic myth, this time of Australia as Arcadia, a mysterious new world of natural and social promise, against which he measures the social world as he sees it, degraded, deformed and ugly. There is a danger that Ireland's repetitive technique, by which he explores the myth, may become at the least tiresome or at the worst laughable. Alethea's fascination with male and female genital organs and her unending description of acts of sexual congress and dripping semen courts that danger. Furthermore, an unfortunate addiction to writing indifferent poetry is

one which her creator might well have denied her. These quibbles do not detract from Ireland's achievement in *A Woman of the Future*. Although it lacks the wit and the inventive, colourful use of language that informs Ireland's satiric vision in his earlier novels, it has both the complexity of structure of *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and the coherence allowed by a unifying narrative vision of *The Glass Canoe*. Informed as it is by a new, optimistic aspiration, *A Woman of the Future* may also point to the future direction of David Ireland's fiction.

DELYS BIRD

Randolph Stow, *Visitants* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1979), 189 pp.

Concurrently with Randolph Stow's new novel *Visitants* I have been reading Patrick White's new novel *The Twyborn Affair*.

It has been an interesting exercise since in my opinion these two writers share the pinnacle of excellence among our novelists. These two books show in vastly different ways exactly why.

White's book is like a conducted tour — brilliant, fascinating, irritating — through a decaying mansion in some mossy room of which, you are led to believe, countesses and hunchbacks will be found fornicating in disused refrigerators.

Stow's is a trip in an open boat among sunlit archipelagos dark in the shadows of purple peaks and mysterious beneath the pelt of jungles, and menacing in the pursuit of ancient, implacable feuds and sorcery.

White's characters are all, after his usual fashion, larger, smaller, meaner, dirtier, more resilient and more ockerish than any you might ever have met — a sort of extenuation of his longrunning jeremiad against the crassness and stupidity of people of all races and sexes.

Stow's are people minutely observed in sometimes unusual circumstances, beautifully realised with an understanding deep as a well and a compassion never weak or accommodating.

You follow White, sometimes in exasperation, just to find out what might lurk around the next corner of his phantasmagoria of

double-indemnity sex: to one of a number of possible conclusions any of which might have proved just as satisfactory.

You follow Stow through jungle and lagoon and village, and the lives of the people he has placed in and around them, to an inevitable end which has hovered over the whole beautiful book like the knowing sideways glance of a fortune-teller on the trail of tragedy.

While I was reading *The Twyborn Affair* I was overpowered by White's brilliance — as, while reading, one is affected perhaps more temporarily by Hal Porter's.

I put *Visitants* down with the sort of deep fulfilment Stow's books generate — fulfilment which it not dispelled by subsequent readings, nor indeed, by the passage of years.

For those, myself among them, who are lured into a book by the opening lines, *Visitants* is an inescapable buy.

And he screamed: The house is bleeding, there is nobody inside, he said. But I said. No, des', it could not be like that. A house is strong, I said, and it has its own time. You will see, I said.

There is, also, the matter of Stow's prologue which blows a whiff of strangeness through the window by relating how at Boianai in Papua, on June 26, 1959, an Anglican missionary called the Rev. William Booth Gill and thirty-seven other people — Papuans — experienced two days of close (although not "third kind") contact with what seems fairly clearly to have been an extraterrestrial visitant of some sort.

So what are we in for, in this book? Rampant jungle voodoo and science fiction? Heaven forbid. A look at the historic kiap/boy lifestyle now banished from the Islands almost as completely and certainly as swiftly as the dodo was banished from Mauritius?

Yes, indeed — and coming as it does from the hand of an on-site observer of Stow's calibre, a very engrossing look it is, too. An examination of the way in which a callow youth will sometimes enter at one side of what is called the cauldron of experience and emerge at the other as something of a man? Certainly — and once again because Stow was (one believes) both the young man and his elder mentor — and perhaps one or two of the on-lookers — impeccably on target.

Visitants is in fact all of these components with something added — the something being, of course, Stow's capacity to endow everything he writes with such a deep sense of the poignancy of being human, and hopeful, and stupid, and good, and fallible. So . . .

The novel is set in 1959 on the island of Kailuana, in Papua. Alistair Cawdor, an Assistant District Officer, arrives at the island with his Cadet Patrol Officer Tim Dalwood, and puts up at the plantation homestead of the legendary Islands character MacDonnell of Kailuana. They become involved in a transient love affair (Dalwood, with the native girl Saliba); and in the politics of succession between the old chieftain Dipapa and his logical successor, the stalwart Benoni. They experience a cargo-cult uprising and the attendant loss of life and destruction of villages. They investigate the disappearance of three men putatively whisked off from a neighbouring island by a star-ship, and are drawn into the edges of old island superstition about, and modern, seemingly actual records of, visits by star-people. And at the finish, despite the fact that Cawdor has taken his own life, and old Dipapa is dead, and Benoni has succeeded, and Dalwood has achieved authority, nothing really has been resolved. *Visitants* ends, as any good novel should, in my opinion, by inviting the reader — compelling him, almost — to conjecture just where they all will go from here.

Stow illuminates this sequence of events in a very simple and satisfactory way through eye-witness accounts by five of the participants.

There is MacDonnell, the planter, who puts himself on the line very early on in the piece: "Not what I really expected, in a life devoted to escaping from everything, to be left at the end of it the guardian and ward of an old woman with . . . a back like a spear hardened in the fire." There is the old woman, Naibusi, MacDonnell's housekeeper and one-time lover, a character of quiet and wisdom and beauty. There is Benoni, the young chieftain elect, tellingly portrayed in a double-exposure as dignified and assured among his own people but only a "boy" among the Dimdim (white) people. There is Saliba, the native girl, no Tondeleo beauty but bouncy and fresh as an island breeze, who with the other girls likes to sit under the white men's houses and peer up, through the chinks between the floorboards, at

what goes on in them — particularly in the showers. There is Osana, the government interpreter, arrogant among his own people, treacherous and dumb-insolent with the whites. And there is Dalwood the young cadet, whose progress through the crucible is one of the main threads of the narrative. "I'm not happy about the change in Dalwood," says MacDonnell, at the end. "Our puppyish man-mountain is turning into something else. I preferred him before."

