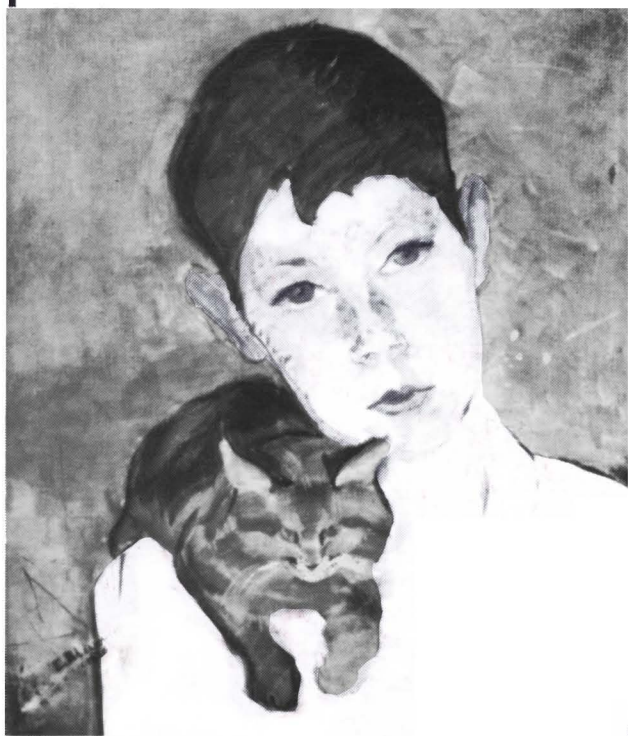


WESTERLY

stories poems reviews articles

An Indian Selection — Contemporary Writing

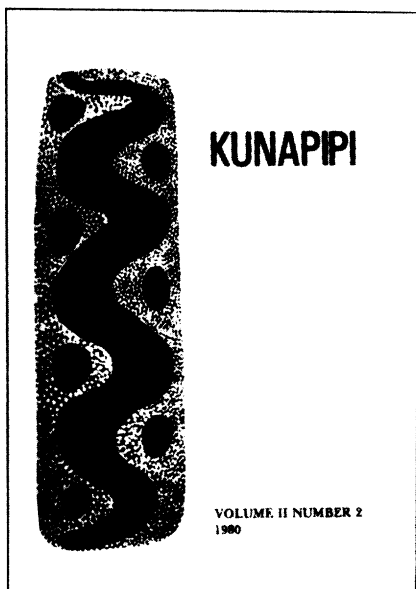


“In former times”:
Elise Blumann
remembers

DECEMBER, 1983

NUMBER 4

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Kunapipi is a bi-annual international arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on post-colonial literatures and arts.

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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

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WESTERLY

Vol. 28, No. 4, December 1983

CONTENTS

STORIES

O Baby Mine	5	FAIRLIE SZACINSKI
The Chinese Bride	9	NICHOLAS JOSE
Endings	13	SU GRUZIN
On the Edge of a Narrative	17	JUDITH FORRESTER
Journal from the Belly of a Whale	21	TIM WINTON

POEMS

RORY HARRIS	11, 31	AUDREY LONGBOTTOM	33
ANDREW SANT	12	DIANE DODWELL	35
BARRY WESTBURG	16, 25	JAMES CHARLTON	36
JERI KROLL	19, 34	JUDITH WOMERSLEY	43
SUSAN SCHWARTZ	20	WARRICK WYNNE	54
SHANE MCCAULEY	23	RORY STEELE	55
PATRICIA AVERY	24	ROBERT HABOST	56
SARAH DAY	26, 27	MARIAN DE SAXE	57
E. M. BRADSTOCK	28, 29, 30	QUINTILINA EVANGELISTA	58
MICHAEL HEALD	32	ANDREW LANSDOWN	64

ARTICLES

Ripening in the Sun: Shirley Hazzard's Heroines in Italy	37	ALGERINA NERI
"In former times": Elise Blumann remembers	45	CAROLYN POLIZZOTTO

REVIEWS

Shirley Walker (ed.)— <i>Who Is She?</i> <i>Images of Women in Australian Fiction</i>	59	DELYS BIRD
Stephen Muecke (ed.)— <i>Paddy Roe</i> , <i>Gularabulu</i>	61	BOB HODGE

Notes on Contributors	104
-----------------------	-----

Cover: Elise Blumann—see Article by Carolyn Polizzotto

An Indian Selection edited by Ron Shepherd

ARTICLES

Towards Liberation: Four Recent Novels from India	66	MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE
Contemporary India in the Writing of Ruth Praver Jhabvala	73	YASMINE GOONERATNE
Forging a New Language: Sri Chinmoy's "Ten Thousand Flower-Flames"	81	VIDAGDHA MEREDITH BENNETT

STORIES

The Shoeblack	87	SHIV K. KUMAR
The Merchant of Kisingarh	91	G. V. DESANI

POEMS

SHIV K. KUMAR	96	JAYANTA MAHAPATRA 101
---------------	----	-----------------------

O Baby Mine

"Good possy, this," Webster Trickett had announced. He used few words, mostly cautious clichés. His mildly caved countenance assumed something like triumph as he connected the caravan to its power post.

"Facilities are good too." Rita moved heavily into view, she'd been down to inspect. "Nice and clean, tiled washrooms like that park out west, and looks like plenty of hot water." The two pairs of bespectacled eyes met in agreement, took fright, and instantly averted.

"I'll put up the annexe in the morning," Webster said. Gently he took up the forefinger of his right hand with the fingers of his left, as if that particular finger were made of satin or egg-shell and must be cossetted.

"Uh huh . . . I'll see to the soup." Rita was a big woman, clumsy, needing room to move, so Webster took the hint and disappeared into the bedroom section of the van.

Yes, he thought, they would enjoy this mid-winter holiday to be spent barely north of Capricorn, where river met ocean in a picturesque union. They'd arrived late afternoon, yet the sun still held warmth. A touch of a breeze riffled the leaves of the coolibahs along the road which ran from the jetty on the river to the jagged cliffs stemming the ocean. A cluster of shops and cottages lay between 'Hideaway Park' on the river — the venue of the Tricketts — and 'Paradise Gardens' with its rugged coastal outlook up the lesser end.

June and July brought many couples of middle age here. They strolled the foreshore, clucked over southern newspapers and postcards, spent a deal of time at the post office, either sending or receiving, and sipped daily cups of coffee at 'The Three Sails'. An observer might notice similarities shared by these holiday couples — perhaps merely a lack of haste, or simply that their sixty-plus or -minus years had given them a smudged look, a conditioning of cautiousness and consciousness that deterred spontaneous reaction. As a rule, one or other partner looked the worrying kind. In parley, it was often discovered quite early that a grandchild was on the way. Many of the ladies had that tea-drinking, crocheted, comfortable look that goes with being a proper nanna. These were nice people, solid brick folk who had earned their way into retirement after a commendable working span. Now and then a few giveaway signs indicated that the good-morning, day-touring, mid-life-be-in-it smiler on top was less of a paragon beneath. A tell-tale mouth, a hoppitty leg, a snappish retort, furrows of anxiety, extra dark glasses, even an amble without the partner could show that an apparently fixed twosome was made up, after all, of two individuals. And each had a story.

Take the Tricketts, for example, settling into their van at 'Hideaway' . . . like most other couples cautiously friendly, modest, whole-hearted in maintaining standards of justice and cleanliness. Over the years, however, the two had become performers in a life-long play — rarely was a line missed, a cue ignored, an aside unfulfilled. Rita *ad libbed* occasionally, which caused Webster to recoil in confusion; he'd acted out of turn perhaps half a dozen times in their well-studied wedlock.

Right now, with Webster out of the way, Rita clattered about fixing dinner. She scrabbled in paper bags, banged saucepans, dropped the tin opener and turned on the radio near enough to full blast.

"Cheerful," she said aloud, "a bit of music."

Webster, lying on the bed staring at the ceiling, smoothed his right forefinger. The noise dug at his core, an area that had been chiselled at for years. One of their few dinky di rows had been when he'd switched off "Chickery Chick cha-la cha-la" early in their married non-bliss. He still suffered.

Rita's head intruded. "About five minutes." She wished he wouldn't lie on the quilt with his shoes on. He looked like a patient fiddling with his fingers, had no life in him.

"Right . . ." He'd slip over to the Men's first. He noticed that Rita had coated her lips again, a purplish colour that didn't suit her, and the ethics of the play forbade mentioning it. The way her lipstick adhered to cups, spoons, cigarettes and tissues revolted him, as if the smear campaign were personally directed towards him. Small grounds, but fifteen years ago he'd thought of separation with longing.

Then, he'd mumbled to his brother that his nerves weren't too good. Sheepishly, for he wasn't one to confide. Rita . . . he'd muttered and left it at that.

"Stick it out," Harry had advised. "Phyllis was the same, had a real old monkey on her shoulder for a coupla years. Could be an early change, it's gotta hit sooner or later."

Webster had nodded and retreated. But it wasn't the change — she'd got on his nerves always, only now he didn't think he could keep the cap on. But he did.

Rita, too, had been in despair. On occasion she'd have liked to shake Webster until his eyes popped and teeth rattled. She considered taking off once or twice.

"Don't be crazy, Rite," her neighbour Avis had said. "You ought to know which side your bread's buttered. He supports you, doesn't he? Keeps out of your hair? Doesn't booze or bash!" Thus counselled, Rita went home to make the best of it. After all, there were the three boys growing up, maybe later on . . .

And five years ago Webster had bought the caravan. Eureka. Wife, lover, mother, friend and baby, seventeen by eight on wheels. O Baby Mine, he'd hummed quietly as he inspected, tested, wiped, polished, arranged and rearranged its interior.

"Simply went ahead off his own bat," Rita had marvelled to Avis. "Never said a boo. Most unlike Webster." She was more astonished at the *fact* of his secret purchase than with the presence of the van itself. She'd had to make a snap decision whether to admire or scorn this intruder to Westford Grove. Seemed like it wasn't going to make much difference, so she applauded the move lest he take off in it himself leaving her humiliated in front of the neighbours.

The boys approved their father's unexpected enterprise.

"She's spunky, Dad," Pete, the youngest, had visions of heading north to sun, surf and birds. They regarded Webster with new-found respect. Together they put up a shed to house the new arrival; the back garden had been large and bare, and the van looked far more a picture than any bed of roses or plot of silver beet.

The inside fittings fascinated them all except Rita. The silly little stove, the shoe-box sink, the low-slung frig., the many small cupboards and shelves irritated her. Space everywhere, Webster pointed out, opening and closing and opening again. Rita had frowned; being of solid frame she needed a different sort of space about her. This, to her, was a cooped-up, mean sort of existence.

Still, over the last five years she'd grown used to it. Pete had joined them the first couple of years they'd gone away, and he and Webster had often spent the day fishing, while Rita had sought company down the laundry or up the store earnestly comparing notes on milestones and menfolk. But now Pete had left home and the Tricketts were left to the challenge of one another's company, and thus they acted out their tidily-scripted husband and wife roles, rarely violating the code.

Now, Webster dawdled back from the Men's. In the darkening gloom of falling night, lights shone at the windows of the vans, squares of steamy welcome at this mealtime hour. The air smelled of onion and meat. A noisy group was devouring sausages by a barbecue.

As always, Webster approached his own van — white with a silver and blue trim — with pride. It rested staunchly on its concrete slab, warm and reliable, marred only by an ill-tuned static version of 'Bright Eyes' emanating from it. As the racket obtruded further into his hearing, he suddenly conceived an idea so brilliant in its scope that his heart palpitated along with the bright eyes. He had to slow down and walk twice round the van to calm himself.

"Soup's on the table... dear," Rita looked every centimetre the care-giver, although the "dear" was a mere pause-filler, like "um" or "er". Webster had dispensed with endearments unless in-laws were about, or they were in a group of people.

Rita had arranged the meal at news time, so that conversation need be minimal. Mind you, the radio was a poor substitute for watching Mal give out the items in colour, to be viewed from the comfortable settee in the lounge at Westford Grove. No need for telly in the van, the austere Webster had decreed.

"Soup's good and hot," Webster offered, which meant he didn't like it, Rita knew. He'd given up saying that onions and pepper gave him heart-burn. He massaged his fingers under the table, the flesh was palpable, real, undemanding. He hoped Rita wouldn't insist on a second helping. Her lips were the colour of ageing gravy beef in the fluorescent light above. Gug.

Apart from the soup, Rita cooked a tasty meal. Pork chops and vegies, baked rice and cream. He had to acknowledge that she did a great job with the little stove, but messily. She'd spilt something gooey on its stainless steel top and he itched to wipe it up, as if it were his child running at the nose.

"Nice meal."

"Enjoyed it myself," Rita agreed, smearing the cream spoon with her evil lip-stick (it could have been his blood). "Worked up an appetite with the drive here." She pushed the dishes aside and drew out a yellow garment she was knitting for the expected grandchild. Needles clicked. Webster knew he should toy with his newly conceived plan until the end of the holiday. But somehow, beans had to be spilled *now* lest they freeze in restraint within his walled-up being, as had other beans, other times. He breathed, and so did she, and they spoke together —

"Go on," he paused.

"Thought I'd give Tim and Val a tingle tomorrow, Val had a check-up today, you know... (he didn't) and what with young junior due in six weeks, I'll just make sure everything's going well, find out what doctor said about her weight and so on." Rita would have liked to continue in that vein, as she did with Avis, mindful of her own past experiences, and speculating on arrival date, hospital,

layette, breast-feeding and the high or low shape of her daughter-in-law, but Webster signed off from any such women's talk.

He mumbled a clearing sound, a way-paver, as he traced a sort of cauliflower pattern on the laminex table top. "You could ask Tim what he did with the hydraulic jack," he jerked in prelude.

Rita unravelled wool. "What were you going to say . . . dear?"

Webster stroked the perishable spider's web skin of his hand. He addressed his knees, "I'll be moving into the van when we get home." The irritating click of the needles had stopped.

"I'll be moving into the van when we get home," he enunciated each word singly.

Rita's coated lips bunched and trembled.

"You've got to be joking!"

"Why not?" Having verbalized his idea it had consolidated into logical decision. He could spend his retirement in silence with his feet up or messing about in the workshop adjoining the shed. He could use the old shower and toilet out the back. And he'd have Plod — the ever-faithful kelpie forbidden the house — for company. Why on earth hadn't he thought of it five years before?

"You must be — be off your rocker . . . I've never heard of such a thing. The neighbours, Webster, you must consider the neighbours." Rita's voice cracked and fluttered across the table.

"How do you mean? I won't be making a racket."

"No . . . dear, what will the neighbours *think*?"

"If you mean Avis, I don't care what she thinks."

"Meals, Webster —" Rita grasped at this practicality, "do you intend . . . I mean, will you cook for yourself?"

"It's up to you." Never had his role been so lordly. "Speaking of cooking—" Webster frowned, stood up and turned off 'Hit And Run, Baby' or *somesuch*, "thought you might like a night off tomorrow. Chap in the washroom said they turn on a decent grill at 'The Three Sails'".

Rita gurgled her assent, she must allow heart and voice to return to normal. She took up her knitting and concentrated heavily on a row of garter stitch to block out *that other*.

Webster pulled on his Coca Cola cap in preparation for his customary nightly stroll. "I'll be off," he told Rita, unnecessarily, but as dictated by his scripted years.

A quarter moon grinned in the darkness over the sweep of the river mouth which lay, stilly cradled, in the crook of the sandy shore. Coolibah ghosts and impenetrable shrubs lined the foreshore. Two late pelicans flew across the water and flapped out of sight. The soothing sound of distant breakers filled his being with attunement. The niggles and prickles that plagued his existence were blanketed by warm thoughts of a seventeen by eight future.

Soon it would be curtains drawn on the big act. Meanwhile, he would enjoy his holiday at 'Hideaway', this new man, heading back to his cosy van and night-cap of hot milk. Tonight he'd have a drop of brandy in it.

NICHOLAS JOSE

The Chinese Bride

She stood in the room and giggled into her hand uncontrollably. He was pleased to see her so happy. At last she dared to move and touch the single thing which was familiar, the Chinese painting of a crane with crooked wings. It was a souvenir from his first time in Saigon. His second time, a holiday, he had brought back Mei Lin.

That first night he did the cooking and she stood or sat at a remove, staring at him with wild laughing eyes. He grilled chops and boiled vegetables for two, and joined her laughter as she struggled delicately with the knife and fork. He promised to get her some chopsticks.

That night she made him very happy.

She smiled when he came home from work, and when he asked what she had done that day she showed how she had tidied the house by arranging things exactly as they were that first night, when he had ushered her across the threshold. She remembered every detail.

But in the kitchen she did things her own way, except on Saturdays when his friends came round for a barbecue and to watch TV. He took charge of that, and her only task was to take part in the fun. They were the other men from the shop, butchers and apprentices and the occasional wife. 'Bet you don't have this back home,' they said to make her laugh.

Originally it was her older sister who had made him happy. He had gone to her not knowing where he was, blocked up with pain, and she had released him. When he went back years later the bar was still there, but her sister had other business. He had been passed on to Mei Lin, who whispered like a child, scarcely daring, 'You take me with you?' He had never imagined inspiring such devotion.

He liked it when she told him how strange Australia was. She would stare at the empty space around the house with a blank look which barely concealed her panic.

'Very strange,' she said, 'because in my country we have a garden inside the house. Australian garden is always in the front and in the back.'

And she might have added that the front garden was never used for anything. No man's land. She had never seen him open the front door. Friends went round the back. People who went to the front were always sent away. She sometimes stood in the room and stared at that heavy door wondering what bad omen it would be to open it. Then she would turn briskly to face the scroll-painting on the opposite wall, and did not know whether the crane's bent wings were spreading or folding in.

When he asked if she was glad to be there, she said she had come for the freedom.

The world inside her head was as extensive as space and time, but they never talked about it. Sometimes she wrote letters home. Her funny dextrous doodles charmed him. But a reply came only once, and she left off. One night he found her missing from his bed. He found her standing in the middle of the front room, motionless as on the night he first brought her in, except this time her eyes were red and round from sobbing. As he shepherd her back to the bedroom, he said, 'You have to forget all that now. Put it out of your head.'

Their happiest times were when they went to the club. She loved Western dancing, and her head rocked dreamily from side to side. She could dance all his friends off their feet. Yet no one dared touch her. Her rapturous gratitude was all reserved for her husband.

At Easter they went and stayed in a caravan park at the coast. His friends came too — there was a car rally on the Sunday. Days were spent fiddling with the cars, driving in and out of town. Sometimes they went down to the beach. He wanted Mei Lin to see the sea, and be admiring of his swimming. But she was frightened when she saw him wade up to his neck in the bouncing grey surge. She feared the tow of the current, and retreated to the little house on wheels where she was in charge. Even when all the men and wives and girlfriends went off to the pub and left her, she would not step outside. The bush beyond was too high. She might wander into it and never find her way back.

So the caravan was as tidy as an altar, and she sat there.

After the long day of the rally everyone exhausted and shouting with an overflow of affection together, though no one had won, built a mighty bonfire and got stuck into the cans of beer which were stacked by the dozen, bound in thick plastic like little rafts. They cooked their meat quickly and threw on trees which they had dragged from all around, until the mass of flames was as high and wide as a van.

It was hard to keep talking when they finished. They stood in silent groups of two or three gazing with pride into the burning emptiness of what they had done. Their faces were orange.

'Where's Mei Lin, mate?'

He flared up when her absence was noted. He leaned in through the door of their caravan and saw her sitting up straight on the folded-out bench which was the bed.

'Come on. You've got to have a look.'

She shook her head. 'I don't like fire.' She smiled to make a joke of it, though she shuddered. The fire, the sea, the dense bush were memory and terror. She needed no reminder.

He was drunk and had the gaping grin of a thwarted child as he shook her.

Later that night he was brutal to her for the first time, because he didn't understand.

On the road back there were more cars than she had ever seen in her life, full of different-looking people.

'Where are they going?' she asked.

'Back home. Into the city, I s'pose. Wish they'd get off the roads.'

Where was this city, this heart where so many must live?

The drought that year brought birds into the garden that she had never seen before. They came in flocks, but no people. She stood in the back doorway and studied them as they pulled in their wings and pecked at kernels.

When she asked him about the city, he said that no one lived there. Everyone lived like they did, in their own houses. Walled by space.

She hated the clock when she was alone during the day. She didn't know whether the hours she had to pass were worse than her husband's return at the end. And then the night.

When the rain came, the birds left. From the step she stared at their wings as they spread. No matter how long she waited they didn't circle back, so she went inside and stared at the painting of the crane instead. How could she discover whether he was landing or stretching for take-off? Many times she promised herself that she had come for the freedom. Now in her body she felt its meaning, as her heart pounded outwards and released a way back into the throng, into the future. She pulsed with exhilaration as she turned away from the painting and walked towards the solid door.

When he turned into the drive at evening, he saw that something was gapingly different. He entered by the back as usual and prowled from room to room until he came face to face with the wide open door to the street.

The young husband bit his tongue. For days he was wild and bitter. Later on it became the story he told to prove that he had a right to feel sorry for himself.

RORY HARRIS

the woman in the seaside cafe
holds back the sea

the counter has grown around her
more defined by need

than ownership
her posture changes slowly

she's seen it all before
the day hangs around her like excess flesh

i bring some of the beach in with me
fumble the change for cigarettes

"it wasn't much of a sunset"
"it wasn't much of a day, love"

ANDREW SANT

Itinerant

The sun makes pale a sandstone wall
that rain, for eighty years, has smoothed —
a fine place to lean and talk
in spite of traffic since I haven't seen you
for, is it, a year. Where have you been?
We settle that fast, name some places,
a few familiar, that serve
for the moment as common ground —
a road with surprising shops, a northern town.
Now your hair's cut short, easier I guess
to manage when dossing's unplanned
in a sleeping bag or, occasionally
in a well-heeled house. Your dresses
I see are still bright, liquid colours.
Now you're back in town, to continue painting,
though the pace, you say, is unsettling
and, if it wasn't for a job, you'd rather leave —
next time for Europe, or Bali.
I remember the time, on a camping trip,
regular waves crashing on the beach,
you said there was something, unnameable,
you had to find. I guess
it remains unseen — you seem
much easier telling amusing anecdotes about places,
a kind of pact with what's evident
without the disappointment that wells
after ceaselessly fragile, shifting highs.
It's good to see you looking fit, refreshed
in this absorbing afternoon light
and it's accessible moments like these
that, unknowingly, come from the sorts
of future we discussed, unplanned.
When you talk of those who've settled down
there's a seriousness, a firm contempt
not for them, but for planning fate, avoiding risk —
such inevitability leaves you shifting
on your feet, distracted by the traffic,
which reminds you it's getting late
for an interview for work; rejoining
the flow of pedestrians making for the city
you smile wryly at the contradiction
since the strength you own is resolved,
living, by choice, from day to day. On the wall
the sunlight glints through a swarm of shadows.

Endings

Your hand's under my elbow and you're humming some blues as we go into this place shadowy with dark, and filled with smoke from the cigarettes of sad intimate people drinking cocktails. Sax and piano wail away in a corner. The carpet is a mournful red, the few lights an incandescent yellow, making faces under them sallow and grey. Your eyes are middle distance sad and spaced out, like the eyes of the cocktail drinking people leaning close, not looking at each other, in booths and at the bar. This looks like a set up for an ending to me, and I should know. I've been to so many with you before now.

We perch at the bar on red plush stools, and look at ourselves and each other in the mirrors while the cautious preliminaries take place. Falling into the mood I order a brandy alexander. You think you'll try a pernod and ice (god you can drink some disgusting things as well as whisky.) The prefatory conversation travels haltingly from one depressing subject to another : all the accidents you've had recently; all the money you owe people and the way they keep asking for it; the way your mother keeps ringing you up to tell you you're doing the **wrong** thing, and inviting you out to dinner so you can talk about it; the way the house is falling apart and the landlord won't do anything about it; the way my bad health is going from bad to worse.

We duplicate our drinks with similars, and look around us casually when we can't bear the mirrors anymore, and the conversation's too dismal to concentrate on. Then you make the mistake of mentioning work, and after we've talked about how much you hate it, and how they abuse you, and don't pay you enough and ask you to do impossible things, I get all enthusiastic over what I'm working on, and start gesturing, and looking excited, and alive and well and living in Sydney in other ways. So you bring me down with 'us'.

'Us'. My mouth goes dry and I have to go to the toilet, but I'm rivetted to my stool, my legs wound tensely round the pedestal. I order another brandy alexander and you go on with a whisky and dry — signifying the start of solid drinking from here on.

'Us'. You don't think it's very good for me, us; *you* living with *me*. Much as I hate to, I have to agree. You know it's all your fault — probably — but you just don't seem to have what it takes. You've tried, heaven knows, but it isn't easy this living with someone you love. Maybe it's just you, maybe you can't live with anyone, let alone people you love. You think, this being the case, the only thing we can do is call it quits. My ears are in shock, and even my toes are tense, but I have a solution to the problems of 'us' too.

My solution is for you to make some of those changes you're always saying you want to make : stop being so sexist and expecting me to do all those 'feminine' things your mother did like the cooking and the washing and defrosting the fridge; stop drinking so much and start remembering what you did the day before, the hour before, and start thinking about why you do these things; stop sleeping so much and watching television so much and get up and do some of the things you're always talking about doing; stop waiting for your life to arrive in a Cadillac at the front door, and go out and get it. Do you really want to be the way you are now for the rest of your life? Do you?

You're silent into your whisky and dry, regarding it intently. My legs wound round the stool are almost giving me cramp; I unwind them gingerly, spiral by spiral.

Well *do* you? Do you think you're perfect? I unwind right off my stool, and go to the toilet to give you a chance to think about it, god knows why, you never have before, and you always say the same old thing when we have this conversation.

On the toilet, thinking about it, listening to the piss falling into the bowl, I wonder . . . I wonder whether you're sitting there waiting for me to convince you you should stay. I wonder if your talk of calling it quits is just a threat, an empty echoing threat, to get me tell you again that I want to live with you. Why is it that you won't give me anything unless I give you something first? And what you're saying right now, is that because you can't change anything — you are what you are (however unsatisfactory) — if I want to live with you I'll have to put more into 'the relationship' than you, I have to accept your terms and conditions. And all I have to do, to get you to stay, is convince you that in some mysterious way — when I'm having psychosomatic illnesses all over the place — you *are* good for me. And I realise that I have always done this before.

