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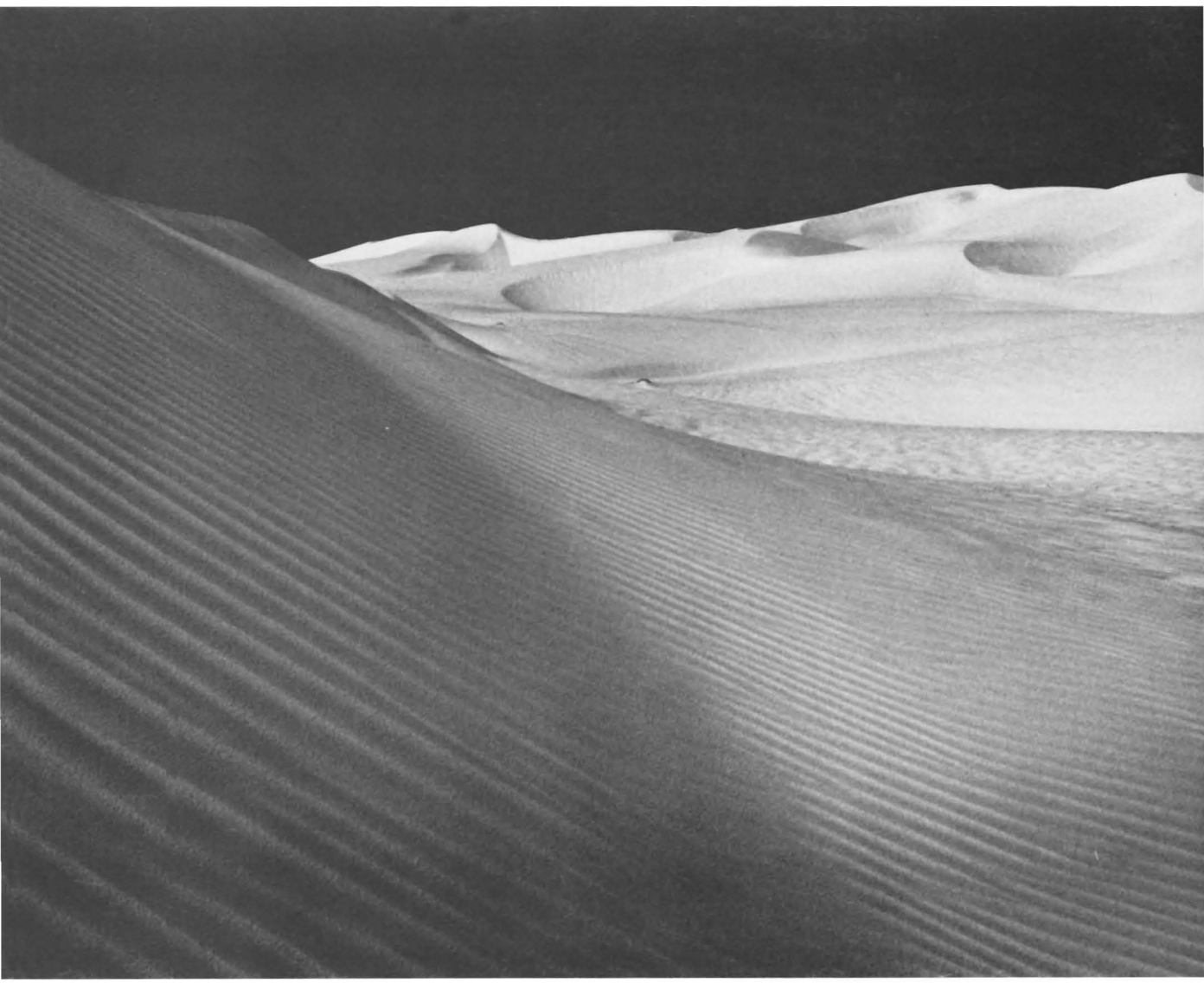

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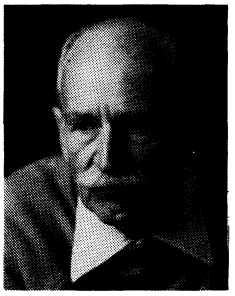

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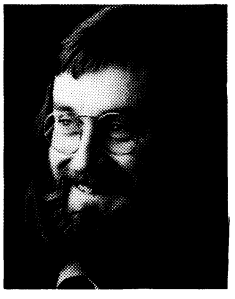

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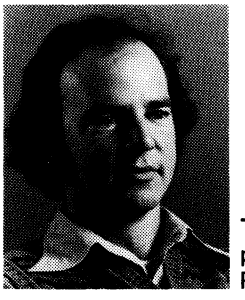

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WESTERLY

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JAMES McQUEEN

The Brown Passport

When at last the announcement came, the metallic edge of the loudspeaker's voice burred and blunted by the resonant echoes of the lounge, Raines closed his paperback, slipped it into his briefcase, and joined the queue at the counter. The muffled clatter, the discordant hum of the terminal, surged over him and, carrying with it the last of his composure, rose towards the distant ceiling. He hated air travel and relied upon the opiate of books to dull, at least intermittently, the pre-flight nervousness that always gnawed at him. Today he felt even more disturbed than usual. He had flown often enough before—too often—on the domestic services; but this was his first international flight. He shuffled along with the queue, a nervous and unremarkable figure in his neat grey suit, clutching his passport and making a last minute check for wallet and dramamine pills.

Immersed in the contemplation of threatening but unlikely disasters, he was surprised to find that his turn had come. He blinked at the hand which extended to take his passport. Fumbling a little, he handed it over, together with his departure slip.

The man behind the counter, armed with the authority of his blue uniform, his telephones and rubber stamps, the campaign insignia of coloured biros on his breast, seemed improbably young. He took the passport, flicked almost contemptuously through its empty pages, and began to hand it back. Then, suddenly, he stopped. For a brief calculating second his hand seemed frozen in midair. Then, slowly, he withdrew the passport, opened it again, looked more carefully at it, checked the photograph, the serial number. He laid the passport on the counter in front of him and gazed down at it. His right forefinger began to tap slowly, deliberately, on the dull plastic cover. He did not look up at Raines again, but his left hand moved slowly, almost furtively, to press a small recessed button at the edge of the counter.

Raines stood immobile, too surprised to speak. Finally he opened his mouth to question, to protest ... something, he didn't know exactly what. But before he could find the words he felt a polite touch on his elbow. He turned to find an older man, thin and greyhaired, beside him. Raines was unable to decide whether or not the man's worn blue suit was a uniform. The man reached past Raines and, delicately, picked up the passport from the counter.

"If you'd step this way a moment, sir?"

"What is it? What's the matter?" Strange alarms fluttered in Raines' stomach.

The man smiled, a slow warm smile of commiseration and reassurance. "Just a small irregularity, sir, no more. If you'd just come with me ...?"

His grip on Raines' elbow was gentle, polite, yet commanding. Together they

turned away from the counter, from the side windows with their vistas of pale thin sunlight, damp concrete, waiting silver planes. As they walked through the crowd Raines noticed the curious stares and found himself flushing a little.

When they reached the far side of the lounge the man stopped at an unmarked door between the toilets and the newspaper kiosk. He opened the door, stepped aside. "If you wouldn't mind?"

Raines stepped through the doorway; the man followed and closed the door behind them, shutting out the noises of the lounge. The only sound now was the gentle whine of airconditioners. Raines found that they were standing in a long corridor, carpeted, brightly lit by fluorescents, that seemed to stretch endlessly away on either side. He felt suddenly naked, and a little frightened. He clutched his briefcase a little more tightly. His guide smiled again, motioned to the left, and they set off along the corridor, their feet making no sound in the thick olive pile of the carpet. The walls of the corridor were blank, white, studded irregularly with plain unmarked doors. At one of the doors set in the righthand wall the guide stopped. He opened the door without knocking and ushered Raines into a small office. At least Raines thought at first that it was an office; after he had looked about the room it seemed to him that it was in fact more like a workshop or laboratory. Along the right-hand wall ran a stainless steel bench. Above the bench were shelves on which stood bottles and cans of chemicals. There were tools ranged neatly on the bench, small shining tools that reminded Raines somehow of a dentist's surgery. At one end of the bench a black microscope stood beside the cowled hood of an extractor fan. There was another door in the far wall, beyond the desk.

The desk, plain grey-enamelled metal, stood in the middle of the room. Behind it sat a small round middle-aged man. He was quite bald, and wore an immaculate white laboratory coat. A pair of spectacles dangled from his neck, suspended by a silver chain.

The man in the blue suit padded softly past Raines and laid the passport gently on the bare desk in front of the man in the white coat. Then he turned away and left without speaking, closing the door quietly behind him.

Raines, recovering slowly from his surprise and apprehension, began to feel irritated. "Look," he said, "I don't know what all this is about . . ."

"Sit down." The man behind the desk raised mild brown eyes for a moment. His voice was low and throaty, and under the easy friendliness of its tone lay a certain hint of authority.

Raines sat down abruptly in the single chair before the desk. "Please . . ."

The man in the white coat held up his right hand, palm towards Raines. "Don't worry," he said. "It's nothing . . . a formality. It will take only five or ten minutes . . ."

"But I have a plane to catch . . ."

"Don't *worry*." The man looked down at the passport in front of him. It was an ordinary passport, a rectangular booklet with rounded corners, a dark blue plastic cover, gold embossing, a serial number perforated through the first half of the book. Apart from photograph, personal details, signatures, it was blank, virgin, unused. Raines was surprised to see that the man did not open the passport, but merely looked at the cover, turning the booklet over and over in his hands. Surely, thought Raines, if there's anything wrong with the passport it would be the signature, the serial number, something like that. He knew so little about passports—he had had this one for less than a month. As he watched, the man in the white coat opened a drawer in the desk, took out two sheets of white paper and slid one inside the front cover of the passport, one inside the back. Then, also from the desk drawer, he took a thin plastic stencil and placed it carefully over the front cover of the passport, securing it at the edges with tiny

clips. The stencil sheet appeared to cover, as far as Raines could see, the whole front cover of the passport except for the gold embossing. The man in the white coat stood up, carried the passport to the bench and laid it on a large sheet of coarse paper under the hood of the fan. He touched a switch and the gentle humming of the fan filled the room. From the shelf the man took an aerosol can, a small bottle of transparent fluid, and a tiny brush. He pressed the button of the aerosol, directed the colourless spray onto the masked passport cover. Then he replaced the aerosol and unclipped the stencil. Opening the bottle, he took the small brush, dipped it, and—using a magnifying glass—touched up the areas of embossing previously covered by the bridging strips of the stencil—the A's, the R's, the P's, the O's, the tiny interstices of crown and emblem. He re-capped the bottle, cleaned the brush, and turned back to Raines. "Very quick," he said. "It dries in a few seconds . . ."

Raines frowned, looked at his watch. His plane was due to leave in eight minutes. Apprehension made his voice thin and high. "My plane . . ."

"Won't be long now," said the man in the white coat. He took down another aerosol can from the shelf and began to spray the front cover of the passport. When he had finished the cover was no longer dark blue and gold, but a deep muddy brown. The man smiled at Raines again. "This dries fast, too," he said, and flopped the booklet over, sprayed the back cover. He waited a few seconds, turned the passport over again. With a pair of fine tweezers he began to peel off the masking film, revealing the gold embossed words and symbols. Then he switched off the extractor fan, picked up the passport and brought it back to the desk. "See . . . all done. Plenty of time."

Raines regarded the passport blankly. It seemed suddenly very strange, foreign. A brown passport? Were there different colours? Had he been given the wrong colour in the first place? If that was so, then it must be a common mistake; the place was obviously equipped to handle the necessary transcolourations quickly and expertly. But it *did* look strange . . . a brown passport. Still, apart from the colour, nothing had changed. Surely?

The man in the white coat pressed a button on his desk. In a moment the door behind him was opened and a thin young man entered. He was ginger-haired, nondescript, his expression amiable. He wore no uniform, but a rather dingy fawn suit and frayed necktie.

The man in the white coat handed the passport to the youth. "All finished," he said, and leaned back in his chair. He didn't look at Raines again. The youth smiled tentatively at Raines, and gestured towards the door through which he had come. Raines, still clutching his briefcase, walked towards the door. The young man reached round Raines to open the door, waited for him to pass through, then followed. The door closed silently behind them.

Raines found that he was in yet another corridor. But this one was very different from the last; it was shabby, high-ceilinged, dadoed, with a dusty coconut matting runner over bare boards. The light, dim and uneven, came from a few bare bulbs suspended from the ceiling at wide intervals. The walls were studded with oldfashioned doors, heavy and wood-panelled, with porcelain knobs. Raines tried to recall the layout of the terminal building, tried to imagine just where he might be. He found it difficult to believe that the building he remembered could be big enough to contain the areas through which he was passing. He thought that it might be, perhaps, part of an older building, hidden by the facade of the new.

He followed his new guide down the dim corridor to a turning, into another identical corridor, round still another corner. Finally the youth stopped outside one of the anonymous wooden doors, rapped lightly on the panel with his knuckles, opened the door, glanced round the edge into the room. Then he turned

to Raines, smiled, beckoned. Raines looked ht his watch. Two minutes. He knew then, with dismal certainty, that he was going to miss his plane. Still, he told himself, there would be another plane in six hours. They would just have to find him a seat on that. And luckily none of his arrangements would be irredeemably disrupted by the delay. He sighed, and followed the young man into the room.

When he looked around him he was more puzzled than ever. Because now all trace of officialdom, of formality, seemed to have disappeared. The room was large, dim, with no windows and only a single skylight. Suspended from the grimy ceiling a lone light bulb burned ineffectually at the end of a frayed flex. The walls were dirty yellow plaster, the floor covered with worn grey linoleum. The smell, the stuffiness, made him think of a long-closed school-room; chalk-dust, stale air, a faint lingering hint of old perspiration.

With a small start he realised that his guide had left by the door through which they had entered. And that he was alone with the only other occupant of the room. She was seated behind a worn wooden table in the centre of the room, staring calmly at him, the passport lying before her on the bare scarred table top.

She was in her late thirties, perhaps, strong and stocky, with short blond hair and tanned skin. She wore a thin puce dress that left her arms bare to the shoulders. Raines, staring blankly at her, felt a curious sense of unreality begin to creep over him. He seemed to have stumbled into the midst of some inexplicable and farcical bureaucratic tangle. And the surroundings seemed so commonplace, yet so bizarre. He had a strange feeling, too, that despite the silence of the room, there were others just like it, a whole warren of them. He sensed silent surreptitious life about him, an endless and slightly menacing air of transience; rooms, just like this one, occupied for a little, abandoned, reoccupied.

"Look," he said, "I've already missed my plane. And no-one's even told me what all this is about..."

"Sit down." The woman pointed to a plain wooden chair in front of the table. Her voice was neutral, assured, detached.

Raines sat, holding his briefcase tightly on his lap. In the confusion that surrounded him the case seemed, he thought, almost his only connection now with reality. And, despite his irritation, his impatience, he found to his consternation that he was feeling ... more than uneasy ... almost guilty. As if he had committed some indiscretion, some phantom misdemeanour, for which he was about to be called to account. He tried to shrug the feeling off; to reassure himself that he was a simple traveller, nothing more. At least he had been, until half an hour ago.

He watched the woman. The brown passport lay on the table before her, but she did not open it. Instead, she tapped at it with her right index finger, a gesture reminiscent of the officer at the counter. Raines felt his irritation rising, flooding over into anger. But before he could speak, the woman forestalled him.

"You've never married, have you?"

He stared at her in disbelief. "What?"

"You've never married, have you?"

He shook his head, genuinely puzzled. "No." There must be some kind of mistake in identity here, they must be confusing him with some-one else, some stranger with the same name perhaps...

"Why not?"

"Why not?" He was stunned now, not merely surprised. "What... I don't see what this has to do with ... look, I applied for a passport in the proper way ... if anyone's made a mistake it's not me..."

"Tell me a little about yourself," she said, and leaned back in her chair.

Raines could see the heavy tanned legs beneath the table, moulding the thin fabric of her skirt.

When it came, his own voice sounded strangely distant to his ears. "I'm an accountant . . ."

"Yes?"

He could feel reality receding now, like a wave retreating over smooth damp sand. Something was happening here, but he couldn't understand, even believe.

"I'm forty-seven years old," he said, half in defiance, half in a kind of despair. He looked closely at her face. The wide-spaced blue eyes were neither friendly nor hostile, merely intent.

The silence widened over the room like a dark spreading pool. He found it difficult to keep his eyes away from her legs. She had crossed them, and the skirt had ridden up.

When she spoke her words struck at him like a blow. "How often do you masturbate?"

"What?"

"How often?"

His irritation and anger had disappeared now, and all he felt was a great confusion and the beginnings of panic. How could she speak to him like this, anyway, a woman? And why, why?

He found that he could no longer look her in the face.

"Not often," he said. He had not meant to speak at all, beyond, perhaps, some despairing protest. And the echoes of his humiliating admission rang like thunders in the quiet room. Why had he answered? Why had he said anything? Stand up, he thought, stand up and walk out . . .

But he no longer knew where to go. The corridors . . . the endless barriers of silence held him immobile in his chair.

"How often?" she insisted.

He refused, with great effort, to answer. He bent his head and concentrated on the fine dark hairs on the backs of his hands.

"Well?" Her voice was as cool and calm as ever. And as insistent.

He felt blood surging slowly to his face, suffusing his cheeks. "I don't know . . . months . . ." For Christ's sake, he thought, stop it, stop it . . .

"What do you think of when you're masturbating?"

His forehead crinkled into a frown. What could she mean? Despite his resolve, he looked up at her face, and was immediately trapped in the necessity of a reply. "Well . . . what do people usually think of?"

"'You'd be surprised . . ." He saw, for the first time, the ghost of a smile on her face. "Do you think of women?"

"Of course . . ." It was as if she were unravelling the convolutions of his mind as coolly, as callously, as an anatomist might unravel the coiled intestines of a cadaver.

"Have you ever had any homosexual experiences?"

"Of course not!" Every other emotion was drowned now in the tide of indignation that swept over him. She had no right . . .

"How long since you've had sexual intercourse?"

"I don't know . . .

"How long?"

"Does it matter?"

She smiled again, slightly, secretly. "That's what we're trying to find out, isn't it?" she said. "How long?"

"I don't remember. Fifteen years or so . . ." He was drawn now into her insistent web, trying desperately to defend something; he wasn't sure what.

"Who was she?"

"Just a woman . . ."

"And up to that time you'd had fairly regular intercourse?"

How did she know? he wondered. No-one could know, no-one could care, surely? It couldn't matter, *surely* . . .

"What kind?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, vaginal, oral, anal . . ."

"Normal, of course!"

She smiled again, a very small smile. But Raines had sensed in it some almost triumphant condescension. He felt very much alone, isolated, and frightened now. He found it increasingly difficult to conjure up an immediate recollection of the airport, the bustle of the departure lounge, the whine of the jet engines, the smell of thronged humanity. It *must* be there, of course, a hundred yards away, perhaps . . . how far *had* he come? And why? Why?

"Look," he said desperaely, "what's going on? Why all this questioning? You must tell me! I've got a right to know . . ."

"Did you talk to the women while you were having intercourse?" She might not have heard his outburst.

"No, but why . . . ?"

"Why didn't you talk?"

"I don't know . . ." He felt suddenly enormously tired.

"Did the women talk to you?"

"No." Perhaps they had, he could no longer remember. But even truth seemed to be of little importance now. All that mattered was escaping the burden of his great weariness. He watched a spot on the dirty plaster wall above the woman's head. He did not want to look at her again. He realised suddenly that he hated her very much. But he felt too weak, too lethargic, even to continue to protest. She had defeated him, won her strange contest, whatever it was.

Suddenly she leaned forward, picked up the brown passport, slapped it sharply on the desk. "You can go."

"Go?"

She stood up, walked round the table, handed him the passport. He stood up, conscious of a great weakness in his limbs, a trembling of relief. He took the passport and turned towards the door.

"Not that way."

He felt her strong blunt fingers on his arm, turning him towards the far wall, towards a door he had not noticed before.

"Through there," she said.

He opened the door, walked through, not knowing what to expect: another corridor, another guide, perhaps; or the clamour of the departure lounge, the boarding gateway, the concrete of the runway.

But he found none of these things. Instead, a blinding light struck at him, its intensity so great that it felt like a physical blow; his free hand, clutching the brown passport, darted up to shield his eyes. He heard the door closing softly behind him, and turned to see the last long sliver of shadow disappear. On this side the door was plain grey metal, with neither lock nor handle. From behind it, from the very edge of audibility, he seemed to hear the faintest echo of distant laughter. Then he turned away again, the passport still shielding his eyes.

Before him now, as his eyes grew slowly accustomed to the glare, he saw no airport, no runway, no waiting silver planes; only a vast and endless desert of sand and red broken rock, beating and pulsing with heat, stretching away towards the place where the yellow sky should have curved down towards the horizon. But there was no horizon; empty plain and empty sky seemed to stretch towards

infinity in a cruel parallel, compressing between them an intensity of heat and light that held no objective, no goal, no salvation.

He turned back, desperately, towards the door.

But it was no longer there.

JOHN FUERST

Lessons

Colour fractions
Chalk themselves
Over the board of the schoolyard;
Uniform blue
Over wooden top yellow,
Swing red
Over lawn green.
This way there are divisions made.
Back in class
Separations are also learnt;
Apples into addition,
World into words.
Once through the gate,
Some kids still know
Reality's grades aren't numbered,
But mingle with themselves
Like the bird and its reflection
Meeting in a sidewalk pool
On a hot afternoon,
Wings ruffled
Into cool infinity.

JENNY BOULT

Memories of a Lost Childhood

Aged ten. Flounced in the loungeroom
lookin down my nose said
Capitalism stinks, socks like concertinas
school tie all crooked
Dad was a capitalist. Mum said

Who the hell do you think you are?

I'd been listening to Bob Dylan
freewheelin thru my homework
all fired up to take th class by storm
with a composition called
Aspects of Cinematic Architecture in Coventry Cathedral
Hedgehoppers Anonymous were tellin me th news.
Maybe I was twelve.

Told mum I wanted to be an angry young man
they called me thunderbolt on th bus to school.
Thunderbolt.

Thunderstruck.
Don't be so silly, you're a girl
and
there'll be no angry children here.

She never did see th stained glass window
or th tapestry

I don't know if she ever listened to me

I only remember her telling me

Be quiet.

ELIZABETH JOLLEY

Woman in a Lampshade

One cold wet night in July Jasmine Tredwell took several sheets of paper and her typewriter together with a quantity of simple food and some respectable wine and, saying goodnight fondly to her dozing husband, she set off in search of solitude.

"I'm going up to the farm," she said, "I'll be home first thing on Monday morning," she promised. But her husband, Emeritus Professor of Islamic Studies, was encased in head-phones listening to Mahler and paid no attention to the departure.

It was not her custom to give lifts to strangers. Indeed, because of reported bashings and murders in lonely suburbs, she had, in an impulsively tender moment, promised the elderly Professor that she would never pick up from the roadside any stranger however pathetic or harmless his appearance.

She saw the young man standing in the dark. He seemed to be leaning rather than standing, the storm holding him up in its force. He was an indistinct outline, blurred because of the rain. It was as if he had come into existence simply because someone, hopelessly lost among words, had created him in thoughtful ink on the blotting paper. Immediately, forgetting her promise, she stopped the car and, leaning over, opened the door with some difficulty.

"Hop in quick young man, you're getting drowned!"

The grateful youth slipped quickly into the warm and secure fragrance. He tried, without success, not to mark the clean upholstery with the water as it ran off him in dirty little streams. Jasmine took the hills noisily, the windscreen wipers flying to and fro flinging off the splashings as if the car boasted small fountains on either side.

"Thanks," he said, "thanks a lot."

"Such a terrible night," she said, "are you going far?"

"As far as I can get."

"Where shall I drop you?"

"Oh, anywhere. It'll do if you drop me off when you've gone as far as you're going." He gave a nervous little laugh. "Tah very much," he said, "thank you very much, tah!"

That the young man had no definite destination did not cause Jasmine to wish that she had not stopped to offer him a ride. They hardly spoke. Almost at once Jasmine was touched to notice that her youthful travelling companion had fallen asleep.

"He must have been exhausted," she thought and she wondered about his ragged soaked clothes. "He's probably hungry too," she said to herself.

Jasmine felt safe in the lamplight. And she felt same in the lampshade, pretty too. She was not a pretty woman, she never pretended to be. But the lampshade, when she put it on, made her feel pretty, softly so and feminine. It was the colour of ripe peaches and made of soft pleats of silk. It was light and it fitted her perfectly. It was like a garden-party hat only more foolish because it was, after all, a lampshade. To wear the lampshade suggested the dangerous and the exotic while still sheltered under a cosy domesticity.

She never guessed the first time she placed it on her head how she would feel. She had never experienced such a feeling before. It had taken her by surprise. After that first time she had looked with shy curiosity at other women in shops and at parties, at the hairdresser's and even while passing them in the street, quietly noticing the private things about them, the delicate shaping of the back of the neck or the imaginative tilt of the ears. She wondered too about all the tiny lines and folds and creases, all the secret things. So recently having discovered something about herself, she wondered what secret pleasures they had and whether they had known them long before she had discovered hers.

She sang softly,

"I love my little lampshade
So frilly and warm
If I wear my silky lampshade
I'll come to no harm."

"Are you awake?" she asked the young man later that night. He was buried under a heap of old fur coats and several spoiled pages.

"Are you awake? Hey! Are you awake? God! how soundly you sleep! It's being young, I suppose, hey! wake up!"

"What's that? What the . . . ?" he hardly moved.

"Young man, could you move over a bit, my typewriter's falling off my knee, it's giving me the most awful cramp. Also I'm getting a pain in my back. Ah! that's better. No, no further or you'll fall out. That'll do beautifully. Hey!" she laughed, pleased with the music of her own voice, "don't roll back! You know, if you lie on the edge of the bed, you'll soon drop off!"

He drew the coats closer and made no sound.

"That was supposed to be a joke," she said nosily rearranging the papers. "But seriously," she said, "it's like this, I've got a young man, he's a bit of a nuisance really. First he's in a suburban post office in Australia. Can you imagine him behind the counter with his pale offended eyes about to burst into tears and all the little veins and capillaries flushed on his crooked boyish face, or something like that?

Then he turns up again in a depressing hotel in Calais where two lesbians have gone to have a bit of privacy. The younger one wants to get away from her husband and the older one is the husband's secretary, a really boring stuffy old maid. She's quite empty headed and very irritating to be with for more than a few minutes as the younger one discovers quite quickly. In addition, the secretary, the boring one, drinks heavily and is not really very clean. An unfortunate situation altogether. Anyway, my young man's there at the hotel reception desk, in the night, being absolutely useless."

"Who?" the voice muffled in furs could hardly be heard.

"My young man of course," Jasmine, preening, fingered her peach-ripe silk pleats lovingly. "He's left the P.O. to be a hotel receptionist in Calais," she continued. "And then, to my surprise, he moves to a cheap hotel in India,

Madras to be exact, and I've got him there exactly the same, the pale offended eyes filled with tears, the same blushing capillaries, perhaps he's a bit thinner, more haunted looking and, as usual, he's no earthly use," Jasmine sighed sadly. "He's absolutely unable to help the guests when they arrive exhausted in the night. It's two more lesbians, younger than the others and one is very uncomfortable with an unmentionable infection. Not a very nice subject really but, as a writer, I have to look closely at *Life* and every aspect of it." Jasmine sighed again thoughtfully, her long fingers reaching up restlessly plucked the folds of unexpected foolishness.

"C'est une triste métier," she knew her pronunciation was flawless. "In all the stories," she said, "one of the women is horrible to my young man. Absolutely horrible! I mean one in all three. So that's three times he has a really bad time, in all, he's despised, rejected and betrayed. But I'm glad to say that on all occasions the awful unkind behaviour is deeply regretted as soon as the resulting wretchedness is evident."

"What's the trouble?" the young man sat up and yawned almost dislocating his lower jaw.

Jasmine banged her typewriter.

"Can't you understand, I'm stuck! I'm stuck, stuck, stuck." She shuffled the papers across the bed. "Oh by the way," she said as calmly as she could, "would you mind not smoking in bed. My husband can't stand it."

"He's not here is he?" the young man began uneasily, "you said, I thought . . ."

"No of course not," Jasmine said, "but the smoke hangs around and he's very sensitive, his nose I mean," she laughed. 'But," she said, "whatever shall I do with them?"

"Who?"

"My characters of course. I suppose," she paused, "I suppose they could carry on in bed." She began to type rapidly.

"Eh? Yeah!" he turned over.

"Mind the typewriter! Oops! I thought it was gone that time. That's better. You know I must tell you I've got a friend, Moira, well she's not a friend really, more of an enemy. Writers don't have any friends." She settled comfortably against her mountain of pillows. "Well Moira's trying to get a psychiatric musical off the ground. God! That woman's a Bore when she talks about her work. She never stops talking! All last week she was on about an official speech she'd been asked to write for the ceremonial opening of a deep sewerage system, I mean what is there is deep sewerage?"

"Quite a lot I should think," he yawned again. "Have you got going now?"

"No, not at all, it's awful!" she pulled another spoiled page from her typewriter. "I'm afraid," she said watching the paper as it floated to the floor, "I'm afraid, well, you must feel so trapped and cheated. I mean, being here with me in this lonely place. Just think! I brought you all this way and then everything happening like that!"

"What d'you mean, happening," he said patiently, "I mean nothing has yet, has it?"

"I didn't expect my young man and the lesbians . . ."

"I thought they was in Madras," he interrupted.

"Yes, that's right, so they should be, but my young man . . ."

"Well, where is he then? I thought the idea was we'd be having the place to ourselves and I'd work the farm and —" a note of disappointment replaced the impatience in his voice.

"It's such a nuisance," Jasmine replied. "Really I'm sorry. I was so looking forward, you know, to our getting to know each other and," she paused, "and there he is, stupid and useless!"

"Who? Where is he?" he sat up.

"In my brief case. Would you mind awfully? I left it just outside in the porch, I'd be so grateful if you would."

Reluctantly he looked at the cold floor.

"No stop!" Jasmine cried. "Stay where you are in the warm. I must be mad! I'm the one who should go. It's my fault he's out there. I should go. I'm going out to get him. You stay in bed. I'm going!"

Jasmine slipped from the bed and pattered with quick bare feet over the boards. He heard the outside door open and slam shut. He heard the noise of plates and cups and cutlery, a plate dropped somewhere crashing and breaking.

"What's that? Who's there?" he called.

"It's nothing," she replied through a mouthful of food, "nothing at all to worry about. I'm just having a cheese sandwich." She came to the bedside. "Would you like some or are you the kind of person who doesn't like eating in bed? I've sliced up an onion and a hard boiled egg. Do have some!"

"No thank you," he said. "I'm not hungry really no; No thank you, really not hungry thanks all the same."

Jasmine ate ravenously.

"Have some Burgundy," she said, "or would you prefer a beer?" She poured a generous glass of wine for herself and opened a can for her guest.

"'Just move over a bit," she said with her mouth full, "thanks." She chewed and swallowed, "I'm sorry, really I am," she said, "about these papers all over the bed. I'd like to be able to make it up to you in some way. You see I should never have picked you up. When I saw you at the side of the road absolutely drenched I simply couldn't help offering you a lift." She studied the remains of the egg apparently lost in thoughts for which there were no words. "Ever since I decided to become a writer," she announced, "I've been an absolute Pain! You hardly know me really. I mean, take tonight, I've been perfectly terrible. Please, please don't try to contradict me."

In the silence of his obedience he hiccupped.

"Manners!" he apologized.

"Oh dear!" Jasmine was dismayed. "Perhaps you shouldn't drink beer in bed. My husband always gets hiccups if he drinks lying down. Try walking about."

He was not inclined to leave the bed.

"Well," Jasmine said, "if you're shy put this old nighty on. You walk about and I'll think up a fright for you."

Self-conscious and solemn in brushed nylon the young man paced to and fro on the creaking floor boards. He hiccupped at regular intervals. Every minute his thin body jerked.

"Manners!" he muttered, and one minute later, "manners!"

Suddenly she screamed. "Help! Help!"

"What, the, who's there? Where the hell are you?" he hiccupped, "manners!"

"Help! Hellup!"

He hiccupped, "Manners! Where the hell are you?"

"Under the bed silly! Help me out there's not much space," she was out of breath. "Such a pity it didn't work." In the brief silence he hiccupped again.

"Look out!" she whispered, "look out! There's a spider behind you. A great black spider. S.P.I.D.E.R. Look behind you!"

"Manners! What? I can't hear you. Manners!"

"Oh, it's no good. You'll simply have to wait till they wear off," she was just the tiniest bit sulky. "I really can't help it," she said, adjusting the lampshade with one delicate finger, "if He visits me in the middle of the night."

"Who? Here? Who visits you?" he began to search through the heap of furs. "Where's my clothes? I'd better be off. Look, I shouldn't be here."

Jasmine laughed, "Oh Relax! The Muse of course," she said, "perhaps I should say My Muse," she paused, "'it's very amusing really Oh!" her laughter was like a shower of broken glass. "Oh!" she said, 'I made a pun there. I wonder if I could use it somewhere in here, let me see." She rearranged several of the papers. She laughed again. "You look so serious walking up and down in that tatty old gown." He turned to look at her seriously and steadily.

"I've been wondering what's that, I mean, what's that on your head?"

"It's a lampshade," she replied.

"If you don't mind my arskin', why do you?"

"Always when I'm writing," her voice was deep with reverence.

"But I thought we was going to have it away together."

"Yes," Jasmine said, "I thought so too but it's my young man —"

"The one who was in all those places?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I see," he paused and said in a flat voice, "praps I'd better go then."

"Oh no," Jasmine said, "there's absolutely no need. I know," she said, "let's dance! My little transistor's here somewhere. I know it's here, somewhere here." She rummaged among the bear skins and the ancient silver fox. "Ah! here we are. If we danced, you never know, it might be better. I'll just see if I can get some music. Ah good! here's music. Listen there's a dancing teacher too. What a scream!"

The pulse of the music noticeably caused life to return and the dancing instructor's voice flowed quietly bringing shape and order into the disordered room.

"Now for the stylized step. Starting position," the Irish voice was kind, "beat one step up beat two step together beat three step back beat four step together up together back together and up together and back together arms loose relax and smile."

"Come on!" Jasmine was laughing.

"I don't dance. Really, I don't dance."

"Oh come on!"

"Not on beds. I don't dance on beds. It's too dangerous and, besides, it's rude."

Jasmine laughing and breathless reached out and turned the volume on more. There was a change in the music.

"Now the basic camel walk and step and kick and camel walk," the instructor's patient voice continued. "Beat one stub left beat two stub right beat three stub left beat four stub right beat five stub left beat six kick left beat seven stub right beat eight and kick and kick that's just fine you'll make it in time beat one stub left beat two stub right think happy and relax beat three stub left beat four stub right that's great you're great the greatest!"

Jasmine fell off the bed with a crash.

"And now the Latin Hustle," the dancing instructor's persistent voice changed rhythm as the music changed. "Touch and one and two and step back three and four forward five and six repeat touch and one and two and step and one and two and one."

"Now you've properly done it!" the young man fell over the furniture. "You've knocked over the light. Have you broke it? It's pitch dark!" He stumbled again, knocking over a chair. "Where are you?" he shouted. "It's pitch black dark. Yo' must 'ave broke the lamp."

"Over here!" Jasmine sang, teasing through the music and the darkness.

"Where's the matches," panic made him angry.

"Yoo hoo! Here I am," Jasmine was beside him, and then she was far away. "I'm over here," she called, and suddenly she was close again. Both were breath-

ing heavily, gasping even, furniture fell and crockery crashed as if something was rocking the cottage. Jasmine was laughing and laughing, pleased and excited.

"Oh go on," she cried, "don't stop!" she pleaded.

"Repeat these movements till you feel comfortable and confident in your performance," the dancing instructor's voice, keeping time perfectly, penetrated above and below the sound of the music. "Follow the beat sequence and turn and turn repeat and turn and repeat," his patience was endless.

"I'm going outside," the young man was polite and strained. "If yo'll excuse me," he said, "I'll 'ave to go outside."

"Yes, yes of course," Jasmine said, "Just through the yard and up the back you can't miss."

"Thanks," he let the door slam. "Sorry!" he called.

"You'll make it in time," the dancing master's voice consoled, "Try once more beat one stub left beat two stub right."

Jasmine switched off her tiny radio. She was laughing softly, breathlessly. "Now where's the other lamp and the matches. Ah! here they are."

In the soft light she made herself comfortable with three pillows at her back. She began to type rapidly,

"My story just needs a bit of action," she said.

A gun shot sounded close by, it was followed by a second shot.

"Splendid!" Jasmine said. "That's just what I needed. Now I know what happens next." She continued to type. "He'd better do it at once. But not in Madras. He'd better get on a 'plane quickly." Her typewriter rattled on. "Oh well to save time he can do it at the air port." She read aloud what she had written in the mincing tones reserved for her work. "*Quietly he took the jewelled pistol from its silky case and held it to his pale crooked forehead. His eyes were full of tears . . .*" She changed her voice. "That's a nice touch, the crooked forehead, what exquisite writing. I've never written so well before." She read again in the special voice, as she typed, "*Closing his eyes, he pulled the trigger . . .*"

The young man came in. He hiccupped.

"Oh my God!" said Jasmine. "What happened?"

"I missed both times," his voice was flat.

"Oh, what nuisance. So you're still here," she pulled the page from her typewriter and crumpled it in her hand.

"Of course I'm still here. Where should I be?"

"But the shots," Jasmine interrupted, "I thought —"

"Oh that! I tried to get a rabbit but it was too quick," he gave a shy laugh. "I've never pointed a gun at anything before."

"Useless, absolutely useless," Jasmine was exasperated, "you've muffed the whole thing. You muffed it. Can't you do anything properly."

"I don't know," he was almost tearful, "I've never had the chance."

"I suppose you've never tried for long enough," she said.

"I would be able to if I stayed here. I —" he was eager. "I've had a look out there. I like your place. It's just beginning to get light out there, I could see all the things that need doing. I'll fix the fence posts and paint the sheds. I think I know what's up with the tractor, I'll be able to get it going. There's all the things I'd like to do out there." He paused then rushed on ,"on the way up here in the car you said I could stay and work the farm, you said you needed someone like me."

"You never stay anywhere long enough, you said so yourself." She put a fresh sheet in the typewriter.

"Well it's not my fault. Like I said, I've had no chance."

"What do you do?" Jasmine asked.

"What d'you mean?"

Outside a rooster crowed.

"Oh never mind!" Jasmine yawned. "I suppose you're, how do they describe it," she paused, "discovering yourself."

"I'm between jobs," he shouted, "That's where I've always been, between jobs. Between jobs. Between Nothing!" he paused.

"But out there," he was breathless and excited, "I saw it all out there waiting to be done, there's everything to do out there. I'll fix everyhing, you'll see."

"We like it as it is," Jasmine said. "My husband and I like it as it is, we don't want any change."

"There's even a turkey yard," he interrupted her, "'you'd like some turkeys wouldn't you, the yard only needs a bit of new wire netting. I'd have some fowls too."

"But don't you understand," Jasmine said, "we only come here to get away from it all. We like the place as it is. It's only a weekender you know, we like it like this."

"I'll measure up how much wire," he ignored her, "I'll need a bit of paper and a pencil. I'll work out how much paint."

"Australia, Calais, Madras," Jasmine said softly, "what does it matter where I set him, London, New York, Bombay, Paris, Rome, it's all the same wherever he is. What does it matter where he pulls the trigger. First, I'll get him somewhere alone and then I'll kill him off."

