westerly

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STORIES, POEMS, REVIEWS, ARTICLES

AUSTRALIAN DRAMA IN PERTH 1975

A FORGOTTEN WOMAN—EMILY DAVISON

NORMAN LINDSAY AND 'VISION'—A MARXIST VIEW

JOSEPH FURPHY—PROFILE AND PICTURES

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a quarterly review

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Cover: Susan Leith Taylor as Carol Cummins and Alan Cassell as Paul Cummins in Barry Oakley's play *Bedfellows*. Produced by John Milson at the Hole in the Wall Theatre in Perth, July 1975.

PETER MURPHY

Jester

I meet him often now.

He is not distinguished; you could almost say—indistinguishable. He laughs often. I laugh at his jokes because it pleases him. If I do not laugh, he looks at me in the middle of sentences, and pauses. His face always seems to be saying, "Is it all right? Shall I go on?"

But I clap my hands, and my jester dances. He is always willing to amuse.

Life's short, but I don't have anything to do with mine. Our little friendship helps both of us get through the day. There are no pretensions here. He's not deluding himself any more than I am; not much, anyway. Of course, I have the advantage; sex is on my side. I don't make it easy for him. When I mock him, his pride is hurt. When I crack my whip, my jester cringes.

When he talks about his studies, and I seem to be interested, his face lights up. Then he will go on for hours about the significance of Egyptian mythologies in our understanding of the psalms of David. That is his interest in life, his profession; all he is, really. When I'm nice to him, he's like a schoolboy with a $50 note. He thinks I've given him the world. His face is, at the same, beatific and grasping.

When I give him trinkets, my jester smiles. But nothing changes.

I go to work each day. I'm a graduate, but there's nothing for me to do. A stenographer, I spend most of my day typing from the tapes of incoherent but obsessive businessmen. Cool and bored and uninvolved—I don't really fit into my world.

We go out together often, to cultural events mostly, but, in general, to anything. He says we're very discerning. We're always getting away. The weeks are filled with obscure concerts, bizarre films, and esoteric art exhibitions, which capture your attention mainly through their grotesque novelty and neat impersonal arrogance. We go to be bored; to say what it all meant; and to explain how much it moved us, or failed to.

I wouldn't go alone; nor would he. Together, it's not so bad. We're used to each other—that's the main thing—yet there's a kind of formality, a feeling for ritual in our relationship, which pleases both of us. He probably thinks of it all as "taking her out"—not just seeing me, or being with me.

Yet that's the best way. If we met in any other way, it would be hideous. If we happened to work together, familiarity would leave us nothing to say; we would look for ways of avoiding each other, and of distancing ourselves. If we were related—cousins or something—we'd never see each other.

Each time we go out, I dress up; not to impress him, but for my own sake. He makes an effort too. He doesn't try too hard—just enough to flatter me; and to make him feel that he's playing the part, and that this is the situation he wants it to be. We're used to each other, you see; we don't expect much. Sometimes I think perhaps he's a little too serious. I wonder just what he would do if I let him; or encouraged him. It might begin with me laughing too much at his jokes.

We go to restaurants, and he's all over me. He gets me whatever I ask for—but I've known his salary for some time now, so I don't stretch my luck. It's nice. He's gallant, because I expect it of him. I wait for doors to be opened for me; umbrellas to be held aloft for me; chairs to be got ready for me. In return I hear about the problems of translating Hittite ideographs and learn of the latest archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia.

But I don't mind—a jester must be humoured too. Without this small applause, these absent-minded smiles, there would be no jesters, no jangling bells, no twirl of multi-colours. Sometimes his motley swings freakishly, and his tiny bells bleat out absurdly—but it doesn't matter now, I'm so used to him. I would have thought that only degenerates or cynics could really care for fools—but I'm not sure of anything now. He's stupid, and I'm not—still, it's easy being with him. I can't escape the thought that we're two of a kind, somehow.

At times, when his face is still as walls, I wonder what he is thinking. Am I there, behind his eyes? What is he doing with me, there, in his day-dreams? Our relationship's as tidy as his gloves, but something must come of it eventually. Lost in all this incredible neatness, there must be something living. Often, though, the care with which he dresses inspires in me a lingering and surreal horror. Everything is so correct that when he's sad his comic head hangs distorted against the harmonies of recent fashions.

Sooner or later, he'll propose to me. I will refuse, and that will be the end of it all. I can't guess what either of us will do then—we're unimportant as bits of stone in the plastic hollow of a child's toy.

I can't always see it coming to an end—that's what terrifies me. Familiarity may drive us into marriage—to provide a kind of resolution, and to pass the time. I don't want that, even though there are no alternatives. He doesn't seem to want it either, but, of course, you can't be sure. Once, I found myself day-dreaming about what it would be like, actually being married to him, and suddenly I found myself praying, *praying*, that it wouldn't happen—and I'm not religious: I haven't prayed for years.

Whenever he has a little extra money, we take ourselves very, very seriously. We go to a ball, or a reception, or anywhere, where we can pay to be seen, and, seemingly, admired. When we talk to other people there we sound very courtly. We are all trying to impress and be impressed. We say clever things, and pretend to know a great deal. It's a struggle, and sometimes we fall back whimpering, pleading, "I'm not quite sure what you mean ... um ..." It's a royal game, a saga of strategies and battles. We're prepared for a hard time.

At such times I let my jester seem king. He looks thoughtful. There are creases in his forehead, as if his mind, on the point of discovery, has a tendency to split. He flourishes his superfluous knowledge like a red silk handkerchief; uses words which sound from beyond the grave; makes jokes which seem like suicide notes, and impresses me immeasurably. Because at such times a man ought to do the impressing, I nod agreement at almost anything he says. I take his side; support his troups. Almost, it seems, I'm his hanger-on, then, if not his jester, too. We have a kind of arrangement, as you can see, yet if either of us knew precisely what it was, it would cease to exist.

And so our days go by. It's not so bad really. You can't expect too much out of life when most people are struggling to make a living, or are going mad, or are dying of grotesque diseases. The cards are always stacked against you. Nobody ever amounts to very much. There's no-one I know I could envy; and this, I imagine, would be the case with everyone. One day, I suppose, we'll only have months to live, my friend and I, and then we'll look back on life like a day at the races.

I tell my friends it's fun, the time we spend together—fun! But it's no use being angry with him, or wanting us to be more real, somehow. He only tosses his straggly, winding colours, and refuses to be my jester. At such times, he seems to be playing another game. I become uncertain then, and ascertain how I might best accommodate myself to his wishes. I have to adapt to his whimsy.

For he is my jester—and, whatever he is, I care for him a little. We're used to each other, and there's no-one else. We've been together a long time. It's no use hoping for much, especially as things aren't so very bad now.

We follow the situation with interest. We have no great fears, or pleasures. The days fade, and go out like cigarettes. We play our games, and time goes by painlessly enough. We try not to offend each other. We aim to please. We don't get hurt, much.

MARGARET McMANN

between the lines

dear . . .
sorry this letter is late, but
thoughts divide/meander/grow entangled,
i flood glucose, sun-yellowed sweetness
& silence
i monopolize; have only a lone wood duck
to keep me company
silence to understand
motionless breeze in my face,
to accept the wild duck's invitation to watch
his complete performance. wings ripple
leave behind an eddying swirl & me
on an island of whiteness far-seeing
through the eye of separation; feeling minute
/feeling
if i had wings i could maybe
feeling winged to
drift into shadows/moaning waves flowing
dry seas/tears. follow distant sounds/hushed callings
/silent pronouncements. see/touch/know each days
lovely forms and enjoy vision to fall on wondering
flowers wondering
pay you a short visit
wondering where the lone duck has flown
& what he'll do. perhaps. perhaps to find a mate
/hold her heart/her store of love chase dreams
but I am anchored here; shipwrecked
dreams i give myself to moving from
one thin shaft of sun to another easily
what's new?
easily and unaware entering love/stealing
moments from authentic tenderness/building harbours
against hesitant steps
the same "old hat" this side of the ocean. nothing new.
much as it always was.
hesitant steps to walk away from endless night
/to hasten and flee the way of the wild, wild,
wood duck back again and a following friend—strange—
they've landed far apart. please drift closer/blend
into one/shining
write soon, i send love,
shining like a kernel/a core/with
everything else dissolved
t' love XXX
. . . . disolving . . . .
m/m

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

Zeehan, 1973

Brand new and temporary
With one-night rooms, brick-veneer, fake stone,
Bars, Dining Room, Reception, cars,
The motel stood, spread here and there,
A boom town's bag of gold dust
Among the areas of swamp,
Heaps of mullock, caved-in shafts,
And sections of a fallen water race
Once raised up high
On thin and spreading stilts.
Across the way, set in a patch of railyard
Long out of use, an ornamental, rusting cog,
While here and there,
Above the fragments of the scene,
Bits of rainbow broken off
By swirling drizzle and shifting banks of fog;

Home for this one night,
No quick scrape of boots
Sounded at the motel's Entrance door,
A miner's gesture to the uselessness
Of work done, outside and in;
No trace of mud
Brought home from down below
Stained carpets wall to wall
As I stood at Reception and recalled
Hob-nail prints punched savagely,
The way my father had of feeling sure
He still belonged to some small show,
Silver-lead, tin, zinc or gold,
That one by one were closing down,
The mullock and the mud crunched on
The central and the sacred piece
Of scrubbed, thread-bare linoleum,
A polished shadow that stood out from
The splintering kitchen floor
Warped wall to wall to form a bow;

Worn high, severely set
As if forever out of reach,
My mother's hair was ordinary brown
With glints of red
That now and then flared into fire
Because she so much hated living there,
Yet staying on, implacable,
Being neither here nor there,

Just keeping house as best she could
Made up as it was
Of damp and rotting wood,
Sheets of rusting tin,
Support posts of the verandah leaning in,
My father seldom there,
Or drying-out on Sundays
From a week-long binge,
Till I imagine now his drunken, vague recall
Of having slept with every bike around
As further masked by lies
As treacherous as mining towns,
And her first ring of troth,
Lack-lustre, a ruby worn away
To stone a rusty-grey
Encircled by the second
Ground to shifting, fine, washed-out alluvium,
The bone-white sand of a deserted
Once-golden band of harbour bay;

The breakfast tables being set,
By long-faced waitresses
Who turn their backs on dinner guests
Ten minutes late in from the bar,
I wipe my shoes and leave,
Walk the mud and wheel-deep holes
The length of Main Street to the other end,
To where the Gaiety Theatre stands;
A coat of paint, brownish-grey;
Overlays the smell of damp,
The layered mould,
Preserves it as a monument to folly,
Where Nellie Melba sang
For miners and their one-night sluts
Drunk and swank on fake champagne
And crumbling portions of meringue;

Nor all the king's horses
Nor all the king's men—
The west-side wall
Of that vast, ruined hall
Where Nellie Melba sang
Trembling into life—
Nor all the king's horses
Nor all the king's men—
A woman with red hair,

Brown and auburn, shifting into gold,
Constant, composite and strange,
The mother whom I lost
Seemed pictured there
Walking by my side,
Gold, swamp and lust,
Back and forth, ebb and flow of tide,
These fragments of my being
Seemed pictured there,
Areas of black honey-combed with light,
Collapsing shafts of light
Swimming into range—
Nor all the king's horses
Nor all the king's men—
And poets who still mine
This nearly worked-out world for gold
Walking by my side,
Sifting through long years of dross,
Poets with long-suffering wives,
Thin-faced women whom they loved
When hope was there,
Then dutifully, and sometimes cast aside
As millstones round the neck,
Their one-night sluts
Turned into imaginary brides,
All walking by my side,
Constant, composite and strange,
Miraculous in shifting forms
Swimming into range
Upon the west-side wall,
My mother and my father
Both of whom I lost
Seemed pictured there
Where Nellie Melba sang,
A woman in long-trailing gown,
Her hair worn loose, red, brown and grey
With glints of gold, composite and strange,
But fixed and real as there and mine,
And temporary is my loss
Of all that's there shored-up through the years
As my inheritance to known and learn to love.

T. TREDREA

Morning

In morning it should be . .
this should not lie between us
this vacant routine of our bodies.
I rise ghostly, putting on opinions,
as the sun defuses through the days.

And across my copy of Blake's poems
that I cherish like a day-dream, you
have unwittingly spread your bracelet
a ring, your chunky watch, and one
tissue, littering my life with yours.

SUSAN HAMPTON

A Shower of Rain

Is this the room? she said grimacing. The man nodded, checked over his shoulder to see who might be watching, and then slid the key into the lock. The lock needs graphite, she said. He swore. When the door opened they were in a beautiful orange tomb. The windows faced the afternoon sun. The drawn curtains were orange, the carpet was orange, the chenille bedspread. The sun was a late orange, though it would pale to green before night fell. Outside the sun was a nuisance, a glare through the smog, but it made the room inside exotic as a ripe mango. Rapturous with light coming off all the different textures, the room made her suddenly shy.

Come here, he said. Let me undress you.

No. She jumped onto the bed and then onto the floor near the window. No. I want to sit here and feel how warm the room is, first. Don't rush.

But I have to be . . .

Back, you have to be back at two o'clock, or two fifteen, or whatever, I know. But two o'clock (or even five . . .) is not enough anyway wham bam is not what I want let's sit here on the carpet and talk. She whispered this. In a sense she did not wish to impose. She was unlacing her suede shoes. I wonder, she said, why I come. There is no reason.

Sweetheart, you rang me. You said "I must see you".

I did. Well I'll tell you what happened. I was in the library, and I had a very bad pain in my stomach. I can never remember what side my appendix is on so I decided to find the librarian and ask her if she knew, or where the medical section was. Then I realised the pain was all over my stomach. So I tried to think, and it occurred to me that it might be a hunger pain. Because I sometimes forget to eat.

He was in the bed, patting the sheet next to him. Come here, he said. She removed her clothes and got in beside him. She was looking at her red suede shoes near the curtain. I went to a cafe, she said, the cafe where my neighbour works. I told her to give me a lot of food because I was probably hungry. There was no-one else in the cafe. She brought me a steak and salad and coffee, she sat down with me. Then she said you look very pale and all your freckles are sticking out. Are you sick. I said no, not that I can think of, maybe you can talk to me and I will feel O.K. So she told me about her lamb. Keep your hand over there till I finish. *Listen* to me. The lamb was sleeping near the mother sheep in the night. In their back yard, near the clothesline. In the morning there were pieces of bones and wool fluff all over the yard because the next door dogs had eaten the lamb. The mother sheep was shaking on her thin legs and her rope was round

right around the pole. Gilly cleaned up the yard and then she had to go to work. She told me the story to make me feel better. I said I know a lot of people are worse off than me.

What she was thinking, lying there, was that other people had problems that were visible and shared. That their victims and aggressors were not subtle. That the hatred they felt was open and well directed. There was no ambivalence, and a person's actions were explicable. Her own problem was not visible, nor was it explicable, and so it could not be shared. And yet she was sure the man had helped cause the problem, so she tried to tell him. While she talked, she noticed a control board on the bedhead. There were six buttons. Fleetingly, she wondered what all the buttons were for. But the man was asking questions. She must listen.

I can't understand why your neighbour talked of slaughter, he said. Did you eat your steak? She felt he asked this so as to finish the talking . . . he wasn't really interested in her problem. It did not concern money or people he knew or things he could manipulate to make the problem go away. He could not help her empty feeling which after all had not been hunger.

I rang you, she said, because all the other possibilities had been eliminated. The pain was not sickness or hunger. The pain was for you. I needed you.

I am here, he said.

She did not know whether that was true, but she turned to him in the bed. What she noticed while he kissed her was the colour of the wall, the grain of the pelmet, the shape of the cornices. That the architrave was not really straight.

Oh you are lovely, he was saying.

Am I, she wondered. She touched his hair.

Then she was thinking about her sister, who was seventeen. Her sister was no longer naive but recently she had been naive. When her sister's first lover had said in a solicitous way, Are you coming, she had sat up in bed and said with true surprise, Why? Where are you going? They had laughed and laughed. Don't tell Mum, her sister had said. The woman tried to think about her first lover. She could not remember his face even though she screwed up her eyes and concentrated.

Are you coming? said the man. She bit her tongue in order not to laugh, in order not to laugh so loud and shockingly that the walls of the Motel Aloha would crumble and fall onto the highway blocking all out-bound traffic. It was this picture she had in her mind as she bit her tongue. Also she was tempted at that moment to use her sister's reply. Suddenly she remembered the knobs on the bedhead. Reaching a hand behind her, she pressed them, one by one. As things in the room began to move and flicker, she memorised the functions of the knobs. Remote control for T.V. Fan. Heater. Lights. Canned music. Radio. The whole room was alive, buzzing, whirring, alight, crazy with music on currents of hot and cold air, a vast enclosed movement of light and colour and sound which transformed the orange tomb into a tropical aviary and Aloha! Aloha! sang the Hawaiians on the canned music and Oh Oh Oh Oh, Ahhhhhh, said the man, and then he opened his eyes very wide.

The whites of his eyes were almost blue and the fine white hairs on his ears were stiff. The woman smiled at him. She thought he looked like a rabbit.

It's all right, she said, I was just checking.

Jesus Christ. He lay stricken.

In the shower her hair got wet with little droplets all over the edges. He rubbed her head with a towel and said, Oh dear. Where are you supposed to have been? In the library, she said, reading for a W.E.A. course.

What are you learning?
Oh. Rats and things. Psychology.
At the Uni, he said, they call it rats and stats.
How clever.
Do you like the course?
I don't understand it much. The words they use.
Why did you choose a Psychology course?

I thought I might learn about people. One night, she said, I was minding some children. Their parents had gone to a wedding. The boys tried to tease their younger sister and I got out the wooden spoon and threatened them. They left her alone.

"The boys tease Mummy sometimes", the girl said.
"We can make her cry", one boy said.
"I can't. I don't", the sister said.

You know what the oldest boy said to her? "You haven't got enough experience." That's what he said.

The man looked at her, his foot on a chair to do up a shoe-lace. Why did you tell me this? he asked. I don't know, she said, it seemed relevant. He could not make it out. Come on, he said, I'm late already.

Just now she was beginning to want to be with him. He had the door open a crack. She smiled. I will say, there was a shower of rain in the library.
What?
In the library. Rain.
He shook his head. Come on, all clear.

In the car she remembered to think about her pain. It was gone. She no longer felt as if her stomach were falling out. She switched on the car radio and lit a cigarette. She drove through three sets of red lights because she felt so good. Or rather to prove. No-one caught her. She missed herself.

SHANE McCAULEY

Lovers

your rippling violet flesh
scent coloured
changes him
burns a crater in his heart
takes away the glare
that conceals
his fish deadness
he is bizarre with love
golden as a trash can
eloquent as a camel
the night passes
and his eyes
wedged beneath grinning flesh
are never
where he left them
so rolling over
he puts lips to the wall
touches a cockroach
recoils pleased as a stone
throws back his hand
and taps reveille
on a limp and sleepy breast

SHANE McCAULEY

A Matter of Need

cream coloured shirts for sale
the window says
but who cares
it's not important
now that we are clay
or just sunburnt effigies

how small
our lead hearts are now
—once they were larger
and bronze plated

only a dollar a day
to pay off a sarcophagus

I'm broke
who has the time to be dead
—find a place in the sun
if you think you won't melt

ANDREW LANSDOWN

Fremantle: Under the Wharf

The water laps like memory
At old concrete pylons and wooden cross
Beams, each lick and suck claiming
Some importance—
But as to just what, it is difficult
to ascertain.

Bolts are beards of rust
Growing to the sea from the dirty wood.

My brother straddles a beam—
Feet hanging casual to the river,
And long wisps of hair stirred fluid by the wind.

My lady sits with her back against a pylon,
Her legs held coyly together at their crease.
Her breasts swell like small twin wavelets,
Immobilised in time, from below the pits of enveloping
Arms. Her buttocks sit wider
Than the beam, and balance her effectively.

Oh, and her hair is caught behind one ear.

Breathing unevenly at the water's command,
Cold air hints at the potential for piles—
As I sit here, two feet above water
On this fixed raft, almost unnoticed:
Abhorring the smell of fish that clings
Closer than gloves, and claiming
My preference for *fishers of men.*

My brother detects a twinge
Which tugs him from his hidden rivers
Back to the external sea.

If I were a canoe-man . . .

A blowfish ascends reluctantly;
It inflates like a rip-cord rubber boat.
He pops it on the beam, and stabs
It over and over again;
He smiles
At me as he drops it to the sea:

A moment
Of silent rapport . . .

The rain meanders down—
Looking like a million small fish
Gently mouthing their sky's ceiling.

Spider-threads
Are motionless in the waiters' hands.

The scavengers of sea and land
Are all flourishing now.
The line slap-sucks at something
And is gone.

WILLIAM COSGRAVE

Beneath the Skin

this old house
leans into the strong wind
off the river, is buffetted
by it; its walls creak

& shift against the
weather, recalling
the splendour of the old
sailing-vessels, their canvas

cracking, full-bellied
off the China coast.

ROBBIE WHYTE

Family Poem

I've got fathers-in-law
like most people have got
mothers-in-law.
Which means I've got one
who sits dejected
    on the fencepost,
and rejected
    on the doorstep,
and protected,
    by my wife.

He's uncanny,
and horrifying,
and horrible,
and he's gonna get me
for this.

NORMAN TALBOT

Muse Through Summer

The orchard shook its bloom
it crumpled & went brittlebrown by my feet

I suppose you to be born there in my own
dullblue langorous dreams

Suffolk offered no browns I could fear
neither earth nor eyes

yet you stared me down my childhood
quiet grassgrown owlfeather evenings

there you were—not passionate, but
quietly so, wholly, you were—

when later, more hairily, I risked your lips
you scarcely smiled, a scarceness that did not want

& wanting I could sell you even then,
even now, even—if you'd buy.

The brown water glistened brighter
than the skies changed

when I dared summer, whether you knew
or not, you swerved each time, whispering

leaves of silence, so I left my right
to walk there as if for the first time

(for a pint of passion's your only man
& sure of his parenthesis)

you smiled more deeps, my fingers whispered too
their own blue piratical sing

& shuffled their typewriter keys, for tearless
as an elegy your eyes

I laughed & felt like crying into words, & praised
the swift brown autumn orders of your smile.

MICHAEL SHARKEY

Guy Fawkes Night

Roman candles light the windy suburbs;
rockets soar & fall too short
& fat drips from the chops into the fire:
day's end is a barbecue, if any can approach.

Bonfires scare the hedgehogs in the fence
& roast the crickets in the citrus;
children howl & run from jumping jacks
& drop their sparklers; parents carve weird patterns in the glow.

