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The editors of *Westerly* wish to thank Richard Woldendorp for the use of his photographs in this issue of *Westerly*.
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Eyeing the Environment – Editorial Comments

Westerly has published one special issue each year, since 1986, concentrating on an important and sometimes neglected, aspect of Australian cultural life. The topics covered - the 1930s, Australian Expatriatism, Imaging Western Australia, Representations of Motherhood, Australian Suburbia - to some extent reflect our idiosyncratic initiatives and to some extent reflect the tenor of the times. The latter has never been more true than with this issue, "Eyeing the Environment". A recent W.A. Government notice prepared for Productivity Week, 1991 noted that "85 per cent of the industrialised world's citizens believe the environment to be the number one public issue". Everywhere in the developed world (at least) governments, companies, social organisations and individuals have become aware of the environment and the havoc we have brought about by presuming that nature was simply there for us to use. Having thought that it belonged to us we now find that we may belong to it. "Environmentalist" has joined "nature" and "natural" as a potent emotive word.

This is so much the case that it may seem there is nothing to say about the environment beyond forebodings and clichés. This issue of *Westerly* was prepared in the belief that there is a great deal still to be said, particularly about representations of the environment in literature and in culture generally. Nature, of course, has long been a fundamental subject of poetry and fiction, or at least a treasure house of images. This has been especially so in Australia, where the landscape has figured so prominently in literature and in the general consciousness of both the Aborigines and the white settlers. The Aborigines, it is now known, saw their own identity in relation to the land. By contrast, to some early white settlers the environment of Australia seemed merely an aberration. The Reverend Sydney Smith (1771-1845), for example, claimed that "in this remote part of the earth Nature (having made horses, oxen, ducks, geese, oaks, elms, and all regular and useful productions for the rest of the world) seems determined to have a bit of play, and to amuse herself as she pleases", a prospect which "mingled emotions of distress and delight". Even allowing for a bit of play on Rev. Smith's part, this attitude and phrasing had serious implications for what would be done by the new settlers to the natural environment and to its original inhabitants. Our representations of the land reveal the way that philosophical values impinge on our lives.

This is the subject of George Seddon's opening essay, on the concept of "nature" and of the "natural". Seddon includes a brief history of the way in which nature has been conceptualised, ideas of butter meeting ideas of margarine.

Ian Saunders examines the interpretive practices commonly brought to bear in our reading of nature, socially, in the arts and in politics. Toby Miller looks at

popular reactions to environmentalism and to the politics of representing environmental issues in popular culture. In a way related to each of these essays, Delys Bird considers gender readings of the landscape, noting a political description of Kakadu National Park as almost "a tatty old tart". Frances Devlin Glass, co-editor of the authoritative edition of *Such is Life*, analyses Furphy's mythologisation of the land, influenced by the feminising myths of the Irish.

In essays with a particular focus, Graham White explores the writings of the ignored novelist, parliamentarian and all-round Renaissance man, Simpson Newland (1835-1925), and John McLaren looks again at Randolph Stow's *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*. Newland's novels about white Australian pioneers recognise a power in the land which he considered central to the Australian mind. McLaren, one of the leading critics of Australian literature from a socio-political perspective, sees Rob Coram's search for a sense of harmony with the land as the only way of discovering harmony within himself.

Shifting locations, Barry Lopez provides a brilliantly descriptive account of a visit to the intriguing but alien environment of Antarctica, while Laurie Hergenhan examines Australian writers' responses to a locale long since inhabited and represented in art: Tuscany. Concentrating particularly on the work of Peter Porter and David Malouf, Hergenhan reveals the presence of other environments, experienced earlier in their lives, in Porter and Malouf's representations of Tuscany, much as the temporal past impinges on the present. Sylvia Hallam and Veronica Brady discuss Aboriginal conceptions and organisation of the environment, and contrast Aboriginal and white ecological and cultural practices. Brady emphasises the way in which the Aboriginal sense of dignity tied to a relationship with the land is now being recovered through literary explorations in a range of genres, from drama to non-fiction prose. George Seddon provides a commentary on what is seen in the landscape by early explorers and by the Dutch-born photographer, Richard Woldendorp. In the most remarkable essay of all, Pat Lowe reports Ngarta's story - the personal story of one of the last people to leave the Great Sandy Desert and traditional tribal ways, during the 1960s.

The book reviews, poetry and stories included in this issue present a relationship to the environment in various ways and together with the essays do more than support the argument that we must nurture nature, although that is undeniably true; H.G. Wells once said that "There is no reason to believe that the order of nature has any greater bias in favour of man than it had in favour of the icthyosaur or the pterodactyl". But beyond this, the way we see the environment reflects the way we see ourselves and, sometimes, the depths of our egoism. Ecology as a science is inseparable from the wider culture that surrounds it.

Bruce Bennett and Dennis Haskell

GEORGE SEDDON

The Nature of Nature

'How do you know but ev'ry bird that cuts the airy way
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five.'
William Blake, 1793[1]

The problems in understanding how we ascribe meaning to a key word like 'Nature' are deeply embedded in our cultural history - from which, of course, the word derives its complex of meanings, as with all words. We might begin with a warming-up exercise familiar to philosophers. What are the antonyms to Nature and the Natural? With what is it in contrast? The major ones are as follows: the natural and the supernatural (or the Divine); the natural and the unnatural; the natural and the human (as in Man and the Biosphere, or Man and the Environment, so that Nature becomes everything that is Not-Man). Finally there is the natural and the artificial. Wool is a natural fibre, nylon is an artificial one, although both are man-mediated, as is even more obvious when we think of the advertising campaign claiming that sugar is a natural food and all those television advertisements showing waving fields of golden sun-flowers or whatever, about to be processed into margarine. Logically, butter and margarine are equally synthetic or equally natural, but the difference in feeling about the two shows clearly that we are already beyond the bounds of logic.

The first of the meaning-pairs (The Natural - the Supernatural) has first place in the history of Western thought and it is still very powerful, but it is no longer the primary contrast. The view that Nature was inferior to Super Nature, the Supernatural, the Divine world, co-existed with its opposite, that Nature itself is Divine, through most of the Middle Ages and beyond, while the view that Nature is an expression of Divine creative power has persisted to the present day. Contempt for the natural world - the contemptus mundi - was exemplified by the lives of the saints; in its extreme form, it denied value to the natural world, to the self, and to all pleasure, especially sexual pleasure.

However, this attitude was never uncontested. Since God was creator, and the Perfect Being, then his creation might be seen as Perfect, and the natural world, it might be argued, was fit, not for contemptuous dismissal, but for study and delight. These opposites were to an extent, reconciled by the concept of The Great Chain of Being. 'Everything, or nearly everything, that existed was thought of as necessarily existing, but as graded in value. The further away from God, the lower the value.'[2] Nature constituted an artistic order. Sir Thomas Browne puts it splendidly: 'Natura nihil agit frustra' [Nature does nothing in vain] 'is the only indisputable axiom in philosophy; there are no grotesques in nature, nor any thing framed to fill up empty cantons and unnecessary spaces'.[3] His reasons, however, are not ours: Nature does nothing in vain because it fulfils God's purposes, which are wholly focussed on Man. God made the ants to teach us industry and thrift, the bees to teach us the principles of social order. That is what they are for.

That Nature partakes of the Divine is also a component of many non Judeo-

Christian theologies, especially in Asia, and also of the animistic world view of the Australian Aborigine and other groups, and to the extent that we see God revealing himself through Nature, it may also be a component of Christian theology. These are deep waters, but before we strike out for the shore we should note that the romanticisation of Nature as partaking of Divinity is a major component of popular culture today - and it is very common among idealistic students. It is expressed in phrases such as 'interfering with Nature' (which is supposed to be a bad thing to do) or 'Design with Nature' (which is supposed to be a good thing to do); and of course, in the more basic and long-lived phrases such as 'Mother Nature' and 'Nature Knows Best', beloved of the homeopaths. The trouble with all these phrases is not that they are wrong, but that they are fuzzy-minded. They all express a grain of wisdom, but a wisdom that is applicable in some situations, and not in others. As with all slogans, they do not carry with them any instructions that indicate when they should be used - criteria of application and misapplication. Consider 'Nature Knows Best' (presumably because Mother knows Best). As a general warning against interventionist medicos who have an inbuilt tendency to overtreat, this is wise. As advice to parents of a child with acute appendicitis, it is dangerous folly. Let nature take her course, indeed - as it did in a recent unnecessary death in the USA.

Consider 'Design with Nature'. As general advice to a society which has so often turned to engineering and technological solutions to biological and social problems, this is again wise advice. But there are just as many circumstances in which Nature is inimical to our purposes, and we therefore design against her (if one cares for this turn of phrase, which I don't). Think of Venice. For over one thousand years, the Venetians opposed natural forces with brilliant success. They needed the Venetian lagoon to remain at a constant depth. If it had grown deeper, the city would have drowned (as it is now doing). If it had become shallower, they would have lost the security that preserved them from invasion through all those many centuries. But lagoons are naturally ephemeral features of the earth's surface, normally filled in by sedimentation - and the Venetian lagoon was fed by three big, fast rivers rushing down from the Dolomites and the Alps. So they took to pick and shovel and diverted all three rivers in a masterwork of engineering control. They did not Design with Nature - that would never have been possible. But they had a profound understanding of natural processes, and that is the real point - an understanding lost only in this century, when the deep water channels were cut through the shallow lagoon to the industrial Porto Marghera, thus dramatically changing the tidal flux and initiating major erosion.

Another version of Nature as partaking of the Divine was a component of the Romantic Revival. Wordsworth is full of it, although his version of Nature takes meaning largely from his detestation - in most moods - of London, The Great Wen, as Cobbett called it, a cancerous growth. For Wordsworth, Nature included agricultural landscapes, country folk and children. He did not draw our current distinction between 'natural' and 'cultural' landscapes: his primary distinction was between the 'natural' and the urban. In North America, Walt Whitman shared somewhat similar sentiments, but the Divinity of Nature is perhaps most fully expressed by the National Parks Movement and the language of John Muir and some early members of the Sierra Club. The mood is caught by the superb photographs of W.H. Jackson, and later, Ansell Adams. As David Lowenthal, one of our most subtle cultural-historical geographers has pointed out, Americans were acutely conscious in the nineteenth century that their continent lacked the great cathedrals and other architectural treasures of Europe, so they sanctified their natural monuments instead: The Grand Canyon and Old Faithful and Muir Woods and Yosemite were older and grander expressions of the sublime than anything Europe

could show. We have constructed an 'Ayers Rock' cult in the same vein.

The view that Nature is Divine or Holy co-existed with and was in part reaction to its opposite: the view that Nature is the Enemy. This has always been a part of the popular culture, with good reason, because ordinary people have always been the most vulnerable to the vagaries of natural forces. It has had strong expression in the high culture in periodic mode, like Halleys Comet. The two moods co-exist, but one is now in the ascendant, then the other, depending on a whole range of associated shifts in cultural mood.[4] Nature as the Enemy is expressed in phrases like 'Taming Nature' (of which we have done a good deal in Australia), or 'harnessing' a natural resource, such as the wind, or the tides, which are like a wild horse before we introduce the bit. The popular culture is rich in such phrases, and the gardening columns are full of them. 'Untidy trees' for example, or trees that have a 'poor habit', usually said of poor old *Eucalyptus macrocarpa*, and pruning to retain 'a good form' and so on. All of these suggest that Nature at the very least is undisciplined, and much in need of our control.

An interesting variant of the 'Nature is Hostile' theme is to be found in much natural history discourse of the David Attenborough kind. Imagine him - as one easily can - on the top of a high, windy snow swept mountain, or in Tierra del Fuego or the middle of the Sahara, enthusing over some plant or animal and its ability to survive in what he calls 'this very harsh environment'. The truth, of course, is that since the plant or animal is adapted to that environment, it is not at all harsh for it: it is at home. But take that plant from the Sahara and put in in your temperate zone garden, and water it and fertilise it; it will almost certainly die. That is the harsh environment for that plant.

The view that nature is undisciplined and in need of control lies deep, and can lead to striking inconsistencies. I discovered one in myself recently. I regard myself as ecologically enlightened, but I still don't like to see dead wood on trees in my garden, and I hate to see my *Eucalyptus erythrocorys* disfigured with lerp. Yet I love birds. A young ecologist a few weeks ago pointed out that lerp are good: they bring insects and the insects bring the birds. So I am learning to love lerp. After all, 'it's natural'.

However, the antonym pairs that seem to me to underwrite most current discourse using the word 'Nature' are 'natural - unnatural' and 'the natural' and 'the human', in which Nature is NOT-MAN. The idea of the 'unnatural' has been around for a long time, and although it grades into the 'Nature Knows Best' nexus of meanings, it usually carries specifically moral overtones, as in 'Sodomy is an unnatural practice'. That not many people use that expression today does not mean that the concept of the 'unnatural' has disappeared, but rather that its range of application has changed. Some will now say, for example, that celibacy is unnatural, or that it is not natural for a young girl to lock herself away in her room reading books all day, or whatever. The point, of course, is that what we consider to be 'natural' and 'unnatural' changes through time. Our concept of Nature is a cultural product.

This leaves me with what is today the most elementary meaning of Nature: the non-human world - it is in this sense that we talk of the conservation of nature, and understanding natural systems (a phrase I have used myself already). We could hardly communicate without some such distinction, since we could not talk about an undifferentiated cosmos, and one of the most basic distinctions is between the US and the NOT-US. Yet there are some major problems with this distinction.

It may be surprising to learn that this sense of the words 'Nature' and 'the natural world' are of fairly recent origin. Michel Foucault has suggested that the landmark is the publication in 1657 by Jonston of a Natural history of quadrupeds. He uses this date to mark the birth of natural history. Before that date, there were

just histories, for example, a *History of serpents and dragons* by Aldrovandi, or *An Admirable history of plants* by Muret. Up to an including Aldrovandi:

> History was the inextricable and completely unitary fabric of all that was visible of things and of the signs that had been discovered or lodged in them: to write the history of a plant or an animal was as much a matter of describing its elements or organs as of describing the resemblances that could be found in it, the virtues that it was thought to possess, the legends and stories with which it had been involved, its place in heraldry, the medicaments that were concocted from its substance, the foods it provided, what the ancients recorded of it, and what travellers might have said of it. The history of a living being was that being itself, within the whole semantic network that connected it to the world.[5]

The distinction that we make so easily between the knowledge derived from direct observation, that from reliable secondary sources, and that from sources that we regard as legendary or fabulous, did not exist. Thus the essential difference between Jonston and Aldrovandi is not that Jonston knew more. In a sense he knew less. The difference lies in what he left out.

> The whole of animal semantics has disappeared, like a dead and useless limb. The words that had been interwoven in the very being of the beast have been unravelled and removed: and the living being, in its anatomy, its form, its habits, its birth and death, appears as though stripped naked.[6]

There has been a further change within our own times. Most of us now wish to see ourselves as a part of Nature, and this new sense of the inter-dependence of all living systems and their further dependence on physical cycles is a significant intellectual advance - but of course it undercuts the dualism of Man and the Biosphere or Man and Nature! Those signs on freeways, fairly common in Australia, that read 'Animals prohibited on this freeway' now seem comic, although we know that 'animals' means 'horses', and excludes ourselves.

Another aspect of this distinction is one of the enduring puzzles of philosophy, usually approached in the philosophy schools through an introduction to Locke, Berkeley and Hume. To parody the debate, which is all I have time for, Locke was a champion of the newly emerging scientific methods, based on observation and measurement. He was called an empiricist, and later, a realist, in that he believed that there is a real world out there, which we can learn about scientifically, while all the learned, wordy, theoretical debates were a waste of time: we should burn the books. But Bishop Berkeley, labelled an 'idealist', asked an unanswerable question. How do we know that there is a real world out there? All we have are our perceptions. We can never know what corresponds to them 'out there'. There may be no 'out there'. Thus the distinction between 'US' and 'NOT-US' is fallacious. Dr Johnson asserted the reality of the external world by kicking a table, thus splendidly missing the point, but nevertheless reaffirming the common sense of the ages. William Blake asks the Berkeleyan question, in poetic form, with the epigraph with which I began this paper.

> 'How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way
> Is an immense world of delight closed by your senses five'.

The answer, of course, is that you don't, and can't, although as I watch a willy-wagtail on my lawn, I wonder. To me, he seems to be playing and enjoying it immensely. He is also catching insects, and setting them up with his rapid movements, and perhaps courting an unseen mate. You can say I am projecting my own feelings on to his behaviour to say also that he is playing, enjoying himself. But you can't prove that he is not playing, and I can't prove that he is.

The battle between the idealist and the realist philosophers has not been settled,

but the common sense view that there is a world external to ourselves continues to be held by ordinary mortals. Just what that world might be, however, has become increasingly uncertain over the years. We now know, for instance, that very few animals share our binocular colour discriminating vision; many organisms quite literally see a different world. One of the most conceptually sophisticated of contemporary landscape architects, the Frenchman Bernard Lassus, once began a talk with the following story, reported by a well-known French anthropologist:

> An African tribe was brought out of the dense jungle in which they had lived all their lives, in what used to be called French Equatorial Africa. When they came to the clearing, they at first tried in vain to shakes hands or clasp the arms in greeting, of people who were in fact many metres distant from them. In the dense jungle, if you could see other people at all, you were very close to them, and they therefore assumed that the figures they saw in the clearing were doll-sized people who were nonetheless very close to them.[7]

Lecturers in psychology sometimes use this story to introduce the study of perception, since it is a striking illustration of the way in which even our most basic perceptions, such as the judging of distances and relative size, which we take to be objective responses to the real world, are in fact conditioned by our prior experience. In a new environment, our prior experience may turn out to be irrelevant or even substantially misleading. Generally, we see what we need to see or want to see. When we go for a drive together, my son sees trees by the roadside, and Hondas, Mercedes, Pulsars and Holden Calais on the road. I see cars on the road, and *Eucalyptus polyanthemos* or *Eucalyptus melliodora* by the roadside, and say to myself: ah, dry, stony, shallow hill soils, or deep alluvial loams, as the case may be. We have to learn to see: seeing is not like taking photographs. I still remember clearly how I learned to see zebra in tall grass in Africa. First I saw a little flick, which was a twitch of the tail, and then the zebra came into focus. The South Africans I was with just saw zebra, and if there were two stages in the process of recognition for them, they were so speeded up as to seem instantaneous.

Thus individuals perceive different worlds, and whole cultures do so on a greater scale. Whether or not we are philosophically realist, we are driven towards relativism by discoveries in science, including physics and psychology, and increasingly also by linguistic theory. The old chestnut about the Eskimos having a dozen different words for 'snow' has been around for years, but there are many other examples. The Australian Aboriginals from South-western Australia had about eight different words for 'burning-off', burning the bush, since they did it in different ways, at different times, for different purposes. In short, language structures our map of reality. The new relativism pervades contemporary culture. Semiotics, the theory of signs, for example: signs are susceptible to a range of interpretation. In much literary theory, we find 'the text', and 'readings': there is a multiplicity of readings, and although some may be of wider interest than others, we are now wary of using words like 'misinterpretation'. A reading is simply a reading.

Scientists are not immune from such analyses. They strive for what we (usefully) call objectivity by focusing on the measurable and the repeatable and this can achieve a degree of paradigmatic consensus, but they too are a product of cultural conditioning. This is a subject of interest to me, because much natural science shows a bias towards the northern hemisphere, what I call Eurocentrism.[8] I have time only for a couple of examples. One striking example is the odd way in which the Australian flora is fitted to a classificatory system devised in Europe. There are some 600 species of one single genus, *Eucalyptus*, whereas there are only half-a-dozen representatives of one whole family, the Rosaceae, insignificant plants

like the bidgee-widgee, *Acmena anserinifolia*. Had the Linnean system of binomial classification been developed in this hemisphere, there can be no doubt that the families would be different. The huge range of what are now the Proteaceae and the Myrtaceae would surely not be lumped into two gross families, while relatively insignificant groups like the rose and the lily would not have been accorded family status. The grass trees were assigned to the lily family for the first 150 years after their discovery by Europeans. They now have family status as the Xanthorrhoeaceae. Dr Laurie Johnson has also proposed a break up of *Eucalyptus* into a number of new genera, but his proposals are slow to be accepted.