"What's that," he said quickly, "what did you say"

Outside another rooster answered the first one.

"Oh, nothing," she fussed through her papers. "I think it's really quite light outside now. There's a bus down at the cross roads about five fifty. It should get you back to town around eight o'clock," she paused and then said, "I want you to know I feel really bad about the whole thing. I mean about bringing you all the way to the cottage like this," she spoke rapidly, "because of wasting your time like this, and I do feel bad about it, I'm going to give you this poem I've written. You can keep it. I have other copies."

"Thank you," he was only just polite, "thank you very much."

"Fourteen stanzas," Jasmine crooned, "fourteen stanzas all with fourteen lines and every one all about my adorable black poodles."

"What'll I do," the young man said, "when I get to the empty town at eight?"

"There's a little refrain," Jasmine murmured, "in the middle of every stanza."

"What'll I do," he said, "when I get to the empty town at eight? I mean where will I go? What can I do there?"

"All the stanzas," she continued, "have this little refrain to include every one of my little black dogs."

"I mean," he said, "where will I go when I get there? I'd rather stay here and fix the fences. Where will I go? What's there to do in the empty town at eight?" He smiled a moment at his own thoughts. "You know," he said, "there's something good about putting new paint on with a new brush. Dark glossy green, I can just see it out there," he smiled in the direction of the yard.

"When I wrote the poem," Jasmine said, "I knew it was good. I was really pleased with it. It's a good poem. I love my poem."

"Where will I go in the empty town," he whined, "I'll have nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep. Can't I stay and paint the shed? Please?"

"I want everyone to be pleased with the poem," she said.

"Eight's early to reach town if you've no reason," he shouted.

"There!" Jasmine smiled, "I've just thought of a wonderful line for a new poem. I must get it down because I forget everything I think up if I don't get it down." She began to type, made a mistake, and pulling the spoiled page out, started a fresh page.

"I mean," the young man cried, "where will I go when I get there? What's there in town for me to do?"

"I never realised before," Jasmine yawned, "that my young man in Madras is an absolute Bore!"

He went to the door and opened it. "Well, I'd better be on my way then," he said in a quiet flat voice. He went out carefully closing the door behind him.

Jasmine sat in bed writing her autobiography. *My father,* she typed, *was the distinguished scientist who discovered heat and light.* She stopped typing to sing to herself,

"I love my little lampshade
So frilly and warm
If I wear my silky lampshade
I'll come to no harm."

He wrote, she typed, *in his life time, two text books, the one on light was blue and for heat, he chose red.*

MICHAEL ROBINSON

A Wedding

Once you have a reasonable job, with reasonable prospects, or a business of your own getting started, and looking secure, so that money and long-term commitments are becoming part of your life, you're likely to want to get married, many people do. Even without much money it seems to happen, maybe it's a sense of direction, coming to realize what's possible to you, what you can honestly hope for, and how to attain it. And being able to love, to grasp another's hand, to give, to receive and be given. I hope they know what they're doing. I stand with the others, in the pleasant afternoon sun, and the light cool air from across the bay, waiting for the couple to arrive. It's my first wedding. There have been other weddings in my circle, but I wasn't invited, or preferred not to go, managing somehow to find an excuse. I remember I sent a telegram.

The church, or chapel, was built only three or four years ago. The forecourt is still very sandy, the grass is struggling, in isolated, straggly patches, without much success. I wonder if anyone waters it, it hardly seems worthwhile, but it would be counter-productive, and heartless, to neglect it. People stand mainly on the wide cement paths, laid out in hollow rectangles around where the grass should be, or on the front steps of the chapel itself, in small groups, talking. In a way the occasion is for them, for parents and relatives, after all it marks a stage in their lives, a change, or a fulfilment, I don't know. And the friends of the bride and groom are almost for moral support, at the actual ceremony. I look around at my contemporaries, most are wearing suits, but now they're here they don't look too uncomfortable, though many must have been edgy on the way, and while getting ready, as certainly I was. And women fussing with their hair, nervously adjusting it, doing, undoing and re-doing it up to the last minute, you can easily imagine, right until their cars pull up. All this elaborate show, by each individual, in tribute to the bride and groom, who will scarcely be observing closely, in tribute to the occasion, to a rite in which all are joined, which is there forever, and which you ignore, or are ignored by, at your peril. Or the same show as always, for your neighbours' eyes, friendly, measuring eyes, ready at the wink of an eye to go blank against you, and shut you out. Then the suits are identification, and the manner of wearing them too, you're with us sufficiently, for today. And the two people getting married will be there alone, together in front of their world, well represented by us and their parents and relatives, putting forth all our respect, and silent, sympathetic friendship, for a few moments. They'll arrive in separate cars, but leave together. They'll have to shake hands with everybody, and make speeches. The reception will be long and noisy. I hope they enjoy it. A photographer will move around taking pictures of everyone there, that will soon be printed and mounted in beautiful albums, to be kept and

brought out every so often, passed around to visitors, children, old friends who call, until one day many of the guests here will be no more to them than this photograph, having passed quite out of their lives, so that they must strain to remember ... was his name Peter? or Andrew?

And they'll have children, too, it's almost inevitable, and maybe, in the distant future, even grandchildren ... Probably they'll stay together, it should work. They've known each other so long, it's nearly three years since they first went out together, and now that they're getting married it doesn't seem strange, or surprising, although I didn't expect it. They had to talk to the priest, about reasons for wanting to marry, and responsibilities, they don't do these things lightly nowadays. I wonder if they talked about children, and how to raise them, how to behave in their presence, it's very important. I'm sure she will want to have children, two, three, she ought not to go much further, when she once gets settled. Some people say it's enough just to be natural, I suppose it depends on your nature. But when you turn your look on a child, or transfix it with the words that are its gospel, your words and your gaze should be clear, coming from your strength. And what germs of weakness are nurtured within these two? I don't know. They seem unspoiled and good. They may wait for years before starting a family.

It's autumn, and there are mists across the river in the cold of morning, but now, before evening falls, the bay is bright in the sun, limpid and rippling. Most of us went to the school that overlooks it, only a narrow road and a parking area separating the school grounds from the chapel. And some are still at beginnings, the beginning of married life for example. Slowly, a lot will change, old habits, old friendships, friendships especially don't stay the same, however much you want them to, your friend's outlook is different somehow, calmer and a little removed, and whenever you want to see them you must visit two people, instead of one, or of seeing them one at a time, in surroundings that are right for that person, and not for others. Everything draws together, into small, familiar worlds, and each becomes separate. And maybe we'll all travel, move into different orbits, then veer briefly back and sit drinking and remembering, as if no time had passed at all, only now there are houses and families, and different cars, and larger waistbands perhaps. They'll move into a house, I hope it's soon. Looking at different houses, in different suburbs, avoiding the snares and contracts of different estate agents, that can be a depressing business, though exciting at first. But I think they have a short-list already, and a good solicitor to advise them. They're lucky to have a large combined income, and reliable backing. Not all of us here are likely ever to be rich, comparatively speaking. You need opportunities, and the acumen to make the most of them, to be able to work hard, and to handle responsibility without buckling, or making the wrong decisions. To be able to think on your feet, without falling over, that gift is rarer and more valuable than people realize. First they'll go on their honeymoon, in a beach-hut south of the city, be alone together and be happy, without having to dress up. And then, when they come back, there's that small but well furnished flat, already full of wedding presents, they'll be quite comfortable staying there, if they can clear out the presents to make room. In how many different houses, I wonder, will they live, as their marriage continues?

A large sedan drives up, and stops some distance away, by the beginning of the long path that leads up to the courtyard. Is this the car with the bride? It's difficult to see so far, but yes, there they are in the back, arrayed in white, the bride and her two sisters, and her father opens a front door and stands, tall and resplendent, peering about him. Shouldn't the groom be here first? I don't know much about weddings. Will we all have to join in prayers, and sing hymns? Of course they'll provide books, which we'll handle clumsily, not knowing our way

about them as we did at school. The priest will have to say something, give a sermon. The bride is still in the car, she's not getting out, she must be nervous, and shy, waiting for the groom to arrive. At first they'll be strange to each other, in the unfamiliarity of the ceremony and their strange new roles, then they'll come together as they speak the responses, and kneel at the front of the church, before the priest. Will she look as wonderful as she should, serious and unconsciously glowing, in her white wedding dress? I'm looking forward to watching her. I know she will. I wonder if she feels embarrassed, or finds it all silly. Or are they both terrified, wherever he is, like raw actors opening a new theatre, convinced they'll trip on the carpet and bring the house down? I'm glad I'm not in his place. When the service is ended, when they've walked back down the aisle and reached the church-door, that photographer will be there waiting for them, ready to capture their smiles, of relief, of dutiful joy, of happy triumph. When will my loneliness end? I stand waiting with the others, listening to their everyday talk. People begin to move inside.

And now the groom is here.

JOHN FOULCHER

Martin and the hand grenade

Martin displays the grenade, the class pauses
for history. With his father's bleak skill
Martin edges out the firing pin, indicates

the chamber where the powder went; he fingers
the serrations, bristles with the shrapnel
possibilities. Questions. No—it had limited

power: ten yards, then the spread
became too loose to catch a man's mortality.
Around the class now. And each boy holds

the small war, lifts it into the air
above the desk trenches: the dead weapon hurls
across mind fields, tears the heart ahead.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

Bees

Bees
have small furry pelts,
hard to keep from getting sticky.

Their languages
are dance and telepathy.

Inside each bee
is delicate machinery,
a noisy swiss watch.

Some kamikaze freely for the Empress.
Others, at the end, look back with pride
at an 8oz jar in the supermarket.

Moonta

They shovelled the best oxide
from the earth a century ago .
From land greener than Cornwall,
a stony green desert of copper.

Now the graveyard presses them to ore.
Rows of a family never known,
but catching my throat like a ballad.

The Museum preserves likenesses.
Daguerreotypes of my father's grandfather,
blacksmith turned mayor.
Great uncles scrubbed for sermons,
aunts bent great by toil.
All their possessions catalogued—
even their bedpans become antiques,
the meagre heritage of democracy.

They left high pyramids of slag,
the rubble of a past long smelted.
Their history still extractable, but uneconomic.
All of us being relatives, in the end.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

Bank Statement, March 79

Fissioned from a nuclear family
I survived a dozen country schools,
a thousand Sunday congregations.

Something less definite than ambition
washed me down hard rivers
to the bitumen estuary.

I was six years an inner-city nomad,
a subsistence of Marx and sheet-metal work
supporting me through medical school.

But I left that factory too late,
my heart smelted to a pellet,
hating myself, and all bludgers.

I am related to my family,
to a pair of football boots,
a rack of cassettes.

My head is a mattress of dreams,
my bed a warm grave. Of my poems
only the words remain.

PETER GOLDSWORTHY

Songs on the Death of Children

1

Dry eyed after so many deaths
how many could still bring tears?

—family and friends
I count on a handful of fingers

and all the children in the world.

With children
the first million is hardest.

2

I walk through their sleeping ward.

Among heads inflated with dreams,
faces loosened on pillows.

Among small milky breaths,
smaller than words.

My child
and the children of others.

Shared animal young,
possum eyed and thimble nosed—

shapes that every kind of love recognises.

3

I wake to death
in the night.

The cold weight
of a child in a mother's arms.
Locked from her grief

and the whole archipelago of parents
weeping with her—
the uselessness of tears.

In this public ward
her private room of pain.

4

I bring my child home
to smiles and somersaults.

Bedtime rhymes
taken after meals
for the treatment.

I watch her by night
dreaming through her fears,

her small milky breath
smaller than tears.

HELEN JACOBS

I was not old enough to look
into my grandmother's eyes then—
only afterwards in photographs—

But I watched her shape and
her movement, coming back with
duck eggs from searching
along stream banks, watching
her pull the last stalks
of cabbages from freezing ground;

but mostly watching her shrouded
in bed beside the continuing fire
with her diaries, where I was
allowed to play quietly,
because we were both silent
both needing the fire;

and they said I had her eyes—

but I never looked in her eyes
only wanting to write in diaries
like hers,

which were burned afterwards.

MERYL THOMPSON

The Tunnel

This had to be King James Parade or why would her feet carry her with such conviction to the bus-stop? But above the pavement it was all hazed over with unfamiliarity. Even the air smelled strange. She approached the shelter obliquely and so came close to a chunky woman standing firmly near the glass and wire.

"Is this where I catch the bus for Merton?"

The chunky female looked up into her face and sniffed in, testing the air around her mouth. Then she jerked her chin at the yellow destination board, and grunted an affirmation. Helen went over and stood in her globe under the street lamp. But still it did not become an identifiable act at a recognizable place. She looked back at the chunky woman, who was still there, and stepped once more out of her circle of light.

"Could you tell me the time, please?"

The poodle-knit coat jerked back up the forearm and exposed a small, black watch. This the woman half-showed her, as if she did not think she would believe, otherwise.

"Almost eight o'clock."

"Are you sure?"

The poodle-knit was not only sure, she was offended. So Helen retreated once more to the four names on the yellow board.

Three hours. It couldn't be, surely.

The bus, at last, grunted into the kerb. The doors squealed their objections and Helen felt the poodle woman urging up behind her, pressing her up the steps.

She stood, staring helplessly at the metal tray with its rounded coin slots. "PLACE MONEY HERE" it snarled at her. "How much?" she implored the block capitals. The driver was shifting sideways in his seat.

"Yes?" Her eyes sought out the face which had spoken. And saw the grey dust-coat.

No, not grey. It had been brown. And a raincoat. Knee length.

"I don't know how much."

"What stop?"

His fingers were tapping on the metal circles where she ought to be putting her coins.

"I don't know. I'm sorry." But the poodle was nudging into her, as impatient as the driver. A street name floated just within reach, and she grabbed it and threw it wildly at the grey coat.

"North Street."

"O.K. lady. That'll be thirty cents." At last she could satisfy those slots and escape to the seats.

The bus rumbled endlessly through unfamiliar tunnels, stopping occasionally without explanation to jerk out its uncertain cargo. Once, when the doors belched open, nobody moved. The driver turned slowly in his seat and looked around the glass panel behind him.

"I thought you wanted number 23, lady?" Still nobody moved, and Helen began to suspect he must mean her. She looked behind her but the only other passengers were two men, sitting together. She ran to the hissing door and jumped onto the grass, and the bus snorted off into the distance.

North Street opened up, one light at a time, and she followed these pools to a corner which her feet rounded mechanically. Then the click of a gate and she was standing in front of a door under a yellow light in a dog-muzzle, feeling in her bag for a key. It slipped in quite easily and the door rounded open into the subdued lighting of a proper entrance hall.

Past the lounge and on to the kitchen where, from the doorway, she looked into a sea of plates. Some on the table, some on the sink, some stuck on the front of faces, but all cream-coloured and soiled with confusion. Chairs scraped, plates swam, and they all rushed towards her.

'Helen! Where on earth have you been?" Her husband Frank, leading the charge came hands out to take her. Somehow she kept them on the other side of her circle.

"'Mummy! Mummy!" The children squealed, trying to push through their father. She looked over them to see Meredith, her sister, suspended by the sink, an egg-slice in her hand.

Of course, baby-sitting the children till she got home.

Well, she was home now.

But Leslie? What was he doing here? Good old brother-in-law Leslie. Always the complete professional. Parting a way for her to the table, pulling out a chair, helping her to make a choice. Taking over, in fact.

"Are you all right, Helen?" Gently, leading her, not suggesting, not accusing her of anything but... Just asking. Again. "Are you all right, Helen?"

"Yes," she said. Though not surprised at their drawn-in eyebrows, or the children, whimpering around her knees.

Meredith had put a cup of instant coffee in front of her, in response to a nod from Leslie. Very sweet too. Helen shivered. Who never took sugar in her tea or coffee. But it was easier to drink it than to explain why not.

Somebody said the children ought to be in bed. Frank towed them out of the kitchen, and Helen listened after them, and winced for the hair that got caught in the zippers at the back of their jumpers. Frank came back asking her to go and kiss them, but they did not ask her to read to them. It was not, after all, as usual.

On her way back to the kitchen she went into the bathroom and turned on the taps. Frank and Leslie were now drinking coffee, too. Sweet as hers, she wondered? Meredith went on rattling dishes as if this were indeed Everynight, but punctuating the plates with question marks and the cutlery with exclamation points.

Frank was holding up the keys.

"What made you come in the front door, Helen? Did you leave the car in the street?"

The car.

"No. I came home by bus."

"What happened to the car then. Did you have a breakdown?"

Helen was sinking under the cutlery. The plates were crashing over her head.

"The car, Helen! Where is it?"

"I don't know." And she didn't either. She had no idea. Or why she had come home on the bus. Nobody in his right mind would choose public transport with its poodle passengers and metal trays over a comfortable, family four-seater.

For the time, they had to believe.

She looked across at her sister. "Thank you for staying, Meredith."

At last!

"Well, when it got so late, I thought I ought. If Frank had got called away or something... Well, if there'd been an accident, he might have been needed ....."

"An accident?"

Now Frank's voice cracked at her across the table.

"Damn it, Helen, you *are* three hours later than you should be. No message. No telephone call. Nothing. What were we supposed to think?"

"I'm sorry, Frank. Really. All of you."

"Sorry! Bloody Hell! What kind of an explanation is that! We've nearly been driven out of our minds."

She must check the bath-water.

"Where the hell are you going?" Normally, Frank never screamed.

"I'm going to have a bath."

But he was through the doorway first.

"Shut the door after you," she called. "To keep the steam in."

Leslie was taking charge again.

"Helen," he said. "Are you sure you're all right? I can give something if you've had some kind of shock."

A man. In a brown raincoat. Knee-length. At the pedestrian lights.

"No, Leslie, honestly. I feel O.K. Just tired."

"But three hours, Helen. What on earth did you do? Are you sure I can't fix you a sedative?"

"No. Really. The bath will be enough."

The bath. Ah. He suddenly projected himself down the passage in search of Frank. Helen could hear them murmuring. Meredith too would have stopped clattering the dishes to listen if she had dared. Only then, of course, Helen would have heard as well.

Helen went off to get her things for the bath, and Frank and Leslie cornered her in the bedroom. Frank pressed her down gently on to the bed, and then they sat down too, on either side, hemming her in.

"Helen." Frank in his reasonable voice. "Helen, would you let Leslie have a look at you. Before you have your bath, that is."

Take particular care that the victim does not wash herself, however strongly she feels the need, until she has been examined by a doctor. Proper medical evidence is vital if a successful charge is to be laid.

No. They were not going to examine her. Not for that. Not for anything.

"No, Frank. That isn't necessary. I'm quite well. And you know I've never used Leslie in a professional way. I see no reason to start now."

She pulled herself out from between them and went off into the bathroom. And slid the bolt. Somebody tried the handle a few minutes later but did not insist.

The steam closed in around her and filtered out the conversation from the kitchen. Jagged words tried to wrap up and contain her time, struck at the clouds of steam and wanted to pierce into her very skin.

....must be some ..... can't just lose three whole ..... doesn't just disappear ....."

The words rolled on and on, seeking out through the mist until at last they seemed to find a target. Not quite the one they had wanted perhaps, but soft-centred nevertheless.

"..... with the car!"

"The car! Of course. That's the answer!" And then Frank was in the hall, dialling. Then giving particulars. But the 'phone went down fairly quickly, and Frank's voice followed Leslie back into the kitchen.

"They don't know anything. No accident reports anyway. But they'll treat it as a stolen car for the time being, since we can't tell them where she left it. They'll let us know when they find out something."

At the pedestrian lights, near the footbridge. Waiting for the green. The car on the other side of the river—over the footbridge, of course. Free parking all day there if you were early or lucky enough.

She had lain deep in the bath long enough and now she raised herself and began to wash very carefully, seeking out all over her body for places which might cause pain or draw away from her own touch.

Nothing. Just like she had told Leslie. She was sure of it.

The three came down the passage together, halting, hoping by the bathroom door. But there was no let-up to the splashing and sloshing, and they moved on to the front door.

Frank was thanking, never enough, and Meredith was doing no more than her duty Frank. Leslie's professional space, once established, was not so easily penetrated, but there was something strong on the table if Frank thought she needed it at any time in the night. They were no more than a 'phone call away, and Meredith would make it her business to be there in the morning, on the dot of eight, for the children.

Coming back past the bathroom door, Frank made sure she was still all right, and then his footsteps continued away into the kitchen. Helen felt sorry for him, knowing he wouldn't know what to do with himself now.

The water whirled out, around and around in glass circles, like traffic lights sucking her out over the road. Then out through steel bands which swung the narrow path across the river.

Frank would have to be faced eventually, and it might after all be better in the kitchen where the light was strong and where stainless steel and white enamel forbad disorder and disbelief. He was there making hot milk with chocolate and nutmeg. That was a nice touch, the nutmeg. Especially under the circumstances. They sat down together and she refused a biscuit.

"I'm surprised you're not ravenous, Helen. Three hours ... over four now, and no tea. Or did you buy something while you were out?"

Hoping. Waiting to catch whatever she might drop, accidentally or by design.

"Frank, I'm sorry. I can't tell you anything. It's no good looking at me like that. I can't tell you something I don't know myself."

But he had dropped his eyes from her face and his head swung away in a tight circle of disbelief. The brown raincoat, shining in the dwindling light. He had looked down too, but decently, as she passed in front of him. On to the footbridge, his footsteps following hers. But not really following, not in *that* way. Just going in the same direction across the narrow bridge. His steps were steady, echoing against the high metal, behind her own. They had both gone on into the gathering darkness.

She drew a deep, shuddering breath for the tunnel behind her, and the clinking steps on the bridge, and grabbed at her chocolate.

"Fod Godsake, Helen, did someone touch you?"

The tunnel swirled before her eyes again. If she looked back at it now, what would she see? A man in a brown raincoat .... waiting .... knowing? Or was

the tunnel empty, just as hollow and empty as it had always been? But if she started to tell him, Frank would discover, one way or another, and he would make her know, too.

"Helen, you've got to tell me!"

No, for once, not 'got to'. For once, something she couldn't give up to him, or the children, or even Leslie. None of them. Nothing she could tell. Nothing she would explain. A private tunnel, with wrought iron sides, but long enough to suck in three hours of her life and lose them utterly before it released her once more onto the evening street.

"No, Frank. There's really nothing to tell."

ZENON PIRGA

The Collector

He is a crow, my father,
with an eye to see
the value in things
rejected by people like me.

His garage is a nest
of drawers, shelves and hidden pockets
lined with trinkets,
coils and bits of string.

There are tins of paint, brass and nails,
old shoes with wrinkled skin
whose soles, though worn,
are not beyond being reborn.

There are cases of old cycle parts,
lights and inner tubes;
he even has a mattress
and two beds to spare in the rafters,

And somewhere,
stuffed in the shadows,
a vision of a winter
which only he can see.

WINIFRED BELMONT

helen

1.

helen on the hill with four small children
and no man stays.
they come still.
boys from the university
there for a while until their adolescent desires
to be dad expire.

i'm glad he likes the children, she says.
until she sees the attention they take,
then finds him boring and tells him so.
he makes her a cup of tea and runs outside,
someone's crying.

and helen tells me about 1969,
living in double bay, acid trips and g.i.s.
how she nearly married an american guy who was a doctor,
and if she had
she would be rich now.

2.

helen drapes herself in blacks
of silk and satin
fingers wrinkles round her eyes.

crow's feet walk the mirrors.

at 21 i had two kids,
and one abortion, she says.

looks me up and down.

knows i'm 23
and only managed fears of pregnancy.
they don't show.

3.

her man is dead, an overdose.
helen hasn't seen him for at least a year
but mourns him now.
he was the only one i ever loved.

gathers up belongings,
all his books.
i'll keep them for the boys, she says
his boys are smart and will take after him.

builds an altar in the hallway.
rows of books lest helen should forget.

4.

i visit helen watching television.
actors eating words she says
becoming john wayne movie lines.
the kids are hell, the last cheque
gone before the fortnight.

her daughter in the kitchen doing homework.
fingers in her ears
against the call for cups of tea
above commercials.

5.

having drinks and helen wants to buy.
the barman's spunky, she says
and wants to try a line.
that's still the same.

the boys are younger now,
no ready answers. grins
and shrugs his shoulders.
helen loses patience,
used it all up long ago.

6.

her 15 year old daughter
climbs through bedroom windows
late at night.
comes to me
thinking she is pregnant.
mum will kill me, she says.

at dinner helen introduces gordon.
someone asks how does it feel
to be another notch on helen's bed.

7.

helen's father was a soldier.
w.w.II american on brisbane leave.
i was adopted, she says.
wears it like a badge down the years.
ten years ago a cause to blame,
now she tries it on the trendy set.

helen tells us how she grew up
out the back of bourke.
step-father a fencing contractor,
lived in a wagon, very picturesque,
and taugh herself to read.

visions of the charming prince
amid the spinifex.
i've heard that somewhere before.

ROSITA DELLIOS

Melayu Magic

This day at ten o'clock
many Melayu nights at ten o'clock
we have invited ourselves to a syurga magic show featuring electronic tigers at Pertama coin playground. Sound and shamans provided. The occasion, our birthday. Syurga, the way of heaven. Allah shows the way in this land.

* * *

Special request for a birthday song.
"But it's not our birthday." So shoot the silver ball.
"Our birthday if it's a free game."
"Sure we celebrate. Stop kicking the machine."
"I'm bored."
"You mean losing bores you."
"The machine never loses."
"Then it's the machine's birthday."
Special request for a birthday song. For twenty cents, select the code, P18, a voice from the studied intestines of this machine teases with sincerity, "... now that you've got the vision, what you gonna do?"
Paul trades a dollar note for coins. "Play another game of pinball?"

* * *

In Kuala Lumpur we glide, in the warm moist, unashamed of our infancy. For today we are born; tomorrow again.

* * *

And sometimes we play pool, when I visit sister Paul. Who is interchangeable with me, sister Sita. It is more convenient that way. We are like twins and share the same shirts. But we have different schools. So I live in Penang. In the hills. Where I go hunting, not to kill but to catch, perhaps a tiger. Once I caught an angel. The Angel Yussof, who told me that within forty-four days of someone's death, the one about to die betrays hints to those around him. His brother rode a motorcycle head-on into a car. That left him charred. That left him in the morgue in the arms of the Angel. Yussof spoke at some length of the hints, which I, like most of the living, ignored. I was listening too far ahead. Into a

collision with death, into the arms of the Angel who holds the dead.

There was a time. Long before I created thiself. A Muslim moon. A small arc of light, steady in a flashing sky. The jungle was too close to ignore, and I thought I heard a tiger yawn. Yussof taught me the tender facts of death; I wished to be born.

* * *

Seven mystagogues discussed the intricacies of humans at Kuckoo's pub. Bala, the third, remarked that we wore the same shirts. Ashuk, the second, asked what hobbies we had apart from dropping coins. And ordered another jug. Satan, as usual, talked of miracles. He was the first and most improbable, but we all got used to him. For he was in league with the knowledge that circulated, and so kept us informed of almost all, miraculous or otherwise. Except his true name. The other mystagogues were playing darts. Our hobby was meeting interesting machines. "At last we celebrate." The boss's wife played a Hindustani tape. Solid minutes of mice squeaking. Changed her mind and played Humble Pie's Street Rats. She remembered we liked loud music and that we were celebrating. No one knew why. Why was a stranger, only a name. Which comforted Satan who said, 'Better to be known by deed than by name."

Bala often said in the course of conversation, "Do you know what?" And then urged Satan to announce a miracle. "At last we celebrate." Kuckoo's was dim and smokey and darts were flying, the mystagogues were laughing the tape machine shouting, the boss's wife wore dark specs and a sari, and in our only Indian pub we demanded nothing short of a miracle. Satan became evasive. He ordered another round of drinks—"What to do, lah, let's celebrate whatever you celebrate." But disappointed, we announced a rendezvous with an important machine.

Raja who was not there said that in Thailand they would shoot you for a glass of beer, but Paul would shoot for a miracle. Or a free game. Before the last bust and the storm.

Sister Paul lives in Number 13 Gembira, ten miles out of K.L. City. Children chase chickens; we chase storms or boil rice in condensed milk, or walk upstream, past the washing board and stray rubber trees, up the bank to observe the saw-mill. Paul always wanted to work in a saw-mill. Ever since New Hebrides where she went to learn French but watched giant blades, splitting with precision. Her first mechanical wonderland. Sometimes we chase chickens out of the house, which serves as their thoroughfare between the back and front, the doors are rarely shut. Neighbours bring sweets and play cards. I sit in the path of a breeze, rocking myself to sleep, chattering in my head. Matters of immense importance. While our universe turns its blind eye to the sun, peering instead through the moon with its monocle of hazed rings. Sister lights up a mosquito coil. I still have much to say, even in sleep. But the only human I see is not speaking. A man holding something written in his hand. Stooped, his face quizzical, he too must be dreaming. I look into his hand. Before I can discern, he swivels away in a fraction of a dance. A flash of uncertainty. Illumes the search of my words. He is gone. With his secret in a fist. Yet he unlocks the other side of an instant. Midnight at Gembira, positioned between two doors and a mosquito coil. The air is sweet with all that sleeps. Gembira means happiness. My musician friend lives in Number 15 Syurga. Syurga means heaven. Once we were on the way to Tiger Hill, a three hour hike. The tourists, he said, preferred the foothills. I never said I preferred the tigers. But we guessed as much that silent afternoon. When I should have been at university watching a slide-show on the origin of art and he plucking a power failure from his newly painted guitar, his best machine friend. Where I should be modelling in clay, then pouring cement into the plaster

mould of a head. Wait for it to set and paint it black. A cement head that weathers all—"Do you study the jungle men?" say students who pass by.
"No, my sister does. We are interchangeable, like our shirts."
"Is he going to be a demon or an angel?"
"They are interchangeable, like our friends."
"Good day and good luck." An afterthought, "May you collect many heads."
But this afternoon I was walking with a friend. The origin of art was as good as the origin of a stream where I waited and he leapt, to the other side, the side of the hill's summit. The jungle yawned; it swallowed him whole. I thought of his newly washed black hair. His sound machine. For we were too shy to speak.

* * *

Mother often said that we run in the family. It made us feel like a congenital disease because she was referrering to the Old Turk, our grandfather, who was blamed for our irresponsible genes. She would fondly refer to him, never seriously speak of him. Racially he was Russian, culturally Turkish, and his official religion was Greek Orthodox. He felt quite accidental and so nothing mattered too much. Mother had us born in the bush and reared in the schools of the city, where we learned by experience that origins are an impression. A breezy skeleton or a bloated emptiness. The Great Australian Emptiness, to quote the White Prophet of our birthland. In such circumstances I was very religious. Like any martyr, my ambition when I grew up was to die. I imagined my cranium bleeding thoughts, and my classmates gossiping that I would bleed to death, from a flood of thinking. Then Nothing. Only a dry skull. She died of Void, they would say, and bury me in a lawn suburb where I would be worshipped as an example.
"An example of what?" Sister Paul used to ask at lunchtime. She was too religious and expected to grow into a nun. Her observations left her with little choice.
"I'll tell you when my thoughts transubstantiate, blood to wine." Because, as usual, I knew what I meant but could not explain. One morning, two years later, we boarded an aeroplane, again we could not explain. We simply said we were going to university. In Malaysia. Sister Paul's misanthropy gave way to anthropology, and my carvings into the Lives of the Saints unearthed forming tendencies; my major would be sculpture. Needless to say my cement heads were mistaken for demons. I could not very well explain I was a head-hunter. Mother was good at explaining most things. She said, as always, we run in the family.

Towards afternoon the Old Turk was feeling accidental. Smoking his hookah, as was his habit for most afternoons of his years, he faded into dreaming—"A corrupt practice in the world of purpose," grandmother, a devout Greek woman, was known to speak occasionally. The Old Turk laid low, in the hollows of a tired divan. Heavy green curtains were drawn, but the shutters left open. Slender sunlight and an autumn breeze blew out the smoke. Grandfather sagged for hours on the ancient divan, on a carpet of swept-pale roses. The room was deep with furniture in an apartment of architectural indifference, which was the Old Turk's style or disregard for it. The apartment happened to be in the old quarter of Thessaloniki, known for its Jews, Chapel of Miracles, savage winters and heavenly autumns. That afternoon the Old Turk was in heaven, swaying slightly, in the regions of blue in gold, gold of wine, spilling smoke in his eyes that turned bluer with cold. Shutters slammed at the approach of a snow storm and flung open with contempt. The Old Turk remained unperturbed, though he had not been prepared for accidents in heaven.

That was grandmother's responsibility. So he sighed a snore and turned on his side to go. But froze in his inability. Not being a man of detail he failed to

notice how he arrived, in order to go, as we must when conditions become uncomfortable. "The weather, in the final analysis, is to blame for everything," a much quoted statement by mother who is good at explaining her family. And the Old Turk, though unconcerned with the administration of life, is still subject to its laws, particularly such an insidious principle as the weather. To his mind, however, the problem was exaggerated. He stroked his fat bearded face, squinted a rosy-blue eye, and decided without further ado to defy the laws of nature; he denied the existence of the problem.

The Old Turk could not be described as a radical determined to destroy the accepted order of things. It was merely a matter of convenience. Which distinguished him as a reference point for all who thereafter denied the existence of problems. Of course grandfather Turk did not simply launch off into the space of denial. It would have been out of character and takes some intellectual engineering. Better to be a dull antique and fall spread on the carpet, one large enough to accommodate his fantasy. As it rippled through the space of negative matter, black holes of dust unsettled; possibly he sneezed. After talking to God at the Chapel of Miracles, grandmother could not bring herself to speak to the Old Turk, who was lying face-down on a bed of swept-pale roses, sneezing. Setting the example for generations to follow.

"An example of what" Sister Paul implied.

"Spill the wine and you'll get smoke in your eyes."

She raised her glass, "But I'm drinking beer." And reached over Kuckoo's bar to borrow dark specs from the boss's wife who unmasked a bruised eye. "Now who's got a cigarette? Who punched you in the eye?" In reply, she turned the music up and mentioned something about a drunk who was doing time in hospital, thanks to the boss who was sixteen stone and her brother, a part-time gangster. Bala complimented sister Paul on looking like a gangster. Wearing dark shades and blowing smoke rings. But how did he explain the overalls? He characteristically replied with an equation, "Do you know what? You share the same overalls." As a Kuckoo's qualified mystagogue he was well informed on the intricacies of human nonsense—"You ask a question—Do you know what? Do you know why?—and offer a reply in case the other person is at a loss for words. Question plus Answer equals A Loss for Words. It is based on the same principle as talking to yourself."

We learned a great deal at Kuckoo's. Satan who was near-sighted at the best of times, was never at a loss for words. Only miracles and his identity. He couldn't see why. Paul suggested a move to our Pertama pub because Satan was driving her crazy. All the way down the stairway and into the street, while I went express by banister, she was saying, "I'm sick of people who can't find themselves. Know Thy Self, I say. It's a good thing that people in this country have to carry identity cards."

"You sound like you need a game of pinball."

By the time we passed the little merchant of bubbles we were clinging to each other like Jekyll and Hyde; whenever one of us was disturbed the other pacified. Paul told the little merchant that we were born under Libra which was why we were so well balanced.

He was as permanent as us and so understood. We were regularly going to Pertama Complex for the purposes of pubs, pinball and basement shirt shops. And he was always sitting on his mat in front of the Deer Horn Remedies store. He would dip a tiny looped wand in a plastic bottle of liquid soap and blow bubbles at people who passed. He looked like an Orang Asli blowing poison darts from a blow pipe. In Jalan Tunku Abdul Rahman, K.L.'s busiest street.

He was as predictable as us. The bubble man is the jungle man, his secret sold for sixty cents. We bought a packet for our friend who knew all about the

mysteries of bubble-type machines, at a discount price of fifty cents. I wanted to buy the Old Turk one too. But Paul said he was dead. As we stood next to each other on the escalator to the second floor, Paul was pacified—"Two years ago I was told I needed a hole in the head, but all I ever needed was a game of pinball."
"They say travel broadens the mind. How did grandfather die?" Death disturbed me.
"In his sleep."

Before the third floor of amusement parlors, we stopped to rest at our pub. Raja was there telling a New Guinean that in Thailand they would shoot you for a beer. Sister Paul ordered a beer. I asked the New Guinean if he came here often. He said he was passing through, on a U.N. grant to study the intricacies of communications. I wanted to tell him about Kuckoo's but couldn't explain.

* * *

The morning was slow but accelerated towards noon, when sister Paul stopped and I ran across a road without seeing a brother on his motorcycle. We felt each other's moments like an unexpected gust of wind ... scattering. My head my tangled limbs; my shaman dreams. Yussof, angel, don't let go. I heard talk for many nights now. Around my hospital bed. Of the coming of a man who multiplies and peoples the deserts of our dreams. So I was told. So it became a legend among my many minds. The Aboriginal shaman, once a youth wilfully alone, was stripped of his flesh, that he may tread lightly in the lives of the dead. Plasma tubes informed by tangled limbs and thoughts. That a musician sped on a high powered machine. I followed him to the mouth of a cave, as legend told, where he lay submitting his body. In my hands. A shaping in sculpture. Tight, the skin of meaning. Naked, this night moment, when nightmares subside and bones untangle.
"Where am I now?"
Cement transforms to flesh.
"What do I look like?"
I don't answer him. The shapes of thought perform.
"How do I feel?" Trusting my hands, he hardens, his desire for life.
I speak—"You feel fine." The tiger leaps. I hold—the formed body of an unformed man ... Curiosity caught the tiger.
"Tell me, when do I see you again"
"When I return from heaven, a formed man." The shaman held out his hand and touched the space between words. For what, to speak, for whom? When sculptured form illumes what language blurs. I swivel away in a fraction of a dance. My secret clenched tight in a head.

* * *

Music inhabits my sleep. Musicians, magicians dispel hours of delirium, deserts of words. A bubble bursts.
The doctor smiles, "How do you feel?"
"I'm feeling fine."
"And your head?"
"Light, but alive."
Sister Paul took me home to Gembira, to the Muslim moon, a night of prayer. The mosque calling above the storm. It became clear. "We ere bumiputra," she spoke. "Sisters of the earth."

* * *

She pulls the spring and shoots the silver ball. I try to blow smoke in her eyes.
The jukebox says—"Now that you've got the vision, what you gonna do?"
"Play this machine blind," sister replies.
She knocks out targets on both sides.
"Free game!"
"Saves twenty cents for the jukebox."
Special request for a birthday song.
"Then we'll spill some champagne."
"At ten o'clock."
"By special invitation."
"By special request."
"Who could have been the boss's wife."
"Or the Angel Yussof."
"Or Satan and his mystagogues."
"I expect a gangster, a shaman and a merchant to turn up."
"We still have time for another game."

JOHN McLAREN

Colonial Mythmakers: The Development of the Realist Tradition in Australian Literature

I

Three characteristics emerge from any reading of Australian literature written during the latter part of the nineteenth century. One is the predominance of the rural environment, and the lack of any real engagement with the life of the cities —this, despite the fact that Australia was already one of the most highly urbanised societies in the world.[1] The second is the uneasiness about the status of the hero. The third is an ambivalence towards the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country, or the total lack of any awareness of their existence. This last has been dealt with at length by J. J. Healy, and I do not intend to go into it at length here.