It's like the steps in some careful dance, or the moves in a familiar game whose rules although unwritten are clear to everyone except me, except now. I realise as I look into the mirror to see if I'm still there, if I look different, that I've followed this path before, stepped out left to your left in this dance, panicked and castled for quite the wrong reason in this game. But I've played the game well : you're still with me, we're still together, I've won haven't I? Always before in this *deja-vu* conversation I've thrown that next line : convinced you, and myself as well, that you *can* be good for me, that you *are* good for me. that we should continue living together.

Why have I always done that before? Why do I want to live with you so badly I'll accept the poor bargain of yourself as you are?

I wipe the lines of nervous sweat that this thinking has caused off my forehead with some paper towel, and know I can't answer those questions right now; and realise also, that at this moment, for whatever reason (even if it is too many brandy alexanders in a dismal bar full of sad people) I don't want to live with you as you are any more. I don't want to play this game again; it seems too childish and I am always being hurt by it. If you do decide to stay with me, you'll stay because *you* want to stay, and because you can at least meet my terms half way — and not because you're unsure, or uncommitted, or have let *me* convince you to stay.

I dab my forehead again, and leave the sanctity of the toilets for the real world of the bar. You're silent when I get back on my stool. I order another brandy alexander and watch the bar tender — a John Newcombe moustache on a routinely handsome face — make it, tapping cinnamon over a straw to achieve a railway tracks decoration. We smile 'how nice' at each other, the bar tender and me.

I ask how you feel about it, and realise — before you do so — that you'll field that ambiguous question back to me. Why did I think it was your serve? You ask me how I feel. I tell you I'm sick of meeting your hedges, of compromising to you, of accepting your barriers. I tell you it's your turn to make some efforts, that is, if you want to live with me.

You don't say anything for such a long time that I wonder if you've heard me. I lick my brandy alexander in silence and watch the bar tender chatting up a sad lady without an escort, and the people around us, cringing into the shadows and still avoiding each others' eyes.

You ask me if that's what I really think, if that's how I really feel, and I get sharp and astringent, and say I didn't intend to make a joke out of anything. You're stymied. It isn't going how it should be, how it's gone before. The ego boost of this woman you say you love pleading with you with all your faults, despite all your faults, to live with her, just isn't happening.

In the silence I start thinking back, over what our life together has so far meant : the fighting, the making up, the endless accusations and recriminations, the endless compromises and pleading; but also, the fun times, the picnics and parties, the consolation your presence gives me, the basic climate of trust that spontaneously occurs when you live with someone no matter how untrustworthy. As always the good times start to outweigh the bad times, to assume more importance. I say I'll be sorry to lose you — if that's what you decide (emphasizing that it's your decision now, not mine) — because there have been lots of good times . . . And I stop myself adding that I thought you'd already started to change, started to improve — because that would be an encouragement to you to stay, and besides, I realise it's not true, just wishful thinking.

You say, yes there were some good times. Your eyes go fond as you think of the past. However, I say, intimating to you that I'd like to know one way or the other. Your eyes snap out of it, and you ask me which of us should leave our present home.

I do a doubletake. So that's how it is : if I don't want to live with you as you are with all your self acknowledged faults, then you don't want to live with me at all. Well. Well fine then, if that's how it is.

I think you should leave, since you are the one who wants to call it quits, who wants to leave.

You say you don't want to leave, but it's just too much, you *have* to leave, you don't really have any choice, there's nothing else you can do. So your adapting yourself to me in any way is untenable. Funny it doesn't work the other way round, my compromises have always been perfectly acceptable to you. You say we're obviously both unhappy. But you're the one who's making both of us unhappy. But that's just the way you are. I say that's why you should leave. It's the only thing I have left.

So you say you will leave, you'll go and stay with Mary (old girlfriend) until you find another place.

And now you start looking dewy eyed and maudlin, behind your iron resolve, and I can see the good times chasing each other through your mind. It's just relief and the drinking, I know it's not real — just your natural melodrama. It pleases you to make the 'last night together' (you say you'll go in the morning) a real last night together. You start telling me how wonderful I am, and how magnificent it's been of me to put up with you at all. I want to cry and I want to be sick and I want reassurance. I want someone — you — to love me enough to treat me right and make me happy.

We leave, and catch a cab home, holding our sad little hands in the back seat. The bright neon lights and people passing by outside make me feel more unhappy and alienated. I am being left. You are leaving me. And I want you to comfort me, and tell me it will be alright. But you don't. At home we fall over each other with last night lust. I sleep soundly.

.

At work next morning — when you're still asleep — they ask me how dinner went. I say, what dinner? Weren't you going to have dinner with him, they ask. I tell them that we didn't really have dinner, just drinks and more drinks. They've heard the story often enough not to ask for any details.

When you wake up, you'll either go and stay with Mary (old girlfriend), or I'll get a phone call asking me if I want to meet you somewhere for a drink and have dinner.

BARRY WESTBURG

nothing happened

I woke in the morning
she had already gone
her cat was locked away
in the spare room
I walked around
the strange house
closed-up
the double doors leading
into the garden
where the sun was
half a glass of wine
on the stereo
the whole house
open to my view

JUDITH FORRESTER

On the Edge of a Narrative

I put aside the ream of paper. Sitting at a table on the edge of a space defined by four walls, I tell myself, "Even after the alphabet was formed, language was not finished. Even after the seventh day, there came the morning of the eighth." But only fifty pages are written and fourhundredandfifty are not.

I watch through the window. I watch along the shore. A mist drifts over the sill. On the stony shore, a row of telephone poles disappears into a gray that is both sea and sky. I watch the mist slide over the rocks — the hem of an escaping muse. Telephone poles, which were once trees, bear the absence of branches between them.

Should I call out? A seagull hovers in the frame of the window. Single words drift to the surface and float on undulating fins. But no pattern forms between the pressing down of the sea and the rising up of the shore.

There are figures moving among the rocks. At first it seemed the rocks themselves had moved, but the rocks are still. Two figures grow out of the mist. Two silhouettes as black as shadows bend towards one another. They are moving along the shore. They are pressing against the grayness, bearing words too heavy for slender wires. Together they bear the words: now one, now the other, bending to get a better grip on their meaning. Bowed by words, they are pressing forward. I want to help them. I want to help them bear the words: now one, now the other, now myself. They press against the gray. I cannot hear them. Should I call out? The mist slides between us.

II

"So, you want to stop?" The smoke rises from the pipe between the thick lips of the mustachioed man at the desk. The Office is quiet. I have reckoned with this quiet. I need it. I trust it. I wish the question would float for as long as the smoke and slowly disappear. Beyond the window, a path, lined by leafless trees, stretches outward toward the street. The arms of Demeter wait for her daughter, while beneath the surface of the earth a goddess walks the shore with Hades . . .

The heels of the last secretary tap down the corridor. She herself does not appear on the path. Perhaps she takes another exit; perhaps Ceases to Exist when she leaves the door of the publishers. The presses are stopped. The type lies in its boxes. No more paper cutters' hands can be cut off today, like the hand that lay between the fifty and the fourhundredandfifty. That hand lay still.

"Stop?"

"That's what I asked."

"You mean, do I want to give up?"

"Well, roughly, that's what I'm getting at, yes. I mean, that's it, precisely." Cough, cough. The smoke comes out through the thick lips. His question burns his tongue, and now the words are no more than smoke. I inhale his question. I shall purify it. I shall breathe out an invisible answer.

I am part of a guild, I think, but am I master or apprentice? No matter. In my vision it is Sunday. The shop is closed. The presses are still. The paper is stacked in reams, some printed, some unprinted. The type lies in little boxes waiting for The Word. When the letters receive The Word, they will spring from their boxes as if I had filmed The Unwriting of a Story and shown it in reverse. How simple to simply wait. How anxious God must feel in the mornings. There is the smell of Was. The floorboards are sagging and stained. A mouse runs from a press to its hole. Such a learned mouse with a nest of shredded Dante.

This is what I am beginning to understand:

A young girl has made her way into a neighbor's library. Her hands touch the leather bindings. The dark bindings with the golden letters. But when she opens a book, she finds that the print is small and the words difficult. Five hundred pages. She is very young. Her neighbor reads in an easy chair next to the fire. The smoke rises from the pipe between the thick lips under the mustache. The thoughts directed at him from the corner do not disturb his concentration. Deeper than the carpet are the thoughts, too deep for expression by a child. A row of telephone poles is waiting for wires. The poles stand barren like the arms of trees in autumn. Waiting for the words.

At last I say, "What I want and what I do are two different things. It is easier to be the letter A than to be God." But this is not enough, so I tell a story to the editor.

"When I was very young, I awoke suddenly in the night. I had heard music in my sleep and knew that was why I had awakened. It had sounded like a cello. It was not a song, really. Tones were growing up out of the inside of the earth. I wanted to hear the sound more clearly. I was too young to trust sleep. To fall asleep again would be to lose the sound. I pushed back the blankets and set my feet on the floor. I had been called by music as abstract as A. So fully did I know its command that I knew it was I who had commanded. I went to the window. I looked into my neighbor's yard — into his library.

"In the summer when both our windows were open, his music would rise to my window, but now it was autumn, and our windows were shut. In a rectangle of light he sat, drawing the bow across the strings. I could see the bow drawn across the strings, but I could not hear. It was a pantomime of my desire. Had I heard his music? Had I only known that he was playing? Both of us heard the music, and yet it did not pass between us. Above, the sky was a silver cloud lit by a single moon. How cold nature seemed. I could not feel sad. I could not feel afraid. Feeling Nothing, as painfully as Nothing is felt, I lay out again upon the bed."

The heels of the secretary are coming back up the corridor. She won't Cease to Exist, it seems.

"That's a weird sort of answer," says the editor, but then he is closer to the letter A than to God.

III

I take out the ream of paper. Sitting at a table on the edge of a space defined by four walls, I tell myself, "It is you yourself who walks along a gray shore, pressing against the grayness which is both sea and sky, casting two shadows bowed by words, bending to get a better grip on their meaning." Even on Sunday there is a knowledge of restlessness. Even through telephone wires one dares speak

of leaves. Should I stop? He read in an easy chair next to the fire, the smoke rising from the pipe between his thick lips. Should I open it? It is the book that lay in the library smelling of pipe smoke.

I take out the ream of paper. Smoke thoughts are too clear to be borne by shadows. It is impossible to judge their course against a gray cloud. I look. I imagine a time when smoke rises in the chimney, print grows larger, and words are more than the letter A. I look again. Each page is like the next except fourhundredandfifty have been written and only fifty have not.

The editor leans forward across his desk. A neighbor in the window turns his eyes to the moon.

My footsteps, too, will return along the corridor. I will not Cease to Exist, it seems. I have a weird sort of answer.

JERI KROLL

Dialogue

Once he decides that's that,
she's past the last outpost,
traipsing like any sun-dazed fool through the wastes,
and with her provisions it's ridiculous,
that nothing's wrong with his tone of voice,
she's being overdramatic,
as far as regard for her work, he's meticulous —

But he was reading the paper, she knows how he feels,
he heard her good news,
she knew he'd say something later —
he'd be silly to lose precious sleep.

So he sleeps, turning once. There's a cut-off switch,
the power main in the ego.
She lies in the rigid dark
telling his sins, hearing him breathe.
Dawn. Late again.
The door appears clearly shut.

SUSAN SCHWARTZ

For my daughter

Long before you were conceived
I saw you standing by the bedroom door —
a small, dark girl with steady eyes
choosing me to be your mother.

Now you call me
and I come;
surround you with my arms
my veil of hair
my breathing.
Press you to me
until our skins forget
their separateness;
give birth to you again

again and again.

For my son

When you imagine your infancy
will you feel my mouth on your forehead
my lips on your lip's curve

my fingers just touching
the impossibly soft skin of your cheek?
Will my kiss flicker

in the press of other lips
at that time when a mother's touch
is barely tolerated?

Will you remember clinging to my warmth
as I kissed you at will
cupping the small globe of your skull?

TIM WINTON

Journal from the Belly of a Whale

Almost three thousand years after ancient Jonah fled from his mission to Ninevah, a man, Sutherland Krast, surviving two day's exposure in heavy seas, was swallowed by a whale. Horrified, Krast saw the slick walls of throat, esophagus and intestines rushing past him, and he bellowed in fright as much as disbelief. Although it seemed much longer to him, he spent hours in the peristaltic shunting rooms of the creature's digestive system before arriving in a moist, safe place. Delirium overtook Krast; he was several days without consciousness. When he awoke it was to a cool twilight. He sat in silence, unable to think. Gradually, his rational mind also returned to him. Such a place could not be considered a void; regularly, pulpy masses joined him and their stench visited him until they lurched away. Constant damp and lack of sunlight caused his predicament to be one of discomfort as well as disorientation. Eventually, Sutherland Krast grew bored, and he remembered — with the help of a chafing at his chest — his sea journal, and with his eyesight failing, and his handwriting unsteady, he began to make entries to pass time. In great sadness, Krast continued to write until he died of starvation. His body came loose from the sitting position he had adopted since waking, and fell back, the journal pressed against it, onto an organ which gradually became irritated. The whale vomited the ripened corpse onto a beach and sought open seas.

Throughout the winter (for it was winter when the whale sickened) joggers from nearby suburbs passed the shrinking green lump many times, mistaking the body of Sutherland Krast for a dead seal. For most, the stench suggested a turning point in the early morning run; it served as a mile peg.

On the first morning of summer, a child, Billy Gray, who was nine years old, discovered in the still pungent sand, digging for big hollow shells with which he thought he might listen to the voice of the sea, the partly composted journal of Sutherland Krast. It was wedged between two rib-bones. Entries were legible in places. Even the heading was mostly intact:

T Se Journa o Su herlan Kr st

In a long session which made him very late home from lunch, Billy Gray read what he could.

27th (?) September: Today I woke in a vacuum. This place is a void. There are noises and smells, but no other beings. I despair.

28th September: Again, I wake. Or have I truly slept in this place that is without darkness and light? Some time ago my life was full of purpose. Was I not the paymaster aboard the *Long Cruise* bound for the Middle Eastern ports? Now there is nothing.

29th September: Scum washes about me. Yes, I understand. This is the true nature of existence. I listen to my own heartbeat and sometimes a piston-beat that I am sure is the fluctuating pulse of the universe. There is no-one else here but me; nothing else exists. It is sad, desperate, even, but unalterably true. I must face this; I face it with every breath, this embracing nothing.

30th September: I do not believe I am in the belly of a whale because the concept is an impossible one. The baleens: the right, the finback, the great blue, the humpback, none have the throat for such a feat. I am a seaman; I *know*. But I'm not a superstitious, cowering ancient mariner. Am I in tiny pieces, strained through the coarse veil of baleen like a hoard of shrimps? Or the big-jawed cousins, the toothed whales: the killer will certainly not fill his stomach with something he has not yet mutilated beyond recognition. The narwhal would have skewered me on his unicorn tusk, and gagged on me, and the mighty sperm, the cachalot, would he not funnel me, mangled, into his compressor of a stomach, crush and suffocate me in his airless tomb of a body? Such thought is infantile, and so is any prolonged inquiry into the reason for this state; it can get me nowhere.

31st September: I feel stronger now, even in my enfeebled state. I feel as though I have come of age. Skin is peeling from me; I think I am undergoing a kind of mutation.

32nd September: Today (or is it today? All time is such nonsense!) I harkened back — out of nostalgia, I suppose — to the grand old days of voyaging. Not that I am not voyaging now; I can feel the journey within me; yes, I can honestly say I am travelling. But because they are past times, those days and nights (however irrelevant to my present existence) of fresh, tangy breezes, glittering harbour lights, chatty passengers, and smug ward-room teases, seem at times (though few), attractive.

33rd September: It is illogical and totally inconceivable that I have been swallowed by *any* creature. This mush that comes in at intervals... I don't know what it is. Ah, why must I always search for answers and meaning? I exist!

34th September: The preposterous thoughts one has! Think of the waste of energy! Energy is to be conserved at all costs. Difficult now to write. Perhaps becoming irrelevant to do so. But, whilst one is a rational being... should exercise one's consciousness to the utmost.

35th September: A great wind. Roars. Limbs have left me. One cannot exist in belly of mammal. *Belly?* Such archaic. Do I look like a mindless skerrick of plankton?

36th September: No write. Exist.

When he had finished reading, Billy Gray, in a timely move, to avoid a spanking, gave the journal to his father, William S. Gray. Mr. Gray, a Professor of Humanities at a local university, read the title:

T Se Journa o Su herlan Kr st

He was momentarily excited at its prospects. The stench of the manuscript caused him to leave it in the laundry. The odour did not go away; it discouraged him from reading it. He was a man undaunted by normal hazards of the profession, but he was discouraged. The family dog, irritated by the odour, chewed part of the spine. Next day, Prof. W. S. Gray deposited the manuscript in a sealed container in the Archives Department at the university. He sent memos to the Departments of Ancient History and Literature:

... Have obtained oldish ms. privately (quite a sum), possibly early Gnostic writings or Nordic epic fragments. See F.S. at Archives (4) if interested...

Within days, Prof. Gray, a busy man, had forgotten. The Departments of Ancient History and Literature showed little interest; all were engaged on more pressing fields of study. Billy Gray visited the beach many times that summer. He made a bone handle for his pocket-knife in autumn.

The Archives attendant, Frieda Scheeman, has only opened the box twice for keen thesis-writers, but neither student wished to pursue study of it beyond a hurried perusal of the exterior and the mystic title, and now she refuses to open it at all.

SHANE McCAULEY

Sydney Tower

Torn from the cover of some science-fiction novel
You stand, warding off spaceships, or searching
The sky like an elongated record-player stylus
Hungering for celestial music; sometimes, at night,
I have seen you almost scratch the moon
In your haste. And at your top, revolving,
People slowly sustain themselves, unaware
That one dark night you will gather strength,
Pulsate, and disappear into some space
Far beyond the Southern Cross; slim aliens
Will find your cargo of well-fed pink mushrooms.
But that is moons in the future. In the meantime
Stay safe on tourist brochures, undeveloped films,
And while you remain ever-bronzed Emperor of the sky-line
I will look at your smooth knee-cap and wait for a sign.

PATRICIA AVERY

At the Incinerator

Neighbours late afternoon
disappear to secret rhythms
of tennis, shops,
a cookbook over cosy tea
or wearily, bare feet and gin . . .

Magpies
like loud children
disturb the grass

Smoke feels vague,
all smooth and lazy
as illicit desire.
A poet of fire
(but mainly ash or smoke)
ignites old news,
grey photographs, and
tokens of insanity
innocent amid the weeds
and invitations to the dance.
His ceremony
delicate as harmony
composed upon a lute.

The birds go.
The poet
burns words.

BARRY WESTBURG

total eclipse

I forgot it was today
reading to myself
aloud in an innocent voice
from an old book
my lamp was on
it was midday
not like sudden clouds coming up
a different kind of darkness
made me stop
Siamese cat standing
frozen on the area fence
not knowing where to look
I saw nobody
was anywhere no cars no radios
the magpies had all shut up
at the local flea market
the incense lady left a sign
"closed for the cosmic
catastrophe"
I could not look up again
until the sun came back
a miracle
like rekindling an old love

SARAH DAY

Disagreement

Seven weeks now, farmer and son have come back
to the paddock, combing it for rocks.

Having started they must go on
panning. As if the world leant slowly

silently from side to side, the grid
brings to the surface more and more work.

Through the long day they talk about this
though they talk seldom. And they disagree.

The boulders, says the farmer, creep. They rise
to set themselves loose. The son jeers into the red dust

and into the wind he knows lays bare
the stony frames, picks away the earth.

SARAH DAY

Poppies

Fragile as coloured rice paper
tippling on pencil lines,
pink and cantelope complexioned
wing petals flex and warm towards
each day's sun until
they are wide and perfect
and vulnerable.

A sound
as the afternoon shaft
shifts slowly westward
the quiet remonstrating
of a tongue perhaps,
it continues through the night.

And in the morning,
the deflowered,
bent heads with pastel chintzes
on the ground beneath.

E. M. BRADSTOCK

Passenger

 ("I have lost all passion;
 that was, you understand,
 another country.")

What, only four months gone
and already a citizen
of the real world,
your Bloomsbury group the passport
to expatriate success.
Madam, I allow your wit;
it is lately come
that you have grown so wise.
In this tourney
I do not choose to ride.

And you'll have habitats
for your several lives,
not leave the foreign citadel
too long ungarrisoned
against a troop of rivals,
nor pass up altogether
the Australian connection,
its welcome strangely cold.
How long will this land,
shocked out of the marriage-sleep,
await your nomad visitation,
the settling of accounts.

I'll not float upside down
like mad Ophelia
or Astolat's fair maid,
laid back by the glitter and crashing
of your worldly harness,
but it may not yet
be lightly forgotten,
decision I did not make,
this rough divorcing,
armour hacked from the heart.

E. M. BRADSTOCK

For Kendall

(and all the others)

Five names on the radio,
kids your kids grew up with.

You're up at the Central Coast
playing pool with friends
when the newflash comes
and recognition hits,
like a rock face, head on.
And in every suburb
on every Saturday night
other people's children
go out, like sacrificial dancers,
to die, in packed cars.

Tribute exacted
no silken thread unwinds.

The call comes through.
No, your daughter wasn't there,
not this time;
but the minotaur's shadow
is that much closer.

In Monday's paper,
it rates six lines.

E. M. BRADSTOCK

Whose Blues?

Coming back from the movies
on the Ryde 500
the kid, who used to hold my hand
(yellow rainboots shiny, hair
a magnetic field of iron filings),
pads barefoot up the back
of the bus, wielding
the banner of his floating hair.

The other one sees Greg, laconic hero
of a dealing and possession charge.
Heard the good news, she says, *Talk to you
about it later.* Strap-hanging,
conspires with me, *Marie said, If you
want a sample I can get you some,
I've got friends who grow it,
and I said, Hasn't everyone?*

In this neutral zone,
last outpost for a go-between,
the deal that I pass on
is cut with other substance;
Macbeth's brief candle
doesn't burn for them,
no history but their own
pickets the narrow lines.

At least they're not hawking
their memoirs up at the Cross.

RORY HARRIS

tourists arrive with their suitcases

tourists arrive with their suitcases
everything smells homely & ironed
they take cruises like anti-acid tablets
they never drink the water

tourists stand out in crowds
especially the Americans
the Australians
are always uncertain

tourists take on different disguises
to show where they've been
they consider the t-shirt
a status symbol

tourists take enough
of their cigarettes to last
they speak in colours & contrasts
you'd swear they're interior designers

tourists get angry in a fix
they become emotional in corners
they are fringe dwellers
on the edge of discovery

tourists either arrive or depart
they have no middle
they read newspapers from home
especially the deaths

tourists meet other tourists
& fall in love
hope fills their wallets
like American Express

MICHAEL HEALD

The Verandah

Sitting near the darkness
that has just come down on the garden.
The galah in its cage is attentive.
There's no wind. The call of a bird
hard to identify recedes out of hearing.
When the weather is warm I stay out
on the verandah,
with the illuminated, other-worldly fuschias
drooping, and watch the stars
and breathe the night-scents,
until it feels time to go inside to sleep,
leaving its chairs empty, a wine glass
on the table, like a room
oddly desolate and open to the moon.

The Tide

Y' can't say we weren't warned,
the men from the CSIRO were going on
about a bitter, subterranean tide
coming in unbeknown to us
avid waterers, under our gardens,
but we couldn't see through the rainbows
activated in our sprinkler systems.
Now their colours are lowered
and the lawns burn — withered trees
are the rule in even the best suburbs,
cars that once sparkled in the drive
are dull with dust — it will take
a long rain to reverse the trend
(the moon, they say, is powerless
to drag the dark waters back) —
a prodigious wet-season the likes of which
we've never seen and these skies
in no way promise.
The fine-boned gum with its tufts
of lank leafage darkens the blue.

AUDREY LONGBOTTOM

The Colour Man

I have no memory of his name.
The Indian Hawker, my mother called him
because of his turban.

His hands held my gaze:
dark, smaller than my mother's
moving among braids, rainbows of ribbons
holding high a fall of lace.
'You will be buying this today?'
My mother's acquiescence would lead her
to the wedding present teapot on the shelf
a drop of silver to his pink tinged palm
and something like a sigh.

One day the house was locked against him.
We huddled quiet in a corner
while he pounded on the door, rattled windows.
I thought it fun, an adult hide-and-seek
until I understood my mother's trembling.

He never called again.
My mother thought it *better*
but I remember my dreams ribboning
through flaunts of silk and lace
silver falling into pink-tinged palms
outstretched, insistent,
promising a rainbow.

JERI KROLL

Clare Folk Festival

1 am

The last musos drain from the pub.
Whoever knows *N* from *S* drives.
Everyone navigates by the showground fires.
A few stagger with wood for the spring cold,
the rest slump on logs blinded by smoke.
Time's as slow as port down the throat.

Firelight wine heat bottles spilling from hand to hand
a word or two shivers the wind

Then a voice stirs, a guitar joins in,
a mandoline wakes, husky throats swell and break free
rustling tents as possums scouring the camp,
tossing the souls of children who dream
they're already grown up, passing the cask,
losing their voice to the dawn.

A few sing down the stars;
they won't give in to cold, wine, fatigue, love.
These are the ones who let the wind sleep in their tents,
rarely anyone else,
who close their eyes only for tragic songs.
Day breaks in the ashes.
They sit wide-eyed and hoarse,
their fingers numb.

DIANE DODWELL

Dracula

The coil and hiss of his cloak
streaming through high windows
like a black curtain.

The bed is curtained in white
and billows like a ship.
Appleflesh! . . . Just a tiny toothful,
he tells himself. She falls limp
on her pillow, matching its pale.

He is left in the wind-filled,
corniced room, satisfied
but lonely.

Bubble

The stubbed finger
bled beneath the skin.

I waited for the bubble to surface
remembering, still wanting

the assured comforters of childhood,
amused but unpatronising,

bringing release. By now I have learnt
to comfort myself.

The blood stayed inside,
then disappeared.

JAMES CHARLTON

Three Old Men, Delhi

Outside my door lie three old men.
Quietly,
they give room-service.

They live full-time on the corridor,
to one side of it. They lie
on rattan mats, unmoody.

Mr. Nayana speaks Oxbridge English.
He lies next to a Worcester jug of water,
neither hot nor cold.

Mr. Naudiyal speaks Oxbridge English.
He lies next to five toilet rolls,
neither dirty nor clean.

Mr. Nandi does not speak.
He lies next to a brass garden sprayer
and squirts mosquitoes.

Postscript: four years later.

The old men are still on their mats,
bare legs and arms like washed roots
of trees.