Part of the problem is that North America belongs essentially to the same biogeographic province as Eurasia, to which it was linked by land during part of the Pleistocene, as the fauna and flora show (oaks and elms, wolves and bears etc.), and this has tended to confirm the Eurocentric bias of the natural sciences. The point is beautifully illustrated in a short article by Stephen Jay Gould from Harvard, with the title 'What is wrong with marsupials?'[9] The answer, of course, is that there is nothing whatsoever wrong with marsupials, except that they have long been regarded as second rate citizens. From the outset, they were looked on as freaks; the platypus was actually called a 'lusus naturae', and the first specimen sighted in Europe was regarded with suspicion, the compounded work of a practical joker (a view which, as we have seen earlier, could not have been entertained by Sir Thomas Browne). When it became clear that the marsupials were real enough, Darwinian evolution became the practical joker, and the following story emerged: Australia and South America were isolated from the great linked land masses of Africa-Eurasia-North America, and so the relatively primitive marsupials carried on in a kind of sheltered workshop, immune from the fierce competition of a free-market ecology prevailing in these more aggressive lands. When a land-bridge was at length established between the Americas, the placental mammals dashed across it, and the backward marsupials of South America were soon displaced by the more efficient placentals. Only in Australia were they able to dodder on.

Those relatively few biologists who have done research in this field tell a quite different story. It is now thought that reproductive differences had nothing to do with the success of North American over South American mammals in the Tertiary. The North Americans would have won out even if they had been marsupials themselves. Their adaptive advantages were in locomotion and feeding characteristics, derived by chance from pre-adaptation - that is, they had already begun to adapt to climatic changes which were felt earlier in North America than in South America. This does not mean that they were more highly evolved, but only that they were better adapted. As for the Australian marsupials of today, the first point is that they are as 'new' or recently evolved as the fauna of all the other continents. They are not ancient relics at all, but post-Pleistocene, a response to climate change, as everywhere else. Only Africa and Asia retained a substantial representation of the Pleistocene megafauna - large animals - that we had and lost; but of course even so the elephant and giraffe and camel are not Pleistocene but Holocene species. They are just a little closer to their ancestors. Our marsupial fauna is nothing like its ancestors.

Moreover, the marsupial fauna of Australia is a miracle of adaptation to an environment that is mostly arid and has very high climatic variability. The amazingly efficient production line of marsupials may involve the presence of three sequential stages of offspring associated with their mother at the same point in time. An almost weaned young kangaroo (a 'joey') may be still going back occasionally to the pouch to suckle, when a newly arrived diminutive sibling can already be in the pouch and while a very early embryo is waiting ('embryonic diapause', a physiological block to development) in the uterus for its turn to grow.

Other evidence that life in the pouch is not a second-class solution for 'unsuccessful' primitive mammals can be found in the degree of sophistication of marsupial milk production. When both older and younger joeys are feeding in the same pouch, the mother is producing two different types of milk: one richer in proteins secreted from the nipple where the younger joey is feeding, and one richer in lipids for the nipple used by the older joey. A four-star catering performance, which makes lactation by 'higher' mammals look like a fast-food line.[10]

CONCLUSIONS

Whether or not there is a world out there independent of our perceptions of it, we cannot escape the variability of those perceptions. The ways in which we perceive, imagine, conceptualise, image, verbalise, relate to, behave towards the natural world are the product of cultural conditioning and individual variation.

One of the rewards of the study of philosophy is to strengthen our defences against abstract theorising: we should be searching for clarity rather than for theory. The important question usually is 'what do we mean when we say ...?' or 'where have these words been before, and what aspects of our past do they trail behind them?' It is important because linguistic structures are conservative, and they pattern our thinking. The feminists have taught us that we need to struggle to escape sexist language, but that is only one example of cultural bias perpetuated by language. The examples of Eurocentrism are another, but only one of many. Our ethical and our aesthetic pronouncements are probably the most suspect from our present point of view.

For the purposes of this discussion, our current intellectual dilemma, one that has many practical consequences, is that we conceptualise 'Nature' in three ways - ways which are not mutually compatible in logic. They can be crudely located along an axis measured off by degrees of internalising and externalising Nature. At one pole, we see ourselves as a part of Nature, a concept at which we arrive through evolutionary theory. Man is collapsed into the Biosphere, rather than set outside it. At the other pole, natural systems are seen as self-regulating and self-maintaining. Extreme forms of this conceptualising are the theory of the Selfish Gene and the theory of Gaia, both of which see Man as of very minor significance in the scheme of things; his pretensions to externality, responsibility and some degree of control are irrelevant. The more common forms however, are those implicit in much ecological writing, which is preoccupied with 'natural systems', 'the balance of Nature', and so on. Human intervention is conceptualised as disturbance, almost always seen in a negative light, which clearly externalises us from Nature itself. We operate on Nature.

Somewhere in the middle, very uncomfortably sited, is the most common conceptualisation, of Man both as a part of Nature, yet at the same time responsible for managing it. The paradoxes of conservation arise from this uneasy compromise - wilderness areas, for instance, are managed to protect them from 'disturbance', i.e. human intervention, but how? - by human intervention, of course. And, for whom? Well, for us; for 'natural man' rather than 'techno man', but there is still only 'us'.

These paradoxes are endemic, and I could give many more examples. Nor are they restricted to the natural sciences. A central preoccupation of Physics and also of Linguistics, for most of this century, has been the relation between the observer and the observed. There is no securely privileged external viewpoint in Physics, and this undercuts all traditional concepts of the very act of observation. In Linguistics, we have learned that there is no point outside language from which we can observe

language. Hence the post structuralists began to ask: "But what is the structure of structure?" and so began a deconstruction. As they may, at this very point, begin to ask, 'But, ah! What is the nature of the Nature of Nature?'

NOTES

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2. Brewer, D.S. (ed., 1972) *The Parlement of Foulys* by Geoffrey Chaucer, Manchester University Press. p. 28.
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IAN SAUNDERS

Against Beauty: Ecology and the Nature of Reading.

The 1990 Australian Federal election campaign was one of the first in which environmental concerns were seen to play a decisive role, with both sides doing their utmost to court the 'green vote'. And, of all the plethora of media images that were associated with the campaigns of that time, perhaps the most enduring is that of Prime Minister Bob Hawke, decked-out frontier style, apparently with no other company than that of the camera that sees and hears all, drifting across the waters of the Alligator river against the lush backdrop of the colours and sounds of Kakadu, grinning towards the lens before laconically remarking 'Beautiful, just beautiful'.

With all the deftness with which television's advertising machine is capable, the scene captures the key components of what we might call romantic environmentalism. Hawke's khaki outfit, his personal isolation within the shot, suggest he has moved beyond the realm of the political, and indeed beyond the social, in order to position himself where he can perceive the natural on its own terms. It is a one-to-one meeting between the pioneer and nature in which complexity is displaced from its usual site within the social: here, the admiring subject is uncluttered and uncompromised, while it is nature that is richly abundant. And, of course, the perception is not merely of the mechanisms of the environment, but of its transcendent beauty. Environmentalism, as this image encodes it, is about freeing oneself from the shackles of culture and being able to perceive and enjoy the unique and, above all, the beautiful in nature.

A potent combination of the romantic ideology of the sublime and an ethics of personal salvation, the image records a seductive possibility; it is not, however, the only one inscribed in it. For, if the image depicts the escape from the political, it is also, simultaneously, driven by political imperatives - this is, after all, part of an election campaign - and if it assumes the independence and receptive integrity of the admiring subject's gaze, it is a gaze that is also, simultaneously, determined by the technological, semiotic and economic imperatives of the camera lens and its medium without which our screens, and perhaps Kakadu itself, would remain blankly inarticulate. The image, we could say, maps two rather different ways of thinking of environmentalism; on the one hand it marks a site of natural beauty distinct from the social, while on the other it can be thought of as the outcome of a series of practices in which politics, technology, and the available forms of meaning production are all implicated. It is my purpose in what follows to suggest that, attractive as romantic environmentalism is, the alternative perspective is the more cogent. I want to do so, though, somewhat obliquely, and begin with a little further consideration of the two rhetorical nodes that have come to figure so prominently in the discourse of environmental concern: the rhetoric of seduction and, its prudent

counterweight, the rhetoric of balance.

Talk of the environment, and of the environmental lobby, is often cast in terms of seduction: one can be seduced by the untouched beauty of wilderness (as we say, 'virgin land') just as, apparently, governments can 'court' the 'green vote' - although as the recession bites, the ardour begins to cool: in the words of *The West Australian*, 'Two senior Federal ministers have confirmed that the Hawke Government has ended its flirtation with the green movement ...' (23 September, 1991). On this logic, the environment is a woman, beautiful, alluring, wild; a female Siren to the very male (and intriguingly Hawke-like) Odysseus who, taking the wax from his ears, is seduced by a voice with a beauty like none other: 'The lovely voices came to me across the water, and my heart was filled with such a longing to listen that with a nod and a frown I signed to my men to set me free.'[1] Odysseus hears their incomparable voices but his men keep him bound to their joint enterprise; Hawke too hears 'the lovely voices' that come 'across the water' but, like the better environmentalist he was constructed to be, having discarded his pin-stripe chains is able to embrace the natural on its own terms.

There can be few clearer signals that this episode of 'flirtation' is over than the displacement of the rhetoric of seduction by that of balance. The key consideration now, we are told, is that the decisions are balanced, that excessive weight not be accorded to any one special interest group. Central to that rhetoric is the figure of blindfolded Justice, impartially weighing economic necessity against ecological outcomes. The point of the blindfold, of course, is to block the perception of that which otherwise would seduce. Like the wax that Odysseus's crew use to render themselves deaf, and so immune to the beauty of the Sirens' song, in the context of the discourse of environmentalism we can read the blindfold as an admission of the seductive powers of the voice of nature that otherwise could well overpower the process of rational decision making, and tempt the boat of economic development into the uncertain waters of minority lobby groups and political extremists.

However, as different as the new environmental pragmatism is from romantic environmentalism, surprisingly, they are built on common ground. For my purposes, of special interest are the two enabling premises they share: that the natural is all of a piece, that it is a connected whole that can be weighed according to a single scale (or, the romantic analogue, absorbed by the single admiring gaze), and that the natural speaks a seductive language of its own (which romantic environmentalism recommends we embrace instead of our own language of economic rationalism and resource exploitation, while the new pragmatism prudently declines the offer).

Both the assumption of unified interconnectedness and of a communicative nature figure prominently in ecological theory. Indeed, for all its diversity, all ecological thought insists on some version of the first assumption: that events be read not in isolation, or according to the protocols of local practice, but in inter-relation. The very notion of an eco-system implies the incorporation of all lifeforms (and indeed of nonorganic forms), in which complex web the fate of any individual, site, or species has implications for every other, and in which the rerouting or mutation of any process affects every other. 'Deep Ecology' and 'ecofeminism', both versions of what I have dubbed 'romantic ecology', take that a step further, and insist on the second assumption, namely that this connected whole is moreover a locus of meaning, that it is meaningful or that it signifies in its own terms or, simply, that it has its own terms, that it is able to speak. So, according to Deep Ecologist Denys Trussell, our empiricist-technological failure to grasp such a perception ought to be understood as 'a syntactical unwillingness to express the noumenal and significant wholeness of things,' while success occurs with the

perception of 'the continuous and unified fabric of the macrocosm' (which, moreover, Trussell describes as both 'an epiphany' and that 'which both artist and audience share in a cogent work of art').[2] Notice the way Trussell's rhetoric recalls the romantic ideology and (here explicitly) the latter's faith in a noumenal order beyond the accidental patterning of the shards of day to day existence, an order that is the producer of 'significance' and, of course, in its belief in the therapeutic powers of the 'cogent work of art', the work that speaks with the one voice.

Ecofeminist Gloria Feman Orenstein, like Trussell, is convinced of the close connection between art and the experience of the essential unity of the natural:

> I am suggesting that what might be called the 'ecofeminist arts' function ceremonially to connect us with the two powerful worlds from which the Enlightenment severed us - nature and the spirit world. If the severing of our intimate connectedness to the Earth, the sky, the dead, the unseen, and our ancestors was the accomplishment of the Enlightenment, then ecofeminist calls for an *endarkenment* - a bonding with the Earth and the invisible that will reestablish our sense of interconnectedness with all things ... Ecofeminists ... honour Gaia's Earth intelligence and the stored memories of her plants, rocks, soil, and creatures.[3]

The art-work, on this view, speaks with the voice of nature, it merely rearticulates that which is already spoken by it. Thus 'the shaman/poet becomes the intermediary between humans and the Earth Mother, translating the messages of nature into words that are communicable to human ears that have become deafened to the meanings of the natural world.'[4]

Ecofeminism and Deep Ecology are not without their differences, of course. Ecofeminism's founding assumption is that social exploitation that has characterised the patriarchal society is linked with environmental exploitation, and that the empowering of a female perspective would enable the environment to be seen and respected on its own terms; whereas Deep Ecologists tend to think that no social subject, male or female, can see beyond the anthropocentric confines of socially constituted knowledge. For both, however, there is a tendency to invoke the paired assumptions of the exhaustive interconnectedness of the natural, and the unification of that multiplicity in something like a voice.

How persuasive are they? Let's try the first, the thesis of unified interconnection. Ecological narrative, we know, typically seeks to plot relations of exhaustive inter-connection, exemplified, for example, by the 'story' (if I can use that word in a non-prejudicial sense) of the growth and behaviours of various population centres, of industrialisation and the burning of rain forests, and of changing atmospheric structure, global warming and the associated change in sea levels, and so on. However, that emplotment is not a simple registering of the material world; if it were, we would expect those skilled in the associated scientific fields to produce identical narratives, which clearly (as the slanging match on changing sea levels testifies) they do not, and, in any case, it is after all in just that registering and consequent manipulation of the material world that post-enlightenment empiricist science and technology have excelled, at massive cost to the environment, as both ecofeminism and Deep Ecology remind us. Rather, the emplotment of eco-narrative is one that requires the establishing of *otherwise nonevident* paths of significant connection (or, as some would have it, on the assumption of a pre-lapsarian or pre-industrial or pre-patriarchal epoch, the re-establishing or reweaving of otherwise nonevident paths of significant connection). If such paths were plain to all there would not be an ecological crisis. The fact that we have made such a mess of things, then, has to be seen as evidence that, ordinarily, we do not see the connections that matter. Eco-narrative, by contrast, attempts to lift us beyond that myopia towards a perception of a transfigured real under a rubric somewhat like E.M. Forster's exhortation, 'only connect.'

The critical difficulty here is simply that if any knowledge, even of the most humble, non-noumenal or untransfigured kind, is necessarily in some way constructed, dependent on the protocols and conceptual apparatus available to us, then it would seem that (as was the case with the project of romanticism) the knowledge ecological narrative claims is, as it were, constructed to a second order. 'Only connect' is, after all, an instruction of such massive generality it is hard to see how it might genuinely operate as an instruction at all, unless accompanied and disciplined by a sense (as like it as not unspoken, but powerful for all that) of what appropriate or 'significant' connection would look like. Some connections will count, others will not, according to the authority of one or another contingent category which is read as if it were transcendent and unproblematically accessible, be that 'integrity and stability', 'sustainability', 'diversity and spontaneity', 'self-determination', 'social utility or social justice', and so on. This necessity for specific, highly exclusive direction anchoring the project of connection is of crucial importance in understanding the generic features of ecological narrative, most evidently its inability to settle on a single form of emplotment (although premised on just this possibility: on its own judgement, such narrative fails if it is but one alternative amongst many). Rather than a unique eco-narrative, an array of quite distinct narratives or narrative types have been proposed and defended, each operating with a different sense of what is likely to constitute a significant connection, and thus each producing different narratives from the endless, unordered mass of phenomena within which we find ourselves. The imperative of ecological narrative - that the real be read in terms of global significant connection - necessitates the transfiguration of the real and, as is the case with any nontrivial transfiguration, that cannot be achieved by a simple decoding of the data, a mere reading in the book of nature, but only as the result of an active, selective and directed process of construction, a process controlled as much by the interpretative category valorised, as constrained by 'nature itself'. The competition of different kinds of eco-narrative is, precisely, evidence of the range of ways in which such choices can be made.

In sum, 'our sense of interconnectedness with all things' is made, not found. If this is so, though, then the stronger thesis, that nature is interconnected in a way that signifies, that we might learn to hear 'the messages of nature', since it relies on the thesis of unified interconnection, fails too. If nature isn't one, it can hardly speak with one voice. Indeed, there is little cause to hold that it speaks at all. Our enthusiasm for those animals, such as dolphins and whales, which seem most nearly capable of speech-like behaviour, ought not blind us to the fact that what is involved is less a communication with nature on its own terms, so much as a valorization of just those animals who happen to be, well, most like us. But on the thesis of the unified speaking voice herring and plankton ought to be just as voluble (and valuable) as the dolphins beloved of manufacturers of plastic cartons, window cleaner and laundry powder; that they are not is indication enough, perhaps, of the gulf between nature and language. Language is not a natural phenomenon, but a social one. Prior to the social there is no speech; the wolf-child, abandoned to the wilds at birth, does not grow up to speak the language of nature: it does not speak at all.

As both Trussell and Orenstein make plain, their belief in the linguistic power of nature is tied to a particular understanding of art, and of beauty. On their view the art-work and nature are alike in that each has an authentic self-identity, each can be read on its own terms. The perception of beauty for them, as for Bob Hawke in Kakadu, is predicated on disentangling oneself from the confines of the discursive economy, and is the outcome of a reading which is always true to the letter and spirit of the text. I have argued that since neither the thesis of unified

interconnectedness nor that of nature's having a voice are persuasive, this picture of the reading of nature is uncompelling; it seems to me, moreover, to be based on a mistaken notion of what is at stake in the reading of texts.

To read a text is not simply to identify or retrieve the primary or 'authentic' meaning of its inter-related component parts, it is not a matter of appreciating its quality or its beauty 'on its own terms'. Indeed, it is far from clear just might be a text's *own* terms. Of course texts are constructed in language, but the words of a text are not what we are thinking of when we talk of its meaning. Standardly, we do not have difficulties with the meaning of words and sentences, no more than we have difficulty with the Johnsonian rocks and stones of day to day life. When problems arise the usual strategy is to offer paraphrases, synonyms or translations; but faced with literary texts, this never seems enough. We are not inclined to accept as the 'meaning' of (say) *The Prelude* or *Nights at the Circus* a paraphrase; indeed, an essential part of disciplinary training is to insist that students are able to do something more than 'tell the story'. In a like manner, while it seems sensible to say that the meaning of (say) the phrase 'les mots et les choses' is 'words and things', we would hardly concede the meaning of Foucault's text *Les Mots et Choses* is its translation. Rather, we would want to know what the text is 'getting at', what its 'point' is (although, I would want to recommend we abandon the intentionalist component of these formulations). To avoid confusion, it might be better to give up talking of the 'meaning' of texts altogether, the usage carrying as it does the implication that the phenomenon is in some way equivalent to meaningfulness in the case of words and sentences, and talk instead of interpretation as being concerned with the significance of texts. Interpretation, that is to say, is not a matter of reading a text (if it were, criticism would consist in no more than a series of marginal glosses to obscure words and syntactic conundrums in order to facilitate communication); interpretation is a way of construing a text.

To construe a text, though, is to see it as significant in some way or other, it is to read it in the light of particular interests and concerns, to see significant patterns in some one way rather than in any other. The usual complaint of the militant anti-theorist is that theory-inspired criticism transports its object into an alien context; a better formulation would be to say that interpretative practice consists in the articulation of otherwise unvoiced configurations. The outcome of interpretative work is the perception of significance, but the labour is a constructive one. And, if by 'authentic' one means uniquely appropriate, then there is no authentic interpretation (but then, there is no inauthentic interpretation, either). There are endless ways of construing a text. This would mean, though, that any such redescription is necessarily non-exhaustive (or, if we want, we could say 'reductive') in that there are always other interpretative possibilities. Interpretation is not the perception of beauty, but the construction of significance.