Through this five-pronged device Stow keeps the action of the story marching purposefully, not so much as exposition by the author but as first-hand explanation by the various characters, and it is particularly telling when, in some cases, it provides juxtaposed views of the same incident from either side of the black-white fence.

The whole novel is lit by the excellences usual to Stow's work. The sudden irruption of the kind of mudlark humour which prompts Midnite, in the book of that name, to record in Mrs. Chiffle's Visitors' Book that "the underneath of Mrs. Chiffle's bed is remarkably free from dust and fluffy stuff". The ability to compress into the smallest space the essence of a moment of tragedy, as when the village boy Tevea is killed during the cargo uprising and Saliba, finding him lying in the grass, recalls that it was he who broke into the cookhouse one night while she was washing the dishes, and put out the light "and then for a while we were laughing and struggling in the darkness". The quick, lasting physical description in a handful of words — as when Dalwood says of Naibusi that her face is like "a thoughtful prune", or when Osana says of Dalwood: "He is clean like a hospital. He looks as if they painted him, like the boat." The equally swift, sharp evocation of landscape — "white reef herons standing like the wreck of a fence" or what anybody who has lived in the Islands remembers so keenly, "the applegreen, peacock green sky pouring down pink and golden light". The marvellous sense of place which in novels such as *The Haunted Land* and *The Merry-go-round in the Sea* painted the Geraldton hinterland so lastingly into the picture of Western Australia is just as tellingly at work in *Visitants* in the all-pervading sense of sea and cloud and sun, coral reef and jungle: the wonder evoked by the circle of great, ancient stones "called Ukula'osi" which might be an old temple, an

early aid to the teaching of inter-island navigation, a lodestone for visiting star-people. Few sequences of writing have ever evoked evil so suddenly and so chillingly for me as Stow's picture of the mission church still as scrupulously maintained and painted as when the last *Onward Christian Soldiers* had rung out across its little sunlit clearing of clipped jungle grass, yet now transformed as the ju-ju house of the cargo-cult.

"the earth floor was bare, but at the end where an altar might have been in God-times, a huge black plane carved from ebony hangs upright: and hanging by his neck on the plane, hands nailed to the wings, the new Christ of this post-war kanaka world, an ebony pilot glaring at Dalwood from cowrie-shell eyes — the underside of the shell, like puckered white lids with no eye-balls behind them."

Whatever Stow might offer, it is always his way with people that clinches one's allegiance . . . utterly without sentimentality yet with moments of heart-stopping tenderness and understanding: as when in *Visitants* the old black woman tells the old white man that when they were young—when they were lovers — his skin was "like a new born pig's".

So, when at the end Cawdor takes his own life, it is hardly a moment for tears. Just as when Keithy walks into the holocaust at the end of *The Bystander*, or when Rob relinquishes his ideal of love and loyalty at the end of *Merry-go-Round*, or when in the last few lines of *To The Islands* old Heriot faces death in his cave above the sea, one feels this is what the stars conspired toward. It is in no way a tragedy, but in a sense a consummation devoutly to be wished for — and, like all Stow's writing, utterly devoid of mawkishness.

For twenty years or more, I have been studying in the house of a friend a painting by the Australian artist Ray Crooke. It is of a Papuan man in a white shirt and dark laplap standing before a mirror in a shadowy room fixing a blood-red hibiscus blossom in his looming cloud of hair. The point-of-view of the onlooker is from somewhere behind the mirror so that one looks past the figure, its face hardly realised in the deep brown shadows. Across the room a door opens onto a brilliant patch of flower-starred jungle beyond which a dark and secret mangrove-crocodile of

a headland juts out into a glittering white sea.

A thousand times I have asked myself: why that faceless man, that shadowy room, that brilliant, hostile landscape? And now I think I know. Having read *Visitants*, it seems to me that Crooke's picture and Stow's book deliver exactly the same word from all of us — black, white or brown — to all of us. I am as distant from you as the stardwellers. We may visit, and perhaps hover, and even exchange certain friendly signals. But in the end you will never know about me more than I care to reveal.

Stow's Dalwood, who appreciated — respected, valued, loved? — Stow's Cawdor could say at the end only: "I couldn't bring myself to touch him . . . I saw them hide him away, under the red blanket . . . And then: I thought, it will be different now. See nothing by accident. Hear nothing by accident. Say nothing by accident. Move through the villages like royalty, like a wooden figurehead."

In the end, there is nothing to do but what must be done, to go our own ways: if we are lucky, wondering.

T. A. G. HUNGERFORD

Glenda Adams, *The Hottest Night of the Century*. Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1979.

Glenda Adams possesses at least one of the credentials held in common by many of the major authors of our century; that of being a voluntary expatriate. Born in Sydney in 1940, she has resided in New York since 1964, the same year in which she began seriously to write short fiction. Her recent collection of stories, the first to be published in this country and containing material of mainly 70s vintage, shows that self-imposed exile for the literary artist tends to result in both a certain clarity of view about the homeland, a desire to search out and scrape clean the abscesses swelling under the complacent skin of the mother-culture, and also in a determined attempt to come to terms with artistic demands made by the adopted culture.

The Hottest Night of the Century offers fourteen stories arranged in such a way that certain anatomizations of personal roots in the land of

Oz precede, and provide a context for, the last few stories of the collection, in which the contemporary drift in American short fiction toward fable, and toward self-referential parables about the possibilities (and limits) of Art and Vision can be seen to be tugging at Ms Adams's own purposes. But if the collection declares, in its beginning and end, the frame of such cultural pressures, in its middle it announces most clearly the nature of those purposes, for in such stories as *The Wedding* and *Summer in France* cultural imperatives shrink before Ms Adams's determined fictional assault on the trans-national Western dilemma of women.