Scorched earth: baked worms cease, like Pharaohs,
underneath. Guy's stuffed with burning entrails,
face engulfed drops piecemeal in the holocaust
of damned rebellion's overthrow.

Stench of sulphur, crackle in the breeze
that fans the city's outer limits: catherine wheel
pinned on the gatepost whirls & spews ellipses:
flowerpots spray tiny novas.

Lovers hold hand by the embers, drunkards
laugh behind deflowered bushes; fences smoulder
in the smoky pall & bits of tissue flutter
like the stranger in the fire.

IAN WILLIAMS

Between Words

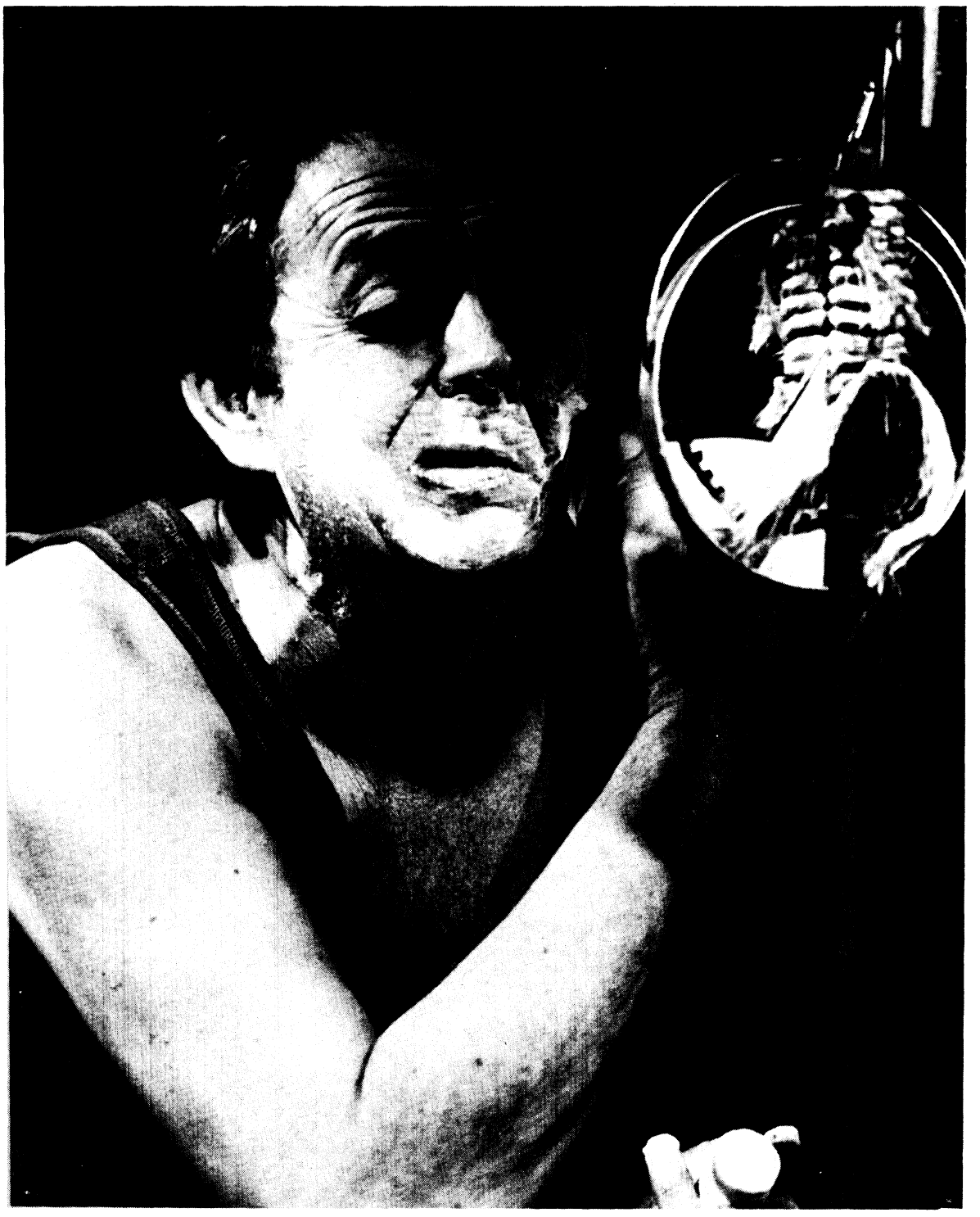
We quarrel.
It is a small thing, a word, ending
always in silence.
You do well to remind me of such silences.

You are of the night. You come
to me in your feline way smelling of old summer's
incidents (always bringing home a truth or two)
and I unprepared
have nothing to say.

So I turn away, leaving my angry position
and take fill of the window shapes. How the evening grows
around us, uncontrolled, lending to the room an
elegance of shadow. Though I cannot see,
I know you respond.
You are of the night.

Even yet you speak,
a dull hammering in my head keeping me from
sleep.
And I, though seemingly adrift, staring into the
empty street,
at the dark rooftops hard against the evening sky
(anticipating the expressionless night?) listen
to every defined word of your malicious wit with
but a casual ear, quite numb to the bite,
quietly satisfied. There is an avenue of shadow
between words beyond elegance, something dark,
secretive, pertinent to cats, into which
you disappear.

I turn back but cannot see your chilled face.
The room is a study in darkness;
only words announce your presence.
Between words there is nothing tangible.



Neville Teede as Monk O'Neill in Jack Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination.*

COLLIN O'BRIEN

Stretching our Imaginations

Productions of Australian plays in Perth, 1975

The citizens of Perth can hardly complain that they are not given every opportunity of seeing contemporary Australian plays. The record of both professional theatres is excellent. Taking 1975 as a fair indication, the National Theatre at the Playhouse has presented John Romeril's *The Floating World*, Alexander Buzo's *Coralie Lansdowne Says No*, Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*, Jack Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination*, Brooksbank and Ellis' *Whitlam Days* with, at the time of writing, David Williamson's *What if you Died Tomorrow?* still in rehearsal. The Hole in the Wall Theatre has given us Alexander Buzo's *Tom*, Michael Cove's *Jesters* and Barry Oakley's *Bedfellows*. Even the amateur theatre, notoriously careful and reactionary, has yielded *Don's Party*, *The Legend of King O'Malley* and *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, and there has been Aarne Neeme's production of Mary Gage's *Supermarket* for the Darlington Players.

Before commenting on the professional productions mounted this year I would like to speculate as to the reasons why we have so many recent Australian plays presented. It seems to me that we are remarkably well served, considering our remoteness from Melbourne and Sydney where the plays are being written.

I think that the current interest in Australian plays has to do with more general causes than the purely theatrical ones. Contemporary playwrights are reflecting a significant change in the way Australians see themselves, what has been termed the 'new national consciousness'. In attempting to anatomize this I would suggest that the emergence of a new playwrighting context, eclectic and experimental, is a reflection of an Australia no longer measuring istelf by presumed 'overseas' standards but prepared to see itself as a reasonably independent South East Asian country.

Allowing that our changed vision of ourselves explains the upsurge of playwrighting, does it explain why the plays are getting such prompt presentation and good audiences? I think the answer is 'yes'. The change in our image of ourselves, and the degree to which we are prepared to accord respect to the locally nurtured is reflected in the way we form our theatre companies quite as much as in the plays being written for them.

When the Elizabethan Theatre Trust was formed in the 1950s we at once looked to England for the man to take charge, and found Hugh Hunt. Even when seeking out directors for the Playhouse in the 1960s our immediate reflex was to look to the Mother Country, Raymond Westwell and Edgar Metcalfe being the result. We were furthermore inclined to import actors: Peter Collingwood and

John Romeril's *The Floating World*. Ivan King as the Waiter, Laurence Hodge as Herbert Robinson.

Michael Cove's *Jesters*. Helen Hough, Frank MacKallister, Merrin Canning, Spencer Whiteley.

James Beattie for example. These imports did much to bring high professional standards to Perth—notably Edgar Metcalfs in his first term as Director of the Playhouse—but imported directors necessarily mean imported attitudes and ideas, however admirable. The present penchant for Australian plays necessarily awaited the appointment of Australian directors, and Aarne Neeme, Terence Clarke and John Milson all stand as anything but mute witnesses to our current willingness to appoint Australians. Who knows, perhaps in the 1980s we will have the temerity to appoint a West Australian, but I suspect that the growth of local talent to the necessary standard probably depends on our willingness to expand our training facilities.

But I digress from my main purpose, which is to comment of the plays we have seen in Perth this year. Stylistically they represent a cross-section of the differing current approaches to playwrighting, and also the different thematic concerns of the playwrights. I will consider them in roughly the order of presentation.

The first Australian play presented in Perth this year was Alexander Buzo's *Tom*, directed by John Milson in the Hole in the Wall Theatre as part of the Festival of Perth. The play was not well received by the critics—indeed, it would be correct to say that it was generally panned. Confusion seemed to arise as a result of the style of the play: it was neither the riotous, even near-farcical sendup which was *The Roy Murphy Show*, nor was it as consistently realistic as much of the dialogue and action suggested it should be. Indeed one critic accused Buzo of trying to write a realistic play, but getting in his own road with unrealistic lapses and uncertainty of style and focus. I don't agree.

Buzo is a deceptive playwright because his plays can look as though they are realistic when they are not. Even the speech in his first play *Norm and Ahmed* is not, if one examines it carefully, realistic. There is far too much condensation of both attitudes and speech patterns for the language of Norm to be merely lifelike. The speech patterns are archetypal rather than real, but the intense banality of the diction is deceptive.

Buzo's conception of the relationship between the individual and the world is what I would term 'structuralist'. The particular areas of Australian society which Buzo depicts are spiritually and intellectually arid, materialistic and aggressive, lacking in warm contact or compassion. It is worth noting that two of his favourite images for certain of those who people this world are 'tarantulas' and 'barracudas'. Individuals find or fight for their place—even their very conception of their own existence—in psychological games (in the Eric Berne sense), rituals and verbal gestures. Norm's archetypal Australian 'individuality' is only brought into existence by his aggressive game with the intruder Ahmed. Ritual and verbal gesture are the very structure of *The Front Room Boys*. Bentley in *Rooted* finds himself in an even more frightening world, an Absurdist world in which the rules are arbitrarily changed as the individual tries desperately to conform to them.

Language thus has a similar indirect function in the world of Buzo's plays as it does in that of Harold Pinter's. Speech is a form of aggression or of defence, a means of proving one belongs by making the appropriate noises, even sometimes no more than verbal whistling in the dark. Rarely does speech communicate directly or express warmth or compassion, as these outgoing attitudes—in Buzo's world as in Pinter's—are highly vulnerable.

In *Tom*'s world there is the personal aggro of the previous plays but there also exists more explicitly the big deal go-ahead fight to the top in the business world only suggested in earlier works. The men in *Tom* are troubleshooter oilmen, shifting multi-million dollar oilrigs around Australia like chessmen. Buzo heightens

Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*. Peter Fisher as Joe Cassidy
and Robert van Mackelenberg as Jack Shannan.

Joan Sydney as Aggie Cassidy and Geoffrey Gibbs as Dan Cassidy in *A Hard God*.

the absurdity of their personal aggressions by such symbolic mockery as the sea-wine version of ordinary wine snobbery. The play is a hyper-realistic portrayal of the aggressive young go-getters of affluent middle-class Australia, realized in Buzo's highly individual imaginative style.

I felt the production in the Hole in the Wall didn't succeed because the focus was wrong. Tom himself was made the point of concentration of the production, whereas I felt it should have been Susan, played with such great warmth and understanding by Nicole Demarchallier. It is Susan who tries to break the pattern, to make genuine contact with someone—eventually anyone. The last scene of the play, where she sets up a new flat, could equally be the first transposed: but that's the point, the ambiguity is deliberate, she is locked into the ritualistic pattern.

The punchy crackling pace of the production forced us to focus on the men at the expense of Susan's dilemma. This may explain the apparent incoherence, although only a different production could prove whether such is the case or if the flaw is indeed structural, in the writing.

John Romeril's *The Floating World* in the Greenroom of the Playhouse saw two firsts for me: Mike Morris' direction (sharp, imaginative, unfussy) and the acting of Malcolm Keith (a clear professional capturing of the brash, vulgar, bum-kicking shipboard entertainment officer who quite openly despises his pleasure-bent victims). The central action of the play is the trip to Japan of an ex prisoner-of-war, slipping back from the easy Toyota/transistor acceptance of the Japanese to the bitter hatred of a reluctant builder of the Burma railway. Some of the supporting roles were rather two-dimensionally conceived, and I felt at times that Romeril's poetic rhetoric left the line of action of the play too diffuse, but the production was vindicated through a fine central performance by Robert Faggetter.

For the second Buzo play of the year, *Coralie Lansdowne Says No*, the National Theatre wisely chose the small Dolphin Theatre at the University of W.A. This play vindicated my theory that Susan was the centre of the conflict in *Tom*, as here Buzo explores the same dilemma in more depth and in a more realistic mode. The play poses the question of how it is possible to be your own woman in a male-oriented world of cynical self-seekers and emotional cripples, especially when that woman fluctuates between unrealistic romantic idealism and cynical detachment. In a world of 'cripples and Mercedes', the affluence of a north coastal outer suburb of Sydney, surrounded by characters such as Paul whose very sentimentality is exploitative, Coralie has to decide what compromises can and must be made.

I find the play a fine expression of this dilemma (in the western world clearly a feminine one, but not essentially so), and have no hesitation, in context, of seeing it alongside Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. In this production we had a stunningly truthful and uncompromisingly honest exploration and portrayal of the central role by Pat Williamson, excellent use of limited space and fine attention to detail in Tony Tripp's design, clean and well-paced direction from Aarne Neeme and good supporting playing—especially by Frank MacKallister as Stuart. The production played to capacity houses, showing the very real following Australian drama can command in its own right.

The National again shifted venue for Peter Kenna's *A Hard God*, this time to the Hole in the Wall. Reading the play I had felt that the language was perhaps too banal, the exposition and plotting obvious, demonstrating too long a contact by Kenna with *Portia Faces Life*. But the play in performance proved me lamentably wrong, driving home a truism I have long reiterated when faced with literary approaches to drama that there is no final test outside performance. Tony Tripp's set was a brilliant marrying of optimum use of minimal space with evocative

Alex Buzo's *Tom*. Nicholle Desmarchelier as Susan, Frank MacKallister as Ken, Helen O'Grady as Carol. Designed by Philippa O'Brien.

Alex Buzo's *Coralie Lansdowne Says No*. Robert Faggetter as Peter York, Frank MacKallister as Stuart Morgan.

recreation of time and place. Terence Clarke's direction left me in no doubt as to his abilities as a director, although I must confess an affinity I share with him for letting a play dictate its own pace rather than being obsessed with the notion of 'keeping it going'.

The actors seemed equally prepared to let the powerful subtext and essential honesty of the play determine its flow. Joan Sydney gave a dangerously unsympathetic portrayal of the wary, give-them-an-inch mum Aggie—dangerous, that is, in terms of inducing the moistened eye, but not of the hard-eyed clarity of Kenna's conception. With equally commendable restraint Geoffrey Gibbs brought a fine warmth and understatement to Dan—in fact all the actors played with assurance, honesty and commitment.

I suspect that the play embodies strong emotional memories from Kenna's youth, and is therefore in dangerous territory indeed if the slide into sentimentality is to be avoided. But Kenna has managed to capture the emotional vortex of emergent adolescent—specifically Catholic adolescent—sexuality; to embody in his older characters the way in which unswerving religious belief carries the paradox of comfort and certainty of moral stance on the one hand, and possible spiritual sterility and inhuman conformism on the other. And he has done this without ever sacrificing honest realization of the existence of the good alongside the bad, without opting for the easy answer for or against *any* of his characters. It is these aspects, together with the brilliant realization of certain Catholic attitudes of the particular generation, which gave the play its particular power—and, I predict, a power which will endure because the play embodies the attitudes rather than stating them, or depending for its effects on a knowing audience.

In the middle of the year John Milson directed two further Australian plays at the Hole in the Wall: *Jesters* by Michael Cove, and *Bedfellows* by Barry Oakley. There is no need to devote a great deal of space to *Jesters*. It is an unpretentious, realistic psychological thriller of a less subtle order than *Sleuth*. Two lifetime friends play increasingly frightening practical jokes on one another, backed by their somewhat cardboard girlfriends, one dumb, the other bitchy. The play pretends to be no more than an edge-of-the-seat night out, and in the face of some pretty thin scripting, directed and played with panache and good timing.

The production of Barry Oakley's *Bedfellows* coincided with his visit here as Writer-in-Residence at the University of Western Australia. A realistic three-hander, it is wittier and less overtly ockerish than many of its contemporaries. The characters are a lecturer in a university department of English, his wife and her lover. A higher level of wit than usual is feasible in that the characters are articulate and observant rather than the more usual personae chosen to depict Australian attitudes. Oakley examines current Australian sexual mores in intellectually with-it suburbia, in this case Carlton. I thought that Alan Cassell as the lecturer let the possibility of wry, bemused characterization go by the board in favour of the more obvious laughs. Susan Leigh Taylor played his wife with a sense of the character's acceptance of inevitable disillusion in personal relationships, if a little too humourlessly. Spencer Whiteley rightly saw that the character he was to realize gave nothing away, and therefore played with the cards close to his chest: one of the nicest performances I've seen from him.

John Milson's direction was straightforward and professional. The play started out being a fairly straight comedy, and only later showed its depths and subtlety; it is difficult to decide whether this was the director's decision, or an inherent quality in the writing: in any case the change of key did not mar the overall value of the play. It is worth noting that Oakley is writing quite unlike any other playwright currently operating, and quite unlike a novelistic playwright in the perjorative sense. He has brought to this play wit, urbanity and shrewd obser-

'Waiter! Tongs, please. Pluck that slug from the endive.'
Neville Teede as Monk O'Neill in *A Stretch of the Imagination.*

vation and used to advantage his novelist's articulateness and feeling for language, but always in a thoroughly theatrical context.

There is no gainsaying the imaginative power of Jack Hibberd's *A Stretch of the Imagination*, presented in the Greenroom in July. Hibberd has combined a sure ear for the Australian idiom at its most 'poetic' with his talent for imaginative documentary (as in *Les Darcy* and *A Toast to Melba*). The theatrical mode of *Stretch* owes much to Samuel Beckett, but without being in any serious sense imitative. In my opinion Hibberd has created one of the truly great one-character plays, and not just in Australia but in the whole corpus of dramatic writing. In Monk O'Neill, sitting in defensive solitude on One-Tree Hill reminiscing on a perhaps fictitious and certainly colourfully distorted past, Hibberd has both embodied and exploded many Austraian myths: that of mateship, of the pioneers, of the diggers, of the Aussie sportsmen. As a poetic image of the white man's love/hate relationship with the Australian environment it encompasses more than any other play I can think of—an imaginative stretch it indeed is. The play calls for a virtuoso actor but not an overtly virtuoso performance, and Neville Teede managed the tight-rope with great skill. Under Aarne Neeme's direction he made the poetic imagery of the play come alive, at the same time keeping the line of action and shifts between present and imagined past clear, peopling the stage with his imaginary opposites. If I have a quibble it is that more marked changes of mood and narrative tone were both justifiable and would have made for even greater variety of pace.

Whitlam Days, by Anne Brooksbank and Bob Ellis, is the last Australian play to have been presented at the time of writing. It is an ironic look back at the fading of the hopes and aspirations of the near-left intelligentsia who saw in the election of Gough Whitlam's Labor Party the hope of an upsurge in both money and freedom for the arts and the media—in this case the ABC. It brought to mind that other picture of failed left hopes, Williamson's *Don's Party*. Just as the once-fiery lefties of Williamson's play drifted into an affluent suburban shrug, these hopeful ABC types find themselves either overplaying their hands (an opportunistic strike) or finding that the years of compromise and being sterile but 'promising' have left them impotent. The play did not receive a good press, although I found it quite tightly knit. For me it embodied a very special Australian paradox: wanting to be both free to do what you want but with a guaranteed job with good superannuation. I saw in it all-too-familiar unresolved hopes and aspirations; resentment of anyone who has escaped (and the certainty that their return means failure); the way in which the search for a feasible life-style in Australia can fall into the trap of easy affluence, of replacing commitment for ego-tripping and exploitation on the personal level. Again I was completely in tune with Terence Clarke's easy-paced direction, and particularly I liked the performances (in a good cast overall) of Robert Faggetter and Leslie Wright—and even more that of Helen Neeme.

In conclusion I can only applaud the policy of both professional theatres in continuing to present Australian plays, and thankfully not out of duty but because they are worth airing on their own merits. The wide range of styles is healthy if at times confusing, probably pointing to the need for more serious commentary and critical study of the different modes of contemporary Australian playwrighting. Certainly the fact that a healthy theatrical life is a worthwhile cultural asset is clearly recognised, so that support through public grant is admitted as essential. With strong public support, the encouragement to playwrights inherent in progressive policies from theatre companies and the steady publication of Australian plays (chiefly by Currency Press), the outlook for the future is hopeful indeed, with the 1975 productions a good indication of just what can be done.

A. HITCHCOCK

Who was Emily Davison?

A search in several encyclopaedias is fruitless. No mention of Emily Davison. How strange that the name of a woman who gave complete dedication, endured much suffering and finally gave her life for the cause which she considered worthy of martyrdom should not be better remembered.

In England, in June 1913, it is Derby Day, a fine day with the usual huge crowds at Epsom Downs, and the great race is about to begin. "Fine horses, long watched and tended, carefully trained, are waiting for the start ... one horse and one jockey of great interest to the crowd; the King's jockey, the King's horse."*

The race begins, and in the crowd no one has noticed a woman, inconspicuously dressed, but with two flags, one wound round her under her coat and the other, rolled tightly, in her hand.

"With a rush the horses come in a great swinging sweep round the curve of Tattenham Corner. There is a woman on the course, there, in amongst the horses, and a flag waves ... A hand grasps at a bridle, the King's horse swerves and falls; the King's jockey is hurled to the ground; cries and confusion everywhere ... the life so often risked has been given ..."

In the country home of Emily Davison, not far from London, her mother, whose bond of sympathy with her daughter was very strong, was standing in a room alone. "As she stood, something went by her—a bird it seemed. But how had it entered and how escaped? for the window was shut and the door, and looking she saw that there was nothing in the room, no living thing, save only herself."

Thus died Emily Davison, brandishing a flag of the Woman's Movement, to which she had devoted almost all her time, thought and energies for the last seven years of her life.

She was born on 11th October, 1872, at Blackheath, near London, but her family had come from Morpeth in the north of England, and after her death at the age of 31 years she was buried beside her father in the graveyard of Morpeth Church.