Like textual interpretation, the construction of ecological narratives might most usefully be seen as not dependent on, or oriented towards, the retrieval of intention, the environmental equivalent of which is the notion of an authentic or originary or healthy eco-system which, at some sufficiently deep level, speaks for itself, has its own preferred meaning. Equally, neither textual interpretation nor the construction of eco-narrative can be the outcome of a process of close reading: just as the linguistic analysis and identification of the component parts of texts cannot of its own accord produce an interpretation, no aggregate of empirical observation alone, I would maintain, can produce eco-narrative. That is not to say that the material of such analysis is not real (to put it differently: that is not to say that ontological considerations collapse into epistemological concerns); it is to say that in what ever the real may consist, it is only available through the constructions and narratives of

knowing, which are never the result of the unmediated observation of easily accessible particulars. Eco-narrative is not the reading of the book of nature, but the writing of it.

Against beauty? The simple fact is that if the public enthusiasm for environmentalism waxes and wanes, the process of resource depletion, land degradation, and the production of pollutants continues unrelentingly. If we suppose that the voice of natural beauty and transcendent interconnection that comes across the waters is not in fact real, but a product of the beliefs and reading practices of those that perceive it, then it is less than surprising that those whose concerns lie elsewhere remain unmoved. The romanticism of those who renounce the everyday becomes, all too easily, a marginal force within the every-day. If I am right about the nature of reading, however, we would do better to interrogate the political and interpretative practices that produce the ecological, and not hope too much that one day we might drift down it.

NOTES

1. Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans E.V. Rieu (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), Book XII, p. 194.
2. Denys Trussell, "The Arts and Planetary Survival," *The Ecologist* (1989), pp 173 and 172.
3. Gloria Feman Orenstein, "Artists as Healers: Envisioning Life-Giving Culture," in Irene Diamond and Orenstein (eds) *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991), p. 280.
4. Ibid.

TOBY MILLER

Environmental Populism

When I hear the world "environment" I reach for my greening. The greening is a rule of thumb that programs me to listen attentively, be caring and sharing and see the connexions between the local and the global. When I survey exhaust fumes coming from the bus I just got off, I know to feel better than when I see them coming from the car I just got out of. When I feel frustrated about not having an auto and catching the worst bus in the Southern Hemisphere (the Fremantle to Murdoch 143, which even has a set of daily dev(o/ia)tions from its already absurd route), I feel joy in my heart that this is saving the environment. I sing or hum. This is music and the environment. This is greening. And greening has a more profound, public face as well.

Ernie Bridge was a singer at a conference called Dismember Remembrance in Fremantle in 1991. It was a conference that enshrined the cultural critic's aesthetic narcissism, inside political correctness. This was quite an achievement, because it involved a precise replication of what has been occurring all over textual analysis for a century. Mr Bridge was invited as a black country and western singer to the conference's important Saturday night dinner. Other figures at the dinner included a black comic, a black poet and black dancers. Mr Bridge was singing with the support of his sons. One of them sang a Bob Dylan song. Earlier, the black poet had described his time in prisons. He had become a poet in part via the practice gained during incarceration at changing the lyrics to Bob Dylan melodies so that they would encompass his own world. Bridge *fils* did not do this when he sang Bob Dylan.

Bridge *père* sang about country music and Australianness. He sang in front of a large map of Australia. The map included his fantasy. Mr Bridge's fantasy as a Minister for Agriculture in the State Government of the night went to building a water and gas pipeline that would be the marvel of the age. He had a little song about it. He sang the song. It sounded like a Woody Guthrie melody (I heard this from someone else) with lyrics changed to encompass his own world.

Mr Bridge also spoke. He spoke of his Ministry and welcomed the Asian folk at the conference, telling them that their region was of great importance. Mr Bridge had not heard the important paper earlier in the day which had problematised the nature of Australian screen texts and their treatment of "Asians" as always outsiders, never residents. Mr Bridge spoke of the line, the pipeline, and how it would change Western Australia. Was this environmental music?

You know, don't you, that wonderful moment when Andreas Huyssen and his little boy are wandering around the art gallery? The little boy wants to know - or maybe the big boy wants to tell him - about what is this that they call "modernism", daddy? Daddy is at a loss. Then Huyssen *fils* touches an exhibit. *Fils* is warned

by the surveillant eye, voice and coordination of a servant of the ideological state apparatus that is watching on. "Don't you touch, Huyssen *fils*. That's a work of art", says the servant. Huyssen *père* is relieved. Duchamp. He makes for the Duchamp-function and the piss-bowl as work of art. Modernism is putting things into spaces called art curation spaces and naming them as worth watching and not to be touched. A little later, *père et fils* are a little fatigued. The boys decide to sit down. Again, the servant of the ISA intervenes. "Don't you sit down, father and son. That's part of the exhibit". Huyssen *père* is relieved. When the hour comes when *fils* wants to know what postmodernism is, or maybe it's the hour when *père* wants to tell him, the exemplar will be ready. (It's not knowing the difference between the aesthetic and the functional in everyday life.)[1]

And that's the way in to accounting for Bridge and the line of pipe. Mr Bridge was making a party political songcast about the environment. As a son of song he used the technology of a cultural studies conference to sing for our supper and make a precondition of this that we consider the importance of what he did during his dayjob. I don't think he should give up either one, actually. Because I don't know the difference between them. The aesthetic policy-maker on water and gas is perfectly self-referential. Function is aesthetic, aesthetic is function. The song is what we do to the environment. This is political. Just as country music tells us about heartache, heartbreak and loss ('Ive got your picture, but she's got you'), Mr Bridge has both the map and us. He is the earth. He's WA's Minister for the earth and he's our host for the night. He can make the environment the subject of part-political song at part-political conference.

And this is what music and the environment need to be. Music of conflict does little. Music of displacement doesn't leave much. What you need is music of replacement. No displacement without replacement. Destroying the careful natural edifice of development just isn't good enough. You've got to put into its wake a careful natural edifice of environment. Cultural critique through song wins hearts and minds, not court struggles and committee decisions. It's a moot point as to whether the successes of Goanna and Midnight Oil are to do with politics. It's a banal point that *everything* is to do with politics.

When bands such as Midnight Oil sing about industrial wastelands, the labour process and its imbrication with that wasteland, and the injustices done by white Australian residents to the land of the Aboriginal people, they are being popular (records are sold) and ideologically sound (lyrics are correct-line). But how are those lyrics being heard and reinvested? Similarly, when Yothu Yindi's recent successes are throbbing pulsatingly across dance floors, are listeners and dancers differentiating them from 15 years earlier and moving their bodies to music that saw John Travolta preparing his assault on the disco in you-know-what film?

When the Federal Secretary of the Australian Timber Workers Union devoted some of August 1989 to ordering his members to destroy John Williamson's *oeuvre* because *Rip Rip Woodchip* negated the singer's previous status as 'the worker's mate', and then ABC radio bureaucrats tried quietly to silence the song from their country New South Wales stations, we saw some politics.[2] Similarly, when we heard Mr Bridge sing at Dismember Remembrance in company with his map and his party political speech, that was politics. Peter Garrett stood for the Senate in 1984 because he could connive affect in audiences, but not change in society:

> I think art can reflect the change, I think that art can herald it. I think art can define it, it can articulate it, but I don't think it can actually bring it about. Change can only be effected through the political process.[3]

Neil Kinnock has appeared on television giving rock videos a score out of twenty and he has been a presenter at the British Phonographic Industry awards.[4]

Politics can invest itself in entertainment like this; it can derive technologies of self-presentation from the culture industries; it can make policy about aesthetic infrastructures; but "it", a monolithic "it" organised as a process of decision and execution, will have its agenda set by a complex network of lobby groups. Policies on the environment will be made by the work of those groups and their intersection with other interested parties and segments of the state and business.

Popular music texts are not alienating people from the real stuff of grassroots environmentalism. They are not sapping minds of the propensity to embark on productive searches for the ideal communicative speech act or the formation of a counter-public sphere. Nor are they engaging persons in effective political action at the capital "P" level that I am prescribing (the wonderful world of interpersonal relations and their politics is elsewhere). In short, the juxtaposition that Katrina Irving asked about a couple of years ago in *Cultural Critique* ("Rock Music and the State: Dissonance or Counterpoint?") is crashingly irrelevant to environmental politics.[5] There is neither dissonance nor counterpoint, but difference; by which I mean that different paths are being trodden here. One is about affect and interest and fun and sorrow. The other is about the formation of actionable policies and programs founded on an ethics of person and world. These are different and distinct *milieux*. When John Williamson's song disturbed the workers, that was a momentary blip. It didn't change woodchipping. When, on the other hand, fifty famous people met at Tammy Wynette's house in Nashville in 1974 to do something about the fact that the Country Music Association had just awarded Country Music Female Artist of the Year to a "cultural carpetbagger" named Olivia Newton-John, and proceeded to form the Academy of Country Entertainers to police definitions, topics and standards, this was politics in music. It was a politics tied to understanding a relationship to territory that was significant and enduring. It was institutional politics.[6] Just as it is institutional politics when discussion of Yothu Yindi on Radio National's *In The Mix* proceeds to be connected to cultural policy and the support of Aboriginal musicians. Which is the politics that makes and breaks environments.

Associating effective cultural politics with the reading of texts, albeit ethnographically forged ones, was the *donnée* of Dismember Remembrance. That form of aesthetic gymnastics - the moment of effortless extrapolation from the protocols of cultural critique that claims command of the moral high ground of resistive identification with miserabilism - was its own form of cultural politics; genuinely political for the next impacts it will have on forms of academic assessment and writing at diffuse sites of policed intellection across the university world. Similarly, institutions, be they Colonial Sugar Refining, the Australian High Court or the World Heritage List, will determine the environment in ways that we can measure. Try playing or "reading" the soundtrack to Paul Kelly in the dock. Affect has no precedent.

NOTES

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3. Quoted in Richard Glover, "Why Garrett Chose Politics over Pop", *Sydney Morning Herald*, (October 13, 1984), n.p.
4. John Street, "Red Wedge: Another Strange Story of Pop's Politics", *Critical Quarterly*, 30 (1989), p.79.
5. Katrina Irving, "Rock Music and the State: Dissonance or Counterpoint?", *Cultural Critique*, 10 (1988), pp.151-70.
6. Richard A. Peterson, "The Production of Cultural Change: The Case of Contemporary Country Music", *Social Research*, 45 (1978), p.292.

ALAN URQUHART

Huts of the High Country

1.

Waking at Four Mile is starting again.
You burrow your way out through snow
like a frozen pharaoh
through to his afterlife.
The landscape has conspired against any looter
or archeologist
hot for your traces: snow in the night
has magically remade your yesterday
and your virgin mind sparkles.

2.

Full of overnighters down from Bogong,
Cesjacks reminds you
nowhere is far enough
from anywhere: looking for drying space
about the fire, is like the discovery
of a conflicting interest, after the honeymoon,
and lying space, is the finding
of your hard bench
full of someone else, and your sleep
wracked by dreamless, kicking limbs.

3.

Missing Mawson's in the white-out
is the main chance
you let slip one day, merely
because snow was blowing out your eyes,
and you dared not look up for fear
that the white-blindness would panic
your imagination, and any moment would find you
a frail snapped stick
at the bottom of some ravine, staring
up at the world's pale cypher,
while ice crystals grew a silent fur
on the emptiness of your sightless brow.

4.

The Shlink Hilton is the high country's
idea of humour. The view from the vestibule
shows megavolt powerlines stalking off
into a distant parody of the Eddas,
while the boast of tapwater, unpotable
by summer, now has frozen. The rooms
are "private", but the air-conditioning runs
throughout the August, and sometimes
trying to sleep, is like sharing
a long boat on the Arctic
with Snorri Sturluson, and
his hoard of snoring Vikings.

5.

In '81, White's River Hut
was just a smoke-stack in the snow.
You could stand on the roof, the last
afternoon of a winter, and glower
into the sunset, at the perfect shadows,
on the perfect snow. You try
hard to grasp
their hard-edged reality. Too late
you realise your skis are elsewhere,
and you're on a downhill, scattering
a swathe through stocks stuck
there, too far over the pass,
with no real desire for going back.

6.

The S.M.A. Hut, a few hours up
from the power station at Guthega,
is the last resting spot: breaking in
by twilight, there's nothing left to say.
You curl up next to the stove
with that book you've humped from Selwyn,
till the guttering of the candle
leaves you restless
still twenty pages short
of climax, where you end.

RON PRETTY

Paterson's Curse as Salvation Jane

So they set out again
the weary travellers
seeking the long vistas
the purity of sand
away from the cluttered rim of towns,
the hessian shanties riddled with ants,
the stinking creeks.
They crossed again
the semi-settled plains, the semi-tamed cattle
stampeding as they passed, finding the edge
of the desert, the sandhills of the mind
rippling and flowing in the antiseptic air
- the Gunbarrel Highway, the Birdsville Track -
faint first yearnings sketched in sand
and almost buried.
They crossed again
from south to north, from east to west
back & forth, seeking the centre,
the transparent core and finding it
sand. Knowledge too dry for some to carry,
who laid themselves down in the shade
by the dried-up bed to wait for relief or death
the same whichever came.
From that dead centre
radiating, the desert ripples and flows,
the inland sea swamping the vision,
the desert now and always on the move.
In the path of the blown intentions
lashing the skin like sea-spray, the settlements go under:
outposts crumbling, out-grazed pastures rising
in windblown sand drifting east, drifting south;
exploring the towns abandoned in its path
the desert comes
to the centre of town again
choking the fountains, the hillsides
like Paterson's Curse or
Salvation Jane.

MICHELLE MEE

Kashubian Lake Diary

Friday afternoon 25th April: We leave Gdynia in a local bus heading towards a workers' holiday resort in the Kashubian Lake District, gradually losing ourselves in the pine trees and undulating hills. Horse and carts spreadeagle across the road. The horses' amber coats are silky in the sun. When we arrive we walk down to the lake and watch the sunlight move on the milky water. The hills give, at the base, a substantial reflection, but around the outline the definition shimmers with elongated round shapes like elastic bands, intersecting.

Saturday 26th April: There was a thunder storm last night with protracted blue lightening flashes. The mirror-like quality of the lake is disturbed. The rain is puncturing it. The reflections of the trees and hills are indistinct dark water against a mottled light grey....Outside in the cleared afternoon a man from the top balcony is passing bottles of vodka down on a string to an accordion player. For which the gay-mournful sounds of a Kashubian love-song is interrupted.

Sunday 27th April: There are figures in the distance, fishing off the jetty. A woman, arms folded on the railing, lost in the movement of the water. Figures walking along the path between the pine forest and the lake. People on the balcony listening to the incessant song of the accordion player, who is shouting it out, only sometimes stopping for vodka. A Polish flag flaps atonally with the Kashubian music.

Monday 28th April: Lying on the jetty. It's still too early for it to be warm. A light breeze ruffles the surface of the water. Small scales of light texture it. A shoal of fish idles one metre below the surface. Their forms are made clear by outlines which are made transparent by the sun. Fishes flash. Something makes them all change direction, perhaps a cold current. Occasionally just one scale catches light, sometimes a whole side. Patches of light and ruffled intersect areas that should be in the dark shadow reflection of the pines. They grow larger and merge with another, obliterating the darkness. The fish are more frenetic now. They flash like knife blades in the sun, as they dart to the surface. A plank of painted wood makes its way from under the jetty, covered in weed. It is a blot on the surface at first, and then because of its untidiness, asymmetry, it becomes the only thing of visual interest. Water sounds. Fish plip. I would like to hear the sound of one of these tiny insects touch the water.

Playing tennis, the sun seems to have melted our bones and we flop like gelatinous squid about the court. The closed in winter is being shed like our layers of clothes, and we flap about in the sun as if the iron substance of ourselves has evaporated.

Walking in the forest, I picked a piece of pine resin from a tree and rolled it between my thumb and forefinger feeling the outer crust cave in and become part of the whole. Put it to my nose and get a headache from the strength of the smell of the oil.

Tuesday 29th April: Over by that farmhouse the hens are squawking, and then silence. The latest addition to the Kashubian kitchen. It has started the ducks off. A breeze is moving the water away from the jetty. It looks as if the world is moving forward and we are stasis, or even moving backwards.

A fish comes to the surface, tweaks at a piece of floating grass then rapidly dives down, producing a bubble which looks like a fish scale or a sapphire. It wobbles and rocks as it comes to the surface, explodes and is nothing. Small freshwater crays dart over the light sand to a dark object where it is hard to make out their shape. They rattle along the lake bed like army tanks. The fish look vulnerable in comparison.

Wednesday 30th April: Walked to the Ethnographic Park. The relocated buildings are ornate for peasant houses. The furniture is roughly-cut but intricate in physical design. Parts can be extended and used for several purposes. They are painted with a sprawling floral pattern. The architecture is often innovative or cunning, but it is executed with simple materials. The design intentions would have been on par with the landowner's, economics being the determining factor. Function appeared to play the most important part with decoration as a spiritual boon.

At lunch we are served the news that there was a melt-down of a nuclear power plant in the Ukraine. We are told not to be concerned, and as a precautionary measure children are to be issued with Iodine tablets. We are not to drink milk. The knowledge is at first just a topic of conversation. We can find out very little from the World Service. From the uncertainty a cancer grows. There is speculation without information.

In the afternoon we go out rowing on the lake. There are places where the water has undercut the banks and the roots of trees jut precariously over the lake, exposing their foundation to reflection.

Thursday 1st May: The sunlight is very strong at eight in the morning. The colour of the sand has red in it. The lake and sky are a primary blue. Early morning light intensity leads to further concern about the Ukraine. Today is May Day. Extra flags are placed outside the buildings. Radio stations are full of reports on May Day festivities. We do learn that it would have been better to stay indoors over the past few days, a few days too late. In the evening the view of the lake looks like a black and white photograph. All colour polarized except for a thin line of pink on the horizon.

Friday 2nd May: Today the water looks black. The light doesn't penetrate the water. Swans career across the sky. Their wings make a dry, squeaky sound, as if they need oiling. The B.B.C. World service reported Russian authorities admitted today that radiation levels had been 800 times normal levels as they went overhead on the way to Scandinavia. The wildlife of the cleanest lake in Poland seems to be going about unawares. Although our suspicions are heightened by any small anomaly.

Saturday 3rd May: The lake does not hold us today. We are anxious to return to the city where there may be more news. Everything takes on a fatalistic hue as we all have inadvertently exposed ourselves, as have most of the uninformed population.

DEBORAH ZION

Away From Eden

Soon after she returned from a long absence, Rose began to think about birds and about the animal kingdom at large. She began to think about them because some very strange things happened to all the people around her. They had entered into a state of mock-nature. But she should have realised that three years is a long time, and that while she had returned, not only to the same city, but to live, once more on the Edinburgh Gardens, many people were in the grip of something called the New Age. And to make matters worse, the New Age was not even new, it was already worn in and assimilated. Crystals, goddess courses, silk patchwork, it was all in place. Indeed, she moved into her current home, just as one of the occupants was leaving to go to a goddess course in Bali. After reaching the goddess within, Lisa returned in time for a rebirthing workshop in Eden. The goddess of symbolism exists, at least, thought Rose, but then this was not in question. She spent her time trying to escape the spirits, to disendow things with meaning.

Every story she heard made it worse. The night before she had gone to the Florentino bar. A safe enough place, to meet a balding journalist friend, who dreamed of beehive hairdos, and moaned about clutching at straws. His preoccupation was old age and alopecia. Nevertheless, he proceeded with his own weird tale, much at odds with the atmosphere of the bar. After the greeting and the gossip he clutched her hand.

"Look," he said, "I've had a terrible day, things are badly awry.

Since my split with Sharon, I've been living alone. Every morning for the last two weeks a white cockatoo has come into the garden and unpegged all my jocks from the clothes line. I think that it must be someone's pet gone on a rampage, because it says a thing or two as well. It seems to have a penchant for underclothing. Having donned my dusty jocks, this was last Monday, I went out, walked through the park, was passed by a middle aged jogger, who then had a heart attack, and died, just like that, before I could do anything."

"Oh God", said Rose, "How dreadful".