"I wanted to wear a lovely nightgown on my wedding night. I wanted to be the loveliest, most desirable woman my husband had ever seen. I wanted him not to recognize me on my wedding night. I wanted him to look up in surprise and delight when he saw me in my nightgown and ask: how can this wonderful woman be the plain, dull, everyday girl I thought I was marrying, who stayed in my room secretly after visiting hours and shared my bed, loving me silently and fearing all the time we would be discovered."

So goes the opening of the story *The Wedding* and in its economical fixing of the narrator's frantic desire to please, to conform to masculine stereotypes of desire, to escape, however briefly, from the burden of low self-esteem which is the fate of the sensitive but plain female, it focuses a recurrent theme in the whole collection. These stories explore, most frequently, the territory of failure, of sexual relationships corrupted by the pressures of advertising's myths of the desirable (and valuable) female person, and corrupted also, perhaps more fundamentally, by human fears of loss and exclusion suffered in silence as husbands and lovers lavish attention and interest on other unwittingly and even unwillingly but (such is the force of our corrupted myths of desire) nonetheless predatory (because beautiful), women. This, indeed, is the familiar territory, the haunted ground of the best of Ms Adams's stories; sometimes surveyed with a wry, clear-sighted resignation but at other times viewed with an anger the more potent for its suppression, and savagely devious in the kinds of revenge it seeks. In the first few stories of the collection, for example, those

set in the Australia experienced (and opposed) in the bosom of a schoolgirl's family, Adams makes of her usual protagonist a figure isolated not by ingenuousness, but by a kind of sophistication which often proves chillingly destructive.

"Sometimes I tell lies, and sometimes I only tell stories, but never with intent to harm. I only want to please people and make them happy."

So begins the child-narrator of *Lies*, who shares with the child-narrator of *The Hottest Night of the Century* an insight into the evasions and untruths of the adult lives surrounding her so penetrating as to seem, to those scrutinized, witch-like. It is the power to tell stories, to make of Art not simply a consolation but a weapon, which unites both narrators in their struggles against parental patronizations, sibling rivalries and the injustice which locks a sensitive mind into a plain body. On the whole the weapon of Art, the creative Imagination, is wedded in these stories to a justifiable defence of the self but it can become, as it does in *The Hottest Night of the Century* the tool of a sadist. The narrator tells her younger brother, the beautiful child of the family, after having dared him to listen as long as he can "a story that contained one sentence for every grain of salt in the sea." Since the story is told on a beach under a biting sun from which she is protected but he is not, the result is a severe case of sunstroke for the brother and a permanent marring of his "good brown skin". The narrator's satisfaction with this result is not condoned by the author, but neither, in her effort to discover the psychopolitics of family life which generate such cruelties, is it condemned.

In *The Circle*, the motivations for such imaginative bone-pointings are moved out of the ambit of the nuclear family and into the realm of the adolescent girl's encounter with the stifling expectations of masculine desire.

The resistance offered by the narrator of this story to the blandishments (honourable though he imagines them to be), of Pete, one of her companions on a group skiing holiday is at first a revealingly routine withdrawal of herself from the activities of her companions. His persistence drives her to sleeping outside at night, in a womblike 'ice-cave', and during the day,

while the others yo-yo up and down the same valley slope, taking the tow-line up and the ski-run down, she sets out on solo excursions around the top of the hills encircling the valley. And then comes this piece of voodoo—

“At the top I looked back into the valley, at the others randomly careering about their slope. I took out the peppercorn and measured them, one by one, until I located Pete. I measured Pete for some time. I was still breathing heavily from the climb, and my hand shook, so that it was difficult to hold the peppercorn still enough.

When I had measured Pete sufficiently I took off my skis and lay down in the snow. I placed the peppercorn in my mouth and cracked it in two with my teeth. I chewed it into tiny grains and swallowed it.”

When she returns that evening to the ski-hut she learns that Pete has had an almost fatal accident that day, a tangling of his scarf in the tow-line which has left him with a red and angry welt around the throat. Adams knows better than to insist on the magic of this. She insists instead upon the pressures which generate and release such desperate and revengeful fantasies. They are pressures themselves generated by the inevitable distance enforced by our culture, at least as Adams seems to see it, between man and woman; pressures generated by the conspiracy of the “normal” against the autonomy and sense of value sought by the female self. Adams’s subtle explanations of this heavily mined and dangerous ground are most successful in the opening stories of the collection; the stripped bare, economically punchy and, in terms of narrative strategies, fairly conventional tales.

The least successful stories, and those which confirm a suspicion roused by the occasional heavy-handedness, the tendency to dot i’s and cross t’s, despite the obliquity of approach of the first few stories (a suspicion that much here is “prentice-work”) are the tales grouped near the end of the collection, those which follow the recent American lead and deal in the un-localized and “symbolic”. Here Adams is less (literally) at home, for though her themes remain the same there is a certain callowness and preciousness about these stories. They lack the focus found for these themes in the earlier stories, where the sharply realized details of “petit-bourgeois” family and school life in Aus-

tralia support and clarify the sense of entrapment, of suppressed hysteria which gives them their impact.

The Hollow Woman, a pretentious and unfocused piece of symbolic parable-making, *Reclamation*, a lame fable of the achievement of personal autonomy, and *Reconstruction of an Event*, a precious exercise in the modishly auto-referential macabre, all owe much to the formal experiment of American contemporaries such as Robert Coover, but Adams’s tales in this mode lack both the teasing ambivalence and forceful disruption of reader expectation achieved by Coover.

By far the best of Adams’s overtly ‘experimental’ tales is the fourth story in the collection, *A Snake Down Under*. Here, in a series of vaguely connected single paragraph vignettes dealing with schoolday proscriptions on *East of Eden*, the lore of snakebite treatment as purveyed in Australian schools, adolescent explorations of sex, suburban reactions to the spectre of the unmarried pregnant girl, and occasional encounters with live snakes, Adams employs her oblique strategies of suggestion most resonantly. The story concentrates its force in the spaces between paragraphs, filled as they are with a subtle thunder of allusion, choked with that sense of the inevitable connection of Evil and Sex which has for so long suffocated the West.

