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DECEMBER, 1982

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WESTERLY

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Correspondence should be addressed to the Editors, *Westerly*, Department of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009 (telephone 380 3838). Unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted. Minimum rates for contributions—poems \$7.00; prose pieces \$7.00; reviews, articles, \$15.00; short stories \$30.00. It is stressed that these are minimum rates, based on the fact that very brief contributions in any field are acceptable. In practice the editors aim to pay more, and will discuss payment where required.

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Synopses of literary articles published in *Westerly* appear regularly in *Abstracts of English Studies* (published by the American National Council of Teachers of English).

A Note from the Editors

This issue of *Westerly* is the first since the inauguration of a Centre for Studies in Australian Literature in the English Department of the University of Western Australia in September 1982. The business management of *Westerly* has been taken over by the Centre whose Secretary, Mrs Susan Miller, will work with the Editors in building up the magazine's sales and subscription lists and keeping our readers informed of developments. Our first decisions—to keep the price of *Westerly* to \$3 per issue, or \$10 per annum for subscribers—is one to which we will adhere as long as is humanly possible. At the same time, while the quality of material submitted for *Westerly* remains high, we will aim to hold our page length at around 100 pages per issue.

The Centre for Studies in Australian Literature (CSAL) aims to co-ordinate research and publication activities in Australian literature. For this purpose, literature may be defined broadly to include a very wide range of forms of writing: it may even, as George Seddon persuasively argues in his article in this issue on Western Australian literature, include scientific writing, essays and historical studies. Such writing, as Seddon indicates, may be considered from a literary standpoint alongside prose fiction, poetry and drama. The initial appointment to the Centre is Mr Peter Cowan as Honorary Research Fellow.

The first activity of the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature was a seminar on Southeast Asian and Australian literature held at the University of Western Australia from 23 - 25 September 1982. The theme of this seminar, in which Southeast Asians and Australians participated, was 'The Writer's Sense of the Contemporary'. A selection of papers from the seminar will be published by the Centre. Another publication from the Centre will be the 1982 Octagon lecture by Leonie Kramer, 'From Fact to Legend: Writing and Broadcasting in Australia'. Leonie Kramer is Chairman of the ABC and Professor of Australian Literature at Sydney University.

A major activity of the Centre next year is the organization of the conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature to be held at the University of Western Australia from 22 - 26 August, 1983. The theme of this conference is 'New Connections in Australian Literature and Theatre'. Inquiries about the conference can be made to the convenors, Bruce Bennett and Veronica Brady.

Contributors to *Westerly* may wish to become Associate Members of the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature. This will enable you to receive regular information about activities of CSAL and to obtain reduced rates on publications from the Centre. To obtain Associate Membership of CSAL you should write to Susan Miller, Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, English Department, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, WA. 6009, enclosing a cheque for \$10.

WESTERLY

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Cover: 'Riding Through the Blazing Bush'—illustration by Hume Nisbet from
Cassell's *Picturesque Australasia* (1887)—see article by Peter Cowan.

The Shedding

The Gardener Has a Problem

The problem was really whether one could keep a bull in a suburban garden. My father was of yeoman stock, and had been frustrated in his dream of a small holding somewhere in the hills. He had sworn to protect from all harm the wife he idolised, and her idea of harm was the small holding—out of town as it would have had to be, and therefore, of course, out of control.

When you think of it, if my father hadn't viewed my little mother with such seriousness, none of it would have happened.

Under it all, he was a stubborn man, and perhaps all the more passionate for his frustrations, and certainly capable of secrecy. That is where I came in.

I was to act as cover, simply by being—there.

The Difference of Siblings

For the purposes of this story, let's say I was Daddy's girl; though for all others I'd like to hold the statement wide open to question.

It's true certainly that my mother didn't much care to have me in the house: I was slow and clumsy, and given to ask questions of the kind that prompted only one answer from someone of so practical a disposition. "Straw," she would say, and then, "Oh go outside and play."

So, it seemed decided: my small sister with my mother in the house, and I, where I belonged, outside it with my father. Division of labour.

I fell in nicely with their respective intentions.

Before the Time It All Began

I don't remember how long the garden had been there, or who had planned or planted it, or what had been the idea behind it. Was there one?

I think I knew, once. But that was before, when I was allowed outside it, to where the swamp started at the end of the road. I do remember the sun seeming a good thing, there, and the mound of earth feeling comfortable, the water making edges against it under the grass stalks. The dead water-rat's body not very different from mud and squashy flower stems and the water that rocked it all about. The sudden shots of light through leaves against ripples and shot back again against thick trunks. All warm. All the same feeling. From, of, the sun.

Well; one minute you are just a kid out there at the swamp. Next, you are told to stay inside the garden fence.

I won't say my father let me in on his secret. But I knew something was up.

There Are Different Kinds of Love

So then: I had to stay inside the garden. It wasn't altogether a bad thing. There were moments when to be there was to be loved. The one-ness from outside would press down through the sun. Or the bird I could never catch sight of would cry, to remind, to warn: that call.

My father's garden was given over to roses. Roses, roses, roses, roses. In two rectangular beds and a diamond shaped one. On trellises over the summerhouse, the shed, the steps up to the house. In squares and oblongs set in the asphalt all around the house. And in a double row the whole length of the fence. I used to scratch myself getting close enough to the fence to talk to the kids passing by. I took it to be a kind of warning, or punishment; the thorns were telling me something—I wasn't supposed to be doing that.

When we buried my little black cat it was in a pit of roses. Any rose that was full blown came to be cut off and thrown into a special pit. That way you prevented the hips from forming.

The roses worried me. I couldn't for the life of me understand how they came to be, the helpless floosies, on such penitential stems. And I couldn't work out the scent. The sweetness had a turning back into earth in it, and just as it was ending, or becoming the same as the rest of the air, it seemed to be wanting to say something.

I've never worked them out.

The Gardener's Devotion

My father would keep his eye on me as he husbanded it all. He was very painstaking about everything he did. It was he who carried me over my early fear of steep steps into the house at evening; he who scrubbed me up, a bit too carefully one would have thought; who sat me at table where my mother had already laid out the pieces of bread; and who tucked me into bed for the night.

He gave the same kind of care to the garden. Forever turning and turning and turning the beds, keeping them clean of weeds, preventing the shedding of petals, and pruning back at the end of the season, just as he cut back my nails at the end of each week. I didn't like him doing that to me either, but I could never run far enough away from him.

The best part was the manuring. Why did I find that exciting? He would let me help him water it in. Extra scrubbing, that night.

A Change

He began to spend more time in the shed. The shed was set to one side, away from view of the house, behind the summerhouse where I played with dolls on my cousin's visits. She was older than I, and used to tell me about things, banishing her brother to the outside where he'd stand looking at us, a bit shadowy and lost. I could never make out whether he was wistful or relieved not to be part of our mysteries.

The shed was dark. I remember it was dark. My father kept it shut.

Anyway, for quite a few days he spent all his time in there. You could hear noises now and then.

Up In the House

I could hear my mother, too, singing as she moved around in the house. Her joy made it terrible. She used to protect her hair from the sun and house dust with a helmet made from her scarf of royal blue silk. It was marked with white circles like the whites of staring eyes.

I hungered, once, for the experience of the silk.

The Sibling Thing Again

Perhaps the silk was why, when my little sister had her first birthday, I collected rose petals to shower her with. I thought she would laugh to feel them. But she cried. So they laughed at me, then.

They told me I was silly, too, to cry for so long when my cat was poisoned. But then, they hadn't been able to get in near her under the house, they hadn't seen her die; the spasms, her unbelieving eye, the wrenched dividends of excrement and vomit. Even the soft fur stiffening at the last. The extended claws. Their helplessness. The smell.

The Shed

I became more and more suspicious of the noises. I would look up to the closed windows of the house to catch sight of my mother. She usually had my little sister with her, their faces looking out. My sister's hands were held together.

What was my father doing in the shed?

I had been told to stay, playing, in the garden.

All the same, I thought I might take a peep.

Another Use for Roses

I was always trying to save the blown roses from the pit. On the morning of the day I am talking about, I tossed some over the fence. The kids passing by would sometimes stop to pick them up, and then I'd ask them questions, such as: where've you come from? where are you going? and: what for? That day, I asked them if they could hear anything different from the usual garden busy-ness. But I don't think they could be bothered very much.

When they left, I was staring full in the face of the rose, much prized, my father called "Peace". Yellow, with fleshed edges. Smelt it. Too sweet. And wondered what to do.

I was missing my black cat, but didn't want to go into the summerhouse near where she was buried. It was boring in there by yourself.

There is No Connection Between Time and the Way Things Look

This was one of my problems that morning. You think: "The look of that rose is enough to fill time forever." And then: "I remember the look of my cat. The way she looked enters this minute." So your time should be satisfied by what you see. But it isn't, not always. It gets empty corners, and you've got to hunt something else up to put inside the minutes. It's sometimes difficult.

Noises again. Father in the shed.

I decided to undo the clasp on the shed doors and sneak a little look.

I wasn't supposed to do that.

The Protagonist Makes His Appearance

The noise became loud and the shed seemed shaken and I saw from the darkness his bursting out with the abscess on his head the rage of him bellowing the tearing the trampling the ground giving mud churning all the roses mouthing the mouthing wound close the gardener flailing the woman there watching from behind the high windows and high up watching and my sister's hands wreathing and the gardener's mouth opened like an outraged tomb and who was there to say it, mouth, say it, say, say it: Poor Beast. Poor Beast.

Before the black.

Before the stillness.

The Stillness

The minutes seemed still. They have been, quite still, most of the time, since. Still. And heavy.

And within them another kind of heaviness, as though the widest open crying somebody's body could make had been wadded. Had been bunged.

The Dream

Then there is the dream. The Beast again; yes. But grown and handsome. The fire of his nostril red against the sun. A pale yellow glimmering on his forehead. The horn very slow, very sure as it makes its entry. Then the arrest of him. And a lifting of me off by a great darkness, and down.

The Thorn in the Flesh

Going back to thorns. That is how I have come to view what are called my headaches. The warning; the pain. But I always welcome the darkness when it comes. Within it, the minutes liquefy, elude wadding, and fill with what their thinning film selects as real.

Other Versions

The gardener of my story gets off pretty lightly. I might think he put it in my way to make a bit of a mess of things; and only (remember: this is as I see it) from trying to look perfect in a perfect person's eyes.

But he, after all, is a kind man, a good man, one who, although believing in the law of compensation, tries his hardest to make up for things himself, and to keep them at peace. He is one, too, who always strives to fill the unforgiving minute.

My mother also copes. I haven't heard her cast direct aspersions at my father, even though I turned out to be a nuisance. She'd sometimes ask, "Why a big thing like her couldn't do as she's told and look after herself like everyone else has to?" I know the question still relates to me, but—well—I'm slow to understand. Because I want to be, she says.

Then again, even of my dream, I am puzzled to remember the downcast eyes and compressed half smiles of certain bystanders, my boy cousin a stranger among them. It's as though they know within themselves, but think better of looking.

Well, I don't know. It may have been simply that I fell down the steps. I was always doing things like that. Certainly there's a scar on my left knee. Rose shaped, of course.

The Moral

I think these versions try to teach me—is it: not to show what are called lies?

A Quandary

Yet I should have liked to have offered something.

Conceded Facts

After whatever it was that happened, things were back to normal. My father continued to attend to the gardening, and to move his implements and the bags of manure around in the shed. You could hear him muttering to himself behind the closed doors in a kind of disgusted self-impatience. My mother kept on, still singing, up in the house. My small sister was sometimes even allowed down to

play for an hour in the summerhouse, providing my father was on watch and I was good.

And on days when the sun pressed down on us with all his singing love, there would be minutes when I felt as though—surely—nothing could ever have been seen or heard, or smelt or felt—or wanted—beyond a certain—cultivation.

The Final Say

One thing I regard as curious. After the day forever in question, my mother always had the table laid by four-thirty, and my father brought me up over the steps to be scrubbed one hour earlier than he was used to doing.

Before the sun dipped towards the swamp at the end of the road.

Before the hint of dew.

Before the roses paled and began their uttering under the urgent attending of the twilight.

R. G. HAY

Semi-conductors are also semi-insulators

Yes, my room's a mess. 'Alfred' Carlyle is reputed to have said of Tennyson, 'is always carrying a piece of chaos with him, turning it into cosmos.' I hope I'm not so cosmetic as Alfred, but that, roughly, is my work too. Better, then, to be surrounded by mess. You, of course, are a tidy soul: a neat body, too. But what things lurk in swamps, under rotting logs, in deep scrub, live under water, or move on dark nights, you prefer not to think on: sometimes, though, your well-lit, disinfected, clockwork, deodorised life gets dull. So you come to look in my room, remind yourself of some of those unthinkable thoughts you wish to live safely insulated from. That's why all civilised minds keep a tame poet or two on their bookshelves. So, in a large view, I'm neatly pigeonholed in a role, too. Besides, it's a carefully chosen, cunningly fabricated mess: else I would have to walk outside, and who knows what waits out there?

BRUCE DAWE

A Letter Home

Now that we're sure you've properly settled in,
how do you like our place?

We meant to write long before this, but I don't know, somehow we never got around to it (perhaps because we had trouble finding other accommodation—people forget pretty quick—did we ever tell you we were the original family in the district?). Of course, we had to give up educating the kids at home when we left there, and the other kind came hard—the only success it looked like we were meant to know was constant failure. And finding a job wasn't easy, given that we had a reason for getting knock-backs nothing would shift short of a change of skin.

One thing and another—kids on the run, funerals, sickness sickness—we never did find time to drop that note and let you know (you said when we were loading up the truck, the day we moved, you'd always like to hear how we were getting on . . .). But then we started reading all about you in the papers—*you've* done really well, by all accounts! We know we'd hardly recognize the old home now—once, when we were walking in the neighbourhood, we thought of calling in to say Hello, but there were cars parked all around the lawn, a barbecue going (you could just *smell* the steaks!), and little kids playing chasey between cars called out some names we'd just as soon not mention, so we crossed the street and went on past, but still we thought we'd write on the off-chance anyway and say: "Hello! Remember us? We're the ones who were living there before you . . . How's it going?"

Funny how you can't stop thinking about a place that hasn't been yours for a long time now—they say the same thing happens when you lose a leg or arm, a ghost pain haunts the spot. *That* must be what it is makes it hard to live with—you've lost the thing, but not the *sense* of it.

MEREDITH MICHIE

Passengers

Your grandfather. Daughter mine, there he is.

Four o'clock, Derby day, the crowded air of thundery Flemington platform, after the Wakeful Stakes and before the home-bound crowds. Otto Mullett. Just like that.

That tall body. Though the shoulders stoop now and thrust forward the head.

See. The brow obscured though it's plain the eye-patch is absent. That eye-patch, not there.

Still the strong curved nose, but the caving flesh and stringy neck skin become more beakish.

Large long-boned hands, too, are there but their purpose wavers for which, I suppose, we can be thankful for it is hard to imagine them ever again taking up the spade with such strength and wrong-headed, as my friend Brenda would say, energy. They were once honey hands and I should know, for in my avoidance, all that time ago, of his gay sly eye my own eyes would ride those eloquent fingers. A futility because the blushes would pump up anyway from moonless bitten nails burning shameful bitter-aloe holes in pockets of dirndl skirt or school blazer and I'd lose my concentration and my wits again.

Such were our hands then. I still have the biting habit thirty years on. Though I see that thirty years have turned his honey to a transparency of fig preserve blemished by old death's dark flecks. Mortal Mr Mullett. But palpable Mr Mullett.

I follow your grandfather. See. He boards in a concentrated way with a stick to help him. But he's not a totterer yet though he'd be seventy.

The inevitable hat, same worn by racing men of the 'fifties and all time. He always was a racing man and even had a couple once mixed up with cows and chooks in his back paddock. I don't know if they were goers. My friend Brenda would of course, the way she got around and took an interest. I have never followed horses, it's other followings that get me to the races.

Narrow jockey bums mainly.

Bonkers, as Brenda would say. But there it is. I watch and watch the slender flanks and tiny expert bums. I watch and watch the tough tight expert faces and outsize expert hands emerging from the rippling silk as they parade, squatting gnomishly atop their rippling animals, vividly.

O well. But what if now, right now, as we limp through sweltering Kensington, I should lean across the aisle and tap the old man's scarecrow elbow and tell him of this silliness? Would he chuckle "by jingos", and turn on me his bluely teasing eye? And would my deceitful fingers knot yet again to conceal their ravaged ends?

Brenda would confront him of course, absent eye-patch or not. If she was here it would be simple.

"Crikey," she'd drawl. "Look, Verge. I'm blowed if that's not old man Mullett. You know, Hughie's dad who went wrong-headed and lit off all that time ago."

And across the platform she'd amble.

"Mr Mullett? G'day. You remember us. We went to school with Hughie. Brenda Gunn and Verge, or should I say, Virginia. Remember? You used to pay us threepence a bucket some Saturdays. Of snails. From your garden. And you supplied the salt for their eradication. They were the days, hey."

And although essentially laconic, she'd press on. Yarning.

"How've you been keeping all this time? A lot of them in the town still talk of you and wonder how you went after the . . . um . . . *accident*. Yairs. I'm still there and never did catch the smoke disease like my friend Verge here. Your local friendly pharmacist now, and on the Council. Re-grassing the oval we are, and updating your stand you'll be pleased to know. The famous Mullett stand. How'd you go today? I came out ahead and Verge here doesn't bet. She's more fixated on the colour and, hey Verge, the jocks. Well. Here's the train. Tra for now. I'll tell them all back home you're keeping fit."

That's how it would have been, Brenda's confrontation. Easy. She's practical, and swamp and murk and tangle dissolve in the clear light she casts. But she doesn't lack imagination and it's not as if she doesn't have her insights.

The doomed snails for instance. We'd only have been ten then but she shared the ecstatic shame of those death buckets alright, *as we crouched, transfixed by our own handiwork, the heat pouring down in strong waves on our shoulders and pelting our knees, releasing rich earthy essences flooding up now in warm waves as the reservoirs of gritty sweat behind our knees make our squatting slippery.*

Squatting here.

Here among Mrs Mullett's lettuces, her staked grosse lisse, her blazing dahlias, our scratches from her wire bean supports starting to sting, our fingers sticky with the pungent milk of bruised nasturtiums. Here life is. The other life of the town's Saturday-morning-business-as-usual is a hum as dimly heeded as the honeyed thrumming of bees suspended round the peppercorn.

Squatting.

Poking back into the slow-heaving mess sluggish would-be escapers on the top. Little Mulletts standing around and Hughie too, come over from his ferrets, to gaze into our buckets. As we wait for Mr Mullett to come with salt and see that buckets are filled fairly.

Now the salt. And how we watch and watch the seething bubbles, the glistening froth rising in an effervescent silver turmoil. O Brenda.

Until shy and decent Mrs Mullett, troubled by the witches in her garden huddling over foaming cauldrons, turns on the sprinkler. And breaks our spell.

The drops would splatter down and up we'd scramble jiggling out our pins and needles and avidity. The ritual payment. Then clutching the little silver coins we'd push our bikes back up the side of the old weatherboard through rampant woody lantana, its astringent stench, by the recent drenching, released. And cleansed, we would exult in our Phantom and Mandrake in the Full Moon Cafe. And in the sweet froth of our spiders rising in the chunky glasses we would be restored, the rank and lovely nasturtium stink still clinging to our fingers. O Brenda.

O well. But what would old one-eye across the aisle know of it as we lurch through murky North Melbourne. See his innocent and blank commuters profile. Daughter, I travel with your grandfather, who's nodding now.

He was a pillar in the town although he liked a drop and was a gambler. He had an office in the town hall and fixed to their advantage certain clients' income

tax. And drank with them. He wasn't town hall staff though and his office entrance wasn't in the main street but round the side adjoining the bike shop and across the street from Moron Potatoes, as Brenda used to call that thriving grocery chain. I never went in, though I'd sometimes see Hughie's hybrid bicycle propped across his father's entrance.

A pillar, and people used to call on him and use his name a lot in times of crisis and decision. His height maybe. Or eye-patch. They called him the Count, though he was always *Mister Mullett* to me and Brenda. His name, they said, was Müller although he was fairly Australian and raised in the Barossa. He changed it, but they interned him anyway in 'thirty-nine for a whole year. Just like that. Even though he was a farmer.

Interned but not interred. Because even when he lost his eye there in that camp it didn't seem to stop him. He appealed. And when they let him out he shifted to our town, got a small herd going and a garden, quiet-like, as Brenda would say.

But when the war was over he made his presence felt—at thirty-five, a one-eyed star full-forward for one triumphant season. After that they made him a selector, then, as his interests turned from milkers, chooks and spuds to town hall office, from Holden ute to Packard, second-hand, and from roll-your-owns to pipe, they voted him club president. Even after the horses claimed him he left his mark on football. His stand transformed the oval. A palace of a stand, talk of the whole district and bearing his name. Though where the money came from. His five or six kids and Mrs Mullett travelling in the depleted dairy. A book on the side. He must have.

Your grandfather, daughter mine-o, SP bookmaker. That's how it would have been. He had that kind of style.

Like when the drops would splatter down and up we'd scramble jiggling out our pins and needles and avidity. The ritual payment. Looming Mr Mullett. I'd ride your teasing fingers jingling and juggling silver coins. I'd watch and watch your honey hands knotted now, now spread, secreting and revealing silver coins.

"Six buckets, stone the lizards . . ."

"Stiffen them you mean. Stiffen, Mr Mullett." Perky Brenda.

"That's as may be. Six buckets. Now at a penny each . . ."

"Threepence, Mr Mullett. Threepence each, you said." O daring Brenda.

"That's the ticket. At threepence each then, that makes . . ."

"One and six. One and sixpence, Mr Mullett." Invincible Brenda. Songster.

"Well by jingo, is that so Miss Tub. And what, Miss Grub, do you say?" From such a blue height.

I'd try, o I try to get my eyes up and my voice.

"The same," I croak, "I think." Miss Slug, more like. Or toad.

"You're sure now are you girly. Six times threepence . . ."

"Jeez, Dad." Interceding Hughie. Lanky Hughie, two years older and second Mullett son.

"As nimble with their sums as with their snail-spotter eyes, eh. Though, by golly, I make it a shilling. Hold your horses now! A shilling . . . for each of you! In threepences!"

And how your hands now come to life, mesmerising Mr Mullett. Out of Hughie's ear, a threepence. From Brenda's armpit, threepence. From under a still frothing bucket, a magic glinting coin. Your golden hands feinting, darting. The flashing wrist. Down snakes your hand to lift my damp plait.

"And what, girly, have you got hatching under here?"

Fossicking.

"Stiffen the crows, a thrip? Hugo, get mother to bring the Lindane. By gum, Miss Grub, the dreaded thrip and greater scourge than any snail."

Delving.

"Yes, upon my soul, thrip, thrip, thrip . . . ence!"

And your long fingers send it spinning in the dazzling air. Up. Expertly. Perfectly.

They're still now though, those fingers, and rest limply on his knees as we jostle into fetid Flinders Street. He's staying put. No changing. What line is this anyway old man? I stay with your grandfather, daughter mine, though the absent eye-patch makes me edgy.

It must have been those hands that undid Sister Hamilton's knots. Inhibited Stella Hamilton, midwife, solitary, favourer of night shifts and ten years older than her Count.

Brenda told me once who had it from her mother, the indefatigable Mrs Gunn, who guessed, even though at the time she and my mother, their shaved and slack and feeble bellies swaddled in their tight binders, were still woosey from their anaesthetics in Maternity at the Base and District a mile out on the left next to the Showgrounds, while Brenda and I squirmed and squawked in the swaddle of our tight binding sheets in the nursery. In 1940. In a heatwave.

Many of the town and district mothers were there. Mrs Cruickshank, inseparable Mrs Feuster and Fowler, Mrs *Leonard* Duckworth thank you, Mrs Sheedy and swampy Miss Eileen Person. And Mrs Mullett, too, was there awaiting her third with fortitude and, on the face of it, no co-operation.

She had a nose had Mrs Gunn, for it was probably little more than a sudden tremor of bed pans, a dropped foetal heart steth, a palpable silent tension as nurse tended patient in the clammy wakeful nights of their confinements. And Mrs Mullett's closed and stricken face in the glaring clanging days of their confinements.

Who followed who to the town, Stella Hamilton? Because Mrs Gunn was right and you'd known him before, hadn't you. How clearly I can see it now though the very air is murky as we toil through panting Richmond. But here he is Sister Hamilton, an old bloke, dozing. I see him and I see it all. Your ecstasy.

You knew him from the time of his wife's first confinement, didn't you. Some hot bush hospital in South Australia. The enquiry crowding his eyes. Growing. The trembling patience of his wondering unpresumptuous hands presuming, omygod, slowly. Your knots released. Delicate small stars of bush orchids and the bitter stench of ants. Warm small stones chinking and brittle crackling earth throbbing to cicadas' choir. The shapes of crashing animals. The dazzle of exultant sulphur-crested. Eucalypts exploding. And the infinite South Australian sky spreading.

What happened to the child, Sister? Yours and his. This Hugo. She took it didn't she. Mrs put-upon Mullett, to salvage something. Her second, so everyone thought. Nose-wiping, bum-wiping, farex-mixing, *raising damn it*, while you did your bit for the war and took a drop in pay and went to Bathurst to nurse a bunch of internees. But Otto Müller Mullett wasn't alien was he, Sister Hamilton, to you.

And then our town. Who followed who out of that camp after Mrs Mullett had been promised for her pains that you would disappear for ever. And her, come all that way over on the train with two hot smeary kids for one special camp visit when her husband's eye was lost, swollen with their third by the time they shift to our town.

And why does it get, as Brenda would say, my goat? Because it does, daughter mine, it does, as we labour through sweating Prahran.

Would Mrs Mullett gnash and wail as only the shy and decent can? Her outraged heart. Her boiling heart. Would he abandon her thrashing on the ground, rending her rampaging nasturtiums, pushing earth into her mouth to smother her

mad heart each time he came to you, single-hearted Stella Hamilton? Then and for the next twelve years.

Well?

Would his honeyed eminence single-heartedly position his ute (and later, Packard) among the no-mans-land peppercorns which, until they put up the tin fence, divided Show from Hospital grounds? Would he headlight his need through the window of the night nurses' room? Were your colleagues good sports who had an understanding of your obsession?

Otto Mullett's light shafting through your window.

"An hour Rita, alright?"

"Mmm." Feet up and yawning between the covers of a New Idea.

"Baby Lynch has had its sup and Goode's not due 'til two."

"Mmm. Have fun Stel."

Off veil, on scarf and dark camouflaging coat for the purpose, never mind buttons, clutch in front. Coming. Glide down dimly glistening corridors. Launch across gravel path to spongily receiving buffalo, bugger, sopping from forgotten sprinklers. Coming. Sail round dahlia islands, rosebed peninsulas, promontories of pungent lawn clippings and incinerator. Coming. Sod, ankle-deep in darker oceans of fresh ploughing not there last time. Yaw, pitch on through. Coming. The beacon? Omygod where?

The gurrk gurrk of hidden frogs.

"Hello?"

"Stel."

"Otto."

Cicadas choiring.

O well, you couldn't help yourselves, never mind Mrs Mullett. And rarely would you fail to come Sister. But you had taken the veil and were dedicated, a professional nurse and expert, and although you left your post on these occasions you could not, could you, abandon it or desert your charges. When they needed you or when things were, as Brenda would say, on the boil, you stayed and endured the twenty minutes of patient beaming before the ute withdrew. And though outwardly composed, you would be desolate.

I was a deserter of posts. That's why I stay to the bitter end of all posts now. Look, daughter mine, at the way I stay by this one, your grandfather. Though am sweatstuck to the seat which helps. Here in this stifling compartment as we grind through sullen Windsor, old one-eye's body swaying and flopping to the motion. Dead most likely. O well. I'll see him to his terminal, and there this skin-of-the-teeth enterprise will have to stop.

One of my desertions was Miss Eileen Person. Just once. Miss Person's Monday afternoon coaching class in Arithmetic. For I was not a gifted mathematician, more a speculator than a calculator, especially in that universal urgent need to know how many gallons fill tanks of bizarre dimensions in what lengths of time. Brenda would know of course, she's accurate and has that sort of mind. Miss Person was, as Brenda would say, a witch's wart. Never once did she mention outright my shudder-making fingers exposed at full stretch frantically drumming to the beat of her devious puzzles, though you could tell she was watching and watching. No, she'd give her smooth sermon about grooming and making the most of yourself just-look-at-her-own-daughter. Smelly Wendy? Word mincer, the closest she could come to the unmentionable was her acid-sweet insinuation of the aloe's bitter juices. Yes Miss mincing cunning Person, I know about the bitterness of aloes.

My Monday of abandonment. Dark bulging clouds blundering around a low growling sky and slabs of breathtaking midwinter wind, gone haywire in the

crannies of the main street, whooshing in off the plains. After school. Four o'clock, but dark. A few fogged up anonymous utes with their lights on, but empty footpaths. Talk about bleak. The shop lights on already make it somehow bleaker. Or, as Brenda would say, spooky. One lingering spider in the Full Moon to fortify the spirit for imminent circumferences and two pye r's. Dawdle past the newsagent craving Enid Blyton's latest, flaunted in the window. A wind like this would burn your ears off, but better earless than suffocated in Miss Person's cloister, the card table erected two inches from her throbbing heater.

Bleak streets. Bleak heart, slouching down past the oval. But here, the frenzied peppercorns. Unnatural. Unnatural gloomy light. Spitting now, with menacing intention. Get going. Footy practice cancelled, so short-cut across. Now, cold curtains of hard rain. Cover. The Mullett grandstand. Galloping. Rain pelting, spurring shoulders and behind the knees. The sludgy threadbare centre square. Baulk. For coming, full pelt, panicky and running blind, the sickening creature. The undulating horror. And another. Those things, on the loose. Zigzagging. And scarecrow Hughie blundering lop-sidedly. His contorted anguished mouth into the driven rain, bawling.

"Me ferrets."

His haywire windmill arms.

"Stop 'em."

His stricken heart.

"Get 'em. Getem."

Me? Those things?

"For gawdsake."

Dive. Furious sodden body. Fumble. The shocking little bones alive beneath the saturated fur. Butter-fingers. The pink mad eye. Bren-daa? The rodent-squealing. I can't. Grab again. Take possession. The weasel-biting. Hold on. Don't puke. Hughie's on the other one now, and now the sky throws down its ice. Bruising stones of ice. Ice fists belting, hurting. Get going, galloping. Broken birds dropping down. Unnatural. The Mullett stand.

Steel lockers, grey. Concrete floor, grey, awash. Stiff rows of slatted wooden benches, foreign. Disinfectant, pee, wet rampant animals, stinking. Cold. Fling mine into the writhing cage. Hughie fighting his. To stop it swallowing its tail.

"Its back is broke."

A hailstoned cripple.

"It's crook."

They will even swallow their own young, Brenda says.

"Have to smash its head."

Crying, shivering, doing it. The sounds. My rushing stomach. Hot lumpy puke afloat on the sloshy floor. And again. Puking.

"Are you alright. Hey?"

The stink of stale old saturated sandshoes.

"Verge?"

His damp and gawky hands. Electric bones.

"It'll be alright."

Pressing. His slippery boney breast. My flattened leaky nose.

"Please?"

Doe-say-doe-your-partners-now.

"I know you're not a miss stiff-britches like they say."

The rickety dance. The perilous floor.

"Come on Verge."

This drumming chamber. The scuffling cages.

"You're beaut. You know I've always thought."

His goose-pimpled narrowness.

“Mmm?”

His skinny flanks.

“It’ll be alright.”

My stomach knotting on its own emptiness.

“Verge.”

Pressing.

Cold.

And yesterday’s pants on.

So. There it is. Lanky Hughie, two years older and second Mullett son. Not everything happened in heatwaves in our town.

O Mr Mullett, Mr Mullett of the teasing eye, wake up and hear. You’ll chuckle “by jingos, what you nippers got up to”. I’ll look you in the eye and unknot my fingers as we crowd through brooding Balaclava, the reservoirs of gritty trainsweat gathering behind my knees. Mr Mullett?

He won’t hear now though. And he never knew then, about you, his granddaughter, because he’d already wielded the clothes prop and the long-handled spade and vanished. Just like that. He laid about him alright, old death’s mad dark flecks crowding his eye like, as Brenda would say, a swarm of blowies. The devastated garden and the frenzied leghorns. Hughie’s amputated toe, another smaller son’s torn ear. And valiant Mrs Mullett. Flattened in her rioting golden glories and for her pains, one-third vision and a permanent squint and always a headache impending. We would sometimes see her after that toiling to the Lutheran services.

There was speculation.

The whisky sent him haywire.

He couldn’t stomach the spell of sandpaper northerlies, grittiest in memory.

The torment of whatever it was behind that eye-patch got to him at last.

It was all those kids—six or seven by this time—and the responsibility.

He was in over his head with the horses and caught fiddling.

Just another crazed kraut and what else can you expect from the hun. (Though he was raised in the Barossa.)

Wrong of course. All wrong. Because it was dedicated Stella Hamilton. Who died in fifty-two. By herself. Just like that.

He missed her.

I missed her.

Where were you Sister Hamilton when they admitted a stricken childmother, prem, to the Base and District one mile out on the left next to the Showgrounds. In 1954. In a heatwave. That time when the Queen toured our town in the middle of a locust plague so thick that Brenda, who was down at the oval with the school, said you couldn’t tell if She was waving or swiping. That time of chaos and disintegration with the thump thump of hoppers blundering into flywire screens. Those glaring days of pain and shame. The wakeful clammy nights of my confinement.

You would have curtained off for us a dim quiet island, Sister. You’d remove the sodden pad. And starting with my fevered feet, you’d bathe with tepid water and just a hint of meths, my body. Your quiet sure hands. You’d take up my fevered hair and brush and brush. Your fingers would begin to plait and how deft would be your weaving. You’d take away the hated rubber undersheet and replace the saturated linen. You’d calmly raise the rule for weaning mothers and bring me barley water in a glass and while I’d sip you’d unwind the sticky bandages they’d bound so tightly around my chest, that winding sheet, and relieve my fevered nipples. Your knowing fingers would release the thin pale streams.

Milking me. Quietly in the night. You'd clothe me in clean cotton. And then, o then, you'd come with a little metal kidney dish and cotton wool and spatula and file. You'd take up my hands without a tremor and from finger tip to wrist you'd smoothe in your emollient. There'd be the faintest trace of nasturtiums in the quiet air around us and, hovering, a golden glowing light. Then each finger, with care and concentration, you'd manicure. And all my moons would start to rise.

O sister.

And because you'd already relinquished your own motherhood and knew what it was like, you'd have shown me the way to keep my daughter.

