Westerly

A Quarterly Review
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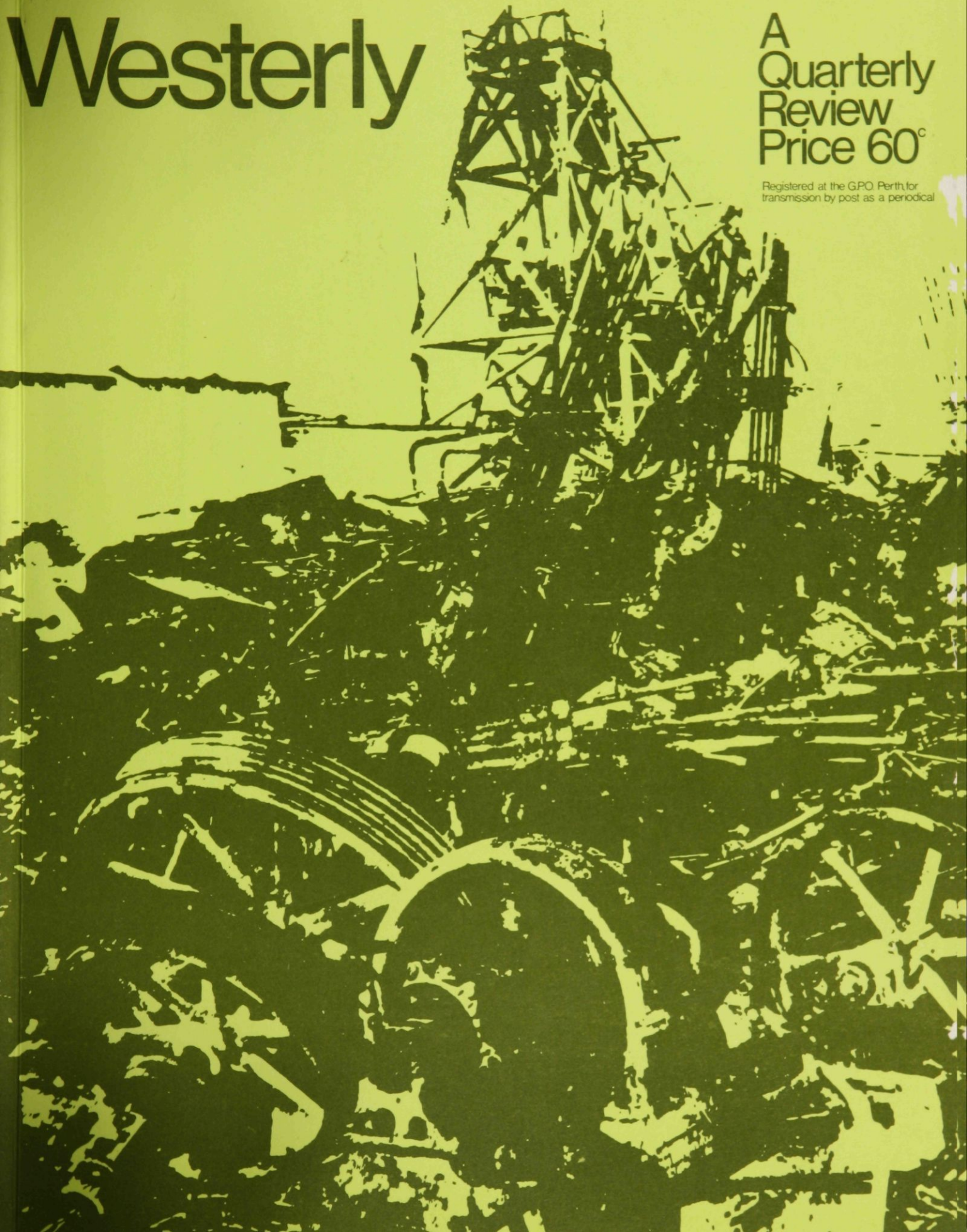

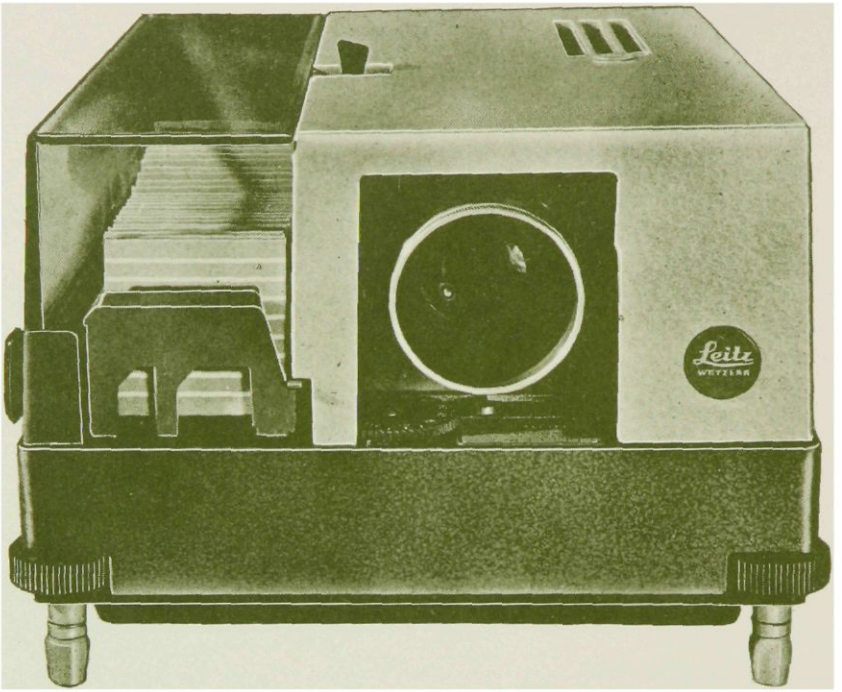

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A Quarterly Review

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Westerly

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DESIGN
Jill Yelland

ILLUSTRATIONS
Felicity Marshall
Leonie Stenhouse
Tim Burns

The Wisdom of Mrs Greenberger

Judith Clarke

'A girl like that!' cried Mrs Greenberger. 'What can you be finking of, an educated boy like you? She can do you no good.'

To tell the truth, Mrs Greenberger did not like the look of Phoebe. She did not like it at all. Any girl who dressed like that; who wore her skirt so short and her jumper so tight—Mrs Greenberger could tell. There was no end, in fact, to what Mrs Greenberger could tell, from the style and disposition of a single piece of clothing, or the shade and degree of brightness of a nail polish.

It was the perfume that really convinced her. Phoebe used a whole bottle of perfume in her bath. Lal Chandra had told Mrs Greenberger about this because he had been proud. But Mrs Greenberger did not share his admiration.

'What does she need with a whole bottle of perfume, now? In the baf! Johnson's Baby Powder and a little bit of Mum Rollette, that is all that is needed, I tell you. Does she fink she is Cleopatra?'

Mrs Greenberger gave a loud cackle, which hurt Lal Chandra.

'Phoebe is a lovely girl,' he said, shifting his feet.

'But look,' Mrs Greenberger said, 'look at what she does. Is that nice?'

Phoebe was an artists' model, part-time. Mrs Greenberger had been most interested to hear this.

'What!' she had cried, her eyes gleaming. 'With no clothes on? Nude?'

She would have been disappointed if Lal Chandra had said no.

'Why,' she said, 'it is not any better than being a prostitute. To parade naked before a group of men! It is not nice.'

'But they are artists; it is different,' said Lal.

'Different!' cried Mrs Greenberger. 'How is it different? They are men, aren't they?'

What was the use? he thought. Mrs Greenberger would not understand someone like Phoebe. She was not herself an artistic person.

'She does other things,' he had said.

'Really?' cried Mrs Greenberger, looking up eagerly. She was anxious to hear.

'What other fings does she do, then?'

'Typing,' said Lal. 'Sometimes she does typing.'

'Oh,' said Mrs Greenberger.

'What I tell you,' she said now, 'is for your own good. One day you will come to me and fank me for it. You will say, "fank you, Mrs Greenberger, for warning me in time, before I made a ruin of my life". Ah,' she said, seeing the expression on Lal Chandra's face, 'you may not fink so now, but that is how it will be, as sure as I am standing here now. What I tell you is true. Believe me, I say it from my heart.'

Lal was silent. Mrs Greenberger cast down her pitying eye.
'Ah, poor fing, I know you must be lonely. A boy your age. So strong and healfy. It is a shame you cannot find one of your own kind.'
She watched him turn red.
'But it *is* a shame,' she said.
Mrs Greenberger did not bother to conceal the fact that Lal's solitary state was a real source of anxiety to her. For who knew what might happen? Especially with what she had heard about Indians. Mrs Greenberger herself had a friend whose daughter had run off to England or some dreadful place with an Indian and never been heard of again. What had happened to her? No-one would ever know.
And now she herself had one under her own roof. What would happen if he got some girl into trouble? Imagine if the father came round, to her own house! Fank goodness at least that Dora was so young.
But looking at Lal Chandra standing there in his old brown jacket, his fingers playing with the fringes of his long, long scarf, Mrs Greenberger felt her fears subside.
It hardly seemed likely. She remembered her concern for him.
'Yes,' she repeated, 'it is for your own good that I tell you all this, as if —' she hesitated a moment, as if making a decision, and then gave a big smile—'as if you were my own son, even.'
'Yes,' said Lal Chandra, miserably, 'thank you, Mrs Greenberger.'
When he had gone out Mrs Greenberger stood beside the curtain for a few minutes.
'No good will come of it,' she thought, watching the brown jacket disappear down the street. 'No good at all.'

Phoebe liked Indians. They were exotic. She had never had one before— except for that Pakistani taxi driver—and he didn't count. It was all part of Experience— that was what she always thought, about everything. 'You've got to be in it to win it,' as Ma always said. And Phoebe had always been rather partial to oriental things, even as a kiddie. One of the things she remembered best from her childhood was her father reading her that Arabian Nights storybook at bed-time, the one with the pictures of the lady with the veil over her mouth and the spangled pyjama things. There was another one, too, about the little boy who was brought up by wolves in India.
She remembered a picture of wolves standing in a circle, and another of a lot of older Indians with turbans and long beards, in a cave or somewhere.
'Pale hands I love, beside the Shalimar,' sang Phoebe, looking out the smoky window at a thin sliver of moon.
What was the Shalimar? she wondered. A temple? A river? She would have to ask Lal.
At the moment she was doing her eyes up like Sophia Loren's. Actually Sophia Loren's eyes were not that big, Phoebe had discovered, it was all in the way in which they were made up. She propped the magazine up against a mirror—first a black line, then another, thinner, black line, to make a kind of triangle at the side of the eye which you filled in with white shadow. Then you outlined the whole thing with grey.
The final effect exceeded even Phoebe's hopes.

Lal Chandra looked into those dark-ringed caverns and was amazed. What beautiful eyes Phoebe had!
'Lal,' cried Phoebe, laughing. 'Guess what!'
Lal Chandra looked rather frightened. What could she mean?
'I couldn't guess,' he said sadly, fidgeting with the fringe of his scarf.
Phoebe thought Lal's scarf was a bit of a laugh. It was so long. If you pulled it at one end, would he spin round and round, like a top? That was what it looked like.
'I've made you something special for tea—an Indian meal.'
'Oh,' said Lal, 'you should not have troubled.' But he was very happy.
All the way to the house he had been wondering if Phoebe really liked him. He had picked little pointed leaves from the tops of the hedges and thrown them into the air just ahead of him. If they fell to the ground before he reached the spot, then Phoege did not like him; she was only being kind.
For why should she like him? thought Lal Chandra, stopping outside the laundromat

and staring sadly at his reflection in the window. He was no beauty, he knew, but tonight he seemed to be looking worse than usual. His clothes were shabby, and once again he had forgotten to clean his shoes, though he had meant to do it specially. Worst of all, he was not tall. He was not in the least bit tall, he was not even what you could call medium height. He was short.

'It is such a shame,' Mrs Greenberger used to say sometimes.

And once she said, 'I fort Indians were tall people.'

'Some of them are not,' Lal Chandra had replied. 'Some of them are not.'

He walked on past the laundromat, feeling very dashed. The asphalt pavement had occasional large cracks across it. If there are ten cracks before I reach the house, he said to himself, she must like me. There were only seven. By the time he did reach Phoebe's place, he was very despondent.

But she had made the meal specially for him. He sat down at the table and Phoebe placed a great bowl in the centre of the cloth and swept the lid off with a flourish. It was red rice, with little dark lumps of something in it. She ladled large helpings onto the plates.

'What is it?' Lal Chandra asked faintly. He had never seen its like before.

Phoebe flushed. 'It's rice goolay.'

'Oh.'

'I copied the recipe out of a travel magazine. It's made of beans and meat and rice.'

Lal Chandra raised a forkful to his mouth. 'It's very nice,' he said, swallowing.

'I put two cans of beans in it, for flavour,' Phoebe explained.

'Oh,' said Lal Chandra. And putting down his fork for a moment, he smiled. It pleased him to be there, to sit at the table with Phoebe, to eat with her in her home. He looked at the white salt and pepper shakers with the green clover leaves painted on them, at the white net curtains tied back from the window with loops of yellow ribbon, and the red clock ticking away on the sideboard, and he felt happy.

Across the table, Phoebe surveyed him stealthily from beneath her Sophia Loren lashes. He was a nice boy, Phoebe thought, but quiet. He hardly said a word. You couldn't tell where you were with him. He was awfully slow. She had heard—a friend of hers had had an Experience with an Asian boy—though he had been Chinese—and then there had been that Pakistani. But this one was certainly no sheik. Perhaps he would liven up a bit if they went out.

'Let's go and have coffee somewhere,' she said.

'Oh yes,' said Lal, smiling. Did she want to get rid of him? he thought. He rose awkwardly from his seat and began to wind himself into his scarf.

There was no-one in the coffee shop but the proprietor, a decayed looking man in a dirty red bow-tie, who was hunched down behind the counter. They sat down at the back beneath a life-size wall painting of a victorious toreador about to spear his bull. Lal looked mournfully at the toreador in his gold clothes.

'I always wanted to do something like that,' he said, 'but I am too small. They would not have me in the army so my parents sent me away to University.'

'Oh well,' said Phoebe, 'never mind. You mightn't have liked it anyway. All that fighting—and rushing around,' she added vaguely.

'But I feel that I should have something more physical. I am a very physical person.'

'Oh?' said Phoebe.

'I do not like to study.'

'Oh, study—' murmured Phoebe. 'But look at all the things you can do when you get out.'

'What?' asked Lal. 'What can I do?'

'You could be a doctor.'

'But I am not studying medicine.'

'Oh. What are you studying?'

'History.'

'History. Well—you can be a history teacher.'

'Yes, I can be a history teacher,' said Lal dismally. He feared he was not understood.

Phoebe decided that it was time to hurry things up a bit. Lal Chandra suddenly felt her

foot against his leg. Embarrassed, he flinched away.
'I am sorry,' he said.
Phoebe sighed.
I am boring her, thought Lal. I should not have said so much about myself.
He tried to think of something to ask her, about herself, which would not offend her.
How could he ask her about her job, when she worked as an artists' model?
It was too personal.
The proprietor crept up, crashed their coffee down in front of them, and slid back behind his counter.
There was a silence.
'What's the Shalimar?' asked Phoebe.
'The what?'
'The Shalimar?'
'I don't know.'
'But it's in an Indian song—you know—Pale Hands I Love Beside the Shalimar.'
'That's not an Indian song,' said Lal. He grew hot with embarrassment.
'Oh, I thought it was.' What was with him? wondered Phoebe. She picked up her spoon and began to eat the cream from the top of her coffee. Lal Chandra watched her in silence. He hoped he had not offended her. He could not think of anything to say.
He knew she would never like him now.
A little girl came in from the street and went over to the proprietor. She was small and dark, with a red dress and long untidy hair. Lal saw her and laughed.
He touched Phoebe lightly on the hand. She looked up hopefully.
'That girl looks like my little sister,' he said.
His little sister! Well, thought Phoebe, well—perhaps she did. She imagined a little kid with black pigtails and one of those stamps on her forehead. She watched Lal smiling.
He must be the family type.
'What is your sister like?' she asked.
'Oh beautiful, beautiful,' said Lal Chandra. He began to talk away, and Phoebe picked up his hand from the table and held it tight.

Phoebe brought the red clock in from the kitchen and put it on the little table beside the bed.
'What is that for?' asked Lal. He felt a little dazed.
Phoebe looked at him. 'It's the alarm—I have to set it for the morning, to get to the art school on time.'
'It's a shame for you,' he said, 'to have to get up early in the mornings. If I had some money I would give it to you, so you wouldn't have to work. Perhaps, if I left college, I could get a job.'
'It doesn't matter,' said Phoebe. 'I don't mind.' She held her arms out. Very gently, he drew her down beside him.
What a lovely girl Phoebe was, thought Lal. He could hardly believe she liked him.
He kissed her eyes. Very seriously, he said, 'You have eyes like stars.' Phoebe was embarrassed, but pleased. He said things like that. It was a bit of a laugh, but nice.
She ran her hand down along his side. Without any clothes, he looked like the picture of the jungle boy who was brought up by the wolves.

Mrs Greenberger, coming down at two o'clock to get a glass of water, observed that Lal was not in. She looked in his room, to make sure.
'Well,' said Mrs Greenberger to herself. She could have told. There was one good fing though, she thought. It probably would not last long. Mrs Greenberger was very wise in the ways of the world.

Lal Chandra woke up later that night. He wondered, for a moment, what he had done. He stroked the hair back from Phoebe's face. I have seduced this poor girl, he thought, horrified. I am a man with no morals. But I will make it up to her. He lay there for a while, thinking how he would do this. Then he fell asleep again.
Phoebe could not sleep. She looked at the very young face beside her, and the hand clenched on the pillow. She turned her face against the cool shoulder, which was round and smooth like a girl's, and wondered what would happen.

Poet in a Glass Case

Through the antennaed night we heard her message
Of a country and for a country rocking the cocoon of sleep,
Even the milling schoolboys listened and then
Having chased her across a continent
We caught the poet and pinned her down
Under a hundredfold magnification of curious eyes,
Vulnerable in her honesty, wafer membranes
Through which the visible heart moved.
Each of us, not meaning to harm her of course
Must touch the tented wings clumsily
And look with wonder at the dust of gold
Rubbed off on our fingers, quite forgetting
That it might have been her vital substance
And the mark never be erased nor the hollow filled.