I remarked at the beginning of this review that Glenda Adams, by virtue of her choice of voluntary exile has equipped herself with one at least of the potent credentials of the dispossessed ‘modernist’ writer. The creative tensions generated by such a choice are evident in this collection of stories, but exile alone is no sufficient condition of great fiction. *The Hottest Night of the Century* squeezes out, often enough to sustain the reader’s interest and attention, sparks of an original, questing talent. But Adams is worth reading now, in my view mainly for the hints provided of more substantial work to come, when the uncontrolled emotion, derivative form, and occasional callowness which mars too many of the stories in this first collection shall be overcome, and advances made on the promising fronts opened up by the best of them.

CLIFF GILLAM

Robert Drewe, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*
(Collins, Sydney, 1979), 244 pages.

A Cry in the Jungle Bar is Robert Drewe's second novel, and it confirms his power as a writer able to explore the distinctive features of the Australian experience of the world. While a great deal of the novel's success lies in its vivid evocation of Asia, the principal focus of interest is always its protagonist, U.N. buffalo expert Richard Cullen, his relationship with his wife, Margaret, and his futile attempts to harmonize with both his inimical Asian environment and the expectations of his own nationality.

Cullen is based in Manila, where the ambience is distinctly threatening. It is also a "culture of sweethearts", of naïve, enthusiastic adoption of all things American, especially militarism, movie stars, and sentimental pop tunes. Television programmes make palpable the "vague physical threats" Cullen suspects all about him:

"On screen the scowling, flamboyantly gesturing figures were blurred by the tropical afternoon light flooding in the study window. They grunted and lunged, screamed maniacally at each other and indulged in mayhem involving swords, *bolos*, daggers, flame-throwers, .38s, hands and feet. Regularly a cleaved limb would fly through the air. Blood fountained in high arcs. Women keened over the twitching amputees. Margaret was leaning back against cushions on the divan with a gin and tonic watching a Tagalog adventure-romance called *Cleofatra*."

Cullen's apprehensions of injury and violent death pervade the novel from its beginning. Cullen, unreasonably and superstitiously afraid of Margaret after a quarrel, hides all the household knives. "His spine especially anticipated an evil little bone-handled knife which the girls used to slice calamansi fruit and papayas." Images of blood and knives are encountered everywhere in Cullen's tour of U.N. duty stations. Identified by others, as well as in his own mind, with the buffaloes he studies, Cullen responds with carefully justified pain, and sympathy, to the primitive castration methods employed on the beasts, their ritual slaughter, by virtual decapitation, and the voracious infestations they suffer.

"Grisly varieties of snail, hookworm, lungworm, roundworm, leech, tick, mite, mosquito and fly were represented. A lush savage range of tropical bloodsuckers depended on *Bubalus bubalis*."

In the recently, horribly redecorated Jungle Bar itself, images of carnivorous violence provide the backdrop for Cullen's unhappy attempts at suavity with the unbearably pretty Gigi Fernandez, the condescending Jenny Loh, and his friends, Hugh Galash and Z. M. Ali, who are "velvety with alcohol and self-assurance" in this setting.

Within episodes of the novel, Drewe integrates black humour, a more delightful comedy, and telling social observation of a region he clearly knows well.

With Cullen at the Mañana Club, Galash notes:

"Of course this country is crazy. Who wouldn't be after three hundred years in a convent and forty in Hollywood.

All this while a thirty-man band of idiosyncratic guitarists and brass players performed jarring pop-music, stroke lightning sent electric impulses through his brain and a glossy boy in sequined cowboy gear sang pensively, "*I shot the shereef. But I did not shot the deputee*".

A whiff of urine fanned down the corridor to their table."

Cullen's neighbour, Ted Orosa, is a blend of the sinister and the ridiculous. Absurd, egotistical, a social-climber, Orosa claims local fame through his newspaper column, his alleged closeness to the President, and the possession of his voracious Australian wife. Yet even he proves to be capable of the bizarrely unexpected — even if passively so. Orosa's column touches a raw Presidential nerve, and he is removed. Equally swiftly, but utterly inexplicably, Cullen's colleague, Z. M. Ali, is expelled from the country.

Cullen has time to ponder these events, as well as Margaret's ultimate departure for Australia, when going over the duty stations he and Ali had previously visited, in order to collect data for the latest U.N. publication on *Bubalus bubalis*. Danger seems implicit in every situation, and Cullen more vulnerable than ever. Just as, earlier, the reader's attention was drawn to casual observations of the barbed wire and broken glass reinforcing the walls of

houses and hotels, from Manila to Dacca, so, in the final section of the novel, we feel more powerfully the dangerous amateurism of the various armed groups patrolling the provinces, the smouldering resentment of the impoverished peasant population, and the essential irrationality of that compromised, still embattled society.

The close of the novel brings to fulfilment all Cullen's earlier fears and presentiments of injury. Again, his pain and his sense of moral isolation are suffered in a setting of macabre humour. Cullen is the victim of an enraged nightclub tout, and of his own delicacy in finally electing not to spend the night with a local prostitute. As Cullen tries to "explain" to the Moro soldiers he stumbles across, the U.N. seems to have drowned in irrelevancy.

Even more compellingly, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* is a study of two sensitive people, linked painfully to one another in a relationship of virtually permanent strain. The impact of the Asian environment on them is such that Margaret feels "a trivial novelty", and Cullen a buffoon and "a stateless person".

Unlike the Bangladeshi, Ali, whose "nationality seemed not to have left its stamp on him", Cullen cannot escape his uncomfortable Australian identity. His size, his colouring, the irrelevant, sporty guilelessness of his background, are like a dinosaur tail of disadvantage to be dragged about Asia with him. Worse, he is unable either to resist or enjoy the relentless sociability of the Australians he meets in the Jungle Bar. He cannot escape the "national scum of mateship", now as alien to him as the Orosas' terrible parties.