My daughter, that's how it would have been. Grub-Slug-Verge who knew nothing, just did not know, would have been shown. Your lament, daughter mine. When you howled up your despair, my mother don't abandon me, I'd have calmly come and called you daughter. My committed breast. The knots of your despairing fists released.

O daughter.

Bonkers. That's what Brenda would say. Brenda's motto is clear level heads on clear level shoulders and both feet on the ground.

But I can be clear-headed in my way. I know, for instance, daughter mine, that you'd be twenty-six now and well and truly fending and I know that it wasn't so much your grandfather's gay sly eye but the mystery of the hidden socket that stirred up my morbidity and I'll tell you what, this day I have outgrown the narrow bums of jockeys. So that's a start. We'll see.

So. Everyone dies, and Sister Hamilton went that way a year or so before you came and we missed each other in the Base and District. You never knew elusive Stella Hamilton, your grandmother. But I've given you glimpses of your grandfather this thundery Derby day?

Look at him, he's stirring as we blunder into growling Gardenvale. Gardenvale? A geriatric rest home? A burial park for pets? I'll do it now, absent eye-patch or not. Watch me, daughter mine.

"Excuse me, Mr Mullett?"

See how at last he turns his head.

"It's me. You remember, I used to go to school with . . ."

He can't see! The other eye! *Both* eyes not there!

"The threepences Mr Mullett, for the snails, my name was, is . . ."

"Otto. Come on old-timer."

The practical station master's face.

"Your stop, Otto."

The Saturday afternoon vaudeval.

"Head in the clouds again. I've told you young fella it's no good nodding off. You've got to count the stops in case I miss you."

A gerrie's keeper?

"Here we go now, that's the ticket."

I farewell your grandfather.

"How did we go then?"

The door.

"That double'll pay a quid or two I reckon."

Up the platform.

"Come on old mate. The change'll hit us any sec."

Gone. Just like that.

O well. O well o well owellowello.

Your grandfather, obedient totterer? Martyr, more like. What intensity of feeling to have taken the eye, his remaining eye, in his remorse, for his redemption. And now his head's up there with angels.

Of course if Brenda got a whiff of this she'd say that I was off again. Brenda's always said that I exaggerate and shift my ground. Moody I'm supposed to be. And fanciful. She says there's too much wax and wane. All flux, she says. And now she'd say my fantasies were festering and offer to apply some kind of poultice. After all, she is a chemist and should know. A chemist.

O well.

But now I'll show her my cool head and both feet firmly planted. I'll tell her that for all our gruesome speculation what lurked behind that eye-patch was just an eye, albeit rather glazed and starey. And how relieved she'll be to know it is now unveiled and joined by the other.

Or did we need his mystery? *As we watched and watched the glistening froth of our spiders rising in their chunky glasses in the Full Moon. A whole hot Saturday stretching. To muck around in. We will gather up our bikes now.*

The river?

Mmm. Have to get our bathers first.

Go round to Windy-Wendy's then, and scare her. Say we've seen old man Mullett's eye-hole.

Nah, too hot.

We could go back to the Mulletts and watch dopey Hughie feed his ferrets.

Murder no. That horror show.

They say those undulating horrors will even swallow their own babies.

Errk.

What about the cubby. We could take our comics.

Sick of that.

Well something then. Come on. Or else we'll get the doldrums.

We would gather up our bikes and pedal out to the edge of town and the stretch of bush where the golf course runs out. That part with the small brown dam in the middle. For a while we'd clamber over the churned up mud of night-drinking animals baked hard and lumpy.

We'd find a place to squat and dangle yabby lines. We'd catch them too. The thrilling tug. Big ones sometimes and sometimes, when I'd prevail on Brenda not to take hers home for boiling, the same ones over and over.

And now we just fossick and lie around. The sweet hot stench of summer grasses pulsing up. Warm small stones chinking. The brittle litter of eucalypts crackling in the dry quiet dusty air and rustlings of hidden animals. All around the long dusty leaves of eucalypts drooping in the still air. Waiting. And still, that morning's sweet nasturtiums haunting our fingers.

O well. O daughter mine. You'll never know how fond I am of Brenda though you'd be twenty-six now and well and truly fending.

The sea is at hand as we slide into Sandringham. Hear the exhausted throb of engines of dredge out there? Dredging. A wind is getting up and there's growling all around. Coming in over the dark bay is a queer and heavy golden light. A rain-laden light.

But before I step out on brisk cool feet across damp sands I'd love to know. I'd love to know, do you bite yours, love? Or are they firm and shaped with serene and perfect moons.

LEON SLADE

The Clef's Edge

Every growing boy desires fame.
Prodigiously I tried the violin for size
(each gut bowed, dragged frenetically),
fronted for only one lesson.
I accompanied sister on the piano
she'd already begun:
each grand brio drummed furiously.
After a thousand repetitions I excused myself.

I listened to the school orchestra,
the school band, the school in concert
which made me jealous. *Jealousy*
was never one of my aspirations.
Breathing in and breathing out is life.
I made the school choir three years in a row,
got selected in the bass elite because I sang flat
and pretended I could read music.

Tempted to confine myself
to disc jockeys' record broking,
I succumbed to the harmonica,
got to suck and blow through *Home Sweet Home*,
only to have my career cut short once more
(breathing in and breathing out is life)
when my work mate insisted
I return his teach-yourself-text.

Every greying brave dusts feathers
of his baby bonnet off;
breathing in and breathing out is life:
life stops with the music.
Every gross bass damns fate's fat,
faces the bathos of his bathroom scales.

Mandy's List

Lately, whenever Mandy glanced at the paper, women seemed to be on the front page doing it. Crossing Australia on yaks, on llamas. Going over Niagara Falls in barrels, blindfolded. Crossing the English Channel on floating combine harvesters. Women everywhere doing their Own Thing. Getting their Rocks Off. Going Places in a Hurry

And to make it worse, Mandy realised they'd been doing it for years—ten at least, maybe fifteen—and only now had she begun to notice. Why, even John—sweet, dependable John—had noticed, and John was usually the last person in the world to notice anything.

'Maybe you should develop an interest,' he'd begun telling her, 'outside the home. Do a course. Take up pottery classes'

But where was that going to lead, she wanted to know. Across the English Channel in a ceramic soup tureen? It might make the Guinness Book of Records, but even blindfolded there wasn't much glamour, much chic in that!

It didn't even compare with Liz Jones next door. Good old best friend Liz, collaborator in a thousand mid-morning, mid-vacuuming, mid-rinse-cycle coffee breaks, had overnight transformed into Libby Jones, fashion photographer for *Cleopolitan*, glossiest of women's magazines. *Ms* Libby Jones to you now baby, Mandy told herself despairingly

There would be no more coffee breaks with good old Liz now—she brought her office boys home for coffee instead. And did strange things to them afterwards on top of the kitchen table—or so Mandy discovered one morning when she wandered innocently in through the the back door, cup in hand, to borrow some sugar. Her 'Yoo-hoo' cut off mid-vowel by the astonishing sight of her best friend and neighbour doing it. Her own thing, obviously.

'Saves rushing around changing bedsheets before hubby gets home,' Libby told her a little sheepishly as she showed her out the door. Then hastened to add, 'Not that he doesn't know, of course. And fully approve—we've talked it through. I just don't rub his face in it'

Just rub a dishcloth in it instead, Mandy thought indignantly as she walked back home. Just wipe down the table and set out the evening meal—how convenient!

Although indignantly was probably not the right word for it, she realised. More a mixture of emotions she was having increasing trouble identifying. Half-indignantly, perhaps—and half-enviously. Because a woman couldn't help but be envious. A *housewife* couldn't help but be envious.

'Occupation?' the enrolment clerk at the pottery class had asked. No, accused. 'Housewife,' Mandy had confessed inaudibly. 'Just a housewife'

Just a housewife—how long had it been *just*? Ten years? Fifteen? It was bloody *unjust*, she thought. Unjustly a housewife. A hausfrau. Might as well be called a blowfly—it sounded just as ugly.

‘Sorry—I didn’t catch that occupation,’ the clerk repeated, pencil poised.

‘Blowfly,’ Mandy spoke out bravely. ‘Just a blowfly . . .’ But her moment of exhilaration was brief, and ended only in frustration as her words were translated into the language of clerks. *Domestic Duties*.

Was it that obvious? she wondered, examining her reflection in a window as she left. She could see no pastel brunch-coat. No curlers, no slippers—the field uniform of modern drudgery. Her face might not make the front cover of *Cleopolitan*, agreed—but the body beneath was reasonably trim. And the clothes . . . designer jeans, imported Italian boots, slinky knitted top. Not off the latest plane from Paris, perhaps—but not off the slowest boat either. Men still turned and looked, which seemed important to her. And even more importantly, other women still turned and looked . . .

And her mind—what of her mind? She leaned closer to the window and squeezed a blackhead. Not much of her mind seemed to be reflected there, but she knew it was sound. Even, at times, quick—‘scintillating’ as John complimented her after every dinner party. Which meant a lot of compliments, for there were any number of dinner parties—John was always bringing clients home for tax-deductible dinners, along with their brilliant spouses . . .

But on her home territory, Mandy was sure of herself. She could shine as brilliantly as the best of them, even if it took a cheat-card slipped discreetly in her napkin to do it. A schedule of Interesting Topics to introduce whenever the conversation flagged. Like different wines—red or white, dry or sweet—she uncorked a different topic with every course. The Microchip Revolution with the Asparagus Soup, The Islamic Resurgence with the Pepper Steak, Can the Novel Survive? with the Chocolate Mousse.

And in the kitchen, on top of the fridge, her dinner party bible. *Five Thousand Witty One-Liners For Every Occasion*. She memorised those single lines carefully as she ladled the soup, ground the pepper, creamed the mousse . . .

Number 2957, for example, when the conversation had turned to the somewhat easy target of politicians the night before.

‘I hear that someone broke into Parliament House and stole both their books on economics,’ Mandy had quoted. ‘Including one they hadn’t even finished colouring in!’

It might have been cheating, but the laughter had more than compensated for that. Brilliance—even stolen brilliance, rehearsed brilliance—had been enough. Or almost enough—doubts still crept in occasionally . . .

‘Am I a bore?’ she had asked John later that same night, as he lay beneath her, half-naked and still panting, amide the wreckage of dinner on top of the table. But John was too shocked to answer . . .

Either that, or he was asleep. Sweet, dependable John—she slid his pants the rest of the way off, tidied away the cups and ashtrays around him, and covered him with a blanket.

‘Am I a bore?’ she repeated to her smudged reflection as she cleaned her teeth, but found no answer there either. Perhaps she had even shocked herself!

*

‘What’s a bore, Mummy?’ little Kylie asked in the morning, her mouth full of milk and cereal.

Mandy was a little taken aback as she squeezed the orange juice—she had obviously been thinking aloud. But luckily no damage was done—John had his nose buried in the morning paper and had heard nothing. Otherwise who knows

what innermost secret thoughts she might have revealed

‘A bore? A bore is a sort of well, sweetheart.’

‘What’s a well, Mummy?’ her daughter pressed on, relentless as ever.

Her daughter. Her little Kylie. Her precious baby—although suddenly a baby no longer. Suddenly trotting off to school each day, apple in hand—which just as suddenly left the whole day stretching emptily ahead, waiting—no, *begging*—for Own Things to be Done. Rocks to be Got Off. Places to be Gone To in a Hurry. But which Rocks?, she wondered. What things, what places? Where the hell were they?

Certainly not in pottery classes, she decided as she walked out on the first day. Mud-pies for Grown-ups! But if she wasn’t the arty-crafty type—which type was she?

The sporty type? True, she had been something of an athlete at school. Had won the cups, the trophies, the statuettes that still decorated her mantelpiece *Tennis, squash, badminton*—she drew up a list of her sports and looked at it. *Netball, basketball, volleyball, softball* The list was long, but even as she wrote, she realised that life would always be longer. She might live for another forty years—a lot of years to fill with sport. Besides, she would be so fit at the end of that forty years, she would probably live for another forty years after that! And how would she fill those? There were no answers in sport—only further questions.

Another baby then? She added the word *baby* to her list, for babies were certainly fulfilling—if only in the sense that they filled time fully. But each one lasted what? Five years? She could go on popping them out every five till menopause, but five years after that? Back to square one. Back to scratch. Back to the youngest trotting off to school each morning, apple in hand—and a whole day stretching emptily ahead

She knew how Libby next door would advise her to fill those empty days. With an affair—an affair conducted as much as possible on top of kitchen tables. And no doubt it would be delicious, even magical, for a month or two—but worth the inevitable scenes afterwards? And what of the kitchen table? It was on its last legs already! (She smiled to herself at the badness of this joke.) Besides, she liked John too much. Cliche or not, they really were each other’s best friend. So she scratched a line through *affair*. Then scratched a few more lines through to make the word completely indecipherable in case John should happen to glance at her list. Their friendship wasn’t quite *that* good

So what was left? Not much, apparently. Or nothing big-time, anyway. No meteoric career, no all-consuming affair (There was still religion, she suddenly remembered—and just as suddenly decided to forget.) Small things only seemed to remain—everyday pleasures, modest daily goals, little somethings. She began to jot a few down—*headlines in the morning, hot baths at night. Coffee breaks, tea breaks, sherry breaks* (Give us this day our daily sherry, she smiled as she wrote). Also—*conversation with friends. Jokes. Parties. Holidays. Dinners in restaurants.*

She turned to a new page quickly as the list accumulated, and went right on scribbling. *Games with children. Tennis mornings, bridge afternoons. Cooking. Films, plays, books, concerts. More sherry breaks.* (Oh yes, definitely more sherry breaks, she laughed, pouring herself another.) *Music. Sex*—preferably of the in-bred variety. And *sleep*, of course—mustn’t forget sleep

She paused, her writing hand beginning to ache, and read back over her list, feeling more cheerful already. Realising, in fact, just how much pleasure the small things of life still gave her. And if this was another cliche—okay it was

another cliché. She could also enjoy clichés—even the most worn and threadbare blankets still comforted just a little.

She wrote the word down on her list. *Cliches*. They also were one of life's little pleasures

As, for that matter, was the compiling of lists. She poured herself another little something, felt the glow fill her throat and spread through her chest.

When the list was complete, she might even make a paper boat of it to sail over Niagara Falls

DORIS BRETT

Go Forth

He's in each day,
trim as a pin
stripe, neatly slots
into allotted spot
as if he were
a rare sort of centaur—
half man, half chair.
Stationary, there seems
to be some strange trick
he's mastered. His face
stares out of windows,
opens doors, takes over
vacant spaces. Bad
days I see him everywhere.
He multiplies
like Magritte's rains
of business men
drifting from the sky.

BETH SPENCER

Atonement

She never saw me as others saw me. She only ever saw a mirror reflection of me. Yet she knew me better than anyone, surely. And I knew her better than anyone.

She lived alone. When she wanted to see people she went out. Then when she came home, opening the door and stepping inside, it was like stepping into herself. Each reunion was wonderful. The flat was precious. Each piece of furniture—curtains, ashtrays, books—they were all unique because they were hers. She couldn't bear to part with any of them. (She kept broken bowls in the cupboard rather than throw them out.) And she rarely added anything unnecessarily. Each thing was carefully chosen—nothing indiscriminately collected as in the past—everything fit, blended, sang of her aloneness, and caught the light in a way that nothing else in the world did. It was her womb.

Because the flat existed only for her she felt then that *she* existed. That we had a right to live, a meaning. Because the flat needed her. It needed someone to pay for it, and live in it.

It was the womb she could retreat to while she was trying to establish herself as a person out there in the world of real people. Because she never could feel quite real when she was with other people. It was difficult.

Sometimes she couldn't say her name. I'd send the words in a message to her brain and she'd recoil and try to close me off. But I'd keep sending it. You are . . . *I am* . . . I'd mouth the words and she'd soothe to the rhythm and eventually we'd be screaming them aloud. This would happen in the car, with the windows rolled up and the night outside like a soft cat.

Gradually she was discovering how to exist.

She began to flirt. We'd do it together like two schoolgirls. It was fun. There was no jealousy; nothing like that. I guess we were really just flirting with each other but somehow we always needed a man there—the doctor, the petrol pump attendant, the bus conductor—someone to make it okay.

But it just didn't work out the night that he came. Afterwards she closed in on herself until I could hardly reach her.

She had forgotten about us when she brought him home that night. She often did forget when she went out. That's why coming home was always such a joy, because it was a kind of surprise—a relief to find, each time, how nice it was to be alone. But it was only when she had walked in the door that she realised what she had done, and it was too late then. He didn't fit. His presence—in her bed, in the kitchen in the morning, in her bathroom—his presence violated everything and she could feel all her possessions shrink from his touch but they had nowhere to go.

We just waited until he'd gone.

And then she felt sorry. So sorry for what she'd done to us. But I understood.

It was usually *me* being sorry. It was actually a relief to be able to tell her how very *much* I understood.

She always hated me after I'd told other people about us. She never said it, but I knew that she resented my habit of turning our experiences into examples of her theories and then telling people. She'd take it out on me when we were in bed. But I'd dream of attempted suicide and being found against all odds and spending months in a sanatorium afterwards and how I'd let nobody but her come to see me. That way I'd win her back. She could never resist my suicide fantasies. We'd weep over them.

I guess I always told other people the things she'd told me because I was proud of her. I wanted to show her off. Like she was proud of the flat. That's why she brought him back here that night. She wanted to show it off. Usually, she stayed at his place.

She avoided the mirror that next day. She wouldn't look at me.

I knew she had to have something to do. Something for us. Something to keep her mind off regret. She needed activity. So I suggested she do something about the sheets.

Oh, yes. The sheets. The sorrow of it. Her sheets. Her unviolated alone-sheets. His sweat and his breath and his hair and his semen on *our* sheets. She dragged them off the bed and bundled them up to take to the laundromat . . .

On the way she stopped at the bank to cash a cheque.

The bank was cool. Anonymous. When she signed her name I felt a long way away from her. As if she was real but I wasn't. But when she said her name for no reason, just "I am . . ." it was totally different. We were still two people, but we were together, shouting in unison. I could almost hear her voice, hear it coming a beat after mine because she is so much more hesitant than I so it was me that led it. "I am *am* . . ." I'd say it slow to give her time to get the words out. It was terribly difficult for her. But it was *important*. She didn't exist if I didn't make her say it. Or I didn't exist . . . and she *needed* me.

She put the money in her purse. I saw her put the money in her purse. She smiled a "you'll see" smile. I knew then that she was up to something.

She left me at the flat and went out on her own.

When she came home that evening she was exultant. We cooked tea and listened to music and had a bath and then she brought out the parcel.

New sheets.

Beautiful sheets. Warm and soft and clean and a pale delicate green like no others in the world. We needed sheets, she said, and laughed. The others were somewhere on their way to the tip now. I loved it when she laughed.

Alone-sheets. Never to be violated sheets. When she got some more money, she explained aloud, we'd buy some more from the op shop to use if anyone came. But these sheets were ours. Only, always, ours.

She moved to the mirror and we watched each other.

My sheets. *Mine. Jouissance*—I felt *real*.

J. W. CLARK

Anticipating the Dawn

By the millstream this afternoon your father cast for the large trout that has been eluding him since your family moved here from the seaside. If he caught us like this his anger would be profound. I saw the muscles standing in his arms as we chopped wood last night. So listen for his footfall upon the staircase. Count the hours by the chime of the hallway clock. If the worst comes to the worst, I suppose I could lay low in these hills where the daily bread cools in open windows.

There's a strange light outside like moon or starglow. A soft drumming claims it as a car, when I thought it could even be your brother returning late across fields by torchlight. This morning he showed me where the stream runs beneath the drawing-room floor. We prised the trapdoor under the persian-rug and there was the water glistening within angling distance. The sight conjured up the image of your father sitting in his armchair with a line dropping into the rushing depths. Your brother said it had been tried but the experiment proved entirely unsatisfactory, for before long there were trout flicking amongst the willow-china and leaving stains upon the walnut sideboard. While your mother stood open-mouthed as the lively fish were pursued between the family heirlooms.

I walked the labrador early this evening, setting him upon invisible game, when suddenly from a hillock he produced a shrieking mole. I attempted to rescue the smaller animal but only succeeded in causing it to clamp its tiny jaws around my thumb. And there I stood in the open field with the setting sun staining the sky pink and the mole's sharp teeth colouring my hand crimson, wondering if England was rabies-free. The dog's excited barking soon attracted your father's attention and he lay down his fishing-rod and walked over, treading the ground heavily in his thick-soled boots. At each step my self-confidence diminished so that by the time he'd reached me I thought I might feign nonchalance, calmly declaring that indeed nothing was amiss but would he mind striking this extension of my hand with a length of wood so that I might resume my wanderings without its painful encumbrance. Fortunately this scene was avoided when the labrador swiftly grabbed the mole by its hindquarters and in fright the animal loosened its hold and fell to the ground. Your father stood there, his arms folded, looking at my hand, the departing mole, the dog, the sunset, and said Christ. While I tried to maintain my self-esteem which, like the sun, had almost disappeared.

Remember when we first met? That evening in a wine-bar in Eastbourne when my accent was such a novelty that I had to seek refuge in silence. And there I stayed in a corner in the heat of mankind and cigarette smoke, waiting for the

wine I was drinking to have the desired effect. Finally, my senses numbed, I broke out of that mingling sea extending a hand to anyone who would take it and wish me farewell. Before sliding out the door and into the night-cool air, thankful to be alone. But finding you behind me as I slouched my way up the street towards the hotel. You caught me up and mentioned food Chinese-style in a café not too distant where they didn't even speak English. Such an offer I could not afford to turn down, and as we went arm-in-arm along Cornfield Terrace I blasted each open doorway with a volley of Australian expletives.

You were my liferaft on that strange night, and now it is another miles inland from the sea. Just outside Salisbury where I spent a day doing my laundry, selecting the least crumpled clothes to wear before arriving at this great house of stone with the two Jaguars bedded down in converted stables. Your mother showed me to my room, threw back the curtains, told me to call it home, and pointed to the bottom drawer of the wardrobe saying that your elder brother keeps his poetry there so please don't open it. What else could I do but read his private words? Of his conquests in London. Of his child that never was. Of your mother's tears when he told her the sad news. And how her grief built a wall between them.

Your parents spent New Year's Eve very quietly. No toasts were drunk, no celebrations. Nothing. As if one year simply rolled into the next without any clear line marking their division. And while every car out on the main road flashed its headlights, your father stoked the fire, let the dog out, mumbled something about a busy day tomorrow, and headed upstairs. Taking with him the hope of champagne and handshakes. But not before he'd glanced at my bandaged finger, warning me that once a mole had tasted the blood of its victim there was no earthly way of preventing it from eventually completing the kill. And while you and your mother were in the kitchen washing up, he came back down and strode over to where I sat. He stood before me saying nothing. No words passed between us but his meaning was clear. I rose from the chair and went straight to my room, closing the door purposefully behind me. When he was satisfied that I would pose no threat to his daughter's integrity that night, he returned upstairs, his role as guardian reinforced.

Three o'clock. Three hours into the new year. Hear the soft rippling beyond the window of the millwater passing beneath this house until the sea. Perhaps to return as rain upon the roof. As I might return to you as parts of a whole. A memory of this night. Standing before the fire drinking with your brother. My name mentioned in passing. But nothing absolute. Merely the remembrance of someone sharing your bed on the morning of New Year's Day, hoping you would not be discovered before the dawn light found you alone in your room.

The Path

Early on some Easter mornings there is a sense of excitement; a feeling of change in the air. The whole land seems to be waiting; perhaps anticipating a change of season. In the high country, the air takes on a freshness; a crispness that is exhilarating.

On such a morning, a man runs up the incline of a dirt road. The headwaters of the River Murray are on his left. The green river flats contrast with the grey-brown of the road. The grey morning mists are lifting from the river banks. The road winds higher. Distant shots ring out as early morning shooters seek forbidden ducks. The runner slows to a walk. As he walks, his eyes focus on the scene now far below. The trudging shooters have been outwitted by the ducks, now wheeling off to the left—high in the sky—silhouetted against the rising light.

From a distance, the man looks slim, golden haired. Closer up, his slim body is echoed in his face. High cheek bones, long angular nose, and distant blue eyes, give him an aristocratic appearance. Closer still, the Adam's apple is prominent on a long, thin neck; the chin seems somewhat weak; the forehead is partly hidden by blond hair which falls forward naturally. He is dressed in a pink and white, horizontally striped shirt, white shorts, white socks, and light blue sneakers.

The man looks back to the grey road. He brushes his hands through his yellow hair. He is pleased that this time the ducks have escaped the hunters. But he does not smile; his tooth hurts.

'I want to make an appointment before Easter,' he had cried through the telephone.

'Check-up or filling?'

'Extraction, I think.'

'Come in on Thursday, Mr . . .'

Thursday had come.

'Mmm,' the dentist had said. 'The tooth's been rotting away. I'm afraid it has to go.'

. . . Now the tooth is eradicated. It will never be replaced, muses the man.

He walks further along the grey track. Away from the shooters. As he turns a bend, a fox trots towards him. The man stops; the fox stops. Their eyes meet. The fox's eyes seem to penetrate further, deeper, and through the man's eyes. Eyes more human than human eyes. The two stare at each other inhumanly. They stand three metres apart on the dusty narrow road. The man can almost smell the fox's breath. He imagines that possibly this is the strong scent that hunt-dogs follow. Perhaps the fox has rotting teeth too.

Three seconds pass; probably more. Contrasting lives meet in the passing of time. Who has seen this fox before? A lonely hunter; perhaps a farmer from a distance? But this; this is a once in a lifetime meeting.

The fox scuttles into dense undergrowth at the side of the road.

The man feels exhilarated. His feet quicken. Run, run, run. His lungs feel like bursting. He walks. He recalls his toothache. His tooth was decaying; he has had it extracted, dispensed with, and yet the pain lingers on. The man imagines that the tooth is still in his mouth. He has another pain; a pain that is lingering on; the pain, the heartache, the agony of life. If one dispenses with life, how does one know that the pain stops. It might even be worse. Infection might set in. Post decapitative depression! Who knows? The eternity of pain . . . Why should these thoughts intrude on this magic morning; on this new path?

The narrow lane turns right, away from the river flats. He smooths back his golden hair, as if sweeping away the past. He walks on, a half smile on his face. He feels re-enlivened, elated. At peace with the world. Strong and confident. His mouth has stopped aching.

In the distance, a figure runs towards him. It is a girl. She is wearing a green and white striped top and red satin shorts. In the dim morning light, the man thinks she looks like the movie actress, Ali McGraw, but with better legs; not as spindly. She stops.

'Are you one of those shooters?' She tosses her head back defiantly; her eyes seem to penetrate the man, forcing him to avoid her eyes.

He is nonplussed. He shrugs his shoulders and raises his arms wide and then high toward the sky. 'I haven't got a gun. I'm just on a morning jog.'

The girl looks the man up and down. Her head cocks to one side as if to see around him or through him.

'They shoot our sheep and frighten our cattle,' she says accusingly.

'I know, I know,' the man nods in agreement. 'I saw them just now. Rotten they are. Just rotten.' He shrugs his shoulders. 'They missed the ducks, thank God.'

The girl seems relieved, convinced; she smiles. Her 'McGraw' white teeth penetrate the grey gloom.

'Are you running my way?' she asks enticingly.

The man hesitates. He blushes. There is silence for a moment. Perhaps he is confused; or cunning like the fox.

'Yes,' he says finally, looking at the road and not at her.

They wheel around, running together, retracing the girl's path. Seen from a distance, the two figures are similar; both slight and supple.

'My name's Anita . . . Anita Woodlock . . . What's yours?' the dark girl asks as they run.

'Adrian . . . just Adrian.'

As if by mutual understanding, they stop running and walk.

'I'm a nurse in Melbourne. I come up here every second weekend. Back to the farm. And you?'

He pauses; he seems reluctant to say much. 'Holidays. There's three of us in Turner's cottage near the bridge.'

'Turner's? Ah . . . yes. He left his wife in the lurch. Went off with a barmaid from Corryong.'

The man smiles and she smiles back. Yet he has a distant look.

'The house is empty,' he says. 'We're renting it for a week. Getting away from it all.' He smiles again and gives a shrug with his shoulders and hands, as if to indicate that there are reasons for 'getting away', but up here it all doesn't seem to matter.

They walk on in silence. The morning sunrise casts long shadows down the road. The shadows diminish as the sun rises. They walk on and on, each deep in their own thought. The sun rises higher in the eastern sky; it beats on their backs. The road is now bathed in brilliant sunshine. The once grey road takes on an almost golden hue.

Deep in thought, the man imagines that the morning is magical; a time for decision; a time to resolve his conflict. He recalls that just three days ago he had said to his friend, 'I'm leaving you at Easter. There is no point. This way of life has no future. No past. No present. I have to get away.'

'Yes,' he thinks to himself. 'Yes, yes. Now is the time to change.'

The girl's voice comes in over the top of his thoughts. '... a few of my friends are coming over to the farm after dinner tonight. To play music ... and talk. Would you like to come?' Her white teeth seem to flash in the sunlight. She appears enthusiastic, radiant, welcoming.

Her black hair glistens in the morning light. She reminds the man of a beautiful black filly grazing in a green paddock. Strangely, there is also something about her that reminds him of the fox he had come face to face with on the path. Perhaps it is her eyes. Yes, it is her all-knowing eyes that remind him.

'I'd be delighted,' he says.

'Eight o'clock then.'

They part at the farm gate.

He turns and runs back along the track. Back towards the green river flats. He runs as if in a dream. As he reaches the final rise, before the river flats, he slows to a walk. He thinks about his new found 'Ali'; his life ahead; the aches and pains of the past. His hair hangs low on his forehead, but he does not care.

Over the ridge trudge three figures. Three shooters walk up the gravel road towards the man. They have no ducks. The man walks past them silently. He smiles to himself. Ahead the green fields welcome him.

DIANE DODWELL

Strings

Balloons at a fair.
Above the crowd loom her special faces:
sometimes one is released and floats away;
accidental puncturings are common; and
sometimes they just go down by themselves
shrinking into grotesque fingerstalls
of memory. But there are plenty left,
still, she thinks, and holds on tightly.
The crowd presses into her. The faces
are up there, tied but independent,
a shifting constant hovering visibly,
not yet beyond recall.

Difficulties

She can't bear to say the obvious things
like 'I really loved your last book',
or 'A pound of mince steak, please'.

The unsayable is more interesting,
but makes for long silences, naturally.

And quite often she stutters, each word
mysteriously breaking into three.

Map

You can put maps on a wall
and gaze at their veins and capillaries,
their shifting boundaries and names.

Her world is just like that,
flat as those tacks holding it up,
but with sudden, unexpected changes
of boundaries, and words blurring
into unknown codes.

Only the sea maintains its constancy:
infinite well of blue.

Journey

She has been to the dark side
of the moon and brought back
windless heath woven with tiny,
midnight-blue spiders; also a plant,
textured like seaweed, looking as though
it had tried, once, to be a flower.

RIVKA SHOLANE

Dead City Life

The rooms, you understand, were once designed
to comfort the relations of the dead.
They stayed a while to mourn,
then left their ghosts
to splendid dusty domesticity
in their dead city.

Some kilometres distant Cairo throbs
but here
squatters in the world's most spacious mausoleum
scuttle from tourists.

Some of the stone and marble monuments
take up whole streets, kept clean and empty
by favoured squatters paid and fed
by the relations of the ghosts.

Others exist on beans six days a week
and keep a goose to lay an egg on Fridays.

Needs of a ghost are few.
There is no water, heating, and no modern force
to make a light glow in the chambers.
The children's teeth will rot, and one in five
May go to school to learn
what he is missing.

Marriage

He works on rows of capsicums and beans
she tidies the refrigerator
he digs and mixes compost, toting pails
She puts five roses in a vase with ferns

He wants to
conquer deserts in a fourwheel drive
She wants to
change to automatic

And every night they sit with trays
and watch
a Western till he falls asleep
a Golden Oldie till she turns it off

Their bodies lie on floral sheets
chosen by her.
Twin effigies on tombs
with inner springs.

She dreams of bargain hunts
He shoots wild boar
Sometimes they talk across the breakfast table.

HEATHER CAM

Songs for a Lover

When my love approaches
holy mountain men blow
on long ivory horns a drawn-out drone
that crosses still valleys and leaps hillsides
touches towers and temples and
elastically glides its thin pipe of sound
over rice fields and terraces, villages and towns,
threads the tips of minarets, brushes the roof-tops of pagodas,
rounds the humped backs of wats, stupas, and dagabas,
finally spends itself among prayer-flags
on the Bo tree of Buddha:
bright celebratory tatters
dancing and aflutter
that stir
as my heart does
when you approach, my lover.

* * * * *

When my love passes
all the gongs of Asia
open O-mouths of ecstasy
and round with sound;
their brazen bellies'
reverberating chambers
roll with thunder
strike dumb and stun;
their clanging clashes,
their drumming clamour
of beaten metal
flood and drown
my reeling senses
in the thick of battle—
O warriors' shields
that glint with sound!

Tou Wan's Tomb

In Hopei province, Tou Wan,
light as a grasshopper
her girlish spirit sprang.

The Prince Ching of Chungshan,
her lord Liu Sheng,
buried her, mourned her, and never married again.

For two thousand years
no Hopei sun, no Hopei rain
entered Tou Wan's tomb;
only Hopei soil
pressed its weight upon her.

So that, when Tou Wan's tomb
was opened to the sun again
they found her
jade carapace caved in,
its stone plates lying all awry
that her nimble-fingered maids
had stitched with gold threads
and lowered heads, tears and sighs.

But the jewel encased in jade was gone.

Your death-suit, your jade armour
is damaged, Tou Wan,
and your royal body vanished . . . gone.
Leaving your tomb's litter:
lacquer bowls, cracked porcelain,
and in your death-suit, Princess,
a fine powder and stains.

Yes, the body you wore in the Emperor's court
has turned to dust, Tou Wan;
and all that was your lord Liu Sheng's joy—
your breasts' firm mounds,
your belly's smooth plain,
the curve of your ankle and thigh—
blows in the wind now with the pollen
and comes to lie on the land.

ANDREW BURKE

Talk in Tongues

Tongues hug,
tongues point,
tongues flap,
tongues hang,
tongues flag,
tongues stick out,
tongues wag tales,
tongues trip,
tongues drip,
tongues feed,
tongues bleed,
tongues lie

down

and in falsenests . . .

Tongues love—

ah, tongue, oral spear,

lick my ear . . .

The plant form,

opening, flowers,

sculpts the air—

Earth tongues.

RUSSELL BLACKFORD

The Load on Her Mind

One of the records Michelle always dances to plays on the jukebox. Michelle sits in the bar, alone this evening, and feeling like broken glass. Her friend—no, her ex-friend—has avoided her today. He was supposed to be at the beach, but he was probably at his fiancée's flat.