"But then", he went on, "This morning someone next to me had a cerebral haemorrhage on the tram, and I got to work, and there was a body in the alley, an old drunk. But the worst part is that I've discovered the reason. It's to do with that bloody cockatoo. Apparently they are the Aboriginal symbol of death, a kind of antipodean crow."

"Oh" said Rose, "Imagine keeping one in your house as a pet."

The two friends kissed and parted. But the story had a terrible effect on Rose. For he ought to have known right away, he ought to have sensed it. If not, what portents of hell, what symbols of paradise were they missing on their daily rounds? What a margin for error existed as people bought their cat food and their birdseed, caught

tadpoles, and watched the stars at night?
After hearing this Rose became too watchful. She saw signs everywhere. She had a kind of anti - asthma, where her organs opened up and too much air poured in. Small things became inflated with meaning, they floated through her life at eyelevel. She could no longer trample them underfoot. In Italy, they made the passagiata, dressed in their finery, walking through dogshit, pood on by pigeons, with absolute unconcern. It was considered a blessing, a small portent of good fortune to stand in shit. A virtue of necessity, it saved cleaning the streets. In such a country other blessings are rife and ordinary. No one looked for the goddess within, for the Madonna smiled at them, opposite communist town halls, in streets called after anarchist poets, in shrines graffitied with the names of soccer luminaries.

When Rose walked through the security system, the alarm went off. She was not surprised. She was lucky that terrorism was not commonplace in Melbourne, and that she was nicely dressed. "What's in your pocket," said the security officer, her blue rinsed curls bobbed, seeming to grow stiffer by the second. Rose looked in her pocket and saw the gardening secateurs. "Oh dear," she said, "it's the gardening scissors. Look, I'm just here to see my brother off, I'm not getting on the plane."
"Alright, give them to me and walk through again."
Rose walked. The bells rang. People came. Rose looked in her pocket and saw a condom. The brand name was "checkmate." "I'm sorry," said Rose, "it appears to be a condom. Do I have to give it to you in front of all these men?"
"Yes." She held them both up. "Tell me dear, what do you do for a living?"
"It's wise to be careful" said Rose. But she had not been careful. She had fixed her eyes on the heavens, and stopped looking around. The new age was creeping up on her. She felt outmanouvered, hexed. Earlier that day her house mate had returned, not from Eden, but from the nearest asylum, where she had ended up as a result of too much heavy breathing. After the first rebirthing class she had been reborn as a mad woman, been sent to the local madhouse, and fallen in love with a paranoid schizophrenic called George. They had returned that day.

George was speaking. He was skinny, tattooed, and had tried to embrace Rose at the door. "I think a handshake will do to begin with," she had said.
Rose looked out into the autumn garden.
"I used to be violent", George was saying, "until I met Lisa a few weeks ago. She took away my stone heart and gave me a crystal heart."
"Well, that's nice," said Rose, "but I don't want to live with you, whatever your hearts made of. And Lisa didn't ask. Nevertheless, here you are. Perhaps you should leave." "Got that," said Lisa, "but I discovered after I was reborn when those idiots thought I was mad, that I have a right to be on this planet. I can control things. I saw lightning in a bolt falling from heaven to earth. I spoke with animals. I breathed under water with the frogs and saw into the fishes eyes. I have a right to be on this planet." "Frogs don't breathe under water", said Rose, "and this planet is very large. Perhaps you should find yourself another corner."

After the bells and the fishes eyes, the condom and the scissors, the crystal heart and the unsuccessful homecoming, the house filled up with sleep. Its occupants went on journeys. George and Lisa, crystal pendant pressed to crystal heart fell into sleep as others fall into deep water. Lisa dreamed. A voice spoke in her ear.

When I was a young man, I never realised that I would end my days in the animal kingdom. I had less notion still that I was destined to be a prince in anything except love. In love, however, I fell, without thought of consequence or any ability to fly.

So here I sit now, in New South Wales, at the beginning of the winter, in a pond the size of a large puddle. The woman I was in love with all that time ago was very ordinary, and very strange, as are all people when you love them. She certainly didn't seem capable of transforming me, but nevertheless, she managed. It was only when she had got all my ugliness out into the open that she kissed me and left me. Although the kiss released part of my soul, she had not intended to curse me with this amphibian form. But then the amphibian is, of necessity, a form that is neither land based nor sea based. It is ambivalent, as I am. I too follow that form, I am neither here nor there, irrevocably caught in the past, when I was whole, and then too, always harking back to those other conversations, those one or two moments in which the soul and the body collide, and I looked neither forward nor back. And it is in this way that I ironically lost myself, and Clarissa, my other self.

Like a frog, I too began to hunt at night, and to be overly responsive to touch. And that way of course is the way of all wayward flesh. The resulting infidelity was small, very small, but once the thread is caught the whole tapestry can unravel.

I procrastinate endlessly. I have even sought help for it. I went to a procrastination workshop. It started on time, but I was late. I missed the vital moment of beginning, which everyone pretends can be picked up from the notes of friends, but is, like all beginnings irredeemable.

So how did Clarissa, my darling Clarissa come to leave me? It was not my infidelity but rather, the infidelity that was unleashed in her, and my resulting jealousy, being unsynchronized, and waiting to pounce, not at the right moment, but when it has just passed. Procrastination, like anything else, can be made into an art form, a song, a thread of guilt in which to tie up dubious gifts.

Since that magical kiss, that transformative moment in which I took on my present frogginess, I have been waiting for another kiss, and a chance came last week. Alas, I did not pounce. It happened this way. A woman appeared at the edge of the pond. She was not at all like Clarissa. She looked like an inmate of the asylum near by. She began to talk to the heavens, to call to the thunder, to bargain with the gods, but then she used neither their language nor her own. It was like listening to a record with the treble tuned up too high. She then plunged into the water and we were face to face. She wanted me to teach her to breathe under water, but, having bypassed being a tadpole, I never learned how. She had been at a rebirthing weekend nearby, but all that was born was an older madder self. She said she had been in Eden, only five miles off. Well, haven't we all. Being near paradise is cold and lonely. It is a place where we can both sink and swim.

Down the hall, Rose moved towards sleep. A train crossed her mind's eye. Chacha chacha, the lullaby of travel. Rose was travelling. She was wearing black. Black silk trousers, and a fine black shirt, and a coat that was a kind of green and black tapestry, depicting no narrative save that of ethnicity. She looked tired. She looked like old Europe, except for her strong teeth that were from the new world, without gold edges or silver caps. In the dream, her body had become heavy. Each foot weighed a ton. She arrived at a kind of railway station, and there she saw a sign. "Rest Room For Jews". She went into the room, where she stood alone in the opulence. She sank down on the couch in front of the mirror. Gravity is a strange thing when we sleep. We are weighted down under goose feathers, and yet we waft, as if the geese also cover us with a gift of flight. Rose felt herself lighten. Her bag was set down. For five dream minutes she was blonde, transformed and weightless. She shook herself out like a garment.

Rose woke up. The day stretched before her like a tunnel of light. She threw back the eiderdown, but she could not bring herself to get up. She looked through the window, past the shadow of her own reflection into the changing season going on in the street. Winter was coming. Coming down from Europe, blown on the

breaths of her friends. They lived above her in a kind of geographical heaven. Perhaps if she got up she would see them. She looked up. Along the flightpath she saw the birds, in effortless migration. She felt a benediction falling.

DELYS BIRD

Women in the Wilderness: Gender, Landscape and Eliza Brown's Letters and Journal

From the time that Renaissance geographers speculated about a fabulous, paradisal land in the south, outside the limits of the known world, through European seafarers' first encounters with the Great South Land and the succeeding stages of European occupation and exploration of that land, the Australian landscape has existed as a powerful imaginative construct in the European imagination, one that has dominated ideas about what it is to be Australian.[1] Visual and literary representations of Australia have in turn been dominated by its landscapes. More recently, reinterpretations of the meanings and mythologies of the Australian landscape - its melancholy, its harshness, its romantic picturesqueness, its alienating aspects and so forth - have uncovered many of the assumptions inscribed in the 'bush'. Most notably for me, its masculine history and masculinist recording has been recognised. When gender is brought into direct negotiation with the landscape and its representations, alternative meanings may be suggested, resulting in an increased awareness of the ways images and ideas are constructed and naturalised. By 1991, it would perhaps no longer be acceptable for a Federal Minister of the Environment to make a remark like Gareth Evans's in 1986. "Virgin wilderness it isn't", he said, to encourage public acceptance of mining in Stage Three of Kakadu National Park, "I won't go so far as to say it's a tatty old tart, but it's getting close to it."

The expectations and values that European settlers brought to the Australian continent included the ancient and pervasive convention that signifies the land as female. Even today, the cultural assumption that women are closer to nature or the natural than men are is justified by reference to women's morphology, including their reproductive capacity. Although late twentieth century Western societies no longer worship an earth goddess, the social and symbolic positioning of women in post-industrial capitalism remains different from that of men. The body of woman, that female landscape, has been used as the source and the verification for the ideology of woman as nurturant, intuitive and so on. This ideology is not singular, however. Woman, like the land, can withhold her favours and her fruitfulness; she has been stereotyped as at once seductive and repellent: "mysterious, duplicitous - a source of pleasure and nurturance, but also of destruction and evil."[2]

By the late eighteenth century, however, this ambiguous dichotomy had shifted towards an emphasis on the virginal and maternal aspects of the land/woman,[3] one which coincided with the contemporary doctrine of the civilising and improving aspects of land tenure. Cultivation of the natural world was not just connected with but considered an index of the moral betterment of human nature. This belief provided a powerful justification for imperial expansion into a continent like Australia which was to European eyes and understanding uninhabited, therefore unimproved. Thus colonial Australia's land tenure system and state powers were

founded on the doctrine that settled occupation and European cultivation of the land was a civilising duty, that the land existed for the benefit of all, and belonged to those who worked it, allowing for the legal dispossession of its aboriginal inhabitants. While it was clear that these people had long inhabited and used the land according to their own system of laws, the absence of apparent modification or habitation of that environment made them easy targets for dispossession. The land was seen as virginal, waiting to be brought into productive life. White settlers' claim to the land, then, was underwritten and legitimised in their view by their labour, which improved it.[4]

Numerous inscriptions - and later, analyses and critiques - of the ongoing struggles to map and 'improve' that landscape have only recently begun to recognise its particular vulnerability to Western technologies and ideologies. With the introduction of gender into the debate, it is now arguable that Australians' especially brutal land grab and (mis)use of the land can partially be understood through the ambivalence of white Anglo-Saxon masculinity to the area of the feminine, hence to the land. The often unquestioned equation of 'womanly virtues' and women themselves with the Green movement, with environmental ethics and various ecofeminisms, calls on a similar association and is both acclaimed and questioned by feminists, from different sides of the same ground. The feminine is either celebrated for its difference from the masculine in which case its nurturant capacities are aligned with nature and the natural and can be activated to save the earth, or this woman/land/ecology/nurturant difference is seen as a form of gendered essentialism relying on a false separation between public and private, men and women; repeating the ideological construction of sexual difference which excludes women from arenas of social power and influence.

While this impasse remains unresolved, the issue of the interaction of gender and the environment raises significant questions. For example, does the cultural convention that the land is gendered as woman affect the way a patriarchal Australian society understands and treats that land in all aspects of man's (sic) involvement with it? Is there a connection between the way women are situated within patriarchal social structures and institutions, in an historical sense as subordinate, and the way white Australians have subordinated the land to their ends? Is it possible to argue that women express a different relationship to the land than men do (this of course has to be understood in the most general sense),[5] and if so can this be attributed to some essential gender difference or to women's social positioning, which encourages them to plan gardens rather than mines? New interpretative feminist frameworks have made it possible to both ask these questions and assess the outcomes of that questioning.

My particular interest and involvement in the beginnings of an Australian debate around these issues has been through colonial Australian writings, looking at the ways gender affects description of and attitudes towards the new world. Annette Kolodny's work in America in the seventies and eighties provided its impulse. Kolodny uncovered a gendered metaphoric structuring of the female landscape in American colonial writing, arguing its relevance for our understanding of the despoilation and degradation of the American continent. While the male writers she used tended to adopt the language of conquest to describe their interaction with the land, the women's writing suggested a more accommodating relationship, providing a different 'context of imaginative possibility'[6] in relation to their landscape. In her pioneering work on women's position in Australian society, *The Real Matilda*,[7] Miriam Dixson makes reference to what she sees as a potentially destructive connection between the equation of women and nature, and women's subordination. More recent feminist work includes Kay Schaffer's major psycho- linguistic study

Women and the Bush, [8] and a recent Discussion Paper from a study commissioned by the Office of the Status of Women, which examines women's perspectives and needs in relation to the Federal Government's policy on ecologically sustainable development.[9]

Recent readings of colonial Australian women's texts - their letters, diaries and memoirs, many of which have now been published - have illuminated what it meant to be a woman in a very male, very new (to white emigrants) world - the landscape of the Australian bush. Any emigrant's sense of place is sharpened by an intense awareness of the difference between the familiar environment which they have left and the new one, and emigrant colonial women's perceptions of and interactions with their new landscape offer a different view from those of male colonists. This women's writing was part of a domestic economy, written for personal not public pleasure, for purposes of communication or self-definition rather than for public information or profit, and circulated privately. Women and their writing, then, occupied a space outside the area of public discourse where men were administering, exploring, taking up tracts of land, and generally establishing their colonising authority and shaping their colonial landscape through those activities and in their recording of them. The means available to these women to establish a voice was restricted by their gender and prescribed by their social conditioning, and what they were able to say was determined for each by their social situation, the conventions of their genre, and their sense of audience.

Rereading Eliza Brown's letters with these issues in mind was revealing. A very well-known published Western Australian archive, they are letters to her father, and in them she observes the prescriptions of formal address, daughterly respect and affection, and so forth.[10] They also produce a sense of a wider audience, since letters from the colonies were habitually read out loud to gatherings of family and friends and passed around among those groups, and they contain descriptions of the inhabitants, the social structures and the physical aspects of the Swan River Colony, as well as giving and receiving news of her family. But the often major preoccupation of these letters is economic, and this shifts the possibilities of subject matter for women's writing - financial matters were not usually a woman's province except when she made out a 'shopping list' for goods not available in the colonies. Colonial circumstances altered Eliza Brown's relationship to the economy of the land. Her father had contributed to the family's emigration by lending them money. Very conscious of this obligation, Eliza Brown uses her letters to mediate between father and husband, meticulously recording expenditures on land, livestock and hired help. Justifying her husband's decisions while their fortunes fluctuate during their first decade in the colony (the period the letters cover), and conciliating her father's apparently increasing irascibility as more money is needed and lent, Brown struggles to keep these male influences in her life in balance with one another. At the same time, it is clear that she would have been capable of both making the financial decisions, which according to convention only her husband and father could make, and taking responsibility for those decisions herself.

More typically, like many other colonial women Eliza Brown's interaction with the landscape is conveyed in part through details of the differences to her domestic life that Australian rural living demands of her. At first, she says, the family was "almost without the common necessaries of life"(4), although their property was only seventy miles from Perth. She must instruct her own children, as well as teaching neighbours' children, and worries constantly that her sons will suffer from a lack of a formal education. She gives birth, often without medical help, and acts as a midwife when necessary to other women in the vicinity. One of her children is drowned in the river - the loss of a child through a tragic accident like this is a

common experience for these women. She grappled with the Aboriginal language, in order "to make the Natives more useful to us", and acknowledges that the Aborigines are more adaptable perhaps than she is. They "are very ready at acquiring ours" (p.39). Life in the bush meant a shifting of traditional class and race differences for women. The Aboriginal youth who herds the Brown's sheep lived for a long period with the family; Eliza Brown is "always much engaged in domestic matters and with the needle", having been "eight months in the present year...without the assistance of a servant"; and the family lived in a shed for nearly a year while their house was being built. For Eliza Brown, the "greatest loss in coming to Swan River [is] the deprivation of social intercourse with our relatives and friends" (38); this is the major area of privation for colonial women living in the bush, who often had no other women with whom they could share their experiences.

The writing can be understood as, in part, a compensation for that lack of female company. Yet despite the very evident hardships and problems of bush life, Eliza Brown, like many of the colonial bush women who wrote of their experiences, was positive about her environment. Her pleasure in her new surroundings is palpable in her description of the Brown's new home, a two-roomed cottage built at the foot of a range of hills which run through their property. It has "an exceedingly picturesque appearance", and its attraction derives from its natural surrounds: "the extreme beauty of the site where it is placed, rugged rocks are packed in wild confusion around and a fertile valley stretches itself for full two miles and a half like a green lawn in front of the lonely habitation."(23) Later, she describes the beauty of the spring flowers, although the trees "are not handsome", and the sight of the hills in February, alight with fires set by the Aborigines. The Browns understood the effect of the fires, "ensuring a much more luxuriant crop of grass, and this is I suppose in general the reason why the Natives are allowed to pursue their custom."(38)

Travel or journeying was important in the emigrant's experience. Many of the archival holdings in Australian libraries from women's pens are travel diaries or other accounts of the sea journey from England to Australia. Descriptions of journeys into the bush to their new homes, and from property to property, also occur within many of the letters and journals written from the period of settlement.[11] On a three-week journey from a property in New South Wales to one north of Rockhampton, Rachel Henning delighted in the experience: "I never slept in my life as I did in that tent",[12] she wrote. An unpublished archive in the Mitchell Library, a "Recollection of Two Years of Colonial Life", is the story of a Katherine Hays who came to Sydney for her delicate health, met her future husband, and when she married him undertook without complaint an arduous journey to his home in the far North of Queensland. She writes that "one had need of pluck and consumate (sic) self-control to travel in the bush". In their writing about their travels, the gendered relationship of women to their environment shifts in subtle ways. The accounts are characteristically more self-conscious than the writing that surrounds them - letters, diaries and so on - although, of course, these familiar forms also depend, to a greater or lesser extent according to each writer, on a process of selection of detail and event.[13]

An increased narrative self-consciousness and changes in style and voice may occur because travel writing was a well-established genre in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; therefore, when bush women journeyed, their writing was framed and shaped for them by its conventions. More significantly, I think it is because these women were singular in their travelling, and it was during journeys that they were more fully able to realise themselves as heroines of their colonial life. Eliza Brown's journal - of a three-hundred mile journey with her husband and eldest

son to look at land in the north to which the family might move - exemplifies these changes. Written for publication, it is in two parts, and titled, "Narrative of a Journey from York to Champion Bay, in the colony of Western Australia, during the months of May and June, 1851", signalling its formality through its title and structure as well as through its language and narrative self-consciousness. This journey had only been undertaken once before, but Eliza Brown is going for personal reasons, linked to the land: "I wish to see the aspect of the country that the family have in all probability to be brought to", and to be part of her husband's decision-making process: "we should consult together on the spot as to the advisableness of it."(146)

She characterises herself in this narrative as a stoic, grateful for any shelter and hospitality she is offered, and compliant. Her heroism is not asserted, but alluded to. For example, when she and Mr Brown are forced to find overnight shelter in a shepherd's hut, she merely "own[s] to feeling some little anxiety" and "meditated on the danger of the undertaking, and half regretted leaving home."(147) She frequently positions herself as an uninitiated outsider. The only woman in the party, she often seems to fill a role as scapegoat for the male ego of her son, who accuses her of spoiling his shooting. Once, he claims "the fluttering of mama's veil" ruins his aim, on another occasion he asks, "baffled and a little vexed,...'Why did mama toss up her head?' "(147) Again, unable to shoot a kangaroo, Kenneth claims "mama's large bonnet glistening in the sun was enough to frighten anything". Until then, Eliza Brown says she had "rather prided" (147) herself on this large, veiled bonnet as a substitute for the black hat she usually wore while riding.

Most interestingly in this account, the rather stilted prose and catalogue of minor sights and events is broken by a curious section which is marked by a fracturing of the writing's previously formal structure and lack of emotion. While this may signal a conscious straining for 'literary' effect, the unacknowledged hardship for a woman on such a journey is located in its textual differences, as is the suppressed anxiety such a journey must have generated for her. "What signifies fatigue, hunger, or the sand flies;" she writes, "Are the guns all loaded? keep them near at hand; never mind the dogs having tumbled one after another, into a native well-hole; it has somewhat clouded the purity of the water, but here is some muslin to strain it. Oh! dear how long it is going through! and the sand-flies sting so tormentingly" and so on. She then returns to her previous mode of narration: "With the blessing of Providence, this night passed over our heads in safety," (149). The longest, and most 'picturesque' section of the journey narrative is taken up with a description of the "romantic place" where Mr Brown intends to settle, "lay out his fields and erect a small cottage". (151) Here, the threatening aspect of the landscape which is difficult to contain in the previous passage is domesticated and tamed by the Browns' projected settlement.