ALGERINA NERI

Ripening in the Sun: Shirley Hazzard's Heroines in Italy

Shirley Hazzard was born in 1931 in Sydney and educated there, but spent most of her life abroad working in places such as Hong Kong, New Zealand, Europe, New York. In fact for most of her adult life she has been a New Yorker; working for the United Nations there for many years, marrying the American novelist and critic Francis Steegmuller, publishing in the *New Yorker Magazine*. Her first Book was a collection of these stories, *Cliffs of Fall*, which came out in 1963, and was quickly followed by her first novel, *The Evening of the Holiday* (1966), a book of satirical stories, *People in Glass Houses* (1967), the novel *The Bay of Noon* (1970) and a book about the United Nations, *Defeat of an Ideal* (1973). In 1980 she won the United States National Book Critics Circle Award for her most recent novel, *Transit of Venus*.

Although she had the good fortune to be born and educated in Australia, it is difficult to regard her as an Australian writer. With the exception of one story, her fiction is set in Europe or America. No work has specifically Australian themes, unless her heroines' wish to leave home and experience love and life abroad is a particularly Australian preoccupation. However it could be said that she shares one of the strengths of modern Australian writers such as Randolph Stow and Patrick White; a finely-realized sense of place, an ability to locate her story in a particular and appropriate locality. Indeed, Shirley Hazzard often seems pre-occupied by "locality", the ways in which our fragmented cultural and physical environments affect our lives.

In 1979 in an ABC Radio talk "Problems facing contemporary novelists" she says: "No-man's land or at any rate literary no-man's land might be the title of this talk, since one of the greatest challenges faced by contemporary novelists is an unprecedented loss of geographical and, to some extent, national and even social sense of belonging. I don't mean that this is exclusive to novelists, I mean this is what's happened to their material, what's happened to the world. The sense of territory is like a great rug that's been pulled out—very recently and very quickly—from under the feet of all of us."

This preoccupation is most apparent and most effective in her first two novels—*The Evening of the Holiday*, which is set in Tuscany, and *The Bay of Noon*, which is set in and around Naples. She uses these different Italian landscapes, these particular cultural and physical environments, in several important ways.

The Evening of the Holiday is a simple brief love story, occurring around Siena over a few months. Sophie, an English woman in her late twenties, comes to Italy to visit her aunt Luisa. During her visit, she meets Tancredi, an architect

in his forties who is separated from his wife. They fall in love, they live together for a while and when autumn comes the affair ends and Sophie decides to go back to her country, only to revisit Italy the following winter when her aunt dies.

The first and most obvious use of the Italian setting of the novel is the traditional one of providing the heroine with an environment free of the constraints and prohibitions of home. In this sense, Italy is the conventional holidayland of novelists such as Cooper, Hawthorne, Henry James and Aldous Huxley—a beautiful, civilized landscape that is at the same time both excitingly exotic and reassuring familiar. It is a place of experience and tolerance, where everything is possible because everything has happened before. It is that wonderful land of holiday, so dear to the hearts of Anglo-Saxon novelists, where the heroine is free to make friends, make love and make mistakes. In one of her short stories in *Cliffs of Fall* an English guest in a pensione outside Siena says “In this country everything has been *done*, as it were—even this landscape has been done to the point where one becomes a detail in a canvas. In Italy one is almost too much at ease, too well understood; I simply mean that in our countries one must be prepared for a few surprises, but here all experience is repetition, and that gives one an outrageous sense of proportion. That’s why we feel so comfortable—why we find it so attractive to come here”.

Not only the English characters but also some of the Italians in her stories are appreciative of the special qualities of the Italian landscape. Indeed, a few of the more intelligent Italian characters are aware that their unique cultural and physical environment has had an effect upon their way of life, that is, upon the values by which they live. When Luisa, in *The Evening of the Holiday*, is dying, she reflects upon her life and wonders “Whether I would be the same, if I had led a different life in another place. Everything here is beautiful. All is conducive to the right choice, or to no choice at all. Perhaps if we lived with less physical beauty we would develop our true natures more” (p. 123). As can be seen from these two quotations, the Italian settings in Shirley Hazzard’s fiction are not just there for their picture-postcard value—they are not simply lovely Botticellian backdrops to the action. Shirley Hazzard is vitally concerned with the interrelationships of environment, life-style and character. In fact, the influence of place upon character forms a large part of the thematic structure of the *Bay of Noon* and will be considered later in this paper. For the moment I would like to draw attention to one of the consequences of Miss Hazzard’s interest in place and character: her Italian characters are recognizably Italian. This reasonable circumstance is, unfortunately, a rarity in Anglo-Saxon novels set in Italy. The failure of many English novelists to create Italians that are interesting and believable is often a result of the novelists’ preference for living in the English colonies of Venice, Rome and Florence, and their inadequate knowledge of the Italian language. Although this failure may be disappointing for some Italian readers, it does not necessarily detract from the worth of these novels, which are usually concerned with the social interrelationships of English and American people with their compatriots while visiting Italy.

Shirley Hazzard’s novels are different. Her interest in the Italian way of life is more profound—in fact Italian attitudes and values are central to the plot and structure of her novels. She continually examines contrasting attitudes to life. Her heroines mature and develop through their Italian experiences. They are educated by being forced to consider attitudes and values that are, at times, superior—or more life-enhancing—than their own.

It is crucial, then, for the success of her fiction that her heroines’ Italian friends should be intelligent, interesting, and believably Italian. Which they most successfully are. Tancredi, for instance, Sophie’s lover in *The Evening of the Holiday*, has many of the habits of speech, gesture and behaviour that one would expect

in a prosperous Tuscan architect who is also fat, balding, separated from his wife and in his forties. He is, consequently, very interested in his clothes. Partly because of his vanity, his concern with *la bella figura*, and partly because he is not sure how to impress Sophie early in their relationship, he is constantly adjusting his image. As Luisa tells him, "How elegant you always are, you wear a new suit almost every day. Eventually, perhaps, you will find one that is just right for you". (p. 26). The particular Italian—or, rather, Tuscan—qualities of such a man in the 1950's are most effectively revealed in his behaviour toward other people—in the courteous respect he shows Luisa, the way in which he bullies his sister, his friendly indifference to the welfare of his tenants, his blatantly sexist attitudes, and so on. Although he has more individual characteristics of course, he is still very much a typical Italian of his time and situation. And he does not pinch anyone's bottom!

We learn a lot in Miss Hazzard's fiction of what might be called the rational life of her principal characters—of their thoughts, opinions and attitudes. And we are also made aware of the ways in which thoughts and prejudices translate into social behaviour. In fact some of her characters share Miss Hazzard's interest and are often involved in examining the significance of an experience, or judging other people's behaviour, or analyzing the changes in their own attitudes. All this is necessary of course for novels that are primarily concerned with evaluating different modes of behaviour, the different values by which people live. And the novelist's intentions are well served by her methods of ironic appraisal.

At the same time it should be said that this emphasis (in *The Evening of the Holiday*) upon the rational examination of experience (by the characters as well as the novelist) has an unfortunate effect. The reader rarely has a sense of what the characters are *feeling*. No attempt is made to present or re-create strong emotions. We have the unusual experience of reading a love story in which love is not directly presented. The effects of love are examined but not the passion itself. The characters often talk or think about being in love, and wonder whether they are in love or not and what effect such an experience will have (or has had) upon their lives—but we rarely see them as being in love. The reader is kept well-removed from the characters' experience of love, partly by Shirley Hazzard's ironic tone of voice, and partly by her reluctance to describe or examine any passionate behaviour. Many crucial episodes in the affair—such as their "honeymoon" period, their love-making, the moment of final separation—happen off-stage.

This deficiency is largely compensated for by the effective use of significant details in the environment that acquire, because of the lovers' association with them, a certain poetic or symbolic power. Such objects as the old fountain in the garden, or the nightingale's song, or the painting of the Madonna on the ruined wall suggest, in an impressionistic, but effective manner, the feelings that the lovers have for each other at that particular moment. These evocative details tend to work as objective correlatives for the lovers' changing emotions. They keep us aware of the state of the relationship at any particular time. They are often surprisingly powerful, implying much more than the state. Their power stems from the natural yet unexpected way that they occur in the story, the precision with which they are observed, and the finely controlled implications that they contain.

When Tancredi first meets Sophie he is interested but not impressed by her. He thinks of her merely as "the archetypal Englishwoman . . . nothing special". However some of her conversation engages his attention and when later he takes her to see the beautiful old marble fountain in his sister's garden he experiences an unexpected revelation. So does the reader. It is a beautifully realized moment. Sophie rolls up her sleeve to retrieve her bracelet that has fallen into the water.

"Her reaching hand and forearm, transfigured by water, had seemed in that instant to form part of the design—the design attributed to Pisano but probably even older. These simple actions moved him by their involuntary power, their immense accomplishment. He was amazed too by the magnitude of his own response, which gave her gesture real consequence." (p. 18)

A more complex set of suggestive imagery occurs in chapter ten, when Tancredi takes Sophie on a hot day in late summer to visit a farm that he owns. By this time they have become lovers—Sophie is living in Tancredi's house—and so their affair should be at its happiest and most secure. And yet on this holiday visit to the farm, Sophie is brought face to face with an aspect of life—a contented family—that she knows she will never share with Tancredi. After meeting the peasant family, which includes a mother and her baby, Sophie is taken into the barn to be shown the impressive remains of a religious fresco in an advanced state of decay. It had been painted centuries earlier on this surviving piece of monastery wall. The rest of the monastery had vanished without trace. "Higher up there was a seated central figure rather larger than life-size, surrounded by saints and angels and balancing a child on one knee. The Madonna, whose inclined face was a pale, almost featureless oval, was draped in a blue robe that also covered her head." (p. 100) A ladder is thrown up against the wall, scraping the fragile fresco, and Sophie is encouraged to climb up for a closer look. "There she stayed for some moments, eye to nonexistent eye, gripping the edges of the ladder. The pallid, erased face, only slightly larger than her own, had less the look of decay than of some utter forgetfulness, some monumental knowledge never imparted and now irretrievably mislaid." (p. 101)

The chapter ends with Sophie and Tancred walking down the hill from the farm to their car. "He took her hand as before because the rough grass, folding under their feet, was slippery as they went down. At one point he stopped and turned back to kiss her, and then they went on. As he did this he did not even look about—for this afternoon it was completely deserted, this country. There were just the solitary trees, the lake of grasses and red flowers, and two figures descending the upward path." (p. 102) The phrase "the two figures descending the upward path" is a reference to another painting, Renoir's "The Upward Path", and gives the reader a clear intimation that in the midst of their happiness, their affair has begun to deteriorate.

Shirley Hazzard often refers to European art and poetry in her novels. Particularly to poetry. In an interview published in the *Bulletin* (in October 1981), she described herself as having been formed and influenced by "many forces, events, persons, and environments, in Australia, the East, Europe and America; and most of all by poetry".

Like her reference to Renoir's painting, "The Upward Path", her references to poetry arise out of the particular conditions of a situation. These references enrich and strengthen the symbolic implications that are already inherent in the scene or object, and they help to define the characters' emotional condition. When listening with Tancredi to a nightingale in an evening garden, Sophie thinks of Keats's Ode, that poem of yearning for a life in the warm hedonistic south or for a rich life of the creative imagination. And then, significantly, she has trouble remembering the beginning of the poem . . . "My Heart aches . . ."

But the most important poetic references in the novel are made to another Romantic poem (written at about the same time as the "Ode to a Nightingale"), Giacomo Leopardi's "La sera del dì di festa", which in English means "The Evening of the Holiday". Shirley Hazzard has drawn attention to her indebtedness to Leopardi's poem by using one of its lines as an epigraph to her novel.

"Questo dì fu solenne: or da' trastulli prendi riposo."

"This has been an important day: now from its diversion take rest."

Because of the central significance of this poem to the novel, I shall briefly paraphrase it, asking you to please remember Robert Frost's dictum: "Poetry is that which cannot be translated."

The poem is addressed to a woman who is now resting from the pleasant activities of the holiday, remembering perhaps the persons she met whom she liked or those who liked her. The poet cannot sleep because Nature which seems so beautiful in its outward appearance has denied him not only the consolation of love, but also hope. The solitary song of an artisan who goes back to his poor house after the recreations and amusements of the holiday brings him back to reality and he is taken by melancholy at the thought of how everything passes so quickly. Everything vanishes and doesn't leave any trace. This has even happened to old, famous civilizations. As a young boy, he used to yearn for the holiday and then in the evening of the holiday he couldn't sleep and was overcome by anguish while hearing a song fading away in the streets.

The three main themes of Leopardi's poem are: firstly the longing for the holiday to come, a state of mind which can offer an infinite range of possibilities of feelings, sensations, and thoughts; secondly, the experience of love, one of the few things that can relieve man's solitary and painful life; and finally the melancholy one suffers after the long-awaited but fleeting moments of happiness have passed.

The themes of this poem reverberate throughout the novel. So too do many of its details, which are so numerous that it would be tedious to list them. In a sense the novel is like the poem turned into a story.

It has been assumed by some readers that the title refers to the evening of the Palio at Siena when Sophie and Tancredi consummate their love for the first time. However such a joyful occasion contradicts the tone and thematic structure of Leopardi's poem. It is much more fruitful, I think, to regard the holiday of the title as referring to the whole of Sophie's experiences in Italy, in other words her Italian holiday. And the evening would then become that bleak period that follows any happy occasion. It is the melancholy realization that because of the nature of the human condition, everything worthwhile vanishes without trace, happiness does not last.

This point is emphasized in the last paragraph of the novel when Sophie, a sadder but wiser woman, is returning to England. On the train she hears a sad wistful incomplete melody played by a soldier with a bugle. It is another version of the poignant song that fills Leopardi's heart with anguish on the evening of the holiday.

Shirley Hazzard's other Italian novel, *The Bay of Noon*, deals with similar events and has the same melancholy *carpe diem* theme. Indeed the novels are so similar that I will deal with *The Bay of Noon* very briefly. In this novel, an unhappy English girl, Jenny, escapes from a stultifying home-life by accepting a job in Naples. During the year she spends there, she befriends a young Englishman and an Italian couple, Gioconda and her lover Gianni. The plot revolves around the changing relationships of these four people. After a brief but happy love-affair with the Italian Gianni, Jenny leaves Italy.

The novel is narrated in the first person, from Jenny's point of view. However, Shirley Hazzard is able to retain the ironic tone of voice that she prefers, by separating her heroine from the events she describes by fifteen years. Because Jenny is looking back over such a long period, she is able to see things more dispassionately and therefore more clearly.

Like her previous novel, *The Bay of Noon* is concerned with contrasting lifestyles, the effect of locality upon character, and the individual's recognition of her own particular needs in her search for happiness. These themes are touched

on in the epigraph to the novel, four lines from W. H. Auden's poem "Goodbye to the Mezzogiorno":

To bless this region, its vendages, and those
Who call it home: though one cannot always
Remember exactly why one has been happy,
There is no forgetting that one was.

Auden's poem not only suggests the title for her novel but also, through its close analysis of the differences between English and Neapolitan attitudes to life, it provides Shirley Hazzard with many significant details and images.

However it is not Auden's poem, but another poem by Leopardi which pervades the novel and provides the author with her principal themes. "La Ginestra" ("The Yellow Broom") celebrates the vivid yellow flower that grows on the barren slopes of Mount Vesuvius, the death-giving volcano. Nature is portrayed not as a mother but as a force that can destroy in a few moments town, people, life. A noble person is one who helps his fellow-creatures understand that we are not born to joy but to sorrow. He is noble also who is strong in suffering and finds the only effective remedy in human friendship. Against natural disaster men should unite and so loyalty, justice and mercy will come back to mankind. Although man is an infinitesimal part of the earth, he is able to realize this, and this very act is proof of his nobility and strength, this capacity of his mind to know things superior to itself. So although the ginestra broom will succumb to the wrath of the volcano, the volcano will find it wiser and more worthwhile because it is conscious of its frail but noble nature.

As Naples dominates the novel, so does Mount Vesuvius dominate Naples, a perpetual *memento mori*, Leopardi's symbol of Nature's cruelty. As Jenny realizes, it is the presence of Mount Vesuvius on the other side of the magnificent bay which "goes on absorbing the tributes to those it clearly intends to exterminate" that has compelled Neapolitans to acquire a fatalistic enthusiasm for enjoying themselves. It is "this sense of catastrophe, impending and actual that heightened the Neapolitan attachment to life and made an alleviation out of every small diversion or absurdity." (p. 65)

This attitude to life, a sort of defiant *carpe diem*, is an attitude that Jenny comes to share. Looking back on her Neapolitan experiences some fifteen years later, she says "Here, literally, I had come to my senses". (p. 145)

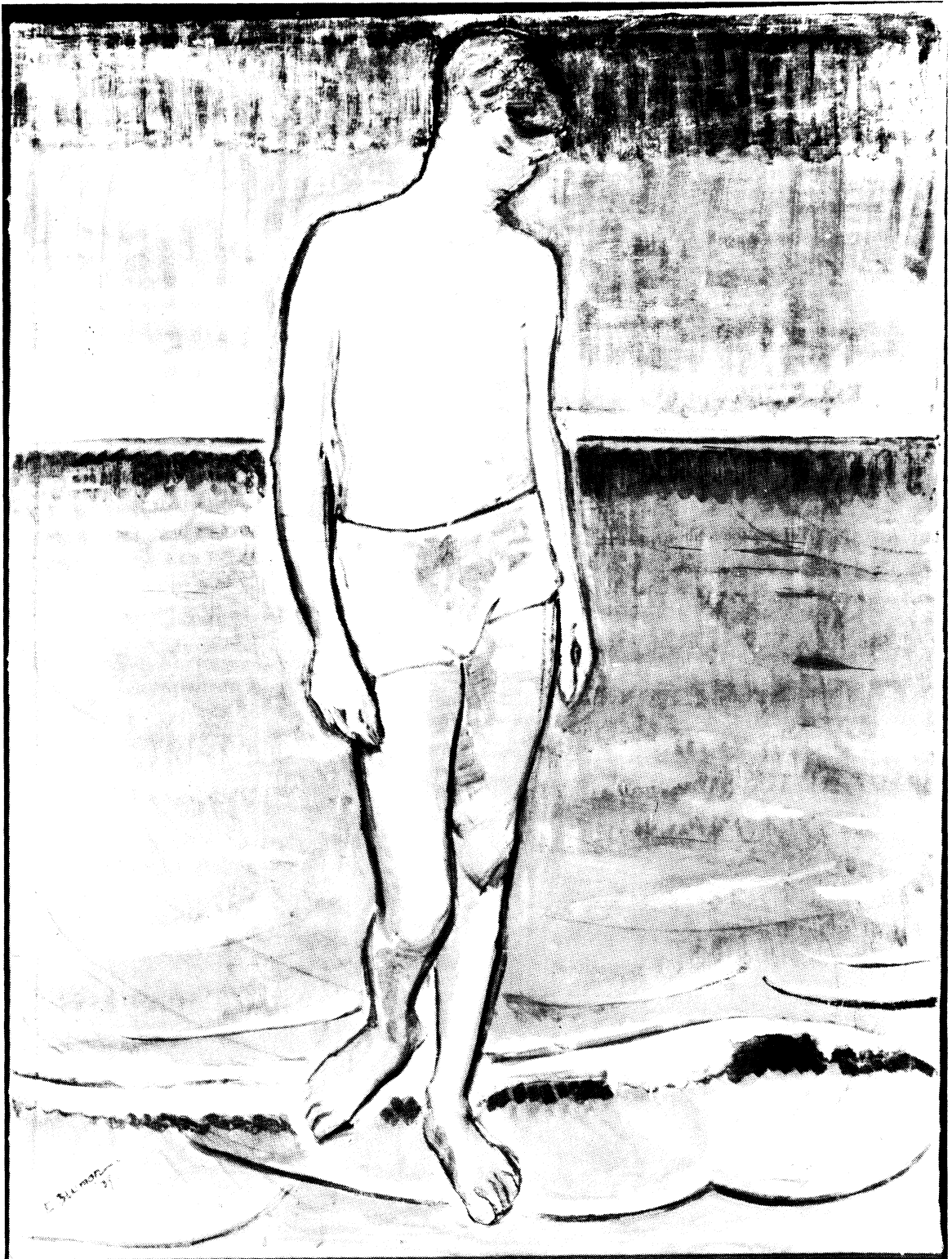
It is an attitude that Shirley Hazzard endorses when she gives her four lovers names that echo Leopardi's yellow broom, La Ginestra. Justin, Gioconda, Gianni, Jenny, Ginestra. This does not mean that they are not unique, but that they share a frail mortality, and an ennobling determination to live more intensely, to flower more brightly.

Editors Note: This article is the text of a paper given by Dott. Neri at the ASAL Conference in Perth, August 1983. Page references are to the following editions of Shirley Hazzard's novels: *The Evening of the Holiday*, London, Macmillan, 1966; *The Bay of Noon*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1982.

JUDITH WOMERSLEY

Leonardo da Vinci: anatomical drawings

Such meticulous fine lines.
Neat bodies looking just
like ours.
Surprise. Muscles
were much the same
in those days.
Mortality's a myth
as we see ourselves reflected
in ancient chins,
thighs, bones,
and skulls
that contained our thoughts.



“In former times”:
Elise Blumann remembers*

With my parents, naturally, we spoke always high German. But at my grandparents' farm near Parchim, I would hear low German spoken. I remember once when we were staying there, my mother asked me what I had been doing. I said, 'We took the ducks to the *Bäck*' [i.e., as though to be cooked], using the low German, when in fact we had taken them to the *Bach*: to the brook! I remember that! And my mother of course corrected me.

The farmhouse had outbuildings to the rear on either side, forming a horseshoe shape which enclosed a muddy yard. There was a cobblestone path through this to the rear entrance "... but the smell of manure was terrible! If you went round the front, to the proper entrance, the smell was absent; and that I preferred ... My earliest memory? My earliest memory is of when we moved to Schwerin. I was so sad that I was sick with a high fever for a week: I, who was never ill! Imagine, that homesickness could so affect a small child! I remember saying to my mother, 'We can go *back*, the cooking stove is still there; and Tante Luise, *she* is there! We can stay at *her* house: *she* will look after us!'"

Elise Blumann was born at Parchim in 1897. Now in East Germany, it was then part of Mecklenburg, as was Schwerin, where her father was transferred when she was still very young. When she speaks of her early childhood, it is the turn of the century that she recalls. Even her memories of adolescence pre-date the First World War. There have been many changes in her life but the times, too, have changed. For that reason, as much as for their own sake, her recollections compel our attention. Her memories of "former times", as she calls them, restore to life a sedate and ordered world very foreign to our own. "At the top there was the Emperor. After him came the dukes. And at the head of our family stood my father." Formerly a cavalry officer, her father took up a post in the army administration during their time in Schwerin. They did not move again until he was transferred to Hamburg, by which time Elise was already at high school. Thus, for her memories of childhood, it is to Schwerin that she chiefly returns.

"I remember one morning my father could not find his whip. The household was in an uproar, the servants running ... No one could find it. Then I appeared, holding it in my outstretched hands. My father was smiling. He said, 'Let her be dressed!' (I was still in my nightgown.) And it was done as he had commanded. He took me up before him on his horse and I rode with him into the forest. We saw the deer being fed with chestnuts, I remember. It was wonderful to see

*Part of a biographical study in progress on this prominent Western Australian painter.

that." The youngest of three children and the only daughter, Elise had been delicate at birth and was not expected to live. As a result, though she grew into a robust child who was never ill, she was, she says, extremely spoiled. At the dinner-table, the children had all to remain standing until her mother entered and sat down: all but Elise who, being the little one, was exempt. And she had special presents. "A miniature sleigh was made for me, a copy of the big, and in it I would ride, wrapped in furs."

At Christmas, however, the miniature sleigh was piled high with presents for the poor: it being her task, and her brothers', to distribute them. For if their status brought its privileges, it also entailed certain responsibilities. Because a pew was reserved for her family, they made sure of attending the military church at least once a month. It would not have done for the lower ranks to see those seats too often empty. And she was made to feel her position in other ways. On the outskirts of the town, their house was the last stopping-place for the foot traveller before the wilder countryside began. In consequence, their maid had a bowl of pennies always to hand as alms for beggars who passed by the kitchen door.

But on one occasion her mother stopped the maid and gave the beggar five marks instead. Five marks was a considerable sum. "She had seen it in his face, you see, the kind of man he was. My mother had little formal learning but still she was so wise! She told the man, who was not a normal beggar, that he could come back when the money was finished and she would give him more. But he never came back. (This she told me much later.)" And when the maid warned Elise that the old, bent women whom she saw on the edge of the forest collecting firewood were witches, her mother intervened again. Though Elise was not to go near them, and emphatically never to speak to them, they were not witches. Their faces were ugly from deprivation, not witchcraft, and the huge bundles of sticks on their backs were their only livelihood. They were, said her mother, the very poor. "'We are to be thankful,'" she told Elise, "'that we are not like them.'"

Sometimes these memories come back to her in dreams. For Elise now is eighty-six; and to her it is an unlooked-for reward of our talks that they prompt her to dream more of the distant past. The happiness of her childhood sometimes spills over into the day and her face, recalling it, will be alight with remembered joy. "One day in winter my mother said, 'We shall go skating'. The Duke's men had cleared a path on the lake and we could go on the ice." And so they skated: her mother in front, full skirt swinging as she skated in half-circles, and Elise behind on a rein. "She had told me that if I stayed completely upright and kept my feet together, I would be all right; and I was." Then suddenly her mother saw the Duke and Duchess approaching, accompanied by courtiers, and she drew Elise aside, to let them pass. As they did so,

My mother said, 'Curtsey!' Well, as you can imagine, having been brought up in military circles, I could curtsey before I could blow my nose. So, like my mother, I sank in a full curtsey to the ground: except that hers . . . was successful. I fell flat to the ice! The Duchess came over to me and extended her hand to help me up and . . . whoops! Suddenly there two of us on the ice!