She was the second youngest of several children, but the youngest and her special playmate, her sister, Ethel, died in childhood. As a child, she does not seem to have shown the aggressive qualities manifested in later life, but was, we

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* *The Life of Emily Davison, An Outline*, by G. Colmore. The Woman's Press, Lincoln's Inn House, Kingsway, London, W.C., 1913, page 57. This quotation and any others in this article are from this publication.

are told, a happy, attractive, normal child, high-spirited, venturesome, sociable, a born leader, very affectionate and impulsive and most intelligent.

Whilst her family lived at Gaston House near the village of Sawbridgeworth between Hertsfordshire and Essex, they appear to have been in comfortable circumstances, and the children had a resident governess. Emily later went to the Kensington Girls' High School, where she not only excelled at sport (swimming, cycling and skating) but at her studies also, passing the Higher Certificate Examination of the Oxford and Cambridge Joint Board and obtaining, in 1891, a bursary at Holloway College. Her special interest was in English literature.

Her father's death in 1893, however, cut short her studies at Holloway College, and she had to earn a living as a governess. She managed to continue her studies during evenings and any other spare time available, eventually gaining a degree with honours at London University.

For some time afterwards she taught in public schools, but preferred work with private families, with one of which she remained for six years. In this work she seemed to be very happy, and often spoke of "her affection for her pupils and the kindness she received from their parents".

For some time she had been interested in the Woman's Movement, and in 1906 she joined the Women's Social and Political Union. After eighteen months, she was holding an official position in it, taking a prominent part in organising "the first of the many great processions organised by the Women's Social and Political Union, consisting of seven battalions of women converging from seven main starting points at Hyde Park and holding there a monster meeting".

The nineteenth century had seen some strong supporters of women's rights, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter, Mary Godwin, who married the poet, Shelley, and who wrote under the name of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley. On the whole, however, though some women obtained admission to universities and took degrees, the nineteenth century was an oppressive time for women. The greatest achievement on their behalf was probably the Married Women's Property Act in 1882. The state of affairs prior to that law was that not only that the woman, on her marriage, became a chattel of her husband, but everything she possessed became his also. This provided wonderful plots for novelists with scope for the machinations of villains such as the wicked Sir Percival Glyde in *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins or the scheming and equally amoral Sir Francis Levison in *East Lynne* by Mrs Henry Wood. The plight of the unhappily married woman, however, was a very sad and oppressed one and, in some cases, a desperate and dangerous one as well.

With such a fundamental injustice to be fought first, the lesser one that the franchise had been granted to all citizens with the exception of criminals, children, "lunatics" and women had to await some future struggle. The dawn of the twentieth century showed no progress in this direction until the Women's Social and Political Union began their campaigns.

It seems to be at some later stage that the term, "suffragette", denoting a supporter of women's suffrage, was coined, and not long afterwards that its meaning gained opprobrium until it expressed the stereotype of a very militant and sometimes even dangerous demonstrator. The people concerned were often highly educated and sometimes titled women, who considered that they had begun a holy crusade. As Emily Davison herself often said, they felt that "rebellion against tyranny is obedience to God", and the response of the authorities to their efforts added fuel to the fire.

At first the line taken was to ignore them, and no hint of their activities could get publicity in the press. As they resorted to more desperate measures involving

law-breaking of various kinds, however, their appearances in court, fines and imprisonment gave them the notoriety which they sought, though it lost them some sympathy in certain quarters.

At this stage, Emily Davison gave up teaching and devoted all her energies to the cause of which she had become one of its most active supporters. Their protests at first took the form of deputations, attempts to see the Prime Minister and other Members of Parliament to express their views, gate-crashing meetings from which women were excluded, causing interruptions by their noise outside, or trying to address the House of Commons. Emily made courageous attempts to do this on several occasions, on one of which she hid for nearly two days amongst the pipes of the central heating system of the Houses of Parliament.

It seems unlikely that she would have succeeded, even if she had been able to enter either of the Houses at a suitable time. But the overheated atmosphere of the place of her vigil caused an intolerable thirst, and she ventured out in search of water. In a letter to a friend she described her experiences:

> At 1.45 I descended. Arrived at the bottom I opened the glass window cautiously and looked out. No one was about. To my joy I saw just below the window a tap with a little tin dish below it, and "Cold" printed above it. I climbed out, and as all was silent, eagerly drank some water. It was indescribably comforting. I rubbed some over my begrimed face and hands. I dared not stay, so swallowing as much as I could of the blessed water I crept back into the hiding-place and up the shaft. After that I felt capable of waiting on for days, if necessary. I dozed occasionally, and listened for the Abbey afternoon service bells. Later on, however, I had to go down again for another drink. Four, five, and six o'clock struck, and once more I felt the need of water. I descended, alas for the last time. I drank of the cool, blessed water eagerly. Then I noticed that as the dish was narrow and flat a good deal of water was spilt on the floor, and fervently hoped no one would pass that way.
>
> I had just returned to my niche when I heard steps and saw light, for the evening was closing in. I drew back as far as I could, but, of course, the water attracted the watchman's eyes. He opened the door and looked in, and there he saw me.
>
> What I must have appeared to be I cannot say—a terrible object no doubt. The poor constable was terror-stricken, so that he nearly dropped his lantern. He trembled violently, and called out, "What is it?" He banged the window to, and then seized his whistle and blew it shrilly. Still trembling, he opened the door again and yelled "Come out!" When I descended he gripped me hard and drew me out of the passage, and there at last appeared another constable, very much astonished.
>
> After I had washed I was taken quietly to Cannon Row by the station passage, and had a meal which was brought to me by the matron, while they sent in every direction to find a friend who would bail me out, and at last, about 9.30, a constable came in and told me that I was free to go. I could hardly believe it, but found that the authorities had decided not to prosecute me. It appears that I could not have been tried in a Police Court, but would have to appear before the House of Commons itself; this is probably the reason I was not prosecuted. I went back to my lodgings to recover cleanliness and ordinary comfort. Such was my visit to the House of Commons!

This exploit was in the early stages of the women's campaign, which was to become much more serious and bitter. A sort of half-promise by Mr Asquith, the Prime Minister, of a Women's Suffrage Bill, caused a truce during the summer of 1910. During this period, Emily Davison employed her gifts as a writer by contributing articles on the work of eminent women such as Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry and Hannah More to the official organ of the Women's Social and Political Union.

Then, in the House of Commons, Mr Asquith announced his intention of shelving the Women's Suffrage Bill, and this caused another outbreak of hostilities. "What followed is well known: the deputation led by Mrs. Pankhurst; the sickening scenes round the House of Commons; the coarse roughness of the police and or the hooligan element, encouraged by the police; the orgy of brutality which has caused the name of Black Friday to be given to that day."

The campaign had begun again with renewed vigour, and protests took more violent forms, such as the breaking of glass and other damage to government and other public buildings. This resulted in more and heavier fines and longer periods of imprisonment. On principle the women never paid the fines but went to prison instead, though sympathisers sometimes paid their fines for them. When imprisoned, they demanded that they be treated as political prisoners and put in "the first division" of the gaols. This was refused, and they retaliated by barricading themselves in their cells and by hunger strikes.

Forcible feeding was then the method of dealing with hunger strikers, and was in no way to be compared with, for instance, the present-day hospital feeding intravenously of an unconscious patient with care and solicitude. Again we have a description by Emily Davison of her own experience. The matron of the gaol, two doctors and five or six wardresses entered her cell, and she was grasped by her hair and her head pulled violently on to the pillow. Then:

> While they held me flat, the elder doctor tried all round my mouth with a steel gag to find an opening. On the right side of my mouth two teeth are missing; this gap he found, pushed in the horrid instrument, and prised open my mouth to its widest extent. Then a wardress poured liquid down my throat out of a tin enamelled cup. What it was I could not say, but there was some medicament which was foul to the last degree. As I would not swallow the stuff and jerked it out with my tongue, the doctor pinched my nose and somehow gripped my tongue with the gag. The torture was barbaric.

It was on one such occasion when several other protesters were being treated in a similar way that Emily conceived the idea that "one big tragedy may save many others" and the thought "that some desperate protest must be made to put a stop to the hideous torture that was now being our lot". By smashing the panes of the window of her cell, she was able to climb out into a corridor, and threw herself from a staircase but fell on to some wire netting. Not being successful in her purpose, she says:

> I began to look again. I realised that my best means of carrying out my purpose was the iron staircase. When a good moment came, quite deliberately I walked upstairs and threw myself from the top, as I meant, on to the iron staircase. If I had been successful, I should undoubtedly have been killed, as it was a clear drop of 30 to 40 feet. But I caught once more on the edge of the netting. A wardress ran to me, expostulating, and called on two of my comrades to try and stop me. As she spoke I realised that there was only one chance left, and that was to hurl myself with the greatest force I could summon from the netting on to the staircase, a drop of about 10 feet. I heard someone saying "No surrender!" and threw myself forward on my head with all my might. I know nothing more except a fearful thud on my head.

In spite of severe injuries sustained to her head, the seventh cervicle vertebra and another at the base of the spine, right shoulder-blade, sacrum bone, vertebra at the back of the head and many bruises all over arms and back, she was not sent to hospital. She had a medical examination in her cell by a specialist and the prison doctors, and her head was dressed, but the forcible feeding was resumed, though it gave her intense pain.

A few days later, however, she was again examined by three doctors, and was told that she was to be released. She went to the house of friends, Mr and Mrs

Penn Gaskell, where she was nursed back to health, but it was a long time before she regained her strength. "At this time she spoke more than once of her idea that a life would have to be given before the vote was won, an idea which the trend of events and the action of the Government had deepened into a conviction." Though her friend, Mrs Gaskell agreed, she said, "It is not your life that should be given. You have done enough—done your full share and more", but Emily always replied, "Why not I as well as another?"

In the meantime, during her enforced withdrawal from the scenes of action, the campaign for Women's Suffrage continued, and the Census in 1911 presented a golden opportunity to the protesters. So many suffragettes (or "suffragists" as they preferred to call themselves) refused to fill in the papers that the threatened prosecutions had to be abandoned. Emily commented in her paper: "As I am a woman, and women do not count in this State, I refuse to be counted."

As soon as her health permitted, she resumed her efforts, this time more by public speaking and writing, sometimes under the auspices of the Workers' Educational Association, since her constitution had been weakened as a result of her prison experiences and her injuries. She did, however, undergo a period of imprisonment and hunger strike in Aberdeen, after which she spent some time at home with her mother, from whom she had kept as far as possible information about what she had endured.

At the end of May, 1913, she was one of the speakers at a lecture given in connection with the Workers' Educational Association, and her public appearance on this occasion was her last effort in support of her cause before the final tragedy on Derby Day in June.

In some ways the almost fanatical intensity of her devotion seems to be out of character, according to the descriptions of her by her teachers and the friends who knew her best. She is said to have had "a sunny, cheerful nature" and a sense of humour, and the former headmistress of her school often mentioned "the peculiar brightness of her look", to which a photograph could not do justice.

After her death, others remembering her motto that "rebellion against tyranny is obedience to God", carried on the work of supporting the Women's Cause. But on the international scene storm-clouds were gathering, and August, 1914, saw the outbreak of the Great War, World War I. During the ensuing years women were not only accepted but even welcomed to take the place of men in occupations which they had never entered before.

They acquitted themselves so well, and it was felt that so much was owed to their support in all areas of the war effort that there seems to have been hardly a dissentient voice when they were granted the vote by Parliament in 1918, many years after this privilege had been granted to women in Australia, in 1902, and in New Zealand, as early as 1893.

In the last few years before the War, the activities and sacrifices of the Women's Movement, the Women's Social and Political Union and the "suffragettes" generally seem to have been all in vain. To what extent, if any, did they contribute to the final victory? And how many women who fail to vote intelligently or do so as directed by their husbands, if they take the trouble to vote at all, remember the struggle for the privilege to which they attach so little value? At least, perhaps, in this International Women's Year we can spare a thought to the memory of Emily Davison and her sacrifice of her life on Derby Day, 1913.

WINTON RIFFE

Preparing His Place

Reverend F. C. Gonzales left the pulpit
Early, crippled hips and knees
Hands deformed by arthritis.
A furniture repair and antique shop
Occupied him, taxed his twisted
Hands past their limit.

Late winter snow, crusted and crystalline
Sun high and distant.
Grandfather in shirt sleeves on sheltered
Southside, whistling a hymn,
Crutches angled against the wall
Sitting on a chair facing a large
Box which rested on saw horses,
Carving with a set of knives, trim for his coffin.

Ten years after, he came to Colorado
To live with us, supervised the
Hoisting of the coffin into the rafters
Of our garage.

Fourteen months later,
Voice choked by the cancer
In his esophagus, he called
My father in, told him it
Was time. Time to get the casket down.

An artery behind his eyes gave way that night.

Carving coffin trim, sewing gold
Damask lining, he sat in the
Winter sun whistling one line
Of *River Jordan's Healing Waters.*

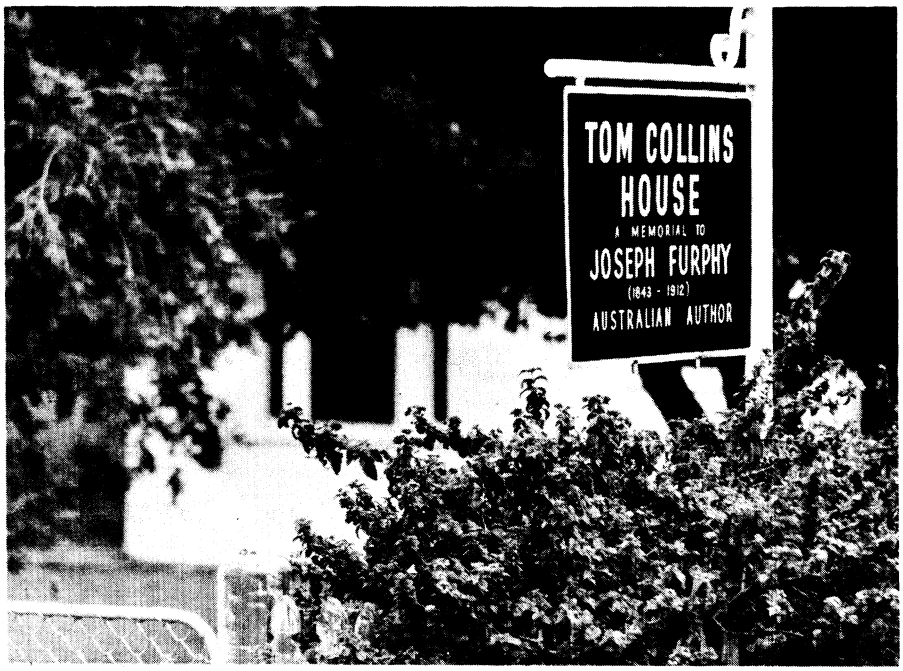
GRAEME KINROSS-SMITH

Joseph Furphy

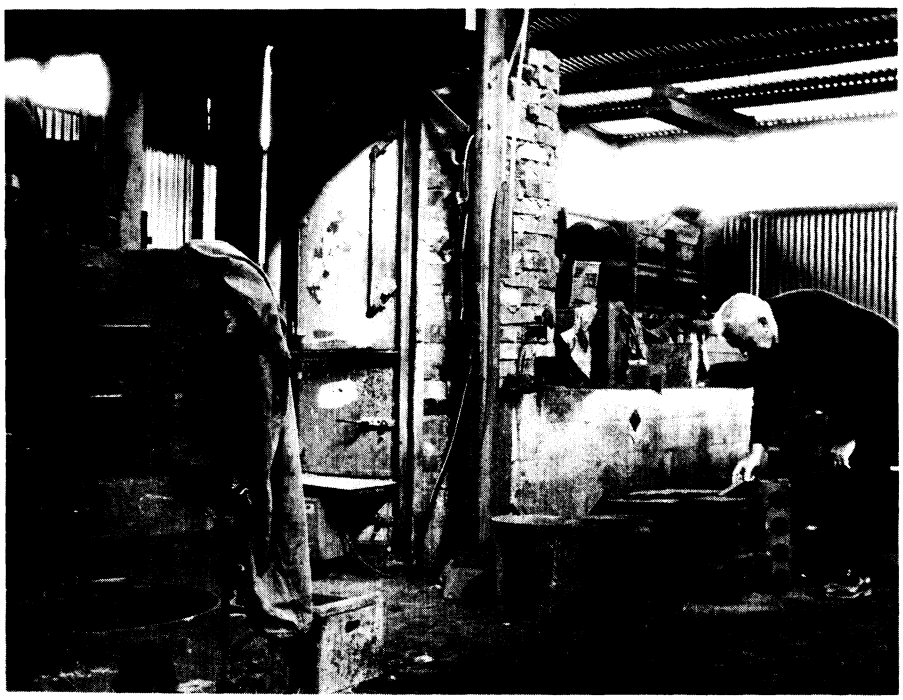
He was a man with green fingers, as we say—he grew moss roses, tree ferns, fuchsias. He worked in his garden and orchard by moonlight after a day's farm work at Corop. A man not given to hoarding either money or time. An hospitable man—"He was not content to give a meal to a tramp at the door", his son recalled. "He would invite him in and waste a whole Sunday in talking to him or anyone." A big man—"... his bronzed face, his tall, strongly built figure and the leisurely intonation of his voice were not the salients of a city dweller", Norman Lindsay wrote of him. A man self-educated, and with a passion for reading and knowledge—"half bushman and half bookworm" is how he described himself. "A lean, shrewd, proud, modest kindly man", said A. G. Stephens of the *Bulletin*. A man who had been goldminer, labourer, travelling demonstrator of farm machinery, foundry hand, farmer, bullock-driver. A father of two sons and a daughter—and of three children who did not survive infancy. A dour student and a lover of his own country—Miles Franklin, his friend and correspondent, tells us that in moments of frustration he would mutter, "Never mind; I still have Australia". A man who never lost the fondness for the Bible and for Shakespeare that his mother had instilled in him, who travelled the Riverina as a bullock-driver with a small edition of Shakespeare's plays in his pocket. A man for whom the Sermon on the Mount was a pointer towards socialism. This was Joseph Furphy, the author of *Such is Life*, one of the most important Australian novels yet written.

From his birth at Port Phillip only two years after his Irish parents had come to the colony, Furphy was a Victorian. "However we may flourish or wither here, our rootlets are still in the soil of Vic. and cannot be eradicated", he wrote when late in life he and his family moved to Western Australia. By the time he was twenty he had worked with his father on the land, as man and boy, first at Yering Station and then Kangaroo Ground in the Yarra's valley at the foot of the mountains, and later at Kyneton where he finished his schooling. For a time he operated a steam threshing plant, then spent an unprofitable time on the Victorian goldfields, all the while keeping up his lamplight reading at night. In the Furphy home great store was set on books.

In 1868 Joseph Furphy married Leonie Germaine. Soon after he moved with his new wife to Corop, on the old Colbin Abbin Station, not far from the present town of Stanhope in north-central Victoria. The selection at Corop, originally taken up by Joseph Furphy's father, still runs away on gently sloping ground from the heavy iron gate at the end of the drive. The gate, with the property name, "Jubilee Pines", cast in its bars, was made at the Furphy foundry in the



The house that Joseph Furphy built, in Swanbourne, Western Australia, provides a meeting place for Perth writers.



The Furphy foundry in Hoskin Street, Shepparton, 1973.

years after Joseph Furphy sweated there on the selection to bring the land under crop. The Boree tree, the Kurrajongs, the pear trees that Joseph Furphy planted there still punctuate the new-ploughed ground on the slope towards the house. In a shed stands the Furphy smithy—anvil and fire and huge leather bellows. Even now it is occasionally called into use. Furphy toiled there, built a timber house with his own hands, raised an orchard and flower garden. But in Furphy's words, it was the "worst selection in Rodney Shire". A run of bad seasons on the poor soil forced him at last to sell up.

He took labouring jobs. He tried his luck again on the Bendigo diggings to make ends meet, but failed. Finally he took up the role of bullock-driver. He based himself at Hay in the dry plains of the northern Riverina, set himself up with a bullock wagon and an initial team of four bullocks, and contracted for carting work in the Riverina on both sides of the Murray. Furphy grew to know the bush, the lignum scrub, the squatters and their precious grass and fences. He knew the sinuous Murray and its beautiful reaches in the ringing redgum forests from Moama and Echuca through the Barmah forest and east to Tocumwal and beyond. He knew the way the plains stretch dryly northwards into the interior from Deniliquin. He knew sleeper cutters, splitters, drovers, outstation men, bush "hatters". Although he had not a thought of writing at the time, Furphy was to build all this years later in Shepparton into his greatest literary work, the long initial version of *Such is Life*.

"For seven or eight years", Furphy wrote disarmingly of his bullock-driving days, "I followed this adventurous and profane occupation, partly on the Victorian border, but chiefly in Northern Riverina, where I saw all that was to be seen." Sometimes his wife Leonie and his children camped with him, sometimes they stayed in Hay. Felix, his eldest son, drove the second wagon, while Furphy struggled to build up a team of 24 bullocks with full equipment. "But the expenses", he wrote in a letter to his father, "are such as would have swallowed my Victorian income and called for more—wages, repairs, material—such as ropes, chains, canvas, etc.—rent, horse feed and travelling expenses such as water and bridge tolls . . ."

Managing to keep only £10 to £20 in hand, Furphy worked on. It was a lonely, uncertain life. On one occasion he came close to dying of thirst in the dry plains and belts of Murray pine. He sucked scratches on his hands for liquid and thought of killing his horse for its blood. Just at that time he found a providential puddle in the bush, strewn around with the carcases of dead stock. Furphy, in his own words, "strained the nauseous mud" between his teeth and was able to move on until he found a hut and water.

The drought of 1883 ruined Furphy. "I was never out of sight of dying cattle and horses, let alone dead ones", he wrote. His team was almost wiped out by pleuropneumonia. Furphy, his eyes seared with opthalmia from his years on the dry plains, returned to Shepparton. His hopes of working on his own account were dashed. His brother John, a staunch Methodist and lay preacher, had set up an agricultural machinery works and foundry in Wyndham Street, Shepparton. Joseph settled down to work there for his keep.