With a practised feline walk that makes her unpopular with the other girls who come to the bar, Michelle leaves her table, and begins dancing, something that she loves, and that can often cheer her when she is unhappy.

She always comes to this bar. She feels safe here. With its black, padded seats, it is comfortable and middle-class. She's the only one who ever dances to the sounds of the jukebox. Maybe some people don't appreciate her dancing here, alone. But that does not concern Michelle, who has other considerations on her mind: a load on her mind.

She dances well, moving slowly to this song, swaying precisely, arms waving. Yet, she breaks off in the middle of the song, and returns to her seat. Without knowing why, she feels closer than ever to sobbing. Her eyes do not betray this. Though she looks around pleadingly, on Michelle's tanned and catlike face this appears more like an expression of generalized desire.

When Michelle dances in the bar, the eyes of others watch in appreciation or lust, or in jealous terror. Even when she does not see those who watch her, her energies somehow attune themselves to their eyes. She will never understand this phenomenon. On occasions, as now, she feels exhausted before dancing through one track. At other times, she can maintain astonishing displays of animation: in a disco, surrounded by admirers, she can dance on her toes and bend back until her long, dark hair whips almost to the floor. She can slide and turn, exhausting partners, through number after number. It all depends on the vibrations she picks up off those who watch. They provide the energies.

Michelle sits, drinking her gin squash. Her mind turns over the past week's events, the continued attempt by her friend to keep their affair secret from Helen, his fiancée. Michelle wants to say to Hell with the whole business—but she also wants him back with her. She thinks about his decision finally to move in with Helen. She thinks about how she had been stung when he told her of this decision, but how they had gone on to make plans for seeing each other anyway. Some of their plans were really only jokes. All of those plans depended on his continuing to go to the beach. There was a meeting place! Michelle loves the beach, and so does he. Helen hates it.

That was three days ago. Then, yesterday, he had told her that everything had to be over. His real obligations, he had said, were to Helen. What does Michelle

know about or care for real obligations? All she knows about right now is sitting and wishing she were not by herself in this room of people. She looks around, her gaze falling on different individuals, as if that could get them to help her. She does not know any of them well, though she has seen most of them before. Many are regulars at this bar. Her eyes are momentarily directed at one of the girls at the table nearest the bar itself, but Michelle is thinking, and registers nothing.

Yesterday, he had said it was all over. Once before he had told her that, and she had gone home and slashed her wrists. She'd really gone through with it. (The scars have faded, but they are still there if she ever wants to show them.) Last night, she had been going to go back to the beach, stand at the cliff there, and hurl herself . . . but she had remembered his promise to be at the beach today. She had decided that she would see him, excite him. It may have worked, except that he had failed to turn up.

At the table nearest the bar, the shop girls talk about Michelle. She has become a legend in their circle. Each evening, they have watched her appear, sometimes with her boyfriend, often alone, dance once or twice, then leave. Sometimes she finds a boy to share a drink with her, and leaves with him.

"I still can't believe in her," says one of the girls. "The way she comes in here and looks at everyone like that."

"Or at no-one," adds her companion. "That girl seems to lust into empty space."

"It's certainly not just at the boys. She was giving me that look of hers a minute ago."

"Hey, the walking orgasm's doing it again!"

Another of her favourite songs has begun to play on the jukebox, so Michelle has stood up to dance. This time the rhythm is fast, insistent, and she goes further than she has ever before at this stuffy place, dancing here. She tries, oh, to surrender herself to it, to the rhythm, dropping to her knees, head flailing back and forward as on a shaken rag-doll. But a blackness invades her mind from the direction of the girls near the bar, and she slows, crying out as in pain. How can she understand? But their thoughts, or the energies of their thoughts, invade her mind: cruel, negative energies.

The girls at the top table have had a hard day, too. It has been a hot one, and hectic with the rush before Christmas. Though she does not look at them, Michelle feels their eyes on her, and now she groans. There is a stirring around the room. Michelle's brain overloads. Some people move towards her to help, wondering what is wrong, but she gives a sudden scream, and then she is on her feet. Some defence mechanism has come into play. Those negative energies are being cast out . . . back . . . She is on her feet, dancing vigorously and with grace.

The girls at the top table cannot bear to look at her, but they feel her eyes on them and a blackness in their minds making them groan. Something's wrong with their minds. Michelle, forgetful of all except the music . . . free, Michelle dances.

MARGARET SCOTT

At the Salmon Ponds

A quiet grey day of long calling echoes
drifting from far faint hills to catch and fade
among the rampant hawthorns at the gate.
This formal garden with its lakes and lawns
gleams against the dim autumnal marsh
like an album portrait framed in weeping haze.
We linger on a rustic bridge to gaze
through smoked-glass gold of elm and beech to where
the full-fed salmon cruise the lily-beds.
A moss-grown fawn might pipe beyond those trees,
but the avenue conducts us to the trap.

They are stripping the salmon.
The lawn's littered with gear—
buckets, nets, jackets, knife.
A man in waders stands thigh-deep
in a swarming boiling broth
of fins, eyes, tails and gaping gills,
netting up wild five-pounders for his mate
crouched over plastic pails,
forcing out eggs and milt.
Under a hedge the fish unfit to breed
lie slung in a sour knot of mooning flesh.

As daylight fades the walks carved out
for officers and ladies who talked of trout streams,
London and new books, fall into chill shadow.
Flakes of darkness nourish the blind earth.
The waters breathe mist, and now from the lost hills
that long wordless calling casts its ineffable web
over root and scale.

MARGARET SCOTT

Cemetery Point

Up the road, where ruins of sandstone
barracks and cells look out to sea,
the earth under the cropped grass is black with coal.
Mining started in eighteen thirty-three

and the bush is riddled still with tunnels and shafts
dug by transported men. Of all places
of punishment these mines were most feared.
This is where they cracked the hardest cases

and buried them one on another
in nameless graves. But the free dead—
privates killed in melancholy accidents,
infants, and soldiers' wives, dying in child-bed—

were brought to this quiet headland for burial
and given these headstones lettered and carved by some
convict mason with an odd idea of angels.
For every child, he fashioned on the tomb

a creature with wings sprouting from a face
round as a child's sun. Barn-owls sweeping
in silent flight over names and weathered texts:
'In the bosom of the Saviour he is sleeping.'

Job, mourning without the sun, in the
days of affliction, when his sleepless bowels
boiled, stood up and cried, 'I am a brother to
dragons and companion to owls.

My skin is black upon me and my bones
are burned with heat'. 'Where is my hope?'
calls the bird hewn by the dragon's brother
to the red-coated father laying a wreath by the sea.

The owl in Greece was sacred to a goddess
older than Zeus. Her bird's keen eyes
looked on ancient mysteries of rebirth
long before Pallas Athene the all-wise

gathered under her wing the city state,
turned the malicious Furies to kindly ones,
and blessed the craftsman. 'Bring healing', cries
the strange angel to the mother mourning her sons.

Ragged gum trees press about the graves. Winter wind
has twisted their limbs. Their roots keep hold in coal
and sleeping bones. Stone they take to themselves.
They are swallowing the mines whole.

Owls, released here to breed, watch from their boughs
the grotesque mercies of time, sleep's mystery, new birth
unheralded by flame or trump, and all
the strange transfiguring craft of sea and earth.

JEAN KENT

Poem in August

It was my thirtieth birthday
and I woke to the sound of the sea.
On the headland, mute and brown,
cattle were grazing.
No herons
priested that shore. Rather it was a celebration
of seagulls and schoolchildren on holidays
prodding out the mussels
from the weed—
lashed eyes of rockpools.
It was a jubilant planting of feet on sand
and grass echoing with the sweet plop-plop
of cakes of manure.

Dylan Thomas, what have you to answer for?

Seeing the sun
creep up from under the coast of Australia
and thinking of you . . .
Short of seventeen, lighting candles for poems
in a frangipani house when all the world
I should have been growing
into was quoting
some other, hipper Dylan,
your Welsh voice crashed like a shipwreck
beached, beatifically, upon the rising sun.

Beside a hare-lipped boy
who wrote laments with one ear turned
to the shell-rinsed song
of Alexandria Bay
I lay within your curling wave. He talked
of war and dreamed of young girls lonely
under willows. It was not
romantic. Nevertheless you sailed right in
guttering the candles with your creaking sails
your shirt tails tearing from the masts
as you roared over the Pacific
ripping
its long blue seams

The day folded round you
Alfoil-bright, dumping surfers, boards,
Beach Boy songs crumpled
magnificent
as messages in bottles—
by the smudge-faced lantana and the sand chute
suntan-lotion scented there above Little Beach
your anchor struck.

I woke to silence, ringing like a temple gong.

In thirteen years
I should have grown out of you.
I should be into
water ballet, a fitness fanatic at the local pool.
Or taken up with lukewarm milk for babies.
Left the sands
to build upon the safer rock
of Real Estate.
The hare-lipped boy, after all, is married now
to his Speech Therapist. Why doesn't he
write poems still? Is his ear
taught now by some
drier tongue
while I run pebbles barnacle-tight
round the insides of my mouth, wanting to grow there
a rockpool so bright, anemone-fringed, as clear and ready
to hold shadows as love?

It is my thirtieth birthday.
On the headland those dawn celebrants, the cattle
are taking on their tongues
tablets of sun.
The day rises up
through a thin gold slit—
far out over all my horizons the sea dances in its chains
and all I have learned of life is nothing beside the red
whiskered coral
tree bloom, dropped in the night
on the slow, snail-shelled
caravan roof
and now dancing defiant on a wave.

Falling back behind the rim of the world
the sky is buckled blue and glittering, ships
are streaming down
disguised as gulls with their gold voices strong as wings
unfolding. I wake
once again to this song under silence,
to this earth truly
turning

JENNIFER de GARIS

Wanderer

I
have just been
courted
by a
butterfly!

I was standing
in the heavy yellow
and green lace
of the apple tree
when a sudden gust of wind
brought her burnt-umber sails
drifting down
like a leaf
out of the
blue air
into the
lushness of grass
at my feet.

It must have been
the breeze
flapping the green and orange pattern
of my skirt among the apple leaves
mised the butterfly,
for she stayed
to unfold her wings, and try.

So I saw close the
stained-glass tracery of her wings
as she slowly turned and
strutted
closing up her satin
only for the sake of
opening it out again.

That insect made
a meaning out of me
untenable in terms of any logic
yet my gut responded
with a rush of love.

The ravishing beauty
of the shining day
that was
enough to justify
our randy fellowship,
allowing me
to know the poetry
of those slow opening moments,
to be initiated
into the central mystery of the season.

JENNIFER de GARIS

Song for My Sister

Yesterday
(the tomorrow entailed by your arrival)
I held the
thorn-sharp rosebud of our parting
close,
I clasped it in my hand
to carry home with care,

then
brought it out
where I could watch it open
on my own,

and
as I looked
the unfolding bud became
a lotus-bloom some unexpected
star or moon had grown
from the dark waters of our pain;

Today this radiant flower fills my mind.

Thank you, my sister, for your gift of grief.

BARRY O'DONOHUE

Dream Sequence

1

Skywards, landwards, the hero
is waiting
coiled tightly around himself,
a spring
poised in a palm of silence
far off
over foreign oceans heavy with wind.
This is
a journey into movement yielding
its chaos
beyond calm where the hero walks
for us all
on soft white cloud, the webbed feet
of ducks
pillow him alone beside his fishing
nets
on distant oceans listening to waves
wash away shadows.
Across dark skies now he fishes
for a rainbow
flickering out, knowing hope is
a desolate plain
always growing out beyond horizons,
that colours
imprisoned by air are beautiful,
contain no substance
beyond thought.

2

A friend takes me back into myself
 to discover another person tugging
 at my sleeve. Why does self appraisal
 make us this aware of the presence
 of others? Myself, the other
 stranger, is looking for debris
 on the rising tide, a note perhaps needing
 cypher? Each wave brings us loneliness
 nothing more. Yet dark images gather
 here, rise and fall drunkenly beneath
 the surface. My friend takes me into himself
 and I know him no longer as a friend. The tide
 is despised for coming and for leaving.
 Each journey we take must begin with ourselves
 and end at the very core, blinking.

3

On factory floors, the workers
 watch for signs knowing they
 will never come. They leave their husks
 of labour, never looking back.
 At night their courage eats
 itself and becomes sleep
 drifting out over quiet waters
 towards its own end. Now the throb
 of engines is dizzy with neglect,
 mad men with spanners and hatchets
 tear and rip them down. . . .

(the dark sea is wild with grief)
 (being this content, I champion the men on)
 (within all dark waters the hero sings)
 (no man alive shall be dead within himself)
 (give me courage to go beyond these walls)
 (send me a leather purse with latches and thongs)
 (carry me from sleep that I may see the wild sea)
 (one man walks the houses and the factories)
 (two men rip our society down)
 (three men swarm across the littered floors)
 (four men throw yellow-cake into an uplifting wind)
 (five men turn, look at broken hands, broken teeth)
 (across the ground small flowers struggle towards a
 distant sky)

ROD MORAN

In the River's Text

1. *Pier*

Pelicans roost broken stumps,
boats bobbing like brooding gulls,
water slaps cracked pier wood,
the beach a clutter of pink weed,
vacant shells and tide lines,
perished craft amassing sand.
Rain folds down across the river
like fine silk, the sky leathered
and dark as kelp: the elements
conspire against all intentions,
except the river's silent tide.
The old pier rots to green barnacles.

2. *Life Forms*

Take the benign scuttle of crabs,
a night squawk of herring gulls,
the wind's administrations,
(wave forms and surface currents,
rock structures, petrous sand);
our ideologies resemble this scatter
of vivid yachts, the river gusting:
larger storms will wreck them,
(gulls bleaching decks and strong sail,
crabs roosting forlorn hulls).

3. *Ferry, Blackwall Reach*

(For Peter)

Above the water banksias arrayed
amber coned like buoy lights;
black rock juts vertically from
obscure water and deep tides,
the scarp a granite wall of land
flush against the river, green;
a cold current scours quartz,
pod and flower seeding the wind.
Around a spit of scrub a ferry
wades, white belly like a petrel's,
(confluent, human artefact,
almost part of this equation),
framed in the river's umber scape,
shadows of rock and bark on depths.

4. *Osprey*

Its eye sifts the river's colour
high above live dunes, traces
the urgency of shining lizards
below drab scrub, across rock,
poised on a sheer height of wing
and stretched air; its head pivots,
promising quick death,
dives like a white dart on
warm sinew and scale, feather.
The hawk ponders a tilted world,
perched wide-eyed on limestone,
astonished at death's quota.

5. *Pelicans*

On the near shore jacarandas
glaze the warm air mauve;
pelicans drift their phalanx
down river, calmly hunting
bronze shallows by the river wall,
stone blocks that shelter algae,
diminutive crabs and bivalves;
the jacarandas almost stand
square at the water's edge.
What entity here would pay
wilful death for any cause?
The pelicans hunt serenely
through purple bud and weed.
Their allegiance is to running tides.

ROD MORAN

Elegy

*For Ron Moran, 1924-45,
2/14 Machine Gun Battalion,
Prisoner of War.*

1

Only days beyond
your twenty-first year,
the war's last beat,
the world bleeding,
you ended where death
hung across bleak wire,
barbs of historic light
cutting silhouettes
on the innocent morning.

2

The torpedo crushed flesh,
the frail steel of boys,
decked out those dark soundings
with skull and white limb.
A past and future fodder type,
young to an ancient war,
your cause a vague laurel,
sharp shouldered, keen as hope,
Darwin blacked out against
a too-far black horizon.
To survive then was your
young death's beginning,
transported where: Thailand,
Borneo, the Burma Road,
long lines of labour unto death?
Have you gone to old bones
in the jungle's green snare?

3

Your mother survives still,
her voice thin as a telegram:
two husbands, sons, two wars,
she lives despite the era,
your memory grim jetsam.
Your generation haunts
its own mothers, always.

We talk of you;
there is much not said,
you smiling yellowed
and young on the dresser,
me trying to imagine
you like your brothers,
trying to pay homage.
The afternoon sun shone
bayonets in the window.

Thirty-six years on
she still mourns,
lost in a deep quiet,
a grief that is all
she does not utter.
We pool words over tea,
you waiting in the wings
like distant tragedy.
Your entrances are various.

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

An Untitled Painting

For Hendrik Kolenberg

(i)

A deep blue, purple bruise at base,
The white-walled house is gash-black edged,
Its windows dark and looking in

On grief and hate roofed red as blood,
Light lifting from the iron in waves,
A hurt so deep it cannot mend.

(ii)

The house as still as death itself
The threshold with its shadow cast,
A slash of light can only heal

To black across a darkening wall:
The summer haze like muffling snow,
The empty streets waits for a hearse.

(iii)

With black obsessive lines that frame
A home for Calvin's vengeful God,
The doors and windows at high noon

Are deep reflections of a face
That scripture calls a thunder cloud.
There's no escape from given ends.

Oedipus

(i)

Oncoming and stretched out for miles,
The road without relief is dark,
A darkness the rear vision turns

To strips of light that hurt the eyes
As though to drive the meaning deep:
The future's what we leave behind.

(ii)

He ordered me from the dark road
And in rage I struck till he fell,
The witnessing, pendulous hills

Rain-swollen and heavy with grief,
Enfolding us round as we fought
For the place where the three ways meet.

(iii)

Life's ended up leading me home,
To my mother's cheek rigidly cold,
Fiercely marked with all she's withheld

As I bend to a welcoming kiss,
In a room pitch dark where I crouch,
The gleaming road slippery with rain.

(iv)

Antigone fears the black clouds,
Ismene the road when it's dark,
They cry in their sleep and remind

That God's face is blacked out above,
How nothing can comfort or guide,
My blindness the darkest of roads.

MARK O'CONNOR

Ios Beach

A beach slope
buried in boulders
as if the giants
had pelted heaven.

En tout cas meadows
floored in granite chips.
The thornbush cowers
in crevices by the dry-dunged
goat-trod fields,
while the hobbled villains bleat
and the owner neglects to come.

Crazed foreigners strip and swim
in the inlet that seems
a rock-quarry pool. Was
Homer really buried here?

From a boat landing bricks
for the new hotel one slips
and wavers through green-blue water
joining a store
a thousand years deep.

MARK O'CONNOR

St. Titus's

The chandelier's motionless plumbline
between columns is an extinct pendulum
waiting a livelier age. On red velvet
a *CHI* marks the veil
that women cannot pass;

and the cross's simple rebus
in classic knightly style
proclaims Himself at home.
Simplicities of stone and
intricacies of foliate wood mix
with mahogany polish—a child's
first taste of sacred.

Mary, spike-crowned, virago-faced,
no Italian girl with baby boy, but
the Cosmos Mother, All-Holy *Panagia*,
recalls 'The Mistress', that older one
the Cretan peasants still invoke
though they forget her name.

This place has been a Mosque, lost belfries,
sprouted minarets. The sideways-tensing hawsers,
binding the roof no god protects, sink
in subtle curves above saints' bones mouldering
too deep for Turkish renovations.

Silver greaves and gauntlets
on the altar-string attest the miracles
of saintly bones—so many limbs, hips,
bladders cured. Doubt mysteries if you choose,
the bones are there.

And that's a miracle, how Earth's soft wave
has thrown these hard mementoes on the beach.
What goat's cheese fed what mother's milk to build
the calcined frameworks of a sponge-soft brain
that hoped and feared eternity so much
that it turned legend, fossilised in art?
—No man endures long in an icon's pose;
yet all these worthies found the secret out
to turn into an incense-patterned dream.

The Virgin's black wood face
worn down by kissing lips
seems a skull wrapped in a silver veil.
Though the savage star outside makes
every summer's cranny drown in light,
the painted floor and polished roof
reflect a deeper dimness—
the chthonic Hanged Man's cult
trampling on light Apollo.

The walls lean in.
The symphony of incense and rich wood,
with the claustrophobia of in-turned art, makes
a psychic pressure-cabinet to crush
imagination into faith.

The wooden Dove on his velvet rostrum
flaps to convert the world.
The giant candelabra, tiered in gold,
descends, descends on a steel thread
to crush a crown upon some monstrous head.

RORY HARRIS

building castles

& the sea swells
like a thought
with bodies
carrying their own weight

& clouds tinged
pink
around their edges

& we walk on the edge
of the shore
missing the waves

& we walk on the edge
of words
waves of murmurs
clamouring around us

& at our feet
children
pick at the ripeness of language

& find sand & shells
more suitable
for building castles

LITERATURE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Editorial Note

The reviews, articles and interview which follow indicate great scope for intelligent reading, discussion and research of literature by Western Australians or about Western Australia. *Westerly* has vigorously promoted this interest, and will continue to do so in the face of unwarranted neglect and lack of interest elsewhere.

The opening discussion by George Seddon of *The Literature of Western Australia* indicates some of the strengths of this literature and suggests the possibility of more extensive definitions which would include essays, histories and scientific writing. Adam Shoemaker raises the important question of connections between fact and historical fiction in work by Ion L. Idriess and Colin Johnson; and Colin Johnson replies. This issue is also addressed by Peter Cowan in his essay on Hume Nisbet and by Paul Eggert in his revival of interest in D. H. Lawrence's Western Australian connections and the source of his political ideas in *Kangaroo*. In interview, Jack Davis talks of the strengths of Aboriginal writing and of his own impulses to write, especially in drama. Greg Burns reviews some of Lawson's experiences and images of the West. Dorothy Hewett considers the East-West axis in Australia from her individual but influential standpoint. Finally, in this short selection of reviews and articles, Veronica Brady surveys some points of growth in the contemporary, highly active literary scene in Western Australia.

All of these discussions are unfinished essays in a field which awaits further response, criticism and research.

GEORGE SEDDON

The Persistence of Place— Western Australian Literature

I

*The Literature of Western Australia** suggests literary geography rather than literary history, and the idea that the arbitrary marks on a map that delineate the boundaries of the Australian states should correspond with significant cultural boundaries may seem extravagant. The subject of literature is the human condition. Is life in Western Australia just a part of that condition, or is it a regionally distinct part? The answer, of course, is: yes and no. Yes, because although the lines on the map are arbitrary, there are real boundaries. The state is as much an island as Tasmania; although it is a bigger island, it is also more remote than its neighbours. It has had a distinctive history, and literary history is a part of that general history. No, because that general history can only be understood by seeing it as a part of movements well beyond its boundaries—the colonial expansion of European powers in the nineteenth century; the role of the new lands in providing cheap food and fibre for an industrialising Europe; the injection of European capital into the railways of Argentina and Canada and China and Western Australia; the demand for gold; the role of the World Wars—and so on. And what is true of general history is also true of literary history, even of the literary forms that make the chapters of this book. There is no chapter on the sonnet, or the masque, or the epic, for the self-evident reason that the forms literature might take in Western Australia were those defined elsewhere. But then the same thing might be said of regional histories of any kind—some things are distinctive, some not; and it can be instructive to find out which. When we have better regional literary studies we shall be better able to write the literary history of Australia, and to see its place relative to other colonial experiences—that of Canada, and New Zealand, and the USA—and to the metropolitan culture from which it derives.

This book, one of the Western Australian Sesquicentenary series published by the University of Western Australia Press, is therefore interesting as a survey of the literature of one state. It is good value at the recommended retail price of \$15, and worth the money for its rich haul of quotations alone:

The Premier sat in his rightful place,
the uncrowned Czar of The Golden West;
A smile played over the royal face as he
thought of the stuff in the Treasury chest.

* Bruce Bennett [ed], *The Literature of Western Australia*, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, 1979, 304 pp.

These lines may bring the 1980s Court of Charlemagne to mind, but they appeared first in the *Geraldton Express* in 1895, penned by Andree Hayward, quoted by Don Grant in his chapter on 'Literary Journalism' in *The Literature of Western Australia* (p. 279). Birthdays are for taking stock, for finding out where we have been and where we are. There are many quotations in this volume that throw light from the past to the present, suggesting patterns of experience in the 150 years of settlement in the west.

Another newspaper comment of the same year (from the Fremantle *Messenger*, 8 November 1895, by H. St Ruth) deplores the absence in Western Australia of any kind of art:

There are no poets, no painters, few, very few musicians . . . The mass does not think, seldom reads and its standard of intelligence is barely above that of a well groomed flock of sheep . . . It has no past worth remembering, no future worth anticipating. (p. 276)

Such comment is still easily overheard from the sophisticates of Crawley today (in the Beer Garden at *Steve's* for example, so well named, for little else grows there). Yet when St Ruth made the comment in 1895, it was in a period that saw the birth of *eighty* newspapers in a dozen years, and Don Grant labels the 'sesqui-decade' 1895-1910, 'The Golden Inky Years', in that the papers provided 'a real forum for debate and discussion, prose and poetry, sketch and satire, reminiscences and ramblings . . .' (p. 276). As for today, this well-groomed flock of sheep has given birth to fourteen scholarly volumes in one year to mark its sesqui-centenary, a remarkable feat for so small a community. If there is a very real sense in which Western Australia seems to have no history, that in itself is worth investigation. There are two reasons, I think. One is that some major episodes have been rigorously suppressed; above all, memory of the convict years, the treatment of Aborigines, and the experience of the Depression. The other is that there have been three waves of migration; a ripple in 1829, a flood in the 1890s, and another since World War II. These migrants brought a different past with them, so that the historical discontinuities overwhelm the continuities.

There are continuities, nonetheless. The place persists. Although profoundly man-modified through time, it haunts the imagination of those who have experienced it. The benign climate, of Perth at least, has also been praised from the colony's infancy:

Nought's now required to make a Prosp'rous land,
But Councils wise, and Industry's strong hand.
In this secured, let each one do his best
The sunny clime will work out all the rest.
(*Perth Gazette*, 1835, quoted p. 263)

The 'sunny clime' thus becomes more than meteorological fact—it becomes an article of faith that 'it will work out all the rest', and is still seen to be so. The people of Perth today take a proprietary pride in their climate, as if they invented it. It is at least a stick to beat Easterners with, for they clearly botched the job of climate-making. Yet Dorothy Hewett concludes that it 'may still look a little like Eden, but suicide does grow in this clean air' (p. 145), and the endlessly bright blue skies are seen, not as beneficent, but as empty. The emptiness has bred in the past, a 'brutal innocence' in Western Australian life and literature (p. 145).

The 'sunny clime' theme has generated many illusions. One interesting claim was that the sunny clime promoted health. This claim was also made strongly for California, and for other Australian colonies, especially Victoria, above all in the arrest and cure of tuberculosis, although the evidence was to the contrary:

a report to the Royal College of Physicians in 1829 noted that consumption in Australia was actually fairly common and that

more in advanced life suffer from this disease than in England . . . In people who arrive in this colony labouring under this complaint it runs a much more rapid course than it is observed to do in colder climates. (quoted in J. M. Powell, 1978, *Mirrors of the New World*, p.131, in a chapter entitled 'Elysium: the Search for Health'.)

There is no history of health in Western Australia in the sesquicentenary series, but there is a useful chapter on 'Changing Patterns of Health' by Neville Stanley in *European Impact on the West Australian Environment 1829-1979*, 1979, University of Western Australia Press, pp.101-136). In this case as in so many others, the reality of the Western Australian climate was interpreted in the light of needs and aspirations of the Old World, especially those of the British public and later, of the colonists themselves in their search for self-sustaining images. Much depends on the contrasts made, and the motives for the contrast. In the *Perth Gazette* in 1833, for example, the climate of Western Australia is compared in a promotional way with that of Canada, where the harsh winters and short growing season are a major hardship for settlers, whereas in the Swan River Colony, there is little winter check on growth:

How blessed may we esteem ourselves in this climate with perpetual verdure around us—nature affording us a most abundant return for our industry in a continued succession of crops throughout the year. From dawn to dusk the industrious pursue their various pursuits with ample time for the improvement of their own buildings and grounds. (p. 253)

And so they do to this day. Most Western Australians, who of course live in the suburbs of the capital, spend most of their ample leisure in 'the improvement of their own buildings and grounds', although the author of the encomium in the *Perth Gazette* was soon to learn that a sunny clime did not of itself guarantee agricultural productivity using English farming methods of the early nineteenth century. For early farmers, the environment was soon perceived to be singularly harsh. No environment is harsh to an organism that is adapted to that environment, and it makes no sense to say that 'Aboriginal culture was based on an acceptance of the harsh environment' (a comment in Chapter 4, p. 147); ways in which the environment has been perceived, as harsh, or benign, or indifferent to man's purpose, constitute one of the major themes of Western Australian literature, and offer a measure of cultural adaptation.

II

In the introduction to this volume, the editor, Bruce Bennett, says that the book is a response to neglect. Unlike most of the volumes in this series, it is a pioneer work, the first such survey of Western Australian literature, although the history of Western Australia has been a flourishing industry for decades. He gives two reasons for neglect. The first is that Australians have:

tended to perceive literature and culture as belonging elsewhere (usually in Britain or Europe) and saw themselves as passive receivers of the inherited wisdom and skills of old civilizations. (p. xii)

The second stems from a tendency in many former British colonies to conceive of literature as an arrangement of 'peaks' or classic works for detailed internal analysis, rather than a variety of works which can be appreciated in relation to the social and physical environment to which they often refer (p. xii). The literature of Western Australia offers few peaks, so this approach has led to its dismissal as an object of study.

Because this is a pioneer work, the editor and his colleagues decided that the main aims should be to convey the scope and variety of the literature of the region, and by appropriate quotation to convey something of the flavour of that literature. It succeeds in this very well, with much fresh, apt quotation; and the bibliographies alone at the end of each chapter will make it of great value to the reader who wishes to pursue his interest further.

The decision to take a descriptive approach precludes a primarily evaluative one, but that is no great loss. The literary critic as self-appointed Chief Examiner has never been of much interest other than to his small clique of fellow Examiners. Other decisions follow from the organisation of the book into chapters, each with its own author, on the standard literary forms—novel, short story, poetry, drama, to which is added a very good chapter on 'Diaries, Letters, Journals' by Peter Cowan, another good chapter on 'Books for Children' by Barbara Buick and Maxine Walker, and two valuable chapters on the newspapers from 1829 to 1859, and from 1860 to the present.

The decision to use literary forms by different contributors for discrete chapters has had the consequences that there is no thematic continuity to the book, and that there is no clear chronology. For an approach that is both analytical and synoptic, we must turn to other work, perhaps to John Hay's socio-literary analysis of Western Australian writing in the *New History of Western Australia* (p. xv). Even so, chronological sequence in the material making up this book might have been much clearer with a slightly different organisation, in that chapters 1 and 7, on the 'Diaries, Letters, Journals' and 'Newspapers 1829-1859', deal with the era of settlement; chapter 8 carries the account of literary journalism through the 'Gold Rush years'; Chapters 2 and 6 on the 'Novel' and 'Books for Children', span the years from the late 19th century to the present; and finally chapters 3, 4 and 5 on the 'Short Story', 'Poetry' and 'Drama', are concerned primarily with the last few decades.

The two chapters on the era of settlement read together well, and they show very clearly that one of the distinctive features of the Swan River Colony is that, although a small society, it was a literate one.

Manuscript newspapers were published as early as 1830, the year after the colony's founding. . . . In New South Wales the first paper was not published until fifteen years after the colony had been established (p. 250),

whereas the *Perth Gazette*, the forerunner of the *West Australian Times* and *The West Australian* ran from 1829-64, and nine newspapers had begun by 1840, although only three survived into the next decade. This was, moreover not merely a literate society, but even in some degree a literary one. The *Inquirer* (1840-1901) ran an occasional review section which 'discussed a great variety of publications including books on travel, exploration, novels, English theatre and new volumes of poetry' (p. 256). A good deal of original verse was published, as a rule based on direct experience and observation 'so that many of the early poems of the period . . . possess a strength and clarity of utterance which give them a certain attraction' (p. 263), a claim borne out by effective quotation. There was also some vigorous and sensitive debate about current value conflicts, especially the consequences of European settlement for Aboriginal culture.

The clash of the two cultures elicited a more vivid response from the press than almost any other topic. Inevitably such confrontations provided material of a dramatic kind and the quality of the writing appeared to improve accordingly. (p. 253)

Robert Menli Lyon wrote a sympathetic and lucid account of Aboriginal culture in the *Perth Gazette* (30 March 1833) entitled 'A glance at the manners and language of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia', and pointed out

that although white men had invaded their land, 'the aborigines helped us when we were in their power if lost in the bush, sharing their food with us and showed us our way again' (p. 253).

One of the most moving of these early encounters, because of its prophetic tone, is the following from a correspondent to the *Perth Gazette* on 1 June 1833:

Yagan stepped forward and leaning with his left hand on my shoulder while he gesticulated with his right, delivered a sort of recitation looking earnestly in my face—I regret I could not understand it. I thought from the tone and manner that the import was this:

"You have come to our country—you have driven us from our haunts and disturbed us in our occupations. As we walk in our own country we are fired upon by the white man. Why should the white man treat us so?"

This song reminded me of a chorus in a Greek tragedy and was commented upon and explained by the other natives who seemed all to act as subordinate characters to Yagan. (p. 253)

Chapter one (Diaries, Letters and Journals) tells a similar story of cultivation and sensibility. George Fletcher Moore noted early that 'our minds are in danger of becoming rusted for want of the polish of the literature of the day' (p. 1), but being aware of the danger in such cases is half-way to averting it, and Moore put his powers of observation to work in recording the new world around him, as did others of his kind in the Swan River Colony. The result, as the anthropologist Sylvia Hallam has shown, is an outstanding 'contact' record of Aboriginal society, language and culture. Rarely has the first sustained contact between a tribal society and Europeans been one in which the Europeans included a good sprinkling of sensitive and literate observers.

Many of the early diarists record vividly—Jane Roberts, although a seven-week visitor only, gives a memorable account of the rituals of gentility played out in the sand at Fremantle (p. 3); Captain Fremantle himself, who was in his early twenties at the time, comes through as a Boy's Own Adventurer:

Found nothing on the Island but seals; killed three or four; they took to the shore from the water and the boats crew with Tomahawks had a capital hunt after one, which they succeeded in killing with the assistance of two or three shots through him (p. 3).

—presumably after the seal had been properly slowed down by good work with the tomahawks.

Lieutenant Bunbury was a more sophisticated observer. Although he was in the colony for less than two years, he saw much of the country, some unexplored. His comments on those he met, including the governor, are perhaps the strongest to have found a way into print. He wrote frankly—possibly feeling himself only a visitor—and with no concern to conceal his opinions. His description of places and events was clear and realistic, in a style straightforward and without deliberate ornament, often with a nice irony. His eye—and appetite—for detail went beyond that of George Fletcher Moore, or indeed most of his contemporaries (p. 11).

