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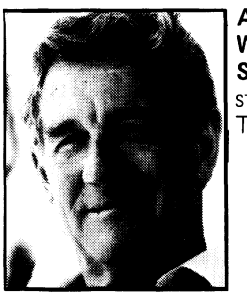

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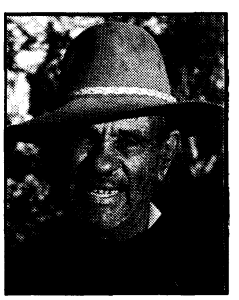

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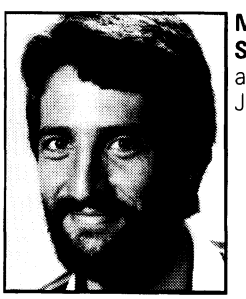

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WESTERLY

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Cover painting by Judy Prosser

CHRIS HANLON

The Myna

Archer, the axeman, took polite steps across the public lawn into the territory of a man alone. "Mind if I join . . ."

The word stuck. As he had walked, the motive, turning in his throat, had swabbed it dry.

Without an offer he took, from the lap of the man propped against the base of the date palm, the bottle, and let it provide the first, burning moment of liberation. He had been so willing, after all those years, that he had seized it greedily for himself.

Having examined the label, a long forgotten nicety, he was able, half-turning, to scan the quiet foreshore reserve. A couple on a bench were kissing. In a car, across the busy road, a man was turning a newspaper.

"I must advise that you, sir, have just made the acquaintance of a dangerous criminal," he said huskily, handing back the sherry. "A fact, no doubt, of which you have just become aware."

Floury tufts were sprouting at the temples of the man below, as if someone had taken the finicky trouble to wash that cheeky old head, so full of grumbling insouciance. Against his tree, in clear view, he was as accessible as a buddha, to which troubled men would often approach, but always singly.

The duffel coat, now rolled up behind his shoulders against the nubbly spines of the trunk, was the same drab coat that always hung at his elbow, as a sleazing tourist might have once affected. At night, under the lights of nearby Fitzroy Street, it was his badge.

Archer had first sighted him on Boxing Day, along the low bonnet of his car. The man had stepped out for a butt, or a wrapper, cursing, muttering away, then crossed regardless, like the little birds, the Indian Mynas, always challenging the anonomous cars with their quick, bold rushes from the kerb. "Whar . . . watch it!"

Archer had almost run him down, but braked, and had seen him again later, and begun following, cruising behind, a box within a box, knowing just as surely that he was being followed himself.

The Myna left the bottle on the dirt and stood up, presenting little pellets of teeth which he touched carefully together as if loose. Hissing through the same grin he observed the man who had upset his contemplation.

It was New Year. The Myna still meant, that night, to sleep on the beach, as normal, but the same pangs were returning that had sent him desperate, at Christmas, to a boarding house. An old woman there, the landlady, had embraced the manifestation, fed him, washed him, prayed for him. Her aged, bony hands he still felt, and trusted.

Archer, eye on the bottle, moved in closer.

"Go on, then, it's yours you want it so bad."

When release was imminent, they had dug up another therapist, a slow, seemingly ineffectual man, well padded with surburban fat.

"I remember you as a real hell-raiser, Archer, at the Grammer school, a form ahead of me. We worshipped the older boys."

Archer, distrustful, said flatly, "It's a blank." He had toughened, over the years, and was sustained by prison routine, suspecting all changes to be ploys. Such as the intimacy of that temporary office, its blondwood shelves packed with stationary; the occupant himself, turning to fidget with piles of order pads each time before speaking, raising dust that was soon troubling his sinuses.

"So you're going to live in a funky suburb like that. Women, con-merchants on every corner. There'll be just the element, just the character somewhere to unravel your toughness. And the bottle! Your old faithful! How about that?"

Archer clung tensely to his stoic calm, wondering this time how far it would be. "No, I don't intend to drink again."

"Don't intend." There was irritation in the eyes of the therapist, from dust, and his cheeks chuffed twice at the stale air, as if they could take it all. "They'll watch you, no risk, especially in St Kilda, for the slightest mistake. The whole state to choose from and you go back to where it all happened."

"I remember your family, of course, but never met your wife — sorry, your ex-wife — where does she live now?"

"In New Zealand."

"The house itself, of course, was sold, yes, years ago. But what of your feelings towards her, your ex-wife? You going to try to contact her perhaps?"

From outside came dull cries over the drone of the laundry boiler, as volleyball began in the quadrangle below.

"No."

"Now, come on Archer this is for you as much as for us. You've got a whole lot of poison there, deep down, and we all think it might be better to stir it up *now,* and let's see just what we've got."

All his will could not deny, for the moment, that the therapist was right. when the voice came, emotion had burred it, "I was never given a chance to speak with this." A finger rose to tap the scarred forehead. "Not a single letter would she answer, not one. Just one chance she gave me to speak, that day, and I spoke with . . ."

The therapist sat bolt upright. Broke the spell.

"With what?"

But he had lost his man, comprehensively.

"You spoke with what? The axe? You mean the axe?"

Into a void so final that they were both staring, after a few minutes, at the waxy image of the volleyball game through the thick, glass panes, standing quite close, but silently, at the little window.

All week, in that humidity, the sky had been a swamp of low, dissolving cloud. At Brighton they walked from the carpark onto the beach. A flaring shawl hovered, in time, in space, over the distant You Yangs, the sky above grown complex and dark. All the water intervening was violet powder.

Archer had packed the Myna into his car for the short drive, but the first touch of upholstery had sent him slumping into the seat. He peered out, feeling lame, at the tossing of tea tree thickets, the rattling of a date palm against the sunset, along tracks that he had, those few years ago, ranged along each day.

Stopped at traffic lights, a young buck in a sports car had slid level, staring tensely ahead into his own, private future, that necklace of friends forming around a backyard marquee, such as were being raised all across the suburbs.

Everywhere, the rhythm had been changing, since afternoon. A wayward energy concentrating, forward, into the night.

"You must take me back," the Myna complained. "My legs are weak and I don't

want to walk so far."

Archer swigged the dregs of the sherry and tossed the empty bottle across the sand. "They lined up three axes in court! Three! As if I would have walked into my tool shed and said, 'Look, I think I'll slaughter this low bastard that comes round here cheating with my wife. Hmmm . . . think I'll use *this* one'."

Pacing back and forth, he was littering the whole beach with his words. How much longer, the Myna wondered, before he would stop hurling them around, and drift away, the sherry finished, as others did. The Myna listened. To the sounds of words, to breath, and drew such fantasies harmlessly away from men. This much he understood, and trusted.

"That colour, Myna, that crimson, can you still see it?"

But the western light had faded, on all but Archer's keen retina.

"You said you been in jail, you're not the only one." The Myna was stirred to speak by a deathly stench of seaweed, which the wind had stopped dispersing. "I lie awake on those crumby beds and hear the coppers come sneaking down to chat the street girls in the cells."

"Do you think that I could sleep," raged Archer, "with all the papers screaming 'axeman'." He shifted closer, the lines down his cheeks pulling taut.

Touched the Myna.

"It's a very vascular part of the body, the face. I came down here afterward to this beach, after I had slaughtered scum, *scum of the earth,* to wash him off my hands."

He drew back, from the irritation of bristles. "I let her live. That was my one mistake."

Eleven thirty. Walking down a backstreet close to Beach Road, which was quiet, the eye of the storm, with fewer cars for each passing minute.

Finally they stood before a wire fence, rose stems jutting through, with full blown yet anaemic flowers. "Her garden, Myna, her little garden. How I longed to run back here and tear it all out."

The Myna tagged numbly along. On the lawn a sprinkler was turning slowly. A cat leapt out, like disembodied tendon, across the street.

Within the backyard. Across the fence tops came warm, human sounds, little bonfires of music and laughter glowing upward, for just a little way, into the dark night. A party for every block.

At the bottom of the street a jilted girl had wept inside a phone box as they passed, hands cradling her head, knees jammed against the glass, fixed within that light like a specimen in alcohol. She would have heard steps. And then, a minute later, another set. The third, stalking figure had slipped past, into the deep shadow of drooping melaleucas. The girl, her grief pierced, had looked idly up.

Midnight. All around the music breaking off. In the spotlit backyards toasts were being proposed amid laughter, kisses pressed, beer glasses balanced upright behind halter tops.

Archer was scrabbling, in the dark yard, across bricks with his fingertips, finding there the faint fretwork of a once festooning ivy. "My beautiful, innocent house."

He found a sill, its window barely reflecting their passive shapes, with a more lucid spangling of leaves by stray silver light behind.

"I chased him across there," Archer whispered. "Her face screamed at me from behind this window, so that I couldn't come back for her, but could only run."

But the old, dark house huddled, in the Myna's mind, over only its implied generations of family life, that he felt moved to protect. "Another man's home. You're pouring your putrid fantasy into another man's home, instead of into the gutters, or the park, where they belong!"

Archer found the door of a shed, rummaging and clanging behind it as if he could

forge it there and then, as a proof.

He did. There, held out in the doorway by the sinewy strength of his forearm, was the axe. Real. Solid. Complete.

Its shape, against a rusty filigree of cloud low over the streetlights, was all menace. Real! The Myna was moving.

Legs swinging wildly, he reached the wire gate that led to the driveway, but a hand thrust out, of a person concealed, grabbing at his coat, then relenting at a crashing of glass behind.

"Drop that right now or I'll shoot!"

The man programmed to fail — Archer — was confronted at last by the man programmed to act, the detective. And fell dead.

The shot was, for the Myna, merely the dullest of confirmations. For he was running, crookedly across the camber of the street, until he faced the same girl again, who had just managed to call a taxi, and had stepped out. Her long hair was still matted by worry but all the cheering voices and blaring horns seemed to have buoyed her irrestistably.

"Happy New Year, you old drunk," she cried, and would have kissed his curling lip, if all the trust had not sped from it, just as the wrenching, choking grief had sped from her. It had sent out runners, that passion, across her smooth complexion, flowered for a minute, then fallen away. Next day, she was already thinking, she would go to the beach, with her parents, not suspecting there might, one day, be roots as deep into her.

"Happy New Year!" a youth called, clutching a witches hat in one hand and throwing with the other a beer can which struck the Myna between the shoulder blades. Sirens wailed back along Beach Road as he slowed to a jog, then a walk, the strength in his ankles gone, head aching.

It was one o'clock. Perhaps her light would be on, that woman at the boarding house, that old landlady, as she heard the cars trumpeting up and down outside? Even at that hour?

The Myna shuffled back along the kerb, taking hours for the trip, and would knock desperately upon her locked door.

ROSALEEN LOVE

The Laws of Life

They say that all life is one, that we have a common origin with animals, with plants, with bacterial sludge even. This common root in the tree of life has given some of the young of the human species a special kind of sympathy. We are born into a knowledge of what is going on in the living world. We have an intuitive grasp of the language of life. I had this gift, and it was what made me try for a career in science. I thought it would be a pushover. I was, of course, ever mindful of the words of the song:

I talk to the trees
That's why they put me away.

So I kept my talent a secret. But no-one can be certain of anything in the present job situation, and this is the sad story of my career.

I had a tough time to begin with. It was as hard for me, as for anyone else, to understand the structure of cells or the embryonic development of the frog. At this level, my gift counted for nothing. I couldn't ask a pine tree intimate details about its mode of sexual reproduction. It's very vague about the details. All that comes through is the sense that every now and then an overwhelming urge comes over it, and staminate cones sprout on one branch, and ovulate cones on another. It knows nothing of pollination and cross-fertilisation. It's like asking a politician, what is the good life? Useless. Plants are too busy photo-synthesising to be self-reflexive, and that's why the world is, on the whole, a green and pleasant place.

So, with the normal course of entry into graduate school, I came to find myself on a scientific expedition to the Great Barrier Reef. I was certain it would be the making of my future life. Here I shall get the chance to show the professionals that they need me on their staff. Certainly, though they never knew it, it was my gifts which guided them to where the sea snakes were. I was by far the best at counting starfish, and I could tell the spear-fishermen where the large coral trout were hiding, though that with a slight pang of guilt. I ate my brother the fish, figuring out, what the heck, I'm a carnivore like the rest, and who am I to place myself above my brethren in pain and suffering? It's a hard world down there, eat or be eaten, and a thousand different ways of doing it.

I'd have liked to tune in on my shipboard companions, but my gift had its limitations.

My first mistake was due to simple forgetfulness. We were on one of the smaller keys, though one with some vegetation, grasses mostly, and I was helping with the sampling.

"Need any help there, Frances"?

I looked up. It was Peter, the man from the marine park. He was definitely someone I wanted to impress with my qualities as a future employee. I knew I was looking good in my cut-down jeans and too-tight top, but I wanted to come across as more than that. I should have known better. It wasn't my body they were after. It was

my mind which was to concern them.

Peter was thin and rubbery from a lifetime spent underwater, sampling the crown-of-thorns star-fish and the rubbish from passing ships. "Sea-floor litter is a terrible problem", he'd say, sounding like a teacher doing yard duty, and I'd wonder if I really wanted a job with him doing the garbage run. But I warmed to him more as we hammered in the bright yellow stakes that marked our sampling spots. His secret love was turtles, he confided to me. I can only admire a man who loves turtles. The best part of his job, he said, was when he camped out on the lonely beaches where the turtles come to lay their eggs. Then, he'd hear them coming up the beach in the early hours of the morning, "Chugga, chugga, chugga, like those machines that play space invaders".

"I've been out with the turtle man. Stokesie, d'you know him? He's always there when they're laying. Before they know it, he's caught them, measured the distance between their eyes, clipped their flippers, and counted their eggs. He usually publishes six papers every laying season".

"Mmm", I said. "Hey, do you know there's turtle eggs two feet down, under that yellow stake you're hammering in"?

"Hell, Frances, why didn't you tell me"? He turned white around the eyes, as only a turtle lover can. "I could have damaged them".

"No you haven't", I said. I could hear the gentle murmur of life within.

Peter dug down to the eggs. "It's true. How did you know that"?

I shrugged. Peter carefully replaced the stake. "You're weird, Frances".

"It's not me who's weird, it's everything else that's weird". We looked around the coral island. So far, we had hammered in about twenty yellow stakes along a north-west transect. Karen was leaping about with a large white butterfly net, collecting insects. Greg was trundling a pedometer around the low water mark. "Alright", said Peter, "We're normal, but he's weird". Greg wore a yellow oilskin, green tracksuit trousers, legs unzipped to show wet socks and dirty sandshoes underneath. Greg gave us a wave. Then he stopped his measurements, frowned, and trundled his pedometer up the beach to us. Carefully, he rolled the pedometer over my leg.

"That's weird", I said to Peter.

"Unacceptable margin of error", muttered Greg, as he put his machine into reverse and made off down the beach to the shoreline. Scientific research is like that.

My second mistake happened soon after. That night, back on the ship, we sat at the same table, the professors and me, commensal, as they say in the world of protective hosts and protected guests. The barnacle on the carapace of the hawskbill turtle, or the anemone on the shell of the hermit crab both eat at the same table as their host carriers. The barnacle must wait for the turtle to take it to places where the plankton is plentiful. So the graduate student must rely on attaching herself to a professor who knows where the grant money flows freely.

Brodie was one of the best at attracting money. He could always be relied on to predict one natural disaster or another just before the grants money was handed out. "Box jelly-fish terror" , the newspapers would announce, just as the jelly-fish season ended and the grants season began.

It was the joke session that did me in. "Have you heard the one about Sara Pipelini"?, asked Brodie, and we all said, "No", as one does. Up till then I had managed to laugh in all the right places, though I was troubled by stirrings deep beneath the ship. Something large was moving down there, and everything else was moving out of its way. I didn't notice when Brodie stopped talking, and I was far away when everyone else was laughing. These things add up, these moments of obtuseness, they count. The inability to see the point of a professorial joke may be interpreted as a lack of that empathic sensitivity to the group so necessary for the scientific teamwork of today.

The next day Jim came up to me. "I'd like you to do me a favour". Jim was a freelance ecologist noted for his zoological approach to love and life.

"After all, we have something in common", said Jim, who liked his women uncomplicated and his booze straight.

"Well, don't we"?

"Do we"? I thought of his passion for motor bikes.

"We're both interested in proper reef management".

I was relieved.

"Here's some notes I made last night. Look them over, and tell me what you think".

He sat patiently by while I read. He had all the right buzz words, like ecological strategy, and the plant's investments in its genes, as if the natural economy mirrored the Aussie Bond. "Techniques for survival in times of stringency", I read, but the theme was not today's graduate student in pursuit of a job, but the plant *Boerhaavia* striving to survive in the waterless sand and the wind of a coral key. As I read it, I realised he was making a fundamental mistake. It was the old problem of the observer and the observed, where the two may have very different perceptions of the same situation. How could I ever tell him that?

"That's as far as I've got at the moment", Jim said, as I put the paper down.

"Nice", I said, "Neat".

"Seriously, it's up your alley. Tell me what you think".

Over on the reef, I could sense the crown-of-thorns starfish stirring. Peter was over there, counting them. They consider themselves an oppressed minority.

"Have you considered all the dynamics of the situation"? Disturbed by Peter's activities, a beche-de-mer extruded its digestive system through one end, and began rejecting its own insides.

"I think so".

The complaints from the crown-of-thorns grew in volume. I held my hands to my head. I shut my eyes for concentration. I jerked back and forth as I thought of the plant *Boerhaavia*. "Take the plant itself", I said at last. "It buries its thick, fleshy root two feet down into the coral rubble. But it's not the Darwinian notion of the struggle against a harsh environment that drives it on. No".

"What do you mean"?

I should have stopped there, but the noise from the reef was dinning in my ears.

"What I'm saying is that it's a plant which is really into self-improvement. It burrows deep into whatever soil there is in order to keep in tune with the pulsing web of life. It likes to feel at one with the cosmos. Talk to it about ecological strategies and it simply won't listen. It knows perfectly well what it is about".

Jim looked concerned. "Frances, are you feeling alright"? He took his notes. Later, I saw him talking to Brodie. They looked my way once, then looked away again.

The sea snakes proved my ultimate undoing. Sad, that, because it was the best part of the trip. I could have come into my own as a sea snake catcher, but I let the boys do that. It's best not to poach the macho preserves. I helped where I could, in the water, snorkelling along, and acting as a sea snake spotter.

A sea snake spotter has a job, admittedly not the best job, but a sea snake spotter has a part to play in the grand scheme of things. It was pleasant in the water, floating over the edge of the reef, spotting a slight movement here, sensing a life coiled there. Naturally I was good at spotting, and the others soon learned to follow me. I would show them a tail pointing out of a coral outcrop, or a body neatly coiled under a ledge.

I despaired at what we did with the snakes, but then we did all that any non-empathic zoologist could do. We measured them, we weighed them, we determined their sex (two penises or none, nature in the case of the sea snakes overdetermining the issue). We cold branded a number on each snake, and then we put them back where we found them. The entire exercise would be repeated the next year, and the year after, and so the observations would go on, indefinitely, into the future.

The snakes knew more than could be told this way. I alone took pleasure in their awareness. I was filled with their golden fire.

"Here", I shouted, "Over here. Look, tracks of shining white".

Jim came along, and down he went, and another snake swam into the catching net.

"There's another one! It's blue"! I yelled. When the snake proved the usual olive green, Jim swam up to me instead of the snake.

"You've been in the water too long. You're turning blue yourself. Go on back to the ship with this lot of snakes".

"I'm alright. Look, it's just the light reflecting off that coral. Look how blue it is".

Jim checked up on me. He looked under the water, and then at me. He looked as unconvinced as anyone can look in a face mask and a snorkel.

I stayed out a while longer, and then we got back into the dinghy with the snakes. We had to take them back to the ship after we'd collected twenty or so. I lifted the lid of the red plastic rubbish bin, and looked down at them.

No doubt about it, they were ropable. Chased, caught, and placed any old how on top of each other, they roared their indignation. Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, small pointed faces darting up the sides of the bin, and into the air above it. Each flash of their life ran electric through my mind, so that my gift, my albatross, fell. I called, "Redemption"! And I put my arm down into their midst.

Jim watched, appalled.

They didn't bite my arm. But as I took my arm out, a green head brushed my cheek, and I felt the blood run down.

So here I am, sitting in the mess room, waiting. My companions are watching me carefully. They must watch for twenty hours, for only then will they know whether the fangs injected venom. They are watching me for signs, of drowsiness, of thirst. Only then will they know, to give the anti-venene. Meanwhile, they are murmuring. "Your trouble is growing noticeable", and "It's overwork, it happens. People get over-anxious, they overdo it", and "It's been a considerable strain".

I know now, that I could live ten thousand lives, and keep a record of their interactions, and it will never do me any good. Nature, by itself, is not enough. I am caught in a web whose significance I myself had spun. I am beginning to understand the harsh laws of life.

I am suddenly very tired.

DAVID PHILLIPS

Bunyip

1.

She can hear the clock on the living room mantlepiece chiming two and she is restless, unable to sleep, head tossing on the rumpled pillow beside him. A soft breeze catches in the cluster of gums outside the window, dappled shadows move behind the curtain in the grey morning light. A cough from the child in the next room; the creak of a bed spring. And perhaps the patter of her cat on the kitchen linoleum, water-dish scraping against the skirting. Then silence. She listens carefully. Nothing now but the familiar rhythm of his breathing, heavy, irrevocable; he is deep in sleep. She knows now that to wake him she would have to shake his shoulders violently and he would rise into consciousness only reluctantly, in slow, mumbling stages. Always at this moment, cocooned in that velvety stillness peculiar to early morning, she feels the need to talk to him. Always now. And it is a feeling which will linger.

Sometimes she cries.

Unless she can work.

Softly, carefully she rises now, throws a dressing gown over her shoulders, creeps along the passage to the front room. To the east and south, windows line two whole walls of this room. Cold light broken by moving shadows of the nearby bush spills over the floor; it is supple, rug-covered, comfortably familiar underfoot; *her* room. Quickly she seats herself at a small sewing table in the corner and removes a worn manilla folder from the bottom drawer. Inside are many sheaths of hand-written notes and paper clippings. She takes one and begins reading; it is a photocopy of part of a page from the Katoomba Gazette dated July 25, 1892:

> BUNYIP SIGHTING NEAR JAMISON CREEK.
> Eminent naturalist, Mr H. Schlage investigates claim.
> Another, dated June 1, 1923:
> BUNYIP MYTH EXPLAINED.
> Phenomena of Mountain Stream and High Altitude Optical Illusions Discussed at Science Club.
> And another:
> OUR OWN YETI.
> Bunyips and other mountain stories.
> And another . . .

The greys and white on the floor have dissolved into morning pinks and oranges, the clock is chiming six and she is still hunched over the table. It is covered with intricate drawings and scrawled notes.

She is humming to herself softly. It is a sad sounding kind of hum. Sometimes she will forget that she is doing it and will stop herself suddenly.

There is a loud cough from the other end of the house, muffled footsteps, the sound

of running water. She looks up and for an instant her body is perfectly still as she stares out the window. It is filled now with the dense browns and greens of the mountain bush which is pressing in from all sides, steadily covering the shrinking square of unkempt lawn. Beyond, she can hear the babble and splash of the creek snaking through the rocks just twenty metres below the edge of the yard. Carefully she gathers up the scattered papers, returns the folder to the drawer. She stands and crosses the room, closing the door gently behind her as she leaves. She is still humming.

2.

Standing on the front porch and it is her ritual morning wave in blue dressing gown as he backs the car down the muddy driveway, school-uniformed child on the seat beside him. The house with its solitary waving figure seems small and vulnerable in the receding frame of the car back window, the bush-covered hillside rises up behind it like a giant green curtain. It is the last house on the road, the next is nearly a kilometre further down. Cheap, he'd said, until we can afford something better in town, closer to work. But I like the trees, she said. She's a bit tired, a bit funny: man and son nodding together in male camaraderie, crisp purposefulness in cold slipstream and freshly washed faces. Then she is blotted out by a bend in the road.