In her letters and her journey journal, Eliza Brown presents many of the characteristics of colonial women's experience in a wholly strange environment. Of course, the material we have access to is almost solely that of middle and upper class women, whose experience of the landscape, no matter how different from that of their former life, was relatively privileged. What is most surprising is that women like Eliza Brown familiarised that experience so quickly and thoroughly. They reinstated a Victorian ideal of domesticity in the new land, according to a contemporary cult of femininity which allocated the 'cultivation' of a domestic space as women's work. The definitions and proscriptions for achieving that space and constituting oneself a lady within it were stretched and made very flexible by their new environment. Colonial women contributed in different ways, often very considerably, to the family economy, usually working extremely hard at totally

unaccustomed tasks. Their satisfaction in these contributions and their accommodation with their new landscapes suggest that the more active agency offered, or demanded of women in their bush environment was, potentially at least, enabling to them.

NOTES

1. Alan Frost, 'What Created, What Perceived? Early Responses to New South Wales', *ALS* 7,2,1975 is a major source of information. There are numerous explorations of the ways that the Australian landscape has been understood and represented and the impact this has had on Australian cultural life - Bernard Smith's work on Australian landscape painting, Coral Lansbury's *Arcady in Australia,* Ross Gibson's *The Diminishing Paradise,* J.M. Powell's *Mirrors of the New World,* and *Islands in the Stream,* edited by Paul Foss, are just a few of the major studies.
2. Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture,* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986, p.l.
3. In *Sacred Groves and Ravaged Gardens,* a major study of the implications of the traditional associations of the mother earth, especially on contemporary land use. Louise Westling, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1985.
4. Alistair Davidson and Andrew Wells discuss the history of land ownership and use and the way land became the basis of Australian colonial capitalism. 'Carving up the Country', in *A Most Valuable Acquisition,* eds Jenny Lee and Verity Burgman, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1988. Another view of the civilising benefits of working with the soil is explored by David Goodman, 'The Politics of Horticulture', among a range of different approaches to the question of the landscape, in a Landscape Issue of *Meanjin* 47, *3,* 1988.
5. Although I will be using women's writing to demonstrate their gendered relationship to their environment, Janine Burke has a similar view of nineteenth century women's painting. Excluded from the European art school training of male artists, early Australian women artists, she says 'were patiently recording the new land with a naive delight.' *Australian Women Artists,* Victoria: Greenhouse Publications, 1980, p.13.
6. Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984, p.10, and *The Land Before Her,* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975.
7. Miriam Dixson, *The Real Matilda,* Ringwood: Penguin, 1976.
8. Kay Schaffer, *Women and the Bush,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
9. Valerie A Brown and Margaret A Switzer, 'Engendering the Debate', Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, 1991.
10. Eliza and Thomas Brown, *A Faithful Picture, the letters of Eliza and Thomas Brown at York in the Swan River Colony 1841-1852,* ed. Peter Cowan, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1977. For all further references, page numbers will be cited in the text.
11. There are other records from the pens of women who journeyed for pleasure, and those who did so for a specific public purpose, to write about the travel, or to undertake botanical work, and so on. These are set pieces, not written out of an experience of bush life.
12. Rachel Henning, *The Letters of Rachel Henning,* ed. David Adams, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p.99.
13. As Elizabeth Webby has pointed out, "Even Eliza Brown appears to spare her father many of the rawer details of pioneering life." 'Born to Blush Unseen', in *A Bright and Fiery Troop: Australian Women Writers of the Nineteenth Century,* ed. Debra Adelaide, Ringwood: Penguin, 1988.

FRANCES DEVLIN GLASS

Furphy and the Land: The Feminine as a Metaphor for Landscape

In investigating Furphy's ethnological sources for *The Annotated Furphy*[1] in order to trace where he acquired some recondite information in Chapter II about the original Irish race, it became clear that such information as he had about the origin of the Celts[2] is common in twentieth-century studies of Irish pre-history, but not, to the best of my knowledge, in the sources available to him at the turn of the century. This in turn led, via some thinking about the way in which Furphy's attitudes to the land differ from those of his contemporaries, to some speculations about the possibility that he may be drawing, possibly unconsciously, on the mythic paradigms which underpin the culture of his Ulster forebears.

I think I am not being unfair to suggest that the generation which most urgently recommended Furphy as a key player in the radical nationalist tradition, although sympathetic, was in fact quite ignorant and uninformed in their reading of Furphy, but more importantly, they simply lacked reading skills and the necessary contextual apparatus for such a complex work. I am speaking, of course, of the generation of the '40s and '50s, especially the Palmers and Russell Ward who declared the 1890s to be special, and who selectively defined the attributes of this "school" and deemed them to be somehow normative. For the purposes of their own unconsciously masculinist (even misogynist) mythmaking,[3] they chose to ignore the variety of ways in which Furphy plays with gender stereotypes. Despite having been to some extent constructed by the *Bulletin* as a writer, with all that means about the marginalisation of women,[4] Furphy was simultaneously its most atypical, idiosyncratic writer: most intriguingly, he rejected essentialism (he is as uncompromising about refusing to stereotype women as he is in his refusal to define the (more often documented) "gentleman of fiction" and the "squatter").

It is my view, and Julian Croft has already argued some of the points [5] (from a different ideological standpoint), that in Furphy explicit misogyny is frequently subverted by the use of irony and by some of the most finely drawn counterpoint subplots, (female) heroes and cameo characterisations in Australian literature. This is not to say that Furphy can be exculpated entirely of sexism, and that is certainly not my project. But I would argue with more urgency than Croft that Furphy's attitudes to gender are complex and multi-layered. In doing this, I find I am joined by an ever-increasing band of women readers of Furphy.[6] However, my focus in this paper is not to be on character, nor will I be paying attention to the ways in which he critiques gender construction, or his examination of male ratiocination, though I think all of these issues warrant consideration by feminists. Rather, I want to turn the spotlight very specifically on the ways in which Furphy mythologises the land itself in *Such is Life*.

Myths which embody sexual metaphors of subduing and subordination of the

land, are, as Kay Schaffer has demonstrated, as old as European imperialism,[7] and myths which assume man's mastery of nature are older.[8] They posit that the masculine (man, Empire, Civilisation) has an unquestioned, God-given right to appropriate and master a land which is conceived of in essentially female terms as pliant virgin, awaiting consummation.[9] By the eighteenth century such metaphors were embedded in mutually self-serving philosophical and religious discourses which were defensive of the imperial enterprise. When the bush failed to realise the Arcadian, Yeoman-farmer[10] dreams of fertility and wealth so common in the British emigration guidebooks, its persona metamorphosed into the threatening, alien, engulfing, obliterating Other. Schaffer offers many examples of this kind of signification, ranging from the journals of explorers to the accounts of the nationalist and modernist historians[11] and it is easy to locate others even in the most unlikely sources.[12]

Furphy's imaginary and symbolic construction of the land is significantly different from the one considered normative by the constructors of the radical nationalist tradition, for whom the bush is either a "vision splendid" or harsh, destructive, and synonymous with failure,[13] a threat to identity and sanity. Probably more than any of the writers of the '90s, he was a man who knew failure on the land intimately and all in stereotypically Australian ways: as a gold-digger, small selector and as a bullocky. Yet, paradoxically, he is not driven by the imperative to conquer and to master, or to the brink of madness. Although he, like his contemporaries, unconsciously sexualises the landscape, his approach is not phallocentric. Rather, he sees the relationship between man and the land as interactive. The set-piece panegyric in Ch.2 of *Such is Life* is a case in point:

> It is not in our cities or townships, it is not in our agricultural or mining areas, that the Australian attains full consciousness of his own nationality; it is in places like this, and as clearly here as in the centre of the continent. To me the monotonous variety of this interminable scrub has a charm of its own; so grave, subdued, self-centred; so alien to the genial appeal of more winsome landscape, or the assertive grandeur of mountain and gorge. To me this wayward diversity of spontaneous plant life bespeaks an unconfined, ungauged potentiality of resource; it unveils an ideographic prophecy, painted by Nature in her Impressionist mood, to be deciphered aright only by those willing to discern through the crudeness of dawn a promise of majestic day. Eucalypt, conifer, mimosa; tree, shrub, heath, in endless diversity and exuberance, yet sheltering little of animal life beyond half-specialised and belated types, anachronistic even to the Aboriginal savage. Faithfully and lovingly interpreted, what is the latent meaning of it all?
>
> Our virgin continent! how long has she tarried her bridal day! Pause and think how she has waited in serene loneliness while the deltas of Nile, Euphrates, and Ganges expanded, inch by inch, to spacious provinces, and the Yellow Sea shallowed up with the silt of winters innumerable - waited while the primordial civilisations of Copt, Accadian, Aryan and Mongol crept out, step by step, from paleolithic silence into the uncertain record of Tradition's earliest fable - waited still through the long eras of successive empires, while the hard-won light, broadening little by little, moved westward, westward, round the circumference of the planet, at last to overtake and dominate the fixed twilight of its primitive home - waited, ageless, tireless, acquiescent, her history a blank, while the petulant moods of youth gave place to imperial purpose, stern yet beneficent - waited whilst the interminable procession of annual, lunar and diurnal alternations lapsed unrecorded into a dead Past, bequeathing no register of good or evil endeavour to the ever-living Present. The mind retires from such speculation, unsatisfied but impressed.[14]

In many ways this passage is redolent of *Bulletin* rhetoric of the "vision splendid" variety (it is worth noting that this chapter was added late to *Such is Life*). This passage, especially the "virgin continent" paragraph, has most often been read as signifying Furphy's hopes for the Coming Australia, but I wish to suggest a reading that is mythic. Certainly Furphy makes what to our generation are uncomfortable

ethnocentric assumptions about *terra nullius*;[15] certainly, "unconfined, ungauged potentiality of resource" suggests the exploitative eye of the developer. But it is different in important ways. It is interesting to note that the passage resists gender stereotypes, which are used of other non-typical (for Furphy) landscapes: other landscapes may be read as "winsome" and as having "assertive grandeur", but this one is marked by attributes such as "wayward[ness]", "spontaneity" and "exuberance". The land is "she", alien and Other, but anthropomorphised and sexualised in such a way as to suggest she has latent power, and the integrity to "[tarry] her bridal day": she is "grave, subdued", difficult to know intimately, awaiting to be "deciphered aright". If she is a virgin, awaiting consummation, a metaphor which as I have already argued had much currency in the period, then it is on *her* terms, and the suitor must prove his worthiness (an important point to which I will return). In this twist lies Furphy's subtle deviation from the discourse of his contemporaries. This emphasis on the active nature of the woman in relationship finds an echo not only in the Molly Cooper subplot in her strenuous attempts to live life and to love on her own terms, but also in minor comic instances. Tom refuses to coerce or re-educate his horse, Cleopatra, for the very good but jokey reason that he does not want to be "pestered with people borrowing [it]" - but also because "It was all in the *contract* [my emphasis]"

> A few minutes afterward, Cleopatra was shaking this refreshment well down by means of the exercise with which he [an example of Furphy's gender-bending] habitually opened the day's work. But this was to be accepted in the same spirit as the abusive language of a faithful pastor. It was all in the contract.[16]

For the purposes of my argument, the concept of a *contract* between man and nature is crucial. As it is between the classes and between the sexes. The simple matter of squatters not making grass available for teams is, for Furphy, not a matter simply of a bad season, but a social justice issue, in which one class has plainly not honoured its part of a moral contract for services rendered. Ideally, in Furphy's Christian Socialist state, he envisages a contract based on mutual respect, honour and accommodation rather than coercion.

When Furphy assigns blame for failure or seeks its causality, failure which in other writers is laid at the feet of the alien, hostile or indifferent land, it is more likely in *Such is Life* to be found in flawed human nature than in nature itself. Mary O'Halloran's death is central here. She is described in Ch. 2. in a passage which in a retrospective reading must be savagely ironic, as "a child of the wilderness, a dryad among her kindred trees", a pre-lapserian Eve in Eden (73-4), a description which suggests that her death has potential for melodrama, and yet that is precisely what Furphy avoids. Thompson, the most accomplished story-teller in *Such is Life* tells her story in austere and unmelodramatic pose. Tom is not entirely able to resist the maudlin with his comments about the "little copper-toed boots", adding,

> Deepest pathos lies only in homely things, since the frailness of morality is the pathetic centre, and mortality is nothing but homely[17]

Whether Tom is being sentimental and evading his own part-responsibility for Mary's death, or whether this is a simple philosophical truth about the inevitability of death, or an illustration of the realist enterprise (and it is probably all three), Furphy involves the reader in what turns out to be a multi-factorial search for the causes of Mary's death, with human agency[18] being implicated more systematically than the land itself. And this is true of all the lost child stories in the novel: it is clear that Furphy is engaging in intertextual debate with the melodramatic accounts of such events in Kingsley and Clark, and probably also but inexplicitly with

Lawson, and that his eye is drawn not to the hostile, or indifferent or engulfing landscape, but to the human accidents which motivate the lost children's behaviour.

The worst calamities that nature can deliver are treated by Furphy, if not matter-of-factly, then in a comedic rather than a tragic fashion. The Wilcannia shower (Chapter 7) is potentially death-dealing, but the nonchalance with which Tom and the other bushmen sit it out, smoking, making scientific observations and casually saving the unnamed stranger from certain dehydration while registering the indignity of not being able to do this other than as a quadruped, belongs to comedy.[19]

A similar case can be argued in relation to Furphy's representation of selection life. By 1883, the date at which SL is set, and which coincides with the publication of the Morris and Ranken Report into the operation of the Land Acts,[20] the gap between the political rhetoric of the promoters of the free selection clause of the Land Act, with its ideal of small-scale farming by an industrious, self-respecting yeoman class on the one hand, and the reality of lack of water, poor seasons and land unsuitable for small-scale agriculture and grazing on the other, was manifest; free selectors had met with very mixed success.[21] Furphy often depicts failed or failing small selectors and instead of finding the land itself responsible (an analysis common in both literary and legislative texts of the period), he seeks human agency again: he points out such factors as the extortionate rates of interest charged by storekeepers during the three year licence period when land-holders were unable to secure a mortgage under the 1869 Act,[22] or the folly of such as Rory who is so out of tune with the earth beneath his feet as to not be able to distinguish between mallee and yarran.[23] The catastrophes that overtake Ida's family after the father's suicide were presumably common rural accidents. The accumulation of tragic event is made comic in Tom's reportage, and the comedy is functional not only in discrediting Tom, but also in highlighting Ida's firm grasp of hope and self-respect. She is, after all, the most active democrat in a chapter (Chapter 6) which raises class issues very directly. To fail in a selection is not to fail in life for Furphy. The creators of the Rudd family and Joe Wilson might have been intended to take note.

The most speculative part of my enterprise comes at this point: it seems to me to be highly likely that Furphy's myth of identity, the myth which generates the metaphors about the land which I have described and a constellation of beliefs in harmony with his explicit designation, dissonant as they are within the discourse of his contemporaries, is not, I think, his personal invention. Rather, I suggest, it is an example of his unconscious internalisation of the myths of a much older discourse, the Sovereignty myths of Ireland. It is clear to me, after 17 years work on Furphy's sources for *The Annotated Such if Life*, that I cannot claim as sources the late nineteenth-century Irish myth-resuscitators of the Irish Literary Renaissance; however, and this is to make a large imaginative leap - one which needs to be validated by a research methodology which I shall indicate at the end of my paper - the oral tradition might have provided the necessary symbolic framework. One can be confident that *Tristram Shandy* provided the impetus for Furphy's metafiction; another Irish source, that of folk thinking may have led to his mythologisation of the land which is written against the grain of his Australian contemporaries.

In particular, I refer to a central (and what is claimed to be a specifically Irish) myth of the land and of identity which exists in many variants and goes under the general heading of the Sovereignty of Ireland. It is an ancient fertility myth which in the early historic period was appropriated for political purposes by pseudo-historians. In the myth and in pseudo-history based on the myth, the kingdom is conceived of anthropomorphically as a goddess who herself endures, experiencing a series of ritual marriages with kings of her choosing. She is not only the earth itself

of the territory, but also the spiritual and legal dominion which the king exercised over it.[24] The sacral king is the spouse of his kingdom, and its health and wealth, conferred by the goddess, are dependent on his good conduct, and his knowing and recognising her for what she is. The land understood as a goddess is essentially unable to be mastered or possessed. Not only is the goddess a notorious shape-changer, but she must be embraced in her crone aspect for the king to be legitimate; there is much to say on this score about Molly Cooper's various manifestations. The goddess is also deeply ambivalent: both a giver and a destroyer, paradoxically and simultaneously the source of life and its repository in death.[25] This point is critical to understanding the ways in which bushcraft (in particular the skills of survival) and botanical and topographical knowledge are valorised in *Such is Life*. According t the Jungian theorist Erich Neumann,[26] the linking of positive and negative aspects is the mark of archaic consciousness, predating the binary logic to germane to Christianity and Western thinking. Furphy's thinking about the land curiously embraces just such a dualism: he is aware of the beneficence of the land at the same time as he accepts its death-dealing attributes. Furphy's attitudes to the land are neither romantically Arcadian nor are they adversarial; when he conceives of the land mythically as woman, she is not objectified or to be acted upon, but rather, she is acknowledged as having an independent reality, latent power, and as simultaneously beneficent and maleficent, but maleficence is dealt with surprisingly unrancorously (possibly in response to previous writers' angst). The land's destructive mode was, for Furphy, able on some occasions to be circumvented by prudent bush-wisdom, and, if not, ameliorated by men and women acting cooperatively. My question is this: is it possible that the modern age reawakened in Furphy doubts and anxieties which necessitated a withdrawal from binary thinking and a return to the pre-phallocentric and matrifocal thinking of his Celtic forbears?

Finally, I want to suggest a fresh direction for research and a methodology, inspired to some extent by Stephen J. Greenblatt's procedures, and in particular by his re-readings of Shakespeare. Even if it cannot be established that the folk tradition was the source of Furphy's myths of the land, it may be that analysis of the non-literary and subliterary texts of pre-famine Ulster (for example, tracts, journals, diaries, speeches and yellow-back novels) may be a fruitful source of information about the continuity of Sovereignty paradigms. It seems unlikely to me that the twentieth-century reemergence of the paradigm in the works of Joyce and Heany and other writers would have been possible unless at some level (other than the discourse of comparative anthropology and philology), the transformations which drive these myths, so different from those of Christianity, were current and powerfully symbolic in the everyday language of Irish culture.

NOTES

1. All references to *Such is Life* are to *The Annotated Such is Life* (edited by Frances Devlin Glass, Robin Eaden, Lois Hoffmann and George Turner, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1991).
2. He claimed that they were "... not only non-Celtic but Non-Aryan...", *Ibid.*, p.73:2/90:10 and note (page and life references are to the 1903 and 1944 editions of *Such is Life* respectively).
3. See John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974, pp. 89-102.
4. See Susan Sheridan, "'Temper, Romantic; Bias, Offensively Feminine': Australian Women Writers and Literary Nationalism", *Kunapipi*, Vol. 7, No. 2/3, 1985, pp.49-58.
5. "'Who Is She?" The Image of Woman in the Novels of Joseph Furphy', in Shirley Walker (ed.), *Who is She? Images of Woman in Australian Fiction*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1983, and in *The Life and Opinions of Tom Collins*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1991.