The Bussells were a family of diarists and letter writers, and the letters of John Bussell to Sophia Hayward, who had intended to join him but then changed her mind, is one of the most moving passages in the book. Peter Cowan claims for it that this correspondence revealed qualities that would not have been disowned by some of the great novelists of the nineteenth century:

The long letter of J. G. Bussell to Sophia Hayward has much of their irony and their seriousness, it enjoys some of their love of rhetoric and overstatement and their ability to offer barbed comment. And it is also a more sensitive revelation of human character than will be found in any fictional counterpart in the country Bussell writes from, during that century, or—with one or two exceptions perhaps debatable—at any later time. (p. 16)

Another notable southern family of diarists and letter writers were the Molloyes, who also settled at Augusta and then moved to Geographe Bay. Georgiana Molloy is of course the best known of the family, for the refuge she found in natural history. Cowan also gives a good account of Eliza and Thomas Brown, who describe farm life at York (p. 24); Lady Brassey, a lively and popular travel writer who 'might be likened to some woman television commentators of the present time' (p. 33) and Marianne North, another acute student of natural history and human affairs (p. 35). Her accounts of travel in the wildflower State long before that title became retrospective only, has great poignance for botanists, amateur or professional.

Cowan concludes, justly, in my view, that the early period is:

richly documented, movingly recorded and brought to life, not by the novelists or writers of fiction, but by those who themselves lived through it. While the novel in England from 1830 to 1890 adds a dimension to the understanding of life in England during those years that cannot be gained in any other way, this was not the case in Western Australia. Understanding emerges from the humour and vitality and tragedy of the letters, journals, and diaries of the people who lived what they recorded at first hand. (p. 45)

These two chapters round out a recent social history *The People of Perth* by Tom Stannage (which I have reviewed elsewhere: *Westerly* No. 3, 1980, pp. 91-101). Stannage shows effectively that the gentry of the Swan River colony were conservative—even repressive—in their concern to maintain and extend their economic, political and social power over their domestics and workmen, perhaps especially tough masters because the land yielded so poor a living. Peter Cowan and Don Grant (and Alexandra Hasluck before them) show the gentry of the colony in a more positive light.

III

But if the first two decades are richly documented, the next three are not, certainly not in this volume: 'South Australia by the 1860s had novelists' (p. 63), but Western Australia had to wait. A few popular novelists used the goldfields as a setting, including Nat Gould and Rolf Boldrewood, but 'the 1920s . . . saw what was really the first interest by local writers in the novel.' Convicts were transported from Britain to the Swan River Colony from 1850-1868, but the Imperial convict establishment was not officially disbanded until 1886, and even then, some 200 British convicts had still some years to serve. Yet these three decades are not nearly so well known as the years that preceded them, or the goldrush years to follow. They play no significant part in the literary imagination past or present. Only one children's writer (Buddee in 1972) uses the convict era as a setting retrospectively for a story about the escape of Fenian prisoners from Fremantle Gaol. It thus forms a rare companion to the one substantial work dating from the convict era itself, *Moondyne Joe: A Story from the Underworld* (1879) by John Boyle O'Reilly, a romance based in part on O'Reilly's own experience as a Fenian who was sentenced to 20 years' penal servitude in Western Australia, but escaped after a year, and later organised the escape from Fremantle of five other Fenians in the brig *Catalpa*.

So what happened to the lively journals, letters, diaries, newspapers, of 1830 and 1840 in 1850? There was little new emigration, apart from the convicts, so we are dealing with the same people, twenty years older. Either their writing has been neglected, or, more likely, it holds less interest. The group psychology of the colonists during the convict era suggests acute withdrawal. The day-to-day grind of making a living in an infertile land must have taken its toll, but there must also have been a great loss in self-esteem when transportation began. The

Swan River Colony had seen itself as a colony of gentlemen and was sustained by pride in the first two decades that fed partly on contempt for 'the pick-pocket Colonies of the east'. When this powerful psychological prop was withdrawn, their little world seems to have closed in on itself. The theme is worth investigating.

We hear of two newspapers, however, in Chapter 8: the *Fremantle Herald* established in 1867, and the *Geraldton Express* in 1878. The *Fremantle Herald* was remarkable in that it was owned and produced by three ex-convicts:

In retrospect it seems remarkable that the *Fremantle Herald* should have survived for so long—for almost twenty years. The paper was a champion of democracy in a penal colony; it wrote specifically for the working man rather than for a class of educated and influential readers; it welcomed controversy and campaigned for reform in areas such as transportation of convicts, responsible government, education, public works and ownership of land; and it was owned and produced by three ex-convicts: William Beresford, James Pearce and James Roe.

But the *Herald* did survive, and for twenty years provided its readers with more serious, stimulating and literary material than had any of its predecessors or did any of its contemporaries. In 1895 Joe Drew, editor of the *Geraldton Express*, paid a tribute to the *Herald*:

We remember the *Herald* from our earliest days, and we think it deserves to be held in memory by every lover of liberty and freedom. Back in the 'sixties and 'seventies . . . the *Herald*, having at its command an array of genius such as perhaps has never been brought to bear on Western Australian journalism, bravely and successfully fought against the monstrous abuses which were practised in those times. (p. 274)

The *Herald* may thus be seen as establishing a cultural tradition in Fremantle of which John Curtin was a later expression. The *Herald* closed in 1886, but the *Geraldton Express* survived into the goldrush years, and was, for a time, 'one of the most important goldfields newspapers'. (p. 275)

IV

Most of the newspapers of the goldfields era, however, were the work neither of ex-convicts nor of established Western Australians, but of new men, migrants from the eastern states and elsewhere, like the miners themselves. There were many of them, both miners and newspapers, and Western Australia virtually made a new beginning. 'The *Murchison Miner* started publication in 1892. This was the first of more than *eighty* newspapers which appeared during the next dozen years' (p. 275, my italics), and their variety and vigour was remarkable. But their fortunes were linked to the miners, and they ran down together:

But the conclusion seems inescapable that there was a steady decline in the importance of literary journalism after the start of the First World War. Many reasons might be suggested for this. Declining prosperity after the gold boom forced the closure of many papers and thus a diminution in the numbers of opportunities available for creative writers. Newspaper traditions and policies interrupted by the war sometimes were not resumed or were altered. New outlets for creativity became available through the development of broadcasting and television, and through the establishment of specialist literary magazines such as *Westerly* in Western Australia and *Southerly*, *Meanjin*, *Overland* and others in eastern Australia. Interest in local matters and in specifically local literature may have declined with the introduction of broadcasting and television, the availability of interstate and overseas newspapers and magazines, and the introduction of the cheap paperback book. And if an opening thesis of this survey is accepted—that in the last decade of the nineteenth century a liberal democratic habit of mind was more sympathetic to the cause of literature than a conservative one—then a fading radical spirit in Western Australia might well have been accompanied by a decline in

literary journalism. By the start of the First World War most of the once-thriving camps were deserted, many of the mines were closed, and a large number of the “rebel t’othersiders” had shifted to Perth, where they grew nostalgic about the “roaring days” of the nineties. The great days of the radical press were over and with them passed much of the support which Western Australian newspapers had given to the development of a strong and original literature by local people about life in their own state. (p. 300)

V

To turn to the consciously literary forms is to turn to thin pickings, by comparison. The novel was late to mature. The ‘twenties saw what was really the first interest by local writers in the novel’ (p. 63), usually with a rural setting for the next forty years, as elsewhere in Australia:

This was partly a hangover from pioneering days, partly an alibi for novelists with no skills to interpret the complexities of city living—though this lack did not necessarily equip them to interpret the complexities of the relationships of human beings in any other setting (p. 72).

There are some persistent themes, above all, the struggle to relate to place. Katharine Susannah Prichard, for example, in novels such as *Working Bullocks* about the timber workers in the south-west, ‘established a sense of relationship of the people and the land they worked with, offering a strong sense of place’ (p. 85). The quest for harmony with the land, rather than its exploitation, is apparent in many novels; for example Grant Watson in *The Desert Horizon* (1923) has one of his characters, a boy, say ‘I should like to live here without changing anything’. This aspiration is one of the major themes of another novel by Prichard, *Coonardoo* (1928), in which a way of relating to the land is explored through an Aboriginal protagonist, herself destroyed by an exploitative western culture.

There were a few urban novels. *Upsurge* (1934) by J. M. Harcourt describes the hardship and injustice of the Depression in Perth

and his novel cuts across the rather strangely optimistic view that has since arisen, that Western Australians were not much affected by the Depression (p. 78).

The book was a success outside Australia, but

reviews were hostile to content and style, and the book shared what was to become a fairly common distinction in Australia—it joined the list of notable overseas books which were banned (p. 81).

Seaforth Mackenzie also set novels in Perth, *The Young Desire It* (1937) and *Chosen People* (1938), which is ‘probably still the best evocation of the city’, used as a background to the exploration of character.

Randolph Stow uses Western Australian settings in five novels, from *The Haunted Land* (1956), set in the country south-west of Geraldton, to *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), in which he returns to the same landscapes; but his intentions are not descriptive. Sydney Nolan’s paintings of deserted mining towns in the west, one-third of them a luminous empty blue, transfigure the landscape by setting up echoes, and Stow’s novels have something of this effect.

There is a good chapter on the short story by Bruce Bennett, who claims that it has been an important form of writing in Western Australia. The convict period once again ‘has attracted strangely little fictional interest among short story writers’, he says, using ‘strangely’ as he does elsewhere to make a comment that is obvious but damaging. The relations with the land are explored again: of Peter Cowan,

it may not be fanciful to notice something particularly Western Australian about Cowan's austerity and restraint, this deliberate flatness of tone and avoidance of flamboyant gestures, which reflects the general flatness of the landscape and which is at least as representative of the temper of the place as the publicly imposed slogan "State of Excitement" would imply. (p. 134)

So much for those atypical Western Australians Sir Charles Court and Lang Hancock, who lack the necessary flatness. Cowan has it, and 'a brooding ironic regard for the vast spaces of the state into which he was born' (p. 135). Barbara York Main writes of a land that

is no mere passive receiver of what is dealt out to it. It can answer back, as the rocks do in "The Scapegoat", or the cleared land does in "The Betrayal": "He had betrayed the land for silver—but the silver was ground gone salt." (p. 141)

Annie Brassey the diarist put a similar point of view, crisply, nearly a hundred years earlier in describing the slaughter of whales at Albany:

Formerly this part of the coast used to be a good ground for whalers, and there were always five or six vessels in or out of the harbour all the year round. But the crews, with their usual shortsightedness, not content with killing their prey in the ordinary manner, took to blowing them up with dynamite; the result being that they killed more than they could deal with, and frightened the remainder away. (p. 34)

But the short story also encompasses social analysis from Peter Cowan's Perthites, 'generally characterised by a paralysis of the will and the emotions (p. 133), to Nicholas Hasluck's witty stories of the lawyers, academics and others of upper middle class suburbia (p. 143).

The major claim of this chapter is that Western Australians have been good at the short story. 'One in nine of the stories published in *Coast to Coast* (an annual anthology of Australian short stories) 'between 1941 and 1973 were by Western Australian writers, which is about twice the number that might be expected on a population basis', suggesting that there has been 'a disproportionate amount of talent among Western Australian writers from the 1940s and a particular interest in the short story form' (p. 123). Part of the credit for this must surely be due to Allan Edwards, who introduced the serious study of the short story as a literary form at the University of Western Australia well in advance of most other Australian universities, and part to Peter Cowan.

Bill Dunstone does the best he can with meagre material in his chapter on 'Drama'; he might have made more of the remarkable complex of theatres at the University of Western Australia, beginning with the Somerville Auditorium and the Sunken Garden through the New Fortune and Dolphin to Octagon, but his focus is on text rather than performing art. Nicholas Hasluck and Fay Zwicky speak for 'Poetry', beginning with the remarkably provincial admonition that

A poet must be an honest writer. A capacity to coin vivid phrases, an ability to juggle rhymes, an instinct for topical metaphor, the fashionable style—none of these is enough. (p. 147)

—and much, much more in the same vein, writing that is similar in tone to the praise of Western Australian writing eighty years earlier for its 'manliness'.

Finally, there is the survey of 'Books for Children', which has the virtue of organising by themes: Aborigines and race relations; sense of place; treasure seekers (which is about the goldfields); convicts and bushrangers; humour and satire; conventions (for example, stories about boarding schools). There is also a good discussion of illustrations, which play such an important part in children's books. Randolph Stow's *Midnite* (1967), based in part on the antics of the bushranger Moondyne Joe, is given the high praise it deserves. The chapter is

a most valuable survey, and full of interest. My only regret is that May Gibbs is not given a little more space. Her stories of *Snugglepoot and Cuddlepie* are very odd, like so many of the most successful children's stories, with their own streak of perversity (*Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan*), both in the relentless focus of so many of the illustrations on bare bottoms, and in the violence of the natural world she portrays, a world of predators and prey that is good ecology, but not at all cosy or coy, despite the illustrations.

Perhaps one should not hope for detailed analysis from a book that aims primarily at descriptive survey. The only legitimate criticism of the book as a scholarly work that I can make is that it lacks an index, which is a curse to anyone who attempts to cross-reference a theme. My illegitimate criticisms are many. We look to literature for the interpretation of life, and so to the literature of Western Australia to deepen our understanding of the experience of 150 years of European settlement. But the illumination is patchy. A book with a dozen contributors is bound to lack a unifying imaginative grasp of the totality of its material, no matter how good the editor. There is also some uncertainty of stance. By extending 'literature' to include letters and newspaper articles, we are taking the sum of written words as raw material for an attempt at a history of ideas and attitudes. But then so much is left out, arbitrarily. What about the essays, biographies, *Westerly* and other journals, above all, the histories?


The biographies of Alexandra Hasluck surely give more insight into the experience of living in Western Australia than most novels, and are part of a strong natural history tradition that still persists. *Between Wodjil and Tor* by Barbara York Main (1967) is an outstanding personal response to the natural environment of the wheatbelt. And what of the scientists themselves? Diels' major pioneering work *Die Pflanzen welt von West-Australien sudlich des Wendekreises* (1906) is the first substantial effort of the human imagination and intelligence to comprehend the West Australian environment as a whole, and it has been very influential in shaping images of that environment and the way it is perceived.

Much more could be added to this list of omissions. They are perhaps marginal to a literary survey, but the questions are invited by a survey that interprets its subject broadly, and purports to take a 'history of ideas' stance. There is no 'History of Science' volume in the sesquicentenary series although partial histories of particular sciences are given in some volumes in the series, and the *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* has published a sesquicentennial history of the Royal Society. A synoptic history of science in the west would be difficult to put together, in that it would require great knowledge and a unifying imagination—but there are few settlements that have been more heavily dependent on science and technology for their survival and growth.

A. L. Rowse the English historian has long argued that history is a department of literature (most recently in *Memories of Men and Women*, 1980). One can hardly imagine classical literature without Thucydides or Livy (or Homer or Virgil) who were historians. Yet surveys of English literature usually omit Clarendon, Gibbon and Hume. Educated Western Australians owe a great deal of their concept of their past to historians such as W. B. Kimberly, J. S. Battye, F. K. Crowley, Geoffrey Bolton and more recently, Tom Stannage. Crowley's *Australia's Western Third* (1960) was written very much within the values of the society he records, and a critical analysis of his 'point of view' would be useful; whereas *A Fine Country to Starve In* by Bolton is an iconoclastic reappraisal of the Depression years. The running debate between Bolton and Stannage on the role of the gentry in setting the tone of the colony and state has been instructive, and their writing is a significant part of the literature of Western Australia. In the final chapter of *A New History of Western Australia* (ed. Stannage 1981,

p. 691), Bolton claims that in 1980 'no other Australian state could boast so many works of historical synthesis or detailed studies as Western Australia; and with one dubious exception, no other State had been the subject of a single-volume history since long before the Second World War'. If the most interesting writing in Western Australia in the 19th Century is to be found in the letters, journals and newspapers of the day, the view put forward in this volume, then surely one might also argue that much of the most interesting writing in this century has not been fiction or verse, but the essays, natural histories, biographies and historical works.

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The Selected Life

Biography, Autobiography, fiction and poetry

Fremantle Arts Centre Press held its third biennial writers' weekend on August 28th and 29th. The weekend was devoted to the discussion of biography, autobiography and the use of such material in fiction and poetry, Visiting speakers were Blanche D'Alpuget, author of the award winning novel *Turtle Beach* and the recent biography of Bob Hawke; Helen Garner, author of the highly acclaimed fictions, *Monkey Grip* and *Honour and Other People's Children*; Martin Harrison, writer and ABC broadcaster with the programme *Books and Writing*; and New Zealand novelist Witi Ihimaera. Local speakers were poet Alan Alexander and fiction writers Elizabeth Jolley, James Legasse and Julie Lewis.

ADAM SHOEMAKER

Fact and Historical Fiction: Ion L. Idriess and Colin Johnson*

Most visitors to Australia—and indeed, residents of this nation—seem to believe that the Aboriginal people offered no meaningful resistance to the European invasion of their continent. According to this popular view, such opposition as did arise was not only sporadic and short-lived but also disorganized and decidedly ineffective. In fact, only during the past decade have Australian historians begun to re-examine, and to challenge, the myth of Aboriginal passivity. As one of the foremost of these revisionist historians, Henry Reynolds, put it, in his most recent book, *The Other Side of the Frontier*:

Recent confrontations at Noonkanbah and Aurukun are not isolated out-crops but part of a long range of experience reaching back to the beginnings of European settlement. . . . The much celebrated actions of rebel colonists are trifling in comparison. The Kellys and their kind, even the Eureka diggers and Vinegar Hill convicts, are dwarfed when measured against the hundreds of clans who fought frontier settlers for well over a century.¹

One of the most striking episodes of Black Australian resistance took place in the Kimberley district of Western Australia where, for three years, a former police tracker named Sandamara led a concerted rebellion against White pastoral expansion. Sandamara carefully organized his resistance movement: taking advantage of European firearms and supplies, he adopted guerrilla tactics which, on a number of occasions, were more than a match for his White opponents.

But what, one might ask, does an Aboriginal freedom fighter of the 1890s have to do with Australian literature? The answer is, 'Far more than one would expect'. For the exploits of Sandamara and his men have, until very recently, been largely ignored by White historians; to this day the only published and readily available treatment of the insurrection by a White Australian is an historical novel, *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, by Ion L. Idriess. This fact was made abundantly clear when, in a recent—and unpublished—Honours thesis dealing with Sandamara, Howard Pedersen observed that the rebel was almost entirely neglected

in the two books written about the history of Aboriginal/European relations in Western Australia. He is not mentioned in Paul Hasluck's *Black Australians* while Peter Biskup devotes one page to the rebellion in *Not Slaves Not Citizens*.

Pedersen concludes, 'a novel, written in 1952 by Ion Idriess, is the only major piece of writing'² devoted to the subject.

* First presented at a conference of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, Adelaide, May 1982.

This statement is ironic, not only because an historian is according the Idriess novel the status of 'a major piece of writing'—whatever that might be—but also because Pedersen is either totally unaware of, or has chosen to ignore, another fictional examination of the Sandamara episode: Colin Johnson's *Long Live Sandawara*, which was published in 1979, one year before the appearance of this thesis. Whether this omission was intentional or not, the fact is that the achievement of an Aboriginal Australian has again been thrown into the shadow of neglect, in the very study which is casting light on an historical Aboriginal achievement, eclipsed by the same shadow.

The aim of this paper, then, is to illuminate the relationship between these two novels, one by a White and one by a Black, Australian, the historical importance of both being particularly clear. At the outset, one would expect the two novels to be very different. They are separated by a quarter-century of socio-political changes; the two authors come from vastly dissimilar cultural backgrounds; and they emphasize quite different aspects of the clash between Sandamara and his mob and the White authorities. Idriess, naturally aiming his book at a White reading audience, emphasizes not only the threat which the wily and dangerous Aboriginal leader presented but also, in particular, the courage, tenacity, and cleverness of the police patrols which hunted him down. In a prefatory note he comments, 'But for the ceaseless work of the hard-riding police patrols he would have caused a lot of white tragedy in our Australian Kimberleys',³ with a noteworthy emphasis on the word 'our'. Indeed, his final line in this introduction is a somewhat wistful *adieu*: 'And so, farewell to the "Days of the Big Patrols".'⁴

Colin Johnson, on the other hand, obviously had another aim in mind when he wrote his novel, for he has stated that it is directed at an Aboriginal readership far more than his first book, *Wild Cat Falling*. In his words, 'This was a conscious decision. Even the style is as non-intellectual as possible. I didn't want words getting in the way of the action and the argumentation'.⁵ Of course, *Long Live Sandawara* is also a far more stylistically experimental book, one half being written in the contemporary inner-city slang of the Perth slums, and the other in far more timeless, grand, and imagistic language. Johnson explained the reason for this bipartite structure as follows:

It was two stories right from the beginning, in order to relieve the tedium of the modern novel. Also, it is very difficult in Western Australia not to write about modern times when you're writing about the past.⁶

Whereas Idriess is lauding, above all, the valour of the Kimberley law enforcers, Johnson's emphasis is patently upon the heroism of Sandamara, and the style of his historical segment was deliberately adopted with this consideration in mind; as he put it, 'Very few Aboriginals know of this Aboriginal hero. That is why this part of the book is written in an epic style'.⁷ Whether or not this consciously-chosen style accurately reflects the meaning which Johnson hoped to convey is a more thorny question, which will be returned to at a later stage.

Thus, from the first word, the two novels are at variance structurally and stylistically. Idriess, the inveterate outback *raconteur*, utilizes hyperbole, hyperbolic punctuation (exclamation marks are ubiquitous) and animal imagery, to achieve the desired atmosphere of drama commensurate with the clash of civilized and loyal man, versus primitive and depraved Aboriginal man. Near the beginning of the novel, Constable Richardson, who is later murdered by Sandamara when he commences his rebellion, inspects his Black prisoners, suspecting that they are hatching up a plan to break loose from their chains. Note the language:

His mind now obsessed by a file, he stepped down from the veranda to again examine the chain, grimly conscious that his "tigers" knew more of

local conditions and happenings than he did, now that he was alone and Pigeon and Captain were away.

Stone Age men! but cunning as a bagful of monkeys.⁸

The equation of the animal and Aboriginal worlds is repeatedly emphasized throughout the novel; the Black men are devious, stealthy, and treacherous, yes, but all the while somehow less than human—or so the imagery implies. See, for example, this description of Sandamara in a chapter typically entitled, 'Caught Like Rats In A Trap'. As he discovers a means of escape from the cave whose mouth the police are guarding, Sandamara's 'eyes gleamed exultantly, his mouth widened in a long-drawn, animal-like whimper of joy'.⁹ His men start digging their escape route 'with deep hisses and low, guttural growls'¹⁰ while outside a constable berates a Black 'boy' with the words, 'You've got less brains than a porcupine' . . . 'And stop that hyena laughter', he added again, 'or I'll chuck you down the cave'.¹¹ It is of course arguable that these sentiments are not those of the author, but are those of the characters he envisioned, acting as they would have in the last decade of the Nineteenth century. Certainly, by writing the novel, Idriess has not only brought the Australian reader's attention to the fact of Aboriginal military-style resistance in the Kimberleys, but also to the fact of Sandamara's courage and tactical acumen. But, all of these facts must be viewed within the guiding principle of his fiction. For, *Outlaws of the Leopolds* is an historical novel, in which the author's preface, which quotes reference to numerous Police Department reports; the inclusion of a score of photographs of an anthropological nature intermittently throughout the text; and the author's assertion that he had consulted 'aboriginal friends' who obliged with 'big-feller talk'¹² concerning the days of Sandamara and his guerrilla fighters; all these give the impression of historical scholarship, and provide the aura of historical accuracy. In view of the fact that Idriess travelled through the area and completed his research on Sandamara half a century after the events took place, he surely does not have a monopoly on historical veracity.

By the same token, neither does Colin Johnson, but there is no doubt that his view of the significance of Sandamara's deeds is vastly different from that of Idriess. In this case, the imagery is very indicative of the goal which Johnson hopes to achieve by writing his novel. Idriess discovered in the Sandamara episode the potential for a fast-paced adventure story which was thoroughly Australian, and then proceeded to write one; a pattern of discovery and description which he repeated more than twenty times throughout his career. One receives no impression of personal commitment to a cause in *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, other than to the artistic cause of seeking and finding episodes of Australian historical heroism which can be fictionalized. Johnson, on the other hand, had a cogent personal and social aim in mind when he wrote *Long Live Sandawara*. The former goal was the attempt to rediscover his own roots in Western Australia after a seven-year absence from the country; the latter, an attempt to inculcate a sense of Aboriginal pride in those Black Australians who read the book; to cultivate the awareness of an Aboriginal history which included indigenous heroes and leaders, who had fought and died for their cause. The imagery, especially of the historical portion of the novel, is indicative of these aspirations: it is powerful, resonant, and fluid:

All the land moves, whirling like a cyclone, and the eye of the storm is this man, Sandawara, who sits apart from the others, his mind weighing the odds and thinking only of the final victory.¹³

In the Idriess version of the events, Sandamara is calculating, cunning and war-like, but he is still a mere mortal. Johnson, however, describes him as a quasi-supernatural figure, a 'maban' or shaman with magical powers:

The men collect at the water's edge and nearby they see a soft rainbow light pulsating without strength from a dark figure. It is Sandawara. The men creep towards their leader and the strange roar dies away leaving only the sound of the rain and wind and thunder. Beyond them, the fires sizzle out. A lightning flash strikes a tree right next to where Sandawara is sitting and the fire runs down the trunk. In amazement and fear they seem to see a huge serpent wrapped about the body of their leader. It writhes about his body.¹⁴

Above all, Sandamara is what Kevin Gilbert has termed a Black 'patriot',¹⁵ who feels a unity even with the Aboriginal trackers who pursue him and ultimately chase him to earth. He dies, not bitterly gasping and cursing the trackers, as in the Idriess novel, but poignantly and serenely:

At last the trackers gingerly approach the fallen figure and circle it. They edge in and stand looking down. The white men are far off. The black men stare at their fallen brother and watch as he stirs and gets into a sitting position. 'Brothers, the white man can never take what I have', he gently murmurs, then falls back into freedom.¹⁷

The alteration in the character of Sandamara, and the new exhortatory and educative role he is ascribed are both equally clear.

Of course, it must be remembered that only one half of *Long Live Sandawara* is a historical novel. The other half is terse in style, urban in environment, often humorous in characterization, and frequently sexual in pre-occupation. It is also very much concerned with the concept of Aboriginal patriotism, and Sandawara as an historical figure is ever-present: as a role model for Alan, the sixteen year-old leader of the group; as an inspirational poster on the wall; and as a memory in the mind of the old, downtrodden Aboriginal elder, Noorak, who becomes Alan's link with his past and with his heritage. The parallel structure of revolution which is established, serious in the historical episode and comical—until the final gruesome chapter—in the contemporary segment, is very successful. According to the author, despite the blood-bath at the end of the modern segment (which indicates the futility of armed rebellion in Australia), the salient aspect is that Alan—the new Sandawara—survives, to become a fully-initiated Aboriginal patriot and himself an inspiration for the future.¹⁸

Therefore, both halves of Johnson's *Long Live Sandawara* differ stylistically from Idriess's *Outlaws of the Leopolds*. The contemporary section of Johnson's book portrays the dialogue, speech patterns and environment of urban Aboriginals very accurately; it is this segment of the novel which is most evidently directed at an empathetic Aboriginal readership. But, despite Johnson's claim that the style of the historical half of *Long Live Sandawara* is intentionally of epic proportions, critics such as the linguist Stephen Muecke do have a point, when they say that his adoption of a mode of description appropriate to a romantic novel of the Western tradition could have an alienating effect upon potential Black Australian readers. In short, if Johnson is intending his novel first and foremost as an inspiration for other Aboriginal Australians, he may in this way be defeating his own purpose. As Muecke puts it, in this section 'Pigeon the historical figure disappears, to be replaced by a romantic hero. The position of the reader shifts once more. We (as readers) need no longer be White or Aboriginal'.¹⁹ However, it is also possible that Johnson is effecting a didactic process aimed at Australians of all colours in this portion of the novel and thus, taken together, the two halves of the book may have a calculated appeal for all Australian readers.

It is, of course, hardly surprising to find differences in the approach of Idriess and Johnson. What *is* surprising, and is perhaps a cause for some critical concern, is the similarity in content which one discovers upon a close reading of the two texts. It must be emphasized yet again that the version Idriess provides of Sandamara's exploits is only one interpretation of history, based largely upon Police

Department records in Western Australia. There are other historical sources which can be unearthed and other interpretations which can be determined. Yet, it is patently clear that, like many others, Johnson has used Idriess as his primary historical source. One cannot ignore the irony of an Aboriginal author, who popularizes a Black Australian resistance fighter and advocates close ties with traditional Aboriginal society, allowing the work of a rather biased White Australian writer to be his major factual wellspring. Yet, this appears to be precisely the case.

It is true that Johnson shades many of the characters and events rather differently than does Idriess. For example, in the earlier novel, Sandamara's close ties with his mother and with his woman, Cangamvara, are repeatedly emphasized; Johnson does not note the first relationship at all, and gives only glancing emphasis to the second. In the Idriess book, Sandamara's death spells the end of the rebellion, which is viewed as a disturbing aberration from the norm, presumably, of Aboriginal passivity; in the later novel, the hero's death is part of a continuum of Aboriginal resistance against White invasion. However, again and again in the two books, similarities of plot present themselves: in both novels, Sandamara and his accomplice, Captain, are incited to revolt by their prisoner, Ellemara, who allegedly has a supernatural power of suggestion. In both, after killing the settlers Burke and Gibbs and taking over their supplies, Sandamara permits his men to open and consume the White men's casks of liquor, and an orgy of violence ensues; and the battle of Windjina Gorge is described in very similar terms in both books. In fact, on one occasion, Johnson seems to have come very close to plagiarizing the earlier novel. Consider the following two extracts, the first from Idriess:

'Ah!' Pigeon would chuckle, 'it is because they love me so. They are always chasing me, they want me to be always with them—in a little hole in the ground. They will plant you too like that when they catch you, so that you can never get away again. So take care and cover your tracks, always remember that your tracks are leading you to a little hole in the ground. Never take a chance, always cover your tracks. Otherwise they might track you while you sleep. And you will wake up with lead in your guts!'²⁰

Now the second, from Johnson:

He listens to his men and chuckles and says: 'Those white fellows really love me. They run after me all the time and how can I say "no" to them. They love me so much that they want me to be with them for ever—in a little hole in the ground with no way out. You better watch out that they don't start loving you and come chasing after you. They want you just a little now, and once they catch you, you'll never be free of them.' His voice hisses, then echoes on: "So take care and always cover your tracks. Always be on your guard and be sure that no tracks lead towards your refuge in the earth. Never leave a mark for them to follow; never sleep with both eyes closed, or one day you'll sleep on with lead in your guts."²¹

Aside from any ethical considerations which the above two extracts might raise, does it matter that the historical segment of Johnson's novel is derivative? In a number of ways, it does. First, the fact that a Black Australian appears to confirm the accuracy of a significant portion of the Idriess novel has important consequences: not only is one far less likely to question the veracity of the description in *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, but the reliability of the sources Idriess has used remain equally unchallenged. In short, no alternative historical sources are contemplated. Yet, as Pedersen relates, Aboriginal oral history paints a very different picture of Sandamara's defection from the police to a life of armed rebellion. According to oral tradition, the hero was himself a magic man, or 'maban', (as Johnson notes) but he was not swayed to suddenly revolt against

White authority by the persuasive, quasi-hypnotic influence of Ellemara. Rather, Sandamara killed Constable Richardson and liberated his prisoners because of tribal obligation: he had slept with many of the men's wives and had to make reparations; the discharge of those obligations necessitated the murder.²² This is a far cry from the spontaneous conversion spawned by Ellemara, which Idriess suggests and Johnson accepts. After all, if Ellemara had possessed that kind of sway over Sandamara, it is logical to assume that the former—not the latter—would have been the leader of the insurrection. At the very least, the rapidity with which contacts were made with tribes throughout the Kimberleys, the speed with which action was taken by Sandamara and his newly-liberated men, and the organized, military style of the leader's tactics, all suggest, as Pedersen has pointed out, a pre-meditated plan of attack, whatever the motive.²³

Again one might ask, 'But what does this have to do with Australian literature?' The answer lies in the fact that, in the field of race relations writing in Australia, literature and history are very closely-related. At the outset of this paper, mention was made of the slowly-emerging trend of White historians to examine Aboriginal history in its own right. In the absence of such study, literary works, such as those of Idriess, are often assumed to be a motherlode of factual, historical material. As this paper has demonstrated, such an assumption is often inaccurate and quite misleading; such fiction is not always fact, nor is there any unalterable requirement for it to be so. Yet, it is arguable that historical accuracy does matter in such cases, for otherwise readers absorb ideas and prejudices in good faith without realizing that the book they have put their trust in is only one version of the truth. No historical novel is value-free, and those of Idriess are no exception. Indeed, when one examines his statements concerning Aboriginals made elsewhere, an attitude which is at best highly ambivalent emerges; in 1943 he advised:

Never become too familiar with the Abo, but treat him in a friendly way, and leave him with the impression that you are a friend of him, and he of you. Then, should an opportunity occur later, he will do anything for you.²⁴

These are not the words of an author who is no longer read; these are the words of a writer who in 1980 had more books in print than he did five years earlier.²⁵ In short, circumspection is advised.

But, what of Johnson's novel? It has numerous strengths: the clarity of its characterization, its realistic dialogue, its satire and the wedding of the historical and contemporary segments of the book. But, after reading *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, it is difficult not to have a lower estimation of the worth of the historical section of Johnson's novel. Hugh Webb has stated that *Long Live Sandawara* is 'Black words on a white page',²⁶ in symbolic terms. Unfortunately, as has been demonstrated here, that is not entirely the case. Johnson is a good novelist with obvious talent, but in order to do justice to his convictions, he will have to seek out sources and inspirations other than those provided by a novelist of the ilk of Ion L. Idriess. Muecke has suggested that Aboriginal oral history may be one such source. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate concerning the novel that would have emerged had *Long Live Sandawara* been based upon such a resource.

Regardless, in order for Aboriginal creative writing in English to thrive as a separate entity, it must be as independent as possible from White Australian influence—in fact, as well as in fiction.

* When reading this paper, it should be noted that the names Sandamara, Sandawara and Pigeon all refer to the same individual.