Immediately, of course, we must make some qualification. There is a great deal of urban journalism which gives a lively account of the cities of the time, as well as providing the background for most of the significant political movements, concerned as they were with the franchise, protection, separation and transportation, conditions of work. In the journalism of Clarke or James, to keep to the Melbourne scene, or even the fiction of Fergus Hume's admirable detective story, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab*, we see the Australian city in the pattern of its European, or British, model—a Bohemia or Alsace of art, poverty, crime, fashion and vice. The intent is to inform the readers of the life they could find around them, and, in the case of Clarke, both to celebrate the city as a worthy field of human endeavour and to rouse his readers' moral passions. If we compare these works with their Dickensian models, the *Sketches by Boz*, we find a quite different kind of engagement with the material. Instead of presenting his readers with street scenes as a background to action and incident. Dickens presents people and buildings as a single organism, pulsing with the same life. It is because his buildings are seen as animate that they obtain that air of quaintness which Clarke was to emulate in the early chapters of the serial version of *His Natural Life*. This animation went beyond the conventional moral view of the city, which he had inherited, to produce its own image of the city as a living creature with its different areas of vitality, decay, obstruction and sterilty. The moral vision hence becomes one of cure, of removing obstructions in order to promote life. The

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urban vision of James and Clarke, however, never goes beyond the journalistic. The evils they describe are offered as object lessons to call us, in the case of one, to efforts of personal morality and charity, and of the other, to social action. It is only when Clarke becomes involved in the drama of man's efforts to survive that the environment becomes a part of the action.

This change commences in his novel during the voyage of the convict ship. Clarke's imagination seems to have been stirred by the detachment of his characters from that urban social world in which as an individual he was so much at home. His ship contains a variety of characters, but it is no microcosm of society —rather, it is humans reduced to their essentials by isolation from a wider social order. The mood for the attempted mutiny is set by the lack of wind, by the fire on the Hydaspes, and by the fever on the convict ship itself. 'The *Malabar* seemed to be enveloped in an electric cloud, whose sullen gloom a chance spark would flash into a blaze that should consume her.' (Penguin edition, p. 199)

The mutiny on the *Malabar* is important to Clarke's plot, for it both sets Rufus Dawes apart from his fellow convicts and thwarts his attempts to establish for himself a role in which he can maintain the standards of human decency. This pattern is to be repeated as each of his humane actions involves him more deeply in the toils of the convict system. For our purposes, however, the significant element is the way in which the environment, in its seeming indifference to human concerns, abets the violence which is the driving force of the system. The hero, Dawes, is sufferer rather than actor. Unlike the heroes of romance, whom Clarke ridicules in the early version of his novel just as effectively but more succinctly than Furphy was to do later in *Such is Life* (*His Natural Life*, Penguin edition, pp. 725-6), Dawes neither creates circumstances nor masters the situation. His heroism consists in refusing to succumb to his environment, in preserving the core of his being against the corruption which is threatened not merely by the malignity of the environment but by its complicity in his destruction. The scenes of Gabbett's cannibalism in the Tasmanian wilderness, or of North's alcoholic derelictions and consequent horrors, are not as fearful as the relentless combination of system and setting to turn every one of Dawes' generous impulses to his own destruction. In the version of the novel which Clarke eventually prepared for publication in book form, this process is emphasized by the ending, which observes the imaginative truth established by the novel that the only alternatives for escape are either to succumb to the system and surrender to brutality or to succumb to the environment and perish. Nature's only benign act occurs in the revised version of the novel, where Dawes and Sylvia are granted recognition and reconciliation at the moment of their deaths.

While Clarke is not the first Australian novelist to deal with the convict experience, he is the first to have apprehended the power of the combination of land and system. While there are—very occasionally—idyllic moments in the novel, there are no idyllic landscapes. The love which dawns between Dora and Dawes while they are marooned at Hell's Gate is blighted by the memory of Dawes' hopeless wanderings in the forest immedately beforehand, by his discovery of the mutilated body of one of the victims of Gabbett's cannibalism, and by the reality of the system which awaits him and which, at best, can offer him only slightly refined servitude. 'He had performed a prodigy of skill and daring, and for his reward he was to be made—a servant to the creatures he had protected. What more could a convict expect?' (p. 331). In fact, the combination of chance and perfidy is to deny him even this reward. There is no room for an Admirable Crichton in the savage society of the south.

Clarke's novel was written when the system was already 'forty years ago', and now existed only in a few memories. The power of his writing depends not only

on his evocation of past horrors but also on the fact that they are past. He is the urban writer who can look on the past and the bush from the security of his situation in one of the cities which has grown from these terrible beginnings. Although the novel establishes an irrevocable image of our history and environment, the outcome of this image is a political lesson. The novel returns at its end to England, and the Australia it has created is a metaphor for any urban civilization which attempts to cleanse itself by exiling unwanted elements. The novel however provides no images to enable the people who continue living in the continent to make it their home.

The appeal of Boldrewood's writing can be ascribed to its success in providing such images. Following in the tradition of pastoral romance established by Henry Kingsley, he establishes the elements of the populist school of bush writing which has continued to today. These elements include the assumption that the bushman is superior to his urban contemporaries, a belief in an easy good-fellowship between all classes, an assumption of the natural ascendancy of the landed gentry, and an admiration for practical skills and physical accomplishments. There is, however, also in Boldrewood's writing a dark side which suggests that the ideal he presents is not entirely secure. The action of the novel demonstrates a natural system of law and order being re-established after the disruption brought about by the ill nature of old Marston and the wilfulness of his sons. A wider disruption is hinted at in Starlight's mysterious past, but he atones for this through his death, thus leaving the code of the gentleman intact and, to the reader and all lower orders, inaccessible. The action therefore conforms to the pattern of nineteenth century English historical romance and, in particular, to the pattern of the detective story, the variant of the novel which became particularly popular in the last part of the century. The pattern differs from that of the romances of settlement, either Kingsley's *Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, in which, as in the early version of Clarke's novel, the reign of the gentry is eventually re-established on new soil, or the earlier American example of Fennimore Cooper, in which man corrupts Eden in the act of taking it. The safe pattern of the action of *Robbery Under Arms* is, however, undermined by the character of the younger Marstons. These are not men like the outlaws in Scott whose conflicting loyalties force them to leave the pale of the law, but men whose essential character leads them into opposition to the lawful order which the novel explicitly endorses, both in the author's intrusions and in his later comments. Yet this essential character is that of the happy-go-lucky Australian bushman which the novel also endorses.

The ambiguity of the novel is most apparent in the qualities attached to Terrible Hollow, the retreat to which the bushrangers retire when they are too hard-pressed by the law, or to do their work of branding and marking so that they can release their stolen stock on to the legitimate market. The Hollow is in one sense an arcadian retreat—running water, good pasture, seclusion, peace. In these respects it is like Tom Hutter's lake in *The Deerslayer*, and like that lake the Terrible Hollow is used as a retreat by a lawbreaker. In Cooper's novel, however, the innocence and beauty of the countryside is used as a contrast to the bloodthirsty deeds of which it is the scene. In *Robbery Under Arms*, violence is only implicit in the Hollow, but the setting is itself described in terms that contradict its idyllic nature. The approach to it is by way of a 'dark, dreadful drop into a sort of deep valley below', and on first seeing it Dick Marston notes that 'on three sides of us was this awful, desolate-looking precipice—a dreary, gloomy, God-forsaken kind of spot. The sky got cloudy, and the breeze turned cold and began to murmur and whistle in an odd, unnatural kind if way, while father, seeing how scared and puzzled I was, began to laugh. I shuddered. A thought crossed my mind that it might be the Enemy of Souls, in his shape, going to

carry us off for doing such a piece of wickedness' (pp. 30-31). When, troubled with the intimations of disaster, the boys think they might abandon the enterprise, the Hollow presents Jim with temptation in the form of a fine colt, and they stay. Through the book the Hollow continues as their refuge, yet for all its pastoral qualities they are never satisfied when they are there. After the relief of escaping to its security, they start to become tired of its false peacefulness, to quarrel amongst themselves, and to seek further cross deeds. The refreshment it offers them nurtures only further evil.

The figures who preside over the Terrible Hollow are old Marston himself, Starlight, and Warrigal, the half-caste Aborigine who is devoted to Starlight but who eventually, through long-standing and well-merited resentment towards the Marstons, betrays them to the police. He too is an ambiguous character, associated with the evil hooting of the owl, and himself an accomplice of evil as well as a messenger who brings temptations and tidings of evil to others, but also a superb horseman with an unerring knowledge of bushcraft. He is virtually an emanation if the land itself, tempting the brothers, scorned by them, and eventually betraying them, at the cost of his own destrucion. This destruction is accomplished back at Terrible Hollow by old Marston, who is himself mortally wounded by Warrigal. The Hollow thus virtually destroys itself, as a consequence of the unresolved hostility between the two groups of people who are closest to the land. The forces of law and order triumph not because of the superiority of squatters or police, but because of the failure of the Marstons to accept Warrigal as a member of their community. The attribution of heroic status to the bushrangers acknowledges the illegitimacy of the squatters' title to the land, yet their outlawry and final defeat demonstrates that their own claim is equally fragile. For all its sturdy assertion of a bush ideal, *Robbery Under Arms* is finally about the failure of European, or English, standards and ideals to find a home in the bush.

This failure becomes evident if we consider the alternative that Boldrewood offers to the life of the bushrangers. The squatters like Falkland represent a way of life beyond the capabilities of the Marstons, a way which is to be regarded as one with Starlight's past, and therefore essentially outside the local provenance. At the end of the novel Miss Falkland marries an English knight, but she is still given the grace to extend her hand to Dick Marston, to the discomfort of her fiancé. Sir George's distaste, however, merely expresses Boldrewood's preference for the home-grown squattocracy. There is never any suggestion that Miss Falkland could give herself to Dick Marston. The measure of his aspirations is set by George Storefield and his sister Gracey, whom Dick eventually marries. Gracey's part, like that of Dick's mother and sister, is to wait for him, to encourage him in virtue, but never to set herself up against him. She is God's policeman to the Barnes girls' whores. Had Dick married her early, he could have emulated George's rise to prosperity. But, just as Boldrewood is not capable of giving any effective life to his good women, so he is not able to convince us that the respectable George Storefield is anything other than the dull stick that Jim and Dick take him for. We are told that his course of honest graft brings him prosperity, but we are not shown how it could give expression to the spirit if currency lads like Jim and Dick Marston. The ideal of rural-prosperity therefore remains totally unrealised within the novel. Boldrewood gives it substance only in such occasional writings as his essay on 'Shearing in the Riverina' (Brissenden, pp. 465-84), but this is essentially the reporting of an outsider who is delighted with the way in which the patriarchal model has been repeated in Australia. Neither this essay nor the novel is able to give us an image of a prosperity, or even a secure way of life, established in terms of the land itself.

II

The nationalist school of writers attempted a similar task by accepting the legitimacy of the bush worker and asserting the need to establish new standards around his reality. Yet this reality was to prove as frail a vehicle of legitimacy as the earlier claimants—when Middleton's rouseabout replaced Middleton he became his image. Lawson's stories resemble Chekhov's not only in their lack of imposed structure and their precision in detailing inner reality through outer gesture, but in the fact that he is dealing mainly with people who have no function in society. Although his characters are workers, he chronicles their failures and their subsequent efforts at survival. We see them leaving and returning home to and from droving, facing the track after the shearing, maintaining illusions of bush voices or bush heroism, keeping madness at bay through routine or surrendering to it in some bush shanty. His heroes are those who share their own meagre resources and those who keep the world at bay through their own wits. The toil of Lawson's workers yields them no wealth, and the only way he can persuade himself that their efforts may eventually prevail is by allowing the assertive rhythm of his verse to over-ride ear and eye alike. These are the rhythms we hear from down the track in 'The Story of Gentleman Once'—the rhythms by which lost and defeated men persuade themselves that the world does bear the shape of their desire.

The world Lawson shows us is one shaped by bushmen, by the opening of the goldfields, the clearing of the bush, and the work of the teams which knit it together, but it does not belong to the people who have shaped it. It belongs to the wool firms and the banks and the politicians who rule the cities where Lawson's people are only faces in the street. Yet just as the people of the cities are peripheral to Lawson's world, so his characters are in fact peripheral to the world they inhabit. In making them the centre of his perception he shows us the world as it appears to the dispossessed, but in limiting his perception to theirs he becomes a creature of the powers which control that perception. Thus the Chinese can become as much a part of his demonology as the cities and the banks. The only conclusion to his work is that the world is really too cruel a place for devil-may-care bushmen and sensitive poets. His vision is not of the future, but of the past, of the 'Roaring Days' of old, when the world was still wide enough for the individual. As this past was an illusion, it can give no substance, no sense of possession, to the present. Ultimately, his work is rooted in nostalgia.

Yet, for all Lawson's nostalgia for the days of his youth, he rarely gives us in his prose a positive image of these days. Certainly, he does suggest that the miners established among themselves a kind of comradeship which compensated for the futility of their quest for riches and gave hope to their later struggles on selections. But the main force of his nostalgia is rooted not in the period but in the fact of childhood. Childhood is not seen as necessarily a time of happiness —the mood of 'A Child in the Dark' is more typical—but as a time when there was still hope. The sorrows of youth may be bitter, but their misdemeanors were slight, and Lawson looks back on them with a sentiment strengthened by the broken romances, the failed selections, and the deaths which have come since.

Nevertheless, within this sentiment Lawson does struggle to establish some sort of ideal. We see one aspect of it in Peter M'Laughlan's sermon in '"Shall We Gather at the River",' where his words bring into being a community among people who are linked only by proximity and common hardship. The basis of this community is the mutuality of assisting each other in difficulty, which forms the theme running through a great part of his sotires. Coupled with this assistance is forbearance towards each other's failings. This theme finds its expression

in Mitchell's dream of the Lost Souls' Hotel, which will provide the weary bushmen with recompense for their suffering. Yet the lost souls suffer not only through their own weakness but because they are necessarily victims for whom even Mitchell's notion of a haven must always remain a dream.

Lawson's most sustained work, the Joe Wilson series, in which all these themes are brought together, is set in the narrator's past. The selection, and the double buggy which crowned their efforts and which represents Joe's answer to Mary's isolation, the means by which she can be restored to human community and saved from the fate of Mrs Spicer, were, as much as the Lost Souls' Hotel, a dream, but in this case one which is destroyed as much by human weakness, or man's weakness, as by the physical or economic environment. The only part of the ideal which Lawson is finally able to establish in the lives of his characters is that which sustained him in the ruins of his own personal life—the acceptance in need of one man by another. It is not an ignoblie ideal, but neither is it one which can do more than enable men to survive their failure, including their failure to maintain any kind of community in which women can preserve their sanity or children grow to an adulthood which will realize their potential.

Lawson's heroes fail because they cannot face the truth of their own past. They externalise the cause of their own failure, blaming it on drought or the banks of a generalised human weakness, rather than seeing it as the consequence of their own inability to establish any sustaining relationship with the land, and therefore any relationship with each other. This failure in its turn is rooted in the fact of Australian colonialism, which imposed foreign forms on the landscape without receiving any native form into its own reality. The sources of Australia's cultural life, like the sources of its economic life, were in the cities and in the foreign markets which they served and on which they depended. There was thus no room in the local culture for even such ambiguous folk heroes as Leatherstocking, whose native integrity brought about the destruction of the environment which gave it its strength. The bushman, unlike the frontiersman, did not create his own history, and consequently he could appear in literature only as victim. By attaching his ethical standards to Mitchell, Lawson was dooming us all to failure. Yet this failure of the bushman to confront the causes of his own defeat is inseparable from his failure to accept that his own position is a consequence of the realty of conquest and dispossession. The victory of the American frontiersman is ambiguous because it depends on the destruction of an established culture, which is perceived even if it is misunderstood. The Australian bushman fails not only to make himself master of the land but also to understand that the forces which defeat him are the same forces which create him—the land in its isolation, and the power of an industrial society which first sets him down in his alien land and then robs him of his individuality within it.

III

The colonial writer who comes closest to understanding this reality is Joseph Furphy. Like Lawson, he presents us with characters on the periphery of the urban and industrial society which they serve, and like Lawson he suggests that it is only on the periphery that the real man is created:

> Without doubt, it is easier to acquire gentlemanly deportment than axeman's muscle; easier to criticise an opera than identify a beast seen casually twelve months earlier; easier to dress becomingly than to make a bee-line, straight as the sighting of a theodolite, across strange country in foggy weather; easier to recognise the various costly vintages than to live contentedly on the smell of an oil rag. (*Such Is Life*, p. 39)[3]

This passage not only indicates the bushman's contempt for the easy living of the city but also suggests the real satisfaction which is derived from the work the bush requires of those who live in it. This work creates its own consciousness, a feeling for a potential national identity which is not realised in the action of Furphy's writing:

> It is not in our cities or townships, it is not in our agricultural or mining areas, that the Australian attains full conscousness of his own nationality; it is in places like this, and as clearly here [that is, in the Riverina] as at the centre of the continent. To me the monotonous variety of this interminable scrub has a charm of its own; so grave, subdued, self-centred; so alien to the genial appeal of more winsome landscape, or the assertive grandeur of mountain and gorge. (*ibid.*, p. 81)

I think that Furphy is more at home in the Australian landscape than is any of his contemporaries, and he certainly has a robust sense of the future which completely eludes Lawson and would have seemed impertinent to Boldrewood. Yet, while he has no romantic illusions about either the historic past of the country or the personal past of his characters, the present no more belongs to Tom Collins or his mates than it does to Jack Mitchell or Joe Wilson. Furphy's characters are not defeated, and like Warrigal Alf they may press on in the confidence of redeeming past mistakes, but the only present they are able to construct is one of illusion and subterfuge. Their carrion may find pasture for the night, but the next day will bring either renewed drought or another encounter with boundary riders, managers, and other agents of alien power.

While Lawson's characters take refuge in nostalgia or mateship, Furphy's defy reality by constructing their own. The whole of *Such Is Life* is an elaborate demonstration of Tom Collins' ability to deceive himself, and of the necessity of such deception if we are not to succumb to a reality where the law and the squatters deny men the grass which sustains both life and livelihood, and where not even a community effort which overcomes barriers of class and colour can prevent the fate which the land wreaks on Mary O'Halloran. Furphy's hero, the only hero apt for such a situation, is neither the actor, whether bushman like Barefoot Bob or patriarch like Stewart, nor the sufferer, like Warrigal Alf or Steve Thompson, but the man who is able to detach himself from circumstance and live in his own consciousness, the illusionist, Tom Collins.

While the power of illusion is implicit in *Such Is Life*, it becomes the ostensible subject of *The Buln-Buln and the Brogla*.[4] In an early episode of this yarn, Tom and Steve disguise themselves as bushrangers to hold up Fred Pritchard, who has attained a temporary state of independence as mailman. The heroes of this youthful prank thus re-enact the theme of Boldrewood's mythologising, but here for the purpose of debunking Fred's pretensions. They succeed in their purpose, but only at the cost of destroying the whole myth, and thus the possibility of heroism in the Australian context. Yet ultimately it is Fred who is victor, for he inherits money from abroad and thus obtains, at least temporarily, a real independence from the Australian environment, and on this basis is able to construct a wholly fictitious reality for himself. In the contest with Barefoot Bob, the bushman's lies have the merit of verisimilitude, but Fred triumphs over circumstance partly by sheer audacity, and even more because his money has given him a freedom from necessity which Bob can never achieve.

Bob himself, although presented in *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga* as the epitome of the bushman, remains an ambivalent character. As boss's man, he plays an honest but less than comradely part in the action of *Such Is Iife*, failing to warn the teamsters of the fate threatening their stock but doing nothing actually to assist their discomfiture. In *The Buln-Buln and the Brolga* he remains a

loyal dupe of M'Gregor, although Collins tells us that he later becomes an equally loyal union man during the shearers' strikes (p. 102). In his work for the station owners he tells that he is involved in some of the shootings of Aboriginals, yet neither he nor his auditors suggest that these actions are anything other than necessary but fundamentally trivial incidents accompanying the process of settlement. Nor is there anyway a suggestion that Aborigines possessed a culture with its own intrinsic dignity and values. On the contrary, Bob sums up the general attitude in his reply to Mrs Falkland-Prichard's query whether there were three in his party with the remark: 'No, missus, o'ny me and Bat. Paddy was a blackfeller.' (p. 78) Because the Aborigines are denied any human status, there can be no heroics in the encounters with them, and therefore no confrontation with the issues of legitimacy which are raised more by the fact of white occupation than by the contingent facts of class oppression within the white society. We are left therefore with Freddy's false heroics—a satire on the fantasies of Boldrewood—and the equally false mythologies of the bushman.

IV

In none of these writers of the colonial period do we find any convincing images of men making themselves at home in the Australian environment. Clarke's hero endures, Boldrewood's bushrangers are inspired by the spirit of the land only to a lawlessness which destroys community, and his law-abiding citizens represent an alien ideal which he fails to acclimatise. Lawson's heroes look from a present of failure to a past which never was, and Furphy's, the only ones who show a consciousness of the totality of the situation in which they move, can find refuge only in illusion. None faces the urban reality which controls the bush which is the setting of their stories, and their heroes therefore remain peripheral. None faces the reality of conquest, and their characters therefore lack one of the dimensions of reality. Because they stand aside from both social and historic circumstance, their personalities remain partial. The fantasies nourished on this basis become in the twentieth century a dangerous flight from reality.

It was not until the later part of the twentieth century that Australian writers were able to face these elements in the national experience, and thereby liberate our identity from its parochial restrictions. Katharine Prichard saw the contradictions implicit in the act of settlement and its consequent ideologies. Christina Stead faced the urban environment. Patrick White subsumes the realities of settlement and exploration, Aboriginal conflicts and urbanisation in a new order of mythology which makes them accessible to our intelligence. Xavier Herbert takes the confrontation of black and white as his subject, locating the bush ideal not in the brutality of history to the present but in a possible future in which the reality of conquest may be expiated by white society abandoning is urban dominance and voluntarily accepting the pattern of Aboriginal meaning.

NOTES

1. T. Inglis Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*, Sydney, 1971, p. 73.
2. 'The Ethics of *Robbery Under Arms*', from 'How I Wrote *Robbery Under Arms*', in Alan Brissenden (ed.), *Rolf Boldrewood* (Portable Australian Authors series), p. 498. Page references to the novel are to the text in this edition.
3. Page references to Angus and Robertson edition, Sydney, 1948.
4. Rigby, Adelaide, 1971.

HELEN DANIEL

The Picaro in Disguise: The Novels of Barry Oakley

In Laurie Clancy's *A Collapsible Man*, O'Donahue has retreated to a sanatorium to write his memoirs—or rather, in good Catholic fashion, his confession, "typing away like some demented Herzog, still confessing for all I am worth, still with a black spot on my tongue".[1] He feels himself falling apart, "the complete do-it-yourself collapsible man" (p. 13), and tormented by ghastly spectres from the past. He writes to break the siege of the past, to

> stop seeing myself, through every action I perform, endlessly reflected in a psychic hall of mirrors, a thousand mimetic selves in some giant amusement park of the mind. (p. 14)

Like Percy Wort's retreat to the wortarium or Muldoon's to the monastery, O'Donahue's retreat to the sanatorium is a recoil from a world that makes no sense and, in the comfort of his retreat, he searches for a way to re-enter the world. Pursued by dark O'Fate as Muldoon is by the Grandmaster, O'Donahue sifts through the past to uncover the origins of an unsatisfactory present, searching through a classic Irish Catholic childhood, through political and religious entanglements at university, through sexual exploits and disasters, trying on again the disparate, usually Bogartian personae he had donned in the past.

Where O'Donahue's search remains a personal one and perhaps too tied to Jan, too particular, to carry the wider significance it hints at, the inner and private selves of Oakley's characters are less exposed, their searches becoming glaringly public. Watson has suggested that Oakley is "the spokesman for the great incompetent",[2] the enterprises of his heroes tending to be fiascos on a grand scale. They bumble ineptly through rising chaos in tides of foolish hope that order might prevail, their activities public whatever private aspirations are swept to disaster through them. I have argued elsewhere that there has been a re-emergence of the picaresque mode in contemporary Australian fiction, notably in *Trap, the Wort Papers* and *The Chantic Bird* as well as in Barry Oakley's novels.[3] Oakley's characteristic figure is a protean, role-playing being, usually on the run, usually crossing swords in true swashbuckling fashion with a chaotic society before retreating in despair. His fundamental attitude to the society around him is incredulity with which he too is greeted by the hapless, bewildered members of it he confronts. Matthews has argued that each of Oakley's heroes is

> a prolific role-player, running through a whole succession of bit parts and guises ... the chaotic world is *so* unmanageable ... that the roles necessarily increase in frequency, desperation and grotesqueness until an inevitable "last gesture" brings the world down about their heads ... they break the tightening knot with an anarchic, desperately defiant gesture, before running away.[4]

The world refuses to be impressed by the magnificent gestures of Oakley's heroes, whatever the guises and personae they adopt, whatever the splendid exploits they dream up to try and encourage an ill-fitting existence to make sense.

Oakley believes life is "a matter of rising and falling in an endless wave motion"[5] and his novels adopt that motion, with tides of foolish hope swelling in the face of successive fiascos. Muldoon, McCarthy and Prendergast are kindred spirits, all "uneasy pilgrims making a bumbling progress through the perplexities of modern life".[6] Yet there are significant differences among the three novels which I think precludes regarding them as "a three-decker, or a trilogy" as Watson has suggested.[7] Both Muldoon and McCarthy discover in the course of their chaotic passages through Australian society that it offers them no place. Through the memoir structure of *A Wild Ass of a Man* and *A Salute to the Great McCarthy*, each regards from the hideout of the present the innocent he was in the past, each is his own accuser and his own interpreter. Muldoon and McCarthy are both observer and observed, both donning a multitude of masks in the past and naked under the eye of the present. By contrast, in *Let's Hear It For Prendergast*, the picaro is escorted through the narrative by an interpreter whose consciousness of Prendergast is as crucial to the novel as the feats and machinations of Prendergast himself. Prendergast does not return to survey his own exuberant passage through the world for he is much too busy pitting himself against the chaos, parrying absurdity with absurdity of his own making. He needs no awakening to the disorder of society, as do Muldoon and McCarthy: he seems always to have been privy to the world's absurdity and to his own homelessness in the world, as if never the naif; but he is also eternally the naif, uninformed of the world's intractability, sublimely confident that it will ultimately yield to his touch, that it can be righted from the askew position to which it has toppled. Unlike Muldoon and McCarthy, Prendergast does not recognise his own disguises and Morley, his interpreter, contributes the literary roles and disguises as part of his own increasingly frantic struggle to make sense of Prendergast. In this respect *Let's Hear It For Prendergast* is closer to *Trap* than to Oakley's earlier novels, with Morley and David David both driven into a frantic struggle to combat the insidious influence of the picaro, both resorting to writing to make sense of their chaotic experience.

While I consider *Let's Hear It For Prendergast* the best of Oakley's novels, there are rich garnerings in *A Wild Ass of a Man*. From the cocoon of his new role as priory dishwasher and performer of humble tasks at the monastery, Muldoon acts as his own cartographer, stumbling back through the past to find "the vectors ... in my free-wheeling trajectory through life".[8] He searches for the seemingly random factors for which Grandmaster, lightly toying with him, in fact had a place. He seeks the factors which "coalesce, mesh like clockwork, tick-tocking towards my undoing" (p. 8). Like Percy Wort in the cocoon of the wortarium, Muldoon is both observer and observed, both "hopeless Lazarus, bandaged head to foot from wounds of his own making" (p. 170) and an innocent abroad in the past. He surveys the multitude of roles with which he disguised himself: victim of Catholic upbringing; "lecture-skipping picaro" (p. 11); conspirator in the plot to carry off Maria Natoli; fugitive from unrequited love; victim squirming in the clutches of the dreaded 3F; suitor of the Amazonian daughter of the Principal in order to elude said clutches; fugitive lurking in the Correspondence School; avant garde dauber of doors, twisting in the grip of Sibella Wolfenden; copywriter emblazoning the wonders of the Comet car on Australian society; toiler in the Titles Office; quester in general, fugitive in general; and finally, preacher of accumulated wisdom.

Oakley's targets are multitudinous, embracing squatters, psychiatrists, Catholic schools, the Education Department, advertising illuminati, business executives and

avant garde artists, as well as innumerable manifestations of the conventional, the plastic and the dullard in Australian society. The multi-faced Muldoon is variously Lazarus, Sancho Muldoon, Don Quixote, Lord Jim Muldoon, even J. Mephisto Muldoon. He bangs his head against the brick 'herd' until

> here is sober-dressed Muldoon on his knees, gravity-bound like the rest of them, coat-heavy, with our smokers' coughs and loud noseblows, sounding our own reassuring trumpeting noises, all safe with the herd. (p. 171)

But Muldoon running with the herd is but another disguise and he is also the "blunderer", gasping in the nets of convention:

> the normal live their lives, while the nets of the law go down and the blunderers, gaspers on the edge, the grotesque deepsea movers by their own private illuminations, the spiky and the bristled, tumble to the deck. (p. 180)

After he leaves advertising, the narrative pace accelerates with Muldoon's despair, darting forward into apocalyptic visions, like the Last Day at Flinders Street (p. 177), and shifting to the final zany scene after Maria's death. Muldoon, "a vaudevillian past his prime", is immune to the humiliation in the Yarra and on the Silver Wheel to which he is affixed after his final attempt to announce his horror of society through the loudspeaker at St Kilda beach. His final apocalyptic vision is of chaos in Australian society:

> the strands binding all together strain and snap, all falls apart: a million motorists, changing gears, plunge over cilffs in Gadarene madness, lemmings with the urge to die; motor mowers turn Frankenstein and savage their masters. Everything is loosed from its hinge and pivot: no more the world laid out in orderly columns ... (p. 185).

Over the chaos he spins, the clown-buffoon of Luna Park, a Tintoretto Christ and "a lost star burning in Australia's subconscious" (p. 185), before being liberated and then recoiling to the monastery in despair. He is left not with resurrection but with a quieter acceptance, from within which he can still anticipate happily playing the Playboy of the Western World.

Burns has written that Oakley's

> comic forte is large-scale disarrangement, somewhat in the manner of J. P. Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*. It involves a rapt attentiveness to the forms of Melbourne's very conformist way of life and a sudden bending of them sideways, so to speak.[9]

A Salute to the Great McCarthy is more integrated than its predecessor but also thinner, more narrowly conceived and the 'large-scale disarrangement' reduced to one central issue, that is, football. Oakley considers this novel superior to *A Wild Ass of a Man*, partly because he "succeeded in sloughing off the curse of the autobiographical novel" and so could achieve "an ironic distance between subject-matter and self".[10] While this lends greater narrative control, it also yields less substance and energy. Through the religion of football, with its celebrants and its rituals, Oakley takes a multitude of passing swipes at Australian society, drawing into the arena gossip column magnates, businessmen manipulating sport, the parasites feeding on footballers. He draws in too the rigid social class structure to which McCarthy comes as "Jack the climber, trembling at the beanstalk", "the Pip of the twentieth century",[11] the one "taking the unmade road with great difficulty. Made deliberately steep to deter the underpowered vehicles of the plain folk" (p. 153). Football is both circus, with the clowns tumbling before the delighted crowd, and Circus Maximus, with the gladiators falling at thumbs down to the howls of the herd. It is also the brutalising lash of Twenty-

man and the tides of popularity cults that dump the surfer, while the crowd hails the next sacrificial figure.

Like Muldoon, McCarthy is at first an innocent, but where Muldoon recoils from the chaos with an innocence crazed but largely intact, McCarthy flees from his own guilty complicity. As he quits the ground, ball aloft, "with the steady jogtrot of the marathon man" (p. 196), he carries with him recognition of his own acquiescence. His soar to the sporting heights is also a moral decline which he traces through his memoirs and the sobering act of writing. He notes with acerbity the innocent cavorting on the football ground—the posturing Batman McCarthy, Orville Wright McCarthy, "Pope of football" (p. 179), Hillary and his Sherpa scaling dizzying heights. He debunks the guises and roles of the past, the "Bogart in danger but playing it cool" (p. 19), the "Simon Peter McCarthy wailing at the Gate" (p. 32), just as he debunks the figure trembling at the foot of the beanstalk of social success. Throughout the novel, his exhilaration in the past is mocked under the eye of his despair in the present. Like Muldoon, McCarthy is both witness and participant, struggling to create out of the meeting of past and present some understanding that will make existence tolerable again. Both act as accuser and interpreter.

In *Let's Hear It For Prendergast*, Oakley moves from a memoir form, with all the complications of narrative perspective that entails, to a character desperately in need of an interpreter and so enthralled by his own assault on Australian society that the task of recording his exploits cannot be his. From the moment Prendergast invades his home and lays siege to his consciousness, Morley becomes ever more frenzied, in true David David style, and ever more compelled, by the very enormity of Prendergast, to bear witness to his achievemnts. In this sense, *Let's Hear It For Prendergast* is akin to the play, "Witzenhausen, Where Are You?", for, although its hero is unusually stationary (for the most part locked inside the toilet at the Comet factory), as Witzenhausen pushes under the door the notes that summarise his objections to the system and Management, the faithful Kelly receives them and acts as go-between.[12] So too in "Paterson" the excesses of the iconcoclastic hero, "a ponderous Icarus descending under electric light",[13] are registered through the calmer O'Brien. Rather than the perceptions of the picaro grieving over his innocence and the chaos of the outer world, as in the two earlier novels, here the emphasis is on the effects of an outrageous consciousness on the conventional. The exploits of Prendergast are not sobered by his later reflection and he remains dedicated to the swashbuckling cause to the last.

Let's Hear It For Prendergast has the openness of *A Wild Ass of a Man*, that sense of a freewheeling journey through society rather than the more restricted image of conformity of *A Salute to the Great McCarthy*. Oakley himself has pointed to this inclusiveness, writing of Prendergast as "a wild bull of a fellow determined to ravish all of Melbourne's most sacred cows ... to strike at the heart and groin of Australian life".[14] The novel's characteristic motion is again one of rise and fall, wave-like, with Prendergast evolving plans of attack, sallying forth to engage in hasty skirmishes with society, before being routed into ignomious flight and pursued by the outraged back to his trenches —there to evolve the next plan of action, the next strategy. The narrative is punctuated by Morley's attempts to eradicate Prendergast from his once peaceful life as a failed writer, but he is more often conscripted into service as an unwilling accomplice, guilty by association. As Prendergast expands into his role, so Morley shifts steadily into "a poor Peter trailing after his master",[15] Sancho to Don Prendergast in the quixotic quest for "the Loch Ness Monster deep down in the Australian Soul" (p. 145), for the dragon, 'homo australiensis'. In a narrative inclined to bound feverishly from one tableau to another, the shifts in

Morley's attitude are a major integrating factor: as he becomes more aghast, he also becomes more reactionary and is driven into a more conventional stance. And the shifts in his attitudes are an emblem of the wider reactions to Prendergast, as society becomes more keen to bludgeon him into silence.

Morley recognises in time that he belongs with the crowd, accepting Prendergast's predictions that

> 'One day old man you'll secretly steal back into the suburbs. Into God-fearing, white-collar, two-car country... You can't see your own chains! The beer's in the refrigerator, all's well with the world!' (pp. 182-3)

Initially, Morley has an innocence that permits him to believe Prendergast (and overflowing cat) can be expelled from his home and from his consciousness. The peaceful life of failed-writing-amassing-rejection-slips he is confident can be resumed. He soon learns that elaborate machinations are required to achieve this and the early part of the novel is punctuated by various horrendous plots to rout Prendergast—and by Morley's bouts of premature elation at the imminent success of his schemes. Morley creates truces and demilitarised zones to ward off the alien presence, at least to contain it, for Prendergast is "not a man but an infection" (p. 106). Morley resolves to "Fight fire with fire. Against the supernatural, I'll use the occult" (p. 17). Prendergast however is "the spiky Cannabis plant ... in the suburban front garden" (p. 182), growing wild and unchecked, bringing shame to the pruned rosebushes. Morley's and Prendergast's positions are polarised through the narrative and Morley, like the hapless society Prendergast ever menaces, resorts to ever more frantic self-defence. To Morley, he is a presence sprawling through home and consciousness, "some kind of hoax, a masquerade from a joke shop" (p. 44), but also a presence which is addictive: Morley becomes a victim of "the tame madman" (p. 28), "the wingless bird, born for blows" (p. 130), and he determines to capture Prendergast on paper—and so contain him. So, another of Prendergast's pursuers, he resorts to literary analogues to try and make sense of Prendergast, perhaps even capture him. Morley casts him variously as Ibn Saud Prendergast at the beach, *le film directeur*, King Kong on the shrine, Prendergast the Fisher King, a Rue Morgue creature, Genghis Khan Prendergast, the mad Ahab, even Oscar Wilde Prendergast walking "with episcopal slowness, a presence, a totem, something you carry in a procession" (pp. 131-2). Morley casts himself too in roles and guises—as "Morley the net" for the trapeze artist soaring above (p. 153), leaping into space holding aloft his schemes to confront society with itself. The disguises of the picaro here are not the making of the disillusioned innocent surveying his past, as in the two earlier novels, but of the frenzied Morley struggling to make sense of the picaro and his own ineluctable complicity in the picaro's schemes.

Oakley uses images of guerilla warfare, napalm and snipers, as Prendergast declares "war to the death on Glen Waverley man" (p. 161) and assembles his armoury. The original enterprise was a modest one, that of acquainting the unsuspecting world with his poetic inspirations. This modest undertakng spills over into tribulations unforeseen and demands new and powerful weapons. He must cope first with giving birth to said poetic inspirations on the Remington, with the perils of collecting photographs befitting the coffee-table edition, and with the literary seduction of Fulton, as well as the intricate schemes needed to achieve these. Yet he must also eventually swear revenge on academe, elude the clutches of Papadopoulos, cross swords with Catholic dignitaries and Legionnaires of Decency, even defend his opus at the obscenity trial. A modest ambition thus is swollen into a determination to "rip society's underbelly wide open!" (p. 169) and the picaro is driven thus into hand to hand combat with his society—whenever it can catch up with him. Prendergast moves through the world, charac-

teristically, in search of a captive audience, swamping others with his presence, ambushing them into hearing his latest insight (poetically clad) before they turn on him to bludgeon him into a merciful silence. As Morley discovers, "This is Prendergast's moment, the time of impasse, a crowd around him, his freedom running out" (p. 178).

Many of the most memorable sequences of the novel focus on tableaux of Prendergast in improbable stances, his soaring hopes clad in a red Captain Marvel skivvy as he plays the eternal fugitive. He is variously pursued by Fulton's guests (late victims of the poetic inspirations), masons (lately informed of the dignity of labour), Legionnaires of Decency (combatting their ubiquitous foe), camera-festooned tourists (who would capture the unbelievable on film), a thousand Italian ladies (shocked into the chase), Jews (suspecting a rapist lurks within their prey) and multitudinous others of the fraternity of the outraged. But Prendergast is first the pursuer, cornering his victims and subjecting them to his magnificent vision of their foolishness and their ineradicable conventions, the mores of Glen Waverley man.

As Prendergast is driven to head-on collision with his society, "moving round a narrow catwalk with a rushing Quasimodo lope" (p. 192) and bound to topple, there is a brief lull for further plotting of the collapse of Australian society, of pulling the rug from under Glen Waverley man. Then the narrative pace accelerates to his ultimate glorious defeat, atop the blazing ruins of 200 years of Australian history. In true comic apocalyptic style, Prendergast is the swashbuckling hero to the last. His fiery vision he proclaims to the last, his last role that of "apotheosis, the man standing there erect, extending his arms like the Pope in St. Peter's Square" (p. 192) before crashing gloriously into the flames. Morley remains as ambiguous interpreter of this "creator of visions that soared, glowed, then popped into nothing" (p. 96): he is both a conventional consciousness who "incarnates the forces against me" (p. 189) yet also the one who stands ready to blow the horn if Caliban wakes; both the brakes that failed in Prendergast's freewheeling passage through Australian society and yet the one seduced into becoming a nervous disciple, a frantic fan.

