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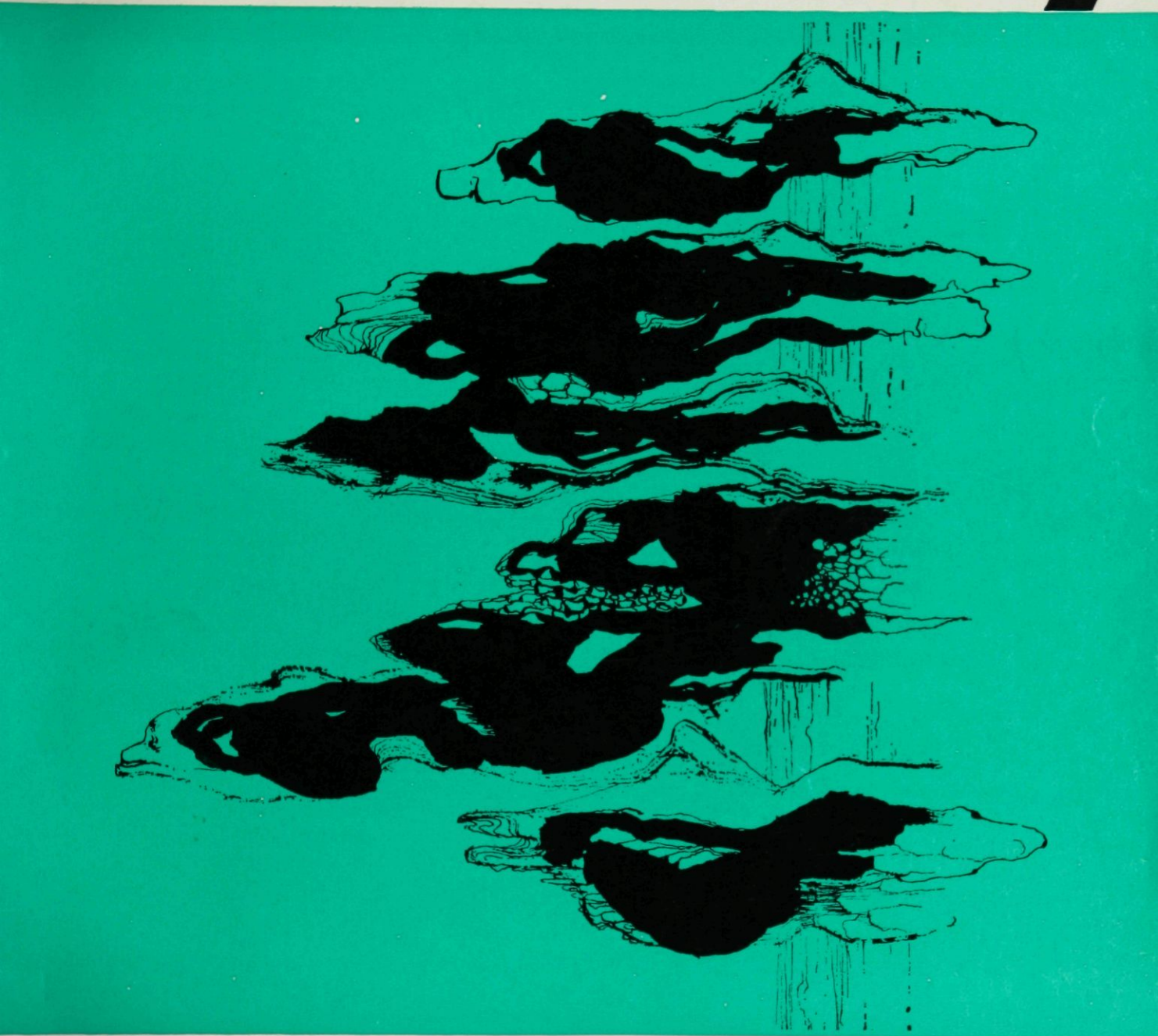

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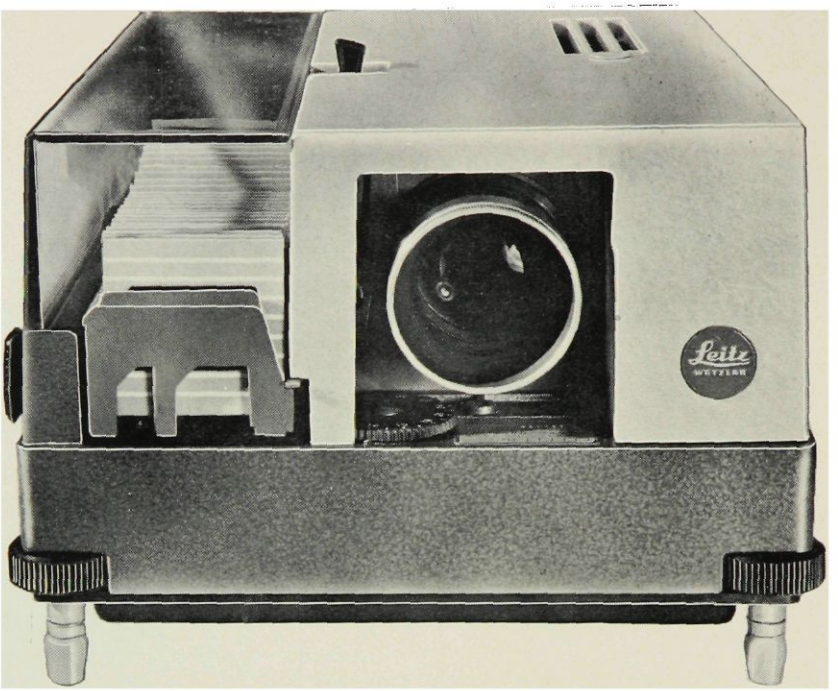

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No. 1, March, 1968

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G. M. Glaskin

THE ASKING PRICE

Mr Johnson said to Mrs Jonhson: "Somebody's at last bought the Allingham place." And Mrs Johnson gave immediate attention.

Putting down both knife and fork, she said, "Really?"

Mr Johnson went on eating; he could be quite maddening at times. It had given her weeks of speculation ever since Mr Allingham had run off with his secretary and Mrs Allingham had gone for a divorce. After all, it was not only that there was a house vacant on The Heights, but also that it should happen to be just across The Knoll from themselves. Ever since the Allinghams had gone (and so precipitately, too, mind you—she had to hand it to Ted Allingham, nobody had even guessed) and the Allingham house had been put up for sale, she had been in a state of nervous anticipation as to who their new neighbours would be.

"Well, tell me who," she demanded.

"Tell you who what?"

"Who's bought the Allingham place, of course."

"Oh. Fellow called Steinberg, I gather."

Mrs Johnson's hands fell clean into her lap.

"Oh, no!"

At which just slightly alarmed, Mr Johnson looked up.

"Oh no what?" he ventured to ask.

"That *name!*"

"What about it?"

"What *about* it! Alec, don't be an idiot! It's Jewish, of course."

"Oh, I don't know. Could be German. Perhaps even Aryan. I suppose the mountains in Germany are made of stone like anywhere else."

He well knew his wife's prejudices, as well as her whims.

"Steinberg!" she said, and it was almost a screech. "German, my foot!"

Mr Johnson sighed. At least, for once, she hadn't referred to some other part of her anatomy.

"Well, until we're sure, you might give him the benefit of the doubt," Mr Johnson dared to suggest.

"There can *be* no doubt," Mrs Johnson retaliated. "Steinberg! Steinberg! My God, what *could* be more Jewish than that?"

Mr Johnson could conjure up a suggestion or two, but thought better of it. Besides, his wife hadn't finished. Dinner perhaps, but certainly not what she had to say.

"Did he pay the Allingham's asking price?" she wanted to know.

"Ah-hah."

"What, right to the penny?"

"Right to the cent, dear. Right to the cent."

"Then that settles it."

"What settles what?"

"That's he's a Jew, of course."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, who else but a Jew could pay a price like that!"

Mr Johnson had to give her one there. Mrs Johnson's hands remained in her lap; they had discovered her dinner napkin to toy with. But food didn't interest her; only Steinberg did.

"And how many of them *are* there?" she wanted to know.

"How many what?"

"Oh, Alec! Steinbergs, of course. Dozens of them, I suppose! And all with names like Benjamin and Sarah and Rachel and such!"

"Oh, that. No, only the one."

She seemed a little placated.

"Just *Mrs* Steinberg, then?"

"No. Only him."

"What! A bachelor! On The Heights!"

"It has been known, you know."

"That was different. He at least was a bishop."

"Well, maybe this one is, too."

"With a name like Steinberg? Don't be so silly!"

"Perhaps there *are* Jewish bishops," Mr Johnson suggested.

Mrs Johnson snorted; she positively did.

"And what does he do, may I ask?"

"Do?"

"For a living, of course."

"Nothing, I gather."

"There, that confirms it."

Mr Johnson dared to look a trifle exasperated.

"Really, Amy," he said. "There are also some gentiles who choose to be indolent."

"He must definitely be odd," Mrs Johnson proceeded, but was prepared to acquaint herself with her dinner again.

"How come?"

"Well, enough money to buy the Allingham place, does nothing for a living, unmarried, lives alone, and a Jew into the bargain."

"He doesn't exactly live alone," Mr Johnson informed her.

"What!" And food again failed to interest.

"I said, he doesn't exactly live alone."

"I heard you, I heard you! Now tell me he supports a whole Jewish family! A whole Jewish community!" she was compelled to append.

"No, only one."

"What, one family?"

"One person."

"A mistress!" she shrieked. "I might have known! And he thinks he's going to bring her here, to live on The Heights!"

"No, not at all."

"What do you mean, 'No, not at all!' Do you mean to say she'll only come on occasions?"

"I meant no, it's not a mistress."

"*What* then?"

"Another man, I'm afraid. Fellow called Henderson."

Unbecoming or not, Mrs Johnson let her jaw drop.

"You don't mean to say that . . ."

But she couldn't bring herself to finish. Mr Johnson decided he'd better do so for her, if only to get it over.

"Looks a bit like it, it seems."

"Oh, my *God!*"

"Now, Amy! I only said 'looks' like it."

"*Looks* like it! *Looks* like it!"

He wondered if she might even break one of her own dinner plates. But of course, she did manage to control herself.

"What age is he?" she said. "Steinberg, I mean."

"Around fifty, I'd say. It's not easy to tell with a well-preserved man."

"That's *one* way of putting it! And the other one, whatever his name is?"

"Henderson? Still in his twenties."

Mrs Johnson gaped.

"And you say it just *looks* like it!" she eventually said.

"Well I——"

"Alex Johnson! Do you mean to tell me that a couple of pansies have dared to buy a house on The Heights and you just sit there and say it *looks* like it and you haven't the faintest intention of doing anything about it?"

"Now really, Amy! Steinberg's bought the place. What on earth do you expect me to do! Change his sex? Run him out of town?"

Mrs Johnson's gape turned to venomous glare. Then she threw down her dinner napkin with considerable force, though not as a towel.

"What do I expect you to do?" she retorted. "I expect you to do *some*thing about it, of *course!*"

"Amy, I've just said——"

"Well, if you won't, I most certainly shall!"

And he hadn't the slightest doubt that she most certainly would.

* * *

She also didn't doubt that she most certainly would. She wasn't on so many committees for nothing. If the men wouldn't do something, then it would be up to the women. She could amass a pretty formidable array, she contended, when it came to committees.

It took her forty-five minutes on the phone and she'd got the best of them behind her: Beryl Adams, Bessie Matthews, Hilda Haley, Elspeth Carruthers. With herself as self-appointed chairman, she considered it the most formidable committee she'd ever contrived. It had taken only a few words to each of them about having a couple of 'those' on The Heights and they were immediately agreed that something had to be done. It might not be often that they agreed, but in a matter like this there was no question about petty differences between them. They were all agreed in a trice.

After that, it was only a matter of an hour or two and they had Marian Hudson, Mary

Stuart, Barbara Worthington, and even Emily Hodgkiss behind them. It was quite a *coup*, of course, when Diana Hetherington joined in as well. They had their first meeting the very next morning—coffee and crumpets at *her* place, of course. The crumpets because this was no time for cooking.

* * *

"Now let's face it, girls," she was pleased to have thought of, "from what I've heard of them, they're really basically like us. Feminine, I mean. That means they're social climbers. No, No! Listen to me, please!" she said quickly when there was a faint sign of protest from Emily Hodgkiss, "And it all adds up! Or why else would they come here to live on The Heights? Agreed? Right! So what we do is cut them off from all social activities for a start.

"They can't join the Knoll Club inside a year, so that's no drinks of a Sunday unless they stay home or go out of town. Alec is seeing to it that they can't join the tennis club just in case they *do* play. And you, Mrs Worthington, can keep them out of what they're so much more likely to be interested in, the Stage Club. Marian, your Ben can keep them out of the golf club and we've already fixed Father O'Brien—just in case, you know, girls; can't tell with a name like Henderson, whereas we don't have to worry much about Steinberg. And it's also fixed with the Reverend Baker. So, that's no church functions either.

"Now then, I think there's no need to mention that we don't accept *their* invitations and we certainly don't give out any ourselves. So that's taken care of them socially, shall we say. Now for the sound effects.

"Bessie, your Henrietta will practise her piano scales at six every morning. Yes, I know, dear; a bit wearing on you and Bert. But it's all in the cause, you know—all in the cause. And Elspeth, evenings you can encourage your Tom on his drums and young Eddie on the trombone. Then there's your Robert, Beryl, with his stereo-set and his beat music. And Hilda, I think we can rely on your old Aunt Audrey to let loose her dogs? Good! That should take care of the noise angle until we can think up something else.

"Next is litter. I'm afraid we'll have to depend on our girls for paper-strewing over the fence. In a case like this, as you all know, we can't have our *boys* going too near the place. In fact, nowhere near it at all, may I stress. But of course they *could* help the girls assemble the litter in the first place. Yes, no harm in that, surely.

"And now, let me see. Oh, yes, fire hazard. As you know, we're about half-way through the dry season, and though it may seem a pity to spoil a little of our natural beauty on The Knoll, the Horticultural Society has assured me that it does benefit the natural species to a considerable extent to have a burn-off now and then. Well, as the reserve land on The Knoll, the Horticultural Society has assured I mean—Alec and I have decided that you can leave that part of it to us, with the help of the local fire brigade which has already been arranged. I do hope that none of you feel that we—we Johnsons, I mean again—are taking too much of this on to ourselves, both the tennis club and the fire hazard, as well as any other little contributions we can possibly make, but I think you will agree that we must all do what we can. And in any case, we are, unfortunately, their closest neighbours.

"Now I think you'll all agree that, after a few months of our, er—little organizations, they'll be out of The Heights much quicker than they came, and the Allingham place will again be up for sale. But this time, girls, I have a feeling that the asking price won't be quite so high as it was the last time. Well, we can't help that. Business is business and, as everyone and Jock Carruthers well know, real estate is real business. Now, any more questions? No? Any more crumpets anyone? No? Well then, the meeting is closed . . ."

* * *

Of course, sooner or later she was bound to run into Steinberg, and it happened in the butcher's.

She had to admit that he was, for fifty, a fine figure of a man. His hair might be grey, but at least, unlike Alec's, it was a beautiful crop. Dressed impeccably, of course. No rings or those identification bracelets his kind usually brandished. But what really disappointed her was that he had, contrary to her expectation, perhaps the straightest nose in The Heights. Was it *too* straight, perhaps? Plastic surgery, no doubt. And perhaps also a face-lift. He was as least discreet enough not to have his boy-fr . . . . er, Henderson with him.

Yet in a way, this also disappointed her; she was curious to see him and perhaps give

a leer. What really infuriated her was that when she came to give her order, she found that Steinberg had taken all the best meat. Even the ham! Well, at least he wasn't tiresomely orthodox. But it was a damned inconvenience when she had the Worthingtons coming for dinner and bridge.

Barbara Worthington, that evening, was full of excitement. She had seen the carriers arrive and my dear, she said, it was just chock of the most divine furniture you ever did see. No, not at all modern—all fantastic antiques. There was a china cabinet that was out of this world; seventeenth century, she thought. So heaven alone knew what kind of china he had to put in it.

Barbara, she decided, was more stupid than she thought. He probably didn't have such furniture to live with; Jews nearly always dealt in antiques. Let him try it in The Heights! He'd soon be told of the community's by-laws about conducting business on residential premises. Then he'd have to earn his lucre elsewhere.

She was preparing for Andy to come home from college when Bessie Matthews burst in.

"Meissen!" Betty yelped.

"What? Where? What on earth is it?"

Bessie looked at her ox-eyed.

"His china, of course," she replied. "The whole damn shebang. Meissen, mind you! And not only that, but all of it antique. Must be worth a fortune, to say the least . . ."

"What else would you expect!" she had to retort, and couldn't help the tartness that had given it an edge.

Next day at the chemist's, Hilda Haley said: "They've got a housekeeper. I ran into her at the grocer's yesterday afternoon. From the city, of course. But I must say she's charming. Been with him for seventeen years, she told me. And do you know what? He's got a Rubens *and* a Raphael *and* two miniature van Dijks. Lots of others, too, the housekeeper told me. But you know me, dear—simply hopeless at names. I must say, I'd give anything to see them . . ."

"Just you dare!"

Hilda looked as though she'd been hit with an axe.

"Oh Amy, how could you! You know I wouldn't dream of it."

But knowing Hilda Haley, she wouldn't put it past her.

Bessie Matthews again: "You'd never believe it, but they've got a grand. *And* a Steinway at that!"

"You mean piano?"

"Of course. What do you think! Henrietta found out. They've invited her to play it some time."

"They?"

"Henrietta met them both on the bus going to school. They were going to the city."

"You didn't let her, of course."

"Let her what?"

"Try their goddam piano."

"It hadn't occurred to me."

"Well, it had *better* occur to you. Good God, don't tell me you've forgotten our campaign already!"

Bessie Matthews was indignant.

"Of course, I haven't. But really, when you think of it, Henrietta *could* make quite a nuisance of herself. Well, couldn't she? If she went every day? And even I know the limit of Henrietta's playing—if she *has* a limit."

"Well," she had to concur, "that *could* be an idea . . ."

But to her amazement, Bessie's face had disintegrated into something that might have been rapture.

"Young Henderson plays," Bessie said. "Rather well, I believe. In fact, I hear he has given up engineering to be a concert pianist. Steinberg's his patron."