Joan Williams

Way to the West

11 pm & sunset still going on
but that cd be the latitude
whats wrongs the color
everywhere horseshit ochre & roiling
like paper that twists/browns
before firing up on hot ashes
theres somebodys hell ahead
meantime our lips prick
& the trees are dead

but its another 20 miles before the sign
SUDBURY
& christ there on the skull of a hill
3 manhattan-high stacks a phallic calvary
ejaculating some essence of rotted semen
straight up like mass sabotage at cape kennedy
the damned are everywhere the young
shrieking (looking much like anyone)
drag race with radios up
from one smouldering stoplight to another—
under neon the older faces
assembled from half europe
screwcheeked/pitted all the same way
have something dignified about their devilship
that stares us down till they come human
& houck brown on the cement

WELCOME TO 73% OF THE FREE
WORLD'S NICKEL IS CREATED HERE
& the free world invented a special cough
not even 100 taverns can dampen
or all the jukes drown in the doorways
of pandemonium milton thou shouldst
be living etc

DEAD END wheres west? sunset folded
our headlights finger dumped cans
wriggle through streets like crevasses
blasted in bedrock pink & folded
like glazed guts on a butchers marble

out of the starless dark falls the roar
of golgotha how long before one stops
noticing? & the sting in the eyes?

by a raped old car an indian site
praying? puking
YOU ARE LEAVING SUDBURY/ CENTRE OF
20 more miles of battlefield)
FREE ENTERPRISE
at last a moon smoulders out &
we are into the dumb firs again
TURN OUT 300 YDS
HISTORIC SITE
FRENCH RIVER

what? canoe route the Hurons found
& showed the whites—

the way to the west silks buffalo
vietnam the moon
shines over the middle of nowhere—
dumb as the trees

we stop for a leak silence
too late for other cars
the trees listen back
nothing the owls dead too?

suddenly some kind of low growl
coming up! we head back for the car—
only a night jet

but after it passes we realize
we'd been hearing the river all along

Earle Birney


STOP

Bangkok Boy

On the hot
cobbles hoppity
he makes a jig up
this moppet
come alive from chocolate
sudden with all
small boys'
joy
dancing under the sun
    that dances over the toy king's claw roofed palace
    and beats on the roof above the tallest Hong Kong girlies
    imported to strip to the beat of copulation
    and shimmers over the broken-china towers
    sit forever on the other boys' ashes
In his own time
naked
laughing he
on the scene's edge
like a small monkey-
man
in the endless Ramayana
fresco
skips
    that frozen fresco of old wars
    under still another glittering Wat
    where tourists worship in a regalia
    of cameras pacing out their grave
    measures along the enormous stone-still god
    or splaying to immortalize the splayed
    gyrations of temple dancers
Beat out brown
smallfry
beat out your own
wild
jive
under this strayed towering
tourist and his bright
strange cold—wheel—
coin in your small paws
    before in his own motions he vanishes
    in the fearful tempo of a taxi
    to that spireless palace where god-tall
    in their chalked goblin-faces all tourists
    return to plod in pairs like water-buffalo
    by a bare hotel pool to their funeral music
Pranced this
dazzled instant
of your father's big
Buddha smile
and all the high
world bang in tune
the bright
sun caught
cool

before in the high world's clumpings
you are caught slid lethewards
on choleric canals to where the poles of klongs
and rows of paddy fields are shaped
to bend small leaping backs
and the flat bellies of impets
are rounded with beriberi
Scamper little Thai
hot on these hot stones
scat leap
this is forever O for
all gods' sakes beat
out that first
last cry
of joy under
the sun

Earle Birney

The Widow

The widow who lives in a house at the end of the street, has a lover
And an illegitimate child. She is fenced about by the long, sharp
tongues of people.
Every day a new picket is added to the fence.
Neighbours have a way of extending it. Women, over tea-cups. Men, over
garden-walls.

That the widow has found an exit in the fence, and walks through it
With the child, indicates a weakness in its structure. Some faltering
of will, by someone . . . somewhere,
Has made a gap between pickets.
The widow who never glances at people, keeps them suspiciously glancing
at one another.

Joan Mas

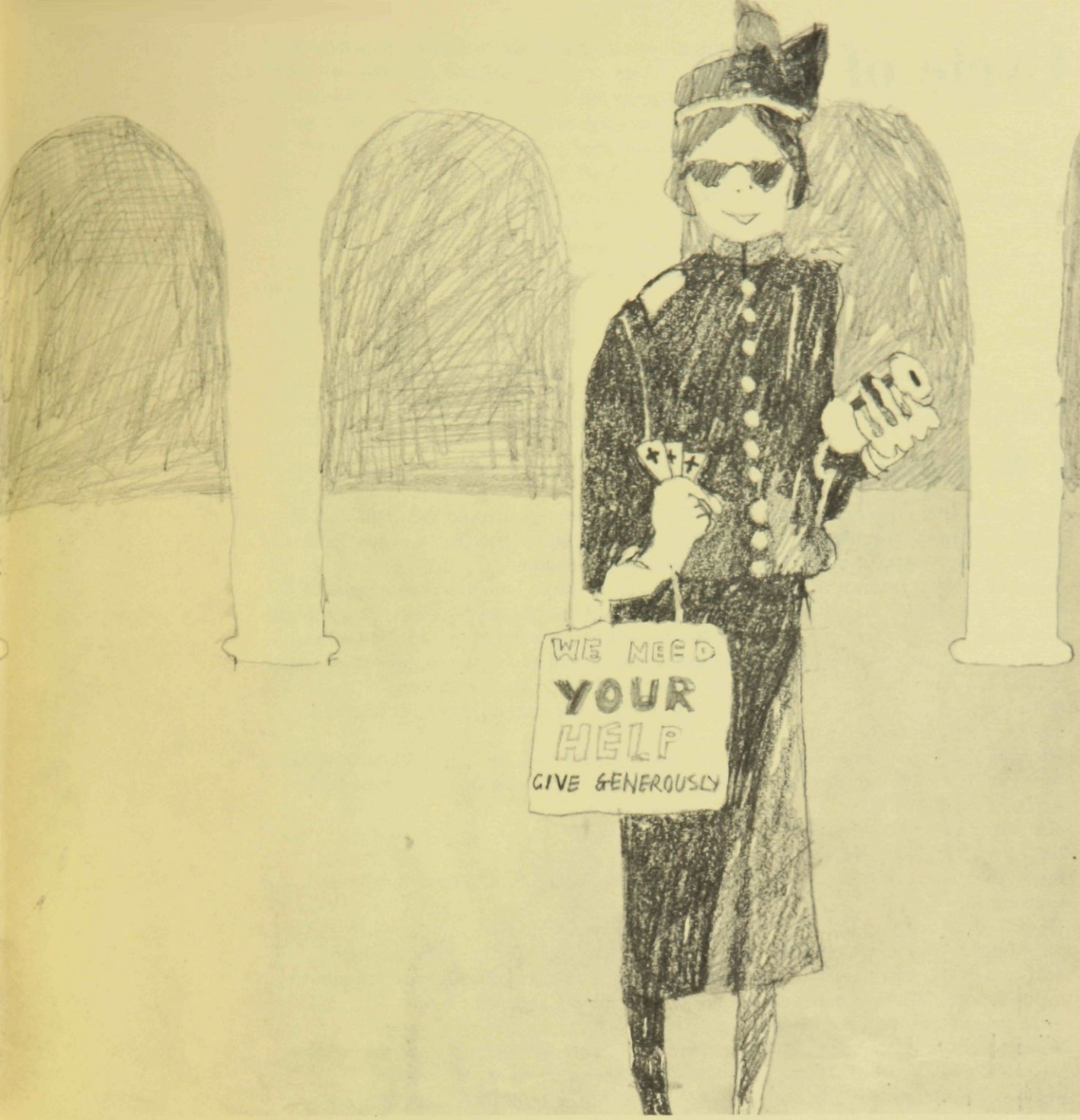
Merry Weed

There on the clipped green cube the grass is singed
Tendons chopped by the weekend churn
Down to feeble springs, the prim suburban lot.
The plastic gallon of ridiculous froth
Has somehow kept the buds in check.
And if by some perversity it shifts its sap
And breaks one green eye through the polished slab,
Confronts the scoured and holy graveyards of the streets
With its bold stalk, its subterranean blood
The scrutiny of desperate eyes
Locked on the lawn from windows over lunch
Will hold its impish thrust, and mark its stand,
And tactics wrangle in the sudden hush
That drops on the spaghetti.

The murderous measure of milky pink
Is tiptoed gravely in its little can
Before the coffee comes, in case a breeze
Might scrape the sinner into camouflage.
Heavy with purpose, the besieged goes forth
And not a thunderbolt would shake her righteousness.
The weed winks from its concrete crack
An open target in the shaven zone.
Her delicate knuckles lift the gaudy tin
Poised in its perfect polish in the obedient noon—
One strategic dollop cracks down like a doom
And its pink cancer blights the merry weed.
The stain crawls up the bunker walls
A rusty blister in the sun.

Battle joined, objective crushed
The hunter turns, her cheeks are flushed—
She pulls deep on her cigarette
A brand that isn't filtered yet.

Peter Loftus



Badge Day

Statuesque under the Town Hall arches, I offer badges.
I know every bone and nerve discomforted in anxious flesh.
People pass—singly.
We are awkwardly aware of each other.
They butt their heads against the wind to bury their eyes,
or being confident, stride past with rigid intent.
Some are direct and buy themselves free from embarrassment.
Others hesitate, fumble and fade.
The clock hoards time while I shuffle uneasily in myself.

Anne Holman

Cycle of Rain

I. W. Payne

He was the first libertyman ashore. The boat hit the jetty gently and then bounced off again, only to be held firm by the restraining bow and stern lines that the crew held tightly as they leaped on to the concrete. He was back again.

When he arrived in town the rain had started and he stood looking at the avenue of lamp standards. The fine drizzle gave length and depth to the beams, making them look like bright curtains. He waited for a moment, wondering where to go. He had three choices, all equally pleasant. Drink all night alone or call at the cafe on the promenade and have a free meal and then take home the waitress and sleep with her or he could look for Vee and perhaps sleep with her. He crossed the street and went into the first pub for a few primers.

He hadn't expected to find her so quickly. But there she was, as if she had been waiting for him. He closed the door behind him and walked over to the marble-topped table.

Are you alone?' he asked.

She smiled up at him—recognising him.

'It's been a long time,' he said.

She didn't answer, but smiled again. He noticed she looked behind him.

Looking for Mike.

He picked up her glass and said, 'You'll have another?'

She nodded so he shouldered his way through the crowd at the bar. The familiar beer-soaked top brought back memories. Of the two of them, raincoat covered elbows in the wetness, drinking beer and talking. Always talking and planning.

Mike doesn't care now, he thought.

When he got back to the table she was putting on more lipstick and when she saw him she put it away quickly. He sat down and offered her a cigarette. She took it and held it in both hands while he felt for matches. The brief flame highlighted the sharp lines around her mouth and the smoke made her turn her head to one side.

The five years had not changed her at all. Still the same hard yet attractive face that wore a sad cheated look when she was thinking. And her figure was still good. Not artificially, but naturally so. The compensating firm curves that stay with some women throughout their lives.

'Just to save you any embarrassment, my name is Lew,' he said.

'I remembered.'

He looked at her black hair and said, 'You're not back with your husband?'

'It isn't even worth trying.'

'What about a divorce?'

'I'm Catholic.'

She began to draw circles in the spilled beer. Then she lifted her head and he knew she was going to be cheerful.

'How is Mike?' she said too brightly.

'I haven't seen him since that diving course we did together.'
'That was when he stopped writing to me.'
He raised his eyebrows to express the surprise he didn't feel. 'He's in the Far East now,' he said. 'Made up to Petty Officer last year.'
He wondered what he was doing here when he could have gone straight to the cafe and Amy. Or on a savage run of the Portland pubs.
They sat there at the same table and talked of many things. They were still talking when the pub began to empty and had just about covered the past five years when the man came and took away all the empty glasses.
She looked up at the clock behind him and said, 'Are you going to see Amy now?'
'Plenty of time,' he replied.
Kicking back the chair he stood up and took her by the elbow.
'Let's have supper,' he said.
He threw his coat over them both and they ran for the smokefilled chip shop.
They stood in the shelter of a shop doorway and ate the greasy fingers. He could smell the dampness evaporating from her body heat. Her hair hung wetly. He was waiting for her to ask him home.
A submarine wet bus came along and she stepped out on to the pavement to meet it.
'Well, good-night, Lew.'
'I'll come with you.'
She looked down at him from the platform and said, 'You'd better go on to the cafe.'
He followed her into the bus and they sat down side by side, looking through the steamy windows in silence.
When the bus stopped in the Victorian street he helped her down. A dim light shone behind the frosted glass of the front door. It was a big terraced house and she had three rooms at the top of the building. As they went up the linoleum stairs he kept a little behind her. I'm a leg man, he thought.
She made some cocoa and he sat drinking in the small kitchen while she spoke softly to her child in the next room. When she came back she had taken off her coat and shoes and he noticed that her feet were small and unusually well formed. As she came to the table to take his cup away he tried to pull her down on to his knee, but she stiffened and pulled away.
'What's the matter Vee?'
She walked over to the doorway and said, 'You think I'm easy.'
'I always wanted you,' he said. 'But Mike got you first.'
Now she was smiling a little, so he crossed the room and put his hands on her shoulders. She turned her head away, so he kissed her gently on the neck.
'It's true Vee,' he said.
As he held her she reached behind and switched off the light. The rain hammered loudly on the hard slate roof above them.
When it was over, he felt the usual chemical change take effect with customary speed and efficiency. The detached, sexless feeling of the male after copulation. Her head lay back on her long hair, eyes closed, nostrils dilated. Now he no longer gazed, but observed. She folded her arms above her head and he could see the start of new hair in her armpits. Now she had no power, no attraction.
He smoked a cigarette in the quietness and listened to the rain running back into the sea. He remembered that day in the diving boat and could visualise it clearly still. Waiting for Mike and then looking over the gunwale and seeing his body come floating up from thirty feet. Now he's dead and I'm alive, he thought. Now he's dead and so are all his ambitions, all the girls he was going to meet will marry other men. He'll never be an actor or a painter or a writer, neither will he be an alcoholic or diseased or lonely and old. He'll be as he was before the rising pressure ruptured his lungs. I still have one of his books, he thought.
He put out the cigarette and closed his eyes. He could hear Vee sleeping beside him. In the morning he would take the first boat back to the ship. Down the steel ladder to the mess and into the artificial light and tinned herrings for breakfast and letter writing and cards and what it will be like next leave with all the money we are going to save on this cruise.

A Fashion in Porcelain

Rosslyn Smith

Even in my short life-span I have lived long enough to see the way things go in and out of fashion, and the way the fashions separate us from one another.
This idle thought on its afternoon thistledown comes about because grandmother was buried, beneath floral wreaths, at eleven o'clock this morning, her grave remaining, as we walked away, like a petunia bed in the town gardens. Three days ago grandmother and my mother spent some hours in arguing, scorpion-tailed, and then in the night grandmother had a heart attack, and my mother was a bit put out about her dying with all that ill-will between them and no chance of patching it up again. Still, said my mother, that was a chance you took with old people, and how was she to know.
My mother is mooning over a cup of tea at the moment, sipping delicately at its amber nectar, consoling herself, and I know that one of the first things she will do, now that it's all over, will be to throw grandmother's chamberpot on the rubbish heap, because that was the whole cause of their argument.

*

The chamberpot was one of the treasures grandmother brought with her when she was widowed, and came to live with us, despite mother's protests. After all, lavatories in this age were not bucket affairs hidden in arbours at the far end of the back-garden. It was not as if one had to make torchlit journeys down the garden path on wet, muddy nights. One had only to go as far as the back-porch adjoining the kitchen, and surely that was no inconvenience. But my grandmother was unmoved. It was a beautiful chamberpot, a family heirloom almost, made of the finest glossy white porcelain, richly embossed with a pattern of pink roses and limegreen leaves. And the handle curved with all the pomp of the daintiest teacup, while the bowl bellied out generously in the shape of a Byzantine dome, and was fanned slightly at the rim with a green frill to match the leaves. You had only to knock it accidentally with the toe of your shoe while making the bed and it tinkled like a bell. Grandmother knew you could not buy chamberpots of such quality these days—they were all made of aluminium or murky plastic, and scarcely big enough for a ten year old.
My mother is the sort of woman who would clean the house up before the charwoman came, if she had a charwoman, and spends a great deal of time imagining what people might be saying about the way she manages her household, what a smart efficient woman she is. Half the nights of the week when I sit down to do my homework at the kitchen table, she is off to the Ladies Guild at church, the cake-decorating class, the Floral Art club or C.W.A. And when she comes home she flutters about a little, touching things with her fingertips, smelling of Max Factor perfume, and waving the lace handkerchief she won as first prize in the "prettiest birthday card" competition—I suppose clubs have their fashions too.
Being the model-housekeeper type of woman then, grandmother's chamberpot severely tried her patience. Why did the old fool have to lovingly squat on that every night, then leave it to get stale beneath the bed over night? A simple enough matter to walk as far as the back-porch! But no! The hideous images my mother concocted of bacilli, cocci and spirulli writhing wickedly in the atmosphere made no impression on grandmother—I believe she thought it was just something I learned at school. She listened with mild attention, then went affably to sit in the shade of apple trees until mealtime. She never interfered with my mother at all.
Each morning after she had eaten breakfast of marmalade on toast she took the chamberpot and emptied its swimming liquid under the orange tree—for the good of its roots, washed it out and returned it under the bed. Nothing to fuss over. Let the roses of the chamberpot climb the trellises of her past youth, beneath the apple trees, and

grow dreamier day by day, while the heart's hammer strokes fell out of rhythm and the blood thickened.
Grandmother had become very vague, what my mother called "wandering". Three days ago she carried her chamberpot as far as the backdoor-step, where she stood it down to attend something else and forgot about it.
There it rested, gleaming in the morning sunshine that streamed through the open backdoor, its cupped golden pool motionless with the nude white porcelain. Mother was somewhere up in the front of the house, rattling things in drawers, when the old black woman from the weatherboard house on the corner knocked at the backdoor, and grandmother was out of sight in the garden, letting coin petals of light play upon her through the leaves of the apple trees.
The old black woman lived with her sons in the small house, in the middle of paddocks planted alternately with onions, potatoes and oats. This year it was oats, so the blackwoman waddled through the oats and down the road whenever she wanted to ring up or ask for a ride into town. Mother didn't complain because the poor old devil was clean enough and did not deserve two such lazy, drunken sons as she had, mother said.
She stood at our doorstep, waiting, her fat brown body floundering, like a walrus flopped on a pinnacle of rock, and stared at the chamberpot by her feet. Waiting, until mother came. Then it was terrible. Mother, her hair in curlers and net, burst through the kitchen door and stopped short on the other side of the chamberpot. Her lips worked silently a moment and you could see she was looking for grandmother.
But the black woman said, 'Um, good morning, Mrs Frogley. I wanted to know if you could give me a ride into town this afternoon—if you happen to be going.' Which was plain from the curlers. She fingered her dress and eyed mother humbly over the wasteland of the chamberpot. Mother stood there trembling, looking like some sort of skinny rag doll being twisted in the merciless hands of a child. I thought she was going to make excuses for grandmother, but perhaps you don't make that kind of apology to black women begging favours, black women who probably know nothing of traditions in chamberpots anyway. Instead, mother curled back her rouged lips and said icily, 'I'm sorry, Mrs Hazelgrove, but I'm picking up some ladies on the way to C.W.A. meeting. It would be too much of a squash in the car,' and Mrs Hazelgrove's dark eyes cast embarrassment to the ground. She nodded her head in understanding at my omnipotent mother, and before turning to go, said with curious politeness of the chamberpot, 'It's a very nice one, Mrs Frogley. The nicest I've ever seen. Very nice.' Waddling off through the geranium bushes, our dog sniffing at her heels.
Leaving mother towering stonily above the chamberpot as she yelled for me to go and find grandmother at once. The silly, half-witted old fool! Blast and damn her! Leaving her muck lying around for everyone to see! Disgracing her household like that! Making a laughing-stock of her. What did she think! And grandmother, when she came, sat stoically by the fire, reciting, You ought to be ashamed of yourself. My daughter, taking her temper out on a poor old black gin who'll have to trudge four miles into town now to do her shopping, and all the way back again with a heavy basket.

