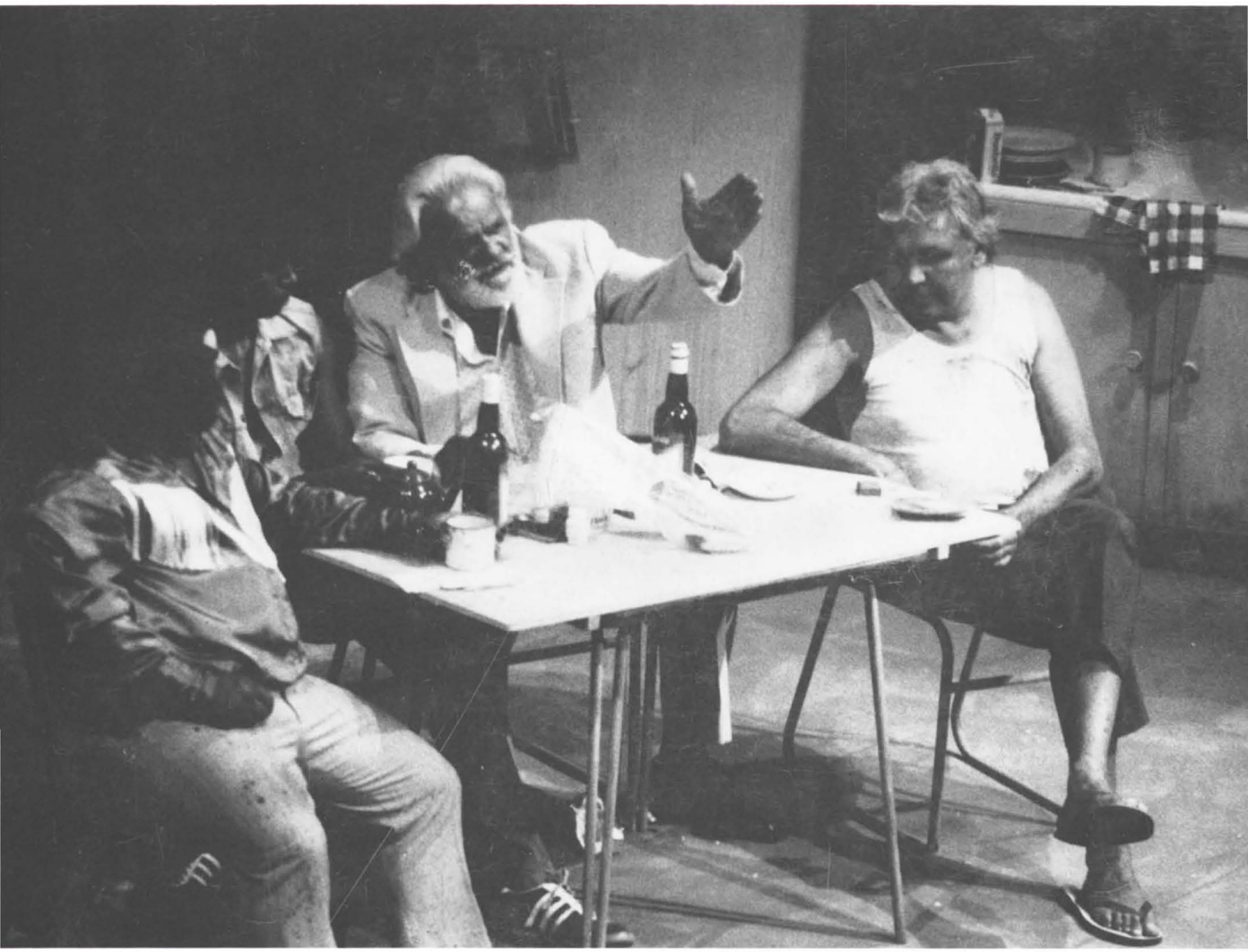
Westerly

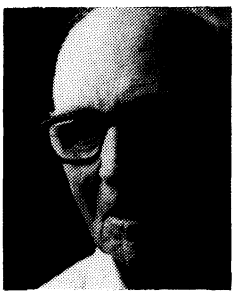
STORIES POEMS REVIEWS ARTICLES



JUNE, 1982 NUMBER 2

a quarterly review price three dollars registered at gpo perth for transmission by post as a periodical Category 'B'

latest releases

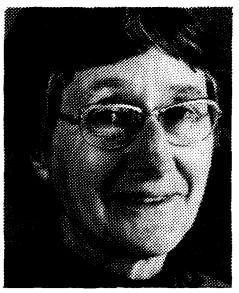


A FORTUNATE LIFE
A.B. FACEY

'*A Fortunate Life* is a personal account of great poignancy, humour and humanity. The childhood chapters are a classic in Australian writing (as is) the extremely powerful description of Gallipoli' – Geoffrey Dutton.
'The remarkable life of an ordinary Australian' – Humphrey McQueen.
recommended retail price $22.00 HB

OTHER EARTH
Greek-Australian stories by
VASSO KALAMARAS

Moving and intense stories, in English and Greek, that come from the heart of the immigrant experience. An important addition to the literature of Australia.
'The English prose is as intense and beautiful as the sound of Greek music' – ***Adelaide Advertiser.***
bilingual edition, second printing
recommended retail price $6.00 PB



THE NEWSPAPER OF CLAREMONT STREET
a novel by
ELIZABETH JOLLEY

'Undoubtedly her most stylish and accomplished book to date. The wit and delicacy of writing hold the reader from the outset' – Thomas Shapcott.
'One of the best writers of fiction in this country' – Nancy Keesing.
recommended retail price $20.00 HB / $8.00 PB

THE SAME OLD STORY
JAMES LEGASSE

The Same Old Story is both an examination of the development of character and emotional alienation and an exploration of the nature of truth and reality, and the relationship between the writer and his fictions.
West Coast Writing 13
recommended retail price $6.50

available from your usual bookseller or

Fremantle Arts Centre Press

1 Finnerty Street, Fremantle 6160 write for complete catalogue

WESTERLY

a quarterly review

ISSN 0043-342x

EDITORS: *Bruce Bennett and Peter Cowan*

EDITORIAL ADVISORS: *Margot Luke, Veronica Brady, Fay Zwicky*

Westerly is published quarterly by the English Department, University of Western Australia, with assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the Western Australian Literary Fund. The opinions expressed in *Westerly* are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.

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

Recommended sale price: $3.00 per copy (W.A.).

Subscriptions: $10.00 per annum (posted); $18.00 for 2 years (posted). Special student subscription rate: $8.00 per annum (posted). Single copies mailed: $3.00. **Subscriptions should be made payable to Westerly, and sent to The Bursar, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009.**

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

WESTERLY

Vol. 27, No. 2, June 1982

CONTENTS

SHORT FICTION FOCUS

VERSE

ARTICLES

INTERVIEW

REVIEWS

Cover: A scene from Jack Davis's play *The Dreamers.*
(See Bill Dunstone, 'Four New Plays', pp. 63-66.)

Short Fiction Focus

Editorial Note

Westerly normally publishes 20 to 30 stories a year, selected from some 600 to 800 submissions. A brief comment on our approach to selection of these stories may be helpful, particularly if this is read together with the commentaries by editors and writers in the recent short story issue of *Australian Literary Studies* (vol. 10, no. 2, October 1981 — available from the University of Queensland Press).

Westerly's policy is to encourage among writers and readers an interest in a variety of forms and styles in short prose fiction; less often, for reasons of space, we also publish novella-length work. Stories are not commissioned from established writers, though we are as pleased to publish fresh, lively work by these writers as by those whose names are not yet known. *Westerly*'s record in the publication of early work by talented young writers is outstanding: Moorhouse, Wilding, Viidikas and Bail are names which recur in this magazine in the sixties and early seventies; some of the writers whose work appears in this issue may be as well known in another five or ten years.

It should be clear from a reading of *Westerly* over the past decade that our first concern is less with subject matter than with how a subject is given point and purpose; in brief, we are concerned to encourage the *art* of the short story, at the same time remembering that the most successful art is often that which conceals its own artistry. Certain *kinds* of story are not intrinsically superior to others: an impressionist's manner is not inherently better than a realist's approach to a subject; nor is the reverse necessarily the case. Yet certain approaches to storytelling may become hackneyed, as happened to the bush yarn; and may be happening to the confessional monologue. The writer should be aware of a range of possible approaches to his or her material.

Nor do we select short fiction according to its social or political message. While it may be true that the writer with liberal values and sympathies has greater imaginative scope than the repressive, authoritarian author, this has yet to be proved. In our view, the morality of a short story is often conveyed most effectively when it is implicit: to suggest rather than assert, to show rather than tell are useful precepts. But the writer, and the intelligent reader, should also be aware of current trends towards affirming the artifice in fiction and admitting the shakiness of lines which are drawn between fact and fantasy.

In the short story issue of *Australian Literary Studies* referred to above some of the pressures in Australia towards ideological commitment are evident. In this context, it is interesting to observe Frank Moorhouse, one of Australia's pre-eminent writers of short fiction, recoiling from these and other pressures towards commitment:

> Marxist-feminists are on your back, anarchists hate you if you can spell, what about blacks? There are no homosexuals in this novel. Why? Australia is multi-racial, multi-national, post-colonial, semi-asiatic—write about that, why don't you. A semiologist will give you a kick in the guts on a rainy night and you won't even feel it till the next morning.

The writer who wants to get on with his or her work is often under siege, but should feel free to worry, like Morris Lurie, about how to find 'the central metaphor, an image to reverberate long after the mere words have been consumed'; or like Shirley Hazzard, to worry words, phrases, sentences into patterns which will 'sound on the mental ear as effectively as possible'. These worries are the central concern of literary explorers, for whom literary magazines should exist.

Westerly is on the lookout, then, for zest and creative audacity, and 'finish' as well. Surprisingly often, we think we find these qualities. Or hints of them.

JILL SMYTH

Trading Partners

Bargaining is in Jake's blood. You don't expect him to be of Anglo-Saxon stock. Jamaica .... or Africa or something, you might think if you saw him from behind. He bounces.

He's like an Othello who doesn't mind loose women and is much slower as a result. And kinder of course. He's been my best friend since I had the .... well I'm over eighteen now so it must be nearly four years. Took me under his wing. Delivered me from evil, he says. He likes to see himself as my protector, but I know that's becoming an excuse for not doing anything else with his life.

Him being a taxi driver all that time probably put him off teaching me how to drive, even though I got my learner's as soon as I was sixteen. But I put the hard word on him again when I saved enough money to buy a car. I wanted to be more independent.

I wish I knew more about cars but really I'm not at all interested. To get from A to B is all I care about. I don't even care if it's got class or style etc. Or not. I would've rung up about a Holden, but Jake said no, Holdens are pedestrian.

'You'd suit a zappy little sports car or something French,' he told me. 'If money was no object that is.'

'But you've got a Holden.'

'Yes but I'm a pleb.'

When he says things like that he swivels his eyes in their friendly folds of saggy flesh ..... they look twice his age. Reminding me of telescopes, somehow. I love it, and try to make him do it more often.

We circled some ads in Saturday's Advertiser.

In Norwood a man took us down the back shed to show us his Renault. Jake looked for as many things wrong with it as he could, to knock down the price.

This sort of thing embarrasses me, as does any transaction where the worth of something is under scrutiny.

Jake says maybe I was sold in a slave market in a past life, and didn't fetch a high enough price.

Anyway, not being good at buying and selling, I drifted down the drive. A very formal little boy with a tie on talked with me for a while about flowers. As he opened the front door to go back inside the house he looked me very directly in the eye.

'I know you'll be getting a good car if you buy ours,' he told me, 'you can believe it if my father says it's a good one, because we're Jehovahs, and Jehovahs don't lie.'

We got the car.

On the way home, I bought a butterfly transfer and stuck it in the back window. In a corner. The wings were transparent yellow and blue, and I couldn't keep my eyes off them.

But it turned out to be ages before there was time to teach me to drive, because Jake was going through a difficult patch. He was sick of driving taxis but needed the money. He had the chest congestion and discomfort he usually gets when he doesn't want to do something and can't get out of it. When this happens he makes grunty sorts of noises to relieve the pressure in his chest. They annoy me.

I wish he had more self control.

We both know his problems are related to his emotions and stuff. I can't blame him for having emotions, we all have them but not everyone gets psychosomatic and grunty.

A few weeks after we got the car we were in the lounge, watching TV. Jake was having his chest problems.

'Can you be a bit more quiet please?' I said, coolly.

'Give a man a break, Nan, it's really bad this time. Honest.'

The way he says 'Honest' always annoys me too, partly because it is an Americanism and also whenever he says it I always think he's exaggerating. Not quite lying .... but he's always kind of borderline about the truth.

I felt judgmental.

I put up with the noises for a while but soon I got fidgety.

I turned up the volume on the TV to drown out the sounds of his breathing difficulties.

'For God's sake, Nan, neither of us are deaf.' He was hunched up and scowling in the bean bag.

I swept over to the controls and whisked the volume knob off by mistake, trying to turn it down. I always get jerky when I'm annoyed. I fitted the knob back on, taking my time, while the sound was still way up.

Then I turned it down and said sorry.

'Sorry my ass.' The grump. Crumbs of toast all round him and he was stubbing his cigarette out in the leftovers on the plate on his lap.

Revolting. I reminded myself that I was about ready to leave the little scene cooped up with Jake. I'd been in it a long time. It was sort of a chrysalis stage for me, at least that was what I was hoping.

For quite a while we'd mostly slept in our separate bedrooms. From time to time he had women around but they didn't ever stay for long, sometimes he got sick of them first and sometimes the other way around, and sometimes he slept with me, though I usually find him too coarse for my taste.

Two extremes—chaotic or Spartan—alternate in his room. There's a passing parade of faces and scenes on his wall. Desperado cowboys and misty oldie worldie underwear of young girls. His bed's on the floor. Sometimes he just gets

up and out of it, leaving the blankets all in a heap like mouldy rags. Or he rolls back the bedclothes to air them, putting baby powder at the bottom of the sheets, to minimize the smell of his feet, in case he brings a woman home.

Probably the reason Jake got congested was because he was anxious. He'd insulted a regular customer in his cab. 'That Gestapo social worker hag, treats me like I was some kind of subnormal retard, I ought to tell her I've got half a sociology degree myself, carries on a conversation with one of her social worker mates in the back, all nicey nice, then spits out orders to me in front. Reckoned I was deliberately taking a longer route. Anyway by the end of the ride I told her she was a grotesque old chook and she could bloody well get a different cab next time. I bet the bitch reports me.'

She did. He was sacked. I was partly sympathetic but by this time I was sick of him, he never does anything right except getting things cheaper than anyone else.

He came up with a plan to sell the Renault we bought at $850 for $1000 then buy me a cheaper car plus have a bit of money left for himself to pay some old bills they'd sent some official round to hassle him about. It's alright by me, I said, feeling charitable.

So he phoned an ad into Saturday's Advertiser and asked me if I could stay home and show the Renault to people while he went out looking for another car.

Who was the first person to come around but Allan, one of the art teachers from my old school! I never had him as a teacher though. I got to know him on more equal terms a couple of years after I left, after I had the baby. If I'd stayed at school I bet I would've gotten through to university. But even though I gave the baby up for adoption I never went back.

I used to visit Allan quite a bit back then. We'd smoke joints and watch Sesame Street on TV. Jake was a bit jealous because he thought Allan was trying to get into my pants but he wasn't. I probably wouldn't have minded but no doubt he thought I was too young for him. He must've been about twenty-four. He thought I had been a bit of a dill for having a baby instead of an abortion.

My reasons for this were emotional. Around the time just before I suspected I was pregnant, I was at school and in biology we were looking at chicken embryos in the lab one day.

There was a whole row of cut open eggs, showing the different stages of development, from a speck, to snotty bits of goo, to a baby bird. I got a big lump in my throat at the end of the row because the baby bird, just at the point where it would've started tapping on the shell to get out, was all coiled up, dead. Eyes, beak, flesh, wet feathery spikes .... and it had been all ready to have a go at life when it was cut open, doused with formaldehide or whatever, for us to file past and look at.

Anyway it was Allan who answered the ad first. But he'd altered. I knew he'd been overseas somewhere and something must have happened to change him. His face looked different—the way an old building looks after it's been sandblasted and restored to its original light colour. The hair was shorter, the eyes a clearer blue, the clothes light and Asian looking.

He went for a ride in the car to test it out but I felt obliged to tell him that Jake was trying to make a bit of money out of it. He smiled, said 'How *is* Jake?' and invited me round to his new place.

In the spotless kitchen I was introduced to a couple of people who lived there too .... they all had the same look about them that Alan had acquired. He told me he was very much into Buddhism these days. 'That's funny,' I said, 'I've just been reading about Buddhism myself, a couple of days ago when I was in the laundromat someone had left a book behind.'

Allan smiled and said 'It's probably no coincidence' and looked into my eyes with a very warm expression on his face. I felt warm back, and tried to show it like he did, with the eyes instead of just grinning.

The other people wanted Allan to drive them to Central Market before it closed so I didn't stay long. I said I'd walk. When I left he embraced me in a peculiar sort of way, firmly but holding me a bit away from him. It seemed to be a new habit he'd picked up when he was going through all the spiritual changes he'd been telling me about. He never used to hug people before.

He said he'd think about the car.

Back home I slept for a while. Jake came in around three. He was considering buying another Holden, but he wasn't sure if I'd like it.

Monday evening we discovered that the power was off.

'Funny, next door's is still on.' I frowned at Jake. He looked shifty.

'We've got plenty of candles, honey, all your pretty pretties from your candle classes. You haven't ever lit them, now's your chance.'

I glared at him in the half light.

'Ar so I forgot to pay the bill so what.' He grabbed me and tried to waltz with me in the kitchen. For such a bulky guy, he's a graceful dancer. But I broke free.

'It was your turn ... in fact you told me you *had* paid it .... half of it was my money .....'

'Yeah I wrote the cheque out but I remembered I didn't have anything in my account so I didn't post it for a while then I must've forgotten .... ar, what the hell, let's have a candle lit supper.'

'That means we're even broker than we thought, *sweetheart*,' I said nastily, pinching his arm so it would hurt.

He said, 'OK, OK,' and shunted and grunted across the lino, lighting the gas, trying to perch a little metal teapot on the gas ring. It kept wobbling off. He always makes tea that way, instead of using a kettle he stews the leaves direct.

Revolting.

I had an impulse to go and see Allan again.

When I arrived, Allan led me into the lounge and made herb tea.

It was a loungeroom after my own heart, light coloured rugs laid out on glossy wooden floors, with splashes of colour from fresh flowers. Some Buddhist mandalas were on the wall.

Allan showed me some tai-chi movements he'd been learning.

Actually, as soon as I turned up, he was definitely very seductive towards me, even though he spent the whole evening talking Buddhism and Sufism. I could tell from the way he touched me when he was helping me do the tai-chi movements.

No one else was around and later in the evening we spent quite a long time looking into each other's eyes, like a staring match but more cosmic I suppose,

and he took my hand, kissed it and said 'Let's go to bed,' in such a soft, caressing voice that I followed without a thought.

I can't remember much about making love with him. It was an effort for me to stay awake, for some reason.

But in the morning I woke feeling cheerful because it was nice to be with someone new, especially someone who was almost my art teacher. I pounced on him when he came back from the shower and was silly and playful with his cock. He seemed to become annoyed then looked at me caringly, saying that I was being a little too flippant and inappropriate about sexuality, which shouldn't be demeaned or debased in that way.

I never thought of it like that. I always like to fiddle around with a penis when I see it dangling there. I'm like a kitten with a tassel hanging off a bedspread, that's all.

I'm probably too used to Jake, he encourages me when I do things like that. He often goes round naked with an erection and a towel or face cloth hanging off it, as though it was a hook or an extra hand.

I went back home and pulled Jake's blankets off so he'd get up.

He growled. I told him I'd stayed with Allan but he just said 'Big deal.' I told him Allan didn't think he'd buy the car, but Jake just yawned and said 'I don't give a damn.'

'I'm glad in a way,' I continued, 'because I love that butterfly transfer, I'd rather keep the Renault.'

'You can just peel it off and stick it on the next one.'

I hadn't realised that. I'd just presumed it'd tear.

I skipped outside to see if it'd come off as easily as Jake said. It did. Stretched a bit, but stayed intact.

Now I had it off but no new car to stick it on, so I took it to my room and put it on one side of the mirror for safekeeping. Jake wandered in, still sleepy. I told him I was starting to get interested in Buddhism and would probably begin going to the group Allan belongs to.

'They're just a bunch of wankers.' Jake wasn't impressed.

'Don't be so gross,' I told him, 'you should go along too, Thursday nights in Unley somewhere.'

What Jake needs is a bit of spiritual discipline and although in many ways I'd like to move away from him altogether, I think I'll stay put for the time being, because if I wasn't around he'd just be a total slob.

ANDREW BURKE

Skull

My skull cages birds,
herons fly with house swallows.
It's a zoo in here:
on a hot day dugites slither
through my balding pate
and hiss. My ear
drums up fear
so I
pay my bills.
It's a bank in here
and the teller knows too much
and won't tell.
It's a playpen in here,
Sunday morning,
and I
play with words.
Welcome to my skull.
Open the curtains,
please. My politeness
bores me
but the past hangs on
until some strong future
can toss him out.
It's a nightclub in here,
another seedy dawn,
I rolled off the stained lounge
to the sticky floor
and see the wall is torn
where last night's showgirl
threw ashtrays.
My toes curl
from the pain in my head.
Pull the curtains.
I bleed as I notch
another day
off the wall of my skull.

FRANCIS WALSH

Up Hill

The most beautiful city in the world was laid out around me and I thought I might have been dreaming. The panel van seemed to grow wings and Kate flew it with ease across the girdered bridge. Down below, the quiet arm of the harbour was shining with silver and blue corrugations. Yachts bobbed, their rigging clanging against metal masts. A speckled gauze of houses, trees and gardens covered all the land from shoreline to hill crest and warm air spiralled through our windows.

It was a city of jewels, or that was how it seemed on that day when I was with Kate. She had a sense of open range about her. I felt free and glad to be away from my 'scribbling desk' as she called it. She twisted her tangling hair and held it in a ponytail, steering with the other hand.

"Louis, we can do anything. We can go to the movies or to North Head to watch the ships come in. Maybe we should just drive to the airport and take a plane to Los Angeles. We've got unlimited choices."

I just smiled. The traffic was dense and we glided on, frictionless on that perfect day.

"Well?"

It seemed like she did want some sort of decision. "Oh, um. I think we'll have to give L.A. a miss. Just take me to the city like I asked. My publisher has granted me an audience. I'm like a train on a single track." I laughed but that really was a big moment for me. I'd sent an outline of a novel to a big name publishing house and the chief editor rang me up to say she was interested. When I thought about it my hands began to shake. "To the city, Kate. Today I don't have any choice."

"When's the appointment for?"

"Not until noon. We've got two hours."

We clipped over the metal expansion joint at the end of the bridge. The bump set off a rattle around the back axle which Kate carefully ignored. We sank toward an intersection at the bottom of a long incline. The lights changed from green to red and Kate swore as she pressed in the clutch. We free wheeled to the wide line and drew to a stop.

"Bugger. I wanted to get a bit of a run up." She tapped her fingers on the steering wheel. "So, Mister Author, what's this one all about?"

"It's futuristic. About a crisis where this guy is caught up in a coup brought about by oil millionaires. I haven't quite got the ending right yet."

She nodded out of politeness then said, "I can never figure out why you write stories. It's a weird job, isn't it?"

I had no easy answer.

Kate put the van into first. We had rolled back a metre or two and she revved the engine to draw us level with the lights. I gazed at the side of her face for a moment, wondering when I'd tell her that she was one of the main characters in the novel. She held the car steady with a fine control of clutch and revving motor.

"Why don't you put on the hand brake?"

"No good. The cable's gone. But don't worry, these lights'll change soon. They're always fast."

"I bet you haven't done any work on the foot brake either."

"Nup." She stretched her shoulders. "Air's still getting into the system. No hassles, everyone drives this way. Plenty of room for us all."

The fumes put a peculiar petrol taste in my mouth. The lights changed and we accelerated onto the low slopes of the rise.

The van badly needed a tune. We were soon holding up a long line of cars and they peeled off to pass us, their tyres hissing on the smooth hot-mix. A kid in a superman suit watched us through a receding car window. I had a pencil and a fold of paper in my pocket so I wrote down a couple of words to describe the scene. These solemn children, dressed in dreams.

The road steepened, cutting into a ragged honeycombed cliff. Homes painted white, pink, and cream were fitted tightly into the rocks. Way below, the harbour forked into the glittering city.

The road began to coil. Kate shouldered the van into the first left turn and the engine missed a beat. She dropped it down to second gear.

"What's wrong with it?"

She didn't answer me. I glanced across the dashboard. The petrol gauge was jiggling. The pointer was a finger width below empty.

"Are we out of petrol?"

Kate drew her lips back and made them thin. "We'll make it."

"Why didn't you get some when we started? There's a station right next to my place."

"What? You mean Ferguson's? Never. That guy's a pig. Look, just don't worry about it. It's just the hill. The fuel can't get up to the carby." She put her hand up to indicate the gradient. We swept past terraces of flowers: pretty mauves, yellows and reds. They all shook in the breeze we created. The other cars flattened themselves, accelerating through the esses, while the passengers slipped uncomfortably from one side to the other.

I leaned forward and gripped the edge of the seat. The van stuttered again. I stared hard at the houses, trying to take my mind off the problem. They were more spread out there. Some were fibro, some were maroon brick, and the footpath was just a strip of gravel with a shallow gutter. The road surface was badly broken up.

"Why don't we stop here, Kate? You could ease the van back onto a light pole or something. I could hitch a lift and get some petrol."

"Naaa. Don't worry about it. There's two petrol stations up the top here. Luck is with us. When this old bus gives up we'll think of something."

"How do you know we're lucky?"

"I can feel it." She casually scratched the back of her yellow t-shirt. "It's a great day and we've still got a lot of options open."

My silence said that I disagreed.

The engine died. The van jolted and jerked. Kate threw it into first and pressed hard on the pedal. We crawled around another corner.

By then the traffic had thinned out and the only thing we could have held up was a big semi that was booming up behind. The truckie pulled his rig into the right lane and let out the throttle of the diesel. Black fumes whirled out of the exhaust pipes and the stink drifted into the van. Kate coughed and spat. When the cabin was level with us the guy blew his horn and waved. Kate saluted him and shrieked over the din. "See I told you. He wished us good luck."

The air folded under the barrage.

"Yeah." I had my head down. "I just don't want to miss my appointment, that's all."

The road was in bad shape. Workmen had graded it back to its clay base but they hadn't got around to resurfacing it. Already there were bumps and pot-holes and furrows that shuddered under the wheels. Kate swerved back and forth.

There were no more houses. The scrubby bush had dusty tracks through it. Peeling signs read 'Look out' and 'Point Danger'. I couldn't remember ever having been there before. We were climbing up to a plateau. The city had dropped out of sight to the west and the ocean was somewhere over in the east.

It seemed that the road was gradually demolishing the van. All the bolts and welded joints were rattling apart. Kate was pumping the accelerator trying to force fuel down the line.

I couldn't resist. "Would it help if I pedalled too?"