The role of the writer/artist is a recurrent motif in Oakley's work, the act of writing a way of laying siege to reality and bringing it under control. The writer is no impassive spectator but a "refractor"[16] usual frenzied and engaged in a desperate quest for order through the act of writing. The writer is also a Ned Kelly figure in this "vast two-dimensional continent":

> Ned mirrors the situation of the artist in a philistine society—the outsider, the man who sits by his lonely campfires while preparing to attack society with sharp-pointed phrases. But eventually he's lured out from hiding, the critics aim low at his legs and he's brought down.[17]

Prendergast is brought down but his defeat is glorious. While Muldoon and McCarthy turn to writing in despair as a way of bringing order to their experience of a chaotic world—one they have been forced to flee—Morley records his struggle to combat the presence of disorder incarnate, resorting to literary analogues to try and control the new and devastating vision of society Prendergast thrusts upon him. Prendergast himself is engaged with the Muse as a sword with which he incompetently swipes in the direction of homo australiensis.

Heseltine has argued of Oakley's novels that:

> their essentially serious critique of contemporary Australia is sometimes dissipated in plots of a marked farcicality ... increasingly comic rather than Dionysiac in conception, increasingly involved in grotesque episodes manipulated somewhat to the detriment of serious moral concern or social comment.[18]

This increasing farcicality which becomes more marked towards the end of each novel is tied to the growing desperation of all of the picaros, the tightening bond with the antagonist, and so serves to reinforce the serious concerns of the novel because of the nature of the despair underlying it. Oakley's comic images of disorder and of the zany exploits of the picaro as he grapples with that disorder, whether through the act of writing or through more swashbuckling means, offer a sobering vision of a society absurdly committed to its own most repressive and plastic conventions. The picaro, clad in a multitude of disguises in order to elude detection and despair, crosses swords with it, before retiring in bewilderment, like Muldoon or McCarthy, or, like Prendergast, in glorious defeat.

NOTES

1. p. 28 *A Collapsible Man*, Outback Press edition, Melbourne, 1975.
2. p. 32 Betty L. Watson: *Art, Anger, or (Mere) Entertainment? A Critical Contextual Assessment of the Novels of Barry Oakley*, unpublished B.Litt. thesis, University of New England, 1971.
3. See "The Picaresque Mode in Contemporary Australian Fiction", *Southerly*, Vol. 39, No. 3, September 1978.
4. pp. 169 & 171 "Life in the Eye of the Hurricane: The Novels of Thea Astley", *Southern Review*, Vol. 6, 1973.
5. Quoted by Watson from a conversation with Oakley, p. 3 op. cit.
6. p. 327 Florence Wilkes: *Some Aspects of Satire in the Australian Novel*, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Engand, 1974.
7. p. 193 Watson op. cit.
8. pp. 5-6 *A Wild Ass of a Man*, all references to the 1970 Penguin edition.
9. p. 61 "Australian Fiction Since 1960", *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. XI, No. 2, 1972.
10. p. 69 "The Writer in Australia", *Westerly*, No. 3, September 1975.
11. p. 162 *A Salute to the Great McCarthy*, all references to the 1974 Penguin edition.
12. In *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. XXVI, No. 2, 1967 and in E. Hanger (ed.): *Contemporary Australian Plays: 4*, St. Lucia, 1970.
13. In G. Dutton and M. Harris (eds.): *This Vital Decade*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968.
14. p. 70 "The Writer in Australia", op. cit.
15. p. 173 *Let's Hear It For Prendergast*, all references to the 1971 Penguin edition.
16. p. 244 "The Task Before Us", *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, 1974.
17. p. 68 "The Writer in Australia", op. cit.
18. pp. 243-4 "Australian Fiction Since 1920", in G. Dutton (ed.): *The Literature of Australia*, revised edition, Penguin, 1976.

JILL DWYER

Country Woman at the Gate

Sometimes we've paused
in heat-stilled, summer noontime towns,
seduced by unseen crowds of bees, high frequency
in listless peppercorns.
And later, startled, found the dust
already gathering quietly in our minds
inch upon inch
and rising.

Just enough time to stir,
grateful to spin the wheels and run.
It's then we've missed her, on the fringe
of many straggling main streets, many times,
standing where the wire gate divides
her shrubless, sere apportionment of grass
from hard, grey highway.
We've peered for a moment into narrowing eyes,
slitted to guard against the killing sun
and keep out questions.
"Don't try to see in here, there's nothing here for you,
so don't bother looking,
don't bother,
don't."

At Eastertime
peppercorns come alive with musk pink sprays.
If you go by in the cooling dusk
she might be there.
Quite still by the rusting gate and yet those eyes
are travelling,
somewhere on the darkened thread of grey
that thins and disappears
into the start of night.

But don't look for her in winter.
Inside then, building the fire to numbing, breathless warm.
Perhaps she counts the rows
of apricots in glass,
the yellow globes of peach and milky pears.

"They'll have those at least when I decide,
if I do decide,
if I do,
if I."

September
and the child, about on wide-splayed legs,
sampling the dirt for hard and for decay,
for sweet and foul,
needs guidance still.
So the old wire gate, rusted, sunken at the hinge,
is tied again
with the well-used, faded, floral apron string.

But she can still look, no charge for that,
through the new green fringe of pepper trees and
fresh red tips of gums,
and think not yet, but soon perhaps.

"Next spring perhaps,
some other spring, some spring,
another time,
another year."

SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

Returning to the Missionary School

Will the dull bell ring? The cracked
Nun in the tower strikes and strikes.
Down in the tropical compound
Where red-lipped hibiscus stick
Thick pistils in the watery air,
The town's daughters say their prayers.

A country of lessons: they stand
Crocodile-line on a playing field
While like starched wash drying
At noon the Angelus peals
Downwards in billows
Of damp pinafores.

An old barren woman taught
Music to school girls then, beating
A down-beat with a ruler.
I walk backwards, measuring
How a tuneless tune can span
So many singing children.

Simple natives believe in
Breastless women stuffed with God,
Instructing monotone of
Sing-song behind walls glass-jagged.
What's sacred must be possessed
Beneath white vestal dress.

2

Alone, in mid-life, I return
To the parochial school, listen
For that loud clamour in
The sky—and hear children's jargon,
The lolling bell, clearly
Clap desire and old irony.

VERONICA BRADY

Making Connections: Art, Life, and some Recent Novels*

Literature is not life, but there is a connection between the two and it may well be one of the more important tasks for criticism to illuminate this connection. Certainly some of the more significant novels written recently in Australia challenge the critic in this way, attempting as they do to bridge the gap between the common reader and writers with some pretensions to literature. David Malouf's *An Imaginary Life*, Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Thomas Keneally's *Passenger*, Roger McDonald's *1915* and Robert Drewe's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* have all been successful not only in winning critical esteem but also selling well, questioning merely aesthetic ends in favour of a larger awareness of what the act of writing a novel means, taking a hand in a culture which each novelist in his own way implies is in a state of crisis. Like the Hungarian artist Maholy-Nagy, who asked himself in his notebook in 1919: "Is it right to become a painter in a time of social turmoil? Can I lay claim to the privilege of art for myself when everyone is needed to solve the problems of mere survival?" they seem to be troubled by life as well as concerned for literature. Keneally, Koch and Drewe for instance set out to report on contemporary issues as a journalist might as well as commenting on them; on the relationships between Australians and Asians, for example, or the nature and meaning of totalitarianism. As for Malouf, his style is more metaphorical, closer to myth. Nevertheless, *An Imaginary Life* implicitly makes its comment on Australian culture and records the decision to renounce it and set life on an altogether new footing. Even from the beginning of his career (though the story concentrates on its ending), his protagonist, the poet Ovid, is disturbed by his society: "No more civic virtues—since we all know where they lead. No more patriotism. No more glorification of men at arms [he declares looking back]. . . . My world was strictly personal, a guide, in good plain terms, to such country matters as can be explored in the two square metres of a bed" (p. 26). As it develops this questioning of civic virtue develops into a scepticism about the enterprise of civilization itself. Ovid, master of language and one of the guiding spirits of his age, driven into exile for his opposition to tyranny, there renounces this mastery and the language on which it depends to learn the "language of the earth" from a child brought up with animals. As the story concludes he is on his way not only across the frontier of the Empire but out of life itself, moving into the embrace of the "immensity, the emptiness" of nature, into death.

* Robert Drewe, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* (William Collins, Sydney, 1979); David Malouf, *An Imaginary Life* (Chatto and Windus, London, 1979); Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1978); Thomas Keneally, *Passenger* (William Collins, 1979); Roger McDonald, *1915* (University of Queensland Press, 1979).

What *An Imaginary Life* celebrates is thus a mystery of relinquishment, and it may or may not be relevant that Malouf, whose earlier novel, *Johnno*, gave such a vivid, affectionately rendered account of growing up in Brisbane, has now gone to live in Italy. In contrast Keneally's *Passenger* is a novel which seems to mark on its author's part a return to the question of Australia as well as to the metaphysical and literary seriousness which characterised earlier works like *Bring Larks and Heroes* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. Yet Keneally's attitude to society is also a negative one. He takes as his subject the story of an unborn child whose existence is threatened in the first place by the hostility of his father who, unprepared for the responsibilities of fatherhood, tries to have him aborted and in the second place the general violence of a society which attacks his mother's well-being and even her sanity. Implicitly, then, while birth is the goal which the child struggles towards, it represents a fall out of, rather than into, grace. Less dramatically, *The Year of Living Dangerously*, *1915* and *A Cry in The Jungle Bar* also register a sense of social, political and cultural malaise, a feeling that the resources of liberal and humane feeling on which our culture depended are now exhausted. Nor is this merely a matter of following the fashions elsewhere. In all these works, explicitly in all but *An Imaginary Life* and implicitly in that, the self-identity which is in question is an Australian one. *1915* is the most explicit in this respect, of course, since it reworks the Anzac legend, but Koch and Drewe also make the fate of their characters turn upon the fact that they are Australian, presenting them as peculiarly vulnerable in Asia for that reason. Of them all, Keneally's attitude is the most optimistic, though his optimism seems fairly simple-minded; Australia is the place of life where the child can be born safely, a place somehow more innocent than the England in which his life is perpetually at risk. Yet compared with the other novels where this innocence is seen as a kind of evasion rather than something positive, the result of a flight from the self and from reality, Keneally's optimism is not entirely convincing. He is perhaps more truthful when he compares the child coming to Australia inside his mother, with his convict ancestor in the ship carrying him toward an "unknown society, full of vague dreads and fears".

A feeling of menace, in fact, is common to all these novels. In all of them, the environment is the great antagonist working to destroy the decency, kindness and trust which are central to what we call civilization. McDonald's exploration of the Anzac legend, for instance, concludes that, far from being a heroic adventure, the landing at Gallipoli involved an encounter with the forces which rule the world and its history. These forces are organized to destroy human aspiration and dignity and are allied with something the main characters sense in the land and in themselves as well. The protagonists in *The Year of Living Dangerously* and *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* are destroyed similarly by a blind absurdity in the nature of things which mocks human intention and confidence in reason. Thus, for all their urbanity, all these works with the exception of *An Imaginary Life* move towards the tragic vision which, as Simone Weil observed, is based on "the recognition of might as an absolutely sovereign thing in all of nature, including the natural part of the human soul, with all the thoughts and all the feelings the soul contains [the recognition which also sees that subjection] at the same time as an absolutely detestable thing".[1] A similar sense underlies most of the significant literature of Australia from *For The Term of His Natural Life* to the novels of Patrick White, Christina Stead or Xavier Herbert. So the five works under discussion are part of the attempt to define ourselves to find accommodation for human shapes, sounds and aspirations in a world which is at best indifferent, at worst hostile to us.[2]

Writing about a similar attempt in contemporary literature generally, Richard Poirier remarks that it involves "negotiation, struggle and compromise with the

stubborn material of existence",[3] and this remark illuminates the five works under discussion. With the exception of *An Imaginary Life* all tend to suggest the need for new forms which depend upon but must also guarantee the individual, seen as the centre of value in a world which is otherwise largely valueless. Accepting a general breakdown of relationships with one another and with the world, all except Malouf resist the temptation of Narcissus on the one hand and on the other the desire to take the easy way out and subordinate the individual life to the collective and the instinctual. Their dramatisation of this resistance thus become sa matter of considerable concern.

The way they choose is oblique. They do not set out so much to "redeem the time" as to preserve the self, attempting to grasp the meaning of individual lives and finding it in the power to give form to their experience. At opposite ends of the scale, Malouf and Drewe create a form which is flexible, open-ended and capable of expansion into the life of their readers as well. Koch attempts a similar open-endedness, but his device of retrospective narration tends to close off his story and the detachment of his narrator from the events he was involved in but now looks back on represents an evasion of the consequences of the story he tells. This evasion makes one suspect the complacency he adopts towards it: mere survival is not in itself an achievement, especially when the philosophy underlying this survival is no more than the desire not to get involved.

In *Passenger*, the narrative device is also very important, though once the reader has become accustomed to it and to a story told by an unborn child, the novel's significance is traditional and moves, fairly predictably, towards a happy ending. *1915*, however, uses the materials at hand, drawing upon diaries and conversations with survivors of the Gallipoli campaign as well as upon his own experiences as a child growing up in the country. But where the familiarity of his material tends to smother Koch's imagination, McDonald manages to preserve his own identity and vision, remaining in command of the inherited feelings and knowledge which have made him part of what he is.[4] Drewe is even more successful. At times McDonald has to force his material to bear the interpretation he wishes to place upon it—for example, in the character of Potty Fox, to be discussed later—but Drewe manages not only to bring about the marriage between form and vision but also to bridge the gap between popular success and literary significance. True, at first reading *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* seems a disarmingly simple, merely entertaining novel. It is very easy to read, and the vivid and meticulous rendering of detail and feeling for local colour reminds the reader that Drewe has been and indeed still remains a very good journalist. Always aware of and generally respectful towards the commonsense of things he is able for that very reason to gain assent for a vision which is not at all complacent, a vision of fabulous contrasts and incoherencies which opens out into a larger sense of what Auden called the "privilege and panic of mortality". His story moves simultaneously at the level of reality and of metaphor, a simultaneity that only Malouf is able to achieve as easily. Keneally's conceit of the unborn child presses its metaphorical claims too urgently, while in Koch's novel the metaphor of puppets and puppet-master evidently intended to govern the action and present a whole world in the hands of someone "more than a puppet master" whose characters are "more than puppets [since] their shadows are souls", fails because of its over explicitness. His narrator is too sceptical, too self-ironic, to entertain such an idea for long so that when the novelist intrudes to force it upon the reader one is aware of the discrepancy between him and the narrator on whom his story relies. But unlike Koch, Drewe is prepared to risk himself, his own identity and self possession, in his story, taking a hand in the struggle which his novel dramatises. The story is about defeat—Cullen dies in the state of self-misunderstanding and confusion about the world around him in which he has

lived—but also about the victory of the novelist as he triumphs over the destructiveness which arises within his form as well as within himself. Resisting the temptation of infinity, he takes his stand on what he himself knows and can bring within the compass of his comprehension, reporting what he sees accurately and honestly. Nor is this triumph lightly won. As in his previous novel, *The Savage Crows*, there is a sense of involvement. The account of Cullen and of his travels through Asia as United Nations expert on buffaloes which is both vivid and detailed is informed not only by his feelings for the characters but also by a narrative presence which seems somehow implicated with his character in the absurdities and brutalities he witnesses which finally destroy him. The point of *A Cry In The Jungle Bar*, lies, in fact in this dialectical interplay between the self and the world which depends upon a larger dialectic between the limited and the limitless. Drewe's vision centres on this human dialectic which is the source of their respect for freedom on which the novel takes its stand.

In this sense, although it is at first glimpse more negative in its conclusion than any of the other novels except *1915* (which ends even more disastrously with all three main characters condemned to a kind of death in life, Walter as prisoner of the Turks, Billy committed to a mental hosptial and Frances, the girl, condemned to live in sad awareness of the destruction she has been responsible for in the lives of others), *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* is in fact the most positive of them all since it offers a justification of the individual life and of the validity and enduring worth of its perceptions. Moreover, this justification is achieved without explicit reference to any ideological system which might support it. McDonald and Koch both appear to share this feeling for the individual but, more or less explicitly, they appeal to Christianity. To justify it, Koch relies on the musings of his narrator, a lapsed Catholic living still on the capital of this inheritance and on the claims made and refuted by his actions, of course, by Billy Kwan who passes successively from Methodism to Communism to Catholicism to Mohammadanism and finally to the worship of Sukarno, McDonald introduces a special character, Potty Fox, a clergyman who is a kind of Christ-figure, an embodiment of the "wisdom of God which is foolishness in men's eyes" and has him preach a sermon on Christmas Day 1913 which tells them that Christmas Day is only the prelude to the crucifixion and implicitly predicts the fate of the young men listening to him. The trouble is that religious talk of this kind is over-explicit and does not fit easily into a context in which people tend to suspect religiosity and indeed emotion in general.[5] Drewe, however, seems to share this suspicion—certainly, the introduction of Wilson, a fellow-Australian and disillusioned ex-Catholic who is detailed to act as Cullen's guide at one stage of his travels enfores a sceptical point. True, the sense of man and of the universe which underlies *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* is a Christian one. It is not made explicit, however, but remains implicit rather than explicit.

In fact each of these novels directly or indirectly raises the question of belief since the malaise they describe and contest appears as not merely social but rather as a metaphysical one. *1915* can be read in terms of the analysis made in 1933 by the theologian, Paul Tillich,[6] on the struggle between true and false belief in god, struggle, which in his view underlies Hitler's rise to power in particular and the spread of totalitarianism more generally. Hitler was calling Germans to the worship of the gods of the soil and of the blood, false gods in Tillich's view since their service depends upon the notion that might is right and surrendering to the collective will takes away individual responsibility and freedom. As the story begins the characters in *1915* also are in the grip of these "gods of the soil", in the terrible doldrums of absolescence, tormented by their awakening sexuality and by the monotony of lives bound to the seasonal cycle of rural life. They welcome the war since it promises escape, an opportunity to

prove themselves by heroic deeds. In fact, of course, it delivers them into the hands of the "gods of the blood", making them part of an organization which, dedicated to destruction, mocks their personal desires. Yet in another sense the war does prove their opportunity because it introduces them to the mystery of suffering.

Yet this vision may be too stark in the long run, too clumsily expressed, to persuade most readers. On the other hand, the references Koch's narrator makes to Christianity are perhaps too mild and liable to be confused with Billy Kwan's ideological madness. As for Keneally, notoriously preoccupied as he is with the Catholicism he can neither live with nor do without, he plays down explicit references to religion in *Passenger* though, implicitly, the struggle to preserve the life of the unborn child draws on the capital of discussions about abortion, and the birth into new life with which the novel concludes has something of the significance of the Christian notion of resurrection. Malouf also insists that the crisis his protagonist confronts is a metaphysical one though his vision is probably closer to that of Eastern religion than to Christianity. He directs the reader's attention quite specifically to this crisis when his character declares, turning to the reader:

> I am the poet Ovid [his character is made to declare]—born between two cycles of time, the millenium of the old gods, that shudders to its end, and a new era that will come to its crisis at some far point in the future I can barely conceive of, where you, reader, sit in a lighted room whose furnishings I do not recognize—translating this—with what difficulty?—into your own tongue. Our bodies are not final. We are moving, all of us, in our common humankind, through the forms we love so deeply in one another, to what our hands have already touched in love making and our bodies strain towards in each other's darkness. Slowly, and with pain, over centuries, we each move an infinitesimal space towards it. We are creating the lineaments of such final man, for whose delight we have created a landscape, and who can only be a god. (p. 29)

Like all the other writers, Malouf here rejects the possibility of a culture that is autonomous and attempts to live without reference to something ultimate and unconditional, following only the demands of rationality and practical usefulness. The task as he sees it is for men to achieve divinity. Yet here it is fair to say that "divinity" is merely the projection of what we know and feel already. The Child who becomes his psycho-pomp, teaching him the language of the earth and leading him finally across the frontier into the embrace of nature, corresponds to something natural, something in himself which comes up out of the dark in dreams. True this presence is also "something that belongs to another order of being". Nevertheless it belongs to the creative order, represents what he calls "the child in me" (p. 52) and the movement towards it is thus a movement towards self unification, not the discovery of a god who is totally other than man.

In this respect Malouf shirks the challenge of the resistance of objective reality to our subjective designs on it, a challenge which Australians are perhaps particularly conscious of, given the harshness of our physical environment which preoccupies the other novelists. Since he has removed himself from this environment, Malouf may well plead exemption of course. Nevertheless, even in Europe nature remains unconcerned for man and resistant to his designs, and the radicalism of *An Imaginary Life* must ultimately be accounted sentimental, more a question of wish than of fact, since it shows little interest in the work of accommodation. What is presented as victory, the protagonist's surrender to the powers of nature, ought rather to be seen as defeat since, as Simone Weil has pointed out, nature knows no other law, no other relationships, than those of necessity[7]

which subjects the human body and spirit as well unless it consciously asserts its claim to its domination, to death, decay and all the ills that flesh is heir to. Identifying with nature, Malouf's poet in fact identifies with what is hostile to human integrity and freedom, not with creation but with dissolution—as the novelist himself seems to realize as his character approaches the end of his quest:

> And so we come to it, the place. I have taken my last step, though he [the Child, the other side to the self] does not know it yet.... From here I ascend, or lower myself, grain by grain, into the hands of the gods. It is the place I dreamed of so often—the point on the earth's surface where I disappear. (p. 150)

Ovid here surrenders the struggle for human value to the powers he has contested throughout the writing of his *Metamorphoses*, poems, "full of strange creatures caught between man and some higher or lower creature, in a moment of painful transformation". (p. 50) In the *Metamorphoses*, however, the poet was in control, shaping his intuitions to his own ends. But in *An Imaginary Life*, despite Malouf's claims to the contrary,[8] the poet moves towards silence or at least towards the language of the earth which in human terms is the negation of language. Life surrenders to death, embracing the savagery implicit in "the Child's sharp little face with its black stare" which seems to mock his former ambitions, reminding him how "poorly [his] poetry ... compares with the accidental reality of this creature who must exist (if he does exist) ... because he has somehow tumbled into being" (p. 50). Essentially, therefore, *An Imaginary Life* sides with the forces making for tyranny, the forces of mere being which oppose the long and patient discipline of measured expression, deferring instead to the notion that might makes right which, as Paul Tillich has remarked, is in fact "no ethic but a mere assertion and the unfounded use of the two names—might and right—to refer to the same thing",[9] the only ethic possible, however, for those who worship nature.

A Cry In The Jungle Bar, however, implicitly perceives the connection between the worship of nature and totalitarianism and dramatises an attempt to retain some kind of freedom and self-understanding, insisting that, despite the forces arrayed against his character in this attempt, the proper direction lies ahead, in continuing the struggle, not in an escape into the embrace of some absolute. Cullen, ex-public school boy and ex rugby star, buffalo expert and technological missionary to Asia, represents the contemporary Australian 'homme moyen sensuel', and his naïve bewilderment and inability to cope with a world which is more taxing morally and socially than the one he has known at home is an indictment of the simple, unjustified values to which he adheres out of habit rather than conviction. But there is nothing cynical about the novelist's criticism of him. On the contrary, he seems to feel a profound affinity for him and to respect his decency and kindness. The trouble is that the novelist is also aware of "man's impotence in the presence of nature in all its might, majesty and power",[10] an awareness that Manning Clark argues is typically Australian. Cullen is vulnerable because he denies this sense, foolishly unaware of the odds against him. Running his five miles each morning, even in the tropical heat, holding himself aloof from the erotic adventures of his American colleague, Galash, and from the political commitments of Z.M. his Asian colleague, he makes no concessions to his difficult environment.

The naïve humanism which inspires him thus emerges as a kind of nihilism, a denial of reality. At the same time it preserves him from surrendering to the totalitarian pressures to which Malouf's protagonist succumbs. Cullen keeps his own counsel. He is no mere do-gooder; his sense of irony protects him from this mistake as it protects him from the indulgences of his colleagues Galash and

Z.M. True, self-awareness can also be destructive—in fact it kills him. He leaves the prostitute he picks up after a gaudy night with his friends because the sight of her shabby room and sleeping child fills him with compassion. He pays her but forgets the pimps who follow and beat him up, leaving him wandering about dazed, to be finished off by terrorists. In this sense his decency destroys him. The world he lives in is too much for the values he lives by. Yet he matters because he is concerned with the question of value, is groping towards something to revere, as at the festival of Parvati which he witnesses in India:

> Heart drumming, Cullen waited for the sense of ceremony to hit him. From the impassive crowd shuffling and snuffling in the square, he sensed nothing [yet] he still looks for some revelation, demanding. At least let there be awe. (p. 83)

Here, however, he is let down; what he witnesses is brutal:

> A bell rang. From nowhere in particular came a guttural direction. The straining men holding the calf grimaced, pulled and pushed; there was a simultaneous intake and exhalation of breath, a quick upward and downward swing and the scheme of things was miraculously changed. A headless beast stood upright before him, and a disembodied head supported itself in mid-air. (p. 83)

In effect Drewe and his character here are battling to preserve the traditional humane and Christian values which underlie Western civilization in a different, much more savage world. In contrast, although Koch's narrator affects detachment from what he describes, there is a certain complicity with it, especially in the presentation of Billy Kwan, the Chinese Australian, ex-Univerisity tutor freelance press photographer who becomes the professional guide and wants to be the moral tutor of a group of Australian journalists in Jakarta. This complicity is evident first of all in the conceit which makes Billy a dwarf—Drewe is able to dramatise the pathos of his character's inadequacies, but Koch has to rely upon mere image, an image moreover which is not just obvious but excessive, given the burdens already placed upon his character in the shape of his mixed parentage, his undue intelligence and an unusual religiosity. Koch's complicity also allows his character a great deal of space to expound his ideas, and having the narrator commend them as he does here:

> Polishing my glasses to avoid looking at him, I said 'We belong to the same faith, I believe!'
>
> 'You're a Catholic, Cookie?" He was interested.
>
> 'Not a very good one, I'm afraid. But you stay a Catholic even if you sometimes wonder if God's there—it's a cast of mind, don't you think?'
>
> 'I wouldn't know, old man—I'm a convert. The Jesuits didn't have me as a child. But I don't think the Faith is much good unless it's passionate. Lately I have a feeling the Church has spent its passion. If it has, it's no place for me.' (p. 96)

Admittedly, Billy then goes on to suggest that he may leave Rome for Islam: "That's even purer. No priest caste. Equality for all believers under God and they have fire" (p. 96). Here the novelist succumbs to the blandishments of syncretism, sharing Billy's preference for force over the search for truth. Belief seems a matter of feeling:

> We talked for some time about religion, and I asked him if he was certain of the existence of the supernatural.
>
> 'Absolutely, old man,' he said. 'The unseen is all around us, particularly here in Java. There are a lot of spirits about—the Indos believe they're everywhere!' (p. 97)

True, as the story develops, it comments ironically on this feeling. In Indonesia there are also human spies everywhere, spying on Billy and his friends as Sukarno's regime staggers towards its end. Nevertheless, Koch seems to want to have it both ways as the narrator reflects that, though "like everything [Billy] said, it was exaggerated ... there was a core of truth. Java seemed always to promise some weird revelation; [though] it was never quite seen". (p. 97)

After these events are done, it is true that the narrator retreats to the safety of his own half-agnostic half-believing Christianity. But in contrast with Cullen, he fails to take a stand, contenting himself with observation. So he remains "one of those people who are secretly waiting for something more: that vast and glorious happening, delicious as speed, bathing everything in gold, which perhaps never comes at all" (p. 66). Cullen, however, is committed to the proposition which Manning Clark also characterises as Australian, that there should be "no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight".[12] The actual world, however, rejects this proposition. Commitment to it may thus not be merely quixotic but, as Drewe's first novel, *The Savage Crows*, suggests may represent a culpable refusal to acknowledge the extent of evil and one's personal involvement in it.

In this sense, being Australian poses with peculiar intensity the problem of what Conrad calls "the world pain, the heart pain". Koch however, does not accept this. For him and his characters Australia represents "the safe dry continent to the south" (p. 39), a place of sanity and security to which it is possible to retreat from Indonesia under Sukarno, for instance, "where the amalgam of hatred and danger was a constant odour" (p. 41). There, underneath the disintegration of political and social forms "something much older grunted or moaned; a thing that lived in thickets or in drains; something like the spirit that lurked near Billy's bungalow" (p. 97). In Australia, however, the narrator feels on safe ground and is able to look back on events there from his cousin's hilltop farm, an Arcadian place where he writes by the light of a kerosene lamp, "its flicker and smell [bringing him] back to the farm, where we were boys" (p. 88), confirming his right to be here in this more innocent world.

Drewe knows no such exemption but seems to participate in what he describes. From the first sentence of *A Cry In The Jungle Bar*, reader and writer alike exist upon the same weird frontier of dissociation as his character. "After their quarrels Cullen often hid the knives" (p. 13), the opening sentence, already implies a breakdown of social forms and delivers the reader into a world in which, life is "nasty, brutish and short and subject to the onslaughts of a savagery against which our values seem powerless. This sentence is thus no mere shock tactic to engage the reader's attention but challenges moral attentiveness initiating the reader into a world in which curiosity, compassion and the basic human decencies are at risk even though they are all we have—he implies—to defend the dignity and freedom which matter. The "spirit of Asia" here is something menacing, a kind of infection:

> "Cullen wondered why he was afraid of his wife: these days there was just something about her when she was overwrought and they had been drinking, a desolation in the eyes, a glittering potential he could not pin down." (p.141)

Here, instead of surrendering to the fascination of the irrational the novelist is concerned to establish some order. As throughout the novel, the irony here depends on the force of the fixed valuations implicit in it which resist the fascination of the "glittering potential" which Cullen glimpses in Margaret's eyes and associate it with whatever it is which might impel her to use the knives he hides.

The very fact that he cannot "pin down" this threat and bring it within the compass of intelligibility increases the menace. What he wants and what the novelist wants for him is to be his own man.

Drewe thus places a high value on freedom, that is on responsible choices. Where Malouf surrenders to the blandishments of ideology and Keneally and Koch to a greater and McDonald to a much lesser extent acknowledge its seductive power. There is nothing sentimental about this position, however. From the beginning, Drewe is committed to truth as against wish-fulfilment in life or in fiction. Thus the sensational sense of reality implicit in the opening sentence may violate the genteel tradition of the novel based on good manners, understatement and trust in the reader's perception but is the interests of a truth—life can be like this. But the novelist refuses to make any sensational capital out of this fact and as the action develops it becomes increasingly clear that his sympathy lies with his characters' battle to resist violence and confusion and keep their poise. At the festival of Parvati the battle lines are drawn. Implicitly here it becomes clear that what Cullen dreads in his relationship with Margaret is related to the dark forces personified in the goddess who demands the bloody sacrifice of buffalos; and the fact that Cullen himself is a buffalo expert underlies the personal nature of this threat. In fact, of course his death does have overtones of sacrifice: he is set upon by young men carrying knives and delivered over to the servants of a more ruthlessly efficient savagery, three Moro soldiers, "very young and dressed in M.N.L.F. commando uniforms; their long hair [falling] from under berets and head bands decorated with nationalistic and religious insignia [and carrying] .... new automatic weapons". (p. 244)

A Cry In The Jungle Bar is concerned with the personal aspect of politics. Koch's novel, however, moves from the personal to the general. It centres on Billy Kwan and his fascination with Sukarno but moves beyond that to associate social disintegration with disintegration of human values. Billy Kwan, like his hero, Sukarno, is "crazed ... obsessed, by the romanticism of revolution" (p. 98). As Koch sees it, however, romanticism is characterized and is the product of the "new pornography". " 'Something bloody unique's happening in our time, old man,' [Billy tells Hamilton]—'we've begun to give de Sade to the masses, along with corn-flakes. The beginning of a degenerate psyche for whole populations!' " (p. 236). To the extent that Cullen's disablement results from the breakdown of his marriage and the general sense of tedium and lack of purpose that seizes him and most of his friends, Drewe agrees with this view. But it is not his central point. Moreover, his tone is much less shrill, less horatory. True, Cullen's death dramatises Billy's declaration that "it's not for nothing that evil's so much tied up with losing our sexual integrity" (p. 236). But where Koch is content to leave this statement general, applicable to what goes on elsewhere, Drewe makes the connection; his interest is in people rather than ideas. Nor is it only a contemporary problem. Cullen's parents are as confused as he, and potentially just as much at risk as he is. The enemy is not outside, nor merely the product of a present situation but inside themselves, in their inability to cope with the life they share which subjects them to necessity.

The menace Drewe senses in Asia is thus only an extension of the feeling that seized upon the first settlers in Australia faced with "the uncouth environment, the weird animals, the sense of nature's vast indifference and man's insignificance and impotence, [which marked] ... the idea that the world was the creation of some benevolent being".[13] Like them, Drewe's characters are trying to be faithful to what is left of the Christian and humanistic tradition, to the impulses towards decency, truthfulness and an embarrassed compassion. Cullen, in particular, going on faintly trusting the larger hope is thus a kind of antipodean Don Quixote, the Knight of the sorrowful countenance.[14]

Even though the environment is very important in *A Cry In The Jungle Bar*, exerting a pressure which it does not in any of the other novels, Drewe's characters are not merely passive, subject to the onslaughts of forces outside themselves which they neither understand nor can control; they also contest this pressure. True, by and large they fail and Cullen and Margaret remain, like the Wandering Islands of Hope's poem, spending their "love to draw them closer and closer apart". Nevertheless they also remain, quite movingly, determined to make sense of themselves' and their predicament and the order they aspire to would seem to represent an answer to the incoherence and savage disorder about them if only they could find it.

Drewe is thus committed robustly to values many of us would like to regard as central, and understands the challenge to them. In contrast, Malouf and Keneally at one end of the scale seem to opt for a kind of sentimental radicalism which is in effect totalitarian in its implications, while Koch and McDonald at the other feel for the individual but do not seem to hold out much hope for him. Coherenly organized around a central narrative presence, who seems to have come to terms with what he sees and to be fond of the characters he describes, *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* knows nothing of the sense of surrender which informs *An Imaginary Life* or with the totalitarian solution which tempts the other writers. This poise, I suggest, comes from a wry kind of self-possession, like that of Lawson and Furphy, the self-possession of "the battler", the man who is always beaten yet refuses to give in. Drewe's imagination has never been conditioned by false hopes and so in contrast with the other writers, especially Koch, whose evident fascination with Billy's worship of power throws the whole work off balance, Drewe refuses to be seduced by them. Unlike his Asian colleague who devotes himself to politics or the American, Galash, whose preference is for erotic adventure, his protagonist's life therefore centres on personal relationships, however blundering and obtuse he may be in these relationships. Nor is anything sentimental about this. On the contrary, Drewe's vision is bleaker, more tough-minded than any of the others, even McDonald, since while McDonald contemplates a world in which good and simple are inevitably broken, the Christian myth which he brings to bear upon this world rescues the reader, if not the characters, from the full pain of the situation. But in *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* there is no such rescue. Nor does the novelist allow himself or his characters any of the sentimental exemptions the other writers allow. For him, unlike Koch and Keneally, Australia is no Arcadia and his protagonist cannot appeal to memory for comfort. When he recalls the first time he invited Margaret home to meet his parents it becomes clear that the past was not very different from the present. In Asia "sterile clouds had hung over the Sierra Madre for a day [and] now it began raining steadily ... Fungus glistened on the high compound walls [and] ... there was a smell of rot" (p. 23). But nature was also threatening Casuarina Bay:

> Precipitately he had invited Margaret home for a weekend at Casuarina Bay; much sooner than he had brought her predecessors. Of course she was ill at ease, Nature required a seasoning, a hardening. Immediately there was a fear of spiders: funnel webs in the laundry, tarantulas in the bathroom, redbacks in the wood bin. Then, even the tame birds seemed in cahoots against her. She took it personally when kookaburras snatched barbecued chops from her flapping fingers. Tense currawongs fixed on her their severe gold eyes, scavanging magpies clicked beaks millimetres from her lambent head. Rising in clouds, small scarlet parrots repulsed her timid offerings of sugar water. (p. 22)

Even then Cullen was being worked on by whatever made him invite Margaret home so "precipitately". He did not understand then, just as he does not under-

stand now, what is pressing on him, though here in Asia the sheer otherness and hostility of the natural world is more evident at least to the novelist. For him it is clear that what is undermining their marriage is their inability to cope with or even to acknowledge the force of these pressures here in Asia. Like Cullen's father at Casuarina Bay, "playing the rustic bohemian ... gardening naked a flour bag around the loins, flailing a reckless scythe through the wet-the-beds, delighting in his suntan, holiday white stubble, fly-away hair strands", (p. 22) they are out of touch with reality,—and the novelist highlights this with the comc picture that follows of Cullen senior squatting on "the front steps sucking a mango, licentious juice trickling down his brown stringy neck, knees open, ... old exhibitionist's balls sagging in the heat almost to the step below". (p. 22) The fact that Drewe manifestly knows more than his characters here, is underlined by the sentence which follows. "She [Margaret] had persevered nonetheless" to reach the point at which she and Cullen now find themselves in Asia. Nature is not as tractable as suburban nature—lovers think.

In the multiple ironies of tone and structure which pervade this scene in which the observing self—the self which writes novels—is also the participating self, life and art move closer together. As in *The Savage Crows* one senses an identification with character and with the world of the novel which also gives the novel a peculiar freshness and keeps the reader from being smothered by what is, after all, fairly predictable material. The response to it is still going on as we read, as the ironies suggest not so much that the fictions are fact but rather that all facts, including the world itself and its power which overwhelms the characters, may well be fictions of a cosmic kind. This is evident, for example, in the description of Cullen flying across the Himalayas:

> The sky was a travelogue blue. A dazzling sun rose above the very Himalayan mountains of childhood geography book fame. Abruptly out the port windows there they were: Gauri Shankar, Cho Oyu, Nuptse, Everest, Lhotse, Makalu, crisply etched against the sharp early sky. The Ministry men chanted their names like a mantra.
>
> Sitting across two seats at the rear of the plane Cullen experienced a range of feelings at this vista. There was the requisite soaring of spirits, the elation at viewing one of the world's classic pieces of topography. The uniqueness, he liked that. Then, he urgently wishes Margaret was with him for the sake of the shared experience. And yet he was just a shade disappointed that Everest wasn't, well, taller. Viewed in its surroundings its outline wasn't singular enough. Every peak around it was high, too.
>
> That was always the story. Not the anti-climax exactly, rather the vague let-down. (p. 66)

Lightly, even smartly written, this is a passage which nevertheless offers a key to the metaphysic which underlies the novel as a whole, a metaphysic of freedom. This freedom arises out of humility, out of the consciousness which plays upon the scene, aware that these great mountains are too much not only for Cullen but for human beings generally;[14] faced with their majesty human consciousness feels helpless. Lacking what Simone Weil calls "the principle of rising"[15] he feels unable to cope with their splendour. This is the source of Cullen's disappointment. Indeed this "vague let down" is the real point of the description which links it to the rest of the story. Drewe is not writing a travelogue, he is not interested in the sensational. He rejects cliché in favour of a truthful account not so much of the scene as of what the observer makes of it, and this redirection dramatises the commitment to human beings which underlies the novel. Moreover, it highlights Cullen's feeling for Margaret; the thought of her is what matters here and is perhaps all he has to comfort in a world

which is otherwise too much. True, in this instance, his feeling for her is a little sentimental. There is no room for sentiment, however, in the scene on the Great Wall of China which follows this memory.