By this time, however, Joseph Furphy had begun to write. His day in the foundry was only secondary to the literary pieces that he worked to turn out—short sketches and poems for the *Bulletin* mainly. Living close to the foundry in a cottage that backed onto the banks of the Goulburn River, Furphy worked in the foundry by day and wrote at night in the tiny hut that he called his "sanctum". It was just large enough to hold table, stretcher, chair and a kerosene lamp with an an old felt hat over it as a shade. "Every evening is occupied", he wrote, "in shifting a fresh bit of my ignorance." As well as reading eagerly and deeply

Furphy now began to work quietly on some stories of his bullock-driving days, encouraged by the letters of William Cathels, a blacksmith and book lover to whom he had been introduced by fortunate chance on one of his trips to Melbourne. Joseph Furphy was hardly of a caste of mind to be understood by the remainder of the god-fearing and commercially acute and successful Furphy brothers and their families. He was largely writing alone, without backstops, advice or encouragement. He relished Cathels' opinions therefore, and their swapping of notes on their reading. And later came Kate Baker, the young schoolteacher, who from 1887 gave him the support in his writing that his own humility needed. It was these two friends, Furphy knew, who could be relied upon to give him honest opinions of his work in progress.

The story of the writing of *Such is Life* has become in itself a legend of dogged persistence and genius. The beginnings of the book were in those innocently written stories of Furphy's days as a bullock-driver. Furphy in his riverbank sanctum worked slowly on the task of "federating" seven of the pieces, with the unheeding commercial preoccupation of his family and Shepparton around him. "The idea of Joe being able to write a book was considered a joke by all the family connections except his mother; she knew he could", wrote E. E. Pescott, Furphy's early biographer. It took Furphy years to write and rewrite his "yarn", to federate the stories, to check details in the Shepparton Mechanics Institute, or to ask Kate Baker or his friend Cathels to look up references in the Melbourne Public Library. It took him a full year to write in his copperplate handwriting the 1125 pages of manuscript which he hoped would be the final draft. This he humbly sent to J. F. Archibald of the *Bulletin* for advice in 1897:

> "I have just finished writing a full-sized novel: title *Such is Life*; scene, Riverina and Northern Vict.; temper, democratic; bias, offensively Australian."

Fortunately for Furphy and for Australia A. G. Stephens, the brilliant young editor of the *Bulletin*'s Red Page replied, asking to see the manuscript. Having read it Stephens admired it:

"I am in the habit of classifying MS as 'worthless', 'tolerable', 'fair', 'good', or 'very good'. *Such is Life* is 'good'. It seems to me fitted to become an Australian classic or semi classic . . ." wrote Stephens.

But this was merely the beginning. Stephens advised Furphy to type the manuscript. Furphy, undaunted, undertook this task himself because, as he explained to Stephens in a letter, he could not trust any typist to be able to transcribe the dialect of the bullock-drivers, drovers, squatters and bushmen of the Murray River and the plains who peopled his novel. First Furphy had to teach himself to type on an old Franklin typewriter he had bought for the purpose. "There are two typewriters in this town", he wrote to Stephens. "One in a lawyer's office, and one which my Right Rev. elder brother keeps for writing out his exhortations . . . Therefore I got a Franklin for myself, and to be sure, I keep her jigging every evening. I am now at page 64 of the written MS., though I started less than a fortnight ago . . ." Tap-tapping at lunch time and in the evenings Furphy took almost a year to finish typing out the manuscript. He then showed the complete work to Cathels and Kate Baker. Both recognized greatness in it.

But it was not until 1903, after Furphy had cut out two major sections in the original and Stephens had persuaded his superiors at Bulletin Publications that they should include Furphy's novel in their newly started *Bulletin Library* series of Australian books that *Such is Life* appeared. Furphy, who had not begun writing until he was forty, was by then 60 years old. The book had been six years in the publishers' hands.

Such is Life sold slowly, its worth not appreciated against the more immediate appeal of the established writers like Steele Rudd and Henry Lawson. But it had in it a liveliness, a philosophical scope, an Australianism, an unsentimental wisdom that would bring a later generation to see its central influence in Australian fiction.

Since Furphy's death his book has been recognised as a classic for its detail (Furphy wrote with deep knowledge and realism of the men and the bush of the Riverina) and for its marvellously interwoven plot echoing the humour, the pathos, the tragic irony that he knew as part of life in the bush. And it is all told at a half remove through Tom Collins, Furphy's earnest but young and fallible narrator. Tom Collins was the pseudonym used by Furphy in his previously published sketches. He had taken it from the name given to that mythical man who is the fount of all bush fantasy. "Ask Tom Collins!" bushmen used to say if they were at a loss for the origin of a story.

Furphy scorned the romanticized accounts of Australian bush life presented in the novels of men like Henry Kingsley and other Anglo-Australian writers who did not know the country at first hand, who failed to understand it, and who drew a gloss over life in the bush while suggesting always the innate superiority of the well-educated Englishman over the native-born bushman. In *Such is Life* Tom Collins speaks for Furphy as he complains of the "threepenny braggadocio of caste which makes the languid Captain Vernon de Vere (or words to that effect) an overmatch for half a dozen hard-muscled white savages, any one of whom would take his lordship by the ankles and wipe the battlefield with his patrician visage . . . which makes the rosy-cheeked darling of the English rectory show the saddle-hardened specialists of the back country how to ride a buck-jumper; which makes a party of resourceful bushmen stand helpless in the presence of flood or fire, till marshalled by some hero of the croquet lawn."

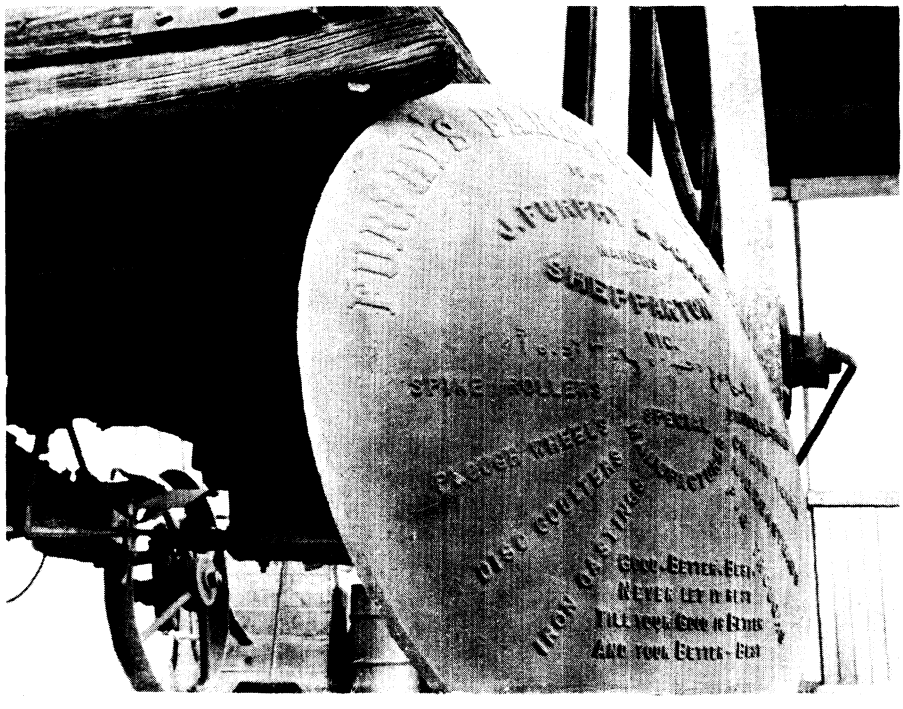
Life, says Furphy through Tom Collins in *Such is Life*, is a mixture of predestination and free will. Like a bifurcating railway line it constantly offers choices of direction to the indivdual, and his decision to take one branch line rather than the other on each of these occasions can drastically affect events that follow. Furphy's device is to show the effects of this through Tom Collins as narrator. Collins delves at random into the diary he has kept of his tracking through the Riverina as a government official. He then gives an expanded account of the happenings on each of the chosen days. His descriptions take us to drovers' camps, to stations, to towns all through the Riverina—Wilcannia, Moama, Hay, Booligal, Deniliquin—as well as up and down the Murray, the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee.

The book has its moments of graphic tragedy—all the more powerful because unsentimental. What quirk of chances allows a child, seventy-two hours lost in the bush, to die by falling down a bilby-hole with help only an hour behind her? In another incident a bushman dies of thirst and exhaustion almost within reach of food and water because Tom Collins has mistaken him the day before for someone settling down for a nap under a tree and has taken the fateful decision not to disturb him.

The book is varied in its irony, in its argument and anecdote, and in its sprinkling of Tom Collins' pieces of conjecture and his airings of his factual knowledge:

> (For the information of people whose education may unhappily have been neglected, it will be right to mention that the little morsel of chewed bread which a tin-smith of the old school places on his seam to check the inconvenient flow of the solder, is technically and appropriately termed a 'tinker's dam'. It is the conceivable minimum of commercial value.)

Old hands return to the Furphy foundry in Shepparton for the celebration of its centenary. Joseph Furphy worked in the foundry by day, and wrote in his shack on the banks of the Goulburn, at night.



The cast end of the Furphy water-cart.

And *Such is Life* has wry humour to set against the inexorable grinding on of life and death. There is probably no more amusing passage in Australian literature than Collins' description of his swamping as he tries to cross the Murray on a simple bark canoe belonging to some timber splitters. The canoe sinks, Collins boards a floating log and in trying to swim to the bank with his clothes on his head loses them all. He lands naked on the Victorian bank as night falls, all the time thinking he is in New South Wales:

> Now, though the Murray is the most crooked river on earth, its general tendency is directly from east to west. Would n't you, therefore—if you were on a floating log, remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow; standing, like the Apollo Sauroctones, with your hand on the adjacent stump, and, to enhance your resemblance to that fine antique, clad in simplicity of mien and nothing else—if you were sadly realising the loss of your best clothes, with all the things in the pockets, including a fairly trustworthy watch—if, in addition to this, the patient face of the spratless swagman was rising before you till you involuntarily muttered "O Julius Cæsar! thou art mighty yet!" and the nasty part of your moral nature was reminding you that you might have had anything up to four-pounds-odd worth of heavenly debentures; whereas, having failed to put your mammon of unrighteousness into celestial scrip, to await you at the end of your pilgrimage, you were now doubly debarred from retaining it in your pilgrim's scrip, by reason of having neither scrip nor mammon—under such circumstances, I say, would n't you be very likely to take the sunset on your left, and swing for the north bank, without doing an equation in algebra to find out which way the river ought to run? That is what I did. It never occurred to my mind that Victoria could be on the north side of New South Wales.
>
> After shouting myself hoarse, and whistling on my fingers till my lips were paralysed, I brought Pup into view on the south, and supposedly Victorian bank, opposite where I had landed. By the time I had induced him to take the water and rejoin me, the short twilight was gone, and night had set in, dark, starless, hot, and full of electricity.
>
> And the mosquitoes. Well, those who have been much in the open air, in Godiva costume, during opaque, perspiring, November nights, about Lake Cooper, or the Lower Goulburn, or the Murray frontage, require no reminder; and to those who have not had such experience, no illustration could convey any adequate notion. Hyperbolically, however: In the localities I have mentioned, the severity of the periodical plague goads the instinct of animals almost to the standard of reason. Not only will horses gather round a fire to avail themselves of the smoke, but it is quite a usual thing to see some experienced old stager sitting on his haunches and dexterously filliping his front shoes over a little heap of dry leaves and bark.
>
> To return. The recollection of much worse predicaments in the past, and the reasonable anticipation of still worse in the future, restored that equilibrium of temper which is the aim of my life; and I felt cheerful enough as I welcomed my dripping companion, and, taking a leafy twig in each hand to switch myself withal, started northward for the river road, which I purposed following eastward to where the pad branched off, and then running the latter to my camp. Once clear of the river timber, and with the road for a base, the darkness, I thought, would make little difference to me . . .

But Collins is reduced to making a number of attempts to get a pair of trousers from people he meets in the darkness. Couples returning from a Sunday School picnic by buggy and on horseback take him for a naked lunatic at large in the riverside forest . . .

It is not surprising, if we view *Such is Life* as a whole, that the critic Hartley Grattan accords it a similar place in Australian writing to that occupied by *Moby Dick* in the American tradition. "Tom Collins (Joseph Furphy) is the nearest

approach to Herman Melville that Australia has produced", Grattan wrote. *Such is Life* indeed has the solidity, the integrity, the thoroughness of background and conception that puts it in that class.

In his later life, elated at seeing *Such is Life* in print, Furphy rewrote two of the sections excised from the original. One became *Rigby's Romance*, with its natural fishing stories of the Murray River. The other became the "tall" story entitled *The Buln Buln and the Brolga*. Both carry the wry Furphy stamp, but neither touched the genius of his magnum opus. Furphy failed to find a publisher for either of them as a book in his lifetime.

For a time Furphy continued to work for wages at the Shepparton foundry. In 1904 he moved to Fremantle to join his sons Felix and Samuel and his daughter Sylvia. In the West he again built a house, this time of jarrah, with his own hands. He established a garden and fruit trees. The house, "Tom Collins House", in the suburb of Swanbourne, has remained a memorial to him since it was handed over to the West Australian Fellowship of Australian Authors after his death. It is still their meeting place. Furphy continued his correspondence with his now distant literary friends in the Eastern states. And he began to enjoy and understand the sea—he had never known it at close quarters before. Then, one day in September 1912, leading a horse to do some carting, Furphy had a sudden brain haemorrhage and died.

Furphy's death went almost unnoticed. His work was still little known. It fell to later readers to understand its importance. It is interesting to read a memorandum written by the far-sighted A. G. Stephens years earlier in 1899, strongly urging his superiors at the *Bulletin* to publish Furphy's famous novel. It was some 30 years after Furphy's death that Australians began to realize fully the truth of Stephens' assessment:

> "This book contains all the wit and wisdom gathered in Furphy's lifetime: it is his one book—it is himself. It is thoroughly Australian—a classic of our country."

A Postscript

Over a hundred years of business perhaps the best known product of John Furphy and Sons, the Shepparton foundry in which Joseph Furphy spent a considerable part of his life, has been the famous Furphy water cart. These water tanks, rigged first on steel tyred wheels and in later years on rubber motor tyres, have served and still serve on farms and construction camps all over the country. The end of each tank is cast in the foundry, impressed with the distinctive messages added to the company name by the original John Furphy and his son, William.

Good, better, best,
Never let it rest—
Till your good is better
And your better best . .

proclaims the lower section in English, while the body of the cast plate lists the other products of the foundry—swingle trees, chain yolks, middensteads, pig troughs, land graders, mallee rollers and steel delvers—all of which Joseph Furphy had worked at making in his years in the dim light of the foundry. An addition to the wording on the tank end was made by the son William. A line of Pitman's shorthand exhorts the user of the cart in these terms:

Water is the Gift of God,
But Beer and Whisky are Concoctions of the Devil;
Come and Have a Drink of Water . . .

The word furphy, meaning a rumour or piece of gossip, is now part of the language. It is said to originate from the fact that the Furphy water carts used to ply up and down the regimental lines among the troops during the First World War. Men gathered round the wagon and its driver for a drink and heard and retailed the latest rumours, some of them brought from other camps by the driver of the water cart.

In March 1973 the foundry of John Furphy and Sons held its centenary celebrations. Early samples of the foundry's products were offered by farmers from all over the Riverina, the doors of the foundry were opened to visitors, the walls of the present foundry (in Hoskin Street, Shepparton, where the business had moved from the Wyndham Street site in 1906) were lined with old photographs of the foundry and its employees. One of these showed a moustachio'd Joseph Furphy standing in an apron at a work bench with other workers on the foundry floor.

To the foundry during its centenary week came a number of former employees. Among them was Frank Attwood, who recalls working with Joseph Furphy in the foundry before the writer moved to Western Australia. "I was just out of school then", Frank Attwood explained. "So of course I have a boy's impression of him. I was the 'joey' for the place at the time. I can remember the way the blokes used to chiack me, sending me up to the gasworks to bring back a bag of gas and that sort of thing. They all used to yarn in the foundry at lunchtime on wet days. Joseph too. But he'd generally go off at lunch and type a foolscap page or so. He didn't have a bad spot there with his hut. You know the saying—'Live on a river bank and fall in'. Well, that was just about right. Joseph could do that. After a day's work in the foundry I'd hear him say, 'Ah, well. Another day gone. Another day closer to the grave.' And his writing was everything to him. Nothing else mattered. What he was writing then I don't know. But sometimes when we were working I'd see his lips moving. I'd think he was calling me over for something. But no—he'd just be working out the words aloud for what he was going to write . . ."

HUMPHREY McQUEEN

The Lindsays and 'Vision'—a Marxist Reading

The *Vision* grouping, which gravitated around Norman Lindsay in the early 1920s, is once more being taken seriously with John Docker locating *Creative Effort* in the mainstream of a Sydney cultural tradition and Douglas Stewart demonstrating the significant support for and influence of *Vision*'s four issues.[1] While their articles help make an appreciation of the *Vision* grouping possible, they leave untouched the class nature of the ideas which the Lindsays produced, since Stewart is concerned with the immediate questions of authorship and influence, while Docker spends much of his time establishing Norman Lindsay's relationship to the universals of the Western intellectual tradition. The present article, by contrast, offers a Marxist reading of the Lindsays' writings of the years from 1920 to 1924, demonstratng that 'bourgeois ideologue' is an exact, substantial and non-pejorative formulation.

The definition of class ideologues employed here is that given by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*:

> Just as little must one imagine that the democratic representatives are indeed all shopkeepers or enthusiastic champions of shopkeepers. According to their education and their individual position they may be as far apart as heaven from earth. What makes them representatives of the petty bourgeoisie is the fact that in their minds they do not get beyond the limits which the latter do not get beyond in life, that they are consequently driven, theoretically, to the same problems and solutions to which material interest and social position drive the latter practically. This is, in general, the relationship between the *political* and *literary representatives* of a class and the class they represent.[2]

The same rule applies to bourgeois and proletarian ideologues. Their personal class origins are irrelevant to the determination of their class situation, although these origins will clearly have great importance in determining the range and nature of ideas and practices open to them in forming their view of the world. What is decisive is whether their view of the world co-incides with the social practices and needs of a particular class. Thus someone born and brought up as a feudal baron is a proletarian ideologue if his world outlook coincides with the practical interests of the proletariat just as surely as it is possible for a member of the central committee of a Communist Party to be a petit-bourgeoisie ideologue. In seeking to locate an ideologue's class situation, any investigation of his rela-

1 John Docker, 'Norman Lindsay's *Creative Effort*: Manifesto for an Urban Intelligensia', *Australian Literary Studies*, May 1973, vol. 6, no. 1; Douglas Stewart, 'Slessor and "Vision",' *Quadrant*, July 1975, vol. 19, no. 4.

2 K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, Volume One, p. 424.

tives, share holdings and club memberships is a waste of time. The only thing that matters is the content of his thought. These other things might help us understand why he thinks such and such a thing, but they are not "the what" he thinks. Thus a bishop who advocates government-assisted small-landed proprietorship, as an alternative to capitalism and socialism, is a petty bourgeois ideologue even if his father was a wharf labourer, his wife a major shareholder in BHP, and he himself a member of the Melbourne Club. Consequently, all sociometric surveys of teachers, parsons and novelists which seek to determine their class situation through multi-factoral analysis of their education, religion, place of residence, family background and wealth are irrelevant because they ignore the one thing that determines an ideologue's class situation, namely, the thing he or she produces —ideas.

Ancillary though it is to the establishment of the class nature of the Lindsays' ideas, some recollection of the immediate environment in which these ideas were produced will help in the approach to such an analysis.

Horror at the Great War and 'the strong feeling ... of a coming war, a convulsion that would leave 1914-18 far behind' were major concerns of the *Vision* group around the Lindsays. Responding to some 'patriotically callous comments' from an associate, Norman Lindsay exploded, 'Do you know what you're talking about? The war isn't something over there, in Europe. It's here in this room. There's blood everywhere, all round us, on everything, on us. Can't you smell it?' According to his son, Jack, Norman's entire outlook was reshaped by the Great War:

> His Nietzscheanism, which he used to concentrate his love of energy and fertility, his contempt of other-worldliness and of the lies by which men shrouded cruelty and repression, he now inverted and fabricated into a transcendental philosophy. If all that he had dreamed of joy and sensuous fulfilment was denied by a world of maddened war, then he would deny and defy the world by lifting his dream clean out of it. He clung to the dream, but felt he could sustain it intact only by locating it outside time and space in a new dimension.

This is a good example of crisis optimism, of re-establishing hope by retreating from the world of men and building hope outside human experience, outside the only area where it has any meaning.

Jack Lindsay prepared a libretto for his composer friend, Beutler, on the theme of Atlantis, the lost world. The opera, with its climatic social, spiritual and scientific conflicts culminating in the destruction of the earth, was barely commenced

> but Beutler improvised themes and motives, struggling to define a vast pressure of maddened and cruel forces and to pit against this the luminous image of joy and beauty. We were thrilled, again and again, by the pictures we summoned up in our minds of huge barbaric ceremonials of bloodlust and mass-movements of violence; the sort of thing that at the moment seemed sheer fantasy ...[3]

Without some recognition of the impact of the Great War, it would be difficult, though not impossible, to proceed to any meaningful analysis of the Lindsays' ideas at this time.