She looked out at the rotten road, expressionless. So I withdrew inside myself. I thought that somehow that hill we were climbing, that eternal hill, might be a good ending for my novel. I wrote a few more words on the scrap of paper.

Just up ahead, parked at the side of the road, was a battered and broken down ute. The back sagged down so far it looked like the suspension was shot. Kate turned to the outside lane to pass, but when we were level the engine coughed once more. She pressed hard on the foot brake, disengaged the clutch and stamped on the accelerator. I looked across into the ute and a bright face suddenly appeared, then another. Two aboriginal kids rubbed their eyes as if they'd been having a snooze. Their faces were wet with the heat.

The older one said, "Giday."

I said, "Hi. You broken down?"

"Yeah. Me Dad's gone up ahead to get some petrol. Your car sounds stuffed, mister."

We all laughed together except Kate who didn't seem to find it funny. She let out the clutch and we jerked away.

I yelled out, "You okay then?"

The boys waved. "See ya."

I suddenly felt stupid asking them if they'd be all right. It was really me I was worried about.

"Kate, I reckon you should stop. I can run up and get some gas."

"As long as we're still driving what's the point?"

"If you drive any slower we'll get a parking ticket."

There were no more cars. I thought we must have taken the wrong turn somewhere. The road was only two lanes wide and the surface was stoney. The scrub was flat and ruined and the earth showed through in brown and grey patches.

Finally the gradient flattened out a little. The top of the hill was in sight and floating above it was a big sign, Petrol. I wiped my sweating hands on my pants,

settled back and felt my face begin to relax. When we came to the driveway of the petrol station Kate suddenly swung the van back onto the road.

"What are you doing?"

"I don't like that brand."

"What?"

"That petrol, I reckon it doesn't give you much power. I think I'll go to the next one." She pointed to a second petrol station fifty metres further on.

The van was still clattering and stuttering and I laughed at Kate's audacious style. We edged into the second drive and rolled under the shade of the awning. Kate switched the engine off, right in front of the bowsers. Triumphantly she climbed out and slammed the door.

When I stood on the ground my legs went shaky. The air was thick with heat and the place was perfectly still and silent. A pile of glittering safety glass lay near the workshop. Oil, petrol and grease seemed to stain every wall and window, every square of concrete and gravel. Kate called out and a man with stiff yellow hair came from the office.

"Can I help you?"

"Five dollars of super, thanks."

"Sorry, Miss, we've run out."

"What! Really?"

I thumbed over my shoulder. "Has the other bloke got any?"

"Not a drop, mate. There's been a strike and what with all the road works . . ." His hands were veined and boney and I thought I should write that down when I got the chance. "The oil companies say they haven't got enough fuel for everyone. I had the lowest turnover so I'm the poor bugger that has to close down."

Kate was gazing at the man. "There any other stations around?"

The old bloke raised his eyebrows and said, "Yeah, but the nearest's a couple of kilometres further on." He pointed with a crooked finger. The way ahead looked more like a bush track than a road. "He's probably in the same pickle I am by now. Reckon he's close to dry too." He started back toward his office and I followed him to see if I could use his phone. I was nervous when I got through to the editor but she seemed understanding enough and we arranged to meet at three that afternoon. When I hung up the old man came near. His eyes were clear like water. "Another bloke came through a couple of minutes ago. An Aboriginal. I sent him on to the next station too. Maybe you could ask him to help youse."

I nodded and went back to Kate who was staring down the track. Near the horizon the body of a man jumped about, weirdly distorted in the shimmering heat haze. In a moment Kate had rolled up the van's windows and locked the doors.

I said, "We've got to walk it I guess."

We started to pace away from the station and the track became so dry and so hot that it lost all colour. I pulled a pencil and a scrap of paper from my pocket and scribbled down a few notes.

"What are you? I reckon you're mad."

"Why?"

"Cos we're bloody doomed if we don't get to the petrol station pretty soon. We could die in this heat and no one would ever know."

"What about this black guy up ahead? He'd help us."

Kate brightened. "Good idea. He can bring some petrol back for us. Let's catch up to him."

But when we looked up there was nothing. The man had long since vanished into the distance. I folded back the paper and wrote down every detail.

GEOFFREY BEWLEY

They keep on after you

He said, in the end you get sick of all this being hassled. It just pisses you right off. It's not as bad on Java as it is on Bali but it's still pretty bad. On Java you don't get so many people trying to sell you shit you don't want, but you still get all the kids saying, hello, mister, and all the other guys trying to practise their English on you, their ten words or whatever it is. You just get sick of answering them. It's always the same thing. It's not even as if they've got anything to say. Sometimes you call out, hello, what your name, where you from, before they can do it. But in the end mostly you just ignore it, you just keep walking.

Most of the time it's just because they don't know any better. It's like they reckon you haven't got anything better to do. I don't know, maybe they reckon that's what you come here for. But a lot of the time they do know and then they get a lot of fun out of it. They reckon they can get away with anything, because you're never going to pull them up for it. And about ninety-nine per cent of the time they're right.

It really pisses you off the way they hassle the chicks here. Not the chicks who come here looking for it, they know what it's all about, they get on to these Balinese guys and it's like buying whores. But the other chicks come over here for a holiday and they find all these guys around them, sort of fluttering around, you know the sort of thing. And they reckon it's all fun at the beginning, for the first day or two. And then they find out these guys are on to them all the time and they can't get rid of them.

One of us said, it sounds like you've made a study of it.

He said, I've been here five weeks this time and I was here a month before, and you can't help seeing what goes on. It's the same thing over and over. There's new dumb chicks coming in all the time.

Somebody else said, they're not all that dumb, not all of them.

He said, some of them are incredibly dumb. You wouldn't think it was possible, how dumb they are. I met these two in Java and I couldn't believe it. They were really screwed up. They were really dumb.

This was in Jogja and I was coming back through from Bali. I was in one of the places round Superman's in the lanes there. This was one of the nights Superman's was closed early, so I was having something to eat in the place down the lane from there.

One of us said, Eating Stall something.

He said, yeah, that's the one. It's not a bad little place, actually. They're more friendly in there than the crowd in Superman's. But anyway, I was there having

something to eat and these two chicks came in, and the other tables in front were full so they sat down at the table where I was. One of them was this dark Canadian chick I'd seen around and the other one sounded like an Australian. Anyway, they didn't say anything to me, they were talking about something else, batik or something. They just sort of nodded and went on talking, and I went on eating.

Then this guy came up. I suppose he was a Javanese. He might've been a Balinese. Anyway, he was a skinny guy in a T-shirt with that sort of long frizzy hair. I think it's supposed to give them a sort of a Bob Marley look. And he actually looked like he was on weed or something, too.

Anyway, he came in and one of the chicks saw him and she said, oh, look. And the other one, the Canadian one, said, oh, no. And the guy was looking round the tables and he saw them, and he started to come over. And the Australian girl said, it's terrible the way they keep on coming after you like this. And then he was there and he sat down in the other chair next to me, just on my right.

He looked as if he was really happy that he'd got on to them again. He had a great big grin and he was puffing away on one of those kretek clove cigarettes that they all smoke.

One of us said, not a joint?

He said, no, I remember that. I remember it wasn't. But he looked stoned, half stoned. He was lying right back in the chair and he had his elbow halfway across the table. He obviously reckoned he was putting on this really great demonstration of, you know, suave and cool and shit like that.

The girls looked away and they tried to go on eating. But then the Indo guy leaned over the table and said, hey, I know you, remember me?

The chicks just sort of glanced at him. It was about the least they could've done without completely ignoring him. But this guy kept on after them. He was saying, hey, how you doing, man? How you like it round? Shit like that. He just wasn't picking up their vibes, or if he was he wasn't worrying about it.

Anyway, the Canadian chick said, we liked it fine until now. That was a pretty big sort of hint but the Indo guy just went straight past it. Maybe he didn't know enough English to pick it up. Maybe he was just too stoned.

Anyhow, I was just watching all this, like from a distance. Because I'd seen it all before and I could tell how it'd happened, they'd been polite to this creep when they met him somewhere before and now he was sort of fastening on to them, the way these guys do. So now they were stuck with him and they didn't know how to get rid of him. And I reckoned it was bad luck, but it was their bad luck, you know? It was nothing to do with me. I didn't know them or anything and I was just minding my own business.

So then the guy started talking about dope. He was saying, you still interested, I can get. Anything you want, I can get. But the chicks said, no, we don't want any dope. And he was saying, hey, but remember earlier on you said? And they said, no, we changed our minds, we don't want anything.

I thought they might've been a bit embarrassed about it, because I was sitting there and they didn't know me. Anyway, the guy looked like he couldn't believe this. He said, ah, come on, man, everybody want dope. And he laughed, and then to show how cool he was he blew cigarette smoke right across the table where we were all eating.

So that turned me right off. And all of a sudden I said, okay, that's it, piss off. These ladies don't want to breathe that while they're eating and nor do I.

Then the guy looked really surprised, and he said, I can smoke, man, I can do what I like. This my country. And I said, not round here.

So then he sort of tossed his head and he breathed in deep again for another

lot of smoke. He was still leaning across the table toward the chicks. And I said, don't breathe that here.

He just sort of sneered and I thought he was going to do it then. And I stared at him, you know, straight at him. And I said, don't do it here.

I was waiting for him to go ahead and do it. I thought he was probably stupid enough. But then he sort of drew back across the table, and he said, ah, you crazy, man. And I didn't say anything, J just kept staring, and then he tossed his head again and sort of slid off his chair and ducked out into the lane in the dark.

So that was all there was to it and it also saved me figuring out how to handle it if he did breathe smoke again. And I was feeling pretty good about it, because it's not every day you get a chance to do something like that in real life. You know, sort of the John Wayne bit. And it's not often anybody gets back at one of those little shits, either. And it'd actually worked and he'd pissed off like I said, so I felt pretty good about the whole thing.

Somebody else said, fair enough, too.

He said, but the thing was, the chicks were completely different after that. I mean, before that they'd just been ignoring me, and that was okay, but now all of a sudden they were very hostile. I couldn't understand it. I mean, I thought I'd been doing them a favour, but somehow what I'd done had got them really pissed off at me. I said something like, that takes care of that, sort of making a joke of it, but they just sort of sniffed and turned away as if I wasn't any better than he'd been. I tell you, there were some very bad vibes around that table for the next few minutes.

Somebody said, what happened then?

He said, nothing. They finished eating and then they pissed off. So I never found out what it was that got them like that. And I wish I knew now, but it's too late. So I guess I'll never know.

Somebody said, maybe they saw you handling a situation they couldn't handle, and they resented it.

He shook his head. He said, I mean, this little shit was breathing on my food the same as on theirs. And at least I did handle it.

Somebody else said, there's this thing about Asian guys. They're a lot more feminine in some ways than Western guys are, in their manner and that. They're always touching one another and that sort of thing. So maybe these girls were responding in some sort of way to something that was slightly feminine about this guy, and then you came on in this masculine, aggressive way, and it was like you were attacking something feminine. So that made them against you. It might have done.

He said, yeah, but I wasn't going to let that guy blow his smoke on my food, it doesn't matter how much of a siss he was.

One of us said, maybe they reckoned you were a racist.

He said, yeah, maybe. But I mean, what can you do in a position like that? What else could I have done?

None of us could imagine him doing anything else. Somebody said, maybe they just didn't like you calling them ladies that time. Maybe they were women's libbers.

He said, yeah, well, I was wrong there. But I couldn't tell that then.

Somebody else said, you should've asked them.

He said, yeah, I know. But I was still full of the John Wayne bit. I mean, I got rid of the guy, so they ought to be grateful, right? They ought to be a bit pleased about it, anyway. So if they're not, well, stuff them. Who cares? Then when I thought about it they'd already gone.

Somebody else said, they wouldn't've told you the truth.

He said, no, I guess not. But they would've had to say something and maybe I would've got an idea.

Somebody said, too late now.

He said, yeah, I'll never know. But anyway, it shows you how screwed up they were, if none of us now can figure out why they went on that way. They were incredibly dumb.

One of us said, millions more where they came from.

He said, yeah, and they can all look after themselves from now on. As far as I'm concerned that's it. I'll go on looking after myself with these guys, but when the chicks are over here they're all on their own.

Longman Cheshire

Longman Cheshire House 346 St Kilda Road Melbourne 3004

Cross Currents

Magazines and Newspapers in Australian Literature

Bruce Bennett (Ed)

This book is an absorbing study of the contribution of magazines and newspapers to Australian literature as well as an important guide to this hitherto neglected aspect of the nation's cultural life.

The 17 contributions focus in various ways on the purpose, function and value of Australia's major literary periodicals and newspapers. Although completeness has not been attempted, the range of information and depth of individual insights will promote a fuller knowledge of currents and cross currents in Australian literary history.

The personal voice often speaks from these pages. A. G. Stephens, Jack Lindsay, Rex Ingamells, Stephen Murray-Smith and Michael Wilding (who are among the contributors) have known intimately the vicissitudes of Australian periodical publishing. Themes recur—idealism and pragmatism; local loyalties and international strivings; shared policies and literary warfare; the discovery and sustenance of talent; the occasional triumph of intellect and imagination over ignorance and apathy.

'Cross Currents' presents a lively challenge to simplistic views of literary creativity and development.

0 582 71112 6 248 pages $25.00

Western Australian Literature: a Bibliography

Compiled by Bruce Bennett, John Hay and Susan Ashford

This bibliography of printed books presents a comprehensive listing of literature written by Western Australians to 1978.

Before publication of this work students of Western Australian literature have had to juggle reference books and specialist catalogues of various sorts. This book effectively 'centralises' the information.

The criterion for determining 'Western Australian' was that of a writer having been a resident of Western Australia or writing about Western Australia.

The book is organised as a series of alphabetical entries, with works listed alphabetically within each entry.

0 582 71116 9 336 pages $45.00

Both books available at local booksellers.

GEORGE STERN

Poetic Constructs from Year Book: Australia 1981

Australia Found

Man entered
at least 40,000
migrations
at least 30,000

    The original
    resources
    before European
    Aborigines.

The physical barriers
cultural isolation
Aboriginal societies
the disappearance
colonists established.

    Although references
    no definite
    of 1597
    Carpentaria.

The Portuguese may
the Arabs may
the Spaniards
the Dutch.

    Quiros
    Torres
    Jansz
    Hartog
    de Houtman
    Carstensz
    Thijssen
    Pelsaert
    Tasman.

William Dampier
James Cook.

*

Australia Defended

The primary aim
interests against
situation support
Vietnam during
significant uncertainties.

High importance
defence effort
particular stress
the alliance
event.

Defence policy
situations.

Priority
from which
the maritime.

The stress
own environs
imposed
strengthen
concerns.

Three billion
six hundred and
fifty million
nine hundred
and four
thousand
dollars.

One patrol craft.

* * *

Australia Secured

Aged
invalid
sheltered
widow
parent
unemployed
sick
special
funeral
family
orphan
handicapped
compassionate.

Income test
subject to tax
residence qualification
maximum rates
preclude from entitlement
subject to a special
half the excess
reduced by up
income as assessed
half the combined
exceptions
otherwise qualified
subject to the same
required to pay.

Long term inmate
not payable
discretionary basis
unable to qualify
permanent and temporary
benefit is suspended.

To be eligible
expired
not expired
ineligible.

May be entitled
cannot exceed
hardship applies
reduced
permissible income
may be treated
in respect of
deducted
regarded as income
not qualified
ceased participating
overriding requirement
dependent.

Class 'A'
Class 'B'
Class 'C'
if
unless.

* * *

MARTIN LANGFORD

Open Venetians

Although I only went outside
To check some stars,
I stayed to watch you dancing
Cheek to cheek—
Boozed,
Obliviously dreamy—

A grendel stirred within:
Why couldn't I be dancing
Like that?
Or cupping your boob, Gina,
Screwing,
Naked in bed?

Forgive me—
I wished you both well
The next breath—
But then, as lovers
You will know yourselves
Of the heart and its helpless rapacity.

MARGARET ELIOT

Flash Jack and the Frog

She watched the old woman shuffle and cut the cards. Her hands were thick-fingered and puffy now, veins stood out, brown spots dotted the skin. But she was still deft with the cards. Her thumbs aired the pack, her fingers interleaved the two halves then squared the pile into her palm, tight and solid as a wooden block.

Cassie pushed down an urge to laugh and clenched her jaws to keep a smile off her face. She wasn't ready yet to be part of what the old woman was creating. She wanted to stand aside, to be an amused spectator. But she knew if she showed even a hint of a smile, the old woman would stop and nothing would coax her to continue. And Cassie did want her to go on, she did want to be respectful and believing. She concentrated on watching a fly negotiate the upward slope of a louvre pane and the urge passed.

Then she could appreciate how good the old woman was at creating a proper sense of occasion. Her movements were purposeful, her preparations methodical. She had cleared the kitchen table, got an old darned damask tablecloth from the linen cupboard, laid it on the table and carefully smoothed out every wrinkle. Then she'd got out the cards; first fumbling for the key from behind the glass animals in the china cabinet, unlocking the drawer and taking out the card box. It was a shiny wooden box with a sliding lid and a flowery poker work pattern around the sides. There was nothing special about the cards themselves: standard red Queen's Slipper, old but still clean and sharp edged. They were never used for anything else.

She would never read the cards to order. You could ask her until you were blue and she'd shake her head and say she didn't have the feeling that day. Then when you'd given up asking her and had almost forgotten she did it at all, she'd say she'd do a reading for you. It was a gift she gave you when she had the feeling. Like now. Cassie had only been there ten minutes, chatting of this and that and noticing that the old woman seemed absent-minded and preoccupied. She'd put it down to the sticky February heat; it was enough to take the starch out of anybody. Suddenly the old woman had cut through the chat and said she would do it now; she had the feeling, she'd woken up with it and it had stayed with her all day.

Now she was laying down the cards in rows, the longest first, shorter ones above and below. She slid each card off the pack and laid it in its place with a slight snap. Cassie was drawn in by now; her eyes followed each card, she felt a surge of impatience to know what lay beneath the flowing red whorls of pattern.

It was time to start prising their secrets from them. The old woman paused, flexed her fingers then began to turn the cards over; one from this row, one from that, following a set pattern that Cassie could never remember afterwards. The first set dealt with money. Cassie guessed she started with what she thought was least important.

"There's a bit of money coming your way soon. Not much, mind, just a bit and quite soon. And a present, something small and made of gold. Apart from that, you're in for lean times, not much coming into the coffers."

Cold comfort there, Cassie thought, as she watched her lay down more cards. Though the little gold something sounded nice; maybe a bit of jewellery.

The next set was ready: travel, visits, life's comings and goings.

"You'll be staying close to home. A few short trips maybe, but not far. An old friend will appear and you'll have mixed feelings about seeing her. A child is coming to stay for a while."

That'll be Lorna bringing Eddie up from Kiama and the three of us taking short trips to Leichhardt pool, she thought wryly.

Now for hopes, ambitions, projects. The old woman laid down more cards and scanned the sequence carefully, with head on one side and lips pursed.

"Nothing very clear here. You seem to be working your way towards something you want, but very slowly. There are many pauses and detours. You are easily diverted from your path."

Haven't a clue what that means, Cassie thought. Maybe she was making her way, crab-wise, towards some distant goal. She didn't know for sure. She did have plenty of dreams of what she wanted to do but they tended to stay shimmering like mirages across stretches of hot dunes while she loitered in the leafy shade of whatever oasis she had reached.

But never mind all that. Here was the fourth set: affairs of the heart, the final sequence, intricate and complicated.

This time the old woman talked as she turned each card, telling the story chapter by chapter.

"There is somebody approaching, coming into your life. Quite close and getting closer."

Cassie leaned forward, excited and tense.

"I can see changes in the shape of your life. A matter of great importance. There's passion and storms here, tears and joy."

The old woman's hand paused over the key card. Cassie could hardly bear the waiting. The card was turned and lay there, showing its face. The old woman shook her head and sighed.

"There he is again. Dark Jack. The flash Jack. He's there again."

She sighed again and leaned back in her chair as though the disappointment had drained her old body of its energy.

"I'd hoped for a King for you this time. But you just don't get him, do you? Always the Jack. And the scheming Jack at that. You know who I mean."

Oh yes, Cassie knew Flash Jack. She remembered him very well. What a charmer he'd been: silky dark hair, bright cat's eyes, a rapid smile. Even now that's what she first remembered when she thought of him. After all this time. And back at the beginning, he'd only have to push back that shiny hair and smile at her and she'd forget what she was angry with him about, forget she'd sworn never to give him another cent, never to listen to another of his money for jam schemes.

She remembered the time they had visited his mother on her birthday. There'd been the hot trudge from Lidcombe Station, with Jack whingeing about going and her carrying the boxed brooch and the wilting flowers she'd bought because he'd

been a bit short that week. He'd taken them off her a block from the house, of course, and presented them to Ma with a flourish, knocking her sideways with his thoughtfulness. Jack had never been so loving and thoughtful, she said, and she knew it was all because of being with Cassie. There was a traditional remedy in Ma's family for wayward boys: a good woman. So for Ma it was simple: all he needed was a loving woman to steady him and point him in the right direction. And it did work sometimes, she knew it did; it had been the making of her brother Lennie, she said, and there was a lot of him in Jack. So Ma made it harder for Cassie to finish with Jack because she hated to disappoint her fond hopes. But she also played a part in helping her see Jack for what he was. It was in the way he treated her: seeing her as a soft touch, taking her sunny warm loving for granted, accepting it as his birthright.

There had been prophesying that afternoon too, Cassie remembered. Ma liked to read the leaves. She was an amateur compared to Nan, doing it for a bit of a laugh, she said. But Cassie knew she was comforted by the messages she read in the cups. Both these old women shared a need to glimpse the future. They could assert themselves, pit themselves against the powerful outside forces that willy-nilly shaped their lives. They could know what was coming; they could be comforted, expectant, forearmed, according to what the message was. Ma had picked up Cassie's cup as she had drained the dregs of her tea and started to read her leaves. She'd squinted at the cup, turned it from side to side, held it at arm's length. Two birds flying up together towards the sun; that's what she said she saw, making a picture of her affectionate hopes out of the little brown specks straggling up the side of the cup. And she'd looked across the table at them and smiled. Jack had taken his cue and put his arm around Cassie, hoping to please them both, but Cassie was as still as stone. She knew by then that neither she nor he believed that a message from the leaves could put things right between them; these leaves were either lying or talking about somebody else. And it was all downhill after that. He'd sensed very quickly that he'd almost eaten out the pasture and had begun searching out greener fields. But he'd come back again and again to reproach her, threaten her, try to soften her into a few more favours. It was finished at last and she was exhausted for a long time. She missed tim too, longed for him in an achingly painful way that startled and frightened her and made her uneasy about herself. She still saw Ma sometimes to talk and share a cup of tea with her. She'd mention Jack when she was leaving and Ma would shrug and sigh, then smile and kiss her goodbye.

No, she didn't want Flash Jack again. She had nothing to spare for him now, no heart for his games, no appetite for his pleasures.

Cassie's voice broke harshly into what seemed a long silence.

"Do it again for me, Nan. Go on, do it again. Turn up a King for me."

The old woman's voice matched hers for sharpness. It wasn't proper to talk like that, she said, you didn't order the cards about. They told you what was to be, not what you wanted to hear.

"But why doesn't the King appear? Why? It's not fair."

She sounded petulant now and felt it. She felt she'd been given a lousy deal.

"No use pouting. That's for children. You're a young woman. Just you think a bit, my girl. The Jack will appear. So? What then? What will you do? Have you thought about that?"

Cassie wriggled in her chair, not wanting to hear any more but the old woman hadn't finished.

"And do you really want the King? Would you know him if you met him? Have you ferretted out the secret desires of your own heart?"

What on earth did she mean by that? Cassie felt angry now. Of course she'd

rather have the King. Of course she'd know him if she met him. Anyone would think she hadn't learnt anything. Secret desires, though; that made her feel uneasy, a bit off balance somehow, as though the old woman was able to see something in her that she couldn't see for herself. But why did she have to be so cryptic?

The old woman slowly gathered up the cards and put them back in the box. It was clearly time for a cup of tea so Cassie put on the kettle, got out the cups and the pot, then did the honours with the tea and scones. The familiar ritual soothed them both and they began to talk again. They planned to make marmalade on her next visit. The spindly old lemon tree down the back yard was laden with fruit and Nan hated to see the crop fall and rot on the ground.

Cassie drained the last of her tea and, thinking of Ma, looked at the trail of leaves up the side of the cup. No birds, not this time. But there was a message all the same. Near the bottom of the cup was a frog, sitting on a stone; definitely a frog, clear as day. Now there was something to set against the Jack. A frog's a much better bet. Frogs surprise you. Throw them against the wall and they turn into princes.

"Look, Nan. See what I got in my leaves. A frog."

The old woman heard the note of bright optimism in her voice and looked suspiciously at her then clashed her own cup into its saucer.

"What are you up to now, my girl? Taking a bet in another race?"

"No need to bite my head off. I was just looking at the leaves and saw this frog. That's all."

"You know as well as I do that you can't read your own leaves. The cards have told their story, you know what's blowing in the wind. Be satisfied with that."

Cranky old woman. What did she know? Where did she get that maddening certainty from? There she sat, calm as you like, shuffling her bits of cardboard about and making pronouncements about someone else's life.

Cassie stared at the poker work box and thought of the pile of cards lying there in the dark; suddenly they seemed malicious and spiteful. She snatched up the box, got up and returned it to its place, shutting the drawer with a bang.

She turned around and saw the old woman smiling knowingly at her and holding out the little silver key.

"Don't forget to lock them up," she said, "safe and sound, ready for next time."

BEVERLEY FARMER

Inheritance

Here I sit in your armchair shrouded in shadows of grey lace; my glass of red wine glows on the sill; the garden is starlit beyond the mirroring pane.

Again and again you were taken to the hospital and came back determined not to die. My father each time grey with terror that you soon must. Your mind, half-dead since your stroke, stumbled on among twisted words and phrases, hostilities, old affections, shards of memory. Some querulous love left for your garden and for my little girl, Julie, whom you kept calling Carol. Splutters of anger or distress when anything was out of place or time. My father in his closed room tinkered with clocks and radios, played scraps of Bach on his piano, studied the stars by telescope. He died years ago and is charred bones now.

Up at the hospital they said that this time you would die. You'd given up. Why?

You used to ask me to promise not to look at your dead body. That's not how I want you to remember me, Carol, you said. You didn't look at your own mother, who died young. What remains is only the husk, you said, the soul being ascended unto the Father. We went with Auntie May one cold afternoon to put lilies on your mother's grave, cold white folded lilies. I crept among the staring statues in bony drapery. The cypress trees had seeds like snails on their black fronds.

Promise you'll have me cremated, you said.

*

The first time you didn't want me to know that something serious was wrong. I was in the middle of examinations at university and must not be put off my stride. But Auntie May rang me in college.

Carol, if they won't tell you the truth I will, she shouted. It's *cancer.* Your mother might die under the knife. *Yes.* You ask your father.

Cancer was what I had always most feared for you. You smoked such a lot. You rolled your own. Godgies, I called them. (You loved my baby talk.) Pipes and lipsticks and lollipops were all godgies, and the little stalks that boys could pee through, but not my father's bicycle pump which was the hogfig. Daddy hated your godgies too. You lit the first, convulsed with deep coughs, at daybreak. I delayed opening my bedroom door and letting in the smoky breath of the rest of the house. In winter on the way to school—streetlamps still gold, a grey light spreading—I watched in disgust as white smoke poured out of me.