"I'll bet!"

Next was the car. Or *cars*, rather. No less than three of them. A Bentley for town, mind you. A Lincoln station-sedan for the country. And young Henderson had a Porsche. She'd have to warn at least sixteen families to keep their young sons away from *that* lot.

But then came Henderson himself. Tall, blond, blue-eyed and James Dean wasn't in it. It made her, at just the sight of him, suddenly and acutely uncomfortable with abdominal sensations she hadn't experienced in years. If she'd thought her young Andy a good looker, he was an ogre in comparison. Oh the pity of it!—when there were so many eligible young girls on The Heights. But then, of course, she had to admit that it was probably those very good looks that had made him what he was. She didn't read The Ladies' Home Journal and Readers' Digest for nothing. And those clothes of his! Even if he did have the body of an athlete, it was almost indecent the way he showed it off. But you could hardly remark

on it; cod-piece trousers and shoulder-length hair graced—or *dis*graced—so many of the young men these days, even in The Heights. Her own Andy, for instance, though she'd remarked and remarked. Didn't matter one jot. She'd only made herself blue in the face.

Almost the last straw was the swarm of house renovators. Within a week, what had once been the Allingham eyesore became the sight of The Heights. And indoors, she'd been told, was not to be believed. Even the swimming-pool was enlarged—and then heated, by God.

There was only one consolation: the campaign was under way.

* * *

But even that wasn't going as well as expected.

The noise tactics first. Henrietta Matthews played her scales every morning, only to hear an echo from across the way that left her dead in her chromatics. Henderson could play them at twice the velocity, ascending and descending and even simultaneously. Henrietta, Bessie told her, was in raptures over his Scarlatti. They'd even got to attempting duets, despite the vacant block in between. To cap it all, Eddy and Robert Carruthers had gone stark-eyed when the Steinway joined in with them. Henderson was the mightiest, they went around proclaiming—a veritable jazz king. Yet Henrietta said his Brahms might have been played by a Solomon. And as for his Mozart! Henrietta's glasses had never been known to get so opaque.

And of all things, even Hilda Haley's Aunt Audrey failed with her dogs. She let out the lot and in a trice young Henderson had them eating out of his hand, and Hilda Haley's Aunt Audrey prepared to do the same. Steinberg had two Corgis, a Dalmatian, and—German again—a whole litter of Dachshunds. What was worse, Steinberg had evidently given the silly old maid a new remedy for ticks.

At least the litter campaign did get under way. But then it stopped almost as soon as it started. Henderson, it seemed, had caught some of the girls at it and suggested their using his Porsche for their paper-chase. And of course the girls didn't know what the older women knew; after Henderson's charm, they refused to co-operate. If it hadn't been so dangerous, she was almost tempted to call another committee meeting and have the girls replaced by the boys. But that, of course, ran the risk of contagion.

One thing, the social arrangements were being kept to the letter. No invitations were sent, and none were accepted. But what was most maddening was that neither Steinberg nor Henderson had yet applied for the clubs. Then, of all people, the first to turn traitor was the Reverend Baker. It appeared that he, too, had once owned a Porsche before taking the cloth. Doddering old fool! It also seemed that in no time at all he'd accepted young Henderson to be one of the ushers. Now if that wasn't blasphemy if anything was . . .

Well, there *was* the fire hazard left. It had been infuriating that Alec had sprained a wrist at tennis, but at least it was only a day or two and their Andy would be home. He'd see to it. She'd see that he did.

* * *

Steinberg, Andy said, had once been the greatest full-forward the city team had ever known. He couldn't wait to get his autograph. It had been the worst row she'd ever had with her son, and his first night home too. But she'd won, she'd won. And she'd keep right on winning. It might take longer than she had thought, but she'd wear them down sooner or later if it killed her, and she swore that she would. Then her day would come when Steinberg would give up and go elsewhere to live. She might even put up with having her mother in the district by getting *her* to buy the Allingham place. But even here there was an 'if'—and a big one at that. With all the improvements Steinberg had made, could even her mother afford the price he could ask?

* * *

She first heard of it through Mary Stuart. The Carruthers, Mary said, had been there for drinks.

"Elspeth? But she's on the committee!"

"Jock," Mary reminded her, "sold them the house."

"Well that's no excuse. He's sold it now, hasn't he!"

"It seems," Mary said, "Steinberg is wanting The Knoll."

For fully ten seconds that left her quite wordless.

"But—but he can't! It's reserve land."

"It was."

"It always will be."

"Not any more. It seems that the council needs extra revenue, and Steinberg has offered it."

"But they *can't* sell The Knoll!"

"They can," Mary said, "and it looks like they will."

* * *

She *thought* there was something fishy when Alec was so subdued for fully three days. She tried to find out the cause. A loss on the stock exchange? She even looked at his accounts, but that wasn't it. She'd never considered herself a nagger as were most of the girls, but she did have to keep at him.

"I've been over-ruled, I'm afraid," he finally confessed.

"What do you mean, over-ruled?"

"The club, I'm afraid."

"What, you mean the tennis club?"

"That for young Henderson. Steinberg too, I should say. And you'd better face it, Amy. They've been put up for The Knoll Club and I think they'll get in."

She couldn't believe it. After all her plans and all she had done? After the committee's unanimous resolution? Where *could* they have failed? She'd been certain for years that her girls had their husbands under incontrovertible control.

She began to wilt when she got more out of Alec.

"Well, there's Carruthers to start with, with real estate the way it is. The tradesmen came next—Connolly, Ridgeway, and Hobbs. Steinberg can easily shop somewhere else, and it seems his custom is considerable."

"They couldn't!"

"They already do."

It took her quite a minute to get over that. And then——

"But there are still the councillors, surely," she said. "Worthington, Horace Haley, Jimmy Adams, Ben Hudson, Harry Stuart . . ."

What came next did at least come quietly, she had to admit. But never in her life had she known Alec to be quite so brutal.

"Amy," he said, "you've underestimated human nature too much just for once. Bert Worthington, remember, is a stockbroker, and he'd be an idiot to miss the chance of Steinberg's account. Horace Haley's a lawyer, so need I say more? Tim Adams has got three new cars to be fuelled and serviced, apart from the fact that Steinberg changes his models pretty well every year. Ben Hudson, of course, is doing the renovating."

"And Harry Stuart?" she did manage to venture. "What could Harry make out of someone like Steinberg?"

But—"Plenty, I should think," came the crushing reply. "Steinberg collects rare manuscripts, and he's appointed Stuart his agent."

"Then you mean that——"

"What I mean, Amy, is that it's money you're fighting. And plenty of it. Not only Steinberg's, but the whole district's as well. And you might, if I may say so, have overlooked human nature as well—that being what it is."

She was crushed and she knew it, but she still wouldn't give in.

"Then I for one," she resolved, "will never have anything to do with them. I shan't even speak to them. Nor will you. Nor will Andy. Don't ever let me catch you, not with either of the monsters!"

* * *

Then the parties began.

The Carruthers, of course, were the first to ask both Steinberg *and* Henderson, then the Stuarts followed suit. At least it was only cocktails—till the Worthingtons had them for dinner and the Haleys did lunch. Of course it was just a matter of time before Steinberg's invitations began to be sent. She tore theirs up immediately and what's more she told Alec. Even if there *were* forty people for dancing and buffet and champagne the whole night, nothing, but nothing, would induce her to go.

The following weekend, there were to be even more. A garden party round the pool, they all let her know. Such food, catered by the Waldorf in the city, had never before reached The Heights. The women were nearly bankrupting their husbands, she'd heard, in trying to outdress each other. Fools, fools that they were! For a couple of pansies? . . .

And speaking of that, there was talk of some rather weird stag parties at times. Well, they'd expected it, hadn't they? She'd warned them, hadn't she? The absolutely awful thing about it was: it seemed to have drawn a fair number of participants from the district itself. People no one would have dreamed of. The golf pro for one, the Adams boy for another, that house-termite sprayer and even the Reverend Reggie Baker. She *hoped* it was only talk. But one never knew . . .

The third invitation was the filthiest of all.

Guest of honour? No less than the Governor! And she'd been trying for years to get into *that* circle. The Governor, my God! Didn't even *he* care about the company he kept? Or—could that *also* be possible? One just didn't know these days. One just didn't know. Being married didn't mean a fig any more, nor their position. In fact, it now seemed that the thing was not to wonder who *was*, but to be certain of who *wasn't*. All that silly secrecy in the Masons . . .

Alec *would* have to be away on some business appointment. Should she ring him long distance to consult him about it? After all, the Governor . . .

Then the full horror of her hesitation suddenly swept over her. What on earth was she thinking of! How *low* could she stoop?

She couldn't believe it, but it was Steinberg himself on the phone.

"Mrs Johnson," he said, in those nauseating tones, "I wonder if I have your address correctly? I'm sure I've sent you invitations, but I've had no reply. I was particularly wanting you this Saturday. I'm sure you and Maisie Harris will have so much in *common* . . ."

Maisie Harris! A snob if there ever was one! But the wife of the Governor. Quite literally, the first lady . . . and Steinberg's emphasis on the word 'common'?

"I'm giving a formal dinner party," Steinberg was saying, "if you didn't get my little note. And I'll be most disappointed if you and Mr Johnson can't come."

There, that was the answer.

"I'm afraid Mr Johnson's away," she replied.

There was hardly a pause.

"Oh what a pity! Must keep the numbers, you know. But I believe your son is home on holidays from college. If you bring him along with you, then the invitation still stands . . ."

Her Andy! Nineteen, good-looking, and not exactly demented over girls. The sheer evil of it! Alec away and no doubt Steinberg well aware of it. That Jew! That—that *thing!* He expected her to eat in his house and take her Andy as well. The devil!—to have found out her one weakness. He must know how much she wanted to be one of the first hundred. Perhaps even the upper ten? But what an asking price! And after this, what other invitations might Steinberg contrive?

It took her three seconds to make up her mind.

"This Saturday, you say? I'd be delighted," she said.

YOUNG MOTHER: LONDON

The birth accomplished, can such strangeness
have been the familiarity she loved so long?
Could she have known a negroid head
was grinding stubble inside her?
Confronted now with the living fact
the blonde wife's tears betray how little she suspected
her husband's thrust of greater impact
than her own persistent nourishment and blood.

That alien body violates the law
of mother's dominance, her deeper right
to likeness in the child, her primitive
identifying with the flesh
for which her own flesh parted then unfurled.
Yet the skin tightens on her breast,
she feels the milk flood up inside,
the baby's hunger stabs, and they join in love.

RODNEY HALL

THE NAVIGATORS

(To Albert Tucker)

Being a contortionist myself,
or at least an awkward gymnast—
poised on the lip,
forever stammering at the abyss
of never-surrendered wishes—
I take time now to praise true heroes,
who chart real courses and
arrive at real places,
those landfall-making men: the Navigators.

For when you think of it,
the unknown is an impossible journey . . .
The silence between one heartbeat and the next.

(Pour we now libations unto each the dead)

First comes ODYSSEUS,
that many-troubled man . . .
(tho' who would have thought it?)
Raw salt in his beard,
brown head thrown back—
laughing, wicked eyes . . .
Such an accomplished liar!

Remembering of his voyages
only
the sea
the loneliness
and the bitter cold:
the inhospitable ports.
Forgetting (for Penelope) Calypso's generous thighs.

Knowing too, when he recalled her,
(Circe of the purple couch)
that she expended small metamorphic power,
used no enchantments of note
to turn men into swine . . .

The silence between one heartbeat and the next.

Then . . .
Hawkfaced
Acquisitive
PHOENICIANS, by the score.
Perceptive men
Subtle talkers
Glib traders on the shore . . .
Civilization's gulls!

Through the Pillars of Hercules,
hinged on the pole-star;
spices
perfumes
incense
cargoes of Egypt, Babylon, Tyre:
speared on the pole-star—
silver from Iberia
amber from the icy seas
tin from the rainy islands . . .
Teaching savages on sparse, savage coasts
the ordinary laws of barter.
Finding no ATLANTIS,
city of gold.
Though they sailed beyond everything . . .

O my Captains, my Navigators, my Mariners—
dying there
without sight of it, dazzling in sunlight,
(the towers are honey and milk,
the breasts of a good woman are the towers:
gold in the morning, pearl at evening)
though you sailed beyond everything . . .

But where is the beginning of culture, IF NOT HERE—
with cardsharp,
three-shell-man
and Semetic trinket-pedlar
operating on a hostile beach?

The silence between one . . . . . .

Mother of navigators.
Beater of men.
Melancholy sea.
To have known you at all was enough . . .
Ask them.

Bartholomew Diaz.
Da Gama
Magellan.
Columbus.

Cross-staff and astrolabe,
but sailing to the moon for all they knew—
eating brine, chewing
on it.
Swallowing,
unslaked
ever:
salt ingrained
deep
in the bone,
in the marrow
of the bone.
Cushioning the brain.
(creak of blocks
slack and strain of halyards
stinging smack of wet canvas . . .
flap slap of bare, horny feet)

Portuguese.
Spaniards.
Slick Genoese . . .

Sea-hunger,
sea-thirst and sea-madness.
Hallucinations,
prayers and
hysterias.
Worm-
infested
tubs,
leaking
blood and dreams
all over the New World.
(looting empires
that pious Isabella
might go to heaven)

Oh Incas of memory . . . . . .

We have come to get gold, not till soil like peasants,
said the young Cortes.
(pest-ridden illiterates
trampling effete,
decadent, dying
—who said?—
cultures)
Incas of memory, dearer by far than rooms of gold . . . . . .

Santa Maria . . .
Pinta . . .
Nina . . .

Flashing meteors.
Compass all awry . . .
The vast plains of the Sargasso: mutiny.
Then
sweetness of morning, like Andalusian April—
sea-birds,
low-lying cloud,
temperate breezes and
only the nightingale wanting . . .
Compass bewitched,
monsters above and below—
then
dog-roses, sodden in the sea—but living . . .

Oh lost and found.
Oh damned and reprieved.
Goblin sailors ransomed on the rim of the world.

America not discovered,
but recovered:
China?
Who the hell said
anything about China?
To have cut the line and ventured forth was more than enough . . .

The silence between . . . . . .

Horizon-haunted men.
Looters and Pirates.
Buccaneers who never came but to rape and pillage:
(so greedy for life
you must all
have been artists
or poets
of some sort)
though Geography pardons and History winks an eye . . .

My unknown,
your unknown—
what difference now?

. . . Though you do have the best of it· you know—

your bones
whitening beaches,
or lying
in quiet reaches
of tidal water
. . . . . undisturbed.
Mine,
as I write,
being
reserved
for the savage coasts
of Identity,
whose fateful ebb and flow
wastes and corrodes
the inviolate
spirit—
where to love, to dare greatly, is counted a kind of greed.

(But no whining: the course is set.)

A little wine for the journey, Captains . . .
No?
How stupid! I forget—
like the rest, you drink blood only . . .
BACK FROM THE STINKING FOSSE then,
I await Teiresias,
who knows what happens
in that silence . . . . . .

JOHN GOODAY

B. Christou

EVENING

Soula was very late. The still, burning sun had already crimsoned in the summer haze over the sea. The dusty trestles, deep in cabbage leaves, were bare except for a heap of bananas here and there, blackening and swarming with ants. The cobbles running through the fish market glinted, a muddy trickle. Only a wizened little Chinaman was still there, dozing against a pillar with his mouth agape.

"E, kyria Soula!" bellowed a Greek voice from the street door. Old Petro, fat buttocks shaking, was waving a parcel imperiously at her. His balding head was scarlet, his gold cross jiggled among the sweat-spangled hairs that sprouted above his singlet. Panting, he peered through the gloom at her face.

"You are so late I was just going! I thought you forgot all about your fish. Here." His gums glistened through the fringe of his stained, grey moustache. "Too hot today! No good for the fish. And back home in Greece they are having snow! You better not fry them now, eh?—make a nice plaki. Give my regards to Taki." He thrust the sodden parcel into her hands and waddled out into the twilight street.

The streetlamps were flaring red as she trudged across the softened asphalt of the road to the footpath by the sea wall. Cars growled past in a glitter of light. As she approached, a cat with wild opal eyes leapt off the wall on to seaweed-swathed rocks below.

Doctor, she had forced out in the cold surgery, I think I waitink baby . . . Taki had not known about it. She had taken time off from the factory to go. Soon she would start to bulge and would have to stop working. There had been no dowry. Now they would never get back to Greece . . . Tonight she would have to tell him. Soula's eyes were bloodshot and swollen.

Her mother had screamed all night, the midwife crouching over her: a wart on the withered neck glowed, bulbous, by the kerosene lamp. A pot boiling, its lid hopping and clattering. Her father had squatted by the hearth, drawing in the ashes with the poker, then wiping them smooth. It had been hours before its little bald head had poked out. The midwife had smacked the baby then, until it choked and squalled, and Manna had lain back, wan and drowsy, as the little toothless mouth milked her. Manna had never been to hospital.

In six months, Soula would be exactly eighteen, and this would be happening to her.

Ahead, the pier lamps were glowing and wrinkling in the black bay. Taki would still be there, dripping sea water, lolling on the hot, weathered planks, a cigarette glowing and disappearing in the dark. Every summer evening he was there fishing under the lamp, his shadow afloat on the water. He never caught anything, but he loved the sea. He loved the throb and jangle of music, the aromatic oil-gilded foods of Greece, retsina drunk sitting on a barrel, the grave abandon of the zeimbekiko dance in dark night clubs. Already he was desperate to go home, away from those drab, sprawling suburbs, and from drudgery in those dusty factories.

At last she saw the row of peeling wooden houses. Old kyria Eleni next door, scarved and robed in black as always, was shelling peas on her front porch by the orange glow of the streetlamp, pods heaped in her broad lap. She slapped at a mosquito on her sagging throat and shrilled a delighted greeting at Soula. She waved, pushed open the rusty gate, unlocked the blue door and plodded barefoot along the matting to the kitchen.

The dingy, narrow room, yellow-coated by the naked light bulb, was hot and smelled of linoleum and stale oil and of the onions with brown-paper skins hanging plaited on the wall.

On the table Taki had left a crumpled Greek newspaper, second- or third-hand; a glass had left a wet ring round a gaunt-faced politician. Moths had begun to thud against the ceiling. She peeled off the damp papers swaddling the fish, and dropped them into the sink—two grey mullet with quivering, gold-plated eyes and tiny clamped teeth. They smelled faintly of rank blood.