> Pounding on his Adidases up the steep slate incline toward the top turret, he was astonished to see that over the centuries its visitors, not content with chiselling their graffiti (in every language but English), had also left behind little petrified pyramids of faeces, wall stains of urine, in every quiet nook. (p. 67)

Reminding one of the conclusion of the pilgrimage made by Hero Pavloussis in White's *The Vivisector*, Cullen's discovery here implies a vew of humanity similarly based on a sense of human beings suspended "inter stellas et faeces". This feeling which pervades the novel as a whole extends rather than diminishes the sense of humanity since it puts paid to any merely parochial view exposing human beings to the pressures of infinity. Cullen's situation here becomes poignant as well as half-comical because, trained as a scientist and ignorant of metaphysics, he is bewildered by his experience of something numinous which does not fit the explanations he knows. But he wants to come to terms with it. His impulse to order this experience rather than merely respond to it reminds us of another remark by Simone Weil that "the order of the world is the same thing as the beauty of the world".[16] As far as our bodies are concerned, this order is a matter of brute force, but to the mind it appears as beautiful, a balance of necessary relations,[17] and commands reverence.

These may seem large claims to make for a novel as unpretentious as *A Cry In The Jungle Bar*. Nevertheless its characters exemplify the situation Richard Campbell identifies as the existential situation of Australians whose lives "stand out into emptiness [which] ... is not nothing [but] ... the uncanny limit of ... self-assertion, a beyond, an 'outback' which indwells their existence".[19] Everything that happens to the characters, to Cullen's wife, Margaret and to his colleagues Galash and Z.M. as well, insists on these limits. But equally, as I have been arguing, it is the discovery of this limit which represents the narrator's victory over the dark forces which rule the story he has to tell. As in the tradition, the encounter with the "outback" is heroic; he knows the truth and learns to live with it.

Thus in the midst of the threats to traditional humane forms and values which his novel describes the novelist's imagination is at work, attempting to rescue these forms and values. He does this by accepting goals which appear limited in comparison with the Promethean strain in their culture which Keneally and Koch, still seem to echo. Malouf's imagination, too, looks for some kind of cosmic ecstasy, while McDonald's moves more or less securely within the compass of the Christian myth. Drewe alone adopts a classical rather than a romantic pose, attempting to hold the middle ground between the extremes of despair and ecstatic confidence. The way in which he succeeds is by creating an image of man which is both wry and affectionate and thus an enduring one, as in the description of Cullen in the Tibetan restaurant "incommoded in body and spirit ... [crouching] on a flat cushion, his thighs pressing uncomfortably up against the sharp table edge [aware that] he was twice the size of anyone in the room". (p. 73) Everyone else here is relaxed, already taken up into the euphoria of drugs, sitar and mridanga music and the strangeness of the surroundings. But Cullen, "always disoriented by mystic surrounds", fights to keep control:

> He removed his tie, sipping tentatively at the atmosphere, taking tiny shallow breaths. It couldn't possibly do you any good, he thought. At the least it made you indolent and puny if these kids were any indication, lying around

passively blinking their soft eyes. Eyes like Bambi, they had, or religious personalities; and chests like sparrows. He foresaw Mark [his son] among them, as sure as God made little apples.

Things were getting away from him.

'God knows how they get the energy to hike around the Himalayas', he said, exerting a trace of his substantiality. (p. 73)

It is true that this passage is also full of ironies, but the irony is directed not at Cullen's suspicion of his situation but at his lack of a coherent system of belief with which to oppose the one which surrounds him. The best he can do is register his athlete's faith in bodily integrity which at least puts him on the way to respect for individual responsibility and in opposition to those who would escape from it, like his mother to whom his thoughts return as Galash puts a cake spiced with drugs into his hands. Hitherto her disapproval of drugs had to him "quaint and eccentric, an old woman's bourgeois view" (p. 74), but he seems to envy her. He is unable to countenance what he sees before him but does not have her certainties to back him up—in the long run, in fact, he joins in. Nonetheless, Drewe's sympathies lie with his character's resistance. Unlike Malouf or Koch, he has no desire to participate in the flow of being. For him going over the edge means the destruction of the individual, not freedom but surrender to tyranny even if freedom is only a choice of the lesser of two evils.

Drewe's touchstone, then, is not so much "reality" as intelligibility,[20] even if he is also vividly aware of the limits of intelligibility. Indeed, the awareness which stands outside this scene in particular but the world of the novel in general, like the minus sign outside the bracket cancelling the experience within it, resembles the stance of faith as Karl Barth defined it, as a "standing place in the air". This stance, this preparedness to gamble on a transcendance of which he has no proof but which he intuits, looking to it implicitly in the value he attributes to human beings, grounds his regard for truthfulness and the freedom which goes with it in a larger metaphysical awareness. In contrast with Koch, who also aspires to a similar position, Drewe does not regard history as final. Therefore, history for Koch is the "larger story" in which his characters are involved and even if he also pays tribute to an absolute puppet master pulling the strings of the puppets who play their part in this story, his imagination does not really range beyond history. This means that, having no recourse to anything beyond it, people are ultimately subject to its determinisms, become mere puppets in the story in which they have a part, involved with the "stern brown faces that expected little, plump faces that were prepared to look coldly on appalling pain, [and] all of dark, threadbare Java, moving towards its holocaust". (p. 144) It is true that Drewe's protagonist is also at the mercy of similar forces and finally destroyed by them. But the point about this destruction is that in a sense it is a result of personal choice and results from the compassion which moves Cullen to lease the prostitute. Moreover, throughout Cullen keeps trying to make sense of his situation and behave decently. In the last sentence of the novel "Swaying, [Cullen] began to explain" (p. 244) he is still at it. He will never succeed, of course; he is about to be shot. Still, he dies as he lived, determined to live by what he knows and thus becomes the centre of value in a world otherwise lacking in values. This does not make him any more powerful in his world, it is true; indeed, it makes him more vulnerable. But the novelist evidently thinks it is more important to become a proper human being than to become successful.

So it is that of all these recent works, *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* is the most positive, if, perhaps the most austere. Defining man in Pascalian terms as a "thinking reed" surrounded by the "silence of the immense spaces", he implies

that the way out can only be through a situation in which human intentions seem more or less bound to be defeated. Unlike the other noveliss, with the exception of McDonald, Drewe sees positive value in this defeat, however. But where McDonald draws on the Christian myth he focusses instead upon the human truth this myth embodies, on continuing and stubborn attempts of human beings to preserve their dignity, their power to love and to choose despite everything. In this way he is agnostic about most things except the supreme value of human beings, determined not hand over the right to one's life or opinions to any other authority or institution.

Evidently, as we remarked earlier, this position has political implications since the free man of this kind is the enemy of the totalitarianism which seems to tempt several of the other writers. More importantly perhaps, given that the basic weakness of democracy may be its reliance on mere sentiment rather than on a coherent appraisal of what its belief in the individual implies, *A Cry In The Jungle Bar* indirectly justifies this belief, criticising Margaret's flirtation with mysticism as part of her longing for "peace ... order ... a sense of bliss and tranquility" (p. 188) the novel in fact echoes the criticism made by the theologian and champion of human freedom, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, of the "God who fills the gaps". Thus, Rajamurti matters to Margaret, we are told explicitly, because "he went some way towards filling a gap". (p. 77) But for the novel as a whole, however, it is precisely the refusal to fill this gap, of the ability to live in tension, which enables the individual to live with integrity, even if his physical life may be destroyed in the process.

So Robert Drewe seems to have realized the ambition John Fowles attributes to his protagonist in *Daniel Martin*, an ambition worthy of any novelist, especially today when the philosophical and social forms on which the traditional form of ficton rely seem to be breaking down. This is the ambition to find "a medium ... that would tally better [than the conventional forms] with [the] real structure of [the writer's] racial being and mind ... something dense, interweaving, treating time as horizontal like a skyline; not cramped, linear and progressive ... thereby creating a kind of equivoaleacy of memories and feelings, a totality of consciousness that fragmented modern man has completely lost".[21] To have gone some way to realizing this ambition is a considerable achievement, not least because in achieving it the novelist also honours the claims of life in a way unusual in recent fiction.

NOTES:

1. Simone Weil, *Gateway to God*. London, Collins, Fontana Books, 1978, p. 53.
2. Richard Poirier, *The Performing Self*. London, Chatto and Windus, 1971, p. xiii.
3. *ibid.*, p. viii.
4. *ibid.*, p. xiii.
5. Ian Turner, *The Australian Legend*. Melbourne, Sun Books, 1972. p. xvii.
6. Paul Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, translated by Franklin Sherman. New York, Harpur and Row, 1977.
7. Weil, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
8. Quoted by Peter Pierce, "Exploring the Territory: Some Recent Australian Novels". *Meanjin* 38, 2, July 1979, p. 233.
9. Tillich, *The Socialist Decision*, p. 19.
10. C. Manning Clark, *The History of Australia*. Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1975, III, p. 355.
11. A point made by Peter Coleman in his introduction to Peter Coleman (editor), *Australian Civilization*. Melbourne, Cheshire, 1964, p. xiii.
12. Manning Clark, *op. cit.*, III, p. 136.
13. *ibid.*, p. 355.
14. *ibid.*, p. 356.

15. Weil, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
16. *ibid.*, p. 52.
17. *ibid.*
18. *ibid.*
19. Richard Campbell.
20. Barthes has remarked that this is perhaps the touchstone of contemporary European writing generally.
21. John Fowles, *Daniel Martin*. London, Cape, 1971, p. 353.

sibyl

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SHIRLEY GEOK-LIN LIM

August Heat

The August heat breeds unseemly
Thoughts, images like crickets mating
In the sun, drawn by sense, vibrating,
Crowding in the throat and belly.

What a nuisance is this lust
Lying like an assassin in the dark,
Silent, intent, and the park
A sudden wilderness thick with musk.

The threat of falling to the knife
Beats in my heart as I slowly walk
This afternoon, this heat, till stalks
Of love grown over brush and drive

Me to the open empty page.
The impulse of summer is pure
Cascading water, endures
Crashing against roof or fence or cage,

Falls as a flood as though to wash
Away foundations, force
Casements down, and with hoarse
Guttural voice our lives unleash.

A catbird creaks from a hidden leaf.
Exhausted, the iridescent
Dragon-flies blur, descend.
We look for cover, lover and thief.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

Silence

"I suggest there comes a point in one's life when silence is called for."
— Fay Zwicky, radio interview, 20/9/79

I

As if we should have been engineered for
silence
we cry out in the very act of birth
to express anger at our pulse
we cram head and shoulder through
lips
to the cavern. Darkness supposes us
already full-grip, toes splayed
in ironcap boots, terrestrial.
Air holds us now
entirely within its opening,
no sound of lips closing.

II

Smetana in his dream of deafness
envied Beethoven the sanity
of no hearing. He himself,
jabbed by a long high A,
turned sound to a silence
aching with yellow teeth.

III

"But having conceived of it,
man must bring it to be."
Here on the sand floor
well in from the shaft
skeletal friction fondles our clothes.
Breath takes our time. The urge
is to tap messages, move the walls back.
They close in. Silence
is the dream that earth
is immobile. The earth is a body,
settling.

IV

"Space is a vast silence." Space is the tuning-board
of energy, meteor displacement, pizzicato.
Silence may be called for but the music
of the spheres has unheard pitch—is that
the same? Louis Jullien told Berlioz
it was perfect A, the terrestrial globe
revolving in space in his ear, God
as a blue cloud.
Whatever we dream, it is not silence.
Whatever we call for, it has a body.

V

Spliced by word strands
the rope jerks, a conjurer's trick
heading upward. Out of this basket
snake music
turns out the whole cave
like a pocket
full of clicking stones.
Fossils remember motion.
Inside those stern boots
someone's toes are tapping.
We have designs against time,
but that is to say
we have conceived of God,
Who holds us
in his mouth, considering.

NOEL MACAINSH

Australian Literary History—Between Historicism and Autonomy

Brian Kiernan, in summing up his survey of earlier Australian literary history, states that Australian literary historians "have contributed to our awareness of the culture of the past and raised issues of its interpretation from a later vantage point in time and its relevance to the present".[1] Here, one may surely comment that if the present is a vantage point relative to the past, then the future is a vantage point relative to the present, with the corollary that we do not understand the present because we are ignorant of the future. The difficulty, however, resides in our concept of understanding, which implicitly includes the notion of the time-perspective, namely that all 'understanding' is a backward looking from a 'vantage point'.

This point of view is essentially 'genetic'; it corresponds to the "hedge of organicist analogies", behind which Australian literary and cultural historians are said to shyly shelter,[2] that is the numerous measurings of our cultural record out on a scale of 'growth' and 'maturity'. Ronald McCuaig has written succinctly of this recurrent approach in the special Australian Number of *The Literary Review*, U.S.A., 1964, stating that:

> "One of the smartest tricks Australian literature does is Coming of Age. It came of age with the poems of Kendall (1862) and Gordon (1870), with Marcus Clark's *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), with Paterson's *Man From Snowy River* ballads (1895), with the short stories of Henry Lawson *While the Billy Boils* (1896), with the Louis Stone larrikin novel *Jonah* (1911), with Brennan's *Poems* (1913), with Martin Boyd's *The Montforts* (1928), with Henry Handel Richardson's *Fortunes of Richard Mahony* (1930), with Jon Cleary's *The Sundowners* (1952), with Morris West's *The Devil's Advocate* (1959) and with the *Poems* of A. D. Hope (1960).
>
> For more than a century Australian literature has been coming of age . . ."[3]

Brian Kiernan also gives various instances of this process, not only from the nineteenth century, but still more interestingly from our own day, when he cites Geoffrey Serle's *From Deserts the Prophets Come* (1973), "the first book to provide a comprehensive cultural history of Australia",[4] and states that Serle also lists

> "The need for Australia to grow in scale and diversity and to move towards nationhood . . . as important factors in 'the theory of cultural growth' . . ."[5]

The persistence of this theory demonstrates that the nineteenth century historicist amalgam of evolutionism and nationalism is still alive as a descriptive, even prescriptive model of culture in Australia today.

The 'growth' model, or genetic point of view, sees the literary work as an ensemble of various kinds of information, whether these be psychological, biographical, sociological, philosophical, or other; that is it sees the work as the expression of 'something else'. Also, although by no means overtly, the genetic view tends to regard the literary work as causally determined, as a response, a product arising at the point of intersection of external factors; it is an approach that embraces individual, chance and historical conditions of the emergence of work, regarding this heterogeneous multiplicity of externals as 'circumstances' and 'influences'.

This particular point of view is of course by no means peculiarly Australian; it can be found widely expressed in European literature of the last century. The historicism which has loomed so largely in Australian literary history right to this day can be found for instance in English literature back with Southey, Coleridge and Carlyle. Thomas Carlyle wrote in the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1831:

> "The history of a nation's poetry is the essence of its history, political, scientific, religious. With all these the complete Historian of Poetry will be familiar: the national physiognomy, in its finest traits, and its successive stages of growth, will be clear to him; he will discern the grand spiritual tendency of every period, which was the highest Aim and Enthusiasm of mankind in each, and how one epoch evolved itself from the other. He has to record the highest aim of a nation, in its successive directions and developments; for by this the poetry of the nation modulates itself; this *is* the Poetry of the nation. Such were the primary essence of a true history of poetry."[6]

To which, René Wellek comments, "Here all the key terms of historicism are assembled: individuality, nationality, development, the spirit of a nation and an age, continuity. Carlyle's conception was to dominate at least one important strand of historiography during the remainder of the century."[7] One could also view this specification by Carlyle as a bid for the functional determination of poetry in the social circumstances of his time, for the establishment of norms, mediated aesthetically, determining the use of literary resources on the production side and reader-attitudes on that of reception. With the increasing autonomy of literature in modern times, together with social change, such a bid for norm-determination has become weakened in status and increasingly relativised as but one of a number of competing claims on literature, not to mention direct attacks on the historicist concept itself, such as that represented by Sir Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*.

However, historicism is by no means the only approach to Australian literary history, even if a dominating one. Indeed, it seems to have been long accompanied by, perhaps to have generated at times, an opposing or simply ignoring classicistic view of literature as a collection of timeless works to be judged by no other standard than their own intrinsic, aesthetic value. In practice, these two basically irreconcilable approaches become combined somehow in a view of the dynamic nation expressing its growth to maturity in a sequence of static masterpieces. But this is not satisfactory for a literary history, rigorously conceived. It leads, as Wellek states of many Victorian histories of English literature, to works that are "either histories of civilisation as mirrored in literature, or collections of critical essays in chronological order. The first type is not a history of *art*, the other is not a *history* of art".[8]

Literary history itself has described over many years now a steady decline into disrepute. Its highest achievements lie well back in the past. It was surely a source of frustration for past would-be historians of Australian literature to be unable to respond to the nineteenth century ideal of describing the history of a national literature simply because there was no fitting Australian literary

history to describe. The hobbled patriarchs of this discipline saw their highest ideal in describing (in unwitting analogy to Hegel) the idea of the national individuality on its way to itself in the history of literary works. This high calling is today an anachronism. As Kiernan remarks, "the stereotyped view of literature developing in accordance with national consciousness" had become an orthodoxy by the time H. M. Green's *History of Australian Literature* appeared in 1961, but an orthodoxy already under attack.[9] The long-accustomed form of literary history leads an impoverished life in contemporary culture. It seems mainly to survive as an adjunct to the examination system. As an aid to the teaching of Australian literature, such works are of diminishing use. Otherwise, books of Australian literary history sit on bookshelves in lieu of some better way of answering literary quiz-questions. The division of our national literature into periods, or its presentation in overall survey courses, is gradually yielding to programmes addressed to specific problems or systematic questionings. Scientific production offers a corresponding picture. Collective undertakings in the form of handbooks, encyclopedias and bound editions of important series of interpretations have diminished the significance of literary histories, which appear in comparison as arbitrary, lacking in rigor, and pompous. H. M. Green's monumental 1961 collection of sound and honourable opinions on everything in Australian literature, a stately piece of Victoriana, has already sailed over the horizon like a brave windjammer, its own 'history' a part of history.

In his earlier *Outline of Australian Literature* (1930), Green had made the mistake, so he wrote later, of "concentrating too much upon literature in its more aesthetic aspect".[10] His attempt to subsequently rectify this, in the *History*, thirty years later, by the definition of Australian literature in social and political terms, was not consistently sustainable. Kiernan comments that "Green abandons the attempt to relate social history and literary developments closely. His promise to discuss national types and characteristics at the end is not fulfilled . . .".[11]

Here, on two occasions, in the case of this particular critic alone, it appears that a theory did not work out, if one can properly speak here of theory at all and not of an *ad hoc* response each time to a cultural temper or fashion. Indeed, it is surely a weakness of Australian literary history that its theoretical basis remains merely implicit and not subject to clear examination, thus conveying an impression of the foregone and neutral character of the choice of works made for consideration. As Wellek and Warren write in their *Theory of Literature*:

> "In practice, no literary history has ever been written without some principles of selection and some attempt at characterisation and evaluation. Literary historians who deny the importance of criticism are themselves unconscious critics, usually derivative critics, who have merely taken over traditional standards and reputations ... they [history and criticism] implicate each other so thoroughly as to make inconceivable literary theory without criticism or history, or criticism without theory and history, or history without theory and criticism."[12]

It emerges from the example of Green and other literary historians, that a significant question in writing literary history is that of how far account is to be taken of the relatively autonomous aspects of Australian literature while, in relation to the social, economic context, one adopts an evolutionary viewpoint, that is one sees economic and social development as conforming to laws, to a structured process. This question is further exacerbated by the markedly increased autonomy of literature in recent times, such as may well have constituted the true ground for H. M. Green's abandonment of his "'attempt to relate social and literary developments closely",[13] or, more recently, to say Stephen Murray-Smith's confession in *Overland* that the proliferation of new names in Australian

literature does not engage him significantly because no compelling social, political relevance attaches to them: "... I came to the conclusion that what is going on, for the most part, is the Celebration of the Navel."[14]

One observes that the assessment of cultural products, such as those of literature and art, is made with considerable uncertainty and shifting of viewpoint. The autonomous view of literature, as having an internal evolution of its own, is one that had already emerged as a possibility in Victorian times,[15] but it is a conception that has by no means been adhered to in all its consequences by critics; rather they show a marked tendency to deviate into genetic explanations and derive literary works entirely from the social, historical conditions of their 'genesis', from the author's ideas and background. The viewpoint has gained ground, however, that the derivation of literary forms and styles from the general socio-economic forms of an age, on a principle of cause-and-effect, is a will-o'-the-wisp to be rejected. Such an approach would threaten to rob literary criticism of its independence and particularity, being tantamount to denying literature its own development and reducing it to a mere reflex of extra-literary processes.

Brian Kiernan aptly summarises this state of affairs when he writes that:

> "A general pattern of links connecting literature and society in a causal way remains as elusive as ever ... Too much insistence on social and economic conditions, publishing outlets and markets, political ideology and established conventions can lead to a deterministic sense that the 'age' has produced the literature; at the other extreme too great an insistence on the autonomy of imaginative literature can ignore the involvement, direct or indirect, of writers with their society."[16]

The question arises of how one can proceed between this Scylla and Charybidis, with more assurance than in the past, with at least a tentative theory that allows for both the autonomous character of literary development and the relatedness of literature to extra-literary events. The following remarks are intended as a possible indication of such a procedure, in outline only and bearing in mind that with any such theory ultimate demonstration on the literary texts themselves is of overriding importance. That such an undertaking is both needed and unlikely to be fulfilled easily can be gauged perhaps from René Wellek, who, in his "English Literary Historiography", states:

> "To write a really satisfactory history of English literature, which would not be the history of something else but the history of the *art* of literature, is still a problem and a task for the future."[17]

A starting-point for consideration of such a history of the *art*, in the strict sense, is the isolation of the literary sequence from other cultural sequences, that is from the history of politics, psychology, religion, ideas, philosophy, and so on. An independent knowledge of literature as such presumes rigorous restriction to the specific difference of literature compared to all other fields. The autonomy of literature, as Christopher Brennan observed, lies in the writer's complete submission to its own laws and traditions, to its particular mode of procedure, to the specific organisation of its material.[18]

The idea that literature breaks through fixed and moribund, automatized modes of seeing, that it has a de-automatizing function, enabling us to experience freshly, implies already the idea of a constant renewal of literary forms, suggesting thereby a mechanism for that "internal evolution of art", which, according to Wellek,[19] was first conceived clearly in consequence of the emergence of biological evolutionism, in about 1860. Literary works may be regarded from this viewpoint as constituting the immanent evolution of an uninterrupted

sequence of mutually rejecting works. The emphasis here is not on a continuity of tradition and influence, as is usual, but on a principle of opposition and discontinuity as more truly constitutive of the literary sequence. This, superficially at least, fits the facts of actual literary experience, where criticism of writers, opposition, the search for contrary modes, a going and doing otherwise, are more the rule than a meek imitation of one's seniors. The principle emerges here that only the literary works, among themselves, not the chronology of authors or of history, can form the main theme of literary history. This approach is clearly distinct from prevailing genetic theories, whether of a psychological or social kind. As Northrop Frye has remarked: "In the last generation ... the accepted critical procedure was to take a work of literature, let us say a poem, for short, and treat it as a document to be related to some context outside literature."[20]

This principle of the inherent motivation of the literary sequence is also distinct from the 'New Criticism' and its variants. For, as Frye has also remarked, this latter form of criticism, while having the virtue of building up a resistance to all 'background' criticism that explained the literary in terms of the non-literary, "deprived itself of the great strength of documentary criticism: the sense of context. It simply explicated one work after another, paying little attention to any larger structural principles connecting the different works explicated".[21] Thus the classicistic concept of art as a history of the creative masters and their enduring works, as well as its positivistic, distorted image in literary history dispersed over innumerable histories of "the writer and his work", has come under increasing criticism from the structural viewpoint, proceeding from the archetypal literary theory of Frye in the U.S.A., and from the anthropological structuralism of Claude Levi-Strauss in France, and leading to the demand that the methodical step be made from the individual work to literature as a system. For Northrop Frye, literature is an "order of words", not a "collection of works".[22]

From this viewpoint, the literary work is regarded as a text having specifically literary information, to be seen in relationship to other literary texts; it is grasped in a functional, teleological way, so that one may also grasp the regularity and structuredness of literary change, the evolution of norms, that is the sequence of changes occurring in the uniformly based substrate of standards and expectations. It is this latter factor, of the evolutionary substrate, that renders possible the establishment of a continuous, coherent sequence. A corollary of this view is that real time cannot be taken as the basis of literary history; it is only through observations of change in the literary object itself that literary study can record literary development. Thus, what is describable is not the flow of history, of time, but the deviation from previous standards. The advantage of this approach lies in the description of developments, without relationships being distorted immediately by valuations read into them.

This simple model of literary development, firstly thought of as unilinear, will then need to be extended by the assumption of various schools of literature existing simultaneously, with the so-called 'main-stream' constituted each time by the canonising of later works or of subsidiary lines. In addition to these complications of the basic scheme, the isolation of the literary sequence is lessened by the recognition that other, extra-literary sequences at times open their borders, such that various kinds of material are taken up into the literary sequence according to the particular literary principles then applying. Likewise, literature itself may be taken up into the extra-literary sequence, be it that of political, social, cultural life.

An important feature of this view is that the incorporation by the literary sequence of extra-literary material does not thereby extinguish its own nature

as is the tendency of the causal, deterministic approach, in so far as this approach sees the work as finally only the expression, the clothing as it were, of a content that lies beyond it. For instance, if John Shaw Neilson's experience of Protestant religiosity in his boyhood home has entered into his poetry, then it has done so not in unchanged form but as material actively assimilated, transformed and absorbed in a manner specific to the structural principles of Neilson's work. The functional way of consideration advanced here would correlate the various sequences, whereby their specific function, their particularity, would be preserved. Mutual effects between the sequences would be comprehended, including the force that literature itself may exert on other trains of events. It also follows that isolated elements of the literary and socio-economic systems need not be reduced to each other or directly linked to each other, a frequent fault of the causal-deterministic approach to the history of literature. The state of the literary sequence at each point prescribes only the possibilities of further development; the actual tempo of change and its concrete direction being determined solely by analysis of the mutual relationships of the literary system with adjacent systems. This conception takes its rise from modern linguistics, where the field of linguistic phenomena is moved onward by way of the immanent contradictions of the field itself, while the anchoring of the literary sign and structure in the general, social consciousness relates the literary process to the social process, that is makes the literary communication into a part of social, communicative behaviour. As a working hypothesis for comprehension of the literary process in its complexity, one may formulate therefore a dual motivation of every phenomenon of literary history, whether it be on the border between the literary structure and other external structures or within the literary structure itself.

Independent of what the literary historian sees as the moving force of the literary process, he is nonetheless referred to a principle of inner development in the reconstruction of the literary sequence, the members of which exhibit objective differences of quality. This principle is necessary as a theoretical postulate, as an effective relationship of tradition that cannot be ignored by authors and readers, that asserts itself often unwittingly. This leads us to adopt as a model of literary development one in which the preceding state of the literary sequence determines the following stage multivalently, in which the actual selection from this implicitly given field of possibilities is made on the basis of influence from external, non-literary factors.

However, it would be misleading to make the assumption that only the 'inner' aspect of literature is specific to it, that the non-literary context has, in contrast, solely a disturbing influence. Factors which initially appear to be purely literary can be generated as a whole by the influence of society; for instance, a shift in literary structure, in genres, may occur as a reaction to social change, such as described by C. K. Stead in *The New Poetic*, or by A. D. Hope in the course of his plea for a return to the 'discursive mode' in Australian poetry, or as is represented by the passing of the bush-ballad form in response to social change. On the other hand, external influences cannot become directly effective within the literary system but must be processed in accordance with its assumptions and possibilities. For instance, 'Unemployment' does not directly enter into Bruce Dawe's poem of the same name but only in subjection to Dawe's aesthetic, which has its own structure and place in the literary sequence. Even wide-spread and deep social changes do not find a direct precipitate in literature, do not create *sui generis* new literary forms without any preconditions, but resort to possibilities of expression already existing, including the language and structural principles of previous movements sensed as kindred. Australian poetry is rich in such 'returns' and 'out-reachings'. The 'New' Australian poets, for instance,

have returned to earlier avant-garde models, to French symbolist poets, to English and American poets sensed as kindred. Christopher Brennan too, expressed his affinity for Mallarmé and other symbolist poets, as well as for still earlier poets. The 'Melbourne Group'[23] of poets has been said to have paid much attention to modern American poets as models; and so on.

A merely innovatory, revolutionary enthusiasm, perhaps inspired by social problems, does not suffice to solve the presumed crisis of the novel or poetry. Judith Wright, in expressing her disillusion with 'formal' poetry, on the grounds that it is socially ineffective, seeks a model for a literary alternative in the 'pop'-poets and in the later work of the New Zealand poet, James Baxter.[24] Again, it is a specifically literary solution that must be sought; the exernal factor cannot directly create it. The social and literary sequences do not exclude each other, but are mutually conditional; indeed, the 'disturbances' from outside are the moving force of literary evolution and lead each time to an activation of the latent possibilities of literary development; each change in the structure of society appears in some manner in the overall structure of culture. Thus one of the inner problems of Australian literature has been the formation of a more differentiated, higher 'Australian' literary language to meet the aesthetic demands of new levels of readership. For a long time, the Australian vernacular has found application chiefly in the lesser literary genres, in 'popular' forms, whereas the educated classes, the 'higher' public, whether in Australia or overseas, has preferred or even demanded a more international language. This demand for a specifically literary development, however, takes place in a framework of internal differentiation of Australian society. Only when one grasps the literary process as a social communication process, in which the social recipients are an evolutionary factor, can one also understand the tempo with which changes in the literary consciousness of society come about. In contemporary life, which reckons on constant change of its forms, the tendency to destruction of stable artistic norms and to simultaneous acceptance of new and often provocative forms of artistic expression, is a quite regular phenomenon. However, the influence of society should not be speculatively deduced but shown empirically each time.

Thus, the accelerated evolution of modern Australian literature is to be derived, not from specific social changes in each case, but precisely from the growth in autonomy of the literary field, from the distancing of the author from his readers and the very indeterminacy of the social basis of modern Australian writing. A marked feature of this unusual state is the accelerated tempo of development. The schools and directions now break up rapidly, and the contradictions between them are considerable, which is due to release from the retarding influence of the social milieu, whose demands stabilised literature more in earlier times. The rapid changes in the English language, to take a distant but illustrative example, during the period of Norman occupation of England, are generally held to be due to the release of English from a former social function, in favour of French. Freed from official, social constraint, the English language then was less hampered in following its own inherent dynamics. Likewise with modern literary art; the release of literature from direct social obligation signifies an emphasis on the autonomy of literature, which is now given over to its own inherent evolutionary dynamics without the former braking effect of social obligation. This view argues against any assumption of an equal tempo of social and literary development but not against the overall influence of society, since even the release of art from social demands is socially conditioned.

The balance between the aesthetic function of literature, a function so strongly defended by Brennan and others, and the extra-literary functions of literature, may be disturbed in consequence of literature being burdened with too many

practical tasks by reason of the particular national and economic state of the country. It appears that the immanent developmental dynamic of Australian literature has been inhibited in this way. For instance, Kiernan states, apropos of George Nadel's documentation in *Australia's Colonial Culture*, that "the propagation of literature was expected to alleviate the depressingly materialistic tone of the Australian colonies, restore a lost sense of community, and morally elevate the masses".[25] This state of affairs has changed as Australian society, from about the turn of the century, has developed other agencies of influence hitherto lacking. As early as 1902, in his "The University and Australian Literature", Christopher Brennan could remark that "The nineteenth century ... was stern in demanding a moral purpose and a 'message' from art. No back-blocks debating club would today dream of starting the question of the morality of art...".[26] Such a question was seen by Brennan as having "vanished in the restoration of the old and only true religious intuition of art...".[27] However that may be, it appears that our literature, relieved of some of its 'nation-building' burden could then devote itself more strongly to its own problems, differentiate itself and produce 'avant garde' currents, though at the price of less social effect. This inconsistent process suggests a desirable ideal of balance between the literary, aesthetic function and the extra-literary functions, whether these be 'nation-building', didactic, agitatory, and so on; that is the ideal of a many-sided, differentiated literature bound to society.

Today, there is emerging in place of the still seemingly wide-spread assumption of literary study as a self-justifying activity that somehow contributes, on historicist lines, to 'nation-building', the problem of contemporary legitimation of literary study, of the explication of the relationship of literary study with the social situation each time, that is the problem of finding a socially oriented, functional derivation for the discipline. Or, at the very least, we need, in changed times, some elaboration of Christopher Brennan's 1902 contention that "...we have come back to the faith that art as art, and not confounded with any other category, is a necessary part of the national life...".[28]

It has been stated that while all academic disciplines originate from some external, social prompting, they also regularly run the danger of growing away from this external motivation, of striving for autonomy, of becoming more abstract and recondite, a danger already remarked on in relation to Australian literary studies. In reviewing the social legitimation of these studies, a history of literary history itself, such as Brian Kiernan has already indicated, would be helpful. For the deficiencies of previous approaches to Australian literary history, as indicated in Kiernan's study, show that literary history can become adequately grounded as knowledge only when it also takes into account both the historical conditions under which it approaches its object, and its position with regard to the general utility of these studies. Such an approach would lead, not to subjective vagaries in research or mere positivistic accumulations of 'facts', but to that close attention to literary interpretation which our history in fact lacks, despite the seeming wealth of interpretive studies; for these studies by-and-large are a 'reading-into', an assessment from the naive standpoint of the unreflective historical consciousness itself, hardly different from the 'liking and judging' of the typical student or the 'what do you think of so-and-so' attitude encountered at a typical writers' meeting; whereas the essential task is the structural determination of the work itself, of those properties which trouble the Marxist theorist by their ability to confer on the text a survival beyond the social context in which the work originated. Only in this way can the researcher recognise the reasons and, where possible, the social consequences of his choice of object and his perspective of research.

NOTES:

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2. p. 16.
3. Ronald McCuaig: 'Contemporary Australian Literature', in *The Literary Review, U.S.A., VII*: 2. Winter, 1963-1964, p. 165.
4. Kiernan, p. 16.
5. p. 17.
6. René Wellek: 'English Literary Historiography during the Nineteenth Century', in his *Discriminations—Further Concepts of Criticism*, Yale University Press, 1970, p. 152.
7. pp. 152-3.
8. p. 163.
9. Kiernan, p. 10.
10. p. 11.
11. p. 12.
12. René Wellek and Austin Warren: *Theory of Literature*, New York, 1949, p. 30 and p. 35.
13. Kiernan, p. 12.
14. Stephen Murray-Smith, in *Overland* No. 68, 1977, p. 39.
15. Wellek, *Discriminations*, p. 163.
16. Kiernan, pp. 17-18.
17. Wellek, p. 163.
18. *cf.* Noel Macainsh: 'Christopher Brennan's Wanderer', *Quadrant*, February 1978.
19. Wellek, p. 163.
20. Northrop Frye: 'The Critical Path: An Essay on the Social Context of Literary Criticism', *Daedalus*, Spring 1970, pp. 269-270.
21. P. 272.
22. Northrop Frye: *The Anatomy of Criticism*, New York, 1957, p. 23.
23. T. Shapcott: 'Australian Poetry since 1920', in G. Dutton (ed.): *The Literature of Australia*, Penguin Books, revised edition 1976, pp. 135-136.
24. *cf.* Peter Abotomey: 'Class Lecture after a Recent Visit by Judith Wright', *LiNQ*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1978.
25. Kiernan, pp. 3-4.
26. Christopher Brennan: 'The University and Australian Literaure, A Centenary Retrospect', *Hermes*, Jubilee Number 1902, reprinted in *The Prose of Christopher Brennan*, ed. A. R. Chisholm and J. J. Quinn, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1962, p. 224.
27. p. 224
28. p. 224.

R. G. HAY

Is an Island?

In life he had a local fame, in death it
spread: forty miles up the road, buying petrol,
the bloke asked where I was headed
heard, and said 'Better watch them beach buggies—
feller killed in one last weekend'. Closer
there was raw grief: the English lady from New Zealand
who kept the motel, cooked old-style breakfast,
told the odd bitter story of the local boy made good
home half round the world for Christmas, filming
his boyhood beach when a wheel hit soft sand, stopped
film, boyhood, and the music. I forget his name
if I ever heard it, but recall him on chance cues.
Strange the way little townships think even strangers
would want to share what everyone naturally
feels: you'd think, though, a tourist place would
meet enough people to have learnt not to care.

LEONIE J. KRAMER

Islands of Yesterday: The Growth of Literary Ideas*

In 1970 I spoke to a group of Marathi writers in Mysore about Australian literature. They were particularly interested to know whether there were regional differences between writers working on the East and West coasts of Australia, and in reply to questions on this subject I said that there had not developed in Ausralian writing identifiable local characteristics. My answer surprised and possibly disappointed them. Earlier in the tour I had noticed the strong regional attachments of many writers, and there had been some heated debate about whether Indian writers should write in English, or remain faithful to their regional languages. There was no real comparison to be made between regionalism in India, with its strong historical and linguistic basis, and geographical or political regionalism n Australia. Yet when I gave my unhesitating reply to the Marathi group, I had not really given the matter much thought. We have been accustomed to think of similarities rather than differences, of national, rather than regional characteristics, even, perhaps, to assent to A. D. Hope's view of ourselves as 'second-hand Europeans' and to contemplate, with resignation rather than indignation the lines in which he describes the monotony of the people who inhabit a drab, desolate, landscape:

> The river of her immense stupidity
> Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth

One would not go to Hope's 'Australia' for an accurate and complete image of Australian life, any more than one would regard Patrick White's satire on suburban life as an exercise in sociological enquiry. But there is a truth, as well as a judgment in Hope's lines. There are and always have been strong forces in Australian life which tend toward the elimination of local differences. When, for example, distance is seen as an enemy or tyrant, to conquer it will be to make some progress towards reducing the differences that distance both creates and sustains.

On the determination of social patterns, however, ideas as well as practical matters have a significant, though not readily definable influence. How communities think of themselves may well be as important as how they really are. In any case, are these two things separable? How communities think of themselves is an essential part of how they are, and might, in fact, have practical consequences when they are faced with decisions about their future.

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* Text of the sixth Walter Murdoch lecture delivered at Murdoch University 20 September 1979. Published by, and reproduced with the permission of, Murdoch University.

The way nations or communities think of themselves is not merely reflected in their literature, but partly determined by it. Oscar Wilde's dictum that life imitates art is a commonplace of literary discussion. Patrick White's view of the suburbs and their inhabitants has no *literal* status in his writnig, and indeed exists by ignoring the diverse facts it purports to represent. Yet its purely fictional status does not prevent it from gaining currency as part of the way things really are. Similarly, rural images continue to dominate much Australian writing. Urban life has been and continues to be less adequately represented in fiction than its actual dominance would seem to require. This fact in turn guarantees the survival, perhaps even the strengthening, of the bush myth.

But it is not simply literature itself which imposes modes of thinking on those it addresses. Literary commentary, whether it be mainly historical or critical in intention, is a powerful influence on notions of what constitutes a particular reality. The history of literary ideas in Australia has not yet been written, but much of it is sufficiently well documented to justify some preliminary speculation. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, there are many expressions (from men of letters both great and small) of encouragement for an indigenous literature—one which would express the flavour of life in the still new country, and help it to gain a sense of national identity. One of the most influential spokesmen for this view was Vance Palmer, who devoted a great deal of his life to the promotion of Australian literature, and through it, of a sense of nationality. His views, and others like them, not only defined literary aspirations, but influenced critical attitudes towards literature itself, especially in the case of writing which betrayed its origins in the attitudes, forms and styles of its English ancestry. Nationalistic fervour cannot in itself override regional or local interests, but it can relegate those interests to a minor place in the scheme of things. Yet there is a curious fact to be noted here. Henry Lawson and Joseph Furphy seemed, to the architects of literary nationalism, to be writers who clearly met its aspirations. Yet both are intensely regional writers. Neither could claim to speak for the nation as a whole. One wrote out of a morose vision based on country life in western New South Wales; the other from an intimate knowledge of itinerant life in the Riverina. If they seem to be representatively Australian, it is because the local origins of their work have been transcended by their capacity for generalising experience; or for suggesting that the life they know is larger than itself. We are asked to accept the part for the whole.