*

I can hear mother getting up from the table, and carrying her cup and saucer to the sink. She is not grieved over grandmother any more than I am, ties of blood being no essence for love. But she is offended. As though their quarrel left the execution of duty imperfect. She is going outside now, surely carrying the porcelain chamberpot to the rubbish heap, flinging it down on tins and cheap glass bottles to shatter its roses and green leaves at last. And there on the table where she drank her cup of tea, is a sympathy card to Mrs Frogley, thinking of her deeply in this time of loss and sorrow, from Mrs Hazelgrove and sons. The handwriting is ornate, like the flowers on the chamberpot, the careful virgin script of someone who seldom needs to use it. She must have plodded four miles to buy the card, and mother has carelessly gone and slopped tea on it, in her hurry to smash the chamberpot.
All this seems to be about the full consequence of grandmother's death—mother's household is completely modern now.

The HOLIDAY

LLOYD DAVIES

The Petter's engine beat out urgently in the early morning stillness. Beat out as though drumming up the dawn just pinkly edging the timbered ridge across the valley.

Colin paused for a moment to watch through the feed-room door as the fields began to show through the woolly remnants of the night, the little grey humps of sheep, the streak of residual mist along the creek bed and the silver sheen of the dam waiting behind the red mound of its wall.

He loved the richness of the grass, the gold of the dried-out winter feed, the green of the summer kikuyu growing through. He loved it because it was home and he didn't really want ever to leave it.

'Hey! Boy! Where's that feed? Smarten up lad.'

His father's voice penetrated the noise of the motor. He picked up the bucket with a start and hurried into the cowshed.

'Think you're up amongst the mulga already do you?' his father grinned at him as Colin shook the feed in under the snorting noses.

He couldn't think of an answer, so he just said 'Aw no', awkwardly, and trailed off into one of those broken-voiced chuckles which made him sound dopey and he hated himself for it.

Not that there was anything to laugh at. Not with all the business of getting packed and worrying about catching the bus at Manjimup and ordering your food when they stopped for lunch. And what if people spoke to you on the bus? What would you say to them? What if your voice cracked and they laughed at you? What if Cousin Irwin wasn't waiting at the bus terminal? How would you get to Aunt Alice's? And would Irwin be any better than he was years ago when he was a big bossy boy in his Gillhall College uniform with every second word 'At school we . . . .'.

Of course, he must be, else he wouldn't have asked you up there. Like Mum said, 'Jolly decent of Irwin to invite you. Not many young men would give a second thought for a boy your age.'

But then there would be Aunt Alice for tonight. Aunt Alice with her pale blue eyes and her bunched up lips. And then after that the people at the Station.

All very well for Mum to say 'Don't worry about missing Christmas at home. You'll be one of the family up there with Aunt Dora and Uncle Eric'.

Not if Aunt Dora was anything like Aunt Alice.

He was worried all through the milking; as he turned out the cows and penned the calves; as he helped his father lift the cream cans on to the loading stand.

He almost forgot it at breakfast, hoeing into the wheatmeal porridge, thick with cream; the crisp bacon and new laid eggs, especially with Dad being pointedly jovial for his last morning at home. But then his mother, tense with her getting-him-off efforts, chipped him.

'Don't stretch across the table like that Colin. I don't know what they'll say if you do that while you're away.'

'Oh, Aunt Dora's brought up a boy of her own' his father disrupted with paternal tolerance.

'Yes, but Irwin was educated at boarding school where they teach them proper table manners. I'm only sorry we couldn't afford it for Colin. Anyway, it's not Aunt Dora I'm so worried about. It's Aunt Alice.'

His father snorted.

'Alice would find an excuse for a lecture however he behaved. Typical fussy old maid.'

'That's not altogether fair dear. It's just that she likes things done right. People who live by themselves get that way. Anyway, I don't think it's very nice talking like that, especially in front—well, I mean, you wouldn't like it if it was any of your people.'

Colin watched his father shape up to answer back, then suddenly check and look down intensely at some toast he was buttering.

'Yes,—well,—perhaps not. I wasn't meaning to have a shot.' He smiled his tired farmer's smile, crinkling the lines and wrinkles beneath the suntan at the mouth and crows-footed eyes, and even way up above the hat-line on his forehead where the skin was pink and somehow older—feeble almost—where it joined the hair, thin and greying like autumn stubble.

Smiled and re-assured 'Not having a shot pet. It's just that I'll bet Col won't let the old dairying industry section of the family down'.

Colin nodded, chewing hard, thankful his mouthful of toast and marmalade made it unnecessary to talk, else he'd have had to say something expected of you like 'Sure Dad', or 'You bet Mum', or something dopey like some smart little bastard on television.

'Well I hope so,' his mother admonished with an inference of doubt. 'And if he doesn't hurry up and finish his breakfast he'll be starting on the wrong foot with Mr Hall.'

But Colin was dressed in his High School summer shorts and shirt and standing at the loading stand with his suitcases long before Mr Hall's big diesel truck lumbered up the hill and pulled up with a clangour of jolting cream churns.

Colin was glad his mother had kissed him goodbye at the house and just came out to wave from the verandah. This enabled his father to establish a matey male relationship with big, noisy, chatty Mr Hall in a brief yarn before they left.

'Here's your swamper, Don. He's had enough breakfast for two grown men, so you should be right for a bit of muscle on those cans this morning.'

'Good lad. Don't want to knock him up before he starts his holiday, though, do we?'

'He's not having that sort of a holiday. He's going to the wife's cousin's place up the Murchison.'

'You mean those squatter prick relations of yours? Yeah, they'll keep him busy enough.'

Colin suppressed a grin for Mr Hall's bawdy disrespect and the wink that went with it because of the slight pucker of disapproval around his father's mouth. He busied himself trying to find a place for his suitcase until Mr Hall said, 'Here, give me that, I'll stow it on the load'.

His father took advantage of Hall's absence to murmur, 'Well, so long, son. Be on your best behaviour, won't you? Your mother's people do stick it on a bit . . . you know . . . and we don't want them to think we're barbarians altogether. And don't spend all your money at once . . . hang on to a bit for emergencies like'.

It was a relief when the big karri at the bend of the road hid out their waving hands and he could decently look to the front and watch the road ahead, watch it wind down into the thickness of the river tea-trees and over the clumping bridge with the tree-mirrored tannin-brown river flowing under it, up through the tea-trees again, past farmland and belts of timber with the blue glint of the inlet in the distance and under the wooded hills crowned with their skeleton forests of old ring-barked karris.

They drove haltingly at first from gate to gate until the truck was loaded. Colin didn't mind the slowness because there was plenty to do helping with the cans, sometimes with people you knew to talk to like Normie Edwards at his gate with a message from his dad for Mr Hall, and who reckoned Colin was a lucky cow to be getting out of this dump for a while.

But when they left the coastal karri behind and began to bowl along through the miles of swampy flats between the south coast and the karri forest proper with the roar of the engine too loud even for Mr Hall to talk. Colin began to slump small and miserable amidst the noise and the scrubland reeling monotonously past, dull and grey like his worries. Manjimup, the bus, the cafe, Irwin, Auntie Alice, they jolted one another into

a fitful sleep in which the noise of the engine seemed to turn off and on as he dozed, half-woke and dozed again.

He roused suddenly to a great roar of engine, and all around him the karri forest, its great white colonnades of trunks rising up sheer until the limbs spread away, uplifting their green canopy against the hard hot blue of mid-morning which speared through here and there in blazing shafts of sunlight.

His worry was lost in its magnificence, and he stared untiringly as the giant trees swept by.

Mr Hall pulled into a truck bay just over the Shannon bridge.

'Time off for a leak,' he explained heartily.

The sweet-sour smell of damp earth and rotting vegetation was a relief from the diesel fumes. After the engine the rustle of the forest ceiling high above them was almost a silence.

Bashfully Colin tried not to splash too loudly on the crisp carpet of dried leaves and bracken at his feet. He even blushed when Mr Hall broke wind noisily, yet tittered out of politeness at Hall's relieved 'Well, that's better out than in'.

He was happy to get back on the road and forget his worry in the truck's noisy onrush through the forest until the thinning of the trees, fields, farmhouses and the onset of roadside hoardings, reminded him again.

But it wasn't so bad once he got there. Mr Hall took him straight to the bus depot and helped him buy his ticket. He got on the bus early while it was empty, put his case on the rack, and hunched himself against a window over a "Batman" comic. Even when the plump lady prepared to settle beside him with a clipping of bags, a rustle of cotton and a waft of scent and sweat, he just hunched over a bit more and looked up with the briefest and shyest of smiles.

But his comfort didn't last. Just as the driver pressed the starter, Colin realised he should have gone to the Men's. As the bus roared and shook its way northward, a fresh discomfort was added. His crotch began to itch in the sweaty confinement of the seat. He longed to scratch himself, but with the woman beside him was too shy—even under cover of "Batman" on his lap.

He squirmed and wriggled, crossing and uncrossing his legs in an effort to ease himself. Then the woman, whose massive hip wedged him in commanded with nasal nastiness 'Keep still son, will ya?'.

The lunch stop at a road house was a relief until it came to ordering lunch. The menu shook and blurred in his hand and he could feel the impatience of the waitress as she stood beside him. Then he saw the "Steak and Eggs" and ordered with such vehemence that his voice cracked. There was more trouble after, when the girl asked 'What you want for sweets?' Uncomprehending, he got hot around the ears and mumbled 'What kind of sweets?'

'That's what I want to know,' the girl demanded. 'Well, look at the meenew,' she prompted, pushing it in front of him. Colin searched it despairingly for any reference to "sweets".

'She means puddin',' the man next to him assisted.

Colin's blush intensified as he ordered fruit salad and icecream. While he suffered his neighbour's chuckles he wondered in silent self-justification why the menu called it "dessert".

When he got back on board the fat woman was making an obvious move to another seat, hissing and grunting at her reluctant luggage, so that there would be no doubting his guilt in the matter. He clearly caught her loud whisper to the other occupant of her new seat: '. . . . can't keep still for a moment.'

Irwin was waiting at the bus stop, reassuringly adult in his sport shirt, tight-fitting trousers and canvassy shoes. With his wide-brimmed felt over his tanned lean face he looked like an advertisement for "Country Life" cigarettes.

'Good day young Colin,' his hand shot out and squashed Colin's inside it. A friendly smile rippled up into his cheeks, his teeth were very white and straight.

As he chatted on their way out to the car-park, Colin was glad there was no trace of his old big boy bossiness. Like before, he did all the talking, but that didn't matter because you weren't expected to say anything except "yes" or "for sure" now and then.

Even going along in the car he talked, in the white Jaguar that wheeled and dodged through the city traffic like a show pony.

He was showing off a bit, of course. You could tell it by the way he went flat out everywhere, only pulling up or dodging at the last minute; you could tell it by the way he swore at the other drivers. ('That's right you bastard, give way to your bloody right. I might have a country number plate, but you can't bluff me!') You could tell it by the little sideways glances to see if he was impressing you.

He was friendly enough. Yet somehow discomforting in his over-palliness; his deliberate use of slang like "beaut" and "super" and "with it" and saying "man" after every couple of sentences. Colin got the feeling that he didn't usually talk like this, but was deliberately trying to be boyish.

There was a youth leader who used to be like this back home, Colin remembered.

It made conversation difficult. You couldn't really talk to him as though he was another kid, because he wasn't. And you couldn't treat him like a grown man because he didn't want you to. So you both talked a sort of made up talk louder and faster than normal as though constantly excited.

They got out of the city and on to the highway that led to the coastal suburbs. Colin settled down to be smugly superior as the Jaguar weaved through the inferior flow of Holdens and Falcons and Volksies.

At the crest of a long hill there was a sudden wide vista of sea and Irwin swung off the highway, dropping down into a red-brick valley of seaside houses.

Aunt Alice had a post-war brick cottage with terra cotta tiles and a highly polished red granolithic verandah. Its windows were just made for white plastic venetians.

It was set in a square of buffalo grass surrounding a spiny rosebed in heavy bloom and flanked by pencil pines.

Irwin conducted him down a green cement path to a small sleep-out at the rear of the house.

'This is where you camp. I told Aunt Alice you could bunk in with me, but you know what old maids are like . . . .' He mimicked primly "It's nicer to have a separate room, don't you think?" 'Dump your junk here and I'll show you the bathroom and the dunny. It'll send you, man, that dunny, it's got an embroidered cover for the seat. After that, how's about a swim? We'll just about have time before the old girl comes home from work.'

Colin was still fumbling in his suitcase for his trunks when Irwin pushed back into the sleep-out without knocking and sat on the bed in bulging skin-tight racing bathers, chatting whilst Colin changed self-consciously.

There was a small Hillman in the garage when they returned, towel-draped and salty, from the sea. Irwin grasped Colin's shoulder momentarily, confiding. 'The old girl's back. Better get changed in the bathroom, she doesn't like you sloshing through the house. I'll go and tell her we're here.' He then bounded into the house calling 'Aunt Alice! You there?'

Halfway through his shower, Colin was interrupted by Irwin pounding on the bathroom door. 'Come on, open up man,' then, guffawing into his dripping face as the door closed, 'afraid the old girl will burst in on you, eh? Not that you've got much to show her.'

The last remark was accompanied by such a long a deliberate stare that Colin retreated under the shower.

Irwin followed him, shedding his bathers as he came, urging his way in by force of hip so that Colin was forced to squirm his way out again and escape into his bath towel.

'Hang on till I finish,' Irwin entreated from the shower as Colin dressed hurriedly, half-dry. 'I'll introduce you to the old girl.'

'It's all right I *have* met her. A couple of times when I was a kid,' Colin assured him and slipped out through the door.

'Ah, there you are.'

He met her in the passage, before he could get to the sleepout to comb his hair.

He was awkwardly conscious of the dripping, untidy sprawl of it as she greeted and inspected.

'You've certainly grown since I saw you last. You were only a very little boy then.' She spoke with a deliberate pursing of the lips as if the English accent she used required continual formulation. There was a weary trailing away at the end of each sentence as though the effort of speaking exhausted her. Her hair was a lot greyer than he remembered, but it was still pulled back hard into a bun and the pale blue eyes still held their look of cold accusation.

'Yes, I was about seven then.' Colin pushed his wet hair back with his hand. The mouth smiled briefly then pursed again.

'If I recall correctly, you're fourteen now, aren't you?'

'I will be in March.'

'It's a long time. I had hoped you could have come up to boarding school. You could have come out to me at weekends like Irwin used to. But your father doesn't seem to have been able to afford it. A pity. Mind you, I've nothing against State schools, but a public school education does give a boy that extra bit of polish.'

Colin had no answer except to look uncomfortable until she dismissed him.

'Well, better get dressed for dinner. Only a grill, I'm afraid, but the office doesn't give one much time for cooking on week days.'

At dinner Colin was left untroubled while Irwin talked, pausing occasionally for Aunt Alice to comment when the pouting of her lips indicated she so desired. Aunt Alice was a qualifier rather than a debater. While she seldom flatly opposed or contradicted, she never completely agreed. Her interventions usually began:

'I should have thought that . . . .'

When Irwin proposed 'There's some pretty good pictures on in Perth. I was thinking of shouting young Colin. How about it mate?' Aunt Alice demurred.

'I should have thought that Colin would be too tired for films. He's had a pretty long day of it. And you've both got a long drive ahead of you tomorrow. I should think you'd feel more like bed than the pictures, wouldn't you, Colin?'

But they had caught him half way through a gristly piece of steak and he had to chew interminably while they awaited his answer.

'Aw, I had a sleep coming up in the truck. I'm O.K. for the pictures thanks . . . .' he hesitated blushing as he wondered if it was the right thing not to obey her.

'Of course he'll be O.K.' Irwin assured boisterously. 'We won't be late coming home. Anyway, Col can sleep all the way to Meekatharra if he wants to.'

The road to the city was an exciting stream of light. The city itself burst upon Colin's excited eyes like a fireworks display. As he skipped to keep pace with Irwin's long strides he could feel his mouth fixed in an uncontrollable grin of excitement, all around him the beat of music, the urgent blare of traffic, and young people everywhere, eager for enjoyment in the Christmas-tinselled street awaft with the odour of coffee and broiling poultry.

'What are we going to see, Irwin?' he asked, breathlessly.

'Ah, that'd be telling,' Irwin smirked with a suggestion of daring. 'You'll find out when we get there. That's the sign down there, see those lights flashing?'

As they pressed on along the crowded scuffling pavements, Colin began to make out the message which the flashing lights proclaimed:

"S E X Y W O M E N" and, when closer still in smaller print

"OF THE WORLD".

Colin tingled with a guilty thrill and giggled when Irwin winked and confided 'Better tell the old girl we went to "Stage Coach". She'd reckon I was leading you astray. They say this is pretty hot.'

Close up, there were big lurid posters everywhere with lots of leg and bottom proclaiming "Shocking!", "Sensational!", "The Naked Truth!".

The foyer was placarded with stills depicting strippers, belly dancers, apaches and a massive montage of bare-breasted African dancers.

Notwithstanding the prominent interdiction "Strictly Adults Only" the queue was mainly adolescent, except for an occasional middle-aged man with downcast eyes. Just ahead in the queue were two boys in the uniform of one of the Catholic schools.

'Wonder if they'll tell the Priest about this?' Irwin sneered, prodding Colin's ribs.

All through the newsreel and preliminary shorts Colin nursed a sense of naughty excitement. How much would they show? Of course you wouldn't see *everything*. Or would you? It said "Adults Only". That'd mean it'd be pretty tough.

The first sexy women were can-can dancers ". . . . the abandoned night life of shameless Paris . . . ." the commentator introduced with strident agitation. Colin was bored with the dancing and not greatly thrilled by the final display of frilly buttocks.

'Pity it's not the real thing,' Irwin whispered. 'In Paris they do it with no pants on.'

So that was it. You might've known it. They'd never really be allowed to show you anything much.