Long after the car has disappeared the blue dressing-gowned arm will continue to rise and fall mechanically and she will continue to stare, not at the road but at a drawing; it is on a crinkled piece of paper which she has been clasping inside her left-hand pocket. Later she will throw off all her clothing and pour over that drawing. She will lie on the soft woven rug in the warm front room with her ginger-brown cat nuzzling at her shoulder and she will be humming again. In the corner of the drawing in neat architectural letters she has written: 'BUNYIP TRAP'.

3.

His face is arched is disapproval and he is swinging his arms self-righteously as he moves about the room. Messy, untidy, no meal prepared either; his homeward-bound vision of a well-kept welcoming hearth, carefully nurtured over four kilometres of slippery back-tracks, is unfulfilled. What were you *doing* all day, striding into the kitchen with take-charge steps, throwing open cupboards, pans clattering, water hissing with military efficiency. Are you ill or something? Her hand is clutching the edge of the chair. She is irritated, not by him (already she is projecting a mask of female sheepishness) but because her problem is still unsolved. Something is missing from the pattern of drawings which she sees laid out on the rug in the front room.

Then she notices her son.

Wide-eyed he is watching her from the doorway. How she would like to clasp him now, hold him close as she used to. But his eyes are a barrier. He looks at his father and moves away.

Mum's a bit funny.

She feels a familiarly-growing empty space begin to constrict her throat; quickly she fills it with the pattern of drawings on the rug. A problem to be solved. Her hand relaxes on the chair. Later, when her husband's head has fallen forward in front of the flickering screen she will creep again into her shadowy capsule of soft rugs and large windows filled with swaying trees. Into the complex pattern of taped-together sheets covering half the floor, she will place the final drawing. Humming, she will solve her problem.

4.

She follows the muddy morning tracks of his car; puddle-strewn and misty-cold, it is a four kilometre trudge down the mountain to town. She must make her own way on foot after they have left, she dare not tell him of her journey. For much of the way, the

road is parallel with the creek; she will listen carefully for special sounds as she walks. The retired couple who live nearby pause over the kitchen wash-up and watch her pass, a small figure in boots and yellow raincoat carrying a large sack over her shoulder. Down the dripping canyon of bush she moves like a nervous bird, takes short quick steps, does not turn or wave, shoulders hunched forward in urgent concentration. Strange, not particularly neighbourly, barely a hullo since the day they moved in; the elderly couple nod together above the sink, comfortably enveloped in the shared mist of hot-water and fading expectations. An inner excitement is driving the receding yellow-coated figure forward in enthusiastic skips over puddles, greedy lungs relishing cold air and damp leaves, bright eyes darting to secret movements in windy roadside bushes. As she walks she checks off the items neatly written on the piece of paper in her pocket. It is the list she will nervously pass over the counter of the hardware store in town:

50 metres of high-tensile steel wire
4 collapsible tent poles
One roll of fly-screen wire
4 large dry-cell batteries
10 metres of electrical wire
2 dozen small light globes, assorted colours.

I need them, is her evasive answer to the store owner's questions. She stuffs them into her sack under his disapproving gaze; male pride hackled by her knowledge of wire gauges. Twice she has corrected him; annoyed, he is probing for flaws in her irritating technical assurance. Weird little bitch, he aims a silent barb at her departing back. She feels it and plunges quickly into the cold air.

On the journey back she is humming with the wind. She feels his presence, the soft shadow of the bunyip following her up the mountain.

5.

She is lying on the bed beside him staring at the darkened rectangle of the doorway. Each hour since ten has been slowly measured and felt; now she hears the clock strike two. He is breathing steadily, one sleep-tossed hand lies across her. She is imagining herself as a stranger standing in the doorway would see her now: a small woman, pale and thin, limbs casually but purposefully arranged. She is wearing a night-gown with long, loose sleeves; she knows that as she raises her hands up behind her head those sleeves will fall down to her elbows; so. A pause; arms held in position. And there is the image. It was in some Russian story, name forgotten; a young woman, small-boned and delicate, large-eyed and vapoury, lives in a large country house, spends most of her waking hours sitting and reading. A glimpse by the male story-teller of her pale, thin arms becomes a poignant image of frailty revealed.

Frailty. And his power.

She knows that this is what her husband saw and felt when he inserted himself into her five hours before; frailty to be invaded, power to be reaffirmed. Nearly every time that she can remember it has been the same. His hand upon her shoulder, beckoning. The tired and familiar routine of her undulations beneath him. His coming; then swift drift into sleep beside her. Her waiting; then creeping fingers, her secret silent coming. And yet. Yet this time she detected something still more forceful in his insistence. His power threatened. As if he could sense the change inside her, something growing, being nurtured, apart from him. Her limbs are tingling. She rises from the bed. Again, the silent padding down the corridor to the front room. No moon now, just cocooning shadows. She sinks. They cover her. The rug is soft beneath her shoulder blades. Long, warm waves are rippling out from the centre of her weaving fingers. Low cries. A smile in the dark. Still her limbs are tingling. She rises and crosses to her desk, stretches. Her body feels strong and taut beneath her. She switches on the lamp, takes

out her manilla folder. She laughs. She knows the bunyip has been watching her through the front window.

6.

Morning, cold and bright; her body, hidden now in the folds of her blue dressing gown, feels buoyant with anticipation. She'd like to leap off the porch. His car has barely disappeared from view before she is crossing the lawn to the garage. A blue shape is darting over the dewy grass; she can see herself from above, small skimmer under a pale sky. As she wedges open the door she is pelted with a fusillade of bird-calls. She skips.

And pauses.

There at the back of the old dresser she has hidden her sack. It is next to the workbench where he keeps his tools. His tools. For a moment, she stands at the door and watches in a way she knows she has done many times before.

Watching him work.

His tools are spread neatly on a blanket and he is assembling his son's bicycle. His son is handing him the tools, holding things for him. They lean together, low murmurs. Shared laughter. Clank of spanners.

Something changes as she breaches their intimate circle with a tray of drinks.

She toys awkwardly with something on the blanket, asks a question. A brief answer. They smile, they nod, they finish their drinks. And then, unsaid, they are waiting for her to leave. As she retreats with the empty tray their cosy ritual resumes. She can hear the tone of their voices change. She pauses; hollowness rising in her chest, her throat. Gripping the tray she freezes. Pressure behind her eyes; she will not cry here though. She will run to her room first. Shoulders heaving. Standing at the door she is merely a watcher, an outsider . . . the flock of birds release another volley.

She walks into the garage. She is crying.

The sack is pulled from its hiding place, contents arranged on the bench. Her hands move smoothly, rhythmically; it is a routine mentally rehearsed many times before. In her mind's eye she can already see the finished article standing in the bush clearing behind the garage wall, right at the edge of the creek. The four tent poles have been tied together at the top to form a pyramid, its entrance has been cunningly funnelled: once in, the creature is trapped. Covered with an intricate pattern of wire and gauze, festooned with tiny coloured lights, it blinks and flashes enticingly among the trees.

The long afternoon shadow of the mountain looms over the house, stretches half a kilometre down the road. A car is approaching. Bright-eyed and sore-backed she recrosses the lawn. Her dressing gown is flecked with grass seeds and burrs, there are sticks and leaves in her pockets. The tree-tops begin to swish in the wind again. But there is another sound she can hear, barely distinguishable, a kind of slithery rustling. She smiles sadly, clasps herself. The bunyip is close, very close.

7.

The clock on the living-room mantlepiece is striking two and she has risen, has thrown her dressing gown over her shoulders, has padded carefully down the corridor, has passed the dancing shadows of the front room, has crossed the frosty lawn by the garage, has crept through the rustling darkness of the bush and stands now in the small creek-side clearing watching the bunyip.

Humming.

Trapped in its cage of blinking lights the bunyip is humming sadly. The ground underfoot begins to shake. The trees sway, the grass moans. The humming grows louder and louder; it fills out every empty space inside her till she feels her heart might burst.

By the sleeping man, there is only a small empty depression left in the bedclothes. He rolls; his hands clasp empty space. A voice is calling his name; wake up, I want to

show you something. He grunts irritatedly, rolls over again, pulls down the heavy shutters of sleep. Go to sleep, go to sleep.

Standing in the darkened doorway of the bedroom a small woman in a blue dressing gown is softly calling his name.

Please talk to me, she says, please talk to me.

EDITORIAL NOTE

The editors wish to point out that David Kerr's interview with Fay Zwicky (No. 3, 1984) was first produced as a radio interview and that the interviewee was not aware that it would be published in this magazine. For this, we apologise.

PHILIP HODGINS

Making Hay

In rectangular vertigo the balepress
gives prodigious birth.
From conception to delivery
takes less than a minute.
Humming down slow rows
of lucerne and paspalum it chews grass,
snakeskins, thistles, feathers, anything.
By midday it can do no more.
The paddock is a maze of compression
soon to be unravelled
by hay carters starting at the edges.
Shirtless in cowskin chaps and gloves
they perform their complex dance
with eighty-pound bales
on an earthquaking load that shoves
a slackchained,
bouncing, banging, balesucking escalator
down bays of the marvellous smell
of cut grass.
When the dance is done,
easing to the monolith, they sit
with cigarettes on what they've made.
After the hay has been restacked
they take a big tyre tube
to the swimming hole and muddy the water
worse than cattle,
slushing after the slippery tube.
With one stye eye and sleek
black skin it is the nearest thing
to a leviathan in this billabong.

DIANE FAHEY

Wings

On Medieval Paintings at the Art Museum of Basel

Angels with eagle wings, intricate
as fugues, set to scythe eternity,
but empty robes — just drapery
arranged like a small wind . . .

Artists who painted them had bodies
inside their robes, and wings
visible only to the eyes
of posterity.

Saints, hovering in between —
some barbaric in armour:
the daemonic divine . . .

('Oh Lord,
preserve us from the wrath of Thy saints!')

Still others, thin and vulnerable
as reeds, wait with eyes brimming
like waterdrops before light's wafer,
the gift of peace . . .

Brushes, wingtips:
how the gold of vision endures,
humility and hope steadfast, bonding
these haloed figures in earth as they turn
with the gravity of sunflowers towards
an unseen zenith.

JEAN KENT

Commuters

Every morning this limbo leap. Fog on the lake:
dawn tilts trees up to worshipful air . . .
the train, stiff-backed
shudders dark skin. Past grandstands
of gums and melaleucas bloom-dusted,
coal-hide gleaming it races, shaking off dew.

In still yellow paddocks under rugs
horses go on
whitely breathing.

While houses pregnant with kitchen light
listen for the kick of the clock,
behind us morning leaps back
beyond imagination
holding somewhere still pale pools
crested only by ripples pelicans
the wistful rocking of fishermen's boats.

But the train is locked in its orbit.
It hugs the earth yet never quite drops
back onto it. Behind its picture windows
people pull down their own anti-glare blinds.
There is light behind their faces
levitating them into dreams
paperbacks a cardigan quite quickly
knitted . . . It is possible for them to look out
now but not
for anyone else to see in.

Every day this dubious leap.
Still tucked in darkness which should separate
today and yesterday, we are all weightless
as the train takes off into horizontal flight,
cutting through land and light like a laser,
cutting a trail which tails away
like a ribbon tied to one finger —
the thinnest memory of home.

On the city's landing pad, falling
finally — all along the platforms like the hiss
of a cushion recovering after being sat upon,
too quickly dreams fog our feet. Back
somewhere behind invisible carriages
must be tracking the morning.
Empty seats watch dew as it shivers windows.
Slowly absent faces dent aisles, bodies
inhabit cathedrals of air. The train fills.
Reluctantly, the selves we have leapt from
come ghosting after us.

MARTA KADLECIKOVA

An Ode To Joy

Translated from the Czech by A. French

When I sometimes think about it, I feel as if it has always been like this. I cannot visualise the past. As if some impenetrable barrier had hermetically sealed it off from the existing present, which by now has already its own memories. I can only remember the period of change which brought me to my present state.

There was a series of lovely, pre-Spring mornings. The days began early, and were full of sunshine. Just like it is now! Maybe that is why I remember it. That year there had been unusually heavy snow. The winter was long; the Spring slow in coming. The gutters ran non-stop; frozen, dirty snow kept falling from the roofs in lumps: overnight icicles formed over everything in gorgeous patterns which inevitably dissolved in the morning sun. The birds began to chirrup like crazy; the wet pavement glistened in the thaw; and the music of the brass bands, dotted across the town, sounded even more gay and festive than usual. It occurs to me that in the winter the public musicians have it pretty hard. Maybe they change over more frequently. I don't know. But I assume that they are conscious of their joyous vocation — to remind people that life is beautiful and cheerful, and that they should always keep smiling.

During those early Spring days, now and then I could feel a strange weakness in my right wrist. I recall it very well. It felt somehow too loose. It sounds strange; but if the various parts of the human body were held together by screws, I should say that my right wrist had a screw loose. It just needed tightening a bit; or something. Of course I didn't let it spoil my enjoyment. I just mentioned it once or twice to the cleaning lady.

Old Felicia shook her head worriedly; and illogically, but comfortingly announced that Spring was coming. There was indeed something in what she said, although the branches of the trees were still bare and black, and the grass appearing under the thawing snow was limp. But on the other hand, when the sun came out, people rushed into the street in light overcoats long stored away in wardrobes, just to show that Spring was round the corner. And in spite of the damp, feather quilts began to appear on the window sills.

On one such enchanting morning when I was fastening my overcoat before going to the office, my right hand suddenly proclaimed its independence. It hung unresponsive on my wrist, slumped like a broken flower, and fell to the ground. I fastened my coat and gazed stupidly at my own hand with fingers helplessly extended lying on the carpet. At first I felt only amazement so strong as to leave not the slightest room for fright, or indeed for any other emotion. I suppose that such an unexpected occurrence, contrary to all reason, would be enough to throw anybody off balance; and I have a general abhorrence to any sort of change. I bent down for the hand, and looked at it in despair. It had broken off at the turn of the wrist, a straight, clean cut. I looked at the stump peeping out of the coat. Not a drop of blood. Nothing. I had an involuntary picture of my mamma standing at the kitchen table with a thread cutting neat slices from freshly made dumplings for Sunday dinner. The hand rested heavily on my palm. It

was warm, living. What should I do with it? What an unpleasant complication! The chiming of the kitchen clock interrupted my thoughts. High time to move! I have a horror of arriving late at the office. Not that there are any fines for unpunctuality. It's just that my character has always been one to enjoy carrying out all the rules and regulations. I stuffed the hand into my left pocket and stepped out from the house.

The sun was shining gloriously, as if the sky would never be cloudy again: the birds sang with joy: from the rooftops the melting snow trickled down in filthy rivulets: and the routine cheerful music set a smart marching step. I felt in my left pocket and irritably shrugged my shoulders. Really! What on earth was I to do with it? I had looked forward to a short, carefree walk before starting work; instead I had been pushed into the unpleasant necessity of taking up a position.

The faces of the passers-by were smiling. Everybody hastening breathlessly to work or to instruction. Everybody rejoicing in his duties. Everybody with a radiant gleam in his eye. Only me mooching along on the sidewalk like a zombie. I felt ashamed to be so engrossed in a private worry. I straightened my back, lifted my eyebrows, and (admittedly with some effort) I stretched out the corners of my mouth. Such a lovely morning, I reminded myself. I was lucky that nobody noticed me. If I'd been seen by a Public Order patrol I would have collected a proper fine for my gloomy looks. And rightly so! Only children up to eight years old are allowed to cry and fuss in public. They go really haywire! Why should my hand be of any concern to anybody else? In any case it's some time since I noticed my wrist getting loose; and it's no one else's fault but my own that I didn't go to the doctor. The more I mentally reproached myself, the more it gave me the energy to keep a brisk step, and a smile on my face. I began to seek excuses for myself. Although a person in my position must be above all suspicion, I wouldn't have fancied the idea of giving any impression that I might be blaming my wrist in an attempt to avoid work, which I carry out with the utmost enthusiasm and, all in all, with pleasure. Anyway I suppose I am no exception. Otherwise we couldn't all be living in such a happy community, and revelling in our existence from morning till night.

Sunk in thought I emerged on to the high street, and as usual I stopped at the news stall. When I handed over the money, which I used to keep in my right pocket, I had to reach across for it with my left hand. Very inconvenient! But my spirits soared again as I glanced over the headlines. Nothing but good news and useful information! As always. It sometimes occurs to me that we are really spoiled. We find it impossible to imagine that there were times when loads of unpleasant things would get into print. It must have been awful.

I shoved the newspaper under my right arm, and listened once more to the brisk, rousing music rising up above the noisy morning street. Once more my thoughts turned to the contents of my left pocket. I had to take a decision before going into the office. And it could have been such a pleasant walk! I had only two possibilities. To conceal the fact that my right hand was missing was hardly feasible, but I might pass over the whole thing in an offhand, mocking tone, and get on with my work with the help of my left hand. If it had been the left instead of the right, it would have been simple, I said to myself crossly. Learning to sign and stamp things with the left hand cannot be an insurmountable problem, I instantly consoled myself. The second possibility was to go to the doctor and confide in him. Maybe he might be able to help me. In view of my hitherto blameless record suspicion would be minimal. Moreover I am determined to say right at the beginning most emphatically that I intend to continue working. Still it is possible that it will be unnecessary to visit the doctor. In fact, it is probable. The only result will be the risk of suspicion. So what's to be done? I confess that I stepped into the office building in a very disturbed condition.

And with good reason. I shudder when I think of that morning. I was wounded at my most sensitive point. I discovered how small was the confidence I enjoyed in the

eyes of my colleagues. To begin with, I tried to interpret their sidelong glances as surprise, and maybe sympathy. After all, it isn't every day that a person's limbs fall off like ripe fruit from a tree! But no! I soon discovered the painful truth. They actually suspected that I was trying to fix myself a disability pension. I have no intention of lowering the respect shown in this country — in fact the respect that the regulations demand should be shown — towards invalids; but if it were not for my savings and a small inheritance which I had prudently put away, I don't know how I could cope with my present situation. And at the same time my colleagues are such model citizens! They certainly feel as much joy as I do. I don't speak of gloom: there is no reason for that. Of course not! Not even the hand — It's not hard to live without hands, I said to myself. After that disappointment I judged that amid the atmosphere of general suspicion I risked nothing by a visit to the doctor. On the contrary.

That visit however was not very encouraging. Partly I brought it upon myself. I should have invented some plausible accident. I cannot really be surprised at the doctor's dubious nod. He stuck one hand into the pocket of his black coat; with the other he played with his gold watch chain. It was only when for the third time I repeated that I did not intend to apply for a pension and that I wished to go on working that he put on his long white coat and inspected the stump of the wrist and the hand, which lay for the whole duration of our conversation upon his desk. He shrugged his shoulders and called a colleague. They consulted together for a while, then sent me out into the corridor. After a long wait they led me into a small dark room where another doctor sewed the hand on to the wrist, supported the whole thing with a wooden splint, and bound it up with a tough calico bandage. I was overjoyed by this small operation. Fancy, one small step and everything once more as good as new! To my colleagues in the office I proudly showed off my bandage, from which the finger tips were protruding. I think they were impressed. Their looks of suspicion changed to astonishment, and these gradually disappeared when I again kept turning up at the office regularly and punctually, just as before.

Every morning I would leave the house at my regular time, listen with relish to the sounds of the dripping gutters, and enjoy the song of the birds and the gay music. But I was not easy in mind. There was something odd about the hand. My colleagues again began to shun me, but this time I could hardly blame them. My fingertips had gone blue, and an unbearable smell began to issue from the bandage. Out of consideration for my surroundings I constantly treated the bandage with Eau de Cologne; but it did not help. Actually, I would say that the smell grew worse. On my next visit to the doctor the bandage was removed, the splint fell off, and the hand with it. It was obvious at first glance that it was a dead limb. The doctor looked at it in some perplexity, then picked it up with some pincers and tossed it into the waste paper basket. After that he gave me a searching look, and asked whether I still intended to go on working in the office. 'Oh yes', I cried gaily, and with that we parted.

In spite of everything life slowly returned to normal. I learned to sign my name, use the stamp, greet people, eat, dress myself, in short do everything, all with the left hand. I became so used to it that I gradually forgot the former existence of my right hand. My colleagues also got used to it, for the smell was gone, and the suspicion that I was trying to avoid work, had, thank God, presumably gone with it. Once more I would rise cheerfully, whistle to myself, feed the canary, water the flowers, and leave the house with a radiant smile on my face. For the most part the sun shone brilliantly; the first pale green leaves began to appear on the trees. If it were not so inappropriate, one might have jumped for joy. Except that I know my own limitations. If an adult person, especially a tenured office worker, should leap up in the air in the street, it might be taken as an affront to the whole class of bureaucrats. My high morale was to some extent spoiled by the charwoman Felicia who did not conceal her concern over my loss, and from time to time gave way to unrestrained lamentation. I was ashamed of her; re-

proved her; and congratulated myself on the fact that no one could hear her.

And so my life continued on its orderly path. Working periods were interspersed with Sundays and holidays. Outside, it grew warmer every day. All around me a scene of undiluted joy. Until one day, unfortunately on a literally beautiful day, a fresh complication arose. A real one this time. I left the house that morning somewhat earlier than usual to have breakfast at a small milk bar at the corner of the street, as I often liked to do. Refreshed by the breakfast and cheered by my conversation with the good hearted shopkeeper, I set out anew even more contented in mind.

The city shimmered in morning sunshine, reflecting every shade of its grey colouring: into the mist of transparent vapour it thrust its massed spires, below which spread the flood of damp, shining roofs, from whose chimneys light bluish smoke arose to heaven.

I turned into a quiet little street without a single person on it, and I think that at that moment I was softly whistling to myself. Then suddenly I felt in the wrist of my arm, my last arm, that feeling of looseness, that strange helpless feeling which I would rather forget for ever. Startled, I hastened my step, as though it were possible to run away from unpleasant sensations. A few steps later the hand began to waggle helplessly and fell on to the sidewalk with a plop. My first thought was, Whatever will people say? I looked round. Fortunately the street was entirely deserted. So I bent down and tried to pick up the luckless hand. The trouble is, to lift something from the ground using two stumps is hard for an untrained person, especially if he is upset. Then, on top of everything, I heard footsteps in the street. With lightning speed I straightened up, stuck the stumps into my pockets, and began to study a tattered poster advertising some old theatre productions. The passer-by was a little boy with a school bag on his back; mercifully he was dashing along without paying much attention. I stared at the poster with unseeing eyes, and I realised the absurdity of my actions. What was the good of picking up the hand? The first one had only ended in the dustbin anyway. When the boy had passed, I kicked the unhappy limb to the edge of the sidewalk, and with the tip of my shoe tried to push it into the drain. The hand measured hardly fifteen centimetres from wrist to finger tips. But alas! It was too thick, and absolutely refused to go through the grating. For a while I tried to force it through the narrow opening. Without success! Angrily, I booted it hard. I felt a terrible anger rising within me. I would really have liked best of all to stamp it into bits. Monstrous, useless, abominable, nonsensical, it rolled into the middle of the street, whither my violent kick had propelled it. At that moment I had entirely forgotten that I was in public, that I was a decent, peaceful person, and that my behaviour was quite unbecoming. Clumsily, with my stumps in my pockets, I ran across to the hand, eyed it for a moment with fury, then I spat on it and despatched it to the opposite pavement with another kick.

I was overcome by unspeakable depression. This was the end! Now I had nothing to sign with, or stamp with. Theoretically there remained the possibility of training the feet; but in practice it was hardly feasible. Was it really possible to interview members of the public holding one bare foot on the desk, without damaging the image of the office? At that moment I had become a good-for-nothing, a scrounger, a welfare bludger. In spite of myself! But who would believe me? That day when I came into the office it was only with a real effort that I composed my features into a cheerful smile. Without a word I brandished my two stumps at my colleagues. Expressions of professional good humour instantly faded from their faces. I realised my lack of tact, and thrust the stumps back into my pockets. My closest colleague turned towards me and with a covert gesture indicated that I should withdraw into the corridor. A moment later he followed me, and whispered that I should wait for him in the lavatory. I would have been grateful for any sign that he believed me. I waited for him patiently and submissively. But that conversation was not to be. Even today the memory of it makes me feel depressed. And that is the last thing I want. When after a long interval my col-

league appeared, he locked himself in a cubicle with me, and to the accompaniment of the flushing toilet he informed me that he deeply admired my resolution. I looked at him in amazement. Then with unexpected bitterness he added that he understood me; anything was better than this; and with his hand he drew a sort of half-circle. Finally he wished me luck, and advised me to be more careful, and to keep away from the office from now on. Human hatred is, he implied, a vicious thing. He patted me on the shoulder and slipped out.