Despite popular estimation of him, and, for much of the time, his own, Cullen is anything but a stupid man. It is not even chiefly his acute sense of being out of kilter — in Asia, with his colleagues, with his compatriots — which marks Cullen as a sensitive man. He is compassionately thoughtful about the daughter he sees as a female version of himself, pitying her awkwardness and anticipated painful adolescence. His reflections on his past and present life with Margaret bring a yearning for "her deeply female subjectivity". He frequently suffers visions of his own clownishness—as when, in the nameless nightclub, he realizes that he has been cherishing sentimental hopes of "an

amorous possibility" in the girl who dances there.

The Cullens' estrangement is sensitively explored, and given depth by the insights into Margaret's emotional life. Paradoxically, while she remembers the days when "their minds ran alongside" as something irretrievably lost, she and Cullen are experiencing, though not sharing, very similar emotions. Even Cullen's regular bouts of disgust at his own outsized, ginger-haired person are mirrored in Margaret's neurotic, "mucus-free" dieting and uncharacteristic reliance on a faith-healer's remedies for her emotional ills. Both feel "misunderstood and patronized", and lost.

Drewe's prose is taut and precise; and there is an imaginative vigour, as well as the capturing of strongly recognizable experiences, in his depiction of "the expressionless neutrality of medium-term marriages" like the Cullens'. Continuing the metaphor, much later in the novel, Cullen reflects that Margaret "was at home with the stalemate, the Cold War, the Demilitarized Zone of the emotions. Further from simple happiness, but also less far to fall."

One futile attempt, by telephone, at a species of reconciliation, is one of the most powerful passages in the novel —

"She gave off emanations lacking empathy while suggesting that all the tough times were at her end.

'Have a good time', she said, preparing to ring off. She couldn't resist it.

'This isn't exactly Las Vegas.'

'I'm sure you'll make do.'

'Why the sarcasm? Some long-distance serenity would be nice, Margaret. I'm missing you and you treat me like this. What's up?'

There was silence. Her famous silences. Unstated disapproval was her speciality, it sped as quickly and effortlessly over oceans as across a room. The deadness in her eyes, the icy incuriosity of her repressed features were as clear to him as if she were present. He could have touched a finger to the pale poker face. He took several deep breaths, aware of his racing pulse, of the steamy, used street air invading his room. Was the merest hint of weeping coming over the line? Had she shifted her position yet again? Leaving him dangling, on marshy ground, treading water. Had he misunderstood? . . ."

Robert Drewe writes sensitively and evocatively, not only about the vividly remembered moments in an individual life, but about the peculiarly distinctive experiences and effects of an Australian youth and upbringing. It is a quality of perception as impressive in this novel as in *The Savage Crows*. That the author seems, in *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, not only to have extended his range, but increased in power, since that extraordinarily powerful novel, is the kind of news readers everywhere hope for.

MARILYN ANTHONY

Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: the fortunes of women painters and their work* (Secker and Warburg, London, 1979). 373 pages, 32 colour plates, 161 black and white illustrations; hardback, \$27.50.

To many readers, *The Obstacle Race* may seem a rather surprising work from Germaine Greer, self-styled *enfant terrible* and polemicist. Certainly, there are important contrasts between this book and her first publication, *The Female Eunuch*, one of the most influential analyses of female psychology to emerge from the second feminist wave of the late sixties and early seventies. The latter work dealt with female attitudes and behaviour in the traditional areas of personal relationships, marriage, the family, and certain sectors of the work force. By contrast, *The Obstacle Race* is a much more specialized and academic feminist work, an historical/psychological analysis of western female painters from the fifteenth to the twentieth centuries. Stylistically and tonally, too, the contrasts are marked: the liveliness and acerbity of *The Female Eunuch* give way to a much more subdued, even on occasion flat, prose; the deliberately calculated vulgarity and audacity of the earlier work is replaced by a more detached, self-effacing stance. Some readers may regret the loss of vigour, of what has been described as the necessary 'bile' of feminist outrage; others will see this recent academic specialization as a retreat from the more specifically political aims of the Women's Movement. Others, myself included, will welcome this publication as ultimately a more serious and chal-

lenging work than the admittedly more entertaining *Female Eunuch*. *The Obstacle Race* questions conventional — that is, patriarchal — assumptions about female psychology, social structures, art history, and history in general; but, to a greater extent than *The Female Eunuch*, it goes beyond specific attack, in this case to the encouragement of a sense of pride and dignity in female artistic endeavour. In re-evaluating art history from the standpoint of our society's subordinate culture, Greer helps to recover the sense of a supporting tradition, of models, from which women may work. In this sense, *The Obstacle Race* takes up where *The Female Eunuch* left off: to quote from the latter work's penultimate paragraph:

'... women with a studious bent might do well to research the historic role of women in some attempt to delimit our concepts of the natural and possible in the female sphere.'

In taking on this role in *The Obstacle Race*, Greer acknowledges from the outset that her historic stance is anti-patriarchal, her aesthetic criteria anti-*élitist*. She argues that the question, 'Why were there no great women painters?', implies reductively masculine and philistine value-judgements: for women, she succinctly observes, 'art history is a succession of insults.' The real questions for Greer are 'What is the contribution of women to the visual arts?' 'If there were any women painters, why were there not more?' 'If we can find one good painting by a woman, where is the rest of her work?' 'How good were the women who earned a living painting?' The ramifications of these questions involve Greer in a reassessment of the complex interplay of factors which have shaped our sense of the past five centuries of western painting: as art historian and feminist, she is by turns sociologist, psychologist and aesthete. This approach reinforces one's sense of the synthesising power of feminist ideology, that resistance to the traditionally 'masculine' tendency to classify and categorize ways of knowing.