Through the open window the nasal sobs of Yannoula's favourite singer had begun to drift in from next door. Yannoula always turned the radio full on, although the Australians on the other side were always complaining. Sometimes she sang, too, her voice hoarse and nostalgic. Yannoula had been in Australia for ten years. A gust of laughter interrupted the song. Soula wandered into the dark bedroom. It was still too hot to start cooking. The kitchen light shining on the mirror, rimmed her short, plump body and coarse, curly black hair. No one could possibly tell yet. It was a secret. Pleased, she smiled suddenly at her golden shadow, and danced a few steps to Yannoula's music, now a Kalamatiano.

The bed gave a slow creak. Soula, startled, leapt for the light switch. In its yellow flash Taki yawned, his dazzled eyes squeezed shut. He was still in his wet bathers, and his brown face and woolly black hair were rimmed with salt. Curled up beside him, the cat arched her black belly. Stretching, Taki hung his sandy feet carefully over the end of the bed.

"Agapoula mou, you're very pretty tonight," he mumbled. "Turn the light off and come here."

"I didn't know you were home." She groped in the sudden dark until her hands found the homespun blanket. "I thought you were still on the pier. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Of course I am. I was just hungry, so I came back early. But that's all right, I was sleepy too." He rubbed the cat's purring throat.

"I'm sorry, Taki. I was held up. I'm not a very good wife."

"Don't worry, you'll do." He smiled in the darkness. "Did Petro give you the fish?"

"Yes, two mullet. Taki?" Hot blood was thudding in her forehead. "I want to ask you something."

"If you want to know if I caught any myself—no." He made a wry face. "If I had, I'd throw old Petro's back into the sea."

"No, I know. Would you like a beer?" . . .

In the kitchen, Soula took a frosty brown bottle from the refrigerator and levered off the metal cap. Foam spurted over the cracked floral oilcloth. She poured a frothy glass, and took the glass and the bottle back into the bedroom.

"Come on, Soula," Taki said. "You have a little bit with me, just this once?" From behind he put his arms around her, pressing his mouth against her rough black hair, his breath warm on her nape. He tilted the bright beer to her lips. Grimacing at the acrid taste, she sipped a little. He hugged her, gulped the rest, and pressed her shoulders down on to the pillow.

"Taki, when I'm pregnant, I'll be fat and bulging," she whispered. "You won't love me at all."

"Silly girl. You'll be fat and beautiful, like a ripe pear. Darling, turn round." Soula turned and pressed his head against the gold cross at her throat, then, lifting his face, kissed his dark lips. He closed his eyes. Soula sat up.

"Taki, what would you like our first child to be, a boy or a girl?"

"What the hell does that matter? I want it to be *Greek*. I mean born in Greece, when we go home."

"Taki," she whispered, twisting sweaty hands, "it's already on the way. July, the doctor said. That's why I'm late home."

The kitchen light, caught in the mirror, glimmered in his black-olive eyes. An aeroplane rumbled over the bay. Faintly she could still hear the metallic twanging of bouzoukis.

"Oh, no. How did it happen?"

Soula did not answer.

"Soula?"

"*I* don't know!"

"You know we can't keep it. How would we ever get home? Even if I got another job at night . . ."

"I want to go home, too." Soula's voice quavered.

"Well, then! And you can have a dozen when we get back."

"But this one's already *here!*"

"Oh, hell!"

"Don't you dare blame me!" Soula shouted at his back. Her eyes swilled. "I didn't want it. Perhaps you'll be lucky and it will *die*. Perhaps we both will! Then you'll be free again!" Crimson, she rushed out into the sudden yellow

glare of the kitchen. The cat pattered after her, strutting and blinking. There was no sound.

The limp mullet were still shimmering in the sink. Soula held a shaking match in the oven until blue flames spurted. Hacking off the bony heads, she chopped an onion and cut up some limp tomatoes which sagged and squirted juice and yellow seeds. Impatiently she scooped them up, tossed them over the fish, sprinkled olive oil on top, and slid the dish into the flickering oven. The grotesque heads she dropped for the yowling cat.

The house was dark, hot and still. She sat down heavily, and twisted in her fingers the heavy hair at her nape, sodden with sweat. She wondered if Taki would come out of the bedroom. He was probably wishing he had never sent for her and married her. Katina's husband left her as soon as he found out that she was pregnant, Soula remembered. Perhaps he was thinking of doing that. If only Manna were there! She slid open the zipp of her dress and stroked, with her reddened hands, the warm smooth white belly in which the baby was hidden. Cigarette smoke was drifting in heavy trails out of the dark bedroom. The lace curtains began to flicker in a dank sea breeze. From the silent, lamplit street came the hiss of the sea.

The front door opened, then banged shut. His footsteps faded. Her arms sticking on the warm oilcloth, Soula hid her face, and wept.

FEAR

I

A thousand, thousand stars and I, walking under them; sometimes
looking up,
But not with ecstasy—not any more.
O, what has happened to me? All day, I am sad . . . sad . . . sad. And
frightened.
For the image of her has become sharp now—clearly defined in my
mind's eye, so that I keep seeing her
Everywhere—a Nemesis—cold, sure and relentless, which I feel part
of him wants just as relentlessly, to follow him.

Why, because I love, must I walk naked among briar-roses; feel my
flesh
Torn, festooned at the same time?
Why must my body be bared day and night, compelled to move through
thorns because it desires the touch of roses?
Why do I love like this—half in happiness, half in pain, because
she does not become to him
A little, clouded memory—a dream that he wakes with in the morning
grown very, very far away and dim?

II

To be bound with chains, with flowers.
To know scent on my skin and scars,
because I love. Because this is he.
And he can be no one else, ever again.

I'm scared (I thought) because now I am
not free. Because now I must be as he is,
go where he goes. Because like Ruth,
I must follow him as she followed Naomi
into Canaan . . .

JOAN MAS

CONFESSION

The love I have for you,
is as many-coloured and multiform
as these flowers growing
in the garden . . .
yet single and white
as its one rose.

JOAN MAS

Judith Clarke

THANK YOU MRS. GREENBERGER

Lal Chandra walked along home by the river. The tide was out. He watched the seagulls picking their way sadly over the mud-flats in search of scraps.

Lal Chandra was worried. His scholarship cheque, he knew, would not have come, and at home Mrs Greenberger would be waiting. What would he say? Of course she would pretend not to mind, just as she always pretended, when he had the rent, that there was nothing further from her mind than money. He would place it delicately on the edge of the sideboard while Mrs Greenberger pretended not to notice what he was doing. Some quarter of an hour later, wandering back out through the kitchen, he would observe that it was gone. His mind edged away from the picture of Mrs Greenberger's little white hands closing over the money.

It was very cold. Lal Chandra walked bravely into the wind, his head thrown back, his arms folded tightly across the front of his brown jacket. He never wore an overcoat. After all, there was really no need. If it rained, or even snowed, he could wear his grey raincoat—that would keep him dry—much drier, in fact, than a heavy coat which would only absorb moisture. And to keep him warm, there was always the striped scarf which his little sister Indira had knitted and sent over for his birthday.

This he wore beneath his jacket. Though wrapped several times about his neck, it was so long that the fringed ends trailed down beneath his jacket, all the way to the back of his knees. Lal Chandra turned away from the river and walked up the street to the Post Office. Perhaps, after all, his cheque had come in the afternoon post. He walked up the steps and into the dark little room.

Mabel Higgs, the S.E.3 postmistress, sat firm as a rock behind her counter, stamping the dates on the letters for the five fifteen mail. Whap whap-whap, whap, went her little machine. She was in no mood for nonsense. She pursed her lips and looked each letter grimly in the face before the stamp descended.

Lal Chandra stood there patiently. There was no-one else in the Post Office.

Whap whap-whap, whap.

He watched the red second hand on the wall clock go round and round and round. He shuffled his feet.

Whap whap-whap, whap. Whap whap-whap, whap.

Lal Chandra coughed.

Whap whap-whap, whap.

What should he do? She must know he was there. He almost fancied he could see a sinister gleam in the woman's eye, as if, indeed she was enjoying the whole situation. Finally he ventured.

'Excuse me,' began Lal Chandra.

'Do you want something?' growled the postmistress, lifting her head, her little bright eyes, like an adder's, darting at Lal Chandra. She took him all in, from head to foot, her eyes resting a moment on the fringe of his scarf, dangling beneath his jacket. A smile of great satisfaction passed across the face of Mabel Higgs. Lal Chandra mistook it for a softening.

'Is my cheque here?' he asked.

'Cheque?' demanded Mabel Higgs, in tones of outrage. 'Cheque? This isn't the Bank. The sign outside says Post Office. P, O, S, T, post, O, F, F, I, C, E, office—Post Office,' she spelled, and sank back down behind her counter.

Whap, whap-whap, whap.

'I meant, is there a letter for me?'

Whap whap-whap, whap.

Lal Chandra stood there.

'Name,' said Mabel Higgs, very very softly.

'What?' enquired Lal Chandra.

'*NAME!*' roared Mabel, at the top of her

voice. The letters on the counter quivered. The postmistress's face wore an expression of relish.

Lal Chandra could not understand the woman.

'Oh my name,' he began, 'you want my name—'

'I don't want your number, that's for sure,' cried Mabel smartly.

'Chandulal Chandra.'

The postmistress looked at him, silent.

'Chandulal Chandra. That's my name.'

The eyes were glinting. 'If you say so, I believe you,' she said.

Whap whap-whap, whap.

Lal Chandra was desperate.

'Is my letter here then, please?'

No whap letters here whap-whap, for anyone of that name, whap.'

'Thank you.'

He marched out very straight and stiff, the fringe of his scarf flapping behind him, vowing that he would change his postal address the very next day.

* * *

When Mrs Greenberger got back from Aunty Ella's with Dora that evening, she found her lodger waiting on the front step. 'Por fing,' said Mrs Greenberger, 'standing out here in the cold, wifout even an overcoat to keep you warm.'

'I never wear an overcoat,' said Lal Chandra hastily, looking vaguely across at the rooftops on the other side of the street.

Mrs Greenberger decided to be kind. 'Look,' she said, 'I will show you where we keep the spare key, so fat you will be able to get in if we are not home.' She bent down and scrabbled among the flower-pots beside the door.

'Here,' she said, 'underneath the fyme, in the fird pot from the end.'

'I thought you said you weren't going to show him where the key was,' Dora cried, with a glance at Lal Chandra. He went hot and cold all over. Gods! What did they think he was? A bandit?

Mrs Greenberger pretended not to hear. She felt around in her purse for her own key.

'Do you have a tail?' Dora asked Lal Chandra.

'What?'

'Do you have a tail? There.' She pulled at the end of his scarf.

'Dora, don't pull Lal's ta— scarf.'

Dora looked at her mother, and gave the fringed edges another little flick.

'Leave it alone!' shrieked Mrs Greenberger.

'Gods!' thought Lal Chandra. They were always screaming.

'Thank you Mrs Greenberger,' he said quietly.

'Poor fing, I don't like to see you being tormented,' she replied as they went into the bright little hall.

* * *

Lal Chandra took off his jacket, unwound his scarf, and switched on one bar of the radiator. Two he didn't dare, just in case Mrs Greenberger should come in, as she did now and then, just to see if he was keeping the place clean. She would not have said anything, of course, and would keep her eyes carefully averted from the radiator. But later, he knew, she would just happen to mention to him, in the way of conversation, how heavy the electricity bill had been that month. He sank down into a chair and put his head in his hands. He would have to tell her that his cheque was late again and he wouldn't be able to pay his rent yet. O Gods!

It was not, of course, that she would make a fuss, or throw him out of the house. No, thought Lal Chandra gloomily, she would not do that. It was just the way she had, the, yes, sinister way of being nice that made him quiver to his very marrow; that made him wish even, that he boarded with the S.E.3 postmistress in her dark burrow rather than in the polished room of Mrs Greenberger. He leaned back and felt himself slide over the cold shiny surface of the armchair. Through the wall he could hear Dora screaming with laughter. 'I wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole,' she shrieked. Mrs Greenberger's voice was lower, he could not make out what she was saying. What were they talking about? What did they have out there?

'Lal,' called Mrs Greenberger. 'Lally. Come out here. I have a surprise for you.'

Very very cautiously, Lal Chandra made his way out into the kitchen. Mrs Greenberger was holding something up in front of her. It was an overcoat.

'Come here,' she said, 'let me see how it looks on you.'

'But I never wear an overcoat,' he protested.

'Yes, you never wear an overcoat—and what happens? You freeze. Come here.'

Oh no, thought Lal Chandra, oh no. Gods! No.

It was made of a checkered woollen material, a very loud check. And round the neck there was a collar made of some kind of long, limp white fur, like a feather boa. Gods! it was a feather boa, surely, stitched onto the neck. He turned pale with anguish. The soft little strands tickled his neck as Mrs Greenberger helped to do the buttons up. Lal Chandra's fingers had become very stiff.

'But it is surely—' he began. Should he mention to Mrs Greenberger that it looked like a woman's coat?

Mrs Greenberger seemed to anticipate him. 'It belonged to Gus—fat is, Gustave, my bruffer, who—is no more. He came from France to join us and died as soon as he got here. He was never healfy. But always very particular about the way he looked. Always very smart. Fere now,' she said, patting the coat—'it suits you.'

It was very long. It came almost down to his ankles.

'By bruffer Gus was very tall,' said Mrs Greenberger. 'Such a tall man! You are not so tall. Still, it will keep your legs warm.'

Lal Chandra flushed. He unbuttoned the monster and laid it carefully over a chair. Out of the corner of his eye he could see Dora, her hand over her mouth, squirming in the doorway.

'Thank you Mrs Greenberger,' he said, 'thank you.'

Mrs Greenberger gave a broad smile. 'Ah—it is nuffing. I wouldn't want you should freeze, poor fing. Now, even when you go out in the snow, it will keep you warm. It is a good coat, I tell you.'

'Yes,' said Lal Chandra glumly. 'Yes Mrs Greenberger.'

* * *

As he stared down at the long red frankfurt on his plate, and its companion piece, a single round, red tomato, Lal Chandra remembered that there was something he had not done.

'Mrs Greenberger,' he said, looking up, 'I am sorry to have to tell you this—but my cheque is late again. I shall not be able to pay you the rent yet.'

For a moment, Mrs Greenberger looked blank. Then she gave a big smile.

'Don't worry about it, Lally. I trust you. It isn't as if I didn't know you. I am sure you will pay as soon as your cheque comes. Don't worry yourself now.' She gave him a searching look. 'You can't pay if you haven't got it.'

'Poor fing,' she added.

Leaning her elbows on the table, her chin cupped in her hand, Mrs Greenberger stared across at the dark head bent over the plate.

* * *

Early next morning, Lal Chandra decided to go out for a walk. He wound Indira's scarf carefully round his neck, smoothed the ends down, and put on his old brown jacket. He was just going out the gate when Mrs Greenberger's head appeared round the door.

'Lally,' she called, 'where is your coat? It's freezing out fere. Come back here, you silly boy.'

He padded up the path and stood there while she brought the coat and helped him put it on.

'Thank you, Mrs Greenberger,' Lal Chandra said. Then he walked slowly down the street.

He was not cold; he burned with shame. He felt awful. He felt like—a fur monkey on a stick. Everyone must be looking at him. He hung his head and shuffled forward. Snow began to fall. A flake lodged in the boa-collar and trickled slowly down his neck.

* * *

Lal Chandra walked along by the river. The tide was in. Little waves sucked dismally at the stones. Poor fing. Poor fing. He heard Dora's voice in his ears. 'I wouldn't touch it with a ten foot pole.'

'Scree,' called a seagull, flapping over his head. 'Scree.' He watched it fly away down the cold grey river to the sea.

No, he thought, no, I will not.

He took the coat off, bundled it into a ball, and flung it as far as he could into the river. It swelled up like a balloon and sailed in a dark hump, for a little way; then it began to sink. Last of all he saw the white collar, its thin strands waving on the tide, slide beneath the water.

What would Mrs Greenberger say? he wondered. Let her say what she liked. Wrapping Indira's scarf tightly round him, Lal Chandra walked bravely into the snow.

THERE AND NOT THERE

"Gules vert," she said, and "sable or."
The herald angels soar,
for the music is playing, the willows are swaying
and I am a mouse on the floor.
Did you ever
see a floor on a mouse,
a house on a roof,
or similar proof
of the singular stance
of romance?

"Take x," he said, "and multiply,"
but I was feeling shy,
for the sum of x is the quotient sex
and hope is a buzzing fly.
Can you sever
a fly from its buzz,
the fuzz from a peach;
or formulate each
of the separate gyre
of desire?

"Sing *doh*," she said, and then "sing *me*."
My song burst itself free,
and the music ran for a joyous span
up and down the lignum tree.
Can such music
put a *doh* on a *me*,
lift us both to the sky,
or nearly as high
as the ultimate bent
of content?

"Take Bligh," he said, "now, who was he?"
He was a sailor brave,
for the nine-tails were swishing while he went a-fishing
some agony deep in a cave.
Did you listen
to the cave in the scream,
the echoing fish
that threw back the wish
on the quivering mast
of the past?

"Nuance," she said, and "poetry,"
and I was before the fall;
saw gulls in their gliding, the world darkward sliding,
and life in a glass on the wall.
Can you never
see a glass in a room,
a world in a word,
without you have heard
all the wonder of time
in a rhyme?

"*Bellum, bella*," he said, "*et post*,"
and three-part Gaul was won,
for the legions were striding to Rome's shrewd dividing,
and death was a tree in the sun.
Can you gather
from the corners of time
the words that have failed;
the nailed and impaled
from the ravening heat
of defeat?

"Design," she said, and "simple form."
I drew my simile.
For the still-life fruit was a basket of loot,
and I was an amorous bee.
Shall we fashion
a conceit from a fig;
or agamous nudes
for sensitive prudes
with their aberrant quail
at the male?

The red and green, they said, and x,
and Bligh, and conquered Gaul;
and the music went climbing to poetry's timing
as I sorted and graded my haul.
Did they wonder
how a boy in a class
could float in the air,
be there and not there
as he fished from the pool
they called school?

ERIC IRVIN

Irene M. Summy

A GIRL NAMED CHRIS

I met her at the hostel where I worked as a waitress right after my divorce. Her name was Christine, but the others called her Chris.