NOTES

1. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier* (Townsville: History Department James Cook University, 1981), pp. 164-165.
2. Howard Pedersen, 'Pigeon: An Aboriginal Rebel. A Study of Aboriginal-European Conflict In The West Kimberley, North Western Australia During the 1890s', Unpublished Honours Thesis (Murdoch: Murdoch University, 1980), p. 2.
3. Ion L. Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1952), p. IV.
4. *ibid*, p. 8.
5. Interview with Colin Johnson, Brisbane: 28th August, 1980.
6. *ibid*.
7. *ibid*.
8. Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, p. 10.
9. *ibid*, p. 160.
10. *ibid*, p. 161.
11. *ibid*, p. 156.
12. *ibid*, p. VI.
13. Colin Johnson, *Long Live Sandawara* (Melbourne: Quartet Books, 1979), p. 72.
14. *ibid*, p. 82.
15. Kevin Gilbert, '*Because A White Man'll Never Do It*' (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. 203.
16. Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, p. 239.
17. Johnson, *Long Live Sandawara*, p. 166.
18. Interview with Colin Johnson.
19. Stephen Muecke, 'Discourse, History, Fiction: Language and Aboriginal History', Unpublished paper, Adelaide: April 1982, p. 12.
20. Idriess, *Outlaws of the Leopolds*, p. 168.
21. Johnson, *Long Live Sandawara*, p. 144.
22. Pedersen, 'Pigeon: An Aboriginal Rebel', pp. 52-53.
23. See *ibid*, p. 57. In Pedersen's words, 'It is difficult to believe that such well orchestrated action and a planned military offensive could have arisen in a space of little more than a week. It invites speculation that Pigeon was thinking of such a move well before he killed Richardson'.
24. Idriess, 'Give 'Em A Go', *SALT*, vol. 5, no. 9, 1943, p. 18.
25. Information provided by the Marketing Manager, Angus and Robertson, Sydney: July 1980.
26. Hugh Webb, 'Black Words On A White Page: Colin Johnson's *Long Live Sandawara*'. Unpublished paper, Murdoch: September 1981.

COLIN JOHNSON REPLIES TO ADAM SHOEMAKER:

Pidgin roamed the earth,
His land bounded on all sides,
He was secure, secure in his kin.
He lived, he fought,
And then he died—it is history.

Sandawara, he came from my mind,
Mulling over Idriess, police reports
And bits and pieces I had heard,
About that man, that man called Pidgin.
Sandawara lives only in the pages of a book,
Gammon as such stories have to be,
When the last page is turned,
Sandawara becomes the blank of the last.
If he had been real, as real as Pidgin was,
The gun would ever be in his hand,
Fighting for our rights and forever dying,
Then I would have named him with his name.
I know many modern Pidgins who are following
The tracks of that iron man now gone.
His self lives on in our dreaming,
And his blood stains our banner red.
Long Live Pidgin,
Sandawara was a pale ideal,
Even his name is wrong:
But we follow Pidgin in his way,
Feel the sadness of dispossession,
And fight to gain what we have lost.

Colin Johnson,
October, 1982.

A View of Colonial Life: Hume Nisbet*

The literary work of Hume Nisbet might be considered Australian if it were thought worthwhile, for it is nearly all based on experience in this part of the world.¹

While part of this statement is not strictly accurate, the somewhat ambiguous judgement was shared by Australian critics of Nisbet's work—and at times more strongly expressed. Nisbet did live for a time in colonial Australia; he later visited this country on a commissioned literary tour; and he visited New Guinea, so that he could at least claim a knowledge of the country not shared by many of his contemporaries who, like him, used the strangeness, the colour, the violence and the oddities of colonial life as a background for novels and stories.

Nisbet was born in 1849 at Stirling, in Scotland. His father allowed him a wide early education, perhaps better than the usual, under Dr James Culross and a training in art with Sam Bough R.S.A., a prominent Scottish artist of the period. When he was sixteen Nisbet left Scotland for Melbourne, where for seven years he took various jobs, tried to train for the stage at the Theatre Royal, with the actor Robert Stewart, travelled about the east coast, and began to write. None of his projected ventures went beyond a beginning, and he returned to England in 1872 where he again studied art at the National Gallery and South Kensington. Returning to Scotland he became Art Master at Wall College and Old School of Arts, Edinburgh, a position he held for eight years. After this period he painted, held exhibitions of his work, and tried to continue his writing. It was apparently not a successful period, and he staked a good deal on gaining commission from Cassells to travel to Australia to contribute articles and sketches for their projected *Picturesque Australasia*.²

The commission was delayed until his travelling and writing time was reduced to barely a year, 1886; the book, in four and three volume editions, was published first in 1887-89. Nisbet contributed nine chapters to the publication; his voyage to Australia and the journeys associated with the work are described in *A Colonial Tramp*.³

He returned briefly ten years later, by which time he had used his Australian experiences for a number of novels widely read overseas, and some in Australia, but with which Australian critics never really came to terms. He attempted poetry and drama, but was prolific and successful only with his fiction, novels which he, and others of his period, termed 'romances'. It was a form becoming immensely popular, and varied, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and though

* Part of a study of Hume Nisbet's writing, and work as an illustrator.

Nisbet explored it widely his education and training, and to an extent his travels, did not always fit comfortably with its conventions.

He came to Australia well equipped to observe and to record. Apart from his training in art he helped his father in an early photographic business. Competent assistants were hard to obtain; the incompetent caused expensive damage. Nisbet acquired a knowledge of the difficult wet-plate processes and studio procedures. He had almost at once an appreciation of photography as an art at a time when only its most enthusiastic exponents conceded the term. The early use of photographic studio backgrounds and his work as a painter found an ironic alliance.

In those days backgrounds and accessories were not greatly considered as the means towards an end. One plain background and one a little complicated were all that the operator considered needful, with a carved chair or fluted pilaster: and thus the multitude were turned out with a set, fixed stare, full front, bolt upright. If male, a lenient photographer might permit one leg to cross the other by way of ease. The female portion generally sat with hands meekly crossed over the lap and a curtain falling gracefully on one side...⁴

He was set by his father to paint backgrounds for these portraits, their favourite being:

... a room with a bay-window partly open, revealing an Italian lake with a 'palace lifting to eternal summer' its (half concealed) 'marble walls'...⁵

With this they were ready to begin work and:

... turn out your Dick and Harry by the rose-tinted dozen, all as visitors to that wire-work painted Italian lake.⁶

He remarked of this that he had:

... not then learned the value of suggestive mystery, nor did I do justice to the imagination of our public. I considered then that a fact could not be too plainly told.⁷

Nisbet had an accurate perception of the problems and direction of photography, and he saw clearly how it was to develop, admitting an envy of those who were beginning this career, in comparison with his own chosen art as a painter:

... a career so filled with possibilities and future discoveries. It seems as if I, the painter, walked upon a highway tramped down by countless travellers, leading to an end definite and unavoidable, while he has before him only a little distance marked out, with a vast country to explore, as his mind and genius may best determine.⁸

He did not choose to leave his own path, and perhaps a consideration of the illustrations to his books in comparison to the early photographs that would have been their equivalent suggests why. His perceptions of painting and photography carried over into his concern for writing. Painting gave him a 'preference for subtleties and refinements of light and shadow'; photography reinforced his feeling for the prevailing literary mode of his time, realism. In this respect he faced a conflict. In photography he believed in seeing his sitters as they were.

I want men and women sent down to posterity as they are and not as they would like to be.⁹

But he saw also 'the fatal power of the camera, which must print every object before it'. This aspect of realism, with its remorseless piling up of detail, he tried to avoid, aware of the value of symbolism in evading over-emphasis on detail, the deeper suggestion and imaginative force it offered the realist. Yet this recognition seemed to clash with his own experience. He discovered that, for him:

... imagination is not the gift of creating things out of chaos, but rather the remembering of emotions and scenes and real personages, and that the more vividly I could remember, the better work I did.¹⁰

Which led him back to realism, and at times into a simple recreation of what he had seen. But in an era that valued wordiness he realised the value of simplicity and brevity:

... the great secret in painting, poetry, and literature is—simplicity. Fine words, dear colours, only mystify the student and prove the weakness of the worker.¹¹

His writing reveals a struggle to achieve the aims and precepts he was clearly enough aware of, and which, unlike many of his contemporaries, he was capable of formulating and discussing. His concern for method, for form and technique, seemed in conflict with a concern for the purpose of literature. He saw the strength of realism, but was uneasy about where it led. In painting he saw realism dissipate itself in the narrative picture so popular in his day, which he deprecated, yet in some measure seemed forced to approve because such painting had a 'message', was 'enobling' or 'uplifting'. In this he was assenting to the uncompromising attitude of the art critics, and he seemed also to agree with the same view of the moral purpose of the novel.

As Homer did to the Greeks, so the novelist does for us—presenting to our eyes the world we have not seen, society we may not enter, manners we could not know but for him; virtue gets the reward, vice gets the punishment, the knight of chivalry inspires us with the desire to emulate. The whole path of honour is pointed out, and we glow as we read with the desire to follow: what sermon could teach us more?¹²

Perhaps there is an irony here, and some of his own novels might reinforce the suspicion that he is acknowledging an aim for the novel widely enough held, at the same time deprecating the position into which the novel was forced. His sense of irony and of proportion in the main saved his own work from the moralising and sentimentality that pervaded the novel of the time—or at least deflated the tendency when he could not altogether avoid it. He believed in the seriousness of the novel, of its importance:

Novels are the histories of humanity; they teach us a wisdom that years of sorrow only could reveal; through them we may look into the hearts of men and women and not be deceived by the smiling mask of deceit; they bring to us a world we dare not visit, telling us what we ought to know about sin and suffering; they inculcate knowledge in a pleasant way, preaching to us virtue and nobility, warning us of falsehood...¹³

An elevated statement of the commonplace, perhaps, and a concept it seemed he was not above satirising in some of his own fiction. Nevertheless, even to hold such a view lightly forced Nisbet to consider the novel as having a duty to examine and reveal society, which linked readily enough to his feeling for realism. Nisbet claimed in fact that he became a realist, yet he was never quite reconciled to what this involved, to the kind of novel which must result; he was unwilling to go freely where his themes and method pointed. The kind of novel he should have written, and the kind he did—perhaps could—write never quite came together. While he approved realism, he began increasingly to disapprove what the realist method produced. The concern for the harsher aspects of social life, the poverty and oppression of growing urban societies, an emphasis on despair, lack of free will, nihilism, he admitted but wished to repudiate. His own books concerned themselves with these issues, but drew back from their full exploration, so that he managed quite often to alienate both critics and readers—readers for introducing unpleasant topics, critics for the way he handled them.

This did not mean he was an unsuccessful writer. His many novels issued through a number of London publishers, appear to have had a wide audience, many running to a number of editions, and almost all lavishly—indeed often

beautifully—produced, and very well illustrated. He worked in an era that had not accepted the dustjacket, but where the decoration of spine and front cover was an art in itself, a period which saw the freeing of novel publication from the often drab, utilitarian, three volume publishing dictated by the circulating libraries. The development of new and cheaper printing processes enabled novels to be offered more cheaply, while they could also be published in a more attractive form.

Nisbet had clear views on what was an illustrated book: he believed that not only full page illustrations should be used, but the margin and the chapter heads should carry illustration or decoration, and every book should have at least a frontispiece and title page vignette. He illustrated his own books, with occasional drawing from other artists. His covers are often striking, but perhaps the novel that came closest to his own definition was *The Land of the Hibiscus Blossom*,¹⁴ his first novel, and one of the first written of the New Guinea natives. A larger, fully illustrated book, *Memories of the Months*,¹⁵ gives a fair reflection of his ability as an illustrator.

A relationship with his readers was important to Nisbet. Possibly because of his awareness as a painter of an immediate reaction from an audience—one he might have found all too obvious at exhibitions of his work—he seldom lost sight of his readers. He talked to them, broke off at moments of tension to lecture them, point the way, excuse himself, explain what he may or may not do. The kind of novel Nisbet chose to write encouraged, by its wide appeal, this relationship with an audience, but it was an awareness that led him too often into unevenness of style, into forgetting his lesson on 'the value of suggested mystery', the value of description and symbol. He took the easier way of explanation. While his readers may have found no fault with this, it scarcely fitted comfortably with his concern for realism, and his interest in naturalism. He was addicted to prefaces, dedicated to some friend or patron. Here, if he believed he was likely to offend his readers by his subject, he explained and excused himself—in a way that usually revealed his conflict of interest rather than providing any plausible excuse for it. His prefaces at times became a defence against criticism which he felt was misplaced. It was a reasonable reaction. His work was misread, he was given little credit for attempting some things his contemporaries who were writing the same kind of novel were careful to avoid. Australian critics had little good to say of him. Turner and Sutherland summed up what passed for the more responsible criticism of the day in their comment:

Hume Nisbet—whose latest Australian novel, *The Swampers* contained such violent attacks upon men and things in Sydney, as to cause its sale to be prohibited under penalty of legal proceedings. Society will be the gainer if the prohibition is enforced, for it is an unwholesome story, and, like his previous novels, gives a most distorted view of colonial life.¹⁶

Nisbet was writing the kind of novel loosely termed romance, the term indicating as much a quality of imagination as an interest in love, idealistic or otherwise. It was based on a certain amount of local knowledge or research and investigation, holding a sense of real event and problems, a complex, exciting plot, characters that were representative rather than deeply individual—a novel aware of a new audience, new publishing processes and possibilities, new backgrounds to explore—the kind of novel revived, perhaps, and developed with obvious success by later writers like Neville Shute and Hammond Innes: in another direction the kind of novel that became the often brilliant spy and crime fiction of writers like Deighton and Le Carre. Nisbet, as one of the originators of this kind of fiction, might indeed have welcomed the freedom to expand his themes which a later time allowed, to be free of the prohibitions and trappings which his era compelled.

If there was some confusion in Nisbet's thinking about this type of novel, he was not alone in that. Rider Haggard began writing romance fiction at about the same time as Nisbet, producing in 1885 and 1887 the two examples which were probably the best known of their type at the time, and the most enduring—*King Solomon's Mines* and *She*. After the success of *She* he ventured an article *About Fiction* which commented on the large number of novels being published, most of which 'crude mass' Haggard claimed as worthless, but which did indicate the popularity of the form, and suggested some of its problems.

Many people are of opinion in their secret hearts that they could, if they thought it worth while to try, write a novel that would be very good indeed, and a large number of people carry this opinion into practice without scruple or remorse. But as a matter of fact, with the exception of perfect sculpture, really good romance writing is perhaps the most difficult art practised by the sons of men . . .¹⁷

A great many of these writers never got beyond one of two titles, perhaps finding Haggard's lofty claim apt. But a considerable number ran up a surprising list of titles in a very short time. Haggard's later judgement may have been more to the point:

The method of romance writing should, in my judgement, be swift, clear, and direct, with as little padding and as few trappings as possible. The story is the thing, and every word in the book should be a brick to build its edifice. Above all, no obscurity should be allowed. Let the characters be definite, even at the cost of a little crudeness, and so with the meaning of each sentence. Tricks of 'style' and dark allusions may please the superior critic; they do not please the average reader, and—though this seems to be a fact that many forget, or only remember to deplore—a book is written that it may be read. The first duty of a story is to keep him who peruses it awake . . . Such work should be written rapidly and, if possible, not rewritten, since wine of this character loses its bouquet when it is passed from glass to glass . . . So it comes to this: the way to write a good romance is to sit down and write it almost without stopping.¹⁸

While his travels in Australia provided Nisbet with the background for a number of books, he did not seek complete accuracy in presenting this background, or share in practice the realist preoccupation with close observation and faithful description—indeed he was a careless observer in some of his travel writing which needed accuracy. What he took from the background was what would be useful to his narrative, the newness of the country to settlement, the distances, the scattered population of the inland areas, the excitement and strangeness of a place not much known, rather than its restrictions and tedium. He capitalised on the growing interest in travel and adventure of those whose urban and constricted lives made such possibilities a vague dream of escape—and those who could in fact take advantage of the increased scope for actual travel; a reading public becoming aware through fiction and documentary of strange places and strange adventures. Africa, America, Australia, India offered the travel and romance writer new and colourful backgrounds, often strongly patriotic themes, and—for a while at least—new possibilities for plots. The wide range of magazines, *Windsor*, *Wide World*, *Atheneum*, *Strand*, *Illustrated London News*, Harpers publications and a great many others offered stories, part fact and part fiction, set in places remote but becoming accessible in imagination and in fact. Such magazines stood in odd contrast to the resolute nationalism and scorn of the outside world of a magazine like the *Bulletin*.

The novel Nisbet explored offered wide bounds, from the strangeness of place and situation in little known parts of the world to the exploration of the streets and buildings of the cities its readers knew—and yet could be shown not to know:

it moved from violent action to mystery, fantasy, allegory. Among its trappings were the clichés of false accusation, blackmail, love thwarted and lovers parted, a whole complex of mistaken identity—a fabric which time was to do little to alter. Where many romance writers contented themselves with the externals of the setting, Nisbet frequently looted the history, politics and current social problems of the places he visited, introducing controversial issues into a form of the novel which some readers and critics felt should be free of such concerns. His sense of realism inclined him away from allegory, and to a satirical view of fantasy. The deeper unresolved psychological and personal preoccupations that lay behind Haggard's most successful fiction were absent from Nisbet's novels. His work was more consciously and clearly created. He may have been uneasy with the requirements of the kind of novel he worked with, but he did not seem to have any real objection to its standard framework of plot, or situation. His asides, and the use he occasionally made his plots serve, indicate a sense of irony that recognised the position but was ready to exploit it. He occasionally gave the accepted formula a wry twist.

The first of his two novels drawing on Western Australian backgrounds, *A Bush Girl's Romance*,¹⁹ was published in 1894. Nisbet dedicated the book to Philip Mennell, the author of a book on Western Australia, *The Coming Colony—Practical Notes on Western Australia*,²⁰ published two years earlier, in 1892. In the dedication Nisbet refers to a journey shared with Mennell on the *Himalaya* when 'we discussed a good deal about the Coming Colony'. The preface, in the form of a letter to Mennell, acknowledges Nisbet's debt:

... not only for valuable information, the result of your own personal observation, but also for the book and notes etc. which you lent me on Western Australia, to help me with the data of my present romance...²¹

Nisbet's borrowing was not confined to Mennell. From *The Coming Colony* he appears to have taken the history of the colony—though there were obviously other sources open to him—the descriptive background of landscape, and to some extent the theme of the oppression of the aborigines. The working of the police force and the activity of the bushrangers, which figure largely in his plot, are likely to have come from his first experiences when living in Melbourne. He was not the only writer to transport the most colourful aspects of the bushranging period of the eastern colonies to Western Australia. He seems to have derived a generalised landscape from Mennell's description, but it indicates no real knowledge—his jarrah forest extends oddly northwards, there are vultures overhead, the inland plains are more often grey than red, and with this he combined a fabric of social and political history with little regard for chronological accuracy. He combines convicts, ticket of leave men, gold prospectors and bushrangers with a nice disregard for time and place. And they blend well enough for the plot. A lack of historical accuracy was not one of the major complaints made against Nisbet's novels.

Many romance novelists acknowledged sources, which no doubt gave a sense of authenticity to strange adventures, but may also have been useful in excusing even stranger inaccuracies. There was at times a public interest in the sources of some novels, notably, perhaps, in the derivations of Haggard's *She*, which caused considerable press speculation. Coming too close to reality had its problems, however. Simpson Newland, in the preface to *Paving the Way*, a romance of Australian pioneering life based on actual experience, warned that he had:

... endeavoured to wound as few susceptibilities and tread on as few toes as possible; the time has not yet arrived in the life of Australia when the historian or novelist can write with an untrammelled pen.²²



Frontispiece to Hume Nisbet, *A Bush Girl's Romance* (1894)

Nisbet frequently intended to wound some susceptibilities, and tread on numbers of toes. But he was made aware of the truth of Newland's comment.

In his preface to *A Bush Girl's Romance* Nisbet claims he has tried to give a faithful picture of Australia in its Western portion, but had not been 'all laudation of the people I like and admire so much'. He explains that he has attempted to point out some shortcomings, and gives a hint of his main target when he says he does this lightly, except in one instance:

... as a lover of the primitive races of mankind I must get out my revolver and shoot straight, and without any attempt at sentiment, at those remorseless wretches who would seek to enslave South Sea Islanders, or 'disperse' the original Lords of the Australian soil, the Aborigines.²³

The plot is a common one of mistaken identity, to which Australia with its distances and lack of communications gave full licence. Nisbet initiates a complex of assumed identities. John Danton has been convicted of a crime in England committed by another man so alike in appearance that Danton is mistaken for him and tried in his place. In Australia Danton is brutally treated and escapes, finding gold in the bush, but almost dying of thirst. He is rescued by a criminal and bushranger, Derrick Wild, who has killed another traveller, the Hon. Percy Shafton who was on his way to Turro-Side Station. Danton is at first deceived by Wild and persuaded to take on Shafton's identity, so compounding his problems.

At the Station Danton meets Helen Craven, daughter of the owner, and Wild is left free to assume another identity as Captain Wildrake, using the Station as a base for his robberies and blackmail. He has himself appointed a special police officer, recruits a gang of expirees and general villains as special police, and is able to play the roles of bushranger and police officer, the one committing crimes the other attempts to solve—to the confusion of the local squatters and the aborigines.

Once established, the plot is less complicated than it seems, providing suspense and interest in the development of events. It enables Nisbet to make some play on the differences between appearance and reality, on past and present identity, and on such points as how much difference there may be between bushranger and police in the treatment of the aborigines.

Nisbet does not explore some elements of this very far. He never takes his plot too seriously, as his many asides indicate. The whole story might have been the conventional adventure in which justice is done and love rewarded, and while it has this framework, Nisbet intruded a highly controversial theme based on what he had suggested in his preface as one of the shortcomings of this Western Australian society. His bushrangers are brutal and deadly, but they behave no worse than the police and squatters in their treatment of the aborigines—in his plot Nisbet makes police and bushrangers interchangeable. The squatters live in a squalor and brutality unknown to the aborigines they have brought down to their own level and forced into slavery.

The picture of the squatters focuses on two groups, the respectable homestead of Turro-Side, and another run by four brothers, Crocodile Station—Nisbet had a Victorian love of names. His descriptions of this place probably owe something to the Australian literary tradition of the time, though he remarks he has seen such places in Central Queensland. They were subject for satire for artists and journals from the *Melbourne Punch* to the *Bulletin*.

In the yard which divided the house from the booth lay all sorts of offal and rubbish, broken and empty bottles, preserved meat tins round which flies swarmed in countless myriads, boxes, with whatever was considered useless or advisable to pitch outside.

Potato-peelings, vegetables, used tea-leaves, ashes, all the débris of the living lay and rotted where they had been thrown out from the main door,

for that door opened directly upon the large front half of the building, which was used as dining and sitting-room, bar, store-room and office, and into this the hands lounged one by one as they had tumbled out of bed, and sitting down where they could, called for the one liquor that could be had—rum.

It was a sordid scene of hoggish and unredeemed squalor which only men on the lowest plane of human viciousness could have endured for an hour. A shanty thrown up with rough logs for walls, and trampled earth floor, all as innocent of any attempt at order or cleanliness as were the owners and guests. There were cases of groceries, bags of potatoes, and barrels of flour standing about with meat tins and other cannisters, dishes and pots on the shelves, also from nails hung sides of bacon, bags of onions, bridles and saddles, with the other sundries which could be hung up. In one corner was placed a hoghead of rum on a raised stand with spigot attached, and numerous tin pannikins for drinking vessels; beside this also stood the only article of furniture not home made, and this was a powerful iron safe from which the men who had anything to draw would be paid.²⁴

The brothers rob and exploit their station hands, and exploit the aborigines in every way possible. Nisbet describes them with more savagery than he turns on the bushrangers.

And yet when washed and spruced up they looked and talked not unlike gentlemen. Their bankers had good reason to respect them. And when in town they were received at respectable houses, and possibly might get gentle and good women to marry them when they could make up their minds to pack off, or knock on the head, those coloured lubra victims of theirs, for they would have no encumbrances in the shape of half-castes to reproach them, or make their future wives blush. They had all the greater prospect of this, as they were men well set-up, tall and handsome, with the advantages of having been liberally educated in their youths; they were dirty now, swollen and purple with indulgence, but they had keen, hard heads, and cold, calculating hearts, and a few weeks of careful training would make them once again presentable, with this recuperative climate to help them, and this they had always the strength of will to accomplish on the journey overland to Perth; so for this and the next few days they could safely indulge themselves, and be as vile Yahoos as they liked, such iron constitutions they possessed.²⁵

This dual identity elaborates the theme, but Nisbet is concerned to make the point that it is not only these people who ill-treat the aborigines. The respectable squatters, represented by Turro-Side, organise police protection to 'disperse' the aboriginal tribes. Wild, as the police officer, deceives and shoots down an entire tribe.

In this, Nisbet touched one of the most sensitive aspects of a bitter controversy Western Australia had not been able to lay at rest for at least ten years before the novel was published. The neglected station, the filthy living conditions, were familiar to readers and could be shrugged, or laughed, off as part of pioneering. The exploitation and destruction of the aborigines by men respected in the community was another matter. It was also a very much more complicated matter than Nisbet allowed, or probably realised. But his satire got home, the more so perhaps because it was unexpected in such a novel.

Four years before Nisbet returned to Australia on his literary tour, controversy over the position of settlers and aborigines in the newly developing areas of the Gascoyne, Upper Murchison, and Ashburton, was declared in the Western Australian Legislative Council to be the burning question of the hour. In the House, in the press and community, the debate provoked bitterness and extreme statements. The debate in the Council and the press concerned two aspects of an issue with wide implications: the Government was charged with neglect of the settlers in the newly opened areas, with failing to supply proper police protection for



Illustration from Hume Nisbet, *Reminiscences of Australian Early Life* (1893)

settlers and their stock from increasingly aggressive northern aborigines; it was claimed the Government refused to apprehend known native murderers of white men and other aborigines, and that the settlers would have to take the law into their own hands. The other aspect lay in the charges that the settlers had brought the problem of stealing and aggression on themselves by their treatment of the aborigines.

During the 1882 debate a key resolution was that the law be applied equally to settler and aborigine. While this seemed clearcut in essence, and a private member's Bill was passed through the House, the Governor, Sir William Robinson, vetoed the Bill. The following year the Government attempted an Act to amend the law and the position of magistrates and justices in passing sentences on aborigines. Behind these attempts to achieve some legal solution, the problem continued to arouse bitterness and a range of accusations, predictable or bizarre. Newspapers from the eastern colonies published correspondence, often derogatory of the settlers, charging them with brutality, letters resented in Western Australia as outside comment, always a touchy matter, and for being strongly partisan. Cynics suggested that the eastern colonies had decimated their own aborigines and could now afford to be moral about the problem elsewhere. The whole issue came back into prominence with the strong charges of brutality and corruption of the Rev. Gribble, first Anglican missionary to the Gascoyne. Gribble's savage comments were published in 1886,²⁶ turning the white settlers of the area against him, and alarming his own church, not so much on the grounds of whether his claims were exaggerated or untrue, but that he had so loudly uttered them. Mennell was certainly aware of the controversy and spoke to some of the participants, though in his book he treated the subject with discretion.

Nisbet had access to this material, and though he was hurried during his 1886 tour he was likely to have been aware of the press controversy. He also met and talked with James Dawson, who had observed and written some of the last tribes of aborigines in the Western District of Victoria.²⁷ Nisbet was probably indebted to him for much of his information about the aborigines, their tribal patterns and culture. He had as well illustrated a book attributed to John Phillips—*Reminiscences of Australian Early Life*,²⁸ which contained accounts of the early aboriginal tribes of Victoria. Four of Nisbet's illustrations were of the aborigines.

Nisbet may have amalgamated time and place, in the sense of historical accuracy, and disregarded the complexities of the contemporary debate, but the result was a criticism of Western Australia which had enough force to offend; this despite the fact that the book had an obvious lightness of touch, a humour part satirical, part fantasy, centering on the bushranger Derrick Wild. Even here the satire seemed to have too many barbs; Nisbet plainly preferring his bushranger to the more respected members of society:

He was a bushranger with aesthetic principles, that was all; a Roman of the latter days of the Republic, or a Capitalist or Statesman of the nineteenth century. Without those redeeming principles, he might have been a common low-bred murderer; yet let us honour him, we who bow down daily with veneration to his larger-minded fellow-craftsmen of the pen or the tongue, in Westminster or the Stock Exchange.²⁹

Wild's great gift is his ability as a cook. He converts his bushrangers to experts in fine food, bush style. They will no longer tolerate the traditional rough tucker of the bush—and the bush novel. Wild was 'an epicure and monomaniac on cooking'. His masterpiece comes from his desire to cook a final superb meal for the tribe of aborigines he intends to destroy. It will be a redemption for them, for to him the distinction between civilised and savage was the appreciation of fine food. Wild prepares his great meal:

Let me see—first course, grubs raw, without condiments; second course, grubs done like whitebait with cayenne, salt, lemon juice, and roasted fern root served with them. Snakes and lizards to follow, with stewed muurang. Opossum and kangaroo after this, with munyuup and weakk mashed together and a little made gravy. Cockatoos, parroquets and bush-turkey served with mushrooms, also a salad composed of cooper-reed. Grubs mixed with roasted cheese to follow, and truffle mushroom. Honey fritters and gum cake to finish up with. I can do no better without spoiling the native character of my feast, which I don't wish to do."

He pondered yet a little while as the sun went down and the young men built up the fires. Worrogonga and the fighting men had withdrawn some distance away, and were earnestly discussing affairs, but now this gifted traitor was deaf to their voices, deaf to everything beyond the duty before him as he planned it carefully out.

"I must have soup. Yes, I'll make snake soup, and tortoise eggs, roasted hard and dropped within it. For drink, let me see, with the grubs and fish, chablis; I have three bottles of that, which will just go round the crowd; it isn't native, but that cannot be helped. They'll make chablis some day in the colonies. For the solids a small glass of sherry each, and for the grubs and cheese port, with a glass of brandy to finish off with, and afterwards a good cigar each, before I begin my song. I must halve the cigars though, for they are too big for the time I have to give them, yes, half a good cigar each and then—heaven."³⁰

As the replete aborigines, having finished their cigars, lie about their dying camp fires, Wild's men attack.

In the end, Wild, captured and convicted, is allowed to cook his own last meal. In a scene that is a satire on the gloom and piety of all such conventional depictions, he prepares for his death, and leaves behind, to Helen Craven, his greatest gift, a small book that contains all his skill as a master cook.

The *Bulletin* was scornful of the novel, and of overseas readers:

Hume Nisbet's new book *A Bush Girl's Romance* is called by the English press 'the best story of Australian bushranging since *Robbery Under Arms*'. The leader of a murderous band of miscreants, to whom the Kellys were mere apologies, is, in the story, appointed an inspector of police, and the second, third and fourth murderers are constables, who, alternately cut travellers' throats and yell out 'Silence in th' Coort!' For a howling parody of Australian life the *Bush Girl's Romance* takes the palm. It is, therefore, likely to be a huge success—in England.³¹

If the English press took the novel entirely seriously, was the *Bulletin* any more perceptive? To the degree of being scornful of the events as an accurate depiction of Australian life, perhaps it was, but it, too, surely failed to see that in some respects the novel *was* a parody. That in other respects it was savagely critical of Australian—or West Australian—failings should have been evident to the *Bulletin* at least.

*The Swampers*³² took its title from the term given to the gold seekers who flooded into West Australia during the gold rush years. Nisbet claimed it to be a romance of the Westralian Goldfields, but it is as much concerned with Sydney.

A complicated pattern of changing locations and groupings of characters, in a series of short chapters, suggest something of the pace, the restlessness and impermanence of the gold rush years, the fragmentary and temporary relationships, which are here largely those of the criminal element of that shifting population.

The narrative opens in Sydney in 1896 in the dingy premises of Professor Mortikali—'Psychometrist, Pneumatologist, Futurist and Magneto-Electric Healer'. In his Egyptian-Mystic Hall and Health Sanatorium he was one of those who preyed on the widespread interest in 'Phrenology and Physiognomy, Fortune-

telling by Cards, Palmistry or Astrology, with the art of healing all diseases by Hypnotic-treatment’.

Introducing him, Nisbet intrudes the element which dominates the novel, the denigration of all things to do with Sydney. Mortikali managed to exist well enough

in progressive New South Wales, where convict laws still hold sway and men are hanged for attempted murder, while judges dictate to jurymen, as the celebrated Jeffreys used to do, where even the judges themselves consult the witches; fortune-telling and witchcraft thrive wonderfully . . .³³

The professor is visited by one of his ex-associates, a criminal just out of prison, Jack Milton, who has plans to remove him to new premises in George Street. Milton is a professional, with the assistance of his lawyer and cousin, Arthur Chester, he sets the Professor up in a fine establishment where he is soon parodied by the wealthy and socially elite of Sydney. From these premises Milton with some hired aid plans to tunnel into a bank and large pawnshop—a plot which provided an extraordinarily durable formula, reproduced with little variation for the next hundred years in novel and film, one used earlier by Conan Doyle who apparently took it from an actual case.

It is used here, however, only as an opening. While they carry out the plan Milton returns to his wife, Rosa, who in his absence has found a lover in Chester. The robbery is successful, the proceeds left with Chester, and the only flaw has been in the unintentional killing of a clerk who lived on the bank’s premises.

Rosa did not expect or want Milton’s return. She plans with Chester to betray him. Milton escapes, determined to exact his own revenge. He confronts Chester and Rosa and decides to leave the colony by travelling overland to Kalgoorlie with their enforced help. There he may become anonymous in the crowded gold-fields.

Milton makes the journey, helped by a tribe of aborigines who are glad to disperse the police and trackers closing in on him. The aborigines are happy to be revenged on those they say have tried to massacre them in the past. Travelling with them Milton passes through a rich valley of gold.

The rest of his gang charter a ship after the robbery and sail for the West, putting in at a cove in the Bight, where they retain the ship for a possible escape, while a party moves inland towards Kalgoorlie.

Rosa, tired of Chester, persuades him to accompany her to the new goldfields, in search of easy money, but in reality, as Chester knows, to find Milton. Rosa is no innocent heroine, or decent squatter’s daughter, she is more vicious than the men she associates with, willing to destroy both Milton and Chester.

The threads of the narrative are drawn together in Kalgoorlie, which Nisbet never attempts to describe in any detail. Milton and the party from the boat meet. He shows them the valley with the old gold workings, with the curious inscription on a wall

ἔ·γ·χ·ε·χ·λ·ε·ι·ο·μ·έ·υ·ο·ι³⁴

which hides a cave filled with gold. He and the men take out licenses and become rich. They are soon syndicate and mining promoters, associates of the wealthy and powerful. Chester is forced to return to Sydney when his house is destroyed by fire and the stolen property found. He escapes by leaving the country. Milton meets the woman who has been a figure of his past who introduced him to crime. She has become Rosa’s servant, avoiding involvement in crime for some years and helped by a detective in Perth. She now has Milton’s child. When Milton is

again betrayed the detective believes she deserves a chance, warns her and she escapes with Milton. They leave the country for a place where

... a little colony are living comfortably and honestly, respected by all who supply them with the comforts of life since they can meet their responsibilities ... and if mosquitoes predominate, and quinine is required as a tonic, at least the bugbear of civilization, the detectives, have no chance of extradition.³⁵

They have presumably reached Cosme, part of Lane's planned utopia, of which Nisbet had some knowledge.