It was a day worth dreaming of. Elise and her mother were invited to join the Duke and Duchess for coffee in the restaurant on the *Kaninchenwerder*, an island in the middle of the lake. To Elise then, this honour mattered less than the *torte* which the owners of the restaurant produced. ("They must have telephoned for it. They would not normally have had it.") *Torten* were a source of endless torment for she had been taught never to accept a second slice. "Other things could be eaten up, *yes*—biscuits and small cakes—but never could you have a second slice of the special cake, the *torte*." So when the Duchess pressed her to



Pre 1926



c. 1938



c. 1938

take more, she cast her eyes downwards and declined. "Is it not nice?" the Duchess asked her. "Oh yes!" Elise said explosively, not looking up. And then, wonder of wonders, she looked across to her mother, who nodded, and lo! for the first and only time in her childhood, the rule was broken. It was the one occasion, too, on which she dined with persons of such high rank. When in later years, because of her background, she would be considered highly desirable as a potential convert to the Spartacist movement, the irony amused her. Had her radical friends only known it, her only real contact with the aristocracy had been, as she puts it, two slices of *torte*.

As we talk, the stories are told and re-told. Their location is not always the same. We may be not in Schwerin but in Eutin, even further north, where her father was transferred next after Hamburg. Or Parchim may be remembered not from when she lived there with her family, but from later visits to her beloved Tante Luise. "Did I tell you of Karl Ludwig, the forester's son, and how we kissed one another with our hands over our eyes so that no one would see?" An early memory, certainly, and identifiable with Parchim, but is Elise three or is she nearer five? On occasion a new moral is pointed, a fresh connexion made between this recollection and that. She maps for me the layout of each loved house; and her memories, too, are friendly and accommodating. Familiar, eager to oblige, they inhabit sometimes one setting, sometimes another. But through all the telling the delight of each experience remains unchanged. Clear, lapidary, untrammelled, these memories pierce the air like the sleighbells of Schwerin. "When you say 'Schwerin' to me, in my mind there is always the jingling of those bells."

The note of celebration is unmistakable. These memories come to Elise, as to us, from a foreign country. For within a few years she was to make the decision which would ultimately banish her from the world of her childhood. It is because of this, I would say, that her earliest memories have been preserved in all their original clarity and precision. They were not, in the event, to be overlain by a sparkling courtship and marriage in the same *milieu*. "Talking to you makes me realize what changes there have been in my life! Not only I: the world, too, has changed."

Elise's world changed forever when in her late teens she made the decision to pursue her gift for painting at all costs. The war had by then begun and she was in Eutin, having completed her secondary education in Lübeck. By virtue of her upbringing she should have been patiently waiting out the war in the magnificent house which had been six months in the building, that was the best of all her parents' houses. As tradition had it, she should have taken walks with her father by the lakes near the forest, sketched a little in ladylike fashion and devoted herself, as her mother did, to packing interminable parcels for the soldiers in her brothers' companies. "Dear So-and-so. I am the sister of your commanding officer. I hope that the enclosed will be found suitable. Yours sincerely." She tried it all, with undoubted good will, but remained unsatisfied. Two years into the war, on the advice of her earliest mentor, she was off to Berlin: there to study, unknown to her parents, at the Berlin Academy of Arts.

Deceiving them about this was the most momentous thing she had ever done. She had lied before, of course, but only in a small way. When the family belongings were moved into the new house outside Eutin, for instance, from the apartment in the town where she and her parents had stayed while it was being built, she took the opportunity to dispose of the second-best set of china, which displeased her. When the soldiers who carried both china and linen on foot to the new house brought in the offending plates, she had them buried in the garden, later telling her mother that they had been broken. But the lie about the Academy was of a different order. It endured, moreover, a lot longer than the three years



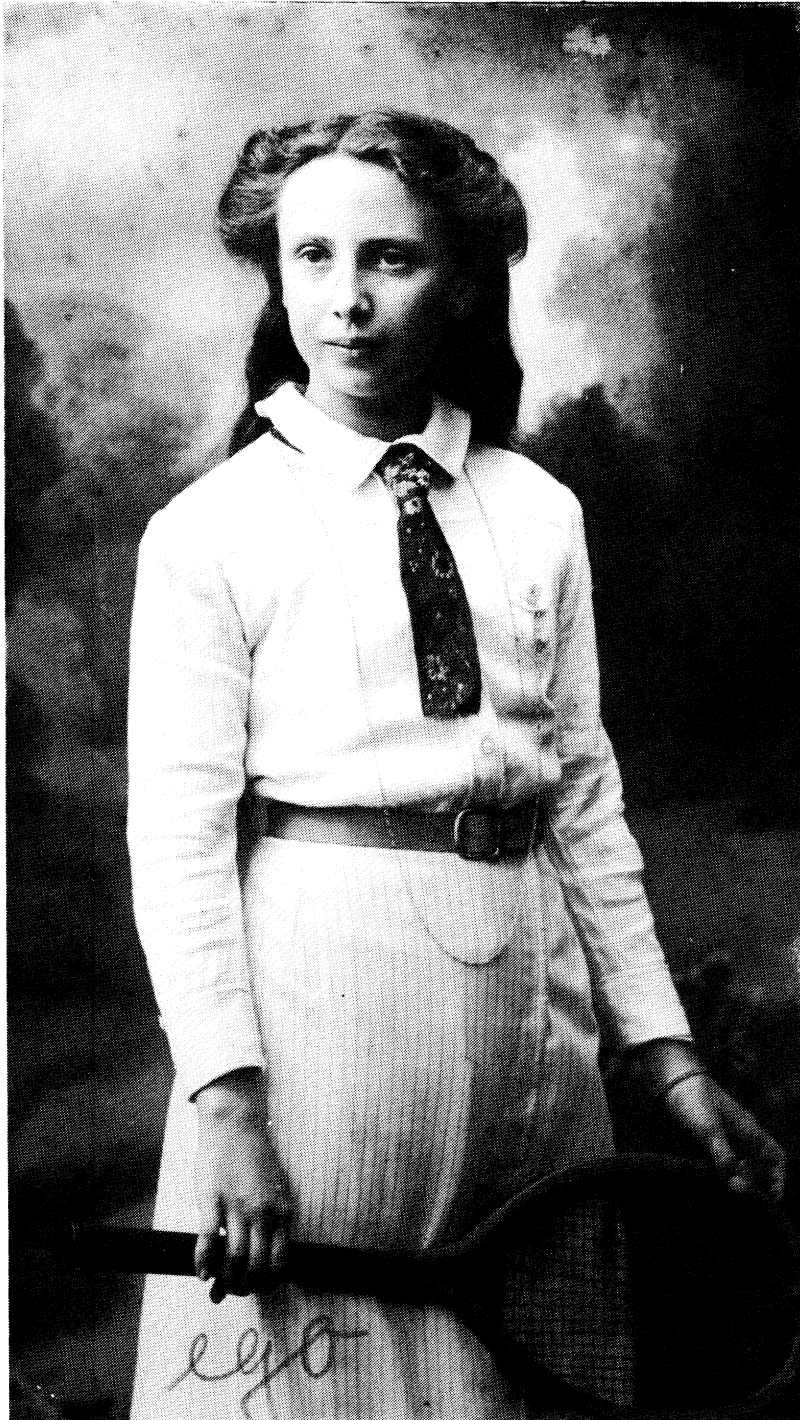
Parchim c. 1896. Elise's brothers,
Paul and Ludwig, shortly before her birth.



Schwerin c. 1905.
Elise with Ludwig.



With her brothers. Schwerin c. 1902.



On a visit to Parchim from Hamburg, c. 1911.

she studied there. Until they died, her parents and older brothers never knew what she had done.

"Did I tell you my parents *never knew* I went to the Academy?" Today Elise stands somewhat in awe of her younger self. That she deceived her parents, however, she interprets as an indictment of her situation. For, she says, "to deceive them was not difficult. Our whole life was based on pretence!" She expresses impatience, now, at the rigidity of the social structure into which she was born and which, before Berlin, she was educated to perpetuate. "You were Elise Schlie and you *did not speak* to a working-class man. You did not speak even to a man of your own class until he had been introduced. And even then he did not hold out his hand to you: he waited until *you* extended your hand to *him*." A world where even the minutiae of human contact were so formalized could not readily give her sufficient scope to be her own person. Her parents' world turned on distinctions such as these. "You were Major Ludwig Schlie and you were Frau Frieda Schlie and you behaved . . . *so*." But Elise's sense of her own talent marked her out. She was not only her parents' daughter: it was beginning to look as though she might also be an artist. If their world could not accommodate her, she would be forced to step outside it.

Ironically, perhaps—but then again, perhaps not—it was her mother who showed Elise the way. Staunch upholder of the system into which her daughter had been born, she nevertheless demonstrated to Elise, on one memorable occasion, that its values were not absolute. It was easy to deceive her parents about Berlin, Elise tell me one day. After all, her own mother had taught her to lie. And with these bald words she introduces the episode which she recalls as having affected her more profoundly than any other in her childhood. "I have told you, haven't I, that I learned early to lie?"

As a little girl, Elise had been very much in her mother's care. Though later her father would take charge of her schooling, for example, at this stage it was her mother who made most decisions. "At first I attended a little school in the neighbourhood where we lived. It was close by and therefore convenient. But one day I came home and asked my mother the questions which my schoolfellows had begun asking me. Why did we live in such a fine, big house? Did I *need* a fresh pinafore every day? And why did my mother and I drive into town in the afternoon in our carriage? My mother decided it was high time I left! And I was transferred to a better school in the town."

The purpose of the carriage rides at which the local children poked fun was to pay social calls. These calls were the bane of Elise's young life. "One took coffee—not tea, as in England—and one was not to speak unless spoken to." Now eating and talking were her two great loves. Barred from her fill of either on these occasions—for the rule about *torten* was never waived here—she hated them. If addressed by her elders and betters, she was to reply, her mother emphasized, as briefly as possible. She was not to *rattle on*. In Eutin in her teens, this was still the case. She remained under her mother's tutelage and would do so, she knew, until she was eighteen. But on that day, always to be remembered, she saw her mother break a cardinal rule.

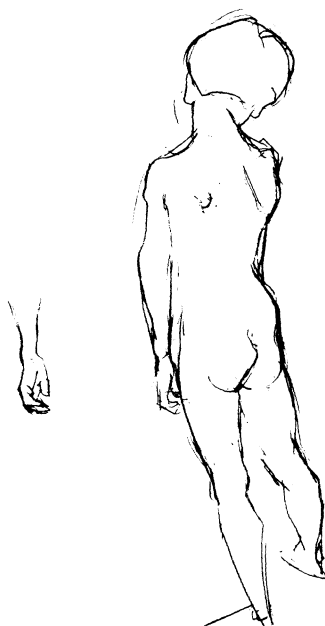
Where we lived outside Eutin there was on the one side a great park and on the other the Duke's forest, where my father had the right to hunt. (Behind our house was a lake, where my brothers and I would swim naked in secret.) When I took walks with my mother, we could not go in the forest, obviously, and so we walked through parkland in the direction of the Duke's residence. One day we met the Duke! (He was also out walking; and in our direction.) We stopped to greet him but my mother then would not stop talking! The Duke was her social superior and yet she told him what he ought to do. That she could talk so: and to a duke!



1929



11. June 1936
W. 3



c. 1936

1936

Elise was deeply embarrassed by her mother's outlandish behaviour but agog, nonetheless, at this gratuitous insight into her character. "I thought, 'My mother can lie!'" The lesson she learned, however, had as much to do with her mother's purpose as with her wonderful disregard for convention. For the subject on which Frau Frieda Schlie lectured the Duke was his peasants: or rather, his neglect of them. He had no idea, she told him, of the cramped conditions in which they lived. Her house was near his bailiff's; and she knew. Was he aware, she inquired, that his peasants had no bedding and were sleeping on straw? "And she told him what he ought to do."

Elise draws attention not only to her mother's outspokenness but also to her bravery. Others would not have dared, she says, to speak so, even had they enjoyed much higher status than did her parents. Through her mother's influence, Elise was alert to the plight of the Duke's peasants as she had been to that of the old women and the beggar. When she noticed the driver of her sleigh, exposed to the bitter northern cold while she sat below, snug in her furs, she saw him with her mother's eyes. So the student friends in Berlin who would try—unsuccessfully, as it turned out—to convert her to the Spartacist cause did not entirely miss their mark. But they might have found an unexpected ally in her mother.

What got Elise to Berlin in the first place, though, was the knowledge that the rules by which she had been taught to live could be broken. "Did I tell you that I learned early to lie?" To her parents, the Berlin Academy of Arts would have been no place for their delicately nurtured daughter. "At that time, in the circles in which we moved, once you knew a person's family, you knew also that person." For Elise to associate with students of indeterminate family in faraway Berlin was out of the question. Berlin in wartime was even more to be feared. "And at the Academy, with nude models!" To Elise, on the other hand, Berlin meant freedom. Her mother's social conscience had obliged her momentarily to set aside the code of manners by which she lived. Spurred on by a sense of her own artistic destiny, Elise abandoned that code with far greater thoroughness and, it must also be said, some considerable gusto.

For the next few years she would continue to move back and forth between her two worlds. "It was like the high and the low German. At the Academy I spoke one language and, with my parents, another." When she returned home each holidays, her life resumed its former course. "I would go back to being a good girl again," she says. But the admiring young men of Eutin noticed a change. "'You are more beautiful now than you were!' they said. *Because I had begun to use makeup!*" The real break with her former life had come.

I cannot imagine that I have told you enough of what it meant to me, Berlin. To be far away from my parents, to be able to speak my thoughts without fear of hurting them! Then there were the Spartacists just starting up and the students at the Academy used to take me to the workers' meetings. We would see the policeman signal and know to leave before the raid began. For a properly brought up girl it was an incredible experience.

And the galleries! Nothing I had seen in Lübeck could compare. I was able to see the work of the new Expressionists, who of course were not represented in the museums. It was . . . overwhelming, you know. In Berlin I began first to be myself.

WARRICK WYNNE

Anzac Morning in Orange

I thought I was up early,
almost alone
in the wide old streets
that run straight and long,
country-style, through this town,
and the trees already turning.

Until the inevitable park & statues,
one to Mafeking and one;
laden with flowers
bright and new as morning,
to Anzacs.
The park already empty

and the sound of bagpipes
somewhere in the distance.

RORY STEELE

Improbability

It is PROBABLE that this or that
It is PROBABLE another thing
It is PROBABLE the theories
Babble on. Our science teacher
Knows he drones so scribbles
Oratorically but I stop slabbed
Against the bolder print which
Blobs and blubs like all the tests
We ever did with gas in glass retorts;
Molybdenum and plumbic lead
Aren't probable but do have poetry
In plosive liquid consonants.
Steele, are you here or somewhere else —
Perhaps you'll tell the class . . .
The droner interrupts and rubs
His board, my smile gone with
Chalk and all that alchemy;
Sudden problems sneer insoluble.

ROBERT HABOST

Silence

Where is that owl now?
So late that his night
punctuations will not allow
me to know the time.
So late that even his mate
is not calling the fortunes
of their black waking.
No more elemental cries,
only the stars exploding
beyond hearing,
trees moving the breeze along,
the cat padding carefully
indoors to sleep
and you in my arms,
sweat lying still
and the blood
calmer in our veins.

MARIAN DE SAXE

On Arnold's "Dover Beach"

No Aegean, this sea,
although the words
remain the same: a yacht
or two slide by and
my, it's blue
today.

Here
bobbing past beached bodies,
past summer slight, past
pleasure
Sophocles might feel
a turgid, flagging flow, the weight
that runs through ages
and oceans, a lowly beat
of gravity and graves.

QUINTILINA EVANGELISTA

Dylan

A JEW WHO BELIEVES IN CHRIST
A FATHER WITH A MISTRESS
A POET WITH A SONG...

A MAN WITH A CONTEMPT FOR COMPLACENCY
but AN ABHORRENCE FOR VIOLENCE
AN ARTIST WITH A STYLE FOR WORDS
but A DISTASTE FOR DIALECTIC

...AN UNASSUMING VISIONARY
WITH DREAMS ENOUGH
FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT
WITHOUT CONTRARIES
IS
NO
PROGRESSION

BOOKS

Who Is She? Images of Woman in Australian Fiction, Shirley Walker (ed.), University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1983, 219 pp., intro., \$24.95, \$12.95 p/back.

Shirley Walker's edition of a collection of fifteen essays on the work of a range of male and female writers of Australian prose fiction covers a literary chronology (not unbroken since the essay on Furphy which gives the volume its title has been placed first) from Catherine Spence to Barbara Hanrahan. Loosely linked by their common concern to analyse the portrayal of women in Australian fiction—Walker's brief Preface introduces the collection according to its intention, "to be an inquiry into the way a selection of Australian prose writers have dealt, in their fiction, with feminine figures and concepts of the feminine"—the organisation of the essays invites an historical perspective, one which conveys a dismal lack of change in the problematical relationship of the feminine to Australian life through its writing. This and other patterns can be discerned, despite or perhaps because of the diversity of methods used and responses given in the individual essays to the investigation of images of woman in Australian fiction (the editor specifically makes "no apology for [this] variety"). But prior critical questions raised by this publication need to be addressed initially.

Who Is She? breaks new ground in published critical studies of Australian writing, organised as it is through a gendered theme. However, images of women criticism is part of that first phase activity of feminist criticism, by now well established, even conservative, which "takes considerable interest in the situations and psychology of female characters, investigating attitudes to women or "images of women" in the works of an author, a genre or a period" (J. Culler, *On Deconstruction*, p. 45). That this is the first such publication in Australia casts an interesting light on the entrenched critical tradition in Australian literature—and that a number of critics and scholars of Australian literature have been propelled into this activity by an energetic, imaginative

editor is itself admirable. The collection will provide students of Australian literature, and those interested in literary manifestations and explorations of the woman in Australia with a useful, accessible range of critical material. The reader who is interested in the recent history, multiplicity and possibility of theories of feminist criticism, as well as the way 'woman' is constructed by and within Australian culture and in the literature which is one of the signifying practices of that culture will be less happy.

The problems raised for the critical reader who acknowledges that this volume does fill a critical gap in Australian publishing, yet who is simultaneously aware of the potential theoretical strategies available to examine the question of *Who Is She?*, are complicated by hidden ambiguities of Shirley Walker's determinedly uncritical Preface, which leaves "judgements . . . to the reader". This judgemental reader would question that the contributors, who include as the publisher's blurb indicates "many of Australia's leading academics in the field of Australian literature", in are the majority interested in the kind of radical stance to the text demanded by the notion of gender in writing. A more doubtful premise in relation to the editing of the collection comes from Walker's assertion that "it was not specifically intended as a feminist volume", and that "the prime consideration has been, as it should be, aesthetic". Yet an enquiry into images of woman cannot be undertaken primarily as an aesthetic one; this activity is necessarily political, bound up with Australian ideological history, and presumes a particular, non-aesthetic and theoretical perspective.

Further, the title of the volume, which derives from the title essay, Julian Croft's witty piece on "The Image of Woman in the Novels of Joseph Furphy" and refers to Tom Collins' question, "often asked in Furphy's stories and never properly answered by Tom" (p. 1) is, I would suggest, not adequately answered here. The question proffers an answer; it presupposes a given subject, an object of enquiry which can be variously, descriptively mined from the work of different authors. Beyond this, though, lies the more significant question, how 'she' came into being, initiating the dynamic of a process, not the stasis of an image, and urging issues, socio-historical, psychological, ideological, and those of language and form which are

rarely raised theoretically by the essays of *Who Is She?* Carole Ferrier's question in the title of her essay, the penultimate one in the collection, "Is an 'Images of Woman' Methodology Adequate for Reading Elizabeth Harrower's *The Watch Tower*?" is one she answers in part by briefly adopting other methodological stances. And it reflects ironically on the assumptions of this collection, as well as on the critical 'tradition' in Australian literature.

None of this denies the pioneering quality of the volume and its scholarly and critical value. Individually, the essays are always interesting, often exemplary accounts of each author's work in terms of the way, and sometimes the why, it presents 'woman'. Many of the contributors bring to their readings historical or biographical material; J. A. Hay on "K. S. Prichard's Women" explores the continuities between the writer's life and her fiction, which gives rise to the ambiguous image of woman in her writing; Dorothy Green begins writing of Henry Handel Richardson through the paradox she presents as a woman "utterly dependent on her husband, both financially and emotionally, but who at the same time supported the militant suffragettes" (p. 84), a tension which was "a fruitful one for her art". Brian Matthews argues the reasons for Lawson's idealistic view of women as creatures who are corrupted by entering the world of men from both a stylistic: "It does . . . seem to me consistent with his weakness for the romantic and the melodramatic" (p. 50) and a biographical stance. Lucy Frost sets up connections between Barbara Baynton's life and her stories to initiate a fascinating psychological criticism of the fiction, reading "troubling personal issues" (p. 64) in the narratives and their images. Shirley Walker on Thomas Keneally and P. K. Elkin on David Ireland uncover the contradictions inherent in the work of two male authors who declare sympathy for women, yet subject them to textual exploitation. In a provocative essay on Patrick White, Veronica Brady argues that White breaks down "the stereotypical distinction between the sexes" (p. 179), identifying his writing in Jungian terms as in the "feminine mode", which "represents a radical break with the premises on which our culture is based" (p. 189). As a critic, Brady challenges the conventions of reading, just as she sees White challenging cultural conventions.

The images of woman predominate in these essays are those of a feminine figure—writer or character—divided against herself. For Lucy Frost, Baynton makes "a strange feminist icon" (p. 56), and the expressive title of the essay on Prichard, "Betrayed Romantics and Compromised Stoics" is explored in its opening which describes contradictory iconographies of Prichard, ones that emerge again in the images of women in her writing. That 'she' is a creature caught between romance and reality, between idealisation and victimisation, between desire and duty is a common conclusion of the various contributors. Often unintentionally, and I think most productively, many of the essays reveal critical problems which will provide a basis for reaction or extension. Helen Thompson ends her piece on "Catherine Helen Spence: Pragmatic Utopian" with the assertion that "In her work national pride found a definitive female voice for the first time" (p. 24), opening up, not closing off her investigation by uncorking the critical can of worms writhing round the idea of what a definitive female voice may be. Lucy Frost on Baynton reads the writer in the writing, illuminatingly, but she introduces yet fails to engage with what Frost sees as the problem of melodrama in Baynton's prose, beyond the recognition that it might signify the writer's need for psychological concealment. As art, it "makes for failure, however peculiarly haunting that failure may be" (p. 65). Melodrama may be read as a writing strategy to enable the expression of problematic material; the application of a positive critical approach to hitherto negatively ascribed areas of an author's prose can illuminate and energise the critical canon. These interesting critical absences, which point to future critical questions, are blatantly foregrounded as Annette Stewart asks at the end of her essay on "Women in Martin Boyd's Fiction": "Was Boyd, in the novels of this middle period of his writing, consciously seeking a perfect female figure who could embody the values that pleased him? Did the quest for such a figure fail him? Why?" (p. 134). The questions, implicit and explicit, raised in *Who Is She?* are important ones. As all foundation works may, it should provoke genuine critical debate and produce further studies.

DELYS BIRD

Paddy Roe, *Gularabulu*, ed. Stephen Muecke, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1983. 98 pp.

As I picked up my pen to write this review I tried to imagine what would be a standard average response to *Gularabulu* from the Australian bookbuying public. At the centre I think would be a kind of puzzlement, a disabling sense that normal criteria of literary judgment are invited yet don't seem to come together as the basis for reliable judgment. For many readers, that would translate into a negative response. For others, it would remain as the nucleus of that most exciting and liberating of experiences, a challenge to habitual modes of reading and assumptions about what literature is. In the history of literature, books and authors that do that have always been regarded as very important. T. S. Eliot in his famous essay talked of the genuinely new work that alters the whole tradition, and every previous work in it. *Gularabulu* is I believe a work of that stature. That means it is likely to be greeted with incomprehension, indifference or hostility for a while, until a body of books like it builds up to make its achievement difficult to evade, and allows a group of readers to become excitedly adequate to its demands.

The book as a whole initially presents the reader with a number of well-known contradictions. It is a book of narratives in English by an Aboriginal story teller, recorded by an academic, and published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press in a characteristically elegant format. These are the standard ingredients for the appropriation of Aboriginality in academic texts or coffee table books. Where this book is unique is in what the dust jacket calls the "gritty authenticity" of the style of presentation. The mediator who holds the contradictions together is the editor, Stephen Muecke, source of the grit which is a defiant affirmation of the aesthetic qualities of Aboriginal oral culture against both coffee-table kitsch and the obtuseness of Eurocentric academia.

Muecke's structural importance in a book which is ostensibly and sincerely committed to "authenticity" is not a disabling paradox. He becomes a character in the total fiction which is the book, part of a frame as rich and nuanced as its contents. He provides an introduction and notes that by some criteria might be considered inept. The introduction seems reluctant to tell the reader what that reader

needs to know, or what its editor believes. He hardly bothers to justify some of his most original departures from normal editorial practice. His notes on the poems seem arbitrary in what he chooses to annotate. One story, the first, has nearly half the notes he sees fit to provide for the whole book, and the principles he employs are unclear. Sometimes he gives scholarly references, (twice to Hugh Edwards) but mostly he doesn't—sometimes he glosses phrases in Aboriginal language, or peculiarities of Aboriginal English, or knowledge of the locality, but there are many other parts of the text which remain obscure without explanation or comment. The effect on the reader is a vertiginous shift in position: at one moment treated mystifyingly as a member of this different culture, an initiate, at the next receiving the careful attention of a white pedagogue. I am reminded of Nabokov's commentator in *Pale Fire*, the scholar who inserts himself into the epic poem he is ostensibly commenting on. Muecke's persona in the same way becomes part of the text he is mediating—even more insistently than Nabokov's, because Muecke can interrupt his narrator. He includes his own comments when they occurred in the recorded sessions. Again, they are often beside the point, or worse. In *Mirdinan*, for instance, Paddy Roe finished one phrase of the story with the formulaic phrase "So he went—finish", a phrase that had rounded off the 3 previous episodes. But Muecke thought that the story was over.

"Stephen: True story?) Eh? (Stephen: True story?)—
yeah, he gone—
finish—
sooo, when he wen' back they grab him again—"

Paddy Roe clearly needed to re-establish the rhythm of the story, with the word "finish" as the springboard for the next phase, over the interruption of an alien discourse, the academic labelling of the narrative. The brief exchange was like a minor disturbance to the narrative, which flowed on essentially unchanged. Muecke could so easily have snipped out those three lines. Every other editor would have done so. It is his unique scrupulosity and integrity which insists on the retention of the obtuse academic self that existed so irrelevantly at the moment of narration, embodied now in a sophisticated awareness that hovers poig-

nantly over the text. I am reminded of another modernist creation, Borge's "Pierre Menard—the author of Don Quixote", whose hero's originality was precisely his self-conscious refusal to alter a single word of Cervantes' masterpiece. Muecke similarly emerges as a fascinating, enigmatic and complex figure from the hints given in the text, occupying the representative position of white listener/mediator but in a highly individual way that includes its own form of heroism.

