WESTERLY

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WESTERLY

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REVIEWS

MOYA ELLIS

Accident

I hate the shack. I would never have built a shack like this. Small windows cut out of the tin, rusty fly wire crumbling. There was not enough light. Afraid of the dark, she always checked under the bed for goannas, and walked clear of the corners in case of redbacks. She lay quiet in the half dusk staring at the ridges in the walls. The suitcase sat on the floor half open. There was nothing else in the room, only the bed. Closing her eyes, she turned onto her side, hand on her stomach. She dozed off in fits and starts. The ten o'clock news came from the kitchen; she couldn't remember anything after that.

The sun broke through the wire, catching off the ridges of galvanised iron. Groggy, she staggered to the bathroom. The water was cold, spurting down onto the tub. The cold woke her up. Soaping fast, she was in and out. She sniffed the towel. It was dirty, time to wash them again. She started to dress, then stopped and went into the kitchen in her panties. Bacon and eggs. No milk left. She went to the back door and stretched, pleased at her freedom. Yawning, she stretched again. The air was muggy. She pinched her belly. A bit too fat, no bread today. Black coffee, no sugar, bacon and eggs on a chipped blue plate. She laughed when she sat down, rolls of fat settling. Shit it doesn't matter. She got up and got a slice of bread and sat down to eat. Good bread. She wiped the plate with it. She cleaned up and dressed, then went out the front to see if the car was coming.

The road was empty. The sky was heavy, too grey to swim. Her stepfather had told her once that sharks come out on cloudy days. She stared a while at the road but the bulldust didn't move. Sullen scrubby little bushes struggled out of the red dust. She went inside and switched on the radio, then lit a cigarette, the first for the day. She leaned up against the back door. The sea was pretty murky. It was too humid, the sweat was prickling her skin. She had wanted to go to town too, or wherever they went, but they wouldn't let her. She had never asked before. Never asked where they went or what they did. Your number one virtue, John had said once. You don't ask stupid questions. Every time they left she was never sure they would come back. It was alright being by herself for a change but after a day or so she got restless. She lit another cigarette. Well if I wasn't here I'd be working in some greasy spoon getting varicose veins. That last one was a real ruby. She cocked her head. The car was coming.

'G'day,' Blue called.

'G'day. Have a good trip?'

'Yeah, it was alright,' John said. 'Anything happen?'

'No.'

John unlocked the boot for the groceries.

'Did you remember the powdered milk? There's none left.'

'Yeah, yeah,' John said.

'Did youse have breakfast?'

'I'm starving,' Blue said.

'Okay.' She grabbed a bag and went in to get breakfast for them.

The afternoon was warm even on the verandah. She lay on the old stretcher waiting for the sea breeze. A black ant hurrying across the floor was the only movement. Bulldust sifting into the cracks, gathering in stripes between the boards. Somewhere inside John and Blue were talking, probably drinking in the kitchen. She lay immersed in her thoughts, thoughts stringing out like bubbles that faded away. A vaguely happy feeling. She drowsed off.

Sweat trickled down her hairline, down her neck. Saliva dribbling out of her mouth onto the canvas. She wiped her mouth, then sat up groggy. John and Blue were playing cards out the back.

'Did you get my magazines?'

'Yeah. They're in there,' John said. 'I thought I put them on the table.'

'I had trouble with the stove, you'll have to look at it.'

'Okay,' John said, dealing.

She went and got the magazines, spreading them out on the table. Autumn fashions. Princess Anne's marriage, success or failure. A new short story by Annabelle Cartwright. How to introduce romance in your marriage. She made a cup of tea and started with the Women's Weekly. The dreamy sleepy feeling wouldn't go away. She stretched and yawned, unable to concentrate on the magazine. She flicked through, looking at the fashions and make-up. The women looked cool and beautiful, in another world. She went to stand in the doorway, watching the sun go down over the sea. Blue's blunt hands were cutting the cards fast. John's sandy hair was starting to straggle down to his T shirt.

'About time I cut your hair again John.'

'Mmm,' he grunted, at her or at his hand.

She pushed herself away from the doorway and wandered down to the beach. The seabreeze was cool. She rolled her sleeves down and sat, her hands around her knees. The little breakers were building up, coming in stronger. Maybe a storm coming, maybe just the night. Strings of brown bubble seaweed were washing up on the beach, the kind you could pop between your fingers. She sat rocking slightly, in rhythm with the breakers, a slight to and fro motion. She sat a long time, hypnotised by the movement. The sea always put a spell on her. Her arms started to pimple with the cold. She stood up, rubbing them. On impulse, she took her sandals off and started to run, then to leap in the air. Like a ballerina on stage she leapt again and again, then fell into the sand giggling. She sat to get her breath back, then brushed her shirt and pants down and put the sandals back on and went back to get the dinner. She could hear the generator and the lights were on in the kitchen.

'Where did you go?' John asked.

'For a walk.'

'You're always disappearing' Blue said.

'Did you fix the stove,' she said to John. 'Here, the back burner,' she pointed.

A gas hotplate with four burners was set alongside the sink. Grease spattered the walls and bench around it. John came around and leaned over it. She brushed past him, her breast grazing his elbow. She looked up. Blue was watching, his eyes narrowed. She washed her hands and started to get the food out of the fridge.

'The burner's blocked, that's all,' John said. 'Just scrub it out then I can see if there's anything else wrong.'

'Okay, ta.'

John took two more beers out.

'We'll have to start thinking of getting some money soon.'

'Not this week. Next week we can think about it.'

'I was thinking we could sell the wagon.'

Blue looked at him in disbelief. 'What do you mean, sell it? Are you crazy?'

'Look we could always pick up something for four or five hundred. Maybe even a couple of bikes. It's worth four thousand at least to us now and we need the dough. Here, I wrote it out. HX Monaro, stereo, GTS dash, tach, clock, front and rear spoilers, radials, auto, V8, low mileage, $6,000.'

'No. No way mate. We need wheels.'

'We can get another one. Think about it. What do you think Carol? Think it's a good idea?'

'I don't know,' she said sullenly. 'Do whatever you think's best.'

She served the hamburgers and they ate in silence.

'You want another game Blue?' John asked as he poured another beer.

Carol cleared and washed the dishes. 'I'm going to bed now,' she said. 'I feel nauseous.'

'Okay,' John said.

She lay curled up in the dark, her stomach filled with a dull liquid ache like it was bleeding inside. She rocked herself to sleep.

The cool air woke her up in the morning. She reached for the cover, the cool salty air frosting her like a sheet of glass. She curled up and the glass shattered. Unprotected, she lay waiting. Slowly the morning warmth filled her. She blinked awake and got out of bed. The shower made her tingle with warmth, the blood rushing up. She made a cup of tea and went out on the couch. I've got a lifetime ahead of me. Twenty-nine. Twenty-nine, thirty. Thirty-one, thirty-two. Stupid. Twenty-nine. She felt like a gin and tonic like the old days. Sundays especially. A beer for breakfast after Saturday night. Then about lunch time she would start on the gin and tonic. John was always there, John with his beerbelly. She went in and got a stubbie. She settled down on the couch, drinking it fast. She went in to get another one. After a couple more she fell asleep.

She woke up with a headache. The sun hurt her eyes. She got up slowly and went inside for an aspirin and breakfast. Bacon and eggs, an aspirin and a cup of coffee and a cigarette. She ate silently. Blue dealt a fresh hand.

'You feel alright?' John asked.

'I'm okay.'

'You're losing John.'

She washed the dishes and took the Women's Weekly out on the verandah. She read it and went in for another one and an apple. She sat dreamily eating the apple. White green flesh browning fast as she stared at it. A translucent shell covering the seed. Green skin with flecks of red. It looked strange and familiar all at once. The flesh sparkled with juice. Juice dripped down her chin. She stared at the apple, then out at the road. Nothing, no movement. Everything was the same. She threw the apple core at the nearest bush. Two cars appeared, and as she watched, they collided. The smaller one spun off the road, dust rising.

'John, Blue,' she called.

'What's up?' Blue said. 'An accident.'

'Maybe we should go and help,' John said.

'Don't be silly mate, what help are we gonna be? And what are we gonna say when the cops arrive? We can't do nothing to help nobody right now.'

Carol sat down again, her hands on her stomach. A vague dull ache filled her.

'Where's the glasses?' John said. He came back with the binoculars.

Small figures were walking round, inspecting the damage. They were looking at the grey car, ploughed off the side of the road. The two pushed futilely at it.

They stopped, looking around.

'Let me see,' Blue said.

'They're just smoking,' John said. 'Waiting for another car. We could go and give a hand, we could show ourselves.'

'Yeah and what if they want to know where we came from?'

'Look times have changed. It's alright now, I can feel it.'

'You can feel it. You can feel what? No risks, right? No risks.'

Carol got up and went inside. John came to the door.

'What's the matter?'

'I've got a pain.'

'Where?'

'In my stomach.'

'What'd you eat? It's that booze. You shouldn't have drunk that booze.'

'I don't know, I just don't feel good.'

'Well just lie down and rest.'

He went out and she lay in the dark, her hands on her stomach. The liquid ache subsided slowly. The smell of food from the kitchen made her hungry. She got up and went to the back door. They were still playing cards. She leaned against the doorway, watching the sun set, her hand on her stomach.

'We're all bruised,' she whispered.

'What?' John said.

'Bruised and bloody bleeding,' she said dreamily.

'I can't hear you,' he said, dealing.

She watched the sun go down, then went inside to eat.

ANDREW SANT

Oslo

At first a puddle's
stillness, a breath

of the Arctic
across the glistening street

will remind you of that wilderness
of ice to the far north

shifting south,
narrowing the keen perspectives

of fishermen
to a few shortening days

of freezing seas
like those pictured

on packets of fish
in a supermarket.

Numbed fingers will recall
the uninhabitable

tundra wastes
as your hands explore

for warmth
in your pockets,

and those sparse populations
whose thoughts

visit here
to be made busy

along the icy
well trodden streets.

BRUCE DAWE

Spaghetti Poem

for Judy

You said as we left the airport (me with my head
reverberating like the whole of AC-DC and especially
Angus Young) "I'll take you to a little
restaurant in Carlton where they make a particularly
good spaghetti"—or at least that's what I *thought*
you said (and if it hadn't been for those post-flight vibes and *especially*
Angus Young I'd have realized
you said "*rotten* spaghetti" or "*interesting* spaghetti").
Well semantics notwithstanding we pushed it around a little the way
you do the cat's doings if you can't get him
to the door in time or the way kids toe a bit of something mysterious
(*Hmph? Errhh!*)
washed up on the beach in the early morning and then we chose
cheese cake because that's pretty hard to play games with
on the chef's night off but I could see even with the reduced bill
you paid for the experience that Melbourne was (as ever) shaping up
to be memorable and that was before I went to bed and dreamt
all my favourite *rotten* dreams in one go and woke
to find *The Sun* on my doorstep with *Percy Jones*
Gets the Blues sharing the front page with *Family's*
Triple Tragedy and I knew what it was, at last,
to be *home* . . .

BRUCE DAWE

The Swimming Pool

for Mark Macleod

Every summer we construct the sea
from rusting bits and pieces specially kept
under the house through three indifferent seasons.
The floor of the back-yard ocean slopes despite
excavations that gave us a nominal hill
converted to a rockery . . .
Each morning
we patrol its limits, scooping out
the overnight freight of soggy insects (moths,
midges, mosquitoes, beetles, flying ants), puzzling over
the latest delinquency of the filter pump, the first
rumour of algae on the P.V.C. . . .
Our dream:
the simple one of holding in one place
by nuts and bolts and galvabond and tape
10,000 litres of town water hydrophaned
as carefully as supreme incompetence
can hope to effectuate, and so sustain
within the compass of too brief a season
a Mediterranean of splashing laughter,
a *mare nostrum* of sleek happiness, a con
to cheat the years, to sucker the smug sun,
and give the forks to all necessity.

JUDY SEAGER

The Waiting

I saw you first in the window of a train,
roaring through my country station.
Idly you turned and met my eye
and my peace was gone,
as the valley's peace was gone,
torn by the thunder of the train's passing.
The last light winked around the curve
and the night wind returned. A bird
complained, a farm dog barked a field away
and quiet came back.

But for me there was no peace.
In anguished loss I stood
seeing clearly the line of nose and cheek,
the way the hair grew round your neck,
and your eyes that looked at me
in startled recognition.

I have looked for you down the hurrying years.
Once in a rainswept street you drove past
laughing with a girl.
She had yellow hair and was beautiful.
At a concert once I saw you:
The music had no power to move me.
I heard nothing but the insistence of my will
that you would turn and look at me,
but you did not and I let you go,
afraid to move closer in the homeward going crowd,
for fear you would not know me.

I have lain sleepless in the grey of dawn
and with that awful clarity of thought
that comes at day's beginning,
have known you are not real.
My heart has imagined you
and we will never meet.
Oh how can I bear to go down
into my last years
not marking the disillusioned day
I said goodbye,
when I have never held your hand
and said hello.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

Diary of a Failed Assassin

Sunday

They wounded me with their cameras. Stole my image and sold it to television.

I got it back on the news tonight—the nurses showed me. They said I was famous. Or infamous.

His image was there too. He was sorry for me, he said—the lie leaking from the corners of his mouth like rich treacle. Spoiling his expensive shirt. A politician, most definitely.

The nurses all work for him, of course. The whole bloody *state* works for him —if you can call it work. The whole state coffee-breaks for him. A million private servants all not working for him, and he keeps right on paying them. A fat cheque every fortnight, minus the tax with which he pays them the next fortnight. Minus the tax with which he pays them the fortnight after that. One fortnight it won't add up anymore. The leech will have sucked itself dry.

Speaking of leeches, here they come again—bringing the drugs he ordered. The phone rang, and now they are bringing me drugs—it all adds up. The phone rings every few minutes. Have I squealed yet? I can hear his voice asking. Have I terminated? With extreme prejudice?

The voices of the nurses answer that I am writing. Engaged in writing behaviour. Everything here is a kind of behaviour—eating behaviour, sleeping behaviour, breathing behaviour.

The phone rings again, and they bring me more drugs. Drug bringing behaviour. They bring me a handful of capsules—green and palest blue like small exquisite planets. I protect them under my tongue, spit them later into the safety of my pillow. One day their inhabitants will thank me. Thanking behaviour.

Monday

Today breakfast came in a needle, and I couldn't spit it out.

He may be evil, but he's no fool. The phone rang, and they came and found the capsules. A galaxy of tiny peaceful worlds, so unlike this one.

He won't spit *us* out. He'll suck us slowly, keep us in a corner of his cheek. He'll suck our juices, our money, our will. He'll suck our spines like soft ice-cream. I would weep, but tears wash nothing away. Only the strong inherit the earth.

And sometimes not even the strong. I tighten my muscles into fists of stone, but the needles still enter. Their warmth floods over me, but I will never love him. They can't make me love him.

Tuesday

Today I was questioned by an actress. She was wearing a white coat that was far too large. A pendant for listening to hearts decorated her neck.

'Of course I still want to kill him!' I said. 'For you!' I said. 'Look at the lines he's scripted for you. Look at your costume.'

For a moment she seemed uncertain—a glimmer of autonomy. Or perhaps it was just her perfume.

'Seize your life!' I advised, but she suddenly remembered her role.

She was an expert with needles. I turned myself to marble again, but she could have found a vein in Michaelangelo's Pietà. She pierced my arm, and the drug washed slowly through me. Warm vinegar.

Wednesday

Things seem somehow clearer today. We walked in the garden after lunch—the air washed clean by rain, filled with shafts of thin sunlight. She asked me was it right to kill.

'In self-defence.' I answered. 'Or the defence of loved ones.'

'But if it wasn't your decision?' she went on. 'If you weren't responsible? A chemical mix-up in the brain, for instance—or a short circuit. Like a fit—a murderous fit!'

I listened, and kept my peace.

'How could it be self-defence?' she persisted. 'He didn't even know you. Nobody in their right mind . . .'

I listened and listened and was safe. If I opened my mouth they put things in it.

Thursday

Reading back over the last few entries I find the words somehow unfamiliar. Even the handwriting seems strange—but it's definitely mine. Perhaps the newspapers are right—temporary insanity. The excuse doesn't ease me though—or soften the knowledge that I tried to kill a man. Even an evil man.

I wonder what they are saying at the office—they must have seen it all on television. Someone possessing my image waving a gun around Parliament House. I grow embarrassed thinking about it—wondering what else my image might have done. Flashed itself at the typists' pool perhaps, or beaten the boss with its fists. I shudder imagining what happened—with all the deliciousness of immunity. The whole week is still a blank to me.

Friday

The Drug Problem drove me to it—it was the final straw. He planned to legalise them—he's been planning it for years. I'm sure he even smokes them himself—or snorts them, or shoots them up, or inserts them wherever else they can be inserted. I've learnt a lot about drugs in the last few days—they rattle inside with every step I take.

Still, I guess he didn't deserve to die. A jail sentence perhaps—as an accessory before the fact. Five or six years for the manslaughter of addicts, for the suicide of the unemployed.

Then again, even that might be too harsh. He could probably plead insanity himself—especially if he was taking drugs. Subtle voltage changes in the brain—the difference between right and wrong. Processes over which he had no control. For the first time I feel a kind of understanding for him—even pity. The natural pity of a lunatic for a politician.

Saturday

She's not going to let me out, I can see that now. I've confessed that I was mad, but it wasn't enough. Admittedly, I don't remember much about it, but I can read the evidence in my diary. No-one deserves to be murdered—not without a fair trial, anyway.

I walked with her in the garden again today.

'He's still a criminal!' I said. 'He's turning us into bludgers. An air-conditioned Welfare State. A city of tea and paté breaks, and Public Disservice!'

'Are those the sentiments of a balanced mind?' she asked.

'If I wasn't balanced I wouldn't know, would I?' I answered.

'I've heard that one before,' she said, and started scribbling in her pad. *Pressure of speech*, I read. *Humorous behaviour.*

'Look!' I attempted. 'I *was* nuts—but now I'm not. I won't do it again, I promise. I'll even keep taking my tablets—Lunatic's honour!'

'Calm down,' she said. 'You're getting too excited.'

'What about Richard Nixon?' I tried one last time. 'Plenty of people think he was criminal. You don't go around locking them up!'

'He *was* criminal!' she said.

'Snap!' I shouted, but she didn't understand. Or pretended that she didn't.

Sunday

She didn't visit me today—she was writing the Court report. But the phone rang, and the nurses brought more drugs.

I hid them in my cheeks, and released them later in the garden. If the phone keeps ringing, perhaps he *will* have to die after all. Self defence behaviour.

ROD MORAN

High Rise Sniper

Lord of his Babel,
the suburb prone along his sight,
determined the world
must share his dark; not madness
this hatred, but vengeance
for his torment, our making.

He is our mirror,
the logic of our streets.

Each squeezed shot shatters
a glowing window;
light dies, a body slumps,
falls like a question mark.

Sirens; the strutting strobe
goose-steps across the pavement.

Surrounded, he is lord of his tower;
they cannot stop
his final free-fall.

ELSE ANDERSON

The Custodian

The lady smiled a big red smile. She said, 'So this is Jamie. Hullo darling.'
I held tight to Grandma's hand.

'Aren't you a big boy?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Come and sit up here, I think we might have some barley sugars here for a lovely big boy. Do you like barley sugars?'

'Yes,' I said, and she gave me two. I put one in my mouth and one in my pocket. Grandma said, 'Jamie's got nine yellow chicks and a lovely big dog. Tell the lady what Wooster does, Jamie.'

'He brings the paper in and he fetches balls and sticks.'

'Isn't that wonderful?' the lady said, 'what a clever dog. Did Wooster bring the paper in today?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Did he? What else happened today?'

'Mummy and Daddy didn't get up all day,' I told her.

'Oh, were they very sleepy?'

I said 'Yes.'
Then she asked me, 'What else happened? Did a visitor come to your house?'

'Grandpa came,' I said, 'then he went away, then he came back again with Uncle Barry and Mister Simpson and two other men.'

Grandma said, 'That was this afternoon, darling, the lady wants to know did anyone come before that, did anyone come in the morning?'

I didn't say anything. Then the lady said, 'Was there anyone besides you and Mummy and Daddy at your house this morning?'

'Wooster was there,' I said.

'Okay, Wooster was there, but sweetheart was-there-any-other-person-there?' The lady talked loud and slow.

I said, 'If you throw a ball or a stick, Wooster will bring it right back to where you are.'

'That's wonderful,' the lady said. She looked at Grandma. 'It seems we're getting nowhere fast."
She talked low and quick.

Grandma said, 'Well, I explained to you how things are; this fellow will be eight in July.'

The lady looked at me. She said, 'He's a good boy, aren't you Jamie?' She smiled at me again. Her smile was like she drew it on her face with a red crayon and there was no pleased inside of it.

Auntie Pat said, 'It's terrible to think of the police questioning a child. Especially a child like poor little Jamie.'

Grandma said, 'I know dear, but she was lovely to him, and what else can they do? They've found nothing to give them any clues, and as far as anyone knows, Jamie was the only other person in the house. Not that he was much help to them. The poor little chap doesn't even seem to realise that Peter and Bev are . . ."

Grandpa told her, 'Shutup here he comes.'

'Hullo, here's our little man,' Grandma said in a surprised voice, like she hadn't expected me.

Uncle Barry said, 'Hey Buster, how about you and me play a game of marbles?'

I told him, 'you're too big to play marbles.'

'No, I'm not,' he said, 'not today, I'm not, look at me,' and he sort of sat beside me like he was some big frog.

'See, we're the same size,' he said, 'twins, we are. We twins'll play marbles.'

Uncle Barry had a big jar of marbles that he showed me one day. They were all different colours and there was a great big yellow one on the top. He was saving them for his kid that he was going to have one day. He wanted his kid to know that his Dad used to be the marble champ of Footscray.

We played three games and I won every time. Then Uncle Barry gave me three more marbles on top of the ones that I won. Then he gave me the big yellow one. Then he pushed the jar over to me. He said, 'You take that. You have all of 'em."

I said, 'What about the kid?'

He said, 'What kid?'

I said, 'Your kid that you're going to have one day and he's going to know that his Dad was the marble champ of Footscray.'

Uncle Barry said, 'Arrr that, I mightn't ever have a kid, and he mightn't like to play marbles. You take 'em. Go on. Take 'em.'

Grandma gave me cocoa, but she didn't take the nasty skin off the top. She gave me three biscuits, two chocolate ones with white icing in the middle, and one with a hole cut in it, and red jam put in the hole. She said, 'Jamie darling, you'll be staying with me and Grandpa and Uncle Barry and Auntie Pat all the time now because God has taken your Mummy and Daddy to be with him in Heaven.'

'Both of them?' I asked her. She didn't talk. She just nodded. Then she hugged me and then she put three kisses half way between my ear and the top of my head.

'Will they be coming back?' I said.

'No,' Grandma said, 'but they won't forget you. You can talk to them when you say your prayers. You won't see them, but they'll hear you all right. And it's a beautiful place, Heaven is, they'll be very happy there.'

'Are there dogs there?'

'Lots of dogs,' Grandma said, 'good dogs.'

'Are there chickens?'

'Certainly there's chickens,' Grandma said, 'definitely chickens. And there's pretty flowers and clouds all different colours like balloons and there's beautiful music.'

'Who plays the music?'

'Angels,' Grandma said, 'angels playing hearts.'

Grandpa was sitting at the kitchen table by himself drinking some drink. The bottle was on the table in front of him. He looked up when I came in.

'Hullo,' he said, 'another bloke like meself that can't sleep, hey?' I asked him, 'Can I taste that drink?'

'Nar, not that,' he said, 'that's not for kids, that's Old Man's Drink. If kids drink that it burns their stummicks. But if an old man like meself drinks it, it's good for him, it eases the aches.'

'Why is it different when an old man drinks it?' I asked him.

'Arr, that's a mystery,' he said, 'it's a mystery drink, a mystery misery drink.'

'Here,' he said, getting up out of his chair and going to the fridge, 'we must have some drink here to ease the misery of a little bloke. Here we are.' He got out the blue jug of milk and he got a cup off the shelf and he poured some milk into it. He kept pouring when the milk was over the top, then he said, 'Oops,' and he tried to put some milk back into the jug but it slopped on the sink.

I took little sips of my milk, and Grandpa took big swallows of Old Man's Drink and for a long time we didn't say anything. Then I said, 'Grandma said I'm going to stay with you all the time now because God has taken Mummy and Daddy to Heaven. Grandma said Heaven's a beaut place, and there's good dogs and chickens.'

Grandpa stopped drinking. 'Grandma said that? Grandma been there herself, has she? Been there and checked out the accommodation in advance has she?'

'No, 'course she hasn't,' I said, 'but she knows about it. And there's pretty flowers and clouds all different colours like balloons and angels playing hearts.'

'Not hearts, sonny, *harps*, angels play bloody harps, that's what angels do for a living.'

'Grandma said hearts,' I told him.

'Okay, have it your way,' he said. His glass was empty, but he didn't fill it up again. He moved it around in a ring, slow, three times, then he moved it sideways. Then he said in a low voice, looking at the glass like he was talking to it, 'The little bloke was there the whole time. He was in the house with them all morning.' Then he looked at me, 'Listen,' he said, 'just between us two, straight up now, man to man, do you know what happened? I mean what I mean, what I'm asking you is: do you know what happened?'

I said, 'Me and Uncle Barry played marbles and I won every time and he gave me the big jar of marbles that he was saving for his kid.'

Grandpa said, 'Oh Christ,' and he laid his head down on the table. After a while he started snoring. I went back to bed and I thought about Grandma saying that if I talked to Mummy and Daddy when I said my prayers they would hear me. I kneeled down beside my bed and first I said, gentle Jesus meek amd mild. Then I said, 'Hullo Mummy and Daddy, this is Jamie, I'm at Grandma and Grandpa's place. Grandma gave me cocoa but she didn't take the skin off the top. Me and Uncle Barry played marbles and I won every time and he gave me the big jar of marbles that he was saving for his kid.'

'A lady smiled a red smile and she asked me things, but I never told her. Grandpa drank Old Man's Drink and he asked me do you know, but I never told him the things what happened. You can be happy now in that beaut place with all them good dogs and chickens and the angels playing hearts. I will look after everything. This is Jamie saying goodbye for now.'

JEAN KENT

Skylab Poems

(i)

5/7/1979

When Skylab falls could it hit me?
That flying seventy-seven tonne emblem
of technological breakthrough which next week
like a frisbee will come fluttering
to meet us, some of it falling in a metal-studded belt
BUT be assured scientists in (God Save) America
are monitoring its homecoming there is only
one chance in six million (approximately)
that you or I will be killed
although it is possible
that debris may rocket like a hole
through the head onto an urban area whack
solid as a mighty MacDonald's
breadclap in which case
the chance of being mincemeat increases
astronomically
However, to even fear such a consequence
would be *paranoia*, unreasonable
as the delusions of the bald Viennese at Broughton Hall
who screams in group therapy: "It's Idi Amin
behind the rhododendrons! He's come to ambush Australia!
—the psychiatrist, thick-skinned,
just smiles

What would you *do*, I asked, if it were going
to fall on you, if there were some way
besides sky reports the stars and the lastminute fireworks
some way that you *knew*, what would you

But of course it was a silly question.
He said: Shoot the Prime Minister, drive off
to Ayers Rock, kill myself first—
don't ask such things!

(After all we've only got a week.
What could you do in a week?)

(ii)

In a week I could listen to every record in my rock
jazz folk classical ten year menagerie
look at all the photographs I've ever taken
and the celluloid progression of life
sliding stale as strained blood
over a sheet on the bedroom wall.
I could write down my first ten years or even twenty
although I'm not really old enough
to remember much before six.
I could go to every gallery & exhibition & happening
in town and still not understand the meaning of Art.
I could quit my job wake up smiling
(perhaps)
sit by the window for hours watching one red whiskered bulbul
frightened out of his feathers by sparrows

I could do nothing at all
but wait for the seventh morning and that trail of metal
a new universe of despair coming down (at last)
to claim me.

(iii)

12/7/1979

Last night in Esperance a charcoal rain
spattered the roofs.
We bought a pizza there last year
then drove by cakey dunes where the sea
a great aquamarine dragon buckled and spat
flying tongues of foam at cliffsides
shelved with rock. Pitiful as pricetags poked into sandwiches
signs said fish here at your peril.
At dusk a quiet swell
of antiquity flooded the sand—we turned sticky-fingered
subdued back to town.

Last year at Esperance we rocked the caravan to sleep
and in the night a black tree rained drumming drips
on the roof. Two days later
we hit Balladonia filled up with petrol
passed on.
Even then the waiting was immense, the road
an unyielding, hooked pull
to nowhere.
Over all the world was a huge sheer dome
and an ear pressed flat against the earth with flowers
like new fur stretching through its pores
could sense very far
far under the skin
a sigh.

Last night over the lost traces of our journey
charcoal rain
spat upon the world. At windows a few souls woke
startled at the explosion of space
against earth. Others crowed
at fireworks till dawn.