Colin slumped in his seat disappointed and bored. Who wants to watch sheilas dancing? Wished we'd gone to "Stage Coach". He yawned and nodded his way through an excerpt from some Yank leg show and a crummy sort of belly dance by an Arab dame with a transparent skirt only she had tights on underneath and what looked like a couple of saucers for brassieres.

Then suddenly, the African dancers swept across the screen with a roll of tom-toms and a stamp of feet. He craned forward from the edge of his seat with excitement, not because of the bare tits, but with the power and savage splendour of the dance. He was so absorbed he failed to notice at first Irwin's clawing hand, and even when he did, it didn't register. He merely brushed it off his lap with a reflex action.

The next item was a night club strip show. A real one, with the camera switching from the girl to the faces of the audience as she stripped. The film audience whistled and cat-called to crescendo when the camera shifted to navel-height as she went through the final motion of shedding her panties, and the camera moved to a close-up of the tense lip-licking faces of the nightclub patrons.

As he sat hot with the half-shame, half-pleasure of his own excitement, the hand came back again, determined, forcing aside his resistance with superior strength.

A nausea of disgust welled up as Irwin persisted, heedless of Colin's attempts to prise free from the steel of his fingers.

'Cut it out, Irwin,' he hissed.

'Aw, don't be lousy,' Irwin wheedled back at him.

Panic-stricken, Colin lurched forward in his seat and bumped the seat in front of him.

'Keep bloody still, can't yer!' a youth in front snarled over his shoulder. Irwin's grip loosened momentarily. Colin bolted to his feet and began side-shuffling towards the aisle to the bitter complaints of his immediate neighbours.

Once in the aise, he ran out of the theatre. He kept running in the street.

Just where he wasn't certain, except away.

Home! Home! Have to get home! His panic called in time to his feet. Morning bus. Got money for fare. It came in fragments as he ran. But how? and where? and what about my luggage? He slowed to a walk as he began to grapple with the problems.

He caught a train back to Aunt Alice's. The bus ran much nearer,
but he didn't know which one to catch or where to catch it.

It was much simpler just to ask the way to the station.

Irwin was waiting for him at the gate. Colin halted on the footpath
a few paces from him, quivering with fear.

But Irwin was genial and chatty.

'Where did you get to, you nit?'

'I caught the train home.'

'Why didn't you wait for me? I'd have driven you home.'

'I wouldn't get in your car if you paid me.' He had to be surly
because he was pretty close to howling.

'Fair go. What about tomorrow? We'll be driving all day.'

'Not me, I'm going back home.'

'Oh, look Col, there's no need for that. I—I was only mucking around.
I won't do it again.'

'I'm not goin'.' Colin's teeth were clamped against the sobbing in his throat.

'What about Aunt Alice? What'll you say?'

'Just—just—I want to go home.'

'You wont . .. . ?'
Colin just shook his head. His bent head, because the tears were running now, dropping down into the dark garden. With a sudden quick step he dodged around Irwin and ran into the house.

'Now young man. What's all this nonsense about you wanting to go home?'
Aunt Alice confronted him amid the breakfast smell.
'I'm just that homesick,' he mumbled at the floor with his ears aflame.
'Now look here,' Aunt Alice commanded, 'you're too old to behave like this. What will your mother say? She has so looked forward to you meeting us all. You're letting her down. Besides being abominably rude to the rest of us.'
Colin stared down at the whirly pattern on the lino tiles and let her rail. There was a weeping feeling inside him. The injustice, the explanation he was bound to suppress. You couldn't say to your spinster Aunt "Irwin's a queer. He felt me up in the pictures. He'll have another go when he gets me on my own." You couldn't say it to any grown-up really. Not pimp. Not about things like that.
At an indignant pause he groaned back at her:
'I want to go home'; and snivelled.
'Don't tell me you're homesick? A boy your age? I should have thought you'd be ashamed. Why, Irwin started boarding school when he was eight. If he was homesick he cracked hardy. Always a little man. Goodness knows what *you'll* grow up to be.'

Funeral . . .

Service for Graham Barrett-Lennard at All Saints, Middle Swan.
Here where the grace of God is asked,
Close in this small church place,
Dark with the dark of jarrah wood
And spartan years,
Under the summer weight of space
And unshed tears,
I too, in part, lie casked.

Where once his firm and splendid stalk
Stemmed above the brash young blades,
Strong from the strength of this red earth
Vine greened with shade,
Sun held to ritual's solemn aids
His husk is laid,
And one sheath less I walk.

Ye are as grass the lesson read.
Grown in my green young years—
Grown with the growth of ripened corn—
Part of my world,
Sure as my skin—his dying tears
A sheath uncurled.
Ye are as grass it said.

Francy De Grys

Celebration

His wife has never been so brilliant: the mesh
of her stockings takes her alive (had she ever really forgotten?)
She circles and curls on a cushion and it centres a group,
spilling and becoming the whole party. Drinks glisten
into voices, voices into metaphors of herself.
Her husband, coping with orders, smiles at her crowd,
taking his secret share out of her success,
knowing the steps to each spontaneous word.

When their eyes meet he grins at her, happy
upon her happiness. The brilliant glass
acknowledges his eye, holding her out to him.
She sees only that he mouths at her *What is the use?*
and she is thinking *You won't this time, not this time*. The friends crowd into mirrors of her face.

Thomas W. Shapcott

Bluestocking

My arguments are meat to Jane.
She takes them joint from joint,
Adding with cold and smug disdain:
'I fail to see your point.'

Please God, I'll get her soon to bed,
And there at last she'll melt;
I'll quell that academic maid,
My point unseen but felt.

R. V. Johnson

Alone

B. Christou

Under the cascading pane, fish glinted: morwong with black transparent eyes, silver smiling garfish, spidery scarlet lobsters, opaque scallops red-crested on trays. The cook's veined freckled arms jerked out a dripping basket of chips, and sank another into a storm of yellow bubbles. Smoke slithered up the oozy walls, hazing yellow over the bare tables.

In the milky coffee Anna watched her nostrils and her swollen eyes gape and quiver. She sipped, clattered the cup into the flooded saucer. The singed, burst sausage and the eggs with their yellow eyes were cooling in drops of fat. With her fork she prodded the yolks, soaking chips in them before swallowing them down with grey slices of sausage.

A man had sat down at the next table, black eyes intent. His black-thatched hair squatting over his ears, he leaned forward, ruckling the oilcloth, blandly smiling. Anna goggled and shrugged. 'Whore,' he murmured intimately, yellow-toothed. Anna turned her back and gulped the cold coffee. A crinkling skin had hidden her face. Sudden headlights jerked over the empty road, glittering on the pane, illuminating her. A snail film still encrusted her sleeve where, sobbing, she had wiped the mucus dangling from her nostrils. She rubbed the smear against her trouser leg. Shadows outside slid on the empty yellow footpath. She paid and went out. An empty tram clanked past, its long rod hopping and flashing along the netted wires. The long row of streetlamps shook gold rings on the asphalt.

Beyond the dark streets, the brick walls and the sheds, suspended masts glowed in tangles of cords and spars. Roped ships lay rocking in the coiling lit river. Slowly a black silent freighter, high masts and funnels tilting and creaking against the deep stars, splashed out from the wharf, past lit ships strung in rows, to the sea. Black rings of swelling water thumped the wharf. Anna cringed beside a stack of sawn wood in the shadows as sailors swayed roistering down a nearby gangplank. Black water swished and slapped. Water dribbled from high in the silent hull, sinking deep in gold globules. On the cobbles between tall sheds Anna bared her cold white buttocks and squatted down. The warm spurt of urine glinted and swelled, rolling dust along the cracks. She jerked her foot away from the puddle, and pulled her trousers up, glancing behind her at the sliding river.

The way back was long and dim, patched with lit shop windows. At last she lay down on the chained lawn of the cathedral, opposite the tarnished cupola of the railway station, shabby and festooned with clocks. Through the white-tufted trees loud bells gonged and jangled above the trundle of cars and trams. Anna took a can from her bag, pulled off the seal, and, tilting the can, gulped warm frothy beer. A bald man stopped to glare. 'If you were my daughter, I'd belt hell out of you,' he muttered. She tossed the empty can into a bin and sauntered away. Delicious.

A lit fruit barrow spread out in the darkness its tiered oranges and pears and brindled apples, green and scarlet glassy peppers, pumpkin-fleshed pawpaws, split, with aniseed-ball seeds. A boy lolled, sleepy, on a box. She stood straddling a puddle in the gutter, as her shadow stilled, vast, with its tiny glinting head. The tawny wires of the lamp-posts buzzed. On the white strip of the road, in a blotched heap, a dog lay squashed, its blood-black jaws gaping on the asphalt. Cars flashed past. She dragged the

dog by the tail's matted hairs into the gutter. It gazed with a gold-lashed void eye. Dusky-faced in the darkness, a man had caught up with her. The man from the cafe, lit smoke trailing from his lips and nostrils. His hand fell, yellowed and hairy, on her shoulder. 'Coming with me, darling?' He stroked her gilded plait.

'Don't!' Anna jerked the hand off and turned away under the lamp. Darling.

'How much do you want?' he called after her. She shook her head without turning. His footsteps padded beside her. 'Come on, I'll give you $20 for it.' His dark smile was swathed in smoke.

'Who are you keeping it for?'

Across the tramlines now the boarding house shone out, shabby wooden archway gilded, balconies lacy at lit windows. Down the dingy carpet, past the dank-wooded staircase. He had stopped under the streetlamp by the door. Across lamplit cobbles, into the long, decaying kitchen.

There was no one at the blackened gas stoves, but no drunken vagrant was snoring yet under the massive table or behind the pantry curtain. Old Mrs Mac, sagging fleshily, was rubbing an iron over a flamboyant blouse: the steam gushed rancid as she smoothed a stained armpit. A knuckly tumour bulged through the white fluff of her scalp.

'Now I suppose you'll be going, too?'

'Yes. In a week.'

'He didn't pay this week, you know.' The whiskery eyebrows furrowed.

'All right.' Anna turned away. 'You'll get it.'

'Well, you see I do, then,' Mrs Mac grumbled.

At the cracked sink Anna gulped cold water from her cupped hands. Hot, rank dandelions curled in a jar of thick water their yellow-grey petals. A bottle stood forgotten on the window sill, half full of lumpy crusted milk. At Mrs Mac's veined ankles a bandy kitten had begun to butt and squeak.

Anna trailed upstairs, turned the key in her door, and snapped the light on. Only her things were left, tangled in the open drawers. The bed-clothes, still crumpled, exposed the rust-spotted mattress. She hoisted the window up to listen to the city hum and rustle: red and white car lamps slithering through damp streets. The yellow plaster walls were friezed with the meticulous grocery lists of a former tenant, webbed with cracks, elegant in lead pencil, precisely totalled:

2 lbs rice — 2/6
3 eggs — 1/6
¼ bread — 1/- ...

She stepped out of her clothes, piled high her tawny hair, and in dressing gown and rubber sandals flapped to the women's bathroom. In the yellow flash, two red-eyed insects swooped, clung to the wall, feelers flicking, and dropped clamped together on the linoleum. She undressed and stood in the bath under the spurting hot shower, rubbing soap in frothy runnels on her white body. A bubble, a membrane of iridescent water, shimmered in the ring of her forefingers and thumbs, until a splash burst it.

A razor lay in the cracked soap dish. She washed it carefully and slit the skin of one wet, drooping breast. Blood pricked and stung, and washed away. She slit thin, shallow red capitals on her breast, pressing out globules of slow blood. LOVE.

She dried herself and pulled on the rough dressing gown. The walls and window pane were furred with steam. Her sandals slipped, clammy, under her feet. Boards creaked in the long passage. Silvered, in her dark room she slipped naked under the cold sheet and pressed her face into the pillow. Night muffled the moonlit house. She stroked her scored breast, embossed with drying blood. A sudden bulge of wind blurted between her buttocks. A dog yapped. A filigree of dust, the lace curtain twitched.

What's to Become of You, Louisa?

Grace Perry

What's to become of you, Louisa?
Two for a penny, please. A brown sweaty penny. Water beads washing the face of King George. Such a sad face. Spit. Wipe the dirt off. Two for a penny, please. Two for the King.
Louisa, Louisa, you know I can't do it. Not two for a penny. What if he sees me?
Quick, here you are then. Take them and run.
Over the glass counter warm with hot buns, cracked hands swing the bland face of brown paper, tweaking and twisting ears on the corners.
Say, thank you, and run with the greasy prize.
The fly-wire door bangs. The bell rings over my head and into the street. Sunlight is blinding and I am too happy watching white horses go down the black road.
Something is happening. Under the lime trees, a drone of cicadas. Counting the clover leaves in Mulligan's yard, while Grannie takes tea in thin cups not for children.
Play outside, Louisa. Wait for me down on the grass. Sit in the shade mind. Don't get yourself dirty. Dirty, not dirty. Wonderful word.
Dirty, not dirty, under the lime tree. A drone of cicadas and nearer to GOD.
I dust down my fingers and peep in the bag. Two for a penny, two moonwhite shortbreads with crimpled edges. Faces powdered like ladies, dimpled with fork prongs and dusted with snow.
I bite. I had teeth then. The butter is melting. Sweet butter warm on the tip of the tongue.
Something good happening. Four leaf clover. Ants in procession come after the crumbs.
Why is the ant-path over the clover? The same dashes and zig-zags coming and going.
The hungry, the empty, the blind-head-down-following. One black ant is slow with the cumbersome load.
Squash him with my finger. Black crumbs and white crumbs. Trample the ant-path. Grind heels in the road.
What's to become of you, Louisa, Louisa? Old hands hard on my arm. Just look at the mess on your very best dress.
Look at the mess here, Louisa, Louisa. . . . Strange, I don't hear the growling so loud anymore.
There's a jar of brazil nuts. Nuts in gold toffee, in a shining glass jar high up on the mantleshelf over the door. All the years I knew her, fat Mrs Mulligan, she never eats them—diabetic, Gran says. And I can't reach them. When they're not looking I try on a chair.
I stand on the seat. My hands on the white wall make smears on the plaster. I can't reach the black shelf. Above me, the glass tower offering toffees. I climb on the padded arm—top-touch the wood.
Someone is calling, Louisa, Louisa. I wobble and fall in a tangle of chair.
What's to become of you? Stealing is wicked. You'll be punished, Louisa.
Drop dead.
Has it been raining outside the window? What is it out there you won't let me see?
I know they're watching me. Dead women's faces. White as a shortbread, studded with eyes.
Storm then, and whispering. Talking of horses. Louisa, blue bow and white dress.

Come for a ride?
He chases and chases me. Thundering horses. Who is it, Louisa? Louisa, where shall we hide?
The room is a coffin behind six white horses. Keep the blind down. There's nothing outside. The horses have taken us far from the mountains. What has become of the blue bow of the bride?
Something blue. Something old. The bedclothes are borrowed. Who is it comes? Who is it calls?
Hard hands are cold. Why must they be washing me? The long white dress. The crumpled blue bow.
Who am I marrying? Louisa, Louisa. Who is it wants me? Can he be here? Where is he hiding? Why the white flowers to stifle the odours? Is it a wedding, or is it a death? Just you and me, now. I'll look after you, mother. Remember, I'm making the great sacrifice.
In the name of the Father. There are no children. None, but the Holy Ghosts of my horses. The horses race wild on the night that she died.
And I'm glad to be rid of her. Watching and watching. What is she watching? What does she see? Something is happening. Something not pleasant. The stone house is empty. What's to become of you, Louisa? Someone is out there, watching for me.
You thought you could fool me. A wide pool of mirror. It isn't my head. No. I won't look. I won't let the glass steal my face. It drowns the wild hair and the crinkled skin. Just look at the silly slobbering creature. The pumpkin-face wobbling.
The horrible dance.
Who is it in there? It isn't Louisa. Whose are those dull expressionless eyes carved in a pumpkin to haunt me? Down wiry chin hairs, thick porridge dribbling. The breath is a bad wind. Cold gruel froths from the mumbling mouth.
Who is it? Who is it? Louisa, Louisa.
It is unclean here, stinking of horses. Why do they stable me in this wet straw?
You're the leader. I see it all now. Thought you could hide in the white apron and veil. The cook in the pastry shop. Where are the shortbreads? Two for a penny. Two for the face of the King.
I have no money. Is that why you want me? To kill me and take all my horses?
I'll struggle and stop you. The big grey will bite you. There. Serves you right.
Cicadas are singing under the lime trees in Mulligan's yard.
My horses will trample you. There's the taste of soap on the thick red fingers. There's the taste of blood on the murderous hands.
Can you see my horses? They will not hurt you. White are my horses, white as the wind. Not soiled are my horses. White as the sunlight. Sunlight on lime trees in Mulligan's yard.
Deep and dark is the earth, and the little ants dying. I am afraid here. Something will happen. I am afraid here. Something . . . bad.
And you, do you like my lovely white horses? They will not harm you. Steady, my beauties, please. Please don't hit them or send them away.
If I let you do my hair, will you? Not in a plait and not in a bun. One a penny. Two a penny. No. Not that way. Loose, in a blue bow. The bright hair will flow in the wind as I ride.
It is not too old that I am for the riding. The horses don't think so. Do you, my darlings? Over the hedges and over the hills.
Listen. They wait for me, stamping and calling.
Take it away from me. Take it away. They whisper. They warn me. It's poison. It's poison. They warn me against the glass and the white-coated pill. Coated with sugar, just like the shortbread. The cups are not delicate. The china's not thin. What have they done with the dead widow Mulligan?
Hot fluid spills on the front of my dress.
Blue cords of blood beat time in the temples. There is a pain in the bones of the head. What are they telling me? Who is it speaking? What's to become of Louisa, Louisa.
Heads nod together like lupins in rows.
Take down the white curtains. The bed is surrounded. There's no need to whisper.

I'm quite deaf, you know.
You must stop them, the strangers who come to torment me. I have no children,
No one. You see how it is. They all want my horses, my wonderful horses. But we
won't tell them. Not a word now, play dumb.
I know I can hold the cup for myself, if you let me. I'm clumsy. I tremble.
The white reins cut into my wrists.
I can't lift my head with my hands strapped to the bed rails. What's to become of
Louisa? The bowels tied in binders, the body rebels. I will escape, but the white cotton
holds me. Only the water trickles and runs. Don't let them know, or they'll come with
the rubber. It hurts. The bottles smell under the bed.
It is dark in the cold room. Louisa. Louisa. Darker and colder. The feet can't move.
The mackintosh sloshes a lake on bare skin.
Here is the pain with the crimply edges. Face powdered like ladies, dusted in snow.
There is the wall and the blind, and beyond them the lime trees. Not dirty. Not dirty.
The heads of the horses are nearer to God.
What's to become of me? She says I'm wicked?
Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned.
Like children and lovers, the hordes of white horses come thundering over me,
joy on the wind.