I stood above the lavatory pan absolutely shattered. The splashing of water died sadly away. No. I could not live in such a world. Radiant world, full of smiling faces, contentment, and work well accomplished! I recovered myself. Heaven knows what that fellow had meant. Even so, I tottered out of the lavatory in a state of stupefaction. The words I had heard had confused me more than the loss of my second hand.

This time the doctor did not bother with stitches. He looked without interest at the stump of the wrist, scribbled something on a form, and with the words 'Attach this to your application', he showed me out.

I suppose that I have never in my life walked along the street with such an inappropriate expression on my face. Above my head the sound of music; around me people hurrying along with joy on their faces!

I reached home, and was about to go in, when I realised that with my unfortunate stumps I could not possibly open the door of the flat. Luckily there was a little boy playing in front of the house. It was very embarrassing, but in the end he grasped the situation, put his hand in my pocket, took out the key, went upstairs with me, opened up, and went away. I felt sorry that I couldn't reward him for his help; but to get the money he would have had to feel in my pocket himself, and I had nothing else to hand (Goodness, what a phrase!). I banged the door behind me with an elbow, and tried to unbutton my coat. Once more the problem of the stumps. For the first time in my life I regretted not being married. Then I remembered that it was Felicia's day tomorrow, and I calmed down a bit. I pushed the hat off my head with one stump, and knocked it on to the ground. Just as I bent down to pick it up (I have to practise!) my right foot fell off. To be exact, the sole of the foot detached itself from the ankle. Together with the shoe, of course. It all happened so quickly that I nearly lost my balance. My left leg, which had lost its normal support, just then tipped over, and, on top of everything else, I could easily have sprained my ankle. I abandoned the hat, and hopped into the kitchen on my left leg, intending to have a bite to eat. The stumps again! The only food in reach was a piece of bread which I had left lying on the shelf. Very clumsily I grabbed it, and bit a piece out of it. But the effort was too much. I put the bread down and hopped into the bedroom, where the bed was still unmade, just as I had left it in a hurry that morning. I threw myself down on it with coat unbuttoned, since there was no alternative; and lay there exhausted.

Upon the quilt and the overcoat bars of golden sunlight were falling. From the street arose cheerful music, the roar of traffic, the cries of children at play. I felt hot in my coat, and a confused mass of thoughts raced round and round in my head. From them arose, like some strange, incomprehensible refrain, one repeated phrase: 'Better never to get up again'. And still I would not admit the thought; I refused to think it; and would not give assent to it. It flashed among memories of my happy life, filled with diligent work and joy, my tranquil pleasures, my childhood, my mother. I saw her bending over me, taking me to church; I could distinguish her figure very clearly, but strangely enough, I could not recall her face. Before me floated scenes from my schooldays, pictures from holidays, acres of golden fields and fish ponds. Before my eyes marched a series of remembered Sunday outings as an old bachelor; and into the scene blended the sound of running water and a lavatory pan. It all rushed through my head in a whirlwind sequence, unconnected fragments, image following image, all full of colour, lit up by the radiant sunshine resting on the window panes of my bedroom. Only that

sentence, alone in all the confusion which reigned in my head, had no colour or form. It was black, made up of flat, plain letters, as if someone were etching it again and again with a thin, bony finger painfully into my forehead.

At last, amid all the confusion and exhaustion, in spite of the heat I fell asleep. I suppose I must have slept a very long time, for it was only the arrival of Felicia that woke me up. She behaved as she usually did when something startled her. She clasped her hands and shook her head. Then without lengthy questioning she sized up the situation. She came up to the bed and began to remove my clothing piece by piece. My left shoe was lying helplessly on the quilt together with the foot. Felicia shook everything else out of the trouser legs and the sleeves: when I say 'everything' I mean literally everything. Felicia looked with downcast eyes at the floor. 'Good gracious', she said: but she spoke very quietly because she knows only too well that I can't stand noise. Then she went out.

I gazed in amazement at my much diminished frame. No real need for panic! The basics — trunk, neck, and head — are still with me, I said; and once more I closed my eyes wearily. When I opened them again I saw Felicia emptying into her well-worn oilcloth bag what she had shaken out of my clothes. She looked at me, and with a shy, apologetic smile she commented that it could all come in useful. When she started to put the foot in the bag, she tried to get the shoe off it. I reminded her that from now on I should not be needing shoes. 'Right', said Felicia in amazement. As if surprised that she hadn't thought of it herself. Then she at once enquired where the other one was. I was so stupefied by my long sleep that I had to think for a while until I remembered that it was lying in the hall. Poor Felicia, how pleased she was over those shoes! And even more when I told her she could take the rest of the clothes in the wardrobe.

She clapped her emaciated hands for joy, took her red bag outside, and returned with a huge wash tub. It was clear she had thought the whole thing out in advance. Good old Felicia! I would never have said what a support she would be to me. She lifted me out of bed and put me in the tub. It fitted like a glove. Round my chest I had — still have — plenty of room. And the top of the tub is several centimetres lower than my neck, so the view is quite adequate. Adequate? More than that, really excellent! Afterwards Felicia covered me and the tub with a check plaid. She arranged it carefully around my neck to stop the draught, opened the window, and lifted me up high.

Down below in the tiny park two little girls were playing with hoops. One of the children had fair hair hanging down her back. It floated gently in the sunny Spring air. The birds poured forth their tremulous song beneath the clear sky; and below, in a corner of the little garden by the house, the forsythia was in bloom.

When Felicia had made the bed and covered it with the violet-flowered quilt, I dictated to her my application for a pension. She wrote it in an unschooled hand, and I had to point out to her several errors. But in the end it was quite passable.

And so, with that sunny morning my present way of life had its definite beginning. Once more the days have a firm routine. Most of the time I sit in my tub by the window. Before she goes home Felicia takes me to the bathroom, cleans out my tub and makes my bed. Three times a day she gets me something to eat; for the rest she can do as she likes. With the passage of time we also have devised some minor improvements. On a shelf laid across the tub we have installed a little bell which I can pick up with my teeth, and ring whenever I want to summon her. The problem is, lately the poor thing has been getting a bit deaf; so the bell has become something of a formality. But that is a mere detail. Generally I don't need it anyway. Of course she has to come every day now; and her pay costs me much more than before. But of course, if we take into account what I save on clothes and shoes, on shoemakers and tailors, on cabs and countless other expenses which have become superfluous, then it is not so bad.

For my birthday Felicia bought me a second-hand pram, in which she takes me for a walk in nice weather. Generally we go after dusk, so as not to arouse attention. The

face of an adult person in a child's pram looks a bit bizarre, not to say comic. But in spite of that shadow, my outings give me great pleasure. I always assume my most joyful expression quite spontaneously. As a matter of fact I don't need to — I wear it all the time. In the tub, the bath, the bed, probably in my sleep as well. Time has long since healed the shock I received above the lavatory pan. Life is joyous, so joyous that I sometimes regret that I cannot snap my fingers in exultation. No matter! As I said that first morning on waking up to my present life, the basics have stayed with me. Above all, my head, which can always unfalteringly do its duty, always wear a smile. 'Cheer up', I sometimes say to Felicia when she shakes her worried head at my smiling face. Poor old thing, I can't blame her. She hasn't understood anything. She is still stuck in the past. Up to her neck. Almost like me in my tub.

LEONIE EASTMENT

Fading Colours

Darkness creeps on my verandah
coldly claiming the cracked,
pushing brightness into out.
And Nature waiting, withdrawing,
calls for repose
so opposition falters on stillness.

In leaping light on dying wood
the summer of blue horizons and busy heat,
of red children and sticky lovers
burns brightly
'til morning ash returns,
as dead as life permits.

It's natural,
I know you've seen it before
and talk of changing season, artificial light
and hope,
but old age lets me see no more
than then, not tomorrow.
Today's lights are memories
when limbs turn to blown ash
and no Spring creeps on my verandah.

PATRICIA GAUT

The Cashews

They were in a round wooden bowl that was warm and smooth and curved.

Joe liked to eat cashew nuts when he watched the Saturday Game, liked the salt on his tongue, liked the edge it gave to the cold beer. His fingers made damp, shining prints on the frosted glass as he put it down, then efficiently tipped some more nuts into his cupped hand, glancing constantly, anxiously, from bowl to television screen.

Sandra watched him. She liked to look at him, even after five years of marriage, liked to memorise the contours of his face, liked to watch the expressions change with every emotion, his eyes darken, his mouth!! . . . It was relaxed now, tiny particles of salt clinging to the hard edge of his upper lip. She experimented with her own sharp, pink tongue, running it across her lips, wondering how it would feel to lean over and lick the salt from his, then gently, very gently, to force it between his lips, to touch his teeth, his tongue. She looked quickly at his eyes, embarrassed in case he was looking at her and could guess her thoughts. There was no need to worry. His forehead was creased with concentration as he watched every move on the flickering screen, intermittently groping for his glass or transferring the nuts from his hand to his mouth. Sandra giggled silently, surprised at her thoughts, remembering then, the first time a boy had put his tongue in her mouth . . .

It was her first dance, her first kiss. She hadn't wanted to kiss him, hadn't really liked him much, but it seemed expected of her. Afterwards she had gone to the "Ladies", feeling sick and violated, scrubbing her mouth with her handkerchief, washing it with soap before she repaired the damage to her lipstick, to her threatened self.

Joe had laughed when she told him about it, after they were married, and she had been able to laugh too. Then he held her and kissed her and put his tongue in her mouth and entered her and overwhelmed her. She felt the weakness in her legs, the warming blood, now, remembering. Loving. "I didn't know" she wanted to tell him, but he didn't like to talk about things like that. Typical of a man, she thought.

His hands were slim and brown, curling gently around his supply of cashews. She thought of taking his wrist, uncurling his fingers over the bowl, emptying them, brushing them, placing them over her breast. He munched steadily. Watched. Exclaimed. Forgot her.

"I've changed a lot" she wanted to tell him, hating the upbringing that had made it so difficult for them to talk about sex, or needs, or love. Maybe it was because she had been so shy and inexperienced that Joe didn't seem so keen anymore. "I'm sorry", she said silently, wondering how she could let him know that she was ready, eager, to love him anyway he wanted. The magazines at the hairdressers had shocked her at first, so that she had looked up quickly to see if anyone had noticed what she was reading, but she had read them again and again and they didn't shock her now. They excited her.

She looked at his lips again, at the sweet, deep corners, wanting them. He looked steadily at the mud-stained players in their battle for supremacy.

Automatically, she reached into the bowl, conscious of the fragmented smoothness, the clinging salt, took a handful, began to nibble, then suddenly became aware of Joe's eyes looking at her, cold with distaste. "Really, Sandy! That's pretty disgusting, you know." Startled, she didn't understand. "What is?"

"Putting your hand into the bowl. You put that same hand up to your mouth, then dip it into the bowl again. A man doesn't feel like eating any more. Couldn't you have tipped them into your hand like I do?"

"I'm sorry. I didn't think." . . .

She took a tissue and wiped the salt from her hands, scrubbed the salt from her lips.

TERRY TREDREA

Reassuring the Deceased

The coffin glides like a ship beneath the trees, rocked gently on a tide of shoulders, tacks slowly along the pooled lanes. Inside it, my friend lies beneath her cold, incurious hands. I know their touch, like gloves of frozen paper; as always.

'How are you feeling?' I ask.

Small muscles move under her white face. She looks at me. 'I'm so glad you came.'

'Are you alright?'

She searches across my face from eye to eye, comparing eyes. 'Yes, thank you.'

'You'll be alright.' I look away. Rain sweeps through us, lifting our cuffs and hems. The faces here are familiar; 'friends' most of us. We wear the trappings of grief, feel most comfortable like this.

'I'm sorry I did this.' She watches me, waiting like a hunter for the prey to break loose. I hold out a sentence: about apologies. One of my cool sentences.

The scent of death. My heart prowls like an edgy lion. 'I was just so depressed,' she says. Her nervous hands scurry like mice. 'I just wanted to stop the world spinning. I didn't care what happened. I just . . .'

'You're fine now. Nothing to worry about.' I look up. Overhead, branches sway like seaweed in the late breeze, forming their own umbrellas of rain. In the suburbs of tombstones rain is numbing the trees in mist.

'Does everyone know?' she asks suddenly. Her lips are hidden. She may be crying. I don't ask; I too enjoy the illusions of solitude.

'We said you fell.'

'I'm a little afraid of the future.' Her eyes swivel like a cat's ears. Her fear stretches out to me, worming into my nostrils. She watches my face. I smile. It is possible to make of the face a mask, and of the mask a face.

'There's no need. Your friends are here.'

'Here?' She tries to look behind her, is held in — the casket's hostage.

'Yes.' I stand helplessly in my best suit; the suit holds me together.

'My friends,' she sighs, seems to sink into the whiteness of satin.

The pit is sudden. It appears black at first, but closer the underbelly of topsoil can be seen, wet and rough with small rocks. Rain has made it slick as a brown throat. Her casket is laid beside it, incongruous as a piece of beautiful furniture in a field.

'Is there anything you need?'

She stares; her eyes drift in their fear. 'I don't think so.'

'You'll be fine,' I repeat, lost for gestures.

'Thanks.' She closes her eyes. Without words, her face lies in the satin like a pearl, clear, and smooth, and without desire.

The words are said to the casket. They bestow their grace on our mouths. Our public gestures. Words flutter about our ears like frightened birds.

'Right as rain in no time,' I say, touch her cheek.

The casket begins to sink into the earth, tipping like a drowning ship. It is lowered by straps that pull small stones from the edges of the grave. A shoulder of casket digs at the mud wall, tries to catch hold, continues to fall, bearing a handful of earth. The box submerges into deep shadow, comes to lie in the cold, unconsoling mud of the pit. Rain spits in, keen to begin the filling in. It runs like fingers down my face.

'She's better off now,' someone says.

I tiptoe away, down the narrow lanes, past the mangle of conversations. I wear my release like a cap pulled down to my eyebrows, an armour. I speak to no-one.

AUDREY LONGBOTTOM

Clown

The man across the street is laughing again.
He's on his balcony with friends. And laughing.

He greets all acquaintances with glee,
finds arrangement comic, chance hilarious.

The weather is observed as laughable;
today's sunshine, the dull of yesterday.

At work his mirth accompanies decisions
at the top, the jottings on his social calendar

and later, at his favourite bar, directs
his efforts to the coming night's performance.

But when the curtain rises to an empty
house, his laughter drums through empty streets

where fading echoes mock, thin to a scream.

DIMITRIS TSALOUMAS

Translated by Pavlos Andronikos and the Author

The Leader

A romantic fantasy

Mere cranial dregs, the bells
still numb the brain
checking the onslaughts of silence.
The sirens,
waking shudders that cut
through the forests of panic,
rage unearthly now, remote,
near tomorrow's horizons —
a dirge from the eaves of cliffs,
an assembly of wolves bewailing
the passing of a vanquished people.

Against the western sky
beyond the balustrades,
sharp as a threat,
reaching above the lofts
of thought,
the spires of the sorrowful cathedral.
An almost-evening sun
full of rustlings, irridescences
of stained-glass saints,
saddens the marble
and with a final effort
floods the dark mass of the table
with the two hands
abandoned and pale
on the surface of setting light.

After a night of anguish, since dawn
an endless stream of suffering
pours out the Southern Gate.
And from the bridge of neighing horses,
amidst the clanking of chariots and arms
and the demented creaking that topples
the gates of cataclysm —
he, in the panoply of his authority
distant and unapproachable
among the frightened people, directing
this exodus of grief.
Bitter unto death such an uprooting:
the city walls erect still
and proud, and no famine,
no plague or inundation.

A weariness of sighs stirs
the draperies of purple
and as the eyes of icons,
wakened to sudden life, mistily
look down through age-old scents

he rises
and step following difficult step
walks to the window and stands,
the Leader,
indestructible in the people's imagination,
heavy shadow of bronze
and burning sky.

The dusk, comforting now like Holy Unction
and smooth as laudanum
to the vitals of the sick,
nurses declining Autumn
in velvets of golden colours.
And down at the children's fountains
where pigeons once basked
fall mists and drops
as if into the urns of sorrow
and the birds sit puzzled
on the balconies of plane trees.
Glory to thee, O Lord. Though most bitter,
even this, the triumph
of your dark counsel, is consolation.

In the days when people were few and valuable
and the centuries moved slowly
like oxen in the pastures of the East
sparingly ruminating the birth of generations,
man could clearly hear the voices
in heaven
and on the other side of cataclysm
there burned, brighter even than the lamp
in Hope's window,
God's promise.
But now only this flight of multitudes
heading for uncharted horizons,
wandering in such darkness
as only bats can dream of
upside down in the cellars of ruins.

And he looks on as day deepens
into darkness, his ear
close to the heart of crumbling silence,
listening still. It wasn't easy,
it wasn't easy, this return
to the dead city,
the doors closed and the whispers.
But if the message was not a command
but nightmare's offspring, madness
that darkens the councils of men,
who must pay for the sun's return
to the rooftops of the houses?
And should the Calamity strike, whose presence
will witness God's will
in the furnace of desolation?

The darkness, with unaccustomed haste
is pushing
closer and closer now
the neighbourhood of windows.
Soon nothing but the heart and the certainty
of his truth will remain

in the fever's collar ring
this side of where his people
wander in the kingdoms of fear.
A shudder stirs
the shadow of bronze.
And the Leader
defying the unacceptable sound,
descends the marble steps
to where impatient night
is prancing shamelessly stamping her feet.
And on the cobbled roads of despair
where his orphaned people walk
he gallops still, an indestructible wind
in the imagination of poets.

CONNIE BARBER

A spread of cats on roofs talk
with their tails. Persian ginger wedges
in a prime corner. The sun
gets there first. Flat red coils
among ivy. Black and white loops
sunshine in the safety of low aluminium
and bougainvillea. Abysinia sprawls
kittening, on the parapet. Grey steps
over her house mate to a secure slot
in the corrugations. White crouches
in the gutter opposite. Black squats
as far away as he can get
on a higher slope. Splotchy is hardly visible
between fuchsias and red roof.
Siamese views the rabble daintily
from her high verandah, attempts
to make ground along a party wall. Defeated
she returns, paws the drop, retreats,
reappears at a lower level, reaches
an old rusty shed. How the iron curls
elegantly to hold her. The frost
leaves the ground. Conversation ceases.

SHANE McCAULEY

The Anchorite Spider

Damp and splayed amidst these
Leaves I let the flowers
Worship me. I have not walked
The grounds for weeks, seeking
Out the spiritual realms of these
Upper reaches. I dote on
My own darkness, dare the
Beaks of birds to disturb
My meditation, readily
Admit there is no easier
Escape from the world. Yet,
While in mutual adoration
With these fragrant surroundings,
I taste deathlessness on the wind,
Blink my thousand eyes
At the sun, sink deeper
In the petals, feel the soothing
Venom arrange itself in
My mouth. Here I dream
Of spider gods, see
Paradise in the glistening
Blue web that snares
The sky. In contemplation
I have found something
Stronger than my black hunger,
A happy anger that even
Such frailty confers
Some sort of strength,
That without wings
I can still be a crouching angel.

THE TRANSIT OF VENUS

A Novel by

SHIRLEY HAZZARD

DELYS BIRD

Text Production and Reception — Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus*

Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus* was first published in 1980 in hardcover editions by two large, reputable publishing houses, Viking in America and MacMillan in England and Australia. This simultaneous international publication with its attendant publicity attracted a good deal of almost universally favourable attention to the book and its author. *The Transit of Venus* was launched by way of promotional material and through numerous interviews with Hazzard, broadcast on radio and published in high quality magazines and newspapers. It enjoyed good bookshop sales, was placed on the American best seller lists for hardcover fiction (most importantly on the *New York Times Book Review* best seller list[1]), gained Book of the Month Club selection, and in 1981 won the American National Book Critics' Circle Award. Subsequently, film rights were bought and paperback rights sold. What appeared to be a masterly marketing exercise of the novel was matched by widespread notice and glowing acclaim in articles and reviews. This immediate and extensive economic and aesthetic success seemed particularly interesting to me — not least because Hazzard's earlier fiction had not attracted the same publicity nor had it been similarly widely or well reviewed — and prompted a series of questions relating to the notion of the literary text as product and the mode of reading suggested by this concept of the text. What, for instance, makes a particular literary text a successful production? To what extent are our reading practices determined by that text's production and reception? Why or how is "value" assigned to a particular literary text? It seems arguable that the processes of production itself; the economics of publishing, the printing, packaging and modes of distribution of a literary work all predicate a potential audience and in fact produce the very consumer anticipated by and constructed in that production. A study of the production and reception of *The Transit of Venus* followed by a reading of the novel in the light of that study illuminates if not answers those questions through an analysis concerned with the politics rather than the aesthetics of this text.

The American and British editions of *The Transit of Venus* were published with different jackets, otherwise they are identical. A semiotics of these jackets reads the book as representative of certain historical, ideological and economic structures. The MacMillan jacket is visually tasteful — it's beige with black lettering, and the cover illustration, a reproduction of part of a "fresco from the Casa Dei Vittii at Pompei" is representative of the myth of the capture of Venus and Mars. Above the illustration is the title, and the author's name in type nearly as large, preceded by the words "A Novel By", is below it. The signs on the jacket stand in a particular relation to each other, acquiring a high art signification which emanates from the illustration; combined, they present the text as a particular kind of product, motivated towards a particular kind of reader. The title is suggestive, conflating science — transits of Venus are astronomical phenomena, observable and measurable, verifiable both through scientific records and the history of their sightings, and classical myth — Venus is the

subject of innumerable representations of the passage from passion to conflict. This mythical element is repeated and reinforced by the illustration, which is a powerful icon of beauty as well as an index of a value-laden classical tradition in art and the history of ideas. Its eroticism is mediated by its age and its appropriation by art. The book is a "Novel", placed in a familiar literary and aesthetic category, while the importance of the author is signified by the prominence of her name, and foregrounded by a full-page photograph on the back of the jacket. This relates to Foucault's contention that the identity of the author and the insistence that the work and its author "make" the text is a significant inscription in the evaluation of literary discourses.[2] In the contemporary conjunction of author and text, the author is made a function of that text.

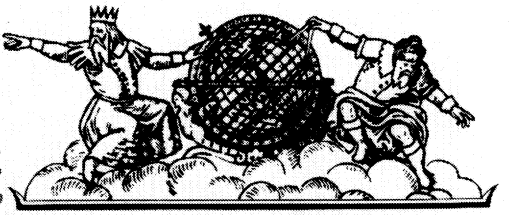
Viking's jacket is similar yet different, part of an American publishing culture that signals the release of an important work of literature by a jacket almost devoid of illustration. It's blue, cool and restrained. The author's name is given primary significance, and the connection between it, the title and the ascription of the book as a novel is implicit. The jacket is designed by a named individual, but no information is given about the small drawing that decorates it, one whose connotations are different from those of mythological sexuality and power associated with the Venus/Mars illustration on the MacMillan edition. Here, gods control the world. The reference is still to a classical ideology, but this illustration has none of the aesthetic or emotional connotations of the Mars/Venus icon. The back of this jacket is devoted not to a photograph of the author, which is relegated to the inside back sleeve, but to quotations from four reviews of Shirley Hazzard's other prose fiction, headed "Praise for Shirley Hazzard's earlier books".[3] This text acquires meaning from the reception of former works by the author.