The critical questions raised by discussions of literary nationalism have frequently been debated. They were raised by Walter Murdoch in his essay 'On Being Australian'. He concluded his argument with characteristic energy and forthrightness, by referring to Robert Lynd's essay on 'The Nutritive Qualities of the Banana', rightly pointing out that Lynd, an Irishman, is not asked to confine his references to 'banshees, colleens and Kilkenny cats' as subjects for his writing. It is equally absurd, he concludes, 'to ask us Australians to concentrate our interest in the affairs of the parish'.

Yet, while arguments about literary nationalism are still to be heard, there are signs that the parish, in a more restricted sense than Murdoch intended, is becoming fashionable. In October 1978 a seminar was held in Fremantle on 'Regionalism in Contemporary Australian literature'. Frank Moorhouse argued that if we are to look for regionalism—defined as 'a posture growing out of special conditions surrounding or forming the imagination'—Western Australia 'would be the most obvious case study', since, he went on, 'it is by far the most self-conscious, self-analytical and articulate region in Australia'. This statement in itself constitutes a definition of regional characteristics. The seminar covered a range of views on the possibility of regional identity, with Moorhouse expressng moderate scepticism, Peter Ward impatiently critical and concluding that

Australia is 'persuasively homogenous', and Peter Cowan questioning the notion of 'sameness' and arguing that 'the strength of regional writing seems to lie in a strong sense of place, often a quality of vision, or view: a rich idiom: a colour'. To this writing he has himself made a notable contribution, and his phrase 'a quite pitiless but utterly attractive landscape' itself contributes to a definition of regional identity.

In this year of celebration, it seems appropriate to go back to the beginning, to see whether it is possible to locate in the early years some signs of a special self-consciousness. It is appropriate too, at this point, to acknowledge the source of my title 'Islands of Yesterday'. It is taken from Barbara York Main's book *Twice Trodden Ground* (1971), a series of reflective essays on Western Australia's past, in which the author, contemplating the 'fragile remnants of the former landscape' seeks some continuity in change. 'It is,' she writes, 'to these last relics of unchanged reality, to these islands of yesterday, that one desperately lays claim.' I am using the phrase to refer both to the attempt to recover the past, and to the peculiar tone of nostalgia and isolation it seems to imply.

What can one discover by looking into the past? The events of Western Australia's history, looked at broadly, tell a story of fluctuating fortunes which could provide the substance of legend—twenty years of free settlement with its earnest hopes for future prosperity; then nearly twenty years of transportation; after that the ferment of gold discoveries; and in modern times the rapid development of mineral resources and industry. Here is a story of success in a new land clouded by the shadows of imported corruption; and this fall from grace in turn alleviated, if not totally redeemed, by unexpected prosperity.

For the early period—that is, up to 1850—many letters, diaries and journals record the impressions of the first settlers. In the introduction to her life of Georgiana Molloy, Alexandra Hasluck draws an important distinction between the factual and fictional accounts of the early days. 'Too many novels and accounts of the first days of the colony', she writes, 'show it as disastrous and tragic.' Diaries and letters, she states, present a different picture, and she finds that in most of the manuscripts of the first twenty years years 'the outstanding fact ... is the evident faith of the writers in the country of their adoption'.

Enthusiasm is not too strong a word for early impressions of landscape. The freshness of the new land still lives in the pages of Captain Fremantle's diary of 1828-9. Charles Russell in 1831, while noting 'the sameness of the scenery' also praised its beauty, and Frances Russell's voyage up the Swan seemed to her to combine 'every beautiful place' she had ever seen to produce 'that fullness of enjoyment which silence alone can express'. Georgiana Molloy's careful observations of bird and plant life are full of delight in the strangeness and variety of the natural world. One could multiply examples. A cheerful, if unsubtle expression of these sensations is conveyed by George Fletcher Moore's 'Western Australia for Me', which was sung by the author at the first ball given by Sir James Stirling in Perth in 1831. Moore concludes his song of praise and encouragement with this stanza:

> No lions or tigers we here dread to meet,
> Our innocent *quadrupeds* hop on *two feet*;
> No tithes and no taxes we now have to pay,
> And our *geese* are all *swans*, as some witty folks say.
>
> Then we live without trouble or stealth, Sirs,
> Our currency's all sterling wealth, Sirs,
> So here's to our Governor's health, Sirs,
> And *Western Australia* for me.

Moore's jaunty optimism is, however, a sideline. His *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia* (published in 1884, but referring to to the 1830s), is a model of sober reflection and observation; but he also expresses the acute nostalgia of homesickness, and his efforts to divert himself by labour from 'painful contemplation'. Such feelings are given a literary context by Edward Willson Landor in some sections of *The Bushman* (1847). This collection of sketches of life in the new country shows a sense of design which places it as fictional rather than factual material. In 'Woodman's Point' the desolate image of an abandoned garden whose centre-piece is an English rose tree is emblematic of the pain of dislocation felt by the forgotten settler.

In such sketches, slight though they are, is to be detected the beginning of the interpretation of experience, as distinct from its reasonably objective recording. But there is nothing either in the documentary material or in the literature up to this period which suggests the emergence of a specifically regional awareness. That statement has to be qualified in an obvious way by noting the special qualities of the landscape. The river scenery, the sandy coastal areas, the park-like appearance of the immediate hinterland and the luxuriance of spring wild-flowers are frequently described; and even if one cannot demonstrate the effect of landscape on individual and community attitudes, it would be rash indeed to assume that the person who lives on the Birdsville Track has the same responses to his environment as a man from the Bogong High Plains, or the North Queensland rain forests. What remains mysterious is the extent to which these differences seep into other areas of human experience, and influence the development of ideas about society and culture. On this point Ernest Favenc's comments on the desert are of considerable interest. In the introduction to his poems *Voices of the Desert* he writes

> That the themes inspired by the desert and its surroundings are more mournful than joyous, and the pessimistic view of life more in evidence than the sanguine, is but natural, for, such as these verses are, they were desert-born . . .

That statement asserts, but does not explain, the effect of landscape on a view of life.

In one significant respect, the historical experience of Western Australia was entirely different from that of New South Wales, whose influence on the intellectual and cultural attitudes of Australia as a whole has been powerful, indeed, determinative. Western Australia began as a free settlement. Randolph Stow has commented on what he calls 'the myth of Australia as prison'. He sees this so-called myth as colouring Australian literature, not just in works which deal with the convict system, but in others which use the notion of imprisonment metaphorically. 'One finds,' he argues, 'in all kinds of places: the feeling that the island-continent is a natural gaol, and that Australian society is the gaoler.' In sharp contrast to Stow's view is the way in which Mary Durack, in the preface to *To Be Heirs Forever* (1976) summarises the introduction of transportation to Western Australia.

> . . . The western settlers . . . were generally agreed that only the introduction of convict labour could free them from the doldrums in which they were trapped. Eighteen years of transportation served them well, providing roads, bridges and public buildings, farm labour and increased population. It is indeed surprising that it did not more drastically alter the social pattern of settlement established in earlier years.

It is just as surprising that it did not leave a darker mark on the literature of Western Australia, past and present. John Boyle O'Reilly's novel *Moondyne Joe* expresses enlightened and humane attitudes toward the convict system. But then

he was, after all, convict and Irishman. His poems 'The Monster Diamond' with its reference to 'the blood-stained soil' and 'the terrible wear of the penal toil', and 'The Mutiny of the Chains', together with the 'Dryblower' poems are the most substantial attempts to deal with this subject. But experiences of the convict days, perhaps because they were self-inflicted wounds, seem to have largely escaped the literary imagination.

The opposite is true of the depiction of the aborigines which is another of John Boyle O'Reilly's subjects. To it Western Australian writers have turned again and again. Katharine Susannah Prichard's *Coonardoo* (1929) is rightly regarded as a pioneering work in its attempt to develop a full portrait of an aboriginal woman, and to penetrate to the heart of the relationship between black and white races. Grant Watson's strange and often ambiguous novels, and Donald Stuart's work, continue what is now a tradition of Western Australian writing. It is a tradition, but not a monopoly, and even here one has to stop short of seeing something peculiarly regional in this literary interest.

Yet the pressure to define the qualities of Western Australian self-consciousness persists, and perhaps has actually increased in this decade. Dorothy Hewitt in her introduction to the anthology *Sandgropers* (1973) speaks of certain literary preoccupations—'ancestor worship', the bush, childhood, the sea (and in particular 'searching for fish and gilt dragons'), 'death, the journey, the desert places' which characterize Western Australian experience. If one leaves out the gilt dragons, which are peculiar to Western Australia, the rest of the list is common to Australian writing in general. Isolation is also mentioned by Dorothy Hewitt—and this is a word which the visitor to the West frequently hears.

I have so far glanced at the direct literary evidence for a local identity in a simple way. This is a matter of counting heads—how many convict novels and poems, how many books on aboriginal life, on gold, or in pioneering families? This method of documentation is valid and revealing; it enables one to talk of preoccupations, as Judith Wright does in her essays on Australian poetry. But there is another kind of literary evidence, to be found in the metaphorical preferences of writers, and in the kinds of images in which they choose to render the general particular, and the abstract concrete. Randolph Stow in *Westerly* (1961), very succinctly made the important point that 'the environment of a writer is as much inside him as in what he observes'. Perhaps one can amplify that statement by saying that the metaphorical and imagistic life of a writer's work gives access to that internal environment, and might in fact send one back to the external environment he has absorbed in a search for the origins of his imaginative expression.

Stow's own work frequently moves the reader between inner and outer landscapes. In *To the Islands* the character of the spiritual journey of the missionary Heriot is defined through precise landscape images. This journey begins in dust and dryness, and moves through alternating landscapes of rocky outcrops and deep refreshing rock pools, towards the sea. It ends on a cliff with Heriot scanning a horizon where, he believes, islands might be seen. I do not need to interpret for you the general significance of Heriot's rite of passage. While recognising this, the reader also recognises that Stow has given to this journey of self-discovery 'a local habitation and a name', and a keen sense of the close links between the aborigines and the land. In *Tourmaline* too the desert landscape and dying township, emblematic perhaps of the absence of spirituality, and hence, to a degree generalized, seem to have been experienced and not simply imagined. The landscape, though dead, has the force of life. In a rather less complex way, Favenc's poems of 1905 create a similar effect. He personifies the desert. It does not simply *feel* hot, but breathes fire; the sun frowns, the stars stare, and the moon grows tired. Earlier still, Dale Carnegie seeking for a possible

explanation of what he calls 'The Great Undulating Desert of Gravel' imagines that 'some mighty giant had sown the ground with seed in the hope of raising a rich crop of hills' (*Spinifex and Sand* (1896)). One could gather similar evidence from writing in and about Western Australia of a metaphorical concern with coastline, the sea, and islands.

Where, though, does this investigative path lead? Does it take us towards a definition of regional concern and an attunement to the special accent of Western Australian writers? It leads me to the conclusion that there is more enjoyment in travelling than in arriving, and that a destination eagerly sought retreats into mirage. For as Favenc personifies his western desert, so too Douglas Stewart animates the desert between Marree and Birdsville in his sequence of poems 'The Birdsville Track'; Stow's ghost town does not *need* to be somewhere in particular, and could be anywhere at all. For the fact is, that however strong a writer's local attachments (as, for example Thomas Hardy's were to Dorset, or Wordsworth's to the Lake District), and however close his landscapes are to the reality with which he lives his daily life, he is also the inheritor of a literary, as well as an historical experience. The pressure of literary and cultural tradition is towards the archetypal. That does not mean to say that the writer must start with archetypes—perhaps that is what he must not do—but that he might well succeed in recreating them out of the concrete particulars of his world. Hence Heriot's journey in *To the Islands* might take him through a recognizable Western Australian landscape; but it also evokes traditional imaginative landscapes which, in their own ways, are just as real. One such literary landscape is the journey of Everyman through the world; another the journey of Bunyan's pilgrim from the City of Destruction across the river to the Eternal City beyond. A writer does not necessarily make a clear distinction between the supposedly real and the allegedly imaginary, between thought and feeling, reason and emotion. The inner environment of which Stow spoke captures the outer one and transforms it into images which travel beyond their local origins.

Stow's comments which I mentioned earlier, on the matophor of Australia as a gaol, were made in an extraordinarily interesting article on the 'Batavia' disaster of 1629. He called the article 'The Southland of Antichrist', and commented on the contrasting myths of 'Australia as prison' and 'Australia as Eden'. The story of the 'Batavia', which is the subject of Douglas Stewart's play *Shipwreck* and Henrietta Drake-Brockman's novel *The Wicked and the Fair*, is itself raised to the status of myth by Stow's interpretation of its significance. He sees it as one half of another pair of myths—the myth of the New Jerusalem in the Great South Land, and its opposite, the myth of the Anti-Christ. James McAuley's long poem *Captain Quiros* embodies the first myth, the story of the 'Batavia' massacre provides the basis, he argues, for the second. In the course of this discussion Stow makes a comment which leads to the centre of my argument about regionalism. Referring to the voyages of Quiros and Pelsaert, he writes 'I call them myths, but they are in fact futile, meaningless historical events, out of which meaningful myths can be created'. One might question whether a *single* event such as the 'Batavia' disaster can give rise to myth. Stow's statement however discloses the gap between the historian's and the poet's idea of history. Historical facts, like landscape, are absorbed into the imagination, and transformed. And it is when they have undergone their metamorphosis into poems, novels or plays, that they seize upon the imagination of their audience, and not infrequently come to be thought of as reality. So, by a subtle alchemy, the bare facts come to be taken as truth, even though they have been shaped by an idiosyncratic internal environment.

The implication of my argument at this point is that while literature begins in the local and particular, it is frequently dealng with the general (if not the

universal). Its tendency, therefore, may be both to define regional qualities, and at the same time to transcend them. So perhaps we need to pay as much attention to the kind of evidence writers advance as to the subjects they deal with or the attitudes their works express. In talking about literary ideas one must deal with two kinds of activities—the embodiment of ideas within literary forms, such as the novel; and the expression of ideas about literature by critics, historians and commentators. These two ways of expressing ideas will not necessarily agree. In Australia it has not been uncommon to find commentators paying more attention to what literature should be, than to what it actually is. It is not just that creative writers and critics make a different approach to their tasks; it is that critics not infrequently look for something in literature which reflects their own experience or accords with their sympathies; while writers search their subjects for the unexpected truths they might reveal. So any trend one might detect towards regionalism and away from nationalism in literary values, is likely to be encouraged by commentators, rather than insisted upon by writers.

At least, I hope I am right about this. In any case it brings me back once more to the persistent search for regional identity, of which this year's celebrations are a manifestation. Sir Paul Hasluck's *Mucking About*, with its detailed account of life in Western Australia before the Second World War, contains seeds from which notions of regional identity might grow. He writes of the importance of family connections, of opportunity and mutual trust, of 'belonging to the same old Western Australian community'.

G. C. Bolton, reviewing Hasluck's autobiography, also amplifies it in various ways in a search for 'a local identity'. As a historian he is well aware, to use his own words, of 'the ways in which the reflections of older citizens on their shared past come to influence a community's perception of itself'. He speculates that the influence might well be weakened by modern developments, but that Sir Paul Hasluck's 'concept of Western Australia fifty years ago as essentially a secure, confident and tolerant society, accessible to those who wished to improve themselves and their community ... is not a bad myth for a community to carry with it into the last quarter of the twentieth century'.

Perhaps an outsider might be permitted to add a footnote to this domestic discussion. Contemplating the evidence I have worked through—only some of which is presented here—I seem to detect a persistent sense of loss. It is not possible to generalize about it. Sometimes it is loss of the past, of precisely that 'old Western Australian community' Sir Paul Hasluck refers to. Sometimes it is loss of a landscape as in Barbara York Main's nostalgic reminiscences, or in Peter Cowan's mention of 'suburban lawns and endless rose gardens'. Sometimes it is a much vaguer sense of a lost innocence, a nostalgia for those Arcadian days which, in the larger context of world history, are still so close to the present in this State. Perhaps not until an Australian poet feels able to write an Antipodean version of Virgil's 'Georgics', will an accommodation between man and environment seem to have been accomplished and that sense of loss diminished. The metaphor for man in his environment in Australia is still too frequently alienation, not husbandry.

This sense of faint regret for sometimes unspecified, possibly even unidentified loss, together with the interest in regionalism are expressions of a deep conservatism. I do not use this word in a pejorative sense. Every community whether it be a family, school, university, or city wants, at least at times, to think of itself as a permanent entity. It accepts all kinds of tacit assumptions which permit it to feel collectively, and devises ceremonies which bond it, however temporarily, together. School songs, birthday dinners, arts festivals and sports meetings are expressions of the desire to mark out common ground. The sense of loss is also a sense of a valued common past, and that in turn is an expression of uncertainty,

even fear of what changes the future might bring. In the Fremantle seminar to which I referred earlier Frank Moorhouse suggested that if regionalism emerges strongly in the West it will be because 'the State wants to be different'. I agree with him. The whole trend of my argument has been iconoclastic, in that I have maintained that all those characteristics which have been advanced as peculiar to Western Australia can be shown not to be, except for some aspects of its landscape—yes, even its isolation, which is, after all, relative. Is the claim of 'isolation' itself a last defence against the encroachment of sameness?

There is a sense in which claiming regional identity is living an illusory life; another, in which it is acknowledging the power of the literary imagination. So while the drift of my argument has been iconoclastic and its method of enquiry sceptical, my intentions are not to mock regional aspirations. Perhaps I might best explain this by means of a literary reference. One of Dickens' most famous and notorious characters is Sarah Gamp, the decaying midwife. There is a remarkable aspect of Sarah Gamp which, so far as I know, has not attracted critical attention commensurate with its importance as evidence of Dickens' penetration into psychological manifestations and needs. Mrs Gamp has a friend called Mrs Harris. Much of her conversation is taken up with what Mrs Harris says to her and what she says to Mrs Harris. Then one day Betsey Prig, Mrs Gamp's assistant, a small-minded woman full of certainties, confronts Mrs Gamp with the terrible accusation that Mrs Harris does not exist and never has existed. Mrs Gamp defends her friend stoutly and denounces Mrs Prig. 'Have I' she says, 'know'd Mrs Harris five and thirty years, to be told at last that there ain't no such a person livin'!' But we know as she does that Betsey Prig is right—Mrs Harris is a figment of her imagination, created to give her some commendation in the world. So skilfully does Dickens manage this scene, that so far from applauding Betsey Prig for arriving at the truth, we condemn her for what amounts to the murder of Mrs Harris. For she has removed the illusion through which Mrs Gamp attains some sense of importance and self-esteem.

I have not come here to play the part of Betsey Prig. I do not wish to have said of me what Sarah Gamp said of her 'Lambs could not forgive nor worms forget'. A sense of identity, for a community as for a person, is vital, and never more so than at a time when so many people seem to have invested in divisiveness and self-gratification. Nevertheless it is necessary to distinguish between the social and artistic purposes and aspirations of a community. Images of identity can serve the former but might limit the latter. In the absence of linguistic and racial determinants of regional differences the cultivation of local interests can produce that parochialism Walter Murdoch attacked. Regionalism can become provincialism by claiming immunity from large movements of ideas in the outside world.

Swamp Yate, Fitzgerald River, 1979. *Photo by Edward Edkins*

Wagerup, W.A., 1979. *Photo by John Robinson*

Writing in Western Australia

A LOCAL HABITATION: LITERATURE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S SESQUICENTENARY*

by Harry Heseltine

Public celebrations of historical events can usually be relied on to produce a measure of sentimental rhetoric and emphemeral self-congratulation. I suspect that the recent sesqui-centenary celebrations in Western Australia produced the usual quantity of both. The organising committee, however, must be congratulated on having taken steps to ensure that the State's one hundred and fiftieth anniversary would be marked also by the production of a series of books likely to have a much greater degree of permanence than the platform which supported the Miss Universe contestants assembled to contest the 1979 title in Perth.

One of the three books here reviewed was among the range of publications commissioned by the State Government; the other two were clearly inspired by the sesqui-centenary festivities. All three constitute what is probably the most comprehensive coverage of West Australian writing, past and present, ever produced. They should be of genuine interest and value both to literary scholars and to non-professional readers: to Western Australians, to tothersiders, and to those who, like myself, are longtime exiles from Australia's western third. This last (and considerable) class of readers will, I am sure, find that acquaintance with these volumes will refresh and re-define their sense of personal origins, the background to their growing up.

The Literature of Western Australia, edited by Bruce Bennett, thus, provides an historical survey of the whole range of literary discourse produced in Western Australia from 1829 to the present time. It represents, indeed, the best kind of literary history produced according to committee principles. Following perhaps the lead of H. M. Green, Mr Bennett has adopted a definition of "literature" broad enough to include diarists, letter writers, editors and journalists. The treatment of such a diverse range of materials, however, has none of the uneasiness which can distinguish such performances. The several chapters are uniformly well researched, clearly written, moderate and balanced in their judgments. Among the list of contributors, names of some literary figures prominent in the national arena—Peter Cowan, Bruce Bennett, Veronica Brady, for instance—blend happily with others of a more local reputation. Were I to find any fault with the general plan of the book, it would be in the failure to provide an

* *The Literature of Western Australia*, ed. Bruce Bennett (University of Western Australia Press, 1979), pp. xvi + 304, $10.
Wide Domain: Western Australian Themes and Images, selected by Bruce Bennett and William Grono (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1979), pp. 270, $14.95.
Summerland: A Western Australian Sesquicentenary Anthology of Poetry and Prose, ed. Alex Choate and Barbara York Main (University of Western Australia Press, 1979), pp. xxi + 242. Sponsored by the Fellowship of Australian Writers (W.A. Branch), $11.95.

index—a particularly useful tool in a work of this kind, where certain writers are likely to be cross-referenced between different chapters. Had an index been included, very few significant names, I am sure (though I am far less systematically informed than the contributors), would have failed to appear. I did note, however, that Xavier Herbert's *Seven Emus* and Griffith Watkins' *The Pleasure Bird* did not appear in the reading list appended to the chapter on "The Novel". My own memories, further, suggest that, at least on the basis of popular familiarity, the West Australian books of Ion Idriess might have rated a line or two of comment. In the area of "Newspapers and Literature", too, memory prompted an unfulfilled expectation of some comment on Walter Murdoch and Victor Courtney. These, however, are minor irritations, and in no way detract from my admiration for the thoroughness and good sense with which the literary record has been compiled and set down. Many of the names and titles, I must admit, provoked a shock less of recognition than of discovery. The sheer bulk of West Australian writing came as a real surprise.

The quality and emphases of that writing, of course, are quite different issues. In this regard, I cannot escape the feeling that a great many of the books recorded here (some, indeed, rescued from oblivion) must be of local interest and significance only. In reading the chapter on "The Novel", for instance, I was astonished at the number of West Australian novels tracked down by Veronica Brady and Peter Cowan; but the prevailing impression that I carried away from their very fair-minded account was, I am afraid, one of *parvum in multo*. Peter Cowan's own name, of course, must be accorded the highest respect in a national as well as a State context—as must those of, for instance, Xavier Herbert, Randolph Stow, Tom Hungerford, Donald Stuart, Katharine Susannah Prichard and Robert Drewe (to venture a selective list). Many of the remaining figures, however, are not only local in reference but distinctly lesser in achievement. The short story, on the other hand, seems to have enjoyed a more uniform level of excellence, a history comparable in many respects to that of the form in other parts of Australia. Within the framework of what is again a remarkably comprehensive record, Bruce Bennett has no difficulty in pointing to work of real distinction in the shorter reaches of fiction. The catalogues of names, thus, which occur on pp. 123-4 and p. 135 read much more like a roll of honour than a dutiful itemising of all those who have ever written a short story in or about the Golden West.

The development of verse has been characterised by many of the same problems (isolation, provincial uncertainty, and so on) as have beset the progress of the novel, and has demonstrated, with much the same frequency, an interest which carries it beyond the bounds of the merely local. If one pattern of advance (on the evidence of Nicholas Hasluck and Fay Zwicky) can be detected in poetry which is absent from the novel or the short story, it may be of a slower start, followed by a more uniformly achieved excellence. This may have something to do, especially in quite recent years, with the sort of impetus that places like the Fremantle Arts Centre can more readily provide for poets than prose writers. It may also be related to what seems to be a somewhat happier blend of native born and migrants (from elsewhere in Australia as well as from overseas) than is the case with the novelists and short story writers. By way of supporting my point, I list some representative poets who have written and published in Western Australia during the past two decades or so: Randolph Stow, Hal Colebatch, Nicholas Hasluck, Fay Zwicky, William Hart-Smith, Jack Davis, Bryn Griffiths, Dorothy Hewett.

All three chapters—on the novel, the short story, and poetry—convey a sense of sufficient substance to warrant the scholarly and critical labour expended on

them. The authors, however, who addressed themselves to drama, children's literature and literary journalism, appear to have been labouring, in some measure, under the difficulty of a subject matter not quite equal to their own enthusiasm and intelligence. Bill Dunstone, thus, writes a history of West Australian theatre as much as of drama—for the good reason, one suspects, that there were simply not enough worthwhile local scripts to fill out his contribution. (In this respect, I might lodge parenthetically a claim for some recognition of Jeanna Tweedie's work at the University of Western Australia). Equally, it is perhaps not unfair to claim that Barbara Buick and Maxine Walker can produce only one local children's book of high quality—Randoph Stow's *Captain Midnite*—in a contribution which, in some respects, solves the problem of writing about its subject by writing around it.

Nevertheless, the whole of *The Literature of Western Australia* adds up to an extremely useful publication—useful in its archival recording of virtually every name and title to have somehow or other formed part of the Western Australian literary record and in the sensible assessment of the kind and quality of their achievement. What emerges is the picture of a lively local activity, moving from the practical culture of an infant colony to a sometimes uncertain provinciality to what is by now a well-developed and accurate sense of its place in the world. It is not, finally, unfair to either past or present to suggest that the spectacle of contemporary scholarship grappling with its own past is almost as interesting as the past with which it grapples.

The necessary test of any literary history is, to be sure, its ability to match the evidence of actual examples of the literature it chronicles. In this respect, the sesqui-centenary celebrations made available two relevant collections of West Australian writing: *Wide Domain: Western Australian Themes and Images*, edited by Bruce Bennett and William Grono, and *Summerland: A Western Australian Sesquicentenary Anthology of Poetry and Prose*, edited by Alec Choate and Barbara York Main. The first offers samples of Western writing from the whole sweep of its history, the second is exclusively concerned with recent work. Of the two, I find *Wide Domain* the more disappointing. The book is handsomely presented, tastefully illustrated, and draws on a range of authors from William Dampier to Jack Davis. Nevertheless, it conspicuously fails to deliver what is promised in its sub-title—a peculiarly local portrait of a society as revealed in the themes and images of its literature. Or, if it does so, the unavoidable implication is that the kind, quality and scope of Western writing are virtually indistinguishable from those of every other region of Australia. It may well be that this is precisely the case; Bruce Bennett's and William Grono's Introduction certainly prepares us for exactly such a conclusion. This is their thumbnail account of the West Australian character: "Western Australians have often seen themselves as tough, easy-going, sports-loving, dependable, beer-drinking, reluctant hard-workers" (p. 1). Now, it seems to me that exactly the same sentence could have been (probably has been) written, with the appropriate substitution in its subject, of the inhabitants of virtually any identifiable region of Australia—indeed, of any Australians considered in their national rather than their local characteristics.

That there is in fact very little differentiation between Western Australians and Tothersiders appears to be confirmed by the classification of the literary excerpts included in *Wide Domain*. The thematic divisions into which the anthology is organised could, in other words, be applied to virtually any chronological selection of Australian literary sources. "Beginnings", "Outback", "Settlers and Convicts", "Gold, Nickel, Iron", "War" and so on:—with very few alterations of Table of Contents could be translated into any comparable collection from New South Wales, or Victoria, or Queensland. If there is any distinctive element to

be found in Western Australian writing, it is perhaps in its use of the small wheatfarming districts and the deep mining of the Golden Mile as source material. The Western Australian wheatbelt seems to have produced a pattern of settlement somewhere between the large holdings and the cowcocky selections of the Eastern States; at least, they are represented differently when treated in creative literature. Nor is there anything quite like, for instance, the Kalgoorlie tales of Gavin Casey in the literature of the Eastern States.

Pioneering West Australians, on the other hand, apparently responded to their new world in much the same manner as their eastern counterparts; nor is there any marked distinction between the West Australian at war (soldier or civilian) and the other citizens of the Commonwealth. Perhaps, then, it is wrong to register disappointment in *Wide Domain*. Better to accept it for what it is—a shrewdly chosen potpourri of fiction, reportage, verse, which sets its sights not so much on rigorous and comprehensive scholarship as on the kind of pleasure afforded by an elegant and intelligent bedside book. The selections, all of them short, provide all the interest and variety one can demand of such a book. If they also demonstrate the affinity of the citizens of sandgroper country with the rest of the Australian population rather than their uniqueness, the fact is probably a matter for neither congratulation nor regret.

If, however, one were legitimately to seek evidence of a uniquely West Australian experience and its expression in a convincing literature, one might expect to find it, if anywhere, in *Summerland*. In such an anthology should be displayed whatever is peculiarly the result of that hundred and fifty years' prologue to the here and now, which was celebrated in the sesquicentenary year. In the event, I was not disappointed by what I found. There was a uniform and professional assurance, a balance between exact observation and personal response, which was a major deficiency in so much of the earlier writing cited in *The Literature of Western Australia*. On the evidence of *Summerland* the damned profession of writing has located itself very securely in the West, and over a wide range of modes and moods. There is, thus, a surprisingly large proportion of history and reportage in the prose selections of the anthology, but by and large they avoid the sentimentalisation of local history and geography that might have been expected in a semi-official sesquicentenary publication. I think, for instance, of Hugh Edwards' "Pieces-of-Eight", Mary Durack's "Matters of the Heart", or Jamieson Brown's "Survivor". In other prose pieces, West Australian travellers show themselves to be self-confident citizens of the world when they move outside their habitual boundaries—in this regard, I might draw attention to the work of Justina Williams, Elizabeth Durack, and F. B. Vickers.

The fiction brought together in *Summerland* displays the unexpected feeling for Western Australia's farmlands (Tom Hungerford's "Grace O'Malley", for instance, or Jean Teasdale's "Granny"). If there is, in these country tales, any special quality beyond their feeling for the details of the life they record, it is their recognition of a certain strangeness in the very air itself. Pieces like Alexandra Hasluck's "The Shade of Difference" or Ethel Webb's "Forgotten Farm" suggest that Randolph Stow in choosing *A Haunted Land* as the title for his first novel was tapping a profoundly important element in Western Australian experience.

The poetic energies contained in *Summerland* are channelled, in the main, into somewhat different patterns; again, however, it is possible to discern some qualities special to the poets and their environment. It rests not so much in the evocation of Westralian earth and sea—though there are several successful exercises of this kind (Shane McCauley's "Driftwood", William Hart-Smith's "Willy Willies")—as in what is at its best an exhilarating sense of the poets' discriminations between Western Australia and the world. Awareness of a larger

cosmopolitan life outside Perth sometimes finds its way into the subject matter of the verse (Hal Colebatch's "Summer in Denmark"); it is more truly felt in the active exploitation of the ways a modern poem characteristically shapes itself, makes its demands on our caring. Again I have less in mind the distinctly Eliotic overtones of "The Garden Revisited" (the piece which occupies first place in the anthology) than the manner in which feeling about the subject matter of poetry is assumed to be a matter of obliquities, snapshots, statements with a minimum of commentary. Many of the poems in *Summerland* present themselves thinly on the page—a literal appearance which testifies, it seems to me, to a certain combination of vulnerability and wry sinuosity which gives them their distinctive note.

Out of this special relationship between Westralia and the world, between, as it were, the provincial and the cosmopolitan, there can grow some attractive and impressively witty poetry. The pieces of Hal Colebatch and Murray Jennings seem to me of this kind; even, in its more substantial way, Nicholas Hasluck's "Search for Sybaris". What is perhaps most heartening in the work of these still comparatively young poets is its basic self-confidence. Their lines imply an exact understanding of both the advantages and disadvantages to a creative writer of living in a community of the kind that Western Australia now is; an awareness of the international scene coupled with an ability to make literature and stay at home. And therein perhaps is the measure of the distance that Western Australia has come since I was an undergraduate on the campus at Crawley. Western Australia and its capital Perth, it may be, at the moment occupy an extraordinarily favourable situation for the development of a truly civilised culture—poised above and between the narrow horizons of provincialism and the brute anonymity of the megalopolis. How long that poise can be maintained, I would not venture to predict. At least, however, it can be said that the three books noticed here, for all their modesty and moderation of tone, provide abundant evidence of the goodwill, talent, and concern which have been so essential to bringing it about.

THREE SHORT STORY WRITERS – PETER COWAN, ELIZABETH JOLLEY, JUSTINA WILLIAMS*

by Bruce Williams

Peter Cowan's is much the strongest of these three new collections in the West Coast Writing series. At least three characteristics of mobiles might have suggested his choosing it for a title. No part of a mobile is self-sufficent: it is the surprising balance between them that gives the structure its charm. That balance, again, is always rather precarious, even elusive. And thirdly, it is a form less ambitious than bronze or stone, kept, it may be, for casual decoration rather than planted down as a Work of Art. In the title story, as in several others, I feel that the latent suggestion of triviality in these characteristics is not wholly avoided. But Cowan clearly means his title to refer, as well, to the transient or urban-nomadic lives so many of his characters lead. In the story *Mobiles* a traveller miles from anywhere picks up two girl hitchhikers. They make a kind of contact, far less tangible than the proposal one of the girls makes for a quickie beside the road. We have a passing impression of empty landscape, emptier lives, vestigial feelings of need from the driver, when finally, and all too abruptly, the girls steal his car. Like *Up North* (but there for different reasons) *Mobiles* attempts a thin, wiry line that simply doesn't suggest enough. These stories, I think, suffer from Cowan's over-zealous determination that people shall be unknowable, inexplicable. A character in one of the longer stories puts it thus:

> I was afraid of what might happen at Mrs X's. But nothing happened there, either. She talked about it at breakfast for the best part of a week, and I think that was the first time I realised I didn't know anything about people, and that you never could.

The drawbacks with this belief, for a writer of fiction, are that it cannot be aimed at too directly (such writers yearn, like Mallarmé, for the blank page) and it must live in tension with the plain fact that we do, in fact, "know" a great deal about people. If our knowledge is spurious, useless to us in any fundamental relationship or critical situation, we nonetheless cannot escape the tension, tragic or comic, between what we think and what we can manage. Conrad, after all, bases whole long novels on one crucial act which he both regards as finally inexplicable and yet from many points-of-view all-too-meaningful. Some of Conrad's fiction, some of Gide's, a good deal of Hemingway's, claims for art the capacity to disturb our chattering complacency. But the slighter stories in

* Peter Cowan, *Mobiles*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979, 102 pp., $4.25.
Elizabeth Jolley, *The Travelling Entertainer*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979, 181 pp., $4.50.
Justina Williams, *White River*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1979, 85 pp., $3.95.
(All published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press in their West Coast Writing Series.)

Cowan's collection just don't engage us in enough ways in these tensions. We are like spectators in a painter's studio, admitted to the presence, but kept too far away to see, over his shoulder, what it is that so absorbs him.

So much on the negative side of these negations. But of course, there are much stronger stories in the collection, and in turning to these, I must correct the too-easy equation of Cowan's characters' views with his own. The stark impenetrability of people is certainly a rock that Cowan's prose blunts itself upon. With that, however, there is another preoccupation with making stories which will define, usually by failure, what it might be like to reveal the self to another. In *The Brown Grass*, for example, a man has two farms in the south west, but prefers, if he can, to farm the chancy edge of the wheatbelt. This year he's failed, but sometime, he tells his mobile woman visitor, he'll be back. She cannot see what he sees in it. He cannot tell her, because such things can only be shown, and then, only when you are ready to see for yourself. She is not, this prostitute on the lam from up north. He fixes her car, she steals some money and goes on her way. On the surface, it's one more Cowan story about isolates who fail to meet. Potentially, however, its deeper concern is with that hardly articulable process by which, at exposed moments, we give each other some intimation of what it is, beyond personality and belief, that sustains us. Cowan's people often define these intimations, so far as they can, through their loyalties (which perhaps explains why many of his stories pivot on an act of betrayal). Very often, the shifting, fleeting, affectless world of the motorised drifter, whose emptiness is essentially social, is contrasted with a natural world which only reveals itself through time, after long, steady contemplation. The opposition goes back to Wordsworth and beyond, but there is no trace of the Wordsworthian sublime. "Nature" in Cowan can seem the least grateful environment possible for a human being. Many of these stories are set either in the desert itself, or in those considerable areas of Western Australia which, despite the crops and the heartbreaking labour of years, silently insist that they would be desert if they could.

Without *The Lake*, the longest and most substantial of the new collection, the terms I have proposed for an understanding of Cowan might seem better reserved for inclusion in the complex account (long overdue) one would have to give of his work as a whole. *The Lake*, together with some stories in *The Tins* (1973) shows Cowan's mastery of the abstract, bony prose he has refined to convey his vision of what lies on the other side of negation.

It is the fullest treatment in the volume of a central opposition in Cowan's work, between devitalised, desperate urban sensibilities and a nature seen as some gaunt transmuter of existence. Cowan prefers his trees bare (even dead), his soil parched and his rocks plentiful. Again and again in his later manner he evokes landscape in the equivalent of a painter's monochrome. Perhaps it is comparison with that pervasive aridity (a created aridity) that gives the mysterious, oasis-like lake in this story more richness than quotation alone can readily demonstrate. Even here, it is rock again, and greyness, and an angularly-treated birdlife that make the foundation. But there is grass near a spring, moss to soften and enrich the texture, both contributing to a sense of abundance.

> The ground greened with thick grass and small reeds, the run of water widening, through it, clear, sharp, a fine weed moved in the flow. By the limestone wall, the earth soft and damp beneath his feet, the water fell from the small caves of the cliff face, over the lime ridged steps and ripples of hardened stone. A grey moss softened the edges of the rock pools, deepening to green where the stone broke out to the light.