One evening after work I found her waiting for me in the street outside. She said hello, had I ever seen the Southern Cross and promptly showed it to me in the sky.

"Which way are you going?" she enquired then.

"This way," said I and started walking.

"Me too. Mind if I walk with you?"

"Not at all."

We walked a while in silence, she looking straight ahead, I studying her stubborn profile. She had a lovely face, small and delicate with full, sensual lips and eyes like forest lakes, all framed by thick black hair, cut short like a helmet.

"I was waiting for you," she said at last.

"For me? Why?"

"I wanted to talk to you." She kicked at a stone. "To see you."

"Did you? Why?"

As if by mutual agreement both of us had stopped. It seemed to me that she had tears in her eyes, but it might have been the light from a nearby street lamp.

"You don't understand," she cried in sudden agony. "Nobody understands. I thought you did." And with that she swung on her heels and went back to the hostel.

But next day she was back again, waiting for me outside in the street.

"I went to a dance last night," she said, falling into step. "But I didn't dance. Now do you understand?"

"Do you like dancing?" I asked.

"Don't you?"

"I'm not very good at it."

"I could teach you. To dance, I mean." I turned my head to look at her, and suddenly she blushed.

"Bugger you," she said and turning back left me standing there in mild confusion.

For two days I didn't see her, and then the third night she was back again. I thought it better not to speak until she broke the silence.

"Don't you want to know where I've been, or don't you care? Haven't you missed me at all?" she demanded.

"Does it matter," I asked, "if I've missed you?"

"I've been drinking," she stated boastfully. "For two days and two nights because of you."

Her behaviour was that of an adolescent boy. I did not know how to deal with her and felt embarrassed.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I said stiffly and then suddenly was seized with unreasonable anger. What was she looking for? A mother? Why didn't she leave me alone.

"You're just making it up," I declared, amazed at the vehemence of my voice. "All this is just a part you're playing . . . a farce . . . a show."

Her face lit up. Her eyes began to dance. "Oh, but I like you," she cried and catching my hand squeezed it tightly with her long, tapered fingers. "I like you so very much." She let go of my hand, abruptly as she had taken it, and ran off with a laughter that kept pursuing me for hours afterwards.

Two nights later she was waiting on my front steps. It was raining, and her clothes were drenched.

"How did you know, where I live?" I asked her sternly.

She gave me a boyish grin. "Oh, there are ways of finding out such things, if one knows how and is determined."

What prompted me to ask her in? Who can define the tenderness I felt towards her? The strange wordless kinship that sometimes unites even strangers? A mother's love? A sister's

love? No, none of these. What then, I wondered and spoke to her gruffly, yet even so my tenderness came through.

She sat in a chair with a towel around her hair to dry it and in my housecoat looked almost like a boy. Alternately shy and aggressive, sad and funny, hostile and defenceless she molded my moods like figures in clay. Outside the rain kept pouring down and now and then a clap of thunder shook the house while streaks of lightning slashed the velvet sky and briefly brightened the room. We sat in darkness, our voices becoming more and more intimate, our thoughts meeting and blending, only to separate again, reluctantly, before becoming one.

"Can I stay for the night and sleep on the floor?" she suddenly asked, and my heart picked up a little speed. "Because of the rain," she added. "I mean you can't chase me out in that rain, can you? You couldn't. You wouldn't."

My lips were uncomfortably dry, which made it difficult to speak. "All right." I found some blankets and put them on the floor next to my bed. Why there? Because I liked her to be close? Her or just another human being? How does one ever know? I felt like someone in a dream, as if whatever I did could be erased by the light of day or the heat of the sun. We lay there breathing in the dark. Just the sound of our breathing, the steady drip of falling rain upon the roof, the ticking of a clock and my own heart beating.

Suddenly her head without the towel was at the level with my eyes.

"Aren't you asleep yet?" I asked, as if I'd been running or smoking too much.

"Are you?"

I lifted myself on one elbow pretending to be looking through the window and felt her breath upon my cheek—a warm little wind coming closer and then growing damp, as if the rain was coming in. Her mouth was cool and innocent, clean like that of a young boy. I felt confused, uncertain of what part to play, unable to be what I wasn't. Blindly, guided by primitive instincts beyond my control, my hands began to undo buttons and for the first time ever uncovered a woman's breast—a small white hill, firm yet soft, that rose and fell within the prison of hand. I mounted it with my lips, lingered briefly at its peak, then buried my face in the hollow of her throat and filled it with tears.

"Don't cry," said Chris above my head. "It's not your fault. You can't help being what you are. You want a man, and I'm *not* a man." A little later, lifting my face she kissed my eyes and said again: "I'm not a man," in a voice of infinite despair.

No man, I thought, can know a woman's loneliness, and then because my own despair had found release in tears, I went to sleep, still resting my head upon her peaceful hills, content like a child at its mother's breast.

In the morning, when I woke, Chris had left. Pinned to my pillow was a little note which read: "Do not be sad. It stopped raining, so I went home."

Soon afterwards she left the hostel and I never saw her again. But often, when it rains, I think about her and how much we might have given each other, if only she had been a man—or I a different woman.

TO WAKE, TO FLOW

for my wife

For me that was a surge, an ebbing, but did you
feel waking in the deep-flow of your life
a ripple fluttering from us, new
as melting snowflake, sure as a surgeon's knife?
From our closed arc, a breaking through.

And when you swelled and 'Look' you said, I pressed with slow
blind fingers finding out the curling lines:
'He's there perhaps. His head!' And no
and yes! a heartbeat, tenuous, leaf-fine.
Together we would feel him grow.

You wore him proudly then, and I would take your arm,
afraid of angles' threats, afraid for two.
'He jumped,' you'd say, and 'Oh the warm
shape of him here.' In bed at night you knew
his curve and mine, Mandala's form.

And then a spiral from that point, a widening arc
to walls white-hard, a cavern hung with steel;
blurred nurse-shapes move, the liquid dark
behind your eyes bursts through my grasp. I feel
the circle rive. Then wait, apart.

Mirrored within the ripples of your eyes, he'll turn—
look now!—your own gaze on you, or he'll speak
my voice to make this circle run
around our lives more surely. Ours to wake
to flow to this, our growing son.

B. A. BREEN

Judy Forsyth

A CHICKEN FROM THE FARM

When Lola's domsetic servant Mina left for her annual fortnight's holiday she promised out of the goodness of her heart, to bring back a chicken from the farm. On her return she brought the chicken, and her little son Alpheus, and not to be outdone, out of the goodness of her heart, Lola accepted both. The boy was the tenderer offering, a plump three-year-old with a charming smile and eyes that cushioned trust in brown velvet. He was forever disappearing, like a cockroach into beading, around a corner of one of the outbuildings when Lola went out into the yard. His mother had obviously threatened him with some rural ogre's anger, to be dispensed by her own obedient palm, to keep his place there. Lola was a kindly woman and she assured Mina that the child was welcome to play in the house with her own children, who were willing enough for an occasional game with the little piccanin but, unable to speak his language and being rather older, they had their own interests; or else, Lola said, he could remain in the kitchen with his mother. But Mina didn't want him in there, getting under her skirts, and she treated her mistress's children's toys, and indeed all her employer's belongings, with an astute reverence that forbade her own child to touch them.

So the little boy kept to the yard during the day time and at night he and Mina slept together in peace on her narrow bed, and squeezed up tight under her breast his knees indenting her big belly, she comforted him for that day's separation and strengthened him for the next.

In fact, in the daytime he was not quite alone, for had he not the other temporary lodger of the yard, the fowl, to play with? At times he could be heard chuckling as he chased it around and around, he himself an ogre now after the errant bird, until it protested and screeched, annoying the neighbours and delighting the servants. Mina, laughing, would at last yell out, "Hey, shut up there, you two," and they would both disappear in an instant. Then a subdued "pock, pock" would tell where the boy and his accomplice were hidden, the one trembling, bright-eyed, and the other beady-eyed and ruffled, both alert, waiting to be discovered, though in fact no one would ever bother and, at last, the fowl would strut out from under the child's constraining elbow and go pecking and picking away amongst the granadilla vines.

Lola secretly hoped that it would be bitten there by one of those snakes which weave themselves unnoticed, like tendrils, through the supporting wire netting, waiting for an innocent Eve's-hand to come and pluck one of the hard oval fruits, with their tough, thin skin faintly purple and mottled, erect as a nipple. How apt, she thought, that in some countries they are called passion fruits, and how the contents of the taut skins are indeed succulent and delicious when the fruit is ripest. Those who are ignorant frequently leave the granadilla until it is too late, until the skin becomes dark and wizened like an old African's face and the pips turn into little black grits covered with tart blebs of orange skin, and, like passion unspent, go sour within the flesh.

As the fowl scratched querulously amongst the leaves Lola watched it and thought that its legs and feet were the ugliest part of its body. She looked at the toes splayed out, horny and grasping, trampling and tearing at the leaves and grass. Their white skin was coarse and cracked, and further up, the legs darkened in colour and resembled the decaying granadillas. The fowl moved with its spindly black-clad props wide apart bony and sexless like the old bird it was. Its body was scrawny and it seemed that those glands responsible for the sheen of a bird's feathers had long since ceased to function, leaving them lustreless and flaccid as an old black umbrella.

With apparent indulgence Lola encouraged the child's continued visit, and it was obvious to all, as Lola was ever so fond of telling Mina and every visitor to the house, that the child and the bird were charmingly inseparable. One market day, however, a network of Mina's relatives from the farm descended on the yard and amidst much good-humoured talk, noise and laughter, Alpheus was carried off home again to comfort a pining grandmother.

The next morning Mina announced that the pleasures of the table need no longer be sacrificed to sentiment and, in the face of this renewed generosity and pressing goodwill, Sunday was appointed the festal day. Lola accepted with grace, for she was a naturally polite person, but she was upset. It was not that she had even minded, after the first awkward occasions, entertaining educated natives to dinner for her husband's sake; he lectured in Native Administration and sometimes he had to, before all those laws came in, bring them home when they arrived as visiting lecturers from other places. It was his job, and anyway he was a liberal, and he liked it. Sometimes she wondered during the meal, whether they used cutlery at home, as she had often seen Mina and her relatives eating with their hands; they were nimble enough the way they screwed the thumb and forefingers around a slice of bread and sopped the gravy clean off the dish. It was of course unpleasant when her guests bent right forward over their plates and smacked their lips together wetly when they ate, but then, as she had said to her mother, not all natives did that, did they?

What she definitely disliked was having to eat their food. You never really knew where it came from or what it had been raised on. She understood that they couldn't help being poor and therefore dirty, but it was a fact that they were dirty and that their food was dirty too. It was just one of those facts you couldn't get away from.

She thought of a train journey she had often taken from Durban to Johannesburg. At every small siding on the line there seemed to be those tin shanties which sprawled away down the slopes into smoky valleys below. She heard again the barking of their thin black dogs and the subdued murmur of many people hidden from sight under the corrugated iron roofs. Occasionally she would glimpse the natives moving about amongst the flapping washing, their dark figures offset by the ripple of a bright cotton garment blown in the wind, but always on some dirty rubbish heaps, or in one of those slimy cesspools which seeped down the hillside, their scraggy fowls could be seen scrabbling about. How could she tell if Mina's farm was any cleaner than those slums? She had never been there.

And she knew that natives ate those parts of the animal, parts like the squashed entrails of people after an accident, that you were never meant to see. She had to walk through their butcher shops when she went for cheap fish down to the Indian market, for a good housewife must often put up with inconvenience for the sake of economy. Above the sweaty, jostling black people shouting and bargaining together she had seen, for the first time, hung on hooks for display, those hideous opaque hosepipes of intestine, sometimes with a spatter of unmentionable yellowing decay still on them, the bright orange pancreates, decorated with red trelliswork, and the bulging hearts and ripe livers.

And below, on the shuffling dirt of the market floor, she could sometimes not avoid trampling in, so that she almost felt it under the sole of her foot and her stomach squirmed while she squeezed up her toes and rubbed her shoe hard on the ground to remove it, a splat of slow-popping grey spittle, like a section of jellyfish washed up on the shore, separated from the living organism, yet still pulsating, bristling, with those T.B. germs which it exploded into the air. How different a visit to her uncrowded butcher's shop where well-dressed housewives stood in front of the gleaming refrigeration counter, waiting to be served by the affable butcher in his clean blue-striped apron. From the recognisable but abstract oblongs of meat he would cut the joints she ordered and wrap them first in white and then in brown paper.

Set in the windows the trussed chickens would be pink and plump, haunched on their tender coccyges as neat as schoolgirls in assembly.

Sometimes there might be brains, or kidneys, or even tripe on display but they would be chilled and bloodless, wrapped in hygienic plastic bags and stacked together on a white enamel dish in a cunning and even aesthetic patchwork of colour.

There was never the faintest murmur here

of that scandal in the mind that these vital organs, given a slight alteration in shape and size, were the same ones that in man daily flinch and grind together in agonised spasms of fear and desire, and which in sleep transmit to the brain their own naked images to dress and conceal as it may.

On the Sunday, after her own late breakfast, Mina disappeared into the yard with a bowl of boiling water and the bread knife. Lola's husband had tactfully taken the children to the beach for the morning but she remained at home as usual to do the cooking. She did not believe in making her servants do absolutely everything. She pretended to occupy herself with a book in the lounge but waited there in a mixed state of revulsion at the impending act and anxiety to know it completed. She expected every second the choking squawk which would announce that Mina had wrung the wretched bird's neck but its cry was as muffled as the sound of Lola's elemental conflicts and she never heard it.

Then at last came the familiar clatter of movement about the kitchen again and Lola went in there. Mina's apron was slightly blood-stained and little drifts of feathers clung to it here and there. The bird, cleaned and trussed in a truly professional manner, spilling a little warm blood from its severed neck, lay on a plate. Its ugly legs were the only recognisable feature of its peripatetic past.

"It's beautiful, Mina," Lola forced herself to say. "I'm sure we all will enjoy it," and she set about cooking it. First she parboiled it and the sickly sweet smell of it rose up from the pot where it bubbled under a head of grey scum which glistened now and then with popping yellow globules of liquid fat. She then roasted it with the potatoes.

Her husband and the children returned from the beach and at last the dinner was ready, the pumpkin and the peas cooked and everything turned out into serving dishes.

The family were all seated at table awaiting the bird, which Mina brought in with a flourish. She was rewarded with pagan cries of pleasure from the youngsters.

"What, Mina," said Lola's husband in his gentle bantering tone, which they all knew for affection, "where is this delicate young pullet from?"

The children giggled in the common pretence. His humour was designed as well to soften for them the savage laws of nature with whose immediacy, as town dwellers, they were unfamiliar.

"I raised it, baas," she said, "at my farm. And the Madam cooked it."

He exclaimed in mock surprise with a wink of complicity at Lola to excuse his apparent slight of her efforts.

"What, you raised it, I didn't know you could raise anything!"

She took the liberty of an old servant.

"Oh yes, baas," she said, "I can raise anything. Even your children."

"Well, Mina," he answered looking up quickly into her face, with his endearing honesty, "if you raised it, then we will eat it."

Mina glowed with satisfaction.

Her husband carved and Lola served them all, giving herself only a wing. As they ate with relish she picked at her vegetables and watched them. They took second helpings until nothing remained but the carcase, like the hull of an ancient trireme, filled with the pungent stuffing, and a few pieces of the meat she had laid aside for Mina.

She was thinking as she watched them eat of the act of communion, the blood of the lamb, the bread and the wine. The guts and the gob, she thought, and she winced at the words—must they indeed eat the guts and the gob to commune with them—the natives?

"Aren't you having yours, Mum?" the children asked in surprise when they looked up, at last all done with their own, "it's good."

"I'm just not hungry today, darlings," she said, and gave hers to the youngest.

Her husband tried both to compliment and excuse her. He smiled.

"You cooked it beautifully my love," he said· "although it started out on the tougher side."

Lola was suddenly filled with envy at their innocence.

She saw Mina coming in from the kitchen to clear away the dishes. As the servant approached the table Lola surprised them all with her reply,

"Well what did you expect with a dirty old native chicken from the farm?" she exclaimed.

Her voice rose with a spite which measured exactly the depth of her mortification, for she had at last acknowledged that the grim communion was necessary only for herself.

TWO WORLDS

All day a lost, mysterious world
that lies outside, and yet transcends
the world of sense, has beckoned me
to seek its snow-fed provinces
far from my environment.

Now with my woman's tasks complete,
I look towards the snow-bright pulse
of Venus where she glows apart,
and wonder should I seek a world
that lies within her influence.

It is for love my tasks are done,
for this my hands grow veined and rough
tending those who came to me
out of my flesh's habitude
into a world that holds them fast.

And yet the world that beckons me
holds nothing of the mortal flesh
that I have loved, conceived and borne.
More than husband, daughters, son
demands my deep allegiance.

There are hours when I pass
out of my days' entanglements
to where a crystal river flows
over jade and porphyry.
I hear its clear, essential words.

Beyond my mere humanity,
rhythms from a snow-fed source
lap my hearing, touch and sight,
and I return to tasks of love
holding reflections I have caught.

MARGARET IRVIN

John Reed

THE NOLAN RETROSPECTIVE

Sidney Nolan is easily the most publicised of all Australian painters, and, if for this reason alone, it is logical that he should have a retrospective exhibition throughout the country; but of course the very fact of his popularity, as well as the sheer weight of the exhibition make it difficult to approach it objectively. The majority tend to follow automatically the image that has been created for them, and, inevitably others react against this. In either case the true value of the paintings is liable to elude the observer, and, in fact, we must remember that this 'true value' may elude the most perceptive contemporary observer, and its assessment must wait for a later generation.

In the meantime one does as well as one can, remembering that in selecting and presenting this exhibition, Nolan has taken the risk of exposing his weaknesses as well as his power, and that one must approach it equally exposed and with one's perceptive faculties fully alert.

In reviewing (I think in the Bulletin) Elwyn Lynn's recent book 'Sydney Nolan. Myth and Imagery', Dr Bernard Smith laid the ground open for a much more complete research into Nolan's work and its sources and implications than has ever previously been undertaken. It provides a powerful and important challenge which deserves to be taken up by someone having the necessary scholarship and insight; but my own concern in this article is with the paintings themselves as they present themselves to my eyes. I am concerned far more in knowing *if* they succeed—which involves an aesthetic value-judgment—than in tracing their source in Nolan's philosophy, their symbolic significance, their link with tradition, their interrelationship between themselves, or any other of their aspects which, to me, are more essentially the province of the research student or the historian than they are of the contemporary observer reacting to the pictorial image presented to him.