Colville

The kind of place where one stops
long enough to fill the tank, buy plums,
    perhaps, and an icecream thing on a stick
while somebody local comes
    but does not like what he sees of you,

intangible as menace,
a monotone with a name, as place
    it is an aspect of human spirit
(by which shaped), mean, wind-worn. Face
  outwards, over saltings: with what merit
    the bay, wide as ambition, shallow

as their hold on history,
good for dragging nets which men are doing
    remotely, disproportioned in the blaze
of late afternoon's down-going
  in a far fire-hard tide's rise
    into the vague where time is distance?

It could be merely simple
pleasure, but these have another tone
    of quality, something aboriginal,
reductive as soil itself—bone
  must get cut close here, final
    but unrefined at all. They endure.

A school, a War Memorial
Hall, the store, a neighbourhood of salt
    and hills. The road goes through to somewhere else.
Not a geologic fault
  line only scars textures of experience.
    Defined, plotted; which maps do not speak.

Kendrick Smithyman

Pictures of

Electric circuitry has
and pours upon us mo
other men.

Great-great-aunt Martha

Doted on *The Illustrated*
To its select volumes of life-
So kept intact—together with
Of tasteful bric-a-brac—the
Heroism—the clean-cut life
Grown-up-schoolboy pin-up
The noblest game of all

f Vietnam

as overthrown the regime of "time" and "space"
instantly and continuously the concerns of all

Great-great-aunt Martha
Served tea to her returned brothers and nephews,
Red coats and braid burning like bonfires
Among the chintz and the delicate bone-china,
The simple message of their eyes underlined
By their stiff, oh-so-masculine moustaches.

And they, strong and gentle as Sir Lancelot,
Elbows carefully kept in and voices down,
Told her as much as she was qualified to bear.

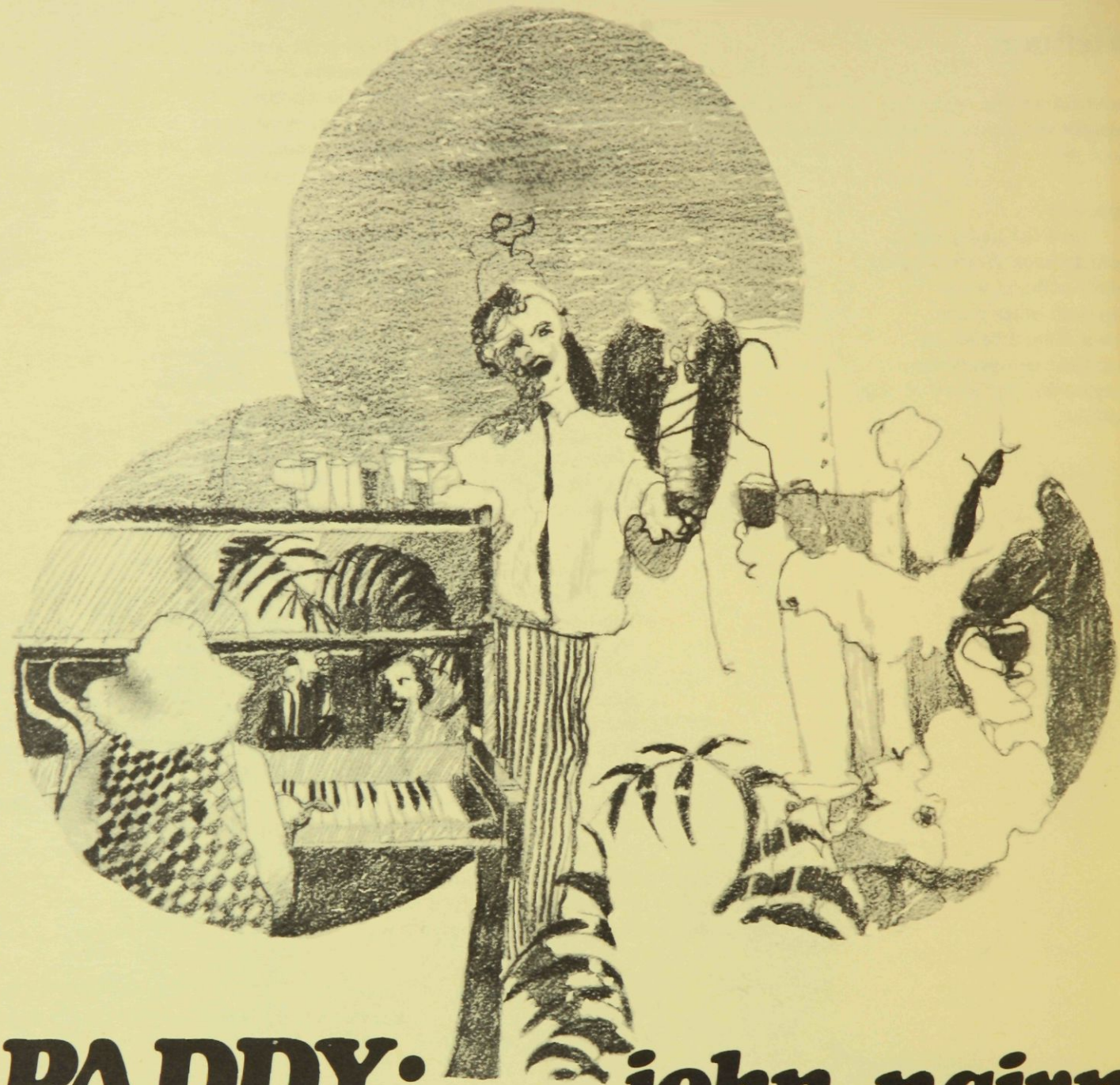
Really, it wasn't so bad . . . like manoeuvres almost . . .
The Colonel . . . magnificent, put hearts into us all . . .
The line never wavered.
About Uncle Charles . . . I saw it.
They asked me to tell you . . . I had my field-glasses trained . . .
A good, clean end, a soldier's end . . . and one thing's sure,
Knowing Uncle Charles as we did: he died happy.

How great-great-aunt Martha loved them, listening.
She knew they understood (modest, manly fellows!)
The horrors. But she never knew how much.
She never knew
The Afridis, when they got her beautiful, blond brother,
Excavated his insides, then neatly filled him up
With gravel. His former contents mingled with the dust
Like a dog's vomit. She never saw the babies that regrettably
Sometimes even then got in the way; or knew
What in the regrettable (of course) chances of war
Befell her brown sisters-under-the-skin. (Though perhaps
It was no more than *they* were qualified to bear.)
And she never heard of the unmanly, unheroic,
Unchristian dark-eyed man whose only answer
To a bayonet in the guts was: 'Thou too are divine.'

Great-great-aunt Martha never knew. And, not knowing,
Stayed pure in heart—if Heaven's word is worth a bean,
By now she should have seen her strong, kind-but-firm
Masculine God.
While we watch, at peak-hour
For family-viewing, the progress of technological war,
So matter-of-fact, reminiscent in so many ways
Of peaceful activity: the drab-clad napalm-sprayers
Methodically de-Viet Cong a hillside;
The herbicide-duster swoops down to convert
Jungle into desert. (No longer does total war
Stop at civilians: trees too are enemies.)

Romanticism dies hard, but dies—and leaves
Who can say what?
Great-great-aunt Martha,
We almost wish you were here to shame us all,
An Angel in the House, civilisation's ultimate refinement,
Faintly crying to Heaven for smelling salts.

R. V. Johnson



PADDY;

john nairn

I had the choice of several jobs in the North-west, but I settled to work on the coastline in a tall old house which was being pushed around inside, pummelled and altered to suit the shape of the times.

The house was set high on blue sloped rock overlooking the ocean. It was a three-storeyed place, with tall pot-bellied chimneys perched like bowling-pins aloft on rough hewn stacks, with gabled roofs slanting away steep and tingled. The chimney stacks squatted high above wide open fireplaces, which like the steep gabled roofs must, in this climate, have been built mainly for appearance sake But the house had been built English style, Elizabethan, for some man of wealth almost a generation ago.

The story went that the man was middle-aged and had married a young bride still in her teens. He had brought her here to this secluded sun-bleached coastline so no-one but him could enjoy her youthfulness. The house was built in yellow sand-stone blocks, huge, squared, and random with deep straight joints all chinked white now and powdered.

At this time a small mushroomed town encircles the house. And parallel rows of squared asbestos dwellings sweep scythe-like down to the pale-fringed sea.

This tall house was being modernized, slashed and hammered into six identical flats for six nuclear-age-ban-the-baby couples who would promise to keep the pill handy, the tiled walls tiled and the plain doors clean and unstickied.

Paddy was a bricklayer there. He sweated and swore on this sextuplex project, and I toiled alongside him labouring with pimple-rough, hand-skinning bricks, and slushed grey mortar which I seldom managed to mix to Paddy's not-too-dry-or-too-wet consistency.

He was at least forty-five, possibly closer to fifty-five; his age was difficult to determine. He was leanly built and a little above average height. His face was weathered like sun-cracked leather. His eyes were the deepest blue, almost black, yet alive and glistening. And when he smiled his whole face lit up, and arrowed bird's feet struck out from his impressive eyes. His lips were thick and pale red and his top lip curled so noticeably at times you almost expected him to whinny. His hair was black and stubbled short, but not cropped for modernity; but only to leave no possibility of his hair falling over his eyes when he was laying the lower courses of bricks with his head hard down and his backside up.

Yet his colourful personality fully made up for his few shortcomings in looks.

Paddy could grouch all day long, yet his grouching seldom bothered anyone, because he nearly always grizzled with his tongue and at the same time laughed with his eyes and jutting chin. His accent was the broadest Irish, and out his words rolled with a deeply rich, straight-from-the-peat-bogs lilt, though he had spent most of his life here in Australia.

On the first day I laboured on him he told me this was his last job here, that he was laying bricks for the last time in this country.

'And it's w'honderful happy I'll be to be wipin' this killin' red dust from me shoes for the last time,' he said to me that first day I was there. 'Sure I know you're an Australian, but I'll not hold it against yer, though this is the God-awfulest c'hountry a man ever drew breath in.'

Even when his tone was serious there was a bantering, roguish expression bubbling close to the surface of his face, and I couldn't help but like the man.

'Now come on now, me bhoy,' he added. 'And let's be havin' more mud. When I was your age . . . and how old might you be?'

'Twenty-one. I'm a university student, just working up the north here for a couple of months.'

'Are you, boy? Well fancy that now. And it'll do yer no harm. When I was your age it was up the thirty-rung ladder I could run with a full hod o' bricks balanced on me shoulder, and a bucket o' wet mortar in me spare hand . . . I could that.'

I shovelled another barrow load of mortar on to his cement-encrusted, plywood tray. Then I watched him gluttonously dispose of the mortar like a starved youngster with ice-cream galore. All the while he talked his weathered arms switched like machine-powered grabs. His right hand skilfully scooped up a trowel load of mortar, then slapped it on the laid course of bricks, so casually, but without a stray grey spot erring anywhere. He furrowed out the centre of the seal-like mound corrugating the inclines slightly; then down came the next brick from his left hand. And so it went on, a human automaton which never seemed to tire.

'Anyone back in Ireland you know?' I asked.

'Is there! And you might well ask that. First there's me own sister, with a skin like pink roses, and her hair black and long like a horse's tail. And I hear she gets prettier every day, though she'll never be seein' forty again. And there's me dear old mother.' His voice softened. 'Aye, she's still alive and kickin'. I can see me old d'harlin' mother now in the public dr'hinkin' a glass o' porter. And that'd not take her long, she can sup it down. And the barman will be there big as the cenotaph, with a moustache from a walrus; and his apron white—if it's a Monday. There he'll be fillin' a pot and flickin' off the thick froth with his flat stick. . . . It'll be fine to be back in civilization again.'

At last came the day when Paddy told me he would soon be on his way. And later that same day, when he had collected his pay packet, he said: 'Already I've booked me

ticket on this first plane out of here. And I've made enquiries about the big plane to London: I can be paying for that ticket when I gets to Perth. But it's all the way I'll have to be flyin' now, boy. Yer see, on'l' this m'hornin' there's a letter from me lovely upstandin' sister. She tells me as our old mother's ailin'. It's a t'errible t'hing to say but by all accounts she's ailin' fast.'

Supposing the old lady passed away before he even saw her. A cruel thought.

But surely fate could not be so pitiless.

Yet immediately after he had told me, his top lip curled in a horsey grin. He moved away from the wall he had been working on, and cheerfully he said: 'But by the time I gets there she'll have picked up fine. I know that. The old people are powerful strong where I come from. And it's me last brick I've just laid, boy, the last brick I'll ever put down in this hell-fire oven of a c'hountry. . . . Will yer be joinin' me in a dr'hink in the new hotel this evenin'?'

He was due to depart by air early the next morning, so I promised to have a few farewell drinks with him after I had finished work.

It was pay day for most workers in the town, and that evening there was a crowd of men, and a few women in the large new smokeroom.

I was sipping at a middy of beer and telling myself I would have five or six and no more, when in walked Paddy.

He wore a new glistening white shirt, and a pair of new bookmaker-patterned trousers, striped boldly black and white on a light grey background.

Someone said: Ponsed up tonight, aren't we, Paddy?'

Paddy glinted a big-teeth grin and strutted over to me, then loud enough for all to hear he said: 'Sure, me old mother'll never know me for her lost son, me walkin' in on her in me nine pound strides and me kangaroo watch strap.'

I noticed he was brandishing a new crocodile-skin strap on his old scratch-faced wrist watch.

'Come on then!' he shouted. 'What are yis all waitin' for? Up to the bar and be callin' yer orders. Whatever dr'hinks you have the fancy for. They'll all be on me.'

Already he was sparking on all cylinders. And a semi-circle of men and two young women gather around him as he leaned, completely relaxed, his back against the bar counter.

'It was not to tr'hy and educate you people I came over here,' said Paddy, 'like some folks I'll not be namin'. It was to lay bricks I came here, and if I was now given a pound for every brick I've put down then it's a millionaire I'd be seven times over.'

Paddy never spoke of dollars and cents.

'But it's you people I feel awful sorry for,' he said loudly. 'I'll be t'hinkin' of the awful sufferin' you'll be goin' through in this dried-up, awful climate, where you sweat your blood then swallow the red dust to put it back.'

Then a strange voice, harsh and humourless said: 'Ireland! If you *do* ever get back there the freezin' cold'll kill you for sure.'

I turned and surveyed the speaker. He was middle-aged, short and balding; with a bushy spray of a beard which covered all the lower part of his face and blended in colour with his tobacco-stained teeth.

But Paddy, unconcerned, ignored the bearded man. With feeling he said: 'It'll be spring in the old c'hountry. Green, you've never seen anythin' so green. And the fresh grass juicy an' as new as the mornin' dew, like it's all dancin' to music.' Then he turned to me and added: 'And the smell o' the air, boy.' He breathed in deeply, shut his eyes, and smiled faintly, plainly elevated by his own words and thoughts. Quietly he said: 'Like yer can taste God's heaven.'

He rolled out his words, like a gentle, pulsating lilt of restful, old-Irish music; like a fine artist painting wolds and hills, with tall sap-green scythes of grass tipsy in the thin, cool air. So well I could visualize the purple heather, supple and fragrant. There was an unusual richness to his voice, a knock-out simple sincerity, stark crisp and uneducated, yet so utterly vital.

No-one spoke. It seemed they all saw things as I did. They waited for him to continue; obviously they wanted to hear more of his rich-rolling brogue.

He drank his beer and ordered another round of drinks for everyone, amidst a clamour of protests, but Paddy slapped the dollars on the barman's ready palm, though there were many other money-waving hands waiting to pay.

'I'll be buying them,' said Paddy. 'It gives me pleasure to buy yis a few drinks. To be sure I've given me sweat and blood, but I've been paid good money, too. . . . I would have enjoyed a trip home on the boat, and watch each glorious sunlit wave sailin' me closer to me old mother. But she's ailin' fast the old d'harlin' . . . I was tellin' the boy.'

He turned to me as one young woman dabbed a handkerchief to her damp eyes.

Next to me, the man with the beard muttered: 'His old mother!' And again there was a strange, besmirching, hostile thrust to his words.

I was tempted to take hold of him and kick him right out of the place, but no-one else seemed even to have noticed beard-face, and I thought perhaps I was being too squeamish. And perhaps the man had drunk too much.

Paddy said: 'So it's all the way I'll have to be flyin' now, though it's to be sure I'll hate havin' me feet off the solid ground for all that time.'

'How long since you saw your mother?' said the bearded man loudly, but in the same derogatory, challenging voice.

Yet Paddy seemed not to notice any disharmony. 'It's twenty-nine years Christmas gone,' he said.

I shuddered. It seemed a lifetime. 'It's a long time,' I murmured.

'Aye, to you, boy, it would be. To me it's like it was on'y yesterday I was sayin' goodbye to me mother, and me promisin' to be back within the twelve month.'

How could a man go back, I pondered, after more than a quarter of a century? Everything, everyone would be so different now.

There were many more customers in the smoke room by this time, some forty or fifty drinkers, yet Paddy attempted to buy yet another round of drinks. But a tall, broad-shouldered wheat-sheaf of a man with an American accent, propelled, almost lifted, the lean Paddy to a table away from the bar counter and near the piano.

'I'll buy the grog,' said the American. 'You take it easy. O.K.?'

A few minutes later Paddy was standing at the upright piano. A large, blowsy blonde, rolled in middle-aged fat and merriment, pounded the ivory keys. And Paddy sang: *Danny Boy*, then *Mother Machree*, then several other Irish songs. He had a fine tenor voice, a powerful voice which shook the glistening glasses on the mirrored shelves. Glasses danced to his lively lilt.

Soon there were rows of filled glasses, beer and short drinks, lined up for him on the table next to the piano. But Paddy was a popular man.

I ordered a beer on my own, and was drinking it quietly when something caused me to look around. Then I realized it was the comparative silence of the place which had struck me. There sat Paddy at the table near the piano, his arms rag-doll loose at his sides. He was a picture of utter dejection. He stared seemingly with unseeing eyes into a half-filled glass of flat beer.

It was so unlike Paddy. Then half a dozen men clamoured around him.

They wanted to know what was wrong.

I crossed to the table.

'Feeling sick?' I said.

'Worse than that, boy,' he said tonelessly.

'Then what the hell's wrong?'

'Plenty. I've lost me roll,' he said quietly. 'Me roll o' notes.'

'When do you remember having it last?' a sympathetic voice enquired.

Within minutes almost the whole clientele hovered around Paddy. They tried to be helpful and plied him with questions. Then every inch of the smoke-room floor was looked over. The piano was moved, the lavatory searched, but not a sign was there of Paddy's roll.

'There was five hundred pounds,' there he said desolately. 'All the money I had.'

Dejectedly he stood up and said: 'I had me roll in the back pocket here o' me new strides; I thought it'd be safer if I kept the money with me.'

'It's a thousand bucks,' said the tall American. He stared around him at the gathered customers. 'If any of you know anything about it, remember it's the guy's fare home.'

There was an uncomfortable silence. Then Paddy said: 'It's me old mother I keep thinkin' of, of how she'll be lookin' out for me. Yer know, waitin'.'