6. Susan McKernan, "Feminist Literary Theory and Women's Literary History: Contradictory Projects?", *Hecate*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1991, p.155, and more recently, Susan Martin's unpublished paper, "'Why do all these women have moustaches?": Gender Boundary and Frontier in *Such is Life* and 'Monsieur Caloche'" read at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature Conference at Wagga Wagga in July 1991.
7. *Women and the Bush; Forces of Desire in the Australian Cultural Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1988, p.82.
8. J.M. Powell, *Mirrors of the New World; Images and Image-Makers in the Settlement Process*, Australian National University Press, Canberra 1978, pp. 96-102.
9. Schaffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 82 and 101.
10. Powell, *op cit.*, pp. 70-81. See also Coral Lansbury, *Arcady in Australia: the Evocation of Australia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1970.
11. Schaffer, *op.cit.*, Ch. 4.
12. See, for example, H.G. Turner's *A History of the Colony of Victoria* (Longmans, Green, London, 1904, Vol. 11, p.229) echoes *The Royal Commission of Enquiry Into the Circumstances of the Kelly Outbreak, The Present State and Organization of the Police force etc.*, Second Progress Report, *V.P.P.*, 1881, vol. 3. pp.1-19.
13. Leon Cantrell (ed.) *The 1890s Stories, Verse and Essays*, Portable Australian Authors, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1977, p.xx.
14. *Op. cit.*, pp. 65-6.
15. Though his allusions to Jacky XLVIII (*The Annotated Such is Life, op.cit.*, 114:14) and the various elegant variations on the idea of Toby as one of the deposed rulers of the land, its "heir-apparent" (see *ibid.*, note 226:17) suggest a more complex reading is necessary.
16. *Op.cit.*, p.65.
17. *Ibid.*, p.199.
18. As I have argued elsewhere ('Joseph Furphy's Novels: Naked Capers in the Riverina', in W.S. Ramson (ed.) *The Australian Experience: Critical Essays on Australian Novels*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1974, pp.73-96), Tom applies the 'one controlling alternative' theory arbitrarily in the case of Mary's death; many other human errors, including her parents' dispute over child-rearing, could be adduced as causes.
19. *Op.cit.*, pp. 264-7.
20. 'Report of Inquiry. State of the Public Lands, and the Operation of the Land Laws;, *Journal of the Legislative Council* (New South Wales), 34, Part 1, 1883.
21. Powell, *op.cit.*, p.75.
22. See *The Annotated Such is Life, op.cit.*, note to 56:32/69:35. Rates of interest charged by storekeepers and others were commonly as high as 35%, and sometimes, and not uncommonly, 70%.
23. *Such is Life, op.cit.*, p.64.
24. Proinsias Mac Cana, *Celtic Mythology*, Newnes Books, Feltham, 1983, pp. 92-3.
25. Maria Tymoczko, 'Unity and Duality: a Theoretical Perspective on the Ambivalence of Celtic Goddesses', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, Vol.V, 1985.
26. *The Great Mother, An Analysis of the Archetype*, Pantheon, New York, 1955.

FIONA KIDMAN

The First Land

My father
built a reservoir
somewhere in the north; there
cool plump frogs and I spoke
a language that only creatures
and lonely children know.

That sacred
plot of first-owned land
was ringed with gum trees stark
skeletal white limbs clothed
in tarnished silver green ghosts
of all other trees

that have shaken before gales and
when high wind spiked branch on branch
I stood beneath and said
aloud 'if it spears me
and I die then it was meant to be.'

But when the rains came rattling
the empty water tanks
and a rime of tropical
green appeared on the cracked earth
I opened my mouth
and drank the rain.

SUE NICHOLLS

Heartland

It is feeding long-legged stabbing at a plant.
It unfolds upwards. I imagine it pince-nezed,
an elderly school teacher with the ready gaze
of a dagger. It blinks stop. I glimpse
a wilderness whorled in the dark thumbprint
of its eye. Then anxious for distance
it strides away in a busyness of going,
little grass hut swaying on legs slender as saplings.

There are two of us on the plain: the emu
and a seven year city kid faltering at the silence
under the steady drumming of the emu's three-toed run.
The flatness of the horizontal, the emptiness
of the vertical hold us like points on a graph
charged with significance the further we move
from the origin; that familial village spare
on the dusty road. Heat hammers silence, squeezes
juices from grasses. Scarred by distance I slow,
stop. Shrivel without destination.

Years later at the Koala Park I meet an emu. Hold
two prisoners in the dark circles of my sunglasses.
The emu stalks closer, dagger beak at the ready.
Blinks stop. Perhaps it sees an emptiness there,
clear hurtle of horizon behind those twin images.
I fold my sunglasses. Surpised eyes flick me
liquid cool then suddenly shrivel empty blink
go and it moves away.

Ngarta's Story – as told to Pat Lowe

Ngarta was born and grew up in the Great Sandy Desert. She was a member of one of the last groups of people to leave the desert - the very last from her part of the country - during the 1960s. She now lives in Fitzroy Crossing. I heard parts of Ngarta's story, from her and from other people who feature in it, over the few years I have known her, and it seemed to me that it should be recorded. Ngarta agreed to this with some enthusiasm, but it was still many months before we could find the right times to sit down and work on it together. As opportunities arose, I took down some of her story in longhand, and on two occasions we used a tape recorder, from which I transcribed Ngarta's account.

Walmajarri is Ngarta's first language, and she also speaks Kriol. For the sake of making her account accessible to the general reader, and with Ngarta's approval, I have chosen to write it in a more standard form of English, while trying to retain the turns of phrase and expressions she uses, except where these make the meaning unclear.

Pat Lowe

I was born at Walypa, next to Wayampajarti. It was in the hot weather time, before rain. My jarriny is puturu. My mother got a big mob of puturu one time, then later she found out she was pregnant.

Paji was camping with us when I was born, and Kurnti's father and mother, and my uncles Kurnti and Nyija, two brothers. Nyija was a new-born baby like me.

I already had two sisters before me. The first one died later, at Cherrabun. The other sister is Jukuna. Jukuna was jealous of me, and we were always fighting. I liked my older sister.

Tapu and Wayampajarti are the main waterholes of my country. We used to go from Walypa to Wayampajarti, then to Wirrikarijarti, another jila. We drank there on a hot day. My mother or father used to carry me. Or my elder sister, when my mother was carrying water in a coolamon on her head. My mother and father were quiet people; they didn't have arguments. It was my father who gave me my name.

I remember Uncle Dickie and his family, and Kainda, when I was small. Dickie and my father, two brothers, were always travelling together, with their wives. Uncle Dickie was still there when my father died, and he looked after us. Then they left for the station. A lot of people already left the desert before them.

When I was a small girl, I liked my grandmother. I was closer to her than to my mother. My mother used to go a long way, with Jukuna. I used to go with my grandmother.

Once, we were near Japingka. I said to my grandmother: "Let's go to Japingka, I don't want to go to another place". So we went to Japingka. We spent two nights there. Then we went to Mukurruwurtu, where my grandfather died before I was born. That's my father's home properly, Mukurruwurtu. We spent one night at Mukurruwurtu. They are all in one line: Japingka, Warnti, Paparta, Mukurruwurtu, all jila.

I was with my father when he died. We were on our way to Kayalajarti: my father, and Jukuna, and my sister who died, and my young brother. My father was sick one night. Next morning he seemed all right. It was a hot day. My mother had gone to Purntarr for water, and I looked after my father. He was lying under a tree. I walked away a bit and sat down under another tree, a Turtujarti.

Somewhere about dinner time, maybe eleven o'clock, he got worse. He called out: "Come and sit down with me. I'm finished." I sat down with him. Nothing.

Only those few words, he said. Then he died. When my mother came back, she found her husband dead. Then she cried and hit herself on the head.

We left my father then, and went on to Lalka, where we found Paji and her husband, Kainda's father and mother, and the other children. We told them the news.

My father had two wives. The other one was blind. She died before him.

One day I was playing with Kainda, my cousin-sister. Two boys took my little brother off with them. They gave him marnta to eat. The marnta got stuck in his throat, and was choking him. The boys brought him back. All night he was crying, and his mother couldn't do anything. She didn't know what was wrong. In the morning he died. The boys never told my brother's mother, that's my second mother, what had happened. A long time after, when we were living in Fitzroy Crossing, they told me.

I was climbing a tree with Kainda that day, killing lizards. We didn't know what had happened. My second mother was hitting herself with a rock, and no-one stopped her. Kainda's mother was there, but she was sick and couldn't do anything.

We all went to another place, and my blind mother got sick on the way. She couldn't stop thinking about the little boy she had lost. She told her husband: "You must leave me here now". Her husband wanted to carry her, but she said no. She wanted him to leave her. So they took her and left her under a tree. My own mother put water for her, and they left her. That was only about two days after she lost her son.

I was asking: "Where's my blindfeller mother?" "We left her behind," they told me. Me and Jukuna, we were crying. "What for we bin leave that blindfeller one?" I asked my mother. She told me: "Never mind. We left her on another jilji, at Mawanti."

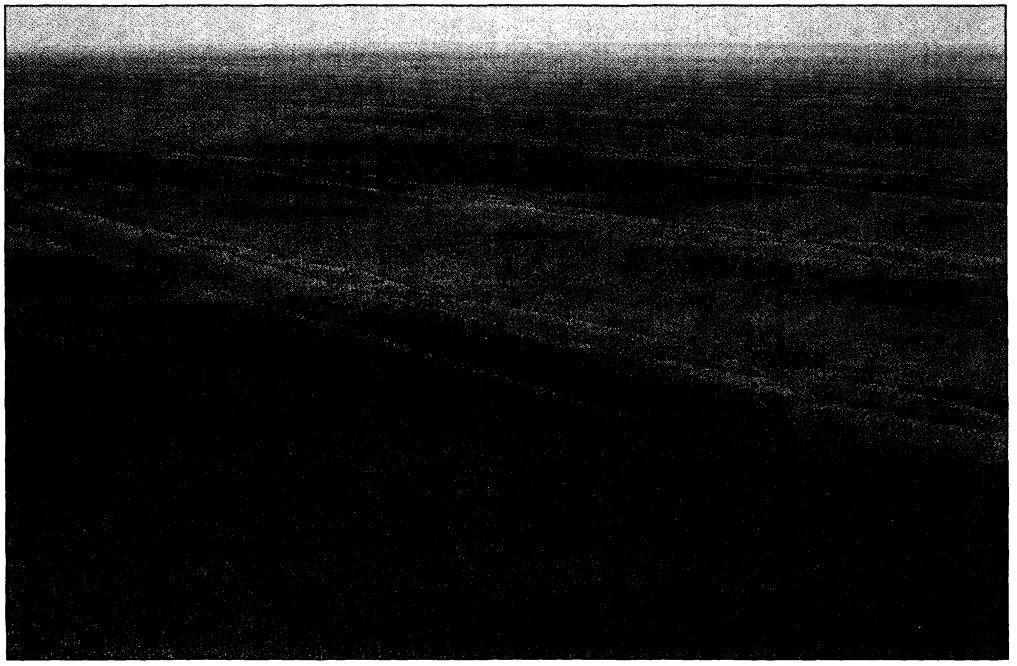
We came out near Paji and her husband and his first wife and Kainda's father and his three wives, and Kurnti and Nyija. Everyone was crying, mother and father and my two sisters.

We left that old woman in the hot weather, first rain. Next year, my father died.

Kainda's father went to the station after my father died. First, he looked after us for a while, then he left us there.

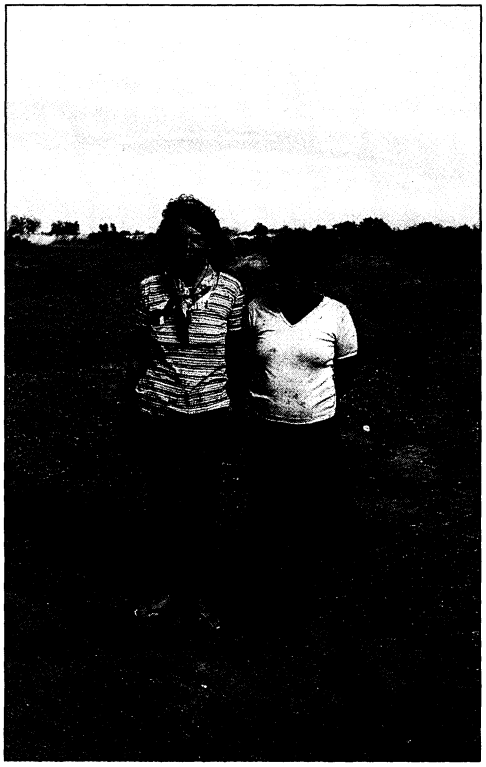
In the cold-weather time, after the wet, the year after she lost her husband, Dickie's brother took my mother. Uncle Dickie went hunting at Wiliyi. We were at Tapu. He met his brother coming up, looking for my mother. He sung out to my mother: "You were jaminyjarti (fasting for meat in mourning for her husband). I was the first one to give you meat. Now you have to come and live with me. My

Ngarta (1990)



Aerial photograph of the desert

Looking down into Tapu jila (waterhole) after it has been dug out



Ngarta and Pat Lowe at Tapu jila

wife!" he sung out. After that, they camped together. When Dickie came back, I went to meet him and said: "Twofeller camping now."

The other wife came back to Tapu and got angry.

After the wet that man went to pick up his wife, and told her he had another wife. They came back to Tapu. He said: "We've got to pick up that other parnany." She got wild, and the two women had a fight. With fighting sticks. Blood pouring. Paji blocked one of them. I was there, I saw them fighting. The husband got wild with his old wife then. Paji had to block the three of them.

After that they lived good way for one year. Finish. When that old man Dickie went to the station, his brother followed him. He left my mother behind at Japingka, and said he would come back and pick her up. He went to the station with his first wife. They never came back. They left us for good.

Then Jukuna mob went to Cherrabun, with Kurrapa and his mother and father. They said they would come back for us. They left us when I was a little girl: I couldn't kill anything - pussycat or goanna. I only killed lizards. And that mountain devil. Well, they never came back, Kurrapa mob.

I stayed behind with my mother and grandmother and aunty and my younger brother and Kurrapa's sister and his grandmother. No men, only all the women. We stayed a long time at Kunajarti. Killing lizards, waiting for Kurrapa to come back. He went in the cold weather, and we waited two or three years.

We went back to Tapu, then Ngijilngijil and Kunajarti, and I tracked a fox. It was hot weather, and the fox got in a hole. Hot day. I got knocked up chasing the fox, and the fox got knocked up too. My mother was looking and singing out. It was late. I was coming up with the fox. I killed it with a kana. First time I had killed a fox. I went home to Kunajarti. My grandmother was crying for me: first time I killed a fox.

After the fox, I killed a cat at Tapu. I found its three kittens. The mother cat came and scratched me, and ran up my side onto my head. I've still got the scar from where that cat scratched me. Then the dog chased it. We killed the cat and took it back. That was a good hunting dog; I think its name was Jaya. My grandmother used to tell me not to walk a long way.

We lived like this for about two years, and the next year the two guilty men came and found us.

We were at Jirrartu. I saw a man coming up. I thought it was my second father. I told my mother, and she said: "That's not your father."

Straight away, that man speared my mother. Right through, with blood. That man had all the kids with him. He turned back to get his brother. We went back to Jirrartu.

My grandmother sang my mother, and put medicine to stop the bleeding, and she got better. It was cold weather.

We went to Ngijilngijil and Kupantartu. After the wet, we came back the same way, to a jumu near Jirrartu.

One of our dogs went hunting, Jirrartu side. The two men tracked the dog, and came out at Maralkujarra, and they found us there. The others were camping next to Ngijilngijil - Kurrapa's sisters and mother and the others had gone by themselves.

The two men came up, and straight away they speared my grandmother. They killed her, no reason. I was crying for her.

Those two men had women and a big mob of children with them. One girl was Jurnpija, nearly same size like me. They came from country long way to the south-east.

I couldn't understand what they were saying. They were talking Manjiljarra, and I don't know that language. They asked for water. My mother knew that language, and she told me to give them water. I was frightened, I didn't give them.

My mother gave them water. After that, from Maralkujarra we went to Kupantartu. We tracked the others to Ngijilgnijil and Wurnpu. Found them at Wurnpu. Then the whole lot of us went to Kupantartu.

The two men killed my brother. He was a big boy, like my son now. They sent me with my mother to get water. They speared my brother while we were gone, and killed him. We came back and people were sitting, head down. We knew then: they killed my brother. My mother couldn't cry for her son. They told us: "If you cry, we'll kill you too." They wouldn't let her cry for her son.

We went to Jirrartu, then Jarrpara. From Jarrpara to a jumu on this side. After they killed my brother and my grandmother, I said to my mother: "You and me'll have to go, run away in the night. They might kill us." My mother wouldn't listen. So I went away on my own, in the afternoon. I went west. I took with me only a kana for hunting and a firestick. I walked on the grass all the way so as to leave no tracks, till I got to Jarirri. There was no water there. Afterwards, I camped in a sandhill. I could see rain coming up, so I covered the fire with grass and sand.

In the morning, I went to Tapu. I got some jurnta, digging. Then I went to look at another jumu, but it was dry. I had to camp all night, no water. I went back to Tapu next day.

I knew which way to Christmas Creek. I started heading for Christmas Creek Station.

A good while after I left, might be three weeks, Kurrapa's mother came and found me. I saw her tracks, near Jirrartu. I found her at one waterhole, I don't know what they call it, might be Warrpiny. It's near Parkanyungu. The two men had speared her, right through. She had the marks on her body, two sides. She came and told me they had killed my mother. I knew they would do that.

That old woman stayed with me. We travelled a little way, not far. She was all right in the morning, talking to me, but later on, in the middle of the afternoon, she was getting sick. She got a big lump in her belly. I stayed with her. I went hunting all right, in the morning time. I killed one cat and one snake. I came back. I asked her: "You want a little bit of meat?" "No, I feel sick. You can have it," she told me.

I stayed with her all that night. Might be somewhere about one o'clock, finish. Middle of the night. I never knew. I just woke up from sleep, morning time. I tried to wake her up. Nothing.

I cried for her. I had to just leave her. I ran away crying.

Then I turned back to Kajamuka. It was rainy time now.

I don't know why I turned back.

I turned back and came out at Kajamuka. The two men and that other mob saw my tracks. They came out and found me at Kajamuka. My mother was missing, and Jurnpija's mother was missing, both dead. I don't know what happened to Jurnpija's mother. They took her hunting to get camels for meat. They took her alive. When they came back, no wife. They killed her. That man was living with Kurrapa's sister now.

They used to do that. They killed another sister, the mother of Jurnpija's half-brother. I never saw that woman; they killed her before, a long way off. I knew that other one, Jurnpija's mother. I was at Tapu when they killed her. Then that man took Kurrapa's sister.

Those two men didn't say anything when I came up. I told them I'd seen plenty of bullock tracks. I still wanted to go to the station. "All right," I told them, "We'll have to go that way, north. I've seen a lot of bullock tracks." That's how I made them go to the station.

After that, Jurnpija taught me her language.

We went a l-o-o-ong way. We came out near that windmill. Parayiparra, they call it. They looked at it, that windmill. The two men started crying, near the water. They were looking at that windmill and tank. I don't know why they were crying. Maybe they were frightened of that water. We camped one night. From there we went to Julie Yard. We were getting close to the station now. We camped at Julie Yard one night. The two men drank tar. They found tar, and they drank it.

Next morning we walked close up to the house, to that windmill, Ngalparla, close to the homestead. Straightaway the two men killed a bullock. We lit a fire.

One old man came along. That was Elsie Thomas' husband. He was hunting on foot, maybe looking for goanna. That man saw all us mob. He went back and told the kartiya: "Big mob of people there; two men and a big mob of girls, kids." He went and told the kartiya, that Don Laidlaw. He went and told all the people now.

It was early. We cooked the bullock; we didn't know about kartiya. Then we camped one night. Early in the morning, they were coming up. Me and Jurnpija were sitting down, near the water, that billabong. We looked round, and saw all the people coming up, still a long way.

We two ran now, to that hill, Mijalpari, to the east. The others had already taken off. That way we ran and ran ... we ran right back to that other place, Julie Yard. We drank water there. Those two men killed another bullock, a good way from the water, and they cut it up. They didn't worry about the people coming up. They never knew.