Though involved, and difficult to summarise, the plot is less imposed than that of *A Bush Girl's Romance*. The varied characters that find their way across a continent do largely engineer their own mishaps and triumphs. The direct speech, often colloquial, frees the narrative from the heaviness of explanation, and the novel has a freshness, a freedom from moralising, though it might be said the accent on the failings of Sydney provides a substitute—but at least it is an astringent substitute.

Nisbet's interest showed as strongly with the dispossessed, the outcasts, those who had decided to meet this society of new affluence and position on its own terms, as criminals. He is relatively free of the moralising such a theme usually imposed, and of the sheer sentimentality and selfconsciousness of some of the Australian writers who found a topic in the dispossessed. Nisbet is no crusader for anything in this novel, which may have puzzled his readers. Both novels do reveal his own strong sense of a variety of social inequalities, made as often through comment as through the fabric of the novels, but in *The Swampers* his criminals make their own way, they have their own values, which occasionally become virtues, they have no mission to reform a society where success is wealth and position. They will join it if they can. Nisbet at the end of the book remarks ironically 'this is an extremely up-to-date romance'. In this novel Nisbet comes closer to his claim to being a realist.

An interest in crime and in criminal figures became a feature of the popular fiction of these last two decades of the nineteenth century, reflecting the darker side of the urban conglomerations of England and Scotland—the filth of the streets and buildings of parts of Edinburgh and London were matched by the poverty, corruption and violence of their populations, and as far as corruption went of the more elevated circles of society. The parallel between this and the decay of some late twentieth century cities is clear enough, as is the interest in the present crime novel and film. The era saw the rise of the fictional 'gentleman' criminal, Raffles—taken from Conan Doyle by his brother-in-law E. W. Hornung, like Nisbet a visitor to Australia and the author of a number of Australian novels—Dr Nikola, Professor Moriarty, and of the 'great' detective, Sherlock Holmes becoming the archetype. The best of the creators of these figures, Conan Doyle in crime fiction and Haggard in the romance adventure, merged something of themselves into their fictional characters and the obsessions and drives of their plots. But though Nisbet moved widely in the territory of both he seemed to stand clear of his characters and plots, despite the frequent use of personal experience and factual background. Partly as a result of this, his novels were never able to achieve that extraordinary involvement of the reader so much a feature of the Sherlock Holmes novels and of Haggard's best stories.

The dislike, almost hatred, of all things concerning New South Wales becomes an imposed theme in *The Swampers*. Written close to the events it describes, the novel needed no historical research. Nisbet's actual knowledge or concern for the Western Australian goldfields is minimal, and for the narrative unimportant. He relies on Giles' account of 1875 of his crossing of Australia for Milton's attempt,

and since Giles and Forrest had crossed the country there was quite a widespread belief that the journey was a possibility for lesser men and lesser parties. There was even a serious suggestion of a stock route from the north of Western Australia overland to Adelaide in the eighties. Ten years earlier the idea that anyone would want to use any kind of overland communication had been ridiculed in the Legislative Council.

The strong influence of Grey—perhaps because of the quality of his writing—lay close to the many writers concerned with the remote parts of the continent. His Kimberley valleys and caves appeared in the strangest geological surroundings, and his curious aboriginal paintings caught the imagination of public and novelists with something of the force of later visitants in flying saucers. Nisbet made use of the valley of hidden water, the place of peace remote from an outside world, and which offered security to those at odds with that outer world, a concept exploited with variations by writers ranging from Boldrewood to Conan Doyle. Nisbet seems to have used in his odd Greek inscription at the entrance to the cave of hidden gold a variant of the apparent inscription that appeared on the headdress of one of Grey's figures—disputed as an actual inscription by later writers.³⁶ If Grey's depiction suggested the lettering to Nisbet, he used it satirically, against the background of a general interest in hieroglyphics and secret codes in the fiction of his contemporaries. The naming of Professor Mortikali, while apt in its satirical reference, seems to have another aspect. The Professor's whole sham of a variety of healing powers and methods was no stranger than could be found, as Nisbet points out, in the advertisements of newspapers glad of such lavish advertisers. They were prominent in the pages of the *Bulletin*. The preface to a 'psychical romance' of 1902, *The Throne of Eden*, which had as its aim to 'eloquently plead the cause of what may be righteously designated 'Psycho-Therapeutics' claimed 'Australia is a veritable hot-bed of Spiritualism and Occultism'. A serious book, written mainly in Sydney, *The Throne of Eden* scorned the more popular elements of the romance, and while its audience was obviously not limited to Australia, had gone to a second edition by the next year.³⁷

Mortikali's corrupt practice of spiritualism, fortune telling, and healing by a variety of psycho-therapeutic and other dubious methods, mocked what was in fact a very large spiritualist movement, whose more colourful exponents visited Australia on occasion, and Nisbet's depiction of the Professor is a biting comment, cruel in its implications for those who were believers. One of those eminent in the spiritualist movement was Conan Doyle. It is hardly likely to be coincidence that Nisbet named the Professor as he did, and that the criminals tunneled from the Professor's premises into a pawnshop and bank. In a story, *The Read-headed League*, Conan Doyle has a pawnbroker enticed from his shop while thieves tunnel from the pawnshop cellar to a bank vault. Nisbet never was much impressed by his fellow practitioners of prose fiction, at least not by those in his own line of country, and may have felt the phenomenal success of one or two was undeserved.

His distaste for Sydney, while so strong as to be personal, yet did reflect the attitude evident in the eighteen-eighties and nineties, of a distinction between Melbourne and Sydney. Sydney had its scandals and its share of notorious events and characters that ranged from the pushes to the politicians, justices, and newspaper editors of the period. It had a violence and colour that found more expression in the press than in fiction. It was not hard to see Sydney as corrupt, self seeking, money and position oriented, without culture or decency in private or public life. Nisbet's distaste is towards Sydney; Melbourne is seen not necessarily as an antithesis, but at least as a contrast—an attitude which has proved to be remarkably durable. Nisbet attacked public figures, under a series of pseudonyms, and public attitudes. His particular dislike of the *Guillotine*, a leading Sydney

newspaper, and its editor, Puffadder, stemmed from his dislike of the kind of criticism his work had received in the colonial press, and from his disputes with editors. To papers like the *Bulletin* he remained as insultingly unaware of the colonial-born literature as he was scornful of the colonial-born population of Sydney. The *Bulletin*, while it gave a reluctant nod to the bigger names of overseas literature held its own scorn of lesser writers. It had also a virulent hate of the Western Australian goldfields during the nineties, evident in its paragraphs on the mines and gold discoveries in the Wild Cat Column—it even offered Perth the distinction of being labelled on one occasion that ‘unsavoury capital’.

Nisbet may have been unwise enough to have attempted to catch the fringe of the long-running debate on the future Australian which had engaged such writers as Clarke, with visitors of the stature of Trollope and Froude adding opinions; unwise, because while these writers attempted some kind of reasoned discussion, Nisbet seems to have seized fragments of their ideas and thrown them, out of context, into his general commentary on the defects of Sydney, and always with a savagery that suggests a personal involvement too strong for judgement. Forky Ben, a minor character in one of the goldfields anecdotes, takes up a number of these fragments:

Forky was great on this point as to the decadence of the colonials. “I’ve watched ‘em,” he would say, striking his pannikin on the log, “I’ve watched them a-growing up, and gradually losing all principle and humanity; the first lot as comes out for their country’s good, may be a bit vicious at times, but they have hearts in them and stick to a friend, the second breed ain’t so dusty, still they don’t care much for their friends, nor do they think a man’s word is worth considering, but the good Lord help us from the third generation; they’ll sit on a fence all the blessed day planning out a mean robbery on a benefactor: they don’t know what truth means, and as for faith or trust, they are sounds to laugh at with the young bred Australian; he knows how to bet on a horse or a cricket or a football match. Oh, yes. The youngest baby is up to that as soon as he can toddle, but as for work, or sticking to a pal, they couldn’t see it and don’t know what it means, they don’t believe in a God, they have no country to believe in, and no traditions to uphold. They only credit the one who can get the better of them. All legs, conceit and bounce, without belly or brains, they are like stag-hounds, inveterate and sneaking biters.”³⁸

The characters are representative of this section of the community, though Nisbet at times seems to suggest there is in fact no other. Milton is slightly different, having no convict ancestry:

Arthur Chester, like Rosa, belonged to the fourth generation of cornstalks—those weeds who have grown up with white corpuscles in their blood, instead of red; lustful, yet lacking stamina; malignant, and sceptical of all that tends to raise humanity; devoted to pleasure, and regardless of the responsibilities of morality. Intrigue and wickedness were to them the necessities of existence. Jibing mockery and cold-blooded jests at all which the older generations revered were the ordinary subjects of their conversation. Such papers as the *Guillotine* served them as the springs from which they drew their wit; indecent and viperish, without a spark of true humour or kindly instinct.

They were both on a slightly more elevated stratum than the hyena Larrikin, but their appetites and instincts were no better.³⁹

Colonial readers were accustomed to the opinions of outsiders, or travellers. ‘Receding tourists, like receding tides, leave their jetsam upon our shores’, the *Bulletin* remarked. The paper was prepared to consider their comments, and to continue the debate upon the future—and present—Australian. Nisbet was no more savage in his comments than Max O’Rell,⁴⁰ a receding tourist, discussing the Australian working man, and far less so than Nat Gould⁴¹ in his description

of the Sydney larrikin, the loafer, and what Gould called 'the dark side of Sydney life'.

Nisbet may certainly have known O'Rell's book, which was widely read, and might have seen Gould's *Town and Bush* before he concluded *The Swampers*. Yet however much he was influenced by such sources he did not share all their assumptions. He had no share in Gould's bitter contempt of the Chinese, a contempt shared by the *Bulletin*. In *The Swampers* he offers a brief satirical scene of colonial justice for the Chinese in the Sydney courts which the *Bulletin* would surely have approved had it been directed at some other target. He was markedly more sympathetic to and understanding of the aborigines than most visitors and many local writers. His scene, melodramatic though it is, of the squatter flogging an aboriginal girl in *A Bush Girl's Romance* expressed a disgust even stronger than that the *Bulletin* liked to offer on such actual reported incidents. But for the *Bulletin*, and to a lesser degree for other Australian papers and critics, Nisbet was not 'colonial born', he did not adhere to a predictable nationalistic line in his critical targets and attitudes, any more than his novels followed the predictable patterns of the romance adventure.

It is not surprising if Nisbet's Sydney readers did not see *The Swampers* as a romance of the Westralian goldfields. In this novel, and in *A Bush Girl's Romance*, Nisbet did offer a view of colonial life, accurate enough or vituperative enough, to be disturbing to many colonials. And in a number of novels he was not deterred from expressing his views, or attempting to merge a social criticism with the demands of his romance form, reaching a wide audience, and through it all remaining sublimely unaware of the burning debate of a national Australian literature, by Australians, and for Australians. For some of the more ardent nationalists and nationalistic newspapers that was too much.

NOTES

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DOROTHY HEWETT

The Garden and the City*

There have been two places central to my imagination . . . the state of Western Australia and the city of Sydney. My life has zigzagged between these two landscapes, both having a kind of almost Utopian physical beauty, but once take the skin off either society and the corruption underneath is palpable.

In the case of Western Australia the corruption is partly hidden, the worm in the bud is secretive, and mainly bears only a silent witness. In the case of Sydney the corruption, the materialism, is vulgar, articulate, unashamed. I find the Sydney brand easier to bear, easier to live with, possibly because the protagonist is so bare faced, but also possibly because it doesn't carry for me quite the same burden of the past, that burden of the first confrontation which every serious artist must feel with the place of their birth, adolescence and early adulthood.

The country that I once knew in Western Australia was mostly innocent, but it was an innocence, naïve, self congratulatory and deeply conservative, a perfect field for corruption. It had a dream of itself as a kind of eternal, unpolluted Utopia, a world of mild eyed, slightly melancholy lotus eaters staring seaward towards the Indian Ocean.

Every now and again this society of lotus eaters found the crock of precious metals at the rainbow's end in its desert places, and this was both its wealth and its downfall. In those periods it grew rich and greedy, and eventually a spurious sophistication began to overlie its innocence.

But at heart that curious emotional emptiness and lostness, compounded of distance, insecurity, and the exile's anger at his condition, gnawed away and would never be stilled. How does the artist confront or come to terms with a vacuity, whether "a steak fed vacuity" as Tyrone Guthrie once called it, or a physical space of distances and mirages that slide away from the eyes and the pen, refusing to be pinned down, but always exercising this curious, ungraspable fascination? Even the quality of the light is different in Western Australia, tending to drain the atmosphere of all colour.

I think there are at least two ways to confront such a place . . . to make articulate the inarticulate by a deliberately understated, sparse style wrested out of silence, like Peter Cowan, or to write oneself larger than life, gothic and romantic, across the empty page, a quality shared by Randolph Stow and myself.

My childhood was spent in the Great Southern amongst the salty tributaries of the Avon River . . . that was my "fair seedtime", and out of that pastoral

* This is an adaptation of a talk given at the University of Western Australia in September 1982.

childhood have come many poems, a scattering of short stories, and five plays . . . *Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly, The Chapel Perilous, The Golden Oldies, The Man from Mukinupin, Golden Valley, and The Fields of Heaven*. It stands in for me as the lyrical, lost Eden of childhood, in the garden of innocence.

The garden is, of course, eternally paradoxical. How make a garden out of stinkwort, salt lake and scrub? But the garden is a garden of the spirit, and bursts into a wild and unpredictable flowering, like the West Australian spring.

Like all gardens it had a snake at the heart . . . the snake of change, sex, adulthood, the journey outwards into the corrupt world.

In her secret garden
under the hump of the hill
she lives her magic life
with Ida Rentoul Outhwaite's
Elves and Fairies
sheep carcasses in calico
blood-spotted shroud the verandahs
where the timber blurs
Grimm's giant flexes his whirlwind biceps,
dry paddocks darken into green
the flag above the creekbed island
bleaches yellow.

But into this garden comes Nim, the lover, the spoiler, the artist:

. . . . a shadow on the shivery grass
hanging between the sun and the round hill
a falcon on his wrist a white owl on his shoulder
she sees his doomed face waver at the bottom
of the well
the sky darkens with locusts
the dry scratch of wings
and the jaws working
hand in hand they fly
Alice and Nim, the falcon and the white owl
from the blackened garden.

The Nim Poems
from *Alice in Wormland*.

Leaving that wheat and sheep farm, fourteen miles from Wickepin, at the age of twelve, has become for me a symbol of exile; the impossible struggle to get back to the peace and harmony of the psychic garden.

As I walk across the campus at the University of Western Australia I have many daunting recollections. It is full of ghosts. The ghost of myself, a seventeen year old student in 1941, carrying two small, red volumes of D. H. Lawrence's poems, and, a little later, two volumes of Marx's *Das Kapital*, which, to this day I have never read.

This ghost wrote a bad novel called *Daylight* in which her friends and contemporaries, disguised in gothic veils, cavorted in a facsimile of that small wartime city on the banks of the Swan.

She also wrote a one-actor, *Time Flits Away Lady*, staged on a make-shift trestle in the University Refectory, which clumsily concerned itself with questions of time, a theme explored later in play after play.

Under the melodramatic pseudonym, Jael Paris, she won a *Meanjin* Poetry Prize with *Dream of Old Love*, an imagist poem full of gilded decadence. She

was entranced with the University, a friendly Spanish mission-style campus with grazing sheep, green swards and a wooden stile. In the lecture rooms were at least copies of great paintings, and there was a library where she developed a passion for Edith Sitwell and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, read Christina Stead's *Seven Poor Men of Sydney*, and Kenneth Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It*. This was a revelation. It was possible then to write poetic prose in Australia.

The Psychology Department taught Freud, Jung and Adler, and when Alec King, lecturing on Wordsworth, told the class to take off their shoes and walk barefoot in order to experience the quickening sense of the natural world, she was the only one who did it.

Across the Nullarbor, in Adelaide, an *enfant terrible*, called Max Harris, had started a modernist literary magazine called *Angry Penguins*, and for the first time she felt that perhaps Australia was linked to the rest of the cultured world. When he discovered a tragic, dead, young poet called Ern Malley, the subsequent literary scandal put the cause of Australia modernism back decades. She was both puzzled and enraged. Did this mean that the rest of Australia was as philistine as the west?

Then in 1945 Judith Wright's *The Moving Image* was published, and she found herself relating to a feminine poetic sensibility that concerned itself with Australia.

I started, with others, the University Dramatic Society, edited a Red *Black Swan*, dreamed of being an actress/writer, lost my unwanted virginity under the pines on the Football Oval, but, in the end, failed scholastically, passing nothing much but Psychology and Eng.Lit. with a distinction.

Yet, eventually, out of that period came many poems and two plays: *The Chapel Perilous* and *Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly*.

The Chapel Perilous took as its central symbol an amalgam of Perth College chapel and the school hall at Perth Girls', with its honour roll of Famous Women in History, in gold leaf.

Bon-Bons and Roses was set in a movie theatre, closely resembling the art deco Regal in Subiaco, once owned by my grandfather, where I cut my teeth and my imagination on the blockbuster movies of the period.

After trying to commit suicide I married, joined the Communist Party, worked on the Communist newspaper, *The Workers' Star* (its headquarters anachronistically in the mock-Tudor London Court), had a child, stopped writing, and left for Sydney with a Communist boilermaker.

On the campus today I also met another older, slightly wiser ghost, back from Sydney in 1959, with three small sons, enrolled as a mature age student to finish her degree.

She studies a special course on Matthew Arnold with Ray Forsyth, and *Culture and Anarchy* compels her to confront some basic problems of the artist and politics. In a public debate with Julius Kovesi of the Philosophy Department, he calls her a disciple of John Stuart Mill.

Sinyavsky and Daniel, the dissident Russian novelists, are imprisoned in a labour camp, the Russian tanks roll through the streets of Prague. In the end she can only say: "*I am political to my marrow, but belong to no camp, because our century has debased them all.*"

When I finally came to work in the English Department for nine years as a tutor, my study looked down on the newly constructed *New Fortune* theatre, a close enough replica of the Elizabethan open stage. That open space, its challenges and its epic proportions, had a profound effect on my development as a dramatist. I had begun to write plays again. The central figure was usually a rebellious girl, hag-ridden by the provincial society she grew up in, destroyed by her concept of herself as a failed artist and dreamer.

"I want to be a second Edith Sitwell. I'll be greater than Sarah Bernhardt", boasts the adolescent Sally Banner in *The Chapel Perilous*.

And Dolly Garden, the lost girl in the faded theatre foyer, whispers in Chekhovian cadences in *Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly*: "It was such fun to be young . . . and such misery. I discovered myself, a charming self. Nobody else would ever take time to discover me. Me! Life was happy and serious, gay and sad, comprehensible and mysterious. I had all that love and tenderness to give, all of it . . . unceasingly . . . but nobody wanted to take it. Why was it so hard to give away?"

The Chapel Perilous was a hit at the New Fortune, and was published in a third edition by Currency Press in 1981. *Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly* bombed at the Perth Playhouse, where audiences, apparently expecting a nostalgic and innocuous musical, wrote angry letters to the theatre and the local press, stalking down the aisles, wrapped tight in their prejudices. I coined a new phrase to describe my native state, "Toenail Land".

Married again, with two young daughters, and a three year grant from the Literature Board of the Australia Council, I left for Sydney, where I have lived with my family for the past nine years.

That last sojourn in Perth had resulted in a book of poems, *Windmill Country*, and five plays. Now for the first time in my life I could begin to call myself a professional writer.

Two more books of poems followed, and ten more plays, but I continued to have strange problems with the place of my birth. *The Chapel Perilous* and *The Tatty Hollow Story* were banned in Western Australia, but nowhere else in the world and my second book of poems, *Rapunzel in Suburbia* was not permitted any distribution in Australia. This sense of rejection from one's own roots, was a painful experience. In the end I think it becomes synonymous with a certain rootlessness, a metaphor for the writer as outsider, and critic of that society. But if the writer refuses to bear witness, who will? The artistic truth always burns, but it won't be denied. There is a certain acceptance in me now, with a lingering dash of bitterness. After all, I have spent my whole life among the bitter Australians who learned it from lags and screws and Irish rebels, all the flotsam of an Empire. Their bitterness has its reflection in me, but I am still grateful for having lived in this place, and for having walked this campus. I am grateful for the Garden, for the freedom to grow at one's own pace with no pressure to be "fashionable", for the uncaring/caring of one's fellows. I am grateful for the social "smallness" of Western Australia, which made it possible to grasp it, and see it as a metaphor for a whole country. The whole of Australia can be described as a corruptly innocent land, "last sea thing dredged by sailor Time from Space".

I am not grateful for the loneliness I endured here, for the alienation, the contempt, the mediocrity, and the narrow, right-wing provincialism, that always hides a brutality at its heart.

But then the role of the woman writer is always doubly subversive in a predominantly male ethos. She *thinks* subversively by nature and experience, and she writes from that other country of spirit and physicality, which still remains, for us, largely uncharted.

Western Australia gave me a country to write about and to begin from, a landscape and a society that will forever be central to my imagination. It gave this earth, for the first time, for me, "a habitation and a name".

The Man From Mukinupin, commissioned for the 150th Anniversary of Western Australia in 1979, was my attempt to come to terms with this conflicting love/hate relationship with my native place. The little country town on the edge of the creek bed, with the plovers rising into that limitless sky, stands in for Western Australia, its benevolence and its racism, its dreams and its nightmares.

The light and the dark side of town are reconciled in the imagination in the figures of the two pairs of lovers: one off to fame and fortune with J. C. Williamson's, the other off to find a dubious Paradise on the other side of the saltlakes.

"Hewett arrives, bearing olive Branch", said a headline in *The West Australian*, but again there were ructions behind the scenes. In an interview with Peter Ward in *The Australian*, Sir Charles Court complained about the commission. A dossier on my life, art and politics was delivered to the Playhouse. But the play was a success and went on to be performed all over Australia, breaking box office records at the Sydney Opera House, which merely goes to prove that a regional play set in Western Australia has apparently something universal to say to other Australians.

Last year I wrote a children's play, *Golden Valley*, which was my song of thanksgiving for the pastoral magic and innocence of that childhood in the wheat-belt.

Early in 1982 another play, *The Fields of Heaven*, was commissioned by the Perth Playhouse for the Festival of Perth. It was a darker, more tragic play, which had a mixed reception.

I wanted in this play to create those "figures in a landscape", that echo from the old Border Ballads that Randolph Stow speaks about in an early article on his work published in *Westerly*.^{*} I wanted to set a passionate love story in the West Australian countryside, as destructive and ambivalent as the love story of Cathy and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, and to end it with a hard-won acceptance by the heroine, Louie Barrow, home from the world to her spiritual place, the family property at Marvell Locke.

Is this landscape then my luminous spirit place, and, if so, where does the city of Sydney fit into my cosmology? Sydney was the place I went to in order to grow up in the world. Large enough, cosmopolitan enough, even in 1949, it was in some ways the City of Dreadful Night and the City of Marvellous Experience.

I arrived during the Coal Strike, finally got a job in the Alexandria Spinning Mills, squatted in a run-down house in Redfern, and experienced what it was like to become a member of the Australian working class. I was blessedly anonymous, and out of that nine years came many poems, a novel *Bobbin Up*, and a play *This Old Man Comes Rolling Home*, which celebrates the Redfern battlers. I live a life, which on the surface, seemed totally inartistic, but it was my apprenticeship to a larger, tougher, and in the end, more humanitarian world view. That this should have occurred in the rackets, industrial, often ugly environment of Sydney is one of the paradoxes of human development.

Sydney was the city I had always dreamed about. Just as other young people dream now about London or New York, I dreamed of the liberation and the fulfilment of Sydney, and, in a peculiar way, I was not disappointed.

"We had this fabulous year," says Johnny Apple in *The Tatty Hollow Story*, "There was a map of the world in blue mould on the wall. Every Sunday we went to Luna Park and rode in the Tunnel of Love till Tatty had a baby."

In order to come to terms with the world, the writer creates constructs, which, in the end, may have little or nothing to do with an actual place.

Sydney was my construct of *the city* with the harbour swinging at the end of narrow streets teeming with humanity; a fabulous city of politics, and demmos, and poverty and ugliness and beauty. Eventually I began to write again, joining a left-wing writers' group, the Sydney Realist Writers, under the tutelage of Frank Hardy. I wrote my first novel during the coldest winter on record, warming my hands at the gas flame, because we had no money to buy coal.

^{*} Randolph Stow, 'Raw Material', *Westerly* No. 2, 1961, pp. 3-5.

When I returned to Sydney in 1975 the eastern suburbs had changed. The sleazy bed-sits of Paddo were now trendy, upwardly mobile terraces, and I was a professional writer storming the citadels of culture, "the little frog in a big puddle".

This Sydney of new literary magazines, poetry-readings, theatres and passionate young poets, had nothing whatever to do with my first Sydney. Only occasionally, I would get glimpses of that former city out of train windows, or among the derros in a Darlinghurst park.

There were exciting things taking place in the literary and theatre worlds of the big capitals. Australia was coming of age. The modernist movement was flourishing. There were alternative publishing venues, writers were actually being *paid* to write.

In the theatres Australian audiences were queuing to see Australian plays written by new young playwrights. Sydney embraced it all with her usual sardonic, rambustious energy.

I arrived towards the tail-end of this nationalistic euphoria, but there was still enough charisma around to generate a lot of excitement. It was as if I found myself living in the world I'd dreamed about, and yearned for, when I was seventeen. All those empty lodgings, walking the campus as a teenager, were about to be satisfied. Dangerous stuff, and, in the nature of things, its glowing promises could never be fulfilled. But I was still enough of a Gatsby to be suborned.

Suborned and rewarded, because the last nine years have been a workshop of experience and learning. Sifting through what was useful, what needed to be retained and what rejected, I found another lease of artistic life. There was an energy to be breathed in at the pores from this most energetic, hard-headed, crackling city, alive with a kind of ozone in the air, that bounces off the high rise and the harbour.

From Sydney and the long nights of talk, and coffee and smokes and booze, I began to forge a new poetic style, crisper, harder-edged, modernist, to be the scaffold for a Romantic vision and imagination. From this came *Rapunzel in Suburbia* and *Greenhouse*, two collections of poetry, and ten plays.

Working in the professional theatre, in that vast co-op of skills, often travelling from state to state, I have learnt to recognize and respect expertise, and to learn from it. It's a world that dies in a final night, only to rise again like a phoenix for a new season, and so, in a sense, one is always being reborn into it, with new hopes and new options.

And yet the result must be a sense of impermanence, homelessness, because one is seldom *at home* anywhere. To be a wanderer, a perpetual exile from some ideal country of the spirit, is perhaps the inevitable fate of the artist, and, in particular, the Australian artist, who still lives in a society inhospitable to visionaries.

The child shut out of the garden makes his or her own way to the city of experience with options open.

Tatty was a goer
in a feather boa
starkers coming down the stairs
who could forget her
who could let her go
showing off her wares
on the marble stairs
in the All Night Show.

(strip song from *The Tatty Hollow Story*)

"I like parading on smooth asphalt" wrote Vladimir Mayakovsky in *The Fop's Tunic*.

VERONICA BRADY

Place, Taste and the Making of a Tradition: Western Australian Writing Today

Western Australia is a geographic entity. Recent books, *Decade*,¹ an anthology of W.A. short stories, and *Quarry*,² an anthology of W.A. poetry, both published by the Fremantle Arts Centre, together with the series of books of poetry and prose fiction published by the same publishers and novels published elsewhere by Elizabeth Jolley, Nicholas Hasluck and William Warnock suggest that it is also an imaginative entity, a place of the mind. What are its characteristics?

In a review of *Decade* on ABC Radio Gerard Windsor found that these stories had a distinctive quality, a certain "domesticity" he called it. Certainly, in contrast with the experimentation, the historical awareness, the self-consciousness and ironic sophistication of most contemporary literature, Western Australian writing does seem old-fashioned, generally earnest in tone, traditional in form and decently commonsense and humane in theme. True, there are exceptions. Fay Zwicky, whose *Kaddish and Other Poems*³ won the New South Wales Poetry Prize for 1982 writes in the shadow of the holocaust, from a sense of personal, historical and metaphysical crisis, and, at the other end of the scale, Nicholas Hasluck⁴ expresses an ironic and sophisticated sense of self and the world, cosmopolitan rather than provincial in tone as well as theme. But most of the stories in *Decade* centre on the family, on a community based on people and shared memories rather than on social and economic function, and on the coming to terms with nature and the outside world which is more characteristic of the frontier than of metropolitan life today. True, poets like Andrew Burke, Philip Collier and John Catlin write with the urban wit, the sense of the chattering city, of cars and freeways, popstars and movies, sex and drugs and lonely angry aimlessness which informs the work of John Tranter, Richard Tipping and most of the poets in Tranter's anthology. By and large, however, there is little sense of the city—as distinct from the suburbs—in *Quarry* or *Decade*, and little sense of the contemporary. Even the story Windsor praised for its sophistication, Marion Campbell's "Peep Show", speaks in the end to the desire to discover a personal rather than a social destiny. Uncharacteristic in its sense of literary tradition—one senses the influence of Joyce, and Borges, for instance—the games this story plays with language are not merely formal, but move to a need for the true father, the source of the self, who will be "No clown. No upside down acrobat. No shoebox father that. She knows."

It is not, I think, merely local piety to say that this concern for the human, unfashionable though it may be, matters in a literary sense as well as in other ways: without some sense of personal destiny there is little sense of personal dignity. It also reflects on the one hand the genteel origins of W.A. and on the

other the pressures of the environment—the weight of space, in which, as in the work of earlier W.A. writers like Kenneth Mackenzie and Katharine Susannah Prichard and of an emigré like Randolph Stow, the self tends to dissolve, incorporated into the energies of the universe. Robert Drewe's novel, *The Savage Crows*,⁵ showed a writer throwing his weight against these energies, determined not merely to recapture how to rework the past, above all the story of our treatment of the Aborigines—as savage in W.A. as anywhere else in Australia. In this, of course, he was drawing on the tradition of concern which goes back to Prichard's *Coonardoo*, published in 1929, and includes writers like Mary Durack, Tom Ronan and Donald Stuart. Robin Sheiner's story in *Decade*, "The Call of the Magpies", continues this concern, though it is perhaps more personal in tone.

Nevertheless the need to draw a moral can be inhibiting, especially to the free exploration of character and event. In *Decade*, Joan Williams and Nene Gare, for instance, tend to impose their sympathies and beliefs on their stories, leaving the reader with a sense that the situation has not been fully explored. However, old-fashioned as it may be, human feeling can also be empowering as it most notably is in Elizabeth Jolley's *Palomino*.⁶ In this novel about a lesbian relationship, Jolley's feelings for people cuts through the taboos which surround the subject to deal with the essential human situation. Similarly, her story in *Decade*, "Two Men Running", rests on an extreme situation, a man in prison for murder. But it, too, avoids the sensational to focus on its source, the loss of innocence. Using the crude possibilities of her situation as ballast, she is able to write lyrically, even tenderly, without becoming sentimental—like the writers of traditional ballads.

This ability to use and even trust popular stereotypes is evident in other stories as well: in Wendy Jenkins' prize-winning "Uneasy Rider" (though "Three Into Four" shows her playing with form and identity as a Borges might), Pat Jacobs' "Terry's Truck", Adriana Ellis's "Sojourn in San Fran" and Andrew Lansdowne's "Anwal" (based, this, on the stereotype of the "battler" fighting the Depression). This can make for stories which are not only finely told and crafted but also widely accessible—and the popular appeal of Western Australian writing is one of its strengths. But it can also diminish tough-mindedness and formal curiosity. So in *Decade* description rather than invention prevails and memory replaces experiment. This is true of the poems in *Quarry* also, though with less debilitating results—in Ian Templeman's poems, for instance, melancholy is empowered by a masterful sense of form, and William Grono's poems use melancholy for ends both witty and ironic. By and large, however, the figure and the fate of Narcissus haunts much of this writing. True, in writers like Stow and Mackenzie or, more recently, Fay Zwicky, who are prepared to take the gamble of the self seriously and explore the depths, the way of introversion becomes a way which confronts the furies. But the normal rate of Narcissus is to be overwhelmed, to drown in the pool of self-reference.

Far too much Western Australian writing is evasive, attempts to defuse rather than endure tension. So passions and convictions give way to the line of least resistance. Apart from war novels like T. A. G. Hungerford's *The Ridge and the River* (1952) few writers concern themselves with the diversity of culture and historical challenge of the nations of South-east Asia just a few hours flight away; and fewer still, apart from Randolph Stow, who can hardly be called a West Australian writer, even seem aware of the metaphysical challenge these issues represent—Alec Choate's poems are an exception here. The absence of anything lasting in a culture only 150 years old leads, it seems, to the collapse not only of a sense of history but also of the self-confidence which allows for imaginative exploration.

There has always been an Arcadian strain in Western Australian writing—not surprisingly, in a society founded by English gentlefolk in search of the “good old days” which, it seemed, would not come again in England. Left to itself it turns into the literature of nostalgia—evident still in the works under review. But when this longing is turned outwards, as in the work of Katharine Susannah Prichard, it can lead to vitalism, the sense of nature’s power, which informs the work of writers like Dorothy Hewett, Philip Salom, Wendy Jenkins and, paradoxical as it may seem to put him in this company, Peter Cowan. A number of the writers in *Decade* and *Quarry* draw on this strain. Joan London’s story, “Lilies”, honours the healing power of the natural world, informing with vitality, the clichés of family conflict as a result. In poetry Philip Salom presses out a powerful series of analogies between the world and the self, to discover a bodiliness lacking elements elsewhere in Western Australian poetry, even in a writer like Stow. Salom’s first book, *The Silent Piano*,⁷ won the Commonwealth Institute of London Prize in 1981 for the best first book of poetry and in *Quarry* his sequence, “Hawes”, and the shorter but powerful “Fishing with My Father” shows a poet in unmistakable possession of himself taking possession also of a poetic country which is charged with some brooding presence, at times violent, at other times worshipful but always sacramental; that is, manifestation of mysterious power. The quality of romance, the suspension of the ordinary laws of existence makes his people and settings a larger than life in a way that is reminiscent of Kenneth Mackenzie, especially in early novels like *The Young Desire It* (1937). Wendy Jenkins’ first book, *Out of Water Into Light*,⁸ also set out to make its own country, this time a more feminine, more inward and nurturing one, with a series of images fusing water and light, making what is recognizably Fremantle into a legendary place. In “Names”, the verse sequence published in *Quarry*, she moves outwards, taking up the question of identity in historical as well as mythical terms, combining the personal and public childhood memories of an old livery stable and its horses, a children’s playground, a circus with a dancing horse, Council records and so on, with an assurance that issues in a masterfully constructed and urgently moving sequence.