There where man is at most a footprint in air
I should have liked to see the debris,
the blue showers and startled stars.
And as man's muddling to make himself real collapsed
(before the stamp of boots longing
for souvenirs and payment for the scraped embers
of their experience was stuck upon it) last night
at Balladonia as the heavens ripped
I should have liked again to place one ear against that endless earth:
to hear the infinitesimal bumping and the earth in sleep
slowly turning
oblivious of us all.

WILLIAM FRASER

"Wheels Within"

Clocks covered the five walls of the tiny shop. Mechanical creations of every shape and size, all alive and ticking. Tocking. Oiled geared wheels gliding silently within wheels. With hundreds of sharp-ended, delicately ornate hands stabbing at the heavy air in every direction so that anyone entering the shop would be pointed at, no matter where he (or she) stood. Hung faces of dazzling white enamel, some with small black jagged holes showing stark against the pale where age, or neglect, had made the brittle vitreous chip away. There were rose faces. And some with curling vines, all lovingly hand-painted. One of the clocks had a Turkish carpet countenance, purples and blues and reds. Repeated patterns.

No two clocks displayed the same time but, so many of them were there that, at any moment of the day, one of the timers revealed the correct span.

The man who ran the shop had been there so long that 'regulars' could not remember a time when he wasn't (there). He was there now. This being Monday with the time at nine o'clock. In fact he was sorting through some clock pieces, hands, actually.

'Two dozen spade. Eleven moon. Mmm. Almost out of Fleur-de-lys. That bastard Brien was supposed to get those in for me. Plenty of Serpentines. Ah! And twelve Maltese Crosses. Knew I had some . . . .'

People came into the shop, to the man, for parts, spares. And advice. He knowing all there was to know about clocks. And a good deal besides that fitted into a less specific category.

He (the old man) had never married. Looking too long perhaps for the 'right' person. And, with stunning realisation suddenly coming to the conclusion that his standards had been (were) too high. All round. And that, during his human rummage, the years had caught up with him and now it was too late. But the reality had not frightened or disappointed. Rather the end result of a long exploration. The 'dawning' had come seven years ago. And since then the man had devoted his very life to clocks. And to people who also shared his passion for those time-measuring instruments. Actually, he had made quite a few good friends. Through clocks.

(CLOCK: Periodically wound up, kept in motion by springs or weights acting on wheels ..... what is the time?

In, on, out, off .....)

How he'd laughed, reflecting now, the day that commercial traveller had come into the shop. Armed with a *nice* new leather attache case and an expression of helpful benevolence flooded all over his cherubic face.

"Morning! Lovely day isn't it?"

Tick tock. Tick tock.

"I see you're interested in clocks?"

Tick tock. Tick tock. ('Interested?')

"I'm sure you'll be fascinated by these."

Opens shiny briefcase.

On the other side of the counter a smooth beat.

"Just look at these!"

Long case clock dials. Printed on paper. Paper! Stick on clock dials. Bloody stick on clock dials!

Tickety tock. Tickety Tock. Tock tock tock.

"What do you think?"

The old man had said: 'Are you serious?'

The young man: "Everyone's taking them. Save a lot of time, these."

'*Who's* taking them?'

"That big watchmakers' down the road. By the post office."

'Jacob Frenz! Who else?'

"Er . . . Handels, down by . . ."

'I know it! I'm not surprised.'

"Most everyone in the business, actually."

Actually.

Tickety tock. Tick tick tick tock. Tick tick tick tock.

'Not me, sonny.'

The shop's army of clocks reinforce the brief silence with their clicking serenade.

'I *paint* all my dials. By hand.'

"But these are just as good. I mean, they *look* just as good. And sticking them is much quicker."

'They're no use to me boy. (Pause). Can you hand-paint a clock face?'

"Er . . . no."

'I can. And do. Stick on paper dials are for amateurs. I'm a professional. So you see Mr., you're barking up the wrong tree.'

Woof!

"Well, I thought that . . . ."

Whirr. Tickety tock. Tickety tock. Tickety tock.

'It's people like you who are helping to lower standards.'

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

"No, I . . . ."

'Panderng to the lazy. The laic.'

"I've never really thought about it that way. I . . ."

Bong!

'Well think about it Mr. Now, gooday!'

The cherubic face had worn a drawn look as it hurriedly left the shop atop its sleek suited carcase.

Memory.

Once, he had made most of the clock parts himself, on an old lathe in the back room. The lathe was still there, as was the worm-eaten Bentwood piano stool upon which he had spent all those hours. But demand had fallen. Gradually, and then, with the advent of mass-produced parts, more rapidly. Until now he hardly made anything at all any more. Except for the half-dozen or so customers who were of like mind. Or similar mind, anyway. People who were prepared to pay for beautifully hand-finished brass spires or ratchet wheels. Or whatever.

He'd have to ring Brien about those Fleur-de-Lys. That slack bastard! Two weeks he'd been promising those hands. Two weeks!

Tick tock, tick tock.

The door bell jingled. It was an old bell. A very old bell. Having come out

of a 17th Century clock he'd had 'in' once. From memory the case was past it. All wormy. And some kids had got to the works with a blunt screwdriver. The bell was all he could salvage. It had been on the door ever since. A beautiful pitch. Tone, was probably the right word. Its peal hung in the air as the customer came inside to stand looking over all the clocks.

The stranger was, unbeknown to himself, and in relation to where he chose to stand, caught firmly in a crossfire from the joint hands of a 30-hour chronometer and an elegant eight-day timepiece.

The old man busied himself sorting through the untidy pile of clock keys lying in a dusty heap at one end of the battered oak counter which separated him from the customers. Brass double-ended wing keys, Vienna regulator crank kays, brass star keys, long case crank keys . . . .

"How much is that one?"

Tick ..... tick .... tick .. tick tick tick tick.

'Good morning! Which one is that, sir?'

The old man wore rimless spectacles which, when the overhead naked light bulb caught them, seemed fairly to blaze. As a result his eyes were difficult to see at the best of times. And now, as he looked at the stranger the thick lenses were dazzling.

"That one there! The pretty one."

'The *French* one you mean?'

A nod.

'£175.'

Gasp! A human reaction.

'It's one-hundred and tw'enty-five years old. Keeps perfect time. I've overhauled all the working parts myself. It's guaranteed against defects. No worm in the case. Anywhere. It's a beautiful timepiece sir.'

"It is."

Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick.

'For cash I could do it for £160.'

The stranger sways on the balls of his feet which are encased in expensive hide cocoons. He is computing. There are whirrings coming from between his pinnas.

"Would you accept £155?"

The glasses glint. Turn the winder gently.

In the confines of the shop the clock army is triumphant.

Crisp new notes exchange across the old counter top. As they have for years past. The clock is removed and wrapped. The stranger is ticking now.

The bell chimes as he leaves.

There was a time when this sort of pre-sold sale occurred three or four times a week. Now. Well, things had changed. This clock was the first the old man had sold all month. Jacob Frenz wasn't in the same situation. No. He had made the change some years ago. These days he mainly sold new timepieces. Elaborate monstrosities from Russia and Taiwan. With brittle plywood cases and badly-made mechanisms. And the people snapped them up. Jacob had told him, in strictest confidence of course, that as far as he was concerned it was all money. All grist for the mill so to speak. Whether he sold a reproduction or an old clock was immaterial to him, he had said.

The old man went to put the thick wad of notes into his secret hiding place behind the counter, just below the work-worn top, behind a piece of loose moulding. Using a screwdriver he carefully prised the marked board loose to reveal a small Havana cigar box hidden in the recess. The cedar container was already full of large denomination notes and he had difficulty closing the lid after adding the new heap to it. Funny how he never bothered to count the

money, rather thinking of it purely as an exchange toll. Having no real value in terms of what could be bought with it today. Some of the notes in the cigar box were more than ten years old. Irritably he banged the piece of moulding back into place.

The ticking of the shop's clocks grew, a hypnotic beat, filling his head. So steady. Man-made but predictable. Reliable. You knew where you were with a clock. Even if it refused to go. Or ran fast. Or slow. It could be fixed. Only needed a little patience. A little time. Ha! That was a good one. Yes, one could *rely* on clocks. And they were all different. Perhaps not to the untrained eye. But he knew they were. Every one had a personality all its own. Its appearance. Or shape. Or even its rhythm. But all different.

The ticking grew to a new height, overwhelming the old man's thoughts. His very skull throbbed in time with the many mechanical beats. And his arms became a pair of sculptured hands as he sorted through the pile of keys, methodically selecting and re-piling the many brass star keys from the jumbled heap. Steady. Rhythmc. He sorted. A Master Timekeeper. Tick tick tick tick tick tick tick tick . . . .

Ring! Ring!

The foreign sound made the old man jump. Distraught, his meter disturbed he moved over to the telephone and snatched it up.

It was Brien.

Brien had once worked for him. Here. In the shop. Had showed promise too. Real promise. A 'natural' with clocks. Such as one only comes across once in a lifetime. He had amazed the old man with his thirst for knowledge. About clocks. And his skilled hands that seemed to make light of even the most delicately complex repair or adjustment. Then, one day, for no apparent reason, he had left. No explanation. No apology. Had just upped and gone. Throwing the old man out of balance for weeks. Like a mainspring had suddenly broken. Repairs had been made, of sorts, and the mechanism still went. But never quite as before.

He had dreamed of passing on what he knew to another. To keep the shop going for another generation. For it to represent something by being there. By its *being*. Hoping that the pendulum would swing back and that time, times, would catch up. Brien had taken up social work. Just like that. He'd gone to night school for Christ knows how long to qualify. And now he acted as a supplier to the old man, in his spare time. Volunteering to get him bits and pieces from firms up north. It saved the old man the bother and endless paperwork involved in ordering.

'Where are my Fleur-de-lys? I asked you for them weeks ago . . . . . it's no use you being sorry. I need them Brien. What do you mean you've been busy? Yes, all right, I know your job keeps you up 'til all hours . . . . . Yes, yes, I *know* it's important . . . What? When? Christ! Did you manage to save her? . . . . Well, where did she get the bloody pills in the first place? Her G.P.! Typical! Can't someone do something about these quacks? Where is she now? . . . . Good. I'm pleased to hear that . . . . . How's the child-minding project going? Good! Good! . . . . and Jenny? Mmm . . . . . you should find more time for her son. Yes, I don't doubt you're up to your neck . . . . No, things are fairly quiet here. Yes, just the regulars. You know. Much as it's always been. Yes . . . . So, anyway, when can I expect the hands? Friday! Good! . . . . Yes, and you, son . . . . Thanks . . . . Bye.'

The old man put the dusty telephone down, carefully removed his glasses and began to polish them slowly. From one dingy corner of the shop their came a loud, Cuckoo! Cuckoo!' and a little wooden bird suddenly shot out of the shadows, hovered briefly in the half-light, and then shot back again.

Outside, it was beginning to rain.

ANDREW McDONALD

Lizards

I think these lizards are Zen masters.
We're all basking in the winter sun
and they're willing to share it with me,
to let my feet clomp across their domain,
my porch, to fetch a pen. The shadow
of my head does not scare them,
nor the shadow of my moving hand.
They know what to fear, and when,
and what to do about it.
Without whining or supplication
they simply let go
flip out
into whatever void, six inches
off the porch, or the whole height
of a wall. Even the damned
cockroaches, hearing the scything zip
of my dread cocky-smacker
drop
from wherever they are into
wherever they land, knowing
anything will be better than this, even
a chance with my brutalising feet.
It looks quite like passivity
but has a deal more art.
Warm enough to chase breakfast now,
the lizards rip about the undergrowth
chomping insects, fearing none.

ANDREW McDONALD

Brighton Beach

Especially when the April breeze
stirs up breakers in my *café comptoir*
    at Brighton beach
where the sea 'looks like birds'
    light flocking on the water

and the mercury soars to 68
and the daring take off their shoes & roll up their sleeves

and the pale & the bulbous lie stretched on stones
at the freezing toes of waves
    fiddling and small
and the fat ladies shriek and have to be helped up
    to avoid the rush of the two-inch surf

and the lovers are salty and mackerel-crowded
and the old move their bones slowly
    dreaming of dolphins and daffodils
and the fish lie gasping on the dusty floor
    of an icy unswept sea

then the tunnels that led us here
    'look noisy and sound dark' indeed
and no kind of swimming can find the way back.

Waves churn the land's flinty grist
as the children perch on the shore like birds
picking out shells to bring me
    winkles & cockles
then bury my feet, my legs
    alive alive-o.

'Try to move!' I heave up, grinning.
The stones press down
    round and smooth.
'Go on!' We all laugh, I stay put.
They move back down to the water
    pick up flints
    and fling and fling.

BEVERLEY FARMER

Maureen

I held the kerosene lamp up to her face. At eighteen I was a shy and fearful young man. She looked like a slut to me, standing there on the sagging verandah, her black hair long and ragged, her swollen face shiny as if coated in oil. A coloured girl. Perhaps even Indian herself. I averted my eyes from her tight jeans and the heavy, dark-teated globes of her breasts in her red shirt. I suspected a practical joke, a prank to liven up a quiet Saturday night. Everyone in Sarina seemed to know that I lived like a monk in that decaying shack. I glanced past her at the dark trees, the far cane fields smouldering in a red glow. It seemed that she was alone. I have never enjoyed being made fun of, however, and my first impulse was to slam the door. As I hesitated, she stepped back, wincing away from the lamp.

"Look, I'm sorry to bother you." Her voice was deep, rather nasal. "I saw your light on. Can I just use your phone for a minute?"

"No, I am sorry —"

"Oh, please! My car won't go. Just to ring a garage?"

"I am sorry." I lowered the lamp. "There is no phone here."

Her face crumpling, she turned away. I took a deep breath.

"What is wrong with your car?"

"No idea." The lamp glinted on tears in her bloodshot eyes. "It just won't go, that's all."

"I fix my motor bike myself. I might be able to help."

"It would have to happen now."

"Where is the car?"

"Up there on the road."

"Would you like a cup of tea? You look tired out. And I'll see what I can do."

She smiled then, in relief, perhaps, or in amusement. I daresay she might have preferred something stronger. But who can read a stranger's face? She accepted gratefully enough.

I watched her stare round, taking it all in, the wooden walls covered with our shadows in the wavering golden light, the black window panes, the three unmade beds and, on the trestle table, my unwashed frying pan and plate encrusted with the pungent brown remains of my curry dinner. A Madonna and Child and my family photograph pinned on one wall. Piles of books and papers waiting in the lamplight. A heap of black-skinned bananas furred with ants. Housekeeping had rather gone by the board. I had to spend every day of the August vacation studying for the exams if I was to have any chance of getting into the University. She said nothing, just chose a bed and slumped down with her eyes closed, her rough black head against the wall. I lit the primus, and made the tea.

"How do you like your tea?"

"Milk and two sugar, thanks."

The milk bottle was half full of a cheesy substance with a green pelt of mould.

"I have no milk. I am sorry."

"No worries, just sugar, then. Thanks."

She winced, sipping the hot tea. There was a sore on her full lower lip, like a baby's milk blister. One of her eyes was swollen, I saw, and ringed with a purple and yellow stain.

"I am sorry, it is none of my business, but I hope you have not been assaulted? Your eye —"

"Never you mind about my eye. I gave as good as I got. Better."

Was she afraid I might use violence on her? I have always had difficulty in finding the right thing to say. I held my tongue, and we drank our tea in a silence broken only by the hissing of the lamp.

The moon had risen, full and golden, by the time we walked up the dark track to look at her car, but neither of us had a torch, and besides I was no expert. I regretted my rashness. She was hoping, she said, that it was just out of petrol. She had filled it up at Rockhampton in the morning, but the petrol gauge was out of order. The sight of it was not reassuring. A crumpled, rusting blue Volkswagen on the gravel verge, sagging and mud-caked. It had Victorian number plates and was packed to the roof with bags. In the back sat a yellow plush elephant the size of a grown labrador, with gold glass eyes.

"Present for me kid. He's three."

Absurdly, I looked around for him as she unlocked a door and crawled in to release the bonnet.

"He's not here, he's at me sister's place in Townsville. Haven't seen him for nearly a year. It's taken me a week to get up this far."

"On your own? From Victoria?"

"Melbourne, yeah. And that's driving all day. Bedding down in the back seat at night, I'll be bloody glad when it's over."

I stooped over the dark, dusty motor for a token look. It was obviously futile. A car surging past with headlamps on full wrapped us in a cloud of dust and fumes. I slammed the bonnet down, and shook my head.

"Oh, bugger it." With a despairing grimace. "I'd dump it and hitch the rest of the way, but I've got everything I own in the bloody thing."

She was exhausted, it was late, and I was able to convince her that it was best left until the morning and that she should spend the night at the house. She locked up, hoisted a bag on her shoulder, refusing to let me carry it, and trudged at my side along the moonlit track. It would be lovely, she said, to sleep under a roof again. I peeled the best of the black bananas for her, and gave her the tin of golden syrup that was the only other food I had in the house. She sat huddled on my bed, dipping each banana in the tin and curling a thick ribbon of golden syrup around it before she ate it.

"Want some?"

"No, thank you."

"Well. My name's Maureen. What's yours?"

"Peter. My Christian name."

She looked blank.

"I do not use my Indian name. I am baptized Catholic."

"Oh, are you Indian?"

"Yes, from Fiji." Her eyebrows were fine and arched, drawn, I saw, with black pencil. "People always think I am Aboriginal."

"Stiff shit."

"I am an outcast here."

She licked her fingers. I brought her a basin of cold water. She bent and splashed her face with handfuls of bright water, and ran her wet hands through her hair.

"So why stay?"

"I am on a scholarship. I must not let the brothers down. And my family. I am the eldest of six."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one, why?"

She put the basin on the table by the lamp, and stood gazing into my face.

"You don't look it."

"Yes, I am, honestly."

"I'm twenty-five. I'm an older woman."

I was too flustered to answer. She sat back, grinning. Her teeth were beautiful, very white.

"Wouldn't have a cigarette, would you?"

"I have never smoked. Sorry."

"Oh, well." She stretched and yawned. "Tell me about yourself. Got a girlfriend, have you, Pete?"

I hastened to explain that two other Fijian students were sharing the house, although they were away that weekend, and that, although my mother was anxious for me to marry, actually I was thinking of entering the priesthood. She made no comment.

"Are you Catholic?" I asked.

"Me? No. It's a lot of bull I reckon, religion."

She was struggling not to laugh.

"That is very funny, I suppose?"

"Oh, not that. It's just here's me shitting meself about that bloody great black bike out there on the verandah. Didn't see it round the side till after I'd knocked. Thought you'd be a Hell's Angel." She laughed, rubbing her eyes. "What a day. I'm buggered."

I wished she would not use language like that.

I smoothed over the rumpled beds, apologizing that I had no clean sheets. She did not mind, and which one was my bed. I showed her and she crawled into it, dragged off her jeans and her red shirt under the sheets, dropped them on the floor, sighed, and fell asleep. I spread a thin blanket over her. The nights could be cool there by the river. Impossible to concentrate on differential calculus. The smoky caramel smell of the burning canefields hung in the room. Moths thumped against the lamp, and she lay under their moving shadows, submerged in a flickering golden light. I must have fallen asleep at the table, still watching her. I woke at daybreak, put out the lamp, a dim copper glow in the grey of morning, and lay down to sleep on the next bed. When I next woke the sun lay on us in thick white rods.

I made some tea and sat down on the bed to drink it, watching her breathing face until at last her eyes opened.

"What are you staring at?"

"You look more Indian when you're asleep. You look like one of my sisters."

"Yeah? Which one?"

"Lalita." I showed her on the photograph. "Would you like some tea?"

"Love some. Me Mum says me Dad had a touch of the tar. You know, Abo blood. Not Indian though, lovey. I never saw him meself. Is she a nice sister? Lalita?"

"My favourite."

"That's all right, then." She yawned and stretched her brown arms, smiling up at me. "Best sleep I've had for ages."

"Good." I brought her tea and, looking away, hastily gulped mine. "Now I will look at your car."

She gave me the keys from the pocket of her jeans. It was a burning day, sizzling with cicadas. Sweating, I checked the obvious things, the battery, the oil, the spark plugs, terminals, radiator. I found nothing wrong. I hoped it was just the petrol and not something complicated that would waste precious hours arranging a tow and repairs on a Sunday. I would have milked my bike tank for her, but it was almost empty. My cheque was late again, and I have a frugal nature. I went to the house to suggest that we ride into Sarina with a jerry-can, but to my intense relief she preferred not to come. Too bloody hot, she said.

"Get us something to eat, too, will you, Pete." She patted my arm. "Golden syrup rots your teeth."

My consternation must have been all too plain.

"My shout." She thrust a twenty-dollar note into my pocket, despite my absurd protests. What choice did I have but to take it?

"And a packet of Marlboro," she called after me.

I got her petrol, and some on account for me, and bought bread, butter, cheese, tomatoes, ham, milk, two cans of Coca Cola, cigarettes, bananas, at the milk bar, dim and quiet behind its sun blinds. As I went out I saw to my horror Father Michael's chubby black form toddle across the street, and I remember to this day the waves of guilt and shame as I bent to load the bike, as if I had not seen him, and thundered back down the shimmering asphalt.

With petrol in its tank the wretched Volkswagen started up with a roar like a jet plane.

She came running when she heard it, overjoyed, calling out thank you, thank you, her breasts bouncing. Her hair was tied back with red ribbon. When she reached me she flung her arms round me and kissed me on the mouth.

I had never been kissed before.

The house was cool and quiet, so dark that it took me a minute or two to see that she had swept it and washed up and made all the beds. She shrugged and grinned at my thanks. I handed her the bag of food and her change. She grabbed the packet of cigarettes and lit one.

"Oh. At last." She breathed out gusts of smoke.

"Are you going to live in Townsville now?"

"No. I think I'll look for a job on Hayman or somewhere. Or on a prawn boat out of Darwin. Good money, they say."

"What about your husband?"

"Huh. What husband?"

"Your little boy. Will you take him?"

"No. And let's get something straight. Saint Peter." Smoke gushed from her flat nostrils. "Since you're so bloody worried. I stood it for two years, getting bashed up every time the bastard got drunk." She touched her purple eyelid. "Benny's not his kid, see? I had to rush him to hospital twice. Doctors aren't fools, they could tell. So Betty's got him now. She bloody well worships that kid."

"I am so sorry." I was appalled. Who was I to disapprove? She was right to be angry with me.

"Easy for you to talk, isn't it."

"You have suffered." Tears filled my eyes. "Forgive me."

"Oh, I might." Grinning, she stubbed out her cigarette and set about buttering bread and making sandwiches.

"Is there a shower here, Pete?"

"No, we wash in the river. Behind the trees at the back."

"No crocodiles?"

"No!" I laughed. I was forgiven. "There are lotuses."

"So long as they don't eat people."

"I will protect you!"

"Come on, then. A picnic and a bath."

We sat on the river bank among the roots of dark trees and ate everything. No one else was there. Then she undressed and slid naked into the river. Her hair afloat, she glowed in the heavy water, golden brown all over, diving and splashing, floating through rings of thick green water.

"Come in, Pete. Oh, it's lovely."

The water felt icy, dark in the shadows of the trees. Stick-like insects stilted over the glassy surface. She splashed me and challenged me to dive between her long, shimmering legs. A mirrored bird flapped above us. I was in every way out of my depth. In the green clumps on the far bank lotuses had opened their long petals, but she would not let me pick her one.

"Here is like home," I said, swimming slowly at her side. "Fiji. The river. Sugar cane. The sea."

"Do you wish you were there?"

No. I did not.

As we waded out she caught me glancing at her dripping breasts, and cupped them in her hands so that the dark nipples stood erect.

"Want some?"

I giggled.

"Go on. Don't you like them?"

I stood gaping on the bank, my hands hiding my shame.

"You think I'm a slack, don't you?"

"No!" What a thing to say. "I know you are not."

"A black's a slack."

"I am blacker than you."

"Well, then?" She spread out her hands. "Tell me."

"I told you."

"Oh, Pete."

"I don't know how." I gritted my teeth. "I have never done it."

"It's all right." She reached for my hands. I could not look at her. "Come on, lovey."

We wrapped ourselves in towels and crept back hand in hand, not speaking. The dark house felt hot, stifling to our cool bodies. We lay down together on my bed and she kissed me with her soft tongue. My heart was drumming madly. I clung to her in my terror and urgency. I was frantic, and must have hurt her, at least in the beginning, but she led me calmly and steadily up to the last overwhelming moment.

When I finished, I remember, I thrust my hot face into her wet black hair, whimpering that now I could never be a priest. We were lying with arms and legs entangled, both of us hot and slippery, and I felt laughter shake her.

"Please. It is a very serious matter."

"You're just a big baby, Pete."

My face was mirrored in her smiling eyes.

She left soon after. We dressed in clean clothes and had a cup of of tea first, tea with milk, to postpone her going, I suppose, since neither of us drank much of it. I wanted her to stay, at least until the others came back, but she said no. I made her take my address and a silk scarf I had bought for Lalita. She got into her car, kissing me, promising to take care, to have the car checked at the first garage, not to mention me there, to try to stop smoking, to write to me, to come back. I watched her drive away.

There was one brief postcard from Townsville a week later. I have it still.

JOHN WRIGHT

Baggin'

"G'up t' th' 'ouse 'n' get 'Baggin'.
'N' put wood in th' 'ole as y' go."
Well, not knowing what he said,
but not keen to be seen as daft
on my first job, I left him
crouched under cows' udders,
and shut the milk-shed door.

Stepping round the frosty yard,
slapping my arms against the chill,
I saw his wife at her window-sill
in the vapours of a can of tea
and plates of melted-butter toast:
"Quick wi' thee, Lad," she scolded,
" 'N' get this Baggin' out o' cold!"

So, as if I'd known all along,
I received the steaming load,
then, swollen with duty, strode
down the yard to the feed-room,
where bales of hay and straw
were set, and men who'd worked
all morning sat, growling
"Baggin's 'ere. 'Bout time too!"

Louts

After sunset's softening shades,
hard voices break, to echo
war-cries round abandoned shops
locked behind glass bravado.

Their bayings to the risen moon
snarl into the quiet of my room
where my shadow stirs, to lope
deeper than these walls, to a time

when I, without rhyme or hope,
would howl with the red-eyed pack
into the dark of No-man's-years
between school and a legal drink:

the scene before initiation
to our fathers' tamed world,
where, lurking in the twilight
of ordered lives, shadows growl.

JUDITH WOODFALL

Mad Aunty Maisie and the Malvern Star

Mad Aunty Maisie, who still lives at Numurkah, was eighteen when she "fell in", as my dead Dad called it, one passionate weekend when my Uncle Willy was home from leave in France in 1917. They married when my cousin, Cynthia, was eighteen months old, during another passionate bout. Uncle Willy was wounded twice at Mons, and lost his right leg, his left arm, and his right eye. However, for many years he remained the best rifle shot in Australia of clay pigeons, ducks, and coins tossed in the air. He was an alcoholic and more out of work than in.

When my little brother, Alex, and I went to stay on our yearly visit, Uncle Willy would pretend he was a pirate and wear a black eye patch and his striped pyjama pants and his army jacket—he would hop on his good leg skilfully using his knotted walking stick as an ack ack gun. Sometimes when under the influence, "Where the bloody hell does he get the money?", would whisper Mad Aunty Maisie, he'd get real bullets and put them into his real rifle, and go into the backyard full of chooks, ducks, cats, dogs and rats—Aunty Maisie was far from clean, and let fly with a few shots into the moonlit sky.

Alex and I slept together on a horsehair mattress covered in stained mattress ticking, with a rose patterned hand painted jerry under the sagging bed, a basin and jug full of freezing soapy water on the marble covered table and brown splodgy coloured lino on the uneven floor. The small room was festooned with prints of Jesus and little kids' embroideries saying "Bless this house" and "Now I am seven I will be good". It was exciting, spooky and very very cold.

We also got hungry because Mad Aunty Maisie forgot to cook. We'd fossick in her cupboards and come out with bursting tins of longforgotten jam, oatmeal and honey, and somehow manage to stay healthy for the fortnight.

Uncle Willy has died but Mad Aunty is still on the rampage on her Malvern Star. Hair dyed carrot red, crisply permed, aged eighty, she hunts night and day for her chooks and past lovers. She parks the bike near the horse trough outside the Railway Hotel, has her quota for the day of sweet sherry and lemonade, and can be heard singing softly over the dull, dry hills of the Numurkah streets, as she peddles home singing for Uncle Willy to suddenly appear "Just like him to play a practical joke, love", and for her lost youth when she was known from Numurkah to Yarrawonga to Catamatite, as "that Mad Maisie, had to get married, but ah, ooh, so exquisite, so beautiful, do you blame the men for loving her?".

My Aunty Ida, Dad's full sister, and my Aunty Carrie and Aunty Violet, Dad's brothers' wives, left their indelible print on me. Every Sunday, Mum and Dad, Alex and I would hop into our little blue hopping Hillman, and drive, at a

ferocious pace, to East Malvern or Bentleigh, to spend from 3 p.m. till 5.30 p.m. exactly, with the family.

We learnt about food, the 2nd World War, vegetables like cauliflower and brussel sprouts and turnips, clothes, war rationing, love, happiness, sickness and health, sex, misery, nervous breakdowns only muttered about, how to make scones, play skippy and the pianola, how to play Doctors with my stupid cousins, Kevin and Evan, and how not to eat Aunty Carrie's food.