In the holidays when we went to the city for lunch and a show I wouldn't sit

in a smoking compartment and flounced on my own to a non-smoker. Perched on a green seat by a shuddering double window I watched bridges and factories trundle beyond my dusty shadow. On the city platform you were waiting, breathing smoke through an angry smile.

At ten, on some dull visit, leafing by lamplight through old magazines while you grown-ups played cards, I read that cigarettes caused lung cancer. I tore the page out. Oh, what rubbish, you said. Tearful and urgent, waiting on the corner that frosty night for a brown bus home: Mummy, please, please stop. You'll get cancer and die. Daddy, you tell her. It's your mother's own business, Carol. Just keep quiet.

You never got lung cancer. Eight years ago after your stroke the doctors made you stop smoking. My father and I weren't mean. We kept quiet.

*

When I rang from college, my father denied that it was cancer you had.

You know what your Auntie May's like, lovey. Always got the wind up about something, he soothed. Mum's got to go in for a minor op., that's all. A fissure of the anus. Now you do your best. We're proud of you.

But it was cancer of the bowel. You survived the colostomy and learned to fasten plastic bags to the new hole cut in your belly. You've had to do it for twenty years. You were both cool after that with Auntie May, for having interfered. But my results weren't bad.

By then I was deep in first love and that was all that mattered. He was married. I never told you. He behaved like a gentleman and paid for the abortion. In all that summer of muggy heat and secrecy I only wrote you a letter or two. I'm sorry.

When that was over I hitchhiked down to see you in your bedroom that Dad had moved out of by then. In the hot noon darkness crowded with old furniture you lay asleep, tangled in bedclothes, your lamp still on. Your mouth gulped, grimaced, when I stepped inside.

Hullo, Mum.

Carol! Is that you?

Tears, glowing, trickled down your furrowed throat.

Are you all right, Mum?

Carol! Your voice blurring in the pillow. Why didn't you ever come?

Later, after your shower, you called me into the bathroom to show me by its furred yellow light. I had never seen you naked. You hesitated, frail and shaking, your knees slack; then took the towel away. Your eyes rolled up in appeal. From hip to hip your belly grinned at me with crooked lips. On one side, your new anus, a puckered bud, a hole. Your nipples lolled, pink eyeballs staring down. Under the belly's sag nestled the shaggy grey chin of your groin.

Is it still sore?

Not too bad.

It doesn't look too bad.

You smiled at last, and I kissed you. Your wet suede cheek.

*

At Julie's age, at seven or so, I remember reproaching you for looking so flabby, wrinkled and sick. Why don't you look pretty like other mothers? I persisted. You were close on fifty, no longer pretty, but loved. The grocer sold you more butter, the butcher more meat, than you ever had coupons; old ladies poking in their dry flower beds straightened stiff backs and held you up with gossip; neighbours were in and out all day for coffee. The tram conductors on our way to the second-hand bookstore told you their life stories. One whole summer in

the hot twilight before bedtime you read me and my playmates *Alice in Wonderland* from my faded green copy that smelled, still smells, of autumn leaves.

Daddy read me music in bed. Scales, crotchets and quavers. FACE and Every Good Boy Deserves Food. We hummed the first bars of sonatas he was going to teach me. But I had no ear, and disappointed him.

Waking in terror of cages and shadows and furtive rustlings I would call out to you. It was always he who came, he the lighter sleeper. Mu-um, my leg's got cramps. His knee joints crackling at every step down the dark passage. He would switch on my dazing light and sit rubbing my calves, wryly yawning.

Not better yet? he would sigh.

No. Daddy, can I come into your bed?

No, lovey. Back to sleep now.

But I'll dream about the hospital!

No you won't.

Will you leave the light on?

All right. The passage light. Night night, Snooks.'

He would kiss my cheek and stalk crackling back to the dark room you two slept in. Snoring in counterpoint.

*

I was always dreaming about the hospital. This great terror of hospitals, all my life. At five I spent six weeks in one with scarlet fever. You dressed me in my best brown jumper and skirt and Daddy took me there in a taxi. A nurse bathed me in phenol. The children's ward was long, cold, dim. Its balcony had a high wire fence that I clambered up one day for a dare. I was caught, punished with isolation; the nurse had short red hair and an angry contempt that stunned me. You rang the matron daily. No visitors were allowed for fear of infection. The fenced ward was our prison. Often I overshot the bedpan and rubbed the sheet for hours after, to dry it; the white cage of my bed jiggling, tinkling. I could see one skylight with stars behind it turn blue, grey, gold each morning. Nurses sponged us and replaited our plaits tightly. When Daddy came for me at last, I refused to speak. My brown jumper and skirt were brought out folded. I had given up hope of ever seeing them or home again. It was a sunny day. A stiff wind blowing.

*

As he aged and in retirement became remote—brittle, silent—his nights were more disturbed and the crackling of his joints woke me several times a night as he crept outside, but by then I never called.

My knee joints crackle too. I take after him. Daddy's girl. We were skinny, to your plump. Daddy's little skinnamalink. He dinked me on the bar of his bicycle to vacant lots where in other summers circuses had appeared overnight, soiled elephants shambled; to clamber through the golden skeletons of the new houses. He lifted me high into our gumtree to pick off its crouched caterpillars. He built bonfires like haystacks and lit catherine wheels warily. He held my cheeks in rough palms to guide my gaze at galaxies and constellations. Our trees waved giant hushed shadows over skyfuls of stars.

You weigh five stone now.

On that last day, when you trotted in right on time with his morning tea, he lay flung half-off the bed in an attitude of terror, his grey eyes wide; heart pills all over the sunny floorboards. I was two hours getting here. An aged, sorrowful child, you sat numbly for hours by the window; scurried to pack away his clothes; on the telephone mumbled over and over broken half-reproaches, despair. You

had squabbled over breakfast. He had trudged back to bed in a sulk. Feeling sick, he said.

Mum, you couldn't have known.

Should have. Should. Oh yes. Oh.

*

Once his clothes were packed off to the Brotherhood, the piano and telescope sold, you asked me to find you a flat near ours in the city. I looked around on my days off: it had to be a ground-floor flat because of your heart. There was nothing suitable. After a couple of months you said you'd changed your mind, you weren't helpless, thanks all the same. You'd stay put.

I wish I was one of those women who give up their lives to care for the old and sick.

You always hoped I'd want to be a nurse when I grew up. When I got out of hospital you had made me a nurse costume. When I was twelve you talked me into spending Saturday afternoons helping at the hospital with friends from school. The patients were old, paralysed, incontinent, blind, abandoned. We folded linen and peeled potatoes. We hacked off the green shells of pumpkins, polished and grooved, with orange seeds and rags of flesh hanging in their wombs. One afternoon nurses asked me to feed a young blind man his custard. It was a privilege: nicknamed Freddie, he was their favourite. In my awkwardness I let hot custard trickle down Freddie's neck and puddle in his pillow as he lay smiling up. Tears spilled from his white eyes. Frantic, I mopped his raspy throat and chin. I was too ashamed to ever go back. He kept asking after me, my friends reported. Oh, Carol, you said. Shaking your grey head. You are heartless.

*

We were down here just last Sunday. Whimpering, you bared your sore, swollen ankles. Oh don't want. Turn into a vegetable. Your veined eyes round as you faltered, saying that. You spent most of the day in bed and refused to eat. On Tuesday the Meals on Wheels man found you lying on the kitchen floor and called the ambulance. The matron rang me at work.

Can you come down? Doctor says her heart's grossly enlarged. She's very weak.

She'll be all right, though, won't she?

Well, we can't say. Come down if possible. She's asked for you.

You'd asked for me.

I took time off and drove down with Julie to the little bush hospital. A day of midwinter spring, with the lamps lit all afternoon along the shore. Kookaburras and magpies in the shabby gumtrees in the grounds. From your window, late sun glazing the hollow sea. Woodsmoke from chimneys in the hills towered.

When you had your stroke a few days before Julie was born, we had been estranged for months: my child would have no father. I lumbered in to visit you in the city hospital, kissed your cheek and flopped gasping in a chair with my offering of daffodils. You could hardly move. Slowly your stiff mouth drooled words.

What, Mum?

You. Go. Now.

What did you say?

Want. You. Go. Now.

I flung the gaudy flowers down and went.

*

Last Sunday Julie found some of your old photographs. She brought one in

to show us, the one of you and Auntie May smiling on a staircase. Two little sepia girls with frilly dresses and bows in their hair.

Have you still got that dress, Mummy? Please can I have it?

No, that was Granma's dress.

But you've got it on!

No, that's not me. That's Granma. When she was your age.

Oh. Have you still got it, Granma?

You smiled, shaking your head. That was all. Later I found the photo in the rubbish bin. I took it out, stained and creased, when you weren't looking.

A while ago I played all the tapes that Dad had made, mostly of broadcasts of organ recitals. His beloved fugues wheezed, thumped and groaned. In the middle of a slow passage I heard him sigh. I played it again. There it was. His deep sigh, embedded in the music.

I told you about it. Would you like to hear it? I'd play it for you. You shook your shaggy head. Were your eyes blank, or hostile? You would have loved to hear his voice, wouldn't you? You would have.

You turned your head away.

*

This time I brought red tulips propped in a carafe on the locker like five sunlit glasses of red wine. They are opening unseen beside you now, showing their yellow throats. Inside each are six rods of black velvet like the legs of an upturned insect; and a three-pronged tongue, its colour lost in the yellow glow.

Your mottled hand crawled to huddle in mine, a dry claw for all these years plump again now with the same fluid that was welling in your ankles. In your lungs.

Sorry dear. Accident. Shower.

You fell in the shower?

No, no. Shaking your angry matted head. Accident. Bowel. Mess in bathtub.

Oh, Mum, that's nothing! I'll clean it up!

Disgusted.

Of course not. You couldn't help it. Don't be silly!

You rolled your filmed eyes up to gaze at me.

Thank you. For coming.

I'll be back tonight. Now you get some sleep.

I kissed your hollow cheek. Your cropped grey hair sodden, fetid, all on end. You nodded and twisted to watch me go back to Julie, anxiously on tiptoe in the doorway. We waved to your mute face watching. Watching us go.

I dropped Julie at the Smiths' to play and came back alone to sit here drinking as night fell. The wine was dark as blood by lamplight. Remembering.

I drove back alone in visiting hours. I was too late. Your body, wracked as if in childbirth, was heaving up off the bed with every gasp; your mouth a mute howl; your eyes bulging, blood-stained. I called you. Nothing. No hope now, the doctor said. Did you know I was there? When I was holding your swollen hand, could you feel my hand? You'd asked for me. Did you want me to go now? I'd always promised not to look. I crept away.

What could I have done?

I picked Julie up. Fast asleep by their fire, she hardly stirred when I carried her to the car and then to bed. Read me *Alice*, she mumbled, but fell asleep again.

I sat up gulping wine. Your wracked grimace accused me. So weak, how had you found such strength, such anguish, to fight for each breath, each heartbeat, one by one? I sat slobbering with shame and dread until the telephone rang and the doctor murmured that my mother had passed away, and suggested an undertaker. So it was over, you had cast your loose old skin: it lay there stiffening in

warm sheets. Nurses will sponge you now and stop up all your openings—the warped anus, too, in your seamed belly. You used to apologize to new nurses for it. At home you flinched as wind purred out, escaping the taut bag; with strained composure visitors would ignore the sudden smell.

Stars roof your luminous garden. The trees are still. Empty snail shells, small brown skulls, litter the flower beds and the frosty grass. A blue glow covers the fuchsia with its dangling bells, the japonica's red paper petals, the studded daphne. Pale lilies are coiled around their dusty rods. Soon your dry wisteria vine will hang out its frilled mauve pods in bunches.

In one of the grey snapshots by the bedlamp in your room you and Dad walk elated hand in hand past the pillars and steps of the G.P.O., just married at forty at the start of the War. In the other you grin squinting into the sun on the verandah, your only baby, bald and glum, cuddled in tentative white-downed arms. My lifetime ago.

*

The shower taps are smudged with brown. You told me. The soap as well. Splatters here and there blotch the grey enamel of the tub. With rubber gloves on I scrub away the hard brown spots, pour boiling water over and wrap gloves, soap and steel wool in newspaper before I ram them in the bin.

Stooped here in splashing yellow water, sludge oozing from your hole and between the puffed fingers that tried to hold it back, did you decide to die?

Rust is tarnishing the steam-furred mirror. I am shiny under the dusty globe, my lips black from the wine. The dim skin of my eyes is bruised, wilted. My bones are yellow ridges. Hollows lie dark along my jaw and throat.

Julie's tread thumps down the passage. In the mirror her sleepy face that was mine once. Her warm hair all on end.

Granma just died, darling one, I say.

Won't we ever see her again?

No. She wouldn't like us to.

Does she look horrible?

I shake my head. She leans frowning in the doorway:

This is our house now, isn't it?

Yes.

Are we coming to live down here?

Maybe in summer.

Where's Granma's soul now?

I don't know.

Not here! she shrieks.

No. Not here.

With Granpa's?

Nobody knows.

Can I come into your bed? And leave the light on?

All right. The passage light.

She comes and presses her hot face against me.

Mummy, she whimpers. Don't you ever got old and die.

JULIE LEWIS

Conversation over Port

— Objective reality
is impossible.
— Here we go!
Do you mind, Angela?
— Oh, shut up, Clem,
for God's sake.

— We should be going...
— Sit down, woman. The
party's only just started.
— Shall we move somewhere
more comfortable?
— Where'd you have in
mind .... mmmh?
— Warren!!!
— No I meant these chairs
aren't all that...
— Break from the table—
break up the party.
— Oh, all right. Stay put.
I'll put some more coffee
on.

— As I was saying, there's
no such thing as objective
reality. Everything is
viewed through the percep-
tions of the observer.
— Sure. But there is one
perception that has to be
the real one, the true one.
— Whose Paul? Take this
party. Whose perception
of what's going on round
this table is the true one?
— Oh, I take your point. But
as a kind of overview there

— Squeeze it ... lovely
drop!
— There is another bottle.
— Well ... why didn't you
say so.

— Put it down eight years
ago ... waiting for an
occasion.
— I didn't realise...
— Well... Clem's appoint-
ment and all that.
— Mm. Does run on a bit
doesn't he?
— Still ... I suppose ... on
the bench. Stands to
reason.

has to be one perception that
is objectively accurate. As a
writer, Warren, don't you agree?

— No! I don't agree
with either of you—
the whole exercise—
of just being here,
creates its own reality.

— Maybe. But there has
to be an *absolute* truth.
— Who's to say so?
— An objective observer.
— It's that person's perception.

— But a disinterested
observer?
— Still *his* perception.

— or hers!

— All right, Angela . . .
Or hers.
— So what you're saying
is—there's no absolute
truth.

— Warren always gets
argumentative when
he's had too much
to drink.

— Exactly. Unless you believe
in a kind of omniscient God,
overseeing all, storing away
each response.

— A kind of heavenly
filing cabinet?

— At least he stays
awake. Look at Dave!

— If you like.
— And where'll that get
you?
— God knows.
— The judge has spoken.
End of argument.

— Bull! We're back to
the beginning.

— In . . . the . . . beginning . . .
— Go back to sleep,
Dave.

— Thank you Warren. Let's
pursue it then.
What?
— Being God. Gathering
the evidence.
— Sounds rather like a
trial. You'll be on
familiar ground, Clem.
— Not a trial. More like
a board meeting. A presenta-
tion of the facts. A demo-
cratic overview.
— You can't have it both ways,

— Ignore them, Clem.
Talk to me instead. I
must tell you this
marvellous story. It seems
that these two were (*rhubarbrhu*
rhubarbrhubarbrhubarbrhu
barb) and so there they

Paul. Autocratic or democratic?
— Shut up! Warren. Shut up! I've got it. An Absolute Truth board.
— That's a contradiction in terms.
— Then ... a heavenly truth board.
— Sounds like a nineteenth century hymn.

— Come on Paul. Establish the guidelines.
— I'm thinking.

— Thanks, Mandy. I need a stimulant right now.
— Right. Guidelines. There are some things that are irrefutable. That are constant ... absolute.
— Such as?
— Facts. Like the number of us sitting here. Sitting ... talking ... drinking.
— I need a pee. I'll be back.
— Clem ... Clem ... You'll agree with that won't you?
— Even facts are subject to selection.
— No! Facts are indisputable. For instance. There are eight of us sitting round this table.
— Right. But at this moment, Paul, this precise moment, how many of us are involved in this particular conversation?
— Two, I suppose.
— And a few minutes ago there were also two. A different two. You and Warren.
— That's a detail.
— Is it? When I recall this conversation I'll probably only remember two of us taking part.
— But that's not true.

were, covered in treacle and feathers!!
— What did they do?
— What could they do?

— Well I think it sounds fascinating, Paul.
— Thank you my dear.
— Don't you think it sounds fascinating, Mandy?
— Oh, absolutely. More coffee, anyone?

—Oh ... oh.

— And this guy looms up, round the corner of the library, puce in the face, jogging. Thud .. thud .. flab .. flab .. heading straight for me. Thought he'd flatten me. Veered off course at the last minute and collapsed at my feet.
— What? Dead?
— Yeah. As a beached whale.

— Not in terms of other people, but in the memory of the particular person recalling the evening, it is.
— You mean a kind of Freudian slip?
— Perhaps. Or simply discounting those who are not participating at this moment. In a sense they aren't here.

— You two are getting much too serious.

— Now there are three. See what I mean? Come and join us round this side of the table, Mandy. Clem, I'm going to establish an indisputable FACT.
— Go ahead.
— How many guests have you asked tonight, Mandy?
— Eight. Can't you count?
— There, Clem. An absolute fact.
— Oh sure. On the face of it. But I want to verify one point. You asked eight or have eight turned up?
— I asked eight. Eight turned up.
— The same eight?
— Oh ... well, no. Actually, one couple I originally asked couldn't come, so I substituted ...
— Ah ... so one couple was second choice.
— Not actually. The table only seats eight ... so ...
— Why were couple A (we won't embarrass you by asking who the replacements were) more desirable in the first instance than couple B.
— I don't know. I try to choose people with things in common.
— And was that your first priority?
— Yes ... no. I always ask people I like. Preferably both of the couple.
— And this applied more to couple A than to couple B.
— Look. What is this? An inquisition?
— No. Just getting the FACTS as Paul required. You asked eight people. Two couldn't make it so you substituted two others. So you asked ten people and eight came. The apparently simple fact is far from indisputable.

— It's a matter of principle, I said.
— And what did he say?
— That I was a pain in the arse.
— Ha! Sounds like him.
— Well. I shan't compromise myself, I said.
— And?
— He accepted by resignation.

— There I was, this night, one arm leaning against the tiles, when a guy comes in ... full scottish regalia, kilt, sporran, bagpipes. The lot. He disappears into the loo and I'm just zipping up ... when this terrible noise starts. I mean ... the bagpipes ... They're like howling cats at the best of times ... but in among the porcelain and chrome ...! I couldn't believe it. Then he comes out ... Grinning. 'Just practising' he says and goes out the door.

— God you're becoming a bore. But that's right.

— Nicely put Mandy.

— Why not? Fill it up. Tomorrow's Sunday.

— so we have established one fact.

— Can't someone shut him up?
— I think it's fascinating.
— You would!
— Go to sleep if you're bored.
— Is that an invitation?
— You must be joking.
— Warren!!!

— Well I have established one fact, in spite of what Clem says.
— Leave it Paul.
— No. We have established one fact. There are eight guests seated round this table.

— That's been obvious all evening.

— No so! Warren left the table at one stage.

— Oh .. oh. He's off again.

— He only went to the loo.
— So?
— So ... your objective observer—God—may have given the table a cursory glance at that point and decided you had seven guests.
— This sounds rather like one of those medieval arguments about angels dancing on the point of a pin.
— Not at all. It's impeccable logic.

— Do you know something, Clement? You're a pompous prick!

— That's enough Warren. You sound like one of those dreadful people you write about. Real people don't talk like that.

— Well I *do* talk like that. Am I not real? Prick me (no pun intended) do I not bleed etc etc? Anyway I don't go along with this argument at all. Fiction offers a true reality.

— That's absurd. The very definition of fiction precludes that.

— Crap! The writer creates a truth. His own truth. Out of all the little lies and deceptions.

— Even that depends on his selection and interpretation of those lies and deceptions.

— Right. But what he creates is reality.

— AND HERE'S *YOUR* REALITY!

— My God. Mandy's got us on tape.
— The bitch!
— What have we been saying?
— I heard a story once about someone who left a recorder in the ladies' loo. The play-back split up three marriages!
— Play it back, Mandy!
— Oh, no.
— Go on Mandy, play it back.
— Jesus, do we have to listen to all that bulldust again?
— We really ought to be going.
— Shut up woman. This should prove my point.
— I think it's absolutely fascinating!

— OBJECTIVE REALITY IS IMPOSSIBLE
HERE WE GO DO YOU MIND ANGELA
OH SHUT UP CLEM FOR GOD'S SAKE
SQUEEZE IT LOVELY DROP THERE IS . . .

TIM WINTON

Urinals

And so. Face to face with a stinking urinal. There's no way the dripping will stop, because somebody has smashed the cistern with a crowbar or a brick, and it leaks in browning trickles over the stains and dried-up slag marks. The cement is cold. The noise is worse. It's like hearing people talking in the next room, loud, but you can't pick up what they're saying.

I need to sleep.

Back to urinals. Not even funny.

The tek-guns are terrible. Screaming. The sound of a person screaming, having their fingernails pulled off, or something. Asbestos sucks the sun. Limestone in the assembly yard reflects it back into your face. All you do is wait for the sea-breeze.

Every Monday I swore I was getting out. I will.

Nothing for you at the Uni or Tech, that's what the smug little fart at the CES told me. I said what about up north. The same work, he said. Honestly, I'd even drive a truck. The counsellor lowered his glasses on his nose and asked me some "personal" questions. He was reading them off a sheet, I swear. I read along with him. Sometime around then he asked my name.

—Does it matter? I said.

—If you want a job.

—You're telling me to go back to the site, I told him.

He tipped his glasses.

—That's all, sorry.

And that's when I snatched his glasses and off. I heard him get caught in the electric doors. Looking for a good place. A Good Samaritans Bin—couldn't have been better. Down the slot with them. I ran off, looking behind to see Mr CES kicking at the bin, and a bus queue smothering him, hitting him with shopping bags and shoeboxes. He had his head in the slot. A charity bin. The last I saw of him was when I caught a bus further up. There was an umbrella hook between his legs.

That was the CES. I went back to the site.

I have been building dunnies since I left school. Transportable fifteen-holers. Twelve-foot urinal. Five man sheep trough to wash in. I make things for people to crap in. And on. I am the man of a thousand rivets. That's all that holds these things up. And some silicon glue.

A lot of times—not now, because I'm too cold and sore—I have dreamed of making something like a doghouse or a shed on my own, but I never have. I started building a hill-trolley when I was a kid, but my old man didn't trust homemade ones, so he bought me one. It was welded steel with bearings in the wheels. I never used it much. The old man went crook. I want to build something, take my time, and do a really good job of it. Then maybe I'd sell it, keep it, it doesn't matter. But it wouldn't be like on the site.

Sometimes I miss a hundred rivets in every thou. You're in a hurry. The foreman, bastard he is, wants the job out by lunchtime. And there's the frame for the next one, waiting.

We went out tonight, me and Jill. A year now. Both of us got pissed at the White Sands. She said let's go to Sydney, get your head out've the dunnies for a while. The band was loud. She was shouting. Beer spilling. I thought about it for a while, fighting the noises in my head. I said yes. She kissed me and said she'd arrange it tomorrow.

Sydney. What is so special about Sydney? Everyone goes east. They all come back looking like hippies. I didn't mind. It's a big place; maybe I could get a job there.

Then this party. Somebody's. I lost Jill for a while in the mess. Everyone was drunker than I was, and most of them were on the floor. I saw a honey-headed girl piss her pants. It was all she had on. I've never seen anything as rough as that before, even though people think I'm an animal. I wandered through the bodies.

The blokes on the site give me hell. They found me in a urinal one lunchtime. There's nothing dirty about it. A freshly turned-out urinal, gleaming slick and silver, is as clean as a washed plate. You could eat your lunch out of one. That's why they are onto me. I did. Come lunchtime, I need somewhere to lie down to let my head stop screaming. It's the same noises: tek-guns and buzz-saws. I have lunch in the urinal if it's fitted. Some plastic packing behind my head for a pillow—makes a good bed, and I eat my two rounds of peanut paste and drop off.

I found Jill in the bedroom with another bloke. I didn't know what to do, what with Sydney and all. I grabbed the bloke by the cheeks as he was pumping away ... and then I was in the rosebed. I chucked up a bit, then unhooked myself and limped off. Couldn't figure it out. Thorns in my hands.

I argued with the blokes at work about it, but there was no way they could understand. Somehow the noise and the heat were worse after that. There was one bloke, though, Emilio. He is a smart bloke. I know he is only in prefabs for the money. I reckon he has been to Uni; he never says anything about it. I was talking to Emilio about the urinal problem and he said he understood. I suppose a urinal's not a urinal until it's been pissed in, he said. But he wouldn't repeat that to the other blokes when I asked him. He walked off. I understood, though. Emilio is a Wog. It wouldn't sound too good for him.

When I got home, my old man told me to get packed. He said he wasn't standing for it. I was covered in chunder and beer and compost. I think he must have found out about the urinal business, too. He knows the foreman. Got me the job, the bastard. I went crook and said I was going to Sydney in any case. I didn't get any packing done. I was out in the roses.

I couldn't get a taxi (where to?).

Jill's mum told me to go to hell and where was her daughter.

Motels are too much.

Streetlights out, walking in the black.

I thought about sleeping at the site, but now I haven't got Mum's car, and anyway, there's barbed wire around the twelve-foot fence. I've had enough roses tonight. I don't need barbed wire. Eventually I came down here. About two o'clock, it was. The beach is flushing down there. Papers slash up and down the bitumen carparks. Sand hisses against the walls.

Did you ever have the dream about falling into the urinal at school, getting your foot stuck in the grate? Having all the kids pissing down on you? Didn't you see all those yellow rainbows aimed at you?

The pressure is changing in the cistern. Leaking everywhere. I can feel the little drops.

Didn't you?

The University Bookshop

on Campus, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, 6009

In addition to University Text and Reference books, we stock a wide range of books in the areas of General Literature, Australiana, Art, Cookery, Craft, Gardening, Travel, Children's books and Paperbacks.

Our Special Order Service enables books not in stock to be ordered from the Eastern States or overseas.

10% Discount

is given off most titles and for further savings check our stand of Remainders on the Ground Floor.

For your calculator requirements check our range of Hewlett Packard and Sharp models.

HOURS: Monday to Friday, 8.45 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.
Saturday, 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon

PHONE — 386 5578 and 386 5579

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

Istanbul. 1981

(i)

Past sixteen hundred years of age
It staggers on as improvised,
The heaped up crumbling buildings kept
To house another million like

The ones who smell of chemicals and drains.
God's everything. Men let each other down.
The muezzins in anguish call,
Insisting on the power of prayer.