In effect, then, these younger writers are responding still to that sense of “passionate need” which Katharine Susannah Prichard recognized in *Intimate Strangers* (1937), which drove people to the beaches in summer, “something more than the heat and a hankering for unlimited water”. This need, I suspect, arises from the pressures of place and history or rather, the lack of history. On the one hand the sheer distance which separates the West Australian from the rest of the world, and on the other the uneventfulness of life leads to the sense of *ennui*, the classical *accidie*, evident in the very rhythms of poetry and narrative, but which is dealt with directly by Nicholas Hasluck in his novel, *Quarantine*,⁹ and Hal Colebatch¹⁰ in his two books of poetry which deal with the possibility that history might not continue precisely because, here, it has not yet begun. In a world cleared of wanting and willing existence becomes uninteresting and heroism problematic. Thus William Warnock’s attempt in *Captives of the Samurai*¹¹ to recreate the heroic mode of T. A. G. Hungerford’s fine war novel, *The Ridge and the River*, is overmastered by the savagery it describes, and instead of renewing the legend tends to deform it. As Marx remarked, the great events and people of history produce themselves twice, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.

Of all our writers perhaps only Peter Cowan has directly confronted this problem—with triumphant results. A major writer, Cowan has gone on writing in his own way, perfecting his mastery with an integrity that refuses all temptations to popularity and fashion but situates itself precisely in this sense of emptiness

—the most difficult of all situations from which to write, one would think. His story, "The Lake" which opens *Decade*, is one of his best. More expansive and more complicated than most of his recent stories which push to the limits of concentration, this is more accessible to the ordinary reader. Typically, his concern here is not so much with human action as with inaction. What dominates and moves through the story is a sense of menace, associated with the land, at least in the consciousness of those who are in effect its prisoners, but which is ultimately located within that consciousness, so what is at issue is the nature of "reality" itself. So the reader, too, is put to the test; the air crash which leaves its three survivors at the mercy of the wilderness and of the strange man who lives there may never in fact have happened but may be the dream of someone herself trapped in her own unhappy mind. The story thus fuses the physical and the psychic, and its menace is located not so much in the survivors' antagonist as beyond him, in the fear of death, the sense of entrapment and the repressed desires which threaten not only their physical existence but the existence of sanity and commonsense decency. At the same time the story pays tribute to the larger order of nature which stands over against these human fears and desires, and the power and precision of passages like this are those of a major writer:

The water stretched away to the high limestone wall, curving out of sight to the north. Grey. Still. Heavy clouds settled above the cliff, dark like the rock itself, the light fading from them. He heard the swans before he could see them. In a sudden slant of light broken from the clouds, copper colored across the water, the yellowed caves and scars gouged from the wall lifted clear. Near a patch of reeds, edged by the light, the birds waited without movement, watching him. Their necks curved, the bright red bill tips held towards the water as though he had interrupted them. They began to move, drifting slowly as if there was a current that did not mark the water. Out beyond them were others, still, like the broken stumps of the dead trees. Pairs close together called quietly, the light fading from the broken stone, dulling the surface, the clouds closing above the cliff.

The monumental quality of such writing shows a writer who has succeeded in constructing a place in which to live. All things are in their place here, as are the feelings about them, which are gravely reverent. The story's poignancy arises out of this sense it generates of our human distance from this order, of the impossibility of our mastering it and, on the other hand, the possibility that if we do attempt to do so, we will profane it and diminish ourselves.

In this sense this story and Cowan's work in general rests on the basic situation of melodrama, a sense of being imprisoned and bereft of value. But where the melodramatic writer rebels, appealing (as James puts it) to some "dream of an intenser experience", Cowan preserves his dignity, learns to live with it in the situation in which he finds himself. The restraint, the tight-lipped stoicism which informs his subject thus achieves the heroism other writers seek in the large gesture and romantic inflation of language. What he achieves, however, is the intensity they are looking for. True, this intensity is malign where as in romance it is benign, but it produces the dignity that romance does not. Pushing beyond the surface appearances in which, it seems, no real significance is to be found, "The Lake" focuses on what "looks like nothing", to quote James again, and can only "be inwardly and occultly dealt with" but which for that reason involves "the sharpest hazards to life and honour". Moreover, the life and honour protected here are not merely literary: the writer and the reader as well are involved. The real subject here is the act of dreaming. The young woman whose projection the whole story may be belongs, it seems, nowhere in the world her parents inhabit and has retreated into herself—as the bushrangers retreat into their hide-out in *Robbery Under Arms*, the book she is reading. But dreams, too, prove

terrible; the escape is thwarted here as in *Robbery Under Arms*. The dream itself dissolves as the story ends, leaving the distinction between what one desires and what is possible to be resolved by the reader.

Like all major literature, then, this story throws light on the culture it expresses, on what Dorothy Hewett calls the "corrupt innocence" of Western Australians. It also suggests an explanation for the curious lack of inner conflict in the writing. Melodrama tends to exteriorise, projecting conflicts outwards on to external events and places. So the antagonist becomes the land itself and isolation and alienation are seen as something external to the self, a kind of general rather than personal fate. There is poetic mileage to be made out of this, of course—evident in many of the poems in *Quarry*, notably those by Lee Knowles, Terry Tredrea and, in a comic ironic mode, Philip Collier. Similarly, the sense of lost innocence reaches passionate intensity in the poetry of Dorothy Hewett (whose work is not included in *Quarry*, probably because she no longer lives in Western Australia). Expelled from some original garden, identity questioned, forced to retreat into the self, into dream and fantasy, her poems nevertheless express a passionate rebellion against hallucination.¹² Rapunzel, the Lady of Shalott, she is always attempting to smash out of the tower, and, as Eve, to come to terms with the loved and hated others, Adam, the serpent and her own wild desires.

Hewett's poems represent the most passionate aspect of this sense of disinheritance, of being stranded on the far side of the world, in some legendary place. More moderately, it can lead to the Robinson Crusoe response, the determination to make a self and a world, evident at one extreme in Tom Hungerford's finely crafted recent stories¹³ which work to rebuild a childhood world, a more rural, even Arcadian, Perth, and at the other in Albert Facey's autobiography *A Fortunate Life*,¹⁴ moving in the unpretentious way it tells an heroic story. In between stand the recent works of Bert Vickers and Donald Stuart, firmly based on the story of our lives but by reason of their craftsmanship carrying with them a general convincingness. In *Decade*, too, stories by Fay Zwicky, Margot Luke, Vasso Kalamaras and James Legasse explore personal memories, closing the circle of themselves against a world organized against it, forcing out sharp, painfully vivid images which have a lyrical if poignant grace in contrast with the present blandness.

This appeal away from the here and now to a world elsewhere is evident also in *Decade* in Adriana Ellis's "Sojourn in San Fran" and, in a different way, in the sophistication of Brian Dibble's two stories, "Instructions for Shooting Your Dog" and "Fliers" and in the experimentation of K. E. Gasmier's "I Ask the Question". Among the poets Alan Alexander, born in Ireland, is also a man for the legendary. Moved by Yeats's call to contest "the slow dying of men's hearts that is called the progress of the world" he nevertheless grounds his poetry in the present, in a human and local particularity. In his first volume, *In the Sun's Eye*,¹⁵ it is true, sometimes he tended to put his experience at the service of a poetic prose. But in his second volume, *Scarpdancer*¹⁶ the language and tone is much less self-conscious and, more powerful. A lyric grace combines with a sensuous appreciation of people and places as well as of his own body and place in the world which turns the Swan Valley and the South West into a poetic country: "Limestone at Margaret River", for instance, is remarkable not only for its ease and singing quality but for its asceticism, for the poetic humility which enables him to humanise the world without imposing his own desires on it, distancing himself from his creation at the same time as he suffuses it with his own presence. There is a writer here with sufficient confidence in his powers to trust the world, whose work is therefore likely to move towards a classic impersonality, to become more cosmopolitan (the influence of Spanish American poets like Neruda is already

evident) even as he explores a specific place: he is at present writing a series of poems about the Northbridge area of Perth.

At present, however, the one Western Australian poet to have reached international stature is Fay Zwicky. Her second volume, *Kaddish and other Poems*,¹⁷ lays claim to the whole tragic range of experience in this century. The sequence "Ark Voices" invokes the story of Noah. The last creatures left on earth, adrift on fathomless waters, cry out their names, their longings, their pain, their moments of tenderness and hope, attempting to give themselves a habitation and a name, face to face with the void. "Kaddish", the title poem, is intensely moving as it turns the lament for the death of the father into religious ritual, the Jewish Kaddish, which pushes the poem beyond the compass of the merely secular and merely personal, investing it also with the tragic force of the poet's Jewish inheritance. In her subject matter here and in other poems like "Cleft" and "Three Songs of Love and Hate" she is exploring the same territory as the so-called confessional poets, Lowell, Berryman and Plath, but passionate irony, a dividedness that scrutinizes the self as well as the suffering, gives these poems a dignity, a general quality theirs so often lack. Sharp and hard, never self-indulgent, the tone here heightens the sense of solitude; there is no narrowing of the world so that the work protects the poetic self; it stands here monumentally enduring its pain, a pain which is both personal and universal. But it is an ability to depict reality which makes these poems so triumphant, infuses even the pain with the joy of victory and turning their moments of rejoicing into something rarely and passionately beautiful.

We conclude, then, on a universal note. Nevertheless it may also be that Zwicky's poems have also given a new intensity to the inward desperation, the sense of imprisonment in West Australian writing in general. The new world, according to the Spanish American novelist Carlos Fuentes, may open out the geography not of a new life but of death precisely because of its physical beauty and strangeness: paradise is not for the living. It may be that the most significant W.A. writers, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Kenneth Mackenzie, Randolph Stow, Peter Cowan, Dorothy Hewett and now Fay Zwicky, have been struggling to break its terrible magic, to recover the identity spirited away from them.

NOTES

1. *Decade: A Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Short Fiction*, ed. B. R. Coffey, 1982.
2. *Quarry: A Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Poetry*, ed. Fay Zwicky, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1981.
3. Fay Zwicky, *Kaddish and Other Poems*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1982.
4. See Nicholas Hasluck, *The Hat on the Letter O and Other Stories*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1978; William Grono and Nicholas Hasluck, *On the Edge*, Freshwater Bay Press, 1980; and Hasluck's novels, *Quarantine*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1978 and *The Blue Guitar*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1980.
5. Robert Drewe, *The Savage Crows*, Collins, Sydney, 1976.
6. Elizabeth Jolley, *Palomino*, Outback Press, Collingwood, 1980.
7. Philip Salom, *The Silent Piano*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1981.
8. Wendy Jenkins, *Out of Water into Light*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979.
9. *op. cit.*
10. Hal Colebatch, *Spectators on the Shore*, Edwards & Shaw, Sydney, 1975; *In Breaking Waves*, Hawthorn, Melbourne, 1979.
11. William Warnock, *The Samurai Kites*, Sphere, London, 1981.
12. See, for instance, *Rapunzel in Suburbia*, Prism, Sydney, 1975; and *Greenhouse*, Big Smoke, Sydney, 1979.
13. T. A. G. Hungerford, *Wong Chu and the Queen's Letterbox*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1977.
14. A. B. Facey, *A Fortunate Life*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1981; Penguin, 1981.
15. Alan Alexander, *In the Sun's Eye*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1977.
16. Alan Alexander, *Scarpdancer*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1982.
17. *op. cit.*

ADAM SHOEMAKER

An Interview with Jack Davis

- Q: I have before me your two published anthologies of verse, *The First-Born and Other Poems* and *Jagardoo: Poems From Aboriginal Australia*.^{*} I understand that there is a third volume in the works; can you tell me anything about it?
- DAVIS: I sent away seventy-two poems to the University of Queensland Press and I told them, 'They may be too long or they may not be good enough, and the climate mightn't be right for publishing them', and I was right in one respect because there were too many poems, so what they've done is they've divided them into two volumes. One half will be for children and the other half will be for young adults. No definite date on publication.
- Q: Kath Walker also seems to be writing for a younger audience these days, because she feels most Australian adults are 'mentally constipated'. Do you agree with her?
- DAVIS: I think when you're my age and her age, you go through a period of writing for adults, and then you sort of reach a saturation point in your own mind and you want to get onto another level or a different medium. So, you know, writing for children: you go onto that—it comes much easier—it's an easier platform to work for.
- Q: Have you really reached your saturation point yet?
- DAVIS: Well, in fact, I've got a novel three parts finished about a boy—a part-Aboriginal boy who lives in a white environment, from when he's five until he's ten years of age. Of course I won't finish that until next year some time.
- Q: Is that set in an urban environment?
- DAVIS: Yes.
- Q: So it's not really an autobiographical work?
- DAVIS: No, it's a fictionalized account of my own life as a child. I would say it's 30 per cent fiction and the rest is more or less incidents which came out of my own life.
- Q: And at the same time you have a number of other projects on the go, don't you? Can I ask you about *The Dreamers*, first of all? It was first performed as a one-act play in 1973. How is it different now?

^{*} Jack Davis, *The First-Born, and other Poems*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1970; *Jagardoo: Poems from Aboriginal Australia*, Methuen, Sydney, 1978.

DAVIS: It's now a two-act play, and also, that was an amateur performance. This is a professional performance: directed by a professional director, professional people in regards to lighting, etc.* And of course the scene in W.A. and Australia even seven to eight to nine years ago is different from what it is today, because the Aboriginal scene has changed fairly rapidly. So the things which were paramount seven to eight years ago no longer apply today. So I've re-written it and changed it to fit in with the scene of 1982. So the characters are the same, a lot of the dialogue is the same, but still there are a lot of changes.

Q: That play didn't have a terrific exposure anyway, so it is not as if a lot of people will be seeing it for a second time, I imagine. How would you characterize it: is it an optimistic or a pessimistic play?

DAVIS: Well, a mixture of both, I think. *The Dreamers* in 1973 was more or less political—it had political overtones, especially in terms of local government. But this one is more or less a psychological play which deals with part-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people in an urban setting, but still it applies to any ethnic group throughout the world today. It could happen in Germany; it could happen in Canada; and it not only applies to Aboriginal people or Indian people or Eskimo people; it happens to non-Aboriginal people also. We all suffer from the same thing.

Q: So it is not necessarily about a minority situation in a society?

DAVIS: It is—a minority situation in any city in the world or any town or any country in the world; it can happen and it does happen.

Q: So it is more an urban play whereas *Kullark* was more an historical, largely country-based play?

DAVIS: Yes, that's right. I thought, well I know that *Kullark* was very political; and it also dealt with the early history of Australia, especially West Australia, of course. But this one more or less . . . is a very cruel play, with a psychological twist which I think everybody can grasp, and everybody can suffer from: and that's the degree to which we sink because of our feelings. We can't rise above them—our frustrations which we face everyday—and the degree to which we can sink in terms of alcoholism and drugs and all that type of thing.

Q: So it comes to terms with a lot of current issues?

DAVIS: Everything. Every current issue which faces us.

Q: Is there any humour in it?

DAVIS: Yes, oh yes, verbal and situational.

Q: That seems to be a characteristic of your plays: that there is humour throughout.

DAVIS: Well, anything I write, and I find it especially so dealing with writing plays, you have to hold the whole gamut of people—that's the audience. Don't just show them the comic side of life right through; you show them sadness, pathos, gladness, happiness, sorrow, and all the in-between, that's all the way. And then the audience can grasp that straight away . . . all those emotions you know, that they go through—and the younger ones can see the humour and when they're a little bit older all of sudden they come along with a little bit of sadness. So, if you can pick up those emotions, and put them on paper and with good directorship in terms of lighting, etc., you can put up something which is really good for the audience.

* See review of Jack Davis's *The Dreamers* by Bill Dunstone in *Westerly* No. 2, June 1982, pp. 63-66.

- Q: Is there violence actually portrayed on stage in *Kullark* or *The Dreamers*?
- DAVIS: There was violence; there was—naturally. Of course there *has* to be violence in terms of Aboriginal existence. And so there was violence in *Kullark* and there is also violence in *The Dreamers*. And . . . *Kullark* was extremely successful, inasmuch as we had 97 performances, and they brought out *Death of a Salesman* in 1979 and they lost money on it. . . . But ours was a locally-produced play by a local director, by a local writer, local actors, and we broke even: 32 thousand dollars.
- Q: And you toured?
- DAVIS: We toured the south-west, yes, and the eastern goldfields.
- Q: Speaking of *Kullark*, first of all, what was the major theme of that play?
- DAVIS: It was history and neo-history. Before the coming of the white man, and after the coming of the white man. And it went in terms of a series of flash-backs and the scenes were interwoven: you saw the so-called Battle of Pinjarra, which was a massacre where they shot the official report was, fifteen Aborigines were shot, but the unofficial report was, 57 were buried in one great hole. And that was in a letter written by one of the settlers' wives to her relations in England in 1834. And then that story of what happened then is not finished; and the next scene, you're in a modern setting in 1979. So, the stories are like that—they interweave into one another like that. . . . In fact, using that was the only way I could get from 1829 to 1979—150 years—so we got the 150 years in the short space of an hour and a half, and the only way which we could do it was the clever way in which we used the scenery.
- Q: Was it very strongly anti-government, do you think?
- DAVIS: Not anti-present government, but colonial government; anti-colonial government. Well, it's still colonial bloody government I suppose, but in terms of it being a very sharp dig at the government from 1829 until 1946 anyway.
- Q: Is there any talk of the Black nationalist movement in either of your plays?
- DAVIS: Not in *Kullark*, but there's talk of Black Power in *The Dreamers*: 'There should be more smashin' and burnin' of these cars! We'll make these wadjellas sit up. . . . They can't treat us Blackfellahs like that. We'll be like them fellas in America: we'll really get stuck into these bastards!' That's part of the scene—but we might cut it out.
- Q: I wasn't really referring to violence, though. Put another way, have you ever tried to reach towards a kind of pan-aboriginal nationalism in your drama?
- DAVIS: Oh, yes. . . . I think pan-aboriginalism is very important. I think too that I see the West Australian situation as being the same as any other situation throughout Australia. . . . I think that mainly because of our isolationism over in W.A. that it seems to be just completely W.A. But the same thing has happened elsewhere, so there is a tie-up. You could show *The Dreamers* or you could show *Kullark* in any other state in Australia and, just by changing names where massacres took place, where missions were, where there was police brutality—all you have to do is change names and you're in the complete *locale*: it's the same thing exactly.
- Q: Is the theme of *The Dreamers* more political or less political than that of *Kullark*? From what you've been saying, it sounds less political.
- DAVIS: No, no. It's not so direct but it's more subtle. Inasmuch as I could afford to be more directly political in 1979, because it was the 150th year celebra-

tion. But this one is more subtle and you'll see it's very cunning the way it's put.

Q: What kind of targets do you have? What is your aim in writing the play?

DAVIS: Well, it deals with the life of an urban Aboriginal family from sun-rise in the morning until sun-down at night. The whole event goes throughout the day. And, the longing for the things they can no longer get—the longing for the past is there all the time. The longing for the camp-fire; the longing for the safety of the Bush. Not having to face up to the white man's syndrome in terms of rent, electric light, a leaking roof, a stove which refuses to work, and that type of thing—which Aborigines never had to suffer in those far by-gone days when Aborigines lived in the Bush, and they were isolated but they were happy. The differences are there, which they complain about: 'Oh God, I wish I was back in the Bush!'

Q: So, it's an anti-urban play—desiring a return to more basic things?

DAVIS: Well, desiring a return, but knowing it's not there any more. The longing is there but even if they thought they *could* go there they wouldn't, because the television set's here and, you know, there are too many good things in life now. But the longing is there in the back of their minds.

Q: So what's the solution, or the resolution of that problem?

DAVIS: Jamie has the answer. Jamie is the 1982 urban Aboriginal. He's got a good job, he's a smart-looking guy, he's got a nice suit and everything and he's got a job as a carpenter. He comes down to visit the relations and, because he's a young smart-aleck, he's telling them what to do—what they shouldn't do—and he's the modern Aboriginal. And, he's a very important part of the play.

Q: Would you see that as a general solution to Aboriginal dilemmas, though? Is this not assimilation?

DAVIS: There will always be differences. I don't care where it is: there will always be differences between black and white . . . there is that difference and that's it. A lot of my family is white, you know; I've got white grandchildren with blue eyes and fair skin and they call themselves 'Nyoongar', which means 'black'. They don't even regard themselves as being white. And they talk with an Aboriginal *patois*; they've got Aboriginal behavioural patterns and Aboriginal speech patterns.

Q: This distinctive Aboriginal world view: is it reflected in Aboriginal drama?

DAVIS: Oh, yes. You see, we've always been acting. Aboriginal people are the greatest actors in the world . . . we've acted up before magistrates, we've acted up before the police, we've acted up before social workers; we've always done our own mime. It's not too long since we were introduced to television and all that type of thing, and when we lived in the Bush we had our own way of doing these things ourselves, so that's why it's not so difficult for me to find an Aboriginal theme. . . . Like the man who burns his feet and he doesn't even know his feet are alight. He's standing on the fire and he says, [imitating voice] 'By Crikey, I can smell somethin' burnin' there! You fellas burn an old bag over there somewhere? Or you burnin' kangaroo skin?' [New voice] 'Uncle! You're standing in the fire! Get out of the fire there!' He never wore boots for forty years and he's got callouses on his feet that thick, and he was standing in the fire. His feet were burning and he didn't even know it! And laughed—you know that, [claps] that went around the camp for a week. Well, little incidents like that, you know, that

carry on all the time—it's not very hard to put 'em down on paper. I'm sure the Aboriginal playwrights have seen that.

Q: So, then, is drama your favourite *genre* of writing?

DAVIS: Look, frankly, it's the hardest job I've ever had in my life. Being a playwright is terrifically—it just pulls the gut out of you. You can write a poem and it may be a lonely occupation, but at least it's your thing. You can write a short story—it's your thing; you can write a novel—it's your thing; but once you sit down to write a play, it's everybody's fucking business. It's the actors, it's the bloody stage money, it's the director: the whole lot. You've got the whole lot to contend with . . . and you've got to sit here and review them. If somebody miscues or says the wrong thing, you sit there and shudder in your seat—you just simply shudder. So I would say writing plays is the hardest job I've ever had in my life, and I'm pretty sure I'll write this one and another one—I'll write three—and then I'll give it away.

Q: Well, what *advantages* does drama have then? Do plays have a greater impact than other forms of writing? Are they a better vehicle for humour or for political ideas?

DAVIS: I don't know whether drama is a *better* form. O.K., your audience that sees the play—if it's a good play—might have been a thousand. But, if you're writing a short story, it might be read by twenty thousand—perhaps the writing medium is better than the acting one.

Q: I guess what you're talking about is exposure, really. It's great to have Aboriginal writers get published, but if they're only published by very marginal publishing houses, or if the distribution isn't very good, then the impact is really lost on a lot of people. Is there anything that can be done to improve that side: the actual distribution and marketing side of the system?

DAVIS: Well, you know here's the medium of film—video—video, in terms of plays, because that's the next step. I would much prefer to have seen *Kullark* produced as a film and, in fact, two film companies have got hold of it at the present moment and they've cut it in half. The finance for one is coming from Germany and the other is a film treatment in Australia, and they're going to flog the strip to some suitable director.

Q: So, will this be produced on location?

DAVIS: Yes, it will be produced right on the spot where the actual happening was—the Battle of Pinjarra and all that type of thing. They got the idea twelve months ago but it's a matter of money.

Q: Are you hoping that perhaps television might be an area that you'll get into at some point?

DAVIS: At some point, but I would much prefer to see *Kullark*—initially—go on film. That's 35 millimetre. . . . It will come. Oh, it will come—although it may take another three or four years.

Q: Speaking of the future, are there any up-and-coming Aboriginal authors, whose work you are particularly impressed with?

DAVIS: Oh, Archie Weller. Oh yes, for sure, the brightest writer in Australia, white or black.

Q: Has he been writing anything else besides the novel, *The Day of the Dog*?

DAVIS: He had a go at poetry. And, I had a look at them and I told him to forget it: 'You'll never make a poet'; which he did do. He's started on a

* Archie Weller, *The Day of the Dog*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981. This novel won the W.A. Literary Award 1982.

play, which he was two-thirds through, and I don't know what he's done with it. Right now, I believe he's up in northern W.A. researching his next novel.

Q: Are there any other young Aboriginal writers whose talent you admire?

DAVIS: Well, the younger writers certainly will improve. They're coming up with some good stuff. You've got to remember, too, that Aboriginal writers are not like non-Aboriginal writers, inasmuch as they've got the political scene to contend with. And, they've got their own thoughts to put down on paper, regardless of what's political, in terms of writing something which they want to *sell*. So, it's sort of like splitting their mind. You know, if you haven't got any political hang-ups, I should imagine you can sit down and go ahead and write with your mind fairly free. But, most Aboriginal writers were involved within the Black movement.

Q: Did they start out as political people or did they start out as writers?

DAVIS: We all started off as political people.

Q: So that's a stage you've gone through . . .

DAVIS: That's right.

Q: Do you feel that the writing is hampered by being too political?

DAVIS: Oh no, I don't think so. As I said, the political scene has changed and now it's more right for us to write what we think about ourselves. Like I said, I was writing this book about a boy from when he was a five year-old until he was ten years of age. There's nothing political in that whatsoever; it's just a funny book about a little kid who goes to school.

Q: So then, how significant is activism and demonstrating for Aboriginal people now?

DAVIS: They've had their usefulness, but that's gone now . . . you could put up a tent today and people would laugh at it . . . now it's time for the people with the pen to take over. I always believe that the old axiom, 'the pen is mightier than the sword' is really true. And, I always like to modernize that phrase by saying, 'the biro is far, far better than the gun'!

Q: So just how significant are the Aboriginal writers in English?

DAVIS: I think they're the most important thing we've got . . . and I think we are extremely lucky because we belong here, and are not a transplanted Black people like they are in the [United] States. We belong here, and we've got a vital say in it. And, people are going to turn over one morning and say, 'Christ! Look what I've got in my library!'. You know, I really think so . . . I talk in terms of decades—ten years—everything I think of in terms of ten years. And I see the changes in my lifetime. And I'm going to see it in the next ten years—and I think I'll live to see that—the people are going to have, not half a dozen; they're going to have thirty or forty books on their shelves which are going to be written by Aboriginal writers. And I think they'll cover the whole field.

Q: That's an optimistic view.

DAVIS: I'm not even optimistic; I'm quite sure it's going to happen.

This interview was conducted in Canberra on 13 November 1981.

Lawson on Westralia

On the 17th June 1867, in Grenfell, New South Wales, was born a person whose name was to become, for many, representative of Australian literature. He was Henry Lawson, and his work was to be published and republished from the 1890s onward. As someone who achieved recognition employing a style which possessed a special 'Australian' quality and who produced so much of his work during the decade that preceded federation, Lawson has a unique and, it would seem, a permanent place in Australian literature. Described as "the first articulate voice of the real Australia", his success stems from more than being an Australian with literary talent.

Much of the admiration for Lawson's work derives from the recognition of his ability to create in his work so much that reflected the views of those he described as "the Men who made Australia". It is this ability that gives his work so much historical worth because, real or legendary, the beliefs of those men were and still remain an important part of Australia's heritage. This paper recognizes that historical value; indeed, its specific task is to attempt a reconstruction of Lawson's perceptions of Western Australia and its people during the 1890s.

Lawson's most productive years were those coinciding with the 1890s when the *Bulletin* was still being "read to rags". It was in the *Sydney Bulletin* that his first published verse is found. In tune with the tone of the *Bulletin*, the poem contained the words "Sons of the South, make the choice between . . . The land that belongs to lord and Queen And the land that belongs to you."² First and foremost, Lawson was a republican.

Lawson was also a wanderer. That he often used the name "Joe Swallow" suggests that he viewed himself as one. Lawson's travels took him from hometown Sydney ". . . to Melbourne, to Western Australia, to Queensland, to Bourke and Hungerford, to New Zealand to Western Australia again, to New Zealand again, to England"³

Both visits to Western Australia were short. The first occasion was in 1890 when he stayed the months April to September in the town of Albany. This visit resulted in an incident when, as Charles Manning Clark suggests, "The *Western Australian Bulletin* had also tried to take him down a peg or two"⁴ Clark elaborates by stating that the W.A. *Bulletin* quoted the *Sydney Bulletin's* announcement that "The talented Henry Lawson has left Sydney for Western Australia"; the W.A. *Bulletin* then asked, "Who's Henry Lawson?". Lawson himself, after his arrival in Albany, made his feelings known in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper:

The W.A. *Bulletin* might reasonably ask this question, but is it right that an unknown writer should be used as a weapon of spite by one paper against

another, and the individual in question, who might well be a German, could easily relieve his injured feelings as follows . . .⁵

What followed was a poem with the first and last stanzas ending with the question, "Who's dot Pull-itin?". Lawson was probably right in suggesting that he was being used as a weapon by the relatively unknown West Australian publication. Whatever the motive, it was made to seem rather short-sighted and foolish when, in 1896, the Perth-based *Western Mail* took pride in having secured Lawson as their special writer (though it resulted in the publication of only three short stories).

Lawson's second visit to Western Australia was even shorter than the first. He arrived in July of 1897 and left on the second day of October. Judging from the recollections of Edith Wiles, who remembers encountering Lawson, the second visit was not as controversial and certainly not as well announced. Wiles states that she first met Lawson on the ship *S.S. Bullara*, en route to Western Australia. She and her father disembarked, probably believing they had seen the last of Henry Lawson. However she then recalls:

. . . my father, who liked a stroll before breakfast, walked down to Beaufort Street Railway bridge [*sic*] . . . To his astonishment, as he looked over the parapet, he saw Henry Lawson and his wife shaking out their rugs . . . They had walked Fremantle and Perth and could find no place to stay.⁶

As a man on his honeymoon his second impression of Western Australia was probably not an impressive one: he left soon after. Totalling both visits it can be seen that Lawson had experienced Western Australia for less than a year. But he had in this time arranged and articulated many thoughts on the Western state.

Lawson's thoughts, mostly of a social nature, are found in the *Albany Observer*, a paper to which he contributed regularly while living in that town. Before looking at broader phenomena, such as unionism and mateship, Lawson wrote on Western Australia's characteristics and potential. Lawson clearly saw Western Australia as a land of promise; as it seems many in those years did (not the least of all, West Australians). In Lawson's prose also, aside from being an example of a barren and isolated land, Western Australia is looked upon as a place to go to "make a quid".

The first such reference in *The Prose Works of Henry Lawson* can be found in the short story, "For Auld Lang Syne".⁷ This tale is of a group of mates living in Sydney whose numbers are diminishing as, in ones and twos, they leave in search of success. It comes as no surprise that Western Australia should be mentioned in this context: ". . . two went next— to try their luck in Western Australia".⁸ (stress added). Similarly, in the unfinished autobiography edited by Colin Roderick, Lawson states:

"If only I could raise the price of a steerage ticket to West Australia!"

This was the burden of the unemployed clerk's and workman's song in Sydney in the middle nineties. There was little or nothing doing in the building trade and, when there is nothing doing in the building line there is little in any other—save, perhaps, that of a labour agitator.⁹

Elsewhere Lawson is willing to identify reasons, other than undesirable circumstances at home, that led individuals to go to Western Australia. In the period immediately prior to the rush days that Hannan and Coolgardie/Kalgoorlie gave the State, Lawson suggests that there were those who would ". . . declare that the labourers in Albany and Perth were receiving fourteen shillings a day; and were so independent that it was impossible to get a man to carry your luggage from the wharf".¹⁰ Though Lawson states that he did not believe such reports he goes on to say that there were those who did ". . . and would come on the strength of it, and afterwards by unfavourable accounts they prevent many really desirable colonists from coming".¹¹

In his journalistic endeavours Lawson develops his concern for Western Australia and its future, suggesting that its reputation as a land of promise could be its own demise. Western Australia's future, he continues, would depend:

... mainly on its people, and on those who are coming here to make homes—not those who come to “make fortunes”, a fact which is disregarded by the well-meaning but mistaken persons who are now industriously “puffing” West Australia in other colonies.¹²

Despite these words it is possible to argue that contemporary creative writing, particularly Lawson's, willingly projected an image of Western Australia as a somewhat undesirable land fit only for the rugged individualist in search of those quick rewards. In the short story, “The Ghosts of many Christmases”, Lawson tells of the experiences of Christmas in different places and periods of Australasia.¹³ The Western Australian variation is one of extreme isolation. It is introduced with the lines:

I got a letter from a mate of mine in Western Australia—prospecting in the awful desert out beyond Whitefeather—telling me about a “perish” he did on plum pudding. He and his mates were camped at the Boulder soak with some three or four hundred miles—mostly sand and dust between them and the nearest grocer's shop.¹⁴

The story develops into the comic situation where communications and transport are so bad that a mix-up results in the mate and his companions having to live on plum pudding until the next provisions arrive. But the effect of isolation in Western Australia, as manifest in Lawson's work, is not always so humorous. “They Waited on the Wharf in Black” is the tale of a digger whose wife dies while he is on the goldfields. Again, there is a problem with communication:

They sent him a wire to the Boulder Soak, or somewhere outback of Whitefeather, to say that his wife was seriously ill; but the wire went wrong, somehow, after the manner of telegrams not connected with mining, on the lines of “the Western”. They sent him a wire to say that his wife was dead, and that reached him all right—only a week late... The wife of twenty years was with him—though two-thousand miles away till that message came.¹⁵

Again, with the notion of isolation essential to the plot, the Western state had provided the setting. In addition, it should be noted that his example is not that of the fortune hunter; rather he is the individual who is forced by circumstances to “go West”. Evidence for this emerges later in the story when the digger is asked, “Going back to the West again?”, and he replies, “Oh, yes, I must go for the sake of the youngsters...”¹⁶

Lawson, seemingly oblivious to the anomaly that existed between his prose and his autobiographical works, persistently emphasised that the people Western Australia needed were not those who returned to where they came from after they have met with success or failure. He illustrates his view by comparing the process of colonisation in Western Australia with that of greater Australia (concluding that the difference is a result of distances involved). Earlier colonists of Australia had “. . . no short passages or cheap fares home . . .”, and to this Lawson adds that “. . . ten to one, by the time the immigrant was in a position to return, he would have settled down, reconciled to his position, and thus become a great colonist”.¹⁷ Western Australia, Lawson went on to say, was different. The newcomer could return if things were undesirable . . .