His deep blue eyes glistened wet, but so did a lot more eyes around him. Quietly he said: 'Maybe I dropped me roll, and one o' yis picked it up. It'd be a great temptation, I know that.' Anxiously he stared at the faces around him, his dark lakes of eyes sorrowfully appealing. Brokenly he said: 'If someone has it, if yer could see it in yer to give me just me fare home out of it I'd be grateful. Me fare to see me old mother. . . . Though I've worked me hands hard for the money, I'll not be mindin'. I'll not mind if I lands there broke.'

I drew the American aside.

'How'd it be if we made a collection?' I suggested 'It's pay day for most of them. This crowd could make up the thousand dollars.'

'You know, man, that's a mighty idea,' he said. 'If you take the hat round, I'll gladly slap in the first hundred bucks. O.K.?'

I added fifty dollars myself. And in less than ten minutes I was able to place a thousand dollars in Paddy's work-calloused hands.

He visibly overflowed with gratitude. He tried to speak, but the words seemed to be caught in his throat. Then that crow's footed cheerfulness arrowed to his eyes, and his top lip slowly curled to show uneven teeth. And a smile broke through.

I knew I was going to miss Paddy.

I ordered myself a final cold beer at the bar, and as I waited to be served, that balding, bearded man came and stood alongside me. But I disliked him even more now: he was the only person in that room who had not donated to Paddy.

'Know why I wouldn't slap even a cent in the hat?' he said.

'Go to hell,' I answered. 'Drop dead.'

He said: 'Paddy's quite an actor.'

'Get out! Go on, on your way, whilst you're still in one piece.'

'Paddy played exactly the same trick in Port Hedland.'

I drew back my fist. Explosively I glared at him through a veiled redness. But I could so easily have stooped to murder right then.

'Steady on,' he said quickly. 'Just hear me out first.'

I allowed my raised fist to fall slowly.

He said: 'Before you pile into me ask your precious Paddy if he remembers Jim Daley, the carpenter who fixed his door frames on the Port Hedland school job. That's me, though I didn't sport a beard then. Ask him if he remembers his last night there in the new hotel, where he sang his songs, just like tonight, and told everyone he was flying home.'

'So he couldn't make it last time. You're nothing but a rat.'

'Listen, all night he was going on about flying home to see his sick mother. Then about half an hour before closing he made out he'd lost his roll of money—just like tonight.'

I was speechless, and the only thing I was certain of at that moment was that I detested this bearded man.

He said: But last time I was mug enough to put twenty dollars in the hat. . . . Ask him if he remembers losing his fare home when he was in Port Hedland. Go on!'

I could only stand and stare at him.

'You could ring the pub at Port Hedland, from here,' he said grinding in the agony.

I turned and walked away from him, and out of the hotel. I knew he was telling the truth. But I never questioned Paddy.

I still can't help liking Paddy.

Love's Dissolution

I
Love, as we lay and searched
Dumbly each other's eyes,
Despairing of speech, I felt
My flesh stir and rise,
As moon and tempest draw
The sea-swell to fill,
Beyond its wonted reach,
Caves to their furthest level.
And, spent, it leaves them only
Till the sure moment when,
As moon and tempest will,
It comes again, again.

II
Faces in the act of love
Or swallowed in a sudden wave,
Their lines dissolving in the swell,
Convulse, become impersonal.
Our tender dissolution grows
Evident even to the eye;
And I rejoice, seeing you lose
Yourself in love's extremity.

III
You pick a flake of sand
From the wind-dried shore
And crumble it in your hand,
Scattering grain by grain
What was one thing before.
Questioning turns the key
That unlocks identity:
What is there that cannot be
Scattered grain by grain?
What price, then, you or me?
A flake of wind-dried sand
That crumbles on the shore.

R. V. Johnson

I Leave Myself

I leave myself.
I am possessed by a longing
To be free,
Of I,
Who am the cause,
Of my negativity.

I slam a door
Upon myself. I leave the house
Of me.
The daily bore,
Of knowing how, tomorrow
I will be.

Joan Mas

Malingerer

Rigid,
I await the next spasm
of your irritated bronchus
to insult my intelligence
with its dogged rasp.
As outwardly you suffer
I mark your inward mirth
at the effort it costs me
to seal my ear, blind my eye,
smile with an easy mouth
in spite of the intrusion
of your inadequacy.
I offer no sympathy,
judge without mercy—
and yet
I beg your forgiveness
for my reason tells me
that it takes a cheat
to recognise his fellow.

Fairlee Apperly

Getting the Morning Paper

It's a bird stitched morning,
the mottled cattle standing
up to their bellies in grass.

The green hill laps the church;
the village knuckles its eyes,
yawns for the morning papers.

Turn back up to fox red road
tonguing over the hills where
the rocks lie in plumes of grass,

and recall a child on a chair
before a tall bookcase. Wherever
he opens his book there's battle.

Oh well, there's always been war.
It's a Mark IV tank that drags
Hector now by the heels.

And this child's face on the page
is the wooden horse dragged back
to the door of our week-end shack.

Roland Robinson

green on the river;

LINDSAY DYSON

Often in the morning I wake early—before her, and lie quietly looking through the bars at the world outside. Sometimes the sky is blue and a few white clouds drift idly by like puffs of cotton wool, and a bird soars high into the heavens. And the tender green leaves of the weeping willow outside the window shiver softly in the morning air and gently swish against the window sill. And I am happy.

Then the woman in the other bed wakes up and the crying starts. She sobs and screams, twisting and turning, until the footsteps come running down the hall and the people bend over her and scold and shake her until there is peace once more.

I lie still wrapped in silence because I want to be left alone. And then I drift off to sleep again and dream my dream—the same one that I always dream. I hear the voices calling to me, sighing and singing on the wind like music. The water soughs in my ears as it slaps against the shore and the spray is like a cool hand on my face. And I am drawn closer and closer, following the seagulls as they wheel and cry and fly about me, until the water surrounds me and I am an island. It feels so fresh and clean that I keep on walking, walking into its cool green depths, sinking, sinking until I am almost covered and held close in its soft embrace. And then the voices start again, calling from the shore, louder and louder, until I turn and go back. And when I wake I am here in this place and there is no more sea.

Later I rise and put on my grey flannel dress and if it is cold I throw my black shawl around my shoulders, while the other woman lies quietly in her bed. I sit beside my table and eat my breakfast—thin porridge with milk and a cup of weak tea. Then I look out the window again and try to count the pale green leaves on the tree. I can see right through them to the sky, the finely etched veins in the leaves like skeletons. When I first came to this place the tree was bare. And as the years came and went so did the leaves. I tried to measure the years by the leaves but I forget. How many seasons, how many years have come and gone I do not know.

Sometimes a bird sings and when the sun shines I go outside gladly once the door is opened, and glide up and down the path. There are others on the path too and they walk up and down, up and down. Sometimes I feel so happy that I laugh out loud for no reason at all. And then I watch them out of the corner of my eye and they all stare at me. And the more they stare the louder I laugh, stuffing my shawl in my mouth to stifle the noise.

Sometimes the other woman comes along and we pass on the path without speaking. She wears a red cardigan. It looks as bright as blood beside the green of the trees and I hurry past in case some of the blood spills onto me. Then I go inside and scrub my hands over and over again, trying to get them clean. And the other woman comes and stands silently beside me. I know she is there because I can feel her at my shoulder. But she never speaks.

When the bell rings for lunch, if we are still outside, as if controlled by a master mind, the whole group turns and hurries up the path to the refectory. We sit down at long wooden tables without a cloth. They serve the meal dressed in white coats. First They put some thin soup, with a few pieces of shredded vegetables, into our bowls. I eat it quickly with my spoon, though it is too salty and not hot enough. Some of the others don't eat but bang their spoons on the table. Then They bring a big pot full of stew with lumps of meat and potato floating around amongst the congealed grease on top, and put some in our bowls. We eat mechanically, spooning it into our mouths, because we have nothing better to do.

Sometimes the other woman won't eat and They come and stand beside her and hold the spoon to her mouth until she swallows the food. For dessert we have a suet pudding with a few currants in it and some bright yellow custard like the colour of a canary's wing.

I found a bird outside today. Last night it rained, pouring down in torrents like a flood. The rain drops were jumping up and down on the roof with rhythmic tapping, beating on the windows with a soft insistent knocking as if trying to get in, and then swishing down the path to the river. And the thunder went rolling around the hills like an angry voice and the lightning flashes lit up the room. I woke in the night and looked out the window and the other woman woke up too and started screaming: 'She's killing me! She's killing me!' Until They came running and stuck a needle in her arm and then she was still again.

I kept quiet because I didn't want Them to touch me. Whenever anyone touches me I think of blood, blood like the red cardigan of the other woman. I think I hate her but I cannot tell her because we do not speak. In the morning it was still raining. The others went to the refectory and stayed there aimlessly turning over the pages of magazines and staring out the window. They came and switched on the radio and some music played. It wasn't my music so I stole out the door and crept down the path. The trees were weeping, spilling their teardrops on me and I was filled with sorrow and wept with them. I kept on walking and under the weeping cypress I call my tree I found the bird. It was a wild bird. At first I thought it was dead. Its brown feathers were sodden with rain and its saffron yellow beak was open. I picked it up and put it in my pocket and went inside. When I put my hand in to touch it I could feel, very faintly, its beating heart.

My heart beats sometimes in the night—in my chest it pounds away, thump thump on the pillow and I wonder if one night it will stop. I lie still and listen, holding my breath, hardly daring to breathe, until I fall asleep. And then I dream the dream again. The same dream that I always dream, only the voices are becoming louder and the water is getting deeper. And sometimes in my dream I make a crown of water hyacinths and put it on my head. And I feel the tide surging through my veins—
I am full of the sea.

And then the other woman wakes and starts to scream until They come to quieten her. I'm glad when she stops because I can go back to sleep again. It's peaceful and cool in the dark when I shut my eyes—like floating on a wave.

I took the bird out and dried it on my petticoat and then I crept along to the bathroom and held it to my face and looked in the mirror. My hair was wet and hung down around my face, all lank and black like seaweed. I laughed out loud because I looked like some demented sea creature. And then I heard her coming. She saw the bird and started to scream. They came running and I hid it in my pocket.

That night in bed I put it on my pillow. In the morning it was gone. I thought it must have flown away in the night. And I looked out the window—but the sky was empty. And then I saw she had it and had squeezed its neck. There were a few drops of dried blood on its beak. And it was dead. Then the screaming started and They came running and leaned over me and pierced my arm with a needle. I fought them but they were too strong for me. It was no use.

How I hate her now. I would like to kill her. I will not stay here soon I will be asleep. I am listening for the voices. Next time I hear them calling I am going with them, floating with the tide all the way out to the sea. They cannot keep me here. When the green is on the river I shall be free.

Caretaker:

caretaker
of a strange house,
hillperched in the tough
fabric of eucalpt
and thornhemmed plants,
I stretch tight
the elastic summer days
until the light band snaps
and the sun falls
into the cityflat
smudged across the horizon.
in the still warm days
of lazy sounds;
choked crow awks
and the wooden noises
of clucking cicadas,
I fall over my head
stupified
by the sweat of skinwishes.
your memory,
eyes and actions
hang breathless in the tepid air.
caretaker
of your love am I;
leaseholder
of your heart and eye.

caretaker
of a strange house,
I listen to the foreign
sighs of roof joints
and sly shifting
of floor timbers.
the hot night wind
chews the tree leaves,
sniffs at the window,
stirring the curtain
to kissglass whisperings.
in the comfortable
sleeve of night,
snatching at sleep
in an unfamiliar bed,
I pick at your face
floating
like a clutch
of tissue paper
in the moonpasted room.
caretaker
of your love am I;
leaseholder
of your heart and eye.

caretaker
of a strange house
I watch the garden grow;
the quinces swellgreen
and wands of jasmine
creep and curl sunwards.
hotcoins of gravel
on city capering feet
and cool sicklecut grass
bunched in my fingers,
are alien sensations.

in the damp orchard
loaded with rich smells
of rotting fruit
and water on sunleaves,
I pluck a plum,
sink my teeth
into the magenta flesh,
feeling
in that shaded place,
your bloodooze
dribble down my chin.

caretaker
of your love am I;
leaseholder
of your heart and eye.

caretaker
of a strange house
I move from chair to chair,
disturbed by otherpeople
smells and habits,
which ghost the roomboxes.
domestic props and books
taste of the householder's
flesh and whimsy.
my lichensoft stewardship
dries pale and crisp.

in the rainslip
and sunblast hours
I dawdle aimlessly
through the tasks
of a temporary resident,
flicking
your eyedust grains,
powdering the thought furniture;
I hesitate to shift.

caretaker
of your love am I;
leaseholder
of your heart and eye.

Ian Templeman

AVANT-GARDE SCHOOL HISTORY

B. N. Primrose

James Griffin (ed.), *Essays in Economic History of Australia, 1788-1939.*
Jacaranda Press (1967). $4.50

Within the limits of its purpose, and in some ways beyond it, this is an excellent work. The purpose was to write an economic history of Australia of a manageable length for use in schools. But more than this. There was also the desire to raise the general standard of material available to students and teachers alike. As James Griffin says in his preface, anyone who has an interest in the teaching of Australian history in our schools is aware that recent scholarship in the field of Australian economic history has not filtered through to the classrooms, that there is little reference made by students to work beyond the set texts, and that even teachers have had little exposure to the recent flood of journal articles bearing upon the subject. While setting out to produce a work which will help solve this problem by basing itself to a large extent on the results of recent scholarship in the field; Griffin and his colleagues have also attempted to set the economic aspects of Australia's history in the context of "the geographical conditions which have limited Australian development" and the "international factors which have influenced it".

The team of contributors which Griffin has gathered around him are well suited to the task, being a blend of academics and schoolmasters, of economists and historians. The essays, with one exception, follow each other in chronological sequence; the exception being Chapter 7, which is a discussion of the emergence of the labouring classes as a political force between 1850 and the First World War. The underlying themes of the work are the staples, wheat and wool. Onto these are embroidered, with increasing complexity, other facets of the Australian economy including the growth of external trade, the gold rushes, the increase of public works and capital investment, the growth of urban life, emigration, labour problems and the federating impulse. The essays conclude at 1939 with a discussion of comparative living standards.

Australia's growth is traced from the first rude colony where rum was the only liquid asset, to the complex, urban, industrialized nation which in 1939 had just emerged from the effects of contagious world depression.

Essays in Economic History of Australia offer no startling, new interpretations of this process as a whole. Rather, the work concentrates on including the fruits of recent research on specific topics in the existing framework of Australian economic history. The result is that some of the existing generalizations are qualified. For instance, the efforts in the early years of New South Wales to establish trade with the surrounding area and with China are given a new perspective. The generalizations on the gold rushes are examined and modified and the material on the growth of the banking system is augmented by reference to recent works published by Blainey and Butlin. Important new evidence on the growth of trade unionism and the effect of labour policies is included. Previous ideas on land policy are tested in the light of the many recently published works and generalizations about the post-war economy are tested by the application of statistics which have recently become available. At the same time the development of the economy is set in its political and geographic context which makes it more easily understood. The close connection that is shown between the economy and politics gives purpose to the study of the economy and more sense to the study of politics.

The net result is a commendable pot-pourri of recent scholarship which should, if recognised for its worth, contribute to the improvement of what has been "the less vivid fields" of Australian history. Written in a lucid and pleasing style, the work is interesting—a thing

economic histories have rarely been—and scholarly to boot. The bibliographies at the end of each of the essays contain the standard works—Shann, Fitzpatrick, etc.—but are predominantly made up of journal articles, biographies and specialized works published since 1950 and mostly since 1960. The feature which endears the work to me is the liberal sprinkling of references. throughout each essay. Chapters 4 and 8 regrettably have none but that lack is partly made up by the provision of copious bibliographies. The average for the others is two references per page. Thus, the student who possesses this work has at his fingertips not only a competent survey of the topic but also an exhaustive bibliography of the most recent work done in it. It can only be hoped that this work will be adopted as a text in an effort to widen the reading of school history students on the subject.

The only criticism I would make is the placing of references at the end of each chapter instead of at the foot of each page. Still, Griffin expresses the hope that the work will soon be revised and augmented by a further chapter to cover the period after 1939 so there is yet hope that the publishers will run to inserting the references as footnotes where they will do the most good. But this criticism is of minor dimensions compared with the potential of the work.

Here at last is a school text which, instead of pontificating grandly, ties itself openly to its sources. This has been almost unknown in texts written for school consumption and has led to the establishment of generalizations as "truth" which in some cases could do with much qualification. This is especially so in Australian economic history where there are such large gaps in detailed research and where general works tend to "skate over" the gaps by repeating the generalizations of other general works. Not that *Essays in Economic History of Australia* is altogether free of this tendency but at least in acknowledging its sources it lays the position a good deal more open and, in acknowledging the results of recent research, it shows areas where controversy is flourishing at the present moment.

School students can now be made aware that history is not the invention of clever men— a parcel of tricks played upon the dead—but a distillation of primary sources which is constantly being added to and revised. The contributors are not only prepared to admit that there are a variety of interpretations possible on some subjects but also that historians do not have all the answers and have, in the past, been known to err. In Chapter 1, for instance, Jill Eastwood, when speaking of the concept of "the search for a staple", says

In many general text books, however, the concept has implied that the activities of the first thirty years of colonial life were so many blind alleys, wasted efforts in a fruitless search for a staple which was not found until the joint efforts of John Macarthur and J. T. Bigge brought wool to the attention of the British government, British investors and British manufacturing interests. It is ten years since at least one historian drew attention to the falseness of this implication and to the importance of commercial activities on what has since been called "Australia's Pacific frontier", but it is only very recently that these activities have been given specialized attention in the context of colonial economic development. (pp. 12-13)

A *risqué* statement indeed for a school text and the thought that what is "written in the book" may not necessarily be correct will no doubt be a traumatic one for many students.

One possible consequence of confronting students with the incompleteness of history and the evolving nature, not only of interpretation, but of the whole discipline may well be that a greater proportion of the brighter students will be attracted to history than at present is claimed to be the case. The "brain drain" to the sciences, which many are prepared to complain of, cannot be laid entirely at the feet of the greater economic potential for scientists. Interest and idealism are still motivating factors surprisingly enough. Part of the reason is the nature of the history taught in schools. It leaves no impression that it would be an exciting subject to follow up and make into a career. There is no hint given of the possibilities for research, the use of creative talents or of the student making a worthwhile contribution to the subject. History has traditionally been regarded as being as dead as the past it studies, while the sciences have had the atmos phere of being modern and vital because they dealt with existing people, things or phenomena and are continually discovering new facts. The fact that history is largely doing the same has been overlooked. The vast sums of money expended on equipment and aids for teaching science have tended to make history the more dull by contrast. Yet there are no good reasons why history should continue to be taught as a pale reflection of what is, and it is thus good to see Griffin and his colleagues produce a work which will give senior school students not only an up-to-date survey of Australian economic history, but also an indication of how that history comes to them, and an indication that there is still more work to be done in the field.