Jurnpija and me, we went off again to sit near the water, that creek at Julie Yard. We sat down right by the water. There's trees along that creek. Then a policeman, police boy, all the men, the people, came out. We didn't see them, we were talking, we didn't look back. Then, when we did look back, they grabbed us. We couldn't get away. People grabbed us: people and kartiya and a policeman. The other lot, they got away. They saw the police car coming up, and they took off. That mob, they were singing out to the others, telling them to come to the station. In the end, they came back. Me and Jurnpija were sitting in the car already, waiting.

People were asking us questions. I could only speak Walmajarri. That other mob, they spoke Manjiljarra. I spoke Walmajarri, me and Kurrapa's sister. Someone asked: "Wangkimalanyngan Walmajarri?" I said "Yes." They gave us fruit - an orange. I was frightened it might be poison. "Don't eat it," Jurnpija told me, "It might be poison. We'll have to hold them." We held them right through to the station. They told me in Walmajarri: "That's good mangarri, from kartiya, you can eat it." But I didn't believe. I still held it.

They took us all the way to the station, and locked us in a house. They asked that Aunty Trixie Long to talk to us. She came along, but we didn't know her. She went to the station before I was born. She asked us about Kurrapa's sister and the others. I told her what had happened.

The police took our photos, first time. Then they locked us in a house, all the kids. We were sitting down inside now. They locked us up all night.

They took the two men to jail then, for killing that bullock. We never told the police they killed all those people. We didn't know English.

They kept us kids locked up all night in the house, in case we ran away. They let us out in the morning. Early morning. They took us to the bathroom and washed us and combed our hair and gave us our first clothes. We kept on wearing clothes after that. They locked us up every night, and we sat outside every daytime. Later on we went to live with Trixie Long and her family, relations. The kartiya put

me in the kitchen and taught me to work there, for about one year. I was washing plates, dishes. Washi-i-i-ing.

Kurrapa's sister, she stayed wife to that man, guilty one. Long time later, that man died in Leopold Downs. He was working on the station. He fell off a windmill. Finish. Might be punishment, he fell down. Because he was guilty.

After the wet season, Jukuna came along to visit me. She came early in the morning, with a tractor: Jukuna and Hughie and Skipper and people from Cherrabun. They came to visit. They told me Hughie was my husband. They told Hughie to come and pick me up later. They said: "After Christmas we'll pick you up." They all went back to Fitzroy Crossing for a church meeting. Later, they walked back from Fitzroy to Christmas Creek: Jukuna and Peter, Paji's brother, Doug Moore, Hughie and all. The Christmas Creek river was running. They came and picked me up, without asking the kartiya. The kartiya sent one man to look for me, and he went back and said he couldn't find us. We crossed the river and went the other side. I went to Cherrabun with Hughie mob.

NOTES

1. Desert place-names (Walypa, Wayampajartj etc) are all waterholes.
2. Names of deceased persons have been omitted.
3. Living characters from the desert have been given their desert names, with the exception of Uncle Dickie. Skipper and Peter (last paragraph) are the same person, Peter Skipper, whose desert name is Kurrapa. Trixie Long and Elsie Thomas are station people.
4. Cherrabun is a cattle station near Fitzroy Crossing.

GLOSSARY

jarriny	Conception totem
puturu	type of grass with edible seed
jila	permanent waterhole
turtujarti	desert walnut tree
marnta	gum from turtujarti
jilji	sandhill
jaminyjarti	fasting from meat in mourning
parnany	old woman; wife
kana	digging stick
jurnta	bush onions
jumu	seasonal waterhole
kartiya	European/non-Aboriginal persons
wangkimalanyngan Walmajarri?	Do you speak Walmajarri?
mangarri	food

Journeys Through Landscape

To hear Richard Woldendorp talk about his art as a photographer is to get a sub-text for the images. Of course they speak for themselves, but he wants, also, to speak for them, to give their context, their meaning for him, to plot the journey. He distrusts his command of English. I think that his own words express well the honesty, clarity and passion of his perception of landscape, but he has persuaded me to write this introduction. These are therefore *my* words, but *our* ideas, the outcome of talking together.

His journey began in a small, flat, low country bordered on one side by the cold grey North Sea, and on the other by a large and powerful neighbour. Holland has often been invaded by both. His people are clean, industrious, very middle-class for the most part, and they often describe themselves as phlegmatic, unimaginative, dull. Yet Holland has produced some great painters, and especially, painters of landscape, and much of the best work is characterised by extreme clarity, both inside (the famous Dutch interiors) and out. Even Rembrandt, who often used chiaroscuro to dramatic effect, still remains sharp, clear, *focussed.* Landscapes that are veiled in mist, in 'soft focus', as the photographers say, are not common among the Dutch painters. Another element common to Dutch landscape painting, at first sight surprising, is a sense of space. Holland is very small and very densely populated, but it is flat, and like all the flat lands, it has great skies. In an undulating terrain, the valleys can be claustrophobic, but on the plains, the horizon is not bounded.

Richard Woldendorp is Dutch and still feels Dutch. He is also deeply Western Australian, and at an obvious level, these photographs are both a celebration of and a plea for our sometimes ravaged land. Beyond that, he wants to communicate his vision of this land. That is not so easily put into words, but it is what matters most to him. In his own words, camera and film technology are now so good that almost anyone can take competent photographs, and thus technical skills are declining in importance. Sharp images are not enough. What makes good work stand out from the ruck is the vision. Not just a good eye, although it begins there. A photographer's vision must be tracked through the choices he makes. Some are more or less technical: choice of camera, lens, focus, film, printing paper. Then there is the choice of subject, vantage point, time of day, time of season, the light, the frame, the composition, and after printing, perhaps cropping - and there is a choice of sequence in the way the images are shown, with the possibilities of counterpoint, contrast, or iterative climax.

What choices does Richard Woldendorp make? The clarity of the images is one of their most striking features, a clarity that comes from sharp focus and from the clarity of the light, but also from clarity of perception. There are no hesitancies or doubts about these images. There is also a clarity of composition, a lack of visual

clutter. Pared down, pared to the bone, perhaps - the landscapes are simple, clean, harmonious, almost translucent.

Sometime they are literally translucent - there are images from Shark Bay in which we see through the water, but cannot see any evidence of the water itself - other than the infinitely seductive colour it generates, that turquoise and aquamarine of the Indian Ocean along the coast of Western Australia, where the water is pellucid and the sand a fine, white biogenic sand, the comminuted calcium carbonate of a multitude of sea creatures. Much of this coastline is low-lying, and there is no Mt Athos, no towering capes or mountainous headlands, but there are few other places in the world where the colours of the sea itself are so startlingly lovely.

Many of the photographs are taken from the air, and are thus the record of a special kind of journey. Woldendorp has chosen to interleave his images with words taken from the note books and journals of other, earlier Europeans who encountered these landscapes, on journeys of their own. The first of these is Dampier, at Shark Bay in 1699. Then Mme Freycinet just over a century later, commenting - equally unfavourably - on Shark Bay in 1803, which she saw with her husband, Lieutenant Commander Louis de Freycinet. These were sea-voyagers touching land; the last two travellers' tales told here are those of George Grey, who explored the Kalbarri coast in 1837-38-39 by whaler, then the Gascoyne, Shark Bay and Bernier Island, but unlike Dampier and the French, he struck well inland; and finally, Colonel Peter Egerton Warburton, whose landscapes were mostly seen from the back of a camel, far from the sea, on his travels through the Northwest and the Great Sandy Desert in 1873.

Only Grey and Warburton have begun to accept the landscape, and they not often. But there are passages of delight in Warburton:

> After travelling six miles, we reached a beautiful clump of large gum-trees, growing in a swamp at the bottom of a small creek, which was hemmed in by a high sand-hill, and then ran through a rocky ridge in which there were fine, clear, deep water-holes 100 feet in circumference. The green foliage of the gum-trees contrasted pleasantly with the red sand-hills on either side, and the barren, rocky ridge in front. Bustard, bronze-wing pigeons, owls, and other birds were seen in the glen, and the whole formed a most gratifying sight after the dreary sand-hill country over which we have travelled. It was a sight which would well repay a few miles' journey in any country.[1]

There is no acceptance in the earlier writers. Driven both by the demands of survival and by centuries of cultural conditioning, they recoiled with horror from the west coast. 'It has been without a single regret that I left that hell on earth, the coast of New Holland' said Rose de Freycinet,[2] and elsewhere:

> I found myself cast upon so horrible a coast without the least resource. My courage forsook me utterly, and I could see nothing but horror about me.[3]

The point is later driven home by contrast, as they reached the Indonesian archipelago:

> On the 7th, we sighted the island of Rotti, and the following day we were near Simao and Timor. Imagine our satisfaction at seeing the lovely vegetation of these islands. Our eyes were pleasantly rested by this greenery after the sand-dunes and the dry or stunted shrubs of New Holland. (loc cit)

A good French woman, she enjoyed the Kalbarri oysters, like thousands after her ('decidedly better than those I had eaten in Paris under more comfortable circumstances'), but they alone earned her praise.

A similar physical experience (of the Kalbarri coast) is given spiritual

overtones by Jacques Arago, a French artist who accompanied the de Freycinet expedition on *Uranie* as draftsman:

> There is first an expanse 40 to 60 feet wide beyond the reach of the high tides: then a cliff, partly white as the whitest chalk, partly slashed horizontally with red bands like the brightest bloodstone: and at the summit of these plateaux 15 to 20 fathoms high are seen stunted tree-trunks, sunbaked, shrubs without leaves or verdure, thornbrakes, roots parasitic and murderous, and all this cast upon sand and powdered shells. Not a bird in the air; not a wild beast cry or harmless four-footed thing or murmur of the least water-spring to gladden the earth. Desert everywhere with its cold heart-freezing solitude, and its vast echoless horizon. The soul is oppressed by this sad and silent spectacle of a nerveless lifeless nature, evidently issued but a few centuries from the depths of ocean.[4]

Woldendorp's camera has recorded such cliffs, 'partly white as the whitest chalk, partly slashed horizontally with red bands like the brightest bloodstone: and at the summit ... some stunted tree-trunks, sunbaked...'. But Arago casts a lurid glow over the scene by his word choice; 'slashed', 'bloodstone', 'roots parasitic and murderous', and so on. My own eye sees the colour bands, not as bloodstone, but as the red of iron oxide, so common in this iron-rich province, and the 'stunted' trees are adapted to low rainfall. Woldendorp sees form, texture, the bands of colour making an abstract pattern, and the twisting roots, an arabesque.

Much of Western Australia is desert in the contemporary sense, that of being arid or sub-arid; it is also desert, comparatively speaking, in the eighteenth century sense of being unpeopled - by the standards of this crowded globe. Arago makes it absolutely so, lifeless, but of course he was wrong. Richard Woldendorp said to me that 'it is as generous as rainforest, on its own terms', and Harry Butler has shown us on television that there is life under every stone. There are miracles of adaptation in this dry country, of which that of the Aboriginal desert people were not the least. Dampier did not think much of them, and said so in an oft-quoted, dismissive text:

> The inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty People, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these; who have no Houses and skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry, and Fruits of the Earth, Ostrich Eggs, &c. as the Hodmadods have: And setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes.[5]

But Grey learnt otherwise, as did Warburton, when his party:

> found a native well with some water, and we soon saw another close by. This discovery caused us immense joy, for we saw the water draining in as fast as we drew it out, and *we thought we had now got the key of the country* and would be able to get water by sinking in any suitable flat.[6] (My italics.)

The editor adds a note here, as follows:

> The native wells, on the discovery of which so often hung the lives of the expedition, and owing to which they were eventually successful in crossing the continent, would hardly come up to an English reader's preconceived notion of a well. They were little holes sunk in the sand with a slight curve, so that the water was often invisible from the surface, and being thus shielded from the burning sun, the evaporation was less, and the liquid cooler. The average depth of the wells was about five feet, though some attained a much greater magnitude. It would be easy to pass within half a dozen yards of these precious reservoirs by daylight and not perceive them, whilst at night their discovery was quite impossible. It is curious to speculate on the instinct that enables the degraded inhabitants of this wilderness to find the few spots where the precious element is attainable. The savage has the advantage of the European in this respect. Out of forty-nine or fifty attempts made by Colonel Warburton's party to find water by

> sinking, only one was successful, although in the selection of likely spots they brought all their experience and desert-craft to bear. How often, when travelling in the dark, and perishing from thirst, they may have unconsciously passed wells, a knowledge of which would have been as new life and strength to both man and beast, it is impossible to say.[7]

This editor (from the 1880s) had failed to learn what Warburton himself did learn in time: there was indeed *a key to the country*, but it did not lie with the wells; it lay in the skills of the people who knew where and how to make them.

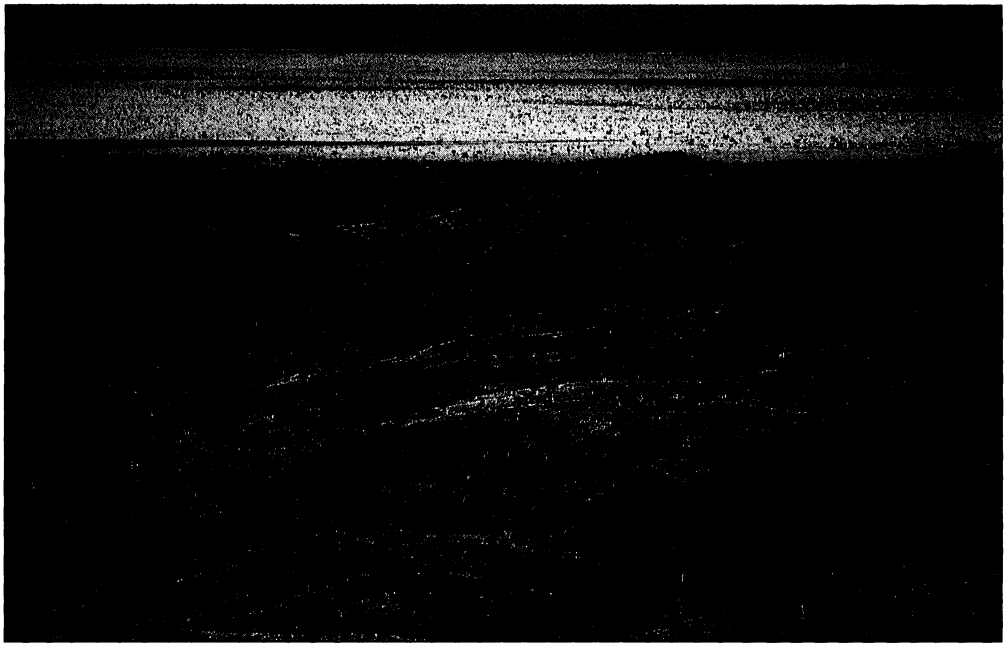
The explorers, the successful ones, learned more and more to rely on those skills. We have since acquired other skills, those of our current technology, which keep the tyranny of distance a little at bay, and we are less constantly preoccupied with sheer survival. Woldendorp's journeys in four-wheel drive vehicles, with abundant provision, good communications and a safety-net of maps, rescue services and so on, are very different from the earlier ones, and it is this comparative security that makes possible, or easier, a degree of aesthetic detachment. The security is comparative only: he rarely feels entirely safe, that nagging question 'what if something goes wrong' always there in the mind's attic. Yet Woldendorp does not see this as a harsh country, or as a 'hostile environment', as it has so often been described. It is simply there, with its own beauty. He has accepted it, and the image-making has been *his* key to acceptance, it of him and he of it.

Woldendorp sees with an innocent eye, but not an untutored one. It has been said that he photographs like a painter. He *was* a painter. The interplay between the art of the photographer and that of the painter is brilliantly evoked in John Scott's *Landscapes of Western Australia* (1986), which works by pairing a Woldendorp image with a painting of the same or a similar subject. The interplay is complex. Sometimes a Woldendorp photograph has been the inspiration for a painting - for example, *Xanthorrhoea* (1982) and *Flood Creek* (1980), both works by Robert Juniper. Juniper and Woldendorp are friends. *Xanthorrhoea* was inspired by a fish-eye lens photograph by Woldendorp of grass-trees, and *Flood Creek* by an aerial photograph of a tidal river across mangrove flats in the Kimberley. But the influence runs both ways. In another pair, *Pilbara Landscape* by Woldendorp and *The Pilbara* (1979) by Fred Williams, the text may suggest to the naive that the photograph is representational, whereas the painting interprets and transfigures. 'I want to isolate those marks, turn them into handwriting. They become an alphabet, like hieroglyphics' said Fred Williams. Woldendorp has chosen a clear but low sun and an oblique aerial perspective to highlight the calligraphic quality of the ghost gums in exactly this way - a vision in this case almost certainly shaped by familiarity with Fred Williams' paintings of the Pilbara, and yet also a two-way traffic, both recreating the Pilbara until 'Life imitates art'. Because this two-way traffic is so imaginatively displayed in the book, it is doubly surprising to read in the introduction:

> Just as significant perhaps is the fact that in the desert the artist has little to fear from his modern rival, the camera, whose technology seemed to many at first to be better equipped to show things 'as they are'. But that same technology cannot reveal the limitless expanse of harsh terrain, the rugged dryness, the "bare bones" and - what we look for in art - man's response to them (in Emile Zola's apt phrase, "a corner of nature seen through a temperament"). In other words, we look at these artist's works in order to see nature *as experienced by man* and not as observed through the lens of a machine.[8]

But a paint-brush is a tool, albeit a simple one, and neither paint-brush nor camera are mechanical in the sense of being autonomous. Woldendorp makes choices, he selects, and through a combination of technical and imaginative skill he is able to select to the point of abstracting a formal essence of the landscape that is his subject.

Seagrass and water near Dubaut Point, Shark Bay



Iron ore country, Pilbara

Zola's phrase 'a corner of nature seen through a temperament' describes this process most aptly.

He was not only a painter himself: his seeing eye has been shaped by a deep pictorial culture. There is no mimicking here, but we can see that he has studied and learned from David Hockney's sharp definition and simple, tender colouring; from the calligraphic shorthand of Paul Klee and Fred Williams; and stretching back into the past, from that long Dutch tradition; Vermeer, for example. The content is different, but both Vermeer and Woldendorp face the world with the same unwavering gaze, the same clarity, the same absorption in pattern and texture. It stretches the mind only a little to think of these images of the North West or Shark Bay as 'Dutch exteriors'.

Many of the best 'Dutch interiors' have an abstract quality. At first glance, they are meticulously representational, yet the content is not the point, or not the only point. Subject is collapsed into object as the interest is held by the pattern of tiles on the floor, the quality of light as it is reflected off copper pots and pans, the texture of fabrics. Woldendorp's' images are abstract in this sense, most obviously in his aerial photography. Often he seems to have built himself a stable platform in the sky to give him the angle he needs, waiting for the light he needs, often a low light that allows him to abstract pure form from the landscape below. In prosaic fact, he taught himself to fly so that he could make such hairs-breadth choices.

The nature of his journey and the landscape images themselves, are an interaction between what is there and what the journeyman brings with him. This is a very personal record, but it is also a composite one, a search both by Woldendorp and by European man to comprehend and relate to these clear landscapes where no sophistry survives. It is a journey from Holland through the Gascoyne and the Pilbara and the South-West, bringing a part of Holland all the way; and collectively it is a different journey, a European voyage through time, from New Holland to a Western Australia still evolving through the exercise of the creative imagination.

The process has no ending. We need constantly to be helped to see in new ways because we fall so easily into stock responses. This is a recurring problem with the words that are so often used to describe our landscapes. Out come the cliches: it is always 'vast', 'harsh' 'hostile', 'unforgiving', all thoughtlessly Eurocentric words.

Vast? A square mile in Western Australia is exactly the same size as a square mile anywhere else. No one talks about the vast landscapes of Europe, although Europe with Russia is about the same size as Australia. Western Australia is sparsely populated and it is a large *political* unit, but neither of these facts adds one cubit to the extent of its *landscapes*. Undifferentiated, perhaps? No landmarks? Well, yes: all Chinese look alike, too. Yet they still seem able to pick out their friends and family from the undifferentiated mass, just as the Aborigines knew their territory intimately, and could hardly conceive how one part of the Great Sandy Desert could be mistaken for another. Landmarking is a perceptual skill.