The lake has a kind of self-appointed custodian, who reveals himself as single-mindedly concerned with preserving the secret of his hidden valley in the middle

of the desert. So much so, that he will not help even the occupants of a plane that crashes in the lake. The pilot, a station-owner given to hunting eagles in his private aircraft, dies of his wounds in a belated (but to readers of Cowan very welcome) serio-comic Hemingway sequence ("I don't think I'm much good inside"). The other passengers, a University lecturer and his actress wife, locked into one of Cowan's purgatorial marriages, are helpless in the face of the custodian's indifference and the larger, still more threatening indifference of the natural life around them. Their efforts to escape peter out. The story closes with a horrific act of destruction which feels not in the least melodramatic, but rather inevitable. The story subtly and economically reveals how for the intruders, the custodian and his world present themselves as nightmare. It is filled with the remote and nameless anxieties of nightmare, as though, always, what the lake might become, in some lost discipline of contemplation, in some unimaginable society—some realm of saving nature—can only seem, when it presses against a lifetime of denial and defence, like a monstrous destructive force. It is the pattern of *The Brown Grass* but developed and extended in a prose that works the difficult transition between a solid-looking realism and constant undertow of symbolic suggestion. To complicate that movement further, the central narrative is framed by brief scenes at the station homestead, before the doomed party sets out—if they do. For in those scenes we meet the daughter who is presented as the chief casualty of the loveless marriage. She is entranced by legends of lost valleys in the middle of deserts (Rider Haggard country). The frame suggests that the central action is in some sense her wish-fulfilment, the acting out of her hostility. But his "dream" convention is no more fully explicit than the symbolic suggestions of the lake itself. The central narrative has a density of specification, and a psychological plausibility that resist any pat reading of it merely as the daughter's fantasy of revenge. What is certain is that, through the frame, Cowan places the lake itself as a conceivable answer to the sterility of life, but as far as these characters are concerned (and their debility is representative) not here, not yet.

I suppose it's only fair to concede that Cowan, to pinch a remark of Henry James, has a curiously charmless surface. He has abandoned any effort to 'entertain' or even bounce along the reader in need of signposts. Elizabeth Jolley, by contrast is much concerned with charm, sometimes in her characters, as in the stories here that concern a lovable Uncle Bernard. Sometimes, too, earlier in her career, she aimed too deliberately for a whimsical delicacy of tone. Her latest collection, however, shows her preoccupied with various kinds of darkness. Her sympathies lie with obscure and eccentric individuals who construct a world for themselves in a hostile, categorically-minded society. Whereas Cowan's art thrives on concentration, on removing all mediations that lie between his characters and their truth, Jolley's is an art of the expansive, the anecdotal, the production of a hundred tiny details which gradually form the irregular maze of a life. Her characters wander, not searching for an exit, but as though when every familiar path has been charted in words, the maze will reveal its form. This pattern is clearest in the first long story in *The Travelling Entertainer*, *The Performance*, in which a newly arrived patient in a mental hospital tells his life to the man in the next bed. Here the author seems reluctant to suppress or interpret any detail that might provide understanding, and the result, despite some touching passages, is more story material than an accomplished fiction.

Like the man in the hospital, her characters are frequently self-chroniclers, piecing together meanings from daily life, which the prose often renders by a frail texture of surprises.

Leonora added more hot water, it brought poetry.

There is a mundane paraphrase of that, but the fun is all in the jump across the comma. A spirit of fun, of play, of the delight to be found in the mind's unique action, emerges from the volume as a central value. Her characters stumble through their experiences, unwilling or unable to join the ranks of the tough-minded, competent people they often seem to have married (as in *The Performance* and the title story, *The Travelling Entertainer*). Often they walk on the edge of the "clinical" disturbance, or fall over. The travelling entertainer, for example, is a well-meaning salesman, married to Natasha, who "often cleaned the whole house before they left in the morning, and, even then, was fresh and trim to face her day at the university . . .". His mounting sadness and frustration lead him to try, in a scene of pathetic farce, to rob and burn down the house of an old friend whose complacency has come to feel too bitter a reproach. The prison or the asylum lie in wait for those of Jolley's characters who, like that salesman, are unable to find expression for their needs. The function of her stories is to provide an act of faith in their intact humanity, a home.

That, after all, is a legitimate use of fiction, but I come to feel it, in the course of this volume, as a kind of holding operation. Fiction, for her, records what the writer feels to be precious, neglected and misunderstood in ways that only fiction, with its intimacies and its freedom from generalisation can provide. In attributing greater strength to Cowan, I have in mind not only the finer discipline and attack of his prose (his story *A Touch of Love* can usefully be compared with Elizabeth Jolley's work), but the effort to uncover a source of strength and potential life in his spiritual deserts.

Both writers seem to feel a very limited confidence in their readership. As one of Jolley's characters muses:

> There's no one here at all, no one in these paddocks and no one on this road. What kind of people will come to my lecture? Will there be anybody there?

Justina Williams, on the evidence of *White River*, feels no such alienation from her public. She works comfortably in forms close to the yarn, in a daylit prose that appeals to commonsense and a reader's ready sympathy for her characters' experiences. Much the best in the collection, I think, is *White River* itself. Too many of the others are tales that may be welcome once, but don't achieve the manysidedness and stability of form that make a story stand up to re-reading. *White River* is based on a conflict between a child's allegiance to the meaning of his world as he experiences it, and the far different, incomprehensible perspective of the adult world. That is the kind of inescapable conflict on which fiction thrives.

THREE POETS – IAN TEMPLEMAN, HAL COLEBATCH, ELIZABETH MARSH

by L. R. Burrows

Ian Templeman's *Poems* is a slim elegant private-press production printed in brown ink on thick cream paper with brown paper covers and illustrated with seven full-page drawings by Robert Birch. It comes in a signed limited edition from the Freshwater Bay Press of Claremont, Western Australia; a press which started in 1939 with a volume of poems by Paul Hasluck and which has now been resuscitated after a 'hibernation of years' by Nicholas Hasluck. And the private luxury of the volume, the traditional good taste of its format, the representational drawings of relevant poetic objects (house, trees, river, beach, landscape), the general concern for an ordered aesthetically pleasing whole—all these seem appropriately expressive of the poems themselves.

The obvious thing to say about them is that they are typically preoccupied with a private and personal world—not private in any sense that excludes the common reader but private in being 'concentred all on self'. They are poems of inner life, of a consciousness brooding nostalgically, tenderly, searchingly, perhaps a little luxuriously over its past experience. The first poem, 'Remembering', is programmatic. The poet catches himself

> undoing the years,
> picking the stitches
> that sew me trickily together;
> bone and nerve, mind and imagination,
> heart and Achilles' heel.

In a characteristic shift to a new metaphor (he is fond of metaphors) he is sifting the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of his own history, fitting together a picture of that 'country of myths' as reflected 'in the mirror of myself'. It is all very much in the tradition of Romantic subjectivity, not only in the personal and autobiographical preoccupation but also in the concern with the nature and process of imagination and poetic creativity. Despite the differences of idiom and image, Templeman is nearer to Wordsworth than to Lowell. This is not confessional poetry; there are no lurid or embarrassing revelations. He remembers his grandmother's boarding-house where he was a small 'solitary child in a house / of women temporarily widowed by war' and his absent father a photograph on the mantelpiece. He made ballet-dancers out of inverted flower-heads, but the return of father put an end to that—'these days of my dancing ladies / were over

* Ian Templeman, *Poems*, Freshwater Bay Press, Claremont, 1979, 61 pp., $9.00.
Hal Colebatch, *In Breaking Waves*, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1979, 74 pp., $4.50.
Elizabeth Marsh, *Changed into Words*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, Fremantle, 1980, 29 pp., $2.50.

for ever'. He flew a kite but lost it. He re-creates the secret kingdom (river, fish, wilderness) of childhood, its inventive imagination, its innocence and unawareness of evil. In his 'newlove days' he catches a 'goldfish' in a watery wonderland and is now haunted by the memory of that 'handcupped beauty'—he 'will never be a child again, / untroubled by saltlove's pain'. Sentimental idealization is the danger commonly attendant upon memories of infant innocence, and this latter poem may be felt to totter on the brink. But it is probably saved from total immersion by the freshness of its language.

The poems of childhood comprise the first sequence. The second sequence, 'Caretaker of a Strange House', is dominated by memories of his dead wife and contains some of the finest poems in the book. 'Only Visiting' is a beautifully controlled and developed account of the first visit to his future wife's family, a poem beginning with a relaxed low-key quietness ('the make-yourself-at-home conversation / served with scones and tea in the best china'), gathering intensity as it describes the lovers' climb to a cliff-top, and concluding with an image which holds poignantly together the starry rapture of that climactic moment of reaching the height and the subsequent pain of bereavement and darkness:

> Picking a palmful of star shaped flowers
> you cradled your face in their sharp blueness,
> allowing them to slip beneath your eyelids.
> The stiff wax petals left tear shaped scars beneath
> your eyes and darkness came quickly without weeping.

Several of the poems are introspective rather than retrospective. The prize-winning title-poem presents the poet's sense of loss and malaise in an elaborate metaphor ('Caretaker / of a strange house ... Caretaker / of your love') projected with striking sensuous vividness. In 'North West Quarantine' he sees himself with some detachment as 'a rocking chair recluse' in the motel of a mining town, a foreigner and misfit, unpacking 'the weekend luggage of the heart'. Another prize-winning poem, 'Weekend', with an even wryer metaphorical wit takes a depreciatory view of the 'hen coop verse builder on holiday', 'a word bone and rag man ... hauling the handcart of remembering ... collecting debris of other days'. And in 'Reflection' he finds an image for his self-consciousness in the 'parallel landscapes' of a train journey, the 'two worlds, two states' of the outer 'landscape chasing itself / and my face in reflection'. 'The Journey' is the title of the third sequence, a symbolic and introspective journey, of course, and one remaining for me enigmatic with its 'unspoken destination' and purpose 'agreed in dumb show'.

Only a little less obvious, perhaps, than the self-centredness of these poems is their strong concern for shape, pattern, form. Almost all of them are stanzaic; rhyme is used in about a quarter of them, but even then only sparingly and usually in a kind of small refrain unit which accentuates the patterning effect. This patterning effect is basically a matter of approximately similar lengths of line; and the patterns, which differ with every poem, are in general novel, original, inventive. But it is the texture (in the widest sense) of the poems that is their most striking feature; and like their shapes this has been artfully and intricately worked. Templeman, as I've noted, is fond of metaphors and these are a staple part of his texture, contributing to its liveliness and colour. Perhaps they are most truly imaginative when they are brief and simple, as in 'wood oven smells cobwebbed the kitchen'; but characteristically they are more noticeable and more noticeably novel ('insular in an igloo of selfindulgence', 'I stretch tight / the elastic summer days / until the light band snaps / and the sun falls'). At times they are ingeniously elaborated, as when the day's taut hitching rope harnesses together hobbled slow moving hills and the stuttering rail talk of

field and fence—some fancy rope-work there. At times they are pleasantly witty —'all my coin-in-the-slot self / is spent in love. / Sadly / the spendthrift . . . / summerchild cunningly evades capitaltax'. But the most distinctive thread in the texture is provided by Templeman's love of the neologistic compound—again very much in the Romantic tradition (Keats, Tennyson, and of course Hopkins, who is doubtless the inspiration here). They are scattered pretty freely through the poems, too lavishly in some, for my taste—they become an obrusive mannerism. Some are effective: the shudderdip of a kite, the finfrailty of a fish; some are so-so: freefish, softwater, sleekbody; some I don't like the look of: blooditch, faroff; some seem rather precious: the kissglass whisperings of a curtain. This inventive playing with language, however, is doubtless a good poetic sign, and often succeeds in what I take to be its intention—synthesizing sensuous perceptions into a felt immediacy, catching the essence of a sensation, a thing, an experience. At other times the effect appears rather as one of decorative flashiness, strings of gaudy beads.

Most of these poems, then, are distinctive and interesting artistic achievements as well as interesting and sometimes moving records of retrospection and introspection. The concentration upon self, the self-consciousness are clearly at the root of the achievement; yet the narrowness of scope is as clearly a recognizable limitation.

In his second volume of poems, *In Breaking Waves*, Hal Colebatch shows himself much less limited in this respect. The outer and other world is fairly conspicuous: there are several poems recording his impressions of various foreign countries, poems presenting snapshot images of West Australian scenes, poems offering satirical or sarcastic comments on contemporary attitudes to love, politics, heroism and life in general. Not, of course, that Colebatch is absent in all these, but there are comparatively few poems in which he himself, his own inner life, is his direct poetic object.

The blurb tells us that 'Colebatch uses the device of travel as a metaphor of his own inner journeyings', and that the title is an illustration of this in suggesting that he 'ventures into deeper, less safe waters' than in his first book, *Spectators on the Shore*. I think this rather overstates the case. It's true that Colebatch's initial poem, entitled (I suppose with some degree of irony) 'The Romantic Poet Goes on a Little Journey', also suggests metaphorical implications for the journeyings—he is journeying, he says, through Cactus Land, where there are 'no knights, no elves or silken thighs'. But I find no deep metaphorical consistency in the book as a whole: how does one reconcile, for instance, the breaking waves with Cactus Land? Cactus Land recurs only once more, if I remember aright, in a longish poem near the end of the volume ('Past Cactus Land'); and perhaps that is just as well—knights and cacti are surely too redolent of Browning's 'Childe Roland' and T. S. Eliot, images too worn to be refurbished. ('Past Cactus Land', I may interject, *is* a poem of inner life, and one of Colebatch's least successful: too loose, too long, too frantic and altogether too full of reminiscences of Eliot.) Alighting on that first poem, I murmured to myself, 'Here we go round the prickly pear', but fortunately it wasn't really so. We were off, in fact, to Greenwich, Yarmouth, Cologne and Elsinore, and though Colebatch didn't at all like what happened to these places and their inhabitants, I got no sense of a journey into the heart of an inner darkness. These travel poems are primarily comments on an actual contemporary world. Colebatch is painfully disillusioned by the contrast between the greatness, heroism and nobility of the past and the littleness, squalor, commercialism and nothingness of the present—and anyone who has seen, shall we say, the kiosk and carpark at Stonehenge will largely sympathize. The tone is that of laconic reportage: poetic jottings from 'My Trip' that present the

scenes and make their points effectively, clearly, concisely and in vivid well-chosen detail. 'Down to Greenwich Museum' is a good example:

> As with Dryden and Eliot, rubbish and dead dogs
> churn in the cold Thames with us. We try to huddle
> out of the cold wind. Four fat Frenchmen cuddle
> their girlfriends or au pairs. Fragments of logs
> wash by from rotting wharves. Tower Pier
> down to Greenwich, and all the cold grey day
> the launches are carrying people down
> to Greenwich Museum, and the Viking display. Here
> is Execution Dock ('Pirates were chained to drown
> under three tides'), here broken windows, the grey
> concrete of new Limehouse, small nameless ships.
> To see maps, models, fragments of Norse spears
> and the Viking gold of a thousand years
> we foregather. The launches' crews beg tips.

(I don't, by the way, recall any dead dogs in the Thames with Dryden and Eliot —nor even any rubbish in Eliot. But this poem displays clearly that rhythmical and metrical medley I mention later. And that inadvertent rhyme 'display' in the eighth line is a blemish.) It must be added that these trip poems suffer from a certain sameness of attitude, procedure and rhythm despite the differences in detail and place.

In casting doubt on the inner metaphorical depth of most of these poems I haven't at all intended to imply that there isn't present a generally coherent and strongly felt view of life. There is, and perhaps we can take Colebatch's own word for it and call it romantic. A handy starting-point is probably 'Party Time', in which the poet presents with self-deprecating irony a picture of himself and his friends (antipodean Prufrocks *de nos jours*) 'at Serious and Intellectual time' in an 'affluent flat above the sea'. Half are 'in the media game', half are 'on Government payrolls'; they are educated, 'well-paid and Progressive', comfortable, desiring Life and Action, clutching proxy experience, but protected in their 'insulated womb' from the raging storm outside. In a little fable in the A. D. Hope manner, 'University Incident', we see expressionless students at coffee-tables watching a spear-billed bird from the nearby saltmarsh poaching the university goldfish: on the one hand the 'disturbing place ... of crabs and shags' and the 'little grey harbinger of winds and claws', on the other hand the protected safety provided by Benevolent Authority where ' "Seek wisdom" is carved on the tax-built buildings / where their instructors simper in their common rooms'. Small wonder, then, that this kind of blinkered, safe, null existence insulated against 'Life and Action', Reality, should produce frustrated hankerings after the 'dim and mighty' past, after the Natural and the Primitive, after the heroic courage that war gives opportunities for; or that Colebatch should be at his happiest ('I should have been a pair of ragged claws') when he is messing about with boats, scraping barnacles, singing, 'no longer searching now to find escape' (in the three songs of Pop-Eye the Sailorman). Well, it all comes across as deeply and sincerely felt by Colebatch; but it's also all in that rich tradition initiated by Rousseau and widely representative of the late twentieth century; and no doubt the majority of Colebatch's readers will share his feelings and attitudes. There are dangers, however, dangers of undiscriminating simplification and of that too easy acceptance that makes for the stock response. Colebatch himself displays once or twice a recognition of these dangers: in a celebratory tribute to Ludwig Erhard he comments sardonically that Erhard is not likely to win poetic glory because he was only a humble and prosaic man who worked for human happiness and didn't go in for being a Superman and mass-murderer;

and in another poem he remarks that 'political romanticism leads to nightmare' and even, Tolkienite though he is, questions dubiously 'that ostensibly innocent romance at Faery's edge' ('Peter Rabbit, Toad Hall, and spears to Offa's Dyke'). I would have welcomed a more general awareness of this kind of complexity. Too often the contrasts, the oppositions, seem to be a little too simply stark; and occasionally the expression of them a little too facile, expected, pat. In 'University Incident' the students would, of course, have to be 'expressionless', wouldn't they? And as for their 'instructors' who *simper* in their common rooms ('simper': smile in a silly, self-conscious or affected manner), isn't this to load too obviously the dice, to heighten the colour unconvincingly, to overstate the case? (Colebatch is somewhat miffed with the university, but though primitivism and anti-intellectualism may be justified up to a point, Lord Copper, it is an attitude I find rather disturbing and one that comes too easily in Australia.) And what, on reflection, is so reprehensible about *tax-built* buildings? In any case, I think Colebatch blunts his point by labouring it too long and too explicitly. There was, by the way, another university incident a year or two ago only a few yards from that same fishpond when a student knocked down in a fight had his teeth deliberately kicked out—how about that for a companion-piece? In 'The Last Grammarians' there is exaggeration pro instead of con: sub-editors are solemnly presented as the ultimate guardians of the Word, priestlike figures reverently tending the 'last mysteries' though it be in 'hard fluorescent light'. One doesn't have to be at all unappreciative of the benefits of sub-editing to find this inflation slightly absurd.

I don't want to suggest that there are more than a few poems that I have a mild quarrel with—and even there I hope it will be realised that I am paying Colebatch the compliment of taking what he has to say seriously. I am properly grateful for the fact that he *has* 'something to say', if I may be forgiven for such an old-fashioned phrase, and grateful also for the fact that he moves beyond his own navel and has an eye and a mind for that outside world. And though he is often at his best when that eye is ironical, his little poems catching West Australian scenes—'South Cottesloe Reefs at Low Tide', for example, or 'Soldier Crabs, Carnarvon'—are excellently done, and so in their quiet way are such poems as the songs of Pop-Eye the Sailorman. The whole volume maintains a level of accomplishment that is never less than competent and is sometimes more than that ('competent', I may say, is a positive tribute and not a disparaging with faint praise), and manages to achieve as a whole that desirable combination of unity and variety. If a good part of that unity is a coherent view of life, another part is a matter of style. Colebatch, we are told, aims at lucidity and comprehensibility, and these virtues are generally evident. It is an aim particularly difficult to achieve *poetically*—without running into that sort of flatness or commonplaceness that we call prosaic, since any obvious richness or thickness of texture must go by the board. Colebatch doesn't always escape these lapses, which are more apt to occur in his more didactic poems with their occasional over-explicitness; nor does he always avoid the attendant flatness or awkwardness of rhythm. I don't, however, underestimate the difficulty of his aim or his quite frequent successes in realising it. The variety of the book is naturally in large part a variety of subject-matter, but it is also a variety of verse-forms. Some poems are in free verse, which is conventional enough nowadays: but many are in various traditional forms which include the difficult and intricate sestina. Colebatch is especially fond of an individual variation on the rhyme-scheme of the Italian sonnet (the two quatrains of the octave—though with four rhymes, not two—sandwiching the sestet) and some of his best poems (like 'Down to Greenwich Museum') are in this form. I don't see any structural merit in this rearrangement but I suppose it gives a new twist to a well-worn track. There

is a good deal of technical proficiency in all this; which makes me more puzzled by Colebatch's metrics. The traditional rhymed forms are written in a curious mixture of the metrical, the near-metrical and the quite unmetrical. Again I suppose that it is a way of showing that though he can handle the traditional, he is not so hide-bound as to be strait-jacketed by it.

In my end is my beginning. Ian Templeman in his public face is Director of the Fremantle Arts Centre and four years ago established the Fremantle Arts Centre Press 'to give wider publication to writers living and working in Western Australia'. The Press has initiated a paperback series, Shoreline Poetry, to publish the work of new Western Australian poets; and the latest in the series is an attractively produced small book of twenty-two poems by Elizabeth Marsh. The title, *Changed Into Words*, is intended (I assume) to lay pertinent stress on the important but often neglected fact that poetry—to borrow the celebrated dictum that Mallarmé is reputed to have addressed to Degas—is made not with ideas or feelings ('experience') but with words. Of course we must suppose some poetic stimulus connected with some sort of 'experience', but to become a poem the experience has to be put into words and is thereby inevitably changed, miraculously, like the lady who changed into a kimono. One would expect, then, a poet apparently concerned to stress this vital process of change to exhibit an interest in what I have called texture; and Elizabeth Marsh's poems do notably exhibit that sort of interest. A simple and obvious example is provided by the most playful of her poems, *Squall*—though it must be said that her poetic moods are seldom so lightly playful, rather the reverse.

Someone up there
is tossing tempests
at my iron roof

hurling buckets
that stride and bounce
like luck across

my strident roof,
cold cats and dogs kicked
squalling on a cold tin roof

scattering caterwauling
nails in baleful pails
barking my roof on edge.

Someone—I know it is you—
is hurling hail—all hail
Jehovah,

hale and hearty and
at it again up there
I hear

killing kind cats
with careful aim
with careful aim again

at me
(grumbling into the distance)
as usual.

The texture here, the verbal medium, is insistent and conspicuous: exuberant sound-patterning (alliteration, internal rhyme) conjoined with exuberant word-

play, a proliferation of puns. (It would be painful for all of us to explicate laboriously, but may I note the perhaps less obvious 'on edge' and the fact that the title itself is a pun—the poet is screaming a complaint about a storm, squalling about a squall?) The important think to recognize, however, is that this insistent, boisterous texture is perfectly appropriate, an expressive embodiment of the mood of comically exaggerated aggrievedness. The original experience may indeed have been a genuine visitation of paranoia; but voicing it, changing it into words, has aided and abetted a recognition of the absurdity of the feeling. As a result the poet has her cake and eats it; she makes her edgy complaint but takes the edge off it. A nice successful poem.

There are several other excellent poems in different moods and tones: the controlled relaxed 'meandering game' of 'Earth Ball', a birthday poem about a cricket match (very much round and about it—not Wisden material); an 'odd' view of 'Races at Belmont Park', likewise not for members of the Turf Club; an amused, amusing picture of the 'Plane Trees at Crawley Bay' against which wedding parties are photographed; and two more poems in which the elements violently intrude, 'Seawind' where wind and weather literally and metaphorically join in a quarrel on a shoreline walk, and 'Cape Leeuwin', a finely organized and textured poem which moves from an initial assault of continents of wind and cold oceans to a waterwheel 'dense with disuse ... petrified in stillness' and ambercold water collected in a flume, and then is caught bewilderingly up into the immensity of wind and tide until it subsides with the poet, 'under the firmament', re-collecting narrowness to *her* flume.

Not all the poems are quite as successfully realized as these—or should I say I haven't yet quite come to terms with some of them?—but none is without its fresh, original, odd, striking phrases, its points of imaginative interest. If I were rash enough to try to extract from these poems Elizabeth Marsh's conception of the poet and his art, I should tentatively suggest that she sees the poet as 'odd', 'uncommon'—uncommonly sensitive and responsive to life, seeing things originally, differently—and changing such perceptions into uncommon words or rather words used uncommonly, with uncommon precision and density and imaginative expressiveness. 'What,' I would murmur, 'has Gerard Manley had to do with all this?' Not that there is anything in these poems approaching crude Hopkinsian imitation, yet I imagine some affinity found, some techniques learned, some poetic principles approved. Fortunately, however, rashness is not one of my virtues. I shall restrain myself to commending this first collection. It is an uncommonly good one. The poems demand attentive reading but they repay it.

LOU KLEPAC

Colonial Vision

It may be historically interesting to record here the evolution of the massive exhibition entitled "The Colonial Eye" which the Art Gallery arranged as a contribution to the 150th Anniversary celebrations of the State.

This particular exhibition would probably not have seen the light of day if I had not spent some three and a half years as Curator of Paintings in The Art Gallery of South Australia in the late 1960s where I became aware of the importance of the research which South Australia had carried out on its own topographical artists, and how valuable it was to have fully documented visual records to complement a State's history. This knowledge is a kind of birth certificate without which we can hardly consider ourselves intellectually legitimate.

The Adelaide Art Gallery had a Curator of the Historical Collections, J. Hunt Deacon (appointed February 1940), long before they had a Curator of Paintings, but probably because South Australia could boast that some of the most important works of art in their State were also their earliest; namely the magnificent watercolours by G. F. Angas (lithographed in England and published as "South Australia Illustrated"), and the watercolours by S. T. Gill which not only record the history of South Australia but also provide a panorama of early life in colonial Australia. These works are of national importance and it may be obvious why such an interest was shown in them by historians and archivists in Adelaide.

Back in Perth in October 1974 (after an absence of almost ten years) I discovered that among the most serious shortcomings of The Art Gallery of Western Australia was its neglect of the historical collection. This may have to some extent been caused by a non-existent curatorial staff which was in turn partly influenced by the lack of space within the Gallery.

There did exist however a group of works of great historical importance acquired over the years, many of which were retained by the Gallery when the Library and Museum and Art Gallery separated. These works had been exhibited from time to time and were well received.[1] They were appreciated by scholars but were comparatively neglected within the Gallery's collection of paintings where they were seen as marginal to the art collection. No-one was ever given the responsibility to look after them, delve into their provenance, catalogue them adequately, devise a conservation programme to protect and preserve them (from borers and silverfish which were hard to control in the inadequate wooden cabinets housed in the printroom of the old Gallery building), or to build on to the existing nucleus a more comprehensive historical collection.

The shortcomings of the historical collection were only one symptom of the lack of research undertaken and documentation collected and stored by the

Frederick Garling, "View Across the Coastal Plain", 1827. Watercolour 13·1 x 37·5 cm.

Staff at work in the old Art Gallery premises.

Gallery. There had never been a librarian or assistant librarian employed by the Gallery and the reference library had been formed through necessity rather than by design. The biographical files kept on artists, although useful, were not of the standard, or as extensive as, required by a State Gallery—which shoulders the responsibility to compile and preserve this kind of information both for the State and also for national diffusion when necessary.

In order to begin work on the much neglected research, the curatorial staff was increased by two assistant curators soon after my appointment to the position of Senior Curator. A graduate was also appointed as my assistant and there was the additional assistance of a previous director's secretary who had been working part-time and had been engaged in making a list of the contents of the print-room cabinets in order to facilitate the locating of works when required.

The delegation of responsibility to the two assistant curators, Hendrik Kolenberg and Barbara Chapman, was obvious, particularly as there was already under way a plan to appoint a Curator of Paintings. Hendrik Kolenberg, who had recently returned from studying the print collections in Holland under a Dutch Government scholarship, was given the responsibility to completely reorganise the print collection and prepare for its eventual move into the new Gallery. And Barbara Chapman, who knew the State well and had had considerable range of experience during four years in the Gallery as Education Officer, was first given the task to assist the Senior Curator in preparing immediately a group of handlist catalogues of the collection: (a) drawings, (b) watercolours, (c) paintings, (d) Australian works including watercolours and drawings, and then to work on the historical collection.[2]

There was an immediate need to have these documents at hand in order to make a survey of the Gallery's collection towards a report to the Board. The speed at which these tasks were achieved was quite amazing when one considers the limited staff available at the time and the many other duties which befell them daily. The typing of so much intricate information was done by employing a part-time typist especially for the task.

A lucky set of circumstances allowed for research to begin in other totally neglected areas. Funds were available through the Federal Government's RED scheme which allowed for graduates to be employed for a period of six months on a project. (I was made aware of the RED scheme through David Hutchison of the Western Australian Museum to whom I am still grateful.)

Space was by far the scarcest commodity in the Gallery, where four members of the professorial staff had to work in one small room which also served as the Gallery library. There was an excellent case to employ a group of research assistants on the RED scheme but the number which could be employed was restricted by the limitations of space. A solution was achieved by renting a room in a building opposite the Gallery in Beaufort Street at $5 a week. This would accommodate three assistants who were appointed and set to work on a programme of research.

Two of these graduates (Joanna Miller and Marjorie Ashworth) were given the task to work on the immediate past history of the visual arts in Western Australia, and the third (Jan Moore) was to begin making a comprehensive catalogue of all works of topographical and historical nature which dealt with Western Australia from its discovery to 1900. The first list was compiled by recording all works mentioned in books dealing with the history of Western Australia and works held in collections within Australia such as the Mitchell Library and National Library collections etc.; then by following leads to where works might be held and through a newspaper campaign to trace works held privately.

The three research assistants worked with great zeal and enthusiasm and gathered much valuable information by the time that the six months were up. No renewal of their services was possible from the RED scheme. It was tragic that just when the assistants had gained so much training and were most able to put their abilities to the task, which was still immense, the work had to be abandoned. An opportunity to re-employ one or two of the research assistants was possible but only as an alternative to employing a Curator of Paintings. But the painting collection was also in great need of sorting out and as in an art gallery art had to be first and foremost, the position of Curator of Paintings was deemed more important.

The Gallery did however keep watch for works of Western Australian interest on the market and began to acquire them. In this way some very valuable material was added to the collection, among which are Frederick Garling's "View Across the Coastal Plain" (1827) and J. Walsh's set of twelve watercolours depicting the life of aborigines on the Swan River in the 1860s.

The importance of historical works to the not so distant Anniversary celebrations of the State was another good reason for stepping up work on the historical collection. These celebrations were also to provide an opprotunity to re-establish research in this area. Due to the illness of the Director I was asked to attend meetings of the 150th Anniversary celebrations, Arts and Entertainment Committee. In examining the projected events it was possible for me to put forward a much more important historical exhibition as the Gallery's contribution for 1979 instead of an unnamed exhibition which had been vaguely suggested and for which a modest $10,000 had been allocated. Here was a chance to continue the research on the historical collection and have a practical reason for doing it.

A much larger sum was approved by the Committee for the project which allowed for a research assistant to be employed for two years and also for a comprehensive catalogue to be published. The funds made available by the Arts and Entertainment Committee allowed the Gallery to re-employ Jan Moore who had previously been employed on the RED scheme. Barbara Chapman was given the responsibility to co-ordinate the work and organise the exhibition which I called "The Colonial Eye" for want of a better title.

Historians will appreciate the benefits this research has brought to the history of Western Australia and what a great contribution Barbara Chapman and Jan Moore made. The exhibition was a great success. However, it may not be realised that it only allowed a fraction of the works located to be brought together. The complete body of research of which the exhibition revealed only a part, will be of benefit to scholars in years to come. A total of 1,283 works dealing with the visual history of Western Australia were listed, of which 960 works have been traced and are fully catalogued. More than half of these and all the important works have been photographed and details are available to scholars and students.

A handlist catalogue recording works in alphabetical order according to artist has been produced and there is also a very useful set of cards which list the works in chronological order of execution. Of the 960 works which are catalogued, 95 are held by the Battye Library; 51 by the Royal W.A. Historical Society; 25 by the Western Australian Museum; 77 by the National Library, Canberra; 60 by the Mitchell Library, Sydney; 48 are in England and 5 in France. The Art Gallery holds 290 works, 169 of which have been acquired since 1974.

The exhibition was a magnificent crowning of the work carried out and proved a great success with the general public and scholars alike. It is unfortunate that the next celebrations, the bicentenary of the State, are so far away that we cannot again find another excuse for continuing research which ought to be

carried out not for such reasons but because it is the natural course for an institution. The mounting of the exhibition was also the death knell for the research. After two years of very thorough training and experience Jan Moore is again unemployed and the research in this field has once more come to a standstill.

NOTES:

1. An exhibition "The Early Days" held in 1970 had included historical works from the Gallery's collection and from private collections. However the catalogue did not list any of the works on loan and no record of them exists.
2. Up-to-date handlist catalogues were produced in the following order: drawings (October 1974), paintings (January 1975), watercolours (January 1975), Australian paintings, drawings and watercolours (February 1975), Western Australian collection (February 1975).

New Literature Review

New Literature Review is published twice yearly. It emphasises the study of New Literatures in English—Commonwealth Literature, migrant writing, South-East Asian writing and all literature written in English as a second language—and Literary Theory. Material in recent, current and future issues includes essays on the literature in English of the West Indies (with an interview with Wilson Harris); new directions in Australian literary studies; and the literature in English of the South-West Pacific. Enquiries and contributions welcome. Contributions to the Editor, NLR, McAuley College, 243 Gladstone Road, Dutton Park, Queensland 4102, Australia. Subscriptions, $4.00 per year, to the Editor, NLR, Department of Language and Literature, R.M.C. Duntroon, A.C.T. 2600, Australia.

BOOKS

Colin Johnson, *Long Live Sandawara*, Quartet Books, Melbourne, 1979.

One of the unforgettable moments in Colin Johnson's first novel, *Wild Cat Falling* (1965) occurred near the end. The unnamed part-aboriginal narrator finally meets an old Noongar, a tribal elder become rabbiter and fringe-dweller. This shadowy figure is both disturbing and reassuring, with his implied knowledge of other ways, other wisdoms. Now, fifteen years later, Johnson has published his second novel and its major theme is an examination of the issues raised in that first, rather poetically conceived encounter.

Long Live Sandawara explores aboriginal identity and heritage. The awareness of dispossession is stronger and, despite its rich ironies, the sense of urgency is more explicit.

The novel is built upon the technique of counterpoint; for example, in the narrative, the original Sandawara incident in the Kimberleys is unfolded in counterpoint with its modern parody. Also, the original hero of that tale is placed in counterpoint with old Noorak, who in turn is presented in counterpoint with the young city half-caste Alan. Noorak, like his precursor in *Wild Cat Falling*, occupies a small but crucial role in defining the author's vision. The shift in emphasis in delineation might seem small, but it is significant. *Long Live Sandawara* is more dramatic than poetic in its techniques; it is certainly more imbued with irony. Irony is at the heart of the novel, and yet (as in the portrayal of Noorak) the whole is, finally, much larger than the parts, and certainly much larger than the sum of its ironies.

The plot is simple. Alan, an urban teenager of part aboriginal blood, is inspired by the story of Sandawara and his heroic stand against those who are destroying his world and his culture. Alan decides to become the new Sandawara and re-names himself—and all his crowd—after these heroes. It is a gesture both childish and convincing. Their mob become, or would like to become, urban guerrillas of the Perth slums. Idealism is confronted with various greeds, not least of which is money. A planned bank hold-up ends melodramatically and tragically.

The surface world of this novel may seem to be a reworking of similar preoccupations in *Wild Cat Falling*—dropouts and dispossession—but it is not only more dramatic in structure and more complex in organisation, it is also far more ambitious in intent. *Wild Cat Falling* presented one world, perceived vividly. *Long Live Sandawara* is concerned with several layers and, more important, with the complex interweaving of them that provides not only counterpoint and irony, but also an overriding harmony.

Precision of observation, strong in the first book, is certainly retained. The voice, tone, actions and gestures (and defences) of a whole new generation of the "culturally deprived" are caught sharply. The identifying surfaces of late 1970s dolepersons are quite distinct from those of the early 1960s—that generation of loners. The 1970s was characterised by the group and the 'pad' and a mutually defensive and partly supportive world of dope sharing, sex sharing, dole sharing, and one immediate achievement of the new book is its larger cast of characters, each sketched lightly but with that sort of immediate precision that defines the born novelist. Sally and Jane, the TV-addled teenagers; Ron the arch parasite (one of the great grotesques in recent Australian fiction); Alan himself—who does manage to be interesting as a characterisation as much as a central cog to further an idea. The narrative thread, and its counterpoint, is handled with skill; even at a first reading one is impressed by the almost cinematic pace. The novel abounds in striking visual images. But it is the handling of irony as an integral part of the story that sets this apart from the earleir novel.

There are at least three significant ways irony is used. The most obvious is the treatment of Alan and his followers; their espousal of the Sandawara myth is set firmly in a context of failure and humiliation. The reward of idealism is punishment. Then there is the irony of the Sandawara story itself, presented through the pathetic intermediary of old Noorak, the Lawgiver become wino. The irony of incident is obvious. More intriguing is the use of irony to defend characterisation from becoming too subjective or idealised (though the danger of two-dimensionalism is not always avoided—immaterial in the case of a robustly conceived betrayer like Ron, but glibly superficial in de-

picting the police as pigs). This is almost an irony against itself, as it is finally developed through the central figure of Alan/Sandawara. This is because Sandawara remains, triumphantly, a transcendental figure, an energy source, impervious to the artifice of later modifications. It seems to me a feat of no mean order that Colin Johnson has come close to creating an heroic archetype of such near mythological power. His Sandawara refuses to yield this power, even in the face of the novel's ostensible series of disasters and accidents.

As with the Ned Kelly myth, Sandawara's story involves a ritual defiance of petit-bourgeois acquisitiveness. Johnson has a vision of society that is more complex than the "Us vs Them" opposition the novel, at surface level, may seem to present. I think this is important to emphasize, because I suspect some readers may take the work as a simple fable of drop-outs boosted by false illusions and a lack of "any ideology, only a rag-bag of gaudy, seemingly revolutionary phrases and the names of revolutionary leaders" (to quote Judah Waten's review in *The Age*). Although Johnson does occasionally make overt borrowings from current ideological definitions ("the middle class, who can't relate to things different from themselves" is certainly close, for instance, to Barthes' "the Petit-Bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other") his intent is not to provide a do-it-yourself revolutionary kit; it is to offer a vision. Everything in the book is designed to defuse ideological certainties. Instead, we are presented with a sustaining myth. And the power of myth is to transcend particularities. Colin Johnson in exploring with such wit and precision exactly this counterpoint has produced what may be one of the seminal novels of the 1970s.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

Peter Carey, *War Crimes*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1978, 282 pp.

If it's his second book out, as it is with Peter Carey's recently published collection of short stories, *War Crimes*, the way of all reviews, the rule of critical thumbs, is usually to remark on the artistic development of the writer. Invariably, the line is that he gets better as he gets older, like a bottle of port, a hunk of cheese, or an FJ Holden. One problem with this formula for the review article, however, is that the critic must at least gently slam the first book to compliment the second. For me to claim, though, that *War Crimes* is better than *The Fat Man in History*, that Carey's "development" as a short storyist is apparent in this recent collection, is for me to be reminded of an idea expressed, I think, by Oscar Wilde, who said: "Only mediocrity develops". In short, I liked *Fat Man*; I like *War Crimes*. The latter offers more of the "Peeling" piece of the former, more of what David Marr calls "The controlled, witty, and chilling" "sense of detail", more of what Frank Moorhouse appreciates as the "intelligent, sizzling, and rapid narrative", more of what Barry Oakley identifies as the amazing myth, the fabulous fable, the "compelling imaginative worlds ... [of] one of the most original writers in Australian fiction today".

But what interests me most is that Carey is neither defined nor confined by Oz. His isn't the droning monotone of the didgeridoo. Hardly. His music is more international (intonational?) and echoes the upbeat rhythms of the three B's: Borges, Barth, and Barthelme. Thus the voices of his narrators are familiar to all who have passed through the stretch of manic moments in contemporary fiction. The voices may be different from story to story, but there's a sameness about them too, since each is characterized by a flatness, a reluctance to express shock (and "flatness" means atonality as well as distance). However surreal the scene, bizarre the event, or grotesque the actor, Carey, like the Seventies' writers of disengagement, offers a calm commentary which challenges the energies of the reader to know and feel as fully as possible.