ANDRE GIDE AND THE GREEK MYTH

J. C. Davies

André Gide and the Greek Myth, Helen Watson-Williams, Oxford University Press, 1967.

The pursuit of literature in France, particularly since the Renaissance, has gone hand in hand with a devotion to the civilization of ancient Greece and Rome. In the great classical period of the 17th century, Roman history and Greek mythology provided material for dramatists like Corneille and Racine to draw upon. But nowhere has this tendency been more in evidence than in the modern French theatre, where a substantial body of dramatists, and among them, the greatest, like Cocteau, Giraudoux, Anouilh and Sartre, have turned to Greek mythology for their inspiration. A mere list of some of their plays reads like a Who's Who of Classical Mythology: *Orphée, Oedipe Roi., Amphitryon 38, Electre, Antigone, Médée*. Yet the great Greek writers of tragedy would have been hard put to it to recognize their progeny, and the purists among modern classical scholars have been known to frown. . . . For the ancient myths have been de-sanctified, modernized and re-orientated by present-day French dramatists, who have used them to express the dilemmas of the modern age or the personal problems of the writer, often in a language which smacks of irony, familiarity and irreverence.

André Gide was himself steeped in the culture of ancient Greece, although not so much directly as at second-hand, for he never mastered the intricacies of the Greek language as well as he did those of English or German. Nevertheless, Greek civilization and literature, if only through the medium of translation, became for him a living reality which condiitoned the whole of his attitude to life. Not only were the balance, the harmony and the diversity of the Greek mind reflected in his own life and works, but even the great figures of classical mythology arose afresh in his writings as he sought continual inspiration in the subject matter of the Greek myths. Here is, indeed, a theme of prime importance in the work of André Gide, and Dr Helen Watson-Williams was fully justified in devoting what is a penetrating and admirably documented study* to the examination of Gide's use of Greek mythology.

One is immediately struck by the extent to which his use of myth conforms to the spirit of the age. Like the other dramatists mentioned, Gide changes the essence of the myth to express purely private pre-occupations, so that the hero becomes a symbol of the troubled mind of the author or incarnates his own personal aspirations. Or again, like Giraudoux and Anouilh, he may adopt an ironic, bantering, familiar tone, which tends to deflate the solemnity of the subject and bring it within easy reach of the ordinary spectator or reader of today. Such was the tone of Gide's own version of the Prometheus legend, *Le Prométhée mal enchaîné*, and of his play

**André Gide and the Greek Myth*, O.U.P., 1967, 200 pp.

Oedipe. The overwhelming impression is that of diversity, as the writer, throughout his career, embodies the Greek myth in a variety of forms (treatise, *récit*, theatre and dramatic monologue), expressed in a variety of styles, which range from the heroic and tragic to the ironic. Here, as elsewhere, it is the great modern-day humanist who emerges from these works, pre-occupied above all with the discovery of the authentic self and the full realization of all that is best in man.

Dr Watson-Williams' study divides essentially into two parts: a first part, comprising chapters 1 to 7, where a chronological approach is adopted to examine in turn each of the works based on Greek mythology; and a second part, consisting of chapter 8, which is a general discussion of what Gide's choice and treatment of myth reveal about his own attitudes and beliefs, together with a final chapter, "Greece or Gide?", which, as its title implies, considers to what extent the Gidian world of myth is an authentic reconstruction of the world of Greek mythology and tragedy, to what extent, on the other hand, it is a purely personal creation.

In this connection, as with most other aspects of Gide's work, the chronological approach is a fruitful one, for it throws light on the successive phases of the writer's thought, which is seen in a continual and ever-changing development. The majority of the works based on Greek mythology are concentrated within the most interesting part of his career, the formative years of the 1890's, when a series of painful personal crises was reflected in the anguished intensity of his written works. Thus the legendary figure of Narcissus, in the treatise of 1891, represents the Symbolist phase of Gide's youth, devoted to introspective self-contemplation, but offset by the presence of the biblical Adam, representing the necessity for action. And it is this necessity for action—heroic action—which is developed in the succeeding myths, those of Philoctetes and Prometheus. In these two legendary figures the Gidian hero already begins to assert himself in his quest for the true, authentic self. As Dr Watson-Williams puts it, Gide's *Prométhée* (1899), is "an act of faith in humanity, but only in so far as human beings are capable of voluntary action based on their understanding of self and of their situation" (p. 55).

Philoctetes (1899) likewise gropes hesitatingly towards the light of self-understanding, but his act is one of renunciation, not of affirmation (unlike Prometheus), as he allows Ulysses to take away from him his bow, thus sentencing himself to eternal solitude on his island. The action of both heroes is for a similar purpose: for Gide, they become symbols for the process of liberation and self-discovery.

Liberation! But liberated for what? At this stage of his career, Gide himself is still groping for an answer, and this is reflected in the indecisive nature of the two heroes' final attitude. In a page rich with suggestion (p. 57), Dr Watson-Williams proposes tentative replies to this question, intuitively developing hints offered in the text of *Prométhée* to suggest for the hero a possible way out of his dilemma, a possible use in the future for his regained liberty.

The decade of *angoisse* for Gide is not yet complete until he has chosen two other legendary figures to incarnate his turmoil. These are Saul and King Candaules. Although Saul is not a hero of Greek mythology, Dr Watson-Williams is quite justified here in considering the play of this name in conjunction with the play which features the story of the mythical king of Lydia. For both plays belong together in depicting heroes who are "trapped and destroyed by their emotional dependence on others" (p. 68), as well as in presenting common links with the personality and thought of Andé Gide at this particular stage of his development. The similarity of theme, yet difference of treatment, in the two plays is well brought out by the critic, as are also their close links with their creator (Gide's homosexuality and obsessive pre-ocupation with love and human happiness). But, particulary as regards *Le Roi Candaule*, this analysis could have been developed even further. *Le Roi Candaule* belongs very much to the period when it was composed (1899), and its links are apparent both with the great lyrical work of Gide which dominates this period—*Les Nourritures Terrestres*—and with two fictional works of approximately the same vintage, *Saül* (1897-98) and *L'Immoraliste* (1899-1901). If *Saül*, as Dr Watson-Williams mentions, provides an antidote to the dangerous doctrine of the *Nourritures Terrestres*, so too do *Candaule* and *L'Immoraliste*, for they also nullify and destroy, by irony, the latent message of the earlier book. It is a familiar phenomenon with the young Gide: having once proposed an attitude to life, he brings his critical faculties into play and examines this attitude from every point of view, especially its implications if it is carried to excess. In this way the Gidian themes of *disponibilité*, dispossession and *dépassement*, proposed in the *Nourritures*, are criticised and portrayed as dangerous when carried to extremes, in the

three fictional works. Both Saül and Michel destroy themselves by a false and exaggerated idea of *disponibilité*, Candaules is the tragic victim of the Gidian principles if dispossession and *dépossement*, which he distorts to the extent of offering his wife to a humble fisherman. One of the lessons of the play is indeed the danger of excessive generosity and a warning to man to "conceal" his happiness, as Dr Watson-Williams so well points out, but it is also a demonstration of the dangers inherent in the Gidian doctrine of *dépassement*, as Candaules deliberately "risks" and experiments with his possessions. From this point of view also, Gide's use of the myth of Candaules is an entirely personal one, and the play can be seen as closely woven into the fabric and pattern of Gide's intellectual development.

The end of the nineteenth century represents the close of the period which saw the most fruitful exploration by Gide of the Greek myth, and one will have to wait some thirty years before he again exploits this field in a work of fiction. Nevertheless, throughout this period his interest is continually sustained in Greek civilization and culture, as Dr Watson-Williams shows in her chapter "Projects and Theories". Above all, he is attracted by the *diversity* of the Greek ideal, which reconciles the most varying views and attitudes in an all-embracing harmony. And it is precisely for the lack of this diversity that he reproaches the Christian ideal, which suppresses natural instincts to impose an artificial uniformity on human life. It would appear that room could have been found in this chapter for a more detailed discussion of *Corydon*, that book which Gide once stated that he considered the most important of all his works, and which deals precisely with the tolerant Greek attitude to *l'amour qui n'ose dire son nom*. For, although the figure of Corydon, the passionate shepherd of Virgil's *Eclogues*, is not one of the standard heroes of Greek mythology and is not even presented in Gide's essay as a legendary figure at all, nevertheless this book puts forward a quite distorted view of Greek civilization, partly to legitimise the author's special *penchants*. In the Fourth Dialogue of *Corydon*, the narrator, in addition to making other sweeping claims, proposes these views: that Athens' decadence began only when homosexuality gave way to heterosexuality, that the admirable figures of women and girls to be found in the theatre of Sophocles were also partly due to the influence of uranism, and finally, that the great periods of artistic efflorescence, like that of Greece at the time of Pericles, coincided with an equally exuberant flowering of pederastic tendencies. A discussion of the exaggeration inherent in these ideas, which is designed partly to support Gide's view, expressed elsewhere, that homosexuality was "indispensable to the temperament of a well-ordered society", would have provided further evidence of the intensely personal nature of Gide's use of Greek mythology and culture.

After 1930, Gide approached Greek mythology for literary subjects only very rarely, in fact only twice in really significant literary works. These were in his play *Oedipe* (1931) and in his dramatic monologue *Thésée* (1946).

Oedipe, in accordance with the greater maturity now attained by the writer, offers a far more positive and articulate expression of the great theme posed by Prometheus and Philoctetes: the assertion of the supreme value of the individual man. At the same time, it is closely linked with Gide's thought during the middle period of his life, when he reacts violently against all forms of oppression, and suppression, of the individual on the part of conventional authority, be it that of the Church, the family or society in general. Thus the figure of Oedipus, in the play of 1931, comes also to represent Gide's protest against the authority of the Church and the artificial uniformity which it imposes. All this is admirably demonstrated in Dr Watson-Williams' lucid analysis of *Oedipe*.

Perhaps Gide's most remarkable—and most noble—work in the field of Greek mythology is seen in his treatment of the Theseus legend, which, appearing only five years before his death, serves as a fitting climax to the career of a great writer and humanist. It is also a valuable personal document for the understanding of Gide's final attitude to life. *Thésée* is the story of a whole life, that of the hero, wherein various phases of crisis and experience succeed one another to produce finally a well-balanced and contented man. And, at many points, the career of the hero recalls unmistakably the career of the writer, who evokes here the varied experiences of his life in a sort of symbolic final testament. Professor Brée has given us a timely warning against regarding Theseus as a complete self-portrait of Gide and considers that to do so is to limit the aesthetic value of the work. Nevertheless, there are enough parallels between Theseus' account of his life and Gide's own intellectual development to indicate to what extent the author identified himself with his legendary hero: the initial stage, in adolescence, of self-

exploration and liberation, with its taste for enjoyment of the senses, its heroic striving and bold devotion to an ideal of self-realization, its contempt for security, comfort and stagnation and continual desire to *passer outre*; the period of maturity, when the concern for the unique development of the individual is at once tempered and strengthened by a concern for man in society and for the welfare of humanity at large ("I wished to exalt man, being unwilling to admit that he should be satisfied with his lot and content to hold his head bowed"). And then, the final stage, when the aging hero becomes reconciled with tradition, convinced now of the necessity to regard one's life from the viewpoint of continuity, of the heritage which one may bequeath to future generations.

Most of these links between the legendary hero, as treated by Gide, and his creator, which are so important for our understanding of his very *personal* use of mythology, are indeed brought out in Dr Watson-Williams' careful analysis of *Thésée*, but more perhaps by implication, rather than by direct statement. This omission is particularly noticeable as regards the final stage of Theseus' career, where the hero's serene confidence in the future of the city he has built, his satisfaction with the benefit he has bestowed on future humanity clearly reflect Gide's serene faith in the immortality of his own work at the end of a long and illustrious career. Dr Watson-Williams does not point this out. It is true, as she says, that Gide had long understood the value of tradition in literature and that it was a familiar enough theme throughout the whole of his literary work. But, it would be relevant to add, at the end of his life this theme acquires a particular poignancy, and a new significance, as the author nostalgically looks back on a distinguished career and views his whole work in the light of immortality, for the benefit it may confer on future writers. "My ambition", Gide confided to his *Journal* in 1943, the year before taking up the Theseus legend, "is to create works which will last; and as for the rest: success, honours, acclaim, I attach less value to them than to the smallest particle of true glory: bringing solace and joy to the young men of tomorrow. Oh! that one may not limit life to oneself alone; that one may help to make it finer and more worth living!" How much richer in meaning does the famous last speech of Theseus become, when it is viewed in the light of this moving declaration! For it is only by considering this work in relation to its date of composition that its full significance emerges.

The last two chapters of Dr Watson-Williams' study are excellently conceived and executed. After the chronological survey of Gide's treatment of mythical subjects, the critic proceeds to discuss, generally, the implications of the writer's attiude to Greek mythology. This is done by considering various abstract categories of man, such as 'the man of action', 'the contemplative man', 'the civic man', 'the man of feeling' and 'the spiritual man', and by studying, in the mythological works, Gide's attitude to each of these human types. From this emerges a clear picture of a Gide ever true to himself, whose themes are ever constant, even when considered, as here, in a very small section of his total work. Dr Watson-Williams sums up as follows the common elements to be found in his treatment of myths—and they are very characteristic Gidian themes —: (p. 168) "the necessity for uprooting with the capacity to endure and profit by it; the rejection of all authoritarian pressures and the acceptance of independence as condition and aim of life; the ideal of self-development as directing principle" (or, as she puts it elsewhere: "(for Gide) the heroic destiny is the discovery and the development of the authentic self." (p. 165)).

In the final chapter, "Greece or Gide?", the critic examines similarities and divergencies between the Gidian view of Greece (and Greek mythology) and the authentic spirit of ancient Greece. The divergencies far outweigh the similarities, which only goes further to confirm what is really the main thesis of the book: that Gide has used the Greek myth above all to explore his own inner crises and to clarify his own philosophical thought. But, in one important respect at least, his thought does coincide with the true thought of ancient Greece, and that is, in its fundamental spirit of humanism. As Dr Watson-Williams remarks in the admirably lucid closing pages of her book: "By the importance he attaches to human life on earth, to the individual development of innate capacities, the enjoyment of the pleasures and privileges of living, with the duty to increase them for others, if it is possible, Gide holds something of the Greek view of man as centre and measure of his world" (p. 192).

This is a fine study, by a perceptive and sensitive critic, of an important aspect of the work of André Gide. It will be found stimulating, not only by specialists and students of French literature, but by all those whose concern is for the preservation of the individual values in Man.

POEMS here and there

Elizabeth Marsh

Shapcott, Thomas W.: *A Taste of Salt Water*, Angus and Robertson, 1967.
Clark, Robert: *Segments of the Bowl*, Cheshire, 1967.
Robinson, Roland: *Grendel*, Jacaranda Press, 1967.
Irvin, Margaret: *The Rock and the Pool*, Jacaranda Press, 1967.
Dutton, Geoffrey: *Poems Soft and Loud*, Cheshire, 1967.
Dawe, Bruce: *An Eye for a Tooth*, Cheshire, 1968.

Ours is not an age of poets. Yet even an assiduous reader, I suspect, is hard put to it to keep ahead of the multiplicity of slim volumes of verse that pour from the publishing houses. The sixties in Australia have seen more than thirty of these from local poets; many lines, many rhymes, some poems. I do not know whether this is a symptom of health or of sickness in the world of poetry. Perhaps things would be much worse if these voices were silent. Poetry should be written, Robert Graves thought, from some inner necessity, and not for any other reason; not to write a poem, not to get a book together. That is probably true, at least of the lasting kind of poetry. Whether the existence in composition of such a necessity can be attached to anything discernable, definable in a poem, I do not know, but I think I have sensed its absence too often in the volumes under review. Anyway, granted that there is a great deal published nowadays, it seems reasonable that readers should cast a fairly cold eye on what there is, and rest confident that true poetry can survive the chill, and eventually, if need be, laugh at our mistakes. We should also avoid the need to detect 'promise' everywhere, for fear we are proved wrong! A poet is going to be a poet regardless of his hack work and his juvenilia and of our readings of it. In other words it is best, surely, if a poem does not work, to say so. Of the six volumes here under review, I think none satisfactory, though I find isolated excellences, and sometimes poems here and there. Both Thomas W. Shapcott in *A Taste of Salt Water*, and Robert Clark in *Segments of the Bowl*, keep close to people, being concerned with portraiture (Clark's "Girl in the Coffee Shop", Shapcott's portraits in his section III), and with moral experiences, especially their own, from which they seek to generalise. I shall attempt to deal with *A taste of Salt Water* first. And it needs dealing with, being a book which claims rather a lot for itself. Its leading poem, a quiet and pleasant one, is an Accelerative. There are Aubades, Madrigals, Sonnets and Elegies, there are Classical names and bits of Aztec mythology, a religious series called "The City of Acknowledgement" and an historical series, "Macquarie as Father", the whole being encased between a snatch of pert French dialogue and, lest anyone take any of it too lightly, NOTES, academic notes, with more French and quotations from Larousse and an Assyrio-Babylonian myth! Much of this apparatus can be disregarded, though when confronted with so much window-dressing, one does not proceed with confidence, especially as

one must suspect the author of lacking it. However, beyond all this one finds, after all, simple enough poems, some pleasing effects. Some of the lyrical poems in the first section, which significantly aim at least, have a limited success. I do not mean the word-spinning Madrigals which have no particular reason to stop or start where they do and could perhaps go on forever; nor those of the Aubades which pursue their changing word order without any development of sense, but the Sonnets, while what they say is slight, are true sonnets in that they grow of themselves into the form, and show some ability to weld meaning and metaphor: one, for instance, concludes of the poet's tracks'

and mine lost with them in the first wind blown
across the grass that day upon night had sown.

where the ideas of passing time and growth within it are made one in the grass image, because the poem sees growth in time as being both what one is, and what one stumbles over in going forward.

There are also some poems worth attention in section III. While the type in "Elegy for a Bachelor Uncle" is conventional, the sketch is well-drawn and built carefully toward the tense and half-guilty, half-anxious last lines. And the poem, "Shadow of War" with its image of angry and pestilent cockatoos, jarringly recreates a time past and a place. "Three on the Mountain" can, I think, be used to indicate both the strength and weakness of this poet's present attempts. Most importantly, there is an ability to describe both place and mood in telling phrases:

. . . angry among the rot
of strangling vines, of insects too sharp to flee,
of choked air and the low enveloping heat,

but also most importantly, an inability to narrate:

You should have said how far it was—my sandal
cuts; and look at the mud-stains on my dress!

is clumsy, with its broken rhythms, words out on a limb, cutting across both line and sense. I think that the greatest and most pervasive fault of this volume is this roughness of narrative and dramatic technique. It is unfortunate that most of its poems, including the long religious and historical series, aim to be narrative or dramatic monologue. One can take a stanza from almost anywhere and find much the same fault. From "The Child Who Had Died" consider

The child is eating, sitting up and tasting
food again. It is a miracle.
The servants crowd at doorways, in passages,
marvelling at each licked receptacle.
'See how she's eating . . . .'

with its jerky rhythms, its construction by short, unsatisfactory phrases, which come haltingly or rush off tangentially from one another. Words belonging to one grammatical unit are dislodged and lie dully at the beginning of another line or stanza until the reader's mind boggles with the sheer effort of organization and rebels utterly at lines like:

'It was everywhere. So much forgotten. Yes, I was humbled.'