Aunty Ida, my favourite, had a lifetime of 'unfortunate happenings' as my Dad called it. She married a Doctor with the surname of Downes, and therefore became Ida Downes, to her undying horror. However, she was an appalling snob, and because he was a Doctor, overcame this obstacle. They married at St. John's Church, Toorak, widely reported in the local papers "Beauty from old family marries well known Doctor" and departed smartly for a round the world trip.

Unfortunately, her husband, the Doctor, got an acute attack of appendicitis, had to be wrapped in white cloth with a British flag covering his remains, nailed into a box, and slowly slid into the thrashing sea off the coast of China. With much courage, Aunty Ida continued her voyage, met up with the first mate who apparently tried to do "awful things to me, dear, because I was so recently bereaved, and had had it, and had probably got used to it". She managed to escape his clutches—occasionally. She bravely battled on to China alone, and I am now the proud possessor of a hand embroidered Chinese jacket, made in Shanghai, sixty-five years ago.

She wandered home, went speedily through the deceased Doctor's money, and ended up as a two finger typist in a factory. She was very naughty, said my Dad. She smoked constantly, dropping ash over my parents best green velvet box lounge chair, which made Mum purse her lips in silent rage. She dyed her hair ginger using cold tea and never wore pants. She grew a few whiskers on her face and always smelt of lavender and b.o. She was magnificent. She also had a series of lovers to my parents' shame, and the worst and last, was Mervyn.

Mervyn was a Concrete layer, and Aunty Ida picked him up when he whistled to her from a building site near where she worked in the factory. He was then fifty-nine, short, fat with a beer gut, loved paisley cardigans, spoke with a flat A, loved Aunty Ida madly, wildly, and was very common said my Mum and Dad.

Aunty Ida and Mervyn spent their spare time together at the Plough In Hotel in South Melbourne, drinking beer. Which Dad said was also common. Mervyn lived in his room in Prahran with a single bar radiator and bible for company, and Aunty Ida lived in her bed sitter in Bentleigh. Their love lasted for eighteen years. They died within a week of each other, and Mum said "Thank goodness that wicked, common man, who has dragged Ida down to his level, will have to mend his way in heaven, and with a bit of luck as its such a large place up there, won't bump into her".

Aunty Ida taught me how to smoke, drink, play bridge, dye my hair, work for a living and was a constant source of delight with her stories about being a slave to a Chinese King—she was generally totally honest, but with a few beers under the belt from the Plough In, she sometimes embellished the truth a little!

Auntie Carrie was a different kettle of fish altogether. She was from a very 'naice' family—they owned one of the first washing machine factories, were fabulously wealthy because they had a good advertising agency and were crooks; and she never let us forget she came from that superior background. She was prissy, pretty like a pussy cat, small, beady eyed, tightly permed and corseted, spick and span, had fidgetty hands, and was a vile cook. However, her worst sin was her boy twins, Kevin and Evan.

Dad said to Mum on many occasions, "Christ, Peg, she's at least done it once and made two, but my God, it must have been a bloody effort and sacrifice.

Just like Queen Victoria said—'grit your teeth and think of England'."

They lived in East Malvern. Uncle Jack was a storeman and packer, which Aunty Carrie thought inferior. "Oh, Jack works inside" she said, hinting that the rest of the family had jobs like street cleaners, or something in the fresh air. Her afternoon teas, which mercifully came round only monthly, were full of stilted conversation, sitting room stuffed with pictures of her smart mother and father, brothers and sisters, and my twin cousings, Kevin and Evan. Photos of their first smile, first tooth, both lying naked on a rug—grimacing I'd call it, not grinning, first efforts at walking, first party. Dad muttered to Mum, "If the little bastards ever farted it's a wonder they didn't bottle it!".

Aunty Carrie tried to be toffy which didn't go down with her husband's raucous family. Uncle Hugh, Dad's brother, Aunty Violet's husband, always took along his little silver bottle full of whisky, smartly hidden in his vest pocket, and would always be nicking outside to "look at the tomatoes and pumpkin, Carrie, and pat Nigger"—their black cocker spaniel.

Aunty Carrie liked China tea and my relatives hated it. It was fragrant and always full of tea leaves, which made Aunty Violet want to tell everyone's fortunes, and always stone cold. She was so slow in the kitchen department trying to make afternoon tea precise and perfect, that the poured tea chilled, the date scones became harder and the daisy cake more sodden.

My dad would stuff his plate with food and then cunningly squeeze and squash it into the waiting hanky in his navy suit pocket. Mum popped the cakes and scones into her handbag. But, Alex and I were stuck. Seated at a cardtable covered with a stiffly starched tablecloth with nazi emblems embroidered on the edges. "Is Aunty Carrie a German Kraut?", I blithely asked Mum, who was huddled near the 2 pieces of coal trying to be a fire. She took me aside and made me eat the gem scone as punishment.

The kids didn't get tea but homemade watery stuff with floaty things covering the top. It was vile. We also got pink, iced with hundreds and thousands, cup cakes. Alex and I would try to beat each other to the toilet quickly to spit out all the horror. One day, Uncle Hugh, on one of his many forays into his brother's back garden, spotted us in the process of eliminating the cup cakes. Help. Caught. Sprung. No. He gave us a swig of his hip flask, thus starting my brother and I on our lifetime habit of drinking!

From the monthly visits to Aunty Carrie's home, we learnt the value of good food, warmth, learnt to speak with a 'plum' in the mouth, to drink, how to play 500, grab, strip jack naked. The latter being the game my stupid cousins excelled at. When I dobbed them in to Mum, she said it was because Aunty Carrie "hid things of that nature, dear". Most of all we learnt that kids should not be segregated like wild animals but be part of a group. Particularly with my cousins around!

Aunty Violet was a 'career' woman and this was considered wicked. She refused to have any children, was married to Uncle Hugh, a clerk with the S.E.C. She was an accountant, and was untidy, adorable, absurdly funny, had an ancient mother living in her front room, always dressed in black, and was the proud owner of a snapping, snarling, yapping Australian terrier named Benny—short for Bentleigh, where she lived close to the station and Aunty Ida.

She was a good cook if somewhat flamboyant for those cake times. Various variations of spaghetti bolognaise was tried on the relatives first, and smiled through the question, "Don't only Italians eat this kind of food, Nick?", my mum Peg asked my dad.

She was extraordinarily beautiful, with long black hair pushed into buns on top of her head. She wore exotic clothes—always slightly grubby because she worked, and loads of make-up with a dash of bright red lipstick running in rings

around her luscious mouth. She was tall and elegant and had glorious black eyes you could fall into with glee. Which is exactly what happened when she changed jobs. Someone falling into her eyes I mean. A bloke, twenty years younger, saw those eyes, the long legs, the beautiful hands and hair, and her jubilant nature—and fell head over heels in love with her.

"And him married with three small kiddies and working in a Bank, Peg," said my grandmother Lavinia, who I hated more than school. Alex and I called her Lavinia the Lavatory in moments of rage which was constant.

Aunty Violet was ostracised, shunned, talked about, despised and probably secretly admired for having her lover. She flaunted him like a string of good pearls. She was forty-six and deliriously happy. Uncle Hugh stuck with her and the S.E.C. He loved her just the way she was. In an old run-down house surrounded by her Georgian antiques, her rambly kitchen with a wood stove, her memo pads—invariably forgetting to consult them, her smelly dishcloths, her Dresden pieces—broken, her ability to hold a good job, her beauty.

Alex and I loved her—we were allowed full reign of the house and garden. We played the pianola constantly to Aunty Carrie's displeasure—tight puffed cheeks showed us her anger whilst Aunty Ida just grinned and puffed! We kissed and cuddled her. We teased Benny, we whistled into the ancient mother's ear trumpet, we used her make-up, her perfume and her furs.

We learnt that relatives we loved could be two faced. On the surface, smiling and charming, whilst underneath having chilling thoughts. "What a disgrace, Jack, to have a friend at her age" we heard Aunty Carrie whisper—and Jack sat and twiddled with the button on his tweed jacket, smirking.

She was constant in her love to Uncle Hugh and her lover, constant in her refusal to have children—to be like others—to conform. She even voted Labor! Constant in her wearing of unusual clothes and colour combinations. A fox fur draped round your shoulder and an American Beauty thigh high split skirt, at your own Sunday afternoon tea party? We were allowed to pick the dew covered new wisteria, the peony roses, snapdragons, wallflowers, daffodils and poppies. Allowed to eat green apples. "You'll get a pain in your tummy tum tum" said Aunty Carrie, severely smiling. We climbed the apple trees near the side fence and threw rotting jonathons and granny smiths at unsuspecting pedestrians. We made strange cat-like calls and then aimed for their backs. My brother to my amazement and delight, scored twelve backs in one afternoon. Aunty Violet loved this game but only picked healthy young men as she said they "could stand the strain" of being pelted in the back by singing hidden cats!

Best of all the wondrous things about Aunty Violet was her library. Huge, dishevelled, resplendent in a dull pink floral carpeted room. Dictionaries, reference books, maps, encyclopaedias, theatre, cricket, the tallest man, the shortest woman—Aunty Violet could answer all our questions. I was given "Love me, Sailor" to broaden my education at ten. "Better than the Bible, my life, my love, My Turtle dove" she warbled. Said my sex crazed Aunt—or so said the look in Aunty Carrie's beady yellow spotted eyes.

Three Aunts are dead. Gone to the happy hunting ground in the sky, perhaps?

Mad Aunty Maisie rides on. Bereft of Uncle Willy and her chooks, she haunts the coming dawn round the still silent streets of Numurkah softly singing a song of love.

ANDREW PEEK

Tim Burstall's 'Kangaroo'*

Peek: Mr Burstall, how closely do you feel that the film you're planning should be based on *Kangaroo* in its published form?

Burstall: When I began thinking about the film, I was thinking of the novel as a very thinly disguised autobiography, and I thought therefore that the facts of Lawrence were just as relevant, as the facts of the material in the novel. In casting Harriet, for instance, I was originally thinking of getting a German. But now, I think not, I think we'll stay with *Kangaroo* as a novel. The film's obviously got to be done as a period piece. We thought about updating it, but we finished up staying closer to the novel than I would have originally thought possible, than I originally intended to. Even though I think it is a rather ramshackle novel, I think you tamper with someone of Lawrence's stature at your peril.

Peek: Critics like A. D. Hope have had harsh things to say about Lawrence's limitations as an accurate observer of Australia and Australians in *Kangaroo*, but you still feel the novel could be successfully translated into the visually realistic medium of film?

Burstall: The only very great novelist we've had come to Australia, and actually stay long enough to write about it, is Lawrence. I think he certainly described things about us that others have failed to do, and I think he took the Australian experience seriously. Perhaps no one else has, in the same way, and writers from inside the continent don't have the same perspectives. There *are* parts of the novel which make my hackles rise. Still, in the conflict between Lawrence and Australia, sometimes I'd say I'm with Lawrence and sometimes I'm with Australia. To try to keep his fresh and objective view, I was very, very persistent that I used a non-Australian writer, Evan Jones, to do the screenplay, a writer who actually hadn't been to Australia before, and would come here to do it.

Peek: The experiences of the central character Somers often seem pretty formless, and, at first sight, not very compatible with the sort of intensity one associates with the film medium. How do you feel about this?

* An interview with Tim Burstall on his plans to film D. H. Lawrence's novel, *Kangaroo*. Conducted by Andrew Peek, 14.6.80, Paddington, Sydney.

Burstall: "The Nightmare" chapter illustrates how he suffers a terrific baulk to his way of life, in England, and the war is directly responsible for it. Even his wife, with her German connections, is connected with the war. The other thing that figured in my early thoughts on Somers (and his connections with Lawrence) is: here is a highly conscious person who's saying of European culture it has got to a point where we've lost touch with the body, we've lost touch with the physical. Here is a frail intellectual pushing a barrow that says what we should be is much more physical, much less intellectual, much less conscious. And he's talking health, he talks the health of the body and the health of responsiveness. The man is, in fact, aware of being threatened by consumption. He talks about the grey coffin of England as he leaves—it's his own coffin, if he has to stay through many more English winters . . . Going off to Australia now takes on a peculiar significance, peculiar in the sense that it is related to all these things. Here is a place which is physical, anti-intellectual, healthy in the most obvious way. He encounters it and feels —"this isn't what I'm looking for, at all!". In Australia, Somers is flirting with his recipe for how things ought to be. He ends by rejecting recipe and place. This is an affirmative thing, and helps give the film script in its completed form its structure and conclusion.

Peek: The novel says a good deal of emphasis on the 'absence of any inner meaning' experienced by those living in Australia. What do you make of this?

Burstall: A friend of mine used to say one of the things that was interesting about Australia was—was it pre-conscious or post-conscious? That is, had we just looked at the European consciousness, and walked away? I used to think that Eastern Australia was a post-conscious society like California . . . I don't think that any more, but I think that Lawrence's encounter with Australia has that interesting overtone for me.

Peek: What about the mateship/true comradeship-in-manliness theme considered in *Kangaroo*?

Burstall: I didn't hear it, but Manning Clark delivered a lecture on the ABC recently where he said he had once hoped that Australia could have worked out some kind of socialist alternative that wouldn't have interfered with individual freedoms—an Australian dream which would not now be realized but which previously could have been. Lawrence's novel is about political dreams, the right wing dream, which is the Kangaroo one, or the left wing one, that that the character Struthers offers. Somers says that, if he had to choose, he'd go for the left wing one.

Peek: What about the homosexual innuendo between Somers and Kangaroo (and Jack as well), for instance, Somers speculating about being cuddled close to Kangaroo's tummy?

Burstall: When I was eighteen, that's when I remember hurling the book across the floor! Isn't part of the problem, that he's confusing man with the 'life of men'—Kangaroo, Jack and the Diggers represent this different order and way of life? Of the instincts that had been suppressed in Somers' and of course in Lawrence's life during the war years, the most important was the societal self. And I think that all the talk about being a man, assuming the male role among men, may be connected with a sense of exclusion, even cowardice, arising from the war? Anyway,

Lawrence wasn't a pacifist—a contrast, there, with Bertrand Russell whom he fell out with in 1915—and so that whole business of taking part in a secret para-military organisation would offer a way of repudiating earlier feelings, of saying, "No, I could have a place in just such a thing". The muddiness, the lack of proper definition in the mateship bordering on homosexuality—I think that ambiguity has to be left in the film. It's something I feel about Australia—I think our *macho* stuff does border on something like that. But I don't think in our culture it is explicit.

Peek: What about problems so far as the character of Kangaroo himself is concerned?

Burstall: In quotations I've read from *Movements in European History* and other Lawrence prose, there are discussions of the leader figure which all connect up with Kangaroo. Lawrence was right to see that kind of big, charismatic figure as decadent, but his effeteness, all that stuff about Munich and music and the elegant presentation of flowers to Harriet, that doesn't square with say, Bob Hawke versus Malcolm Fraser, or other parallels that might come to mind. I was tempted at one stage to turn the film into something like a *Chinatown*, where who Kangaroo is, is the central mystery, and this isn't resolved till the very end. It seemed to me formerly that it might be a way of getting around the problems of the Kangaroo figure. I was worried by him, I couldn't believe in him in certain ways. But I've come back again and again to the novel, even to so unsatisfactory a character as Kangaroo. I don't think we can take him out without doing massive damage to the narrative: what is required is to make credible that thing as it stands.

Peek: What about violence, the violence evoked in Jack Callcott, for instance, and that metaphor Somers uses of the need of watering Australia with blood to make it germinate?

Burstall: There's a sense in which I think Lawrence was interested by the tie-up between power, sometimes violently expressed, and sexuality, especially homosexuality—think back to "The Prussian Officer". Work on the script done for me by Larry Kramer was interesting in that respect. [Kramer wrote the screenplay for *Women in Love*, has recently published a study of American homosexuality called *Faggots*, and was Burstall's original choice for the script writer for the *Kangaroo* film.] In the novel, Jack's violence is only openly expressed, so to speak consummated, near the end, though he much earlier expresses his sexual desire for his wife, Victoria, in a way that shocks Harriet. All the novel's talk of an "Australian marriage": in some kind of a way, the character Somers is attracted to the idea of wife-swapping, but I think that half his attraction to Victoria was his attraction to Jack, though he didn't know it.

Peek: And it's interesting that, after Somers refuses to take up the mateship relationship with Jack, Jack goes on near the close to fulfil himself in those latter moments of murderous accomplishment: "Having a woman's ..... a flea-bite, nothing, compared to killing your man when your blood comes up".

Burstall: On Somers' metaphor of watering with blood: I think it's true that the difference between Australia and America, for instance, is not that we came two centuries after they did, and therefore we didn't have enough

time to establish a separate identity. It's just that not enough has happened. They have had a civil war and a war of independence. They have history that stands behind them in a way it doesn't stand behind us.

Peek: Do you plan to shoot the film on location in Thirroul and Sydney?

Burstall: I have looked at Thirroul and I've of course looked at Sydney, and Sydney in 1922 and Thirroul in 1922, and 1980 Thirroul and Sydney are so different that my best way of getting through to 1922, particularly as far as Thirroul is concerned, might be to go further down the coast. Just as obviously, parts of Sydney will have to be done in parts of Pittwater, and so on. Obviously, I'll try and get what I can, in Sydney. You can get things like the Conservatorium of Music and the Botanic Gardens or Macquarie Street, but you've only got to swing the camera the other way, and it's all enemy. I think we're in for sets for all the street stuff at the end, and even the Trades Hall stuff is going to be difficult to recreate.

Peek: Would you consider using scenery along the coast somewhere near Thirroul to bring out the correspondences between that area of Australia and the English Midlands background Somers comes from?

Burstall: All of that's there; and even there are parts of the novel where he says that the behaviour of the people reminded him of his English past—you remember his memories of Sunday tea in a Midlands farmhouse. I feel that's going on. One of his expressions or hopes when he came to Australia was: "Will this be a new world?" and he was, as it were, thrown back into his childhood. Still, the shot for shot stuff of filming is determined by a whole set of things which even I at this point couldn't predict. When it comes to the filming, how saturated one is in Lawrence has to be translated through one's own antennae. I might come up with a set of visual metaphors which I would hope would be Lawrentian, but which a lot of other people might feel were vulgar transcriptions. How do you know? I don't know.

Peek: How does your interest in filming *Kangaroo* relate to your attitudes towards cinema?

Burstall: What and where you draw the film's material from is crucial, and I still believe that the film is not a graphic art, but a literary art. I think it is a literary art, and that great film-making traditions are related to great literary traditions. We do plunder the novels and plays and short stories and so on and even when we have an original screenplay, it's related directly to the literary tradition of the country. I think film is directly connected with literature.

Hagiwara Sakutaro

(1886-1942)

Translations from the Japanese by GRAEME WILSON

Maebashi

I went to Maebashi, Sakutaro's
Hated and loved home-town, half-hoping there
To find in local stones, in local rivers,
Perhaps among his pine-woods or the bare
Uplands of Mount Akagi some root-reason
For such deep-rooted rancour; such despair.

But Maebashi is a pleasant city.
Nothing I found could possibly explain
The poet's rabid angers: even his grave-site,
High among withered mulberries, was sane:
So sweetly sane that, clanking through the outskirts,
I stared back baffled from the railway-train.

Obscenely propped against the low stone wall
Of some abandoned farm's abandoned sty,
White daikon-roots, like crowds of dwarvish cripples,
Gleamed in the last reflections from the sky;
A sky of churned black clouds, their lower coils
Wet with the sunken sun's dead-raspberry dye.

GRAEME WILSON

THE THIRD PATIENT

The patient third in line,
Looking incredibly beat,
Let fall his tongue's complete
Slubbery length. The doctor
Stuck out a sniffing nose.

"How are you feeling?" "Fine".
"The food?" "The food's a fair
Treat, so far as it goes".
"Anything else?" "No, doctor,
Everything's fine as fine".

And the patient leapt from his chair.

Look, from that area where
Excruciation twists
Wet from the twisted spine
There hang, like strings in screws,
Rotten jellyfish wrists,
Slugs' nerves, et cetera.

That person, through and through,'s
A rank red murderer.

ANGLER

Because he's mad, he must be lonely:
Because his feelings fidget,
Because of unquiet things, he fishes
Under the iron bridge.

SHADOW OF MY FORMER SELF

I am standing in the shadow, in the shadows
Of this crimped lace window-curtain.
That's why my face seems blurred
And my shape uncertain.

I hold this spy-glass in my hand.
Through it I stare away
To that wood where dogs and the nickel sheep
Walk, and bald children play.

That's why my eyes seemed dimmed. Moreover,
At lunch I over-ate.
Too much cabbage. Besides, this window-
Glass is the shoddiest plate.

That's why my face appears so terribly
Writhen. Though hardly fat
I am, if anything, far too healthy.

Why do you stare like that?
Why do you stand there gaping in?
Why such a nervous laugh?

Of course, seen thus, I must look odd
With a ghost's shrunk lower half
But, should you ask why I dwindle down,
Though it's silly to ask at all,
The answer is that I'm standing here
By the pale white-windowed wall;
That I'm standing here, inside the house,
In a kind of shadow-caul.

SICKROOM

Far, far away, a nightingale was burning
With distant fire. Towards distressful green
Through pitch-black night dim willow trees began
To bud as though the window glass had been
Waiting for greenness.

At that very moment
A pale sick person wakened from his sleep.
He got up dizzily. His sad sick face
Coldly a-tremble, he began to creep
Across the low room to its tall glass door.
Man's need for green runs deep as blood runs deep.

SHINING ROAD OF DISEASE

This is the road which I,
Hands trayed head-high,
To offer chrysanthemums,
Tread with my load
Of love and tediums.

This is the road which shed
Blood of my kin; the road
Of cabbage, fish and meat;
Road of the sad perfunctory
Flat dishes for the dead.

With tram-lines in the background,
This is the shining street
Of death and sentiment;
Road of disease where day,
Dying in shattered slats
Of light along the sky,
Turns dogs and alley-cats,
All that must die, must die,
Pure silver.
This the way
That saints, stark-naked, went.

THE NINTH SMALL POEM

How slightly
The small fry in the shallows stir,
How lightly
Snow settles on the fir,
How slight and light a flower
The first frost is:
As tenuous as our
Consentiences.

TO BE A GIRL

If I were a girl, I'd pat white powder
All over my body. I'd play on my own
Always. Always.
Among thick bushes
Where nobody passes I'd crouch right down
And lie like a rabbit that warms itself
In the winter sun. My smell would be
The smell of the rustle of slow dried grasses,
That clean dead smell that pleases me.

On moonlit nights, blue nights of sadness,
I yearn to be dead, to be lying there
A cold white corpse whose pure-white limbs,
White arms and legs spread bonely bare,
Eerily gleam in the moon's blue silver.

But to be a girl, with a Western dress,
A pretty girl in a haze of powder,
That would be pure happiness.

BY THE RIVER TONÉ

This little wood, this copse of writhen pine,
Was where I used to walk. Look, even now
From cold dim depths the same small mushrooms shine.

On my way here, again I noticed how
Pasania-fruits lie tumbled in the road
And how, clear white beyond the pines' dark flank,
The river flows as once, how white, it flowed;
How, here and there along its sandy bank,
The ant-lions' funnelled traps have all caved in.

The lines of small bent pines seemed strained to blue.

And somewhere there, near where the trees begin,
You'll find the stones on which, the whole day through,
I used to sit, wearing my poet's face,
To spout my early verses. Here I brought
The first girls that I loved. And this same place
Soaked up the tears my father's angers wrought.
I remember the very tree to whose rough deal,
Longing for one lost woman, I clung tight.

Looked back upon, these things seem scarcely real:
Yet, now as then, the river runs clear white.

HOMECOMING

On my home-coming day
Through violent winds the train
Butted its brutal way.

When I, the first awake,
Woke by the window-pane,
A whistle screamed in the black
Unhomeliness of night
And flame from the engine-stack
Glared on the sliding plain.

Are not the Joshu mountains,
That wind-embittered ramp,
That rockery of scolds,
Are not the Joshu mountains
Yet risen into sight?

Under the jogging shade
Of the night-train's gloomy lamp
Children whom lust had made
Motherless lay sleeping,
Small crumpled eight-year-olds
That snivelled as they slept.

With sidelong stealthy looks
The passengers took in
My heart on tenterhooks,
My hopelessly inept
Care of the tiny kin
Abandoned to my keeping.

Ah, having once again
Abandoned the harsh city,
Where, in the name of pity,
Still can I claim a place;
What shreds of home remain
Where I could face my face?

The past runs grimly back
To gulfs of desolation:
Whichever way one travels
The future stretches black
To sea-coasts of despair.

Mine is a life of gravels,
Of grit and sanded air.

Raped of my reputation,
Worn out with years of rue,
All sense of going gone,
With what dead-end in view
Should I live on and on?

How, unaccompanied
Save by these whimpering ones,
Can I return to face
The smiles, the hardly-hid
Sneers of my native place?
How, even, should I dare,
Lest sniggering it runs,
Stand as in youth I did
On the banks of the Toné River
Whose reedy whisper then,
Then but now never again,
Could comfort my despair?

Scouring through the savage plain
The grinding of the railway-train
Made yet more savage still
The rancour of that man whose mind
Was native to the rocks behind
Cold nature's loneliness, its blind
Bewilderment of will.

SHINING HAND

From the middle of the sand on the family grave,
Shining, a wrist appears:
A dead wax hand whose weight some white
Bright rheumatism rears
With rotted fingers sadly stiff
Like broken barley-ears.

Ah, always in my morne home-town
How palely life proceeds.

In my live hand the autumn grasses
Wither, and wither weeds:
Things become blue; cold glow-worm lights
Freckle the corpse like seeds.
And all day long the tombstone aches . . . .

Look, from the grave's decay
Shine silver gloves whose fingers open,
Granite rots away
And bright rheumatic kinly hands
Claw for the light of day.

USELESS BOOK

I saw a man of pallidness
Selling books in the street:
I heard him crying like a fighting-cock
With his ribs all thin.

I once was a man of uselessness.
This was a useless book.
It should be sold to someone
For one hundredth of a yen.

On a cold day close to winter,
Wearing a lined kimono,
The destitution of my lack of being
Has turned, inside me, sour.

How, shedding tears and feeling
In these old yellowish pages
Passion for what impassioned me
Once, o how should I dare
So to keep talking of my lonely life?

My understanding empties:
All that I have is nothing:
There's nothing really there.

What should be bought should be bought.

Though the pedestrians run
And, as they scatter, wind
Whips up its scrolls of sand,
My ancient lines of thought,
All that I felt and thought,
Writhe into grief again.

Look,
This is a useless book
And should be sold to someone
For one hundredth of one yen.

ANT LION

Hungry for ants, half-hidden in loose sand
At the bottom of its pit, the ant-lion lies in wait.
How hideously the summer air's hot shimmer
Shines back from eyes intent, insatiate.

When, at the scattering sound of falling sand
The ant-lion scuttles from its shallow hide,
There's something slightly reddish at full stretch
Scrambling to climb the sand-trap's slipping side.

At summer noon the sun beats down upon
The busy blackness of the ant-lion's head,
Its hurrying legs and jaws.
The tear-drops shed
By one small ant, caught on a grassblade, shine
Minutely bright: but soon they too are gone,
And nothing's left but death's antique design.

VILLAGE WHERE THE FLUTE IS PLAYING

Seen from this big-wheeled running rickshaw
Fields and mountains blur to mist
Willows from our windy passage
Into green revulsions twist
Swallows
Songs
And brown-eared bulbuls
Through the wheel-spin disappear
Vanish in the dizzy hazing
Of the half-wheel's hemisphere.

Beyond that daze a strange long landscape
Opens up
So far away
One feels as though the world's most lonely
Flute had quavered into play.

Try as one may to bear this feeling
Ah it is unbearable.

Birds and willows sink from focus
As the flute begins to pull
And the spring's vague greens of promise
Drain into the beautiful
Flute precision
Flute assurance
Of the unattainable.

There
Through the wheel
In that direction
I direct the rickshaw-man
There
To the village where the flute is playing.

He jinks as sharply as he can
But none have reached that village
No one
No one since the world began.

VIEWPOINT

We all went walking, hand in hand,
Along a laddering of land
Yet, thin as was that mountain-road,
On one side there was room
For a row of shops. By the sombre cliff
White lilies were in bloom.

Winding its precarious way
Up the mountain, every day
With various kinds of cosmetics
A car would come from the town.

A car would come from the city
To show us, staring down
Into the house-depths, how bizarre
The patterns of man's living are.

CRACKSMAN

A terrifying masked person,
A person armed with radium,
One who through the hall
Drifted like a sneaking dog
To vanish, shadow-suddenly,
Where the safe yawns from the wall.

The detective fired his pistol
Point-blank through the panel-work.

Nothing there at all.

WORLD OF BACTERIA

Bacteria legs, bacteria mouths,
Bacteria ears, bacteria noses,
Everywhere bacteria swim.

Some in the seedy wombs of women,
Some in the guts of clam-fish, some
Softly in the whitely dim
Hearts of onions, some in landscapes,
Everywhere bacteria swim.

Bacteria hands reach left and right
Interweaving, each strained finger
Fining down to end in slim
Root-capillaries webbing over
The fingernail's sharp raggedy rim.