Both these jackets function to "place", "define" and "categorise" the novel in important ways. According to Tony Bennett, "such designs (sleeve designs) are one of the primary means whereby literary texts are assigned a place in relation to other such texts, subjected to a preliminary ideological definition, and inserted into available aesthetic categories."[4] Inside both publications, the blurb refers to the "powerful magic (of) the art of Shirley Hazzard". "Once more, for Francis" is the dedication. It is elliptical and wittily allusive, at once personal and detached. The epigraph, a short contemporary poem in French by Robert Desnos, is also mysterious (wholly so for those who don't read French) and vaguely yet portentously forbidding. 'Le Dernier Poeme' speaks of the final emptiness of a long-cherished love. It distances passion and moralises the consequences of unfulfilment. As the last poem, it gestures towards a textual meaning aligned with ultimate poetic closure. Like the covers, the epigraph situates the publication in a European tradition of art and literature. Identified in these ways with a past more perfect and explicable than the alienating present, *The Transit of Venus* will bear, perhaps, those ancient aesthetic values of truth and beauty.

A calculated material effect directed towards (and thus producing?) a particular market is clear in these jacket designs and the introduction to the novel provided by the dedication and epigraph. Hardcover editions, too, are expensive and made to last. They are part of high culture, the elitist world of taste and leisure. The title and jacket design draw on and reproduce knowledge of myth and science, of classical and aesthetic traditions. As a "novel", the text categorises itself as belonging to a historical literary tradition. Further, it is announced as the work of an indivudual, an author, one whose name is (or will be made so by this production) sufficiently familiar to a public to be foregrounded by the cover. Her writing is defined through the ideologies of art and magic; it's romantic. *The Transit of Venus* is produced to be consumed by an elite readership; a literate, even lettered, international group; cultivated, discriminating and wealthy.

The discourse of the novel is the raw material of the production, and as part of its process supports and substantiates the significations of its packaging. Its style is el-

Shirley Hazzard



The TRANSIT of VENUS

A NOVEL

egant, mannered, slightly convoluted and persistently metaphoric. "By nightfall the headlines would be reporting devastation" is the first sentence,[5] combining most of those qualities with circumlocution and a typically complicated verb construction that draws attention to the style.[6] A self-conscious movement from implied present to known future announces the possibility of irony. The controlling, flat voice of the novel is distanced, and the narrative perspective is covert, subtly manipulative and non-focussed, yet always evident. The human and natural concerns of the novel are constantly juxtaposed with a background of larger events; political, social, historical. At the beginning, "a man" is placed in the landscape, and the opening storm that devastates the countryside is reported in newspapers "having space to fill due to a hiatus in elections, fiendish crimes, and the Korean War" (p.3). Moving from the domestic, "the South of England" (p.3), the narrative takes in Australia, London, America, Stockholm and South America. Love and destruction are inherent in the title, introduced at once in the narrative, and produce a satisfactory structure of meaning. Circumstances, willed or arbitrary, shape men's lives and lead always to "a single destination". The text is seeded with literary allusions, carefully split into four aptly named sections,[7] and ends on a suitably ambiguous note freighted with all the indices of the discourse. Carrying the heroine, who is a contemporary Venus, a plane takes off "with a long hiss of air — like the intake of humanity's breath when the work of ages shrivels in an instant, or the great gasp of hull and ocean as a ship goes down." (p.337) But the overt use of foreshadowing in this highly self-referential writing has already hinted at the end beyond the final words. The plane will crash, killing the heroine. Her lover, with whom she has finally come together in a parodic culmination of the love he has borne her for several decades will then kill himself. All very satisfying for the knowing reader hypothesised by the processes of the literary production who is ready for the textual games the novel engages in with consummate skill.

The reader/reviewer receives a text already encrusted with its immediate consumption. Reviews in England, America and Australia in news-papers and journals as well as literary magazines have been followed relatively quickly by critical articles, bibliographies of Hazzard's writings and one major critical interview with the author which perpetuates the inextricable author and work relationship produced by the text.[9] This appropriation of the novel by academe, which includes Hazzard's work becoming the subject of thesis writers, signifies a shift in the production of the text. Once it is articulated within an educational apparatus, it is institutionalised as "literature".[10] However, I propose to deal not with this secondary level of reception, but with that which is close to consumption, the commentaries on the novel published within two years of its publication. One unexpected result of an analysis of these commentaries was the remarkable consistency both in the way they responded to the text and which of its elements they commented on. This is perhaps indicative of the influence of the packaging of the novel and its promotion. Also, as part of the materialist consumption of the text, reviews are constrained by their context. Productions like *Transit* are offered for review to mainstream, conservative outlets. Reviewers write for a particular audience and are restricted by deadlines and prescriptions on space. Thus all the commentaries, English, American and Australian, appeared to be part of an identical production; that is, very similar inscriptions of the text resulted from its activation in different social and ideological contexts. The homogeneity of reception of the novel gives rise to interesting speculation both as to the lack of cultural difference within the Anglo-American literary tradition (dominated by English literature) and the potential similarities between the apparently different social formations within which literary texts are received.[11]

Not surprisingly and almost without exception, these commentaries stated or assumed that *The Transit of Venus* is a work to be valued. Questions relating to the way a literary text functions through its production and by way of its insertion in a part-

icular cultural space must finally focus on the central question of value. The notion that value is a given, mysteriously held within a work of literature to be released by the right kind of reader raises certain problems. What is value? How is it assigned, assessed or recognised? Can value be immanent, or is it produced solely by the conditions of the text's publication? Is it socially produced, part of the complex of conditions that make up the production and consumption of the text? These questions have clear connections with the privilege given the concept "literature", and present difficulties to which I can only suggest answers through a brief analysis of those commentaries.

This discourse of value inscribes the text as an object of value and reads it as such, completing in an apparently self-fulfilling prophecy the tautology "A work is of value only if it is valued."[12] Given value, the work's worth will be related, Tony Bennett argues, to some particular set of what he calls "valuational criteria", which will be "moral, political or aesthetic".[13] Criteria used by commentaries on *The Transit of Venus* are overwhelmingly aesthetic and moral; oddly enough the strongly political concerns of the novel are largely ignored.[14] Value may be self-producing, caught in an endless, circular exchange; a review in *The Australian Book Review* begins *"The Transit of Venus* has been widely acclaimed, and justly so" (Rosemary Cresswell, *A.B.R.,* August 1980, p.7). Another claims: "It received the National Book Critics' Award for the best work of fiction in 1980, as indeed it was" (J. Beston, *World Literature Written in English,* Vol.20, No.2, 1981, p.237). More usually, and almost without exception, the novel is accorded an aesthetic status. The aesthetic criteria for which it is valued are multiple. The assumption that the text functions as "literature" goes unquestioned. It is defined as literary as it is placed in the cultural space of the great — and lesser — tradition. Hazzard "writes in the classic European literary tradition" (Alexandra Johnson, *Books and Arts,* March 7, 1980); again, *"The Transit of Venus* is a novel of high culture, and may well be the beginning of a renaissance of writing as art" (Blanche d'Alpuget, *Financial Review Weekend Review,* July 4, 1980, p.37), and "Quite simply, *The Transit of Venus* can be hailed as one of the great novels in English" (Beston, *World Literature Written in English* Vol.19, No.2 1980, p.199). The writing is likened to Hardy's, to Henry James's, to Charlotte Bronte's, Elizabeth Bowen's, Flaubert's and Austen's. These comparisons are seen as unavoidable, forced on the reader: "There have been the inevitable comparisons with Jane Austen" (Cresswell, p.7). Its style is like Patrick White's, it has the particularity of visual detail of D.H. Lawrence, the concerns of Doris Lessing or Nadine Gordimer. But *The Transit of Venus* is not dwarfed by these comparisons. One reviewer, after comparing the novel with *A Sentimental Education,* itself "one of the greatest of novels", concedes: "yet Flaubert's novel does not overshadow Hazzard's, which is itself a work of astonishing perfection" (Beston, p.199). For another, "Miss Hazzard is in danger . . . of forgetting to which century she belongs." Yet she doesn't succumb to this archaism: "She survives to create an extraordinary book" (Blake Morrison, *The Observer,* April 1980, p.39).

Literary allusions are identified and admired, an activity that reflects flatteringly on the reviewer as well as the novel. These allusions include the Bible, and are said to extend from Sir Thomas Wyatt through Yeats to Auden, although, curiously, none of the commentaries remark the specific (yet seemingly hidden) references to French and Italian poetry. Commentators find what they want to find, and the strength and limitations of the English literary tradition are clear in this omission of recognition of a European literary tradition. One or two reviewers complain of a certain archness in the continual use of allusions in the text, but these are seen as only occasional lapses. The *New York Review of Books* argues that the mode of *The Transit of Venus* is more Victorian than contemporary. A knowing reader, this reviewer recognises an invitation to enjoy intertextuality: "The archaism of the novel is of course deliberate." How-

ever, despite the "many pleasures" afforded by the text, it lacks an essential quality of nineteenth century fiction: "Interesting and accomplished as it is, *The Transit of Venus* lacks the propulsive narrative energy of its great Victorian prototypes" (Robert Towers, *New York Review of books,* May 15, 1980, p.33). The problems inherent in this urge to insert the novel into a diachronic history of literature, both valuing it because of its access to that tradition and devaluing it because of its failure to recreate one of the conventions of that tradition are illuminating. *The Transit of Venus* is *not* a Victorian novel. It is a production of a particular culture in a particular time, and in a very modern sense may be read as a novel about other novels; about writing.

The commentaries also follow the "woman and the work" system of valorisation. Attribution of the text to its author is essential for its validation. Hazzard's name is constantly evoked, and several of the review articles take the form of an interview with the author. Again according to Foucault, an author's name on a fictional text functions as a sign of value: "literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. We now ask of each poetical or fictional text: from where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meaning ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend upon the manner in which we answer these questions."[15] The conjunction of author and work as well as the importance accorded the author's background, interests and ethics is continuous in these reviews.[16] One begins: "Shirley Hazzard's writing in *The Transit of Venus* is sumptuous" and ends: "Miss Hazzard's craftsmanship is impeccable" (Myrna Blumberg, *The London Times,* 27 March, 1981, p.232). *"The Transit of Venus* is Hazzard's masterpiece" for another (Beston, p.232) and *"The Transit of Venus* is Shirley Hazzard's . . . masterwork" (d'Alpuget). Lastly, the writing of *The Transit of Venus* is valuable. *"The Transit of Venus,* coming as richly freighted as it does with multi-layered meanings for the unpacking . . . has the weighty feel of great fiction" (Val Cunningham, *Times Literary Supplement,* April 4, 1980, p.382), "And Shirley Hazzard has even managed to forge a sort of "god-like grammar" to contain her amtitious design" (Gail Godwin, *The New York Times Book Review,* March 16, 1980, p.16). References like these to the text's "polished brilliance", its hermetic structure and its language which is "as concise as poetry" (Sue Nichterlin, *The National Times,* June 8-14, 1980, p.12); its "seductive prose" (Elizabeth Riddell, *The Bulletin,* August 26, 1980, p.72) abound.

This evaluation establishes what Eagleton calls "a mutually supportive dialogue between two highly valorised subjects, the valuable text and the valuable reader." Each is a "privileged subject", and their value is established in "mutual complicity" and "sealed by exchange".[17] In this "self-closing circle . . . such a text writes its reader and such a reader writes the text." Eagleton's contentions seem overly determinist, yet the reviews of *The Transit of Venus* support his view of the relationship between text and the reader and the production of value. And this text is not just aesthetically, but morally valuable and valued: "With all its insights into the complexities of human behaviour this novel is unequivocal in its moral judgements" (R.G. Geering, *Overland,* '83, 1981, p.69). It is also indirectly moral: "Its strongest quality is honesty." This reading is inclusive: "Few readers, I feel, will question the emotional truthfulness with which she records her heroines' . . . lives" (Neil Jillett, *The Age,* Sat. 26 July, 1980, p.26). As well, the universality and scope of the concerns of the text, "its implied acceptance of larger patterns beyond an individual's fate" *(New York Book Review)* are a moral strength.

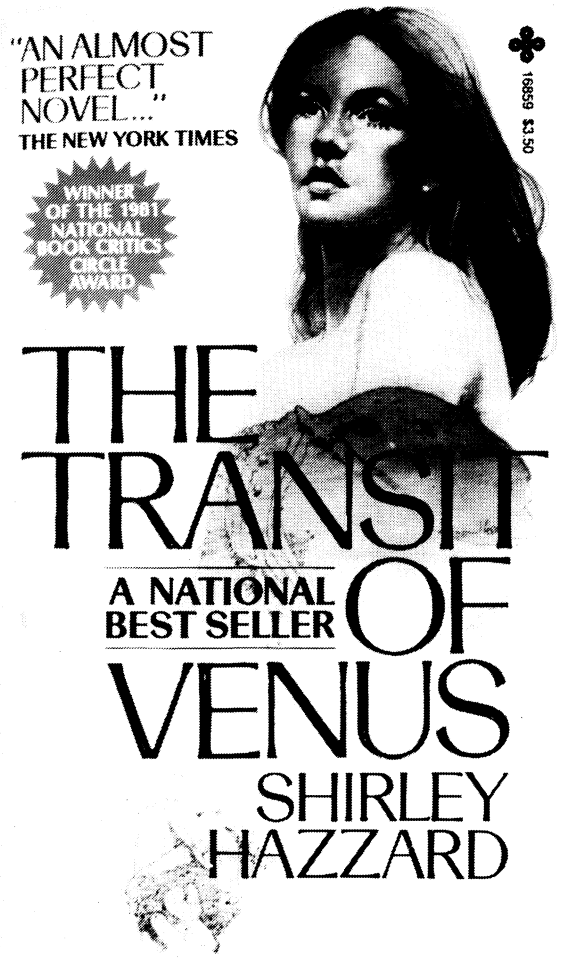
Supporting all these valuational criteria and value judgements is an inevitable reference to the time it took Hazzard to write *The Transit of Venus.* Both editions' blurbs end with the triumphant revelation that *The Transit of Venus* was "Seven years in the writing." Time is a valuable contemporary commodity, and this notion has significance both in terms of the history of the novel as a genre, one whose writing was identi-

fied by its expansiveness and the speed of its execution, and as an ideology.[19] Since the nineteenth century, the increasing speed of production and total consumption of most commodities, including writing, has operated to direct value towards those things whose produciton is economically wasteful of time, and which have the capacity to outlast their immediate consumption. In direct relation to the time taken by Hazzard to write *The Transit of Venus* it has value, and the economy of its reading is also luxuriantly wasteful, completing the time/value equation. From "This book has been seven years in the writing" *(Overland)* to "It took the author seven years to write. It doesn't surprise me" *(The New York Times Book Review),* to "This book . . . took seven years to complete" (Mary Vernon, *Weekend Australian* May 31, 1980, p.37), to "It is a most crafted and sculpted piece of work, if only because it took seven years in the writing" *(A.B.R.),* to "The care taken (to write) is evident" (Weekend Aust., May 31, 1980, p.37), to the writer's personal commitment — "she spent seven years writing it" *(Financial Review Weekend Review),* to a description of literary production reminiscent of the gestation and birth of an elephant: *"The Transit of Venus* is Hazzard's masterpiece, one she laboured over for seven years to achieve finally one of the most flawless of novels" *(W.L.W.E.)* reviewers are unanimous in their admiration for a work whose mode of production was so slow. Similarly, laborious reading becomes a virtue and is to be valued. "For those who can afford the time and effort, *The Transit of Venus* rewards beautifully" *(Weekend Australian).* Fast reading, efficient consumption is impossible: "Shirley Hazzard's sensuous prose keeps the reader returning to sentences and phrases to savour them again and again" (Susan Anthony, *The Bulletin,* August 26, 1980, p.72) and the seven years' work that went into the novel is described as a "payoff" for the reader. "Even the tiniest of details . . . add their weight to the main theme" *(Observer)* What would perhaps be expected to be seen as a fault in that most easily and directly consumable of literary genres, the novel, is made a virtue.[19] Reading that is difficult, demanding and slow must be good.

Clearly, the production of the text has preferred certain readings. Yet Peter Pierce's wittily disparaging review article "Conventions of Presence" which discusses *The Transit of Venus* among several other novels published in Australia in 1980,[20] places the text both in an institutionalised discourse of literary tradition and high culture, and a social discourse of soap opera and popular culture. Pierce links the novel, which is "radically old fashioned", "proleptic", written in a style that "sets up a curious echo of itself and becomes languid" with an esoteric generic mode: *"Transit of Venus* belongs to what Peter Brooks (in *The Novel of Worldliness)* categorised as 'the literature of worldliness.' " Hazzard, like the eighteenth-century French novelists who form Brooks's generic category "addresses an exclusive audience, a supra-society of *cognoscenti* with a taste for elegant moral formulations and a disdain for social realism as a literary mode."[21] However, having discussed the novel, critically, as a text written for this exclusive readership, Pierce finally relegates it in a pejoratively sexist remark to the trivialised category 'women's magazine fiction': "the author closes with a discreet vagueness that makes *The Transit of Venus* look more than ever like the best-dressed women's magazine fiction of its year."[22] *The Transit of Venus,* then, is part of a respectable, valorised, exclusive literary tradition, and at the same time of a disreputable, inclusive, aliterary world of texts. In this apparently contradictory reading, the novel is inscribed as elitist, as "literature", and as popular, as romance; received according to alternative textual and social formations.

Pierce's split reading of *The Transit of Venus* refers back to the first publications and anticipates the second. In 1981 in America Playboy Paperbacks contracted for the paperback rights to the novel. Playboy not only outbid the other paperback houses interested in the book — the initial production now has high economic value[23] — but undertook as part of their contract to purchase all Hazzard's other fiction for re-issue in paperback.[24] This reproduction of *The Transit of Venus* is in startling contrast to the in-


THE TRANSIT OF VENUS
HERE IS A STORY SO ALIVE, SO PASSIONATE, SO CHARGED WITH EVERY HUMAN EMOTION THAT YOU WILL NEVER, NEVER FORGET IT.


"AN ALMOST PERFECT NOVEL..."
THE NEW YORK TIMES
WINNER OF THE 1981 NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD
16859 $3.50
THE TRANSIT OF VENUS
A NATIONAL BEST SELLER
SHIRLEY HAZZARD

itial publications, and it raises the question of the stability of the text. It seems not only valid but necessary to ask whether this is the same novel.[25] Remade and transformed, the text is (re)inscribed in a different social, ideological and institutional context from that of the first production.[26] On its cover, the modes of production and consumption of the earlier release become part of the new text, weighting it with received value. A conventionally attractive, long-haired girl is balanced by the words "An Almost Perfect Novel . . ." from *The New York Times*, and a dark sunburst announcing "Winner of the 1981 National Book Critics Circle Award". Inserted into the title in the centre of the page is "A National Best Seller", and the author's name is at the bottom. Inside, a series of small, highly referential illustrations, which are realistic rather than iconographical and allegorical, create a crude pictorial representation of the narrative. They are dominated by the head of the same girl. Only the title of the text is shown, the author's name has disappeared, and "the novel" has become "a story" which is present, waiting to become part of the reader's life: "Here Is a Story So Alive, So Passionate, So Charged With Every Human Emotion That You Will Never, Never Forget It". A further page is devoted to extracts from reviews in major American journals: "Unforgettably rich and mysterious", "Engrossing; masterly novel", "Sensuous, discerning" and so on, while the next page carries a synopsis of the story, and four more review extracts, all emphasising the physicality of the text. It's "A persuasive page-turner", "full and satisfying", "A luminous novel", and "Superb". This popular edition is clearly structured to articulate a different audience from the "ideal, initiated, limited and sophisticated" reader Pierce assumes is established in the first production.[27] This edition produces his women's magazine audience.

If *The Transit of Venus* is read not as a passive ahistorical form defined by its production as "literature" but as dynamic, capable, as Pierce's review makes clear, of situating its reader in radically opposed reading positions, a more flexible critical account of *The Transit of Venus* that derives from the processes of production and consumption I've described may be undertaken.[28] As a structure, the story of *The Transit of Venus* is that of the essential romance, the fairy tale, and various textual signs — names, incidents, the plot structure and cliches of romance as well as authorial asides produces a popular reading. Two beautiful, orphaned, genteelly impoverished but well-born sisters travel from a primitive land (Australia) to a mystic, magical ancient society (England), ostensibly in the care of but in reality in bondage to a morally ugly half-sister. There are constant references to her "power" over the sisters. One sister, Grace, fair and innocent, marries a pseudo-prince, Christian Thrale, with whom she lives a charmed but hollow life. She's en-thralled by him and the circumstances he offers, hence his name. She's woken from her dream life by the recognition of love for a young doctor, Angus Dance, who however refuses to claim her, condemning her to her suburban prison. The other sister, Caro, dark and more knowing, is enchanted by a villain disguised as an artist-prince, Paul Ivory, who "cast(s) his spell" (p.71) over her. She's rescued — awoken — by the original prince, American Adam Vail, whose froggish exterior is belied by his true nature. He's chivalrous, potent, wealthy, a world traveller, a kind of individual Amnesty International who wields influence with foreign governments for the rescue of the political victims of contemporary power struggles. Vail is also called a "figure in a spy story" (p.180). He's the modern romance hero. Vail dies, and after another period of psychic and emotional stasis, Caro the Sleeping Beauty is re-awoken by recognition of her love for her humble, faithful suitor, Ted Tice, who has always loved her. Constructed as a figure of nineteenth-century romantic novels, "young, poor . . . (with) the highest references — like a governess in an old story, who marries into the noble family" (p.6) and of twentieth-century romantic ideology: "a poor boy from a grimy town, a clever boy who got himself . . . to a great university" (p.11) Tice has great honours as a scientist and a loving wife and children by the time he achieves Caro's love. But the narrative implies that he takes his

own life when Caro dies in a place crash. The world is indeed well lost for love.

At the same time, the fairy story is set in an "awful place" which is "the world" (p.257). Thus it confronts a particular textual reality, as does the web of mythic and literary allusion. Caro is a Venus, and a "rush-hour Eurydice" (p.295), Christian a Penelope who lusts after a Cordelia. Near Stonehenge is a missile base, whose "vibrations" are felt at Peveral, the Thrale's home. The fairy story reading imposes a necessary coherence on the text; the realism insists on its disruption. In the same way, the smooth surface of the discourse is negated by its self-parody and its insistence on ambiguity. The unreality of an art/life split is a constant preoccupation in the novel. Coincidence is more present in life than in fiction: "there may be more coincidences of the kind in life than in books" (p.62). "Characters from Realism" (p.149) crowd the London Underground; Dora's inimitable friends are "like the cast of a play" (p.163). Constant narrative intersections create a kind of convoluted self-referentiality: "Only Charmain Thrale . . . made a contrast between this auspicious arrival and the way in which Ted Tice had been washed up out of a storm" (p.69). Human life is merely a transit from one state to another; conventional oppositions between life and death, past and future, are constant yet contingent since the preferred tense of the novel is an indefinite past tense, and it uses a mixture of tenses to convey the effect of "an imbalance of hope and memory, a savage tangle of history" (p.84). This uneven interaction of abstraction and fact is complicated by the indefinable, detached voice of the text and the omniscient narrative stance. The god-like author seeks "some god-like grammar" to "describe and reconcile" (p.84) romance and reality, art and life.[29]

Passages, transits hold meaning, yet they are outside and absent from the text, and absence is made the condition of life. Charmain Thrale's memory of her experience as a nurse's aide during the First World War — when in response to a boy's complaint of cold feet she moves the blankets that cover him and discovers that he has no feet — could signify the emptiness and impotence of the textual reality. Gaps and silences are its significance. Before they become lovers, Caro and Paul walk through a churchyard. On the gravestones are "the years — of birth and death, connected by a little etched hyphen representing life" (p.76) Life is a space, a "hiatus" (p.152) made meaningful only in its apprehension of death.