(ii)

The nomad strain asserts itself
In buildings thrown up overnight,
Reduced to rubble in a year,

In herds of cows and flocks of sheep
That cross the bridge in search of grass.
Why build to last when nothing does?

(iii)

Like pre-war Chevrolet and Dodge,
The city somehow functions still
And only seems to fall apart,

Rust-coloured armour-plated roach
And side-swiped slinking dog with mange
Fit symbols for a coat of arms.

(iv)

The rose, stiff pricks and flashing knives,
Stale sweat, gold teeth and signet rings,
Great oafs of men and subtle thieves,

The waterfront charms like Genet,
As clumsy shy and beautiful
As a lorry load of flowers.

PATRICIA AVERY

Natalie

I am letting her out tonight. She has been wanting to escape for a long time now, and I have tried to let her. She has no name, but I call her Natalie. Natalie is as free as if she has lived with storms and hiding places in the grass, not with ordinary people. But tonight she will be going out to a restaurant with ordinary people—with my husband (who will be her husband for the occasion) and friends. Well, not exactly friends, just acquaintances who drift by like all the rest.

Picture her beating at the iron bars of a body and a mind for so long, wanting to scream and dance like a wild woman. Or perhaps she would like to float charmingly through life, not caring too much about anything. Natalie prefers cats and fire and the wind. This is all I know about her.

My husband Colin is in the bedroom watching football on the television. He'll sit there in a daze until five minutes before everyone arrives here for a drink. "What time will they be here?" I ask. I'm not sure that I want the evening to begin.

"Oh, around six-thirty. Why don't you start a fire?" He keeps looking at the screen and his eyes shoot back and forth following the ball. So I sing out a few lines of a song just to hear my own lovely soprano voice, and to annoy him a little, since it would be impossible to distract him. When Colin relaxes he becomes as aloof as that television.

In the lounge room—does anyone ever lounge around here?—I put sticks and newspaper on the grate and set them alight. Natalie so loves fires. When it's blazing pretty well I slip in for a shower. Flames and streams of water are alike, so smooth and enveloping.

Then it is time to dry my hair by the fire, to slash red lacquer on fingernails, hood my eyes with black kohl. Natalie drinks in colour with a vampire's greed. She chose the paint scheme of the house, I don't think it looks too strange, a bit motley perhaps with all the reds and blues. I insisted on some white and cream to soften the effect. Anyway we looked stunning in a deep rose-coloured peasant dress—oh I am becoming confused, whether to say I, or she meaning Natalie, or we—that is the trouble with writing things down, one must be precise when one would rather be vague.

At this point I could feel, with the infusion of make-up and silver jewellery and the rose dress, that Natalie was becoming rather strong. I was not nervous but rather drunk without drinking.

"Baby, could you pour me a glass of wine?"

When I came back from the kitchen, Colin was sitting with his knees to the

fire. He looked at me strangely when I handed him his glass, but he didn't have time to say anything before the door knocker sounded. Did my dramatic appearance surprise him? Am I normally so pale and self-effacing that a little song and a few swaying steps should seem unusual?

Well, there were Joanne my sister and her husband Bill, Colin's psychologist friend Gareth and girlfriend Leslie. They came in hesitantly, as do most people on entering someone else's house. I showed them in to Colin and he made some pleasant remarks. Most people usually pay more attention to Colin than they do to me, and tonight I vowed that things would be different. So I said, "Have a seat everyone. Would you all like some Moselle?"

Joanne kept talking to me all the while as we collected glasses and bottles, put cheese and biscuits on a tray. Joanne is my younger sister, rather canny but in a limited sense. She and Bill work industriously; their minds are constantly fixed on refrigerators, carpets, and ceramic tiles. She is a wonderful housekeeper, whereas I am rather careless, and as she wiped up the countertop she started asking me questions about my life, most personal of subjects. "So why did you lose your job?" she couldn't help asking. "I heard that you did something crazy."

"I didn't do anything crazy as a matter of fact, Joanne. They simply said that I was erratic—but that's better than being a plodder, don't you think?" I said this rather pointedly, looking at her right in her bland, creamy face. "Anyway, I felt caged up."

"But what are you going to do now?"

I took a few quick sips of wine and felt Natalie inside chafing at the bit. "Why don't you stuff some biscuits in your mouth and shut up."

I flounced into the other room, leaving Joanne to carry in the drinks. I hate serving people. The sight that met my eyes was not encouraging, from an excitement point of view. Soon everyone was nibbling and gulping contentedly, Joanne a bit nervously I admit. Her husband kept talking to mine about their former cricket careers.

"Would you like to see our chickens, Bill?" All eyes turned to me with what I fancy was disbelief. "Come on, they're quite interesting once you get to know them." I led my brother-in-law outside, and by the light of a solitary bulb throwing spidery shadows, I pointed out to him all the chickens. This was a little difficult since they were all huddled on a tiered perch in an old aviary that the former owner had built for his canaries. Bill was very good about it since he is a docile creature and will ask polite questions. "I think we should be going off to the restaurant now," he said.

"But I haven't even talked to everyone yet. What do you think of Leslie and Gareth?"

"They seem nice enough."

"Gareth is a psychologist you know."

"Well I don't think I'll ever have need of his services," Bill joked lamely.

"No. I guess you and Joanne are the sanest people I know." I patted him on the head. I think he assumed that I was noticing his receding hairline. Such a grey, windy night, I hated to go back inside, back to all the tame creatures sitting in their chairs. I bent down to pick a carnation, and when I put it behind my ear I could feel it damp and red against my hair.

Inside, Colin was leaning back in his chair and diagnosing the ills of society. Gareth and Leslie were listening politely. I said, "Well, Leslie, isn't my husband an interesting man?" She flushed and smiled and looked hesitantly at Colin. "Colin, isn't Leslie lovely? So smoky and sultry. A beautiful beauty therapist. Do you give massages? Colin has a bad back."

"Only to ladies," she answered.

"What a shame. Shall we go now?"

The restaurant was shabby and crowded, an Italian place with crumbs, stains, and solitary spaghetti strands like worms upon the tablecloth. We poured out some more wine and waited for our meals. Natalie had been very quiet during the car ride, since Colin had criticised her for making disruptive comments. Now everyone was leaning back in a chair and looking around, waiting for the fun to begin I suppose. Joanne was holding Bill's hand and Leslie was beaming and whispering to Gareth.

"So, Gareth, how's the psychology business?"

"Just the usual kind of consulting, Colin, nothing out of the ordinary." He looked bored and subdued, round spectacles over square blue eyes.

"You sound bored," I put in.

"I'm thinking of looking for something else to do."

"You know, I get bored quite often." I looked down at my cutlet, and clanked knife and fork together rather emphatically. Colin began to recount last night's movie in an amusing, compulsive way, getting all the characters' names wrong so that everyone would laught at him.

The room was getting warmer. So many smiling people out for an ordinary Saturday night. Would one perhaps have an ice cream afterwards? Would one have a few more drinks and then trot off to bed?

"Boredom is an interesting topic, don't you think? Gareth for example, looks like he'd be bored by everything except sex—judging from the way Leslie is looking at him. But sex can be the most boring thing of all, don't you agree? Oh, perhaps this is in bad taste. I can see that my sister is giving me disapproving looks. Personally, I get bored with something that doesn't achieve anything in the end; I guess that's an old-fashioned attitude, after all I don't want ten children or anything, and anyway you wouldn't know until months afterward whether you'd achieved anything. Or seduction's a good motive too I think, gives it a little spice." I picked up the bottle of wine nearest to me and twirled it around. "This is terrible wine. I think we should drink only the most exotic beverages." The wine began to pour onto the floor and now I had an audience. How nice. I wish I had been an actress. Colin reached for the bottle of wine. I let it go and it gushed over his shirt. "Oh what an interesting stain it makes. The best designs are serendipity. But blood would have been better. Why are you all so terribly tedious, tedious. Why doesn't anything ever happen? Dance or scream or something. I don't think I belong here. I want to go somewhere where everyone has dark hair like mine and they're impatient and wise and they sleep on the floor and worship the sun and they go out hunting every day . . ."

How could I not notice the pulling and the ushering and the concern. They should be concerned about themselves. I have had enough. I shouldn't have written this down at all, because it doesn't count. From now on I will live in a world where Natalie is Natalie, that is me. The trees bend way over to the ground, and I fall asleep.

PETER LOFTUS

Demonstration

'Now this here,' said the sergeant—
His rabbit's tooth disappeared in a flurry of lower lip
'This 'ere's a bloody dangerous little bastard.'
He poked his cane out at the black gavel of the thing
But only at so much air—
'I don't even like lookin' at it.'
There were one or two muffled sniggers—
The sergeant, a Cornishman, was not noted for jokes—
'I don't mind tellin' yhew!'
He looked down at it solemnly with that incredible lower lip
Looking as though it had designs on his nose.
He suddenly stooped forward, like a camel
'We—approach this little termagant—' he thrust out a shoulder
'Like this.'
Something about his shoulders perhaps, in spite of the lower lip
Made most of the men look down, feeling fidgety.
The sergeant put out two brittle fingers
Bent like a stoop of hay
His cane stuck out behind like a praying mantis' broken leg.
He lifted the hideous black incorrosible thing by the snout
And held it aloft with the rabbit tooth once more in the clear.
'Like so,' he said, smiling all round.
There was a fleck of saliva that had just come to life
On the lunar crown of his teeth.
It fascinated two or three of the men in the front row.
'Whereas everything—' the sergeant seemed to swallow something
With a sudden buckle of his stomach
'You see on this bloody table is dangerous—'
The word echoed from the pitted wall of the stable—
'This little monster—' he gave it an unlovely shake
'Is obscenely dangerous—
You can't even do this with it—'
And in white triumph, the tooth glittering as well
He rapped it smartly on the lip of the table.
Lieutenant Auton, who happened to be going past at the time
Said he saw a man's white leg flying over the stable.
Distinctly.

Custody

At midnight they came again.
When she woke up she heard him floundering
At the bottom of the bed
And when she looked over the white wave of the sheet
She saw his hands spread on the quilt
As if he was trying to protect it from the blue knives of light
That stalked up and down in front of his fingers.
Behind the crown of his head the white water-jug on the dresser
Looked like some smooth-bellied bird dreaming under the mirror.
And then he started to sob.
Whether there were stones bleeding inside his head
Or something coming towards him with his own name on its brow
She had no way of knowing
Because even his words had less use than silence.
She slipped out of the side of the bed
And bent beside him
Knowing that the blue light over her shoulder
The substance he was trying to sweep away from the bedclothes
Was the only friend she would have till morning.

PETER LOFTUS

Return

Outside the orchard drooped in a sky of white feathers
The apples hung like warts.
At the top corner of the window pane
A spider had been blowing silk
In a milky vortex of his own.
There was a pot-plant on either side of the ledge
The one on the right trailing fiery green hair
With little flat buds like confetti.
In the room behind her the ancient bloom of the piano
Seemed to be melting afresh as the sun slithered
From one end of the scale to the other.
A man appeared—with a wheelbarrow—
Its cracked pneumatic tyre bobbed jocularly on the iron-lipped furrows.
A blackbird thrashed suddenly in the dusty bones of the hedge.
At any moment the clock would start booming
In the hollow vestibule where the light washed itself on the floor.
She lifted a hand, and parted the hair above her ear.
She could almost feel the medallion on her breast
Crackling with signals, etched on the window-pane.
The orchard was like a captive land
Where the fingers of each tree were trying to retreat
From their own broken promises.

DIANA KAN

Postcards to Titik

(February-May 1981)

Titik Suwarsih Saban
Age 14
Birthplace: Malang, Indonesia

All summer cars follow the road to the coast.
Nights I listen to them leaving the city
thinking of waves breaking.

At the end of the week
we too arrive here late.
A gale blows
shaking the pine under our feet.
Here the wind and the waves please themselves,
banging and bumping from the east,
the sign on the railings calling our name—
ffrogs . . . ffrogs . . . ffrogs . . .

I lie in bed near the sea
mistaking waves for cars.
I want you to know this house
as we know it.
Behind the sounds everything is so quiet—
I know then I am far from any city.

* * * * *

The house rocks at night.
My mother and mother-in-law are old
yet they sleep like children here,
the wind and the waves inventing their dreams.

* * * * *

We live with wood:
wood walls, wood floors, wood in the ceiling
that creaks in summer when the ground dries hard.
In winter, we settle in again
with the damp eucalypt trees.

In the morning the rain has driven rivers
slowly through the dust on the window pane.
The globules still lie on the glass
slowly melting like snow.

* * * * *

There is an old man lives here
who knows the story of the inlet
from his wife, who also lived here
as a child, on this cliff.

He arrived one day,
two parrot fish and a lemon
in his hand.
He spoke for an hour

about the land, about the sea,
naming every shelf at low tide—
Table Rock, Half Moon Rock . . .
and of his wife's skill with a rod

far out beyond the eagle's nest.
I have not yet learned the taste of parrot fish,
but when I climb the rocks at low tide,
I think of a fisherwoman far out.

* * * * *

In summer we swim.
In winter I write
watching the inlet change.
Even when we wear boots
to cross to the swimming beach
the water fills them.

* * * * *

My son, your brother,
picks a stalk of dried grass and sucks,
looking down into the ocean,
past the red cliffs, past the violet
crumble cliffs. He thinks and thinks,
while I flick a fly off my nose.

That was the same day last summer
he taught me to look into a rock pool
and find the secrets of clenched shells
that remind him of songs he will write one day.

* * * * *

From a cave
insects swarm out protecting their nests.
March flies, in warm air,
settle on legs, on arms, on shoulders.
I jump out of my skin
when my son attacks one suddenly
with his hand. We laugh together.

The undersides of abalone shells
shine at the edges of the water.
On my paper the dull morning
describes to you cliff colours:
ochre, grey, purple, olive, red . . .
Just up there, I say pointing
to our house. You asked where I lived?

* * * * *

This rock I call Henry VIII's armchair
is also mine when I'm here.

* * * * *

My daughter, your sister,
works sitting on the bed.
All morning she speaks to herself
the sums are so hard. Sometimes
she mutters french verbs
far into the night. She shares a poem—
out loud she calls lines, learning them.
Sometimes she is just herself.

* * * * *

Did I tell you about a storm
last spring filling the tanks
so full they flowed over?

Cranes lit up the sky.
Frogs mumbled in the sanctuary.
Afterwards crickets cried for joy,
broke down all through the valley.

And the thirst you get
from the smell of the forest
on the other side of the range!

* * * * *

In March flies gather
after the summer heat.
We watch the sea falling
off a shelf.
A huge grey stone
asks to be carried home.

* * * * *

While I write,
my husband, who was also born in Malang,
keeps the house in order.
Because of Java, he understands
earthquakes, red ants, lizards, spiders, snakes.
Once in a city I heard a 'quake coming
in the night. I froze. He said:
I remember them often at home. So I slept.

* * * * *

It is turning cooler. We sleep early.
When we wake the sun is not yet up.
First to turn on the light,
I shuffle about making tea for my husband.
The lighthouse winks at the children
asleep on their bunks.
There is little furniture here
(we use the floor to write on).
The radio tells me it is half past six.
At seven, I find ants
marching in the cupboards again.
It is a good day for walking.

* * * * *

(May-September 1981)

Today the inlet
is full to the brim
It carries a boat
slowly out of the dunes

The oars creak
& slap the water
coming through
the grass

A child in blue
trails one hand
scooping the sun
in her fingers

Out of the sea
voices rise
spilling over
into the wind

* * * * *

Once I heard
your day began at five
I thought of morning
bird-calls stilling the air
at the well

cold water on your skin
& the smokey dawn
in your clothes
filling your thoughts
with school

with mathematics
& facing your final test
When you've run all your errands
I will be listening
for you

* * * * *

At low tide
Juliet & I
come down from the house

On the beach
the foolish albatross
is grounded again

staging a comic pose
on the shore

turning his proud white beak
three times his grey wings
twice raised in protest

We move closer
We look
for a flight plan
the sky is edgy
waves lap
at his back

Juliet walks on
Dark feathers in her head
break up the light
into tiny wing shapes

flowing The tide turns
under its breath
saying
Fly Fly Fly

* * * * *

I ask my husband
—Do you remember the sawahs—

I jolt his memory
It all comes back
by heart
he knows the sawahs
the dry seasons
the wet seasons
netting the fish
the ducks
he prodded along canals

He pictures
your afternoon sun
bending low
& boys obeying farmers' voices

supple limbs
reflecting in water
children attacking their chores

high pitch
& cheerful
the quacking duck bills
& the slow roll home

* * * * *

Guitar strings strum
so fiercely
through the wall
I can't write today

my son has qualms
about performance

He fingers the same strings
over & over

then stops

—My hands feel supple now—
he announces
glumly

Once
caked in mud
hands black
from the football match

he came home
singing
(his own song RECKLESS)

* * * * *

There is music
in your village
the timbre
of bamboo sounding
in the kampong

When you come weary
to the tune
of pots & pans
there is comfort
in steaming rice
fish
& sweet potato

Afterwards
there is talk
of school
stirring the relatives
as they drink their tea
listening

& when you sleep
there are hands
of old women
weaving ancient songs
of your village
out of cloth
& basket

* * * * *

I thought to place
your picture
on the shelf

where others look out
from their frames
from their younger faces
looking out alone
their voices muffled in wood-smoke

You are there

our lives become
part of you
as a sudden flame
your words take hold

* * * * *

Tonight's winter sound
on the roof
& the slow
insistent chant
of frogs
fill our house
of sleep

On a grass bed
you listen
to the ground talk
in its sleep
in low whispers
calling you to prayer

* * * * *

—The wet season is coming now—
you write
I have your letter in my hand
The wind translates your words into chimes

I imagine clouds
heavy over your own mountains
your slim body
caught in a rain-soaked dress

the spell
& aroma of palm thatch
coming true
you write me into your sky
with thanks

* * * * *

In September, World Vision (Indonesia) sadly informed us that Titik and her family transferred to another project.

BILL DUNSTONE

Four New Plays

Historically, local theatre has comprised a strong component in the annual Festival of Perth. This year's Festival (February-March 1982) has been conspicuous for the performance of four new plays by local writers. The concurrence of so many new plays in one festival may have been fortuitous. Nevertheless it could equally lead to the speculation that the presence of so many international playwrights, artists and theatre companies at recent festivals has actually affirmed the place of local playwrights rather than eclipsed them. This may be wishful thinking. Two of these new plays have, however, already aroused interest elsewhere. Mary Gage's play in one act, *My Name is Pablo Picasso*, had a successful run with its original cast on the fringe of this year's Adelaide Festival, and Dorothy Hewett's *The Fields of Heaven* is to be produced at the Sydney Opera House Drama Theatre next year.

Dorothy Hewett's play, Jack Davis's *Dreamers* and Roger Montgomery's *Moondyne Joe* deal variously with periods when Western Australian life has been marked by cultural transitions and conflicts, such as have been brought on by transportation, or immigration, or the impinging of Europeans upon aboriginal traditions and culture. Mary Gage's play belongs in another context. It deals in a more generalized way with popular ideas about the impact which fame has on artists.

The Fields of Heaven, produced at the Playhouse by Rodney Fisher, marks some important developments in Dorothy Hewett's work. The play has a broad narrative sweep and an episodic structure reminiscent of *The Chapel Perilous.* But the narrative of this new play is more inclusive, in that it carries forward several interlocking stories over three generations. In so doing, it balances the central roles of Louisa Barrow and Rome Bodera, the Italian immigrant, with some other strongly drawn figures. The dramatist has also extended her characteristic exploration of the romantic temperament. The imperatives of the ego in romantic love are now paralleled by desires to possess the land—to exploit it or redeem it according to temperament. The ambitious, idealistic, wilful passions which Louisa and Rome feel for one another are reflected in their conflict over Marvell Locke, the Barrow family's farm, from which each seeks to exclude the other. This clash of similar temperaments is also a conflict of values which goes to the heart of the Jarrahbin community, the imaginary West Australian rural setting of the play. The reconciliation towards which these egotistical lovers move through mature accommodation of each other, is perhaps the most important new direction in Dorothy Hewett's latest play.

Dorothy Hewett has said that her play is 'epic' in its sense of figures in a landscape (an aspect which Rodney Fisher's direction at the Playhouse brought out in some powerful stage pictures). The concept of "space" seems to be an important aspect of this epic quality—not only of the spaces of land, but of the inner "spaces" of the psyche, which manifest themselves in spiritual hunger, ambition and aspiration. The life-long love affair between Louisa and Rome can be seen as a process in which two possessive and recalcitrant spirits come to allow each other 'space'. And the theme of regeneration through the generations gives a chronological dimension to this metaphor. Louisa's mother and quixotic father, settlers of gentle and civilized disposition, are spiritually isolated from each other and from their cultural roots. Louisa's purposeful energy, her iconoclasm and her intense love of the land are the right combination of idealism and pragmatism to redeem the ineffectual sentimentality of her parents and, symbolically, to restore Marvell Locke.

There could, by the way, be material for a future play in this theme of generations. Both Louisa and her mother are painters, and the play hints through this metaphor of painting at the links between erotic passion and art. By temperament, Louisa, whose paintings are defiantly erotic, sees art as continuous with life, inspired directly from passion. Her mother's paintings of languid women reading love letters are sentimental in so far as they are at a remove from both of these struggles.

The Fields of Heaven has something to say of national cultural importance, helping to define and embody the experiences of a particular group of Australians and Italian immigrants at a particular point in our history. The play takes an ironic look at various forms of heroism, showing some of the paradoxes in the romantic spirit: it recognises heroic capabilities in humble guises and shows some of the compromises that strong spirits are forced to make. *The Fields of Heaven* recreates and takes the measure of some of our important cultural myths about the land, and it does so within an epic, poetic structure that celebrates and defines the limits of individuality.

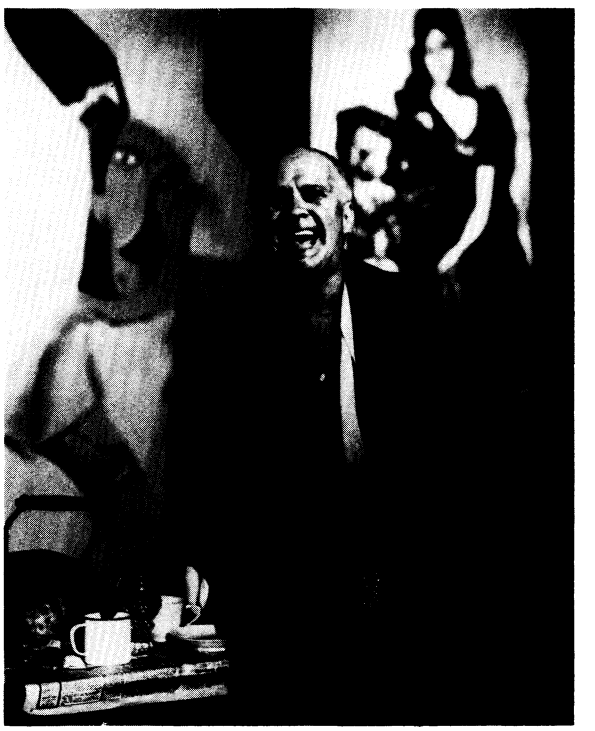
Jack Davis's *The Dreamers*, performed by the new Swan River Stage Company at the Dolphin Theatre, gives the impression that it speaks from direct experience. The play gives a naturalistic account of how each member of an urban aboriginal family copes with his or her indeterminate position in the predominantly white society of Perth. Cultural extremes are kept neatly apart in the play, so that it makes its points without rancour and without recourse to ideology. Aboriginal dances, embodying the ancient 'dreams', are interspersed between contemporary 'slice of life' scenes involving meals, visits to pubs and the arrival of Social Security cheques. The sense of cultural transition is invested in the dialogue, which is at times an unstable mixture of Nyoongah and English. There is a wonderful moment, which crystallises the way in which language embodies values, when the ageing Worru explains the derivation of Mahngh, meaning 'tea', and his granddaughter scribbles the information into her school 'project'—on, of all things, aborigines. *The Dreamers* is not tightly constructed, and doesn't have the narrative thread of Davis's earlier play *Kullark*. But it gives a full sense of the shared experience of its characters and their far-flung extended family. Its title is especially evocative of the complex situation of its characters, most of whom are caught up in the minute details of daily existence. Old Worru, near death, is the most potent dreamer and link with tribal life. His dreams are as real as any actual experience, and his repeated intention to visit the Bolia man, or aboriginal healer, at Pinjarra has a touch of Chekhovian complexity about it.

Fields of Heaven L to R: Lex Marinos as Rome Bodera, Joan Sydney as Ruth Bodera, James Beattie as A B Walsh, Geoff Gibbs as Tom Barrow, Maggie King as Bett Cole. Playhouse Theatre, Perth

Moondyne Joe Rod Hall (above) as Mr Martin and Peter Morris (below) as The Crown Prosecutor
Regal Theatre, Subiaco

The Dreamers by Jack Davis Jack Davis as Worru, Lynette Narkle as Dolly
The Swan River Stage Company at the Dolphin Theatre, University of W.A.

My name is Pablo Picasso
Glenn Hitchcock as the younger Picasso and
Michelle Marzo as Fernande
Hole in the Wall Theatre, Leederville



My name is Pablo Picasso
Edgar Metcalf as Picasso

The third of these plays on specifically Western Australian subjects is *Moondyne Joe*. This is a hybrid of 'goonish' rough theatre and excellent folk songs all devised by Roger Montgomery for performance by five actors and the Mucky Duck Bush Band. The programme was mounted by Mason Miller in association with Interstar at the Regal Theatre—a suitably off-beat venue for a zany occasion with wide appeal. The script doesn't make much impact in isolation from the fifteen or so songs, for which it provides a light framework of narrative and clowning. It is really a series of scenarios which rely considerably on the ingenuity and inventiveness of the actors, but the script nonetheless redeems itself by sending up its own conventions at every opportunity. The ostensible subject, Western Australia's best-known (and only?) bushranger, might more aptly have become known for the sense of comedy which he showed in his numerous escapes from custody. The show makes the most of Joe's career of escapes to drub the colonial establishment and, by extension, today's. Its humour is essentially on the side of the "little man", epitomised by Joe, the gentle humorist who spent his time on the wrong side of the pompous law, and ended his career by escaping several times from the Mount Eliza Old Men's Home. The play gently deflates Joe as nominal hero. Indeed more than one person has observed with amusement that at times the hero looks engagingly as if he has wandered onto the wrong stage, so eccentric is the play. *Moondyne Joe* is a piece for performers. It makes its points rapidly, often by theatrical "sleight of hand", and seems to eddy rather than move forward. The songs written especially for the show are themselves a valuable piece of 'Westraliana'. *Moondyne Joe* has proved to be a very popular theatrical curiosity, and is due for a revival.

Mary Gage's *My Name is Pablo Picasso* was given a late-night season at the Hole in the Wall, in tandem with *Cloud Nine*. Though it was one of the popular successes of the Festival, *My Name is Pablo Picasso* is really an interesting play in the making. It is a schematically neat piece of commercial theatre which perhaps doesn't explore its material as fully as it might. The play is just as populist and eclectic in its material and techniques as *Moondyne Joe*, but it takes itself seriously and so invites some comment on itself as a play of ideas. The main proposition which the play offers is that fame corrupts the artist. It makes this point very generally in a narrative which, despite its double time scheme, is quite simple and direct. Picasso, in love with Fernande at the age of 26, is confronted with an older figure, who turns out to be Picasso at the end of his life, bitterly missing his last lover. The older man's account of the younger man's future is supported by what are really journalistic references to slides of Picasso's paintings projected at the back of the stage: the slides allude to Picasso's various loves and to major historical events such as the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War.