But this is Paddy Roe's book, not Stephen Muecke's. A photo of Paddy's face forms the frontispiece, a weatherbeaten face with a quizzical half smile, and demonic eyes under a drover's hat. Paddy's voice is part of the texture of every narrative, and Paddy's mastery of the techniques of oral traditions organizes every phrase and turn of the text. It is all this that Muecke has preserved, against the unconscious blindness of a European tradition that lost contact with its roots in oral forms two millennia ago. Shakespeare and Donne have been praised for reintroducing the sinuous energies of the spoken voice into English poetry, Wordsworth poeticized under the banner of "the language of men speaking to men", but in spite of later poets with similar manifestos, humans seem not to be able to take too much reality in the language of literature, to rephrase Eliot. It is this energy, with all its subtlety and art, that Paddy Roe possesses and Muecke mediates.

The convention the book adopts is to record every word, every hesitation and repetition, devoting a line to each unit of speech, so that the text appears like poetry, a free verse form. The format is a continuous visual commentary in the oral form, like unobtrusive stage directions. To readers of poetry it announces the density of the language, its aesthetic status, though the aesthetic principles underlying that status may be different. In addition, Muecke adds brief notations about mode of delivery, including voice quality and laughter. To use these conventions to recreate the rich specificity of an oral performance probably requires experience and training that most of the book's readers will not have. This constitutes a major barrier that contributes to the Standard Average Reader's initial problems with the book: on the one hand, a set of signals that the language of this text deserves the closest scrutiny, on the other hand a text full of the

"imperfections" of not simply spoken English, but non-standard Aboriginal English. How could such a text be set for study in our schools, such a reader might ask. How indeed! Our children should not be allowed to suspect that the expressive resources of the human voice have been stunned and neutralized in the high literary tradition we impose on them, but still have a rich life in a tradition that we exclude from our schools, that is sustained by a people we have dispossessed, whose culture we have despised.

Each story is preceded by a brief plot summary, in the inert language typical of that genre. A comparison between these summaries and the actual text would provide to students and others a graphic illustration of the power of oral narrative in the hands of a master. Here, for instance, is the summary of the central incident in *Duegara*, which describes the revenge of a *maban* man on the wife who went off with someone else.

At the place where the young man and the stolen wife are living, the men all go fishing one day while the women stay at home. A big storm blows up so the women shelter in a cave while the men hurry home. The stolen woman is sitting in the middle of the others. By the time the men get back they find that the stolen woman has been blown to pieces by lightning and all the others are unconscious.

The *maban* man had sent his power through the lightning and made it come up right underneath the woman.

Here is that climactic moment, in Paddy Roe's narrative:

so this lightning now—
rain rain rain rain rain jus' pouring—
now ONE LIGHTNING COME—
he strike—
he strike right underneath this woman—
you know ah—
lift 'im up—
chuck 'im outside—
pieces and guts head—
oh liver heart everything—
aall pieces everywhere—
and this woman was in the middle—
this two—
four woman here you see they put 'im in
the middle—
but the lightning come from right under-
neath him—
lift 'im up just chuck 'im through the door
in pieces and finish—

and aall this other four woman—
 two fall down here inside you know—
 (Laughs)
 and 'nother two here too they only lay
 down just outside here—
 only one woman he lift him out from the—
 from that cave chuck 'im right out pieces—
 dogs (Laugh)—
 all layin' down—

(Soft) all the man come—
 (Soft growl) hellooo "Hello might be some-
 thing wrong" that man said—
 that lightning strike right there—

In the prose version, the event is unreal, sealed off from the possibility of meaningfulness by an explanation that is merely trivially human. In the narrative, repetition and emphasis recreate the power of the natural forces of rain and lightning, and move backwards and forwards between the human situation and the play of the elements. Repetition allows the narrator to weave rich patterns, continually recasting the components so that they acquire ever greater resonance. The closest analogues, for Western literature, are the unattainable examples of Homeric art and the language of song, similarly closed off from the mainstream of European literature.

Another expressive resource in this passage is Paddy Roe's laughter. It is a chthonic force erupting from below into the narrative, like the lightning that destroys the woman. Here and elsewhere it endorses violence and destruction, amoral like the lightning, a self-affirming energy, striking inexplicably. Why should the image of the dogs lying outside release it? But Paddy Roe moves swiftly from this laughter to the soft spoken, awe struck "all the man come". Without the indicator of voice-quality, the words would have been as unremarkable as four common monosyllables could be: as part of a pattern of incidents organized by shifts of tone, it has the power of great art.

Paddy Roe tells his stories in Aboriginal English. Muecke justifies this against a position which would see Aboriginality exclusively in traditional Aboriginal languages, but his tone sounds uneasy and defensive. "It is in this language that aspects of a new Aboriginality could be said to be emerging. The fact that it might be playing this important and interesting communicative role makes it seem purist and unnecessary to take traditional languages as a starting point" (p. iv). In any case, as he

then admits, he is not competent in any one of the languages Paddy speaks. The concession, with phrases like "aspects", "could be said", "might be playing" and "seem", signals his uneasiness—especially since he is in other respects very much a purist. But the line of criticism that Muecke is combating needs to be looked at carefully. Ironically, a blanket rejection of Aboriginal English as an expressive medium repeats the judgment that was made on English in the sixteenth century. It is possible to value the expressive resources of traditional Aboriginal languages without needing to denigrate (a nicely appropriate word) Aboriginal English. And anyone who claims that Aboriginal English cannot be the medium for fine literature has only to read *Gularabulu* to be proven wrong.

Paddy Roe's English is not defective English: it has potentialities lacking in standard English. Take the form "yunmi", for "you-and-me", corresponding to an Aboriginal form of exclusive dual "we". English "we", which does not distinguish between a vague group including the self and one or more people, present or absent, is imprecise alongside Paddy Roe's Aboriginal conception of relationship coded in his pronouns, which distinguish between a two-person entity created by the intimacy of address and other more distanced and diffuse forms of "we". At a crucial point in *Mirdinan*, the first story in the collection, Mirdinan says to his wife, whom he has seen being unfaithful to him:

"So never mind" he said. "That's all right—
 Never worry"—
 say, "Come on yunmi better go—
 see if we can get some—
 we go this way bush—"

After this conciliatory comment, "never worry", he uses the intimate, exclusive "yunmi" form, re-establishing ironically or manipulatively that unity which was broken by the Malay lover: and they go off into the bush, where he will kill her. The one word signals economically not simply the form of relationship but also Paddy Roe's sense of its Aboriginality.

This has not been a very judicious review. A judicious stance would rest on the comfortable assumption that "literary" value is apolitical. But the delegitimation of Aboriginal language and culture, or various appropriations of

them, have been highly political. The opportunity this book gives for its readers to recognize strengths of Aboriginal traditions is not unimportant, to both whites and Aborigines. It's a reason why the book should become a classic, in the etymological sense of the word—a text that is studied in classrooms. But books do not become classics simply because they ought to, for political reasons on one side or another. Muecke is aware of the political basis necessary for this book to exist and be valued, including action on “aboriginal ‘issues’” like land rights:

“I hope that the conditions which have made this book possible continue to exist in ways which make more interesting and challenging work emerge from the Aboriginal-White encounter” (p. iv).

He is undoubtedly right to insist on the connection between the Aboriginal struggle and *Gularabulu*, which formally speaking contains only one story that refers to the Aboriginal-White encounter but which in so many ways is a complex and multifaceted instance of that encounter. But his last clause is ambiguous. Does he hope that there will be more works, each one interesting and challenging, which will follow *Gularabulu*'s lead? Or is he so self-effacing as to hope that these later works will be more interesting, more challenging, than *Gularabulu*? If so, he is doing less than justice to a remarkable book, or he has very high hopes indeed of a new tradition in Australian Literature that has just been born.

BOB HODGE

ANDREW LANSDOWN

Kestrel

The kestrel is so
still against the strong wind
it seems to be pinned
to the sky — like a kite, held
by an invisible string.

An Indian Selection

Indo-Anglian literature (Indian literature written in English) has existed for about half a century, though only a few of its practitioners are known to the West. In many respects a brand of English literature produced in Asia would suggest illegitimacy, and serve to remind us of the West's imperialist role in Asia in the not so distant past. In the 19th century it was Lord Macaulay's aim to produce in India a kind of brown-skinned-gentleman class happy to serve their masters in the Administration, and the English language was to be the means of creating slavery through privilege. Nowadays the English language is officially recognised in India as just one of the country's many other languages, though unofficially it serves as a national *lingua franca*. Not surprisingly, it is an issue which has generated, and continues to generate, strong emotions in a large country with disparate regional predilections.

The literature written in English is just one colour in a much broader spectrum of regional literatures written in their own languages. In the past, as Meenakshi Mukherjee notes in her essay here, there were discernible differences between literature in English and in the other languages: that written in English tended to take as its subject issues or ideas of national rather than regional significance such as the *Satyagraha* movement or Partition, while the regional literatures tended to deal with issues closer to home. But this is changing, and Meenakshi Mukherjee's discussion of some contemporary women novelists describes the nature of this change.

What has always surprised me, speaking personally, is the wide variety of styles and the many distinctly different voices speaking a kind of English adapted to suit Indian conditions. In Raja Rao's well-known Foreword to *Kanthapura* (1939) he spoke of the need to forge a new kind of Indian-flavoured English. A first generation of writers showed the way, and now a second and third generation continue the tradition while pursuing other interests. What has remained constant and characteristic of Indo-Anglian writing in all this time is the individuality of the writers and a broad range of concerns from metaphysics to social realism. Some idea of this range may be gained from the small selection which follows.

Contrasting with Meenakshi Mukherjee's study of some contemporary women novelists is Yasmine Gooneratne's essay on Ruth Praver Jhabvala, a novelist of an older generation who is "Indian" only in the special sense of residence rather than birthright. And contrasting with both these essays is Vidagdha Meredith Bennett's paper on the poetry of Sri Chinmoy whose work is only recently available. Sri Chinmoy's poetry, like the prose of Raja Rao, looks back to much older traditions rooted in India's past and is antithetical to the more modern tradition of realism borrowed (along with the novel form) from the West. A similar contrast will be found between the two selected short stories (another borrowed form): Shiv Kumar's "The Shoeblack" employs a conventional realism markedly distinct from G. V. Desani's "The Merchant of Kisingarh" with its *mélange* of metaphysics and burlesque reminding us of Mr Hatterr. Included also are a small selection of poems by Shiv Kumar and Jayanta Mahapatra: wit and sophistication, a slightly aggressive exuberance on one hand, and on the other a quieter poetry of nuance and sensibility. We thank Syd Harrex for helping with the selection.

This Indian selection follows previous initiatives by *Westerly* to keep readers informed of other contemporary literatures in the Australian region. Earlier special issues have been on Indonesia (no. 2, 1966), Malaysia and Singapore (no. 3, 1971), Southeast Asia (no. 4, 1976), the Indian Ocean region (no. 3, 1979), and Contemporary China (no. 3, 1981).

RON SHEPHERD

Towards Liberation: Four Recent Novels from India

The literary situation in India continues to be essentially different from that in the other Commonwealth countries where the books written in English constitute the major literature of the region, if not the only literature. In India such works are by themselves quite marginal both in terms of their number and the readership they command but assume a significance when seen as part of a large and interconnected phenomenon. Since most of the research in Indian Writing in English is carried out in the English Departments of Indian Universities, there has been a tendency to see these works in a linguistic prison, independent of and isolated from the vast and complex literary landscape of India where different languages co-exist and interact. The need to break out of this prison has become more imperative in the recent years when the writers in English seem to have greater affinities with their counterparts in the Indian languages than ever before. In fiction, for example, writers like Arun Joshi or Anita Desai can be easily seen as expressing the same ethos and embodying similar impulses as Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay (Bengali), Bhalchandra Nemade (Marathi) or O. P. Vijayan (Malayalam), although as individual novelists they are vastly different from each other.¹

The earlier generation of Indo-Anglian novelists—some of whom are still writing—was not so much a part of the mainstream of Indian literature. Weighed down by the heavy burden of Indianness, they wrote as if India has a homogenous culture. While their regional language contemporaries (Shivarama Karanth in Kannada, Tarashankar Bandopadhyay and Manik Bandopadhyay in Bengali, Agyeya in Hindi or Gopinath Mohanty in Oriya) never seemed troubled by questions of identity or nationality, Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand took the business of being Indian rather seriously. The novels in the Indian languages dealt with local, tribal or regional themes with casual self assurance (as in *Paraja* or *Arogya Niketan*), or concentrated on the problematic individual and his untraditional predicament (as in *The Puppet's Tale* and *To Each His Stranger*) without worrying about the representative quality of their material.² The Indo-Anglian novelist chose themes that were broadly Indian (the freedom struggle, confrontation of eastern and western values, the metaphysical essence of Brahmanism, evils of the hierarchical system of Hindu society) and at the same time were acutely conscious of the fact that they were writing in English. Notable exceptions are the ironist R. K. Narayan and the fantasist Sudhin Ghose, although even they never show any awareness of the cross currents of culture in India and the tensions that arise in a plural society. Narayan's 'maneater' came from Junagarh (Western India) to the placid South Indian town of Malgudi and one of the characters he disturbed

was called Sen (a Bengali) but the regional characteristics of these characters were never allowed to come in the way of the puranic enactment of an essentially Indian theme. Perhaps the use of the English language created an uncertainty of audience, and these earlier writers consciously eschewed all the nuances that would not be easily understood outside the country. But the Indian novelists writing in English today no longer seem to work under this constraint. The best of them do not appear self-conscious either about being Indian, or about having to write in English. There does not seem to be any compulsion to choose pan-Indian or inter-cultural themes. The tendency, if one can use the word so early, is to grapple with the specific situation, the particular moment, the concrete cultural web; even when history enters their fictional world it gets filtered through an intensely individual vision.

The hero of Kiran Nagarkar's Marathi novel *Saat Sakam Trechalis* (*Seven Times Seven is Forty Three*)³ tells his sociologist girl-friend that unlike her he cannot see people in groups, in countries or in communities:

"I only see human beings. As individuals, isolated... At best I am a practising human being. Nothing else. I don't understand the Indian subcontinent. It does not exist for me, it does not worry me."

Although stated in extreme terms, this attitude seems to underlie a great deal of contemporary Indian fiction in Bengali, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Kannada as well as English. At the most the characters are seen in terms of their specific regional or caste conditioning, or in terms of their childhood memories and family environment—but seldom in terms of a broadly Indian heritage. One has heard all the arguments why a spurious variety of existentialism with its emphasis on alienation must be regarded with suspicion in India: one, it is not an organic growth arising out of the experience of the two wars as in Europe; two, since existentialism begins with man alone and his attempt to create a value for himself through individual choice, the whole philosophy goes against the Indian concept of *Karma* and *samskara*. Yet one often wonders, as one reads the novels of Arun Joshi, Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay and Nagarkar, if what is western and what is Indian is not getting more and more blurred as time passes. Besides, Arun Joshi's alienated heroes are as believably Indian and firmly rooted in an authentic local context as are in their own ways the inhabitants of Malgudi. Anita Desai's intensely introspective and brooding characters get culturally defined even in their loneliness in terms of their memories, their attitudes to climate or landscape, the poems they remember and the music they listen to; yet they manage to avoid being representative creatures.

By analysing four novels written in the last five years one can attempt to illustrate this shift. Chosen fairly at random these are *The Clear Light of Day* (1980) Anita Desai's most recent novel; *The Dark Holds No Terrors* (1980), a remarkable first novel by Shashi Deshpande; *Forever Free* (1979) by Raji Narasimhan and *The Salt Doll* (1978) by Shourie Daniels. One special quality of Anita Desai's writing has always been the vivid evocation of a sense of place, be it either a house or a city. Calcutta was a palpable presence in *Voices in the City* (1965), London in *Bye Bye Blackbird* (1968) and a house in Kasauli in *Fire on the Mountain* (1978); in *Clear Light of Day* Old Delhi provides the brooding static atmosphere that permeates the narrative. In this quality of concretization of space she offers a direct contrast to Kamala Markandaya whose nameless villages and cities are situated in a vague unspecified geographical context and never assume any reality (*The Nowhere Man* is the only exception).

Clear Light of Day presents the story of two brothers and two sisters who grew up in a house in Old Delhi that is haunted by an aura of sickness and decay. It begins when the youngest sister, Tara, who married at eighteen to escape from

the stifling atmosphere, returns after many years and succumbs again to the hold of the past, letting it drag her down, "down into a well of oppression, of lethargy, of ennui. She felt the waters of her childhood closing over her head again, black and scummy". Her husband, a brisk and efficient foreign service officer, who for twenty years had been teaching her to organize her life, to make lists, "to answer questions, to make statements, to be frank and to be precise", is appalled at her relapse into these "silences and shadows" of the old house where things were left "unsaid and undone".

Around the house live old neighbours—Hyder Ali, the influence of whose refined and stylized Muslim culture and Urdu poetry shaped the elder brother Raja's life and the Misras whose relaxed hospitality and unrefined middle class warmth fascinated the younger sister Tara offering a contrast to her own starched and secretive family. Within the family there are complex centripetal pulls of guilt, rejection and fear, revealed in vivid images that surface again and again: the old well at the edge of the compound where the cow got drowned years ago and which has been covered with green scum ever since; the white horse which their neighbour Hyder Ali rode on the sand dunes by the Jamuna; the nightmarish vision of an old aunt tearing off her clothes in an alcoholic frenzy, displaying her sad sagging breasts and a wisp of brown pubic hair. Years of clean antiseptic life in Washington cannot exorcise these images from Tara's mind.

While most novelists, specially in the West, consider an exploration of the man-woman relationship to be the staple of fiction, Anita Desai excels in probing family relationships—between brothers and sisters, parents and children. In this novel Bim's relationship with her absent brother Raja is one of the major strands. The retarded younger brother Baba is not presented from the inside. Unlike Faulkner's Benjy (*The Sound and the Fury* is a novel that often comes to mind while reading *Clear Light of Day*), Baba's consciousness is never revealed to the reader. He looms silently in the background—gentle, smooth and white, forever winding the old gramophone and listening to cracked records. Raja the elder brother is created entirely in terms of the poems he read and recited—Swinburne, Byron, Tennyson, and Iqbal—and the stylized Urdu verses he wrote, the total impression being of a figure of pale and effete romanticism of a decadent variety. Anita Desai has a special way of quoting lines from other books and poems in order to create a mood or to make an indirect statement much in the way a filmmaker uses music. There were the references to Urdu couplets in *Cry, the Peacock*, the Lawrence poem in *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, lines from the Chinese *Pillow Book* in *Fire on the Mountain*. In *Clear Light of Day* the quotations are as eclectic as would be natural for an urban-educated Indian. Bim who was closest to Raja and shared his love of poetry is haunted by Eliot's lines in *The Waste Land* when all have deserted her or died, leaving her alone with their imbecile brother in the old house: "who is the third who walks always beside you?"

Finally the sense of loss and betrayal is expurgated at the end of the novel as she listened to the weathered voice of an old *ustad* under the night sky of summer. The couplet from Iqbal that he sang reminded Bim of all the lost summers of her life, engulfing her in a luminous peace, affirming her that nothing is really lost and reminding her of another Eliot line, "Time the destroyer is time the preserver". Eclecticism is a natural condition of modern India. In Arun Joshi's last novel, *The Last Labyrinth* (1981), the protagonist's reflections contain bits from Pascal, Descartes and Kierkegaard as well as from Yajñavalkya's story in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*; a little silver Krishna becomes as important as the dargah of a sufi peer.

Evocation of summer in North India is something that Anita Desai always does with an unerring touch. One remembers the startling image of the Kathakali dancer and of the carnival in her first novel as metaphors for a summer dust

storm. In *Clear Light of Day* the two focal points of time are two summers about twenty years apart. One is the summer of 1947—the tense brooding months before partition and independence of the country—when the city was in flames and the romantic adolescent Raja burned with tubercular fever at home. The other summer is when Tara is revisiting the family: Raja has left them long ago to grow fat and prosperous in Hyderabad, Bim has grown acerbic and grey and the idiot brother is still playing the old records that have become cracked and hoarse. The blank white glare of the sun during the day, the darkened and closed rooms in the afternoons, the moonlight and the scent of night-flowering plants as one slept in the open at night, the incessant and querrulous demands of the koel that began before daylight—these form the background against which much of the action—or inaction—of the novel is unfolded. Creation of a mood is more important than a clearly defined plot here as well as in her earlier novels. But in spite of the shadows and the ghostly echoes from the past the total effect of *Clear Light of Day* is a life-affirming one unlike her previous novel *Fire on the Mountain*. In fact this novel encompasses much more than anything she has attempted in a single novel before. Not only does *Clear Light of Day* present a larger number of characters, a wider space of time—within a definite historical overtone and a greater complexity of relationship than what she has handled earlier, after the solipsistic dark corridors of separate selves in the other novels here she emerges into the daylight of acceptance, almost of celebration.

“No one comprehends better than children do. No one feels the atmosphere more keenly—or catches all the nuances, all the insinuations in the airs—or notes those details that escape their elders because their senses have atrophied”, said one of the characters in *Clear Light of Day*. Another novel that is concerned with the vividness and vulnerability of childhood is Shashi Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* where the central character carries the scar of an early wound throughout life.

This is Shashi Deshpande’s first novel though not her first book. Her collection of short stories and her children’s books have appeared before. Here she attempts to unravel the tangles in the life of a woman who does not know if her problems are within her or outside. “I am a skeleton in my own cupboard”, thinks Saru, the doctor protagonist of the novel—wife and mother of two children—who is haunted by a complex series of guilt, frustration and fear. The author weaves an intricate web by superimposing the past over the present, by punctuating both with dreams, nightmares and flashbacks, alternating stream-of-consciousness first person introspection with simple straightforward third person narrative.

From the age of eleven Saru carries the guilt of her little brother’s death whom she could not save from drowning. His voice—“Wait for me, Sarutai, I am coming”—echoes as a refrain throughout the novel. Her mother’s accusation of her as a cause of his death (“Why are you alive when he is dead?”) vitiated her relationship with her family. She worked hard and became a doctor “to show them” that she had a right to be alive too. To assert this right she married against her parents’ wishes, outside her caste and below her class.

The man she marries turns out to be not the rebel artist she took him to be, but a weak idler. She begins to earn more than her husband; problems arise in their marriage, manifested mostly in sexual terms. Unable to bear the nightly torment from her sadist husband, she comes back to her father’s house which she had left many years ago, where in the meanwhile her mother had died, unforgiving and bitter to the end.

She comes back to a house where her silent and self-sufficient father has settled down to a neat and orderly pattern of life, with a young man who stays there and studies in a college. Saru feels like an intruder at first, but slowly she too enters the pattern without encroaching upon their privacy, but feeling secure:

Both physically and mentally I hate being touched. May be that is why I am comfortable here with Baba and Madhav. There is no touching—each one of us is an intact, separate whole.

Although she had deliberately repudiated this Brahminical world where touch is to be avoided and spontaneity denied, where austerity is the norm, all pleasure is suspect and human interactions pared down to the minimum (“don’t accept a gift, because then you might have to give one”), yet paradoxically, Saru cannot escape her upbringing. She returns from her affluent life in Bombay and finds the very bareness of her father’s home comforting; the sparseness of the rigidly regulated routine is itself a release for her.

Shashi Deshpande not only creates states of mind skilfully, she also evokes a world which is concretely culture-specific through minute etching of the details of the environment. The interior of a Maharashtrian Brahmin household comes alive through the copper boiler in the bathroom, the stone slab on which clothes are washed—its top smooth, the sides slimy—the tarnished silver mango leaves framing the door of the puja room, and on the wall “the picture of Krishna as a crawling infant—chubby, solemn, with a hint of a smile in the eye. The whole done in a finely stitched embroidery with a real peacock’s feather stuck on the infant’s head”.

Saru’s response to life is conditioned not only by her Brahminical background, but also by her experience as a doctor. She analyses her own physical and psychological trauma with the detachment of an analyst. Her dilemma is not miraculously resolved at any point, though there is a hint at the end, confirmed by the epigraph from the *Dhammapada*—of Saru’s realisation that one has to be sufficient within oneself because there is no other refuge elsewhere.

The protagonist of Raji Narain’s second novel, *Forever Free* (1980), is also individualized in terms of her cultural environment. Shree is a high-strung Tamil Brahmin girl who has grown up in the North. In her disastrous marriage, more than a conflict of personalities is involved: it is also a cultural clash. Her husband is an orthodox Tamil Brahmin from the South who does not understand the free ways of his wife. The unease begins from the day of the wedding when instead of the “rich red music of nadaswaram”, the North Indian shehnai is played. The gap between the girl and her husband’s family imperceptibly widens daily—they are suspicious of her alienness, her bookishness and her sexuality. The author skilfully uses the metaphor of food to underline the problem. The thick and spicy North Indian curry assumes an almost erotic connotation when compared to the austere and thin South Indian fare.

When her marriage breaks up and Shree starts her independent life in Delhi, part of the process of liberation is again described in terms of food and its sexual implications. Her boss in the office, a seasoned hedonist, seduces her through “rich, corrupting food”, drugging her with its “heavy emollients”. The first taste of meat for her is like “the taste of his tongue on mine”. The suave executive sweeps the insecure girl out of her puritanical and vegetarian existence. Trembling with her first glass of gin, she sits at the club, fixing her fascinated gaze at the devotees of the “thousand-thighed goddess of booze and their chicken-guzzling women”. The culinary metaphor with its inter-regional nuances pervades the novel.

The pseudo-feminist blurb on the book’s cover about a woman’s quest for self does not do justice to the novel. Seen as a mildly ironic portrait of a confused girl who does not know what she actually wants in life, Raji Marasimhan’s book seems like an interesting minor work, rich in the understanding of some of the varied cultural strands whose interactions make up urban society in India and whose pattern she refuses to simplify. Her language is involuted, often jerky, but it has an individual quality and occasionally she manages to stretch it successfully to its maximum evocative potential.

Shourie Daniels' first novel *The Salt Doll* (1978), written in an autobiographical style, moves from a village in Kerala to Bombay (with an interlude in Aden), then from a hill station in Himachal to the brave new world of California. Meera Cherian, the narrator, passes through varied landscapes in the process, meets a motley crowd, and undergoes diverse experiences including those of nine boarding schools, to which she is relentlessly sent by her parents. But out of the blurred effect the portions that stand out clearer than the rest refer to her childhood in Kerala by the Kuttapuzha river. The sight and smell of the river bank, the stiff feel of the frill of her mother's *mundu* ("stiffer than a dry areca frond, the rest of her flowered soft"), the enlarged holes in her grandmother's ear-lobes through which the child Meera could put her fingers, necking with a cousin in the dusty attic pervaded by the smell of ripening bananas—some of these impressions come across crisp and indelible.