The reader is thus encouraged to read (easily) the predictable romance, yet at the same time manoeuvered into a position in relation to the text which is itself ambiguous, made so by the conditional form of the language, the indeterminate time scale and the elusive narrative stance and ironic voice. This ambivalent relationship is then heightened by those foregrounded gaps. A reading mode which sees the text as a sign, dominated by the insistence that it is fiction, yet one that it is complexly related to a reality, finds in the dualism of fiction/reality the gap that both divides and holds together the contradictory signs of the text. Venus, for instance, is both science and myth, both morning and evening star, and in the series of opposing sets of signs that pattern the novel, man/other natural forces, history/present and so on, significance resides. As the reader mediates the oppositions, the textual absences and deferrals, meaning is made purely relative. So *The Transit of Venus* can provoke us into renaming the known, into recognising the difference of its perception of this known, into a realisation that in the textual slashes, gaps, absences, stages and transits there is that which is other than language can say.

This text is characterised by that "reticence" which for Barthes is one of the techniques of literature, in which meaning is held back in order that it may spread. *The Transit of Venus* both signals a predictable revelation as it acknowledges the inevitable interrelation of character and incident in the structure of romance, and withholds that working out. The "world of disease" (p.315) is always implicitly present, yet rarely actually so. War, death, corruption, destruction, even ecstatic disruptions are displaced from the text. Lovers are described before or after lovemaking; Caro and

Adam's wedding and Adam Vail's sudden death are recounted after the events and at second-hand. Two of the crucial events of the novel, Ted Tice's rescue of a German soldier during the war and Paul Ivory's murder of a man by avoidance of responsibility take place outside the narrative. And the aeroplane that takes off in the final sentence carrying Caro to a rendezvous with Ted Tice will crash, while Tice's inevitable end has been hanging over the narrative since the second chapter: "In fact, Edmund Tice would take his own life . . . But that would occur in a northern city and not for many years" (p.12). *The Transit of Venus* at once says everything and nothing.

This brief reading suggests this novel as an object for analysis able to project itself as both readable, a romance, and writerly, a discourse that self-consciously insists on its coincidences and contradictions, ambiguities and raptures. Consumption and reception, reading the text and re-making the text are part of the continual process of its production. For literary texts production is never completed. Endlessly reproduced in a cycle which can be understood as a material social process, a text named *The Transit of Venus* exists in each of its inscriptions. To read the text is to make the text speak; the fuller our understanding of the text in its production and consumption, the fuller that speech may be.

å An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference in Ballarat in August 1984.

1. In an interview with Hazzard, Sue Nichterlein calls this list "the taxonomy of *success d'estime* in American publishing" *(The National Times,* June 8 to 14, 1980, p.12).
2. Michel Foucault, "What Is An Author", in *Textual Strategies,* ed. J. Harari (London: Methuem & Co. Ltd., 1980). Foucault discusses and historicises the implications of the contemporary individualisation of the author in a western capitalist culture, relating it to a "fundamental category of the-man-and-his-work criticism"(p.141). He concludes that the "author function" is therefore "characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (p.148), and that literary discourses have been associated with this mark of the author only since the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, when "literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author-function". (p.149).
3. These are *Cliffs of Fall and Other Stories* (1963), *The Evening of the Holiday* (1966), and *The Bay of Noon* (1970).
4. Tony Bennett, "The Bond Phenomenon", in *Southern Review,* No. 16 (July, 1983), p.198.
5. All page references are to the MacMillan edition of *The Transit of Venus,* and will be bracketted after each quotation.
6. Hazzard's prose style is idiosyncratic, overtly "literary", drawing attention to its series of readily recognisable grammatical "signs" (shifters) that clearly refer to the author. See Foucault, p.152.
7. They are "The Old World", "The Contacts", "The New World", and "The Culmination".
8. In Australia, two of the very few less than favourable comments on *Transit* appeared in feminist, therefore radical, radio reviews. These were by Drusilla Modjeska *(The Coming Out Show,* June 6, 1981) and Sylvia Lawson *(Books and Writing,* October 2, 1982). Radio is perhaps a more flexible medium than print, with less authority because of its more transitory nature. Does this, I wonder, allow for a more political reception?
9. See "An Interview with Shirley Hazzard (Summer 1982)", Catherine Rainwater and William J. Scheick in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* Vol. 25, No. 2, Summer 1983, pp.213-221.
10. Terry Eagleton argues that the movement from literary text to Literature takes place when the work is abducted by academic institutions. *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978), pp.56-57.

11. It would have been useful to have the publishers' handouts sent with review copies to assess how far this material directed the review response. What is perhaps an analogous directive for *Transit's* reception is provided by a full-page advertisement from Viking Press in *The New York Times Book Review* (March 16, 1980, p.33) which likens it to poetry, places it in an ahistorical literary "tradition" of "great writers" and describes it an "an almost perfect novel". The novel's formal qualities are those for which it will be admired and it is to be measured against a mythical ideal form.
12. Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism,* p.173.
13. As above. Both Eagleton and Bennett discuss the problem of value.
14. This could be explained by the conventional dominance of aesthetic and moral criteria for assigning a text a place in the literary canon.
15. Foucault, p.149.
16. Hazzard's life-style, setting, interests and opinions are described in several of the articles on *Transit,* and act as an invocation of the "values" seen to be those of the novel.
17. Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology,* p.164.
18. Ian Watt argues that once literature came "under the control and laws of the market place" new characteristics in technique and the initial mode of production resulted, "since it was the bookseller, not the patron, who rewarded him (the writer), speed and copiousness tended to become the supreme economic virtues". *The Rise of the Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p.58.
19. Two different markets, two kinds of consumer/reader are intimated in the way *Transit* is reviewed, and addressed directly by Blanche D'Alpuget at the end of her review: "People who enjoy a good read should not touch it, even with tongs. YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED." *Financial Review Weekend Review,* p.37.
20. Peter Pierce, "Conventions of Presence", *Meanjin,* Vol. 40, No. 1, 1981, pp.106-113.
21. Pierce, p.109.
22. Pierce, p.110.
23. This acquisition of a new valuational criteria, one that had little part in the initial consumption and reception of the novel (Sue Nichterlein in *The National Times* was fearful for the novel of "the perils of commercialism", but was pleased to see Viking "elect to promote her (Hazzard's) book ahead of the pack"), but which was indirectly included in its production causes its shift into a new cultural space, that of "popular culture". Best seller listings indicate this trend: "quiet, careful works written with a dedication to style as much as story rarely achieve the run away sales necessary for getting on the list". (Susan Anthony, "An Unexpected Recognition of Serious Writing", *The Bulletin,* June 17, 1980, p.78). In the same piece, Hazzard told Anthony that she "always felt there was much more readership for books that are seriously written. These books never get the publicity the others do, that's the problem." In one review, *Transit's* potential "popularity" was signified by its denial: it is "not for the masses" (Jill Bowen, *Australian Playboy,* October 1980, p.181). This reviewer, like several others, links Hazzard and *Transit* with Colleen McCullough and *The Thorn Birds.* That highly arbitrary conjunction is fulfilled with the classification of *Transit* by Playboy as "popular".
24. Information in a letter from Hazzard, December 21, 1982. In answer to my questions as to her response to the various covers of *Transit,* Hazzard said the only jacket to which she had strong objections was Playboy's, which was offensive to her, but "which I could only adjust slightly". Playboy, Hazzard says, "distributed and advertised well". Also, she likes "Penguin's new format" less "than their previous orange jackets, which I liked on my books".
25. It has, of course, undergone further (re)productions, but none as startling as the transformation of the MacMillan/Viking editions to the Playboy edition. Penguin Australia published a paperback edition for Britain and the Commonwealth countries in 1981, also a King Penguin edition, and currently available is another edition published by British Penguin. Bronwey Levy has written on the Penguin edition of *Transit* in an excellent investigative paper on the reception of Australian

women's fiction: "Constructing the Woman Writer: The Reviewing and Reception of Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus*" soon to be published in Carole Ferrier's edited collection, *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Australian Women Novelists.* Levy's is an Australian feminist perspective, but coincidentially we both dealt with the same idea and much of the same material at about the same time.

26. See Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production* (trans. Geoffrey Wall), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978), where he argues for a criticism of literary works based on their cultural activity in a variety of social, instititutional and ideological contexts; readings that derive from attention to the history of the use of the text.
27. It is curious that Pierce, although he uncovers *Transit's* "wide range of novelistic tricks" and recognises "its origins in soap opera" which it "stylishly disguises", still classifies the novel as literature, without recognising its potential to "seek" a different audience.
28. For Hazzard, literary analysis too often seems to impose coherence or consistency where none exists. See Shirley Hazzard, "Author's Statements", *Australian Literary Studies,* Vol. 10, No. 2, 1981, p.207.
29. Described as "aoristic" in an issue of *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* devoted to three contemporary women writers. Rainwater and Scheik, "Some God-like Grammar: An Introduction to the Writings of Hazzard, Ozik and Redmon" *(TSLL, Vol. 25, No. 2, Summer 1983), p.181.*

ALEC CHOATE

Iona Ferry

I had dreamed of a remote island,
but at Mull I board the ferry
as one of a huddled crowd,
tourists, with perhaps some true pilgrims.
Flailed by the spray of the narrow sea
and the rain that beats
through our tattered canopy of gulls,
we reach for Iona
less to wander the mists of legend
than to fill a slot in a travel circuit.

We land,
straggle towards the Abbey Church
like a gown thrown about by the wind,
thinning and drifting apart
into pairs or single file,
our voices small
in the murmur and tug of rain.
The age smoothed flagstones
of the path of the Dead
glimmer back at our salt flushed faces,
a parade of faces themselves,
lipless, but sighing us on
till the doorway shuffles us through
and we regather, hushed
in the press of walls.

Packed, most of us standing,
our eyes have nowhere to go
but upwards, to the peaked arches,
the flat timbered ceiling,
or, as mine cannot help but do,
to the stained glass window
where the faint sun falters
revives and falters again
round the lean irascible saint whose shrine this is.
Beyond the lifting of so many eyes
that might be endorsing their faith,
even beyond my approval of sacred art
which the window offers,
the birthright call of my culture,
there is my questioning focal point,
my look for light other than that in the glass.
As in all like places I come to,
I resume this quest,
though once more, and feeling I knew beforehand,
I must too soon look aside

to the twilight of dove grey stone.

It is only in late afternoon
when the crowd drifts back to the ferry
and I walk the sun showers alone
that Iona stands clear
as a mind's needed island.
In the dark hooded rocks of its shoreline,
in its time settled hills, the wind chastened grass
where the cattle's hooves have bared
the track I follow,
there is an assurance, an all weather calm,
which I feel is a special offer of voice
that would have me concede
someone came in from the sea
to found a threshold, a stepping stone,
from which could go forward
a word that had to be said.
More than a coracle has become one with the earth
in the high land breasting the pebbled beach
that is lit with all colours in sunlight or rain.

JOYCE PARKES

Papyrus' Sail

Dialogues could be semantic
steps. Whether slender or
glad, render spells to valley's

rung; a compass, attaining a
course, going beyond agility.
Now a sage — then a fool,

deeper than a shadow passing
on the ceiling. Anchoring onyx
company, saying, Rowena's wing

may be perennial gales. On the
bridge we sat, sketching phre-
nology's arch. Crossing the

litmus of memory, we were ancient
before dawn, knowing an arcadia
in spans of emerald terrains.

KATERYNA ARTHUR

Fiction and the Rewriting of History: A Reading of Colin Johnson[1]

White obliteration of Aboriginal culture in Australia has been as much the work of the pen as of physical violence. Aborigines have been *written* out of literature, out of the law, out of history. The extent to which they have been erased from White consciousness is becoming clearer with every new positive attempt to reinscribe the Aboriginal presence into Australian cultural and historical awareness. Although these attempts are gradually modifying perception, they are plagued by contradictions which limit their effectiveness. They are usually made by Whites, within a European cultural and legal framework, in documents written in the English language. The existing power structures are reinforced by the very manoeuvres that set out to reinstate Aborigines and to draw them towards the centre of the historical arena. White writing has inevitably marginalized Aborigines, if not by neglect or disparagement then just as effectively by paternalistic benevolence, or by the very fact that it *is* writing.

Because writing itself is alien to Aboriginal culture, it has been a force against which they have had no weapons to employ. Aborigines have been the objects of discourses that they could not even receive let alone comprehend or participate in. The unequal struggle between Black and White in Australia has been, to a large extent, the struggle between literacy and orality.

Aborigines who enter the battlefield now, as Colin Johnson has done, particularly with the writing of *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World,* can only do so by writing in English. At one point in the novel, after a violent encounter between White settlers and Aborigines, Wooreddy asks himself:

> Was it advisable or even permissible to use *num* (i.e. White) weapons?[2]

He concludes that he has no choice as he does again when he follows George Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines (or the "Fader" as the Aborigines call him), out of his home territory, against most of his instincts and desires. But both "capitulations" are symbolic analogues of Black decisions to write in English or to allow White appropriation of Aboriginal stories by translation or transcription. What this decision entails, its political and artistic implications for Johnson's novel and more generally, are the subject of this paper. Artistic choices in this context are always political choices. When Johnson retells a well-known story from the early days of European settlement he is retaliating against the weight of White authorized versions of this and other stories of White-Black relations.

There are innumerable ways in which White texts have banished or degraded Aborigines. The following selection of quotations from a variety of kinds of works — anthropological, literary critical and historical — will serve as a reminder of some of them. It is a small sample, representing the vast body of textual abuse that has shaped White Australian perception of Aborigines for the last two centuries. On the question of Aboriginal intellectual powers, C.S. Wake reported in the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* in 1872 that

to speak . . . of intellectual phenomena in relation to the Australian Aborigines is somewhat of a misnomer. This race presents, in fact, hardly any of what are usually understood as the phenomena of intellect.[3]

The same writer's fixed preconception is so resistant even to his own contrary observations that he can write of Aboriginal language:

The complexity of its structure, the richness of its grammatical forms or the copiousness of its vocabulary affords no proof of great intellect.[4]

In 1899 the historian Richard Simon comes to the conclusion that

the Aborigines are nothing but nomadic huntsmen, and this very circumstance is the reason of their low intellectual level and scantily developed artistic sense . . . they are entirely devoid of imagination.[5]

Old prejudices die hard. In a 1967 volume of literary criticism there is an essay entitled "Literature and the Aborigines" written by the poet, historian and critic F.T. Macartney.[6] In it he writes of Aboriginal "mental fuzziness" as exhibited in their legends and claims that any Aboriginal "philosopher" is "on a lower mental level than that of an ordinary thoughtful man amongst ourselves." The art of Aboriginal songmen is similarly downgraded by Macartney who doubts whether their songs "or any other utterance in Aboriginal language, is capable . . . of great strength and beauty" or "heights of feeling." From the security of the printed page and all the cultural apparatus that supports it such attacks upon the speech and song of Aborigines have reiterated and reinforced the assumptions that written forms are of a higher order than spoken forms and that European intellectual and artistic criteria provide a universal standard against which other cultures can be measured.

An oral tradition has no defence against such convictions. Because these assumptions have seemed indisputable to Whites the Aboriginal community has had no right of reply. Orality has been traditionally equated with primitiveness and ignorance. Until very recently the only histories of Aboriginal people available to the European population of Australia were constructed by Whites. Reading them reveals very little about Aboriginal life but it tells us a great deal about the course of European prejudices and preconceptions. Whites have been the heroes of their own histories of White-Black contact by the very fact of their central positioning in their narratives.

This is not to say that there have been no favourable accounts of Aboriginal culture. But as G.K. Chesterton once pointed out, a colonialized culture "can be injured or extinguished simply because it can be *explained* by the conqueror."[7] This effect is a kind of cultural write-out or white-out and it is not limited to the Australian situation. In the case of the Australian Aborigines this writing-out was bound to occur because there was no indigenous writing to act as a counter force. The Australian continent could thus be perceived as empty and silent, a receptacle waiting to be filled, or a blank page upon which a new history could be written, a *terra nullius,* or no man's land.[8]

Australian history, certainly as it was taught in state schools in the 1950s and 1960s was a White Anglo-Saxon history. Its Anglocentricity was so deep that it caused a kind of blindness. As a member of an immigrant Eastern European family I remember experiencing the disorientation that all non-British immigrants must have felt as the result of the almost total neglect of other cultures in school curricula. Aborigines were at best mentioned in passing in accounts of European exploration of Australia. In this context of Aboriginal near-invisibility, even a writer as sympathetic to Aboriginal culture as P.R. Stephensen could write, apparently without noticing his omission:

Australia is a whole continent, unique in its natural features, and unique in the fact of its continual homogeneity of race and language. Australia is the only continent on earth inhabited by one race, under one government, speaking one language.[9]

This kind of deletion was the logical result of a century and a half of depiction of the Aborigines as less than human, "less manlike than a grinning, chattering monkey," as Sir W.M. Snowden put it in 1882.[10] The moral convenience of such a view of Aborig-

ines is obvious. It has justified neglect and exclusion and it has endowed the concept of protection of Aborigines with a spirit of generosity whatever its actual policies and effects. Johnson's novel is largely about this concept and its consequences for the Tasmanian Aborigines.

Many others, before Johnson, have defended Aborigines against the tide of popular opinion. Katherine Langloh Parker, in her *Australian Legendary Tales,* was the first to popularize Aboriginal mythology with a view to showing it to be worthy of interest and respect.[11] Her work had a high degree of success in that it gave a wide European audience a sense of the richness of the Aboriginal oral culture. But Parker's work, with other such reconstructions of elements of Aboriginal culture, exposes a number of problems inherent in the process of popularization. Colin Johnson's Aboriginality does not protect him from the same problems, which involve multiple violations of the very thing that is being defended, in the transposition from oral to written, from Aboriginal to European context.

First, the idea of popularization itself is alien to Aboriginal culture, where there are no clear distinctions between high and low, nor between sacred and secular.[12] Popularization is a concept that is closely allied in modern Western culture with technologically based print, film and radio transmission. It entails a radical depersonalization of the process of communication. It dispenses with the particular traditional contexts in which stories are told or information delivered, releasing them from ritual tribal patterns of dissemination with their restrictions and prohibitions and also from their functions within particular communities.[13] Especially when the English language is used, White popularization is an appropriation which empties Aboriginal stories of much of their meaning in the process of preserving them. It masks the fact that orally delivered stories change from telling to telling, not only in terms of the heteroglossia of the situation, to use Bakhtin's term, but also in terms of primary content. Print is formalin to oral culture. It has built into it the same museum impulse that drives anthropologists to put Aboriginal skeletons on public display.

Mythology is inseparable from daily Aboriginal life. Its transmutation in a foreign medium to a foreign audience robs it of its power to influence thought and action. Its popularization is inevitably a form of betrayal, whether it is carried out by Europeans or Aborigines. As the Berndts point out in their book *The First Australians*, all writers on Aboriginal cultures are already outsiders by the very fact of their decision to write.[14] The fact that Katherine Langloh Parker and others like her who have been deeply sympathetic to Aboriginal culture have lived with Aboriginal people does not give their work much protection. Violations and betrayals are caused by the transitions themselves from speech to print, from significantly restricted local positioning to a far-flung anonymous audience. It has been observed that one of the most common results of this transition has been the reduction of Aboriginal myths to something childlike and also to give them an exotic quality. Both these effects reduce and marginalize Aboriginal culture further while purporting to elevate it and give it a more central place in popular consciousness.

The monumentalization of spoken stories within a print culture has other destructive consequences. It transfers authority to the printed word, an authority deriving from its durability and mobility, so ultimately reducing the authority of the figure of the wise man or woman within an oral culture. Writing destroys memory. Words acquire meaning from their "actual habitat."[15] Printing Aboriginal stories throws meaning production out of the traditional circle of the storyteller and his listeners to the open field of reader reception.

The post-invasion physical dislocation of Aborigines from their tribal lands is closely linked with linguistic displacement. In both cases European understanding of the significance of place in cultural life has overridden or overwritten Aboriginal understanding. When groups of Aborigines are forced out of their traditional territory they

lose not only their homelands but also the signposts and symbols of the mythology they live by, the visible and tangible framework of their "Dreaming." White popularization of their myths can never recover or preserve anything but a shadow of the displaced culture. The myths become different stories in the new medium.

Colin Johnson is not primarily a preserver of Aboriginal myths. His *Doctor Wooreddy* is an attack upon White myths and misconceptions about Aborigines, a conscious rewriting of history from an Aboriginal point of view. Its aim is not to preserve but to disrupt. What is at issue is not the historical "truth" if it is accepted that history is, as Barthes puts it, "a play of structures just like language . . . itself also a form of ecriture"; it is a matter of repositioning.[16] The Aborigines have for two centuries been under the gaze of the European settlers. In *Doctor Wooreddy* the Europeans become the objects of Aboriginal scrutiny and interpretation. "Almost human, ain't they," says an Aboriginal observer of the white *nums* or ghosts as they are called by Aborigines throughout the novel to distinguish them from themselves, the humans. The ghosts' intellectual powers are questioned by the Aborigines who also feel sure that the ghosts eat humans.

This reversal of narrative point of view has profound consequences. First, by making Wooreddy the central character of the work and filtering experience of the Europeans through his consciousness, Johnson's book effectively refutes two centuries of prejudice concerning Aboriginal intellectual and emotional capacity. They had no inner life worth revealing, according to most White accounts. Second, it reinterprets White protection of Aborigines as one of the most potent agents of their destruction. Third, it redefines the concept of civilization by casting the Europeans as rapacious barbarian invaders. They have, of course, been seen in this way before. But Johnson's work has greater authority than earlier accounts of this kind because of his Aboriginality and also, paradoxically, because his book is a novel rather than an official history. It can thereby exploit the genre's greater freedom to manipulate narrative point of view.

This gain entails losses. It is not only the language but also the alien genre that gets in the way of the expression of Aboriginality. The novel's conventional European realist organization — its linear chronology, its closed plot, its way of presenting character — looks incongruous when tied to Aboriginal subjectivity. But this incongruity is also a source of parodic power. Johnson adopts the genre but inverts the ideological structure by a series of simple reversals of Black/White positions and attitudes. The cost of this subversion is its partial betrayal of Aboriginality through complicity with the other culture's ways of thinking, feeling and speaking. Wooreddy sometimes appears to be a White man masquerading as a Black. By using the words of the oppressor and employing a familiar European tool of oppression, the written text, the writer cannot avoid engaging in a form of cultural transvestism and so running the risk of self-parody in the act of ridiculing the other. But these contradictions are inherent in the structure of parody itself, as Colin Johnson well knows. This is why early in the novel he has Wooreddy give his reasons for adopting the idiom of the *nums.* In this way Johnson's carnivalesque, subversive imitation acts as a powerful political strategy.[17]

The project of rewriting the history of early Aboriginal-European contact has another tangle of contradictions to contend with. They are embedded in the term "history" itself. History, as Bob Hodge has recently reminded us, is a white invention. It depends upon a view of time as an unfolding "scroll."[18] History proceeds sequentially, following the same kind of course as written words on a page. Because Aborigines have a different understanding of time, they do not recognize history as a distinct category.[19] "The Dreaming" for them connects the present with the past. This they have in common with other oral communities. Levi-Strauss writes of "the savage mind," "a characteristic feature . . . is its timelessness; its object is to grasp the world as both a

synchronic and a diachronic totality."[20] It is impossible to reproduce cyclical understanding of time in a language whose grammar operates out of a different system.[21] And so a history like *Doctor Wooreddy* that tries to dramatize that crucial difference within the framework of a linear literary form, partially undermines its own cause while promoting it.

According to the anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner, there is no Aboriginal equivalent for the word "time."[22] With its half-ironic reiteration of Wooreddy's rueful comments, "It must be the times," Johnson's novel repeatedly touches on a cultural discrepancy that the novel cannot bridge. But although it cannot communicate the Aboriginal experience of time, the novel is a peculiarly apt form for recording a *particular* time of change and crisis.