Mary Gage makes her point simply and directly. The play leaves an audience with the impression that it has learned something about Picasso's paintings. The dramatist also carries off something of a theatrical conjuring trick. The play exposes Picasso as a genius whose perspectives on art and life cut across our contemporary Philistine values, but at the same time presents him as an ordinary mortal capable, like any of us, of feeling old, lonely and broken-hearted. The play seems to catch itself out there.

My Name is Pablo Picasso is promising material. One can imagine, for instance, some exploration of the psychic relations between the two "Picasso" figures. The play's nexus of art, passion and money also points to areas which Dorothy Hewett's play develops more substantially. Most interestingly, the play could be worked up into a piece of 'meta' theatre, commenting implicitly on its own relation as art to the market-place.

DETAILS OF PLAYS

The Fields of Heaven by Dorothy Hewett.
First presented at the Playhouse,
10 February 1982.
Directed by Rodney Fisher.

Moondyne Joe by Robert Montgomery.
First presented by Mason-Miller in association with Interstar
at the Regal Theatre on 23 February 1982.
Directed by Raymond Omodei.

The Dreamers by Jack Davis.
First presented by The Swan River Stage Company
at the Dolphin Theatre on 6 February 1982.
Directed by Andrew Ross.

My Name is Pablo Picasso by Mary Gage.
First presented at the Hole in the Wall
on 11 February 1982.
Directed by Ken Campbell-Dobie.

G. C. BOLTON

Sir Charles

(I) The Rising Politician*

Sir Charles Court's biography has never been written. In this age of the instant journalistic life-story most Australian politicians have seen their careers summed up between hard covers: Fraser, Hayden, Peacock, no fewer than three on Bob Hawke, Bjelke-Petersen, Dunstan ... the list seems endless. Gough Whitlam and Sir Gordon Chalk have attracted detailed studies by academics. The reasons for Court's neglect provoke conjecture, since Sir Charles while premier possessed a sufficient appreciation of publicity and is known not to have been hostile in principle to the idea. Of course some would contend that it is impossible to write the life of a contemporary because complete evidence is unavailable and in any case further insights into character and motivation may be provided with old age. Consider how no biographer of H. C. Coombs ten years ago could have given adequate weight to his persistence in the cause of Aboriginal justice, or how no assessment of Sir Robert Menzies would be complete without his unguarded comments on men and issues during his stricken last years. For Court such an argument is less easily sustained. On present indications he seems a less likely personality to provide many surprises in old age: a public life on which judgments may be made on the public record. It says something about Western Australia as a community that no biographer has attempted to make these judgments.

This could simply reflect the old Western Australian horror of contention. In a small community you withhold the wounding epithet from one who is after all a Western Australian and a neighbour. Even those who have been most exasperated by Court's policies respect his sturdy local patriotism, his dedication and hard work, his sense of personal decorum. But there could be another and less agreeable explanation. In a community where the publication of history has benefited so greatly from State government subsidies, especially during Court's term as premier, it is possible that historians have judged it prudent to avoid embarking on projects which might even inadvertently give offence. After all, there are powerful elements in the State Liberal party who lack tolerance of interpretations of the recent past which fail to glorify sufficiently the achievements of the Brand and Court governments. Even so mild a judgment as the comment that the success of those ministries owed something to good fortune has been strongly criticised by such party heavyweights as Ian Warner and W. W. Mitchell. Court's

* This is the first of two articles on Sir Charles Court, who retired from the position of Premier of Western Australia on 25 January 1982.

own reactions to troublemakers such as Bruce Davidson and Dorothy Hewett may have contributed to this attitude of mind. It is certainly the case that access to contentious government archives has become less easy in recent years. None of this may add up to a conscious effort to control the present by controlling the past. Taken as a whole, however, it may lead to a certain canniness in writers in their selection of subject matter.

What follows in this article is based entirely on the easily accessible public record and owes nothing to archival research or private information.

Charles Walter Michael Court, the elder son of Walter and Rose Court, was born at Crawley in Sussex, England, on 29 September 1911, the festival of Michael the Archangel. Traditionally Michael is the leader of the heavenly host in the great battle against the devil and his angels. It is not usual in Anglican and Protestant families to name a child for the patron saint of his or her birthday, but it was an apt choice for one whose political style has at times suggested a fighter in a good cause pitted against desperate and unscrupulous adversaries, with no quarter given or expected. Before Charles Court was a year old his parents joined the outpouring of British migration prior to World War I, arriving in Western Australia during the great expansion of the wheatbelt. Walter Court did not go on the land. He found employment as a plumber, and with his wife and two sons lived in respectable artisans' suburbs, first at Leederville, then in a better house on the border of Shenton Park and Hollywood.

The Courts were in no sense privileged, but they tried like so many of their generation to improve themselves and their family's opportunities. Many children from such a background found their way to Perth Modern School and the University of Western Australia; the high road to the middle-class professions. For those who missed out—as Charles Court did—there was a recognised second chance. One studied for qualifications in accountancy, usually part-time. This required diligence and concentration, and these qualities Court surely had. Hard work did not preclude an interest in soccer, nor an enthusiasm for band music which persisted into later years, but it must have been in those years of studying for accountancy that Court trained himself in his formidably systematic working habits.

He chose to set up under his own shingle in 1933. There could have been few more discouraging times for a young man without influential connexions. The 1930s depression was only just past its peak, and its aftermath would linger for the rest of the decade. The experience of those years must have confirmed Court's faith in hard work and abstemious personal habits. He began to prosper and in 1938 entered into partnership with the firm of Hendry, Rae, and Court. Two years earlier he married Rita Steffanoni and they moved into a solid new house at 46 Waratah Avenue in what was then the developing suburb of Dalkeith. It says something of the Courts that they have remained in the same house ever since, instead of moving upmarket to Jutland Parade or Peppermint Grove as so many of his contemporaries did. It says something of Western Australia as a community that it has never been thought necessary to build a fence or wall in front of the house.

To this point Court's career epitomised the fulfilment of the migrant dream. His parents came to Western Australia too late to qualify as pioneers or to share the gold-rush boom of the 1890s, but they in common with many saw Western Australia as a land of opportunities denied them in old England. Ironically, by staying in metropolitan Perth they probably afforded their children better opportunities than if they had heeded the fashionable rhetoric of the time and gone on the land. Nevertheless Charles Court grew up in schools which taught that Western Australia's finest achievement was the development of great primary

industries, and Western Australia's greatest son was John Forrest who rose from modest beginnings to become a peer of the realm and whose fame was founded on his capacity to take big chances in the cause of economic development. Not big risks; Forrest's sagacious judgment owed little to intuition or intellectual brilliance, it seemed, and much to a thoroughly well informed and well prepared knowledge of his community, supported by the choice of able advisers. Such was the model of statesmanship against whom later Western Australian politicians tended to measure themselves.

Before concluding that Forrest directly provided a model for Court it should be remembered that in the years when Court was coming to maturity the standard-bearer of the Forrest tradition was a more limited statesman, Sir James Mitchell, in whose hands the developmental myth became a little tarnished. Mitchell's over-optimistic expansion of the wheatbelt and the South-West resulted for many in hardship and failure, and may be one of the explanations for the run of Labor governments for all but three years between 1924 and 1947. It has even been asserted that Court's own family were Labor supporters, though such assertions must be guesswork; voters fifty years ago took the secret ballot seriously and were often extremely close-mouthed about their choice. But in any case the Labor leaders in Western Australia at that period—Collier, Willcock, and their colleagues—shared the prevalent faith in economic development. They pitched their appeal to the voters not on socialist principles but on a reputation for managerial competence. As Ralph Pervan has shown, cabinet ruled caucus ruthlessly and effectively, and premiers tended to rule their cabinets. It would be easy to argue that some of Court's masterful style of leadership found a precedent in the Labor governments of the 1920s and the 1930s.

Perhaps it would be even more to the point to look at the influence of the Second World War on Court's ideas of leadership. He had what is commonly known as 'a good war'. He enlisted early as a private and ended as a lieutenant-colonel, an assistant quartermaster-general, an officer of the Order of the British Empire. Clearly his administrative skills were exercised to good effect. The military model of exercising power must also have impressed him. In the armed services you are either one of those who are led, in which case your duty calls you to fulfil the commands of your leader to the best of your ability; or else you are the leader carrying responsibility for planning the strategy which will secure victory over the enemy. Your role is clearly defined, and good discipline depends in part on an unquestioning acceptance of that role. For Court, who emerged from the war a keen participant in the Returned Services League and who in later life has shown every indication of enjoying his contacts with the armed services as an honorary colonel, a military pattern of command and obedience duly fitted his temperament.

There are of course other ways of exercising leadership in politics. Some gain ascendancy through their skill in anticipating trends in the political weather and persuading their party and the public at large to welcome the coming changes; Menzies owed much of his success in federal politics to his skill in accommodating to new challenges. One of the commonest styles of leadership—it may well be the idiom of Mr Ray O'Connor—sees the role as calling for a reconciler and broker securing consensus from among a host of competing demands. A variant of this style was practised by Forrest, who while gathering up ideas from many and varied sources and welding them into an acceptable consensus had the knack of looking and behaving like an autocrat, thus disguising the essential flexibility and pragmatism of his politics. But there are also leaders who wish to appear strong by taking all the decisions themselves, sometimes simply to demonstrate their access to power but in other cases because there are ideas and policies which they

wish to carry into effect. Court fell into the last category. He enjoyed the exercise of power because of what it enabled him to initiate.

Although Court was a committed advocate of a free enterprise economy, free enterprise as it is understood in Western Australian politics does not involve the complete abdication of government intervention in the economy. On the contrary the State since Forrest's time has exercised a controlling role in determining the pattern of investment and entrepreneurship in Western Australia. The State takes initiatives in locating sources of overseas capital, determining priorities among potential fields of development, and attempting to secure a balanced and orderly pattern of resource exploitation. The State in the past has provided railways, harbour works, and amenities calculated to encourage industry. The State controls land and mining policies, and insists on determining the land rights of pastoral lessees, Aborigines, and other groups whose interests might be affected by developmental activities; there is no scope for direct negotiation between such parties and the investor whose developmental enterprise impinges on them. In the past conservatives have objected to State intervention, just as Lang Hancock continues to protest. But all Western Australia's most significant premiers—Forrest, Mitchell, Collier, and now Court—have seen the State as an essential instrument for manipulating and strengthening the Western Australian economy. At most times in Western Australian history the control and management of the State's economy has been a more exciting and challenging task than anything offering in the private sector, particularly while Perth has been for so long a branch office town. (It remains to be seen whether the advent of the multinationals will do anything to divert ambitious people with business capacity from the public to the private sector.)

It was not obvious when Court returned to civilian life at the beginning of 1946 that his future lay in politics. No doubt political life looked more attractive after the newly formed Liberal party showed that it could win a State election in 1947 and repeated the feat in 1950. But when in 1950 the Liberals decided to replace the 86-year-old MLA for Nedlands, Sir Norbert Keenan, their candidate was an accountant of greater seniority than Court, C. P. (now Sir Cyril) Bird. Keenan refused to go quietly and renominated without endorsement, and an enterprising young independent Liberal, David Grayden (brother of W. L. Grayden) threw his hat into the ring. Grayden defeated Bird on Keenan's preferences. During his three years in parliament he failed to reconcile himself with the Liberal party machine, who in 1953 nominated not one but two candidates to stand against the interloper. In such a safe Liberal seat as Nedlands this might have seemed an enlightened way of giving the final choice of representative to the voters at large rather than a preselection committee; but Court has since gone on record as disliking the practice because it suggests an inability in the party to make up its mind. At the time he accepted nomination as one of the pair without public complaint.

The campaign was lively. At one stage two impoverished postgraduates who both later became professors of history were given a fee by the other endorsed Liberal to search the files of the Registrar of Companies for evidence of Grayden's investments. Needing the money and seizing the chance of compiling some useful research information of their own on the side the two young men searched conscientiously, but the information was not used. Court conducted a more orthodox campaign, in which his skill at publicity took a characteristic twist when a brass band was hired for the launching of his candidature at the University Hockey Ground. (Television in Western Australia was still nine years off.) He performed well and defeated Grayden convincingly. But he was the only new Liberal to enter

parliament at the 1953 elections, because in the State at large the Liberal-Country party coalition was toppled by the ALP under A. R. G. Hawke.

Court's subsequent rise may have been helped by this setback to his party. The Liberals in the Legislative Assembly were mainly older men in their late fifties and sixties. Those defeated in 1953 were younger men such as Arthur Griffith. Consequently the only contemporary of Court's of any stature was David Brand, the deputy-leader. Brand had already come a long way in politics. As minister for works and protegé of Sir Russel Dumas he was associated with the recent establishment of the Kwinana industrial complex, a much acclaimed breakthrough in the State's economic development. Standing in the rural tradition of Forrest, Newton Moore, Mitchell, and McLarty he looked a likely premier. But as Perth grew there would be an increasing case for senior metropolitan representation on the front bench to balance the rural element; and as early as 1954, one year after his parliamentary debut, Court was being forecast as deputy-leader under Brand when the current leader, Sir Ross McLarty, retired.

Court's first six years in parliament were spent in opposition, from 1953 to 1959. This was a more useful apprenticeship than if he had gone early into cabinet; it taught him to feel for the nuances and procedures of the legislature which might otherwise not have come easily to a man whose talents were managerial rather than diplomatic. There is some evidence that in those early years he was a shy but resolute speaker; the confidence of his style as premier was hardly won. Unusual among the pragmatic homegrown politicans of his time, he took a keen interest in the first principles on which the Liberalism of the 1950s were based, and more than once treated the Assembly to thoughtful discourses on political philosophy. (However *Hansard* notes that during one such speech in 1955 the Speaker felt obliged to reprove the House for loud conversation on the back benches. It was a pity, as the speech reads quite well.) From these statements there emerges a remarkably consistent portrait of Court's thought. He was an interesting mixture of adaptability and reaction: adaptability in his intelligent and imaginative efforts to keep abreast of technological, educational, and economic change; reaction in that he presented a perfect and inflexible example of the Protestant work ethic in its purest form.

First, the adaptability. Perhaps more than any of his parliamentary colleagues he showed awareness of the great postwar changes in the industrial and political world. He teased the old radicals of Labor with having become reactionaries, mouthing yesterday's answers to yesterday's problems. He praised free enterprise as an invigorating force ensuring economic growth. In the Western Australian context this meant creating conditions which would encourage the inflow of investment from as many different sources as possible. It was already a hallmark of his approach that he was prepared to bestow rights of exploitation of natural resources on outside investors at generous terms provided—and this was a crucial proviso—that they committed themselves to expenditure on capital works of longterm potential. Almost his first interventions in State parliament were questions about the availability of American capital. He was also fully alive to the importance of the manpower factor, and more than once urged the training of graduates for executive positions in business and commerce. Compared to the somewhat hesitant and piecemeal approach of front-benchers both in his own party and in the Labor government, Court presented an attractive picture of dynamism reinforced by careful thought.

But there was also the unreconstructed Protestant. He viewed work as a great good in its own right. He sounded genuinely puzzled at the insistence of trade unions on shorter hours and more leisure; how would people use their spare time except on bets and beer? (One suspects that he didn't entirely agree with the easy-

going political leaders of the time, McLarty who was never happy unless he could spend his weekends at Pinjarra and Hawke who was equally tenacious of his Saturdays and Sundays.) He feared that the welfare state could sap initiative; it was 'taking from the diligent and thrifty so that the lazy and spendthrift can take things easily'. Accordingly, he opposed the adult franchise in local government because it favoured the undeserving who had not accumulated property, and might make it easy for militants to sway local expenditure. Militants tended to gain influence when citizens were not working hard, and he worried about them, just as he worried about the possibility of communists graduating from the Teachers Training College and subverting the young. It was as if the remote and the unfamiliar could not be trusted. Perhaps a similar feeling gave an edge to his mistrust of Commonwealth intervention in the economic sphere. Better, he thought, to leave the responsibility to the States, even if it meant taking back the unpopular exercise of the right of income tax.

It remained to be seen whether Court in his career could balance this tension between the rational and creatively intelligent entrepreneur and the wary provincial who did not quite know what forces might unravel society if men ceased to be committed to the work ethic. In 1957 he became deputy leader of his party. In 1959, aided by the Democratic Labour Party and the intransigence of Mr F. E. Chamberlain, the Liberal-Country party coalition recovered power from Labor. Court became minister for industrial development and for the North-West. He addressed the opportunity with relish. It would be his role to transform the Western Australian dream of improvement and development from its rural simplicities to a more complex and sophisticated modernity. It would be less easy to sustain material gain without loss of innocence.

KIRPAL SINGH

Malaysian Exile in Australia: Ee Tiang Hong

Ee Tiang Hong is probably the finest Malaysian poet writing in English today. He was born in Malacca (then part of the British-ruled Straits Settlements) in 1933 and began writing his first poems while still in school. His work was recognised and published when he attended the University of Malaya (then in Singapore) from 1951-1956. Since then, Ee has had three volumes of his verse published: *I of the Many Faces* (1960), *Lines Written in Hawaii* (1973) and *Myths for a Wilderness* (1976). His work has appeared in literary magazines around the world and has been praised by critics within and outside Malaysia. Together with Edwin Thumboo, Wang Gung-Wu and Wong Phui Nam, Ee helped to give a direction to literature written in English in the Singapore-Malaysia region. Today his work is studied in schools and universities in Singapore and Malaysia as well as in foreign universities where courses in Commonwealth Literature are offered. In 1975 Ee left Malaysia to become a lecturer at the Nedlands College of Advanced Education (now the W.A. College of Education). He participated in Writers' Week held in conjunction with the Adelaide Festival of Arts in 1978. He became an Australian citizen in 1979.

Kirpal Singh, Singapore poet and critic, met Ee while on a research trip to Western Australia recently. The result of the meeting was a two-hour interview which ranged over many subjects. Extracts from this interview are published below.

* * *

KS: Perhaps we could begin by discussing how and when you first came to write poetry.

ETH: Well, I first started writing poetry seriously when I was in the University of Malaya—I had done a lot of writing in school but I do not think it was very good. I began quite incidentally, through the encouragement of my teachers (one Mr Williamson in particular) and the exposure to English literature certainly had a lot to do with it.

KS: When you say that you started writing poems at the university, you mean actually publishing them?

ETH: Yes, writing and getting my work published.

KS: Where did this confidence come from? Did you receive help from your contemporaries?

ETH: Quite a lot from friends. There was one Patrick Anderson who had quite a following, and younger people like Wang Gung-Wu and James Loh encouraged me to keep on writing and publishing. They even suggested changes to pieces of work I showed them.

KS: Was it exciting to be at university in the early 1950s?

ETH: Yes, couldn't have been more exciting. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive . . ."

KS: And to be young . . .

ETH: Wordsworth *was* an important influence.

KS: You must have been working out your attitudes towards poetry, the role of the writer in society then. Given the political under-currents of the period—the nationalistic ideals and so on—you must have been compelled to think about these issues.

ETH: Yes. But my interest in politics then was mainly as an observer. Again, even up to now, my interest in politics has been less in politics as a discipline than in the behaviour of politicians, politics as an art, how it works in one's day-to-day life and how it bears on one as an individual, as a member of the state, as a member of society. I was not committed to any political point of view in the partisan sense—it was just an interest and concern with political developments. There were others in my midst who were active and expressed nationalistic sentiments through their writing.

KS: But, surely, you must have thought about the part played by creative writing in terms of national outlook or national identity?

ETH: Right, though I didn't look at it that way. I had not thought about politics, say, as a tool for one's nationalistic ideas, but with regard to English, I had always taken it for granted that even after Independence, English would remain a vital language in Singapore and Malaysia. I sensed, of course, that its role would change, but did not feel that anyone would question whether one ought to continue writing in English. One writes in the language one is most confident in.

KS: Perhaps this is the time to ask about your family background. You are a baba Chinese, aren't you, a perankan?

ETH: Yes. I am what you would call a Straits-born Chinese. I was born in Malacca. The babas are a unique fusion of Chinese-Malay life-styles. We have been in Malaya for so long that we could, really, be called people-of-the-land. We are a very relaxed and accommodating culture and very Malayan. We feel for our country. I've never felt any doubt about the validity of other cultures and there was not, as far as I can remember, any time when I felt there was any real difference between, say, the Chinese-Malaysian and Indian-Malaysian and Malay-Malaysian and Indonesian-Malaysian—there were just Malayans. It is unfortunate that in the last few years one became more and more aware that one was a member of a particular ethnic group.

KS: Was this due to a changing political situation?

ETH: Yes, I think you finally have to say that political changes brought about a fragmentation in consciousness.

KS: In the sense that these created tensions at various levels?

ETH: Yes.

KS: Did it ever occur to you to write in Malay? Why have you been writing in English all the time?

ETH: I would imagine that if there had been encouragement from—well, whatever source encouragement comes from—for people to write in Malay, then I would have tried my hand at writing in Malay. But there wasn't.

KS: Wasn't there a stress placed on the study of Malay in schools then?

ETH: Hardly. Remember I was in school while we were still under the English in colonial Malaya. And Malay was a subject one turned to as a last resort if one didn't want to do Latin or French. It was only after I had started work that Malay came to be stressed.

KS: Very few people in those early days knew English, so you presumably wrote for a select group.

ETH: My background bears heavily here. I was born, as I said before, in Malacca, and in Malacca almost everyone I knew spoke English or some English patois. My horizons were limited to Malacca, then, I suppose, and English was a pervasive influence in that part of Malaya. I think the realisation that by using English one could reach a wider audience only came later.

KS: When did you conceive of a wider audience, an international audience?

ETH: Probably after I had written *I of the Many Faces*, a collection of the poems I had been writing in the fifties, published in Kuala Lumpur in 1962. It was then that I started to sit back and as it were, think who I was writing for and who I should be writing for. Also, as one's work begins to get published I suppose, one gains confidence and thinks of an audience further than one's own country. It became obvious that to reach an international audience English was a very suitable language.

KS: If I may press this language question a little further. Did it ever bother you that you were writing in an acquired language, a language which was not inherently your own? A number of Malaysian writers today feel that way: I'm told that some such consciousness informs the work of people like Phui Nam and Haji Salleh, who are increasingly turning to write in Malay rather than English. Malay is the language of Malaya.

ETH: I've never really felt the language problem in the same way that perhaps other poets or even other men of parliament, people prominent in public life, feel about language and culture generally. One of the things that kept me going, I think, was the feeling that we are moving into the world. Every country in the world is moving towards a culture that is becoming more and more cosmopolitan and more and more international. English, then, was an obvious choice. I grant that, under certain conditions, one ought to write in one's mother-tongue. In my case, my mother-tongue was Malay, but it wasn't a language in which I thought of serious matters. When it comes to thinking beyond the everyday, prosaic, hum-drum activities it's always English that I use. I think in English, I feel in English and so it would seem logical and the most rational thing that I wrote in English. The influence of the West in Malaysia, I think, has been more profound than most people have allowed.

KS: I read with great interest your essay on the role of the poet which you published in *Focus* in 1971. Am I right in assuming that your main point there is that the poet must not pour out personal frustrations that bear no relationship to the audience at large, and yet he should not allow the values, attitudes and mores of his immediate environment to compromise his own integrity?

ETH: I saw the crux of the matter mainly in the kind of commitment that the poet should be making and the point that I was trying to make in the article was that a poet should, first of all, be committed to his art. But this does not go far enough because there are a lot of things that must go into his art, like his family background, his upbringing and his education. I was also trying to distinguish between commitment to oneself and commitment to one's art. There are things like artistic integrity and intellectual integrity. It would be a very insensitive poet who, living in a time of tremendous changes, of political and social ferment, is not aware of all these things. And yet the poet's involvement with these does not amount to commitment to any partisan view.

KS: Throughout most of your work there runs a strain of common humanity, a compassion for ordinary people, and yet to an outsider at least, you came from an élitist educational background and belong to the élite of society in Malaysia. How do you reconcile in your mind this élitist orientation with the position of the masses—those who occupy the lower strata of the social pyramid?

ETH: The fact that we occupied élitist positions—the fact that going through the educational system we did meant getting the best jobs in the country—well, these were conditions beyond my control and one made the best use of opportunities open then. But having reached a certain top position one can still maintain one's humanity and be concerned about the plight of other people who have been less fortunate. Put cynically, one aspect of human nature seems to be that, having reached a position of power, many deny others access to the same position. And yet there is another way of looking at things. Having reached a certain position one can stretch out a hand and try to help those who have not had the opportunity to be as lucky, so that they too can join your ranks. This I like to see as a natural thing. One of my concerns in my poetry is this common humanity. I am cynical of people who are merely opportunistic and irresponsible.

KS: Much of your poetry is moralistic. How do you relate this concern with moral rightness and wrongness, with the kind of poetry currently being written in the West? Western critics often insist that morality should not enter into poetry.

ETH: I read Western poetry mainly to get to know what other people are doing elsewhere. I analyse their techniques, but I am not overwhelmed by the ideas in the work; in any case I have to look to my home situation and seek inspiration from the things I see around me and most of the things I see around me contain moral implications. I sometimes suspect that I am a fool and when you extend foolishness to politics it means you would naturally feel very indignant at the behaviour, say, of many politicians. Being a member of Parliament, a councillor, member of State and Federal Assemblies, a member of privileged circles like the Rotary Club got you to garden parties, best seats to theatres and invitations to public performances and things like that. This was what politics was about in the colonial days.

KS: Have you written any purely personal poems?

ETH: Yes, when I was in Hawaii I wrote a lot of personal poems. I still do not know what exactly triggered them off. Maybe it was distance, being away from Malaysia and Singapore and so divorced from the preoccupations of Malaysians and Singaporeans. But in Hawaii I began to look inside me, at my feelings. The poems that resulted were compiled in the volume *Lines Written in Hawaii.*

KS: These poems have not been circulated widely, have they?

ETH: No. Only 200 copies of the volume were published.

KS: Why?

ETH: I like the poems but I tend to be very self-conscious about them. They were, for the most part, love poems.

KS: Was this out of some personal love involvement?

ETH: Ah, well. We must distinguish between art and life. One looks at life, on life, but what comes out in one's art is much more than the original inspiration. One selects, one highlights certain things, certain experiences, certain emotions.

KS: When you say art and life are different are you trying to tell your readers not to relate your life to your poetry?

ETH: Yes, in a way, because you can never satisfactorily relate the fiction to the fact.

KS: Do you revise your poems extensively before publishing?

ETH: Yes, quite often. I tend to write best when I'm most relaxed and at ease with myself and the environment. I often jot down a phrase, a few lines or even a whole poem and return to this later and prune it, refining it. The whole thing requires a lot of discipline. There is also sacrifice and compromise. The demands of the form itself.

KS: To what extent are image, metaphor and symbol intuitive things for you and to what extent are they something imposed from the outside?

ETH: One turns to whatever resources are available. There are those around you, that you *see*. There are others that come to you from reading, from past experiences and so on. There are a number of poems that I've written—and people have commented on this—that have not relied on say, a central image or an over-riding metaphor. The whole business is too complex. The usual devices—irony, ambiguity, syntax, diction—these are important too.