Greer's feminist and anti-*élitist* sympathies account for her decision to include all known women painters from Europe and North America over the past five centuries. To single out the 'great' names would, according to Greer's criteria, simply reinforce the patriarchal as-

sumption that women artists are aberrations, freaks of nature. *Serious* criticism of women artists necessitates an examination of the tradition and continuity of their contribution. The strength of this approach is not weakened by a refusal to make aesthetic value-judgements: some artists are appraised as having little more than sociological or ideological significance. But even the 'failures' are instructive, as illustrated in Greer's discussions of the effects of repressive social and sexual stereotyping. Thus, for example, the possible consequences of the characteristically apologetic female self-image:

'Rosa Bonheur . . . was at the height of her fame still so uncertain of herself that, as she herself has said, she 'painted every grass blade twice over'. There is no doubt that the talent revealed in her sketches, one of which was exhibited at the 1977 'Women Painters' exhibition, is economical, assured and thoroughly painterly, while the finished works tend to be laboured, the paint surfaces deadened by too much handling. Another painter who divested her work of personality by painting out every brushstroke was Angelica Kauffmann. A preparatory sketch exhibited at Bregenz in 1968 was a revelation. Energetic, broad, loose and free, it seemed almost impossible that it had been painted by the same hand as the finished work. Women's preference for hard, flat surfaces and static forms and composition may in many cases be taken for a kind of protective posture, an artistic flinch. Until we have done the spade-work and put together the works and their preparatory sketches (many of which are passing as the work of better-known painters), this must be no more than a hypothesis.'

(Chapter VI, 'Primitivism', p. 131)

This is only one example of the kinds of pressures which shape women's self-image and hence their self-expression, and Greer argues here with characteristic balance, tact and sympathy.

In the attempt to be inclusive, however, the book suffers from a tendency to present little more than 'laundry lists' of names, dates and possible works. Such painstaking accumulations of examples make somewhat uninteresting reading for the non-specialist. Greer's dilemma is perhaps best illustrated by Chapter X, 'The Magnificent Exception', the only chapter devoted entirely to one woman, the seventeenth

century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi. It's true that Greer is aware here of having compromised her own critical stance and method: that awareness is registered in the chapter's semi-ironic title, and in the deliberate avoidance of hypocritical flattery, chivalric condescension. But it also remains true that this is one of the book's more interesting chapters, by virtue of its comparatively detailed and sustained examination of a complex figure. In defence of the lists, however, it must be said that the very absence or sketchiness of information about 'lost' women painters indicates the extent to which art history is the record of our male-dominated culture; and that the lists serve as valuable potential ground-work for future feminist art historians.

Desire for inclusiveness does not extend to living women painters, and again the justification is feminist and anti-*élitist*. Greer is anxious to avoid playing the 'cult of personality' game, and believes that in this case selection is invidious. It's worth noting in passing that similar sentiments prompted her decision not to discuss Australian women painters. Greer spoke in a recent interview of the difficulty of getting relevant historical data whilst conducting her ten-year research in Europe and North America, and concluded that it was better to leave out Australian women painters entirely rather than to select half-heartedly and in comparative ignorance.

Greer's ideological stance also explains the book's two-part division: an analysis of the barriers, external and internalized, against which women artists have contended; and an historical/generic survey of those women who have attempted to overcome the barriers. Understanding women's specific historical, social and psychological contexts is seen as the necessary precondition for understanding the scope, volume and value of their artistic achievements.

The detailed analysis of the obstacles (Chapters 1-7) makes for fascinating reading, a record of neglect, frustration, insult, slander, misattribution and reductive flattery. Greer singles out the striking fact that, prior to the nineteenth century, all known women painters were related to male painters — fathers, brothers, teachers, husbands, lovers. The consequences of dependency, economic, familial, emotional, are various and wide-ranging, from the more specific restrictions such as exclusion

from art training, to the internalizing of masculine social, sexual and aesthetic norms. In dealing with the latter process (always more insidious than concrete abuses, since the internal enemies are harder to fight), Greer emphasizes the alarming consistency with which women painters have been imitators, miniaturists, servants to the masters in the form of preparing, detailing and engraving their work. For the reader, such artistic activities come to take on the force of metaphors of self-denial, a process by which women accept the confined, reduced, subservient positions to which they have traditionally been assigned.

In discussing the consequences of this phenomenon of 'willing' self-sacrifice, it would be all too easy to glorify women painters as mere victims of brutish and oppressive male egos. But readers in search of shrillness and strident outrage — the vulgarized media view of feminism — will be disappointed: Greer consistently aims at sympathetic detachment and critical balance. She refuses, for example, to take up what she herself calls the 'feminist romanticization' of lost possibilities. A case in point is Marietta Robusti (1560-90), who, under the guidance of her father, Jacopo Robusti (the *terribile maestro*, Tintoretto), became an accomplished portraitist, musician and singer. This is Greer's account of the fortunes of Marietta, or La Tintoretta:

'Her fame spread to the courts of Spain and Austria. The Emperor Maximilian and Philip II both asked her father if she might come to work in their courts, but he refused. Instead, he found her a husband, Jacopo d'Augusta, head of the silversmiths' guild, who accepted the condition imposed by Tintoretto, that Marietta should not leave his household in his lifetime. There, four years later, she died in childbirth.

What she thought and felt about her life will never be known, for she furnishes no more than a paragraph or two in biographies of her father. Those tantalised by these cursory references have been only too eager to identify portraits of Venetian women of this period as self-portraits by Marietta and their misguided chivalry has simply fogged the issue with frivolous attributions. Modern scholars attribute none of the work of the Tintoretto *bottega* to her, although she worked there more or less full time for fifteen years. In the last years of her life, she is said to have portrayed all

her husband's colleagues for the silversmiths' guild and it is unthinkable that all these paintings can have perished, rather they have been submerged in the oceanic muddle of Tintoretto attribution.

Marietta Robusti seems to have been treated as a female prodigy, and to have been happy in that role, as far as anyone can judge. It is tempting to think that she was destroyed by her father's notorious egotism, but it is begging the question. Her talent might have after all been for being a daughter, rather than a painter. She may have been as dependent upon her father as her brother Domenico was. Without Tintoretto, perhaps neither would have painted a stroke.'

(Chapter I, 'Family', pp. 14-15)

Certainly, the facts of this woman's life suggest lost possibilities, but Greer sees no point in idle speculation. The making of romantic myths is in fact a disservice to the cause of women: such stories deal with assumptions as untested as the male myths they seek to destroy. *Real* concern lies in the patient, committed, often arduous and frustrating work which Greer herself undertook for ten years in the art galleries of Europe and North America.