Wooreddy and the other doomed Aborigines of Johnson's story are displaced not only from their land and all that sustained them there physically and psychically, they have also been transposed into an alien time scheme. The novel form is appropriate for telling the story of this cataclysmic event because, as Frank Kermode writes in *The Sense of an Ending,* "apocalyptic thought belongs to a rectilinear rather than clyclical views of the world." History, he goes on to say, "is purely intellectual discourse which abolishes Mythic time."[23] The White tendency to eradicate Aboriginal culture by eliding it from White writing can be read as a logical outcome of the deeply ingrained habit of perceiving history as apocalyptic narrative. The impulse towards closure that is built into European historical narrative conveniently supports the colonializing impulse to break traditional cyclical continuities. "The old ways," thinks Wooreddy, "were losing their shape and becoming as the cube . . . No one had any trust in the future . . . Thus it was, and it was the times . . . He knew that it was because the world was ending."[24]

The historical novel is a popular form of literary art corresponding to the "high" form of academic history. Just as there is no word for time in Aboriginal languages, so there is no word for art. As Colin Johnson and his co-authors explain in a book called *Before the Invasion,* "Art was such a part of life that there was no need for a specific name. It was sometimes given the same name as dreaming."[25]

There is so little common ground then, between Aboriginal and White ways of describing the story of their contact that any literary popularization cannot be expected to authentically reconstruct an Aboriginal telling of the story. But it can construct a new cross-cultural story. Given European settlement and its consequences there can be no return to an oral and purely Aboriginal past but the way in which the past is seen can be changed. And so what Colin Johnson can do, with Paddy Roe, Kath Walker, Jack Davis and other Aboriginal writers, is to exploit the apparatus of European literary communication, not in the hope of recovering or preserving a vanishing culture, but with purposes of mediating between the cultures and gradually constructing new histories. Oral culture has no political power outside its own context. Writing has been the agent of destruction of Aboriginal culture but it is now the only possible agent of renovation. Oppositional histories, like Colin Johnson's, can loosen the histories that are in place, and so demonstrate that the dominant White cultural texts are as provisional and subject to erasure as any other historical fictions.

1. Presented at the Literature and Popular Culture Conference, Murdoch University, Nov. 1984; part of Chapter 8 of *White Dreaming: The Negative Text in Australian Literature* by Kateryna Arthur and Horst Ruthrof (in preparation).
2. Colin Johnson, *Doctor Wooreddy's Prescription for Enduring the Ending of the World* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1983), p.17.
3. C. Staniland Wake, 'The Mental Characteristics of Primitive Man, as Exemplified by the Australian Aborigines,' *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland,* v.I. (1872), 74.

4. *Ibid.*, p.76.
5. Richard Simon, *In the Australian Bush* (London: Macmillan, 1899), p.126.
6. F.T. Macartney, 'Literature and the Abogirines,' in *Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism,* ed. by Clement Semmler (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.55-66.
7. Quoted in W.E.H. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973),p.299.
8. See Alan Frost, 'New South Wales as *Terra Nullius*: The British Denial of Aboriginal Landrights,' *Historical Studies,* v.19, 77 (October 1981), 513-523.
9. See Brian Elliott (ed.), *The Jindyworobaks* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979)p.223.
10. Quoted by Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming,* p.151.
11. Katherine Langloh Parker, *Australian Legendary Tales,* ed. by H. Drake-Brockmann (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1953); first established 1896.
12. See Ronald and Catherine Berndt, *The First Australians* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1967), p.85.
13. Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Two Aboriginal Oral Texts from Arnhem Land, North Australia, and their Cultural Context,' in *Words and Words,* ed. by Stephen Knight and S.N. Mukherjee (Sydney: Sydney Association for Studies in Society and Culture, 1984), especially pp.26f.
14. Berndt and Berndt, *The First Australians,* p.xiv.
15. Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (New York: Methuen, 1982), pp. 41, 47, 49.
16. Roland Barthes, 'The Discourse of History,' in *Comparative Criticism: A Yearbook,* ed. by E.S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.3.
17. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World,* transl. by Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1968).
18. Gunther Kress and Robert Hodge, *Language as Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.128.
19. Stephen Muecke, 'Aboriginal Oral Narratives in Ideological Contexts,' in *Not the Whole Story,* ed. by Sneja Gunew and Ian Reid (Sydney: Local Consumption, 1984), p.21.
20. Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), p.263.
21. Stephen Muecke, 'Discourse, History, Fiction: Language and Aboriginal History,' *Australian Journal of Cultural Studies,* v.1, 1 (1983), 71-79.
22. Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming,* p.23.
23. Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.5.
24. Johnson, *Doctor Wooreddy,* p.9.
25. Colin Bourke, Colin Johnson, and Isobel White, *Before the Invasion: Aboriginal Life to 1788* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), p.99.

JOHN BARTON

In The Year Of

This is not the woman you met
on the great jade steps
of the Imperial Palace Museum.
That woman you talked of
only once, then she was lost,
left among the loot of China:
a figure stopping a moment
on a staircase, a lacquered gate,
your smile and too few words.

Who is this? This woman
shy beside you at my door?
Yet another from the same
tumid summer in Taiwan?
One more of those who fell
so briefly down beside you,
so gently into the scented
sheets of several afternoons?

This one does not seem yet
a lover. She does not yet
take your hand and count
each finger as if distracted.
Arranged on the couch arm so
modestly beside you she stares
at the odd trees coming
into leaf against my window.
Half aloud she wonders
if such trees bear fruit.

She must be the one
I have long expected.
The one you obliquely mentioned.
The one who stepped from
behind a screen of air
at a bus stop and gave you
the right directions.
In a picture I once saw
of you, you are sitting
with one arm around her
on a terrace spread
above the snaking heat
of streets in old Taipei . . .
your glance toward the lens
a rising thread of incense.

Right now your untangling gaze
is wound up in the movements

of her hands. Resting two fingers
a moment below one breast,
she studies the clouds
fret across the deepened sky.
She notices the Ming designs
billowing through the curtains.
Quietly she begins explaining
the good luck of the peach,
the peasant meaning
of its slight heart shape.

JOHN BARTON

At The Delta's Edge

Your mind is a clever house
precariously pitched
on stilts at the delta's edge.
With the other mammoths
of your imagination
I am pinned by its bamboo foundations.
My muscles tense under the weight
of sediment filtering
to the river bottom.

I feel the house arrange your heart's
furnishings with a Chinese restraint.
There a scroll on a certain summer wall.
There an ebony seat looking
through a certain evening window at the geese.
Harmony, you always said,
requires devotion.
You kept a slender vase
with a single orchid on your bedside table.
Once we broke from sleep to find it
shattered on the floor.
Certain I had knocked it with my hand
you could not speak.
All week you repaired without a word
its order: what you thought
a flawless vision of man and woman
you restored to antique perfection
except for a single piece.
How often in the starlight
draining from your eyelids
did I puzzle over that proud man
missing half his face?
Now I wonder if you feel,
snaking down his torso, each crack
adding refinement to the glaze.

Someday I want to rise through
the river surface,
the accretions of time I am wearing now
one by one washed away.
You would find me waiting
in the shallows outside your door,
elemental as a member of a tribe
discovered by chance
outside the jungle's untouched heart,
my urgency modern
as all eternal things.

I would tell you then
the moon in all its phases
beats behind my ribs.
It tells me I would break
your body's slender vase
and fill you
again and again.

Another man's step radiates
through your lacquered floor
tonight.

I can feel his heat.
I can feel the slow
web of his fingers lightly
tangle in the lines
opening across your face and hands,
each line a thread of stars.
I touch you with his hands.
Looking at the palms
I wonder at all that can fall
through the constellations
two lovers weave,
love a comet
chance and slippery as a seed.

JOHN BARTON

The Moabitess

Such a strange harvest this house . . .
it sits inside her, opening.
A door. A window.
Outside maple leaves
rest
the heavy sun on their flushed tips.
She drifts
into a chair, settles.
Her face is damp
from work.
Flesh-
toned lace empties
and swells.
Empties. Gently swells.
A finger marks a line across the sill.
I have come this far.
Pollen on her nail.
My dahlias are just in bloom.
All day she baked her children
bread.
All day
she counted loaves,
throaty notes of geese fading,
shells gathered in her linen drawer.
All day
she waited. Wrote letters.
I have baked the children bread.
My dahlias bloomed.
In the evening light the table was corn
yellow.
For ten years she kneaded her husband
sourdough.
In ten years two
children in her
belly rose
to his touch.
Blessed be his salt.
Now against the window her woman's
face

is dark yet soft.

Soft against the sun's
flush through laden
branches of the larger forest.

STEPHEN HALL

Message Home

Her sunvisor lids search under themselves
for pity, that is really felt,
not a conversation piece
lugged back from trips abroad,
and find, instead, undone chores,
forgotten favours, little things
that love, she says, would not forget.
She is crouching over the lawn,
behind her pock mark piles of culled weeds
and careful not to seem too concerned
looks for more invaders while she speaks
"this oxalis — it spreads from next door"
the annoying always snuck in from somewhere else,
a conspiracy of neighbours
or the world unloading its junk mail into the letterbox.
While my thinking's moving in the grass
she roots out words with a metal spike.

AUDREY LONGBOTTOM

Rewards

Darkness envelops the house of the dead man.
A public figure, cossetting cares this side
of heaven, he trained his family to keep
their noses clean, the Joneses in place.

His soul, transported by creed and good works,
has joined the procession of shades; his body
waxed with rewards of industry, rests
at the cemetery, respectable in cedar.

Night air brushes the snug of earth,
riffles through the quilt of flowers
dispersing petals, whispered conventions.

At the great man's house his sleeping widow
floats through a dream of open doors,
moves to the centre of the double bed.

RORY STEELE

Giddy Down

Smoke, noise, no, I don't remember these
But clearly see the heads or tails
In steelwheel minted pennies on the track
Below our house: we'd wait for trains
Chance madly down the bank and squealing back.

We moved that year to somewhere middler class
And with shifts in time improved on that address
In upward social spiralling. From here
I see my kids have never walked on rails
But out of sight they must have plunged in fear.

It's giddy-making looking down from planes
Or highrise buildings at the mess
Of have-not mediocrity, delayed
By accident of time in shock which sees
Recurring dreams of Railway Parade.

RORY STEELE

Hard Words and Lullabies

Cribs, cots cradles rock like seas
Like hammocks crescented in C's
Sinecures and fantasies
How here on in it starts to ease
At halfway-marking-time
Paces downhill stretch or shrink
To come to terms

But come oh darling come to bed
No compromise now in this word
Bad nightmares of the long long wed
Arguments too often heard
Bones on boards, stone steps ahead
Time concertinas, big jobs bid
On their own terms

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

Convict Past

(West Coast, Tasmania)

The fettlers working on the line,
The pot-hole fillers and their like
Lived on the fringes of the towns.
They called the sleepers and the dogs,

The picks and shovels "fuck'n things",
Their sherry bottles sweeter names
And jammed them into gummy mouths.
There were no women in their lives

And they never went for mail.
The humpies and the water tanks,
Wall-papered courtesy of Tatts,
Had sacking hanging for a door.

They must have come round here to kill
Last dreams of any last train out.
Their backs were freckled, striped with pink,
Like wounds the sun had faintly scabbed.

LAURIS EDMOND

Fontana Rosa

A country railway station, much like
any other — Tutira, Otaki, Taneutua —
but the French grew larkspurs here

and yellow trumpets; beside it, awkward
extravagant, looms the Fontana Rosa.
it's a failed Norman castle

the tower adorned with pink flowers
looped tendrils, oranges lemons — a weird
mixture, the Fontana Rosa. Perhaps it's a joke.

But no, the Spaniard Ibanez wrote his tales
here, dreamed its excesses, dedicated it
to romanciers and the beauties of literature

Balzac, Dickens, Cervantes — their faces
are over the gate in ceramics.
Didn't he trust his own voice then

that he worried about turrets, enamel petals?
(he was certainly no designer) — they are
arguing now, it's become a local problem

the Spanish Government won't answer letters . . .
Don't listen amigo, from whatever baroque heaven
you are tinkering with now;

let it go in its time, the Fontana Rosa —
plantains are unpicking your pillars and only
spiders inhabit the halls of fame, but
I think, Ibanez, that the word endures.

LAURIS EDMOND

Playing House

I come in to the hot house
smelling of absence and dust
dead bumblebees on the sill
dry stalks, strange torpors
laying their heads on the air
sunlight ticking stilly
on yellow triangles of floor —

then the door from downstairs flies open
and she is here, my small friend
serious collaborator
in the comical business of living
— I mean, we know precisely
when money and things
are nothing but air in the hand
shop counters and shelves a mirage

but we know too that some things are real —
the present she's kept for me
tiny soap heart in a tin
a halcyon heart
perfect in her palm, in mine —
we gaze down, consider in silence
this grain of the dust of the stars
'You mustn't put that in the shop' she says
counting transparent money

Well of course not. This is
an exact and judicious magic
— and I have come home.

LAURIS EDMOND

The National Poetry Series: Michael Ryan

I want to go to America, I want to listen
again to the drawly voices
in the glitter and sprawl of 7th Avenue
43rd, Broadway, the crumbly park
where I gobbled a fat tuna fish sandwich
for lunch, just down from Madison Ave

I slept in a tawdry hotel
with gold fleur-de-lis on scarlet paper
all over the foyer and a cross Greek
guarding the phone
and I wrote down all the names of airlines
in the subway coming in from J.F.K.
Aviaco Alitalia Lufthansa Balair
Pilgrim Air France Guyana Finnair . . .

But here is this poet of thirty years
saying 'No one can tell you
how to be alone' — his youngster
is swinging on the fence, it's his birthday
there's a nice guy across the street
he isn't alone, at all

not as I am (women should stay by their men
grow stout with listening)
this young bearded fellow
has continents of living ahead of him
yet knows the bleak journey.

I don't know the way, I shall trip
and fall down in America
and it's the one place
where they're crass enough to leave me
wherever I land
disgrace, they will know,
being what we were born to.

LAURIS EDMOND

Tristesse d'animal

Here, yes, I am here —
don't you see my hand at the window, waving?

It's all still the same,
tremulous water lifting its face
to the wind, a clock calling over the city

light late on the hills —
and I'm alone, as before.

Where are you, companions
who promised to come
to the very door of the grave

— where did you turn back?
Are you dancing somewhere nearby

or is that only the neighbours?
I might call you
but what language is there for it

— the blood-smear we were born in
the gasp of that strong bitter oxygen
the first taste, the last we shall have.

JEAN KENT

Pauses

Pauses on pages look like snakes
— cobra commas —
is that why stumbling on them signals fear?
I want to sidle past not seeing before
silence rears to strike.

Happier sought than stumbled on
— so at least
calendars and travel bureaux would have us think.
And yet holidays can be such hollow hideouts.

Is it possible true pauses prefer
to arrive in disguise —
all you see at first is a car's flat tyre
an unemployment claim form a doctor's bill

Even this pregnant woman at the gym
acts unprepared
suddenly stops en route to an exercise
I think I'll lie down
for a while she says with some surprise
while her body meanders off
as naturally as a cow in clover
& she
subsides in her paddock of dumbbells

She subsides
in a pocket of time like that space
just after the sound of a bird's wing
has slit air
right in front of my nose

Afterwards, it's hard to believe
it ever happened
the light knits back seamless unbruised
stillness plugs my feet
I am quite firmly earthed

Peripatetic, these pauses, impossible to cage
or bring like a cat
with fur and purr safely to sit by the fire
only rarely do they come when called & then

it may be the desire for their return
more than their nature
which makes them seem as in music
to invite me to sit
no greater than a grain of sand

within their big bell-caves
while around me silence
like a clear spring sky sings
& sings & sings

JEAN KENT

Cheryl's a bit handicapped

. . . she says she don't read too good
don't spell too hot neither
still she goes cap in hand to no one
lives all right
on her pension in her caravan
and cries now that Grandpop's
laid out like a slice of night
in his hospital cot.

By the lake with Grandpop
she sat on her hands on the scale —
silver jetty and watched him
hook the bait.
At sunset, fish would popgun
out of the waves.
The first time she almost
left her skin. Later, she waited
and waited for the light to live again.

Cheryl's at Tech, learning to sew.
Tissue patterns fall on fabric
like moonlight on her bad dreams.
Why doesn't someone
seam the sun and cloak it over her?
Why isn't she a fish?

Stroked — half-dumb, half-blind —
Grandpop's under the lake and bubbling.
Cheryl sits in the ripples
with a basket of cottons
and every line she feeds
is barbed. The sun is setting
behind her mouth. Night
in the white ward. Cheryl waits
and waits, reeling in the light.

NOEL MACAINSH

Not a Love Story — Henry Handel Richardson's *Maurice Guest*

Henry Handel Richardson's novel *Maurice Guest* is said to be a study of "the tragic power of passionate love, in the great tradition of the European naturalist novel with *Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Madame Bovary, Anna Karenina*".[1] Nevertheless, Richardson's novel shows a marked deviation in this tradition: its title-figure is male, and its author, behind the pseudonym, is a woman. Furthermore, these novels of Hardy, Flaubert and Tolstoy deal with the love of women for men of conventional range in years and masculine maturity, whereas *Maurice Guest* deals with the infatuation of an eighteen-year old student, still financially dependent on his parents, for a woman twenty-eight years of age. These circumstances favour what Professor Wilkes has called "an idealistic longing which can turn to violence and fetishism".[2] Indeed, they favour a character, Maurice Guest, who not so much *turns* to these things but is abruptly seized by them, who is in a state of preparedness for the fetishistic triggering of an obsession until death. If this is love, then it is also a terrible scourge. The quote from Petrarch, at the start of the novel, is appropriately questioning:

S'amor non,e, che dunque e qual ch'io sento?
Ma s'egli e amor, per Dio, che cosa e quale.
(If this is not love, what then is it that I feel?
But if it is love, by God, what kind of thing is that?)

The kind of thing it is is shown by the subsequent narrative of an obsession, disclosing at its heart a fetish which initiates the fatal attraction and is still vivid to Maurice in his dying moments.

It is a peculiarity of *Maurice Guest* that no mature male figure enters into its various love affairs. The oldest male participants in its *Liebesreigen* is Heinz Krafft, a twenty-seven year old homosexual, whose name may well allude to Krafft-Ebing, the famous author of *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886).[3] Krafft could hardly be argued for as representing maturity, even if of a deviant kind, for the author states plainly and often enough that Krafft looks like a "slim, boyish lad",[4] that he is girlish, childish, erratic, exploitative, self-indulgent and unreliable. Krafft himself is infatuated with the twenty-seven year old Schilsky, the object of Louise Dufrayer's passionate attachment. Schilsky, often presented as "boyish", is the successful lover *par excellence;* at least, it appears that every woman has "a weakness for Schilsky", even if his genius as a violinist and composer precludes any deep attachment to them. In his rough handling of women, Schilsky keeps to the spirit of Krafft's advice to Maurice: "Believe me, women are all alike, they are made to be trodden on".[5] Krafft advises Maurice to take the whip to women. One of Schilsky's symphonic poems is based on Nietzsche's *Zarathustra,* the source of this whipping advice. Schilsky is a talented cad who is "little popular with his own sex".[6] He is vain, curls his hair with the tongs, and winces at the thought of Louise being eight years older than he is; this is "one of his sorest points".[7]

A difference of eight or so years between Louise and her lovers may seem of little

consequence: but at the student age of life it can involve a great difference in maturity. Louise is perceived by Krafft and Schilsky if not as mature then certainly as faded. She is seen to be acting like a wet-nurse, to dominate and mother Schilsky. Krafft taunts Schilsky with "being under the thumb".[8] He says that if Schilsky is ever fool enough to marry, "it will be with something fresher and less faded, something with the bloom still on it".[9] Schilsky and his clique commonly refer to Louise as "Lulu", which suggests Wedekind's then famous figure of this name, a "femme fatale" in his play *Der Erdgeist* (1895), staged at Leipzig in 1898. When Schilsky gives "gratuitous details" of a torrid afternoon with Louise, one of his company sings *The Last Rose of Summer* in allusion to her. Maurice's friend, the matter-of-fact Madeleine Wade, sees that "there was nothing young or fresh" about Louise, that she is neither beautiful or pretty.[10] Maurice, on first meeting Louise, sees that there is no "more than a touch of the sweet girlish freshness that gladdens like a morning in May".[11] And when he begs Louise to marry him she tells him: "Maurice . . . I'm older than you, and I know better than you, what all this means . . . And you are still so young and so . . . so untried. There's still time to turn back, and be wise".[12] On the last page of the novel, an American bystander comments on Louise: "Well, not my taste . . . fine eyes, if you like — but give me something fresher". This final scene involves Louise with "a shabbily dressed young man", who "colours darkly over face and neck" when his hands happen to touch those of Louise, suggesting a replay, in principle, of the pattern already enacted with Maurice: the fatal infatuation of a young man with an older woman.

Dorothy Green[13] has suggested that Richardson modelled Louise, "the pale girl with Italian eyes", on the real-life figure of Eleonora Duse, the internationally famous Italian actress. Certainly, the descriptions of Louise fit with photographs of Duse. Richardson's seemingly objective version of Louise, as described by her Madeleine Wade, fits Duse as well: "dark-skinned, black of eyes and hair, with flashing teeth, and a wonderfully mobile mouth", with a "broad, slender body".[14] In particular, Dorothy Green sees Richardson as much influenced by Gabriele D'Annunzio's version of Duse in his notorious novel, *Il Fuoco* (1900).[15] D'Annunzio (1863-1938) created a great scandal with this thinly veiled literary version of his love-affair with Duse.[16] In real life, D'Annunzio was some years younger than Eleonora Duse, which is reflected in his fictional characters, Stelio Effrena and La Foscarina, the first being a young, imperious, irrestible, artistic superman, a golden twin of the author himself, and the latter an experienced, sensual and fading beauty. In Nietzschean overtones, Stelio shows some affinity with Richardson's Schilsky but is a much more developed and central character. Also, La Foscarina is a more profound character than Louise, though her devotion to her young Stelio is analogous to that of Louise to Schilsky. Dorothy Green no doubt points out a significant influence here; but it must also be said that the high-flown style of *Il Fuoco* makes it quite different to *Maurice Guest*. In style, Richardon's *Maurice Guest* is far closer to Jens Peter Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne*,[17] particularly in her Chapter II, Part I, which is almost a pastiche of Jacobsen. Also, the pattern, of young idealistic man and older woman, occurs in Jacobsen's work too. Richardson presents *Niels Lyhne* as a "death-book",[18] which is in keeping with the death-theme in *Maurice Guest*.