KS: Especially irony. I notice that your poetry contains a good deal of ambiguity with a tinge of cynicism and satire.

ETH: You are thinking of the political poems, right?

KS: Or even those with just a social content, like 'Sunday' or 'Mr. Tan Muses'.

ETH: Yes, because underlying it all, as I see it, is the dichotomy, this hiatus between what is professed and what is acted on. There's always the gap between ideals and practice and this is what makes for all the problems in society.

KS: This is more your basic, philosophic stance in life? This conflict that you find so rife, between what is and what ought to be?

ETH: Yes, and morality comes in too, you move towards an ethical position.

KS: Would you say that for you writing is not merely a translation of experience into words, but also a striving towards a more complete picture of reality, a striving towards perfection, as it were?

ETH: Right, or perhaps a striving towards a more humane society, a society in which there are things like decency, where people are humane, less ruthless, less exploited, less opportunistic, in which we can co-operate as much as we compete, in which we try to help people, try to relate to people as people.

KS: And do away with barriers of race, language, religion?

ETH: Precisely.

KS: How do you feel about criticism of your work? Are you happy with it, with the reception your poems have received? Or do you find people miss what you are trying to get at?

ETH: Generally I find that critics have been very generous towards my poems, barring the one or two critics (and they shall remain nameless) who, not directing their comments specifically to my poems, tend to lump all Malaysian/Singaporean writing as being second rate, or not worth their attention, or that the only significant poetry has to be written in the national language, or that only an Englishman can write good poetry in English. I'm not particularly worried or concerned about this kind of critic. Most of my other critics have shown remarkable insight and made some very trenchant criticism. Thumboo, for example.

KS: Have you found that sometimes critics have seen things in your work which didn't occur to you were there?

ETH: Yes, because one is never aware of the ripples that come with a poem. Other people see differently from oneself and I'm very interested to see what others find in my work. One learns all the time. To stop learning is to stop living.

KS: In his Foreword to your latest book, *Myths for a Wilderness*, Edwin Thumboo discusses a shift in your work. From cynicism, humorous satire, you seem to have moved to a position of bitterness, resentment. The movement is essentially a *felt*, not a thought one and this, perhaps, has to do with happenings around you. Would you care to elaborate?

ETH: This is what I had in mind when I said earlier that some of the criticism has been quite trenchant. My later poems contain bitterness, yes, but more than that I think they reveal a deep sense of regret about some changes that have come about in Malaysia. The attachment, loyalty, love of the immigrant peoples who have for generations made Malaysia their home ought never to have been questioned for, when it is questioned, people begin to get worried about the direction politics is going to take. I've always thought of Malaysia as having the potential of being one of the most remarkable countries in the world. Like the United States, like Australia, Malaysia had the influences of many immigrant peoples, their heritage, their different backgrounds.

KS: The anguish is always there, when one is put at odds with a prevalent ethos.

ETH: Anguish, a profound sense of regret, loss.

KS: Would you care to comment on the practice of some of Singapore's and Malaysia's younger poets? Do you think they are merely being personal, therapeutic?

ETH: Poems that appear to be personal in origin need not be therapeutic. What interests me about the work of young Singapore poets particularly is the sophistication, the craftsmanship. Stylistically, there is much more in their poems, than say, in mine.

KS: For us who belong to the younger generation the experiences of people like you in trying to create a local idiom have been invaluable; you laid the groundwork for a literary tradition.

ETH: One needs confidence in what one is doing. The younger poets today have that. They write with a sense of freedom over a very wide range of topics.

KS: What direction has your own poetry taken since coming to Australia?

ETH: To be honest, I've not written much since coming here. In the next months I might attempt to write in a different medium from poetry—the short story, the novel, who knows, memoirs?

COLLECTIONS BY EE TIANG HONG:

I, of the Many Faces (Kuala Lumpur, 1962)
Lines Written in Hawaii (Mimeo, 1973)
Myths for a Wilderness (Heinemann Educational Books, Singapore, 1976)

EE TIANG HONG

– Some recent poems

A Poem

Is a poem
No matter what its breed
Or the language
It speaks.

It will say
What it must
Notwithstanding the threat
To silence its throat.

A poem will, for sure,
Surpass the fiat
Of a mean creed,
The bull's posture.

EE TIANG HONG

Exile

Disconcerted,
yet not entirely
dispossessed,
he could not explicate
his more than petty grievances,
could not steel his heart
to generalise,
drive home their public import,
dark portent.

The snares had been set
too cleverly,
covered with sentiments
it were foolhardy to touch,
impolitic,
the undoing would scar
for generations.

And so, disengaging,
he bided, carefully,
spoke without meaning,
acted without zeal,
till even mimicry
grew idle, pointless
and demeaning.

He finally chose
the only way out,
for the sake of all
he held most dear,
left one quiet evening,
ash-grey,
incognito,
dirt on tarmac.

EE TIANG HONG

Departure, Kuala Lumpur Airport

Now's the time for boldness,
to tell all,
the many faces of the world
insist.

Seeing your faces,
their outward composure,
I am disposed to give,
leave as souvenir
appropriate to the occasion
something that will not trivialise,
add insult to our state,
this separation.

And yet the consequence,
the indelicacy of touching
on unspeakable matters of state
here, even now, again
the memento cowers
in a corner of my throat.

EDWIN THUMBOO

Krishna

Before he became a god
To tidy up the world, Krishna
Searched a thousand years,
Along the peaks, the lesser hills,
Each sudden plain, persistent star,
The columns of his thought,
Down deeply anxious limbs
And great inclines of the heart
To the rim of the world at sunset....
Searched among the maidens of the day,
The maidens of the night,
A face for Bindavan.[1]

Under her consequential sun,
The computations of every rising moon,
That face grew, asserted
All his love, his dreams,
Destinations, softly magical.
She gazed upon him
With a look of morning lotus,
Till each stood within the other.
So the blue god, his votive flute
Multiplying his love, the gopis,[2]
Sporting with them all,
He sported with but one.

Perched upon a chord of time,
His yearning flute unfolds
The lovely burden of her eyes
To feed his nimble fingers.
Within the radiance of each note
So bound to her answering look,
The world revives, quickens,
Renews itself, turns whole,
Adores their love unparalleled.
And so they sit, ever moving,
Ever still, in stone,
In ivory, in us.

---

[1] The magnificent Bindavan Gardens in Mysore.
[2] The virginal milkmaids of legend.

EDWIN THUMBOO

The Return

(For T.S.H.)

I

We would have you return unimpaired,
Mortal as the evening sun, feeling
No hiatus in the day's pursuit. What
Light remains is ours, Eric will assert.
So the simple thought of death,
Though besieging, is elegant.

We live; we die

Be certain that alone, the flesh
Augurs less than memory, fellowship,
The metaphor of waves quarrelling upon
One imperious curve of Dungun beach,[1]
Or a patch of moonshine sharpened
By the gibbon's sudden midnight call.

We live; we die

At Jemalung[2] an obsessed leopard's claw
Marked a tree with the full angry power
Of death and yet it blooms. Cleansed
Of blood, the stream's pure speech
Still feeds the colours of the fish,
The saving tremble of earth, moon, stars.

These years have made us brothers—
More than most—sharing copee alia,[3]
The occasional discontent, the open road,
Talk of politics, a ministering culture,
How Simon, Julian, Raymond seek to grow
As Four Horsemen skirmish, ride their turn.

The mind's geometry learnt to feel,
Grew intricate, uncovered patterns
As we talked across this issue,
That problem. Ideas were theorems we
Moved around the circles of our hope,
Our city, people, coming history.

We live beyond the body's season,
As you know, my brother.

II

Evening is for remembrance.
The light breaking upon leaves
Is yours. The tears are yours.
We hear again, your soft
Moving in our thoughts,
Uncompelling, whole.

At One-Tree Hill you balanced
Each greeting with a grin,
Poured us Cecilia's coffee, talked wine,
Your mother's coming visit,
A missed Anker trip, the political weather,
While orchids by the balcony bloomed.

One evening the moon rose
Upon a gathering of friends,
The double talk, the puns.
Some limped, others soared . . . .
While the evening fell asleep,
Sweetly uncaring. Such images remain.

There will be moments
When we hear your heart speak
Through its metal valve,
Making us wonder how your body,
Blood, nerves, mind held so against
The promised dissolution.

Your ashes lie before us:
There is a covenant.
In the spectrum of this day,
We are consoled knowing
We live beyond the body's season,
As you know, my brother.

(*Singa*, 1, December 1980)

---

[1] Holiday resort on China Sea, east coast of West Malaysia.
[2] In West Malaysia.
[3] A Singaporean drink of coffee and ginger.

ANNE BREWSTER

Egypt

This is the land where travellers come
expecting patient days will have an end.
This is the land they reach
where the sphinx's broken eye
seeks a horizon beyond the next
where sand slips through the fingers
leaving no trace but the shape of its absence.

You come here to the place of ancient dream
where pharaohs prepared for fabulous death
and temples overshadow your meagre shadow.
Your tourist blitheness perishes in this
monstrous easy power;
you squint under the enduring sun,
your short life shrinks,
the journey has begun.

THOMAS SHAPCOTT

Cleaning out the Annexe
Batignano, Il convento

(i)

The chapel with ordinary sky roof and camomile paths
cannot be cleaned. No spiders yet
but watch for vipers. Once, we explored the vestry.
It is an annexe now. How to imagine the lost chapel?

(ii)

Tomorrow the young singers from London return
another summer of sun and Dido. Dust to be struck up
like a tarantella of spidershells. Rotting costumes
to be claimed from the floor.
Last year ended a rush,
bus, shouting, and then this. Nothing moves here
except damp. That snuffled upwards. Dust
weighted the spidershells down.

(iii)

Each ten minutes I rush out, paste wracked. Ordinary air
douses me. The panic is old alarm wiring along corridors.
Go away. Each time I forget about the dust; was it
always there? How did spiders intrude?
I return to work the ideal of clean space
beginning at corners.
Like moonscapes of surf, dust curls back over.

(iv)

Box of matches, Grosseto postcard curling its dry tongue,
drawers I cram with lace, made-up castoffs, royal cardboard
and the African straw masks for witches. *Go away*:
that sounds dusty now, theatrical.
A full year. I sweep buttons, party corks.
I must believe in cleaning. I am closed off.
Dust makes inefficient paste, good for nothing.

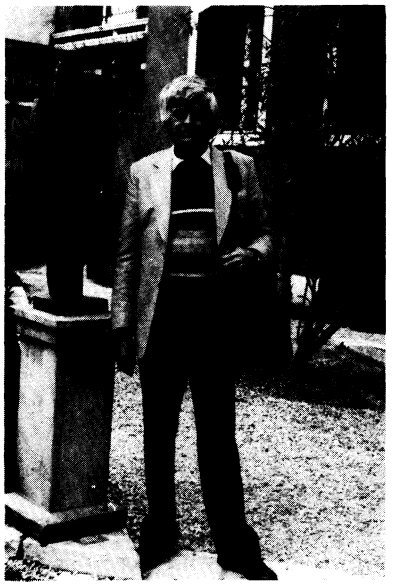
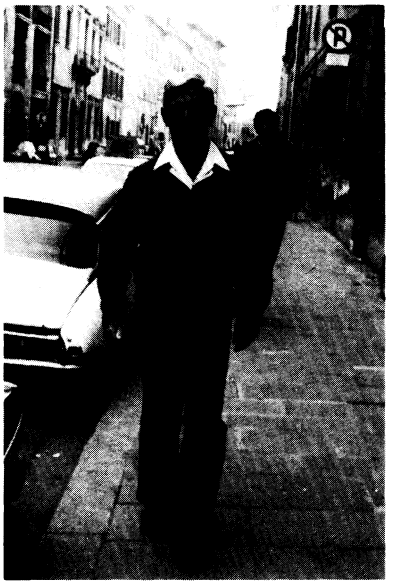
(v)

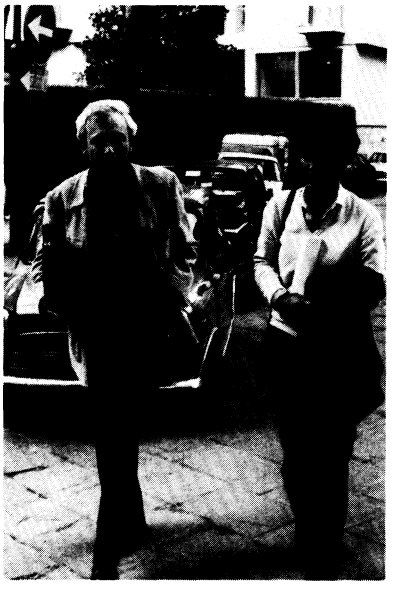
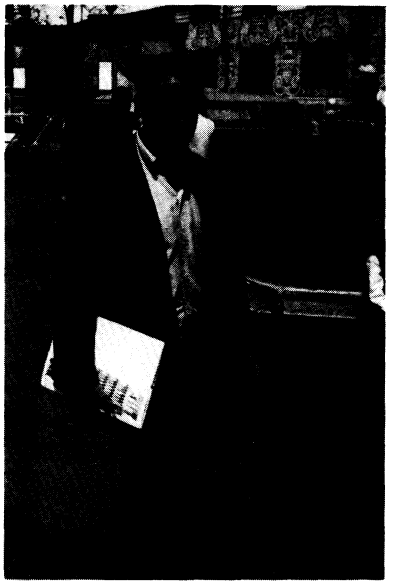
Nothing to think
nothing to remember
no person I have known, the masks become straw nothings
the programmes list nothing, names less imaginary than
olive trees.
The imprint of rush
takes time
and will not willingly be tidied. We are not all paste.
I am cleaning out nothing.

(vi)

Go away.
I am working go away go
to the upstairs gallery out along the loggia
there is a new tiled bathroom go there
go far off go to the olive grove far off, to those last
thickets past the cellar hencoops go far off there is dust here
it clogs nostrils to clay
it filters eyes to spider shells
killing the tongue I taste nothing I see through broken panes
I hear avalanches of memories melt into rising damp
the chapel roof is sky
I have walls discoloured by too much sky that dark paste
the storms fell silent
the vandals came they left programmes and straw faces
ripping and tearing, soiling walls, curling up neighbour cities
non-sound is not silence
what it means is silence retreats go away
I hear you breathing I will not remember
tomorrow another crowd of young singers one of us
will go away I am dust in your way I hear your breathing
you pick camomile through the door the chapel has no roof
my damp fingers smell everything I hear witch fingers
the orchestra thrumming you turn your straw face to others
on your knees this programme not my name
the chapel annexes silence eardrums finger you
your breathing not my name
my moonscape pulse curls over, not my name
surf, breakers, imprint of rush
measuring my throat and not willing to be paste
not able to go away.

WRITERS IN PISA

Top L to R: William Grono, Tom Hungerford, Algerina Neri and Dorothy Hewett
Bottom L to R: Randolph Stow and Cinzia Biagiotti, Robert Drewe

Photos courtesy William Grono

VERONICA BRADY

Australian Literature Conference – Pisa

The Italian Society for Australian Studies (S.I.S.A.) is a product of the vitality of Italian intellectual life. Some years ago a group of scholars already well-known for their work in English and American studies (their publications ranged from books and articles on Shakespeare and the metaphysical poets to American writers like Melville) became interested in Australian literature which they saw as one of the more lively of the new literatures in English and founded a Society to promote these studies. Some of Italy's best known English scholars were involved: the late Professor Rolando Anzilotti of Pisa, Professor Claudio Gorlier of Turin (the current President), Professor Sergio Perosa of Venice, Professor Alfredo Rizzardi of Bologna and Professor Pietro Spinucchi of Verona. The Italian National Council for Research supports the Society in its work, and the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs, has shown its appreciation by offering financial assistance in the organization of Conferences, bringing Italian scholars to Australia and offering scholarships to promising students: scholarship can be a means to international understanding.

The Conference held at the University of Pisa from 19-21 April 1982 was the Society's fourth general Conference, though there have been other gatherings of scholars and students. Its title "Culture and Society in Western Australia: an Example of Regionalism", suggests the breadth of the Society's interests: literature is set in its larger cultural context. Thus in some ways this Conference broke new ground, in Australia at least. Here, apart from some local gatherings like the weekend Seminar at Fremantle Arts Centre in 1978 (see *Westerly* no. 4, 1978), regionalism has not been much discussed. Indeed, at that seminar, Peter Ward, then literary editor of *The Australian*, attempted to scotch the notion, arguing that a general sameness prevails from Perth to Rockhampton, Adelaide to Darwin. At Pisa, however, the concept of the region was taken seriously. Focussing on Western Australian writers, the organizers set literature in its wider social, political and economic context. But they also insisted on the connection between writers and their work, inviting and generously supporting several W.A. writers, Giovanni Andreoni, Robert Drewe, William Grono, Tom Hungerford, Dorothy Hewett and Randolph Stow. John Scott, Professor of Italian in the University of W.A., was also invited to give an illustrated lecture on Western Australian art, and this lecture, together with the film on this part of Australia before the coming of the white man (the first instalment of a series on the history of Western Australia made for Perth's Channel 9 television station and generously made available to the Conference) provided a series of dramatic visual images.

What emerged was a sense of something "West Australian", a quality difficult to define exactly but discussed, formally and informally, throughout the Conference, which complemented discussions of Sydney and Melbourne intellectual and cultural life at the University of Messina's conference in January 1982. True, as some journalistic accounts have pointed out, Drewe, Hewett and Stow no longer live in Western Australia, but their work seemed to share some of the preoccupations and exhibit some of the pressures to be seen in other writings and paintings; and what Drewe and Stow had to say about themselves and their work in their sessions supported this view.

An intellectually provocative Conference, then. But it was also notable for the presence of the writers and for their generosity in reading and speaking about their work. As a result, the scholarly papers were informed by experience. Books were made available to participants by the generosity of the Australian Government, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, and by Bruce Bennett and William Grono, the editors of *Wide Domain*, an anthology of W.A. writing. The arrangement of the papers also helped to develop the argument of regionalism. After the official opening—by the Rector of the University of Pisa, Professor Favilli, the President of S.I.S.A., Professor Gorlier and the Australian Ambassador, Mr H. E. Douglas-Scott—the first papers set the larger context. Dr Greer Chester, an Australian who teaches in the University of Perugia, gave an account of W.A. history, Professor Mario Gabrielle, one of Italy's most distinguished geographers, discussed the contribution of civil aviation. Dr Marinella Mascia looked at the effects of life in Australia on the Italian spoken by migrants (a theme developed further later on in the Conference by Dr Luciana di Nola) and Dr Anna Fochi introduced the work of Giovanni Andreoni, an Italian writer and scholar who now teaches at the University of New England but whose first years in Australia were spent in W.A. The papers which followed thus grew out of this context.

These papers were arranged more or less chronologically, beginning with two on Katharine Susannah Prichard, one by Professor Claudio Gorlier, a generic reading which illuminated the tension between romance and social realism in her work, and one by myself on the image of the Aborigine in her work. Then followed papers on the short stories of H. H. Wilson by Professor Bernard Hickey, on Gavin Casey's stories by Professor Gaetano Prampolini of Florence and on Nicholas Hasluck by Dr Valerio Bruni of Bologna, who saw Hasluck's use of parody as an existential paradigm. Dr Lilla Crisafulli of Bologna discussed the epiphanic experience and moral vision of Elizabeth Jolley's work, Dr Marta Bardotti of Pisa looked at Peter Cowan's use of space in *Tins* and *Mobiles* and Professor Elsa Linguanti of Pisa gave a close and sensitive reading of Fay Zwicky's poetry. The next morning was devoted to drama, with two papers on Dorothy Hewett, a general reading by Professor Paolo Bertinetti of Turin and a close analysis of the formal structure of *The Chapel Perilous* by Dr Carla Dente of Pisa. Bill Dunstone brought the critical work to a conclusion with an account of some key works of Western Australian drama. Finally, Randolph Stow talked about his work and answered questions about it.

Evidently, a wide ranging and successful Conference, a fitting monument to the memory of Professor Anzilotti of Pisa, its originator, who died, tragically, only ten days before. It is unfortunate that some Australian journalists, unable to conceive that European scholars would be interested in our literature and ignorantly condescending to the work being done by these scholars, should have trivialised the Conference in their reports. The cultural cringe, it seems, survives—which makes the European contribution to Australian literary studies all the more important and significant.

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE

Still

Pink top
magenta jeans
you rake the crop of aromatic
newcut grass to mounds
hedged in by hedges
vividly composed
as in a French film
of shimmering bourgeois
country highjinks.
Five years together,
birdcalling together
our harvest home:
beyond that squareclipped cypress
the dark green sea roars.

ALEC CHOATE

An Artist's Wife

Her home is by the sea that seems from where
she took the silk length of the blue sarong
which rises to her breasts, but leaves them bare.
And, standing by the low veranda wall,
she tells her story in the half sing-song
half murmur of her grief, and looks across
the water as if held there by a call,
something that seems to evergreen her loss.

This was her late dead husband's studio,
art shop as well, with broad views of the beach,
the bay, the islands, which he came to know
more than the North Sea shoreland of his birth,
but, in its minor key, I find her speech
is foreign to this sea, this sky, this sun,
as she harps on some highlight of his worth
as painter, and I think a gifted one.

Crowding the inner wall, frame touching frame,
his pictures hang and live, drawing my eyes
at times away from her. She says his name
is little known beyond her home and heart,
which is surprising as his magic lies
in a deft blending of what is refined
and what immediate, a match in art
of both the dreamer's and the craftsman's mind.

I say that he was gifted, having such
a feel for people and a sense of place
that he could slant his European touch
to home itself in what was Balinese,
the childlike spirit here, the static grace,
the rich and never ending morningness,
guiding his painter's truth with a new ease
into the finer meaning of success.

At last she turns, full faced, and looks at me.
Her hair falls darkly on her naked shoulders,
shadow itself, almost indulgently
the symbol of a heart that longs to grieve.
Far round the bay the grey volcano smoulders,
the one point of her background that can brood,
huddling in murmurs, mists, which interweave
and match the sunless pattern of her mood.

And this is now her burden. Her young life
is as inverted as the paintings say
the painter's was. Left to herself, the wife
takes over from the husband as by right
that part of him from which he turned away,
matching his finding of new character
through a land's soul. While he found outward light,
a twilight inwardness has come to her.

She sells her island's wood craft, the usual things,
Rama and Sita as a pair of masks,
Vishnu enthroned between Garuda's wings,
some Bali heads, but as I make a choice
she hardly seems to care what price she asks.
She sells his paintings too? She shakes her head,
and turns back to the water and its voice
where I paint my own thought on what is said.

ALEC CHOATE

Lioness

The zebras graze behind the padlock of numbers,
but the heat waves simmer and fume
to cream them for tasting,
the spread she can choose from, and glut her pride.

And the ribbons, the dazzle upon their hides,
the circus or pantomime wrapping,
this too is garnish.
Camouflage? But she knows better.

They close in together, mouthing the grass,
shuffling their hooves
for a whirlpool getaway.
Ears gently paddle the sleep of air.

Where the grass meets the thicket's edge
there is a stone, stroked by the tawny sunlight.
Two slits flicker as they prowl and ponder
the offering of lowered heads.

The stone catapults, the cat flares.
It is all one
in the jolt and hold of fangs
and night on the sun.

There is no time to wonder
why this is her choice.
What her thunder and lightning say
is a catch in the huge herd's voice.

GRAEME KEIR

A perhaps objectionable but, I think, largely true, Poem

Mothers, deep down you know the real
reason for the subtle morning make-up,
the care with the hair, the business
with the breasts, the flowing floral
dresses, chosen scents, the sheer
delight of panti-hose and bold high
heels—it's not for the office,
not for comfort, not even
pride—ultimately the decoration
and accentuation tend to one
thing and to one thing
only—it's in the blood, in the air
wherever boys and girls are,
an all year round thing
not only found in
spring: Mothers, the young men
lust after your daughters, circle
keen-eyed round your lovely daughters
("O send them forth each day
to us!")—Mothers it's unmistakable,
inescapable: the looks
that pass between your daughters
and the young men on city streets
suggest, "You know the possibility,
don't you? We know the possibility,

don't we?"

BOOKS

An Eagle's Feather

Christopher Brennan: *Musicopoematographoscopes*. With an introduction by Axel Clark. Hale and Iremonger, Sydney. 40 pages. Recommended price $29.95.

Christopher Brennan and the wedgetail eagle have at least three things in common. Both have soared high, both have been vilified by earthbound critics and both have had their reputations revised. In past years in sheep country, I sometimes saw the carcases of eagles draped on a barbed-wire fence as a warning to others against harming the lambs. Brennan was shot down by a university senate and his tattered reputation publicly exposed. In more recent years opinion has changed about whether the bird is a predator and whether the poet is a menace to the young.

Those who have watched the eagle soar will sometimes treasure one feather fallen from its wing. Now Axel Clark, venerating the poet, and aided by the publishers Hale and Iremonger, has given the dignity of an album-sized expensive edition to a piece of frivolity shed by the young Brennan—a moulted feather, an eagle feather.

I have been a Brennan-watcher for about fifty years. In student days, in a patriotic fervour for Australian poetry, I started to search for something more cerebral—perhaps something more difficult and more literary—than Henry Kendall and Adam Lindsay Gordon and so found Brennan. Somewhere about 1933 or 1934—it was shortly after the appointment of Alec King as a lecturer in the English department and when the buildings at Crawley were still very new—an English literature society was formed at the University of Western Australia and, at one of its early meetings, I read a paper on Brennan's poetry, including a rather laborious analysis of 'Lilith', and some fumbling discussion of symbolism. At the end of my painstaknig effort, when the time for discussion came, it was obvious that no-one else in the audience, which included two of our lecturers (Harry Thompson and Alec King) had ever read a line of Brennan except the few short pieces in the Oxford book of Australian verse. This was understandable for, although *The Chant of Doom* (1918) was seen occasionally in second-hand bookshops, the 1913 volume *Poems* was virtually unobtainable in Perth and Brennan was not known in the University library. I had obtained a copy of the 1913 poems by writing to the publisher, G. B. Philip, who still had a stack of them in a warehouse. In sending one to me for five shillings he had written appreciatively about his pleasure at finding someone who was interested in Brennan. Unfortunately a warehouse fire shortly afterwards destroyed Philip's pile of books and he did not have a chance to recover his outlay when interest in the poet was re-awakened.

I did not know until a little later that there was a fellow-enthusiast for Brennan at the University. Margaret Clarke, head of the French department and one of the most stimulating and active minds I met during my university days, had been one of Brennan's students at the University of Sydney and her later studies of the French symbolists had given her a special interest in a comparison between him and Mallarmé. She should have been a guest at the English literature society meeting for she certainly would have made the discussion lively. Incidentally it is interesting that two of the earliest appreciative critics of Brennan—A. R. Chisholm and Margaret Clarke—came from schools of French literature.

The re-awakening of interest in Brennan had followed his death in 1932. It was stimulated by monographs by A. G. Stephens in 1933 and Randolph Hughes in 1934 and by articles in various journals by knowledgeable admirers such as Margaret Clarke, A. R. Chisholm, Brereton, Hugh McCrae, Hilary Lofting and others. Within a few years Tom Inglis Moore, having included Brennan in his long essay on the 'six major figures in Australian poetry' (published in 1942 but mainly written before 1938), commented that Brennan had been 'exalted into a legend'. He wrote: 'A Brennan cult has evolved in Sydney and its disciples have tended to exalt the poet unduly, without proper regard of his considerable defects or sufficient consideration of the comparative claims of other Australian poets.'