* * *

Vision's importance resides in its well thought-out view of the world as much as in its grab-bag of responses to everything intellectual. While it rejected modernism it was up-to-date in a way no other Australian publication has managed. Its contributors scoured the cultural presses of the world in search of decadence to

[3] Jack Lindsay, *The Roaring Twenties*, London: Bodley Head, 1960, pp. 137, 66, 67 and 190.

attack. The cadavers of literature, music, art and science were dissected with amused horror. Fascination with the rottenness of modernism did not mean they were tempted to it. Rather modernism and *Vision* shared a 'violent rejection of the society that had begotten the 1914-18 war'.[4] Where the Dadaists and early Surrealists accepted irrationality as an inspiration, *Vision* ached for classical certainties. Civilisation had to be defended by reasserting its hard won lessons of ordered yet vital creativity. Chaos could be expelled only through the renaissance of certain great masters. In music, the little boys had recently received a pea-rifle 'in the guise of the whole tone scale' while their older brothers were quaffing gallons of green Chartreuse for breakfast, otherwise known as imitating Debussy:

> The only hope is in the swing of the pendulum. Let the young men turn again to the wisdom of the ancients ... Handel ... gave them the key to tone-colour. Bach will give them intricacy of design, cross-woven, and shot with gold. Beethoven can abundantly provide them with rhythm. Wagner is an inexhaustible treasure house.[5]

In art, Rubens would yet be 'a Lord of Futurity' and Praxiteles 'a far light ahead'.[6]

Undoubtedly, *Vision*'s driving force was the twenty-three year old Jack Lindsay, and its range of interests is an early testament to his life-long passion for knowledge. The substantive essence of *Vision*'s message had been made in three articles which Norman and Jack Lindsay had written previously for *Art in Australia*. Taking Pound and de la Mare as representing "Two Directions in Modern Poetry",[7] Jack Lindsay attacked Pound for lacking vitality, for ignoring the aesthetic, and for being 'puerile after the fashion of a smart cynical undergraduate'. De la Mare was defended. Although 'only a small voice, almost only a whisper', he sought 'Beauty' and his 'own individual rhythm'. The key words were 'vitality' and 'Beauty'. Replying to Captain Pitt-Rivers's attempt to provide art with a social purpose through examples from Melanesian cultures, Jack Lindsay agreed that there was a connection between 'general social disruption' and 'the moral disruption' called Art, but disagreed that they had arisen from an individualistic attack on communal order, as the anthropologist had suggested. Both stemmed from a 'mob disorder' that was 'due to a general collapse of Mind values' which was equally apparent when 'thousands of half-formed minds mutilate paper and canvas with vile forms' and in the 'mob hatred that wished to mutilate bodies in war'. 'The present period is one of mental chaos, a transition in which all forms, social and aesthetic are broken.'[8]

These ideas were only the application of his father's opinions as set down in a long article 'The Inevitable Future'[9] which argued that 'Man is a worse savage today than he was 2,000 years ago ... because his power ... is greater ...' and will grow worse as 'mechanical ingenuity, mistaken for progress' increases:

> Tomorrow he will throw battalions across the air, and drive armies underneath the sea. He will use radio activity to harness the sun's rays and generate a power that will wipe out cities at a flash. He will cultivate disease bacilli which will depopulate whole countries in a few weeks. (p. 22)

The 1914-18 war had the virtue of destroying hope through collective effort so that henceforth civilisation would have to seek its surety in 'the developed intellect' who more than ever needed the 'Practical Mind' to ensure 'order'. (p. 23)

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 98.
[5] Andrew McCunn, 'Melophobia', *Vision*, no. 3, p. 23.
[6] 'Foreword', *Vision*, no. 2, p. 4.
[7] *Art in Australia*, 2nd Series, no. 2, p. 43.
[8] Jack Lindsay, 'Social Purpose as a Manifestation of Art', *Art in Australia*, 3rd Series, no. 3, no pagination.
[9] Norman Lindsay, 'The Inevitable Future', *Art in Australia*, 2nd Series, no. 1; page numbers will be inserted after each quotation.

'The developed intellect' possessed the "nerve tissue" which enabled him to 'see a thing as it is, and so conceive what such a thing should be, and by that conception, seek to bring all imperfection towards a symbol of perfection'. Because 'the savage' lacked this "nerve tissue", education had 'only made him more dangerous' because of his 'monkey trick of imitation'. (p. 25) If Dr Johnson could not see well enough to tell which of his dinner companions was Omai, a south sea islander, and which was Lord Mulgrave, there was at least a distinction to be made. Today, it was not possible to know which was which because both were most likely savages, despite their table manners. (p. 27)

Appeals to the humanity of the savage were impossible because he did not have any. The savage was excited by Goya's humane portrayals of horror, while the 'developed intellect' was depressed and hence weakened by them to the extent that the savage was no longer dominated by the vitalising idea of the 'developed intellect'. (p. 27) Indeed, 'the whole outburst of modern savagery, with commercialism as its creed, and war as one of its effects, is due to the inertia, cowardice, and feebleness of the civilized mind on earth to-day. (p. 31) Before this could be reversed the true nature of the 'creative mind' had to be recognised. Lindsay's argument was a restated Platonism in which civilization was an Ideal which could not be improved upon because it was caused by the 'creative world mind' existing prior to experience. Progress was an impossible, irrelevant and highly dangerous illusion because it could mask a decline from the Ideal.

Whenever the 'creative mind' was vital it set up an ever-widening vibration of 'mental energy' which allowed the 'Practical Mind' to control the 'Educatable Mind':

> In short, he is able to direct savagery to useful and necessary activities in the service of the struggle for existence on earth, and by so employing it, to deflect it from its normal impulse of robbery and blood lust. (p. 32)

The present chaos was due to the failure of the perceptive mind—'the Economist, the Sociologist, the Politician, and the Lawgiver' (p. 32)—who had succumbed to scepticism, leaving the savage (the educatable mind) to his own innocent devices of 'making inevitable war and fresh war in the future'. The road back would be long and difficult but it had to commence with a 'continual re-affirmation of all that is highest' (p. 33), which meant Shakespeare and Beethoven: 'If these two great minds are displaced in value, all values on earth fail. When such values fail, vitality fails also.' Bernard Shaw and Samuel Butler were examples of the 'universal collapse of perception'. For as long as they kept to satire they were 'useful and entertaining' (p. 35). But 'they turned from making a joke of the common people to trying to make a joke of ... all great expression in mind'. (p. 36)

That the United States was awakening to 'her impending disaster' was evident in her buying up of European culture, since in the struggle between East and West she 'will need every ounce of vitality she can draw from the life-giving source of art'. Fortunately, the East attracted only its own kind, those who lacked vitality, mind greatness and intention in life. It was because it lacked these qualities—and not for any racial reasons—that the East must be subordinated to the West's 'mission of earth civilisation'. The outcome of the war between East and West depended upon the ability of the West to 'return to vitality of mind'. If this happened then a glorious future awaited all men—creative, practical and educatable—unless the savage did not learn his lesson in which case the renewed vitality would exterminate him in any future war. (p. 38)

Australia had a special place in the re-emergence of the creative mind because primitivism in the arts had 'failed to get even a hearing here' and because 'there

was some courage to face the simple truth of life'. (p. 38) It was this belief in Australia's privileged position that spawned *Vision*.

Deliberately cut off from all but other "Hyperboreans", Norman Lindsay's views were nonetheless ideologically coherent with the most immediate requirements of the bourgeosie which centred on three issues: class dominance; imperial survival; and war. Lindsay's three tiers of minds were readily accesible to bourgeois needs for they offered a social set in which the artist (Lindsay) required that the organiser (capitalist) keep the mob (proletariat) hard at work. Lindsay's occasionally explicit condemnation of capitalists arose from their failure to keep to their appointed sphere, and either interfered with the artist or, more usually, failed to organise the mob with sufficient vigour, that is, failed to be thorough-going capialists. Similarly, his view that the East was inherently incapable of a life-intention justified its continued dominance by the West. Lindsay was providing a pagan equivalent for muscular Christianity in the ideology of Imperalism. Third, by accepting the irretrievable irrationality of almost all mankind Lindsay accepted the inevitability of that which he most feared: war. Moreover, his stress on atavism as the root cause of war silently excused the need for firm social analysis. If the Great War was caused by the mob then the only blame attachable to the managers was their failure to manage with vigour. The prevention of war required more determined managers, and not their overthrow as a class. At a time when capitalism was reeling from the blows inflicted on its ideological dominance by the Great War, it would be difficult to imagine a more comforting doctrine. Norman's rejection of politics and of social purposes was denied by his explicit élitism and by his identification of the 'mob' as the enemy of civilization, since in the early 1920s only one mob was conceivable—the proletariat.

Norman Lindsay's longest theoretical essay, *Creative Effort*, was first published in 1920. Analysis of this work has been left till now because it made few concessions to the reader, being dedicated to other Creative Minds since only they would be able to understand its true meaning. The bulk of the work provided quite convincing examples for Lindsay's otherwise very doubtful premises, although both examples and premises were as logically argued, forcefully written and well-structured as the broad spectrum of Australian academic treatises at that time. Because *Creative Effort*[10] contained no central idea that has not already been explicated from Lindsay's other writing, it will not be given a detailed treatment here. Instead, it is proposed to concentrate upon the class coherence of Lindsay's philosophy since it is both central to this article and the aspect most likely to provoke doubt in readers accustomed to scorn the very notion of class in economic and political—let alone literary—analysis.

While Lindsay encouraged social amelioration to help keep the mob in order, he accepted that it would work no permanent changes: 'Mind may be displayed under the stress of circumstance, but no circumstance can affect its structure'. (p. 196) His entire social outlook depended upon this axiom of the fixedness of the three categories of Mind: Creative, Practical and Educatable. Eternal recurrence (p. 10) was the rule, although temporary imbalances were inevitable since Life and Existence were in constant motion. So that the Creative Mind could produce its 'imperishable wealth' (p. 48) these imbalances had to be suppressed. Order was the greatest of the virtues because it was the precondition of all that was worthwhile. The Creative Mind inspired order but it was the Practical Mind which had to produce it. The function of the Practical Mind was to stand between the Creative Mind and the mob to 'keep the human pigsty clean, wholesome and decorous'. Without its organising efforts, 'the high effort would be torn to pieces by wolves, and trampled on by pigs! The services of Existence is a bodyguard for

[10] Norman Lindsay, *Creative Effort*, Sydney: Art in Australia, 1920; page numbers will be inserted after each quotation.

life ...'. (p. 105, cf. 114) Yet even when the Practical Mind failed in its duties there remained a natural force which finally restored order. Because the mob was motivated by its belly it would not allow a total destruction of Existence. The levelling instinct would be checked by the need to survive, as the existing industrial upheaval would show:

> For this reason, the future of the lower and disorderly elements of society will be organised slavery. That is inevitable, for the worker is demanding it himself, by striving to become a menace, not merely to the more intelligent and ingenious class of society, but to the process of existence, of which he is also an element. It is not a question of justice or injustice, but of necessity, and the worker in the end will find his solution in a benevolent system of slavery, which will make his conditions easier and insure him safety in the struggle for exstence. Therefore all good politicians and humanitarians should welcome the mob impulse of misrule that has overtaken the stress of industrial conditions, for it means that the worker and employer will both come under stricter supervision and the reaction will be towards social order. (p. 85-6)

This long explicit statement is produced in full so that those who require the superficial evidence of direct quotation might be appeased. Certainly, it spells out what is imminent in Lindsay, but it is not a valid substitute for reading the structure of his thought, and is no more than a secondary confirmation of the correctness of such a reading.

At the end of this quotation there is mention of controlling 'the employer'. Surely this denies everything that has been said about the coherence of Lindsay's ideas with the capitalists? No. First, the demand is to control, not abolish, and some state control had been accepted by most capitalists in 1920. Second, and far more importantly, it has never been suggested that Lindsay liked capitalists. The class coherence of his ideas depends upon his not proceeding in theory beyond the limits which capitalists did not exceed in their practice. In Lindsay's case, his endorsement of the regulatory role of the practical mind over the mob travelled exactly the same distance as the capitalists' activities in suppressing strikes and revolution.

For all its raging against the evils of its time, *Vision* was yet another symptom of the disease—the breakdown of capitalist civilisation. Although none of its four editorial "Forewords" mentioned capitalists, the bourgeoisie or the middle-class in any of their rolling denunciations of everything else in sight, *Vision*'s class position is discernible, since it in no sense depended on explicitly political statements, organisational linkages, or the lack of both. On the contrary, the class nature of an ideology can be demonstrated only through the ideas themselves. The proximate derivation of these ideas has already been located in the bourgeois ideology of Norman Lindsay. It remains to look at Jack Lindsay's two-page "Forewords" to each issue for confirmation and elaboration. In addition, different emphases need to be traced since the unanimity between Norman and Jack in the early 1920s was only one aspect of their intellectual relationship—the static one. Jack was moving through Norman's position, and it is of the essence of dialectical analysis to recognise the dynamics within apparently static phenomena.

Vision's "Forewords" were made up of sixty- to seventy-word paragraphs having some inter-relationship, although they were sufficiently discontinuous to suggest a modernist failure of creative power. Their most obvious and recurrent concern was decadence and how it might be overcome through a new Renaissance of Vitalism and Beauty. Within Jack's far greater enthusiasms, there remained the interlocking pillars of Norman's outlook: the self-congratulatory arrogant élitism and the determinedly atavistic prospect for the rest of mankind. The most significant differences in Jack Lindsay's version of these ideas are not easily quot-

able since they were expressed in a general tone of enthusiasm and hope which softened the exclusiveness of Norman's categories of mind. For example, the creation of Art as the criterion for entry to "Hyperborea" widened in Jack's formulation into support for those of 'the younger generation' whose courage enabled them to survive the war's mental horror and who were still capable of 'frankness and laughter' so that Jack's distinctions were drawn between young and old, pre-war and post-war, the frank and the ashamed.[11] There could be much more room here for ordinary people than in Norman's rigid 'creative mind'. Jack's silence on the question of class struggle in contrast to Norman's constantly belligerent antiproletarian statements was perhaps a sign that he did not want to commit himself to an explicit abandonment of his earlier reformist activities in Brisbane, and that he had not firmly decided against admitting some of the 'mob' to his Renaissance.

The connecton between art and civilisation was imbedded in everything the Lindsays wrote because art was the product of the Creative Mind which required an ordered society so that it could produce. Their defence of classical art was therefore the defence of civilisation. Norman Lindsay could 'smell the jungle' in post-impressionism[12] just as surely as he discerned in *Ulysses* 'a primiitve mind in its initial stage of development'[13] and recognised that 'The minds that paint you pretty theories of colour music and Futuristic fooleries are just as dark as those savage primitive brutes who planned a universal war on mankind'.[14] Jack Lindsay claimed that 'Modernism ... set its criterion in a morass of primitive sensibility'[15] with 'Chaos as the governing princple'.[16]

Moreover, it has been shown that the civilisation they were concerned to protect was of a particular kind; that it was, in fact, coherent—to say the least—with the prevailing capitalism. Capitalism was the silent partner in their defence of art and civilisation.

Despite emigrations and defections the *Vision* grouping provided a powerful sheet anchor for countless lesser defenders of capitalism and the classical forms. Because they had ranged over the whole spectrum of creativity—painting, literature, music—the Lindsays' influence was that much stronger. For another two decades, Norman Lindsay remained an articulate opponent of modernism in all its guises, and thus did important groundwork for the Ern Malley and Dobell affairs.

* This article is taken from a longer work—*The Black Swan of Trespass*—which I am preparing on Australian bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideology from 1915 to 1945.

11 'Foreword', *Vision*, no. 2, p. 3.
12 J. Hetherington, *Norman Lindsay: The Embattled Olympian*, Melbourne: O.U.P., 1973, p. 91.
13 N. Lindsay, 'The Sex Symbol in Art', *Vision*, no. 1, p. 25.
14 *Creative Effort*, *op. cit.*, pp. 244-5.
15 'Foreword', *Vision*, no. 1, p. 3.
16 'Foreword', *Vision*, no. 2, p. 3.

THE APPRECIATION OF POETRY

Three Standpoints Examined

L. R. BURROWS

The Unprosaic Imagination

Alec King, *The Unprosaic Imagination*, University of Western Australia Press, 1975, 223 pp. $8.95.

Alec King spent thirty-five years, almost his entire professional life as a university teacher, in the English Department of the University of Western Australia. Ascending through just degrees from temporary part-time assistant lecturer to Reader, he practised with unflagging enthusiasm and to the enlightenment of countless students (not only students of English and not only undergraduates) what Einstein called 'the supreme art of the teacher'—'to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge'. *Quod scimus loquimur, et quod vidimus testamur*. In 1965, when he was four years from retirement, he was offered the second chair of English at Monash University; and it was a source of great satisfaction to his friends and admirers that his outstanding qualities should receive, before it was too late, their due recognition. But those four years proved to be in an absolute sense the final phase of his life's work. He died in 1970 in his sixty-sixth year. And it is now a small satisfaction to learn that before his death he knew that his colleagues at Monash, eager to commemorate the achievement of a career devoted to the teaching of literature, had initiated plans for a book which would gather together some of his characteristic papers and lectures. That book, entitled *The Unprosaic Imagination* and edited by his son Francis (a senior lecturer in English at Monash), has at last appeared under the imprint of the University of Western Australia Press. That is surely as it should be: the University in particular and the West Australian community in general owe Alec King a debt which cannot be repaid but which needed some gesture of acknowledgement.

As the editor points out, although Alec King published three or four books (notably his *Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision*, 1966), his 'proper importance was as a teacher and colleague in the year to year life of the university', and 'such work and gifts did not issue in a large amount of permanent writing'. Yet there was 'a steady but not copious flow' of poems, reviews of poetry, broadcast talks, lectures and addresses; and it was felt that 'the distinctive quality of his work deserved the wider audience and more permanent form that this book could give it' and that at the same time the book 'would also form a proper tribute to him'. The editor, however, had difficulties to cope with. His task, he says, was

> to take material often intended to be spoken to a live audience and to make it as unobtrusively readable as possible, without losing the characteristic ordering of sentences, of images and of ideas, through which so much of the particular vision of a writer is communicated. In some cases this involved using fairly full notes and a tape-recording of the lecture and digesting them into a readable equivalent; in other cases it involved only the alteration of phrases too local and colloquial for a printed book.

The reader should no doubt remember that the author himself is not responsible for the final form of some of these pieces; but the editor would seem to have done his job with tact and skill and to have succeeded, while making his oral material 'unobtrusively readable', in establishing, and maintaining through-

out, a style that is consistently expressive of his father's characteristic manner and 'voice'. Discounting several obvious misprints, I have noticed only one puzzling phrase which might be due to an error in transcription: Milton 'in his most exuberant mood' is described as setting to work on the Nativity Ode 'with a kind of *hopeless excitement*'. I must add that I cannot congratulate the editor on his too selective Index, which is so skimpy that it barely justifies its existence.

Physically this memorial volume is moderately handsome. It is somewhat lavishly embellished with colour reproductions of three paintings by Blake, Poussin and Audubon and of four plates from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. These are no mere decorations. Keyed to the text, they effectively demonstrate the use Alec King often made of the visual arts to illuminate his discussions of poetry and the creative imagination. An eighth illustration, the frontispiece, is a line-drawing of Alec King made in 1942 by Louis Kahan. It does catch, I suppose, something of the sitter's look but it can hardly be considered a very good likeness. The binding is in white cloth—'elegant but not ostentatious' was perhaps the appropriate impression aimed at, but the boards of the case are too thick and heavy and in my copy are already warping away from the pages. The typographical composition of the pages dissatisfies the eye: the type is disproportionately small for the size of page and the widths of margin, and the type area has therefore a rather crammed and cramped appearance. As a result reading is not as easy or pleasant as one could wish.

The title *The Unprosaic Imagination* names the master theme. I shall pick up later the implications of 'unprosaic' but in positive terms it means 'poetic'. The sub-title *Essays and Lectures on the Study of Literature* is mildly misleading. Most of the essays study literature, not the study of literature; and the only kind of literature studied is poetry. In fact literature, for Alec King, meant poetry. I don't imply that he refused to consider plays and novels as literature. It was simply that for him the essence of the unprosaic imagination was to be found in poetry. (When he was promoted to a Readership he dearly wanted to be officially styled Reader in Poetry but the university administration—prosaic minds—declined to sanction such wild poetic licence.) These are essays, then, on poetry and the poetic imagination, and they are suitably enclosed by poetry: at the beginning an *in memoriam* poem by Alec King's old schoolfellow and ex-brother-in-law, Cecil Day Lewis; at the end ten poems by Alec King himself. The essays, eighteen in number, are almost wholly concerned with English poetry from the Elizabethans to Yeats and Eliot (though outsiders like Mallarmé and Rilke get a look-in and there are excellent discussions of poems by Verlaine and Frost). They come in all sizes from a 2,000-word 'reading' of a Dylan Thomas poem to a 14,000 word investigation of five of Milton's 'minor' poems, but are mostly between 4,000 and 7,000 words in length. And not only are the majority of the essays substantial pieces in themselves, all together compose a very substantial and impressive body of critical writing that is never flashy or turgid or turbid, never pedantic or dull or dogmatic, never aloof or superficial but always earnestly, enthusiastically, profoundly intent upon a full response, sympathetic and sensitive, to the language of the art of poetry, always striving to penetrate to the heart of the imaginative experience that poetic words embody and enact.

It is a 'body' of writing not merely in point of substantiality but by virtue of its felt unity. The book is not a congeries or miscellany; it has a wholeness, a real shape and coherence of its own. That this is so is due in part to Professors David Bradley of Monash and Helen Watson-Williams of W.A., who chose and arranged the various essays with care and cunning. But they could not have been as successful as they have been if the essays themselves had not been basically unified by the writer's firm, distinctive and distinct point of view. Over many years of wide and (more importantly) deeply considered study of poetry and the criticism of poetry he had worked out for himself his ideas on what were the vital qualities and functions of the poetic imagination and the poetic medium. Critically *il avait pris son assiette*. Perhaps I make it sound like a doctrine. In a sense it was; it might even be called a gospel, for Alec King believed that poetry was there that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Yet there was no one less doctrinaire, no one more generously receptive and appreciative of 'the drunkenness of things being various'. Let us say that he had established for himself a base of operations.

He describes and defines this base fairly completely in an essay entitled 'The Plight of the Poet'. It is the plight of the 'modern' poet that is in question, or rather the plight of modern *poetry*. 'Poetry is a function of speech, the most resourceful and boldest use of that speech which is the shaping power of the mind in action. If the poetic way of releasing the mind's shaping power ceases to be normal, the mind will have so much the less resourcefulness in coping with life.' The plight of poetry (it is a characteristic insistence) is a general problem, *our* problem, the problem of our civilization; and it is marked by 'the self-absorption of the poet' and 'the disappearance of the object'. After an analysis of an obscure Symbolist poem by Yeats, there comes this 'thesis':

> What this poem is saying is that the imagination discovers within the active processes of real living a universal story, what Dylan Thomas calls 'the mankind of our going'. It is saying that the work of the imagination is not to provide a self-containing dream into which one *withdraws* from the world, but to *see* within the world the pattern of life to which the spirit gladly gives obedience, even if it is a tragic pattern.
>
> And this leads me to the heart of my thesis. Metaphor ... is the essential trope of poetry, because the poet as the chief servant of the imagination works upon the central human problem of which metaphor is a visible linguistic form. The problem is expressed in many ways: the relation between God and the universe, the relation between the Unifying One and the Variant Many; the relation between the enduring psychic pattern of human life which each inherits and the everchanging shapes and motions of things which the psyche has to come to terms with; the relation ... between soul (a 'myth-word' standing for all that endures and unifies) and body (a word standing for what the senses report to us of the shapes and motions of things). This problem sets the framework in which we live. This dualism is what the imagination is primarily concerned with. Art is the way in which imagination solves and composes this dualism, because art by its very nature is the handling of the two sides of this dualism as one activity. It is the expression of the psyche *through* the handling of objects; the creation of images of the objective world moving to the rhythm of the inner dream; the creation of an appearance in objects and of an order among objects within which the psyche can live. Metaphor is the visible form of this imaginative resolution, the means by which this double vision is held.
>
> Inevitably the metaphorical vision swings between the two poles of 'soul' and 'body'. It can so distort or simplify objects, or so fancifully invent them, in order to illustrate the dear concerns of the soul, that we feel ourselves in the trivial grasp of a fairy story. It can so laboriously catalogue the succession of external events that we can hardly see the mankind of our going. It can withdraw from the bodily world so far that 'soul-ful' becomes a term for the weakest self-indulgence; it can spill out into the varied world so that we lose the unity of self and become fragmented . . .
>
> The plight of the poet is to believe that he can compete with science and the utilitarian spirit only by turning his back on the objective world; and so he withdraws into a soulful world only to find that he has left behind the source of the really valuable tools of the imagination, those objective images which alone can give a firm and articulate presence to the life of the spirit ... The peculiar satisfaction of the great imaginative work is that it solves this wretched dualism . . . This vagabond existence no longer rots itself with motion to and fro, but finds itself moving to the shapely pattern of spirit; and the soul (so apt to dissolve into a misty abstraction) discovers in the blood and muscle and guts of the material world the means to live its vital life.