Quite clearly this is a personal and subjective approach; but I believe that, with some explanations, it is the best approach available to the contemporary viewer of works of art. He is in a particular position: he is part of the world of today (as the artist is), and, as such, the art which is being created now is, in a sense, being created out of him. It is not possible for him to judge it 'objectively' in the way he can be objective in relation to a work of art created 200 years ago; but he can respond to it out of an instinctive awareness of its sources and its particular message to him, and as part of an audience with its roots in those sources. This does not imply that every man is his own art authority; but, on the contrary, presupposes a specific involvement in the contemporary creative process and a developed sensibility, which, one imagines, comes from this involvement.

In thinking about one's responses to an exhibition of this size—143 paintings—one probably finds oneself doing so on two levels, first making an overall assessment, and then considering individual paintings or groups of paintings. This is a big exhibition by our standards and must be judged as such—in other words it would not justify itself if it only contained a few very good paintings, and one must not be unduly impressed with its size as such. After all it represents only 5 paintings a year for the period covered, and the main problems involved would seem to have been, not the finding of 143 paintings, but the decision on which to choose and the organisation involved in getting them together and transporting them from one place to another.

Seeing the exhibition as a whole was certainly, for me, a definitive experience. For years we had heard a great deal more about Nolan's work than we had seen of it; only occasional paintings or relatively small exhibitions had been haphazardly shown in one state

or another, and some of the paintings in his big Thames and Hudson book had left a feeling of uneasiness in many of his earlier admirers. More significantly, the younger artists, for some of whom Nolan was something of a minor deity, were beginning to express doubts. These were artists who had always refused to accept the other two big 'names', Dobell and Drysdale, but had felt a real kinship with Nolan.

It has, therefore, been very important for us to have this exhibition, and, for me, it has indeed confirmed Nolan's unique quality as a painter, even if I now make some qualifications. One should remember, of course, that he is only 50, and there is still plenty of time for even greater achievements.

In this connection I can remember that, many years ago, I talked with Nolan about what seemed to me a remarkable phenomenon of the Heidelberg school of painters—the extraordinary way in which they flashed to brilliant creative achievement and then, almost as quickly died to insignificance and banality. Streeton was, in fact, only about 20 when he painted his beautiful early landscapes. It seemed that the revelation of Australia which they had experienced and been able to translate into paint, had burnt itself out, perhaps because they had had to rely almost entirely on their own individual strength without the backing of the sort of tradition against which a European artist is always able to work.

The obvious question was whether Nolan and his fellow artists of the 40's could break this barrier, and Nolan's retrospective now answers this question so far as he is concerned. To me it is not only impressive, but is impressive to a degree and in a way that puts Nolan into a special category among Australian artists.

This is a broad generalisation, and is one which I will have to qualify to some extent. Perhaps one of the clearest impressions I got from the exhibition was a sense of Nolan's infallibility in all his earlier work; by which I mean his paintings up to the first Kelly series (1947). I do not want to be taken as saying they are necessarily 'great' paintings, no matter how powerfully they appeal to me, and no doubt some of them carry too clearly the evidence of Nolan's youth; but it seems to me now—as indeed it did at the time they were painted—that they bear the unmistakable authenticity of a man who is inevitably an artist, a man with a 'vision', who sees the world as it were with the outer skin removed, exposed and revealed with all its inner subtleties and inner meanings, and who has the gift to disclose something of this vision to us through his chosen medium. In thinking of these paintings I find that the word 'magic' comes spontaneously into my mind, and indeed this seems the appropriate word, because a phenomenon is involved, a miracle performed, which is outside normal mundane experience.

It is with this feeling of magic in mind and senses that one continues to move through the exhibition, and instinctively it becomes the touch-stone against which one measures the other paintings. We must surely ask, is this magic carried right through the 30 years; is it as powerful now as it was in the early days; is Nolan a better, a more profound artist than he was then?

Nolan used to say that it embarrassed him to hear talk of a man being a 'greater' or a 'lesser' artist: he was either an artist or not an artist, and there was no more to be said. There is an obvious truth and purity in this attitude; but it is unavoidable that one should want to probe further, and I think an overall survey of this exhibition does hold its disappointments, and even shocks, as well as its pure delights.

One has to be careful in one's criticism of an artist such as Nolan to make it clear that one is in fact speaking of an exceptional artist, and so exceptional demands are made. He has set the pace, and we then rather ruthlessly insist that he keeps improving it, or at least that it does not lessen.

Looking back at the exhibition, and seeing it in the perspective of some six weeks, I am surprised to find that I am conscious of a considerable number of years during which this pace does seem to lessen. I first sense this happening as early as 1948, and it could well be typified by 'Agricultural Hotel' (illustrated in the catalogue in black and white).

Unfortunately, the critically important early Wimmera landscapes (few though they are) and the first Kelly series, are poorly represented in the exhibition—so much so that, in my opinion it is impossible to regard the exhibition as a really satisfactory coverage of Nolan's work. Even so a comparison of the quality of the thing seen and its translation into a painting in 'Wimmera', 1943, and 'Kelly',

1946 (both reproduced in Art & Australia, Sept. 1967), with 'Agricultural Hotel', appears to me to make it clear that there has been a considerable diminution in the intensity of perception and the actual handling of the paint itself. On the one hand we have illumination, and on the other something which relates, at least in part, to illustration. It had not occurred to me before, but in seeing these 1948 paintings as a group, I felt that at that time Nolan could well have been influenced by some of Drysdale's early outback paintings. There is certainly a remarkable common denominator between them, though it is rather as if Nolan had treated somewhat lightly and with a sense of humour what Drysdale had painstakingly represented. In any event, the paint surface has become suave rather than felt, and one senses a loss of creative involvement which is, in fact, carried through into the Central Australian paintings. It is difficult not to be impressed with these latter paintings, specially if they are seen massed together as they were in their original showing at David Jones Gallery in Sydney in 1950. It is not that they are big in size—though big enough for the time when they were painted—but, being painted from a birdseye view (actually, I believe, from photos taken in a plane) they present such a vast image of the inland that one almost feels that the paintings themselves are vast. Once again, however, one senses a lack of commitment in the artist: it is as though he is painting brilliantly and rather coldly what the outer eye sees so clearly on the surface; but his inner eye, which reveals meaning, remains closed.

Without a very much more complete acquaintance with his work than even this exhibition gives, it would be dangerous to generalise too far; but it seems to me that it was not till the Leda and the Swan paintings of about 1958 that Nolan's particular magic began to come out again from beneath the surface of the paintings. This was even more in evidence in his 1962 series of inland paintings, such as 'Deserted Township, Dawn', and 'Explorer and Township', both of which are painted with a tenderness and an understanding which is quite breathtaking.

It is rather silly to talk of an artist's 'best' paintings—he probably paints all sorts of different 'best' paintings—but in an assessment of Nolan's work we must at least note his African paintings as being among his most remarkable. When I first saw them at Kym Bonython's gallery in Adelaide in 1964 I had a tremendous sense of Nolan's beautiful vision (so aptly noted by James Gleeson in his review of this show); how he had seen some astounding phenomenon, the phenomenon of wild Africa, for the first time, and had apprehended it within himself perfectly, and as no one had ever done before; but then I felt, that in realising this in his paintings, it had somehow just eluded him: you could sense the urgency with which they had been painted and their complete integrity, but you wondered whether there was still something more to be said in order to make them quite complete paintings. Now, with the passage of time, and seeing them again, I am not so sure, and it seems to me that in paintings such as 'Elephant and Mountain' (reproduced in colour in the catalogue) and 'Elephant and Tree', he has achieved an almost perfect realisation of his vision. This is not just brilliance—in fact, if there is a failure it is in the area where brilliance operates—it is something much more fundamental: it is the same thing which one finds in the first Kelly series, and in this sense it is interesting to compare them. To me the Kellys still seem more fully realised as a series than the African paintings; but I am ready to admit that this may be because I have lived with them for 20 years, and it is more than possible that I have not yet caught up with Nolan's achievement in these later ones.

Again, in the Antarctic paintings we see this same quality; but, after the African paintings it is only a glimpse and not the full blaze of illumination which they reveal to us. We see it most clearly in 'Mt. Erebus' and in 'Antarctic Explorer', with its amazing patch of green on the horse and figure.

The finale of the exhibition is the series of 3 panels, each 60" x 432", 'Riverbend', 'Glenrowan' and 'Inferno'. 'Riverbend' (reproduced in colour on the cover) presents an endless stretch of river, an endless wall of river gums behind it and some small figures (including Kelly) in the shallows. As a subject, even a philosophy, this seems to present great potentialities for Nolan; but as far as I am concerned, it is something I apprehended intellectually, not pictorially. For me, the painting does not yield up its secrets, and I am left with thoughts of what might have been. I have faith in the truth of Nolan's vision, but

I do not think it has been fulfilled, and the painting presents only its surface to me, without any feeling of being involved in it. I am told that when 'Riverbend' was first shown (in David Jones Gallery) it was not hung flat against a wall, but on stands, which enabled it to be seen as a 'river*bend*', and I can well imagine that this might have had quite a definite effect on one's response to the painting.

'Glenrowan' has much in common with 'Riverbend', but it has been brought to life by the giant prone figure of Kelly and the head of his horse: it engages you in a way 'Riverbend' fails to do, but tends to fade out where pure landscape takes over from Kelly.

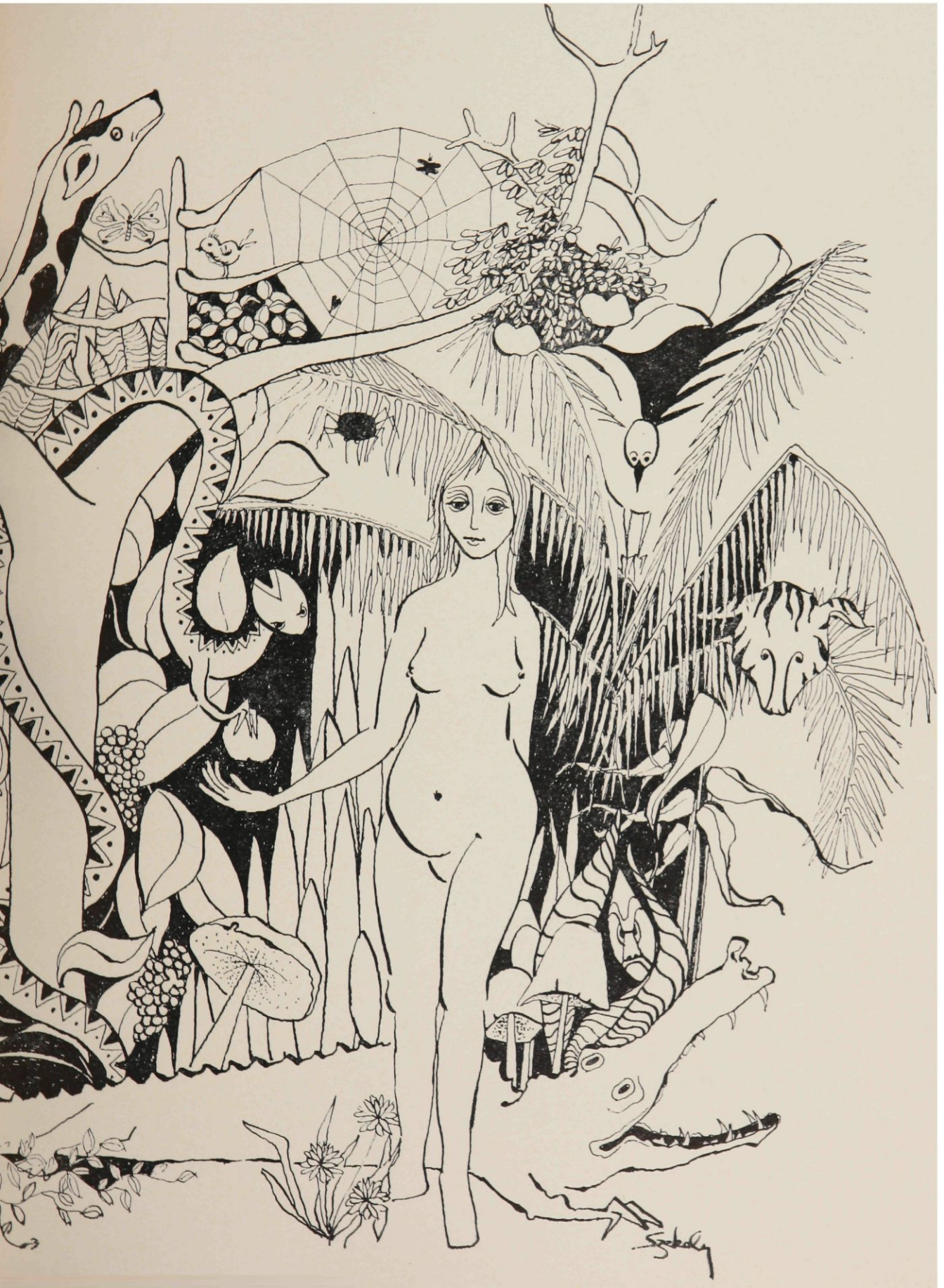
'Inferno' (also on the cover) is something quite different. Goodness knows what you call it: a sketch for a painting, an unfinished painting, a sort of a mock-up of a painting, or, just a painting. It does not much matter what you call it, what it has achieved is the important thing, and its achievement is definitely something disturbing. With vague recollections of Dante, I see the floating, disembodied souls of androgynous beings, armless, sexless except for an occasional swelling breast, and for the most part expressionless too, their heads painted in, but their bodies just blank white forms, though sometimes strangely flecked with patches of red, or red and blue. I confess their precise significance evades me, but the total effect is disturbing and haunting: it stirs some hidden memories and cannot be ignored.

If 'Inferno' is the climax of the exhibition, then without doubt the 1966 Wimmera (and allied) paintings are the anti-climax. Nolan used to say he believed in showing everything he did, and if a painting was 'bad', well, so much the worse for him, but just the same it was part of him and of creative activity. I can only hope that this group of paintings—as well as the Eureka panel in the Reserve Bank in Melbourne—was made public in this spirit. It is a pity in my mind that an exhibition which does so much to confirm one's strongest convictions about Nolan should end on this note, and it must not be allowed to distract our thoughts and responses from the rare and beautiful experiences he has given us.

Though we have other fine painters—I think particularly of the sustained intensity and passion of Arthur Boyd's work—the range of Nolan's vision, its penetrating quality, its revelation of inner meaning in the world about us, and the lyric intimacy with which he presents it to us, place him in a special position, which enables him to seize our imagination with particular vividness, and at the same time, to appeal to a much wider audience than is the case with other major contemporary painters.

* * * *

An interesting footnote to this article suggests itself to me. Nolan as a young man was essentially a 'modern'. Not only does his early painting show this—as at least one critic has noted—but his very active and imaginative mind was always occupied with the modern world and even with the world of the future. For instance, he was exercised with the idea of a city of glass, and was already projecting himself to the moon. Yet, today we find little, if any evidence in his paintings of this kind of imaginative process, and though he must be fully aware of what is happening in the world of art and science, the images in his paintings give us no sign that he is himself involved in this area. It is perhaps this factor which now tends to make him somewhat remote from our younger painters.



John K. Ewers

THE GENIUS OF JUDITH WRIGHT

Before attempting to come to terms with Judith Wright's latest volume, *The Other Half* (Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1966, $1.95), I propose, first to take a brief sampling of what critics and reviewers had to say about her earlier work as it appeared, and then to examine it in more detail as a whole. This will enable us to establish her poetic background, to mark some common factors to be found in all her poetry and the differences that emerge from time to time.

Much credit is due to C. B. Christesen, editor of *Meanjin* in which a number of her poems had already appeared, for publishing her first book, *The Moving Image* (1946). This brought nothing but praise from the critics. Professor S. Musgrove said: "This book confirms what we have for some time suspected from Judith Wright's periodical pieces, that she is the only poet among the younger Australians who can challenge the stature of R. D. FitzGerald."[1] Nan McDonald, herself a poet, wrote: "After wading through many books of verse where only a faint glimmer of poetry haunts the bog of words, the reader can ask nothing better than to be dealt the old familiar blow that says, beyond all shadow of doubt, 'This is poetry'. Judith Wright's first book, *The Moving Image*, does that."[2] *Woman to Man* (1949) was no less enthusiastically received. By the time H. M. Green had published the second edition of his anthology, *Modern Australian Poetry*, in 1952, he was prepared on the evidence of these two volumes alone to place her "among the principal poets writing in English today".[3] Still confining himself to these two books, Green amplified this further in his *A History of Australian Literature*, Vol. 2, 1923-1950: "A couple of lines that certainly and several whole poems that probably belong to world literature; half a dozen poems that are among the best of their kind in the present day: it is an amazing production for a woman of thirty-five, and it fixes Judith Wright's position, alongside those of FitzGerald and Slessor, among the first of living poets, in Australia or elsewhere."[4]

There was less enthusiasm for the third volume, *The Gateway* (1953). Elyne Mitchell regretted that the language and the imagery were "similar to those recording the spiritual journeys of other poets",[5] and T. Inglis Moore found "a relaxing of the high tension, a recurring sense of uncertainty, a feeling that the poet has stopped on her path to look around, unsure of her way".[6] About the fourth volume, *The Two Fires* (1955) the critics themselves were divided. Someone writing in *Southerly*, No. 2, 1956, with the initials of J. T. declared that many poems "lend colour to a suspicion that the author is forcing her art". He even went so far as to suggest that "half-baked critics or importunate publishers may have hurried this fine poet into putting out a fourth book before she was ready to do so".[7] But Robert D. FitzGerald (who is certainly no "half-baked critic") after commenting on the changing direction shown in this new volume, said "the earlier impressions return of poetry that has almost everything we could ask of it", adding later that "one is continuously conscious of a power of vision beyond the ordinary sight of mankind".[8] In the final chapter of his History already referred to—a chapter bringing the record up to 1960—H. M. Green amended his previously expressed opinion that Judith Wright was "essentially lyrist rather than intellectual".[9] This, he said, no longer held, for her third and fourth books showed her "moving inward, less often making her vision concrete and lyrical with pictures and lovely images and more often realizing some inner experience". He conceded that this showed "her poetic attitude is not static, an

important thing for a writer who has already made so high a place for herself".[10]

Judith Wright's fifth volume was *Birds* (1962). F. H. Mares in *The Australian Book Review* said: "These are beautifully wrought small poems: I had hoped for a great deal more, and I fear a withdrawal here."[11] There is a tendency, it seems, for the contemporary reviewer to anticipate what the writer may do next and to be disappointed when his own anticipation is not fulfilled. It was timely therefore that these five volumes should be followed by two selections, each made by the poet herself, so that we could get the flavour of her work as a whole up to that point. The first of these was in Angus & Robertson's Australian Poets series and appeared in 1963, to be followed by a rather fuller selection, *Five Senses*, in 1964. Both contained some poems under the heading of "The Forest" not previously published in book form, of which more will be said presently.