Even where evidence *is* available, Greer refuses to labour the more notorious examples of sexism. Thus 'Edvard Munch, who asked that his sister's paintings not be exhibited because it excited her too much!' 'Crass persecution', as Greer aptly describes it; but to dwell on the famous would be to reduce her argument to the level of the anecdotal, mere coffee-table book chat.

Greer's critical tact is also evident in her assessment of the progress made by women artists since the late eighteenth century. She witnesses the influx of women painters to the art schools and academies with some caution, noting that '(a)s soon as art schools opened their doors to women, the modern phenomenon of the women being the student body while the men are the painters emerged.' In the examination of Pyrrhic victories in the book's final chapter (XVI, 'The Nineteenth Century'), Greer's psychologizing is particularly shrewd and acute. Thus for example:

'When the entry to a school is in itself a victory, it is more than ever likely that the teaching will be over-valued and failure to please one's teachers construed as evidence

of genuine lack of ability . . . More insidious than the teachers' contempt was their praise. At all the art schools women consistently bore off the honours . . . Women easily confused this kind of success with genuine artistic achievement. In such a situation it was very likely that the wrong women were encouraged, for true artistic ability often presents itself in a truculent aspect which does not find favour with paternalist teachers.' (p. 319)

This final chapter is in fact in some measure a recapitulation of the discussion of the internal battles against which women must struggle, in this case offered as a means of achieving genuine artistic progress. Again, Greer locates the problem chiefly in women's self-image: when one's image and activities are other-directed, the difficulty of finding one's own artistic voice is enormous. In proposing solutions for the woman artist, Greer eschews political action: 'the painter cannot expend her precious energy in polemic, and in fact very few women artists do.' What *is* proposed by way of specifics is the encouragement of a climate of intellectually supportive opinion, the offering of 'the kind of constructive criticism and financial, intellectual and emotional support that men have given their artists in the past. The first prerequisite is knowledge, not only of women's work but of the men's work to which it relates, and not in vague generalizations but precise examples. The young Californian women who came to the 'Women Painters: 1550-1950' exhibition in Los Angeles were often disappointed to see how closely the women's work related to that of the men, whom they knew more about, and many of them lost interest right there. That should have been the starting point, for understanding how women artists sometimes led men, were plundered and overtaken, is an important part of recovering our history.' (p. 327). One need only add that *The Obstacle Race*, intelligent, exhaustively researched and documented, sympathetic and committed to women's artistic endeavours, is an important contribution to that process of historical recovery.

The value of this book is both specific and general. As an exploratory work of feminist art history, it offers an impressive quantity of material for future researchers. It provides too, for those researchers, a critical model, practical suggestions, and the example of patient and balanced concern. It acts as an encouragement

to women 'with a studious bent' to recover the history of women in other areas of endeavour. Even more generally, the material in the book, indeed the very achievement of the book itself, encourages women to view themselves with increasing respect and seriousness.

It would also be encouraging to think that *The Obstacle Race* might help to undermine the media's view of Germaine Greer as some kind of Amazonian sex-pot. On returning to Australia after the publication of *The Female Eunuch*, male journalists greeted Greer with a series of innuendos about her sex-life, to which she contemptuously retorted, 'Do you mean, do I do it?' The publication of *The Obstacle Race* ought to ensure that Greer and her work aren't trivialized again.

SUSAN KOBULNICZKY

A. J. Baker, *Anderson's Social Philosophy*, Angus & Robertson, 1979, 152 pp. \$12.95 hb., \$7.95 pb.

"That fifty years ago John Anderson left Scotland for Australia is, in my judgment, the greatest single piece of intellectual good fortune our country has ever experienced."

(John Passmore in *Quadrant*, June 1977)

Anderson became Challis professor of philosophy in the University of Sydney in 1927 and held the chair until 1958, three years before his death. In his last years Anderson's whole idea of philosophy as being, centrally, an attempt to determine the general features of reality, seemed to many to be washed up. The attempt is now again a contemporary enterprise, nowhere more than in Australia, and Anderson is much more a man of the 1970s than he was of the 1950s.

"Empiricist", "realist", "materialist", "pluralist", "naturalist", "determinist", are terms which Anderson accepted as describing different aspects of his general philosophy. They are all open to misunderstanding, along with a number of other terms belonging to his social philosophy. (Andersonian "empiricism", for example, besides much that would usually be thought of as empiricist, is pre-eminently a

rejection of the splitting of reality into different "levels" — God goes out, almost incidentally, on this score.) Anderson's writing is studded with easily misunderstood, hard to understand terms. This is one reason why an exposition of any area of his thought is welcome. Another reason is that although Anderson was an extraordinarily systematic philosopher, his own writing (mostly in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*) is fragmentary.

In the first half of his book, A. J. Baker, a former student of Anderson's and closely connected with him, sets out Anderson's moral and social thought. Baker must have a very thorough knowledge of Anderson's oral teaching. One hears it said by those who are familiar with this teaching that it makes a big difference to the understanding of Anderson, and unfamiliar with it, confined to the cryptic written word, one feels that it must be so. But perhaps this is a mistake. The oral teaching doesn't seem to have made much difference to Baker's exposition: certainly the bulk of the material he draws on is printed.

Explanation of Anderson's terms and systematic exposition of his moral and social philosophy, one gets from Baker. Another thing one would very much like from an Andersonian is an explanation of Anderson's intellectual influence on first rate minds — some of them, it has been thought, better than his own. The remark about Anderson quoted from Passmore, characteristically sober and accurate in judgment, indicates how phenomenal this influence was. There is no particular reason, though, why an expositor of Anderson should feel called upon to explain his influences, and Baker does not explain it.

Finally, in an Andersonian study of Anderson's thought one would like, beyond the run of ordinary clarificatory exposition, an elucidation of views of Anderson's which can seem to other philosophers quite simply incredible. One would like an elucidation which dissolves that appearance. Several of these views came up in Ryle's article "Logic and Professor Anderson" in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (May, 1952) — a rare notice of Anderson by the outside world, and a mark of Ryle's interest in Australian philosophy. Anderson is praised for his "deflationist" attacks on a range of metaphysical theories but why, Ryle asks, is he "driven to tell his equally impossible stories

about mathematics, good, and implication?" — that something is good establishable in the same general way as that something is sulphur, geometry an empirical science, implication a sensible fact.