In the title story to the collection, in one of the many long shorts in the volume (there are short shorts here, too), Carey is allowing one of "the Andy Warhols of business" to speak, and the voice is typical of Carey's narrators throughout. The speaker states:

> My father lost his hand in a factory. He carried the stump with him as a badge of his oppression by factories. When I was small I saw that my father had no hand and concluded that my hand would also be cut off when the time came. I carried this belief quietly in the dark part of my mind reserved for dreadful truths. Thus it was

with a most peculiar and personal interest that I watched the beheading of chickens, the amputation of fox-terriers' tails, and even the tarring of young lambs. My fear was so intense that all communication on the subject was unthinkable. It would be done just as they had mutilated my cock by cutting off the skin on its head.

There is a horrifying razor-sharpness to this laconic style. One should long for respite from the anxious nightmare of mutiliation, but here there is acceptance of, almost a perverse joy in, the sense of event as unemotionally shaped by a narrator detached from himself—a narrator outside his nightmare reporting on his nightmare. And Carey is unrelenting in the tactics of the soft shock. Another passage in the same story—the title story—works in the same unruffled moving manner. Again, it's the narrator:

I watched her mouth move. It became unreal. I had the .22 under my arm, and my feelings were not like the real world, they were hot and pleasurable and electrically intense.

It was rage.

She had just repeated herself. She had just said something about respect when I drew the pistol and shot her in the foot.

She stopped talking. I watched the red mark on her stockinged foot and thought how amazingly accurate I had been.

She sat on the floor with surprise and a slight grunt.

Barto came running through the door and I stood there with a gun in my hand feeling stupid.

Later the incident made me think about myself and what I wanted from life.

The reader reads with attention. The reader reads with alarm. The ironies are so cool. The understatements are so understated. The narrator doesn't blink. The reader is reeling. And that's Carey's peculiar talent for flatness. He, like so many others these days, has the confidence to hold still long enough before the scene, however weird, to be convinced of its reality, and thus we ourselves become believers in the incredibly all-too-real.

The first story in the volume, like all of them, documents action of the most uncanny sort. Imagine a train, a man on a mission, a man indulging himself, having a gin and tonic and ice. And imagine the resourceful porter who, when the train runs low on ice, manages to satisfy one man's demands by getting what's called for from a coffin and a deep-frozen corpse. Yes, it's a simple fable of gin and tonic and ice coming from the most unlikely of places. And the catharsis here is a comic one, as it's been in this kind of story for years now.... But don't get me wrong. Carey is no postgraduate-school Kafka. He's brilliant at this and it's called spinning a yarn, a sort of with-it ghost story, moral to the core.... In the story the narrator asks: "How to describe the afternoon? A long slow dream in which everything was as it should be." If Carey does little more, he gives us markers. But he does a lot more. He gives us a modern voice distancing itself and pacing itself ... I was reminded of a few lines from "Peeling" as I read through the stories in *War Crimes*: "The prospect of so slow an exploration excites me and I am in no hurry, no hurry at all. May it last forever."

I know that some critics of modern fiction are troubled by this flat voice which is "in no hurry at all". Their argument is that the reader is conditioned by the automaton; the way of no feeling is subversively the ethic the reader is inadvertently persuaded to. A basic premise of this argument is that coldness encourages coldness. Although Carey works in this style, however, I do not believe he can be charged with coldness—despite the story about the ice blocks. It's true that the thirteen stories in the collecion offer a vision of a rather ugly world —a world of degradation and humiliation, a world of people unjustifiably wielding control over each other. It's true, too, that the title of the volume is clearly metaphorical, and the crimes perpetrated may be acts of the most banal sort, as in "The Puzzling Nature of Blue", where the narrator says of her lodger: "Vincent's ... crime was to inflict his love on me." "Vincent's ... crime was to perform small acts that would make me indebted to him in some way." The crimes are acts of social intercourse; the war, the fray, is life. But though the title may be metaphorical, the people who populate the stories are real. And when they act cruelly towards each other, Carey, who never directly intrudes between text and reader, leads us, nevertheless, to compassion as the only solution to the problem of what one of his narrators calls " a slow case of someone going slowly mad".

Take the story of Turk Kershaw, for example, the story entitled "A Schoolboy Prank". Like so many stories in the collection, it's one of revenge—revenge so ruthless as to be criminal. The victim is Turk Kershaw, a sixty-six year old, a former teacher, and homosexual. He is visited by two of his former students, now adults. Before they arrive, Turk unsuccessfully tries, with scotch, to hold back the tears welling up inside. But he weeps. He weeps for his dog, "old and worn as a hallway carpet ... beside his foot, dead". Carey writes:

> When Turk wept for the dog he wept for many things. He wept for a man who had died five years before and left his bed cold and empty. He wept for parents who had died twenty years before that. He wept for lost classrooms full of young faces, prayers after meals, the smell of floor polish, blue flowers in a pickle-jar vase. He wept because he was totally alone.

His former students in the course of the reunion are reminded of their own homosexual affairs of the heart, which they have no wish to remember. Because they fear the "pieces of gossip and scandal" which Turk could publish, they punish him. They exhume the muddy body of his dog and nail it to his front door. And the story ends with poetry, with implicit compassion for the victim, and with explicit justice meted out for the persecutor. About the students, the narrator says: "For the people they continued to make love to in their dreams did not always have vaginas and the dog looked on, its tongue lewly lolling out, observing it all."

For Carey there's a toughness to the sadness and a sadness to the toughness. The reader discovers a range of feeling in these stories, and a range of talent as well. Each story acknowledges the pain and uncovers the disquiet of mind; but each, beautifully written as it is, assuages that pain and quiets that disquiet. Such is the magic of the well-made contemporary short story, as Peter Carey works it up again.

JIM LEGASSE

Bruce Beaver, *As It Was*, University of Queensland Press, 1979, 118 pp., $4.95.

There is a Japanese word, a literary term, for their Eastern habit of setting up a poem—the mood, the tone, the theme—and then at the end, maybe the very last line, throwing a pebble into the poemlake so the ripples reverberate back through the poem and either change it completely or heighten it far above the everyday language in which it is couched.

This book does this job for Bruce Beaver's six earlier books of poetry and his novel.

Just as his last book, *Death's Directives*, was not exclusively concerned with death, *As It Was* is more than simply autobiographical. This book is the core of Beaver's oeuvre, it's the core that holds the pip that ensures the poet's continuity. (I don't qualify 'his continuity' because his creative continuity and his life's continuity are one. It is not a romantic overstatement when Beaver said, in a 'statement of poetics' for Shapcott's anthology *Australian Poetry Now*: "Writing poetry is as necessary for me as eating.")

As It Was sent me back to Beaver's other books, right back beyond *Letters to Live Poets* to *Under the Bridge*, his first book published in 1961. Along the way, Beaver has absorbed influences by James Dickey, Frank O'Hara, Robert Duncan and John Blight, although these influences are not overtly apparent in this book. He does write in both prose and poetry in this book, dismissing the idea of the separateness of the two. Notice I did not say verse: I said and stated purposely poetry, because poetry exists in the paragraphed prose sections, and a purposeful prosaic flatness likewise exists in the poetry passages. But the point is perhaps not to make a point of it.

He does write of the animal hunt as Dickey so often does, but Beaver's hunt-and-kill is a guilt-edged dark adolescent memory in 'Hunting Birds', a scene which begins with the seeming necessity of

> "picking off the smallest birds
> with an air rifle in my uncle's tatty orchard"

and ends with these emotive thoughts on the 'water-crucified hawk':

> "So shrunken in such absurd, unnecessary death
> that then and there I made a vow to kill no more
> in 'sport' anything that moved or flew or swam
> upon the beastly and the beautiful terrene surface
> that I and my cousin infected with our lethal presences."

It would be a tidy place to leave the poem, an acceptable ending, but Beaver takes us further:

"But we both, after hiding the dead bird,
boasted loud if not
too long upon a major kill."

A nice note to leave the poem on, a note to echo through future readings, adding to the narrative every time. But Beaver takes it even further and tells us of his cousin rushing off to kill rodents for their skins and of his own sulking off to the 'Collected Shelley':

"Now I was and am a Keats man; rarely
do the followers
of either poet meet rewardingly;"

For the individual poem's sake, I believe Beaver would have been better closing the poem (opening it to the reader) at "too long upon a major kill". However, his established ending does serve a purpose *for the book* as a whole. It positions his questing mind amongst the purely physical pursuits of his relatives. It is a story of his place in his tribe (and perhaps his birth in the 'tribe of poets'), yet it is not a sequential narrative but more an eddying emotional and intellectual autobiography, part invention by omission, part portrayal of a young confused Beaver, forever in the years of emotional flux, forever at the edge of the group—at home, at corn-husking time, at milking time, at a country-dance.

Detours, deviations, asides, they can all be welcome in the same poet-humming sentence, with an intensely personal syntax one must read with the ears—and I mean no pun, for a part of the book is concerned with corn:

'At silo filling time the air was similarly wet
between the dense-packed, leaf-clustered
corn rows, in the little
shed that housed the howling, belting, stalk-
chopping silage-
making machine and in the empty silo,
treading under
a rain of moist fragments the corn leaves,
corn stalks, stray cobs
into a green pudding that would cook itself,
beginning
the thermic process even while we trod that
upright vintage."

Then Beaver defuses the sensuousness of his line with an aside, intentionally factfully flat:

"But the whole process depended on corn.
And corn is truly a magic
thing. As much a gift of the gods as the
grape. It shares with the grape
religious rites, and its history is linked with
the dismembering
and rebirth of a god. I was nearly partially
dismembered myself
one season, ..."

A little further into the same poem ('Silo Treading') is a fine sentence, calling to my mind a Welsh-influenced rhetoric: (or, if American, then to be found in the prose of Thomas Wolfe (the first), or maybe Kerouac or Faulkner):

"After the fiendish games of pursuing the
nesting mice to their deaths
from the barn's cornerfuls of unhusked corn
we could at first
with enthusiasm gradually turned into
lethargy run the finger
taloned with leatherheld three inch nail
down the harsh cocoon
of the husk to disclose the gold, the betel-
red, the milk-white grains,
until someone would carry us snoozing into
a shadowy corner on top of
more corn (and mice) and fulsome sacks of
sweet and foul smelling
mixtures
of things that only adults understand the use
of.

These selections are from the 'Bucolics' section of *As It Was* where Beaver celebrates the joy and tedium of milking cows, the casual comparisons with neighbouring farm girls, the first stirrings of a love salted with lust, the romance in the classical allusions and illusions of, say, Diana spearing fish in 'The Hunting Girl'. But this is the final section and enjoys the lush wordiness to enact the sensations of then now. Of then—now. The headlong rush of language sometimes plays games with the pins-&-needles of punctuation, causing me to re-read some sentences twice because I took a wrong turn within. But there again, a little exercise never hurt any language. And after the fluctuations of form, style and (dare I say) fashion that Bruce Beaver has been through in his half-dozen poetry collections, his experience and first-hand knowledge in the syntax arena must make him an authority.

The first part, called 'Beginnings', may have been born of an impulse out of these lines from a poem beyond this collection called "For a Possible Daughter":

"But I am not here to remember or recount
these things, some of which and others
have gone and will not return, anymore
than I can recall the scenes and persons
of most of my childhood."

Later in the same poem he says:

"of living: each one of us is alone with his
or her memories of what has gone before."

And for us in this 1980 television drugged and stimulated age, what was it like to grow up in time of Flash Gordon, the Katzenjammer Kids, 'Gem' and 'Magnet' magazines, Popeye and his gang (all known with intimacy, all a real tangible part of young life), escape routes for a boy with disturbed emotions—insecurity of family fluctuating fortunes, shifting relationships with grandparents, 'half-boring, half-arousing' ticklings with older girls, and always constant change . . .

"we never seemed to stay long
enough
to get to know the place or people. My father
was a travelling salesman."

until a nightmare too real to handle injured the boy's mind, and the world was "never to be the same again":

"It was all odi et amo
overlapping, frustrating and alienating;
waking or sleeping, a botched
world."

To quote the blurb: "From such unlikely sources developed the poet—in a process both enacted and celebrated in the book's centrepiece, a virtuoso poem about poetry called 'The Poems'."

The dipping and gliding, surfing in thin air, the rhythm of a smile behind the words, the words running out of memory and the continuing craft practised still, tracking the tap-root's source, 'The Poems' is a musical delight. It's long thin structure hides the music within, a music you as reader can only exult in by reading out aloud.

Three quotes—beginning, middle, and end—should be enough as example without supplying you the complete text. (The poem takes eight pages of the book and is too long to quote here in total.)

It begins—

The poems came
and when they wouldn't
come I'd find them
hiding here and
there, between the
seawall's jointures
small as a scurrying
ant or lumbering
beetle, or halfway
up a hugely
spreading pine,
a knot of resin
or a resting
pigeon, or
upon the salty
lawn between the
pines and wall
the strutting, bowing
birds themselves,
or down about
the line of wrack
dogs abounding,
sniffling blue-bottles,
chasing seagulls
grey and white,
red or black-legged.

There are so many delightful pieces to quote, but I will restrain myself and play you a small, chirpy lyrical middle passage:

On the banks
the quanit screwdriver
shells and gritty
path between
the rushes and
the she-oaks, pines
and coral trees.
All about them
and above them
and upon them
grew the poems.

Only a virtuoso word craftsman could weld his words together with song so melodic as to defy any misinterpretation of his score. The words are simple and lyrical and sing themselves.

A taste of "The Poems" last stanza:

The real poems
were everywhere else
then within me
and I would have to
get there somehow,
get into
the world of selves
and singular poems
of the multiple
self of selves,

As It Was is still unfolding to me after numerous readings, aloud at dawn, in silence at midnight. It is a remarkable book for the sheer variety of the writing and its cohesiveness as a tale, and yet it is even more remarkable for its position in Bruce Beaver's works. The mere details of a poet's life can, at times, add something to his poems. But I have always argued the poems should stand alone, with no need for outside information. Perhaps I'm reviewing that stance, for this book has fed the earlier collections with new magic, fattening the scenes into real dimensions, making even more vulnerable and somehow more empathetic the persona, and sharing in the quest of what before seemed almost a bleak desolate journey.

In the book, early snapshots of family life and the footy team at school and Mum at the door of the old family house and the family feeding the chickens delightfully illustrate the style. The book's overall design and presentation are very pleasing, and once again the University of Queensland Press has published a solid, well-bound paperback at a price that is comparable to a cinema ticket. It's hard to guess the 'Coming Attractions' from Bruce Beaver's prolific pen. In the meantime, I'm still glued to my seat watching the re-runs.

ANDREW BURKE

Patricia Rolfe (ed.), *The Journalistic Javelin: An Illustrated History of the Bulletin, 1880–1980*, Wildcat Press, Sydney, 1980.

The Journalistic Javelin is an entertaining and lively tribute to the centennial of the *Bulletin*, a magazine unique in Australian history. As Rolfe says in her Introduction, 'there is no particular virtue in longevity', and the book presents the virtues, and vices, of the *Bulletin*. A refreshing aspect of the book is the view of the *Bulletin* as journalism—'the only immortality its producers wanted was to be in next week's issue'. In the gathering of material there is no attempt to highlight features, or prove a thesis. The book 'was planned as a simple chronicle for the average person of today', but can't fail to contribute material of interest to a student of the paper.

One of the virtues of the book, and of the *Bulletin*, is the tradition of comic and black and white art. On every page cartoons show the variety of the *Bulletin*'s humour and prejudice, social comment and topical notes. Some of these creations have become part of Australian heritage—Lindsay's koalas, and his god of war, May's Mongolian threat, imperial John Bull, his Henry Parkes and Low's Billy Hughes. It is unfortunate the cartoons aren't placed in context with the text more often. Dividing off most of the chapters are double page 'cartoon essays', collections of jokes on a particular theme—the bush parson, sporting life, the motor car, bicycles and others. These collections are mong the best parts of the book, in bringing to life the spirit of a former era. Some are devoted to the work of Souter, Lindsay and May, and convey the contribution made by the individual artists to the character of the *Bulletin*. Rolfe comments that the art of social observation seems to have died. The striking drawings of Souter—from the grand ladies of the 1890s to the flappers and new woman of the 1930s—show it at its best.

While the illustrations have impact through their vitality and point, the text tends to be discursive. The language is racy and sometimes seems disjointed. The telling is largely anecdotal, and can be distracting in its movement from one event or identity to another. There is a lack of balance where the thread stops to incorporate secondary material—such as biographical material—which often includes material of only peripheral interest. The detail is in some cases repeated in later chapters as in the story of Archibald which is touched on in several chapters, and one gains an impression of him moving backwards and forwards between Callan Park asylum and the outside world. Lawson, on the other hand, is treated mainly in one chapter and emerges with a certain stature which, while attesting to his 'prickly' nature, shows a mischievousness and vitality more in keeping with the endearing caricature of him by Low. Rolfe's text is marred by some typographical errors, including a reference to the 'Mandaring water' [*sic*] which gave the W.A. goldfields its water supply (p. 291).

Much of the book's discursiveness perhaps stems from the overall arrangement into apparently thematic chapters. This treatment is ideal for dipping into particular subjects—the bush, art, the short story, balladists—but leads to repetitiveness on a straight read-through. There is little development of the themes, with the exception perhaps of the chapters on the

Bohemians, and the *Bulletin* as Bushman's Bible. Instead, the text concentrates on the early years of the *Bulletin*. After 250 of the 300-odd pages in *The Journalistic Javelin*, we have only progressed to the end of Edmond's editorship (1903–1915). This concentration on an already familiar period of the *Bulletin* is a major disappointment with the book. Rolfe refers in the Introduction to 'confusion' engendered by the 'Great Days', whereby 'Archibald's Bulletin becomes a massive monument looming over everything that went before or came after'. She may have fallen victim to some of this confusion herself.

Of the period after the early days, the chapter on the editorship of Prior (1915–1933) is the best executed. The material is of interest, being relatively unfamiliar, and is well assimilated. In this period the *Bulletin* continued to decline into formula and conservatism, during the years of war, conscription, the struggles of the Labor Party, and Prior's championing of the White Australia Policy. Rolfe mentions the changing society and developments in journalism, such as *Smiths Weekly*, which saw the *Bulletin* falling behind. Prior's novel contests, in their initial success, seemed to mask for him the dwindling appeal of the magazine. The editorships of Webb (1933–1948) and Adams (1948–1960) are dealt with in one chapter. Very little is given of the character of the *Bulletin*'s pages, or the creative work it attracted. The main pointer to its nature, and its decline, is an extract from Sidney J. Baker:

> As I write I have before me copies of the *Bulletin* for December 18, 1897, and for June 26, 1946 . . .
>
> Main features in both are: the Red Page, the editorial page, Plain English, Sundry Shows, the Wildcat Column, Society, Woman's Letter, Personal Items, Aboriginalities, Sporting Notions, and Political Points. A half century and no change? Surely a journal should grow up a little in half a century." (p. 289).

There is little given on Adams, and rather too much on Ellis, who was 'next but one to the editor' and with the paper from 1933 to after its purchase by Australian Consolidated Press in 1960. The cornerstone issues of the time continued to be anti-communism and the White Australia Policy. Rolfe notes that after the changeover in 1960 'almost literally the first change Horne made was to remove Australia for the White Man from the masthead'.

While the final chapter of *The Journalistic Javelin* would have been of interest in the revamping of the moribund paper from 1960 to its present success, it deals largely with changes on the board, personalities in the owning group, dividends and the competition. Very little is conveyed of the spirit or content of the paper except by a reference to a collection published in 1966 of writers like Barry Humphries, Hal Porter, Thomas Keneally, Max Harris, and cartoons by Tanner and others. There is reference to developments in journalism and the *Bulletin*'s own rapidly changing editorship, to Trevor Kennedy in the 1970s, but we get little insight into the nature of the successful formula discovered. Very few cartoons of the last thirty years are reproduced in the book, and practically no comic writing, though admittedly it would have declined from the early years. For a fuller picture of the *Bulletin* of the later period it is necessary to go perhaps to its recent Centennial Issue, which with extracts of the work shows the later writers not covered by Rolfe, and refers in fact to a 'resurgence of creative writing'. While allowance is made for the more optimistic view taken by the *Bulletin* of its own history, one feels the material can't be as thin as Rolfe would allow us to think. In her last chapters Rolfe deals with little more than is mentioned in the Introductory passages in the Centennial Issue, and one gains an impression of hurried execution in the last stages.

The Journalistic Javelin presents us with the *Bulletin*'s virtues of entertainment, art, some good writing, and classic characters, together with its journalistic vices, outmoded prejudices that were worn too long, and the particular stamp it has placed on a period of Australian history. Of the vices of journalism, Rolfe particularly includes the filler material like the block illustrated by Norman Lindsay:

> The boy sat on the Manly boat,
> His head was in a whirl,
> His eyes and mouth were full of hair,
> His arms were full of girl. (p. 205).

Throughout the illustrations embody the spirit of the age, while the text gives snippets of biography and incident that could only be known from inside the paper's tradition. We gain nearer views of some of the minor figures —Goodge, Daley, and Breaker Morant, and

are re-acquainted with Archibald, Stephens and Lawson. *The Journalistic Javelin* shows the *Bulletin* as journalism, and is a beautifully produced book, preserving for our entertainment and pleasure some fine artwork and humour. It doesn't give as complete a picture of the whole one hundred years as we could have hoped, nor of its amazing return to strength in recent years. For the present, however, perhaps it is as true a story as can be told.

MARGARET R. FITZGERALD

Marjorie Bickerton, *Dust Over the Pilbara*, Artlook Press, Perth, 1980, 206 pp., $6.95.

"Soon the sickly smell of the seat leather began to penetrate my stomach and the barley sugar previously handed out by the hostess, mixing with my stomach juices, made me drop my magazine and reach for the thick paper bag conveniently situated on the back of the seat in front. I was violently ill continuously. I was so sick I could not be sick any more. The stops went on endlessly, until I could hardly distinguish the landings from the take offs." Those words are from an essay penned in 1956 by Lesleigh Bickerton, schoolgirl daughter of Marjorie and Arthur Bickerton, in reference to her flight with her mother and younger brother from Perth to Shaw River Tin Mine to rejoin her mine-manager father. For me, that straightforward account is typical of the schoolgirl's mother's approach to *her* book. The mother now: "Three wobbly passengers staggered from the plane. 'Don't worry about the heat,' Arthur cheerfully told us, 'There are fans going in the house. You will soon cool down.' The fans were whirring, but in a temperature of 116° Fahrenheit they were only circulating hot air."

The first chapter of Marjorie Bickerton's book had shown me something of the character of the woman who wrote of her first sight of the Pilbara, and I grinned as I read of her thinking "I'll die, and when I go 'down there' I'll feel at home. It couldn't be any hotter than it is up here." I grinned, knowing that the Pilbara, Hell on Earth in Summer to a newcomer, has a great deal to offer people who stay, sweating it out in the heat, until, slowly coming to terms with their new environment, they begin to know and love the distance and the loneliness, the bright clean air, the brooding beauty of a landscape old as the very bones of our planet.

This is a book of the personal reactions of a perceptive woman's mind to a land and its people, a book of changing perspectives, written by a woman looking back across the years of a successful marriage, her homes in the Eastern States where her engineer husband's work took him; it is a record of her years as the wife of a mine manager, mother of two children, of the tin mines of Shaw River and Moolyella, and of her wide travels with her husband in the years of his being the M.L.A. for the Pilbara electorate. She writes of seeing and hearing, learning, growing in understanding. She saw the Pilbara in its last few years of being as it had been for so long a time, and she saw with a clear mind the land as it now is, with the new "instant" towns, the new ports, the standard gauge railways of the iron ore industry, the Cyclone resistant housing, the aerodromes, all the modernities of the hastily developed iron ore province. Best of all, she saw People. Her husband ("An independent individualist with a sense of humour", she names him in the dedication) had said that of all the great potential wealth of the area, People are the greatest.

Marjorie Bickerton leaves the reader in no doubt about her agreement with that statement. There is a human warmth, a respect for all humanity, and for all life, that shines through every chapter. Travelling with her husband on farflung roads of rock and dust in the furnace blaze of summer heatwave or through seas of mud in occasional wet weather, she met the oldtimers and the newcomers, the battlers and the well-to-do, Australians and migrants from many far off lands, whites and aborigines, young and old, transients, and those with roots deep in the grudging soil of the Norwest. Always to her they were *People first*, and miner, stockman, housewife, nurse, schoolchild, pensioner, prospector, construction worker, project manager, parson, doctor, priest, policeman, civil servant, pastoralist, cook, publican, shearer, fisherman, business man, pilot, Aboriginal, European, Australian, young, old, rich, poor, *second*.

She writes of the long years she spent in the North, from the point of view of a woman, a wife, a mother in a part of Australia that is still more a male than a female domain. She

writes of places that may seem to some minds to be outlandish, backward, unlovely, but always she writes of People, directly, straightforwardly, and caringly. Her travels in the region have been extensive, her observations both detailed and broad, and the result of her writing is an interesting and most rewarding book.

The photographic illustrations are part of the record. Not one of them is glossy, they are a black and white collection of scenes across the length and breadth of the country, and the main subject matter is People. Nothing here for the expensive plush coffee table book; these photographs are a record of People, their lifestyle, their hopes and successes, their failures, their everyday life.

Literary? No. Literature? Yes, if writing from the mind and the caring heart is literature. We could well do with more such writing about interesting places and real People.

Oh, a last thought. Typesetting, layout and design, printing, publishing and distribution are all Western Australian, and all excellent.

DONALD STUART

Craig McGregor (ed.), *Bob Dylan: A Retrospective*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1980, 237 pp., $6.95.

I want to begin by urging the reader of this review *not* to buy the book with which it is concerned. For reasons all too easy (and all too mercenary) to guess at Angus & Robertson have conspired with Craig McGregor to perpetrate upon the Australian book-buying public what can only be described, in the pungent American phrase, as a scam. Nowhere in the book's title or any of its self-advertising subtitular statements are claims made which can be proven to be untrue—at least in a court of law. On the other hand, the contents of the book fail dismally to live up to the claims that *are* made. It is of course the essence of a scam to get people to part with their cash on the basis of misrepresentation which remains a mere whisker this side of the unabashedly fraudulent.

In essence *Bob Dylan: a Retrospective* is a 1980 reprint of a book first prepared by McGregor and published in America in 1972. Angus & Robertson published the first Australian edition in 1973. This 1980 edition claims to be 'revised', but revision extends only so far in fact as an additional sketchy paragraph of McGregor's introduction, and the addition of two interview texts to the sum of news reports, record reviews, 'personality' articles, critical essays, and interview texts compiled for the very first edition. Moreover, both these interviews are dated 1978 and one, excerpted from *Rolling Stone* and conducted by Jonathan Cott, that paper's resident film critic, deals almost exclusively with Dylan's views on film making, a consequence of the release in that year of Dylan's first film *Renaldo and Clara*, as yet unreleased in this country. The other, by McGregor himself, conducted during Dylan's 1978 tour of this country, is remarkable more for what it reveals of McGregor's need to show how chummy he is with Dylan than for what it reveals of Dylan. Thus it is that this edition includes almost no material relating to Dylan's work as singer, songwriter and musician between 1971 and 1978. Can one simply omit coverage of seven of the sixteen years of an artist's career, and those years in which no fewer than seven of Dylan's seventeen or eighteen albums, not including compilations, were released, and still claim that one is offering a genuine retrospective? Could one mount a Picasso retrospective and leave out the Blue Period? It may have been true for McGregor to claim in the introduction to the first edition that "The material in this book follows Dylan's development from his first folk concerts through to the present day". To make the same claim in the largely unrevised introduction to this "revised edition" is to wilfully mislead the potential consumer.

With the sub-titular claim that the book is "a selection of the best writing in Bob Dylan" we are dealing in greyer areas of personal taste and judgement. It is significant however that this claim was not made for the first edition, 'though it now appears in large white lettering against the seductively glossy black cover of this new edition underneath a picture of Dylan taken, ironically enough, during the epoch-making 75-76 Rolling Thunder Revue tour of America, an event which receives no comment in the book itself. I would want to argue that the omission of any excerpt from Anthony Scaduto's important 1972 biography, and of any one of Ralph J. Gleason's many articles

and reviews of Dylan's music written for the *San Francisco Sunday Examiner* (particularly those of the very early seventies, when other critics were lamenting Dylan's 'decline' into 'country music', while Gleason eulogized him) already invalidates such a claim. In short, this book offers neither an adequate survey of Dylan's career nor a particularly competent selection from the vast amount of writing on Dylan suitable for an anthology of this kind, and the latter comment, true enough of the 1972 edition, is even more so now. Much of the best writing on Dylan has appeared in fact during the last five or six years as a response to the rejuvenated Dylan whose *Before the Flood* (1974) and *Rolling Thunder Revue* (75-76) U.S. concert tours and brilliant albums, *Blood on The Tracks* (1974) and *Desire* (1976), re-attracted the serious interest of critics who'd felt the 1969 through 1973 albums, *Nashville Skyline*, *Self-Portrait*, *New Morning* and *Planet Waves*, evidence of an irreversible decline in Dylan's talents and skills as songwriter and singer, the sad slide into mediocrity of the single most important figure in rock music in the sixties. It was *Blood on the Tracks* which really restored the old faith in Dylan. Dylan, the real Dylan, whose words were blows to the heart and knife blades in the brain, whose songs walked naked and taught us the truth about ourselves, who couldn't be ignored, was back—and as the seventies unfolded he proved to be back with a vengeance. There is, however, precious little in McGregor's "revised edition" to convey any sense of Dylan's triumphant endurance amid the vapidities of disco, the welter of L.A. Schlock-rock and the hyped extravagances (along with the genuine excitement) of the late 70's New Wave. There is no doubt though that when Angus & Robertson and McGregor set about producing this "revised edition" they were well aware that Dylan is BIG again. The '78 tour of Japan and Australia proved how big, particularly since the sold-out performances saw as many in the audience who'd come to see a living legend, caring nothing for the music really, as those who were there because somewhere, sometime one of Dylan's songs had possessed them with its truth.

A recent tour, a proven market, a "revised edition". Q.E.D. The profit-logicians at Angus & Robertson have even seen their reasoning providentially blessed, since Dylan's 1979 album *Slow Train Coming* contains his most 'commercial' sound ever with yet more fuel for the abiding myth of Dylan the chameleon seeker, containing as it does incontrovertible evidence of his embracing of the world-view of the 'born-again' Christian. Dylan the enigma, Dylan the setter of trends has moved centre stage again. Indeed Jan Wenner, founding editor and owner of *Rolling Stone*, the most influential popular music paper in the whole of the industri-electronicized West even took up his pen, (employed for the most part these past few years in affixing the Wennerian moniker to the documents necessarily generated by multi-million dollar business) to rhapsodically proclaim the return of the 60's poet-prophet:

> "*Slow Train Coming* is pure, true Dylan, probably the purest and truest Dylan ever. The religious symbolism is a logical progression of Dylan's Manichean vision of life and his pain-filled struggle with good and evil."[1]

Wenner's fervent praise of *Slow Train Coming* is offered in the context of the standard assumptions about Dylan's status as perhaps the most important artist in the history of rock—"The first poet of the jukebox" as Ralph J. Gleason once dubbed him—and also, more interestingly, about the essentially *American* nature of his vision—

> "The title track is nothing less than Dylan's most mature and profound song about America. His patriotism is absolutely clear: it is a statement filled with his belief in the American Dream, as well as being infused with outrage and anger."[2]

Jukeboxes are as American as apple-pie and almost as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola, and defenders of nationalist faiths everywhere (whether "ethnic culturalists" or radical xenophobes) have seen them (with reason) as a good deal more iniquitous. Ubiquity is nonetheless the prior fact and one for which Angus & Robertson should be duly grateful, since it was the ubiquity of the Juke-box (and its avatar pop radio) which made of Dylan a spokesman, prophet, idol and hero for an entire Western generation, and of course created the market in Australia which their "revised edition" so cynically intends to exploit. Let me try to illustrate the power of the juke-box and of rock radio in a personal way. I first heard The Animals electric version of a traditional New

Orleans blues called "House of the Rising Sun" on a local radio station mid-1964, but it was only after, some days later, that I'd played it non-stop for a solid hour in my local juke-box—it was a slow day in the beach-front pin-ball joint, a grey misty day and I and a fellow truanter had the box to ourselves—that I realized I was hooked. The trumpets had blown at the round earth's imagined corners and there was I, mainlining on American folk culture as assimilated by a group of gritty Geordies and retransmitted from grimy Newcastle U.K. to Australian me on Scarborough beach. And the fixes kept coming, dealt on the amplitude modulated waves of radio for nothing and for a zac a shot in the local juke-box, itself full of grooved vinyl talismans for conjuring away national identities, dissolving borders and creating an international community of addicts. A good many people got the rock habit around that time, so many in fact that the veteran rock'n'roll junkies, those Presleyan pioneers who'd hacked out the first clearing on the edge of the global village reserved specifically for the young found themselves over-run, their clearing spreading to the horizons' rim. The Beatles and Dylan, the Band and the Stones, the music they made was to be heard everywhere in the West, and Dylan was to be found at the centre, in the eye of the hurricane.

Dylan's move into rock was inspired, according to Scaduto,[3] by his hearing, while on tour in the U.K. in 1964, that soaring, epic rock version of "House of the Rising Sun", a song which Dylan himself had performed, in an acoustic arrangement stolen from his friend, the folk-lorist and singer Dave Van Ronk, in his first (1962) album. While Dylan remained acoustic and developed the image of uncompromising chronicler of the failure of the American Dream, in the 'protest' songs of his first four albums he also remained a specifically American hero, a taste acquired elsewhere in the English-speaking West only by the left-leaning politically committed, the folk-purists and (as always) the trendiest literati, and this was despite the world-wide currency of Peter, Paul and Mary's prettified version of his early 'protest' anthem *Blowin' in The Wind*. But when Dylan released *Bringing it all Back Home*[4] in 1965, with one full side of electric rhythm and blues, and followed up in the same year with the scarifying *Highway 61 Revisited*, an all-electric album of surreal power which contained the classic, miraculous *Like A Rolling Stone* he became the undisputed laureate of the global village's juke-box. He made music for the mind and body and he made a revolution that was trans-national, though founded absolutely in American Romanticism, and Transcendentalism:

> "He helped create a cultural climate that made it possible for the Beatles and most other rock groups around to break out of the three minute vise of popular song and to pass along their own visions (or pseudo-visions) and add their voice to the attack on a valueless and corrupt society. Dylan became an unofficial leader of the Movement and of those causes that add up to a truly new generation, possibly even a 'children's crusade' as someone has called it."[5]

> "Without Dylan, the Sixties would have taken a different route: There would have been no '*Sergeant Pepper*', no '*Beggars Banquet*', no '*Music from Big Pink*'. That was the level of his impact. It did much to mould the sensibility of a whole generation in industrialized countries, and to understand the Sixties no future chronicler will be able to ignore the music of Bob Dylan."[6]

> "*Bob Dylan* (Robert Zimmerman). The moment of truth. Bob Dylan is a book, at the least. At the most he is a continuing autobiography of this country, its music, its confusions, the failure of its dream. Charting his course is the simplest and perhaps the most complete statement one can make at this time."[7]

Dylan became so central to an entire generation in the West paradoxically because he was so completely American a figure, so enigmatic a key to the soul, if one may so express it, of a nation which had dominated the history of the Twentieth Century after World War I, which indeed, could claim to have invented, in a sense, the Twentieth Century. Dylan effected a fusion of his peculiarly American visionary Romanticism with the musical legacy of the American oppressed, a music which defied oppression simply by being made at all:

> "I tend to base all my songs on the old songs, like the old folk songs, the old blues tunes; they are always good. They always make sense."[8]

From the folk songs of the poor whites Dylan learned how to make melodies that were

simple yet haunted the mind, from the Dust-bowl ballads of his own youthful idol, Woody Guthrie, he learned how to shape narratives full of biting irony and bitter truth, from negro blues he learned how imagery of wild beauty might be wrung from a blighted landscape or a ghetto tenement and he learned in that school too how the insistent rhythms of the blues declared an unquenchable vitality, inviting participation in the dance that obliterates pain. And he added to all this an American faith in the authenticity of the utterances of the visionary Self. Emerson's words in *Self-Reliance* (1841) might serve as the best summary of that sense of integrity which Dylan's music has always possessed.

> "No truth can be sacred to me but that of my own nature ..... A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he."

And Emerson's words in *The American Scholar* (1837) are as appropriate to the image of human possibility which Dylan addressed in his music of the Sixties in such a way as to make it the ideal of a generation—

> "Another sign of our times, also marked by an analogous political movement is the new importance given to the single person. Everything that tends to insulate the individual—to surround him with the barriers of natural respect, so that each man shall feel the world is his, and man shall treat with man as a sovereign state with a sovereign state—tends to true Union as well as greatness."

Interviewer: Do you think you have a purpose and a mission?

Dylan: Obviously.

Interviewer: What is it?

Dylan: Henry Miller said it. The role of an artist is to inoculate the world with disillusionment.[9]

From the beginning, though speaking out of American experience Dylan aimed to speak to the world, as the artist, and with the authority of a hard-won non-conformist individual vision. The hypodermic he needed to inoculate the world he found to hand in the electronic sound technology of our time, the ubiquitous juke-box. Dylan has continued to offer us the disillusioning truth, the reality T. S. Eliot insisted we cannot bear too much of (no accident that each radical shift of direction in Dylan's career has brought angry reactions from fans just beginning to feel comfortable again) down to the present day. It's all happened before, and Dylan told us years ago that:

> Disillusioned words like bullets bark
> As human Gods aim for their mark
> Make everything from toy guns that spark
> To flesh-coloured Christ's that glow in the dark
> An' it's easy to see without lookin' too far
> That not much is really sacred.[10]

CLIFF GILLAM

NOTES

1. Jann S. Wenner: "Bob Dylan and Our Times: The Slow Train is Coming." *Rolling Stone*, No. 300, 20th Sept., 1979, p. 40.
2. *Ibid.*
3. "Bob Dylan, to a friend on his return to New York: My God, ya oughta hear what's going down over there. Eric Burdon, The Animals, ya know? Well, he's doing *House of the Rising Sun* in rock. Rock! It's fuckin' *wild*! Blew my mind!" Anthony Scaduto; *Bob Dylan* (London, Abacus, 1972), p. 176.
4. The title of this album was Dylan's subtle reference to his discovery in 1964 that the quintessential American music, the electrified urban blues, was being performed by white groups in the U.K. Side one of *Bringing it all Back Home* has Dylan performing in that idiom for the first time on record.
5. Scaduto: *op. cit.*, pp. 182-183.
6. Phil Hardy and Dave Laing (eds.): *The Encyclopedia of Rock*, Vol. 2, (London, Panther, 1976), p. 125.
7. Lillian Roxon: *Lillian Roxon's Rock Encyclopedia* (N.Y., Grosset & Dunlap, 1971), pp. 157-158.
8. From "Playboy Interview: Bob Dylan", *Playboy Mazagine*, March, 1978, p. 82.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
10. Bob Dylan: *It's Alright Ma, I'm Only Bleeding.* © Bob Dylan 1965.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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DONALD STUART—Western Australian novelist. His books include *Yandy* (1959), *The Dream* (1961), *Yaralie* (1962), *Ilbarana* (1971), *Morning Star, Evening Star* (1973), *Prince of My Country* (1974), *Walk, Trot Canter and Die* (1975), *Malloonkai* (1976) and *Drought Foal* (1977). Has lived and worked in the Pilbara.

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