Everywhere bacteria swim.

Look, in the world of these bacteria,
As through panes of leper skin,
Vermilion light, vermilion light,
Thinly shining, glimmers in;
And in that film of crimson shimmer,
Barely visible, redly dim,
Sad, sad, sad, unbearably sad,
Everywhere bacteria swim.

EARLY SUMMER

The blood of insects runs and seeps;
And semen, oozing everywhere,
Slimes brilliance on the land.

Between her fingers' whitenesses
A thin gold coin slips,
Slides down upon my hand.

Time, the beginning of May.

The limbs of the very young trees
Swim out upon the square,
And their little shoots make spray
Like bird-chirps on the air.

Look, how exquisitely
The view comes floating by:
With a riveriness how supple
The landscape streams away
Into that clear blue sky
Where, with extraordinary
Clearness, it reflects
Shadows: the shadows of people.

DISEASED FISH AND SHELLFISH

The ear of the fish, the wreath-shell's flabby hand,
Sea-urchin meat, the pulpily inflamed
Gone-rotten guts of sponges; from all these
The gross blooms of camellias expand,
The drained thick reds of your fat flower were framed.

In the dim light of thin string-jellyfish,
Pale lamps that shiver slowly to the sea's
Slow under-sway, its long cold under-swish,
Eyes strain to shape that haggard landscape where
The octopus of rheumatism gluts
On its own straggling feet,
On bruised blue oyster-meat,
The mindless hunger of its squishy guts.

See, in the shallows, there and there,
The cold clams sucking at the long nerve-worm
Of your red flower's wry poison-passing root.

Beyond the shining waves, the shingle-bruit,
The sea-anemones' incessant squirm
Clots the sea-bed with mouths of wriggling hair.

ULTRAMARINE

A baby fish embellished with wee thorns
With small bright-bellied wriggles climbs that tree
Where cherry-blossoms are in silvery bloom.

Pure blue the far blue wriggling of the sea.

The small fish jiggles in this shining world,
Light's tiny hinge that jitters squeakily.

BOTTLES

A frog preserved in alcohol,
A rat, a heart, a sea-shell.

When, motionless as they,
One moons among the bottles
Curious things can be seen
In the dim bent crystal ray:

This cocked white human ear,
These hands that from some sickness
Shrank dwarfishly away.

Hunched like a foetus on this dim-lit bed,
Fat tears ooze out to soak me
Ready for bottling-day.

DEAD MAN IN MAY

This body, with its make-up on, with master-art
Was painted:
Sadly, coquettishly, its breast, lips, arms and face
Are, every part
In every place,
With perfumed oil brush-painted.

O dear dead man in May,
I, like a green-gold snake
Writhing away,
Feel like a sticky thing;
And scrape my body, bared to death's mis-take,
Along this carpetting.

SHINING IN THE SKY

That day when my grief was violent,
That was the day
When my rotted tooth was yanked out sharply
And floated away
Over the tablelands to heaven.

Like the tip of a prong
All day long it blazed with anger,
All day long.

Look, up there in the clouding heavens,
Hurting one's eyes,
A tiny golden insect sparkles,
Electrifies
With its stark bare spark the mid-air waste,
And the darkening skies.

WATER RITE

People coagulating
Into a clot of waiting
For water that now floods
Forwards at the fountain
Assume the shapes of a smile.

The water brings up buds.

Look, in a pistil-while
The rubble-raising fountain
Will lift, like some cold bloom,
A tile as white as tile.

Crowding round the fountain,
People spumed with spray
Sway as their hearts make room
For wonder to advance,
For grief to wince away.

Ah, the pain's severity
Is more than bone can bear.
Alone and pitiably,
Caught utterly aware,
My body irks to dance,
To irrigate despair.

Look, it is dancing there.

WRITER AND AUDIENCE

The following three papers, by Humphrey McQueen, Stephen Murray-Smith and Nancy Keesing are edited versions of talks which they gave at a seminar on 'Writers and their Audience' held at Fremantle Arts Centre from 26–28 September 1980.

HUMPHREY McQUEEN: The Writer's Place in the Contemporary World

1. *The Writer*

After the success of her play, 'The Little Foxes', Lillian Hellman asked Dashiel Hammet how she should spend some of her earnings. Should she buy a sable coat or should she donate to Roosevelt's re-election campaign? Reluctantly, Hammet replied; she could do whatever she wanted with her money providing she remembered that sable coats were like fame and neither had anything to do with being a writer. And so say all of us. Writers are committed to art, to social values, to truth, to their draft, to their vision. Cash and fame, and especially sable coats, are bad for writers. Yet fame and money are the marks of professionalism in a writer.

If we don't get rich we need grants, either state or corporate ones. As a Marxist, I realise that the money for the Literature Board and for the Utah Foundation derives from the same ultimate source, namely, the surplus value extracted from the working people. The taxation system launders corporate exploitation and allows us Literature Board Fellows to feel virtuous. Despite this scientific analysis, I strongly suspect that I could not write on a Mobil commission, that the ink would freeze in my pen.

In order to tell a truth, writers have to try to get their lives into line with what they want to say, as I found out in 1979 when I lived in Sydney for two months. At the end of that stay I tried to write a thousand words on Brett Whiteley. I knew exactly what I wanted to say but the words would not come. On the last day in Sydney I accepted what I had been coming around to realise for some time, namely, that my critique of the Whiteley phenomenon was the rage of Caliban. I had been living the life-style I wanted to attack. In order to write about the layers of physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual fat that had seeped into Australia since the sixties, I had to change my own manner of living. Otherwise hypocrisy would continue to freeze the ink in my pen.

This anecdote reports a routine experience for writers. Either we mesh our lives with our words, or we swiftly reveal ourselves as liars.

So my opening point about the writer's place in the contemporary world is that writing need not be a noble profession. Seminars of this kind tend to define 'writer' in terms of a tiny minority of the people who write for their living. Lots of people who write for a living—whether they be ministerial press secretaries or advertising agents—are employed to tell lies. When writers lie for a living, or even only occasionally, we expose ourselves in such seemingly little ways as our punctuation or our choice of adverbs.

I'd also like to distinguish writers from authors. I used to be an author in the sense that I had published some books; now I am a writer in the sense that writing is what I do for a living in the same way that other people are accountants or

plumbers. I make this distinction partly to defend trade skills against the destructive forces of de-skilling that have worked against both art and craft for the past two centuries. As writer-in-residence at the North Brisbane CAE I've been involved in a 'Creative Writing' course. I don't know how to teach creativity and doubt that it is possible to do so; I even doubt that it exists. Hence I concentrate on imparting craft skills.

Poet is another word that needs to be distinguished from writer. In the past decade, the title of poet has become a social category and not an artistic or a craft designation. This usage has a good side inasmuch as it accepts that, because poetry is useless, to be a poet is to stand against the reign of the commodity.

To call oneself a novelist on the strength of one unpublished manuscript or a painter with a couple of unexhibited canvasses is to risk a certain amount of ridicule. Yet a sheaf of ill-formed words is enough to make poets of us all. This process has been a destructive one, especially for newcomers, as many apprentice writers were betrayed into adopting the easy accolade of poet. It is one thing to say 'I write poems' (who doesn't?) and quite another thing to pronounce oneself a 'poet'. It's worth recalling that John Shaw Neilson called himself a rhymer. In addition to defending the trade of writing against 'poets', I'd defend it against all manner of de-skilled labourers whether they be called sub-editors or professors.

2. *Place*

Does place mean a social or a geographical location? Is it merely descriptive or am I meant to be prescriptive as well? All four, I suppose. The examples that follow are all Australian ones, which temporarily narrows the focus of 'Contemporary World'.

The weak tradition of nationalism in the sense of knowledge about our past has artistic consequences. In his play, *A Manual of Trench Warfare*, Clem Gorman contrasts an unworldly Australian lad against an Irish wordswallower who is a leprechaun and not a person. As a characterisation of 'that other life', Private Brendan Barra, is too different from the boy from the bush for their conflict to grip on the tearing edges of their relationship. If Gorman's general education had included as much Australian history and culture as a young American gets as a matter of course, he would have known that there were plenty of native-born Australians in the First AIF who were intellectuals and sexually uncertain enough to provide the character he needed: Baylebridge is only one example.

Yet the sense of ease necessary for nationalism is apparent in unlikely places. It is in David Malouf's *Johnno* and the same ease, which depends on a Brisbane regionalism, underpins *An Imaginary Life*, that diary of an involuntary expatriate.

Two years ago your conference was on regionalism. Its concerns are still valid and they need to be brought forward to inform today's discussions, thereby rejecting the advertiser's mentality of 'been there, done that'.

The fact that regionalism is still a valid topic does not mean that all forms of regional expression are equally valid. To ask if Balmainism is possible is to ask if art can live off art alone? The contrast between Balmain and Fremantle is that this Arts Centre is part of a working community and regionalism exists precisely because people remake their environments through their work.

Patrick White's two most recent novels are fine expressions of geographical and of social space. White's Nobel Prize has let him stop looking over his shoulder to London, and he has come home. Moreover, his involvement with the Green Bans and anti-Kerr movements has let him into the social space of his own people. The warmth, the wit, the wisdom and the courage of *A Fringe of Leaves* and *The Twyborn Affair* testify to the benefits of this occupancy.

3. *Contemporary*

The distinctive feature of our culture is advertising. Its impress surpasses Goebell's propaganda and is more truly totalitarian because it penetrates into all of our responses and expectations. In particular, advertising has produced a mode of writing which parades itself as super-realist when it is nothing more than naturalism in the cast-off clothes of television commercials, which constitute more of our natural world than do birds and animals.

The prose of Barry Oakley and Peter Carey is still praised for breaking away from the dreary realist tradition in Australian writing. Such a judgement depends on confusing realism with naturalism and never suspects that their fab-ulism is lemon charged. We need a new realism to overcome this latest naturalism. David Ireland opened one path with *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* and Rodney Hall's forthcoming *Blood Relations* will provide another.

Advertising imposes its mode on creative writing in other ways. The first act of Williamson's *Travelling North* desperately needed some well-made commercials between the scenes to add excitement. The Brisbane version of Steve Sewell's *Traitors* suffered from reducing scenes to television grabs; the impact of television on writing for the live theatre is a related issue, but too important to explore further at this time.

A different aspect of contemporary takes us back to Hammett's comment about the relationship between sable coats and writers. Some writers, and plenty of authors, are swaddled in sable. By and large, these people are to be found in that privileged category of welfare recipients known as tenured academics. If continuing financial uncertainty corrodes and sours a writer, then it is equally true that absolute certainty about one's career can corrupt and debilitate. Writers need the occasional unrest cure and the world of the 1980s will see that we get plenty of them as a third and nuclear war becomes more probable than possible, and as the re-industrialisation of the USA rips the economic guts out of its dominions, like Australia.

4. *World*

This term needs to be used in the plural sense since to talk of audiences we soon realise that audiences for writing are different in Africa, China and Latin America where the most marked features of each are illiteracy, propaganda and fascism, respectively.

Poets in Australia complain of the lack of audiences. Pablo Neruda had no such problem and Marquez found an enormous audience for his seemingly difficult *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* On the other hand, if you write for yourself you cannot expect an audience, and it is strange to hear such writers complain that no one reads them.

These worlds are not only different from each other; they also change over time. In the 1940s, a reactionary landowner helped Neruda—Neruda, the poet—to escape from Chile; in the 1970s, a new Right dragged Neruda from and to his death bed. This year, when the People's Republic of China sent three writers to the Adelaide Arts Festival they turned out to be Oxford dons. A few years ago they had been in jail; now other writers occupy their cells.

In these varied and changing worlds there can be no single answer to the question 'What is the writer's place?'. For some, the answer is to tell more lies. For others, like Neruda and Marquez, it is to grapple with those truths that make up the lives of hundreds of millions of people who become their excited audiences.

For the Australia of the 1980s I can offer only the answer of my own imperfectly practised intentions. I share the responsibilities of my political associates for hum-drum activities such as handing out leaflets. The fact that I may have

written them does not excuse me from routine duties. I merely provide my craft skills as a writer, just as carpenters provide theirs to the daily affairs of political work.

Yet my writing brings an additional task. My books and articles are part of an attempt to work out what we should be doing to achieve an independent and socialist Australia. In this work I am sustained and indulged by more active comrades who generously assure me that my books can have a political significance equal to anything I would achieve as a political activist, which is perhaps their way of telling me how inept I am as a political worker. I certainly know that without the opportunity to join in their political actions I could not do what I now attempt in my writing.

In most ways I lead an extraordinarily privileged life, if only because I enjoy my work. I am also kept by the taxes exacted from the Australian people. As Collingwood said forty years ago, I am one of the geese kept by the Romans to warn of approaching dangers. And so cackle I shall.

STEPHEN MURRAY-SMITH: Radical Nationalism and its Audience*

Stalin once said, the story goes, when asked what was the most dangerous tendency of 'right-wing deviationism' and 'left-wing sectarianism', "Whichever we are not keeping the closer eye on at the moment!". This is shrewd, and so far as I am concerned the only remark of his worth repeating. It may well be that the major problem of Australian writing today is not the presence of some kind of ideological viewpoint (except the ideology of complacence, which is always with us), but its absence. Earlier, I raised the question of the absence of 'great themes', implying that the absence of some kind of cement has a disorganising effect on a country's culture. Australians no longer have a vision of a land to conquer; nor, to replace it, do they have any vision of a land to live in. We no longer —rightly or wrongly—see much relevance in class analysis, however much the Robert Connells and Raymond Williamses of this world scold us. (I should add that in my opinion class analysis remains highly relevant to our understanding of our present society and our ability to build a more just one; but another failure of the Left, and of our literature, has been the absence of first-rate Australian writing which transcends crude 'socialist realism' yet shows us how our lives are manipulated by the powerful, and how our system too often transfers resources from those who have not to those who have. Moleskin Midases, Jimmy Brocketts and John Wrens no longer feed our social anger and awareness and no-one has put Lang Hancock or Bjelke Petersen into a book.) Nor is a national awareness, a vision of a Great South Land, any longer an effective unifying symbol, if it ever was.

The position emerges clearly with the poets. From about 1960 on new poets in Australia started writing for each other, to the consternation of editors and the bafflement of readers. They may be *enragés*, but they are not revolutionary or, for that matter, even reformist. John Tranter, a leading ideologist of the poetical Sinn Feiners, puts the position clearly: poets are responsible only to themselves, "constructing fictions out of their experiences in a world qualified by language, not morality". A. D. Hope said some time ago that the new poets represented the "voice of the cocktail party", but in many cases it is no longer even that: there has been a retreat to the back room.

In the short story there has been a decisive (and sometimes beneficial) move from writing about 'me in relation to others' to writing about 'me in relation to me'. The Australian novel has almost collapsed, if you define the novel as a piece of fiction which seeks to generalize on experience—as writers as disparate as Kylie Tennant, Katharine Prichard and Patrick White have all attempted to do. I see this 'internalizing' process as related to the 'credentialism' that we meet with in other fields: a form of territorialism if you like, a marking out of caste ground, a form of cultural *apartheid.* Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this process is that it has gone hand in hand with a startling improvement in the quality of the use of words; the best of our poets, novelists, short story writers today are very

* This excerpt will form part of a monograph to be published by the Foundation for Australian Literary Studies, James Cook University.

competent and professional smiths. Eventually the 'amateur' writer will disappear from serious literature, however original or important their work, to become as forlorn and curious a figure as a self-taught, working-class intellectual transposed from the nineteenth to the late twentieth century, or a bush handyman at a computer terminal. Literature will follow—is following—opera, contemporary painting and serious music into the world of refined and specialized taste. The final turn of the screw will come when some kind of semi-formalized credentials are required, not only to produce but also to consume art.

Sadly, the 'return to the self' will not produce the kind of literature we badly need in this country and which is adapted to the introspective mode: autobiography, biography, the diarist and the essayist. Here Australians have demonstrated a national incompetence so profound that the phenomenon must have psychological underpinnings. The personal and historical sensitivity of a Ray Ericksen (*West of Centre*, *Cape Solitary*, *Ernest Giles*) is so rare that it demands an explanation; perhaps Ericksen's formal historical training has given him a securer base from which to see himself and his country. Part of the reason the 'new wave' writers I have been writing about have, in my opinion, a tenuous hold on the future so far as the survival of their own writing is concerned, is that they are consummately ignorant of, and uninterested in, the past. To this I shall return.

There is, I believe, an alternative both to sterile ideological stasis, on the one hand, and to an equally sterile refinement and trivialisation of art and life on the other. We do not have to accept the political indoctrination of either the Party class or the salon. "Humanism" does not necessarily imply soft-centred self-indulgence. "Progress" does not necessarily imply wood-chipping, or oil-drilling at Noonkanbah. "Radicals" should not seek to destroy the past, but to build on it. "Nationalists" can get by quite well, as we Australians have shown, without anyone being very clear about a national flag or national anthem . . .

Ian Turner has argued, as I hope *Overland* itself has made evident over twenty-five years, that there *is* a continuity of a radical tradition in Australia, that there *is* "a continuity of protest and dissent, of men organizing to assert the justice of their claims against their masters". He adds:

> Radical nationalism—which is a way of looking at the past as a programme for the future—does seem to me to be useful. It leads towards a political strategy which is based in present realities, and an attempt to redefine socialist means and ends in terms of a tradition which incorporates whatever is valuable in Australia's past—including political democracy and intellectual freedom—and which carries a specific Australian resonance.

It seems to me that providing radical nationalism can move with the times, and that to me would involve having within it a capacity to mount critical examinations of the Left itself, it has more to offer as a guide to useful social action than any challengers from either the Left or the Right. But to be a useful way of examining and ordering reality radical nationalism (read, if you like, the quest for a humanist Australian social-democracy) needs to be reinforced from within and to be subjected to critical pressures on all sides. Unfortunately at the moment the critical pressures from outside are there, but Australian social democracy lacks a firm intellectual and theoretical base from which to fight back. Radical nationalism of a kind is still the dominant ideology, in the sense that it informs the views and the work of hundreds of writers, teachers, journalists, social scientists, public servants and others. But it is a sloppy army, without a general staff. After we have mentioned Ian Turner and Hugh Stretton, it is hard to point to our Clausewitzes.*

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* Readers interested in Ian Turner's extended defence of the radical-nationalist tradition should consult, for instance, articles by him in *Overland* no. 72 and *Overland* nos. 76/77.

The reason I want more theoretical debate, and the magazines and books to support it, is not because I want to see Australia swallowed up in some dreadful, imposed DysUtopia, but because I want an enlightened, pragmatic, radical humanism to survive in this country. Ideologues as rulers bring misery in their train, and intellectuals almost invariably make poor politicians. But, without the role of the intellectual in theorizing and systematizing, we are left with what we have now, a society of flaccid tone dominated by media triviality. (The startling ability of the Australian Broadcasting Commission to destroy the meaning of any Australian 'classic' it touches is evidence on the side of the lack of social criticism and the depth of historical ignorance in this country.) The marvellous thing about the metropolitan societies like London and New York are the large groupings of literary intellectuals, free-lance and otherwise, feeding ideas to each other and to their readers in a flowing shuttle of words.

To a large extent the radical-nationalist critique has lost credence, I believe, not because of the various ideological criticisms levelled at it, but because in our community general curiosity about our national origins has never been strong, and has now diminished to a point at which any general perception of Australia as something that has grown is non-existent. Even the successive waves of migration to Australia, from the first Aboriginal invasion onwards, are not examined in context; which is why current 'multi-cultural' propaganda, starting from a compassionate and helpful base, has developed into something of a monster, and in some of its manifestations is becoming an engine that will imprison its clients rather than liberate them.

An Australian of Greek origin said to me the other day: "My people hang on to their old customs and culture as much as they do because they can see no Australian alternative to adopt instead." This is an interesting contrast to the fervid Americanism of the New York Jew, the St Louis German, the Milwaukee Swede and the Hawaiian Japanese. The ugly Oz is a feature of every overseas resort of any reasonable level of vulgarity, and the image we have of him is of an aggressive chauvinist with a deep if misapplied pride in the exceptional nature of his own heritage. In fact the Australian is, in a nationalistic sense, the most modest creature living. We live in a self-satisfied, existentialist society where neither the past nor the future beckons. When the National Book Council, with which I am associated, protested not long ago to Australia Post at the absence of a special book post rate in a country which, because of its geography, badly needs one, the official reply read: "In the past, and owing to the nature of Australian society at that time, a book post was a necessary incentive to the free flow of ideas and information. That need no longer exists."

In the place, then, of a free flow of ideas and information within Australia we have a thriving import industry. American poetry magazines are eagerly scanned by many poets for models on which to base Australian verse, and American art magazines are seized by artists, waiting eagerly at their letter-boxes for inspiration from abroad. There is no longer an Australian architecture, and what there was has been destroyed by municipal councils elected by our citizens . . .

The only other point I want to raise is—does it really matter? It might be argued, and no doubt often is, that there are great cultures, and great histories, and great literatures, and that the major issue is that Australians should be aware of the rest of the world, and of their place within the history and family of mankind.

Yet, if we agree with Vance Palmer that "The unity of man is based on his infinite diversity", then we must see our own diversity as a part of the whole. I would myself go further, and argue that if we are troubled by thoughts about ultimate survival in this country, then in the long run it is only the respect of our

neighbours and the world which will enable us to survive. This will be won at least as much by evidence that we have a life of the mind as by evidence that we can manufacture nuclear weapons or have an advanced capacity for making silicon chips.

Our easy existentialism and our rejection of what Joseph Furphy called "petrified dogmas" has much to commend it; and we have created what we should be bold enough to call, with all its manifold faults, one of the most decent, even admirable, of the world's societies. But that society may not remain decent and admirable if it is dedicated to eclecticism: if its universities teach books rather than ideas, if its academics and teachers stay aloof from the market-place, if dance and drama, poetry and painting, sculpture and philosophy, history and craft and, indeed, everyday discourse in a thousand different ways do not reflect an ordered process of thought about the meaning of the experiences we have been through.

I have tried here to make some pattern of meaning out of my own experience, and by doing so, albeit reluctantly, have at least provided some evidence for others to examine. All true societies need to be involved in a perpetual *apologia.* There is little evidence that the spread of affluence in Australia, the vast development in support for education and the arts, even the application of more compassionate patterns of social welfare, are yet leading towards a more sensitive, aware and thoughtful Australia.

NANCY KEESING: Responsibilities of Writer and Critic

Writers of fiction and poetry so far as I can see have almost no responsibilities to an audience at all beyond honesty in its most basic sense: thou shalt not steal—that is, in literary terms, thou shalt not plagiarise. Conversely, critics excepted, no audience beyond the captivity of the classroom has any responsibility to these kinds of writer. Patronage of good writers, whether governmental, institutional or private is another matter altogether and beyond the scope of this talk today. Patrons and audiences are not one and the same thing. Within the limits of my topic today no one owes a novelist or a poet a living or even a hearing—that is for the writer to win by his own skills and the power of his own vision.

However there are certain conventions and requirements that I suppose can be regarded as responsibilities. One of the first steps to gaining an audience in print is to acquire an entrepreneur—a publisher. I find it hard to think of an author's responsibilities without taking those of the publisher into account. Together author and publisher must establish certain matters before a reading audience is involved. If a work is plainly based on actual characters despite the pretty meaningless disclaimer many books carry, it is necessary to consider, responsibly, the bounds of good taste, and the bounds of legality. These boundaries are often difficult to draw. Joseph Heller, Kylie Tennant, Aldous Huxley, Patrick White are a random few of the countless recent novelists who, without formal recriminations so far as I know, introduce actual people, thinly disguised or undisguised into their books, and not necessarily in genial or flattering terms. In this area I think that almost anything is allowable if it is done with artistic integrity and without malice. In my vocabulary intentional malice is one of the worst forms of dishonesty.

I spoke above of gaining an audience in print. Public appearances and readings by writers of prose and poetry introduce other factors because they convert the writer into something akin to the dramatist and actor. Even here I can't see much responsibility. Some writers have glorious voices and considerable acting ability and that is a bonus for the audience, but not necessarily a requirement of the writer. It may be a responsibility of the entrepreneur who in this case is the organiser of the reading or performance. The entrepreneur ought to make sensible choices. It can be quite sensible to ask a writer with a very faint voice to read in a small room, and idiotic to put the same person in a park at lunchtime, and very unself-critical of a writer who agrees unless a sound system is provided. If the writer as performer presents a tedious offering, or one that is unsuitable or offensive to the audience of the moment, the audience will depart. It is commonsense rather than responsibility to choose material suitable for a particular occasion. Audiences can depart very effectively without necessarily walking out—they simply switch off.

Many of the responsibilities of dramatists may be inferred from what I've said so far.

I said the terms writer and writing cover a wide range. If one supposes completely imaginative and undidactic fiction and poetry to be at one extreme of authorship, and indisputably factual writing at the other there will be an increasingly confused and sometimes confusing area about the middle. To explain this

let us consider a few Australian publications that deal with food. At the extreme of imaginative writing is *The Magic Pudding.* At the extreme of factual writing is the manual for my electric stove. Not too far from *The Magic Pudding*, but rather closer to reality and fact belong long sections of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, Jonah, Such is Life, For the Term of His Natural Life* with its cannibalism and, say, that gruesome canine feast in *The Solid Mandala.* Towards the stove-manual extreme belongs *The Commonsense Cookery Book* and a shelf of scientific treatises on Australian dietary habits. Next to those, but a bit nearer the centre, goes Geoffrey Blainey's *The Triumph of the Nomads* with its accounts of aboriginal Australian foods. Nearer the centre again are a few recipe books compiled with imagination and wit but including reliable instructions—I think of *Oh for a French Wife* or Rosemary Brissenden's *South East Asian Food.* A bit closer to the fiction end are food books whose recipes and instructions do not and cannot yield, from a home kitchen, anything quite matching their ravishing photographs.

And so it goes. Norman Lindsay at his extreme has no responsibilities whatever. If the writer of my stove-manual proves irresponsible and I burn out the oven or receive an electric shock in consequence of his dereliction, I or my bereaved loved ones can sue his company. For the middle, and according to their purposes and intentions, I assume that non-fiction food writers, even when they most indulge fantasy, fulfil their responsibilities to me as audience, by the harmless entertainment they provide especially since most of them, like all of us, hope for re-issues, new editions and further commissions.

Instead of food I might have chosen such topics as history, science, motoring, field sports, religion, politics, horticulture or public speaking.

In fact at present, in this country, England, and America some of the most troublesome areas of confusion and confused expectation about authorial responsibility are in the linked range of history and biography. To a great extent the dispute and passion that has raged about Manning Clark's *History of Australia* and his biographical interpretation of Henry Lawson mirror the confusion of his audiences. I speak of *audiences* in the plural because a few of his readers will be his peers—historians with large imaginations; some are academics who are not his peers, perhaps not yet, maybe never—and he also attracts a very large lay audience which will contain many shades of fitness to judge him. Now audiences are also critics of a sort, a point I shall return to. Some of the argument about Clark's books has been legitimate since one of his aims is to provoke thought and rethinking. If it is proveable that he has made a few mistakes with dates I suppose one could talk about irresponsibility on the part of Clark or his publisher or both. Certainly it is irresponsible if genuine mistakes are not corrected in subsequent editions. But an audience like a critic needs a sense of proportion, a sense of what is attempted and a sense of scale too. The kind of reader who hopes to prove cleverness by pouncing joyfully on a major writer's minor error usually only sounds petty. The malicious and/or jealous critic is despicable and sounds so. . . .

A recent example of dishonesty and irresponsibility is to be found in a reprint from *Encounter*, in *Quadrant* for September 1980. It is a long and interesting article so I will summarise it very briefly because I want to quote its last paragraph. Wayland Young who wrote the article is the son of the wife of Scott of the Antarctic by her second husband whom she married after Scott perished. Young explains compellingly and fully why he believes a book called *Scott and Amundsen* by Roland Huntford, deliberately and intentionally defames Scott, his wife and others. Until I read this article I'd always deplored the Australian Defamation Law provision that, in this country, makes it possible to sue for defamation of the dead. I've thought, and written, that this law is for one thing a barrier to good

effective biography. In the light of Young's article some of us may have to rethink our objections because, had the defamation been published in Australia, Young and others might have sought legal redress—that is impossible in England. Here is Young's paragraph that I think, though in a negative way, sums up a writer's responsibilities:

> I object to Roland Huntford's book as a son, because he maligns my mother and her first husband; as an owner of archives because I gave him access to them and he misused them; and as an (occasional) historian because he has dishonoured that essential calling and put its raw materials at risk, not only for himself but for others.

* * *

And so to critics, whose responsibilities are easier to define. However it must be noted that critics are often what one might call "proper" writers under another hat. Some, like Robert Graves, work as critics to finance other, perhaps nobler, kinds of writing. Some critics publish in small or specialised journals whose payments are non-existent or miniscule but most critics tend to ply their trade for lovely money, whether they are on the payroll of universities and colleges or write for newspapers, journals and magazines or whether they do both. Critics then are susceptible to hiring and firing; they have recognised responsibilities and are answerable to their managements—editors, university senates *et al.* A book publisher may put up with an eccentric, unreliable, conceited, quarrelsome drunken genius. The literary editor of a newspaper with deadlines to be met is much less likely to put up with freaks, no matter how talented.