Early in 1939 H. M. Green published two lectures on Brennan and this stimulated more discussion of the poet in the literary journals. In the same year Philip published his *Sixty Years' Recollections and Impressions of a Bookseller* mainly about Brennan.

Nevertheless those who read Brennan as well as reading about Brennan were probably still few in number. I remember in Canberra in wartime attending two lectures given by A. R. Chisholm (they were published in 1946 as *Christopher Brennan: The Man and His Poetry*). Although the Canberra audience was mostly academic and literary, it was obvious once again at discussion time that very few were familiar with his verse. Texts of Brennan were still not readily available, for the attractive collection, *Twenty Three Poems*, published by the Australian Limited Editions Society in 1938, was limited to 500 copies and these were in the hands of book collectors—or more probably in their glass-fronted bookcases—rather than on the laps of general readers.

In the post-war years discussion on Brennan continued to spread. A special Brennan number of *Southerly* at the end of 1949 contained contributions by the good old faithful—R. G. Howarth, A. R. Chisholm, Dowell O'Reilly, Margaret Clarke, F. T. Macartney and Hugh McCrae—but in the next few years discussion widened, notably with the contributions by G. A. Wilkes. Lesser literary folk followed. In a fashion characteristic of the progress of Australian literature there was even something of a scramble by the usual literary cockatoos to scratch among the scattered hay. Stale legends of Brennan were sometimes more prominent than any new discernment of his quality.

About this time a beginning was made by Chisholm and J. J. Quinn on the preparation of a standard edition of his verse. This labour of love was interrupted by the death of Quinn in 1954. Various other causes delayed progress and the volume did not appear until 1960. At last the general body of Australian readers had a chance to study readily the work of one of our major poets. Henceforward the difficulty did not arise from the lack of text but from the complexity of Brennan himself.

The time had come—about forty years after his most significant work had finished—for a new phase in Brennan studies. One need was to re-assemble the biographical facts, re-examine the legends about him and find a clearer relationship between his life and his works. The other need was for the critical re-examination of the poetry.

Three notable contributions of this kind have been G. A. Wilkes's *New Perspective on Brennan's Poetry*, Pennington's *Christopher Brennan: Some Recollections* and A. R. Chisholm's *A Study of Christopher Brennan's 'The Forest of the Night'*. James McCauley also made a brief appraisal.

Then came Axel Clark's major work, *Christopher Brennan, a Critical Biography* (1980). I welcomed this as one of the more valuable contributions made to the study of Australian literature in recent years. Clark did thoroughly and diligently a work that was badly needed. Of no other recent book in Australian literary studies can it be said so truly that it met a long-felt want. Clark assembled the facts about the man and his works and drew together the many threads into a comprehensible pattern. He provided material for further studies of Brennan and also illuminated the subject.

Following such praise of Clark's major work, I come to look at his latest publication —a mere feather picked up from where the great bird nested. Perhaps it is worth keeping. Perhaps it has some literary interest. Perhaps it can be shown around as a curio. No harm is done by publication but little of value has been added.

The book is a facsimile edition of two unpublished works. They are as baffling to a stranger as most private jokes of an earlier generation. Some of the intricacies of the poet's prank can be unravelled if one looks at it as an imitation and a parody of Mallarmé's experiments or if one examines it as the mocking reaction by Brennan to the lack of understanding in Australia of his own first volume of poems. In his foreword Clark goes further and says the jest 'can be seen as one manifestation of the continuing tension between the European and the Australian, the metropolitan and the colonial or provincial, which has marked the cultural life of the white man in this country since 1788'. My sight is not good enough to do that. The sentence sounds to me

like one of the clichés of current literary criticism in Australia. But if the editor and publisher can see that manifestation then perhaps the labour and the skill they have spent on this 'deluxe facsimile edition', offered at a recommended price of five cents short of thirty dollars and described as a 'unique flowering of European avant-garde art in colonial Australia' may be justified. Again Brennan has been honoured with a book for collectors.

PAUL HASLUCK

Alexandra Hasluck, *Portrait in a Mirror: An Autobiography*, Oxford University Press, 1982, 329 pp.

In *Mucking About*, Paul Hasluck recorded briefly:

> In April 1932 I married Alexandra Margaret Martin Darker, whom I had met and courted at the university. Although this is an autobiography, I share the views expressed by the first Lord Redesdale in his memoirs: 'A veil of sanctity should mask the wedded life of even the humblest individual'. So I commend to notice her own published works and the entry under her own name in *Who's Who in Australia.* (p. 155)

True to his word, Hasluck wrote little about his wife, but now Alexandra Hasluck has filled this gap by publishing *Portrait in a Mirror.* For husband and wife each to publish an autobiography is surely a most unusual occurrence —no doubt there are other examples but none spring readily to mind—and it is interesting to set the two books side by side. Of course the area of overlap is limited in that *Mucking About* ends at 1941 whereas *Portrait in a Mirror* carries through to the 1970s.

This is itself of interest. With the first sentence of *Mucking About* Paul Hasluck informed his readers that 'All autobiographies ought to end about the age of thirty-five', and so his did, though he has cheated a little by writing several books which hover between autobiography and history about periods in his subsequent career. In justification of his dictum Hasluck wrote:

> The prime value of an autobiography is in what it reveals, either deliberately or unconsciously, of the writer rather than what it chronicles of historical events in which he took part. A secondary value is what it reveals of the sort of world in which he grew up, the community to which he belonged and the social conditions which helped shape him. History is written better by historians who study events than by actors who have both eyes on themselves. (p. 1)

Dame Alexandra obviously has not felt constrained by her husband's views on this subject for she has chosen to write of her whole life experience and to tell us of historical events in which she took part. However it remains true that she has told us much about herself and about the Perth of her childhood and youth; her book is a 'must' for students of Western Australian society.

Born in 1908, Alexandra was the only child of a late-ish marriage between John Darker, a senior engineer with the Public Works Department, and Evelyn Hill, a school-teacher, both of whom had come to Western Australia as part of the goldrush influx. John, who was one of a reasonably well-to-do Queensland family of engineers, had been recruited by C. Y. O'Connor in 1894. Evelyn, a graduate of Sydney University, accompanied her mother and brother from NSW to Western Australia a few years later and became a partner in a small private school. After their marriage they settled in a large, old house in William Street, Perth, surrounded by half an acre of garden. Later, they moved to a new house in Mt Lawley, then still on the edge of the bush.

It was clearly a comfortable environment in which to grow up. Freed from the necessity to teach, Evelyn Darker held regular, formal 'At Homes' for her friends; in the evening she often played the piano for the entertainment of her husband. There were always plenty of books available and Alexandra formed the habit of reading while still very young; later, she sometimes accompanied her father to an open-air cinema in the evening. Visits to the Masonic Club, open on Saturday afternoons to the families of members, were a highlight.

Alexandra's first two years of schooling were at PLC but when that school moved from North Perth to Cottesloe, she transferred to Perth College. Holidays were often spent with her friend Louise Clifton, in enviable idyllic circumstances, vividly recalled in this book, at

the then undeveloped Yunderup. Sometimes, too, she accompanied her father on visits to country districts where he was supervising the construction of railways or bridges. Early in 1925, her last year at school, her parents gave a formal dance for their daughter in hired rooms in Mt Lawley, before she settled down to the serious business of passing the Leaving Certificate and matriculating.

Evelyn Darker had long been determined that her daughter too should have a university education, and so she did, from 1926 to 1929, though this was still unusual for men let alone women, with fewer than 400 students enrolled. Alexandra clearly blossomed in the university milieu, throwing herself with equal enthusiasm into her studies, the Dramatic Society, student journalism, and social life. Her recollections of that period are lively and affectionate, with interesting vignettes of academics such as Murdoch, Shann, Alexander and Margaret Clarke, and of fellow students, many of whom have since won distinction in their various fields. It was a university world superficially very different from that of the 1980s though one hopes that the differences are less fundamental than Dame Alexandra appears to think. In a self revealing passage, which will be of particular interest to readers of this review, she unfavourably contrasts *Westerly* with its predecessor of the 1920s, the *Black Swan*:

> It is curious to read over these old *Black Swans* when the University today has a very professional magazine, *Westerly*. Unprofessional as the older magazines were, their entries often simple and direct, I cannot help but think they had one thing vastly different from today: their short stories, articles, poems, all presented an original point of view, had something to say and said it clearly. With the poems, even if their poetic forms were derivative, they were not of sordid thought or gutter vocabulary. They were not hostile in any circumstances, but interesting, sensitive, seeking for the ultimate in thought, in poetic feeling, not denying or rebelling, not losing a sense of the beautiful. They were an extension of what a University then presented—the offering of mind to mind. (p. 100)

Editors, pleate note!

As a young graduate coming onto the labour market in the unpropitious year of 1929, Alexandra sought work as a journalist but had to settle for teaching. In 1930 she joined the staff of Miss Parnell's Girls' High School, which in the following year became St. Hilda's, and there she remained until her marriage in 1932, following which she and her husband enjoyed a honeymoon year in England and Europe. The remainder of the 1930s was spent back in Perth settling in to married life, in a new house overlooking the river, and with an active cultural life still centred on the university. It is with respect to this period that the accounts of husband and wife most overlap and their pictures of themselves and their community substantially reinforce one another.

I have dwelt on these early years, which make up a third of *Portrait in a Mirror*, because they are so evocatively depicted and have so much to tell of what it was like to grow up in a middle-class family in Perth in the early twentieth century. It is true that John Darker's death in 1925 created some financial problems for his widow and daughter; and that Alexandra's uncle, Rowland Hill, lost his farm in the depression. On the whole, though, Perth in the inter-war years was kind to both the young Haslucks, enabling them to develop intellectually and socially with few constraints. In his review of *Mucking About*, published in the December 1977 issue of *Westerly*, Geoffrey Bolton argued that Western Australia in this period was 'essentially a secure, confident and tolerant society, accessible to those who wished to improve themselves and their community', from which class and other such tensions and complications were almost entirely absent. This volume could equally be read as evidence for that view, but it must be remembered that relatively few of their contemporaries were as privileged as the Haslucks. In 1927 Alexandra found herself, as the partner of Keith Cooper, President of the Guild of Undergraduates, sitting at the top table for supper at the Graduation Ball; looking back fifty years later, she remarks that she seems to have been at 'top tables' ever since. In a very real sense, *Portrait in a Mirror* gives a 'top table' view of modern Australian history.

Certainly there are plenty of 'top table' occasions reported in the balance of the book, ranging from U.N. Security Council dinners at the Waldorf Astoria or the Nelson Rockefeller apartment on 5th Avenue, through Yarralumla, to the State Banquet given by the Shah of Iran

at Persepolis in 1971. Students of politics and diplomacy may pick up some titbits from Lady Hasluck's recollections of such occasions, many of them based on her own letters of the time, but the yield is not likely to be great. Her accounts of life in Canberra in the early 1940s and New York in the later 1940s are informative and often amusing but twenty years as the wife of a politician are cursorily treated and the chapter on life at Yarralumla dwindles away into unedifying anecdotes which might have been better left untold.

Alexandra Hasluck's account of her work as a historian, her major claim to personal distinction, is of greater interest, though disappointingly brief. *Portrait With Background*, *Unwilling Emigrants*, and *Thomas Peel of Swan River*, in particular, are useful books which have attracted thousands of readers and are still very much required reading for those studying the history of Western Australia. They are particularly valuable for having been written when the historiography of Western Australia was still in its infancy and could have been even more valuable still had their author been less inclined to work in isolation from other historians. On her own account, Dame Alexandra came to history as a last resort after experiments with fiction and drama came to nothing and her relationship with the historical profession seems to have been a difficult one. It is sad to find her writing that 'when one has made well-documented new discoveries ... one finds the old errors being re-quoted, the old stories re-told, for many historians, even well-known ones, do not bother to read new works, nor is recognition of research a matter of much moment to reviewers. In science, new discoveries are noted and commented on. Not so in history'. This is surely a travesty of the truth, but one would like to know more of the background to such bitterness and a full appraisal of her contribution to Australian and Western Australian historiography would be appropriate now that, if her present intentions hold, she has written her last book.

The impulse to write seems to have been fed by the frustration of an intelligent, well-educated and strong-minded woman, imprisoned by her own values and those of the society which formed her within the roles of wife and mother. These roles kept her busy, at times too busy, but they did not satisfy her even though there were aspects of life at the 'top table' which she obviously relished. Moreover for long periods she saw little of her husband, who was in any case a highly autonomous individual. She had plenty to occupy her time but not enough to occupy her mind. Writing provided an answer, though much of it had to be done at 4.00 or 5.00 a.m. whilst the household slept. To have produced a dozen worthwhile books under such circumstances is no mean achievement and the growing band of specialists in women's history and the history of the family should find much to interest them in *Portrait in a Mirror.*

B. K. de GARIS

Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945.* Sirius Books, Sydney, 1981, 283 pp. $19.95.

As its title suggests, Drusilla Modjeska's recently published work is one of literary history; it is hybrid in its aims and explorations. At the same time, the author announces from the outset her particular affiliations with a feminist perspective and a reclaimant purpose. "Writing the history of women's writing," she states, "is not simply a matter of filling the gaps, slotting people and works into existing literary traditions. Rather, it should be an attempt to unearth a new, dialectically related history." Convinced, then, of the inadequacies of present literary histories, Modjeska proposes her study of the lives and works of Australian women writers in the period 1925 to 1945 as a sort of act of restitution, a purposeful re-examination of literary tradition.

This proposal involves an ambitious historical and critical excursiveness. The book is described as

> a history of ... women writers, tracing the inter-connections between their lives, their works, their politics and their fiction. It is a book not only about social history but about writing, about cultural and ideological struggle, about feminism and fiction, about the contradictions of class and gender. (p. 2)

Apart from the demands of her inter-disciplinary stance, this scope is compelled, I suspect, by the historical complexity and cultural fer-

tility of the period under examination. There are, after all, the huge events of the Great Depression, the rise of Fascism, and the Second World War to be taken into account. More specifically, the period includes very vigorous developments in Australian literary culture, the most striking of which is, indeed, the numerical and qualitative pre-eminence of women writers. Christina Stead, Miles Franklin, Nettie Palmer, Eleanor Dark, Marjorie Barnard, Dymphna Cusack and Katharine Susannah Prichard were among the many women working at the time; these alone constitute a group of considerable recognition and achievement. But the book's purpose is not one of simply bolstering recognition and listing achievement. Following, instead, the view favoured by feminist historians like Anne Summers and Miriam Dixon, it is a notion of deprivation which takes priority in critical assessment. The author begins with the hypothesis that these and other women writers worked under persistent social, cultural and existential constraints, constraints which debilitated expression, and often entailed difficulties of publication and reception. The title 'Exiles at Home' is the author's description of the de facto status borne by Australian women writers; its connotations of exclusion, displacement, contradiction and lack of standing are themes central to her analysis of their lives and works.

Exiles At Home begins with a study of the themes of isolation and expatriatism, and with an assessment of the cultural conditions and historical circumstances of the twenties. Using Christina Stead's novel *For Love Alone* as a central and evidential text, Modjeska convincingly demonstrates the difficulties of creative assertion in that era of post-war conservatism and approaching economic depression. Excluded from intellectual and literary circles (the author instances the *Vision* school) and burdened with the age's prescriptive norms of female submission, instinctualism and domestication, women writers simply retreated or escaped. Curiously, the cases of Christina Stead and Miles Franklin are co-joined, with the wry implication, it seems, that the conditions which caused Franklin to leave Australia in 1906 after the publication of *My Brilliant Career* still existed when Stead departed in 1928. Certainly the author encourages recognition of the bravery, if not the necessity, of departure; both cases were strenuous and self-conscious acts of liberation.

For those who stayed at home, and those who returned (like Katharine Susannah Prichard), conditions gradually improved. Publishing and writing apparently became easier, and while isolation was a dominant constraint in the twenties, the thirties are discussed as a period in which women covertly developed what one might call strategies of solidarity. The most remarkable instance of this is the role of Nettie Palmer. Usually disregarded or only casually mentioned in Australian literary histories, Nettie Palmer emerges as a central figure in *Exiles At Home.* Modjeska has made an exhaustive study of the Palmer letters to propose the case that Nettie's extensive correspondence offered substantial, yet hitherto unrecognized, support, instruction and friendship to almost every major woman writer working at the time. Nettie Palmer's own pre-occupations—with the formulation of a national culture, the consolidation of a minority culture, and the evangelical espousal of the cause of Australian literature—greatly inform these letters, and this causes the author to present her as a sort of matriarchal pedagogue, presiding sternly but beneficently over a hidden network of disciples. This is an interesting view. Coupled with an examination of Palmer's public pronouncements as a critic and broadcaster, it indicates something of the urgency, as well as the dedication, with which she disseminated her ideas. Nettie Palmer adopted the response of liberalism to her troubled times; she energetically argued for the promulgation of optimistic, rather than critical social opinions, of united, rather than sectional interests. Ironically, then, the rehabilitation of her presence and influence exposes the potency of an ideology which at that time severely obfuscated and subjugated the particular claims and interests of women.

This association and contradiction between political persuasion and women's interests becomes the central focus of the author's discussion of the thirties. It is perhaps wise to recall at this point that the process of substantiation in literary historiography is relational, related to the articulated end-products, as it were, of historical circumstance. The author's focus is therefore conditioned more by what is sug-

gested in texts at hand, rather than any injunction or desire to produce a wholly comprehensive history. In *Exiles At Home* this is evident in a very marginal discussion of the Depression, and little mention of the war. Modjeska concentrates, rather, on what was apparently more generally disruptive to the experience and beliefs of the women writers considered, the years of political crisis which manifested in the rise of Fascism. With the exception of the communists Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny, most of the women working at the beginning of the thirties were, like Nettie Palmer, bourgeois in class and liberal in politics. Modjeska argues, however, that textual and biographical evidence of responses to political events and debates suggest that the times were inducing a heightened concern with social issues and consequent reassessments and realignments of belief and value. This choice of topic is a shrewd one, particularly in its management. The enquiry into increasing political awareness is used to examine a countervailing growth in frustration, as this awareness coexisted with a keen but painfully unenunciated sense of the privations involved in being a woman and a woman writer. Central to the author's thesis, then, is the idea that women's issues and political issues were crucially separate, and that the more problematic features of women's writing may possibly be attributed to this lack of concordance. The absence of an explicit feminist ideology, or even of a clear sense of the demarkation of women's interests and needs, inhibited both the literary presentation of an uncomplicated picture of women's conditions, and a firm connection, in life and in art, of the political and the personal spheres.

Certainly the thirties were a period of considerable political activity and bound to cause response and reflection. But *Exiles At Home* is valuable for its evidencing of the full extent and prominence of political consideration in the lives of women writers of the time. It is to Modjeska's credit that her idea of what constitutes political implication is an ecumenical one. Thus she considers a range of issues, assessing, for example, the fluctuations in the fortune and ideology of Australian liberalism (largely through the person of Nettie Palmer), and also the impact of and arguments concerning the rise of an American-informed mass culture. Surprisingly, though, contemporary debates on modernism are barely noted.

Overall, Modjeska is admirably circumspect and judicious in her detailing of the politicization of women writers. Three central chapters of the book are given over exclusively to this theme, and, as an added bonus, the author includes in appendix a document which summarizes well the broadly heterogeneous complexion of the group of writers mobilized against Fascism. This mobilization was often effected by circumstances of manifest and transgressive right-wing action (such as the Egon Kisch affair) and the book provides an interesting analysis both of the process of motivation and coalescence, and of the changes of political consciousness within the Australian Fellowship of Writers, changes which culminated in Flora Eldershaw's assumption of presidency in 1935. This was seen as a win for the "progressive faction", an instatement of the writers' causes of union action and political voice, and an instalment, of course, of a woman.

While this indicates something of the general movement and strengthening of political purpose within the Australian literary scene, Modjeska points out that Katharine Susannah Prichard and Jean Devanny, the most politically active women were, in fact, of a minority group, the communists. In a chapter entitled "The Platform and the Writer's Desk" she examines in some detail the situations of these women, focusing in particular on the apparent incompatibility of their lives as writers and as activists. As Alistair Davidson shows in his history of the Australian Communist Party, the early thirties were years of expansion and action, and, more importantly, of a constitutional change ("bolshevization") which emphasized the subjection and duties of party workers over their rights. Both Prichard and Devanny seem to have responded to the new hardline policies of their party as a test of loyalty; certainly, both were extraordinarily active at this time. Yet, Modjeska suggests, they suffered for their political dedication. The quality of Devanny's fiction is very likely attributable to the rushed and harassed conditions of its composition and in Prichard's case the adoption of the party line of socialist realism seems to have unnaturally deformed her creative expression. Devanny's frustration is clear

in her writings, and in her life of constant contestation, both within and outside the party. For Prichard, though, the artistic compromise was an affirmation of party commitment and a means of stabilizing her precarious situation as a woman intellectual in the Communist party. It involved, however, an effective disavowal of the disturbing but fecund subjects of marriage, female sexuality and female identity which she had been exploring in earlier works. The possibility of creative dissent was negated.

The case of Miles Franklin's political life is discussed in "a chapter of her own". Considering Franklin's movements and ideas over about forty years, Modjeska presents a rather curious and at times sketchy portrait. This is in part due to Franklin's famous evasiveness and secrecy regarding her life and works, but it may also result from the vague and often contradictory nature of her beliefs. It is significant that the chapter includes a long and politically acute discussion of the feminist philosophy of *Life and Labour*, the Women's Trade Union League paper which Franklin co-edited with Alice Henry in Chicago before the first world war. Its revelation of the salience of very confused feminist argument combined with a sort of liberal sentimentalism provides a useful basis for an assessment of the ideas of the later Franklin. Caught between a nostalgia for the passing of an idealized bush community and a desire for strong leadership and an elitist order, Franklin was, in her later years, disillusioned, puzzled, and markedly conservative. Her feminism, never very reflexive, became bound with eugenics, anti-rationalism, and the Australia First movement. Modjeska's negotiation of the connections between the *Life and Labour* philosophies and the ambiguities of later works and attitudes is impressive, and yields, in my view, a considerable and insightful contribution to Franklin scholarship.

Exiles At Home concludes with a look at the domestic situations of women writers, and at their fiction. As one would expect, women writers of the thirties were, for the most part, plagued with financial anxieties and domestic drudgery, and largely unsupported in their intellectual endeavours. Not surprisingly, too, these conditions were transferred to and creatively explored in fiction: "the problems and dilemmas of marriage, maternity, sexual morality and female intellectuality" are, therefore, the major subjects engaged. Modjeska's general view of the fiction is governed by two arguments. The first is that it may be read as an indication of "the contradictions and dislocations within bourgeois ideology during a period of crisis" (214). The second suggests that there is a movement in the fiction from the "moral, self-orientated concern with women's issues" (in such works as Eleanor Dark's *Slow Dawning* and Dymphna Cusack's *Jungfrau*) towards an incorporation, in works of the late thirties and early forties, of broader issues of "class, race and political power" (Kylie Tennant's *Tiburon* and *Foveaux*, for example, Eleanor Dark's *The Timeless Land*, and, later, M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*). These are persuasive, and, in the end, well substantiated arguments. The author relies, however, on a synoptic view of the novels concerned to establish a sense of the particular thematic antimonies and ideological manoeuvres within subject matter. Unfortunately this method seems to involve an unexamined assumption of a clear homology between lives and texts. Works are studied for a symptomatic aspect; the critical issue of their degree of coincidence or contention is largely avoided. Synoptic content analysis tends to circumvent questions concerning the precise nature of the relationship of text, biography and context, and also to elide the issue of stylistic qualification of subject. (The exceptions in this second case are the author's discussions of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow* and *Coonardoo.*) These matters of theoretical clarity are perhaps compensated for by the argumentative acumen demonstrated in the completion of the book's thesis. The incommensurability of political issues and women's issues in the early works is explained, and the charting of an emergence of explicit political concern in women's writing comprises, finally, both a formal and historical judgement of some weight.

This last point is important. Modjeska's revaluation of neglected works using criteria of assessment based on a recognition of the cognate bond of literature and history is at once successful and accomplished, and demonstrates in its achievement both the validity and the productivity of a literary-historiographical methodology. It is no accident, I think, that Modjeska concludes her book with a polemical

plea for an acceptance in Australian literary studies of possibilities of investigation which rest on other than purely formalistic concerns. Her own work is a welcome contribution to the establishment of new directions in scholarship.

GAIL JONES

Joan Kirkby (ed.), *The American Model: Influence and Independence in Australian Poetry*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, 178 pp.

I can tell you this about myself: I like my criticism like I like my literature: provocative, personal and playful. These days I'm not too happy with critics who cower behind *objectivity*. ("Is literary-critical *objectivity* self-deception?" I keep asking myself.) Nor am I best mates with analysts who refuse to take similar risks to those the writers themselves take: if the writer is exposing nerve-ends, the critic should too. I can now say, with unflinching conviction, that I like my criticism like I like my literature: experiential to the heart. Both kinds of texts, primary and secondary (I do wish I could rid myself of the language of category and privilege!) ... both kinds of texts should elicit, evoke, and effect response, and should engage the reader en route. I don't necessarily want to make a passionate plea for passion; still, I feel that, since literature is a human act, the comments on, or criticism of, that poem or whatever should be more personal than clinical (more phenomenological than formalistic?). But don't get me wrong. The personal doesn't mean the merely confessional or the simply appreciative. Rather, the personal, for me, is the demonstration of the self in the process of being the self. That process, I believe, can be imitated through language and the special way an individual communicates—not preaches, not the way s/he addresses a subject, but the way s/he puts the listener in touch with a mind clicking over and a heart beating on. This human contact is what makes me tune into literature; so, I say, why not expect the same turn-on from criticism.

I can just imagine your informed response. "But," you say, "what you're saying may be self-consciously snappy, but it's ever so platitudinous—old hat and all that jazz. I mean what about Horace's dictum, *dulce et utile*? Are you really saying anything different when you call for the provocative, the personal and the playful?" And to your observation, I reply: "No, I'm not. But as for that *utile*, I must say I don't really want my books to be text-bookish in codifying reality for me, i.e., to explicitly instruct me as to what it is I need to know in order to get by. Instead, I'd like the writer of that book—primary or secondary—to do what Whitman required of a text, viz., to provide "but the clue, the start, the framework," thereby allowing the reader the *dulce* of recreation over the *utile* of relation. What this means, I guess, is that I want to be teased into thought. I find that process a more effective way of learning."

I suppose, given these biases, I'm most satisfied with criticism written by poets. Is it any wonder (oh, I like my literature and my criticism to cause me *wonder*, too) that *The American Model*, edited by Joan Kirkby, pleases me so. After all, it's a book of essays by Australian poets acknowledging what American writers have meant to them; and these are pieces which were initially delivered as talks. As Kirkby explains in the Preface to the collection:

> *The American Model* was the title of a poetry conference held at Macquarie University in May 1979. The aim of the conference was both to explore the relationship between Australian and American poetry and to provide a forum where poets and readers of poetry from all over Australia could meet, talk, debate the significance of American poetry in [Australia] ... The result was a highly charged four days of critical exchange which would have satisfied even Emily Dickinson's rather apocalyptic criteria of poetic power—'If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can warm me I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?'