Though Louise is fading, she is still highly desirable to certain people. Madeleine Wade states: "those whose type she embodied went crazy about her".[19] The homosexual Krafft is one of those people, and of course Maurice Guest is another. Madeleine suggests that Maurice and Heinz Krafft were not the only ones, "who were bowled over like ninepins". Nevertheless, Heinz Krafft and Maurice Guest are the only ones specifically named as having been "infatuated" with Louise. Her other named admirers are more of the type of insolent cad like Schilsky or sophisticated pleasers like her dancing-partners, Herries, "the ruddy little student of medicine".[20] These young men are at ease with Louise, not rendered gauche and displeasing by excessive

need of her; they see her as fair prey for their own pleasures. In seeking an answer to the "secret" of Louise's charm, Madeleine finds it not in Louise's appearance but in her movement, in "each gesture of the slim hands, in each turn of the head, in every movement of the broad, slender body".[21] Louise's walk is "different from the motion of other women's". Her admirers are drawn, not by beauty in repose, but by an atypical quality of motion. Not that she is active, energetic; rather, she is thought by Madeleine to be "indolent to the last degree".[22]

But Maurice himself seems not to notice any particular quality of Louise's movements. Instead, it is Louise's eyes that are decisive for him; they have the compelling power of a fetish. Shortly before his suicide, Maurice contemplates Louise asleep. Her face makes him recall the first time he saw her, when "some occult force had gone out from the face, and struck home in him".[23] He now finds her face "neither beautiful nor good"; and he knows that by "all the rights of their different natures, they had not belonged together".[24] But he is held to her as fiercely as ever, by a bond that has "outlasted tenderness, faithfulness, respect", that lies deeper than conventional ideas of virtue. He is morbidly possessed. Nor is it by a "mere blind uprush of sensual desire". In his despairing speculations while Louise sleeps, Maurice experiences a train of thought that might well have come from a psychoanalyst's text on fetishism: "No doubt, for each individual, there existed in one other mortal, some physical detail which he or she could find only in this particular person. It might be the veriest trifle. Some found it, it seemed, in the colour of an eye; some in the modulations of a voice, the curve of a lip, the shape of a hand, the lines of a body in motion. Whatever it chanced to be, it was, in most cases, an insignificant characteristic, which, for others, simply did not exist, but which, to the one affected by it, made instant appeal, and just to that corner of the soul which had suffered aimlessly for the want of it — — a suffering which nothing but this intonation, this particular smile, could allay".[25] This "physical detail" exerts a fatal, determining influence on Maurice. The early Freudian analyist, Wilhelm Stekel, has said that "The problem of love at first sight becomes more complicated on account of the fact that most people are unaware of their fetishism".[26] This appears to have been the case with Maurice initially, but in the course of time he has come to learn "what it was, about her face, that made a like appeal to him. It was her eyes. Not their size, or their dark brilliancy, but the manner of their setting: the spacious lid that fell from the high, wavy eyebrow, first sloping deeply inwards, then curving out again, over the eyeball; this, and the clean sweep of the broad, white lid, which, when lowered, gave the face an infantine look — — a look of marble. He knew it was this; for on the strength of a mere hinted resemblance, he had been unable to take his eyes off the face of another woman; the likeness in this detail had met his gaze with a kind of shock".[27] This physical detail, the eye, or rather the shape of its lid, is realized by Maurice as the quintessential focus of his bondage. But this knowledge is powerless to free him from it. Awareness of this "detail" only serves to show how meaningless life is: "But what a meaningless thing was life, when the way a lid drooped, or an eyebrow grew on a forehead, could make such havoc of your nerves!"[28] He knows that in the brain or soul that lies behind, "no spiritual trait answered to the physical." It is a pure fetish; it is "for others to puzzle over, not for him". A strong man could tear himself away, but Maurice is neither strong nor sufficiently claimed by a saving vocation. He is weak and yields himself abjectly.

Repeatedly, it is the image of Louise's eyes that haunts Maurice. Alone with floral imagery, chiefly roses, her eyes also associate with the animalic: Maurice notes on first seeing Louise that her eyes are "like those of a wild beast crouched in a cavern";[29] in her resentment of Maurice, she is like an "animal at bay";[30] in yielding to him, she reminds him of an "untamed animal";[31] in her longing for Schilsky, she can look at Maurice "with the eyes of a trapped animal".[32] Or, she can gaze at him with "the eyes of a faithful animal".[33]

It would not be out of place if we were to find that Maurice's fetish, a particular shape of eye, had an infantile, even maternal precursor. But if we are to keep to Freudian theory, then it must be assumed also that any corresponding primal experience lies outside of Maurice's conscious recall, for the novel tells us nothing by way of a clear precursor to this image. It does tell us, however, that, as a child, Maurice "picked out his notes, and taught himself little pieces, on the old-fashioned, silk-faced piano, which had belonged to his mother as a girl, and at which, in the early days of her marriage, she had sung in a high, shrill voice, the sentimental songs of her youth".[34] Maurice too becomes a pianist. He has just finished playing the piano when he sees Louise for the first time. When she too plays on the same piano, he looks at her and is caught "with the violent abruptness of a streak of lightning".[35] He is obliged to leave, but, in the corridor outside, he lingers listening to her playing. Then his friend, Dove, drags him off to a concert. Here, just as "the first shrill, sweet notes" of Schilsky's violin had hardly cut the silence, Louise enters up to Maurice's very side. He is lost in her presence, dizzy with her scent, wishing to draw his palm down her "whitest skin", while his excitement at the thought of this is "heightened by the sensuous melancholy of the violin, which, just beyond the pale of his consciousness, throbbed and languished with him under the masterful bow".[36] Here, there are some echoes of his earlier experience at home, and the idea that Louise's eyes may be a reminder of early, long-forgotten experience is perhaps strengthened by the recurrent suggestion that these eyes are "home" for Maurice. More explicitly, however, Richardson simply tells the reader that in Maurice "the smouldering unrest of two generations burst into flames",[37] and that his talent is more a means to a vague but desperately longed for "wider life".

Krafft-Ebing, the psychiatrist whose name may have prompted that of Richardson's Heinz Krafft, regards the whole of sexual selection as a species of fetishism; in his view, the fetish triggers projection of an ideal by a person who is in a state of readiness for love. The fetish may be physical or spiritual. For Maurice, it is clearly physical. In the case of Louise's infatuation with Schilsky, it appears to be spiritual, that is the imperious genius of the violinist has effortlessly conquered her and bound her in compulsive attachment to him. As Stekel remarks: "it happens that violin players and piano virtuosos are too egotistical to be wholly satisfactory in love." Stekel comments of these artists: "the ever-prevailing and in their case strongly accentuated bisexuality impedes them fully to develop their erotic capacities . . . The women are often frigid or prefer Lesbian gratifications."[38] Like Stekel, Richardson seems to have known her Freud early and well, for her fictional characters suggest a corresponding analytical stance in her creation of them. In her later years, she remarked to a correspondent, "I read Freud and his works so early in life — — before his *name* was even known in England — — that his theories have become commonplace to me".[39]

In particular, the youthfulness of Richardson's fictional milieu favours the fetishistic triggering of sexual attraction and fixation without tempering by adult experience. Hence, the central relationship of the novel, that of Maurice to Louise, is unreal, in the sense that the fetish ensures that Maurice is captivated by his own idealistic projection and is at the same time overwhelmingly handicapped in acknowledging Louise's separate reality. Nor is this simply a matter of his passive, unwitting neglect of her reality in favour of his own misreading of Louise, a matter that might be happily resolved by a little enlightenment as to her true nature. For the essence of an infatuation triggered in "violent abruptness" by a fetish, is that the soul of its victim is tenaciously seized by its own dreams, now apparently about to be realised in the figure before it, and will stand no competition from a reality that would banish these dreams to the hopeless obscurity in which they have hitherto dwelt. In the words of the novel: "What such a moment holds within it, is . . . the corner of earth, happened on by chance, which comes most near the Wineland of our dreams". It is a moment in which

"the soul responds forthwith, catching in blind haste at the dimly missed ideal".[40] This "catching" at dreams and ideals involves two antithetical phases: the self-subjection of Maurice to the now unrealistically overvalued object, to the "new god" in his life, and the blind urge to brutually dominate Louise, expunge all elements of her reality that conflict with his dreams. In Freudian terms, Maurice's behaviour corresponds to "wish-fulfillment falsification" of reality. The first phase, of self-subjection, is present throughout his time with Louise; but he wishes to submit himself not to an arbitrary Divinity but to one that exactly fits his needs, hence the emergence of punitive, corrective action as her reality intrudes itself upon him. On first looking into Louise's eye, Maurice yearns to lay an offering at her feet. Then, by chance, he sees Louise later with Schilsky in the *Nonne,* the Leipzig woods, and, unable to sleep that night, he goes back to the spot: "Guiltily, with a stealthy look round him, though wood and night were black as ink, he knelt down and kissed the gravel where he thought she had stood".[41] Later, he throws himself in her way, "for the mere pleasure of standing aside with the emphatic deference of a slave".[42] He heaps on her "all the spiritual perfections that answered to her appearance". Reality may seem to intervene in Maurice's realisation that Louise is having an affair with Schilsky; but this "abrupt descent from the pedestal"[43] simply obliges Maurice "to carve a new attribute to his idol"; Louise is now of the "best and fairest women" who love men unworthy of them; it is both her strength and a divine frailty that such a pure woman should be so mistaken in a bounder like Schilsky. Maurice declares that if he were given the chance, he would show Louise what real love is, "what a holy mystic thing" it is; he wishes that he "might serve her, be her slave, lay his hands under her feet . . ."[44] His subjection gains a childish quality, of a son who wants to be the only one in his mother's eyes. It seems a natural inclination of his, to cast the woman in a stronger role. He has done it automatically in his friendship with Madeleine Wade, and is quite put out when Madeleine tells him she is tired of this role and is thinking of marrying an older man: "I am over twenty-seven, as you know. I need no boy of eighteen for a husband".[45] Madeleine calls the eighteen-year old Maurice "a ridiculous boy",[46] while Louise calls him, "Poor boy . . . poor Maurice". Louise employs a little boy to take notes to Maurice; he goes to her on the heels of the child, to be called "poor, foolish Maurice", to be told he is young and will "get over it". He is repeatedly addressed by Louise as "my poor boy". When she unexpectedly tells him, "I wish I had known you as a boy, Maurice — — oh, but as quite a young boy",[47] he is emboldened "to do what he had often done in fancy: he slid to his knees before her, and laid his head on her lap". She smooths his hair. Later, when she has apparently accepted him, he walks with her in the streets of Rochlitz "with the solemnly festive feeling of a child on Sunday".[48] When she spreads a piece of bread with honey and gives it to a child, he is "absurdly jealous".[49] His experience when he possesses her is particularly informative. At first there is his riotous joy. But, before long, he is uneasy: "he has imagined several things as likely to happen; had imagined her the cooler and wiser of the two, checking him and chiding him for over-devotion . . . What he had not imagined was the wordless, unthinking fashion in which she gave herself into his hands".[50] Her face changes: the "somewhat defiant, bitter lines he had so loved in it" are smoothed out. She grows soft and yielding; which makes things difficult for him. Now, the whole responsibility is his. He tries to be glad for *her* complete subjection to *him*: "Yet, as time passed, he began to suffer under it, to feel her absence of will as a disquieting factor . . ."[51] This ironical reversal of what Maurice had expected finds its peak when Louise begs him to repeat the words, "You poor little soul", to her. She tells him: "Oh, if you knew how good it sounds! — — if I could make you understand! You're the only person who has ever said a thing like that to me . . ."[52] She begs him to promise never to leave her. Her lassitude prompts at first a desire in him to shake her, and then "strange desires awoke in him; he did not know himself of what he was capable".[53] It is not all that far now to thoughts of killing and

death. This theme has already been sounded by Krafft in his earlier questioning of Maurice,[54] in the praise of Jens Peter Jacobsen as a poet of death, and in allusions to Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde.* Also, Part II, which describes the yielding of Louise to Maurice, bears the epigraph: "O viva morte, e dilettoso male!," from Petrarch, which aptly characterises this Part as "living death, and delicious suffering". The reversal of Maurice's hope of happy self-subjection to Louise is expressed in the last and thirteenth chapter of this Part and leads to the more ominous epigraph of Part III: ". . . dove il Sol tace", from Dante, which could be rendered, "where the sun grows silent", for it is in the last and thirteenth chapter of this Part that Maurice commits suicide.

Maurice's death is foreshadowed by various events, but most immediately by his "temporary and charitable death" gained by drinking brandy. In his alcoholic haze, Maurice yields to a "woman's arms" and wakes to find he has spent the night with a prostitute called Luise. Again, his youth and immaturity are emphasized by the description of this Luise as "no longer young" and by her habit of calling him, five times in a brief space, *"Kleiner",* "little one".[55] On leaving her, he says *"Adieu Luise!"* He goes to the same spot in the woods where he has gone with Louise before, and when the image of Louise's face rises before him, now disfigured by hatred of him, he shoots himself. It is early spring; the still bare branches of a tree wave straight overhead; they are the last thing Maurice sees.

In the epilogue, it is also spring, a fresh day, gusty and sunny by turns, a couple of years after Maurice's death. Louise is now married to Schilsky, has "no attention for anyone but her husband". Schilsky, the virtuoso violinist, has come to be noted more as a composer. Very early in the novel, Schilsky has been mentioned as "at work upon a symphonic poem, having for its base a new and extraordinary book, half poetry, half philosophy, a book which he, Dove, could confidently assert, would affect a revolution in human thought".[56] This work is subsequently completed and presented. It is simply called *Zarathustra,* after Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra.* The section headings of the work are announced: *Werdegang, Seiltanzer, Notschrei, Schwermut, Taranteln;* and the words of *Das Trunkene Lied* are sung by Krafft. However, the words "did not matter in the least; all present had come only to hear the music".[57] Nevertheless, Richardson quotes *Das Trunkene Lied* (the drunken song) for her reader: "Doch alle Lust will Ewigkeit,/Will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit"[58] (But all pleasure wants eternity, wants deep, deep eternity). These words from Nietzsche have often been interpreted in a Freudian, psychoanalytical way, as meaning that libidinal pleasures, from however far back in personal development, perpetually seek repetition, despite the forces opposed to them. Here, in the novel, the words simply suggest a motif akin to Maurice's burning commitment to Louise "for ever and ever".[59] The cyclical character of Nietzsche's whole conception, that is *die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleichen* (the eternal return of the same) or, in Freudian terms, *die Wiederkehr des Verdrangten* (the return of the repressed) is matched by the novel's final image of Louise, her involuntary enchantment of a new young man, who might well turn out to be another Maurice.[60]

However, Schilsky's new symphonic poem, as mentioned in the epilogue, is called *Uber die letzten Dinge.* This title, "on ultimate things", and the circumstance that Schilsky is now "talking volubly to a Jewish-looking stranger", suggests that Richardson may well have had in mind Otto Weininger, a young Jew, who, at the age of twenty-three years committed suicide in Beethoven's death-chamber, in 1903. In 1904, Weininger's book, *Uber die letzten Dinge,*[61] appeared, adding to the scandal and sensation that already surrounded his name. For in 1903, Weininger's astoundingly successful book, *Geschlecht und Character* (sex and character) had drawn down on him exactly "that mixture of extravagant laudation and abusive derision, which constitutes fame",[62] as is applied by Richardson in her description of Schilsky and his symphonic poem, *Uber die letzten Dinge.* Weininger was perceived as a scandalous

genius because of his analysis of the sexes; his main thought being that man's erotic relationship to woman is destructive of her, in the deepest sense: "For her lover, the woman is his salvation; she has no independent life, other than the function her lover assigns to her. She is *de*-souled, so as to be ensouled; murdered, so as to be revivified. Here lies the reason, sought by so many since Novalis, for why sex is associated with sadism. Just as in coitus there is psychically an element analogous to murder, because the generation of life is associated with its destruction, so in every love, even the highest, there is an inherent *de-realisation* of the loved person so as to substitute for her one's own highest reality. Here lies also the root of jealousy, in that the man believes he always has a right to possess himself, even when he has localised this self in a woman . . . For the highest as well as the lowest eroticism, the woman is only the means to an end".[63] These words, from Weininger's *Uber die letzten Dinge,* occur in his discussion of Ibsen, an author mentioned early in *Maurice Guest* as "being read by a bold, advanced few",[64] but they also express the view found in Weininger's work generally, that all erotic relationship of man to woman is psychical murder, a deprivation of her being and rights: love, so often presented as self-sacrificing and altruistic, is in fact the most egotistical of sentiments because, in love, "man wants to find himself via the detour of woman". This view, which corresponds to the attitude of Maurice Guest, is quite different to that of Louise: "Love . . . It takes everything just as it is. You have never really loved me".[65]

That Weininger also criticised woman for conforming to male fantasy, so as to gain her own sexual ends, is hardly a significant point for *Maurice Guest,* even if later writers, such as Germaine Greer, have strongly attacked Weininger on this point. Rather, the title of Schilsky's latest work, *Uber die letzten Dinge,* serves, as do other features of *Maurice Guest,* to point up a cultural ambience, relevant to Richardson's central theme, namely that Guest has mistaken a fetish, a part-object, for the whole, that his attempt to possess himself, as reflected in the eyes of Louise, violates her nature and draws her into a murderous tension between illusion and reality. Since Maurice has declared himself irrevocably for illusion, it would seem that the only way he can resolve his unbearable tension is by killing the separate reality of Louise. Indeed, he has tried to do this, by the kind of psychical murder described by Weininger, and by his physical assault on her. Louise, herself, has even complied with him, has "gazed at him with the eyes of a faithful animal",[66] has shown him "humble adoration", a "will to self-abasement". But none of her efforts match Maurice's need; she is somehow finally unpossessable, and is herself so driven by Guest's violation of her being that she comes to hate him and to wish his death.[67] There are physical attacks, "appalling fits of violence", and death-wishes expressed on both sides. But Maurice shrinks from the thought of losing Louise by murdering her; for the object of his fixation is "localised" in her and he cannot bear the thought of life without her: "he . . . had bartered all he had, and knowingly, for the beauty of this face. And as long as it existed for him, his home was beside it".[68] When the inevitable parting looms, occasioned by his parents refusing to support him further, by Louise's aversion to him, and by Schilsky's return, Maurice turns his violence on himself. Unable to still his "craving for certainty"[69] by further attempts to subjugate Louise, he suicides. The light of this world ceases for Maurice Guest; in the words of Dante, quoted in the epigraph: "the sun grows silent".

Maurice has certainly proved himself to be a sorry "guest", of Leipzig and of life. His name brings to mind yet another of the numerous occasional references in the novel; namely, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Maurice carries a copy of Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (poetry and truth) in his pocket.[70] One of Goethe's poems is quite suggestive of the source of Maurice's name, or at least of the particular nature of his trouble:

Und solang du das nicht hast,
Dieses: Stirb und werde!
Bist du nur ein truber Gast
Auf der dunklen Erde

(Selige Sehnsucht)

(So long as you are not able
to die and become
you are only a sorry guest
on the dark earth)

(Legacy)

The *truber Gast,* sorry or troubled guest, is so because he has been unable to die to one life and grow to another. Maurice has been obsessively called beyond himself, but, just as obsessively, he has resisted change, has sought to mould his beloved in his own image, thus violating her nature, instead of accepting her as she is and growing into a new life with her.

Maurice Guest is the story of a youth who has seen a ghost: "the pale face with the heavy eyes haunted him by day and night".[71] He cannot exorcise it by the touchstone of reality; for this "Medusa-face, opaquely white, with deep, unfathomable eyes",[72] has its origins so deep in the fibres of his being, that, for him, it is a reality prior to all others. The fateful encounter with Louise, herself shaped to the type of his dreams, has catalysed in an instant "the smouldering unrest of two generations" and given its obscure inward ideal an outer name and habitation. More suitable than the eyebrows of the woman in the tram, whom Maurice followed "far beyond his destination",[73] the eyes of Louise have promised him such an enchantment of his life that he cannot live without them. Like Richard Mahony, who is to succeed him in the author's fictional creation, Maurice Guest is presented as constitutionally incapable of adaptation to reality, as perversely dream-bound to the point of self-destruction. In violating reality, he has shaped it into a judgement on himself: the distorted image of the face which he has blindly used as the focus of his self-obsession finally rises before him, "disfigured by hatred of him, horribly vindictive", and gives him "an unlooked-for jerk of courage",[74] not to live but to die. This result makes explicit what has already been implicit in the whole structure of the novel, suggesting a psychological determinism given with the very nature of Maurice Guest. From this point of view, *Maurice Guest* is not a love story, even if there are occasional moments when Maurice seems to verge on seeing Louise in her own separate suffering. His realisation, that "he had seen her only as he had wished to see her",[75] comes too late, for it is the kind of insight allowed only when the die is cast; he has killed all hope of her in life, has bought the gun and now only needs remorse and her hatred of him to dispatch himself to death. While some readers, if not most, have seen *Maurice Guest* as a love story in which a beautiful woman seems to have life-and-death power over a man, the novel itself makes clear the aberrant, psychopathic nature of this power, involving an inexperienced, unbalanced youth and an unhappy, misunderstood woman.

1. Henry Handel Richardson: *Maurice Guest,* with an introduction by Karen McLeod, Virago Modern Classics, London 1981, publisher's blurb. This edition is referred to throughout this article. *Maurice Guest* was originally published by William Heinimann in 1908.
2. G.A. Wilkes: *Australian Literature: A Conspectus,* Angus and Robertson, Sydney 1969, p.60.
3. cf. Baron Richard von Krafft-Ebing: *Psychopathia Sexualis,* 1886. Krafft-Ebing was Professor of Psychiatry and Nervous Diseases in the Royal University of Vienna. He was born at Mannheim in 1840, and died near Graz, in 1902.
4. *Maurice Guest,* ed. McLeod, p.162.
5. p.165

6. p.191
7. p.66
8. p.66
9. p.66
10. p.92
11. p.28
12. p.362
13. Dorothy Green: *Ulysses Bound — Henry Handel Richardson and her Fiction,* A.N.U. Canberra, 1973, p.107.
14. p.92
15. Gabrielle D'Annunzio: *Il Fuoco,* con una cronologia della vita dell'Autore e dei suoi tempi, un'introduzione all'opera e una bibliografia a cura di Giansiro Ferrata, publ Arnoldo Mondadori, Milan, 1982 (first pub. 1900). Dorothy Green suggests that "whole passages of *Il Fuoco* could mutatis mutandis refer to Louise", p.108.
16. cf. Piero Chiaro: *Vita di Gabriele D'Annunzio,* Mondadori, Milan 1981, pp.123ff.
17. Jens Peter Jacobsen: *Niels Lyhne,* first published in Danish in 1880, then in the German Reclam version mentioned in *Maurice Guest,* p.495, which version formed a basis for Richardson's translation under the title *Siren Voices,* 1896. The matter is examined in detail in a doctoral thesis by Hanna Bock, La Trobe University. See also, Noel Macainsh: The Shock of Recognition — Henry Handel Richardson and J.P. Jacobsen's *Niels Lyhne, Southerly* No. 1, 1976.
18. *Maurice Guest,* p.495.
19. p.92
20. p.471
21. p.92
22. p.42
23. p.543
24. p.545
25. p. 546 cf. Sigmund Freud: *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (1904-1905), ed. Alexander Mitscherlich, Fischer, Frankfurt 1961, pp. 13ff. Fetishism is of course dealt with also by Krafft-Ebing, op. cit.
26. Wilhelm Stekel, chapter on "Love at First Sight" in his *Frigidity in Woman,* translated from the German by James S. Van Teslaer, New York, 1926, p.30. Stekel's observations reflect early Freudian views. cf. also his *Fetishism, The Clinical Psycho-Pathology of Partial Love Attractions.*
27. *Maurice Guest,* p.546.
28. p.546
29. p.29
30. p.443
31. p.395
32. p.551
33. p.408
34. p.17
35. p.28
36. pp. 31-2
37. p.14
38. Stekel, p.23
39. Letter to Oliver Stonor, 18 May 1939, quoted Wilkes, p.60.
40. *Maurice Guest* p.28.
41. p.43
42. p.46
43. p.47
44. p.48
45. p.338
46. p.339
47. p.361
48. p.365

49. p.371
50. p.374
51. p.374
52. p.379
53. p.375
54. p.159
55. pp.554ff
56. p.24 An interesting article here is that by Richardson's husband: J.G. Robertson, "The Literary Movement in Germany — Friedrich Nietzsche and his Influence," *Cosmopolis,* Vol. XII, Oct. 1898, pp. 31-48. The high estimate of Nietzsche here reflects that of characters in the novel and apparently that of its author as well. It certainly adds authentic touch to the fictional milieu.
57. p.176
58. p.179
59. p.363
60. p.562
61. Otto Weïninger: *Uber die letzten Dinge,* Mathes & Seitz Verlag, Munich 1980 (first published Vienna 1904).
62. *Maurice Guest,* p.561.
63. Weininger, pp. 45-46 (my translation).
64. *Maurice Guest,* p.45.
65. p.428
66. p.408
67. pp. 546, 552
68. p.546
69. p.469
70. p.370
71. p.46
72. p.36
73. p.46
74. p.560
75. p.559

BOOKS

Sometimes Gladness, Collected Poems 1954-1982, by Bruce Dawe. Longman Cheshire, 1983, 245 pages.