Some people think it helpful to allocate critics starting stalls like race-horses. Near the rails are eminent professors and Readers in English; on the outside are newspaper hacks. I think these kinds of distinction ridiculous. A. D. Hope's critical works and books, and his distinction in letters and scholarship, are not diminished by his enormous body of ephemeral criticism in newspapers and magazines or by his years as an ABC radio "uncle" on the children's session where he introduced more Australians to the pleasures of reading than any other ten publicists combined. Many academics often or sometimes review for the popular press; many regular book reviewers in the popular press often or sometimes contribute more detailed, considered and substantial criticism to specialist journals.

As between those kinds of publication, requirements and intentions can vary greatly and so, as a rule, must writing style. But I think essential requirements and responsibilities remain constant.

Honesty and fairness are paramount. Fairness is not the same thing as impartiality. I don't regard impartiality as a necessary or even attainable requirement of criticism in general. Most major, and most good critics have stances about all sorts and kinds of matters. Any honest critic can judge if and when his stance needs explaining or stressing. If his partiality or prejudice on a particular issue or occasion is an obstruction to fairness he should decline to criticise; any editor worth his or her salt will accept that decision and respect it too . . .

One part of fairness is in criticising a book for what it is, or attempts to be. Some authors write the same book many times; others never write the same book twice. In either case it is perfectly proper to compare a new book with an earlier one or vice versa, and perfectly proper to say that Miranda McSwirt was more successful when she wrote about the grand old Duke of York than when she attempts the life of Methuselah. But it is not proper to say: "Miranda McSwirt's new book, by contrast with her earlier biographical works, is a novel of London's slums at the turn of the twentieth century; it would have been better had Miss McSwirt given us a biography of George Orwell."

Another part of fairness is in not bringing out a cannon to kill a mouse. One does not lower one's standards when one selects appropriate standards. I happen to think *War and Peace* is the most magnificent novel ever written but I wouldn't think it an appropriate yardstick against which to compare certain other masterpieces, Joyce's *Ulysses*, for instance. Much less, then, can I admire the kind of criticism that tears a fragile, evanescent novel into shreds and complains that its author is no Gunter Grass.

My earliest book reviewing helped to finance the collections of Australian Bush Ballads and folksong that Douglas Stewart and I compiled in the early 1950s and the *Bulletin* was very kind in providing work. Douglas Stewart and Ronald McCuaig dished out a few rules that, by and large I still adhere to.

I never review a book that I haven't read thoroughly and kept this rule even when I was writing five and six reviews a week. I usually avoid a book that is sent by a writer, not a publisher, and avoid it like the plague if it comes with a flattering inscription or note. Indeed I usually prefer my literary editors to select the books they want me to notice. (It follows that, as a writer, I never ask for a particular reviewer for my books, or send out copies personally.) I never give away surprises in the plot. I am particularly careful never to say that someone who makes his living by writing cannot write for peanuts, which is actionable. Indeed some twenty years ago Martin Boyd from Italy issued a writ after a hapless academic in an Australian literary quarterly tore his syntax into pedantic pieces. Boyd was persuaded to withdraw his action before it came to court. Equally I am careful in making disparaging remarks about publishers. If the index or proof reading is appalling I say so. I keep a note of my reasons for disparagement when there is no room to itemise them in the published piece. I don't keep review copies for weeks and months before I get around to reading them, and if I'm asked to do a job quickly, and can agree, I *do* it quickly. If I can't make the time, I say so. These points may sound to be more in the region of responsibility to editors than to an audience, but the reader has a legitimate expectation to hear about new books promptly.

The last point I want to make is that a general critic has a responsibility to read widely and adventurously and to keep informed of developments in his field world wide. I cannot responsibly inform those readers of review pages if I confine my private and recreational reading only to what appeals to my inclination of the moment.

I end with a caution to young players. It can be great fun to be funny at someone else's expense, and perfectly safe if you pick your target judiciously. But remember that you will have an audience of at least one, the writer of the book, and playing clever can turn very sour, especially if you make a mistake; and everyone sometimes makes mistakes.

THE MORAL 'FASZAD': THE NOVELS OF NICHOLAS HASLUCK

Helen Daniel

Nicholas Hasluck's first novel, *Quarantine*, published in 1978, prompted comparison with a surprising range of writers, including Kafka, Golding, Camus and Conrad[1]. This was no mere literary feverishness, for the novel presents a Kafkaesque predicament, with people in an isolated community compelled to construct their own definitions, while held by anonymous authorities in seemingly purposeless detention. While it suggests much of the fable, *Quarantine* also has the suspense and intrigue of the thriller, a narrative mode with which Hasluck is much at ease. From the isolated community of his first novel, working out its definitions in the desert, in his second novel, *The Blue Guitar* (1980), Hasluck has moved to the city, any city with a face crisscrossed by lines of moral decay, by soaring commercial enterprise and plummeting moral values. While *The Blue Guitar* is a more restricted novel than *Quarantine*, together with Hasluck's earlier collection of short stories, *The Hat on the Letter 'O'*, his work points to a novelist of potential importance in Australian fiction.

In contemporary Australian fiction, there are a number of characters who are driven, compelled by the exigencies of the present to submit again to the experiences of the past, to search there for an explanation of the disorder of the present. In the novels of Mathers and Oakley, for example, and in *Johnno*, *The Chantic Bird* and Robin Wallace-Crabbe's *Feral Palit*[2], the narrator is both protagonist and bystander, observer and observed, contemplating his own excesses in the past, often in disbelief or marvelling at his own naiveté. In *Quarantine*, Hasluck's narrator too is driven, but also blundering. Forty years after the events at the quarantine station, he is compelled to confront those events again, ostensibly to finally acknowledge his own guilt. He sets out to recover the past, that "kaleidoscope of unreality"[3], like the narrator in Hasluck's "The Whole Truth"[4] who tries to clutch at an elusive truth. The period of quarantine has haunted him for forty years:

> As always, although many years have passed, the memory of the affair sets up an itch in my mind which wants scratching. The anomalies, the gaps in my understanding of what happened, the half truths—the memory begins to fester; it begins to trouble me like some blemish of the skin, some residual disaffection which comes and goes but never heals. (p. 3)

Yet Hasluck sets up a complex perspective in the novel, for he himself stands at a dissociative distance from the narrator. In both the past and the present, he exposes not the narrator's stripped truth but rather his clinging still to the evasions of the past, his moral side-stepping, his lingering hope that he may yet be exonerated by the friend to whom he writes. In his short story, "Flowstone", Hasluck created a narrator who is steadfastly dispassionate as he surveys his past, deliberately detached. But in *Quarantine*, the narrator cannot achieve that distance and he writes, not so much a confession, as a defence, clinging still to the case he carefully constructed for himself at the time.

Structurally the novel is complex, as the narrator shifts back and forth through time, admitting to his own premonitions, anticipating future events, then staying his hand to more slowly work through the whole sequence. The narrative pace slows as his anxiety quickens. And Hasluck creates a style befitting his narrator, mildly posturing in an academic way, discursive, even rambling at times, eager to indulge in intellectual dalliance along the way. He plays around the actual events, insisting on their complexity and so initiating his own defence. In structure it seems both impatient and evasive, according to the pace of his moral stress. He seeks out temporary refuges, such as the speculative passage on the nature of boredom (pp. 102-6) to cloak a moral failure on his part; or such

as the witty passage on 'Surbiton' (pp. 56-8) after the encounter with Burgess, years later, where he recoils from Burgess's implied accusation. Such ploys are at once the florid posturing of the young law student and the evasions of the professor observing his own past failures. Again, he writes of Doctor Magro's anecdote about Lake No (pp. 49-50), the irrational gesture in defiance before being sucked into the truth. With all its parrying and sidestepping, the narration is a kind of gesture of defiance before the reality takes over.

The structure of the novel flows too from the informing concept of a "faszad", a term bequeathed — perhaps mercifully — by the bizarre Doctor Magro, who tracks down contradictions in ailments which are protean and confound diagnosis. A "faszad" denotes a hotch-potch of sordid intrigue, almost "a conspiracy without a cause", without purpose,

> as if the intention was simply to trigger off some iniquitous proceeding on the expectation that pickings of one kind or another would be there for nimble fingers in the end. (p. 3)

The "faszad" closes in on its victim, chosen at random, before leaving him enmeshed in his downfall, butterfly-pinned, before the conglomerate of meaningless intrigue flows on to engulf another. Into this "faszad" are thrown the machinations of the slippery Shewfik Arud and his purchaser, Burgess's faith in discipline and committee proceedings, David Shear's relationship with Isobel, her mother's disapproval, the undirected brutality of Bricky and his fellow thugs, the narrator's brothel experience in the clutches of Osman and his passion for Isobel, as well as a myriad of lesser elements which all flow together into meaningless intrigue. As it homes in on David and the narrator, all the moral possibilities are smudged and blurred, so that even the moment of moral choice is obscured.

In the short story, "Keeping It Clean", Hasluck explored the disparity of the private worlds of four passengers on a ship temporarily delayed. In *Quarantine*, he subdues that concern in order to explore the patterns and definitions of the closed society at the quarantine station. He depicts the minor characters with a kind of Dickensian succinctness, seizing on an idiosyncrasy in their reaction to quarantine, such as the scrapbook man's sisyphean labours, or the elderly floor-thumping sister, or Mr. Harwood, grand master of boredom, or Bricky and his mates blurting out obscene, thick encouragement to Burgess. But in this Kafkaesque predicament, where even the nature of the disease is never specified, Hasluck attends to their public stance rather than their private worlds. He studies the human ailment, with Doctor Magro propounding the theory that acquired immunity may be worse than the disease: how to identify the organisms at work in the human body for its welfare? In the absence of authorities other than the cynical doctor and the protean, slippery Shewfik Arud, the closed society must create its own authorities and its own sanctions.

The passengers gladly surrender to Burgess and the institution of the committee, responsibility for their welfare, even though he never intends acting against the interests of the anonymous authorities. His contentment as a figurehead, his determination to preserve the status quo and his insistence on communal codes, all shift into active punishment when David Shears transgresses in individual enterprise. Burgess is the voice of the closed society as it searches for an explanation of its predicament, a cause. Like the 'beast' in Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, created by the boys to give shape and form to their own fears, David Shears becomes the "beast' of the closed society, the scapegoat offered up to appease the anonymous gods holding them in quarantine. Ironically, the narrator's eagerness to blame Burgess when they meet years later is a nomination of a different scapegoat, offered up to atone for his own guilt.

The narrator fumbles back through the past in the hope of acquittal but, even in the midst of the "faszad", there was a moment of moral choice. He elected to remain a spectator during the quarantine, but from his moral inertia, he was compelled to become a participant:

> Urban man sits, bleary-eyed, in front of an aggressive screen; a spectator and, simultaneously, because of his own apathy in a darkened room, his inability to resist events, a barbarian at the gate, a horror-stricken protagonist in all that happens anywhere on earth. (p. 130)

His struggle to remain an outsider, a spectator idly observing the vagaries of mankind, casts him as one of the barbarians.

Quarantine has a subdued comic element, not only in its witty style, its lighter comedy of errors (as in the narrator's night with David), but also in more menacing form, its black comedy, where despair jostles with the ridiculous. The brothel scene carries that more insidious comedy in itself, but also in its repercussions. And much of the blacker comedy consists of the absurd being caught up in the "faszad" and so taking on new significance. Shewfik Arud is a masterly creation, his language steadily comic, his crestfallen pandering to his guests, his pathetic optimism, his unwavering support for the League of Nations, and his distorting truth as a basic courtesy to his guests, all delightfully amusing. But there is a more insidious side to him, a bizarre quality which suddenly becomes horrifying. And the narrator too is witty, amusing, but guilty. The events at the station he too has clothed with fiction, remoulded some of them into after-dinner anecdotes to be displayed before academics and port. The haunting memory of his cowardice and moral lethargy has been transformed into an academic platform, insisting that men must assume individual responsibility. The "faszad" which enmeshed him still holds him in its grip forty years later. When he finally left the quarantine station, he recalled Doctor Magro's warning that sometimes patients are discharged during temporary improvement in order not to sully the hospital's reputation. They perhaps are all carriers, the prognosis poor.

Hasluck aspires to "a conventional type of model, tightly constructed, leading to a dénouement"[5]. *Quarantine* is tightly constructed, skilfully controlled, for through the verbose, discursive narrative befitting the narrator, Hasluck sets up an ironic perspective on him: we explore his consciousness in the present, his evasions in the past and the still urgent dialogue between the two. In *The Blue Guitar*, Hasluck adopts a simpler structure, a linear development rather than the shifts back and forth through time in *Quarantine*. In *The Blue Guitar*, Dyson Garrick sets out with an innocence largely intact:

> The man bent over his guitar,
> a shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
> They said, 'You have a blue guitar,
> you do not play things as they are.'
> The man replied, 'Things as they are
> are changed upon the blue guitar.'
> And they said then, 'But play, you must,
> a tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
> A tune upon the blue guitar
> of things exactly as they are.'[6]

Dyson Garrick, entrepreneur, cavalier go-getter, promoter and developer in general, sets out with his faith intact that " 'Things as they are/are changed upon the blue guitar.' " With only a slight moral limp from a previous deal, he sallies forth into the commercial arena, determined to change 'things as they are' and emerge unscathed.

Instead of the closed quarantine society, here we are in the city, commercially feverish, morally lethargic. The blue guitar is kin to the pianola, with the mastery of Segovia or Baez on cassette inside. Garrick launches it grandly on a sceptical world as the panacea for the ills of contemporary society, for the malaise of the modern world. He sets out with a simple commitment to its inventor, Hermann, to negotiate the optimum deal, the moral issues clear and untrammelled. But he too is enmeshed in a "faszad", a hotch-potch of cross-purpose, almost "a conspiracy without a cause", which leaves him blundering through a moral maze. And like the quarantine society, Garrick too must create his own definitions, establish his own codes in the midst of the city's

> jumble of dark configurations. A haphazard geometry of lines and spaces. Office buildings with lights glimmering, cranes towering above a building site — reinforcements quietly taking up their accustomed positions, etching themselves into the sepia sky. (p. 26))

Garrick moves easily at first between Hermann's world of ramshackle buildings and dilapidated hopes and his own commercial world of towering new enterprises. There is a steady contrast between Garrick's energy and change, with Hermann's wasteland, his stillness in his desolate environment:

> A ghost pattern. A reflection of disorder. An ominous X-ray image of the streets . . . Tom Tiddler's ground, a geometric maze of undergrowth and useless tracks, eroded by indifference. (p. 141)

But his commitment to Hermann becomes ever more complicated and compounded by

his own financial predicament, and, as the "faszad" gathers speed, Garrick's energy and change shifts into frenzy and panic, while Hermann's stillness shifts into calmness.

At the outset, Garrick is confident, elated at the prospect of a new deal, revelling in the launching of the blue guitar. Through him, however, we enter a world of deals and dealers who ride high for a dizzying moment before being surf-dumped or seeking the safety of shallower waters. The bank, calling up the guarantee, is the first of a series of pursuers hounding Garrick deeper into the "faszad". Hasluck writes with biting humour of the most bloodthirsty pursuit, that of Hollins, the fraud investigator offended by the inadequacy of his own case against Garrick and so quickening his enthusiasm into a relentless dogging. Creyke pursues Garrick with a lure, a bait, tempting him to take the quick escape from his predicament. His father, giving voice to noble principles, presses him morally but, like Garrick's wife, remains oblivious of Garrick's mounting despair. And into the "faszad" too are thrown the protean, multi-faced businessmen, like Danny Martin, lurking in their offices and negotiating deals and counter-deals. In that world, moral questions are submerged, held under by the techniques of survival. This is 'things as they are' at which Garrick brandishes his blue guitar, while groping through the "conspiracy without a cause".

As his despair grows, it ceases to be confined to his financial plight and extends into a sense of personal dissolution, taking in his affair with Karen whom he must cast off, and so lose his alter ego, Pascoe, like whittling himself down to the subsistence self. Hasluck writes with assurance of Garrick's despair, using the image of the parachutist: after the elation of flying, then "a body in a field of mud, the parachute trailed out, flapping and struggling" (p. 175). Another casualty of entrepreneurial free-falling, he can do anything, except go back up. He can only swing a few protesting kicks as he plummets down. As he is pinned, enmeshed by the "faszad", he finds

> 'You forget who you are. You just keep ducking in and out of the spotlight. Now and then you look at your driver's licence to find out who you're meant to be.' (p. 187)

In court with Chen, he envies the simplicity of the law's definitions:

> Out there, amidst the traffic, there was a world of untidiness and confusion. Intricate relationships. Ambiguity. But in here, apparently, one had to make do with definitions, whatever evidence was available . . .

Clinging to the blue guitar, he has to create his own definitions, in the midst of despair.

In a sense, his final choice is peripheral. Hasluck's control of narrative is such that it is difficult to predict the outcome. Garrick is possessed of an integrity that may prove stalwart but the lure is strong too. One quick compromise known only to himself and he can salvage all but an integrity alien to his world, only a brief intruder into it. Hasluck's concern is not so much Garrick's personal choice as the "faszad" which smudges moral questions, where there are no indelible answers, even the moment of choice too elusive to be recognised. Like the narrator in *Quarantine*, Garrick chooses the prevailing definitions of his society, scarcely aware that he is choosing. He prefers his father's actual principles to the avowed ones:

> 'But let's keep things in perspective. Branching out rashly on your own. That's a thing of the past. We live in a very crowded world. One has to adapt . . . It's the art of survival. Recognising what's going on around you . . .'.

In the "faszad" of contemporary existence, it is easier to submit. The city is "pushed up bleakly into crude serrated skylines, the air within the labyrinthine canyons dank and lifeless" (p. 206) — and it is easier to move through that without the encumbrance of the blue guitar.

Like *Quarantine*, *The Blue Guitar* is a moral thriller, the narrative tightly structured and events compressed into one week which will shape the moral future. Again there is a subdued comic element, touched with sharp irony, sometimes absurdity. Garrick is a compelling figure as he observes his own moral sidestepping in the midst of events that scarcely reveal their pattern to him, until it is too late. In his short stories, Hasluck captures the odd, fleeting moments of human choice that only in retrospect reveal their significance, that pass almost undetected until the

effects seep through into the whole construct of the future. And in his novels, he extends this into an image of the "faszad" of contemporary existence, from which his characters must disentangle their own definitions, their own moral selves. In the midst of a disordered society, a hotchpotch of conflicting human purposes which saps moral energy, his characters are seduced by moral convenience. Yet his approach is tolerant because he recognises the Kafkaesque quality of their circumstances, even as he insists that from within the chaos man must create and observe his own definitions.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Dorothy Colmer's review, "Comedy and Terror Out of Quarantine", *The Australian*, May 27-28, 1978.
2. See my article, "The Picaresque Mode in Contemporary Australian Fiction", *Southerly*, Vol. 39, No. 3, September 1978, pp. 282-293.
3. p. 9 *Quarantine*: all references are to the 1978 Macmillan edition, Melbourne and Sydney.
4. In *The Hat on the Letter 'O' and Other Stories*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1978.
5. From an interview with Geraldine Doogue, in "Literary View", *The Australian*, May 27-28, 1978.
6. Quoted from Wallace Stevens' poem, 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', p. 111 *The Blue Guitar*, all references to the 1980 Macmillan edition, Sydney and Melbourne.

RANDOLPH STOW'S SUFFOLK NOVEL*

Helen Watson-Williams

For the many admirers of Randolph Stow's works of fiction the recent publication of two novels, *The Visitants* (1979) and *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (1980) (both published by Secker and Warburg) is a most welcome event. They break what has seemed for too long a silence in a career which started so creatively with three novels in print by the time Stow was twenty-three, *The Haunted Land* (1956), *The Bystander* (1957), *To The Islands* (1958), followed a few years later by *Tourmaline* (1963), *The Merry-go-round in the Sea* (1965) and *Midnite* (1967). The silence, however, was only apparent in the works of fiction since publication of volumes of poetry and music-theatre works intervene in this chronological record. Indeed, the epigraph of the book under review, quoting three stanzas from the poem 'Outrider' of 1960, serves to link both the periods of the '60s and the late '70s as it brings together the two forms of expression; as, in truth, it foreshadows in its nostalgic evocation of the English country life the matter which is at once setting and the central experience of this complex, poetic and haunting work. For *The Girl Green as Elderflower* may be seen from its dedication "To C. in Suffolk" to the final toast in the bar of the local Shoulder of Mutton to "seely Suffolk" as celebration of the fortunate, spiritually blessed countryside which proves to be the central character's salvation.

The almost simultaneous publication of the two recent novels after so long an interval perhaps authorizes a brief comparison with their predecessors. There is an obvious change in subject-matter. The formerly dominant Australian background is now reduced to the place of origin of the patrol officers of *Visitants* whose experience is undergone in the cultural and climatic conditions of Papua or the transient prep-school experience of Crispin Clare, the central character of *The Girl Green as Elderflower*. Equally obvious is the change in narrative method from the earlier more conservative stance of the omniscient author or the consistent point of view of the boy, Rob, in *The Merry-go-round*. Each of the later novels adopts a more experimental approach, whether it be the accumulative effect obtained in *Visitants* of the evidence given by six speakers and the recorded notes of the man who takes his own life at an inquiry into the violent incidents which form the novel's climax or the dual lines of narrative interest adopted in the last novel. Here we follow Crispin Clare's own ongoing experience and the three stories he calls *The Lord Abbot's Tales* interspersed within it. This method, as we shall see, is handled with great skill, incorporating diversity with something of the reminiscent harmonies of music.

More important is the different stance adopted in the two later works to distressing and painful experience which must in one way or another be accepted. In the last major novel of the earlier works, *The Merry-go-round in the Sea*, that admirable revelation of an Australian child growing to adolescence in a changing world, the boy Rob meets final disappointment and disillusionment with deeply felt bitterness. He sees mutability as an enemy to be resented. Nothing can compensate for his childish aspiration for an unchanging life; as a small boy he plans his future around the sunken wreck his imagination has transformed into a merry-go-round in the sea:

> He thought how he would swim far out into the deep water . . . until at last the merry-go-round would tower above him, black, glistening, perfect, rooted in the sea . . . The world would revolve around him, and nothing would ever change. He would bring Rick to the merry-go-round, and Aunt Kay, and they would stay there always, spinning and diving and dangling their feet in the water, and it would be today forever.[1]

But the young cousins who adopt the overwrought Crispin Clare are wiser; the ten-year-old Lucy whose father died within the year

* Randolph Stow, *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1980, 150 pp., $17.90.

knew that adults, the most familiar and irreplaceable of them, might faint and take to their beds and die.[2]

And Crispin Clare himself has reached acceptance of the "gentle robin . . . ravening the worm" as he recognizes when the Alsatian dog who had greeted him on his walk with such affection that he called her "dead soppy" devours a familiar cock-pheasant before his eyes:

> It had been his own cock-pheasant, he felt sure, the constant visitor which had marched so masterfully under his windows. What at one time would have sickened him he could now once more take with calm. It was the way of the green god. (p. 68)

The violent climactic events of *Visitants* produce very different reactions in the two young patrol officers whose experiences form the novel; Alistair Cawdor, most terribly mutilated, dies of self-inflicted wounds and his younger companion, Tim Dalwood, resolves to insulate himself henceforth from suffering; as he thinks to himself,

> I will be different now. See nothing by accident. Say nothing by accident. Move through the villages like royalty, like a wooden figurehead.[3]

Within these two works therefore, three ways of meeting suffering are enacted, with the way of acceptance presented in the slightly later publication. It is tempting to think that the publication of the Suffolk novel was deliberately delayed to allow that sequence. In Stow's own account *The Girl Green as Elderflower* is his "first book . . . written for a number of years", one of "uncommonly long gestation", created intermittently from 1966 on, and for which he held a grant in 1969. (p. 144). *Visitants*, on the other hand, acknowledges an Australian grant held in 1973-4.

Be that as it may, the order of publication seems intrinsically satisfactory, not only for the philosophic approach suggested above but also because in its own admittedly totally independent way *Visitants* throws light on the catastrophic experience endured by Crispin Clare in the tropics, prior to his establishment in a Suffolk village, his entry into a family of distant cousins and his return to psychic and physical health. This is a gradual process, accelerating within the six-month's duration of the action, from January to June; it is, in terms of the Tarot card, a "Resurrection" (p. 108).

Clare's recovery takes place in physically restricted circumstances; he moves between his cottage, the fifteenth-century manor house owned by his distant cousins and their widowed mother, Alicia, and the bar of the village pub, the Shoulder of Mutton; and, of course, the countryside, silent under snow in January, stirring with cuckoo-calls and applebuds in April, as lush as a Stanley Spencer painting of Cookham in May and June: "the insistent note of the countryside was white embowered with green" (p. 107)

Apart from the family, Clare's companions are to be found in the bar each evening: local farm-workers as regulars, straw-haired John, gypsy-like Robin, taciturn Roger, and a newcomer, Jacques Maunoir, French-Canadian, a former Jesuit priest, who becomes a good friend who keeps in touch with Clare after his return to North America. On that New Year's Day, too, a fair, green-eyed girl passes through the bar briefly, silent, unknown, and mysterious. These are the characters we are to meet again and again in the succeeding pages. For when Clare goes back to his cottage he returns to his twelfth-century Latin reading about Malkin "a fantastic sprite" to tell the first of *The Lord Abbot's Tales* in his own words. Summoning Malkin, he says, "Come and play your games with me, give me something to do." (p. 35). And the first tale follows of the invisible changeling baby who haunts the manorial hall like a poltergeist, becomes the friend of the Suffolk family, Alicia, her children and "that supernatural little Amabel" (p. 106), in the first of their three transpositions (for the family figures in all the tales), and accompanies the dying father "hand in hand, to the gate". (p. 51).

There is one more character to come back into Clare's life and hence into his second tale, "Concerning a wild man caught in the sea". When Matthew Perry, once a school friend of Clare's, comes to Suffolk to see him he precipitates the catharsis in Clare which releases the pent-up emotions surrounding his tropical suffering and attempted suicide. Perry's brief visit contributes to Clare's return to happiness; and it inspires the moving tale of the merman who returns to prison for love of his young friend John, rescues him

and inadvertently but inevitably drowns him. The April experience (not, in this instance, "the cruellest month") is, in my opinion, the central focus of the book. It holds the turning point of Clare's experience and produces the finest tale.

One more tale recreated from the supernatural events reported by Ralph of Coggeshall (1187-1218) in his *Chronican Anglicanum* (these are given in an Appendix) follows, "Concerning a boy and a girl emerging from the earth". As the fabulous boy dies young and the girl child grows into great beauty and extraordinary attractiveness to men we finally encounter the title character whose mysterious appearances in Suffolk culminate in a tale of womanhood, of sexuality, of nature and its fertility incarnate. How the unknown girl merges in the tale with the supernatural little Amabel, mates with so many of the characters familiar in house and pub, disturbs the priest in his celibacy as the girl had disturbed Jim, marries Matthew the Jew from Lynn and dies, still with the green flash in her eyes, is an illustration of Stow's poetically incremental method in this rich and complex novel.

The multiple interests aroused by the alternation of the Suffolk experience of Clare and the diverse tales of land and sea might in other hands be dangerous, either through confusion or loss of focus on the principal subject which is Clare's restoration to health. But Stow never loses sight of this focus; the tales enrich that experience in a variety of ways. They obviously extend the range of subject-matter, particularly when further analogies or explanations are suggested (pp. 54-58, 126-134); they equally obviously show the creative mind at work, with its integration of literature and life, its dramatization of narrative material, its individualization of representative or anonymous characters (the chambermaid who saw Malkin becomes Lucy who loves her), its interpretation of given events (why Malkin's mother never reclaims her, why the merman returns to prison); and they are harmoniously woven into the Suffolk days by poetic detail, such as the cuckoo call (pp. 61, 65) or eyes, grey as the North Sea (pp. 78, 81-82).

Such interpretation of the given incident is, of course, key to this particular creative mind. How Crispin Clare fleshes out his characters, how he extends their experience, here lie the novel's main concerns.

In the first tale of Malkin, the sprite, which is apparently so lighthearted, we meet the theme of exile which runs through the other tales as well as the foreground experience. As Clare tells the story of the changeling baby whose mother could redeem her at the end of seven years if she would, Malkin is conscious of her alienation. As she says to sympathetic little Lucy:

> "Cheer up, my treasure, . . . it int so bad being a witch. But I'm still very young, and my heart's with mankind, somehow. I should like to live among them, and be one myself." (p. 50).

The same sense of exile, of wishing to belong, is explicit in the April episode when Matt shows the star of David tattooed on his arm for "solidarity", as he says, "In memory of Auschwitz" (p. 73); and he goes on to tell his astonished friend that his mother and her parents became C. of E. as well as Jews in order to "belong", as his father wishes him to support Israel and make a Jewish marriage. Clare himself, calm again after his cathartic weeping, recalls the worst aspect of his former misery as desperate isolation: "Oh, but to be so cut adrift", he says. "Perhaps even the German Jews didn't quite know that." (p. 76). What the two young men learn of each other in this deeply moving experience is the need for mutual comfort; for the loneliness of Matt in his strength parallels the recent weakness of Clare. The story of the Wild Man carries the same themes of exile on land, made more acute by silence, of mutual comfort in a harsh and violent world, of love which voluntarily brings the merman back to land and to John. But here love, through ignorance, leads to death: . . . "John was drowned. The merman threw back his head and howled, in a great bubble of soundless grief." (p. 102).