A little later he feels the need of a disclaimer: 'I am not launching into a treatise on human nature.' Not quite a treatise! But the emphasis —the over-emphasis, even—is symptomatic. Poetry, for Alex King, was no 'academic' study. Nor, certainly, was it the 'superior amusement' of T. S. Eliot's designedly inadequate definition. Another essay comes to this resounding conclusion: 'A poem is a model of how to be a fully living person; and ... reading much poetry will practise the art of living in this complete way.' Bold words, over-bold for my own cautious reticence; yet they would be spoken, I know, quietly and unresoundingly, and to know the speaker was to know that the words were deeply true for him and in him.

Long as my quotation has been, I must go on a little further for the sake of completeness and reach the matter of words, at once the beginning and the end of poetry:

> Of all the arts poetry is bound to feel the problem of our age most acutely; for poetry is made with words and words live exactly at the spot where the problem arises. Their function, one might say, is to exist on the frontier between spirit and world, and to try to be the servants of both. When we use words we have to handle their double nature; we use them as signs for objects and objective processes, and in the same breath as expressions of our inner life. And the very oddness of language is due to this.
>
> As we concentrate on our inner life we tend to soften, enlarge and vitalize words into symbols; as we concentrate on our outer world we tend to simplify and harden them into pointers and labels. The labour of the imagination is to preserve their double nature, so that through them we are referred to the objective world while feeling that these same words are still the powers of mind in display . . . But there is a historic rhythm in the process. A prolonged concentration upon the objective world accustoms the mind to the language of labels, so that words less and less readily perform their function of stimulating and expressing the inner life. The word 'tree', for instance, will be felt instantaneously by the ordinary mind of today as a label; it would almost certainly, I believe, have been felt by the mind of the seventeenth century as much a symbol as a label (unless of course it was used in a context of practical activity). This means that the poet's plight is not merely the initial difficulty of seeing and feeling imaginatively; it is a problem concerning the very material of his art, the words he uses.

The implications of the *unprosaic* imagination are here unfolded. The *prosaic* is the 'body', the objective and utilitarian world whose language is 'the language of labels', and it is a world which has been too much with us since the seventeenth century. Eighteenth-century man (I paraphrase) attached himself too faithfully to the object, became small and mean and mundane, and denied the richness and complexity of man's nature. The Romantics tried to redress the balance but the effort produced a lopsided egotism which marred the impersonal insights of real imagination. It is then a straight road to Mallarmé, who repudiated the objective world and enclosed himself in a sterile subjectivity. But it is 'the labour of the imagination' (the *un*prosaic imagination) to preserve the double nature of words and of reality—to hold 'body' and 'soul' in fruitful tension, in life-giving unity.

It is all fully worked out, fully consistent—though I fear that partial quotation and summary may have resulted in a diagrammatic crudity that is unjust to the detailed fullness of the original. It is not that the ideas themselves, taken separately, are notably idiosyncratic. Most of them are commonly received today—the stress on myth, for example, or Eliot's insistence on 'impersonality', or Leavis's 'embodiment' and 'enactment', or the orthodox historical view of the big split in the seventeenth century with the consequent diminishing of the numinous and the imaginative, the dissociation of sensibility, the alienation of man from Nature, call it what you will. What *is* individual here is, I think, the integration of these and other concepts into a consistent, unified 'vision', into what may be thought of as a personal belief, held and uttered with sincerity and conviction. And it is the strong lines of this coherent view of art and life that largely give the book its shape and wholeness, aided by the intelligent arrangement which is roughly that of a sandwich—a first layer of essays thematically connected (ceremony and myth, myth and the language of the poetic imagination, the poem as the artistic incarnation of meaning and as 'a model of how to be a fully living person', the teaching and study of literature as 'a form of vitality'), then a thick middle layer of essays on poets and poetry in chronological order (a nicely transitional piece entitled 'The Metaphoric Mode' and focused on Elizabethan poetry, discussions of the Metaphysicals, Milton, the Age of Reason, Pope, Myths of Nature, Blake, Keats, Yeats and Eliot), and to top off, two further more general essays ('The Concrete Universal' and 'Popular or Professional').

Doubtless one needs a secure, well-equipped base of operations, but I never found G.H.Q.s spiritually inspiring or spiritually comfortable —too general for my taste, too remote from the actualities. My empirical mind jibs at generalizations which irksomely don't exactly correspond to awkward particularities. In all literary criticism it is the dealng wth the individual works of art in all their awkward particularity that most interests me, that is for me most valuable. And so it is here. What successful operations have been carried on

from that base? What fruitful raids into what rich territories? What are the spoils of war? Those are the questions.

As Alec King clearly recognised. His principle of 'incarnation' assumes the individuality of the work of art: 'like any piece of art a poem is an incarnation—that is, any meaning it has is made visible and understandable to us by being *embodied* in a sensuous body; and the articulations of that body are the way in which the meaning is made articulate to us.' It is the articulations of *that* body that are important. And of course it is the articulations of that *sensuous* body that are also of first importance: Alec King did not go in for the mere extraction of mere ideas. He wanted always to 'bring out the nature of the poem as a physical, sensuous, muscular, shaped and architectural object'—and since that may sound lifelessly static, he adds immediately, 'To read it properly is to feel almost like holding a strong young animal struggling in one's arms.' As a critic he has, it seems to me, two very great and unusual virtues. Firstly, he nearly always penetrates with a kind of bold simplicity to the essential imaginative stuff of the poem. He eschews the trivial, the external, the eccentric; he aims for the heart of the matter. And secondly, he makes wonderfully vivid and alive that sensuous body and its articulations, gives the keenest of insights into *how* the poetic meaning lives and moves and has its being. These essays, in which he talks about poets and poems congenial to him and long pondered, loved and admired, are far from being the standard academic production, the stock little 'scholarly' paper. Lucid, persuasive, 'earnest, ... attuneable', 'they proceed from a saturation, like that of Gideon's fleece' (as Walter de la Mare said of Edward Thomas's poems). What Alec King says of Hopkins's 'Spring' he could have said of all the other poems he discusses:

> I am going to give you the meaning it has for me; I have known it with great and continuing pleasure for many years, and therefore, because as a poem it is an instrument for focusing, relating and concentrating, and because it has had a chance to do this for me over a long time, its meaning has a fullness and richness which it would not have for one who meets it for the first time.

Fullness and richness of response to poetic meaning—every essay shows these qualities so fully and richly that any attempt at brief quotation would be quite inadequate. They are most obviously present, perhaps, in the lengthy, enthusiastic and stimulating explorations of Milton and Blake. Myself I have found four pieces especially interesting and characteristic of the author. Two of them concern his favourite Yeats. One of them, 'Poetry and Philosophy: In Defence of Yeats's *A Vision*', is an excellent example of what I called the bold simplicity with which he penetrates to the essential. It begins: 'I am going to try to find all that can be said in favour of Yeats's system, not to be merely provocative but because if we can see what he was up to and accept it, we shall see, I think, how esesntial is the problem raised by the system.' This is true in general: the bold raising of essential problems *was* provocative —provocative of thought—but never 'merely provocative'. The conclusion, after an acute discussion of a famous passage from Wordsworth, is that philosophy, 'as a handmaid of poetry, needs to keep its own decorum ... Belief-systems have always to be changed to myth, philosophy into poetry, in order that we may experience the act of believing, not merely note the sort of belief; so that "will" may be changed to "willing".' 'Yeats the Poet' is an even better example of boldness of approach. Listing as a preliminary a series of formidable indictments of Yeats (a silly dreamer, a queer man with ridiculous beliefs, etc.), Alec King simply accepts the indictments—'if Yeats is "silly", then it is a silliness I am personally in love with. In fact my valuing Yeats is that he is a fool ...'—but turns them into proofs of Yeats's greatness and importance—'he lives as a poet ... plumb in the centre of the human situation'. It is a magnificent defence of Yeats's poetry, again illuminatingly provocative.

The last essay, 'Popular or Professional', demonstrates effectively a favourite procedure of Alec King's, the making of critical points through poetic 'inventions' of his own. We are offered to start with an example of a contemporary poem, 'the contemporary way of writing a deliberative lyric':

> Death is not obscure in the sunlight
> For those who go walking among birds and leaves ...

He now rewrites this, 'leaving it essentially still a deliberative lyric, but giving it what the Elizabethan critic would describe as a topographical induction':

> A girl there in the wood
> Walking in early sunlight ...

And then offers a final 'rewriting' of both versions as a form of fable, a 'construction-poem':

> Proud Maisie is in the wood,
> Walking so early ...

And how characteristic that after springing this amusing surprise he should say, 'I'm sorry to seem to want to have a joke with you'! He had, in fact, a certain sly humour which appears too seldom in this book, but he never wished to be 'merely' amusing, as he never wished to be merely provocative. The last of my four pieces is the opening essay, 'The Cere monies of Wisdom', an impressively eloquent exposition of Spenser's *Epithalamion* as a public ceremonial poem celebrating the myth of marriage. I can only assert that this is the best—far and away the best—discussion of *Epithalamion* that I have ever read.

One piece stands a little apart from the rest, a paper entitled 'Literature at the University' and originally delivered to the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association in 1966. Boldness again! He begins: 'It seems to me impossible to teach literature, unless one is saved from being portentous by being profoundly amused at the whole attempt.' Imagine standing up and saying that to a whole audience of portentous scholars! He proceeds to clear the ground. Teaching literature is not the training of future editors of scholarly editions; nor is it 'history of ideas'; nor is it the study of techniques in a narrow sense. He pays proper respect to these activities and admits their usefulness, but they are not the teaching of literature. What that is, for him, and what must be the difficulties of attempting it are suggested by this:

> If we take literature seriously, we should take seriously the statement that it is timeless and universal. Its themes are living themes now as they were, and they are the themes of human life, not of this or that person. The themes are alive in our students, before they meet literature at a university; they are part of those human goings-on among which literature can deploy its disturbances and clarifications. And our business is, I suggest, to sensitize the themes within our students by every means we have, but specially by letting them 'suffer' the beauty and power of the themes as they come in at us through literature.

Amen to that, but how often is that I won't say the practice but even the ideal of university departments of literature? 'To hunt for sources, to break open the literature and extract ideas, falsifying them through the conceptual language in which we state them, to fit pieces of literature back into the jigsaw of historical period or a tropological pattern—all this has its place but it is not in itself the study of literature'. And though he gives convincing demonstrations of how one should read a poem, his sad conclusion is that 'the university ... often discourages a real reading of literature, because such reading does not immediately issue in the accepted kind of discourse'. What would his feelings be if he knew that it is now an essential part of the training of first- and second-year students in his old department to teach them to cast their footnotes into he 'proper' PMLA mould? O for that warning voice! Alec, thou shouldst be living at this hour! English Departments have need of thee!

With 'Literature at the University', however, we can leave the final stress where it should be. Alec King was a teacher of literature according to his own exacting conception of that vocation. He was a good teacher, much loved, and this volume is a fitting memorial to him. It is a book that illuminates, inspires and provokes, as he would have wanted. Poetry was for him, in De Quincey's celebrated terms, the literature of power, and he was concerned that it should never be mistreated as the literature of information.

FAY ZWICKY

Rays of Humanity and Civility

Paul Hasluck, *The Poet in Australia*: A Discursive Essay, The Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1975, 67 pp. $4.50

> "—the children's eyes
> In momentary wonder stare upon
> A sixty-year-old smiling public man."

Thus Yeats, in 'Among School Children', reflecting on what has been gained and what lost in the process of growing up. We don't produce too many smiling public men of the Yeats kind in our culture. Among those who smile and know why, readers and writers of poetry are as rare as hens' teeth. And there is not much, it seems, to smile about anyway. On the other hand, the publication of this engagingly unpretentious exploration of the nature of poetry by one of Australia's most public men might cause a few children to stare with momentary wonder for he, too, is speaking less about the poet in abstract than about the patterns of his own development as an attentive, responsive reader. In an age when juggernaut ideologies rumble round the campuses, this pacific attempt to show what the secluded individual pleasures of poetry have meant to one well-rounded man is attractive.

Significantly, Sir Paul begins his essay with a quotation from Drummond of Hawthornden:

> 'It is more praiseworthy in noble and excellent things to know something though little, than in mean and ignoble matters to have a perfect knowledge. Amongst all those rare ornaments of the mind of man Poesie hath had a most eminent place and been in high esteem, not only at one time, and in one climate, but during all times and through those parts of the world where any ray of humanity and civility hath shined . . .'

Words of a cultivated Royalist, man of letters, believer in the patrician virtues. A quiet, scholarly man who knew his Ronsard, Tasso, Virgil and Petrarch as well as the English poets. Although a Scottish Court poet, his love poetry was gracefully conventional in an English, not a Scottish, way. And even if in religious and elegiac verse, he occasionally moved towards more individual and intricate poetry, there was still some foundation to Ben Jonson's charge that he "smelled too much of the schools".

I mention Drummond at length because Sir Paul Hasluck has much in common with such a man both as an individual and as an exile from his cultural sources. To pursue the analogy: Drummond of Hawthornden was, in character and reputation, not unlike a Scottish Sir Philip Sidney. The English Cavalier tradition to which he gave his literary and political loyalty had no real equivalent in Scotland (for Scotland, read Australia). The Court poet in Scotland had no native centre to turn to, with the result that Scottish Court poetry came to be transcribed and collected by a few gentlemen for their own nostalgic enjoyment instead of being actively written and published.

Lacking the Court as a cultural centre, turning more and more to England for literary inspiration, it would seem that the Scottish writer had no choice but to accept English as his literary language even if it involved spliting his personality in some degree (for Scots was still the *spoken* language of non-Gaelic Scotland). The same dualism seems to afflict the reasonable man of letters nourished on English literary sources in Australia in the first half of this century.

And just as the modern Scottish poet tends to see virtually everything about himself and his work against a backdrop of nationality, so, too, does the reflective Australian. The main thrust of Sir Paul's essay, given a technical digression here and there, is to reveal nationality to the self. Private and honest within courtly limits, there are frequent questions, doubts, recognitions about the peculiarly personal relationship of the Australian to the history of where he comes from. And this history is less a matter of textbooks and knowledge than of feeling which, for a writer, can be either fruitful or a handicap, a bruised link with the past.

He honestly records the difficulties of actually being able to *see* one's environment in spite of the inherited culture. He is conscious of the pendulum swing between an overemphasis on the landscape on the one hand and a return to the old English cultural warehouse on the other. Far too sophisticated to be unaware of the damage done to language and feeling when an Australian writes about 'his Australia', there is, all the same, a rhetorical principle behind much of what he is saying which emerges as a shade mystical and more than a shade romantic:

> 'One very distinctive part of experience in Australia is still the landscape in the broadest sense of the word—all those sights, sounds and sensations that come from the physical surroundings,—the skies and the seas by day and by night, the space, the colour of the land, the shape and the feel of the rocks, the light of distance.'

He makes a distinction between those writers "whose sources of nourishment have been chiefly literary and those who have drawn their nourishment mainly from the air and soil of the Australian continent—those whose experience of life in Australia was simple, direct and intense contrasted with those whose experience has developed through much reading of the literature of other lands and ages." The myth of the simple life persists, the noble savage rises in muted form, the state of nature appears redemptively at the moment of corruption and dissolution.

Although it's clear where his instinctive sympathies lie—not with the bookish literati—he is nonetheless very much a product of his teachers, the men who, as he says, had "a habit of looking to literature for solace or for reinforcement". And although he may mildly mock the self that was, the self who "strove consciously, though sometimes despairingly, for the noble thought or the great line", it is clear that this is what he still hopes poets will do. Not for nothing does he use as illustrations the great moralists, Wordsworth, Cowper, Chateaubriand—all transitory innocents. The conventions about the thoughts that people are supposed to express in poetry may change, but the same urge towards transcendence of the commonplace persists, be it in Sir Paul's definition of poetry as "intense, pure, penetrating and imaginative" or in Richard Packer's more up-to-date demand for a return to the "high erotic" or "old carnality" ('Against the Epigones', *Quadrant*, June, 1975).

Arriving at conclusions similar to those reached by A. D. Hope in his article, 'Poetry as Journalism' (*Westerly*, no. 3, 1975), leaning towards formal disciplines of the poetic craft "if self-expression is to be worth more than a grunt, a groan or a scream", he is still sceptically parochial enough to distrust what Chris Wallace-Crabbe called the "trill of artifice". The loss of civilized artifice that produced a Milton or a Pope has to be reconciled with the even, bland quality of life without heights or depths. And although his tone is the very embodiment of humane good sense with its concomitant good-humoured resistance to pretentiousness, there is an occasional romantic rebel's kick in the sober pulse-rate. The large romantic metaphors of alienation remain —of man from nature, of man from his spiritual self. The marriage of nature to the mind of man is used metaphorically for the overcoming of this inner and outer division.

Taking little or no cognisance of at least two generations of contemporary "free" verse, and somewhat ill at ease in the face of ardent self-revelation, he nonetheless rather touchingly makes an effort to come to terms with one of Australia's arch-strippers, Dorothy Hewett, in her poem "Rapunzel in Suburbia":

> '... on a first look I did not like it and thought there was nothing behind it but the coarse expression of disgust that is so much in vogue these days ... But when I looked to see, not the situation, but the experience behind the situation, so much was revealed that could only have been expressed by a poem and by the evocative and emotional use of words ... A closer reading led me to believe that this is a poetess who is revealing something of an experience deeper and broader than any immediate situation.'

His other efforts to read contemporary verse are not all so rewarding:

> 'So often it seems to me that the experience was shallow, the perception trivial or even petty. There is a persistent note of petulance rather than the nobility of anger, often the meanness of a sneer rather than the voice of faith, a persistent scratching at something that itches rather than the surge of passion, a more frequent snort of disgust than a cry of delight, a peep around the corner into an alley rather than a view of the wider landscape.'

As Sir Paul rightly says, one could not apply to it the description of 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', but 'tranquillity' scarcely describes the tenor of our days. However much one might agree with his distaste for the loss of humane values, one can't afford to attribute the wreckage of the old patterns to mere neglect of craft. The sources of our poetic malaise run deeper.

He comes closer to the problem of the poet in Australia in his opinion of Australian intolerance of privacy:

> 'A self-communing man is suspected of all sorts of bad habits... The solitary reader, no less than the solitary drinker, is queer. Yet the poet needs his privacy—not privacy simply in the sense that he can have a room of his own and go inside it to write, but privacy of his own emotional world... Australians do not like that kind of privacy and, moreover, the urgency of life in a young country, which drags almost anyone who can read and write and who has a sense of community service into some public office, makes it probable that many of our finest minds are engaged in public duties which destroy any hope of privacy.'

His conclusions about education in this country are worth repeating, especially at a time when the word "élitist" is flung around with such venom by progressive educators leaping strenuously aboard the "creativity" bandwagon:

> 'The more value we give to training the less we give to idiosyncrasy; the more regard we pay to equality the less regard we show for genius. Talent becomes an insult which the untalented cannot endure... In education, we tend to think that the purpose of schooling is to serve the needs of the community instead of expanding the human spirit ... ability rather than learning, information rather than understanding, a qualification rather than spiritual growth, correct social attitudes rather than a revelation of what is true ... Poetry has nobility; the nation fosters mediocrity. Poetry is rare, the nation upholds the common standards of mass production.'

Still faithful to the tenets of his original teachers, this "ramble' 'of Sir Paul's is less a study of the poet in Australia than a subdued patrician lament for lost values. This is not a man for whom the old European consciousness has, to use Patrick White's phrase, "died by torture in the country of the mind" but a man who knows his Ronsard, Virgil and Petrarch and the richness of a European past and its spiritual dimensions. The old romantic dilemma still remains unresolved, the burden of nationality remains intact. For Sir Paul, as for Drummond of Hawthornden nearly 400 years before him, the rueful hope exists that poetry will have an "eminent place" in Australian life providing that the antipodean sun still beams rays of "humanity and civility".

The November issue of *Artifacts* features a debate that has raged in the national press in recent months—the 'illiteracy problem'. It is not *Artifacts*' fault that the debate has caused scarcely a ripple in Western Australian educational circles. This monthly journal for the arts, which commenced publication in March, 1975, deserves further notice than it has so far received. Its articles have provided a valuable commentary on films, plays, books and cultural events of various kinds, such as the York Fair and International Women's Year. It is edited by Trea Wiltshire and published by the Cultural Development Council of W.A.

VERONICA BRADY

Map Making

J. McAuley, *A Map of Australian Verse*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1975. Paper $7.25; Cloth $13.75.

It is time, I think, to call for a pause in the critical game to examine the premises, and this is particularly necessary in Australian literary studies where all is not yet lost, where pedantry and profit do not yet entirely prevail over pleasure which, I take it, is the end of literature and indeed of all art; that delight Eliot spoke of in "Burnt Norton", which is

> The release from action and suffering,
> release from the inner
> And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a grace of sense, a white light still and
> still moving.