There was no call on Baker to do anything about producing an elucidatory defence of Anderson's views on the nature of geometry and implication. In fact, he does help us towards a preliminary understanding of these views. To comprehend them it is essential to see how Anderson saw observation. Baker helps us here by illustrations which show that, for Anderson, observation was no matter of mere sense perception as opposed to understanding:

"the natural is open to *observation* without this having to be restricted to sense-perception in a narrow sense; we cannot straightforwardly see or smell, etc., the State, trade unions or universities, for instance, but nevertheless social phenomena like organisations and movements and the activities that go on in them, including good activities, are definitely existing, observable, *natural* phenomena" (p. 33).

Does this passage (which is not written with any reference to Ryle) help us with being good establishable in the same general way as being sulphur? We need to look at a nearby passage from Baker as well.

"What things have the natural quality good? The answer is that there are certain definite human activities that are of a productive or enterprising character, which communicate themselves and co-operate with one another . . . Specific examples of ethical goods are investigation, aesthetic creation and appreciation, enterprise, liberty, courage and love" (p. 34).

These good activities and states are certainly observable in the same general way as the State or universities. But how about their being good? The passage quoted above gives (in summary) Anderson's answer to the question "What things have the natural quality good?", but what is his answer to the question, "What is it that these things have; what is the natural quality of good itself?". There is a general Andersonian reason, of a type deployed against any splitting of reality into levels, why good has got to be a natural quality. Suppose it to be otherwise. Then, ordinary observation per-

ceives the *activity* which is good, and some altogether mysterious non-ordinary observation ("intuition") perceives the quality *good* possessed by the activity. But what hybrid perceives that the *activity is good*?

Is it Anderson's view that an activity's being good is its possessing one or more of a number of qualities such as being productive or enterprising? A view of this sort runs into a well-known difficulty which becomes apparent when we ask ourselves about the meaning our words would have if we wanted to call these qualities themselves good. Is it, then, perhaps Anderson's view that goodness is a further quality characterizing each of these qualities and through them the activities which are good? But what could this further quality be? It doesn't look as though it could in any way resemble the qualities, such as being enterprising, to which it attaches or be in any way constitutive of them. There is, however, something which this conjectural further quality does resemble and that is the "non-natural" quality of goodness which Moore (against whom Anderson in part defined his position) believed that we intuit in seeing that some activity or state of affairs is good.

How Anderson conceived of the quality good, is the question which someone approaching an exposition of his thought, would most like to see taken up. Perhaps Baker regarded it as too philosophical a question for the reader he had in mind. In any case, it needs to be mentioned that one of the merits of the book is that it can all be understood by a reader with no knowledge of technical philosophy.

In the field of ethics, Anderson's deflationary moves were made against "Moralism", against conceptions such as the obligatory, "taken to be that which is essentially demanded of us", and "the moral law" conceptions which (in Baker's words) "promise philosophical content but which have none", which have instead "hidden social content". This content will be exposed by social criticism. The action is not required by "the good", "the obligatory" or by "the moral law", because there are no such things; "by whom is it demanded, then", Anderson asks, "and what is his policy?" "It is not surprising", Anderson remarks in this connection, "that the Athenians looked for Socrates's political affiliations when he claimed to take the pure moral stand".

Implicit here is Anderson's view of the nature of society. Explicitly, Anderson held society to be "a multiplicity of interrelated groups", co-operating and in conflict with one another. From this view of the nature of society, it follows that "Solidarism" — the idea that (as Baker describes it) "society as such has a general interest or good, or a set of common interest or goods" — is, like Moralism, a fraud. It is a view of society which has practical implications — against over-all planning, for instance. If it does not entail Anderson's pessimistic view of human kind, it certainly gives no countenance to optimism. Faith in Progress, is the sheerest illusion. History of course has no direction.

The individuality of Anderson's thought comes through well in Baker's account of his "social pluralism" and of what he made of the thinkers — Marx, Freud, Sorel — who especially influenced him. Freud, though, is presented with surprisingly diminished significance for Anderson.

The second part of the book, drawing on material from out-of-the-way sources, takes the reader deftly through Anderson's public life, from his early association with the Communist Party in Australia, of which he was never a member but of which he was for a time appointed Theoretical Adviser, through his Trotskyist period and the increasingly strong anti-communism of his later years and through the controversies also in which he was involved on behalf of academic freedom and against religion in education.

Near the beginning of his book Baker has a quotation from Anderson which is a nice distillation of his thought and attitude. It comes from a passage in which Anderson speaks of "the thorough-going objectivism" of the Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, who influenced him strongly and who was, he says:

"unremitting in his attack on subjectivist illusions, on the operation of desire or the imagining of things as we should like them to be, as opposed to the operation of understanding or the finding of things (including our own activities) as they positively are, with no granting of a privileged position in reality to gods, men or molecules, with conflict everywhere and nothing above the battle" (p. 3).

S. A. GRAVE

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Ockerism, Althusser and Saint Patrick...

make an assorted trio, particularly when the ockers in question are John Singleton and Joe Bjelke-Petersen. However, they all happily consort in *Overland* no. 78.

How may this be so? we hear you cry. Well, Glen Lewis has an important article on the New Ockerism, the populist conservatism that is creeping into Australian political life — winning votes and, as Lewis says, making people we'd normally think of as ratbags look reasonable. Jonathan Dawson has a splendid little satirical story on the topic of an Althusser academic worrying about entering on his age of the bourgeois accumulation of property. (Stories by James McQueen and Barry Hill, too.) And David Dunstan writes on the turbulent history of the Melbourne St Patrick's Day processions.

Manning Clark and Jim O'Connor write on Brian Fitzpatrick, and we reproduce Noel Counihan's famous caricature of the 'Swanston Family' push. Elizabeth Sweeting on problems of funding the arts, two insights into Whyalla, *many* poems and some important reviews.

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