Exile is the essential condition of the final story of "a boy and a girl emerging from the earth". The green children, discovered by John the reaper, like all the analogies offered by the priest or the accounts of her origin by the girl, have wandered from their green home and "like our first parents" (p. 118) can never return in life.

But there are two ways of meeting this condition of exile. The priest finds his consola-

tion in a Christian view of love, life and time; to the dying woman he declares:

> Truly there is in the world nothing so strange, so fathomless as love. Our home is not here, it is in Heaven; our time is not now, it is eternity; we are here as shipwrecked mariners on an island moving among strangers, darkly. Why should we love those shadows, which will be gone at the first light? It is because in exile we grieve for one another, it is because we remember the same father, that there is love in our island.
> . . . For no man is lost, no man goes astray in God's garden; which is here, which is now, which is tomorrow, which is always, time and time again. (pp. 135-6)

And the speaker of this splendid declaration of faith, in the last and, because the most delayed transformation of friend into fiction, the most dramatic use of the device, is the French-Canadian Jim, the lapsed Jesuit priest in the Shoulder of Mutton bar. In his own words, reinforced by punctuation. "This I believe and must," said Jacques Maunoir. "I believe, and must." (p. 136).

But the girl green as elderflower gives another answer. Within the story she is sexuality itself, represented by the green of her eyes which even on her deathbed returns to confront, silently, the priest's belief. Her home is the green home of nature, the gods she worships are the mother goddess of Neolithic times, the phallus, and the head carved on a stick of the leafed Green Man whose nature she defines in Eastern terms:

> He is . . . the bringer into being, and the destroyer. He is neither cruel nor merciful, but dances for joy at the variousness of everything that is." (p. 127).

In this late definition of the green god all the earlier allusions are brought together in an affirmation of the beauty, the diversity and the inexhaustibility of the natural world. At one level such a definition is a structural device. From the book's opening pages when Clare wakes in the New Year from his dream of the Green Man his experience has been moving towards such a declaration: the Green Man's face rises powerfully to the conscious levels of his mind:

> He tried to recreate the face which had appeared to him: a face made of summer leaves, not sinister but piteously amused . . . with the Green Man's voice in his ears, actually within the bones of the ear, supernaturally loud . . . it was internal as sound never was . . . (p. 4)

From this initial apprehension Crispin Clare's experience may be seen as exploration and understanding of the Green Man's world.

And that understanding governs Randolph Stow's vision of the world here in this brief but poetically concentrated novel. Two aspects of the God (Nature, Shiva, "The force that through the green fuse drives . . ."?) are stressed: the inclusiveness of the life he brings into being; and a joyous affirmation of its existence. And these two concepts shape Stow's own world.

The variety of tone is as remarkable as the range of subject-matter: there are the tender and funny scenes within the Suffolk family or the compassion shown for the gangling young Mark's unlucky sexual endeavours; there is understanding of the knight's gradual acceptance of his terminal illness (p. 39); of the young woman who will not jeopardise her hardly-won security by reclaiming her baby, Malkin; there are incidents of violence, torture and rape (both heterosexual in that woman's experience of incest, and homosexual in the Wild Man's tale); of extra-sensory perception which transcend rational explanation; but there are also experiences of human need, communication, and love of different forms (such as little Lucy's for the sprite, the Wild Man and John, the green girl and Matthew the Jew). And, in the final scene between Clare and Alicia whose sympathetic mutual understanding has long been established there is Clare's sudden and suggestive discovery of her eyes as "the colour of fine dry sherry, a few flashes of green" (p. 142) which leads on into the future.

Such a range of interest and tone in itself demonstrates the "variousness" created by the Green God; and in the same way its shaping within the rising months of the year, from frozen January to June's high summer when white doves graze on elderbloom, "ice-white against yellowish white" (p. 141), affirms the place and value of "everything that is."

At the risk of seeming presumptuous in passing judgement on the work of a writer I have long admired I would consider *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, both for matter and

manner, the most richly satisfying to date. Randolph Stow proves here, yet again, that like Malkin the sprite, "(his) heart's with mankind."

NOTES

1. R. Stow: *The Merry-go-round in the Sea*, Penguin, 1968, first published 1965, p. 15.
2. R. Stow: *The Girl Green as Elderflower*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1980, p. 19. Unless otherwise specified, all page numbers within the text refer to this edition.
3. R. Stow: *Visitants*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1979, p. 186.

FIVE ACRE HELL*

Thomas Shapcott

I think many readers grasped at the humour in Elizabeth Jolley's first book of stories, *Five Acre Virgin* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1976). And the humour was evident. It deflected the underlying pain of failed social relationships and muddling intentions; it underlined the tenacity of survival, even mean spirited and absurd survival; and it etched in the 'pathos of the human creature' with a seemingly dry sharpness that was sympathetically attuned to the foibles of the non-entity in us all, despite the temptation to score. There was an underlying anger — and anguish — in that first collection, but it was not allowed to intrude too nakedly among the cluttered surface details of Elizabeth Jolley's world, already precise with observed and heard authenticity. *Five Acre Virgin* certainly established those narrow but remarkably resonant boundaries of Elizabeth Jolley's concerns. The five-acre 'virgin' farmlet up in the hills outside Perth is reinvented endlessly in the two later volumes, *The Travelling Entertainer* (FACP, 1979) and *Palomino* (Outback, 1980), her first published novel. The outer suburbs of Perth, also, rather than the inner city, recur. And the foreground characters are always victims. They sometimes assume a chirpy or defiant tone, sometimes a puzzled or stoical one, but it is their vulnerability and their efforts to come to terms with that vulnerability that is at stake. For this reason, the predators in Elizabeth Jolley's fictions often have a glittering, ruthless but intensely perceived energy that is always infinitely dangerous. The author observes her hawks with extreme precision, each detail is seen in close-up. Only occasionally does this overbalance to vindictiveness. And, more tellingly, the villains do not overshadow the victims. *Five Acre Virgin* brilliantly exploits the dependencies and allegiances of family to mark out the mutual counterpoint of the dance of giver and taker, a dance that cannot begin unless there are two players; though only her victims have (sometimes) the capacity to foresee their own destiny — which as often as not leads them only to incite the predators further:

> Mother refused to leave the valley long after my brother, bored and disillusioned with the country, took up with this Fingertips. He, Fingertips, appeared in our lives all of a sudden. The two of them burned out the clutch and tore up the tyres on two cars driving them round and round the dirt roads skidding with screaming brakes and hidden in clouds of grit and dust.
>
> "You're not going with that lazy good for nothing creature!" Mother screamed at my brother when he came in all dressed to go out.
>
> "I want some money to put on a hoss," my brother said, "and hurry up and cough up you old cow."
>
> She screamed at him but gave him the money. She couldn't bear to disappoint him.
>
> "Get off out of here!" mother screamed and then she asked him if her nose was red as if he cared. It broke her heart all the same and she couldn't stand Fingertips waiting there and grinning all over his face, quick with a politeness which had no meaning. "Smile and smile and be a villain," Mother said emptying her purse into the Doll's open hands.
>
> ("One Bite for Christmas")

It is this passivity in the face of increasing victimisation that gives all the stories their edge of panic and terror. They are disturbing stories. It is the author's skill in creating her victim figures that pushes them beyond the boundaries of easy predictability. That, and the stylish directness of absolute detail.

The Travelling Entertainer, her second collection of stories, is more ambitious in scope though remarkably similar to the psychic world of the first collection. The ambition is shown in more extended narratives and more flexible handling of several characters. There are no first-person monologues — a feature of the Morgan family stories of the first book. And there is little of that almost defensive

* Elizabeth Jolley, *Palomino*, Outback Press, Melbourne, 1979.

reliance on humour and comic irony: *The Travelling Entertainer,* indeed, is a very sobering book. Only the two 'Uncle Bernard' stories take up echoes of the early stories. And yet everything has been prepared for. The dance of victim and predator has become more intense, the refinements of the torture more exquisite, and the final consequences brought into the open. The book ends with the almost novella-length 'Grasshoppers', to my mind one of the most extraordinary stories written in Australia, certainly one of the most unforgettable: I was haunted by it for weeks after reading.

'Grasshoppers' is a story — with a vengeance — about predators and victims. It is also a story that deals, with rare poise, about a lesbian infatuation. Given her chosen predilection for social and cultural victims, it is not surprising that Elizabeth Jolley has discovered in the subject of sexual outsiders a particularly resonant area for study. The sexual deviate is vulnerable even in a 'permissive' society; and in a sense he/she internalises the entire predator/victim ritual. In almost all of Elizabeth Jolley's stories the motto "He/she is their own worst enemy" might be applied. But so many such self-conscious, introverted 'victims', in writing as in life, fail to attract the attention of others. In *The Travelling Entertainer* the absence of sentimentality leads us to a sense of remarkably painful understanding, and nowhere more so than in 'Grasshoppers'. The emptiness and despair that lie behind Peg's infatuation for the refreshingly hip Bettina is not stressed, but its ache grows more and more apparent as Bettina, the seemingly passive one, is seen to be ruthless in her voracity and consumes all who come into contact with her. Peg and Bettina escape to India together, leaving their two daughters in the care of Peg's country mother. The dream turns to nightmare. When Peg returns to the farm the nightmare becomes hell, with only Bettina's five-year old Miranda alive, her capacity to survive as sharp as any cuckoo's. It is a story that could sink into melodrama at the slightest hesitation. One of the things that gives it its special force is the fearful and passionate intensity of the sexual relationship between the two young women: the need and urgency are underlined, not any implication of abnormality. Hungers might very well be a signal, in Elizabeth Jolley's work, for self-destructive energies, but the author is a social observer, not a social prescriber. Human passion is real, no matter what or who the object. It is the point at which the reality of the passion and the vulnerability of passion's victim intersect which she uncovers, with surgeon's precision. And always the slide into subjectivity is avoided through a fine disposition of external forces: even self-destructive impulses need some external trigger — and often enough a very real external 'predator'. Elizabeth Jolley, like Virginia Woolf, is a writer rich in ambiguities as she is aware of the anguish of sensibility.

Palomino, although publshed in 1980 was actually a joint first-prize winner in the Melbourne Moomba Festival of 1975. The seemingly extraordinary delay before publication has, I think, inhibited the sort of consolidation to her reputation that Elizabeth Jolley deserves, though perhaps in some ways, as readers, we have been better prepared for the treatment of sexual relationships in *Palomino* by the many and subtle levels of sexual nuance in *The Travelling Entertainer* than had we read it immediately after *Five Acre Virgin.*

In a sense the novel does inhabit a world part way between the two books. There is, particularly in the chronicling of the seasons on the farmlet (a crucial sounding-board for the development of personal relationships in the novel), a vivacity and freshness of observation more in keeping with the early stories, and the important but subsidiary Murphy family, tenant farmers, have something of the irresistible fascination of the Morgans: they are grotesques, failures doomed to interminable frustration, humiliation and envy, yet finally memorable in their unquenchable urge to survive. In the novel, their claims are alternatively threatening and pitiful. As a counterpoint to the central story — the infatuation of Laura, a doctor in her late fifties, for the much younger Andrea — the Murphy family, particularly husband and wife, become an eloquent testimony of survival and greed. It is the Murphys, more than Laura's well ordered city connections or Andrea's demanding family, who memorably provide the perspective against which the idyll grows, blooms and necessarily dies.

The central relationship is one full of dangers. Elizabeth Jolley tackles all the chal-

lenges with surprising directness. The infatuation of age with youth is a theme at least as old as 'Suzanna and the elders', and one that balances anger, envy, lust and the grotesqueness of human behaviour: Elizabeth Jolley treats it as entirely joyful. The homosexual variant, as in Mann's 'Death in Venice', has been shown as twisting an added dimension of anguish and self-disgust, as the object of desire is seen even more clearly to be unattainable. In *Palomino* the 'lineaments of gratified desire' are the very core of the lyrical writing. The predator/victim theme is still there, but it is surprisingly modified and subordinated to an affirmative view of sexuality that I found, well, strikingly convincing. It is not so much the details of what two people do in bed together (talk a lot, touch a lot), it is the movement, through the novel, of each stage of the ritual of infatuation. This, not surprisingly, is most exemplified in Laura's dominant role within the relationship. Elizabeth Jolley's game with ambivalences is certainly focal to much of the writing — for instance the entire first section of the book details Laura's obsession with the presence of Andrea but her absolute inability to make any contact, even to speak to her. The hunter as victim, indeed. The lyrical sequence of their affair is edged not only by the inquisitive Murphys, but by Andrea's family: Andrea herself is a hunter/victim, through an incestuous affair with her younger brother. There are many underlying threads of future disaster, but in the story they seem as light as cobweb soaked with dew. Both, finally, are to be survivors and, indeed, one of the clear 'points' of the novel is the healing effect of the relationship upon Laura, whose past contains the incubus of a deliberate medical 'mistake'. One might almost imagine that the author had Judith Wright's poem "Age to Youth" in mind as the epigram for the novel:

> and the message we should send
> from age back to youth
> is that every kiss and glance
> is truer than the truth;
> that whatever we repent
> of the time that we live,
> it is never what we give—
> it is never that we love.

I think it an audacious step to have contained the age/youth ceremony in such a warmly celebrative mould. The temptation to predict the end, the losses, the hurt, must have been great—and looking at Elizabeth Jolley's other work, something that could have been elegantly — and harrowingly — done. I found myself not quite able to imagine or intuit Andrea's physical response to Laura: youth to age. But the world is full enough, certainly, of young women seduced and allured by much older men, and perhaps an older woman might be even less disturbing — the novel itself suggests the non-competitiveness of a female relationship (and hints clearly enough at the male element of competitiveness). Perhaps it is this very male urgency that throws an almost classic cast on the age/youth infatuation where the initiator (victim) is the older man. And perhaps, sensing this, Elizabeth Jolley has been astute indeed to avoid a more melodramatic twist — idyllic grace, idyllic regret, idyllic sadness, yes, but the resolution of the novel is towards growth rather than decay. Sentimentality, then? There is a fine edge: the apparently idyllic quality of lesbian sex is perhaps the closest danger: Laura seems in splendid shape. Perhaps if she could have a little more ruefully acknowledged to herself the need to focus attention on to Andrea at all times, rather than on herself . . .

Elizabeth Jolley has said: "I have to explore my characters so much and have them reveal themselves bit by bit, and not everything I discover is put into a story. It could well be that some readers turn away from intimate thoughts and feelings or the development of relationships which they would rather not know about." The depth of understanding in this novel and the short stories is often disturbing. Sometimes the humour, or the celebration, seems almost a desperate counter to despair and the full burden of that understanding. In *Palomino* the shadows are real enough but are often deliberately sidestepped (by the characters, not the author). In "Grasshoppers", the later obverse story of lesbian affection, the horror is real indeed. Elizabeth Jolley is a major figure in recent Australian writing.

BOOKS

Frank Moorhouse, *The Everlasting Secret Family*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1980, 213 pp., $3.50.

Sometimes the publishing of a book is an important socio-cultural event: a vision realized, the actualizing of an idea about the self or the society. And Moorhouse's latest needs to be seen in just this context. Daringly sexual and courageously erotic, it operates on the frontier of a political reality and tries to "unmask, demystify, and de-authorise" the strictures confining convention and defining behaviour. It aims to "crash through inhibitions," "to externalise fantasies," so as to "free the imagination and bring up the subterranean [feeling] that couches within us." Just as Moorhouse's *Days of Wine and Rage* (Penguin, Australia, 1980), from which the above citations come, "explores," in semi-documentary fashion, "the tempo and shifts in modes and style" of the unsettled 'Seventies, "a dynamic decade in Australia's cultural development," *The Everlasting Secret Family* articulates, in fiction, a sense of what the aching 'Eighties may very well prove to be about as we move to making blatant the latent pleasure of baseness, and of discovering, with neo-Byronic force, the dark side of the self.

The four novellas of this collection, in varying degrees, deal with the physical and the personal. The protagonist of "Pacific City," the first story in the collection, is Irving Bow, "the proprietor of darkness" and the expert in the "etiquette of deception." His world is the mysterious place of the Odeon Cinema, with its locked doors, secret passageways, private rooms, and closed trunks of costumes. Irving, "being a bit of a pederast," entertains himself by having young teenagers perform in the silk dress of a siren or the short tunic of a Roman, as he fleshes out the fantasies of a jaded emperor. He and his friend, the Doctor, are "the only real sybarites" of Pacific City, and voluptuaries they are, particularly in their private screenings of "Passion's Slave."

The sexual theme rarely fully comes out of the closet in this story. Rather, it lurks about obscenely in titillating shadows and makes the reader voyeuristically pursue it. The text engages partly in this way. It encourages the effort to complete the vision of itself as story, and to discover who exactly is doing what to whom, right or wrong. The story is sufficiently self-referential, however, in alerting the reader as to how it is working. Since the history being chronicled is Irving's, we are purposefully and playfully told of his propensity for privacy. "In his office," the narrator says, "Irving had a scotch and took some peppermint to hide it. He had to hide too much from this town." The reason for the secrecy is enticingly uninformative: "One should not reveal information about oneself—show something about oneself—which the people around you could not comfortably accept."

The sexual and the secret come together explicitly in "The Town Philosophers' Banquet," when Irving hosts a small group of men who toast "the town's only Olympic athlete from the Amsterdam Games, an eighteen year old who'd had a close friendship with Irving from the young days." The scene is terribly funny and wickedly "perverse" in its innuendo. But there is shocking seriousness about the "seamy." In the next chapter of this narrative, Irving is "visited by a grim pantomime," a vision of a skull of "the dancing naked body of the boy" who performed for the town philosophers. The momentum is from the (homo) sexual to the violent, and this is but a trace of the pace to come in this and the remaining stories in the collection.

In the second tale, "The Dutch Letters," we are in familiar Moorhouse territory: conference-ville. The narrator, a participant at the conference, is staying at a university college, in the room of Dirk Hansen who "had locked his secrets in one of those lockers using a feeble Taiwanese lock and thumb latch." The narrator invades the personal world of Dirk's private correspondence kept in the "secret compartments" of this locker. And the letters are put before us so that we may be similarly prying. The letters are fascinating, and tell a story which the reader must reconstruct.

Like the first story, "The Dutch Letters" is about covert sex and violence, and it's grippingly gruesome. The situation is historical

and involves the presence of The Royal Netherlands East Indies Army Air Force in Australia in 1942. The letters are between one of the Dutch soldiers and his wife. The violence is not only connected, then, with the experiences of the war away, but also with the problems of the family at home. Both are equally dismaying, though for different reasons. Pieter, the father/soldier, at one stage, for example, writes to his son about a perverse souvenir he is sending to him; he proudly posts an American airman's belt which "has a clasp, of course, and in the holes you hook a revolver, a jungle knife, ammunition, first aid box, an airtight cylinder of matches, . . ." He insensitively sends his wife "beautiful napkin rings . . . made from aircraft parts." The problems of home are never brought into full view; we see them from but the corner of our eye. One of the difficulties involves Dirk, however, and the cry from his parents is regretfully "that discipline and punishment [are] not working." The details about the son and his nature are but casually offered and are ironically surrounded by those relating to the inconsequential, like "red cabbage" and "real souvenirs." There is, then, a creative tension throughout the story, as with the first in the collection, generated from expression and suppression of information. The language throughout is that of reticence, evasion, obliqueness, and indirection. The appeal is, thus, to the imagination, albeit the "illegality of the imagination," through the promise of the sensational.

At his parents' instigation, Dirk is castrated in the hope that an operation would prove to be "the correct psychological method to bend him." The connection between the violent, the psychological, and the sexual is fully established as we are made to suspect that Dirk is probably gay, and it's for this reason that his parents feel that he is less than "a real man." The last sentence of the final letter claims that Dirk, who is "just as difficult" after his operation as before, "is forever in the city playing billiards and smoking and mixing with well-dressed older men . . . ."

The third story is the longest and, again, we are in conferenceville, but the "family" this time is but a group founded supposedly on the bond of mutual academic interest. The secret concealed in this story is revealed to the reader but kept from most of the characters of "Imogene Continued". The secret is the rape of Dr. Cindy Broughton by three Aboriginal men attending the conference. This narrative directly engages the reader in the ethics/politics of the event in a way that the other stories do not, and yet it dismisses the seriousness of the event by trivializing the dilemma Broughton finds herself in: "It's a classic textbook dilemma," she [says], "if you look at it — feminism and racism. Shit no. I couldn't bring it to the police, not after what we did to the aboriginals for two centuries." The moral issue is dismissed similarly in the way in which the text seems to ironize the concept of "meaning" or "cosmic significance" and stresses only "accident." The case for relativity here is put by Professor John Anderson who was "appointed to the Challis Chair of Philosophy in The University of Sydney in 1927"; Moorhouse cites Anderson tellingly in his chapter entitled "Only the Interaction of Complex Things."

The stories in the collection seemingly work to subvert most conventional, moral structures and to argue for a reorientation of point of view governing behaviour. Thus, at least initially, we are invited to respond well to Irving Bow and his Odeon Cinema, "monument" that it is "against the jungle" — where "jungle" is the place of polite, though meaningless, "content-less" "words and conversations." Thus, we are invited to denounce the conventional family tie that binds together mother/father/son in "Dutch Letters," and to relax in the knowledge that Dirk's operation was not successful and that he can, at least, "mix" with "well-dressed older men." And thus we are invited to respond well to the comic irony that informs a discussion in "Imogene Continued," the third story, about how chairs might be arranged in different configurations at conference sessions. In this discussion, the conventional arrangement is rejected because it "embodies feudal concepts": "The old arrangement was priest/pulpit, professor and subservient student." This anti-order ethic may be risible here, but it becomes less so for the reader engaged by the eroticism of the fourth story of the collection. In this final story the masochistic, homosexual narrator rhapsodizes: "How hypercharged [is] life when it breaks out of propriety." The "hypercharged" life is that of psycho-sexual liberation.

The collection as a whole, in other words, seems to argue that the taboos of the tribe must be broken, that freedom is only to be found in the illicit. Accordingly, Irving Bow is allowed to admit that "The Odeon [is] where he permitted the young the delights of the flesh" and the Odeon was—in fact—"a place of dark freedom." Dirk in "Dutch Letters" is liberated from the possibility of "a proper married" life only because of his operation. "Mellow" Cindy Broughton, of "pleated skirts and stockings," breaks out of the usual behavioural confines of house and job at conferenceville; when asked in the Senior Common Room about her period away, she is "able to say blithely — I was raped; I staged a revolt against UNESCO; I had an encounter with the police; I wounded a leading magazine editor; and I became a black radical for forty-eight hours." All this, then, prepares us for the shocking scenario of "liberation through obeisance" that we get in the final story, the title story for the volume, "The Everlasting Secret Family."

And it is in this final story that we have Moorhouse investigating the psychosexual bases for relationships in particular and for societal structures in general. In all three of the preceding stories, he looks to the reasons for, and consequences of, grouping attractions, and in each instance, they are made to appear so low as to be above comprehension. In "Imogene Continued" the attraction is called "the Stockholm Syndrome," "where the aggressor and victim form a special bond, a puzzling alliance." In the final story, the "Erotic memoir in six parts," the attraction, the kick, is described thus by the homosexual narrator who has just initiated his closeted, politician-lover's adolescent son:

> I was joined to a line through history which went back to the first primitive tribal person who went my way, who took a virgin boy lover, and every boy who became a man and took, in due turn, a boy lover, through to Socrates. I had played a part now in the continuation of that chain. I had played my first part as a child in becoming a man's lover. I had now played my second part. I now belonged fully in that historical line. It was a way of passing on and preserving the special reality, a joining of him to a secret family, the other family. To belong to that chain is to belong to another life.

It is the unashamed joy that is "the energising motive" behind the story, which anatomizes, and convincingly so, "the perfect rightness of [human "basicness"] beyond morality. The weeping, honest animalism of it."

The intensity of this and the other stories in the collection is very, very powerful. It is shocking too, but, curiously, in a healthful way. According to Moorhouse, sometimes the shock is the therapy needed to free ourselves from the trap of limited self-definition. Sexuality, obviously, is integral to humanness, though it has, again according to Moorhouse, "been dreadfully played down in Australia" (*The Age*, 28/8/80). In this society secrecy is integral as well and makes the sexual all the more salacious.

JIM LEGASSE

Jessica Anderson, *Tirra Lirra by the River*, The Macmillan Company of Australia Pty. Ltd., Melbourne & Sydney, 141 pp.; Penguin Books Ltd., Victoria, 1980, 141 pp., $3.50.

Tirra Lirra by the River, Jessica Anderson's fourth novel, won both the Miles Franklin Award and the Australian Natives' Association Literature Award when it was published in 1978. This delayed review can be justified only by a personal enthusiasm for the novel, and its recent release in paperback. A work which responds to a variety of critical approaches, the action of *Tirra Lirra* takes place in the mind of a central character, Nora Porteous, who has returned as an old woman to her empty family home in Brisbane, having spent her adult life in Sydney and London. Jessica Anderson, too, was born in Brisbane and lives in Sydney, but although it is tempting to draw easy equivalences between the author and the narrating voice, a feeling of distance between the two, even of dislike, is established and carefully maintained. Further, the sense of place in the novel is very diffuse. This is not an Australian novel like David Malouf's *Johnno* which explores and explains authorial identity through a retrospective recreation of a particular time and place; Brisbane is identifiable only by occasional references to humid heat, poinsettias, a mango tree, the joy of eating a pawpaw in the place in which is was grown, houses on stilts, and,

nebulously, by the fact that Tennyson is a suburb of Brisbane, creating a quirkish connection with the title.

Nora's search for a sense of self, established as her memory ranges back over her life, depends less on conflict between an individual and a particularised, hostile environment, a subject of much Australian literature, than on a rejection of any environment which is ugly to Nora, in either its human or its inanimate aspect. Continually oppressed by self-limiting, middle-class gentility — her only, older sister Grace sends Nora "an exhortation to duty, unselfishness and common sense" and a warning not to cry for the moon, "which has always been your big drawback, Nora" (p. 52)—and correspondingly confining surroundings, Nora withdraws, reacting psychologically and physically in ways which seem typically feminine, prompting another kind of analysis, trendily feminist.

Written by a woman, and exclusively and self-consciously concerned with an individual female experience, *Tirra Lirra* can be seen as part of a tradition of literature by and about women. Nora's withdrawal is on the one hand aesthetic: faced by a physical world which is inimical to her, she creates her own space, developing, according to Virginia Woolf's famous injunction, a room of her own. That these literal spaces are small and domestic assertions of self establishes a recognisably feminine life pattern.

Nora's psychological withdrawal is a corresponding impulse to create interior space. Her return to a room in a house which has suddenly become, as she travels towards it, the focus of inexplicable pleasure: "the ghost, perhaps, of some former bliss" (p. 5) is hollow. Yet she finds the source of her remembered exaltation as the "cheap thick glass" of the window distorts ordinary, outside reality, creating as it did for her as a child an enchanted land: "miniature landscapes, green, wet, romantic, with silver serpentine rivulets, and flashing lakes, and castles moulded out of any old stick or stone." (p. 9) This is Nora's Camelot, and like the Lady of Shalott, she waits for a mysterious release: "Much of my long life can be apportioned into periods of waiting" (p. 65), while her passivity recreates a dominant stereotype in the collection of characteristics ascribed to female characters in literature. This waiting is "waste", yet it can be positive. In her old age, Nora is shown the embroideries she made before her marriage, during her first period of waiting, and recognises in them her unrealised potential. Perhaps turning outwards is dangerous for weaving ladies; the beauty of the tapestries is " 'drawn out of the compression of a secret life'." (p. 128)

Nora's sexual potential, like her creative potential, is initially repressed and unacknowledged. In retrospect, this repression too seems to have a generated value which is lost in a confrontation with reality in the shape of Nora's husband, Colin Porteous, who orders her responses: " 'Do this' . . . 'Do that'." (p. 37) Colin is adept at the game of sexual politics; his amiable identification of Nora's sexual difficulty is terrifyingly imperceptive: "Well, you're frigid, and that's that. Women with your colouring are often frigid." (p. 37) When Nora achieves sexual response, Col, at first put out, then disgusted by her spontaneity, snarls: "Look, just lie still, will you? That's all you have to do." (p. 52) In Nora's memory their marriage is "the cohabitation of bitter enemies" (p. 60), yet her attempts to escape are predictably and futilely feminine, and finally, her freedom is involuntary; Col finds another woman. These waiting years are barren, Nora is childless—while her freedom brings physical creativity, she arrives in London pregnant. A destructive episode with an abortionist focuses aggressive masculine contempt for women, as Col Porteous's mode of sexual instruction is repeated: "Take off your pants. Get up there. Do this. Do that." (p. 79) From this time, Nora is celibate.