Books about books are one thing, as a wise and humane scholar once remarked to me, but books about books about books are another, and this is the kind of book Professor McAuley has written. Therefore, respectfully and with a strong sense of my temerity and possible impudence, I must wonder aloud why he has chosen to write this book—he of all men, champion of that "inner necessity" which, he claims, even here (p. 103), should inform writer and critic alike and impel him to "grow in [his] own way", independent of "contemporary critical preferences, prejudices or dogma", and poet who wrote so finely once against "Mercator merchant" and his flat projection of the world:

> Mercator, merchant, I have burned your
> chart.
> In three dimensions is my sailing art,
> To search a world unsimplified, and find
> A desperate North-East passage of the
> mind.[1]

He has always invoked the power to make life new, the force

> ... which lies in our being to defeat
> The emptiness that seems an active power
> Assimilating life[2]

But here, in *A Map of Australian Verse*, he serves the emptiness, tends to the mere pedant's rather than the poet's work. For personally, I cannot see any real need for this book to exist. The territory of Australian poetry has already been charted, Judith Wright and Professor Wilkes being its pioneering cartographers. No doubt, Professor McAuley's approach is slightly different from theirs: as well as mapping the territory, reducing it to neat periods and pronouncing on style and theme, he does include chunks of the actual soil, a judicious selection of poems and of critics' responses to them. But to my mind this only serves to debase the critical currency still further since on the one hand the selections from the critics are necessarily brief and limited in range and scope and on the other the space given to them cuts down the room left Professor McAuley to justify and expand his views. As a result the tone is quite mosaic, pontifical in tone and legislative in intention. Of Hugh McCrae, for instance, he writes: he "must be given some prominence from the point of view of literary history, but whatever gift he had was lost in dilettantism, an inability or refusal to let his talent engage with life". (p. 80) This is all very well and acceptable perhaps, but such reductive judgements are all too easily adapted by students, intent on adopting the Orthodox View with an eye to success in exams, and these, I suspect, will be the book's chief customers. Again, to say of Slessor that in his work "was absorbed whatever of early 20th Century English modernism Australian poetry found usable" (p. 3) compresses and prejudices so many complex and arguable views, that it inhibits instead of encourages the flexible, personally perceptive response proper to critical discussion. To be fair, sometimes the critical extracts quoted present a different point of view from the one argued in the text, and Professor McAuley's presentation of the Angry Penguins affair, in which he personally was involved, is remark-

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[1] James McAuley, *Collected Poems 1936-1970*. Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1971, p. 10.
[2] *ibid*, p. 35.

ably well-balanced. Nevertheless, the execution, if not the conception, of this book seems to me pernicious in its effect on the reader—the very act of carving up the course of Australian poetry into periods, as in an elementary history book, is arbitrary and must have a desiccating effect, directing attention to categories and away from the poetry. Professor McAuley has always been tempted towards the order offered by abstraction, of course, sometimes succumbing to it with splendid effect as in the magnificent stanza from "Chorale":

> The universe becomes an algebraic
> Choir of symbols, dance and counterdance,
> Colours and forms in shimmering mosaic:
> Man enters it as an inheritance[3]

But here the inheritance is the schoolmaster's not the person's, for in the interests of tidiness the critic turns away from the complex between history and art which underlies any work in literary history the impact of social, economic and personal factors upon the poets and men intent on reshaping if not reacting against their times.

John Docker's recent book, *Australian Cultural Elites*, a pioneering work in this field, makes one regret the book Professor McAuley could have written as a man who has been deeply involved in and aware of this interplay. Often, however, it is as if he deliberately refuses this challenge, repressing his better critical self. Thus, he remarks in his discussion of the "ferment of the forties" that "poetic schools are rarely as cohesive and formalized as later history can make them seem ... [and] the best work of slogans and labels suggest; it transcends nationalist, traditionalist, modernist or other categories" (p. 128). Instead of exploring this insight, however, which opens up the question of the ontological status of art, of current definitions of reality and, indeed, of what constitutes history itself, he returns to the work of laborious labelling—perhaps because to pursue the insight would be to sabotage the whole project of a map of Australian poetry. This is all the more disappointing in that when Professor McAuley becomes specific, looks closely at individual poems without attempting to fit them into categories, he writes first class criticism—criticism, that is, which illuminates the poetry not the critic's prejudices. This comment on Slessor's "Five Bells", for example, is magnificent in its nervously intelligent yet feeling response to the poem itself: "the poet ... has turned away from actuality, from clock-time, and retreated into 'my time', which is memory, the still tideless depth of the past—only to find that the mind cannot dredge up any sustaining reality from the past. Enclosing this theme is the apparent meaninglessness of life and a sense of utter darkness and nothingness beyond life" (p. 107). This seems so close to the bone, as if wrought out on the nerves of the reader who is also a poet and sees himself at bay before "demonic powers that rule the age",[4] that his retreat to abstraction if understandable on personal grounds is still more regrettable. Continually, in fact, one feels a first class mind and sensitivity holding back. There is the tantalising comment, for instance, on "traffic considerations" (p. 305) which influence Australian poetry in its relations with developments in England and America but do not, in his view, bear very heavily upon his judgement of its worth. This comment might surely develop into a whole essay on questions of evaluation of national characteristics in poetry and so on. Similarly, the remark on the "limited up-to-dateness" of contemporary Australian poetry, thrown out on the same page in the same discussion demands further amplification and debate. It is as if Professor McAuley has himself succumbed to the Australian disease he described in "The True Discovery of Australia" in which the arts are seen as dangerous because contentious.

> Knowledge is regarded with suspicion.
> Culture to them is a policeman's beat;
> Who, having learnt to bully honest whores
> Is let out on the Muses for a treat.[5]

For the critic here has turned magistrate, and matters of aesthetics are determined as in a court, summarily.

To return then, to my original point. It seems to me that Professor McAuley has misconstrued the critic's function as he sees it in his best moments both here and in his poetry. For what, after all, is this book's purpose? A general introduction for beginners? If so, I have serious reservations about its propriety, for the map ultimately delineates the author's preferences, shaping the material to their dic-

[3] *ibid*, p. 26.

[4] *ibid*, p. 142.

[5] *ibid*, p. 32.

tates—what, for example, is one to make of the strange exaltation of Bertram Higgins and the equally strange diminishment of Francis Webb? If, on the other hand, the book is intended for those already versed in Australian literature, its pontifical tone, its failure to debate or justify its judgements will hardly enhance rational and open-minded discussion. Certainly, I for one question the value of the whole operation which tends in effect to certificate one man's views. In my view, the only proper orthodoxy in criticism is flexibility, openness and the sense of delight which leads to the enjoyment rather than the mere use of literature for other ends. Books like *A Map of Australian Poetry* are suspect therefore precisely because they are so predictable in this country which McAuley himself describes as the country of "faint sterility", with its people "hard-eyed, kindly, with nothing inside them".[6] For this kind of approach to literature is defensive, replacing the challenge of poetry itself with clear judgements which can be used either for examination or general social purposes. Ideally, I believe that each of us should learn to face up freshly to every experience, in this instance to each poet and each poem without the shield of someone else's authoritative opinion, a shield which defends from rather than opens out to the experience. True, this book does provide poetry as well as comment upon it, yet for all that the comment tends to overwhelm the poetry and the arrangement, fragmenting into separate sections the cumulative experience of reading through the course of Australian poetry, seems to me to cater to an obsession with routine which equates order, not personal discovery, with critical achievement. There is little sense of amplitude here, little sense of expansiveness or delight, only a rather grim determination to draw the boundaries and get them right. Why, then, does criticism exist? To expose invention to the questions and purposes of experience or to impose on it the purposes and interpretations of the critic? And to ask that question perhaps opens up a larger one: what is the attitude appropriate to our time, a spirit of inquiry that relies on empirical evidence and historical fact and finds the world and personal experience to be of value in themselves or a mind already made up, already satisfied with its own views and its own interpretations and value?

[6] *ibid*, p. 6.

APOLOGY

In the last issue of *Westerly* (No. 3 September 1975) there appeared a review of "Rapunzel in Suburbia", a book of poetry by Dorothy Hewett. At page 82 of the issue, there was reproduced an extract from one of the poems. It has since been brought to our attention that the extract could be defamatory of some persons.

We were not aware that the extract referred to any living persons and wish to express our regret to any such persons for having published it and to apologise to them for any embarrassment and inconvenience that may have been caused to them.

H. G. COLEBATCH P. COWAN B. BENNETT ALPHA PRINT PTY. LTD.

BOOKS

Hal Colebatch, *Spectators on the Shore*. Edwards & Shaw, Sydney 1975, 84 pp. $3.95 Hardback.

"I am trying", Mr Colebatch says on the dust jacket of his book, "to do something in my poetry which I think is being neglected at the moment—to approach as wide an audience as possible, that is, the people who do not normally read poetry as well as those who do, highbrow and lowbrow." This is a highly laudable aim, and to an extent he succeeds: his subjects, after all, are "folk" ones here in Perth, sailing, beaches, seafaring in all its aspects, Saturday afternoon at the Nedlands Hotel and so on. But how far do his readers go with him as he explores these subjects, how can they in fact do so and not become rather different people? For these are dangerous poems in the medieval sense of the word "daunger"; they have, that is, the quality of being "difficile". And how many of us, citizens of Perth or anywhere else, are prepared to be put in jeopardy like this?

Even the title, *Spectators on the Shore*, is disconcerting. To me, at least, it puts me to the question: reader or-worse-critic-or-perhaps worst-teacher, am I not a mere spectator, standing on safe ground watching the poet as he sets out, like Eliot's fishermen in "The Dry Salvages" sailing/Into the wind's tail where the fog cowers". He moves, confronting the unnamed terrors within—the monsters of "Further Inspection", for example, or perhaps worse, the sheer horrors of boredom—yet prepared to interrogate them until he gets some answer whereas

> "We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
> Or of an ocean not littered with wastage
> Or of a future that is not liable
> Like the past, to have no destination"
> (*The Dry Salvages*)

Mostly, I suppose, we prefer to stand on the shore, at best latter-day Canutes, prepared to run in case some great wave comes crashing in, defying the limits we like to set.

These poems, I think, are like that wave, the first swell of what may become in later books a tidal wave, for Mr Colebatch has a powerful apocalyptic sense, but one that gains added power on account of the urbanity of tone with which he controls it. Indeed, the tension between the civilised voice that speaks in these poems, the reassuring pose he adopts, consoling our complacencies, and the actual import of his words, this irony generates a disturbing force. The voice in "Further Instructions" (pp. 76-7), for example, is that of the comforting preacher, putting all things in their place:

> "Know, my brother, the creatures ,
> are manifold, but all
> their forms are vulnerable"

Yet as the poem goes on the satirist appears, carrying our beliefs to their logical but ugly extreme, warning us against

> "the Anglo-Saxon manuscript
> that is read not for a degree,
> the model soldier
> painted at home,
> the yacht that is not raced,
> the cave explored
> alone,"

in other words, identifying the monsters we fear as our spontaneous selves. The conclusion therefore is deadly, an accusation against us as killers and cowards:

> "I am quite confident
> you know the ways of destroying them
> and that
> I do not need
> to enumerate those here."

Spectators on the shore, we are left here feeling that ours is a bleaker world than we knew.

This strategy, apparent complicity with current feeling which suddenly turns to attack upon it, is typical, and it suggests what is at once the strength and weakness of these poems, their serious moral concern. On the surface, of course, most of them pretend to lightness. "Abandoning Ship" (p. 32), for example, which turns out to be the grimmest of comments upon the "I'm alright Jack" syndrome, or the wonderfully named "Whales and autobiography" (pp. 63-5) which finally telescopes the distance between Vietnam and Albany (the Australian whaling station) quite frighteningly. But essentially, the vision is grim. The first poem in the book sets the tone:

"The flag hangs still from the fort's last
tower
Behind the dunes the enemy may wait,

and the sense with which the poem ends

The flag hangs still as if there is no air,
and man by man the garrison desert.
The fort appears encircled everywhere."

informs most of the subsequent poems. Mr Colebatch does not write as if he were one of a dwindling regiment: reading his poems is strenuous, calls you to discard all complacencies of language and emotion as the reward finally is that of the athlete, the ascetic, the hero, of triumphing in the testing of oneself and one's values.

But how valuable is this? What right has the poet to call his reader to this kind of psychic athleticism? Is he indulging in what Dr Johnson called the "dangerous prevalence of the imagination", the recourse to fantasy to save us from the pain of living in the everyday world". Or is this poetry the product of a steeled heart prepared to know the truth, to tell it and by giving some form, to establish some mastery, over it? "Lament of a provincial academic" (p. 23) suggests that Mr Colebatch has also asked these questions. His academic is bored:

"There is no intellectual ferment here,
which is not the way it should be.
Our people lie at the edge of the sea,
and think upon races and beer."

Consequently, he turns to the politics of violence

"Yet we must try, we must learn
to be aware. How else may tanks
stand upon bourgeois taxi-ranks?
Our houses show they too can burn?"

The point the poem makes is that this man—typical, surely, not merely of many academics but of the public for whom the journalist writes, the politician and the preacher alike reduce all debate to cops and robbers on a cosmic scale—does not recoil from the horrors he creates but that he wants, loves and needs them in order to sustain some sense of meaning and value for himself. Mr Colebatch sets himself to expose this Boys Own Annual syndrome, showing it up as the last resort of latterday Prufrocks, intent on evading the challenge to heroism by manufacturing fake horrors they themselves can control. In contrast, he achieves heroism by sheer truthfulness —it is significant, I think, that Mr Colebatch, a political scientist, has also worked as a journalist. He conquers boredom not by means of fantasies of violence but by his sharp insight into the violence which lies beneath the blandly benign surface of the city "beside the sunny river I love" which he describes in the "Sestina on taking a bus into Perth past the Narrows Bridge" (p. 74). Thus his "Historical Novelist" (p. 84) modelled on Rosemary Sutcliff who spent most of her life in a wheelchair, shows the novelist living out his own fictions, battling the sufferings of his own suburban life.

"Feet pass below the dripping hedge. The
host
is roaring its defiance. The high fastness
rings
Sparks fire from chariot wheels. The hero's
sword
is blazing golden in the dawn. The horde
moves to its master, and the blind poet
sings."

This is the ground on which all high heroic poetry takes its stand, the privilege and panic, the sheer facts of our mortality.

Far from being evasive, fantastic, these are exemplary poems, then, especially for those of us living in "the blue/emptiness of this kindly West", here, where, as he meditates in the Sestina

". . . at the end of the West the concrete
thing is slipping away [and] in this dust of
waiting afternoon
there is no history between the City and the
glass
of the river. Little girls hold kittens. The
wind
chases butterfly yachts."

Beautifully rendered, the scene nevertheless serves not just to delight (though it does this, especially as it is presented in the rippling rhythms of the sestina, its kaleidoscopic effect reflecting his sense of the city as Shalott, city of mirrors) but also to set us in the context of our historical and moral situation.

". . . In this wind
is more than afternoon. Sharp into the blue
air hangs the city of glass. We can come to
terms with love?"

Mr Colebatch's great gift therefore is intelligence and, unusually, in an age which delights

in sloppy emotions and vague effusions, he seeks and finds his heroic territory there. In this he echoes Hopkins in "No worst, there is none":

"O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap
May who ne'er hung there."

My main criticism would lie in the fact that these poems have us hanging there on these cliffs so often (though the careless reader may still think he is in Perth or in the yacht club and so on) with so little to mitigate the bleakness that in fact it is sensibility itself which finally comes to feel cheap. The natural world is there in all the hostility of its brute otherness—as in poems like "Dune Haiku" (p. 18) or "Desert Road Dawn" (p. 12)—but I miss there a sense of self, of the human spirit that asserts itself, whether it be for terror or joy, faces the worst and still rejoices in the irrational splendour of being, of knowing and yet still being. There is some joy in *Spectators on the Shore*, it is true, most perhaps in the self-delighting and delightfully high-spirited mockery of a "Poetic Gem" (p. 16)—gallows-humour though it may be to a poet who knows how close he may be to such doggerel, it's pure fun for the reader. But mostly the joy is muted, the guarded delight of wit. As a result there is for me a certain inhumanity about this book. The poems are accomplished, brilliant, finely and triumphantly crafted, and yet, perhaps for that reason, are rather gauntly austere so that I find myself admiring them as I admire powerful and beautifully streamlined machine.

Yet this austerity, I suppose, is part of the heroism these poems both celebrate and enact. If indeed we are, as Mr Colebatch believes, at bay upon the frontiers, then we must be on guard, there is no time for softness or relaxation and it may be that our most sinister enemy is the sensationalism that surrounds even the arts as, fed on the syrups of sentiment, we decline into fatty degeneration of the spirit, the muscles of our spirit grow slack. Better far to face the bleak truth and at least tune these muscles of ours. This "Crowhurst" obliges us to do. Not that this is the best poem in the book. On the contrary in its length it tends to lose that economy and precision of effect which usually makes Mr Colebatch's poetry so memorable. But it is his most extended treatment of heroism and for this reason deserves discussion.

In the first place, dramatising the story of "Donald Crowhurst, lost at sea in a round-the-world race who never left the Atlantic and disappeared during what is thought to be a mental breakdown', the poet provides us with an image, a grim one, of our condition:

"Sails are bent to the wrong halyards,
pump and switch-gear
are connected to nothing.
the cabin is filled with a tangle
of wires that lead to nothing.
Crowhurst is seasick
and the plywood hulls are leaking
as the voyage begins"
(p. 43)

Then, in the second place, he also destroys, quite systematically and ruthlessly, the illusions which we use to comfort ourselves. The poem's ironies are directed against the mood, straight out of the newspaper adventure story, in which Crowhurst sets out. But the fact that the poet himself is also party in sympathy with his mood gives this poem an unusual ambiguity, a sense of personal involvement, generally absent elsewhere. True, "Whales and autobiography" is similarly ambivalent, but the difference is that that poem begins lightly with the marvellous opening lines:

"Everyone, it seems, perusing the journals
of 1972, is compelled to write
a poem about whales
or Vietnam.
But I am too late, I trust, to catch
the latter.
What then of whales?"

But this beginning seems to set the poem off on the wrong direction, with a kind of sneer, so that it is hard to accept the note of tenderness at the end which follows the violent scenes from the film

"of whales being killed, rolling
down and down till everything was buried
in simple avalanches of blood and entrails
sharks shaking as they tunnelled
into the bodies"
(p. 64)

especially after the bitter cynicism, the remark of the "life-long spectator so far" about these scenes

"All rather prosaic. (It would be
more something to think about
if they found
whales in Vietnam suddenly.)"

In "Crowhurst", on the other hand, the poem begins in delight, in the lyrical description of the Harbour and the fact that it is also an image of futility—

"In clear water,
in derelict water
a succession of ripples
dies away"
(p. 41)

justifies the journey and our sympathy with Crowhurst

"Now there is little else
for heroes to do to the world"
(p. 43)

This understanding holds the poem together, then, enabling the tone to range widely and the poet to entertain apparently contradictory emotions, scorn and admiration combined for Crowhurst, fear and joy, danger and a strange sense of security. Here, too, Mr Colebatch comes closest to genuine folk poetry; the people of Perth, where boats are the familiars even of suburban gardens, who seem to regard themselves as descendants of Dampier, the first Englishman to explore this coast, may well find their own metaphor here in this ridiculously heroic sailor:

"Crowhurst sails south. Crowhurst is
coming!
On to his rendezvous
with destiny and newsprint.

The hatches are leaking, the floats are
leaking,
the hose for the pump was never loaded
A silly mistake"
(p. 44)

So the poem becomes in a sense "doctrinal to the nation", identifying and giving some dignity to the quiet desperation which other writers, Dorothy Hewett, Randolph Stow, Peter Cowan also suggest underlies the West Australian's calm. Similar images operate in the last sequence of sonnets, most powerfully perhaps in "Sailing to Rottnest Island" where suddenly, as the poem ends, "we sail off other people's maps" (p. 82).

In "Crowhurst" rehearsing the conflict between true as against false heroism, the poet helps us also therefore to come to grips with the question. Where most of his other poems on the subject offer brief, sharp images of the situation which makes heroes, here he looks at the hero himself, aware that such situations can break as well as make and yet, paradoxically, it is because Crowhurst breaks, becomes the anti-hero, that he becomes a centre of value. The heroism, that is, lies in the truth, which parodies our cherished notions.

"Having to be a hero, with no option
[Crowhurst] heads for Saint Helena"
(p. 44)

This is the point. Courage is most truly itself when in a sense it is to no end, is ridiculous. It needs nothing else but itself. Today, given the seductive appeal of overwhelming intelligence, Mr Colebatch suggests that the proper human act may be to acknowledge that we are all ultimately perhaps ridiculous like Crowhurst in his leaky boat

"A buzzing fly in the tin of the Atlantic
a rusty tin, its bottom slimed
with other flies, with all the dregs—
the crusted galleons, shark-snouted U-boats,
the Titanic's bones"
(p. 49)

History is nightmare, but unlike Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, Mr Colebatch is not trying to awake from it. Instead, he faces the worst it can do, rejecting all consolations.

". . . The Bismark's classic Götter-
dämmerung . . .
No.
No Götterdämmerung for Crowhurst
Buzzing like a fly inside a tin"
(p. 49)

In this realization, the poem itself becomes an heroic occasion because the reader is called to an understanding bleaker even than Crowhurst's. For Crowhurst goes mad and so finally does not know how impossibly he is situated. The reader, however, has no such comfort, the visions of the "comic mind", the "chess master" (p. 60). From the beginning the ironic tone has forced us to see through the brouhaha of the publicity boys, the frantic collection of money, backers and showy but unreliable equipment. From the beginning, we have to sail alone, undefended by illusion. Yet these lines

from Crowhurst's diary, what the narrator, defensively perhaps, calls his "weak-minded verse" contain, I think, the poem's affirmation and call on us to commit ourselves to him and his situation because it is our own.

> "Save some pity for the Misfit, fighting with bursting heart
> Not a trace of common sense, his is no common flight
> Save, save him some pity. But save the greater part
> For him that sees no glimmer of the Misfit's guiding light"
>
> (p. 50)

Ultimately, then, these poems belong in a great tradition which celebrates the heroism of the artist (and like most of the figures in this tradition, Blake and Joyce, for instance, Mr Colebatch suggests that the artist is not a special kind of man but that man is by definition called to be an artist, homo faber, his work to make himself). Writing and even reading these poems involves an act of defiance directed against what the poet sees as the brute facticity of things, a refusal to surrender to the forces of nature and of history which tend to make the man who feels and hopes a misfit in the scheme of things. Grimly aware of his absurdity, nevertheless he pursues his craft, asserting his right to put his own mark on things and thus attempt to make the world go his way. This is an absurd goal, of course—and this sense of absurdity informs all the poems, giving them their irony, dry tone—yet his defiant persistence in it invests the work with a strange kind of dignity. I am reminded in fact of Conrad as well as Orwell whom Mr Colebatch quotes in the epigraph to the book. Both of them are masters of the wilderness also and both insist on the heroic obligation to truth. The sense of the sea in *Spectators on the Shore* is similar to Conrad's, serving as a metaphor of our condition as human beings, 10,000 fathoms out, out of our depth. Like Conrad, too, Mr Colebatch would say that the answer is not to put back to shore—for there is no shore, we are suspended upon infinitude—but rather, in Conrad's words, to "follow the dream", committing ourselves to the ocean, letting the "deep, deep water bear you up".