The damage from this sort of thing can be serious. The first stanza of the poem "A Taste of Salt Water" for instance, moves cleanly, lucidly until the last disruptive phrase where a new and apparently unrelated thought leaps guiltily and almost ridiculously from the page. It is not that one doubts that the salt water experience makes the poet think of his grandmother. But the reader has no responsibility to either expect her, or to forgive her for so rocking the boat.

Perhaps, however, the most unsatisfactory thing about the book is its failure in its big poem, "The City of Acknowledgement" to provide any new interpretation of the gospel stories. The stories are offered solemnly with an attempt at colloquialization, but the translations of the Authorized Version are not improved on, nor is our relationship with the figure of Jesus redrawn or illustrated. Thomas Shapcott has surely found acknowledgement, despite the protestation of his refrain, too easy.

I found it a relief at first to come to Robert Clark's poems in *Segments of the Bowl*. It is a book which reveals a generally well-read, and civilized attitude. And Clark is a writer whose gentle wit can respond both to general human situations and to a literary background. There is for instance, the twinkle in the author's eye in "The Girl in the Coffee Shop":

How would you like it, medium, fine or coarse?

the girl asks in a poem which mocks gently, not only the girl and her situation, but also the ballad rhythms and the sentimental songs which have given it its form (and which the girl might sing). There is the light touch of the Troubadour poem, its ironic detached voice and the Elizabethan ambiguities of its last lines, which claim their full weight. And the sureness of tone and organization of "On Growing Old", which describes the loss with age, of passion:

To put ashore a man requires
So little gear . . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
Alone, approaching untried shores,
His dinghy poised to catch the flood,
He waits there, resting on his oars.

This sureness of tone is again evident in the poem "The Sought is Rarely Found", a love poem, written with an admirable ease of line and sense, a poem which I think never fails in tact and which uses with awareness words and phrases which have a significant history, such as

We shape toward the dust.

Or

Your boy refined and common.

But it is a poem that possibly gives the impression that it is saying much more than it actually does, an impression which I think derives from the slightly hypnotic effect of the short lines and the faithful rhymes. If this is a fault, it relates to a tendency, which becomes more and more disturbing as one digests the volume, the tendency of these poems to move not toward precision, definition, but away from it. A tendency also to clichéd thought or at least to a too simply dualistic view of things:

To so indulge the animal
brings the decay of spirit near.

Or, of the man who rejected leadership and fame:

that he and they could grow as men
into the hammering light of day.

where the force of the last line only succeeds on a first reading in deflecting one's attention from the cliché, as I think it is, of 'grow as men'.

Or again, the surely over-simplified oppositions of the first poem of the book, where, dogmatically, it is asserted that

. . . balance is the buoyancy we live in,
To every poise an equal counterpoise.

This is a view of life which may possibly be maintained if it is seen as engrossing many ages, but not surely as a law which orders each man's life. But the poem sees it as providing dicta by which a man should live:

He lives who learns to yield and acquiesce

and then goes on to shrug off the obvious problem of the man who 'resists' by simply dismissing him as 'the (sic) suicide' or as one who frequents 'a private road'. If poetry, in one of its functions, takes cognizance of a multiplicity of possibilities or shows itself to be at least aware of possibilities, then I feel sure that these poems fall short. Or again, a poem concerned to say something simple will do so in a way that redefines that thing with a new precision, perhaps with a new image, so as to expand our consciousnesses. Poems should make and be discoveries. That individual lines should do so is not enough, though some of these do, as in:

The sculptured limits of a pouting rose.

The series of poems "The Nameless Men" perhaps illustrates best what I feel it is necessary to say about this poet. In the second of these, three short verses are used to suggest the heroism of an 'inward-furnished man', who apparently left a life with his indigenous people, having heard 'the call of men'. The trouble becomes most clear in the third stanza:

He died content, a fancied debt
to kind not of his kind discharged,
remembering sunlight on a creek,
a need denied, a life enlarged.

where the vagueness of the last line is perhaps comforting but nevertheless inexcusable. The poem leaves one with many questions: Is the man a hero because he left his people? Does the last stanza imply that he did much, or nothing? Is the 'need denied' his or theirs? And what is it? And the 'life enlarged'? And are these two things 'remembered' or apposite to the 'content' of line one? If they are remembered, is he remembering his own or someone else's 'life enlarged?' It is perhaps possible to guess at the answers to these and other questions, but not to know them from either the feeling or the logic of the poem. I am left with the uneasy feeling that the poem is a fake, because while it so nearly sounds good, it discovers no meaning. I think it fairly true to say that this sort of vagueness and obscurity pervades the poems of "The Nameless Men" and others in the book, and does so to the extent that the first "Nameless Men" poem could be paying tribute to Christ or to Hitler (if I read at all correctly).

Both Roland Robinson and Margaret Irvin are poets with an eye for and a pre-occupation with natural things; I think that both of them have found meanings in the world important and relevant to themselves, but not always made so to their readers. Roland Robinson in his book, *Grendel*, is concerned not only to record aboriginal legends in English verse but also gradually to build up though his verses some sense of the great closeness of that man's relationship to the country he once inhabited. One has the impression that for Robinson, these legends have the weight and primary meaning of myth and he presents them straight on a page without interpretation, as simple narratives. This is a disappointment for the reader, whose interest in the stories can only be decisively captured by the excellence of the telling, but unfortunately, the quality of the verse itself is at best only sustaining, at worst less than mediocre. The imitation of archaic syntactical forms from older ballads ('and hunting she is gone' instead of 'goes hunting'),

whether or not it is meant to evoke moods of unaffected naturalness or simplicity seems often only to fill out the beats and supply the rhymes. Even if one overlooks this, one cannot surely forgive either the rhyme or the use of the last verb in:

. . . . . .
Where the girl laid down
Finds two hollows in the dust
That her breasts have done.

The other poems in Robinson's collection are mainly descriptive of the Australian countryside. The writer seems fascinated by the possibilities of life lived in an intimate relationship with the bushland, a rich and flowering bushland which ignores the stereotype of the dead heart.

What a careless country. You camp wherever the fancy finds you, with plenty of firewood,
. . . . . .
She-oaks shelter you, shed their hair

and so on; a theme re-echoed in the pretentious 'And I broke branches one to make my bed'. Grendel turns out to be the old imaginary horror of the bush, the poem a description of a cavernous forest in imitation of the alliterative patterns and caesuras of Anglo-Saxon verse forms. But only the name Grendel is transferred bodily to the Australian scene and the poem convinces us neither of the Grendel terror (a 'mood of the mind') nor of its relevance to us as an experience. But this poet's attitude to language dismays me more than do his subjects. A near-passion for hyphenated words, for instance (Beetle-boat, leaf-laden, ochre-red, fern-hung, and foliage-fringed all in the space of three short lines!), must warrant the charge of prettiness for its own sake, and I have been hard put to it to find an instance of the 'taut, modern line' the dust jacket proclaims, though many lines are short. Some of these short-lined poems are perhaps the best of the book, "Nude", "The Child", for instance, but even these seem content to utter brief descriptive phrases which never add up to much. However, it was when I came to the poem beginning 'Read me a poem as this lake', that I thought I could no longer trust this writer with the English language. I hoped at first that this was an heroic one-man stand against the lamentable Americanization of 'as' to 'like'. Except that the whole point is that both words remain valuable. But am I wrong? Does, after all, the lake read?

Margaret Irvin begins her volume, *The Rock and the Pool*, with a quotation from Gerard Manley Hopkins, and our memories of him, as we read her book, are persistent. These lines from "Greenhood Orchid":

It was not this or that.
Abstract of pain and grief,
curve and incurve, it grew,
simply out of a leaf;
both more and less than I knew—
not easy to estimate.

reminds one of his concept of Instress in more ways than one. The description of the orchid which precedes these lines is finely detached and delicate, but the acknowledged abdication of the poem's problem in the last line, its assertion of bafflement, is symptomatic.

In her deep respect, even reverence, for life in its myriad and often miniature forms, Margaret Irvin is concerned with the 'spring in eternity' and too often it leads her simply to the confessedly inscrutable. The result is that the poems tend either to dismay or to lead into a private language. Hopkins himself, we know, relates his perceptive descriptions of natural things to a belief that leads out from the object to include all natural and human things. His poems have thus an intellectual or religious basis that is relevant and even vital to some of his readers. Margaret Irvin writes:

I dance, I sing, then I am still
nothing I do translates the tree:
quiet and slow the flowers come out,
touching time fastidiously.

Here is an acute sense and expression of life in other things, of their lack of necessary relationship to herself, of their transience. But reading through this volume, one comes time and time again to the sense that this poet *is* trying to 'translate the tree' (that is, where she is not saying that she cannot). Often, like the girl in this poem ("Girl and Blossom"), the poet cannot fully know, and she lapses instead into delicate but in the end ineffectual description, shot through with hints of some mystical something we feel we ought to recognize. The poems then become a kind of pursuit and in a crucial way lack *sense*. And their function seems often to be to deny understanding, as in "The Pool", its last stanza reading:

His listeners sighed, not always perceiving the inward
shining of light on a crystal, love on its sphere:
pastures, timber, the homestead rose—and their centre
a depth for the sun, ripping day from the sky, to sink under,
a pool where the bud of each morning used to appear.

But this sort of assertion does not make for intelligibility.

Margaret Irvin's is a delicate and smooth verse, sometimes, admirably, an incautious verse, but one which too often fails to deal

with a reality its readers will recognize. The poems are I think, inadequately peopled, a disappointment in face of the successes with people here and there, like the nun in "Convent Square Revisited":

she comes towards me now, arthritic, smiling,
stricter than secateurs among her perfect roses.

I think the best poem in this volume and one where Margaret Irvin's chief pre-occupation, as I see it, is made most clear, is the little poem "Citadels". Here Margaret Irvin's sense of life in minute and intricate forms and of their origins, is related to human experience. The last stanza reads:

But here is the heart, and here its country—
each laid open to a cave, a bell
and, in empty spaces twisting darkly,
the labyrinth repeated in a cell.

which acknowledges not only the beauties but also touches the terrors of what the heart inhabits and is. Here the great repetition of life in cell upon cell grows to include us in its scheme in a way both awe-inspiring and almost horrifying. This poem also is able to do that rare thing that poetry does best, confess a negative with a statement of a positive, here, where surprise at the heart's powers of resistance turns us towards its vulnerability:

. . . admitted, might even find
armour and spire between us and the ocean,
tissue holding against the wind.

Margaret Irvin's then is an enviable visual power; she has the perception of a botanist and the rare gift to be able to translate what she sees into words. She can control line and verse forms and rhythms and only once did I notice distortion of syntax to achieve a rhyme. It seems to me that it would be a great shame if this near exquisite ability to write of natural beauties were not turned into a language to speak of men, one so disciplined by rigour of logic and sense that it became poetry.

Geoffrey Dutton in *Poems Soft and Loud* and Bruce Dawe in *An Eye for a Tooth* write poems which in one way or another are topical, poems about our cities, poems of social comment, poems satirical, poems sometimes elegiac. Of the two, Geoffrey Dutton is the more cheerful and his criticisms turn mostly on manners rather than on moral issues that we can locate in our times. In the sense that many of Roland Robinson's lines do not escape Robert Graves's category of 'jingle, jingle' poems, I think that some of these are clearly of the 'Look, I've been abroad!' type. At any rate it does seem to be the typical tourist jaunt around Russia and the look at New York stays close to the sky-scraper-cheese-burger view of that complicated city. I also find this book oddly old-fashioned: for instance in its conventional Western simplifications about Russia (workers, usefulness, drabness) and particularly in its sense of *guilt* about the European experience of war and its association with 'maturity'. Australia is 'innocent' and 'bare'. But would it really have been better if 'gassed naked bodies', the 'children of jellied fire' had happened here too? So we would not have to say 'I have never suffered' and 'the best that we can do is kill each other in cars'? Are we really to suppose that war is good for us? But apart from this, *Poems Soft and Loud* draws its life-blood from clichés. A gesture toward self-criticism, for instance, in the line:

Trivial *despairs at people who drank sweet wine,*

points to an overall awareness the poet must have, but does not bring into play in his poems. One might argue that there can never be enough satirising of the ladies in floral hats, the ordinary decent blokes, the talk of dagoes and reffos, the Beatles in Adelaide, and so on. The trouble is that, if the facts are still true, they are even less now of the whole truth, and the poems thus seem only to find their sense by virtue of omission. One cannot believe that apart from Geoffrey Dutton there are only the

hands around me, raising schooners at closing time.

nor that he has to rely on the done-to-death Australianisms of

What other country lifts one with such sunlight,
Curves its flat miles with magpies singing,
Throws petals of fire and evening from the white tree-trunks,
Galah, rosella, grass-parrot, cockatoo,
budgerigar, ...

to argue joy in a home coming, nor that he feels it worth-while to write sentimentally about town names or his young son running. All of these are disappointments; I hope they do not sound like sour grapes. The book makes reasonably pleasant reading of a relaxed, easy kind and there are some amusing lines; for instance, the resounding

Give way, square city named for a dull, dead queen,

and the superb remembrance of Marvell in "Georgian Wine":

Grabbing for balance at the tendrils of beans
I fall on the glossy breasts of aubergines.

But overall these poems are mostly Soft, few are Loud and one could wish some were Hard. Bruce Dawe's is the most obviously committed of these books. His attitude to modern metropolitan Australian life, heavily critical and ironic, pretty well rests there. It criticizes, it accuses, it mocks, it is often surprisingly bitter

—it almost never affirms, nor does it suggest remedy. I think this negative one-sidedness gives the book as a whole its strength, and an important cohesiveness. Much of the book is concerned, as its title suggests, with the injustice we more commonly represent as justice:

Not blindfold, this justice
But cross-eyed, in truth,
Which asks (in all fairness)
An eye for a tooth.

And in this book it is as if the course of Jehovah has descended on our judgement with the Hebrew dictum, which attains its strength in this context of criticism from its place within our uncritical memory. The irony which discredits it here then serves to bind together our responses to judgements which these poems make, the way they see accepted tenets of our society as perversely destructive, crippling, or operating against individuals. In this Dawe joins many voices of protest, but the list of things he condemns, the war in Vietnam, our Ronald Ryans, the values which feed morbidly upon newspaper stories of our social outcasts, is not the less important because it is familiar. At the beginning of one poem he looks back to Tacitus: 'you have made this a desolation and you call it peace', and Dawe is typically concerned with giving a name to things, having no patience with our tendency to wrap our horrors in newspaper, or to dispose of our guilt before the deaths of millions by turning the set off.

Dawe writes of 'hearts fallen foul of circumstance', but the circumstances are seen as being of our making. His subjects then become, typically, our victims, and Dawe goes on from this sort of accusation to show our involvement in the terrors we have created: thus in "The Victims" the observer-poet's compassion for those terrorised is transformed into terror for himself. 'My heart sounds like feet, like feet, running'; and "The Rockthrower" points to our vulnerability to the arbitrary lunacy of the phantom rockthrower, so like the lunacy of those who throw bombs on other urban communities. The rather heavily ironic correspondence with the Hebrew manna story hint darkly at the intelligence behind our apparently lunatic but violent acts. But these correspondences are able to work in this poem, I think, because the matter-of-fact tone and colloquial idiom are not abandoned. Thus the first direct reference to the manna story is made with the phrase 'at some unearthly hour' where the actual sense of 'unearthly' only intrudes gently on the inflated laziness of the modern slang sense. The poem, perhaps too heavy in the ways it seeks to generalize, shows Dawe's skill with language in particular instances, and points disturbingly to the passivity of the suburban dwellers who have come to regard their nightly exercise in vigilance as part of the status quo. Bombardment becomes 'meaning" and its perpetrators are successfully elusive. In such ways do Dawe's threatening skies close over the poems in this book and a sense of nervous apprehension is at least as pervasive as the sense of humour that informs the book's lighter satirical vein.

Dawe does not always maintain a purely critical stance. Sometimes he is bitter ('What you first see when you get to Hell'); sometimes he is so purely contemptuous of what he sees that he becomes only sarcastic ('In the new landscape there will be only cars'), but there is also the wonderful funniness of "Life-Cycle", with its bare fisted attack on the sort of mentality that the Victorian obsession with football implies, and the compassion of "Prayer for those in Coma", the best poem of the book, with its movingly successful images:

. . . . as they listless lie
in the body's open boat,
and

white laundered shapes that creak like gulls.

Much of this book, however, seems to be experimentation. The author goes over and over similar themes in different forms as if he himself is not quite satisfied he has said well what he wants to say. Some poems seem redundant—thus "The not So Good Earth" does *not* do what "The Saigon-Dalat Night Train Runs Infrequently" does do well. The latter poem stresses our mental distance from the horrors the civilian in Vietnam endures, seeing our reactions as being of the same order as those to the travel brochure or to our notion of an Asian frieze.

Grenade bursts are as unreal as temple-gongs
The rioting Buddhists static in a frieze.

The last stanza of this little poem effectively contrasts the torment felt there, with the fretting felt here because of it. We feel guilt but resent the time it takes. The last line endorses and extends these effects:

And raise a hand to brush the blood away.

where the condemnation of likening our reaction to brushing away a pestiferous insect (or the flush of embarrassment) stumbles dramatically onto the real and inescapable sense of 'blood'.

Six books of poems; many lines, many rhymes, some poems. And some more poem than others.

The

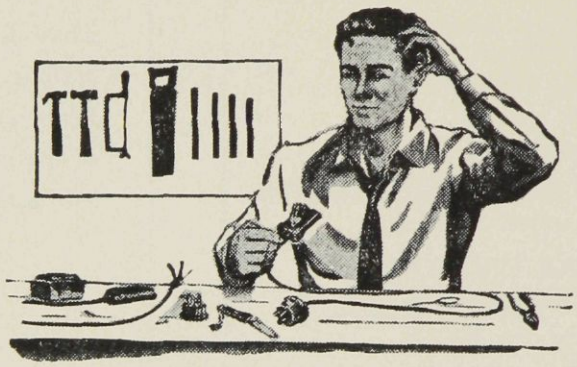
Patricia Hackett Prize

for the
best original contribution
to *Westerly* in 1967 is awarded to
Mr T. A. G. Hungerford
for his story 'The Voyager'.

◆

The Editorial Committee
gratefully acknowledges the kindness of
Professor Leonie Kramer,
of the University of Sydney,
who acted as judge.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW DON'T DO IT



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