Although female submission and lack of aggression are most clearly and poignantly realised in Nora's memories of her sexual life, its end is poorly explained. This reflects a continual lack of explication of the source or need for her passivity, which sometimes seems to be a natural female trait; sometimes a condition imposed on the individual by outside reality: "Whether my submissiveness is ingrained or was implanted I do not know. I only know that all open aggression on my part, in whatever field, has always led me to sorrow and retreat." (p. 52)

While Nora's search for self-identification is not uncommon, Anderson's achievement is the creation of a constant narrative voice within a shifting narrative perspective, which

suggests at once the ephemeral nature of reality and the fluidity of character. Triggered by Nora's glimpse through the glass of the magic region of her childhood, and by her physical passivity — through most of her narrative, Nora is ill with pneumonia — this memory journey is usually ambiguously conducted in the present tense, so that past and present merge. Physical reality is slight; Nora's first image of self as she enters her old home is dissociated: "Through the long mirror of the big black hall I see a shape pass. It is the shape of an old woman . . ." (p. 2) and she is incredulous of past evidence of outer reality: "Who was I? Nora Porteous, née Roche, thirty-five, domestic worker, amateur dressmaker, detested concubine, and student of the French subjunctive tense." (p. 60) Both the unreality of physical or external life and the incapacity of the individual to effect change are reiterated by the episode of Nora's mummifying face-lift, itself fulfilling a female fear fantasy.

Nora asserts many selves, some of which are not portrayed in her narrative. Her fastidiousness, a side of herself she dislikes but accepts: "Though disgusted by this evidence of my own wincing 'good taste'. I am not surprised" 127) may not surprise her, but it is inadequately realised by her character. Asides like this are disturbing, hinting at an authorial secret which inevitably directs attention away from the character of Nora and her narrative.

Nora composes her life as she creates her dresses. Her customers, forever crying " 'But is it *me*?' " are ironic echoes of her own capricious self; they seek, as she does, "to express their conception of themselves." (p. 111) Denying conscious endeavours at the end of her life: "I feel again the utter passivity, the relinquishment of the will to fate" (p. 2), Nora is able to once again to enter the lanscape of her mind, and her spinning globe of memory "offers the queer suggestion that imagination is only memory at one, or two, removes, my interest now is in repudiating, . . . those removes, even if it ends by my finding something only as small as a stone lying on pale grass." (p. 140) The kernel of truth is held in the globe, a circular image of Nora's past life, which finally reveals its beginning, the long-hidden memory of her dead father, at its end. *Tirra Lirra*'s final phrases, which interrupt the impact of Nora's recognition, as her insistence on aspects of her character pulls against its perfect realisation, are minor flaws in a delicate, funny, often wonderfully perceptive narrative concerning the nature and mystery of female life. An incomplete statement, it is nevertheless one which deserves attention.

DELYS BIRD

Christopher Brennan: A Critical Biography by Axel Clark. Melbourne University Press, 1980, 341 pp., $25.00.

It is really difficult to provide an effective summary of Axel Clark's achievement. The method by which he works is thorough, meticulous, exhaustive; it bears all the marks of an academic onslaught at biography. The tone is dry (though by no means flat); the pace is slow, almost plodding; the stance is aloof and objective (though not unsympathetic). In short, it is a thoroughly academic work.

Unfortunately that is not an effective summary, for popular prejudice has equated "academic" with "boring", and Clark's biography is anything but boring. In popular parlance it would be a "paradoxical" work: it is academic and yet it "comes alive". Described more accurately, it is a vindication of the academic, a proof that precision, factuality, and objectivity are *not* boring — and can indeed be enthralling.

The current view of Brennan is that he was a cultural alien in the Australia of his time, but Clark's portrait calls for a modification of this idea. For a period of at least twenty years Brennan had no lack of friends and companions, many of whom were well read and genuinely interested in literature. His dinner guests included John Le Gay Brereton, A. G. Stephens, and Dowell O'Reilly, and through the agency of F. S. Delmer he was brought into contact with Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, and other Australian painters living in an artists' camp at Sirius Cove. Thus Brennan was far less starved of intellectual companionship than Shaw Neilson, or Joseph Furphy in Shepparton. It is true, of course, that none of these people was his *equal* intellectually — but the most important reasons for Brennan's aloofness were more deep-seated.

Even as a child, Brennan had been a "loner". Contracting typhoid at the age of six, ill-health set him apart from others until he went to boarding school at the age of fourteen. His parents were deeply committed Catholics, and Brennan's lifelong interest in ceremony began at the age of seven when he became an altar-boy. His intimate childhood association with Benedictinism probably strengthened his love of the beautiful and the ornate, but it also reinforced the conventional Irish Catholic puritanism of his home life, and this puritan element did not come under challenge until Brennan won a scholarship to attend the Jesuit boarding-school, St Ignatius College, at Riverview.

At the age of fourteen Brennan left a home where Byron had been locked away to attend a school where Byron was read at Speech Day. He developed a passion for the works of Aeschylus, and when in 1886 he saw Hermann's two-volume Aeschylus in Dymock's bookshop, he thrust it in behind books on the bottom shelf, keeping his treasure hidden for more than a year until he had the money to buy it. (Seven years later he was to end his affair with Aeschylus by publishing a major and revolutionary article in the *Journal of Philology*).

An even more important feature of Brennan's time at Riverview was his contact with the classics master, Father Patrick Keating. The relationship was established by Keating's kindness, patience, and understanding, but it was Keating's "air of perfection" which led Brennan to describe him as "easily the most distinguished personality that I have ever met, a standard whereby to test and judge all others". According to Axel Clark, one reason for Brennan's aloofness and sense of alienation was his inability to find another person who could give him the sense of grace and perfection which Father Keating had given him at Riverview. When Brennan turned his back on thoughts of the priesthood and decided instead to go to the University of Sydney, his search for "the perfect teacher" continued. The chair of classics was held by Walter Scott, whose views and preferences were completely at odds with those of Brennan, and so at a crucial stage of his intellectual development Brennan failed to find the teacher he needed. He followed his own interests, working harder on Aeschylus than on the set authors, and hiding his fears and frustrations behind the "mask" of becoming a university 'character". (Brennan wore a gown hung with horse-shoes and jam-tins, became known for "the cheerful 'YORP' which he was wont to emit as he proceeded from lecture-room to common-room", and was called before the Professorial Board for standing outside a lecture he should have attended and throwing stones into the room. He also gained notoriety for his editorship of *Hermes*, the undergraduates' magazine.)

During the break between the 1889 and 1890 academic years, Brennan experienced one of the great crises of his life, and lost his faith. He became an agnostic, and in 1891 wrote an essay for Philosophy honours in which he indicated his preference for Absolute answers. Clark argues that Brennan "never really lost his nostalgia and his basic need for the lost faith":

> The rest of his life may be interpreted as a scene acting the argument of 1890. Throughout his life, in philosophy, poetry, occult lore and love (and even in the Allied cause in the Great War) he sought to establish or re-create an Absolute, an equivalent of that faith. (p. 38)

His strange and tragic marriage to the Prussian girl Elizabeth Werth was one further way in which Brennan pursued the Absolute. The conflicts in Brennan's sexual life had been evident from the time of his "sweet initiation" with a working-class girl whilst he was teaching at St Patrick's College, Goulburn, after leaving the University of Sydney: he had no sooner embarked upon his "little secret affair" with the one girl than he began to yearn after a more respectable Catholic girl. Sexuality and romance were becoming divorced. In 1892, after attaining his M.A. with honours in Philosophy, Brennan travelled to Berlin on a scholarship, there to abandon his proposed studies and travels and to woo and win Elisabeth Werth. The couple became engaged in 1893, and were married in Australia in 1897.

Even on the surface, it was a strange relationship. Being German, Elisabeth belonged to a group of people Brennan generally disliked, and being a bourgeoise, she espoused values which he could never fully understand or uphold. She never learned to speak English well, and would irritate Brennan by inter-

rupting intellectual conversations with inane or mundane questions. Moreover, Clark presents the persuasive argument that Brennan was more in love with the *idea* of love than with Elisabeth herself:

> What had begun as a romance in a foreign country now became for Brennan a highly wrought system of feeling, owing much to many literary models, focused upon a woman who was half a world away from him. Perhaps the distance was convenient rather than disabling for the kind of love Brennan felt . . . Brennan's love was essentially a dream; the loved one, like *[*Keats'*]* Lamia, a phantom. (p. 88)

From May 1894 until their marriage in December 1897, Brennan and Elisabeth were each in their own countries, Brennan trying to earn the money and security that would allow him to marry. Far from serving as a "cooling off" period, the separation allowed Brennan to elaborate his romanticism:

> He seems rather to have synthesized his old romantic preconceptions and feelings with more recently developed interests, notwithstanding their contradictoriness, and to have convinced himself on the basis of this synthesis that he was on the verge of some great discovery, some revelation perhaps of "the source" or of Eden. . . . he advanced towards his marriage as though it were an irresistible climax. (p. 111)

The marriage began happily enough, but by 1922 — the time of Brennan's affair with Violet Singer — he was estranged from his wife and desperately confused about his own desires and attitudes. His final years were a time of bitterness and public scandal, involving appearances in court and his forced resignation from his post as Associate Professor of German and Comparative Literature.

One of the most interesting aspects of Axel Clark's study is its insight into Brennan the critic. Though he was exceptionally well-read in European literature, Brennan's judgements were often odd or eccentric. (He placed Tennyson side by side with Dante, Homer, and Milton, and valued Mallarme's work more highly than the Aeneid.) Clearly, Brennan read poetry for his own private purposes, and made little attempt to weigh personal considerations against wider and more objective factors, such as a poet's place in the English or European poetic traditions.

Axel Clark's handling of Brennan's poetry is well-integrated with his account of the poet's life. He insists upon the Victorian element in Brennan's work:

> For all [Brennan's] obvious references to and borrowings from the literature of other languages, that literature has been absorbed by a poet whose sensibility was basically Victorian, and its influence is subsumed into a basically Victorian style of expression. (p. 106)

Relating personality to poetry, Clark detects in Brennan's work an exaggerated tendency to generalize:

> when the facts and the emotional texture of an experience did not correspond with his expectation (often based on some literary model), [Brennan] tended to "elevate" them, to "universalize" them, to raise what had been personal and private to the status of a cosmic myth. (p. 120)

His conclusion is that "poetry to Brennan was more an instrument than an end". Words themselves were not as important as "what he believed lay beyond them". Brennan "was not born a poet": he made himself become a poet "out of deep spiritual need", and when that need began to ease, Brennan ceased to write.

Despite his "clotted diction and extreme Victorian poeticism", Brennan is an important poet. He was the first Australian to write within the European philosophical poetic tradition, and as such he is to be seen as the forerunner of poets such as R. D. FitzGerald, A. D. Hope, and James McAuley. It is therefore important that the details of his life and thought should be put on record, and it is immensely pleasing to discover that Axel Clark has performed the task with excellence.

VAN IKIN

The Poetry of Judith Wright : A Search for Unity, by Shirley Walker, Edward Arnold, 1980, 194 pp., Paperback: $14.95.

Shirley Walker's recently published book, *The Poetry of Judith Wright : A Search for Unity*, is an important contribution to Australian literary studies on several counts. Its critical approach — a thematic discussion of the cen-

tral philosophical ideas and concepts informing Wright's poetry — is a vital antidote to the biographical or neo-Leavisite interpretations which have characterised a good deal of literary criticism in Australia. And by placing Wright's work in the context of various strains of philosophic thought — Romanticism, modernism, vitalism, to name a few — Mrs. Walker eschews a restrictively parochial account of the poetry. The book is valuable, too, for the general critical rigour and tact of its argument and its analyses of particular poems.

As such, of course, students of Judith Wright in particular will find much of interest here, and Mrs. Walker's discussion should help to dispel the popularized image of Wright as a 'women's poet', a vaguely highbrow Women's Weekly contributor who writes of love, motherhood and the joys of nature. As the book's Introduction has it, the metaphysical strain always present in Wright's work becomes of central concern as the poet matures:

> She is increasingly concerned with such philosophical questions as the nature of reality, the nature of the cognitive act and the ability of language to express it . . . It is important that we recognize in Judith Wright a lyricist who does not operate solely on an instinctive or intuitive level — I can think of only two of her lyrics ('Wonga Vine' and 'Blue Arab') which do not have a definite intellectual toughness either subsumed within the symbolism or overtly expressed.' (Introduction, p. xii)

Oddly enough, however, Mrs. Walker defines this 'intellectual strength' of Wright's as 'almost masculine in quality', and makes the equally damaging inference that it is this distinctively 'masculine' quality which gives the poetry a weight and seriousness it might otherwise lack. In a book generally devoid of jargon and academic catch-phrases, it is disappointing to find such received vagaries posing as critical truths.

The book's central thesis is that Judith Wright's poetry is an expression of a continuing search for 'unity of being', both physical and psychic; in this regard, Wright is placed in the mainstream of modernist thought and its central concern with an overall state of dissociation in the modern world, the excessive emphasis placed on rationality at the expense of the subjective and intuitive response. The book's opening chapter, 'The Prosaic View', outlines some of the forms of that dissociation which have concerned Wright in her various prose writings and in her guise as public spokesperson on issues like conservation and atomic warfare: the alienation of people from one another and from their natural environment, the loss of a harmonious integration of sensory experience and thought, the loss of a language flexible and sensitive enough to embody a fusion of inner and outer experience in the aesthetic act. For Wright, then, Mrs. Walker argues, the task of the poet is 'to restore significance to language, to recapture its symbolic vitality so that it may not be solely a utilitarian medium, but that it may recapture both objective fact and subjective significance, and, in the synthesis, "reinvent the meaning" once inherent in language.' Hence the emphasis Wright places on the concept of aesthetic organicism, the inter-relatedness and indissociability of theme, form, structure, style, and so on: where the act of the poem itself, the thing made, bears testimony to the value of unity. In this first chapter, too, there is a discussion of a hitherto neglected aspect of Wright's philosophy, the influence of the ideas of her late husband, the philosopher J. P. McKinney; and the argument of this 'framework' chapter is expressed with a cogency and succinctness characteristic of the book as a whole.

Thematic preoccupations, like continuity, love, nature, the imagination, death, evil, language, are discussed as interrelated aspects of the search for unity. Underlying ideas and concepts such as primitivism, the life force and the Jungian process of individuation are examined, often by way of a discussion of the complex and characteristically ambivalent major symbols of Wright's poetry. What is of particular interest is the concept of continuity-in-development, Mrs. Walker's thesis that Wright's poetry demonstrates a remarkable coherence in terms of its philosophic and metaphysical underpinning.

Although the book is primarily an examination of the 'ideas' and themes of Wright's canon, it also takes into account the range and variety of form, structure, tone and texture of the poetry. Nor is Mrs. Walker's argument confined to descriptive accounts: again, although the focus is thematic, evaluations are made of both particular poems and the various modes in which Wright has at-

tempted to embody her ideas. In writing, for example, of Wright's use of mythic allusion in the poem 'Trapped Dingo', Mrs. Walker judges the identification of the dingo with 'the insane Andromache, pacing your towers alone', as 'incongruous', the effect as 'strained and inflated'. In analysing the poem, 'The Precipice', a particular evaluation modulates into a generalized statement which locates the source of a central problem in Wright's poetry:

> It seems that direct statement, as in 'The Precipice', is often a trap for the poet . . . The inflated statement, often at the conclusion of a poem, in particular is a pitfall . . . a number of poems from *The Two Fires* onward are flawed by rhetoric [which] leads directly to the polemical poems of *Shadow* and *Alive* . . . [pp. 118-9]

I would want to take this point further and argue that one of Wright's chief weaknesses as a poet springs from her tendency to state rather than evoke or suggest, in particular her use of what the poet and critic Donald Davie, in a perceptive article on Wright, calls 'vague immensities'. Her chief gifts as a poet seem to me essentially lyric and dramatic: she is at her best when the 'philosophy' emerges naturally from concrete and particular images (as in two fine poems, 'Brother and Sisters' and 'Remembering an Aunt'), rather than when it is superimposed onto the poetry in the form of abstractions and didacticism. Oddly, this weakness in Wright's poetry — the by-passing of felt experience — is one which she herself clearly objects to in her criticism of the Australian poet, Christopher Brennan.

The book includes a discussion of the two volumes of poetry published since *Collected Poems 1942-1970*, namely *Alive : Poems 1971-2* and *Fourth Quarter and Other Poems*. These poems, discussed as radically different in mood and texture from the earlier work, are seen essentially as clarifications and crystallizations of the poet's major themes. *Alive*, in Mrs. Walker's view, suffers from polemicist over-statement or banality, but the most recently published volume, *Fourth Quarter*, is judged as having 'a new sense of assurance, a new affirmation of intuitive, emotional and creative power of the mind, and an accompanying resurgence of poetic vigour and control.' There are no fruitless speculations about further development in Wright's poetry, but given Mrs. Walker's persuasive account of the power of this last volume, one can only be optimistic about the quality of possible future work from one of Australia's most important established poets.

Shirley Walker's critique is not for the popular reader of Judith Wright, but nor is it restrictively 'academic'. Her cogent and systematic style of argument, her lucid prose, make this work accessible to the non-specialist. Finally, one of the most refreshing aspects of this work is its critical tact: the writer balances generalized argument with substantially detailed close readings of poems, and is neither indiscriminately gushing nor gratuitously negative in her evaluations. It is a consistently clear-sighted and methodical look at her subject.

SUSAN KOBULNICZKY

Brian Kiernan, *Patrick White*, Macmillan Commonwealth Writers Series. ISBN.O.333. 265505.5. London, 1980.

Brian Kiernan is one of Australia's leading critics and this is a subtle, and sensitive yet very clear introduction to a complex and demanding writer. As such there would seem to be little for the critic to say except to praise its poise and lucidity, to point to some of its critical insights, honour the writer's abilty to throw new light on texts which have become familiar and to conclude. But a question arises which will not be silenced: for all its felicities, is this work really necessary? and if it is, for whom is it necessary? Mr. Kiernan tells us that the reader he has in mind is the general reader. But he or she is already well and better served by the several earlier introductions to White, the best of which, by Geoffrey Dutton, informs his account of the novels with his personal feeling for White and for his problems as a writer and as a man. Kiernan's study is more sophisticated. His general reader in fact is more likely to be someone studying Australian Literature at some tertiary institution, looking for a guide through the jungle of criticism which has sprung up around White's novels, a jungle inhabited by fiercely warring tribes of critics. In my view, this guide should not be provided. Teaching is essentially a matter of taking risks, of face to face discussion and, to my

mind, the habit of appealing to the authority of a book to save one from the demands of this kind of encounter is to be deplored. It is a pity that a critic of Mr. Kiernan's stature has given his support to this appeal. It may be in the interests of publishers but is not necessarily in the interests of students' development as readers or of writers who depend, after all, on having readers who are properly responsive and properly adventurous.

This book, then, tends, however unintentionally, to contribute to the debasement of the critical and, by implication, creative coinage of our society which is one of the symptoms of a culture in decline. It is worth noting in this respect that for quality of paper and general layout this must be one of the shoddiest books I have seen. A critic of Mr. Kiernan's abilities seems to me to be wasting his time going over ground which has already been covered, and wasting his time in the shabbiest of surroundings. White's works by now have been explicated, evaluated, tabulated and presented to the general public more exhaustively — and exhaustingly — than any other Australian writer's. It is time to move on to explore, for example, the further questions raised by this very phenomenon of a writer-become-public-institution, to examine the works themselves in the light of more sophisticated critical methods, and so on. To be fair, Mr. Kiernan acknowledges this necessity, admitting that his approach may well "seem old-fashioned and uninspired". This admission however, does not disarm my objections, particularly as some of the new approaches he refers to might have enabled him to perform more adequately the task his Preface tells us he set himself, "to present [White's] writing in a historical cultural context, to recognise its local and temporal, as well as its universal, aspects". But he eschews these approaches, doing little more than assert the connection between White's work and cultural and social developments in Australia and note biographical or social facts, more or less in passing. This failure arises, one suspects, not from any inadequacy in the critic himself, still less from any lack of intellingence or sensitivity. Rather what it points to is the weakness of the critical position he adopts, the position of New Criticism, and it is interesting that so distinguished a critic is prepared still to cling to it, despite the uneasiness he expresses in his Preface and from time to time elsewhere. In turn, this preparedness points up what is the crux of my problem with this book; that criticism, like literature and like everything else human beings do, is historically conditioned. As a recent letter in *The Times Literary Supplement*, by Grant Webster, points out, "it is one of the curiosities of literary study that it seems to be very painful for literary critics, who constantly examine the relation of works of literature to literary periods, change, and history, to see themselves as parts of history, as members of generations and groups, related to social institutions like magazines and universities, and, like both authors and institutions, subject to change of fashion and obsolence." The kind of criticism Mr. Kiernan is practising here seems to me both obsolescent and, paradoxically, at the same time expressive of the state in which we find ourselves at present. Once one realises the parallels between the New Critical stance and that of the elite which governs our society, however, the paradox dissolves. New Criticism is essentially solipsistic, the expression of that "inner emigration", the retreat from the public life into private consolation which Hannah Arendt sees as one of the means by which people in "dark times" attempt to survive. But as Miss Arendt also suggests, this retreat sells the pass, surrendering any power literature may have to bring about change.

Brian Kiernan's approach tends to defuse the effect of a potentially explosive writer. White's declared intention on his return to Australia was to "help the people of a half-savage nation become a race possessed of understanding". But Kiernan refuses the radical implications of this attempt, reconciling that understanding with the views of the Educational Establishment instead. True, he notes White's concern with "the discrepancy between what this society is and what it might become" (p. 6). But, far from exploiting this discrepancy, the critic closes it, remarking that "the character's search for the realities behind contemporary life necessitates an engagement with that life as it manifests itself in Australia" (p. 6), imposing on his interpretation the kind of closure White rages against in his public utterances as well as in his work. For all its urbanity, Kiernan's approach is thus a product of what White has called "the Great Australian Emptiness", the homelessness in the

sphere of values which makes us cling to what we know and to what is materially evident rather than launch out to explore new possibilities. John Docker has identified this approach with Sydney rather than with Melbourne, associating it with Andersonian philosophy, sceptical, teleophobic and profoundly suspicious of a generally hostile to any appeal to metaphysics. By definition, this represents an ideological position: reality is defined in one-dimensional terms and the authority figures of critic and journalist stand on guard to see that there is no escape from this hegemony. Hence for Kiernan the search by White's characters "for the realities behind contemporary life," the search which rises from engagement with life as it manifests itself in contemporary life is not allowed to exceed the limits officially imposed by that life. Discussing the end of *Voss*, for example, he reaffirms G. A. Wilkes' view that "attempts to find some religious message in [Laura's] . . . utterances [here] should be resisted". (p. 58) Similarly he sets himself throughout firmly in opposition to those who would concern themselves with the religious and metaphysical issues raised by the novels. This is to project his own values on the works, however, and to ignore White's own statements not only about his concern about these issues but also a great deal of evidence within the works themselves which pushes them to the forefront of any impartial reading. Admittedly, critics of a metaphysical persuasion have also pushed their views insentitively, attempting to turn White into their own kind of Jungian or Christian fundamentalist thinker. Nonetheless, the point remains that, with his epic ambitions and his profound sense of metaphysical unease, White does not lend himself to an approach which is ultimately little more than the cultivation of a private and privileged sensibility.

The appearance of yet one more introduction to White at the expense of the more rigorous and challenging study one might have expected from the author of *Images of Nature and Society* is therefore symptomatic. As Hannah Arendt argues, the retreat from the public life is justifiable as long as reality is not ignored but is constantly acknowledged as the thing that must be esceped. What is symptomatic in this study however, is the way it turns the thrust of White's work and co-opts his works, ignoring the historical, psychological and metaphysical questions they so uncomfortably pose and making them confirm the comfortable view. Reading it, there is little to suggest a writer whose vision is profoundly disturbing, questioning the very premises on which our present society is based. In this sense the New Critic is the first cousin of the new technologist, content with operational matters. What Mr. Kiernan has to offer is "commentary", to use Walter Benjamin's distinction, rather than "critique", which is concerned with the truth content of a work. "If, to use a simile, one views the growing work as a funeral pyre," Benjamin goes on, "its commentator can be likened to a chemist, its critic to an alchemist. While the former is left with wood and ashes as the sole objects of his analysis, the latter is concerned only with the enigma of the flame itself: the enigma of being alive. Thus the critic inquires about the truth whose living flame goes on burning over the heavy logs of the past and the light ashes of life gone by."

In our society it may be that the great enigma facing us is the question of value and of the common good which depends on it. Hunted from "rational" discussion, a dim embarrassing presence wherever it lingers in political, social or economic transactions, this question and this notion of the common good would seem to me to matter to any literary discussion with ambition to preserve the discourse about the world and human affairs which is essential to what we call civilization. One could only wish that, instead of raking over the ashes Mr. Kiernan had turned his attention to this flame. His study matches ill with the concern White himself has confessed to with "an overreaching grandeur, a daily wrestling match with an opponent whose limbs never become material whose blood and sweat are scattered on the pages of anything the serious writer writes."

VERONICA BRADY

Clive James. *Unreliable Memoirs*, Jonathon Cape, London, 1980, 171 pp., $14.95.

> "I'm sure it was aesthetically justifiable for Proust to concentrate on his piece of cake, but in fact almost anything can take you back. There is a rhapsodic stretch about

ice-cream in *la Prisonnière* that proves the point exactly. He imagines his tongue shaping the ice-cream of long ago, and suddenly all the past comes rushing back with authentically uncontrollable force. Elsewhere in the novel he keeps his memory on a tight rein. Herzen was closer to the truth when he said that every memory calls up a dozen others. The real miracle of Proust is the discipline with which he stemmed the flow. Everything is a Madeleine."

Especially Jaffas, Violet Crumble bars, Fantales, Minties, Skybombers et al. Clive James' remembrance of things past, for all his coy claims that *Unreliable Memoirs* is "a first novel disguised as autobiography", never does seek to create a world of even vaguely Proustian dimensions, but has nonetheless such a wealth of lovingly recreated moments as demand space to move, and in moving give us more than a poignant and often courageous exercise in self-analysis, for we are also given a basically unsentimental view of the sustaining verities which lie beneath the bland surfaces of Australian suburban life.

In the course of recreating a childhood and adolescence in post-world-War-II Australia from the perspective of a highly visible expatriate 'success' in the worlds of journalism, criticism and talk-show T.V., James manages also to convey a strong sense of some quite radical changes taking place in Australian culture during the fifties. He writes, for example about the sudden, almost overnight replacement of neighbourhoods surrounded by bush (with all its potential to surprise one with a general indifference, and malevolent particulars like snakes and funnel-webs) with the neat, tamed vistas of new developments'.

> "The district was changing. The poultry farm was sold up and subdivided into blocks of building land. Irene Street was extended through it, to join up with a new road called Madrers Avenue, so there were now two ways up to Rocky Point Road. This must have happened in fits and starts over the course of years, but I remember it as a surge of innovation. Concrete kerbing was laid down, so that everybody's front strip had two edges to be kept sharply defined instead of one. Most sensational change of all, the sewer came. Vast trenches were dug in which pipes were laid. My mother boldly proposed that one of the miraculous new devices should be installed not only in the outside lavatory but in the bathroom itself. The very notion spelled doom for the dunny man."

From here, James subtends what for this book is the usual angle—from perceptive and particularized comment on a general movement in the culture to the humourously related, and often self-deprecatory anecdote, although in this case its a hilariously slapstick tale of the last dunny-man's 'solitary mistake'; falling over Young Clive's carelessly abandoned bicycle while carrying (of course!) a full can. The book is full of such anecdotes, many of them, for all the wry and sometimes sardonic humour, almost too painfully close to this reviewer's own memories of 'growing up absurd' in a Perth placed (even as late as the mid-Sixties) about a decade behind the East in relation to both environmental and sartorial changes. (Oh, the days of drape-shape and brothel-creepers!).

James's comic gusto is however tempered by occasions of frank self-analysis, one of the most moving of which arises from his memory of his mother's response to the death of his father who survived the war as a P.O.W. only to be killed, in one of life's little, shocking, ironies, in a 'plane crash while being repatriated.

> "Up until that day, all the grief and worry that I had ever seen my mother give way to had been tempered for my ears. But now she could not help herself. At the age of five I was seeing the full force of human despair. There were no sedatives to be had. It was several days before she could control herself. I understood nothing beyond the fact that I could not help. I think that I was marked for life. I know now that until very recent years I was never quite all there — that I was play-acting instead of living and that nothing except my own unrelenting fever of self-consciousness seemed quite real. Eventually, in my middle thirties, I got a grip on myself. But there can be no doubt that I had a tiresomely protracted adolescence, wasting a lot of other people's time, patience and love. I suppose it is just another sign of weakness to blame everything on that one moment, but it would be equally dishonest if I failed to record its piercing vividness."

Such moments of painful self-assessment are all the more valuable for their being few but crucial. Much more often James shows himself clear enough of his past to employ his wittily acerbic pen against himself.

"By this time my first poems were coming out in *honi soit*. They were, of course, the most abject pastiche, but my first appearance in print led me to an excess of posturing beside which Nerval walking his lobster would have been as inconspicuous as the Invisible Man."