In contrast to this, the second half of the novel lacks the specific and the particular. Shourie Daniels attempts here to depict an improbable writers' colony near Simla where Lebanese, Chinese, Arab, American and some Indian writers live and fornicate, free of the anxieties that beset people in the rest of the country. There are tea-bags and washing machines in this wilderness; Indian girls in bermudas rub cold cream on their legs while practising seductive glances in front of their mirrors, and others lie down on dry grass to tell mysterious foreigners "you can have me if you want me". The concreteness achieved in the first part is totally destroyed in this spurious internationalism. Only one character emerges out of this haze, Meera's husband Nanjundan, a South Indian Brahmin comic and frightening by turns.

From her own Syrian Christian background Meera tries to understand her husband's character and its different values. To explain why her husband has no sense of privacy she says:

In Nagescoil where he comes from, the bathroom is called a bathhouse. There is no bedroom, but a bedhouse. Anything with a wall is a house, not a room. There are no doors. A shut door means you are shutting someone out. A closed room is suspect; all doors are kept open.

She analyses her husband's embarrassment about the body thus:

Language shapes the human mind, not vice versa. Would you believe that a Brahmin has no vocabulary for genital organs, for human functions that are reproductory, alimentary, or visceral? That they have no language of sexual stimulation and that they can not express any emotion other than the ritual ones in any language?

As against the austere, Brahminical denial of the body, the narrator revels in physicality. In a witty, uninhibited and incoherent way, Shourie Daniels encompasses in her first novel vivid details of every possible bodily function—menstruation, copulation, child-birth, defecation—the entire "middle muddle of human existence". Disorder and lack of form are the consequent dangers, but she accepts them as the necessary hazards in her projected enterprise. Shourie Daniels' earthy heroine rushes headlong towards experience and the author tries breathlessly to include more than the frame of her novel can contain. According to her logic the feminine way of perception has this potential danger of amorphousness and the title of the novel is only a metaphor for this:

... a figure of salt must forever avoid the sea. Man can sail the seas in search of white whales; they can hang their souls at the Cape of Good Hope and pick them up on the way back. Men live sequentially, thing lead to thing.

Not for her. If she reaches the sea by instinct, as do newly hatched sea-turtles, she will become the sea. The rest is silence or children.

* * *

Apart from the fact that all the four novels chosen for discussion are written by women and have women protagonists—an accidental common factor—the other similarity lies in their ability to handle the particular and the regional aspects of Indian culture with an easy confidence and to see human interaction and individual motivations in terms of the specific conditioning of caste, religion, community or linguistic alliances. No longer is India presented as a homogenous whole, made easy for the consumption of non-natives, but the tensions that are part of urban life in India are brought out in minute detail, not as extraneous local colour but as an integral part of the theme. Their urban setting is another common factor, noticeable when one remembers the faceless villages of Kamala Markandaya and Bhabani Bhattacharya and the timeless Malgudi which is kept equidistant from both the rural and the metropolitan world through Narayan's careful handling of moderate themes. No longer is there any apologetic assumption that true India resides in the villages and therefore to write about the cities is to dwell upon what is trivial and peripheral in the larger context of the country. When a Bengali novelist uses Calcutta as his setting or a Marathi writer depicts Bombay as the background to his story, he does it casually without betraying a sense of guilt, nor does he feel any compulsion to suggest the sense of a lost paradise if a character moves from the village to the city. Of late the Indian novelists in English too have started using their urban experience without anti-pastoral symbolism or self-consciousness. Since the two percent of the English-knowing population of India generally inhabit the urban centres, the city novels speak with more authenticity to these readers than do the novels which deal either dutifully with rural misery or romantically with pre-industrial values. Those who live in the metropolitan cities daily experience the diversity of India at many levels—through the interaction of customs, cuisine, myths and attitudes. One of the most remarkable novels about India in recent years, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), best illustrates how this plurality can be put to fictional use, even when the mode is not strictly realistic. The success of this novel will perhaps finally explode the lingering myth that Indo-Anglian novels, like commercial Bombay films, must project an unrealistically homogenized Indian culture because the heterogeneous reality would be too confusing for the consumer. For authentic portrayal of reality one had to go until now to the non-commercial film and the Indian language novel. Now that the novelists in English are also acquiring a casual assurance about their material and their medium, they do not have much qualitative difference from their Indian language counterparts. While the writer may in the process gain in authenticity and range, the critic too is liberated from the Indo-Anglian prison and can see these recent novels in a larger framework rich with unexplored critical possibilities.

NOTES

1. See *New Writing In India*, ed. Adil Jussawalla (Penguin Books, 1974), for extracts of English translation of novels written by Nemade and Vijayan. One of Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay's novels, *Ghoonpoka*, has been translated into English as *Canker* (Bell Books, New Delhi, 1978). "Dear Madhuban", the English translation of one of his stories, appeared in *Vagartha*: 2 and has now been reproduced in the special issue of *New Letters* (1982) edited by David Ray.
2. *Paraja*, an Oriya novel by Gopinath Mahanty, and translated into English by Bikram K. Das and Oliver Stallybrass (Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1982). *Arogyaniketan*, a Bengali novel by Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, and translated into English by Enakshi Chatterjee (Arnold-Heinemann India, New Delhi, 1977). *Arogyaniketan*, a Bengali novel by Tarashankar Bandopadhyay, and translated into English by Sachindaralal Ghosh under the title *The Puppet's Tale* (Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 1968). *Apne Apne Ajnabi*, a Hindi novel by Agyeya, and translated into English by him and Gordon Roadarmal under the title *To Each His Stranger* (Orient Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1967).
3. *Sat Sakkam Trechalis* by Kiran Nagarkar, published in 1974; the English translation by Shubha Slee has been published by University of Queensland Press, 1980.

Contemporary India in the Writing of Ruth Praver Jhabvala

India, like other very ancient lands, is a country in which what is contemporary may also be very old. The author whose work in fiction and the film I have chosen to examine in this paper is very much of the 20th century. All her novels and short stories have been published within the last thirty years, the films for which she has written screen plays have all been released within the last twenty-five, and her personal history of displacement and a triple expatriation makes Ruth Praver Jhabvala seem very representative of our own times: a period of history that will no doubt be typified in future ages (if our world survives to write its own history) by the figure of the wanderer and the refugee.

Ruth Jhabvala is a Westerner of European origin, a fact that was not generally known until the award to her in 1975 of the Booker Prize for her novel *Heat and Dust* brought her to the attention of Western readers. (Her earliest reviewers, misled by her exotic surname, took her to be an Indian writer; and apart from a few New Literatures critics with special interests in Indian literature, most readers outside India appear to have done the same.) She was born in 1927 in the German city of Cologne, the younger child and only daughter of a Polish Jewish lawyer, Marcus Praver, and of his wife Leonora Cohn Praver. Her childhood was given its shape by the historical events of the 1930s: a distorted shape, for in 1939 the 12-year-old Ruth Praver moved with her family to England and lived there (throughout her school and university education in Britain) in the knowledge that their circle of relations and friends had been totally obliterated in Hitler's holocaust. "I was practically born a displaced person, and all any of us ever wanted was a travel document and a residential permit," she told an interviewer in 1974; "One just didn't care as long as one was allowed to live somewhere."¹

Her marriage (in 1951) to Cyrus Jhabvala, a Parsi architect, brought her to India for the first time. And here what seems to be accident bears what must carry for this writer herself, historical resonance: the Parsi community in India has itself a history of displacement. Originating in ancient Persia, these Zoroastrian immigrants to India are called "Parsis", and the name of Cyrus the Great (590 - 529 B.C.) is particularly dear to Jewish tradition since, according to the Bible, this Persian ruler freed the Jews held captive in Babylonia. Her marriage and her entry into Indian life and society appears to have given Ruth Jhabvala an intense joy that was accompanied, probably for the first time in her life, by a feeling of belonging, of being at home. Writing about India, she has said,

came about instinctively. I was enraptured. I felt I understood India so well. I loved everything . . . Perhaps I loved it . . . because of my being Jewish. The Indian family life, the humour, was closer to the Jewish world I knew than the Anglo-Saxon world.²

She has also said, looking back over twenty-five years spent in India, that "as a writer I consider myself exceedingly fortunate to have come (to India) when I did and the way I did."³

That *when* is extremely important to Ruth Jhabvala's fiction. The Indian world in which she so immediately felt at home was the urban world of Delhi which, as the Indian capital city, is necessarily in the forefront of change and is frequently itself the source of change. Ruth Jhabvala was "enraptured" by a post-Independence Delhi in which, with the withdrawal of the British Raj, traditional Indian courtesies were being revived and deliberately cultivated; and so Amrita, the young heroine of her first novel *To Whom She Will* (1955) recoils from the Westernized values of her wealthy and well-bred family to seek identity with an "Indianness" that she imagines is to be found only in simple, true, and unostentatious folk unspoiled by Western ways. Indeed, Ruth Jhabvala seems to have set herself from the very first the pleasurable task of drawing as accurately as possible characters and situations that were part of the Indian world that immediately surrounded and so delighted her.

In subsequent novels, even while the author's delight at what she observes begins to evaporate, her gaze remains steady and her picture precise. The decline in the status of the English language and the rise of a powerful business class are two agents of social change in India that Ruth Jhabvala subjects to detailed examination in *The Nature of Passion* (1956) and in *Get Ready For Battle* (1962). In *Esmond in India* (1958) and *A Backward Place* (1965), the freedom fighters of the Independence struggle are growing old; disillusioned by what they see as the distortion of ideals they had fought heroically to establish, they question the validity of those ideals and doubt their own worth as human beings. In "The Biography", a short story published in 1968, a Western visitor to India finds that a new political model—canny but brash, loud and unrefined—has replaced the old-style English-educated Indian statesman. And in *A New Dominion* (1972), the privileged world of royal India is gradually giving way to the men who will, it seems, direct India's future: businessmen with American training and American expertise.

The "Delhi" of Ruth Jhabvala's novels differs from R. K. Narayan's "Malgudi" which, being provincial, is affected only very gradually by changes taking place in the metropolis (and which, being in any case a creation of Narayan's imagination, need never develop the features of modernity unless or until he wishes it to do so). By reflecting in her fiction certain social and cultural changes that occurred in India over a quarter of a century, Ruth Jhabvala has run the risk of being dismissed as a writer of fictional journalism. This is not to say that critics in India and outside have not appreciated the quality and seriousness of her art.⁴ But there are others, Indian critics nettled by what they see as dismissive criticism of Indian society by a Westerner, who have charged her with superficiality,⁵ with creating Indian characters who are "ethnic curiosities",⁶ with writing fiction at the level of the tourist brochure,⁷ with trying "to please foreign readers" by treating India "like an anthropological showpiece",⁸ and (especially after the award of the Booker Prize) with building a personal reputation by selling India as "a sort of foreign exchange commodity".⁹ In contrast with these opinions stands V. S. Naipaul's judgment:

The only writer who, while working from within the society, is yet able to impose on it a vision which is an acceptable type of comment, is Ruth Praver Jhabvala.¹⁰

Of course, Naipaul's views on Indian writing are unlikely to be acceptable to Indian critics who find it hard to discuss without annoyance the opinions Naipaul expressed in *An Area of Darkness* with regard to Indian society. Chetan Karnani concludes an essay on *A Backward Place* with the loaded comment that Ruth

Jhabvala's "work has immense value for all those lovers of literature who have one foot in each camp",¹¹ a category into which Naipaul himself must often be pushed by those who resent the fact that an Indian writer of such brilliance should use his skills to write of the Motherland with something less than adoration. Naipaul is disliked by a number of distinguished Indian writers and critics, while honours, prizes and awards are heaped upon him in the West. Something rather similar has happened to Ruth Jhabvala who, unable to find acceptance of her personal "vision" in India, now spends most of her time outside the country she called home for twenty-five years.

Faced, it would seem, with an insoluble division of critical opinion on the validity of Ruth Jhabvala's picture of contemporary India, I would like at this point to approach the problem from another angle by reading a passage from a novel by an Indian-born writer that was published the year after *To Whom She Will*. In Santha Rama Rau's book *Remember the House*, two young English-educated women are discussing foreigners in India.

Pria said in exasperation, 'Do be sensible. As if one can be *friends* with them. I mean how people like the Nichols end in India.' She added more kindly, 'You know it as well as I do.'

... It always starts in such tiny ways. The food upsets them, or they get bad-tempered in the heat, or an Indian is late for an appointment—'

'And then, all at once—'

'Not all at once. But at some point it seems that it's more than they bargained for. Then they get homesick, and they seek out their own kind. It's a sort of retreat... And in the end,' Pria said with a curious authority, 'unless they have extraordinary courage they are defeated.'

'Or entirely unaffected.'

'Well, that kind doesn't matter.'

'But, Pria,' I protested, for the last time, despairingly, 'so much of it is our fault.'

'Oh, nonsense,' she said briskly, 'we are Indians, *they* are the foreigners.'¹²

Santha Rama Rau's self-assured character, Pria, divides her world into the two "camps" of Karnani's essay, of Indians and foreigners. It is a division I regard as invalid from a literary point of view, since no "camp" or school of critics can be said to have a monopoly on insight and intelligence. And yet I have heard variations of Pria's statement uttered often enough outside India, and so no doubt have we all, since insularity (like intelligence) knows no national limits. It was, in fact, reading this novel as an undergraduate in Sri Lanka that first drew me towards Indian writing in English. I had never visited India at that time. To me India was the land and the culture from which Sri Lanka's Buddhism and Buddhist architecture took their origins. It was also the homeland of thousands of South Indian Tamil labourers working on the tea plantations in central Sri Lanka. Although once very closely connected, the two cultures had developed along different lines for centuries, and I had never felt either overshadowed by the Indian subcontinent or particularly drawn to it. (No doubt the feelings of a Buddhist or of a Sri Lankan Tamil towards India would have been different to some degree: I am only speaking of myself.) What I discovered on reading *Remember the House*, and on going on from there to reading Narayan, Anand, Rao, Markandaya, and Ruth Jhabvala was, that each of these writers had succeeded—while writing about distinctively Indian experience—in capturing truths of various kinds about life and people in Sri Lanka. The little island at the southern tip of the Indian sub-continent is very rarely mentioned by name in fiction written by Indians;¹³ and yet there are numerous Indian authors who take up and explore themes that, though firmly rooted in the Indian experience, surface in Sri Lankan soil and, so readers from other South Asian regions tell me, branch out into their experience of a distinctively regional life.

Santha Rama Rau is certainly one of these gifted novelists: her analysis of the Western sensibility in India, as stated briefly in the passage I have just read, anticipates by several years Ruth Jhabvala's own fictional explorations of her personal crisis as an European living in India. Ruth Jhabvala is another; and in recent years, as India has gradually become as much a metaphor as an actual place in her fiction, I have become convinced that she is one of the few writers of our day destined for permanent fame in literature.

I remarked at the beginning of this paper that in India what is contemporary might also be very old. In *To Whom She Will*, the plot focuses on the subject of the traditional marriage, arranged by relatives and go-betweens for young couples who cannot, due to the conservatism of Indian society, choose their marriage partners themselves. When Ruth Jhabvala entered India in 1951, marriages were still being "arranged" in this manner (as, indeed, they are being arranged today, even in comparatively modern Delhi). Interwoven with this traditional-yet-contemporary theme were two others that were very much of the 1950s: the love-marriage, contemplated by young people in post-Independence India whose working lives had drawn them together across the dividing lines of caste and community; and the situation of refugees from the Punjab, who had been torn from their homes by the nightmare of Partition, and set down in an unfamiliar environment where they must struggle to build their lives anew.

This latter theme gives her first novel most of its vigour, and is carried by Ruth Jhabvala into her second, *The Nature of Passion*. In it she explores the private life of a Punjabi family that has successfully established itself in Delhi. Her primary concern is with the character of "Lalaji", the head of that family, a businessman who combines family sentiment with common sense and a ruthless practicality. The web of intrigue in the centre of which sits Lalaji, accumulating money and influence, seems to extend its strands into every part of Indian public life. This novel meditates in ironic vein upon the importance of money in the new India, which can get its possessor anything he wants: marriages for his children, the obedience of corruptible civil servants, the flattery of artists, the respect and envy of the society at large.

Ruth Jhabvala's fourth novel, *Get Ready For Battle*, is the only one among the eight she has published to approach in a reformist spirit the contemporary problem of India's extreme poverty. She writes with pity and anger of a specific case in which the near-destitute inhabitants of a Delhi slum colony are exploited by the corrupt, the wealthy and the hypocritical members of a leisured Delhi upper-class. As Haydn Moore Williams has noted, the moral values put forward in this novel propose a straightforward conflict between the "Babbitt"¹⁴ represented by big business and the spiritual values embodied in the book's "Yogi" figure, a high-principled woman of birth and means who has abandoned her comfortable life for one of extreme austerity at the prompting of conscience and a desire for self-fulfilment:

The tragedy of modern India as depicted in Jhabvala's novels is the total failure of communication between the Babbitt and the Yogi.¹⁵

The moral war to which Haydn Moore Williams refers goes, in fact, beyond the novels to the films Ruth Jhabvala has scripted for Merchant Ivory Productions since 1960. BOMBAY TALKIE, a film directed by James Ivory from a Jhabvala screen play, ends in a death struggle between two young men who had been close associates in the Indian popular film industry. Vikram is a filmstar of physical and personal charm whom success has made callous and irresponsible towards human need and towards moral and aesthetic values. Hari Mehta, a dramatic poet who ekes out a living writing screen plays for the spectacular musicals in which Vikram stars, has a vision of an India unified through the arts

which Vikram cannot even begin to understand. Their quarrel is about a woman, but their real opposition goes much deeper than that woman's shallow concerns. The struggle that ends the film is appropriately in the tradition of Bombay movie melodrama, but it is offered as a tragic symptom of the cultural split Ruth Jhabvala sees in Indian society.

Despite the social awareness of contemporary problems that she has shown in such work as this in both fiction and film, Ruth Jhabvala has not attempted another reformist novel. Asked in 1975 to explain why, she replied:

I don't know why I turned away from it. Maybe because it's just so hopeless. Pressed to state whether she saw any social role for the novelist in India, she replied:

No, I don't think that is the role of the novelist. You'd write very poor novels if you tried to write social documents in India today.¹⁶

She is, in fact, an artist whose chosen form of expression is fiction: she is not a social scientist. And this is the stance she has taken in the face of Indian criticism of what has been called the "self-indulgence" that has "destroyed her writing".¹⁷ She does not herself criticize, except indirectly by her loyalty to different artistic principles, the fiction of such writers as Mulk Raj Anand. Her vision of India is different from theirs, and the reader of her later novels senses that a line is being drawn, not merely between the ancient and the contemporary in India, but between the timeless and the merely ephemeral. There has begun to emerge in them a sustained impression of India as a mysterious presence, half mediaeval, half modern, immensely old, intensely spiritual, scarred by unimaginable cruelties, blessed with indescribable beauty, burdened by inescapable poverty, a spirit that leads the individual who encounters her to pain and destruction or, alternatively, to the heights of bliss. Ruth Jhabvala's characteristic view is ironic and all-inclusive, making it possible for "India" to exist in her novels as a permanent, indeed timeless, entity in the shadow of which the contemporary breed of "gazetted Government officers", business tycoons, shallow socialites and vain, corrupt politicians multiplying in her new society is made to seem ephemeral and insignificant.

This view of India has developed out of the author's preoccupation with a theme that is immediately personal to her own concerns as a woman and as an artist: the experience of Western expatriates living, by choice or by constraint, in India. She is very much aware of the new attitudes with which Westerners approach India in these post-colonial times. "*They come no longer to conquer but to be conquered*", runs the epigraph to a collection of stories about seekers and sufferers in India that she published in 1968, *A stronger Climate*. The Yogi figure that in earlier fiction symbolized the spiritual side of India's culture, opposing with its austere values the "Babbitry" of her business world, undergoes a metamorphosis in the later novels and stories to become that phenomenon of contemporary India, the Swami whose cult attracts wealthy and neurotic disciples from the West.¹⁸ Her studies of swamis, never merely repetitive as I have noted elsewhere,¹⁹ stress the intense charismatic appeal of the Indian religious leader, and his ability to delight, beguile, and deceive the unwary seeker after truth. When viewed separately or together, these character-studies seem to distil the essence of Ruth Jhabvala's early enthusiasm for India, and her subsequent disillusionment with it.

A film in which Ruth Jhabvala takes up the contemporary subject of the Swami is one titled *THE GURU*, which was released by Merchant Ivory Productions in 1969. This film, for which James Ivory and Ruth Jhabvala collaborated on the screen play, was planned to take advantage of world-wide interest awakened in the 1960s by the visit the Beatles made to India in order to study Indian music

and spiritual disciplines. *THE GURU* traces the adventures of an English pop star and a young American girl who have come to India to seek artistic and spiritual guidance. They choose as their teacher a gifted but somewhat spiritually confused musician, whose ego is flattered by their interest, and who accepts the role of guru with delight. The encounter disappoints all three characters, but ends by directing them towards goals more in keeping with the real bent of their characters. Although screen play-writing certainly brought this normally very isolated and retiring author into touch with the larger world of contemporary India,²⁰ it will be seen from this brief outline of a plot which exploits an incident of headline-getting but ultimately trivial importance, that Ruth Jhabvala's artistic interests remain focused on human character, its capacity for self-deception, its vanities and generosities. The contemporary scene is of interest, but that interest is entirely secondary to the study of the personalities of the Guru and his disciples.

We have in Ruth Praver Jhabvala a novelist who set her characters, prior to 1960, in a Delhi that changed around her, and who presented a necessarily limited but nevertheless penetrating view of a contemporary urban society in transition. The early novels were all set in Delhi, and though they could be said to present India in microcosm, the later fiction (like her films, as I have noted elsewhere²¹) travels not only through space but through time in ways that make Ruth Jhabvala's "India" take on the aspects of a metaphor for life and universal experience. Although her writing remains firmly based on contemporary experience it achieves a timeless quality through her almost fastidious refusal to dwell on the merely topical. Politicians, filmstars, yogis, Indian literary lions and professional committee-women still appear in her later fiction, giving every evidence of being based on close observation of the real world. Yet in the work as a whole (and this applies to both early and late writing), the reader's attention is directed to qualities of character and mind so universal that we forget the personalities familiar to us from press photographs and newspaper reports with which we might have initially connected them.

I should like to end my paper with two examples of this drawn from Ruth Praver Jhabvala's short stories. The central figure of "The Award"²² is an Indian poet named Dev Prakash, who is being interviewed by an earnest young Indian teacher collecting material for a thesis on Indian writing since Independence. Dev Prakash, known widely as "the Tagore of Today", finds his questions slightly embarrassing since he has in fact written nothing at all after Independence brought him back from the "cosy, shabby rooms in Hampstead" where he had lived out his self-imposed exile (supported discreetly by a handsome allowance "sent to him every quarter from his share of the family business"). Dev Prakash had been used to waking, with his patriotic sentiments, "which he enunciated in a low, soft voice vibrating with feeling . . . a warm glow of indignation against oppression in all the right-thinking advanced circles in which he moved" (pp. 47-9). Gently, but quite mercilessly, Ruth Jhabvala reveals the great man—at the moment of his being awarded the Sahitya Akademi Prize for his poetry—as both counterfeit patriot and second-rate poet. Those familiar with the Indian literary scene might believe that they see in the poet Dev Prakash a disguised portrait of some Indian writer of the 1930s, perhaps of the novelist Mulk Raj Anand who spent many of his early writing years in London, and whose commitment to the cause of Indian nationalism produced *Two Leaves and a Bud*, *Coolie*, and other books passionately critical of British rule in India. But the development of the story shows that no personal attack is intended by Ruth Jhabvala on a distinguished contemporary. Dev Prakash is treated throughout with sincere, if ironic, sympathy. *He* might be unable to "disentangle art from propaganda"²³ but his creator certainly knows how to separate the temporary from the permanent.

In "The Biography"²⁴ the central figure is a woman, the niece of a great Indian statesman, now dead; and here again, the reader might feel that he has met her before, in this case in the political columns of the international press.

Anita had, in fact, been more than only niece: the leader was unmarried, and she, his closest relative, had been companion, confidante, hostess to him. She was well fitted for this latter role especially. A tall, handsome woman, she lent tone to any assembly, and although her manner tended to be somewhat sulky and phlegmatic, that only gave her an added stateliness. She was indeed in every way born to move among the great ones of this earth, and, thanks, to her distinguished uncle, she did. (p. 33)

The uncle, now dead and about to be suitably deified in a biography written by an American political scientist, seems equally familiar to us, with "his English tastes and education, his elegant profile, his dreamer's eyes, his fine sensitive nature, his fastidiousness" (p. 38). All this picture lacks, we might think, is the famous rose-bud in the button-hole. Even his words, as remembered and quoted by his adoring niece, are in fact an adaptation of one of the Mahatma's speeches: "*We must keep our doors and windows open and let the fresh breath of knowledge blow in from other lands.*" (p. 43). But if, on such evidence, the reader imagines that he is about to witness, through the medium of fiction, a little-known incident from the domestic annals of the Nehru family, he is mistaken. Anita does not develop the political skills of Indira Gandhi, but remains as we found her at the beginning of the story, out of her depth in a society that is moving beyond the Western concepts of her dead uncle, Anita's position is summed up by the man she regards as her arch-enemy, one of her late uncle's political supporters who is now a Minister in the new-style Congress government:

"Oh the Memsahib!" said the Minister with another laugh. "Yes, I was always very frightened of the Memsahib. How grand she was! In her presence I did not dare raise my eyes from the ground . . ." He became thoughtful and then—perhaps because it was so early in the morning and the cares of the day had not yet properly begun—he became more outspoken than he had yet been: "They were so different from us, these people. Even our language they could not speak properly. When he gave a speech in English, it sounded wonderful, but in Hindi—sometimes we wanted to laugh. But at that time who cared about Hindi? It was only for common people like us." He paused for a moment and thoughtfully scratched the back of his fat neck. "Yes, we admired him greatly—he was our leader, our guide, our guru—but now that he is gone, it is easier for us. We can do things our own way." Then he added: "Sometimes I feel sorry for the Memsahib. This is not a country for Memsahibs any more. But where else can she go? She is here, she hates us, she suffers. What to do? It is history." He shrugged, and gave a healthy burp to digest his breakfast. (pp. 46-7)

The position of the Westernized Indian in contemporary India has many resemblances, as Ruth Jhabvala notes acutely in this story, to that of the Westerner in India; and therefore to her own. "She is here, she hates us, she suffers. What to do? It is history." It is a piece of contemporary history, partly her own, and partly India's, which Ruth Praver Jhabvala has made the basis of her best writing.