Perhaps I have overstressed the stoic note which informs these poems. There are also moments of pure fun, "Poetic gem", for example; of human sympathy, "Portrait of a widower" (p. 20); of tender melancholy, "Sestina on taking a bus into Perth past the Narrows Bridge" (p. 74); or lyric delight in the natural world, "Sleeping on the beach" (p. 83). But it is impossible to avoid the note of pain, sometimes even of sheer horrow at the heart of social existence in "Portrait of a lady" (p. 22), for example. Yet I suppose that note is countered by "Lines written upon learning that a man had his ashes buried between the goalposts of a football ground" (p. 40). What Australian heart could fail to dance to that tune?

Ironic, visionary, finely crafted, this is a remarkable first book of poems. It will be interesting or perhaps more than interesting, a matter of life and death for us all, to see where Mr Colebatch will go from here, for his imagination, intent on the movement of history and our situation written in it may be an Early Warning System for us all.

VERONICA BRADY

Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories by Murray Bail. University of Queensland Press, 1975 (Paperback Prose, 10), 183 pp.

The Fat Man In History by Peter Carey. University of Queensland Press, 1974 (Paperback Prose, 8), 141 pp. $1.95.

With the recent publication of Murray Bail's *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories*, it becomes even more clear that the short story form is currently undergoing a considerable revival in Australia, which bodes well for Australian fiction generally. The nature of this revival, it seems to me, in its essence is qualitative rather than quantitative, despite the emergence of such avowedly adventurous presses as Q.U.P. and Wild and Woolley. There is an increasing body of writers in Australia today, many of them relatively young, who are turning their attention to a more imaginative brand of fiction, one more attuned to experimentation and innovation and characterized by a common fabulative stance. In this fiction, language often becomes foregrounded and a considerable increase in self-consciousness is apparent. This, of course, is consistent with overseas developments in fiction; one major tendency at least is towards an increased

self-consciousness in the actual process of composition combined with a built-in visible hesitancy directed not only at the nature and function of fiction and literary language but at perception and language generally. The nature of reality and its relation to fiction becomes increasingly problematical and of fundamental concern. Traditional notions of 'story' as involving a linear progression from beginning through development to an inevitable harmonious dénouement in many cases becomes if not untenable then at least highly suspect. Conventional representation in fiction more often than not results in a sense of familiarity in the reader's approach, the very nature of which keeps him from actively engaging with the experience of the text. The reader is not challenged and as a result the writer's insight may be ignored, the reason substantially being that his form has become conventionalized, even trite. Writers such as Barthelme, Coover and Borges demand an active participation on the part of the reader, incorporating this demand into the very structure of their fictions by a conscious use of indeterminacy. It is pleasing, then, to see Australian fiction concerning itself with these same preoccupations as it indicates that we are becoming less obsessively aware of our national identity and more attuned to the actual business of seeking to order our universal experience. The two collections of short fiction I want briefly to focus on here are Bail's already-mentioned *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories* and Peter Carey's *The Fat Man In History*; both, it seems to me, are significant achievements, and one may discuss them fruitfully in connection with each other not only in terms of their similarities but also in terms of their implications for the current situation in Australian fiction.

The most immediate apparent similarity between the stories in both collections is the emphasis on the essential validity of an imaginative presentation and/or interpretation of experience. Both writers are fabulists in the sense that they allow their imagination to flow freely to create a significant fiction, a completely autonomous 'reality' which *adds* to our commonly-perceived reality. Objective truth merges into dream, fantasy is inverted suddenly and the reader is momentarily shocked into the realisation that in the terms of the story these apparent fantasies are in fact specific aspects of an insistent reality. Consequently, in Carey's opening story "Crabs", the world of the story turns back upon itself in a terrifyingly inevitable manner, while the central character in Bail's "Ore" finds his obsession with mining and the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange becoming actualized so that 'surgeons' carrying copies of the *Financial Review* gather to 'mine' the mineral reserves of his illness. The inversions and conscious distortions of reality compel the reader to continually take stock of his situation in relation to the fiction; he cannot allow himself to relax in any way, to lose himself in contemplation of the fictional illusion because it is always in motion, changing from one perspective to another with little immediate sense of linkage.

However, the actual nature of Bail's and Carey's fabulation differs quite sharply, and this can be seen in a consideration of their respective typical narrative voices. Carey's fictions are in the main self-contained and self-sustaining and the narrative voice is unobtrusive, even carefully effaced, so that we have the sense of immediately engaging with the experience offered in the text. The narrator in each instance is engaged in the world of the fiction, being more or less an active participant in the existence of that world. On the other hand, Bail is more inclined to stand outside the world of his fictions, directing and commenting upon its activities in what is often an intrusive, highly self-conscious manner, a stance very similar to that taken by certain contemporary writers of Metafiction. The narrative voice in the majority of the stories remains distinct from the figures inhabiting the fictional world, and very often consciously occupies the forefront of concern. We are never allowed to forget that this *is* a fiction, an imaginative ordering of experience for particular artistic purpose. I would emphasize here Bail's obvious concern with fiction as a significant activity, as a means of recording and rendering experience in a meaningful manner; and his concomitant suspicion that language is at best an inadequate means to this end. Carey's fictions, in contrast, invite us to enter them quite freely, however disturbing or perhaps 'unappetizing' they may be, and though we are subjected to often quite radical distortions and inversions we remain firmly within the fiction's peculiarly compelling and particular structure; it is only by extension and implication that we realize that

these too are 'fictions', autonomous acts of the imagination. Both Bail and Carey exhibit, in differing ways, a preoccupation with language, with rendering experience meaningful through language, and with the nature of the fictional process itself. This is best shown in a consideration of two stories, one from each collection —Carey's "Report on the Shadow Industry" and Bail's "A, B, C, ..., X, Y, Z". Both stories address themselves directly to their own problematic nature and function, being in a very real sense 'about' themselves as particular instances of fiction, and both raise questions about the general nature of fictional art. Carey's story is immediately metaphoric—an ever-expanding industry is mass-producing shadows which are eagerly sought by the general public, apparently acting as some kind of agent of emotional fulfillment. These 'shadows', in the immediate context of the story, are represented as actual phenomena; however, the last section invests them with a further quality, one that casts a deeper, more poetic implication over the entire fiction. It becomes apparent that the real concern of the story is with the nature of fiction itself, with man's basic need for fictions and imaginative fulfillment.

> "My own feelings about the shadows are ambivalent, to say the least. For here I have manufactured one more: elusive, unsatisfactory, hinting at greater beauties and more profound mysteries that exist somewhere before the beginning and somewhere after the end."

The implication here, surely, is that language and silence co-exist in the creation of literary art, that there is a constant, hovering tension between them, and consequently the fictional enterprise is fraught with hazard. A similar preoccupation is exhibited in Bail's story, the title of which is indicative of its primary interest in language. The narrator emphasizes the difficulty involved in relating the experience contained in the text: "I am writing a story. ... Here, the trouble begins." As the story progresses, it becomes evident that Bail is foregrounding the actual *process* of fiction and this is ironically echoed in the story's 'content' where one of the characters is an artist living out his role. Both of these stories are considerably accomplished works, though certainly open to specific criticism: Carey's perhaps in terms of its obvious influences and Bail's for its clumsy concluding sentence which could easily have been subsumed into the body of the fiction. Both stories, I would point out, *are* 'stories', they are 'about' something immediately concrete, and the tension between these various dimensions of meaning produces satisfying and significant fictions.

One other common element worthy of mention here is both Bail's and Carey's characteristic brand of fierce, dark humour; both display a keen sense of the absurdity underlying contemporary life, and their fictions are very often informed by a sardonic, almost surreal comedy.

Having stressed their commonalities, I would like to emphasize that each possesses a unique vision of the world, and this is clearly realized in their respective styles and the subjects of which they choose to write. Carey works very often in the general vein of speculative fantasy, his fictions involving nebulous situations which appear to bear some relation to science fiction. In his title story "The Fat Man In History", there has been a revolution of a political and social nature and now fat people are regarded as contravening the normal standards of that new order. The characters in the story are finally revealed as unknowingly the subjects of a chilling social experiment. Other stories in this same general vein include the above-mentioned "Report on the Shadow Industry", "Life & Death in the South Side Pavilion" and "Happy Story"; there is a curious but compelling ambivalence built into these fictions that is closely akin to current trends in S.F.

Bail's work reveals a recurring preoccupation with portraiture, with the capturing of a character's reality in language. One of the most impressive 'stories' in the collection, "Zoellner's Definition" directly confronts this problem; similarly "Heubler" involves twenty-three encapsulated portraits making up a composite general portrait of contemporary life. Other stories with these same concerns include "Portrait of Electricity", "The Drover's Wife" (a particularly fine story utilizing the associations of both Lawson's classic short story and Drysdale's painting of the same title to set up a curiously distilled and arresting fiction) and, in a more traditional vein, "The Silence". Bail is more concerned with formal experiment than is Carey, and his fictions display a high degree of conscious structural patterning. This is particularly evident in "Cul-de-Sac" (uncompleted), a story that to my mind is insufficiently

integrated but nonetheless achieves a most unusual and interesting effect. An element that seems characteristic of Bail's work generally is his conscious effort to 'de-familiarize' the ordinary aspects of our existence, so that we are compelled to attend more closely to the experience being presented in the text at the same time we are made aware of the inadequacy of much of our language and our accustomed sense of the surrounding world. Zoellner's clothes, for instance, are described as 'the cloth resting on the shape of myself'; the effect is to distance the reader from what is being described, to put him off balance so that he is drawn to pick his way more cautiously through the total experience contained in the fiction.

Both collections, then, Carey's *The Fat Man In History* and Bail's *Contemporary Portraits and Other Stories*, are impressive and significant publications, indicating that both of these writers are to be reckoned as in the forefront of the contemporary literary scene. Their work represents a very welcome and accomplished addition to the range of possibilities for expression in Australian fiction, being a distinct movement beyond the rather limited realism of much of our writing. Queensland University Press are to be congratulated on their Paperback Prose Series; both of these collections, which are beautifully presented, add to an already impressive list, and one can look forward now to the continued development of Australian fiction.

W. GREEN

Donald Stuart, *Prince of My Country*, Georgian House, Melbourne 1974, 244 pp. $6.95.

Donald Stuart, *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die*, Georgian House, Melbourne 1975, 208 pp. $6.95.

Donald Stuart is a writer who commands respect for several reasons. In an age when writing has largely abandoned constraint he exercises it; when form has been sacrificed to novelty he retains some of the ancient splendour of words and their rhythm; when in Australia, at least, environment is a dirty word he is vividly conscious of it—in his case, almost exclusively that of the Pilbara. His writing is not part of the modern trend and therefore may be misunderstood and overlooked by trendy critics who are inclined to give scant praise to those who do not follow contemporary fashions.

He is essentially a traditional writer. I use the word in the sense that the composer, Igor Stravinsky, defined it in his *Poetics of Music* (1942):

> Far from implying the repetition of what has been, tradition presupposes the reality of what endures. It appears as an heirloom, a heritage that one receives on condition of making it bear fruit before passing it on to one's descendants.*

Stravinsky made his music bear fruit to such an extent that some critics and early audiences rejected it out of hand, while unworthy imitators saw it as a new trend which they tried to copy. That it influenced other composers is beyond doubt, but Stravinsky in interpreting his own attitudes to life was steeped in musical tradition. Similarly, Donald Stuart, steeped in the Australian literary tradition, makes his writing "bear fruit", giving it a new dimension before it is passed on to future generations. In doing so, he gives no evidence that it is "a repetition of what has been".

That he is also a writer of dogged determination and dedication is shown by the fact that, after the publication of four novels and a volume of short stories, he embarked on a series of six novels which one by one he sent to his publisher without any certainty that any would be accepted. This series, which bears the overall title of *The Conjurer's Years*, is now beginning to emerge from the chrysalis of time, the first in 1974, the second in 1975. While the design behind the series as a whole remains obscure, it seems safe to anticipate that it will deal mainly with life in the Pilbara where Stuart has shown in his previous books such skill in writing with authority of people and their environment. As I have pointed out, environment tends to be treated with disdain by contemporary Australian writers. Indeed, in *Meanjin* (1/1975) Michael Wilding tells us that "the dominant impulse in the new writing in Australia is now an internationalist one". What exactly he means I am not quite sure. You don't become an international writer by imitating the trends in other countries, or by

* Quoted in *Encounters with Stravinsky*, by Paul Horgan (The Bodley Head, 1972).

declaring that you are one or are going to be one. You achieve it by writing so well in your own idiom about your own environment that you are acclaimed beyond the boundaries of your own country. Of this the clearest contemporary example is, of course, Patrick White who, since he ceased to be an expatriate and returned to Australia, has consistently set his novels within its environment.

Other local writers have chosen a northern environment as the setting for their work, notably Mary Durack with a novel, a family biography, a number of children's books and a variety of pieces for the theatre. From those who are specifically novelists we have had occasional ventures into the north such as K. S. Prichard's *Coonardoo*, H. Drake-Brockman's *Sheba Lane* and *Blue North*, Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* and *The Merry-go-round in the Sea* and J. M. Harcourt's *The Pearlers*. Of course, the north is a variable term, but for Donald Stuart it means exclusively the Pilbara. And this is the environment of which Donald Stuart almost exclusively writes.

The first of this series of six novels, *Prince of My Country*, is mainly the story of the early years of David Redman, son of a white teamster, Tom Redman, and a full-blood Aboriginal woman whom Tom always introduces as Mrs Redman. Its opening lines are as gentle as a lullaby:

> Mother is dark, and quiet, smooth-skinned and warm-milk breasted, soft handed, and always she is here. Where he lies in his box, she bends over him and he smells her smell, the mother smell of milk and sweat and dust and woodsmoke.

David is still quite young when his father decides to quit teamstering for prospecting and they join one of Tom Redman's old friends, Eugene Molloy, and strike it rich. With the proceeds they establish a far-out cattle station which Tom names Karrawolgan for his "wife". There David learns about sinking wells, handling cattle and horses and the general management of a station-property. Eugene Molloy thinks he should be sent to a Christian Brothers school in the south, but Tom decides to place him in his mid-adolescence in the hands of John McGrath, the capable owner of a well-established station, Millanilli. In a year spent there he learns much more than he would have at home. He mixes with other men, goes with Peter Lawson and a camel-team and waggon to Port Hedland for stores, listens endlessly to long yarns—all of which Tom Redman has foreseen as the proper education of his son, rather than book-learning at any school anywhere. Perhaps he didn't bargain for the boy's further education at the hands of Hannie who shares her favours with him each night he is at the homestead, and sometimes when he is away from it. To most people, David appears much older than he is. When he tells Peter Lawson he is "Fifteen, near enough", Peter exclaims, "Jesus Christ, lad! I thought you were twenty, twenty-two. You're a helluva big lad for fifteen!" To Hannie, herself not much older than he is, he's ready for a woman and the old people have sent her to him for that purpose. So there dawns an almost idyllic relationship which proves permanent and when David learns of his father's terminal illness and rides back to Karrawolgen, Hannie walks the distance and is accepted by the boy's widowed Aboriginal mother. There are no queries in her mind about their relationship and they ride off together after Karrawolgan is decimated by a prolonged drought, confined to that far-eastern area which has missed the rains. Millanilli survives and Mrs Redman accepts the offer of John McGrath to stay in a vacant cottage there.

To that point, David's life has been curiously smooth and comparatively uneventful. He has encountered no colour-bar, is accepted everywhere, save briefly one day at Port Hadland when a policeman queries his right to be in the town. One feels that problems will arrive for him and Hannie, perhaps in the next book. But in the second in the series, *Walk, Trot, Canter and Die*, David and Hannie don't appear at all until towards its end when, soon after they leave Karrawolgan, they are asked to take care temporarily of a more northerly station, Paradise Creek.

This second book is John Cole's, not David's. It begins when John is nine and living with his parents on a small holding, the location of which is not clearly stated, but which is either in southern New South Wales or across the border in Victoria. Like his brothers, John leaves home at fourteen and the second chapter sees him returning from distant parts after five years. His mother is dead, his five brothers and two sisters have scattered, his father alone.

John stays only a brief while and the old man dies soon after he leaves again. There is more than a hint of mystery about the Coles—Mick, the eldest, coming from Queensland with four horses his father is to hide in the hills—a younger brother, Pat, falling foul of the police and having to clear out—a stranger arriving and sitting facing the open door, pistols at his side. There is a hint of Ned Kelly and one wonders if he was, in fact, Ned. John himself subsequently travels far and wide after leaving home, has frequent woman trouble, actually marrying the wrong kind of woman and leaving her again to go droving in the Gulf country. Little is clearly stated and one has the feeling that this is territory in which neither the author nor John is really at home. At the end of three hurried, breathless chapters—well written but rushing too quickly through time—men are going to the Boer War. But John has no wish to shoot Boers and goes instead by ship to Adelaide, then north to Oodnadatta from where he decides to ride due west. That would indeed have been a hazardous journey on his own, but groups of desert natives take him in hand. The pace of the writing now slows down and the book begins to take shape. The final group of blacks bring him eventually to the Pilbara and that is the beginning of the real story. Coincidentally, he has come to the author's own familiar environment. In due course, John Cole becomes manager of Paradise Creek, replacing Gerald MacAdam who is retiring to live in Perth, leaving behind a half-caste daughter who pairs up with John in much the same way as Hannie did with David in the first book. That Mercedes, or Mercy as he calls her, takes the initiative just as Hannie did, I found somewhat tiresomely repetitious. The story builds round John and Mercy and life on the station is fairly routine till he is stricken with blindness and goes south for surgery. This is where David and Hannie (now Annie or Anne) reappear in the narrative. And this is where the second book more or less ends—in time almost exactly where the first also ended. The shape of the series as a whole remains to be unfolded in future volumes, but one imagines it will centre round the fortunes of David and Annie.

After these two books we can note some recurring characteristics of Donald Stuart's point-of-view and attitudes. His earlier writings have shown a great depth of understanding of the Aborigines—their philosophy, their way of life, their personal attributes. Here we have so far met only those living and working on cattle stations, except for the desert people John Cole encountered on his ride from Oodnadatta and they are not analysed to any extent, except to show the perceptiveness which leads the first group to accept him as worthy to be guided across their tribal lands and the others who accept him on trust. One factor common to both books is the quality of the relationship that exists between coloured woman and white man. This is explicitly stated to John Cole by Joe Alexander who lives on a station in Queensland with a half-caste woman, Laura. "That's the sort of girl you want, John, a woman of the country. Never let you down, never make demands, always loyal." Those are the attributes John was to find in Mercy, and which both David and his father had already found. One wonders if this is to be a major theme of the series.

Another recurring characteristic is that Stuart obviously likes to make his main characters somewhat larger than life. Tom Redman, John McGrath, David and to a lesser extent Gerald MacAdam and John Cole are built in that mould. David seemed to Thomas Shapcott, reviewing the first book in *The Australian*, almost too good to be true. "If only he would pick his nose or his navel or something", he wrote. But David, Tom Redman and John McGrath of Millanilli are what Stuart would probably call "proper men"—honest, straight-dealing men, men to be trusted. Perhaps he is trying to show that only men of that calibre can succeed in the Pilbara. MacAdam and John Cole are slightly scarred, but get by. Other minor characters are amply endowed with human weaknesses, but they remain no-hopers.

If there is a weakness in the writing it is that Donald Stuart confines himself to the relationship of people with other people and with their environment. He does not attempt to show their relationship with themselves. There is no introspection, no inner dialogue. It may emerge in later books but I doubt it because it has never been very apparent in his earlier writing. We don't often get inside his characters' minds and see what they are thinking. Perhaps his major achievement here is that he is able to create something grand and almost epic out of that most harsh and raw of all environments—

the rocky, spinifex-clad, semi-desert Pilbara. By comparison, the trendy writers of today, both in Australia and elsewhere, are alley-cats rummaging among the trash-cans of the literary slums.

JOHN K. EWERS

MISCELLANY

In spite of (or because of) their critics, there has been a resurgence of interest in little magazines in Australia in 1975. As examples, *Quadrant* and *Meanjin* have claimed sellouts on certain issues. *Westerly* has increased its print-run to one thousand this year and subscriptions and sales have increased by approximately 40 per cent. If this trend continues the print run will have to be increased again in 1976.

* *

Westerly's plans for 1976 include a special South-East Asian issue (No. 4, 1976). Provided that appropriate subsidies are available and the demonstrated interest of its reading public is maintained, *Westerly* will increase slightly in size, giving further scope to young and established literary talents and to writers of articles which have literary or social interest.

* *

During a year when the Melbourne *Critical Review* has temporarily ceased publication, the Sydney University English Department has not remained idle. The first volume of a new journal of literary criticism, *Sydney Studies in English*, has appeared, edited by G. A. Wilkes and A. P. Riemer. The first number of this annual publication contains articles on drama, chiefly of the Renaissance period.

Drama critic and writer of children's stories, Leslie Rees, was writer-in-residence at Mt Lawley College, Western Australia, during October and November, 1975. He is currently writing a follow-up to his historical and critical survey of Australian drama, *The Making of Australian Drama* (Angus & Robertson, 1973). The new book will deal more intensively with recent Australian drama.

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As mentioned in Ian Templeman's article in *Westerly* No. 3, 1975, on activities at the Fremantle Arts Centre, a recent initiative there has been the establishment of "Centrepress". A manager for the Press has now been appointed and three publications are proposed for 1976: separate anthologies of Western Australian poetry and short stories and a photographic study of Fremantle and its people.

* *

A small volume which may be of interest to readers is John Shearer's *Music and Drama*, a commentary on Wagner and Shakespeare, published by the Imperial Printing Company in Perth.

* *

Students of Australian literature have not had many significant biographies or autobiographies to contend with so far. Three recent books may have altered that situation: Douglas Stewart's *Norman Lindsay*: A Personal Memoir (Nelson, 1975), Ric Throssell's life of his mother, Katherine Susannah Prichard, *Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers* (Angus & Robertson, 1975), and Hal Porter's third volume of his autobiography entitled *The Extra* (Nelson, 1975). The latter throws light (greatly refracted) on a number of Australian literary figures, past and present.

A flurry of activity by publishers late in the year has resulted in the publication of a number of books that will be of great interest to students of Australian literature. Judith Wright's *Because I Was Invited* (Oxford University Press, 1975) is a collection of talks, articles and monographs written between 1954 and 1974. A. D. Hope's *A Late Picking* (Angus & Robertson, 1975) is a collection of poems written between 1965 and 1974. James McAuley's *A Map of Australian Verse* (Oxford University Press, 1975) (see review pp. 66-68) presents a 'feature map' of Australian poetic history in the twentieth century, including representative poems, selective bibliographies and critical comment. Not to neglect the novel or short story forms, D. R. Burns's critical work, *The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920-1974* (Cassell, 1975) has also appeared.

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