Indeed for all the pleasures this book offers by way of insights into the pecularities of class blindness in Australia, the anxieties and ecstacies of uninformed puberty, the explosive effects of intellectual awakenings as the *naif* goes up to the University, it is its generous humour which most appeals. Most often this humour is generated out of the gap between James's 'cultured' persona and the blunt irreverent larrikin lurking beneath. Take, for one example, the mock-heroics of his description of Mears, the school bully.

"I admired Mears, but for his self-possession more than his capacity to inflict suffering. He was completely without fear. Like Napoleon and Hitler, he seemed imaginative through having no idea of natural limits to his actions. He was a sawn-off Siegfried, a Nietzschean superman in short pants. He embodied Gibbon's definition of the barbarian, since his liberty was to indulge the whim of the moment, and his courage was to ignore the consequences. He was a frightful little shit."

I'm not going to make any apologies for offering this pastiche of quotation as a review, because the plain fact is that it is James's voice that holds the book together, whether wittily irreverent, lovingly recreative of the all-important minutiae of childhood life (backyard tunnels, balsa 'planes, billy carts) or probing the anguish of the past in order to understand his present. I like that voice, its candid nostalgia, and its sometimes stunning capacity to conjure the past's frequent moments of wonder onto the present page. In fact I like it so much that I'm going to let it speak to end this review, and with a simile that does full justice to the particular pubescent joy described.

"Falling for — not just perving on, but actually and rackingly falling for—a pretty girl in a Speedo certainly beat any thrills that were being experienced by the poor bastards who were swimming themselves to jelly in the heats and semi-finals. So, at any rate, I supposed. Every few minutes you could hear the spectators roar as they goaded some half-wit onward to evanescent glory. Meanwhile I concentrated on the eternal values of the way a girl's nipples hardened against her will behind their veils of blue cotton, or the way the sweet skin of her thigh near the groin might be the vellum mounting for a single black hair like the escaped mainspring of a pygmy time-piece."

CLIFF GILLAM

Antonio Casella, *Southfalia : An Allegorical Satire*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1980, 183 pp., $6.00.

Ever since Candide was booted out of Westphalia by Baron Thunder-Ten-Tronckh, the ploy of the "innocent abroad" has been particularly popular with satirists. It reappears in Antonio Casella's first novel, *Southfalia*, in which the literary genealogy reveals (as the publisher's note points out) the figures of Johnson, Swift and especially Voltaire. Subtitled "an allegorical satire", this work is an ambitious attempt to shed light on the malaise in Australian society through a fantasy built upon its inherent values and beliefs.

Rather than setting the novel in the future, as a number of recent satirists have done, Casella turns to a 15th century past. (Perhaps this is a warning, in itself, of a certain lack of adventure in his vision.) The story tells of an island paradise called Southfalia in which society is dominated in every sphere of activity by descendants of colonialists of the Roman Empire. Money, Power and Influence provide the only scale of values and are the concomitants of a knighthood which is "the ultimate goal, the zenith of accomplishments, the realised dream for a few". The only problem is that Southfalia has a "contented" rather than a "perfect society", for large numbers of poor people are forced meekly to accept their lot and to contribute towards the happiness of the knights and their cronies. What emerges is an unshakeable hierarchy based upon the value of the right traditional background and education ("tis of great merit to speak Cicero's Latin and sport a Roman nose") and accepted attitudes to art, politics and religion: in short, a thoroughgoing conservatism.

Into this society strays Manuel, an artistic Innocent from a small village. He meets a worldly old Egyptian philosopher called Iscar, who bears rather an unfruitful resemblance to Johnson's Imlac, and together they wander through Southfalian society, encountering *all* its disagreeable aspects in a desultory fashion. As his name is intended to suggest, Manuel is something of a Christ-figure; he is full of human kindness and selfless interest in the condition of his fellow man while his artistic leanings enable him to see more clearly than most to the heart of things. In a new twist for *ingénu* satire, the Innocent is able to persuade the people of Southfalia that he has found a way based upon compassion and love and he emerges a prophet and leader. Matters come to a head when Southfalia is threatended by an outside power and Manuel feels forced to forsake his code of peace in order to protect the interests of his people. This leaves the way clear for the conservative Southfalians to organise a revolt against him which results in his death. The old order is resumed.

The scope of the satire in *Southfalia* is very large indeed, encompassing the systems of thought and action inherited through the British colonisation of Australia. Most aspects of Australian society are mirrored through allegory — political life, educaton, attitudes to race, religion, culture, foreign affairs and the concerns of minority groups. In an attempt at even-handedness, Casella deals as critically with extreme progressive movements as he does with extreme conservative ones, striving as far as possible for a sense of objectivity; it must be stressed, however, that attitudes rather than the intellectual foundation of attitudes are scrutinised. His method of treating all issues offers several minor advantages. The omniscient, ironic narrator has no need for the unifying presence of the protagonist and moves across all boundaries, oceans and time-zones, lending flexibility and pace — or the illusion of it — to the narrative which proceeds *allegro vivace* rather in the manner of Voltaire. Also reminiscent of Voltaire is the narrator's apparent callousness as he mentions the most appalling brutalities with a casual air:

> One dark morning, following a visit from the monstrous Sir Herod, Iscar found himself emasculated, deprived of his manhood, castrated like a steer or a gelding and sobbing with terror. What a grim, tragic day that was!

Through something of the same approach, grotesquerie vitalises many of the characterisations — there is a large assortment of humors — which on the whole are entertaining. One result of the 15th century setting is a picturesque vocabulary, full of "Roman" names and terms, Biblical references and words like 'serf' which carry the weight of special satiric significance. (This vocabulary, however, never has anything like the satirical dimension of an Orwellian Newspeak.) And as with Johnson's Abyssinian setting in *Rasselas*, the world of Southfalia has an exotic aura, a sense of unreality which develops from the language, the cruel, brisk narrative and elements of the grotesque, and is at times quite effective.

Such aspects do not, however, sufficiently compensate for the number of objections which can be raised about the work. Several of these are very basic indeed and relate to the tactic of allegorical *ingenu* satire which is used. (It may be noted in passing that *ingenu* satire becomes tedious in a work which, on rough calculation, is perhaps four times as long as *Candide* or *L'Ingénu*.) For a start, the allegory lacks bite. While Southfalian parallels with Australian society *do* draw attention to actual barbarism and degeneration, there is in no sense an organised, imaginative force in the use of allegory. A host of satiric targets noted in Australian society are simply transferred wholesale into the fictional society with the barest imaginative justification. The point of doing this seems lost since merely changing names and places cannot add to the thrust or significance of the satire. Indeed, the transparency and pedestrianism of the allegory becomes irritating at times, especially when it consists of painfully literal recasting of news cliches in order to create a *roman-a-clef* involving politicians and their wives. Why bother to describe how little Lord Peppin is accompanied at an important function by his fashionable wife who wears a dress daringly split up the thigh? (And isn't some variation on the event demanded artistically in any case?) There seems to be no real reason for her to be in the novel at all. The nadir is reached, with the imagination audibly creaking, in passages like the following:

> "Fellow Patricians, meet my dearest nephew: Octavius Mendacit Humble: like his immortal ancestor he was born in August and has decayed teeth. He has been carefully groomed to lead us to a Lemonist victory." Respectful cheers were followed by subdued whispers of approval for indeed the youth was of purest Roman strain. The posture was right, the colour was right, the nose was right. And with a name like that! . . . Things were beginning to look up for Patricians at last. Octavius allowed them a humble smile; just enough to show them that his teeth were indeed rotten, then he cast a stern glance around the hall, held out the silken garter before them like a prosecutor waving a damning piece of evidence at the criminal and said:
> "Noble friends, don't you know that life was not meant to be sleazy?"

This self-conscious burlesque lacks any satiric strength and is quite adolescent in its exploitation of simple parody.

Sustaining the allegory at length also presents a problem. At times the fantasy breaks down completely into merely a direct expression of some aspect of Australian life. When the natives of Southfalia are described, for example, the Australian aboriginal rises from the page, undisguised and speaking in a familiar idiom:

> I you bin see black fella in whitefell Manue I bin too much drink. That one differen John I reckon. You teachem properly the black fella's way. Might be you go to black fella land, eat bush tucker might be and mek song too . . .

Why go to the trouble of constructing an elaborate fictional parallel in regard to the white Australian if only to abandon artifice completely in the case of the aboriginal? An answer to this can be found by looking at another matter first. The whole work is characterised by confused and sometimes conflicting aims and this is no more evident than in the use of the *ingénu* as the focus of the satire. At first, Manuel is a passive Innocent whose presence draws attention to the ills in society. Despite the obvious links he makes with other *ingénu* satire, Casella isn't interested in probing the ordeal of experience in order to make the *ingénu* a worthwhile centre for the work; Manuel is simply a signpost, pointing out what is already plain to the reader. The purpose in choosing such a hero becomes clear only when he moves from a passive to an active role in a way that seems to strike at the very foundation of the initial satiric approach. *Ingénu* satire is essentially pragmatic: it makes its strongest appeal to commonsense and is reluctant to force idealistic solutions on the problem of existence. In *Southfalia*, however, it becomes apparent that Manuel's love of man and of human dignity are values which are to carry weight. Not only are ideals proposed, but they reach an ideal audience — not the harum-scarum mob encountered by Candide, but Southfalians who respond to the hero's words with a readiness that immediately reduces the range and effect of the satire. Manuel's success is uncompelling in imaginative, intellectual, or spirtual terms; it is established by fiat and imples that the responsibility for the nastiness in life can be placed at the feet of a few bad "knights" who never reform.

It is this sort of naivety which seems to lie at the heart of the treatment of the aboriginal in *Southfalia*. The allegory breaks down because, firstly, the aboriginals' plight is somehow too oppressive to be treated imaginatively, and secondly, the aboriginal possesses something of value which the white man has lost and which does not easily translate into allegory. The cornerstone of Casella's moral vision appears to be based on something akin to mystical primitivism which is *too* serious for satiric banter. (The notion of the "noble savage" also lingers in the description of the Ricelanders, an undeveloped but "proud people who let it be known that they sought no sympathy".) Black John, the aboriginal, takes Manuel to the native burial ground in the desert, the Big Rock, for it is said "that the man who dared spend a night alone in one of the caves and came out next morning alive would be endowed with great powers". And it comes as no surprise that Manuel returns from the desert (fixed on constantly as a symbol of the awesome unknown) full of new knowledge and visions. The increasing stress on mysticism, rather than reinforcing the pattern of allegorical satire, tends to interfere with it and finally overwhelms it. In a final, incongruous development, the novel moves beyond the passive and active roles of its hero to show him in another light altogether. Manuel finds himself seduced by war and, in

deep shame, yields to his enemies who execute him in a travesty of a crucifixion. Suddenly, the whole work is placed in a more "significant" perspective, as it is implied that not only the wicked knights but the ordinary Southfalians and Manuel himself suffer from spiritual sterility. Black John comes into his own here, for he has retained links with man's deepest past, the past of myth which emphasises man's basic spiritual harmonies with the world. In a cataclysmic ending, his island is engulfed by the sea while he sings to himself:

> The lament had risen to a song, a song unsung and forgotten since the island's conception. Now it exploded in myriads of reverberations from Man to Dust, to Stone to Man, into a single, joyful symphony made of the sounds of breaking matter. Finally, a triumphant flash struck the man, rushed down his spine and fused the light above with the magma below.

This revelation of the Absolute follows most oddly upon the rest of the novel; there is no sense of organic development, only of contrivance.

This is the problem with the work as a whole. It would be pleasant to be able to follow Richard Le Gallienne's injunction that "Praise is more important than judgement. It is only at agricultural societies that men dare sit in judgement on the rose", but a more stringent attitude, especially in regard to satire, is surely more helpful. *Southfalia* is an ambitious novel but it fails as satire, perhaps because of the ambition. It gives the impression of an amalgam of various satiric traditions and tactics used in such a way as to give the most comprehensive — and consequently most confused — account of the subject. It is as if Casella loses perspective of his early idea. Furthermore, the acuity of really sharp criticism is missing with most points being made with an almost mechanical heavy-handedness. While undoubtedly there is much that this author wants to say, he has said it without particular incisiveness, conviction or sense of shape and control of his subject in *Southfalia*.

CON CORONEOS

Victoria Hobbs, *But Westward Look: Nursing in Western Australia 1829-1979*, University of Western Australia Press for The Royal Australian Nursing Federation (W.A. Branch), 1980, xvi + 256 pp., illus.

Much of this descriptive account, written from the point of view of a Western Australian nurse, is based upon the minute-books and reports of the various councils, committees and boards which arose, and sometimes fell, as nurses endeavoured to gain control of their own profession; it is strengthened by reference to government papers, and illuminated — too rarely — by the voices of nurses themselves. Given the turgid style of most minute-books and the stated intention 'to create an authentic source of information for future research' the author takes us through her chronologically organised account without undue tedium.

The plentiful illustrations are almost all group portraits or views of early hospitals (the author notes dryly the antiseptic effect of hot iron upon pathogenic organisms). Plenty of opportunity to hunt for great aunt Ethel's picture, but the integration of the emphatic commentary provided by the illustrations into an analysis of the two issues they raise, the effects of a uniform upon a profession and the nurses' control over their workplace, await further research. Miss Hobbs notes the diminished authority of the matron when in 1939 Perth Hospital appointed its first manager; in 1980 there remains a pressing social problem, which might be frivolously exemplified by the line-up on the platform for the 1980 annual general meeting of Royal Perth Hospital — 14 penguins and a single woman.

As a physical object the book is well-proportioned and satisfying to handle. Reluctantly one must point to two literal errors, an incorrect running headline, a misplaced entry in the index (Perth Public Hospital follows Princess), and the omission from the index of the first words used to test it, Dorre and Bernier, and therefore express some concern about the reliability of material not photographically reproduced from the original.

The choice of a chronological sequence for presentation of the material is debatable. Nursing before 1900 is dealt with in the first 15 pages supported by name-lists of nurses in Appendix I. The remainder of the book is

devoted to the twentieth century. The method of reviewing all aspects of nursing in each decade or period, such as 'The War Years', without any subdivision leads occasionally to disconcerting flips in the narrative, like that from the signs and symptoms of early T.B. (none!) straight over to the wartime location of the headquarters of the International Council of Nurses. Hand in hand with the careful chronology goes a painstaking naming of nurses occupying positions of authority, winning awards, and achieving 'firsts' by chance or by desert. As local history written for the group itself, it may gratify pious memory, but the relevance of such detail in an historical study of an occupation is not always clear. A thematic approach might have given the opportunity to analyse several aspects of Western Australian nursing which are only intermittently illuminated. What were the social, political, and religious backgrounds of nurses? Why did the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association 'flatly' turn down an invitation to join the Women's Service Guild? One would like to know more about the involvement with the W.A. Secession Movement and about the proposal to affiliate with the Labor Party. Deans of Perth seem to have been no more humane in their attitudes to women's professions in earlier decades than in 1980; how many in the Anglican church shared the view which their Dean preached in 1936 that if the Nurses' Union obtained wage justice 'the profession would fast deteroriate'? An argument might be sustained that Western Australian values retarded nursing: private enterprise delayed the construction of public hospitals; examinations were 'tommy rot' in the opinion of A. H. Panton, who later became Minister for Health. In 1928 the Claremont Mental Hospital, which employed only male nurses on male wards, lost its status as a training school because 'male applicants had difficuty coping with the educational entrance examination'. On the other hand it was not until 1931 that the Council of Australasian Trained Nurses resolved that 'in future the President be a nurse'. Medical men dominated until changes to the constitution in 1932. The goal of locating the education of all nurses within a tertiary institution is not yet achieved. The University of Western Australia turned down two proposals for university courses, the first in 1936, when Professor Whitfeld wished success for the scheme but found it 'out of the question with our present grant'. Miss Hobbs's book which remains temperate in the face of many prejudices, may perhaps be a persuasive power in a year when grants are leaner than ever.

DOROTHY W. COLLIN

Edgar Metcalfe, *Garden Party*, Artlook Books, Perth, 1980, 132 pp.

The publication of Edgar Metcalfe's first play, *Garden Party*, gives the chance for a second look at a work which, during its successful first season at the Hole in the Wall earlier this year, was praised in the press for its wit, its social comment and its accuracy as a mirror of Australian society. A reading of *Garden Party*, as opposed to seeing it in performance, confirms two earlier personal impressions, that the nature of the play is not so easily pinned down as at first appears, and that the reasons for its success are perhaps other than those advanced already on its behalf in the press.

The play's strength is in its characterizations, which are built up indirectly through the casual chat of a small group of people gathered for a luncheon party on a hot summer day in Perth. Mr Metcalfe skilfully filters a considerable amount of expository detail about the characters through the dialogue, especially in the first half of the play, where he suggests stresses and preoccupations kept just below the surface for the occasion. Individual characters are established in bold outline with an accumulation of surface detail, which perhaps suits the decorum of such a provincial gathering, but which leaves room, one suspects, for some deeper insights to be developed in performance. The author's grasp of character shows at its best in the first half of the play: in the Second Act he pays more attention to situation, and certain characters, such as Malcolm, the academic who looms so large early on, tend to slip out of focus. Notwithstanding this, the real interest of *Garden Party* is the understanding it gives of how its characters relate as a group. The effect is rather acrid. The hostess Eleanor —

predatory, patronising, sharp-tongued, middle-aged, socially and intellectually accomplished — cultivates a studied "family" feeling among her guests, she being, as it were, the matriarch. This calculated fiction of Eleanor's is gradually contradicted as each character undergoes a crisis, large or small, during the afternoon, and in the process affirms his or her isolation from the others. One suspects that there is a rather chill centre to this comedy. Portraits of brittle and illusory bonds which serve limited social purposes are frequent enough in the theatre, but Mr Metcalfe delivers this aspect of his material with a refreshing tartness which derives partly from the glimpses he gives of tensions below the surface of the dialogue. Within its limited range of character and situation, the play manages to reflect on the generation gap, particulary as it concerns the struggle to preserve some spontaneity and individuality in the face of atrophied and banal provincial values. *Garden Party* also accurately portrays the way in which petty scandal can assume devastating proportions for its victims within such narrow social confines. A further point in the play's favour is that its wit is generally true to character, reflecting tensions within the group. Certain "one-liners", however, seem forced: the young Greek guest's inadvertent reference to his mother's television set as her "box" gives rise to a rather facile retort which doesn't carry the play in any direction at all.

My main misgiving about *Garden Party* concerns its vision. It seems proper first to discount claims that the play accurately mirrors Australian society: its social range is simply too narrow to do so. This, of course, is no reflection upon the play or the author, who, to my knowledge has made no such claims for his play. But two related points need to be made in clarification, and each has to do with the play's verisimilitude, and with the conviction it carries. In the first place, the dramatist seems to edge towards a judgemental view of his characters and their situation. The action seems loaded in favour of the younger generation, who evince desires for freedom and integrity, as opposed to the compromises and failures of their elders. To give the play its due, there is a hint, which might have been fruitfully developed, that the young propose these values partly because they have less to lose than the older generation. Judgement is most evident in the treatment of Eleanor and her arch-rival and spiritual brother, the acerbic émigré and bon-vivant homosexual, Phillipe. These two characters have much in common but while we see only the unattractive predatory side of Eleanor, Phillipe is surprisingly permitted a generous social conscience. The effect is rather lop-sided, and some of the social comment which Phillipe delivers on behalf of homosexuals and blacks seems forcibly conscripted, in view of his cynical nature.

Garden Party presents a further problem to those who might wish to consider the play for performance — though in mentioning it, I don't wish to tell against a play which has deserved its successes. The problem has to do with the scale and pace of the closing parts of the play, and the kind of effect which the play leaves with the audience. Towards the end of the Second Act, Maude, a good-natured, ebullient artist, attempts suicide. The effect is melodramatic, not because of the motivation (her husband's infidelity) which is quite acceptable, but because Maude's crisis is precipitated rather unconvincingly by a chance remark, and happens offstage with such rapidity that the audience hasn't time to grasp fully the reasons for Maude's action. This melodramatic effect is oddly heightened by contrast with the convincing and engaging characterization of Maude to this point. It puts a strain on the play at a crucial point, and in performance the episode would require a sensitive timing and tone to balance it against Eleanor's own low-keyed attempt to set up another of her sexual intrigues in the final moments of the play.

Artlook has done well by *Garden Party*, apart from a minor proofing error in the description of the setting. The play certainly deserves to reach wider audiences, and is very attractively presented. The text is clearly set out, with sufficient space on each page to make the book useful as a working text for actors, directors and students. The Introduction by Raymond Omodei, who directed *Garden Party* for its first season, is mainly anecdotal, but contains some valuable insights into the play. Photographs by Sally McConnell of the first production are included, and evoke character and atmosphere. The picture of the author in the rôle of Phillipe, repro-

duced on the cover of the book, could convey the misleading impression that Phillipe's exaggerated theatricality is also the style of the play.

BILL DUNSTONE

Murray Bail, *Homesickness*. Macmillan, Melbourne, 1980, 304 pp., $9.95.

I have recently, at the invitation of the editor of another compass-directional quarterly, been reading a number of volumes of Australian short prose fiction, for an article I suspect I may never write. The major bias of much of this writing, as it is of Australian literary criticism, is realist, empiricist, historicist. It is a predictable landscape, and often depressing. One longs for leaps of the imagination to transform the landscape of the mind, if not of the country. So, Murray Bail's *Homesickness*, as one might have expected from the author of *Contemporary Portraits*, comes like a fresh wind across an arid plain. It is a triumph of the imagination, a book at once sophisticated and funny, while retaining the "melancholy" that my Australian edition of the Collins English Dictionary associates with "Homesickness".

Bail's theme, which determines his narrative, is that Tourism, as a major twentieth century mode of perception, structures the world through which we move, turning it into a series of museums. In a poignant story in his collection *City Life*, the American author Donald Barthelme writes "At the Tolstoy Museum", where "Sadness grasped the 741 Sunday visitors. The Museum was offering a series of lectures on the text 'Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?' The visitors were made sad by these eloquent speakers, who were probably right." Sadness pursues Bail's characters, and permeates his narrative. In the pursuit of meaning and perhaps happiness, characters and authors alike discover, in Samuel Beckett's formulation, that "the only true paradises are lost paradises."

The American novelist, Thomas Pynchon, particularly in *V*, laments what "Baedeckerland" has done to the native inhabitants of those regions through which the tourists pass. Bail is wryer in his presentation of this problem. At the end of their African tour, the everage Cathcarts question a native child.

> 'And what's this little tacker's name?'
> The boy pointed to himself:
> 'Oxford University Press.' . . .
> 'That's nice. Doug, give him a coin. What would you like to be, dear, when you grow up?'
> The boy looked at Mrs. Cathcart. The driver began revving the four-cylinder engine.
> 'A tourist.'

Bail's tourist party travels to many countries, and their perceptions of those countries are channelled through museums. In Africa, they go to the Museum of Handicrafts, which is in fact a museum of *European* handicrafts. Culturally determined expectations are not so much undermined as disappointed. London *is* a museum. Genealogical trees are looked up. A stately home lacks any means of ingress. There is a Corrugated Iron Museum in the hinterland of east Yorkshire. But these imagined museums may be not so fanciful if the parenthetical references to the Patrick Hill collection of shovels in New Orleans or the Moustache Museum in Prague are true. (And Murray Bail is an author who does his homework.)

In Quito, Ecuador, we discover that the Equator is the country's most important national asset. Because it generates tourism, of course. "This was an outdoor laboratory. Doubting Thomases, empiricists, the last remaining vorticists came here in droves", to observe that in the Northern Hemisphere bath water runs out anti-clockwise, in the Southern, clockwise, on the Equator, straight down, no vortex. In Quito, there is a Museum of Legs — crucial to the activity of tourism.

In New York, the team visits the Institution of Marriage; in Central Park, a Hemingwayesque Game Park is constructed so that the tourists can watch muggings and pack rapes. In London, we meet the bibliophile Zoellner, who appeared in *Contemporary Portraits*. Dictionaries and maps abound. We are treated to a dissertation on the prevalence of kangaroos in world literature. Finally, the group visits Russia, where some are taken to the Centre of Gravity, while the blind photographer Kaddok (*cf* Kodak?) photographs a Party Ma-

chine. The Australian visitors are invited to test the reality of Lenin's corpse.

The novel is self-conscious, urbane, witty, It is full of word games and learned jokes. (I have a feeling I missed many). It delights in its own ludic potentialities. Thus, the English genealogist Lady Pamela Hunt-Gibbons (nudge, nudge) has over her fireplace *Wills and Their Whereabouts* and *Wills and Where to Find Them*, separated by *Origins of the Species* and *Cooper's Creek* (subtler nudge).

Homesickness is a playful novel, and, as novels are made up only of words, it is with words that it so often plays. But words are made up of characters, and Bail's characters are made up of words. They are not so much human beings (who would expect them to be?) but Tourists, made up of the words and conventions of Tourism. They delight, complain, behave (yes, liaisons are struck up) precisely as a Tourist Tour determines. Tourism and the Museums it generates provide the structure of the novel. This, it seems to me on reflection, is why the curious Chapter VI and the possibly enigmatic ending pages are so important to Bail's tale.

This chapter, which begins, "Yes, I went to Russia in late February 19—. I was in a group. I was in the party. . . .", offers a sudden, unexpected, and disorienting irruption of the Author into his text. Bail is too meticulous and painstaking a craftsman for it to be an oversight or a lapse of taste. (It does have a certain character of its own, demonstrated by Bail's choosing to publish it by itself in *Quadrant*, April 1980.) I choose to regard this chapter as a sort of Mannerist distancing device, in which the author disturbs the complacencies that have built up in the reader's relation to the text. The presence of this chapter insists that the author is not merely Author, but that he too, has been, and is, a tourist, and is thus in no manner superior to his characters, is by no means satirising them as Barry Humphries might.

The chapter also suggests the genesis of the text that contains it. We can see the origins of characters in the novel in the members of the tour party that "Bail" belonged to. And we can see, from "Bail's" record of *his* Russian experiences, that Tourism forces necessities and modes of perception upon us that we would not be obliged to observe in our own communities. "There is no doubt being in a foreign country rejuvenates the powers of observation and sense of wonder." But the rub is that we feel *obliged* to observe, and thus force significance upon the everyday. "Travelling makes one tired, perhaps due to the constant state of heightened awareness." And awarenesses are selective. Thus "I" saw "Gogol's nose dripping with snow." Some less literary member of the party might not have observed that. Taking a walk by the Neva "Bail" observes "condoms evidently flushed from various hotel rooms preserved in the ice like bloated toad fish, for all to see." As Tourists, we feel obliged to observe and record such phenomena; we also feel obliged to seek similes to encapsulate our heightened, obligatory perceptions. Tourists are the prisoners of their freedom. Murray Bail, of course, as *Contemporary Portraits* so amply demonstrated, can coin similtudes and thus define experiences better than most of us. Thus, in Leningrad, "Even underground in the smart subways casual lavishness with space was evident, as in a Malevich suprematist canvas, or in the page numbers of a Russian novel or Herzen's autobiography." An informed tourist, Mr. Bail.

Perhaps a corollary of "Homesickness' is "Homelessness (cf Herzen). The novel is pervaded by a sense of loss, absence, sadness. Born in Adelaide, Murray Bail has lived in India and London, spent time in New York, and now resides in Balmain, a Sydney suburb, at once a village and anomic. How can Bail's tourists ever come "Home", for their Tour will have transformed their consciousnesses. They may find that they are at home nowhere. Perhaps the last three pages of the novel suggest that, with, I hazard, the tourists confusedly immured in the Museum of Self. And where is Murray Bail's "home"? Not in any mainstream Australian tradition. Despite rumours to the contrary, I am of the opinion that he has very little in common with the fiction of Peter Carey. Bail is a loner, echoes of Barthelme notwithstanding. His reading is electic, but principally American (North and South) and European (Proust, Broch, Steiner). He is a passionate reader of dictionaries. Perhaps he, and his novel, will only be at home, in the words of Baudelaire, "anywhere out of this world.' Whether that is true or mere fancy, *Homesickness* stands like a beacon of the imagination in contemporary Australian fiction.

The Literature Board of the Australia Council is to be commended for supporting Mr. Bail on a Fellowship (1975-78), and Macmillan is gratefully to be thanked for publishing here and in England and the USA what may not be an instant Best Seller, but will continue to speak to the imaginations of the imaginative. It is a pity that, in such an acutely verbally conscious book, there should be so many typographical errors. When I re-read it, and I shall, I shall record them.

DON ANDERSON

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

A Voice in Adelaide

"Excuse me please,
would passenger Death
travelling to Melbourne
on Flight 219
please call at the front counter?
Passenger Death.
Thank you."

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

We have kept our Erasers in Order

Our government commands us to approve
the bloodiest regime of a century
at behest of policy that greater good
consoling uncle this and aunty that,
such general considerations.
Funny, isn't it?

Our poets never say anything disturbing,
nothing at all smelly or indiscreet,
thinking of LitBoardgrants that greater good
wishing not to upset aunty or uncle
with radical reflections.
Funny, isn't it?

Sand in my Shoes

Dreams of the dour and winsome,
a world for ransom
and a stammering impressario
by the piano.

Ah, the American magazines,
the flagon red after light toil
and summer's fading masterpieces
cool as coconut oil.

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