And even when the fortune-hunter has made a little (West Australian) money, those pleasant Eastern cities, too brightly and too near for him to resist the temptation for him to return; and so he goes on taking with him his, or West Australia's gold, and leaving the colony poorer, if anything, for his visit.¹⁸

The hope entertained by many Western Australians that suggested, "... we want a Ballarat or two to make the colony", Lawson dismissed saying, "A couple of Ballarats would give us a good start no doubt, but that is all; Ballarat don't last...".¹⁹ By 1895 the boom in the goldfield towns in the East of the state promised more than a Ballarat. Yet Lawson saw this as having a worsening effect on the prospects of Western Australia. In a letter dated September 6, 1896, Lawson reveals such feelings in strong terms; though he is also willing to describe the Western Australian opportunists as good businessmen:

W.A. is a fraud. The curse of the country is gold—as sheep are the curse of the East: a more vulgar, sordid condition of things it would be impossible to conceive. The old Sand-groppers are the best to work for or have dealings with. The Tothersiders are cutting each others' throats—the Boss othersiders are nigger-drivers. There is a ridiculous land and building boom in Perth. The country will be in an awful condition when the mining boom bursts.²⁰

Still Lawson's belief in a statement made in 1890 remained unchanged, that is, that the West Australians took "... no interest in the land further than that conducive to a selfish individual welfare...".²¹ He inferred that the first step toward a cure for Western Australia's ills would be realised when such a statement could be deemed absurd:

Let the people who have adopted this as their country try and forget the old one ... and do the best for the country that affords them an asylum. And let the people one and all, irrespective of class creed or nationality, do their utmost for the advancement of Western Australia because—for the noblest of all reasons—because it is to be the land of their children.²²

Having attained this stage, Lawson believed that a logical step would then be to learn from the mistakes of other colonies.

Perhaps the peak of Lawson's idealism is revealed in the logic suggesting that the Australian cities that developed after Sydney profited by improvements and there was no reason for the cities of Western Australia not to develop "... as perfect as it is possible for cities to be".²³ Many of the problems faced by the Eastern colonies Lawson described as "... the evils of centralization".²⁴ On examining these observations there are, no doubt, many today who would echo such sentiments.

Lawson's views on nationality and race are rather curious. Though he states: "... West Australians, should judge a man by his worth as a colonist and a citizen, without regard to his creed or country ...", he soon makes statements which contradict this and appear racist. Referring to the Chinese, he states in June 1890, "... I object to them because, as a nation, they are bad citizens and bad colonists".²⁵ Lawson looks more favourably on Germans, stating in the same publication, "... that we cannot compete with Germans at farming proves that the country has everything to gain, and nothing to lose, by their presence". He went on to state that evidence of their skills was in "... the preponderance of Teutonic names in the prize lists of the agricultural shows of the East".²⁶

In the 1980s there again seems to be a need for the citizens of Western Australia to be reminded that their state should be seen as "... a great place to live!" The woes of isolation and centralisation are still expressed and there are certainly those, from day-labourers to bosses of trans-national corporations, who view Western Australia as a land to be exploited. Today's media often insists that the state is experiencing a boom, and though some, like Lawson in 1890, have renounced such a belief, there are others who "... come on the strength of it". It might be only that the boom-centres have moved, and yesterday's Chinese are today's Vietnamese. But Lawson's honeymoon would no longer provide him with the same memories of discomfort and hard living. In 1982 Perth has a Sheraton.

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PAUL EGGERT

Lawrence, The Secret Army, and the West Australian Connexion: Molly Skinner*

It's the inherent fascination of the endeavour that keeps you reading this book: the hope that Darroch holds out that it is possible not only to track down Lawrence's day-by-day movements during his time in Australia in 1922—whom he met and where he went—but to chart how, and precisely when, those experiences made their way into Lawrence's Australian novel, *Kangaroo*. One's interest is sharpened by the claim that Lawrence had dealings with two leaders of a hitherto unknown secret army, dealings which, a little altered, become the hero's flirtation with the radically conservative politics of Jack Callcott and Benjamin Cooley, the "Kangaroo" of the novel. This comes as a surprise to readers of the Penguin and Phoenix editions of *Kangaroo*: Richard Aldington's introduction has assured generations of readers that "at that time no such political violence occurred in Australia."

Darroch plays his trump card first—in the introduction. At that stage one is not aware of the stake: how fully his case depends upon his "clinching" discovery that one W. J. R. Scott lived in a house in Neutral Bay, Sydney, the backyard of which and the view from which are very similar to those of "51 Murdoch Street" where Somers and Harriet of *Kangaroo* live before moving to the South Coast. Put this at first unpromising fact together with the facts that the organisation of the "Diggers Club" which Lawrence describes is close to that of the secret army cells of the King and Empire Alliance (the existence of which Darroch documents); that Scott was the treasurer of the Alliance and possibly the organiser of its secret wing; that Lawrence frequently drew on personal experience and friends for the raw material of his novels; that Lawrence, after leaving Australia, wrote in a letter to the American publisher of *Kangaroo*, "Do you think the Australian Govt. or the Diggers might resent anything?"¹—put these considerations together, and a strong probability emerges that Somers' dallying with extremist Australian politics of the twenties reflects Lawrence's own. And this, despite the mere two-and-a-half months he spent in New South Wales. Darroch has backed his hunch, and it has proved a winner.

The thesis is promising yet the book is, finally, an irritating one because of the very inadequate standards of execution of the thesis. Although Darroch expresses the hope "that a fuller and more accurate account can soon be written" (p. xiii) one has, nevertheless, to judge his offering on its merits. Darroch confides that he has written the book for "the general Australian reader" (p. xiii). Evidently that

* Robert Darroch: *D. H. Lawrence in Australia* (Macmillan, 1981), \$17.95, index, illus., 130 pp. + xiii.

reader has a short attention span, for he is offered only a little over one hundred pages of well-spaced text. (The remainder is represented by photographs.) Evidently, too, that reader is in the habit of waiting passively for the "story" to be "broken", implicitly trusting the man who has done the interviews, searched through the relevant electoral rolls and the government documents released under the fifty years rule: the "expert", in fact.

This seems to be Darroch's conception of the general reader and of his own role, an understandable one, perhaps, for a journalist (as Darroch is) to entertain. But the general reader is in a different position from, say, the viewer of a current affairs programme which is delivering a "scoop". He is not propelled at the presenter's speed, and with the obligatory scepticism, along a line of tantalising implication and insinuation, propped up by a modicum of fact. He has the opportunity to stop and reflect, and, when he does so, he can generally tell the difference between speculation and proof.

Darroch, however, declines to give the reader much assistance here. He offers but few footnotes—not even to the many passages he quotes from *Kangaroo*. The source of many of his claims of fact are not disclosed, and this at crucial points. The reader, it appears, is to take a great deal on trust. On those occasions when the reader does have the opportunity to check the validity of the argument that trust is apt to be questioned. It becomes clear, for instance, that Darroch is according incidents in the novel almost the same status as newspaper reports, information garnered from interviews and evidence from Lawrence's letters. Darroch glides backwards and forwards between the novel and the other sources, footnoting neither. On page 51, for instance, he quotes Jack Callcott's conversation with Somers in Chapter Two of *Kangaroo*, where Callcott is drawing Jack out about the state of Australian society. This, we're told, "probably reflects an actual conversation between Lawrence and Scott". As such, it forms an integral part of Darroch's step-by-step account of Lawrence's dealings with the Secret Army. The beginning of the next paragraph reads: "By his second week in Thirroul Lawrence was beginning to evolve a method for turning fact into fiction." What was fiction (the supposed meeting) and therefore "probably" fact *is*, now, fact, and thus available for fictionalised treatment. Denied benefit of adequate documentation, we have no lever to prise the circularity open so that we may weigh up the possibilities for ourselves.

Darroch's account of some supposed meetings between Lawrence and General Rosenthal, Scott's superior and leader of the Alliance, skates on an even thinner ice. At the second meeting (in the novel) *Kangaroo* is horror-struck to hear that Somers had been to see Struthers (who "is really the image of Jock Garden", the communist secretary of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council p. 88). "Perhaps", Darroch tentatively remarks, Lawrence "did go to Trades Hall and talk to someone, maybe to Garden himself" (p. 88). Less tentatively: "Rosenthal's first reaction [to the meeting] must have been disbelief, then horror" (p. 90); and even less: "The subsequent exchange . . . between Cooley and Somers gives a hint of Rosenthal's anger" (p. 91). So we arrive at the certainty that Rosenthal and Lawrence did meet when the only argument that has been offered is that, "it is likely that what Lawrence says happened that evening in Cooley's chambers is a reflection of an actual interview between Lawrence and Rosenthal, probably on the night of Saturday 24 June" (p. 89). The thinness of the evidence hardly interrupts the confident progression of the case.

It's a jerry-built argument: very few parts are firmly secured by reference to letter, interview or memoir. The building stands perhaps, but it's awfully tottery. Possibilities are raised into probabilities, and probabilities into certainties—a disappointing outcome for a case so promising in outline. A special caution and a

thorough openness of his procedure to inspection ought to have characterised an argument so dependent on a delicate balancing of likelihoods and possibilities.

Darroch chooses, however, to head off possible criticism by enmeshing his reader in a flow of reconstructed interviews (that "may" have taken place), in factual-sounding dates, places, even times of day, as he retraces Lawrence's footsteps in Sydney and Thirroul. Many of his formulations appear to be similarly defensive: "We do not know when Lawrence first met Rosenthal" (p. 61) when we've been offered no proof that Lawrence met him at all; "According to the novel, Callcott had an odd look on his face" (p. 101)—"according to", as if the novel were simply an eye-witness account of how Callcott's "original", Jack Scott, appeared on the day. (To have written, "In the novel, Callcott . . .", would, of course, have undermined the novel's *bona fides* as an eye-witness report—and that wouldn't do.)

Intent as Darroch is on establishing the political parallels, he is little interested in considering how the context of *Kangaroo* in Lawrence's exploratory post-war fiction and non-fiction might alter the way in which we are intended to understand Somers' dealings with the Diggers Clubs. From this point of view that connection could be seen as providing only the initiating cause for, and some of the terms of, a conflict that takes place essentially within Somers himself—the Lawrence counterpart in the novel. The Australian stimulus, in other words, only prompts a prolonged *personal* self-questioning. If that is so, then Lawrence is unlikely to have thought that fidelity to the stimulus was of prime importance. Darroch does not face this difficulty.

He does offer an interesting counterweight however, and it's one that lends plausibility to his argument. This is the advice which Mollie Skinner reported that Lawrence had offered her about a way of proceeding with a novel he was encouraging her to write about the first settlers at the Swan River colony. (Lawrence was then staying at Skinner's convalescent home at Darlington, outside Perth, prior to going East.)

"What about the story?" [Skinner inquired]

"You need no story." [Lawrence replied]

"Construction?"

"You need none?" (Later he bitterly condemned me for lack of it.)

"I have no time."

"You can take an hour—the same hour—that's very important—daily. Write bit by bit of the scenes you have witnessed, the people you know, describing their reactions as you know they do react, not as you imagine they should. You spoil things by re-writing. Write and build up from day to day."

"And what about the end?"

"When you've done 80,000 words, throw down your pen."²

As Darroch comments, this is "a curious and perhaps significant conversation" (p. 14). Lawrence had read Skinner's then only published work, *Letters of a V.A.D.*, and an early version of her *Black Swans* (on the basis of which reading he later wrote a preface for the novel, which was not used³). He *must* have realised that Skinner's work would always need reshaping and revising. The *Black Swans* introduction, and his letters to her, make no bones about the matter:

Oh, and the ponderous manuscript, tangled, and simply crepitating with type-writer's mistakes, which I read with despair in that house in Western Australia. Such possibilities! And such impossibilities.

But the possibilities touched with magic. Always hovering over the borderline where probability merges into magic: then tumbling, like a bird gone too far out to sea, flopping and splashing into the wrong element, to drown soggly.⁴

The novel Lawrence asked her to write (which she called *The House of Ellis* and sent on to Lawrence in America the following year) also lacked form and consis-

tency; it was, he later wrote, "tangled, gasping, and forever going under in the sea of incoherence". He found it necessary to write "the whole book over again, from start to finish, putting in and leaving out, yet keeping the main substance of Miss Skinner's work".⁵ The result was *The Boy in the Bush*.

How, then, to explain the peculiar inappropriateness of Lawrence's advice to Mollie Skinner? Advice Lawrence gave to writers and artists whom he respected could, in fact, be generous in the extreme—as letters to Mark Gertler and Catherine Carswell demonstrate.⁶ Emotionally and intellectually, Lawrence appropriated the idea or tendency with which he saw the artist as dealing. His belief in the artist's ability adequately to treat of the subject was then almost automatic. Elementary distinctions between his own abilities and his fellow artist's were apt to be lost sight of. What more natural, then, for Lawrence impulsively to commend to Mollie Skinner the novelistic form which, as Darroch suggests, he was probably turning over in his mind for an Australian novel of his own—the novel which was to become *Kangaroo*? Because *he* could espy the exciting development of the idea, Mollie Skinner *could* not fail to do it justice; his personal participation in the idea forbade disbelief. In this case, the idea was a novel about the first settlers. Lawrence's interest in them had been fired by his reading the long historical diary in the *Western Australian Year Book* which a local poet, translator and one-time public servant, William Seibenhaar had given him.⁷

Part of Lawrence's advice to Mollie Skinner was, however, well-aimed. Amidst the frequent invocations of God, the saccharine professions of love for her sister, the quoting from sentimental poetry which Lawrence would have come across in *Letters of a V.A.D.* (a fictionalised account in letter form of a nurse's career in a field hospital behind the trenches in World War I) amidst the self-protective coyness and the emotional embroidery, Lawrence would have encountered the story of the drunken orderly who is described, without horror, as having nearly kicked over a full bucket of gore. The authoress who sought consolation in imagining herself playing the role of Little Mother to dying soldiers could, yet, give a brief, powerful description of wounded Australian soldiers counting out dictatorial nurses.⁸ Lawrence's remedy was the obvious one:

Write bit by bit of the scenes you have witnessed, the people you know, describing their reactions as you know they do react, not as you imagine they should.

Perhaps Lawrence fancied himself in the role of literary mentor, playing the Edward Garnett to Skinner's *Sons and Lovers*. He did at least seem to be shepherding her to develop a more realist bent in her writing (as Garnett had Lawrence): "'Read the European writers,'" Lawrence advised her, "'learn how they do it And don't be sentimental.'"⁹ The scrupulously professional tenor of his letters to Skinner—he discusses matters of royalties, publication dates, advance payments—reinforces the suggestion. It is one which would help to explain why someone as unlikely as Mollie Skinner would become the recipient of Lawrence's closest literary attentions but not, as with many of his friends, of his strenuous *personal* advice and criticism.

It's not generally known that Lawrence's attentions extended beyond *The Boy in the Bush*. When, in 1925, Skinner submitted a short story called 'The Hand' to *The Adelphi*, the editor, John Middleton Murry sent it to Lawrence for revision:

I send back the Molly Skinner article [Lawrence replied]—rewrote the first four pages, and cleared the rest a bit If you print M. Skinner's article with my editing, *don't* mention me to anybody—not to her. Just let her think your office did the editing.¹⁰

Apart from publication in *The Adelphi* (III, 1926, pp. 793-98) the story was subsequently collected in Nettie Palmer's *An Australian Story Book* (Angus and Robertson, 1928), and later in the Walter Murdoch and Henrietta Drake-Brockman selection, *Australian Short Stories* (O.U.P., 1951, reprinted 1952). It has even been translated into German.¹¹ The story centres around the incident of a boy, like Jack Grant, lost in the bush who, after gradually discarding his clothing, stumbles across a bush nursing station to the terror of one of the nurses. The incident also became the centrepiece of a radio play of the same name.

Mollie Skinner was, in fact, a prolific writer of radio plays. Articles about early feminists, fictionalised historical autobiographies set in Western Australia, a very long, unfinished biography of Lord Forrest, a number of unpublished novels in the first person, two unpublished memoirs about Lawrence, a large collection of reviews and press cuttings about *The Boy in the Bush*, and three earlier states of Skinner's autobiography, *The Fifth Sparrow*, significantly different from the published version, are among the items which await attention in the Skinner papers in the Battye Library in Perth. Clearly, a Life and Works is called for.

What is *not* to be found in the Battye, however, is a copy of *The House of Ellis*. Either Skinner did not keep a copy of the "badly typed" typescript¹² which she sent Lawrence in 1923 (which seems unlikely, given that he was constantly on the move), or it has not survived. (It is not catalogued in any overseas Lawrence collection.) However, another Skinner novel, *Eve in the Land of Nod* (unpublished), which Skinner sent Lawrence in 1928 *does* survive. One typescript bears his revisions, and there is another, later version rewritten to take account of his advice and emendations. Though moderate, Lawrence's revisions extend from beginning to end. A parallel text of the three versions—the earlier typescript as Lawrence received it, as he revised it, and the later typescript—could be reconstructed in most places.

Such an undertaking would be an important step towards a full understanding and assessment of Lawrence's dealings with the West, dealings that may come to be seen as of more importance than his dealings with the East, even though the upshot *there* was *Kangaroo*. Darroch's book will stimulate, even if it will not satisfy, the interest of many Australian readers in a subject that calls for more disciplined attention and thought.

NOTES

1. 7 October 1922 in Gerald Lacy (ed.), *D. H. Lawrence: Letters to Thomas and Adele Seltzer* (Santa Barbara, Black Sparrow Press, 1976), p. 43.
2. *The Fifth Sparrow*, M. L. Skinner (Sydney, S.U.P., 1972), pp. 115-16.
3. Published in Warren Roberts and Harry Moore (eds.), *Phoenix II: Uncollected . . . Works by D. H. Lawrence* (London, Heinemann, 1968), pp. 294-96.
4. *ibid.*, p. 294.
5. *ibid.*, pp. 294-95.
6. Cf. Letter to Gertler, 9 October 1916, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, vol. II, (eds.) George Zytaruk and James Boulton (Cambridge, C.U.P., 1981), pp. 660-61; to Carswell: (?) 29 June 1914, *ibid.*, pp. 187-88; (?) 30 June 1914, *ibid.*, p. 188; 10 August 1916, *ibid.*, p. 639.
7. Cf. *Fifth Sparrow*, *op. cit.*, pp. 112-13. Lawrence subsequently wrote an introduction to Siebenhaar's translation of *Max Havelaar* by the Dutch novelist, E. D. Dekker, and helped to get it published—another facet of Lawrence's West Australian "connexion".
8. The likely inspiration for the "counting out" incident in *Kangaroo*, Ch. 16.
9. *Fifth Sparrow*, *op. cit.*, p. 116. Lawrence had been translating works of the Italian realist, Giovanni Verga, on board ship on his way to Western Australia.
10. *Collected Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, (ed.) Harry Moore, vol. II (London, Heinemann, 1962), p. 869.
11. "Die Hand" in *Australische Erzähler* (Walter Verlag, Olten, Switzerland, 1961), transl. Elizabeth Schnack. This volume is a translation of *Australian Short Stories*, *op. cit.*
12. *Fifth Sparrow*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

BOOKS

HOPE ON THE FAULT-LINE

A. D. Hope, *Antechinus: Poems 1975-1980*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1981, 120 pp., \$6.95.

A. D. Hope has produced another collection of poetry and is again hailed, in *The Canberra Times* and elsewhere, as "our leading Augustan". The collection is his least Augustan, his least "eighteenth century", and its appearance provides a new occasion to challenge the applicability of such terms. His poetry is as Romantic as it is eighteenth century in sensibility, his wit as seventeenth century as Augustan, and where the choice of terms so proliferates it might be best to withhold all. Hope's stalwart maintenance of formal conventions that seem to belong more to the eighteenth century than to any other is as often a fence, a pressure cooker's lid, as it is midwife to thoughts from the Age of Reason: bars of iambic pentameter frequently but shield us from (or is it allow us to glimpse?) a panther of unresolved emotion prowling behind them. There are, moreover, poems enough in Hope's canon to suggest that this somewhat antithetical relation between surface and substance is less defensive—as it might have been, say, in a "difficult" Augustan like Samuel Johnson—than it is erotic in nature. In the poetry of A. D. Hope, as Roland Barthes says the prose of de Sade.

two edges are created: an obedient, conformist, plagiarizing edge (the language is to be copied in its canonical state, as it has been established by schooling, good usage, literature, culture), and *another edge*, mobile, blank (ready to assume any contours), which is never anything but the site of its effect, the place where the death of language is glimpsed. . . . Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so [*The Pleasure of the Text*].

Hope's poetry very often traces just such a fault-line, and in *Antechinus* does so with more ease and suppleness than ever before. Although many of his best poems in this vein (I think of "On an Engraving by Casserius" and, in the new collection, "Beyond Khancoban") are in

no evident sense erotic in their subject matter, it might even be said that the consistent preoccupation in Hope's poetry with the heterosexual erotic indexes, in this Barthesian sense, a far deeper flirtation. Hope suggests to us, in poem after poem, that sex and death are very closely related. He has many times said, with Keats, that a poet should seek to maximize his Negative Capability.

I have often wondered, in my attempts to assess the character of contemporary Australian poetry, how much of Hope's amounts, when and if it is possible to make up one's mind about it, to work of "high seriousness". Certainly Hope is one of the very few in this country whose work can make one think about the term. If the urge toward or facilitation of *praxis* can be taken, as it often is, as one of the criteria of such seriousness, what seems at some times an extraordinary, even disturbing ability to create between the various premises of his poems a kind of ultimate philosophical relativism, and at other times a tendency to push an apparent *sortes* to the point where the chain of its arguments disappears in a vague immensity, a mist some way up Helicon, creates some doubt as to how many of his poems can, at last, provide a plank in a platform from which *praxis* might become possible. If, on the other hand, we can take as a criterion of such seriousness the ability to remind us of the ultimate subjectivity and fragility of our mental structures—of the scaffoldings by means of which we create and order our world—then we cannot easily withhold from Hope the term. In this collection, as much and perhaps more than in any of his others, his poetry offers itself as something of a timely inoculation against the various insidious and factionalizing indoctrinations that our ideological climate proffers us.

There are signs in *Antechinus* that Hope might have surprised even himself with the growth of his own Negative Capability, and there can be no doubt that such an expansion was a prerequisite for the new variety and force of his challenges to our received mental structures. If in this collection there are, in "Beyond Khancoban" and others, poems which in a now-classical Hopean manner (a kind of Humanist's inversion of Pascal's Gamble?) argue the need and virtue of man's anthropocentric views at the same time as they remind us that such views are only pragmatic and very

likely subject to some greater, less comprehensible government (for which his persistent metaphor is the music of the spheres), there are also, in "The Drifting Continent", the title-poem and others, pieces enough which hypothesize alternative modes of consciousness to the human in an attempt to suggest the severity and danger of its limitations. In at least one of these, "The Cetaceans", this is done with such imaginative force that one thinks of Italo Calvino's *T Zero* and realizes—as the reader will, I think, many times in this volume—that beneath the conservative attire of his technique Hope's contemporaneity is astounding.

It is evident in the challenge he offers white ethnocentrism in the remarkable and poignant "The People of the Pale". It is evident, I think, also in the manner in which, in the range and tenor of the volume as a whole, he qualifies his own earlier Eurocentrism, drawing at one point from Indian legend, at others from the work of Akhmatova, and devoting, as he does, a whole section (*The Drifting Continent*) to what might be called a spiritual repatriation to the land of his birth—itsself employed often enough in the past as an adequate symbol of the Negative.

There can be no doubt, too, that an expanded capacity to coexist with the unknown is behind the greater range and freedom of Hope's forms in this collection, that it has occasioned a significant relaxation of that formal conventionality which had hitherto helped to keep the dark and inchoate at bay. There are, in *Antechinus*, poems in which not only the fictive and rhetorical structures, but also the rhythms and diction, have become the sites and subjects of *play*, of irony, of a *sprezzatura* that reminds us, as does so much in this volume's range and suppleness, of the later Yeats. One sees this in the rhythms of the opening lines of the collection:

Beyond the Khancoban the road winds
into hills
That lead to the High Monaro of my
birth.
I emerge from a pass to a vast blue valley
which fills
My mind with those august presences of
earth

One sees it, later, in the joyful celebration of "Country Places":

When from Goonoo Goonoo, Underbool
and Grong Grong

And Suggan Buggan there goes up the cry,
From Tittybong, Drik Drik and Drung
Drung,
"Help, Lord, help us, or we die!"

One sees it in the close of "Antechinus", where Hope admits that that virile little rodent has fallen victim to the Discursive Mode:

Antechinus, my friend, almost forgot
In such reflections, let us reflect again,
Since life presents each absolutely and not
As rival species, from amoebas to men,
Which has achieved the best that life can
give?
We do not know; we accept our lot and
live.

Although I would not leave it without mentioning "Hay Fever", a piece which belongs, in a sense, amongst the finest poems of Frost (of whom, in subject, tone, style and joy it now seems, somehow, appropriate that Hope can feel free, if just this once, to remind us), I must emphasize at last what my enthusiasm for its *difference* might have led me to underplay—that the collection is, of course, not all prank and departure: a section entitled *Poems from Pausanias* follows directly upon *The Drifting Continent* to remind us that Hope's repatriations here are guarded; successful poems too numerous to mention assure us that, for Hope, the discursive mode has not shifted from its pinnacle; and the volume, for all its *sprezzatura*, is not without its text-book examples of decorum, than which there is no finer than the conclusion of "In Memoriam: James Philip McAuley, 1976":

Standing on this last promontory of time,
I match our spirits, the laggard and the
swift;
Though we shared much beside the gift of
rhyme,
Yours was the surer gift.

Your lamp trimmed, full of oil, you went
before,
Early to taste the bridegroom's feast of
song;
Wait for me friend, till I too reach that
door;
I shall not keep you long.

I pray that he is wrong.

DAVID BROOKS

Penelope Hetherington, *The Making of a Labor Politician: Family and Politics in South Australia, 1900-1980: A Biography*. Published by the author [Perth], 1982, pp. viii, 204, ill. \$8.50.

Professor Deirdre Bair, in a lecture on the 'nuts and bolts' of biography, distinguished four levels of a biographer's access to information, each related to a differing degree of authority over the final text. She labelled her categories 'authorized', 'designated', 'independent', and 'Bowdlerized'; not surprisingly her own biography of Beckett fell outside these tidy categories and acquired its own label, 'authorized unauthorized'. Pen Hetherington's biography, *The Making of a Labor Politician*, is similarly difficult to pigeon-hole. On the point of access to information the author notes that in addition to 'conventional sources' she used the oral evidence of the subject, her parents. Her conscious authority over the text was complete: 'They did not always understand what use I might make of some of the material but they were sufficiently trusting to put themselves in my hands' (p. 187). The impetus to write a biography, by which Professor Bair further defines her categories, seems in Pen Hetherington's case to have been hers, rather than her subjects'. The cheeky honesty of her dedication puts to shame politer inscriptions: it is dedicated first 'For herself', and only then for her parents and children (p. viii).

Pen's own description of the book is that it 'combines some elements of family history, some elements of the classical political biography, and some of the theoretical underpinning characteristic of psycho-history' (p. vi). To comment on the last element: in several extended analyses of personality the biographer assumes that discovery of unconscious drives has been possible, and describes behaviour in terms of psychoanalytic concepts such as sublimation. Her interpretations are convincing, not entirely because of the penetration of the psychoanalysis (an irreverent thought: has Pen undergone a training analysis, and can one analyse one's parents?) but because she narrates in a way which offers to the reader the pleasures and pains of recognition usually associated with works of the imagination.

Her work has qualities akin to those of narrative fiction. In spite of the book's title, which may superficially be read as focusing the bio-

graphy upon Pen's father, the Labor politician, the centre of consciousness lies closer to his wife, Liza. It is Liza who 'recognized', 'listened', 'understood' (*passim*) the process of making the politician; marital and family relationships are chiefly apprehended from her point of view. This may be seen to arise naturally from Liza's habit of forming strong family relationships, in contrast to her husband's more reticent engagement with his wife and children, but it may also be influenced by the modelling of daughter upon mother, a psychological link which can hardly be nullified in taking up the role of biographer.

And to some degree that link may extend to a female reviewer insofar as one reads novels and biographies better to understand oneself. Thus, in Liza's 'anger and resentment' (p. 118) at finding herself regarded by her adolescent children 'as some sort of reliable household servant' (p. 116), this reviewer and, I suspect, the biographer relive and, one hopes, resolve similar female experiences. The therapeutic quality of the biographical experience for the subjects is indicated in the closing paragraph; anxieties were released in a kind of catharsis: 'They were deeply moved . . . they laughed and laughed . . . they had enlarged their freedom, and come to terms with what had often seemed a hostile world' (p. 186). Although the biographer has almost extinguished explicit indicators of her own personality in the book itself, it is apparent from the book's careful and reticent apparatus that the connection between author and subjects transcended in intensity any categorized by Professor Bair. The book's coherence holds against this potentially distorting relationship because the honesty which characterizes Ron, the Labor politician, and his wife, Liza, is displayed without flinching by their biographer. The book's epigraph is pertinent: "Speak of chance, gentlemen, if you like. In my experience I have observed nothing arbitrary in this field, for it is criss-crossed in such a way that it avoids chance." In tracing the determinants of personality in her parents the biographer is necessarily tracing her own. Almost any other *genre* would be easier to manage, and this biography has been managed very steadily.

It is published by the author (shame on the timidity of publishers!) and at \$8.50 is a bargain. It is pleasingly illustrated with photographs and a map (a table of illustrations

would have been helpful); the typeface, paper, and page layout are agreeable to the eye. In a book which has been printed with attention to economy and appearance, it is a pity that the obsolescent practice of indenting passages of quotation was retained; if quotations are judiciously separated from the main text by white space, there is no cause to lose space by in-

denting. Presumably the author proof-read the text herself, and her standard is not lower than that which obtains in the Trade; at line 4 on p. 188 '1938' should probably read '1838'.

1. *The Institute for Modern Biography Newsletter*, v. 2, no. 4 (Dec. 1981), pp. 2-9.

DOROTHY W. COLLIN

DALE HARCOTBE

portrait

The tiny gold replica
has been refined
carries no splinters to graze
or tear at the body
as did its rough counterpart
The woman fingers the gold
it is smooth to her touch and
warmed by the fire of her body
Her fingers trace the circle
that links the replica
to the chain
The original forged a circle too
and was linked by a far finer
chain than this.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RUSSELL BLACKFORD—was born in Sydney, now lives in Melbourne, where he teaches at Monash University. His critical work on science fiction has been published in Australia and America, and he has since 1980 been associated with the journal *Science Fiction*.

VERONICA BRADY—is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. She has contributed critical articles to Australian and overseas literary journals and edited *Soundings: A Selection of Western Australian Poetry*. A new book, *Crucible of Prophets—Australians and the Question of God*, was published in 1981.

DORIS BRETT—is a Melbourne psychologist. Her poems have appeared in *Westerly*.

DAVID BROOKS—teaches in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. He is an editor of the magazine *New Poetry*. His first full collection of poems, *The Cold Front*, was published in 1982.

ANDREW BURKE—has worked in Perth in radio and as an advertising copywriter. He has had poems published in *Westerly*, *New Poetry* and *Artlook* and a collection of poems, *Let's Face the Music and Dance* (1975).

GREG BURNS—is a graduate of Murdoch University in History and Social and Political Theory. He lives in Perth.

DOROTHY COLLIN—teaches in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. Has edited Mrs Gaskill's *North and South* for Penguin.

J. W. CLARK—has lived in Singapore and London and was a laboratory assistant before completing a degree at La Trobe University.

BRUCE DAWE—has worked at a number of occupations and served nine years in the RAAF. He is a graduate of the universities of Queensland and New England, and is senior lecturer in Language and Literature at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education. The latest book of his poems is *Sometimes Gladness: Collected Poems 1954-1978*.

DIANE DODWELL—is a tutor in English at Burwood State College of Victoria. She has completed her first book of poetry, *Journeys*.

PAUL EGGERT—teaches in the English Department at La Trobe University. His PhD thesis at the University of Kent at Canterbury was on D. H. Lawrence.

JENNIFER DE GARIS—born in England and taught in an East London primary school before coming to Perth in 1965. Has taught English in State high schools.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY—graduated in Medicine at the University of Adelaide in 1973. He has published stories and poems in a number of literary journals, and won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (London) 1982.

DALE HARCOCMBE—lives in Blacktown. Last year won the open section of the poetry competition in the Blacktown City Festival.

RORY HARRIS—lives in Adelaide. He has published poems in literary magazines and been poet in residence at a number of schools. He has edited children's anthologies.

R. G. HAY—was born in Queensland, where he has been a teacher and is at present senior lecturer at Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education. His poetry has been published in Australian literary journals.

GRAEME HETHERINGTON—lives in Hobart, and is a lecturer in the Classics Department at the University of Tasmania. He has published poetry in Australian and English literary magazines.

DOROTHY HEWETT—poet and playwright. Now lives in Sydney, was writer-in-residence at the University of Western Australia in 1982.

COLIN JOHNSON—the well known Aboriginal writer, is author of two novels, *Wild Cat Falling* and *Long Live Sandawara* and a number of short stories. He was writer-in-residence at Murdoch University in 1982 and now lives in Melbourne.

JEAN KENT—was born in Queensland and completed an arts degree at the University of Queensland. She is at present living in Sydney, and was awarded a Young Writer's Fellowship in 1981 and has now received a writing grant for a further twelve months. She was awarded the John Shaw Neilson Poetry Prize for 1981 by the Victorian Fellowship of Writers.

JUDITH LAZAROO—was born in Merredin and lived a 'peripatetic childhood in various Western Australian country towns and suburbs of Perth'. She attended the University of Western Australia, but left to live for five years in Singapore. She has worked at a wide variety of jobs.

ROD MORAN—is a graduate of Melbourne University and is a technical teacher with the Education Department in Victoria. He has published in Australian literary magazines.

MARK O'CONNOR—writer-in-residence at James Cook University in North Queensland. His books *Reef Poems* and *The Eating Tree* (1980) reflect his years in North Queensland and travels in Europe and elsewhere.

GEORGE SEDDON—is director of the Centre for Environmental Studies, University of Melbourne. He has taught in the English, Philosophy, and Geology departments at the University of Western Australia and at a number of universities overseas. He is the author of *Swan River Landscapes* (1970), *Sense of Place* (1972), and many other studies that bridge the disciplines of literature, history, philosophy and science.

MARGARET SCOTT—was born in England and educated in Bristol and Newnham College, Cambridge. She came to Australia in 1959 and worked for the Tasmanian Education Department, and then in the English Department of the University of Tasmania. Her poetry has been published in Australian literary journals and periodicals.

ADAM SHOEMAKER—is a Canadian student who came to Australia in 1980, to take up a postgraduate scholarship at the Australian National University. He is writing a doctoral thesis which concerns Aboriginal/white race relations literature in Australia since 1930.

BETH SPENCER—has recently moved from Melbourne to Sydney to study at Sydney University. *Atonement* is her first published story.

JAMES WHITELAW—works as a public servant. *The Path* is his first published story.

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