Now here's a human context for a critical text!

The people who spoke at the conference included: Buckley, Dawe, Gray, Shapcott, Taylor, Tranter, Wallace-Crabbe, and Zwicky. ('Tis pity the conveners of the conference got only one woman to speak. And is any one of

the above besides Zwicky a member of a minority group? Does the panel of experts reflect the politics of poetry Downunder: mainstream, male, mainly academic, white, WASP, etc?) Their titles are as various and inviting as their voices are different and genuinely interesting. Shapcott's is "Beware of broken glass: models in a room of mirrors". Wallace-Crabbe's: "The Quaker graveyard in Carlton." Zwicky's: "Democratic repression and the admission of difference: the ethnic strain." Tranter's: "An-aesthetics . . . ." Two American writers were at the conference. Galway Kinnell talked about "Walt Whitman's poetic line", and Louis Simpson talked about William Carlos Williams . . . . From these subjects alone, you might be able to reconstruct the scenario; the titles are both testy and telling.

Most of the speakers/writers invoke the names of Whitman and Williams as the two poets whom they were most "influenced" by. Almost all remark on, as Joan Kirkby tells us in her informative and intelligent "Introduction" to the collection, "the predisposition of American poetry toward the idiom and rhythm of actual physical life and its location in sense perception, the particular personal experience of the writer". Many too, echo Tom Shapcott in commenting on "the act of becoming the vulnerable being" and "the vulnerability of experiencing man" in American poetry, as well as on the use of language, "coarsely rich and ready for adventures to make it richer". Other speakers, like Wallace-Crabbe, refer to the narcissistic and solipsistic strain, "the raw subjectivity" of American poetry. Zwicky, Dawe and Taylor talk challengingly about "an awareness of city life in American poetry", a "social awareness", and about the moral contests it encourages. For the most part, although the Blakes of the land warn us to create a new system or to be forever enslaved by that of another, the speakers rhapsodized about their American mentors: in fact, of them, they sang, eulogistically.

But all was not jubilation, celebration, or adulation in the city of poets, May 1979. Even writers (especially poets?) require scapegoats. The three sinister forces in the portrait of the artist as drawn in this collection are the BOOK TRADE, which kept/keeps the work of certain foreign writers out of Australia, the AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT and ENGLISH (i.e., British) LITERATURE generally. These allegorical figures force-fed our future poets on a diet of, what Buckley calls the "monolithic, immobile, or anal-retentive" stuff of the U.K.—as opposed to American poetry with its "naturalness and ease of movement". The privileging here is typical and is probably overstated, but that's the way the poets put it: on the line, up-front, hyperbolic or not, thereby giving us cause to pause. And I approve: better to take chances and reach people (even if it's only through reaction) than to play it safe and be sorry. As Dr Johnson, whose wrong-headed criticism excites me, might have said: better to be shouted down than yawned at.

And there's no yearning to yawn through this collection. If your back's not up by the provocative line, then your feelings are moved by the poetry of the personal and playful prose. Before citing just a bit—and at length—I might note that, throughout these talks/essays, long passages by American writers are quoted. This fact, alone, is probably significant. Your "usual" literary critic would cite fairly sparingly; his/her job is to analyse. Here, however, the passages of American poetry and prose are offered by the Australian poets not only to make a point (maybe in but a simple, declarative sentence), but also, and more importantly, for pleasure—for the experience of the text at hand: not lit, under glass, but the living word, out of the cradle endlessly rocking, and on parade . . . . Taylor's personal, poetic and playful introduction, for example, begins:

> At the end of 1957 I was 17 and what would be called today a semi-dedicated surfie. In all that summer which lasted from when I left school until I started my first year at Melbourne University, I missed only five days on the beach, despite my job as a postman. Next summer I missed three months of beach because I was part of Australia's peacetime army. The following year, I missed only two days. I swam in water so thick with dredged-up autumn sand that I couldn't even see the patches of seaweed that I used to mistake on calmer days for stingrays. I would let myself be swept out by the undertow. Those were cold, early March days when the beach was totally deserted except for me. In 1959, the very first surfboard, a real surfboard, appeared on the beach at Warrnambool. I

asked the old lady who owned it (she must have been about 28 and a total stranger) if I could borrow it. She let me. I wandered aimlessly over the ocean for twenty minutes, I ran over a helpless swimmer, I found the shore and eventually got the surfboard back to its owner, whom I never saw again. I was a different surfie from today's surfies: I only knew how to float with my body, I don't have their elegant sense of balance. But before surfboards appeared on the Warrnambool coast, I used to let myself go like a cork. I'd tuck my legs up and be swept out to sea by the undertow until I was totally beyond my depth. It was a matter of judgement. When I got to where the biggest waves were breaking, I'd flatten out and swim to shore. The waves always brought me back.

I guess this should be a metaphor. I was young. I was prepared to be swept one way or another, frequently totally out of my depth, but I was trusting to luck and, partly, to a developing sense of judgement.

Taylor turns to surfing and Buckley to sickness, before he fleshes out his analogy and gets around to the business of making his point. Buckley writes: "At the end of my first adolescence, which was just before the Second World War.... I was in a military hospital

driven half-mad by an endless system of convention and constraint, caught between an unpromising future and a despised past, a living tree of longing and nostalgia. The universe called with its limitless voices; I responded with limitless mute desire, *with no language*, since I did not have the ease of feeling which would allow language to form itself; I was gritty and speechless as a dream. I read, or in some cases re-read, what American writers I could get.

These were novelists rather than poets. In hospital, the Red Cross women with their book-trolley would look sideways and make embarrassed snuffing noises whenever I would ask for poetry. Outside, in the lending libraries, in the universities and the bookshops, the taste was standard, English-based, with very little reverence towards even Australian poetry, much less other inferior brands. I got my Australian poetry by conscious policy—by reading the reviews and following up the tips which they gave. I got my American poetry by lucky finds, by exchange with other poetry-hoarders like Alexander Craig, and in the form of review copies, got by pointedly asking editors for those books rather than

A Gippsland Grandmother or *The Last of the Sailing Ships.*

This is the sort of literary criticism I like —and it's representative of the quality of thinking/feeling/expression of *The American Model.* I like it because it's criticism which is literary. It's got point and personality. It's got rhythm and it's got blues. It takes chances and offers experience. And if I hear the voice of the Bard right, it seems a cue—the cue of you?—OZ has taken from US.

JIM LEGASSE

Peter Porter, *English Subtitles*, Oxford University Press, 1981, 56 pp., $11.95.

W. H. Auden, whose cadences of wry self-observation haunt these poems, once defined poetry as the "clear expression of mixed feelings". By "clear" I understand Auden to have meant "comprehensible" without necessarily being simplistic. In this new volume, Peter Porter shows some very mixed feelings (when he allows them to show at all) and, even then, their expression is sometimes less than clear. The wide-ranging subject matter is covered with the energetic assurance of one at home with the sounds of language and its chameleon possibilities, but one who is less at ease with the emotional complexities which language names. Behind the toneless, fundamentally unmusical voice of the poet speaking to nobody in particular (compare Whitman's 'you whoever you are' with Porter's press-gang 'we'), lies a tenuous grasp of identity. Like Auden too, the poet assumes too predictably the role of converter of emotion into art, aware of the emotional timidity behind the polished surfaces of poetic speech.

In the skilled performance of the safely neutral *persona* we hear the reflexively self-deprecating tone of one who knows the difference between the legitimate and the phony aspects of his trade, and assumes similar intellectual awareness in his readers:

As we sit in the dark,
I turn the more uncomfortable passions
Into slim sentences, such old words
As I know you know...
('English Subtitles')

There must be some ground between heroic self-dramatization and the coy evasion of those 'slim sentences' where uncomfortable passions might be accommodated in the fullness of their disquieting force. Porter is disarmingly aware of the stoical obligations of rationality, and the way in which heroic action and speculation may be invoked, glanced at, maybe even discussed (albeit mockingly), but never attempted. Leave that to the articulate Yanks:

> The opening up,
> audacity of
> thinking what terrifies
> with its demands
> on heroics,
> on the here and now—
> ('The American Articulate')

Also to be reckoned with is the painful honesty of the shy performer, the earnest propensities and private yearnings behind hard-won scepticism in poems that explore the distance between hurtful and genuinely-felt subjects and the pedantically limiting verbal constructs embodying them. It is all genuine enough and enlightening enough so why do I harbour these grudging reservations?

I suspect it has something to do with a lack of the dramatic gift of immediacy. While this makes it easier to abstract, philosophize and satirize in poems that set out to do these things, in poems that seem to lure us in more personal directions the signposts appear either nebulous or irrelevant:

> Between the arrival of letters,
> neither long enough nor sufficiently tender,
> and the platitudes of dreams
> stalled on their evolutionary ladder.
>
> Between wounds made by words
> and the enduring silence of those
> who can talk of love
> only in the cadences of memory.
> ('All the Difference in the World')

We have heard the cadences of this voice before—those old masters who were never wrong and whose sanctioned world-weariness rendered dreams platitudes, who infused English landscapes with generalized menace, and whose selfless precision cramped the vigour of a thousand colonial undergraduates.

Porter has the habit of thinking of particulars as primarily illustrations of general truths, or else as aesthetic abstracted objects, merely there to be contemplated. This works when the mood is satirical. For example:

> Survival can kill. Not just of cat and mouse
> and dog
> but the million-faceted virus. Inventive Man
>
> breeds a more economical red-meat quadruped
> or white-fleshed avian source of protein
>
> for his Nursing Homes, and hears above his
> hi-fi'd Bach
> a cry from the drawing-board, the Unicorn's
> love laugh.
> ('Two for the Price of One')

But, played straight, it may become pointlessly esoteric:

> Yet we are haunted by our memory
> of perfection, of setting out among ferns
> for our father, the birds of the air
> moderating painful noon
> with their clamant cries.

Which is attractive, poignant, and awake to the nuances of a natural world, give or take the excessively literary 'clamant'. But this is followed by—

> Not even regret may stay in Eden.
> Bellini's melodies are spoiled
> by scratches on a record's surface
> and a baby wakes to light fleeing
> the face of nothing.
> ('The Imperfection of the World')

—where, in clumsy contrast to the perfection of the natural, that master of artifice, Bellini, is invoked at one remove—on a scratched record. And the new baby, suddenly and gratuitously archetypal in this rather fussy sequence of cultural particulars, senses his existential dilemma in Miltonic diction that parodies itself.

Despite a very real intellectual sophistication, Porter can sometimes be self-protectively evasive to an irritating degree in relentless bursts of one-line virtuosity or baroque irrelevance. For example, in 'Returning', which begins simply enough in Larkin-land with the line 'Nobody feels well after his fortieth birthday', the poet goes on to labour the reasons behind the malaise. After the rueful admission of the "rough Justice of the body's failures", he pushes the grimly humorous analysis out into generalized areas which become instant symbolic landscapes and too clever by half:

Yet never daring enough, even those hours
When the timid rule of truth relents
And every written word is without sense
As in some ultimate avant-gardish shape—
The apostle of plain dullness has powers
Of arrest and will use them; nightmares
Are prized categories too, a Southern rape
Modelled in blood but with a classic tense.
('Returning')

We recognize the familiar modern brew of irony and nightmare, but these elements seem to be arbitrary extensions radiating out from a centre whose meaning they obscure rather than illuminate. There is something a bit mechanical about this expertise, fuelled by the desperation of a performer obliged to keep talking to the end even where there isn't very much left to say. The relative hollowness becomes apparent if compared to those deeply-felt poems written after the death of his wife in *The Cost of Seriousness* (1978). Or some earlier nostalgic poems about his Australian childhood in which he seems to draw strength from past loss and the severing of deepest ties.

Dealing with such themes, the poetry is utterly convincing. It is hard to forget, for example, the impact of the early poem, 'Ghosts', in which the following powerfully concrete lines recall his mother:

A large woman in a kimono, her flesh
Already sweating in the poulticing heat
Of afternoon—just from her bath, she stands,
Propping her foot on a chair of faded pink,
Preparing to cut her corns. The sun
Simmers through the pimply glass—as if
Inside a light bulb, the room is lit with heat.
The window is the sun's lens, its dusty slice
Of light falls on the woman's foot.
('Ghosts')

This follows to the letter William Carlos Williams's prescription for the American grain —'No ideas but in things!'—and one could wish that Porter might have further explored the visual concreteness of the outer world before landscape turned inward and became a paradigm of art. While the child's eye holds steady, there is no lack of immediacy. It is when the man dissociates himself from the boy-that-was that those remembered become more ghostly. This doesn't undercut the truth of the recollection but haunting presences are recalled more obliquely and abstractly in later work: self-preservation is at stake now—

She is coming towards me,
looking at me to turn me to stone,
saying my name and turning herself
into territories I know from books,
into the damned who are behind blinds,
the peaceful madmen of the parish.
('Good Ghost, Gaunt Ghost')

The guilt of the survivor is explored compellingly as passion breaks through in unclever, fitful reminders of an older atavistic diction:

Her clothes are syntax, so that I read
someone else's poem and I am there
on the banks of salvation
or crying in a furnace. Why has thou
held talent above my head
and let me see it, O my God?
('Good Ghost, Gaunt Ghost')

The surface vitality functions here to a clearly-recognizable end. The poet's intellectual energy is focused on and correlated with those sources of regeneration which have been lost to him, and the combination is powerful.

Expatriate or not, Porter's energy does not submit easily to the dampening pressures of his adopted country's mores. He can distinguish clearly between an Australian magpie and its English counterpart, not always in favour of the latter either:

You can upbraid the magpie,
saying, 'What do you know of Kant?'
It might shift a claw an inch or two.
('Sonata Form: The Australian Magpie')

The colonial will always speak English "with a glossary" and see with "an eye far too large to be seemly", will be a predator and aligned with barbarism:

Its opening theme is predation.
What it scavenges is old cake
soaked in dew, but might be eyes.

Such alighting and strutting
across the mown grass of the Ladies' College!
Siege machines are rolling near.
('Sonata Form: The Australian Magpie')

An Australian variation on Wallace Stevens's 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird', Porter treats the problem of the relation of imagination to reality with transfiguring wit (and here the playful changes seem appropriate):

We have certainly heard this theme before,
the sound of homecoming. Anticipation
needs a roof, plus a verandah for magpies.

Are these the cries of love or of magpies
sighting food? Some things about desire
call for explicit modern novels.

Love and food are both needed but the poet clings (literally) to his laurels:

Where can there be nature enough
to do without art? In despair, the poet
flies to the top of a camphor laurel.

The material world is seen to achieve its nature effortlessly, merely by existing. Perhaps the latent colonial puritanism in Porter forbids him to relinquish the hard-earned right to art acquired amid alien corn.

Reading these poems, I kept wanting Porter to be less set in his ways, to be possessed by his subjects, to be flung out of his all-controlling self, to have his subject individualize his poems for him. And this is, of course, unfair to such a sensibility which is deeply attracted to ideas, and seeks to link them with perceptions of a public world. From this attempt comes a style that is occasionally capable of going beyond the banalities of self-exposure to touch on more compelling and painful realities, but, more often tends to duck the hazards of confrontation.

Randall Jarrell, speaking of Wallace Stevens, said he was "like a fossil imprisoned in the rock of himself—the best marble but, still, marble". Porter's poems read in an Australian context strike me as similarly marmoreal. And I am sorry to be saying this for such intellectual rigour, linguistic finesse and historical awareness are not easily come by in this country where poetry tends to fall pitifully short of the real demands of the age. But equally, the answers no longer seem to lie unequivocally with art's traditionally civilizing powers, for which Peter Porter stands as a powerful, if somewhat arcane, advocate.

FAY ZWICKY

Sybil

Western Australia's only Feminist Magazine

- The April 1982 issue focuses on various aspects of protest by women.
- Subsequent issues will focus on 'Women and Health' and 'Women and Work'.

Subscriptions: $4.00 for 4 issues of *Sybil*

Send your cheque to *Sybil*, P.O. Box 198, Nedlands, W.A. 6009

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PATRICIA AVERY—came to Australia from America in 1979. She has been studying for a PhD in comparative literature, but has left this to devote more time to writing.

GEOFFREY BEWLEY—was born and educated in Sydney. After leaving university in 1968 he worked as a journalist and has been published in Australian literary magazines and papers. He has recently been in Malaysia.

GEOFFREY BOLTON—is Professor of History at Murdoch University. In September 1982 he will commence a three year appointment as first Professor of Australian Studies at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London. His books include *Alexander Forrest* (1958), *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* (1963), *A Fine Country to Starve In: Western Australia in the Depression* (1972), *Britain's Legacy Overseas* (1973), *Spoils and Spoilers: Australians Make Their Environment* (1981).

VERONICA BRADY—is a lecturer in the English Department at the University of W.A. She has contributed critical articles to Australian and overseas literary journals and edited *Soundings: A Selection of Western Australian Poetry. A Crucible of Prophets—Australians and the Question of God*, has just been published.

ANNE BREWSTER—is a postgraduate student at the University of Adelaide, and teaches part time at the S.A. Institute of Technology. Her poems have appeared in *Compass* and *Matoid.* She is co-editing *The Friendly Street Reader No ó.*

ANDREW BURKE—has worked in Perth in radio and advertising. He has published poems in Australian magazines and a collection of poems *Let's Face the Music and Dance.*

ALEC CHOATE—born in England, but has lived most of his life in Western Australia. His book of poems, *Gifts Upon the Water*, contains war-time poems set in Southeast Asia and peace-time poems of the same area.

BRIAN DE GARIS—is Senior Lecturer in History and Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Western Australia. His writings include *A Short History of Western Australia* (1969) with F. K. Crowley and a number of studies of Western Australian and Australian history.

BILL DUNSTONE—is lecturer in English at the University of Western Australia. He is the author of the chapter on drama in *The Literature of Western Australia.*

EE TIANG HONG—is a lecturer in English at the Nedlands C.A.E. He has lived in Western Australia for several years, after leaving Malaysia. His poetry has been published in England, Malaysia and Singapore.

MARGARET ELIOT—lives in Sydney. She taught history but now works at part-time jobs to enable her to devote more time to writing. She has published short stories in some Australian journals and *Westerly.*

BEVERLEY FARMER—lives in Melbourne, where she attended Melbourne University. Recently spent three years in Greece. Has published short stories in literary magazines, including *Westerly*. Her first novel, *Alone*, has been published by Sisters Publishing Ltd., based on a short story she wrote for *Westerly* in October 1968 under the name B. Christou.

PAUL HASLUCK—retired from the position of Governor-General of Australia in 1974, following a career in the public service and politics which included being Cabinet Minister in three portfolios. His books include *Mucking About: An Autobiography* (1977) and *Collected Verse* (1969).

GRAEME HETHERINGTON—lives in Hobart, and is a lecturer in the Classics Department at the University of Tasmania. His poetry has appeared in Australian and English literary magazines.

GAIL JONES—is a postgraduate student and tutor in English at the University of Western Australia.

DIANA KAN—was born in Melbourne, and has worked as an artist and in a school library. Her poems have appeared in Australian journals and have been read on radio.

GRAEME KEIR—was born in Scotland. Is working at an Honours English course at Adelaide University. His poems have been published in Australian newspapers and literary journals.

MARTIN LANGFORD—has published poetry in Australian literary magazines and is at present working on a book of aphorisms.

JIM LEGASSE—is author of *The Same Old Story* (1982), and is a lecturer in English at the University of Western Australia.

JULIE LEWIS—lives in Perth. She has written for radio and her stories have appeared in Australian magazines. She has been writer in schools at several West Australian high schools during 1981-82. Has published a biography, *On Air*, and a collection of short stories, *Double Exposure*.

PETER LOFTUS—lives in Tasmania and has contributed poetry to Australian literary magazines. He is now also writing prose. *Westerly* will publish a short story in the next issue.

KIRPAL SINGH—is a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Literature, National University of Singapore. A doctoral graduate of the University of Adelaide, he has edited several books of short fiction and poetry.

TOM SHAPCOTT—poet, reviewer, anthologist. Recent publications include *Selected Poems* and *Turning Full Circle*, prose poems. Received Canada/Australia award in 1978. Was writer in residence at W.A.I.T. in 1979 and Deakin University in 1980.

JILL SMYTH—lives in Adelaide. She has worked at a number of jobs, and 'been unemployed, drifting, travelling, dabbling in this, that and the other'. Is planning to do a full-time course in teaching English to migrants. *Trading Partners* is her first published story.

GEORGE STERN—lives in Canberra, where he works as a public servant. He is a feature writer and columnist for the *Canberra Times*, and teaches a course in vocational writing for the community education programme of the Australian National University. Some of his 'poetic constructs' have been broadcast over Canberra radio.

EDWIN THUMBOO—is one of the best known poets and writers in the South-east Asian region. He is Head of the Department of English Language and Literature and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, National University of Singapore. His books of poems are *Rib of Earth*, *Gods Can Die* and *Ulysses by the Merlion.*

CHRIS WALLACE-CRABBE—born in Melbourne and teaches English at the University of Melbourne. He has travelled widely in Europe, Asia and North America, and has a particular interest in the relationship between American and Australian poetry. He has published a number of books of poems and a book of criticism.

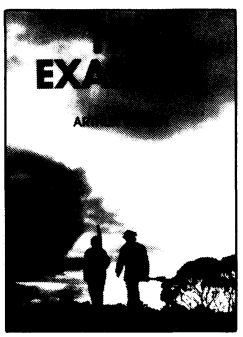
FRANCIS WALSH—completed a degree course in Professional Writing at Canberra C.A.E. in 1979, and was a part-time tutor in that course last year. Her short stories have been published in Australian literary magazines and broadcast on radio. She is at present working as an editor for the Australian National Gallery.

TOM WINTON—was born in Perth and has studied creative writing at W.A.I.T. His stories have appeared in Australian literary journals, and he was joint winner of the 1981 Australian-Vogel Award. His novel, *An Open Summer*, has just been published.

FAY ZWICKY—is author of two books of poems, *Isaac Babel's Fiddle* (1976) and *Kaddish* (1982), and is editor of *Quarry: A Selection of Contemporary Western Australian Poetry* (1981). She lectures in English at the University of Western Australia.

BOOK ARTLOOKS

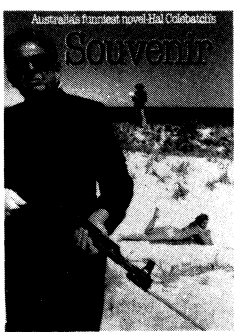
Western Australia's leading publishing house publishing the very



THE EXAMPLE
Arthur Tonkin

A powerful first novel by a new writer.

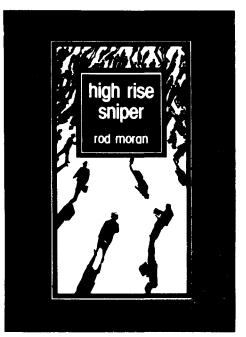
This story of the potential for race hatred and violence which exists within ordinary Australians, individually harmless, once they have been drawn by a skilled manipulator into a plan of collective action, will cause all of us who believe "it can't happen here" to abandon our complacency.



SOUVENIR
Hal Colebatch

The lunatic side to literature is explored in this new Australian novel, which is one of the funniest to appear in years. A Writing Bee on an island sets the scene for an uproarious literary Gotterdammerung.

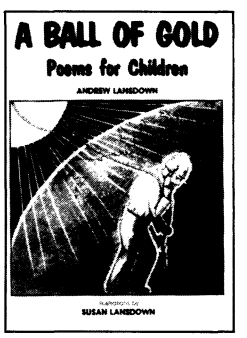
Hal Colebatch is one of Perth's best-known younger writers, whose work has been published widely both nationally and internationally.



HIGH RISE SNIPER
Rod Moran

Australian Poetry Series No. 1.

Rod Moran is one of Australia's most exciting young poets whose work has appeared in most of Australia's leading journals and newspapers. *"High Rise Sniper"* is his first published collection of verse, and is the first in Artlooks new series of Australian poets.



A BALL OF GOLD
Andrew Lansdown

Andrew Lansdown's poems have appeared in most of Australia's better literary periodicals and his first book *Homecoming* appeared in 1979. The sensitive poems in this book were written for his two small children and delicately illustrated by his wife, Susan.

Out soon . . .

OUTER CHARTINGS
Hal Colebatch

Outer Chartings is Hal Colebatch's third published collection of verse, following *Spectators On The Shore* and *In Breaking Waves.* It completes a trilogy in theme and content, and contains his dramatic long poem sequence *Coastal Knot*, previously published in full in *Poetry Australia.* This volume is number three in Artlook's new Australian Poetry Series.

CASEY'S WIFE
Dorothy Congdon Casey

This is a moving and beautifully written account of the life of Gavin Casey, written by his wife Dorothy Congdon Casey. Casey was one of the best writers to emerge on the early literary scene in W.A., and this biography will do much to revive interest in his works. *Casey's Wife* was assisted with an editorial grant by the W.A. Literary Fund.

CULT COUNTER-CULT
Lloyd Davies

A new full-length novel set on the communes of South West Australia. A Moonie-like cult ensnares a young Perth man and the plot concerns the attempts to retrieve his body and mind from its clutches. *Cult Counter-Cult* is written with a chilling accuracy and is superbly crafted by the highly successful author of *Pastmaster.*

TRAPEZE
Shane McCauley

Shane McCauley is perhaps the leading young poet in W.A., and his published output to date is extraordinary for such a young writer. *Trapeze* will be his first full-length collection published, and will form number two of our new Australian Poetry Series. Designed and illustrated by Melody Hampton, who designed *High Rise Sniper.*

164-166 Beaufort Street, Perth, W.A. 6000.
P.O. Box 8268, Stirling Street, Perth, W.A. 6001.
Telephone: 328 9188 (Multiple Lines)

University of Western Australia Press

NEW AND FORTHCOMING TITLES

The Indian Ocean in Global Politics Larry W. Bowman and Ian Clark, editors	$19.80
The Indian Ocean Region: Resources and Development Alex Kerr, editor	$30.00
The Tanner Letters: A Pioneer Saga of Swan River and Tasmania 1831-45 P. Statham, editor	$13.95
Ambitions Fire: The Agricultural Colonization of Pre-Convict Western Australia J. M. R. Cameron	$19.95
Pioneer Aboriginal Mission William McNair and Hilary Rumley	$13.95
Firearms and Violence in Australian Life Richard Harding	$13.95
The Biology of Australian Plants J. S. Pate and A. J. McComb, editors	$25.00
Something in Common (CYGNET BOOKS) Marianne White and Loma Nahrung	$7.95
Reading into the 80's Bessell-Browne, Latham, Reeves, Gardiner, editors	$5.95
How to Teach Reading and The Year of the Child Bessell-Browne, Latham, Reeves, editors	$5.95
An Australian Parsonage or, The Settler and the Savage in Western Australia (Facsimile Reprint Series) Mrs Edward Millett	$25.00
A Place to Meet: A History of the Shire of Katanning Merle Bignell	$17.95

UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA PRESS,
Nedlands, W.A. 6009 Telephone 380 3181

Eastern States: Melbourne University Press, P.O. Box 278, Carlton South, Victoria, 3053

westerly is published by the English Department, University of Western Australia, set in Times type-face and printed by Alpha Print Pty Ltd, Perth, W.A.