This then was the position as far as some critics and reviewers saw it up to the publication of her latest volume of new work, *The Other Half*. It was clear that all were agreed that Judith Wright was a poet of considerable stature, but not all were prepared to concede that her genius had not sometimes faltered in her six published volumes (seven, if we count "The Forest" poems which occur for the first time in the two volumes of selections).

I have now spent some weeks reading at leisure Judith Wright's entire published poems in an attempt to distil from them some unifying essence. When met again after many years, a number of poems in her early volumes assumed, for me, the classic quality of memorableness. What I wish to convey by this is that apparently these poems had at earlier readings entered into my subconscious to a degree I had not realized. Others familiar with this author's work, attempting a similar exercise in re-acquaintance, would no doubt share this experience and be prepared to name further poems which produced a similar effect on them. Among those which came to me in the re-reading with the force and familiarity of old and well-tried companions were "Nigger's Leap: New England", "Bullocky" and "South of my Days" from the first volume, "Woman to Man", "Woman's Song", "Woman to Child" and "Lost Child" from the second, "Birds" and "Old House" from the third, and the title poem from the fourth. There were others where the impact of familiarity was also present but to a lesser degree. This is a very subjective approach and mere memorableness for any individual is not necessarily a virtue. When it is coupled with the undoubted quality which such poems possess and when it is shared with a great number of other readers—as I believe is true of Judith Wright's work—it means a great deal.

One of the strongest impressions I received was the relationship much of her work bears to the time it was written. This can be a disadvantage; it can make for ephemeral work if the poet is too closely a victim of her time. But Judith Wright manages to transcend the ephemeral where many a lesser poet has been engulfed by it. This is well illustrated by the mood of most of the poems in *The Moving Image*. This was published in 1946, but all the poems except one are grouped under the heading: Poems, 1940-1944; that is, they were written during World War II. The title poem is undated, but it *could* be regarded as a war-poem with its overtones of destruction, although it is much more than that in its full implications.

World War II was a time when Australia's survival as a nation in the Pacific received its first full challenge and this evoked a great deal of inward-looking. We might not last long, the time seemed to say. What are we? How far have we come? The year before the outbreak of war had seen the announcement of the Jindyworobak manifesto by Rex Ingamells who gathered around him a group of nationalistic poets whose talents (many of them limited) drew also upon this inward-looking fostered by the threat to survival. Writers in this group over-stressed background and local colour, and aroused a good deal of hostility in certain quarters. Judith Wright was never close to the movement, but when asked by its founder to contribute to a review of its achievements at the end of 10 years she offered a comment that was untouched by the rancour that coloured the criticisms of many others.

> "The Russian, the English, the Norwegian writer can concentrate his attention on the social or psychological problem in hand; his background is already filled in, taken for granted." she wrote in an article called *Perspective*. "But the Australian background,

important as it is to the Australian psychology, has never thus been assimilated. So a kind of split in the writer's consciousness is often manifest; he cannot solve his immediate problem, he cannot keep attention concentrated on his foreground, while his background keeps intruding. Perhaps this duality, this unsolved problem, is partly the cause of the gaps in Australian literature, and the curious lack of writers with anything like a 'body of work' to their credit. Only the single-minded with a track of their own to follow, or the genuinely great writer, can by-pass that boulder in the road. (Henry Handel Richardson managed it in the Mahony trilogy, Slessor and FitzGerald managed it, though neither of them can be called prolific writers; Hugh McCrae and his circle managed it by simply detaching themselves completely from the ground and flying over it, but nevertheless their work as a whole was seriously weakened by the evasion.)

"It seems to me that the Jindy movement was essentially an effort to get the problem into perspective. I don't necessarily mean that the Jindy writers themselves have done that, but rather that in the ensuing argument the issues found some kind of clarification; and in fact the work of the outstanding Jindy writers has to some extent already broken the problem down. To emphasize our regionalism instead of trying to elude it —this has had a value in itself, and it has performed the further function of leading to a reaction against itself. That is to say, that having found out what happens when one tries to treat the problem as an end in itself, it is now possible to apply the knowledge. The regional, the national outlook *has* a value, and no doubt some writers do their best work within such a closed circuit. But there are other jobs to do; and Jindyworobak has probably contributed something towards finding the means to do them. It may be that because of the Jindy movement, *even those most fiercely opposed or most indifferent to it know themselves a little better.*"[12]

The italics at the end are mine. Whether, in fact, Judith Wright herself was opposed or indifferent to the Jindyworobak attitude is not clear, but her poetry in this first volume stands in sharp contrast to that of the bulk of Jindyworobak verse in that, while sometimes saying the same thing, it says it from much greater depth. Reg Ingamells had written in *his* first book of verse published ten years earlier:

Where now uninterrupted sun
Is shrivelling the sheaves,
Black children leap and laugh and run
Beneath a sky of leaves;
And where the farmer thrashes wheat
With steel machinery,
Go glimmerings of their little feet,
If we could only see.

It's a pleasant enough concept and here put forward probably for the first time, but it is shallow and poetically not distinguished. Judith Wright in "Nigger's Leap: New England" puts a similar thought into much richer language:

Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers,
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?

She follows this with an extension of thought to the one-ness of man, an extension, it may be added, which seldom if ever entered into the verse of the Jindyworobaks:

O all men are one man at last. We should have known
the night that tided up the cliffs and hid them
had the same question on its tongue for us.
And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.

Her main preoccupation in this first volume is with what we have grown out of; it derives from the inward-looking that was part of the time in which she was writing. It occurs over and over again. In "Country Town" she says:

This is no longer the landscape that they knew,
the sad green enemy country of their exile,
those branded men whose songs were of rebellion.

. . . . . .

This is a landscape that the town creeps over;
a landscape safe with bitumen and banks.
The hostile hills are netted in with fences
and the roads lead to houses and the pictures.
Thunderbolt was killed by Constable Walker
long ago; the bones are buried, the story printed.
And yet in the night of the sleeping town, the voices:
This is not ours, not ours the flowering tree.
What is it we have lost and left behind?

Where the Jindyworobaks were accusing early settlers of despoiling the countryside, thundering imprecations about "the rape of the land", Judith Wright was enquiring into the sources

from which she herself had sprung. The poem concludes with a call to

> Remember Thunderbolt, buried under the air-raid trenches.
> Remember the bearded men singing of exile.
> Remember the shepherds under their strange stars.

That this call for remembrance is, for her, very personal is shown in many places and nowhere better than in "South of my Days" which begins:

> South of my days' circle, part of my blood's country,
> rises the tableland, high delicate outline
> of bony slopes wincing under the winter,
> low trees blue-leaved and olive, outcropping granite—
> clean, lean, hungry country . . . .

and ends:

> South of my days' circle
> I know it against the stars, the high lean country
> full of old stories that still go walking in my sleep.

If there has been despoilment, this seems to imply, then we are all touched with some guilt and out of the original hate-love relationship between our forebears and this alien earth has come the fulfilment of love.

Her poem, "Bullocky", expressed in a ballad-like form she was not often to use again, became at once a favourite anthology piece. The first three stanzas suffice to show its mood:

> Beside his heavy-shouldered team,
> thirsty with drought and chilled with rain,
> he weathered all the striding years
> till they ran widdershins in his brain:
>
> Till the long solitary tracks
> etched deeper with each lurching load
> were populous before his eyes,
> and fiends and angels used his road.
>
> All the long straining journey grew
> a mad apocalyptic dream,
> and he old Moses, and the slaves
> his suffering and stubborn team.

This is landscape poetry, but it is a landscape with people. In "South of my Days" there was old Dan:

> Seventy years of stories he clutches round his bones.
> Seventy summers are hived in him like old honey.

In "Brother and Sisters" there are Millie, Lucy and John struggling against time and lack of fulfilment on a no-good farm:

> The road turned out to be a cul-de-sac;
> stopped like a lost intention at the gate
> and never crossed the mountains to the coast.
> But they stayed on.

"Half-caste Girl" is pure Jindyworobak, but written with much deeper insight:

> Little Josie buried under the bright moon
> is tired of being dead, death lasts too long.
> She would like to push death aside, and stand on the hill
> and beat with a waddy on the bright moon like a gong.
>
> Across the hills, the hills that belong to no people
> and so to none are foreign,
> once she climbed high to find the native cherry;
> the lithe darkhearted lubra
> who in her beads like blood
> dressed delicately for love
> moves her long hands among the strings of the wind,
> singing the songs of women,
> the songs of love and dying.

Most of the poetry in *The Moving Image* is essentially regional; its appeal could be largely to those who, however vicariously, have shared the emotions which regionalism of any sort calls up. We are reminded of her words in the Jindyworobak review: "The regional, the national outlook *has* a value, and no doubt some writers do their best work within such a closed circuit. But there are other jobs to do."[13] Judith Wright worked magnificently within that closed circuit, but did not confine herself to it. Even in this early volume "The Company of Lovers" entirely forsakes regionalism. It does, however, remain a poem of its time, the time of a world at war:

> We meet and part now over all the world:
> we, the lost company,
> take hands together in the night, forget
> the night in our brief happiness, silently.
> We, who sought many things, throw all away
> for this one thing, one only,
> remembering that in the narrow grave
> we shall be lonely.
>
> Death marshals up his armies round us now.
> Their footsteps crowd too near.

Lock your warm hands above the chilling heart
and for a time I live without my fear.
Grope in the night to find me and embrace
for the dark preludes of the drums begin,
and round us, round the company of lovers,
death draws his cordons in.

This poem serves to introduce us to the prevailing mood of her second volume, *Woman to Man*. Love is a recurring theme in these and later poems. At first it begins as the love between man and woman; later it takes on a more transcendental quality—love, the moving force of all life. Just as the landscape poems, wherever they occur in the flow of her poetry, are peopled with personal memories or derivations, so her love poems have a deeply personal quality. It is doubtful whether any aspect of what she says in the title-poem of this volume has ever been better said and a great deal would be lost were it not quoted in full:

The eyeless labourer in the night,
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,
builds for its resurrection day—
silent and swift and deep from sight
foresees the unimagined light.

This is no child with a child's face;
this has no name to name it by:
yet you and I have known it well.
This is our hunter and our chase,
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,
the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
This is the blood's wild tree that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;
this is the question and reply;
the blind head butting in the dark,
the blaze of light along the blade.
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

The two poems which follow this, "Woman's Song" and "Woman to Child", and another later in the book, "The Unborn", are complementary pieces. They serve to establish the fact that the physical "love" of which she writes here, distinct from the more transcendental "love" to be found in many other poems, is always that of the woman. It is the love for the child she is to bear; it is never the passionate love that men feel and write of, never the pursuit and the capture. Nor is it romantic love which is the subject of many poems, most of them by men and some by women aping men. In this respect her attitude towards love is similar to that of Mary Gilmore, although its expression is usually more intense, more poetic. There are other similarities between these two women poets, notably an emotional drawing from the well of the past, an awareness of the significance in our history of the displaced people, the aborigines (although here Mary Gilmore's poetry is far more emotive) and a strong sense of common humanity. But there are sharp differences, too. Both are feminine, but Mary Gilmore is sometimes also feminist, a characteristic never to be found in Judith Wright's work or her personal attitudes. Nor does she espouse causes or champion the underdog. And nothing could be more out of character than to imagine Miss Wright rushing off to join a socialist colony in Paraguay or anywhere else!

Many poems in this second volume make reference to children: "Child in Wattle Tree', "The Child", "The World and the Child", "Night and the Child". All these are to some degree the result of an intense awareness of the impingement of age upon youth, part of the duality which is stressed in many other ways in other poems: light and dark, real and unreal, life and death. In "Lost Child", a section of the closing sequence of poems in this book, she gives a hint of the metaphysical realms she is to explore more frequently and at considerable depth in later volumes:

Is the boy lost? Then I know where he is gone.
He has gone climbing the terrible crags of the Sun.

The searchers go through the green valley, shouting his name;
the dogs are moaning on the hill for the scent of his track;
but the men will all be hoarse and the dogs lame
before the Hamilton's boy is found or comes back.
Through the smouldering ice of the moon he is stumbling alone.
I shall rise from my dark and follow where he is gone.

I heard from my bed his bugle breath go by
and the drum of his heart in the measure of an old song.
I shall travel into silence, and in that fierce country
When we meet he will know he has been away too long.

They are looking for him now in the vine-
scrub over the hill,
but I think he is alone in a place that I
know well.

Is the boy lost? Then I know where he is
gone.
He is climbing to Paradise up a river of
stars and stone.

It may have been because the contemporary critics expected some blending of the regionalism of her first volume and the various interpretations of love that coloured her second that they paused uncertainly before the third. Its significance seems to be crystallized in four lines from the title-poem, which is placed right at the very end of the book:

In the land of oblivion
among the black-mouthed ghosts,
I knew my Self
the sole reality.

Henceforth and in many different ways, the poet is to embark upon a voyage of discovery in Self, a Self that is not merely of this time but in all time. There are hints of a growing wonder at the miracle of life and of the life-giving force, love. This is the theme of the opening poem, "Dark Gift", in which the poet marvels at the growth of a flower that "begins in the dark where life is not" until with the calyx folded she cries:

Open, green hand, and give
the dark gift you hold.

Oh wild mysterious gold!
Oh act of passionate love!

There is also a growing preoccupation here with the receding of youth, with the approach of age, although she is still only in her late thirties. Often she re-states with no less force and vision the regionalism of the best poems in *The Moving Image*. Thus we have "Eroded Hills", "Drought", "Unknown Water", "The Ancestors" and most memorably "Old House", which begins:

Where now outside the weary house the
pepperina,
that great broken tree, gropes with its blind
hands
and sings a moment in the magpie's voice,
there he stood once,
that redhaired man my great-great-grand-
father,
his long face amiable as an animal's,
and thought of vines and horses.

He moved in that mindless country like a
red ant,
running tireless in the summer heat among
the trees—
the nameless trees, the sleeping soil, the
original river—
and said that the eastern slope would do
for a vineyard.

It was no doubt the diversity of subjects dealt with in this third volume which aroused some misgivings in the minds of contemporary critics, which caused T. Inglis Moore to feel that "the poet has stopped on her path to look around, unsure of her way".[14] But one cannot share Elyne Mitchell's regret that often her language and imagery were "similar to those recording the spiritual journeys of other poets".[15] What different language or imagery could possibly be desirable for "Birds", one of her most profound poems?

Whatever the bird is, is perfect for the bird.
Weapon kestrel hard as a blade's curve,
thrush round as a mother or a full drop of
water
fruit-green parrot wise in his shrieking
swerve—
all are what bird is and do not reach be-
yond bird.

Must we deny the validity of "weapon kestrel", "blade's curve", "round as a mother or a full drop of water?" One wonders whether this poem arose out of the fragmentary thought in R. D. FitzGerald's *Essay on Memory*: that sometimes one sees "the bird's flight as the bird". Judith Wright is here emphasizing the apparent simplicity of motives guiding the lives of the "cruel kestrel", the "thrush in the trembling dew beginning to sing", the "parrot clinging and quarrelling and veiling his queer eye". This is contrasted with the complexity of human motives:

But I am torn and beleaguered by my own
people.
The blood that feeds my heart is the blood
they gave me
and my heart is the house where they gather
and fight for dominion—
all different, all with a wish and a will to
save me,
to turn me into the ways of other people.

The poem concludes with a yearning to

. . . . melt the past, the present and the
future in one
and find the words that lie behind all these
languages.

Then I could fuse my passions into one
clear stone
and be simple to myself as the bird is to the
bird.

If the imagery lacks the sharp Australianism that characterized her more regional poetry, it is because she has moved out of regionalism into the universal. Her future work is to move more and more in that direction, yet in a subtle way its universal aspects are involved in the regional. Thus in her fourth book, *The Two Fires*, we have "The Wattle Tree" with its opening lines:

The tree knows four truths—
earth, water, air, and fire of the sun.
The tree holds four truths in one.
Root, limb and leaf unfold
out of the seed, and these rejoice
till the tree dreams it has a voice
to join four truths in one great word of
gold.

It could be any tree—oak, elm, cedar or what you will. But it is a wattle tree; the last line tells us that. Here, too, is emerging a theme that is to recur more and more frequently in her work—the kinship with nature, yet an apartness, a separateness from it. Under the bark of a "Scribbly-gum" she finds:

. . . . . the written track
of a life I could not read.

However, *The Two Fires* is once again a book arising out of its time. The poet is very personally concerned with the threat of man's destruction through the possible use of the atom bomb. The title-poem shows this concern in a magnificent poetic conception of the earth born out of fire and returning to fire:

My father rock, do you forget the kingdom
of the fire?
The aeons grind you into bread—
into the soil that feeds the living and transforms the dead;
and have we eaten in the heart of the yellow
wheat
the sullen unforgetting seed of fire?

And now set free by the climate of man's
hate,
that seed sets time ablaze.
The leaves of fallen years, the forest of
living days,
have caught like matchwood. Look, the
whole world burns.
The ancient kingdom of the fire returns.
And the world, that flower that housed the
bridegroom and the bride,
burns on the breast of night.
The world's denied.

Other poems like "The Precipice", "West Wind", "Two Generations", and "Searchlight Practice" also develop this concept. They contain lines that stamp her as a poet of the highest possible artistry and sensitivity, lines that cause the reader to pause and marvel when he comes upon them. Has the dilemma of our times ever been better stated than in these from "West Wind"?

for to love in a time of hate and to live in
a time of death
is lonely and dangerous as the last leaf on
the tree
and wrenches the stem of the blood and
twists the words from truth.