NOTES

1. Quoted by Ramlal Agarwal, "An Interview with Ruth Praver Jhabvala", *Quest* 91 (September-October 1974), p. 36.
2. "A Novelist of India reflects two worlds", *New York Times*, Tuesday 17 July 1973, reprinted as "Rot and a deep sense of melancholy" in the *National Times* (Australia) of 7-12 January 1974.
3. R. Agarwal, *ibid.*
4. See especially the following critical studies: R. Agarwal, "Outsider with unusual insight", *Times of India*, 25 March 1973, and "Two approaches to Jhabvala", in the *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 5, 1 (January 1977), pp. 24-7; Y. Gooneratne, "Irony as an

- instrument of social and self-analysis in R. P. Jhabvala's *Heat and Dust*", *New Literature Review* 4 (1978), pp. 41-50, and "'Traditional' elements in the fiction of Kamala Markandaya, R. K. Narayan and Ruth Praver Jhabvala", *World Literature Written in English* 15, 1 (April 1976), pp. 121-34, reprinted in *Diverse Inheritance: A Personal Perspective on Commonwealth Literature* (C.R.N.L.E. 1980), pp. 35-44; A. Rutherford, "Ruth Praver Jhabvala's window on India", *ACLALS Bulletin*, 4th Series, No. 3 (1975), pp. 27-9; V. A. Shahane, *Ruth Praver Jhabvala* (Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi, 1976), and "Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the Indian scene", *Journal of Indian Writing in English* 4, 2 (July 1976), pp. 21-4; P. Stiles, "India and the Western Sensibility in the Fiction of R. P. Jhabvala", unpublished M.A. dissertation, Macquarie University, 1979; Haydn Moore Williams, "Strangers in a backward place: Modern India in the Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala", *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 6, 1 (1971), pp. 53-64, and *The Fiction of R. P. Jhabvala* (Writers' Workshop, Calcutta, 1973); Renee Winegarten, "R. P. Jhabvala: A Jewish Passage to India", *Midstream* (March 1974), pp. 72-9.
5. See Eunice de Souza, "The blinds drawn and the airconditioner on: The novels of R. P. Jhabvala", *World Literature Written in English* 17, 1 (April 1978), pp. 219-24, and "The Expatriate Writer", a paper presented at the ACLALS Triennial Conference, New Delhi, January 1977, p. 8; also Chetan Karnani, "Ruth Jhabvala's Backward Place", a paper presented at the ACLALS Triennial Conference, Suva, January 1980, p. 11.
 6. Eunice de Souza, "The Expatriate Writer", p. 7.
 - 7, 8 and 9. Karnani, *ibid.*
 10. V. S. Naipaul, *An Area of Darkness* (Andre Deutsch 1964), p. 228.
 11. Karnani, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
 12. Santha Rama Rau, *Remember the House* (Gollancz 1956), pp. 85-6.
 13. When it is, it is usually in terms that amusingly express India's image of herself in relation to her small island neighbour. Ceylon comes up for discussion in *Remember the House* only as a possible location for Pria's honeymoon. The choice lies, apparently, between Ceylon and the vale of Kashmir. The disagreeable Maharani of Kalipur is expected to be in Kashmir for the 'season', so Pria decides on Ceylon. In V. S. Naipaul's *A House For Mr Biswas*, a family of Indian immigrants in Port of Spain, Trinidad, have a back-garden that they call "Ceylon".
 14. The term was first used by Khushwant Singh, in "India, the Literary Scene", *International Literary Annual* III (London, 1961), p. 174: "Jhabvala's . . . *nouveau riche* Babbitts (*sic*) of New Delhi." Haydn Moore Williams later developed this fruitful comparison of Ruth Jhabvala's money-minded characters to Sinclair Lewis's satirical exposure of American bourgeois society (see below).
 15. H. M. Williams, "The Yogi and the Babbitt: Themes and Characters of the New India in the Novels of Ruth Praver Jhabvala", *Twentieth Century Literature* 15, 2 (July 1969), p. 89.
 16. A. Rutherford and K. H. Petersen, "*Heat and Dust*: Ruth Praver Jhabvala's Experience of India", *World Literature Written in English* 15, 2 (November 1976), p. 375.
 17. Eunice de Souza, "The Expatriate Writer", p. 9.
 18. The Swamiji of *A New Dominion* is perhaps the most subtly detailed among these character-studies. There are many others, notably in the stories "A Spiritual Call" and "An Experience of India", and a brief satiric sketch in the novel *Heat and Dust*.
 19. Y. Gooneratne, *Silence, Exile and Cunning: The Fiction of Ruth Praver Jhabvala* (Orient Longman, 1982/3, in proof), p. 8.
 20. "The films allowed me to travel a lot more and meet a great many people of all different types My early books were all set in Delhi but later I do branch out and travel. That is entirely due to film." Ruth Praver Jhabvala, quoted by A. Rutherford and K. H. Petersen, *op. cit.*, p. 377.
 21. Cf. Y. Gooneratne, "Film into Fiction: The influence upon Ruth Praver Jhabvala's fiction of her work for the cinema 1960-1976", *World Literature Written in English* 18, 2 (November 1979), pp. 368-86.
 22. Published in *Like Birds Like Fishes and Other Stories* (Murray, 1963), pp. 45-59. All page references are to this edition.
 23. It is interesting to compare with Ruth Jhabvala's characterization of Dev Prakash in this story, the critical assessment H. M. Williams has made of Anand: "Pity and anger burn through Anand's novels, generating heat if not light. In any history of the English novel of social criticism of the nineteen thirties Mulk Raj Anand will have an honoured place . . . But humanitarian concern and political commitment . . . are not enough. The tragedy of Anand's career is his failure to disentangle art from propaganda, a failure glaringly exposed after independence when the disappearance of the British "enemy" appears to have left him at a loss for a subject." H. M. Williams, "English Writing in Free India (1947-1967)", *Twentieth Century Literature* 16, 1 (January 1970), p. 5.
 24. Published in *A Stronger Climate: Nine Stories* (Murray, 1968), pp. 33-48. All page references are to this edition.

Forging a New Language: Sri Chinmoy's "Ten Thousand Flower-Flames"

Sri Chinmoy's chosen medium of expression is the English language. We are inclined to think of this language as an instrument of great richness and flexibility, having absorbed the influences of other languages and cultures for thousands of years. Yet if we enquire more closely into the nature of the words that were progressively assimilated in this way, we shall find that they were in the main words of practical utility, words pertaining to commerce, manufacture, building and agriculture. The capacity of a language is judged by its power of expression and, since commercial interests have continued to remain paramount, the English language has proven to be a powerful communicative vehicle in this field.

The capacity of the English language to reveal the inner life of man, however, has never attained the same maturity. It is possible that this deficiency is due to the lack of any great spiritual text at its source. Where other languages, for example, distinguish between self-love, human love and ecstatic love for the Divine, English is unhappily forced to strain the one word to its limits; we speak of Heaven and hell, but the numerous higher and lower worlds that are adumbrated in the scriptures of India have received no attention—at best we refer to the first, second and third circles of hell; the physical mind, the intellectual mind and the intuitive mind are not differentiated and countless central spiritual qualities—such as purity, light and wisdom—are dependent upon single, much-used words to convey their entire meaning.

As a result of the absence of fine spiritual nuances in the language, there has arisen a relatively small class of visionary writers (including Shakespeare, Keats, Hopkins and Emily Dickinson) who, not content with the language as they find it, have tended in varying degrees to create their own medium of expression: Shakespeare speaks of "self-affairs" and "self-breath" while Hopkins, using a similar process, fused nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs together to form unusual combinations, such as "heart-fleshed", "clearest-selved" and "hung-heavenward".

In our present day, undoubtedly the greatest innovator in the language is Sri Chinmoy. Having little need for the utilitarian words in which English abounds, his sole poetic material is the sparse array that it offers of words for spiritual essences. Moreover, because Sri Chinmoy's mothertongue is Bengali, with its immense spiritual refinement and subtlety, he has further encountered the difficulty of working with an instrument that is far less malleable to his vision, crudely formed in some areas, at times obdurate and blunt. It is hard to fully appreciate the peculiar plight of the spiritual poet who, returning from the heights of mystic vision, feels impelled to share the fruits of his experience with all men. Bringing

news of an unknown realm he casts about him for correspondences from the known world that will make his experience more accessible, he strives for precision among the half-world of names and forms for his invisible but certain reality.

In order to exact a greater accuracy and expressiveness from the English language, Sri Chinmoy has developed a number of creative, but hitherto largely unexplored, principles inherent in it. The first and foremost of these is the principle of compression. It emerges in the poetry as a technique both of style and of form.

Although, by the sum of its individual parts, *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames* may be considered an epic of the soul, it is fundamental to the poet's intuitive method that this vast body of wisdom be presented in fragments—as gleams, shafts of light, flames. We cannot seize so great a vision all at once but we can approach it by degrees, through myriads of separate illumining moments until we have absorbed the whole of it and find ourselves in the presence of a powerful and wordless “seeing”. The major activity of compression in the first instance, therefore, is to enclose his infinite vision within the bounds of numerous finite forms. Sri Chinmoy does this by telescoping inner experience into its major outlines and divesting it of any claim to individuality:

AGAINST MY HEART'S CLIMBING CRY

Against my heart's climbing cry
No opposition can dare
To have any permanency. (4409)*

This poem exists as a pure declaration of resolve, removed from the supportive context of personal history. This very act of penetration to the core of experience constitutes the poet's first act of reduction. Using only the barest components he establishes the positive upward movement of the aspiring heart and then sets into relation with it his refusal to admit any disruptive movement. What force exists in this negation! The choice of the verb “to dare” seems to quell even the faintest suggestion of any uprising of the negative forces. And because great energy is required to annihilate, this repudiation works retrospectively to confirm the solid strength of the heart. The poet's re-arrangement of syntax so that “permanency” falls as the final word of the poem sustains this energy to the close and binds the first and third lines together with a slanted rhyme.

The poet's compression of his message into the miniature world of the stanza creates a tension between the extreme brevity of this form and the wide scope of its subject. Where this might have led to a certain enigmatic quality, however, the poet exercises his perfect control of diction to produce a language of exemplary clarity. Even when the poems are replete with suggestions of mystery and wonder, there is no crowding of elements:

THE SUPERNATURAL MYSTERIES

If you can weather danger-clouds,
Then the supernal mysteries
That lie behind the terrestrial vagaries
Will be all yours. (3219)

In spite of the mystic vastness behind these sets of terms, they are neither tenuous nor obscure. Within the deliberately plain style of the poet's long reflective sentence they appear as part of a natural sequence.

In the same way that the poet invites us to follow the track of his meditative thought in the above poem, he frequently uses the stanzaic form to incarnate a

* NOTE: The number in brackets after each poem indicates its numerical placement in the series of *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames*.

spiritual process. In these poems the technique of compression is evident in the poet's careful patterning of words and phrases, his use of parallelism and internal linkings. The reader is gradually led from one perception to another so that, at the close of the poem, he sees a blended succession of truths. It is an aesthetic of glimpses that resolves into an act of beholding:

EACH OPPORTUNITY

Intense longing creates opportunity.
Each opportunity
Is more than a blessing.
Indeed,
It is a miniature goal itself. (147)

The poem opens with a thought-unit or aphorism. Existing as a fully formed and self-complete assertion it has no need of dialectic. It is a proposition about life which holds that the very emotion of longing generates a special force for change. The sudden delivery of this thought, its boldness of generalisation and strict economy of expression make it seem alive. It enters into us, provoking a reaction and urging us to verify its general terms from our own particularised experience. Its posture is candid and unapologetic. There is an engaging willingness on the part of the poet to set his realisation before the reader as lucidly as possible. In consequence, he is not afraid to risk exposure or criticism and he refuses to take refuge in any protective mediation of the bluntness of his expression. Rather, he intensifies and enriches it even further by building a second propositional thrust onto the foundation of the first. In this second statement the poet examines the nature of opportunity. It is a meditative act or a deepening inwardness and the syntax of the remainder of the poem mirrors this movement by a successive re-definition of the term, first as a blessing and then as a goal unto itself. The poem folds back on itself because the seeds of this goal are contained in the "intense longing" with which the poem began.

The meditative procedure of this poem is not founded upon reasoned argument. It is not an intellectual investigation of the implications of any single word. Here the poet so totally identifies with the feeling of intense longing that each new expansion of meaning comes to him as an intuitive discovery.

The meditative poem is a progressive clearing of vision. It is not a stumbling or groping movement but a leaping and sparkling play. It is a "showing forth" of meaning. An insight into the action of the heart will invariably be followed by an insight into the action of the mind; conclusions about man are fused with conclusions about God; earth is complemented by Heaven, surrender by gratitude. The examples multiply interminably. In this world of vision no one element can ever be finally isolated. Each separate illumination spontaneously summons a host of others. Everything interrelates to form a single cohesive universe:

HIS ILLUMINATION-MIND

His illumination-mind
Soothes the four corners
Of the world
With the beauty
Of Eternity's moon.

His perfection-heart
Illumines the four corners
Of the world
With the power
Of Immortality's sun. (5112)

The poet's meditation on the mind is amplified by a corresponding meditation on the heart. The original syntactical pattern of the first stanza carries over into the second and has the effect of creating isochronic units that operate, as in music, to prolong the effect of something within the subject reaching out to the four corners of the world.

Through parallelism the poet is able to hold a particular thought or figure before the reader's attention while he expands its entire frame of reference. In the following poem, for example, the poet presents four parallel meditations on beauty:

BEAUTY

Tenderness lives with beauty.
Kindness lives in beauty.
Soulfulness houses beauty.
Oneness feeds beauty. (288)

These four aphorisms map the poet's approach to beauty. He begins with the quality that co-exists with beauty and arrives at the quality which sustains beauty. The famous maxim "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is known to all but in this poem the realisation of its truth comes as a fresh discovery. The extreme abbreviation of the poem has resulted in an ellipsis of all connectives, participles and adjectives. It is sufficient, not decorative. The life of the poem and its nexus of meaning are to be found in the fine distinctions between the verbs. Since the four aphorisms are presented in a way that highlights this verbal substitution, we immediately look to them to unlock the poem's meaning. Though these verbs are in no way complex, it is at once evident that their application is unusual for they belong ordinarily to the world of human society. By positioning them between various abstract qualities the poet calls on them to perform the subtle task of personifying these qualities. Beauty has its "society", he infers, wherein each member stands in a different relation to it. In this way the whole picture takes on concrete colour.

The parallel technique is one of Sri Chinmoy's chief means of highlighting fine gradations of meaning. Through a series of approximations or variations he is able to reveal the inclusiveness of his vision:

MY STEADY MIND

My steady mind sits and dreams
At the foot of my Lord's Perfection-Tree.
My ready heart climbs up and devours
My Lord's Satisfaction-Fruits. (6608)

There is a music in this intricate little poem which is a music not of sounds but of ideas. It is a music in which each note finds its answering pair, like two anti-phonical voices rising in song. The first couplet is the voice of the mind, the second that of the heart. The mind-song introduces the rhythm, the heart-song takes it up and fulfils it. In the mind-song, Sri Chinmoy vividly pictures the mind which has grown calm and steady through inward turning as a seeker meditating at the foot of a tree. Since the seeker who is plunged in contemplation withdraws his senses, he becomes in effect pure mind. The reality of the mind overrides everything else. In the second couplet, the poet removes point for point the attributes of the mind and replaces them with those of the ready heart. Though the mind dreams of the highest perfection, it is the heart, he suggests, which shall win it: the mind touches the foot of the tree, then the heart scales the tree; the mind carries us into the presence of God but it is the heart which claims Him; the mind has the vision, the heart has the realisation. Here the supple parallel form enables the poet to present this movement as a continuous growth or expansion.

The parallel technique is used extensively by the poet to join two or more lines of thought. The poem becomes a centre of convergence for a number of perceptions. A further development of this linking technique may be found in Sri Chinmoy's use of compounds. Where the English language cannot supply names for spiritual experiences, or where these names have become lifeless, Sri Chinmoy draws two nouns together into a compound to form a new name. This is an especially effective method of overcoming the limitations of the language. Although this creative option is recognised within English, writers have not adopted it on a large scale. Indeed, the compounds forged by writers such as Gerald Manley Hopkins and Emily Dickinson have remained as their own idiosyncratic stamp and, although time may have lessened their age of strangeness, few have passed into the language as acceptable additions.

Sri Chinmoy's fusion of nouns into compounds, on the other hand, occurs so naturally and frequently that it is more a mode of thought than a conscious device. He seeks no unusual effect but simply a more adequate formulation of truth. In him we see the intently focussed seer-vision impatient of the fewest words by which it must reveal itself. He gathers together his handful of key words and welds them together so that they become incandescent through compaction. The looser connectives are left aside and a new, dynamic energy pulsates between the two words thus combined:

YOU ARE INSEPARABLE

On my mind,
You and cloud-clusters
Are inseparable.

O my heart,
You and moon-lustre
Are inseparable.

O my soul,
You and sun-rapture
Are inseparable. (1599)

This lyric address to the mind, heart and soul highlights the essence of each one. Again the parallel structure provides the poet with a framework which allows him to arrange his perceptions in an ascending scale. Within each section there are only two variables: the object of the poet's address and its definitive compound. The choice of words for each compound is governed by the poem's own internal set of rules which require that each part of the poet's being is linked with a natural symbolic feature. In accordance with this pattern, the poet relates the mind to clouds, the heart to the moon and the soul to the sun. The symbolism in each case is traditional and unambiguous. It is with a sense of aptness and familiarity that we marry clouds with the mind for they capture the confusion of the mental sphere. Similarly, the moon signifies the beauty of the heart, while the sun stands for the wisdom of the soul. It is in the second half of each compound that the poet's language becomes most poignant and original. These descriptive nouns disclose the special quiddity of each symbol. In addition, their delicate rhyme gives the poem a rare beauty. The soft, feminine endings of "cluster", "lustre" and "rapture" elevate the poem as a whole to the level of song. Elegantly spaced by the three separate stanzas, these compounds do not fail to thrill the reader.

Sri Chinmoy employs compounds of many different kinds. They are particularly effective in drawing out the actualising power of certain abstract concepts:

KILL THE DOUBT-SNAKE

Slowly and steadily
Kill the doubt-snake
That has encircled your searching mind
And enveloped your crying heart. (5549)

The poem is a dramatic attempt to arouse the seeker to an awareness of the peril of succumbing to doubt. The strong element of danger to the seeker's aspiration is met with an equivalent strength of diction and image. The unexpressed centre of the poem is a powerful concern on the part of the poet which manifests itself in the spontaneous figurative association of the "doubt-snake". This taut compound, like a single spondaic foot inserted into the poem, is made conspicuous not only by its accentual gravity but also by the poet's use of graphic supporting verbs. He counters the danger with deliberate violence, urging the seeker to "kill" the snake that twists and twines around his mind and heart. The emotional force of this picture is absolutely proper to the degree of danger that is represented.

It may be seen that the compound noun acts as a kind of syntactic shorthand. In the longer and more discursive forms of simile and metaphor (for example, "the snake of doubt" or "doubt like a snake"), one noun is made subordinate to the other, resulting in only a partial identification between the two. The compound form, however, yokes together two nuclei of equal status. The "doubt" subject is thus specifically characterised as a snake. It is an immediate doubling of the subject.

One of the greatest contributions made by compounds in these poems is in approaching God—His "Compassion-Flood", "Justice-Height", "Vision-Light" and so on. Rather than attempting to fix the nature of God, this doubling effect creates a fluidity of meaning, a tacit accretion of whole new areas of reference. It is a form of expression which is in its very grain poetic:

EACH TIME I THINK OF HIM

Each time I think of Him,
I become His Beauty's
Perfection-Bird
And His Duty's
Satisfaction-Wings. (6635)

This is an exquisite expression of the transfigured personality. Far from causing the poem to become monolithic, these two compounds tend to increase its impulse to soar. They infuse the reader with a subtle understanding of God as an infinite sky across which the bird of the soul sports freely. The compounds are not only illuminative but they cause the poem to sparkle with freshness. The simplest of words begins to glow with a new grandeur and sanctity.

The presence of compounds in the poems, the rich and revealing parallel structure and the compression of vision and expression within the microcosmic stanzaic form together create what might have been thought impossible in the English language—the effect of word-shrines. These are not born of the poet's struggle with language but of his victorious acceptance of it. If its powers have waned, he wakes them by using them with a greater dignity than they had previously known; if its words are limited, he gives them new resonance by calling on them to help him approach the highest summits of spiritual vision; where there is power, he preserves it; where there is energy, he harnesses it. All that was immature and undeveloped in the vocabulary of the inner life has now become mature and fully developed. In the poems of *Ten Thousand Flower-Flames* the English language achieves at last its true spiritual potential.

SHIV K. KUMAR

The Shoeblack

For three years, every Monday and Wednesday morning, Romesh Deshpande parked his Austin between the Gandhi Jewellers and the Fancy Saree Store, on the Naoroji Road, to get a shoeshine from the same boy. No, he wouldn't have it done by his own servant at home because Ranga, this coffee-skinned boy with large sensitive eyes, seemed to have some unique expertise in the art. So Romesh went through this fifteen-minute ritual, twice a week, before driving on, three blocks down the road, to the State Bank of India, where he worked as its Senior Personnel Officer. He earnestly believed that a shiny pair of shoes somehow brought the same luster to one's face as a smooth shave—a bizarre juxtaposition of face and foot, his wife thought.

Romesh still remembered the first time he had stopped by the Gandhi Jewellers to get his shoes polished by Ranga, whom he had instinctively picked from among several other shoeblacks, all sitting on their haunches along the pavement. Yes, it was the unmistakable sparkle of supreme competence in his eyes that had first attracted Romesh. Hadn't he always looked for this indeterminate quality in every candidate who came up for interview before him?

'How much?'

'It depends, sir. First grade? With Kiwi, white cream and Chinese brush—or just the regular?'

'Let's have your first-grade then.'

'Seventy-five paise, please.'

Ranga tapped with his brush the wooden tripod in front of him, beckoning Romesh to put out his right foot on it. Nimble jabs of jet-black polish all over the shoe, a brusque sprinkling of a few drops of water, followed by a thin paste of white cream—then a vigorous rubbing of the leather with a rag already greasy with frequent polishing. In a few minutes the offcolour shoes had been resurrected to their pristine glow.

Since Romesh was now his permanent customer, a strange relationship developed between the two. Often Ranga would take him on first, rudely ignoring the next man in the queue. That piqued several of his customers, some of whom moved over to the other shoeblacks. But, so what, Ranga thought!

And Romesh too stayed with him, never taking notice of any other shoeblack on the Naoroji road.

This bond, one morning, emboldened Ranga to ask his patron where he worked. He was very excited to learn that he was a senior officer at the State

Bank of India—that mammoth building in red sandstone, facing the Odeon cinema.

‘Very big officer, sir!’ he exclaimed, his eyes dilating to take in his patron’s new identity.

‘Oh well, isn’t Bombay full of all sorts of biggies?’

‘But you are so different, sir, from everybody else—so warm and gracious.’

Somewhat tickled by this compliment, Romesh offered the boy a special tip that morning, but pat came the response.

‘So, sir, this will spoil me. I just want you to stay with me—that’s enough.’

Indeed, Romesh’s wife, Lata, had also found him quite “different” during the first year of their marriage. There was something ‘plebian’ about him, she thought—this impulsion to hobnob with ‘the commoners’ in spite of his senior executive position. Little did she know that as the son of a junior teacher at the Batlibhoi Art School, he would really have preferred to draw or paint. But his success at the All India Banking Competition had landed him, at twenty-six, this administrative position.

And so, was it Ranga’s sensitive face that intrigued him as an artist (he still did some painting over the week-ends), or was it some lurking sense of humanism that drew him towards any wage-earner?

Romesh felt surprised when, one Monday morning, he didn’t see Ranga at his usual spot. As another shoeblack beckoned him to his tripod, he asked him:

‘But where’s Ranga?’

‘His father died yesterday, sir.’

‘So he’s now left with his mother.’

‘Mother already dead, sir. He has only a sister.’

‘Oh, I’m very sorry to hear this.’

His curiosity now prodded him to know something about this shoeblack. When he was told that a bunch of shoeblacks lived in a slum, right across the Oberoi-Hilton, he felt amused at this queer juxtaposition of affluence and poverty. By coincidence, he too lived in a government bungalow, just a few blocks away.

All day long, a fuzzy sense of uneasiness persisted in his mind—someone he knew had lost his father, and he had done nothing about it. Why couldn’t he visit Ranga to offer him his personal condolences? Lata would have scoffed at the idea as mere mawkish sentimentalism—the eccentricity of an art-teacher’s son! Of course, she knew about his regular “rendezvous with a street boy” (thank God, she thought, it wasn’t a woman)—that’s how she always twitted him about the shoeblack. In fact, she had set his own secretary, Lila, to keep an eye on Romesh. Undoubtedly a humiliating arrangement, but well

As he stepped out of his office that evening, he suddenly decided to look up Ranga. Why not? Of course, it would look as though he were messing around the slums, but he owed this visit to his conscience, he told himself. So he drove out straight to the Ghandi Jewellers and sought out the boy who had done his shoes that morning.

‘Would you care for a ride back home?’ he asked. ‘I should like to have a word with Ranga. He must be terribly shattered.’

The shoeblack felt amazed. The man must be an oddball, he thought—offering him a ride to visit a shoeblack!

‘I should feel honoured, sir,’ he said. ‘Ranga will be deeply touched.’

Immediately he packed all his polishes, brushes and rags into his wooden box, snapped it shut, and jumped into Romesh’s Austin—his first ride ever in a car! In a few minutes, they were near the Oberoi-Hilton. The boy pointed his finger towards several rows of giant conduits, empty and abandoned—as though, due to some contractual snag, a drainage contractor had suddenly frozen his operation.

‘There, sir—that one is Ranga’s home, and three rows further down is mine.’