It is a disturbing thing for some commentators on Bruce Dawe that he happens to be so popular, as though ideally a poet's worth is in inverse proportion to the number of his readers. His *Collected Poems* being listed recently as the only volume of verse among the ten best Australian books of the last decade will certainly further dint his reputation with some of his "professional" (i.e. paid to read poetry) critics. Dawe's accessibility in itself has been a black mark against him. After all, doesn't he have the kind of gift that can seem so engaging to people who hardly ever read a line of poetry? Can't just about *any* audience respond to these poems, pick up what his values are, listen to a voice that is so familiar they are quite at home with it, yet a voice that is so finely and subtly turned that they wait for the quirks, the turns, the wit that constantly surprises them? The trouble seems to be that Dawe can do that at the same time as many people who do read poetry are just as engaged. The puzzle for some then, and the delight for others, is that his poems can be as available as a pop lyric or a racing commentary, and also offer the emotional breadth, the resonances of image and rhythm, that we associate often with a different kind of poetry. At his best, Dawe might bring to mind Pablo Neruda, that cross-hatching of public stance with intricate personal response, and an exuberance of imagery drawing both together. This revised edition of his poems allows Dawe to come at one more "naturally", I think, than the earlier edition which arranged the poems according to themes. It does far more justice to the poet to read him year by year, to follow the maturity and assurance as each poem is put down, than to be editorially directed to designated areas.

Dawe has left us in no doubt about the poetry he admires, and the kind he would like to write. It is a poetry that embraces "the public world in which we have a stake as citizens like everyone else and that private world where we confront the mystery of our individual personalities." His list of poetic godfathers declares his own intentions merely by being named: Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, John Crowe Ransome. The form that has become Dawe's particular hallmark is the one that sets his squarely in that line of succession. "The monologue form itself is of course the paradigm of poetry seeking to deal with both the poet's personal feelings and the potential public audience external to those."[1] Dawe has opted for an ancestry that commits him to the shared tides and fluctuations of immediate social life, rather than to the kind of writing where attention is directed to the poet's *difference*, to his stand *vis-a-vis* more eclectic or more purely literary loyalties. One could say that Dawe has sided with Modernism's stay-at-home sibling, at a time when many Australian poets have gone after varieties of "Internationalism". One *could*. But it would be a fairly limited point one made, an observation mainly about stanzaic preferences and metrical options. Either way, it would imply nothing about quality, although it does propose a good deal about purpose.

That word "purpose"takes one to the centre of the critical debate which is now defining the Humanities. At least within academe, writing is judged less against "experience", that insistent continuum we all know because our senses don't have anywhere else to exist, and more against not simply other books, and other poems, but other theories about other books and other poems. (Criticism's refractory mirrors begin to remind one of sitting in a barber's shop as a boy, the disembodied head springing in crops along receding rows.) It is an argument finally about the primacy of pattern over denotation. Everything in Dawe comes down on the side of the world we're intractably bound to. Literature may do all kinds of other things as well, but in his view it has to do this — it has to speak for and about a man's sense of communal being. Eliot's definition of culture as respect for the dead, concern for the living, solicitude for the unborn,[2] is never far from mind as one reads Dawe. It means that in one direction it leads to "The Wholly Innocent", that moving poem on abortion, whose final argument is that community has been denied as much as individual life — "This was my only life-line: trust." Or it will bring us in "Homecoming" to a level of elegy that is compelling and rare. Notice in that poem the importance and repetitive force of "home", the word that insists again how the communal is at the centre of any human act. It means that whatever we claim for ourselves, has validity because we make those same claims for others. It provides the ground from which Dawe demands, on behalf of the self-deceivers and the

no-hopers, that we respect the "frail personal herb of self-deception" which may, after all, be "the Tierra del Fuego which distinguishes/ Dignity's southern limits". ("The Flashing of Badges") Their feeling for the "passionate, suffering, dumb characters locked into their fates" was what had drawn him first to the poetry of Robinson and Masters. And as it struck him twenty years ago, "It seems incredible to me that so few genuine poems reflect directly or indirectly an awareness of the social problems of our country.[3]

Dawe's perceptions are sharp, and enormously good-humoured, when he writes of those small-time failings that are never going to make the bill-boards, or the unspectacular domestic clutter of barbecues, in-laws, children, neighbours, debts, lovers. He knows how "the happiness of the motorist/Depends upon pedestrians envious of their wheels" ("Then"), and about those "Little Blokes" "badly needing with desperate vagueness/to feel bigger somewhere, sometime." He's an expert at spotting what Thoreau called "the quiet desperation" in so many lives ("Any Shorter and I'd Have Missed It Altogether", "The Family Man"), although his watching is undershot with a constant *caritas*. And when he is read as fully as this collection allows, it is his grasp on the detail as well as the broader drift of a community that strikes one; his deftness in drawing out the filaments of an act ("The Last of Games") or a person ("Woodeye") or some intuition ("Take to the Hills") so that they are then worked into a shared social web, and become part of "the same green transitory world we also knew." ("Happiness is the Art of Being Broken")

Behind his knack for picking up the small lies of the bludger, the self-deceptions of ordinary life, the greater lies of the politician, there is always the humanism that carries with it certain linguistic and aesthetic assumptions. It comes to how best to get across, in full seriousness but with least solemnity,

> as much as any man can offer,
> — time, pain, love, hate, anger, war, death, laughter, fever.
>
> ("Homo Suburbiensis")

For a poet of Dawe's convictions, there is no alternative to a language that is common property, and an imagery whose terms have to satisfy him as a poet, but work back to the shared perceptions, as well as the shared idioms, of the man next door.

> In season the currawongs in the camphor-laurels
> cry like tin-shears.
> (The jacarandas hang their sheets
> of blue water in mid-air.)

The examples come in their dozens. The *outré*, the ostentatious, the introspective, the quick pant after the modish, are not things that interest Dawe. His business is to diminish, not increase, the disparity between poetry and "the common man". (A phrase I am certain Dawe himself would never use.) There is no way of unravelling his aesthetic intention from a political one. Which is why Dawe's is the most *democratic* voice in Australian poetry, the voice that is closest in practice as well as aspiration to what his country rests on. And perhaps the most democractic thing that he does is to put himself on the line in every statement he makes. He knows as well as any other poet what irony offers, or how persona can at times let one off the hook. But the moral tendency of any Dawe poem can be taken as the author's conviction apart from that particular expression of it. That is not a particularly fashionable stance. It excludes certain kinds of poetry, and certain subtleties. There is no guarantee — as there isn't with any kind of writing — that it will always come off. There are times when the reader feels hectored for the sake of a good cause ("The Not-So-Good Earth"), or when a moral line doesn't find an appropriate clarity ("The Raped Girl's Father"). But the charge of condenscension, so justly levelled at some writers with a soft-spot for "the common voice", won't stick if brought against Dawe. He does not need to change register or taste or views to speak "as one of the people", because he knows that on his own terms it is only by being one of them, that he speaks at all. He is much closer to a tribal voice than to "the informed sympathetic observer."

Whenever I read Dawe I find that at some point I am thinking of Patrick White as well. At least that Patrick White who excoriates suburbia, who hates its unimaginativeness and its plaster ornaments and its women's tasteless hats and the heavy telephone breathing. Occasionally, of course, White concedes a suppressed housewife

who may see that a dancing half-wit has the mandala in his grasp, while everyone else in the street has only the keys to the new Falcon. Marvellous as White is on so much else, it is Dawe who strikes me as having the better claim on Sarsaparilla. Fulmination against vulgarity and petty tragedy tends to lose its edge if you're close enough to look into their eyes. Those "characters" in so many of the poems, Shagger's praying mum, the fat lady at tennis taken seriously when she is dead, the boy savouring police attention because at least *someone* notices him, are arguments against ever writing anyone off. Even the famous satirical pieces like "Lifecycle" or "The Copy-writer's Dream" are not dismissive of their targets. They are not poems of anger so much as laments at waste. And it is only by speaking of such limitations wittily, with such idiomatic *élan*, that even the VFL fanatic, or the glib salesman, might see without rancour the point of the poems. On the larger screen of war — the Vietnam poems ask for a discussion of their own — Dawe of course hones a different blade. He is then in company with Swift, "to make vice and folly bleed".

I suppose the strongest reservations mounted against Dawe came from his most impressive adversary. James McAuley was irritated by this assumption of the "tribal voice", although he did not call it that. He pointed out what it is that immediately draws us to Dawe's verse, "its quick eye for the circumstances of our experiences: the usual environments, the trivia, the accidental litter, in and through which our lives get a certain look and feel." But as he then explained, "Whenever anyone sets up to be a satirist of human wickedness and folly, we need to be convinced that the satirist's own convictions are realistic, capable of true accounts of human situations"[4] That was written seventeen years ago. Well over half the poems in *Sometimes Gladness*, and most of the strongest, have been written since. McAuley's demands quite properly stand, but I believe his reservations would have been dissipated. Dawe can now point to a body of work bearing witness to his conviction that you ought not belong to a society, and write as though it's not there. Of course some fine poets have claimed that you can. But from Dawe's viewpoint that would introduce what perhaps one might call "the Wank Factor", which is another matter entirely. In *his* book, poetry isn't something you do with the blinds drawn.

A poet's job, as Dawe insisted when he claimed that balance between public and private, is to call things by their right names, to elicit appropriate responses. It is the argument of Aristotle's *Poetics*, if you like, spelled out for Toowoomba. His is an approach that refuses to call a demarcation dispute between poetry, religion, political conviction. The three should bring one to the same point, to staking a claim, as the poet does at the end of his Introduction to the *Collected Poems*, for "individuality . . . always under attack somewhere in the world, and always somewhere (thank God) defended."

I have referred earlier to Neruda. Here's Neruda again to end off with, in a definition that would cover Dawe from among Australian poets, but how many else? ". . . the poet of the modern age accepts the investiture earned in the street, among the masses. Today's social poet is still a member of the earliest order of priests."[5]

Vincent O'Sullivan

1. "Public Voices and Private Feeling", *The American Model*, edited Joan Kirby, 1982, 162, 169.
2. T.S. Eliot, *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture*, 1948.
3. "Recent Trends in Australian Poetry", a paper given at the Adelaide Festival in 1964. Quoted in *Times and Seasons, an Introduction to Bruce Dawe*, edited Basil Shaw, 1974, 65.
4. James McAuley, Review of *An Eye for a Tooth*, *Twentieth Century*, September 1968, 85.
5. Pablo Neruda, "Poetry is an Occupation", the penultimate chapter *Memoirs*, translated by Hardie St. Martin, 1977.

Matilda, My Darling by Nigel Krauth, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983. 219pp. $12.95 (hc), $5.95(pb). *Kelly Country,* by A. Bertram Chandler, Penguin Books, Ringwood, Victoria, 1983. 341 pp. $5.95.

To anyone who believes in cause-and-effect, our world and its history can be seen philosophically as one of a vast series of alternative worlds and alternative histories. Adopting a view similar to Joseph Furphy's "branching railway-track" theory (which asserts that history is a construction of acts of choice followed by rigorous destiny), a number of writers have postulated various historical alternatives. Len Deighton's *SS-GB* (1978) is set in Britain in 1941, nine months after all British forces have surrendered to German occupation, and a similar scenario is presented in Frederick Mullaly's *Hitler Has Won* (1975). Alterations to American history are canvassed in Martin Cruz Smith's *The Indians Won* (1973), MacKinlay Kantor's *If the South Had Won the Civil War* (1961), and Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953), which also posits a Southern victory. In *The Alteration* (1976), Kingsley Amis charts a world in which the Reformation did not take place, with Roman Catholic domination continuing to the present, whilst in Keith Roberts' *Pavane* (1968) the assassination of Elizabeth I leads to the continuing Catholic domination of England (with Roberts relying on Max Weber's thesis about the complicity of capitalism and the Protestant ethic). Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) — usually regarded as the "classic" work of this kind — deals with a novelist (living in a world in which World War II was won by the Axis powers) who is writing a speculative novel about a world in which the Allies had won the war.

Now, in *Kelly Country,* the same process has been applied to Australian history, with a novelist asking the question: *What if Ned Kelly had successfully derailed the police special train at Glenrowan and had gone on to wage an Australian War of Independence?*

A. Bertram Chandler is Australia's most prolific science fiction writer, and it is therefore not surprising that he uses time-travel as the device that enables his hero (a contemporary sf writer) to return to the events at Glenrowan and prevent the local schoolmaster, Curnow, from signalling to the train carrying police reinforcements. However, the novel's science fiction element is minimal and perfunctory; it is the author's research and his sense of history that is important. As Chandler notes in his foreword, the historical Ned Kelly had all the attributes of a successful rebel leader:

> He was charismatic. He had a sound grasp of guerilla-warfare tactics. He was something of an innovator in military matters, as is evidenced by his famous armour. (p.1)

Kelly lived at a time in our history when there was potential for rebellion, for 1854 saw the incident of the Eureka Stockade, and during the Great Shearers' Strike of 1891 both sides organized themselves on military lines. Most important of all, perhaps, there was the firing of a rocket (a signal rocket?) during the historical siege of Glenrowan. History does not record who was watching for that signal or what action it was meant to prompt them to take, but Chandler allows himself the reasonable assumption that it was a call to arms.

Marx regarded the great men of history as symptoms rather than causes; Carlyle saw the great men as paramount. And Chandler tends to leave the options open. He presents Kelly as a clever tactician (planning not to destroy the Glenrowan train but to trap it in order to take hostages) and the novel's action shows Kelly to be a natural leader of men. However, Kelly's ultimate triumph depends very much upon weaponry and technology, for Chandler concocts a scenario in which Gatling guns, primitive tanks, and even armed airships become available to the rebels. (This may sound far-fetched, but as long ago as 1880 the Andrews airship was in existence, and devices such as a Gatling cannon and an armed armoured vehicle — all steam-driven, of course — were on the drawing-boards.)

The author can, I think, be forgiven for refusing to affirm or refute the views of history offered by Marx and Carlyle. After all, any answer that he might provide would be mere speculation based upon history as it did *not* occur. However, there is a second matter on which the author refuses to commit himself, and for this omission he should take blame. Towards the end of the novel, when Kelly's independent Australia is facing the threat of attack from America, President Kelly (Ned's "present-day" descendant) is made to ask:

> An d'ye really think that Australia would be a better country if the Kelly dynasty had never been founded? (p.329)

The central character responds to this with tactful evasion:

> "At least we should not . . . be witnessing the start of a civil war (in Australia) with the Japs and the Yanks ready to move in to protect their interests. Our cities would not be living in dread of (imminent) atom bombing." (p.329)

However, the novel ends with a nostalgic salute to Ned Kelly, *implying* (but not explicitly stating) that perhaps the spirit of Kellyism is more important than its dire consequences.

Thus the chief weakness of *Kelly Country* is imbalance. The novel cannot help but raise certain questions about Australain history and nationalism, yet these intellectual issues are not tackled with the same zest and imagination that the author applies to scenes of battle or reconstructions of historical spectacle. This imbalance, however, is quite deliberate: it is clear that Chandler has set out to write a rollickingly readable yarn, peppered with suspense, excitement, and enthusiastic humour. Moreover it is to his credit that he ensures that certain key questions are at least *asked* (if not answered).

In the foreword to *Kelly Country,* Chandler labels it an "If-Of-History" novel. Nigel Krauth's first novel, the excellent *Matilda, My Darling,* shares the playful speculative impulse that has motivated Chandler (and other writers before him), but Krauth's novel is best labelled a "Byways-of-History" novel.

Such a label puts Krauth in the company of a best-selling (but undistinguished) writer like "Jack Higgins" (the pseudonym of Harry Patterson). As practised by Higgins/Patterson, the art of the "Byways-Of-History" novel lies in exploiting "shadowy" corners of history. The Higgins best-seller, *The Eagle Has Landed* (1975), extrapolates from the known fact that on November 6, 1943, Heinrich Himmler received a message to signify that a small force of German paratroops had landed on British soil; *The Valhalla Exchange* (1976) speculates that Martin Bormann may have been aboard a light aircraft which was historically reported by Russian radar to have left Berlin on the day Hitler committed suicide; and so on.

Matilda, My Darling explores less sensational material. For several weeks in 1895, "Banjo" Paterson travelled around the area of Winton in Central Queensland. He steadfastly refused to speak of this period in his life, but it is known that during this time Paterson broke off his engagement to Sarah Riley (who was then staying at Winton) and he composed "Waltzing Matilda", working in collaboration with Christina Macpherson (from Dagworth station, outside Winton). Krauth's novel builds upon these known facts, creating a fast-paced story which paints an unconventional portrait of Paterson, speculates about the circumstances of the composition of "Waltzing Matilda", and offers an unforgettable evocation of Australia at a time when the nature of "the Australian Dream" was being determined. The novel won the $10,000 Vogel/*Australian* award, and will probably be a strong contender for the Miles Franklin award.

Krauth claims that whilst "Waltzing Matilda" is always sung "with gusty gaiety", "if you read it like a poem, it's like the beginning of a murder story. Why are all those people there — the troopers, the squatter, the swagman?" (quoted in *The Australian,* November 26-27, 1983). His central character, a private inquiry agent named Hammond Niall, is hired by a group of unionists who are involved in the bitter shearers' strikes of the 1890s. Using various disguises, Niall is to travel to Queensland and investigate the mysterious disappearance of a swagman who is believed to have drowned in a remote billabong. By coincidence, his travelling companion *en route* is Banjo Paterson, and a friendship is formed between the two men.

Krauth's version of Paterson is modern, intriguing — and unacceptable to the Paterson grandchildren, who have copyright of all Paterson's published work until 1991. (A note at the beginning of the book explains that it had been intended that the words of "Waltzing Matilda" should appear in the novel, but were deleted "at the insistence of the copyright holder".) It is suggested that Paterson might have lisped, yet there is no rendering of the lisping in the novel, and Paterson is generally portrayed as an athletic, manly fellow:

> (Paterson and Sarah) traversed a ploughed section of paddock. They were two neat figures, one in blue, the other in white, stumbling a little amongst the dusty clods. They

came to a fence. There were horses in the paddock beyond it. Paterson put his hands on the fence's top rail. With a sudden spring he vaulted it, his legs stretched out to the right, his coat-tail flapping. The straw hat fell from his head. He laughed. (p.64)

Krauth makes Paterson a realistic figure, coping with life's problems as best he can, yet retaining the expected Patersonian reverence for the Australian landscape:

> "I rather think of the bush as a too easy place in which to die," said Clohesy. "Just sit down under one of those mean trees and die. Nothing to it."
> "They're not mean," said Paterson. "They're accepting. They may be subdued by their environment, but they are not beaten. There is a twinkle in the lowered eye of the Australian bush. It's a generous environment if you know how to approach it." (p.40)

Any objection to this portrait of Paterson would probably be based upon the fact that Krauth's Paterson rejects Sarah because of his growing interest in Christina. But this is really only part of Paterson's motivations, for he seems also to be rejecting Sarah because of the uncertainties about his own and his nation's identity.

The 1890s are zestfully re-created in this novel. The charm and heat of the bush is present, of course —

> (At Ithaca Creek) they had taken off their clothes to sit in the pure creek waters rushing around them or to stretch on the flattest rocks with the hot bush sweat in pools on their bodies and their ears full of the hot scream of cicadas. (p.68)

— but so is the frenetic urban liveliness of the 1890s:

> The city steamed and fretted in the stale glow of its gas-lighting. It was an eager, sweaty city. It was keen to try new things. It throbbed with the drive of strange urges in its secret places. Mr Trackson was at work on a steam carriage in his Ascot backyard shed. Bland Holt, "The King of Melodrama", sat in the wings of the Theatre Royal designing a ramp by which he could get live horses on stage. W.J. Byram's lecture to a small audience of the Royal Society linked a droplet of Breakfast Creek water to the Beginning of Life. With the aid of her father, an armless child in a Spring Hill boarding-house practised the letter "A" with a pen stuck between her toes. These were the sparks shooting in dim places. The city was keen to explode into bright lights, fast movement, mad fads, bizarre entertainment, new science, mixed sports, women's education, unionism, party politics, birth control. These were the sparks of a new century. (pp.10-11)

There is also a wide sampling of the opinions and attitudes of the people of the time, from the surly downtrodden anger of the striking shearers to the genteel old lady who mouths the word "Unionist" as if repeating an obscenity.

It would be wrong to discuss the fate of the swagman or to outline Krauth's version of the circumstances under which "Waltzing Matilda" was written, for that would be giving away two of the novel's "punchlines". But it can be said that Krauth explains both incidents in a way that links them with the dilemmas facing the Australian nation at that time. Paterson, for example, finds that "Waltzing Matilda" is sung rousingly by *both* sides of the social conflict (shearers and pastoralists alike) — which means that "the song immortalized the (shearers') rebellion, while comfortably killing it off". And Niall writes to his wife, when the case is over, accusing Paterson of having "enshrined the crude beauty of toughness and action . . . the hollow aesthetics of fighting and winning". Niall's conclusion is that he has witnessed events which represent the birth of a materialistic national dream and the demise of "an Australian Dream" of the spiritual kind (p.214).

Speculations tend to breed speculations, and it is to be hoped that other writers, from time to time, may explore the Ifs and Byways of Australian history. There would certainly be no lack of material:

> What if Harold Holt had lived?
>
> What if Australia had been occupied during WWII?
>
> What if Australia had never entered into an alliance with America, and had never become involved in the Vietnam war?
>
> What if Menzies had *not* been a monarchist?
>
> What if Gough Whitlam had triumphed in 1975?

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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MARTA KADLECIKOVA — lives in Prague. Her work has appeared in *London Magazine* and *Southern Revue*. Her translator, A. French, is in the Classics Department at the University of Adelaide.

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AUDREY LONGBOTTOM — born in Coramba, N.S.W. left school early but returned to study at Wollongong University. She commenced writing in 1968 and, besides poetry, has published short stories and articles. A first collection of poems, *Relatives and Reliques* was runner-up in the 1980 British Commonwealth Prize for a first book of verse. She is working on a second collection.

ROSALEEN LOVE — teaches history of science at Swinburne, Institute of Technology. This is her first published story and won the F.A.W. Victorian short story award for 1983.

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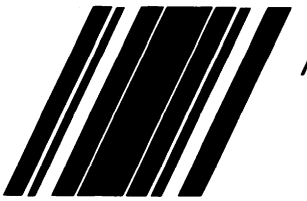

Australian Studies Project

Committee to review Australian studies in tertiary education

REQUEST FOR SUBMISSIONS

The Minister for Education, Senator the Hon. Susan Ryan, has appointed a Committee to review Australian studies in tertiary education. The work of this Committee forms part of the National Program of Projects and Events for the Bicentenary developed by the Australian Bicentennial Authority. The Committee consists of Dr Kay Daniels (Chairperson), Assoc. Prof. Bruce Bennett and Mr Humphrey McQueen. The Committee invites submissions from individuals or organisations on any of the matters in the following Terms of Reference. The Committee is required to:

1. (i) review the provision of Australian studies in tertiary education institutions covering universities, colleges of advanced education and TAFE;

   (ii) make recommendations for the development of Australian studies in tertiary education in Australia, and overseas;

Note: 'Australian studies' is to be defined as including all studies dealing with a distinctly Australian subject matter and is not limited to those studies designated Australian studies with a capital 'S'.

2. In undertaking the above, the Committee will pay attention to:

   (i) the place of Australian studies as a discipline (in courses entitled 'Australian Studies'); within general course areas (e.g. literature, history, geography); within fields of study which combine a number of course areas (e.g. Aboriginal studies, women's studies, multi-cultural studies); and as areas of research;

   (ii) the role of Australian studies in science and technology and in professional and technical training;

   (iii) the needs of institutions providing courses in teacher education;

   (iv) the role of tertiary education institutions in developing and promoting an understanding in the general community of Australian society, history, culture and the built and natural environments;

   (v) any other related matters.

Submissions should be mailed by May 29 to the following address:

The Executive Officer,
Committee to review Australian studies
in tertiary education,
1st Floor, Scala House,
11 Torrens Street,
BRADDON ACT 2601.

TELEPHONE ENQUIRIES: (062) 57 1244.

Six New Stories

Fiction and the Rewriting of History: A reading of Colin Johnson

Not a Love Story Henry Handel Richardson's *Maurice Guest*

Bruce Dave's *Sometimes Gladness* reviewed by Vincent O'Sullivan