Her kinship with nature persists in the much slighter poems of her fifth volume, *Birds*, which were written for her teenage daughter and are therefore less adult in their approach, but are not quite, as Max Harris has said, merely the work of a poet who is "keeping her hand in".[16] A lesser poet would have written a very different set of verses for a teenage daughter! Here are some delightful vignettes which, apart from their poetic quality, can only have come from one who has lived close to nature and who has drawn some of her strength from it. Whether it be "that old clever Noah's Ark, the well-turned, well-carved pelican with his wise comic eye" or the magpies who "walk with hands in pockets, left and right" and whose song thanks "God with every note" or the chattering Apostle Birds ("How they talked about us!") —there is a great deal of shrewd observation here and more than that, a quality of mystic interpretation which, if the single audience for which they were meant were extended to others of that age, might well awaken an interest in those aspects of the Australian environment which have so moved and influenced the poet herself.

Those who are unfamiliar with the poetry of Judith Wright could not do better than make an approach to her work through *Five Senses*, published in 1964 in Angus & Robertson's Sirius paperback series. Here are most of her truly memorable poems and it is interesting to note that, as if to challenge some of the contemporary critics, she has chosen heavily from *The Gateway* and *The Two Fires*—the third and fourth volumes which caused some concern at the time because of their apparent

departure from what had come to be accepted as typical of this writer. It is particularly interesting because it contains twenty-eight poems hitherto unpublished, under the collective title of *The Forest*. These take us a step further along the very personal road of Judith Wright's poetry. They are distinguished by the same certainty of language and techniques we have come to expect. The title-poem of this series, although there are many excellent and diverse poems here, seems to me to crystallize simply and unpretentiously the nature of her quest. I quote it in full:

When first I knew this forest
its flowers were strange.
Their different forms and faces
changed with the seasons' change—

white violets smudged with purple,
the wild-ginger spray,
ground-orchids small and single
haunted my day.

the thick-fleshed Murray-lily,
flame-tree's bright blood,
and where the creek runs shallow,
the cunjevoi's green hood.

When first I knew this forest,
time was to spend,
and time's renewing harvest
could never reach an end.

Now that its vines and flowers
are named and known,
like long-fulfilled desires
those first strange joys are gone.

My search is further.
There's still to name and know
beyond the flowers I gather
that one that does not wither—
the truth from which they grow.

It is a remarkable poem, less complex than many she has written, yet summarizing, I would suggest, her whole poetic endeavour. The vines and flowers, the familiar things of life whether of nature or of man, *are named and known*. From time to time she will return to them, but not merely to identify or describe. Henceforth the search is further: to "the truth from which they grow". In this single poem we see her moving, as the whole of her poetic work has moved, from the regional to the universal.

And now, at last, having attempted to distil the essence of her writing, let us now look at her latest collection, *The Other Half* (1966). The concluding piece, "Turning Fifty", reminds us that the poet is now no longer young, no longer the "woman of thirty-five" whose work, on the evidence of two published volumes, H. M. Green found "amazing".[17] At fifty she reviews the times through which she has lived:

Though we've polluted
even this air I breathe
and spoiled green earth;

though, granted life or death,
death's what we're choosing,
and though these years we live
scar flesh and mind,

still, as the sun comes up,
bearing my birthday,
having met time and love
I raise my cup—

dark, bitter, neutral, clean,
sober as morning—
to all I've seen and known—
to this new sun.

Poems written to celebrate one's own birthday are seldom memorable and this is no exception. It is nevertheless impressive in its homely sincerity. This is a coffee cup she is raising, not a convivial glass, and it is clear that she is still possessed by the doubts and fears which were the main theme of *The Two Fires*. So much profound writing, so much word magic and control, so much that has been accepted as the best of contemporary Australian poetry—all this stems from a woman, now turned fifty, greeting "the new sun" with courage undimmed and, as one knows from what she has already produced, equipped while strength remains with her to continue her quest of ultimate truth.

The themes she has chosen for this latest volume are varied, but there is this recurring note of age, accompanied by a somewhat wistful note of the inevitability of change that age brings. Among the poems in *The Forest* series was one, "For My Daughter", which reviewed the problem of the woman who is also a mother, her child grown up and going her separate way:

My body gave you then
what was ordained to give,
and did not need my will.
But now we learn to live
apart, what must I do?

"The Curtain", describing the homecoming of a grown child, continues this thought:

So grown you looked, in the same unaltered room,
so much of your childhood you were already forgetting,
while I remembered. Yet in the unforgetting dream
you will come here all your life for renewal and meeting.

It was your breath, so softly rising and falling,
that kept me silent. With your lids like buds unbroken
you watched on their curtain of your life, a stream of shadows moving.
When I touched your shoulder, I too had a little dreamed and woken.

It may be said that Judith Wright, however deeply she feels, however much she is moved by the transience of life or the eternal quest for its underlying truths, will never and can never be dogmatic in her statement. A brief poem, "Wishes", gives her answers to the questions: What do I wish to be? What do I wish to do? To the first she replies, "I wish to be wise". To the second, "I wish to love". The final couplet admits the contradiction:

To love and to be wise?
Down, fool, and lower your eyes.

There are several remarkable poems in this volume. The title-poem is yet another attempt to bring about some reconciliation of opposites which we have noted before. This time the opposites are "the self that night undrowns when I'm asleep" and "my daylight self", the subconscious and the conscious. She brings them tentatively together again in a final couplet:

So we may meet at last, and meeting bless,
And turn into one truth in singleness.

We should perhaps have noted earlier this recurring practice of summing up in a couplet the ideas that the poem has been exploring. In this she is not uniformly successful. There are times when one feels that in her desire to round off a poem as neatly as possible she has yielded a little to rhetoric, a little to emotion. In this couplet I have quoted, one may well wonder whether these two opposites can be reconciled in singleness.

The outstanding poems in *The Other Half* are "To Hafiz of Shiraz", "Naked Girl and Mirror" and the New Guinea sequence, "The Finding of the Moon". I name these three because of certain intrinsic differences about them, but would not suggest that any others in the volume fall short of the high standard of thought and expression that characterize all Judith Wright's verse. She is, it seems, too fine an artist ever to write a bad poem; if some reach greater heights than others it is because initially they are aimed at greater heights.

"To Hafiz and Shiraz" is prefaced by the statement "the rose has come into the garden, from Nothingness to Being", which reminds us somewhat of an earlier poem, "Dark Gift". Its philosophical theme is the inevitability of fruition, so that it is no longer "any poem" that might follow her pen, but the certainty that in poetry, as in living:

Every path and life leads one way only,
out of continual miracle, through creation's fable,
over and over repeated, but never yet understood,
as every word leads back to the blinding original Word.

"Naked Girl and Mirror" must take its place amongst Judith Wright's finest poems. It is a reflective essay on the problem facing an adolescent girl whose body once served only the elemental needs of childhood, but is now awakening to the fuller needs of maturity and love. This she sees at first as a betrayal and is afraid. She longs to return to what she was, but finally realizes that she cannot do this, although she still hopes to retain something of her original self:

Let me go—let me be gone
You are half of some other who may never come.
Why should I tend you? You are not my own;
you seek that other—he will be your home.

Yet I pity your eyes in the mirror, misted with tears;
I lean to your kiss. I must serve you: I will obey.
Some day we may love. I may miss your going, some day,
though I shall always resent your dumb and fruitful years.
Your lovers shall learn better, and bitterly too,
if their arrogance dares to think I am part of you.

In the New Guinea sequence, "The Finding of the Moon", she captures to an extraordin-

ary degree the atmosphere of a tribal village in which a young man, Aruako, turns his back Endymion-like on sensual love in his pursuit of the Moon. It is notable that Miss Wright should depart from her familiar Australian background and that she should with her own poetic vision so successfully enter into this new world. There are some poems here with a quaintly domestic atmosphere that perhaps do not quite do justice to her talents—poems like "To Another Housewife", "Cleaning Day" and "Portrait", but others, although comparatively slight, like "The Trap", "A Document" and Snakeskin on a Gate", show that she has lost nothing of her technical skill or sensitivity. In short, *The Other Half* is a worthy successor to the volumes that have preceded it. No doubt it will be followed by others if we are to judge from her supplication in the final stanza of "Prayer":

> And you, who speak in me when I speak well,
> withdraw not now your grace, leave me not dry and cold.
> I have praised you in the pain of love, I would praise you still
> in the slowing of the blood, the time when I grow old.

What then is the real nature of the genius of Judith Wright? Always she has worked within certain specified limits. Most of her poems are quite short. She has never attempted the epic and has touched only incidentally, through the recalled past, on the heroic. Once or twice she has been tempted towards the slightly satirical ("Eve to her Daughter" in this latest volume is an example), but not very successfully perhaps because this is not fundamentally part of her nature. In the main she has blended the emotions and the intellect, and throughout has developed technical skills which, in spite of attempts by some critics to find influences of Blake and Yeats and T. S. Eliot, have remained peculiarly her own. Not the least of her skills lies in the felicity of her choice of word and phrase and the ability to say a great deal in very few words. Let any who doubt this compare the examples I have given with the language in most other contemporary volumes of Australian poetry.

We have seen how her first two books caused H. M. Green to classify her as a lyricist and how her next two caused him to amend that classification. We have seen how early critics applauded her regional poetry and how some later ones regretted her partial abandonment of the regional for the universal. Throughout a now considerable number of volumes she has established for herself an identity which does not easily fit into any category, but it is clear that she is fundamentally a mystic, seeking through her own personal experiences to find the true significance in all creation of Love and the Word, which in the last analysis are synonymous. That she gives no final answer is not the least of her virtues, since this carries with her a company of readers prepared to go along with her in her quest. There are also many, no doubt, who are less concerned with the quest, but equally prepared to accompany her because of the unique quality of the poetry which she uses to pursue it.

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12 *Jindyworobak Review* (1948), pp. 72-3.

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15 See note 5, above.

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17 See note 4, above.

Felicity Haynes

THE WORLD'S GREAT TOTAL OF DELIGHT

Collected Poems 1936 - 1967, Douglas Stewart, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1966, $6.25.

Douglas Alexander Stewart, born in 1913 in New Zealand and domiciled in Australia since 1939, has, from nine books of verse and some recent poems, published after five years of silence, a sizeable volume of his collected verse.

There is little doubt that he is an "unfashionable" poet. His interest lies in the larger forms of epic, and in this cynical age his trust in heroic action is considered by many to be naïve. It could simply be that his poetry is not as susceptible to poetic criticism as that of some other poets, and that he has therefore been disregarded by important literary critics. R. D. FitzGerald has called Stewart a master of technique who "understands rhyme today better than anyone else living", but this is not apparent at first reading. His techniques and awareness do not seem to have changed radically since his earlier poems, and while a close inspection reveals a subtle skill that prefers clarity of meaning to startling technical innovation, lovers of modern poetry may be offended that he chooses to ignore the innovations of Pound and Eliot. In fact, while it is not intended as a criticism on my part, one of the reasons for his not being currently recognised may be that he seems to be writing "outside his time".

A more serious charge, in my opinion, is that Stewart's background as a journalist seems often to lead him to verbosity, to a facile style. Whole poems are made to bear the weight of one image, such as grasshoppers resembling hopping red stones, and often they collapse under the strain. The fault is seen in "Waterlily", a delightful fancy perhaps, but a trivial one:

> Look, look, there is an angel in the fishpond,
> It wakes its yellow wings above the water;
> Or say the naked moon came down to bathe here
> And dipped her toe in weeds and so we caught her;
> Or say the sun fell in and sprang up yellow,
> Or say that mud's in flower today—no matter:
> All images and fancies coalesce and cancel
> In mystery at last; it is an angel,
> And moves its yellow wings above the water.

Often the poem is interesting at a superficial level only, like the occasional poem "With a Wringer for Rosemary Dobson", and lacks the depth and lasting interest that poetry demands. In the same way, although the central point is witty enough, I find "Four-Letter Words", six pages about lifting the censorship of certain words in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, both prolix and too discursive.

On the more positive side, this book shows a robust, vigorous faith in man, a vitalism that Vincent Buckley sees as an inheritance from Norman Lindsay. While occasionally this leads to loose poems, substituting sensation and romantic fancy for intellect and moral imagination, it is this quality that gives most of his nature poetry its vivid life and presents throughout the book a positive idealism summed up not very poetically in these lines from "Easter Island":

> Oh sparkling runs the river of life and joy
> From that high source whose ecstasy is creation,
> And dark is the fate of men who dare destroy
> With doubt, with despair, with hate, its radiant peace,
> Even to the massacre of a nation.

Blessed is the mother with her children, the girl with her boy,
The husband sowing in the field, all those who increase
To yet more life in that world's great total of delight.

In his introduction to *Ned Kelly*, Stewart had written:

> We must find some story of legendary stature and of deep national significance or we will lose that "elevation", that "excellence of action" which Matthew Arnold and Aristotle are united in thinking essential to poetic drama.

To Stewart, man is at his highest peak when he is acting as hero, so that it is not surprising to see such superhuman figures as Rata, Mungo Park, Commander Worsley, Captain Quiros or the scientific explorers Rutherford and Professor Piccard striding towards their ideals throughout the book. "Sombrero" illustrates this search for elevation and identity, this transformation of an aboriginal stockman into a rollicking archetypal bushman:

Oh he was dark as the gibber stones
And took things just as easy
And a white smile danced on his purple lips
Like an everlasting daisy.

The horses strayed on the salt-bush plain
And he went galloping after,
The green shirt flew through the coolabah-trees
Like budgerigars to water.

And then what need had he to sigh
For old men under the gibbers
When he was as free as the winds that blow
Along the old dry rivers?

He had the lubras' hot wild eyes,
His green shirt and sombrero,
He rode the plains on a piebald horse
And he was his own hero.

Besides illustrating Stewart's vivid use of imagery, this poem is a good example of his use of the ballad form, a favourite of his especially after the volume, *Glencoe*, written in 1946. He is fond of the light refrain, and has managed to vary the tone considerably within the framework of the ballad form. In contrast to the brightness of "Sombrero" is the stark, beautiful simplicity of the elegy in *Glencoe*, which concludes:

Oh, life is fierce and wild
And the heart of the earth is stone,
And the hand of a murdered child
Will not bear thinking on.

Sigh, wind in the pine,
Cover it over with snow;
But terrible things were done
Long, long ago.

Stewart, however, does not limit himself to the ballad. His versatility is shown in his handling of sonnets, narratives, love-poems, gentle satires, occasional sketches or nature lyrics. While this variety makes him difficult to sum up, one is inclined to categorize him as a nature poet, for his chief delight seems to be the observant sketches of the small things in the Australian and New Zealand bush—light, detailed portraits of wombats, mules, spider-gums, the desert. They can be tender or whimsical or as boisterously evocative as this one:

"Sunshower"

If he had sung a song for every white feather
That wicked old magpie had sinned for every black
But clear he carolled on the gumtrees behind the shack
For it was a mad season of black-and-white weather
When sunshowers swept the mountains in dazzling waves
And shadow and shine seemed mixed in one tower of joy;
And loud he sang, then like some larrikin boy
Magpie and sunshower, splashing on the wet bright leaves,
Tobogganed down the old green tree together.

Stewart has a gift for the picturesque, for startling imagery. His earliest published poems show a fondness for swooning whites ("O whiten poem for her sake/Whose whiteness locks the note I seek") which changes to a dark sensuous beauty:

Leave it alone! For white like the egg of a snake
In its shell beside it another begins to break
And under those crimson tentacles, down that throat,
Secret and black still gurgles the oldest ocean . . . .

("The Fungus")

He can range from the strangely eerie portrait of Shackleton's stranded ship in "Worsley Enchanted"—

I do not know the name of the spider of cold
That searches the whole of heaven for ships and men
But the timbers cracked and the sea walked into the hold
When the weaver of that white web had ceased to spin . . . .

to the sardonic humour of

Never since the stringy barks stiffened to telegraph poles
And froze their flowers in porcelain has a crow been known
To nest in a tree at Crow's Nest . . . .

Stewart's poems about people are not as convincing to me. They are either about legendary heroes, unreal, like the fiery missionary Father Vogelsang, or the legendary man from Adaminaby, or creamy mysterious moon-like women. On the more mundane level, they become closely identified with nature, animal-like, whether in the dingo-like figure of the hermit-like dosser, or in the sonnet "Familiars", where Stewart half-humorously sees the spirit of his friend David Campbell as a fox and his own as an anteater, nose to the ground, or in the light sketch about the adolescent who buys leopard-skin underpants to prove his own daring. The people are transformed into ideals or forced into postural attitudes—with the exception of bottle-nosed Jock in *Glencoe*, they remain unconvincing as people.

While there are poems in this book that stand out as being far superior in thought, care and depth of meaning (my favourites are "Silkworms", "Glencoe" and "Rutherford"), and others that remain simply light verse, the whole book is full of the excellent qualities of humour, clarity, vivid lyricism and a joyous positive delight in grandeur. I would quibble only over the arrangement of the poems in reverse chronological order—it seems illogical to me to have to work backwards to trace the development of the poet. Yet the book is attractively presented and its two hundred and forty poems a mass of enjoyable reading material. For those who wish to understand Douglas Stewart the book is invaluable.

G. C. Bolton

AUSTRALIA'S BOOK OF KINGS

Kings in Grass Castles, Mary Durack, Corgi Books, 1967, $1.15.

Now that *Kings in Grass Castles* has become a paperback—published, it appears, somewhat disconcertingly in the same series as *King Kong, Sexual Life in England*, and Mickey Spillane's *Bloody Sunrise*—it is worth investigating the reasons for the wide success of Mary Durack's history of her family. For she has been one of the few Australian writers of non-fiction—Chester Wilmot and Alan Moorehead are the only others who spring immediately to mind—to please both the book-reading section of the general public and the professional academic. *Kings in Grass Castles* has not only been well received in itself; it has formed the basis for a children's story, *To Ride a Fine Horse*, and even passed into modern folklore as the basis of a joke—the one about the Ghanaian chief who concealed his stool of office in the thatched roof of his hut, and was killed when the roof collapsed, which only goes to show that kings in grass castles shouldn't stow thrones.