He then yelled out to Ranga, who emerged like a rat from its hole, utterly flabbergasted to see his patron. When Ranga had mumbled out his gratitude for the visit, Romesh said:

'Well, I felt very sorry to hear about your father's death.'

For a moment, the boy completely forgot his personal grief, turning round to call out somebody else. There now emerged from the same conduit a young girl, about twenty, in a frayed saree: tall, slim with long disheveled black hair—astonishingly beautiful. Beauty in rags!—that was Romesh's instantaneous response.

'That's my sister, sir—Gopi. Works as a dish-washer at the Oberoi.'

Had Romesh had his drawing notebook in hand, he would have done a quick sketch of her, as she stood there dolefully, robed in her quiet dignity.

Since a small crowd of shoeblacks had gathered around, after a moment or two Romesh thought it prudent to drive off in his Austin, which too had been surrounded by a few urchins.

Next Wednesday morning, when he stopped off for his shoeshine, he asked Ranga if his sister would like to work as an attender at the bank.

'Four hundred rupees a month plus the usual allowances. I thought, after your father's death ...'

'It's very gracious of you, sir' Ranga interjected, overwhelmed by the offer.

When Gopi joined the bank, Ranga's fellow shoeblacks began to taunt him. 'Did she get the job for her looks or for her dish-washing?' Ranga shrugged off the barbs—just jealousy, he said to himself.

A week later, Lila faithfully reported to her boss's wife about the new attender. 'Of course, she's just a menial, but he always flashes her a special smile. Everyone here is mystified at his excessive solicitude for this woman.'

So her husband had picked up another street thing from somewhere, Lata thought. Oh, the insufferable plebian! If it were a lady-receptionist or a secretary, she wouldn't have felt so rattled. But his flirtation with a mere rag woman—wasn't that utterly nauseating? However, she thought it discreet to hold back her fire till she had fully gauged the situation.

One evening, after supper, when they were sitting alone in the balcony, she decided to corner him.

'Made any appointments lately?' she began, a smirk on her face.

'Well, it goes on all the time—that's my job, isn't it?'

'I mean something really special—something that has excited you.'

As she said these words, she searched his face for some flicker of nervousness that might give him away. But he looked staid and stern.

Suddenly the phone ran, and Lata rose to answer it.

'Yes, he's right here,' she almost breathed into the receiver. 'Could you call me later, please?'

'Who was it?' Romesh asked.

'Just a friend, she replied. How could she tell him that it was Lila, wanting to pass on some scrap of scandal. Somehow Lata didn't feel like probing her husband any further now.

A few days later came Rakhi—the auspicious day when every Hindu woman ties the sacred thread round the wrist of her brother who responds with some gift—cash or a saree. This brief ritual, a custom from time immemorial, binds every brother into a vow to protect his sister against any calamity that might befall her. Romesh knew that his sister Aradhna would descend upon him from Colaba that morning, more for the money than anything else. So Romesh had an early shower and put on his white dhoti and silk shirt so as to keep himself in readiness for the visit. As he and Lata were having their coffee out on the lawn, their orderly announced that a young woman and a boy were at the gate, wanting to meet the Sahib.

'Oh God, no rest even on a holiday,' Romesh said, rather petulantly. 'Send them in.'

As the visitors appeared, Romesh was surprised to see Ranga and his sister. Gracious Heavens! What had they come for, he wondered? As for Lata, she was instantly struck with the woman's beauty, especially Gopi's poised carriage. So deeply engrossed was she in the woman, she hardly noticed the boy.

'Yes, Ranga, what is it?' Romesh asked. 'Returning my call?' Then, turning to his wife, who had riveted her gaze on the woman's face, he added, 'This is Ranga's sister. Remember the boy who does my shoeshining.'

Without once taking her eyes off the woman, Lata nodded her head. This must be the creature, she guessed, who had created such a flutter at the bank. But before she could say anything, Gopi pulled out a large silver-threaded *rakhi* which looked almost like a bracelet.

'May I, sir?' she said, as she stretched out her hand.

A look of puzzlement flashed across Romesh's face. Wasn't it blatant presumption on her part to take such liberty with her boss? Why was she doing it, he thought? But since he couldn't be rude on an auspicious day, he put out his left hand, still embarrassed and confused. But Lata's gaze, he noticed, had now mellowed into a new understanding.

'Are you the new attender at the bank?' she asked Gopi.

'Yes, ma'am.'

'How did you know?' Romesh asked.

'I thought I knew everything.'

There was a brief pause as Romesh fumbled for his wallet.

'Well, in that case,' he said, looking at Gopi, 'I should like to make you an offering.'

'No, not at all, sir. Haven't you already done enough for us?'

Romesh remained mystified.

'May I do your shoes, sir?' Ranga said.

'Oh no—today you are both my guests,' he muttered—and Lata nodded her head in approval.

The Merchant of Kisingarh

The following being the translation of his Hindi spoken to his *burradar* (brother—equal to brother):

In the Kristi years of World War Two, we were prosperous in the city of Bombay. Kristaan was killing Kristaan. There was a rain of *rupees* in Bombay. Everybody was buying. One day the razor blade was one *rupee* for four. The next day, it was two *rupees* for four. The third day four *rupees* for four. Merchants got what they asked for steel. Our village men always had beards. They too shaved. They looked like women. They could not show their faces for shame. Everybody had to shave to get a government job. The army said no beards, go away! Only the Sikh army and the public had beards. There was big demand for razor blades. The god of wealth Raja Kubera said to Bombay, "*Lo! Lo!*" "Take! Take!" Take the *rupees*! My father did not beat me when I broke a ten *rupee* note without a care in an eating house. I ordered potato fritters and sweets after eating a full meal. He said, "Let go!" We had never known such prosperity, O God!

Now and then there was a lack of care with money. I have already said that. Otherwise, we were humble brokers only. We could have had a motor of our own. But we did not want to tell the government of our good fortune. If we had shown our prosperity, the government would have robbed us. We did not tell the public. The public would have robbed us. We did not tell our relations. The relations would have robbed us. We let our losses only be known. We ate good bread and lentils. My mother had served my father the same simple food. We could have bought milk, butter, even honey.

My father had always been a broker. Now he had capital. He could invest. But we did not want to show our capital. I have already said that. For services without wages, a railway clerk taught me accounts. As a poor boy, another man taught me A-B-C-D English free.

The same year, my father got me married to an orphanage girl. Orphanage girls are taught good obedience, we knew. He also wanted it made very well-known that we were only poor brokers. Why would we otherwise marry an orphan? We spent almost no money on my marriage. My wife brought with her what she wore. My mother gave her a spare *sari*, one petticoat for underneath and one blouse. My father gave her one *rupee* present.

At that time, an important thing happened. My father worshipped Shivji. He always carried *bilva* leaves and some milk to the temple on Mondays. I always

followed him with the same offerings. One day, a naked man saw us in the street. He said to us, "*Salò!* you are going to the temple to worship God? Have you *seen* God?" My father could not reply. He whispered to me not to get hot. The man had called my father and me his *sala*. He had said we were his brothers-in-law. So, as their husband, he mounted on our sisters. My father said to him, "Mahatmaji, if not God, whom should we worship?" The man said, "*Sala*, worship God you *see!*" My father was silent. He was afraid the man might curse us. He then said to my father, "Dog! does your woman cook for you? Do you eat, *sala!*" My father said, "She cooks, raja. I eat, raja. This is my son. He also has a wife. He also eats, raja. We are poor folk. We only beg for your blessings." Then the naked man said to us, "If your women cook, don't you see *Agni, sala?*" Then my father understood. He fell at the mahatma's feet. He whispered to me to do likewise. We were lying in the street like dead. The holy man then touched our heads with his foot and said to us, "Go, worship Agni, *sala!*" So he became our guru and we became fire-worshippers. We always folded hands whenever we saw fire. We offered to Agni food also. A pandit told us Lord Agni is the eldest son of Brahma. There is no creation without heat. Our faith was firm even before we heard that.

The same year both my father and mother made their home in heaven. I got into brokerage same as my father. I rented a room in a humble building. It was a *chawl*. Many poor people lived in it. We lived in one room. My wife and I lived on the same simple diet. It made good bones, my grandfather had said. There was one more thing. Now that my mother no longer ran the family stove, my wife's craving for *mirch* became known to me. The green small *mirch* is very hot. She also put in so much red pepper in the lentils. When I bit the first morsel, I ran for a drink of water. Even then I was burning. For years, I ate with my right hand and drank from a *lota* of water with my left hand. I said to her, "Why do you make me eat and drink like this? I am not a cotton fluffer working with both hands!" She would not stop when I told her to stop. I did not want to shout. Our walls were very thin. The people in the rooms could hear everything. That is why everybody in that building always whispered. We never raised our voice. Neighbours were always listening.

I gathered *rupees* in the Kristaan war. I have already said that. We had no friends. Friends would have robbed us. We had one son, Ramsing. The midwife came and delivered him. Ramsing was given to us by Lord Agni to do our last rites. For his sake, too, money had to be saved and kept hidden. We hid it in jute sacks under wheat in our room. Our soul was in our son and in those sacks. When we were so happy, we had a robbery. The wife went down to see a procession, and all our money was gone. It was taken from the sacks by unknown persons. A neighbour said they were communists. I said they were thieves. He said communists say all money belongs to everybody. Neighbours from other floors came upstairs to ask how much was taken. We said, who would steal from the poor? Some little grain was taken, yes. The thieves were sorry for their trouble, I joked with the neighbours. They went away satisfied. Inside, we drank up our grief.

We could not open our hearts to the police, my *burradar*. They would have asked where all that money came from. I had done things which would have been bad if opened. I had bought and sold English gold coins too. The English put anybody in jail for buying and selling gold. If anybody had their guinea coin, the police called his father a dog and took him to the station. They asked him questions. Which son of a dog sold you this gold guinea? Was he not a German spy? Where does he live? The English said buying and selling gold was very bad for their war. They did not say why. Hanging was not good enough for such dogs.

Our gold was gone too. I had paid high for my gold. I used to weep very often. I wanted to kill myself or kill somebody, even little Ramsing, because he kept crying. Twice I laid hands on the wife. I slapped her hard. It was always the same reason. There was too much green and red pepper in the lentils. The third time I raised my hand, she answered back. She whispered, "If it burns you, isn't that your Agni?" The name of God! My woman! The mother of my son! I said, not loudly, "You whore!" and I got the hammer in hand. Seeing death, she screamed. The neighbours came running. I became sober. "She thought she saw communists. I say it was only mice," I said to the neighbours. After that, I wanted to renounce the world. I wanted to become *sanyasi*. I went to join the Ramakrishna Mission. The swamis said they wanted educated *sanyasis*. I never again complained of her *mirch*.

Those were lean days, *burradar*. Money was hard to see. Burma had fallen. There were victory parades by the English. The public was joining too. I was in brokerage for anything, even country whiskey. The government stopped country whiskey supply. This brokerage was paying more than marriage brokerage. One time, for full two weeks, we lived on bread and plantains. We could not pay for lentils and *mirch* was high again.

At that time of need we had a new neighbour. He took a room on the fourth floor too. The fourth floor was cheapest. We died every day climbing the stairs. We shared a small balcony with this new neighbour. He was a retired school master. He got *rupees* thirty a month pension. He worshipped Lord Krishna. We let him play with our son. The wife often left the little one with him. We let him be foolish over our two-year-old. He said our son was the image of the child Lord Krishna when he was on this earth. We called our new neighbour grandfather.

One day, I saw grandfather sitting in his easy chair. His eyes were closed. I asked him why did he close his eyes. He said a man was fighting cancer. Grandfather was cursing his cancer. I told my wife about this. We were afraid. We were afraid he might curse us too. We stopped speaking to him. After a long time we met and spoke. He said he had a hobby. He told fortunes by cards. I asked him, "What is in the cards for me, grandfather?" I was happy that day. Brokerage from one consignment of top leaf tea brought me good money. I said, "Do I become rich, grandfather?"

He made four stacks on the balcony floor. One for me, one for the wife, one for Ramsing, and one for himself. From those stacks, he picked up four cards and looked at them. He took the name of Lord Krishna and said we all four are one family, Lord, guide! Then he was silent for a long time. I wanted to go away. I became afraid. But I wanted to know my fortune. Will our robbed gold and money come back? So I sat quietly saying nothing. Little Ramsing crawled up to the balcony. Grandfather looked worried. He said he saw misfortune. Then he closed his eyes again. I quickly picked up Ramsing and went in and shut the door of our room. I vowed never to speak to such a man. He was cursing. Why say misfortune? If it is misfortune, do we become beggars? Do I die? Who would look after the little one? Someone might touch the wife. They pull up the petticoat of a woman and take her if her man is gone. I lost my appetite that day thinking like that. I could not enjoy the wife that night. I could not give her happiness for many days afterwards.

I stopped going out to the balcony. Grandfather tried to speak with us. One day he left a letter asking to speak to little Ramsing. My wife had learnt to read and write in the orphanage. She read his letter. But we did not reply. He then wrote that our plantain peelings on the balcony floor were collecting flies. I was very hot with him. We eat plantains and bread because the lentils are high. Why mention our shame? I wanted to kill him. I had killed one man before, a brother broker. He had spoken bad words about my mother.

The same day I received the letter, I saw grandfather on the balcony. His eyes were closed again. I wanted to go out and say to him, "Grandfather, you rogue-man, who are you cursing now?" He opened his eyes and saw me from his easy chair. He got up and came to me to embrace me. He had, now and then, embraced me in the olden days. Seeing him coming towards me like that, I got very hot. I said, "You *sala*! I lie with your mother!" I then quickly pushed him down from the balcony.

Everybody understood it was an accident. His eldest son came for his things. He sent us *rupees* three thousand after one week of the funeral. Grandfather had given this in his will to little Ramsing. One day after we received this money, a man came. He asked for grandfather. I told him he was old and had fallen down from the fourth floor. I had been to his funeral. He wanted grandfather to curse his cancer, he said. I asked him what is that? He said it is English language for *naasoor*. I said to him, "Why do you speak English language with us and not say *naasoor*?" He said doctors call it cancer. Grandfather used to curse people's cancer, "Go away, go away!" Some got well. He used to lay hands on people too. He took the name of Lord Krishna, then laid the hands, the man told us.

With three thousand *rupees*, *burradar*, we left Bombay. We moved to the lucky town of Kisingarh. I rented a small house. I invested the *rupees* in poor women's *saris*. The wife dyed them green, yellow, red, also blue. She dried them herself. Our stock was cotton. Silk is for rich women. We worked in the yard. With all stock ready, ironed, also starched and folded, I swore before fire a partnership. O Lord Angi, little Ramsing is ten *annas* in the *rupee*, me and my own woman, remaining six *annas* in the *rupee*, total sixteen in the *rupee*. For three years, there was turnover of the same cotton goods. I made more than I had lost to the communists or the thieves. It was more than my seven ancestors had made in their lifetime. I was a merchant. The poor were buying from me day and night.

That same year, Hindus and Muslims were going to fight. Government was buying. Jute, khaki cloth, and cotton goods for women police were demanded. Mill owner was selling to government. I went back to brokerage. Thanks to the luck of my partners, I flourished. Now Ramsing was grown up. He learnt fourth standard English in school. I paid fees. For some time, he joined one Annie Besant Theosophy psychic development course. It was free. I pulled him out and said we are rich, son. Poor men learn to earn and read and write. He obeyed. I made him a very good marriage too. So he became the sole son-in-law-heir. It was a rich man's only daughter, but the rich man said he was poor. We were happy. Then more good fortune came. We became grandparents three times. Ramsing was father of three sons. I paid back the principal Rs. 3,000 with interest to a widows' welfare home. All three partners were now free of debt. Ramsing then decided on partnership with his own father-in-law rich man Kanaising. I said, it is your own capital, why not? If your father-in-law cheats you, Agni will eat him. You will see his ashes, Ramsing, my son. I have already said that to you, Ramsing, my son.

At the age of 61, my *burradar*, one night, I thought somebody was pressing my throat. I could not breathe. The doctor came. He wanted to chat and joke with a rich man. He was a social man. But I screamed. They put me in the doctor's motor and we ran to the government hospital. They made X-ray photos. They said, in their English, it was embolism. It was in the lung maybe. They said to Ramsing there is a bad clot. Both my partners were weeping. I wanted to shout, be happy, partners! We can pay the dogs! We are rich! Then one dog spoke to a nurse. He said, arrange oxygen, nurse. I wanted to say, dogs, I *guarantee* payment even for a more expensive thing. Get the thing! But in a few minutes I was gone, even with oxygen.

Now that I was dead, same as he, I saw him waiting for me. I asked him if it hurt when I pushed him down. He said when he touched the cement his head hurt very bad. Then it didn't. He said his death was in the cards. He had to go that way. I said, "I was hot, grandfather." "It was nobody's fault, Lord Krishna's will," he said.

I died a man of property and a happy man, *burradar*. Some days after my rites were done, I went to see my senior partner Ramsing. I visited his bedroom. He had a real man's beard, *burradar*, and his side whiskers were like wings. There were curling hairs on his chest and below. Like a jungle! My own son! I waited for him to be done with his woman. It was too hot for the innocent to put on her blouse and petticoat. She was sitting on the bed fanning him with a hand fan. That is how my woman used to do after I was done. Dear Ramsing's eyes were closed. He was happy. I was happy. I sang to him the *Song of Six Million*. I made it up in my head.

One million, there's a lucky town the name of Kisingarh,

ohoho!

Two million, there live merchants and their servants,

ohoho!

Three million, there are Hindus and Muslims, some young and

some old, *ohoho!*

Four, there was a rich man, now dead and done, *ohoho!*

Five, there lives in Kisingarh, a son-heir, earning and

earning, *ohoho! ohoho!*

Six, there's a lucky town the name of Kisingarh, *ohoho!*

He will have six million, Kanaising! Why are you afraid of Ramsing, *burradar*? I have given him all my *rupees*! Now you give him all your *rupees*! Order of Lord Agni, *burradar*! Make a fire, say, Lord Agni my witness, I give now everything to my heir-son Ramsing!—otherwise Lord Agni eat me! eat me! . . . Why are you crying, Kanaising? Ramsing will be happy with you! He will not hurt you! Why would a merchant-man hurt his own father-in-law, Kanaising? Why would Ramsing break his woman's father—make unhappy his own wife, who makes him happy and gives him sons? Tell me, tell me, Kanaising!

I am Lachhising, dead. Grandfather is with me together. I have spoken the command of Lord Agni to father-in-law Kanaising—through my own blood, my own Annie Besant medium-son, good Ramsing!

Lord Agni witness, O Kanai, Kanai, Kanai!

The Merchant of Kisingarh from the forthcoming book, *The Rissala*, by G. V. Desani.

SHIV K. KUMAR

A Husband's Homecoming

Catechism was never your way
of baiting the truth.
All spring you endured silently
subtle as a prophet while I dropped
prevarications that even the beaver's incisors
couldn't scrape up from the water's bottom.

And yet I knew you knew.

Your face was all eyes like a puddle's
overall, riddled with the summer rain.

Then, suddenly, last night
those tears in your eyes
like icicles sobbing in a dark cave.

Since the water's logic is relentless
it can wear down a mount to a drakestone.

So let me come home
to stay.

SHIV K. KUMAR

Central Park, Connaught Place, Delhi

A sanctuary carved out of Lutyen's dream
though *obiter dictum*.

Centuries ago, before the Circus pitched its tents
a royal couple from Hastnapur honeymooned here
under the stars.

But now it's a commoners' Eden.
Here they come for a breather
from the day's grind—
peons, clerks, old folks and lovers.
Cards, siesta, gossip
and the language of hands and lips.

The shoeshine prowls about like a desert
prophet watching their feet
of clay
while Lata coos out of the microphones' throats
noosing from the trees.

SHIV K. KUMAR

At a Whorehouse

Beyond the law's noose
the painted birds warble in clipped accents:
'Do it quick and go!'

In the infrared room, the mirror
above the bedpost is the glazed eye
of a spy behind the heavy drapery.

I must honour the deal my ancestors
made centuries ago
to taste the dead ash.
But I'm played out. Let me first
come to, please. After the day's logic
my jaded hands cannot curl round sea-shells.
And your nipples are raspy like black sand
your lips bruise like cactus leaves.

You should have forged some communion
before unleashing the fierce vendetta
of your body.
A new convert needs time to intone
an exotic chant.

I think this room has some underground
tunnel to another continent. I suspect
someone's relaying messages to the street lamps.

And down the hallway
I hear my mother crying over a Caesarian
gasping in its incubator.

SHIV K. KUMAR

An Indian Mother's Advice to Her Daughter Before Marriage

Giving up all your hoardings to a
stranger, ambushed in bridebed,
may not be entirely painful
for the first bleeding that splutters
like oil on fire is also a cleanser.

Don't ever argue
at the moment of surrender
for the end is ineluctable. So move in
with moonflowers in your hands and the
quick of the sun between your thighs.

But take time unfolding yourself.
Let him seethe awhile in his hot blood
for this is also the moment of asking
a boon, not giving in only.

A man's memory is myopic
like a sparrow's—once filled up
he hardens into a bedrock.
And often at night you may find

yourself alone, pulling feathers
out of your pillow. But be patient.
If he's gone out fishing in the dark
river, he'll be back

for in spite of his appetite a man
cannot swallow both ends of the rainbow.

SHIV K. KUMAR

Mother Teresa Feeds Her Lepers at her
Home for the Destitute, Calcutta

Grey skulls grafted on wizened necks.
Hands droop like claws of dead birds.
The air seethes with worms.
Every white scale on their bodies
is an eye that probes each almsgiver's
skin—complacent, scented and wholesome.

It's lunchtime. A shaft of sunbeam
falls across the hallway, beckoning
the dead to rise. A hand's velvet caress
ripples like an oasis shaded
by palm trees.

When in love
go mute like pebbles under crystal
water, wear white silk, or take the
veil, and your touch will not hurt
for you are then the Virgin's bridesmaid—
only half mortal like the lotus.

Your eyes will then glow like
fireflies, your footsteps fall like
dewdrops on banana leaves on a summer
morn. You may then leap through a ring
of fire, kiss a cobra's hood,
work miracles with sand.

Across the street, a temple
peals out its chants, frightening away
the birds. Inside, a goddess in stone,
ebony face, eyes the color of blood—
her right arm raised, like a cactus
blade, to consummate
an ancient ritual.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

Of a Dawn

What do you want from me now?
It's not yet light; perhaps the nesting wagtail
in the mango tree has sensed your breath already.
The dawn looks strange; skilled in the world's ways
old men feel their shrunk years and return
to their dark with an insane longing for injustice;
hanging from a crow's claws
the guts of a swift tremble in the clear air.
What do I know of those things
which let themselves be measured by a quiet
submissive frame of hurt, by a soft trust?
This dawn is different from others, yet
it is no different. It hides a long nakedness.
Soon butterflies shall grow funky with the sun,
and the silvery seclusion of sleepy-eyed girls
renewed against voyages of the light.
Do I owe you something of my life?
Perhaps this pretence of mine would be enough
this morning, when every sound, every shadow
takes on an unease, an imperfection
to force purpose upon the heart's darker beat;
and now I can hear you awaking, elsewhere,
oriole-call in your ears; now suddenly in fear
of love's bare hour of absence and blood,
then to lose house behind the abandon of light.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

River

Dawn's bone-white light, and in it
the shut, iron palanquin of the river,
the cracked stone embankment sprawled
on the chest of this ruined town.

A lonely pigeon floats past
like a spirit
over twentyfour docile goats being herded
to the municipal slaughter house.

Whose last words come to mind?
The rusted body of a mutilated automobile
watches me behind closed eyelids.
With barely a whisper my blood shuts the door.

And the light stirs, as if to rise,
but is buried under the old peepul limbs
by the river. Pain rolls in the water's unconcern,
where we keep on seeing shapes

of the way we looked once.
Already much water has dragged at the feet.
Haunted by birds of prey, where strange trees grow,
deep in the hills of my blood, that river flows.

JAYANTA MAHAPATRA

At the Summer Place of Tippu Sultan, Seringapatam

for CDN

Full moon tonight, the summer palace
stares across the Kaveri with mad, white eyes.
Two hundred years of heat and pain; and already
the paint has stopped weeping down
the musty, wooden walls. What is there
to understand beyond this frayed plane
of time? It's a barren land where
sheep still prowl the sparse earth,
where the medals and ribbons of old slumber
behind the dead quiet of honor. Dew
sits gloomily on blade-tips, the Tiger
sleeps the sleep of the vanquished.
A cry of protest from my lips perhaps;
but is everything lost? History closes
behind us its tale of disinherited princes,
the clear music of freedom, a magic circle
of wild stripes that once flashed steel
in the bright sun of Seringapatam.
Walking back, I cannot forget the robe,
faded and mildewed, over Tippu's seated effigy,
like a slack spiritless drum holding its sounds
just as night condemned to hold on to its dream.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PATRICIA AVERY—came to Australia from America in 1979. She has been studying for a Ph.D. in comparative literature, but has left this to devote more time to writing. A collection of poetry is to be published next year.

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JERI KROLL—has produced 5UV's Writers' Radio and Authors' Proof for four and a half years. Her first book, *Death as Mr Right*, came second in the Anne Elder Competition for 1982. She has recently completed a second under a Literature Board Grant.

NICHOLAS JOSE—teaches English at A.N.U. Has published stories and essays, and a collection of short stories, *The Possession of Amber*. He is a keen student of Chinese and has begun reading some contemporary Chinese writing.

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AUDREY LONGBOTTOM—born in Coramba, N.S.W., left school early but returned to study at Wollongong University. She commenced writing in 1968 and, besides poetry, has published short stories and articles. A first collection of poems, *Relatives and Reliques*, was runner-up in the 1980 British Commonwealth Prize for a first book of verse. She is working on a second collection.

CAROLYN POLIZZOTTO—has taught History at the University of Western Australia. She is researching the life and times of Elise Blumann.

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G. V. DESANI—Professor of Philosophy Emeritus, the University of Texas at Austin. Born Nairobi in 1909. From 1960 to 1968 contributed regularly to the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and also produced a deliberately provocative weekly opinion page, called 'Very High and Very Low'. His recent honours include Distinguished Visiting Professor of Religions, Boston University (1981). His forthcoming book *The Rissala* follows *All About H. Hatterr* after more than three decades.

YASMINE GOONERATNE—educated in Colombo and at Cambridge. The author of critical works on Jane Austen, Alexander Pope, and on Ceylonese Literature. Has published essays in journals of Commonwealth Literature, and her own poetry in a wide range of magazines as well as in several volumes. Currently Associate Professor of English at Macquarie University.

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