Many of its qualities are obvious. Setting aside the devoted research and narrative skill of Mary Durack, the very materials of her family story could hardly fail to be interesting. That vigorous clan of Duracks touched many dominant themes in Australian legend and history: the two great eras of overlanding first to Queensland and then to the Kimberleys; the gold rush trail from the Turon to Hall's Creek; the land boom of the eighties; and, of course, the impact of the Irish in Australia. Given all these ingredients, one is still rather impressed by the enthusiastic reception for *Kings in Grass Castles*. It has commanded support among English critics who were inclined to superciliousness over the crudities of pioneering life as described in *Keep Him My Country* —which I think is still somewhat under-rated. Even within Australia, however, *Kings in Grass Castles* was published about the same time as a number of other books on pioneering families, perhaps inevitably challenging comparison with Judith Wright's *Generations of Men*. It would be inept and pointless to compare the literary qualities of the two works, but I must own a preference for Patrick Durack over Albert Wright simply as a central subject for a book. Perhaps it is just that, as a study of a sensitive and sanguine man defeated by his environment, Albert Wright calls to mind too faithfully the themes already explored by *The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney*. Perhaps it is simply that my professional pedantry as a historian is nettled by a certain vagueness in Judith Wright towards details of time and place.

Patrick Durack, on the other hand, energetic and extrovert where Albert Wright was solitary and self-questioning, gifted with a simple Connaught fluency which still comes alive from his printed letters, may have been a less subtle character, but he was one whose career illuminates a number of central themes and problems in Australian history. Perhaps this is why his life story has appeal on so many levels. How different he was, for instance, from that equally clannish, eloquent, hardy and enterprising limb of the Irish, Ned Kelly. How can we possibly generalise about the Irish in Australia when, from their almost identical starting-points among tightly-knit communities of battling Irish smallholders, the one around Goulburn and the other from back of Mansfield, the Duracks and the Kellys went on to such different destinies? Ned Kelly's life may have been blighted by his father's convict origins, but this was a second-hand influence compared to the searing famine of 1846 which Patrick Durack lived through as a twelve-year-old.

And yet perhaps both men drew from the poverty of Ireland a grim respect for the security which property can bring, and a determination to be masters of property. Certainly no rational economic calculation can explain entirely the consuming land-hunger which led the Duracks and the Costellos and their kin to throw their possessions, their wives, and their young children into the harsh and hazardous Cooper country of Queensland—and having won through to prosperity there, to start in on another round of pioneering in a Kimberley district which, at the time of its opening, was two years' overlanding away from supplies and markets. This willingness to hazard all one's resources in the cause of development, trusting to skill and Providence to justify the venture, is a recurrent feature in the history of Northern development; it is the same vindication with which Mr Charles Court defends the Ord Scheme against the criticism of Sir Mark Oliphant. And yet, too, one gets the feeling that what interested the pioneer Duracks—we shan't pursue the analogy with Mr Court—was the venture as an end in itself, the excitement of pitting one's wits against the environment and wresting success from it. When success came, as it came to Patrick Durack on Thylungra in Queensland, he hardly seemed to know what to do with it. He concentrated all his energies into the new Kimberley scheme, and, ceasing to pay attention to his Queensland properties, lost them through unwise investment in city real estate and through bringing his properties into a company partnered by speculators who were less sound than they looked. So he failed at last in Queensland, and it was the Kimberley venture which had to support his sons.

And this relationship between father and sons touches on an Australian theme which needs further exploring. Sociologists who have studied the man on the land in Australia inform us that many farmers and graziers regard their properties as an extension of their personalities, and gain a good deal of assurance from the notion of building up something for their sons to inherit. In the case of the Duracks, this feeling was reinforced not only by Irish clannishness, as evidenced by the continuing chain migration through which Patrick Durack assisted remote kinsfolk and friends to emigrate to Australia but also—and this is more unexpected—with a firm belief in primogeniture. The future was clearly planned for young Duracks. Younger sons might go into the professions, for like many of the Irish, the older Duracks had a naïve but powerful respect for learning; but the elder sons were destined irrevocably to inherit and manage the family's lands. So it was Patrick's first-born, the intellectual and unhandy M. P. Durack, who had to shoulder the burden of the Kimberley inheritance. Contrary to his father's advice and experience he chose to take partners for the Kimberley holdings; contrary to his sons' advice and experience, he determined in the last month of his life in 1950 to sell out all but a rump of the family properties, deliberately abandoning the task which his father had set him to carry out throughout his long life. If that hackneyed term 'a love-hate relationship' has any validity, it describes M. P. Durack's reactions to the Kimberleys. He was the perfect foil to his uncomplicated and exuberant father, and although his career is barely sketched in the concluding chapters of the book, enough is stated to draw an effective contrast. There have been so many fathers in Australia like Patrick Durack, men who have founded properties, built up businesses, made a great name in law or politics—and then left their sons the problems of living up to the inheritance. Compared with many second generation inheritors, M. P. Durack asserted his own personality rather successfully; but not without difficulty.

One could go on reflecting about the many issues raised in *Kings in Grass Castles*, but I want to end by making one comment about its technical construction which partly accounts for its success. It is one of the very few historical works where, besides using the orthodox tools of the historian, it has been possible to draw on oral history to give the actual words and intonations of past conversations. Normally biographers who want to enliven their narratives with direct speech have either to invent—which is a gross malpractice in history—or to forego the idea. Because of reliable and extensive family traditions, Mary Durack has been able to quote the speech of her characters fairly, accurately and vividly. This is a rare stroke of luck; but it makes for an eminently readable narrative.

Josephine Gibbon

THOMAS HARDY

Thomas Hardy's Personal Writings, Edited by Harold Orel, Macmillan, London, 1967, $5.30.

This collection includes the prefaces to Hardy's novels and poetry, and what is perhaps more useful because not so easily available, his prefaces to works of other authors, and other occasional writing by Hardy.

Frequently Hardy's prefaces were written years after the completion of the work they prefaced, and they show us Hardy as his own critic. He finds in different novels different faults; including immaturity, the flippant treatment of a subject he views seriously, and an unjustifiable use of suspense "for exciting interest". However he refrained from revising any of these works, feeling that they would lose their freshness and spontaneity. This attitude towards revision was probably maintained in his writing of poetry.

As well as his own criticisms, we find Hardy's reactions to the criticisms of the press. He wrote more than one defence against the charge of pessimism. But it was his treatment of relations between the sexes which aroused the loudest attacks upon him; though it is hard now to see *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as an inflammatory novel. Hardy answered these attacks upon his book, but three years later he commented that he would not write in that way now. Some of his critics were dead and he was reminded of "the infinite unimportance of both their say and mine".

Hardy, however, had not lost his sensitivity to critical attack, and he claimed that the reception of *Jude the Obscure* cured him forever of his desire to write novels. He complained that his reviewers had missed one of the important themes of the novel, "The tragedy of unfulfilled aims", in their attempt to defend the marriage laws which they felt he was undermining. One bishop actually burnt a copy of the book, as Hardy wryly commented, "probably in his despair at not being able to burn me".

And yet it seems unlikely that it was simply hurt feelings resulting from this outcry which prompted Hardy to stop writing novels. In another very important essay, 'Candour in English Fiction', he gives us a clear insight into the peculiar difficulties facing novelists of this period. Popular novels were introduced to the public by magazines and circulating libraries whose aim was to produce "household reading". The novel was not addressed to single adult readers but to whole family groups, the adults of which were anxious to protect their children from anything "unsuitable". In effect the discussion of sexual relations was banned. In 'Candour in English Fiction' Hardy poses the problem confronting a writer who has had the beginning of a novel printed in a magazine before the novel is completed. To continue the story he must either compromise his artistic conscience and make his characters "produce the spurious effect of their being in harmony with social forms and ordinances" or "he must bring down the thunders of respectability upon his head, not to say ruin his editor, his publisher, and himself".

One is led to wonder how far Hardy himself felt that he had maimed his work by such compromises. One remembers Henry James's charge that "the pretence of sexuality was only equalled by the absence of it" in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Certainly Hardy claimed that the price a writer paid for writing in English was "the complete extinction in the mind of every mature and penetrating reader, of sympathetic belief in his personages".

So Hardy can be seen as an author who attempted to win the freedom of expression for writers which today is taken for granted. In

other respects his attitude was more conservative. His novels are set in the period of his grandparents' youth; and as Professor Orel points out, when he remarks that his younger readers may not remember how important to everyone a good harvest was before the repeal of the Corn Laws, we are apt to forget that they were repealed when Hardy himself was a small boy. Hardy confessed to going to great lengths to check trivial details in his attempt to recreate a past age in the countryside, even though he knew it was impossible that anyone should detect a mistake. More than the dispassionate curiosity of an historian, Hardy seems motivated by a desire to honour the memory of a dead group of countrymen, all known well by him and amongst them some of his immediate forebears. He wished to make some record of the manner of their lives which would otherwise be forgotten. He shows us how changes have altered village life; for example, when the village quire, which consisted of instrumentalists as well as singers, all "officially occupied with the Sunday routine", is replaced by one organist, local interest in the church declines sharply.

Hardy writes of the loss of village customs and traditions in 'The Dorsetshire Labourer'. These losses were a result of the annual removal which had become habitual amongst farm workers. His description of the hiring fair shows Hardy's compassion for the older workers in their insecurity. For younger workers employment came easily and the annual removal was something to look forward to. Hardy's description of it is lively and amusing. Since he was never long in one locality the labourer, according to Hardy, had "a less intimate and kindly relation with the soil he tilled". Even so, Hardy admitted that these workers were freer and more knowledgeable than the old labourers who had "lived and died on a particular plot, like a tree', and he agreed that workers should not remain stagnant to please romantic spectators.

Amongst these essays are several records of Hardy's friendships. Friendships for example with George Meredith, Henry Moule, and the poet William Barnes. This last is perhaps of greatest interest since the two writers had much in common. Barnes, too, was trying to record a dying way of life in a particular locality, though his locality was narrower than Hardy's, and his poetry was written in a dialect which yearly fewer people spoke. Barnes, Hardy wrote, had realised "that human emotion is the primary stuff of poetry" and the countrymen about whom he wrote, Hardy said, had a poetic quality in their lives "less in the peasant's residence among fields and trees, than in his absolute dependence on the moods of the air, earth and sky". This statement seems to me significant in relation to Hardy's own work. The "absolute dependence" perhaps accounts for the strange passivity which often marks Hardy's characters.

Students of Hardy and indeed students of the nineteenth century will be grateful to Professor Orel for this useful book. Professor Orel's notes are scholarly and informative rather than critical, and in a work of this kind this is no disadvantage, as the reader will wish to concentrate upon the text. The book is interesting not only for the expression it gives to Hardy's ideas, but for the impression of Hardy's personality which emerges from it.

D. E. Hutchison

THE EARTH AROUND US

Between Wodjil and Tor, Barbara York Main, The Jacaranda and Landfall Presses, Brisbane and Perth, 1967, $4.80.

It is a pity that Paul Rigby, whose satire is often sharply accurate, should have saddled conservationists in this State with the image of a fuddy-duddy in ancient frock-coat and battered top hat wielding the banner, " 'ands off our 'eritage' ". Fortunately, however, the local press has given sober and considerable support to the demand for a sensible conservation policy. Dr Main's book should do much to dispel the former image and will contribute substantially to the latter campaign. It is easy for Western Australians to feel that this is not an urgent matter. Indeed it is not yet quite as pressing as in other places. A speaker on the A.B.C. programme "Insight" recently stated that by the year 2000 the United States will be 50 million acres short of recreational area —an estimate which was unrealistic because it included practically unusable waste-lands. We may feel that we are a long way from this impasse yet, but if account is taken of the much larger areas of Australia which are arid and may never be of use either as pastoral or recreational areas, perhaps the matter is becoming more urgent.

Dr Main's book is probably unique in the literature of Australian natural history and belongs to a class of literature which includes the splendid books by Rachel Carson about the sea. In some ways it is unfair to use Rachel Carson's books for comparison, for she had, in addition to scientific information, a rich store of maritime myth and legend to draw upon. It can be said at once that for this reason, and partly because Dr Main's literary gifts are not of as high an order, *Between Wodjil and Tor* may not appeal to so many. I hope, however, that its many merits will cause it to be read widely.

The book also marks the establishment of a new publisher, Landfall Press, in Perth. This first venture it shares with Jacaranda Press of Brisbane, which in recent years has had one of the most imaginative publishing policies of any Australian press. Considered physically, as a piece of book production, this is a handsome volume, with a striking jacket on which is a large coloured photograph of the sandplain pear, one of our attractive species which is threatened by the spread of agriculture. The price is reasonable, considering the wealth of illustration. The wide margins include, on almost every page, Dr Main's own sketches. Even the most amateurish of these sketches conveys the appearance of the trees and the landscape remarkably faithfully. Taken as a whole they add great charm to the book, making it a very personal record of a scientific and aesthetic appreciation of the ecology of the countryside most familiar to Western Australians. Dr Main has admitted to a 'personal exaltation', but realistically pleads not for total preservation, but for a conservation policy which will allow the wilderness and settled lands to exist in harmony.

She has given us a detailed survey of a small area of bushland through a full cycle of the seasons. I do not think that any Australian writer, certainly not a scientist, has attempted to do this before. We need more of these regional studies. I hope that there are other scientists who can write so affectionately about other types of Australian bushland, with a comparable intimacy of knowledge. The 'wodjil' of the title is a native word for the acacia-dominated thickets of the wheatbelt and 'tor' refers to one of the fascinating granite 'islands'. I have not, hitherto, heard them referred to as 'tors'.

It is fortunate that those massive 'islands' of granite are scattered fairly liberally in our wheatbelt. They have been barriers to total

clearing and, as they are usually the only dominant feature in a flat landscape, many shires have set them aside with some surrounding bush as reserves. However, and this is part of Dr Main's eloquent plea, mere reservation will not preserve the ecology. The reserves require management based on scientific policies. They need protection from conscious and unconscious vandalism and a positive administration to enable the ecology to be as little disturbed as possible.

Natural history enthusiasts suffer from another great disadvantage in Australia when they write books such as these: the lack of accepted common names. Many of our insects, birds and animals, although they have great intrinsic charm and interest, are little known even by people living near where they are found. The developing enthusiasm for garden cultivation of the flora is making it better known. But for most of our trees and flowers, and for many of our birds and animals, there are few universally accepted common names. Inevitably this leads to writing which is sometimes stilted and Dr Main has not always been able to overcome this, nor to avoid the jargon of the scientific paper. This is an example of the latter:

> Now at one time it is the waxy substance which, under harsh dry summer conditions, protects the plants by forming a kind of 'seal' on leaves and phyllodes, thereby minimizing transpiration and preventing undue desiccation, whereas under other conditions the high oil and wax content induces fulminatory destruction. (p. 124)

The lack of common names is not only a disadvantage for writers (of fact or fiction). It is at once a barrier to the development of an affectionate interest in our natural heritage and a reflection of the still-lingering tendency to find it repellent. The landscape of the cultivated imagination is still, for many of us, the landscape of Europe; and it may be several generations yet before the tension between the affection for the literary and the local landscapes disappears. Dr Main recognizes that only a relative few will ever love the complete wilderness, and that for most a harmonious balance between the artificial and natural landscapes has the greatest appeal. But large areas of wilderness must be retained if both requirements are to be catered for.

The detailed information in this book is fascinating, supplementing factual handbooks. In fact, for most people, this one volume will contain as much detail as they will require to have sufficient understanding of the subtle and intricate balancing of plant and animal life in a landscape which may appear almost sterile. It is upon such accurate information that the growing demand for conservation must be based. Moreover, Dr Main's book serves in its own way to enlarge our vision and our affection, sharing the work of the poet and the novelist. Enlargement of vision can come in unexpected ways. I remember returning from England to find the radiant springtime wheatbelt newly revealed for me by the intense and flickering silver light that plays about the el Greco paintings in the National Gallery. In similar fashion, this book has given my affection for our landscape a new dimension. I hope that it will work upon many in this way.

POSTSCRIPT: After the publication of my review of *The Beckoning West* (*Westerly* No. 2, 1967) I received a letter from Mr Percy Hope, a surveyor who worked under Canning. Shortly afterwards I had the pleasure of an evening in his company. Although he was not with Canning on the major surveys of the Rabbit Proof Fence and the Stock Route, Mr Hope confirmed my impression that Canning was a very remarkable man. Mr Hope took exception, until I explained my intention, to one passage in the review: "It was not his (Canning's) fault that his two major achievements, the surveys for the Rabbit Proof Fence and the Stock Route were not crowned by the success of these undertakings." In case anyone else should have been misled, I would like to make it clear that this statement reflects in no way upon the success of these ventures as *surveys*. Canning did his work splendidly. However, I overlooked one fact and was not aware of another. Firstly the Fence, although not effective against rabbits, serves a purpose still in blocking the movement of emus. Secondly, as Mr Hope informed me, the Rabbit-Proof Fence provides "a standard traverse for 1100 miles from which a good ground control can be obtained for aerial photo work". It is pleasing to think that Canning's work was not wasted on a 'folly' after all! I am also pleased to report that the National Trust is considering the suggestion that the Canning Stock Route should be reserved.

SEAFORTH MACKENZIE ISSUE

In this issue it was the concern of ourselves and Evan Jones to publish a faithful text of the Hospital poems. We even thought this had been achieved—but with Mackenzie nothing is simple, and the textual difficulties of the poems were underlined. Evan Jones wishes to draw attention to the following mistakes in the text as printed:

In '*I ought to write to Bill today . . .*', 1.21—stop for comma (comparable errors in punctuation elsewhere, however, *are* Mackenzie's).

In 'Belladonna—Beautiful Lady—', 1.5—'O' for 'o'.

In 'Down on the river levels', 1.19—'disdaine' for 'disdain'.

In 'Grey sky, grey water . . .', 1.12—'of' for 'or'.

In 'An Old Inmate', 1.10—'strange' for 'straight'; 1.39—'grand'ma' for 'gran'-ma'.

(There should, too, be a normal stanza break after 1.42.)

In the prefatory note, 1963 should be 1953.

The textual problems of the poems were formidable enough in themselves. It was unfortunate that publication had to be pushed through just at the time Evan Jones was in the middle of last minute arrangements for going overseas. *Westerly* was at the time attempting to catch up a serious publishing lag, and final proofing offered difficulties for all concerned.

The Navigators–

This poem was first performed over ABC TV, Adelaide, a draft of the complete text was later published in *Meanjin*; a revival of interest caused by a reading of the *Meanjin* text at the Strines Gallery, Melbourne, recently, led to a long-delayed revision in which the latter part was almost entirely re-written: this, then (so far as I am capable), is the final and definitive draft.—J. G.

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