Harsh, hostile, unforgiving? This, of course, is the pathetic fallacy, projecting human sentiments on to the landscape itself. The alternative is to think of the landscape as indifferent to our purposes, or rather, conducive to some and not to others. The onus is then on ourselves to determine which. The thoughtless Eurocentrism of these words irritates me. The few unlucky Aborigines who were taken from this - to them, benign - environment, to England, found the miserable cold and ruthless microbiota, the bacilli and viruses of European diseases, intolerably harsh - and died. But then the malarial swamps of the Maremma, or the plains below Vesuvius, or the disastrous floods of the Po valley, or Florence through the Black Death - all these give the lie to the popular image of Italy, for example,

as a smiling land wrought by the hand of God for the uses of civilised man, in contrast with the stark and barbarous landscapes of the Pilbara. 'Harsh' is where you find it. The pathetic fallacy may have some value. Its negative mode ('unforgiving' etc.) may remind would-be travellers through the North-West to equip themselves thoughtfully, and the positive mode ('as generous as rainforest') might help us to accept the landscape to the point of caring for it adequately. But in general, stock responses blunt sensibilities rather than sharpen them, and that is why we should be grateful for new ways of seeing, which these images give us.

NOTES

1. Warburton, Peter Egerton, 1886. *Journey Across the Western Interior of Australia, with an Introduction and Additions by Charles H. Eden*, edited by H.W. Bates. Facsimile edition, 1982, Hesperian Press, Victoria Park, W.A. pp. 179-180.
2. Bassett Marnie, *Realms and islands: the world voyage of Rose de Freycinet in the corvette Uranie 1817-1820*, OUP, Melbourne, 1962.
3. Dublomb, Charles (ed), *Extracts from the Journal of Rose Saucles de Freycinet* Societies d'editions Geographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, Paris, pp. 5-8.
4. *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.
5. Masefield, John (ed), *William Dampier's Voyages: consisting of a New Voyage around the World, etc.* E. Grant Richards, London, 1906.
6. Warburton, *op cit.*, p. 179.
7. *Ibid*, pp. 179-180
8. Scott, John, *Landscapes of Western Australia*, Aeolian Press, Claremont, Western Australia, 1988. pp. 7, 8.

GRAHAM WHITE

Beyond Windswept Branches: Simpson Newland's Images of Central Australia

Simpson Newland's long life (1835-1925) was marked by enterprise and courage. In the tradition of his father he "represented the best elements of the Puritan character, which may be summed up as devotion to duty".[1] Pastoralist, businessman, parliamentarian, treasurer of South Australia, sometime president of the Royal Geographical Society of South Australia, and the River Murray League, he was the driving force behind the proposal for a transcontinental railway from Adelaide to Pine Creek in the Northern Territory, and for many years president of the Zoological and Acclimatization Society. Apart from being a champion of South Australia, he became widely known and respected for his knowledge and understanding of the Aborigines. He was an authority on the landscape of South Australia, much of the Northern Territory, and areas along and west of the Darling River in New South Wales.

Newland's two novels, *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush* (1893), and *Blood Tracks of the Bush: An Australian Romance* (1900), bear the imprint of personal experience, and his response to landscape has much of the sheer wonder and surprise of Alexander Harris, echoes of the mythic and epic qualities of Henry Kingsley, and is occasionally reminiscent of the affection Boldrewood felt for the interior. Allied to these is his special understanding of tradition and ancestry, both Anglo-Saxon and Aboriginal. But Newland was foremost an Australian, an unashamed nationalist who, in England, in spite of his loyalty to the Crown, found the Changing of the Guard at Buckingham Palace very tame, longing instead for "the sight of the dusty, unvarnished coach from the wilds of Australia, with its rough, calm driver and his unbroken, plunging team".[2] His regard for men and women who, in opening up the land, grew to love it, reflects his own experience, and is marked by admiration and affection. They, he believed, fought a battle equal to that of the soldier, facing "privation, danger, and death with a heroism and constancy never surpassed by those who had fallen in battle, sword in hand".[3] Newland recognises the unique character, born of the soil, of the hard working Australian - the bullock driver, the stockman, the shepherd, and the domestic - all sharing an equal place in his fiction, as in his life, for they are part of the heroic tradition of young Australia. He endorses Australian values, verifying them against the backdrop of a dynamic and partially explored continent. Since he is writing for an English as well as an Australian audience, the acknowledged documentary intention of his novels, although rarely intrusive or consciously patterned as such, as it is for instance in novels by William Howitt and Percy Clarke, is fundamental.

Paving the Way is divided into two parts: "On the Coast" and "In the Interior". The former is centred on Encounter Bay, South Australia, but the major part of the novel revolves around the Darling River between Wilcannia and Bourke, and north-

west into the largely unknown centre of the continent. *Blood Tracks of the Bush*, apart from small sections set in England, extends from the lower Darling to Queensland, and westward beyond the Overland Telegraph Line.

The Darling is a frontier where isolation, the ruthlessness of bushrangers, the danger of disorientated workmen, the hostility of Aboriginal tribes, and the fickleness of nature combine to challenge the first settlers. However, the response of Grantley, the novel's hero, is appreciative and analytical, and it is through his eyes that we share the vastness and complexity of the interior:

> The camp is on a considerable elevation, commanding a view of a wide expanse of country. Immediately in front, to the south, winds the Darling (the Parka of the aborigines), its course marked by the tall gum-and-box trees lining its channel.
>
> In the distance these trees have the appearance of a dark, impervious wall, and, though far out in the back country, the merest novice in bushcraft could never mistake that winding, unbroken line. Many a poor wretch, dying of thirst, casting his despairing eyes upon it, has again taken heart and been saved. To the north roll away undulating sandhills, well grassed and clothed with box-wood, hop-bush, and an occasional beef-wood tree. Beyond these are wide plains dotted with clumps of eucalypti and bounded by another line of timber, much lower than that along the river banks, but still denoting to the practised eye that there runs a long billabong, receiving its waters in flood-time from the great stream, and restoring them to it many miles lower down, probably after filling several lakes and pools.
>
> To the west, away over sandhills, plains, belts of timber, and the winding billabong, rises a chain of hills. As they rear themselves from a broad expanse of level land, they deserve, as they have received, the appellation of mountains. Dark and gloomy, they run as far as sight can penetrate the clear air in a north-westerly direction, miles of their rocky crests, deep ravines, and sun-baked slopes being clothed with the sombre mulga, the acacia, which covers a vast area of Central Australia.[4]

Drought is documented frequently, in a manner long familiar by the 1890s, but it is also used to delineate the terse, casual response to adversity which characterises the bushman. However, it is in its breaking that the narrator, standing beside Grantley, seizes the opportunity to express wonder at the spontaneous rebirth of life, the descriptions revealing an understanding and appreciation of the extraordinary vitality and dynamism of the landscape of Central Australia:

> And, after weary waiting, the blessed rain came at length - not in a sudden storm or gentle saturating showers, but in one unbroken pour, lasting three days and nights. Lakes never known to be filled before in the memory of the white man, and scarcely in that of the black, were full to overflowing now. Creeks, billabongs - nay, even the great chasm where the noble river itself used to run - were flowing strong with the mere local deluge. The very plains themselves, but a few hours before hard, dry, and baked, so that they seemed to contain as little moisture as ashes straight from the fire, were now as soft and dripping as a wet sponge. Dormant nature sprang into active, buoyant, and luxurious life. Countless myriads of water-fowl were spread over the waters ... The small bush-rats swept over the country like a wave and honeycombed the sandhills ... Other strange four-legged creatures, tiny and curious, were to be seen daily ...
>
> Inanimate nature rushed into luxuriant, if brief, existence. Plants shot through the soil, grew, bloomed, and faded in a day; herbs and grasses of the field clothed the lately arid plains and barren sandhills with such lavish loveliness as to fill the mind with wonder and admiration; perfumes loaded the air until the sense of smell was wearied and oppressed. The bushes and trees reared their heads anew and darted out from the bare and leafless boughs new and vigorous shoots, which dressed them in brightest verdure and richest foliage. Nature was robing herself like a bride decked for her wedding.[5]

In the vastness of the interior Grantley's tensions are resolved. Like the Aborigines, with whom he shares much of his life, he is absorbed in the pragmatism and joys of survival, and, having achieved some success, returns to Encounter Bay

to claim Petrel, only to find that she has married. The story is driven to an inevitable conclusion as the rejection of Petrel's natural and spontaneous love, so in accord with the spirit of the land, destroys him. Consolation is found in the silent yet listening inland, in Miola the Aboriginal girl, and in the small group of Aborigines who gather beneath the shadow of the Macpherson Range to witness his final acts. He shoots Star, his trusty horse of many years, burns his body, and disappears, probably into the immensity of the Centre.

Blood Tracks of the Bush follows the pattern set in Part II of *Paving the Way*, utilising a similar landscape, but with more pessimistic emphases. Arnold Wroithsley sees the land as a source of wealth which will enable his triumphant return to England. Chapters are prefaced by extracts from the verse of Gordon, Dyson, Kendall, Stephens, Paterson and Chandler. Almost invariably these are concerned with the darker side of landscape and the harshness of bush life. Unlike his first novel, *Blood Track of the Bush* makes pivotal use of the developing towns of Broken Hill and Wilcannia. The former is peopled by rich men in search of greater wealth, or greedy and often desperate men seeking quick fortunes. The latter is the centre for station hands, labourers, and itinerants of the bush who spend their cheques on alcohol and women in an attempt to escape the loneliness and unnaturalness of their lives. While Newland has some affection for Wilcannia as the Mecca of the hard-working, if often misguided bushman, for Broken Hill he has little. He is appalled by its capacity for evil, and uses this as a background against which the planning and execution of Wroithsley's murder of Lundy are carried out. Nevertheless, the town's origins fascinate him, and his description of its beginnings anticipate those of Idriess and Clune:

> True, before the miner carried his pick into the drought-stricken region, the enterprising squatter had found his way with his flocks. A few stations had been formed; a few wells sunk; a few tanks excavated. Following the tracks of the pioneer owner of sheep, a mail, first carried on horseback and later in a cart, was forced through from Burra, a mining town in South Australia ... What was at first merely a mail-track became a broad beaten road, along which could be seen every kind of vehicle made in or imported into Australia, from the child's perambulator loaded with rations and tools to the enormous ten or twelve-horse wagon ... Frequently, when ruin stared the miners in the face and flight seemed unavoidable, rain fell, turning the barren wilderness into a very garden of Eden; so, at least, the metamorphosis appeared to the scorched-up, thirsty wielders of the pick and shovel.[6]

What distinguishes *Blood Tracks of the Bush*, however, is the success with which Newland evokes the landscape of Central Australia already begun in *Paving the Way*. Most notable is Wroithsley's quest for the snow-clad mountain of the interior, which shares with Ernest Favenc's *The Secret of the Australian Desert* (1895), a vision of Central Australia until then found only in journals of exploration and more speculative newspaper and magazine articles. The squatter stumbles across John Smith, the sole survivor of the Leichardt [sic] expedition of 1848, who pours out his account of a spectacular pillar:

> "At last, one sultry day, when we were sore spent, far away towards the setting sun, as evening fell, a huge, tall pillar appeared to pierce the heavens. We had no glasses to help our sight, for they and every instrument had been thrown away or lost in the terrible march, and the tall pillar soon faded in the failing light. In the morning it had disappeared ... Slowly, reluctantly, we saddled up and crawled forward, but progress each hour became more difficult and hopeless."[7]

It is only Leichardt and Smith who reach the mountain:

> "How long we rested and slept I cannot remember, but when we looked for it again, there, over the tops of the magnificent gums and many other

> kinds of Australian trees growing in wild luxuriance, rose the mountain pillar almost perpendicularly from the swell of the land on which it stood. For thousands of feet its wide crest of snow towered into the heavens, and from it fell, rather than ran, sparkling torrents of water and foam down the seamed, worn sides of the everlasting rock, clothed in mist and spray from base to summit."[8]

In spite of abundant wildlife and a plentiful supply of water, beyond this solitary outcrop the anticipated mountain range never materialises. The river itself pours back into the desert and the fate of the explorers is sealed.

Wroithsley's journey evokes the mystery which surrounds the exploration of Central Australia, and as the detail itself is derived from first hand experience, and sustained by a popular belief in some interior Eden, the account has, like Favenc's, the quality of revelation. While Newland's narrative may be reminiscent of some of the more fantastic, speculative and adventurous literature of the late nineteenth century, including the African novels of Rider Haggard, which he probably read, so convincingly are the scenes conveyed, and so closely are they allied to actual events, that they appear credible. Indeed, there is the possibility, perhaps because of the apocalyptic nature of Newland's vision and the quasi-biblical overtones of his writing, that he himself, while aware of the illogicality of his vision, is nevertheless attempting to delineate some unique power which is central to the land and to the Australian consciousness. While Smith's mountain may be no more than a phantom arising from a disorientated mind, and Wroithsley's journey a perpetuation of this fantasy, the account of the expedition allows Newland to explore the way in which the landscape of the Centre can become an obsession. Like Patrick White, in *Voss*, but with greater empathy, Newland projects the harshness of the inland on to the mind of the novel's central character, thereby revealing his torment. Every tantalising image familiar to the bushman is used to evoke the precariousness and uncertainty of existence - the recurring vision of the endless horizon, the false security of far out belts of timber, the occasional soak, the passing beyond the line of mulga into open country - all hint at salvation, yet all tempt man to destruction.

The only natural survivors in the interior are the Aborigines, the sentinels and guardians of the land, and a few whites who respect their culture. Newland understands and has unaffected admiration for the Aborigines. If, as a young man, it was the isolation of Encounter Bay which made the bush an absorbing theme,[9] it is the relationship with the tribes west of the Darling which later draws him closer to the heart of the land. It is also probable that it was his special interest in the lives and customs of the Aborigines which provided the primary inspiration for *Paving the Way*:

> I particularly wished to write of the aborigines, among whom I had worked and lived for so long. This fast declining race has always interested me, and I felt that within a comparatively short period very few people who actually knew the blacks as I knew them would be left to chronicle something of their habits, traditions, and customs, and of their struggle against the white invaders in the early days of British colonization in Australia.[10]

Initially, in the massacre of the survivors of the *Mary*, Newland portrays the Aborigines as part of a hostile landscape. These "blacks", "black dogs", "devils", "darkies" or "niggers", as they are variously called, shadow the settlers, spearing their stock and attacking when opportunities arise. Their triumphs are momentary and few, and although Newland appears unable to suppress his thrill in the skirmishes which take place, it is probable that he utilises such incidents to delineate human courage, both black and white, which he regards as an essential part of colonial experience. There is also a certain inevitability about the conflict which suggests that Europeans are sometimes reluctant enemies:

> "I don't want to kill any of them; but when it comes to a question of going under myself, or even losing our property, I'll shoot as often and as straight as I can."[11]

Generally, however, Newland is assertive in explaining the black man's cause, regarding the treatment of Aborigines as "the darkest stain on Australia's fair fame":[12]

> We found them a happy, healthy people; and wherever we have come into contact with them, in less than fifty years we have civilised them off the face of the land, or such a miserable remnant is left that it were a mercy if it had gone too.[13]

Through the sympathetic eyes of Grantley, the reader witnesses much of the harshness, illogicality, and stupidity of some aspects of European rule. In particular, the hanging of two tribesmen in reprisal for the slaying of the survivors of the *Mary* shows the futility and inhumanity of some colonial government decisions:

> The two men were then pointed out by the major among the group of savages, and they were led, after their arms had been tied behind their backs, under the cross-beam, and the nooses put around their necks.
>
> The tribe was then ranged in front, and the major in deep, stern tones told them that, having murdered some white people, the subjects of the great Queen over the sea, he had been sent to punish that wicked act ...
>
> A brief pause followed, and then came the command, "Up with them", and two struggling figures were suspended in the air.
>
> "God have mercy on their souls!" added the major.
>
> The face of each Englishman there seemed set as hard as that of the leader himself, as they stood motionless until the welcome order was given, "March!" Then with a sigh of relief they rode from the spot, leaving the stricken tribe alone with its dead. Stunned, surprised, and confounded at the tragic termination of the scene, which few of them seemed to anticipate, they covered their heads or sank to the ground. Presently, loud and piercing, the wild wail that every tribe raises in the moment of sorrow and affliction sounded on the ears of the avengers as they withdrew from the scene of what was then considered justice, necessary though imperfect.[14]

The subsequent discussion between Grantley and Major Cuthbert neither confirms nor validates the act. More than any of his predecessors, Newland is aware of the pain and suffering felt by the Aborigine, and he acknowledges the incongruity of imposing the dogmas of one culture on another:

> "I am not going to argue the point," replied Roland. "I have no reason to feel anything but a desire for vengeance on this tribe; but I expect there is another side to the matter, and that is the one from which the blacks look at it."
>
> "Possibly," replied the major. "At any rate, it has been a devilish unpleasant bit of work, and I'm glad it's over. However, somebody had to do it."
>
> Thus spoke the officer, who simply carried into effect the decrees of the Executive of the country. It was not for him to inquire into the efficacy or justice of hanging men in presence of their tribesmen, who were, in all probability, ignorant of the reason of their suffering thus. The farce of judging them by our laws and addressing them, without the slightest knowledge of their language, on the enormity of doing what their own customs approve and even enjoin as a duty, is evident enough; but, even after the lapse of long years, it is hard to suggest what else could have been done, if any action was to be taken at all. It does, however, seem a satire on our boasted civilisation that we could find no other way of meting our justice than the rough-and-ready method adopted in this case.[15]

Newland's frustration lies in recognition of the enormity of the wrong inflicted on the Aborigine, and the impossibility of ever achieving a just settlement. He demonstrates that history is littered with people whose fate is as sealed as the march of civilisation itself, and it is with this concept of progress that he finds difficulty.

Faced with a dilemna, and what he sees as the inevitable demise of a culture which has so many simple virtues, he incorporates in his novels old Walcoro's accounts of Aboriginal history and legend. "The Last of the Parkingees" (Part II, Ch. X of *Paving the Way*), which leads chronologically to "The Doom of the Mullas" (Ch. XI), records the triumphs of a once proud tribe, and demonstrates the universality of human aspiration. "The Tale of the Wompangees" (pp.303-5), narrated by the girl Miola, re-creates for Grantley and his unsympathetic overseer the spell and magic of the dreamtime, but to capture the essence of Walcoro's stories, Newland uses not the broken English in which the legends are narrated, but a free, dignified, and poetical translation. This, the doubting overseer mocks.

> "Do you mean to tell me this is a true and literal translation of that old savage's long-winded yarn, and not an exaggerated tissue of manufactured trash?" objected Hazle, as Roland repeated the story to him on the way home. "But for the fact that he was so excited and in such hot earnest I wouldn't credit a single word of it. Why the deuce couldn't you put it into commonsense prose in any case? That romantic, half-breed poetry may please beardless boys and silly girls, but it makes a man who has shed his milk-teeth sick."[16]

In this way Newland demonstrates that it is not the white man who has a monopoly on feeling, for in Hazle's reaction the opposite is implied, and what is doubly tragic is Walcoro's submissiveness once the fires of his past have burnt down and he is exposed once more to the present:

> The fire died out of the old man's eyes as he ceased, and in its place came the hungry look of the beggar, as with outstretched hand, he whined out once more his oft-repeated plea for "bacca".[17]

Newland is not uncritical of Aboriginal culture. He concedes the cruelty of many of their actions and the savagery which can brutalise the tribal system, but in spite of this he is concerned to show that behind the broken remnants of a fallen people lies a deep dignity and accord with the land. In Aboriginal culture there is an omniscience which has its roots in antiquity, and it is this which adds a new dimension to civilisation as it is understood by the European. This sense of omniscience, and the spirituality which arises from the Aborigines' affinity with the land, are well illustrated in the account of Swordstick who, as an officer in charge of a detachment of native police, surrounds and annihilates a small tribe in order to prevent their breeding more "noxious vermin".[18] When passing the site as a drover for Wroithsley, Swordstick is murdered by a few surviving tribesmen, and while the narration of the massacre itself is sickening in its intensity, the subsequent visit by the stockmen is especially memorable for its evocation of the indefinable terror which haunts the site:

> "It had been a clear moonlight night ... In drawing the cattle on to the camp the previous evening, they rushed from that thicket in a fright, but I had thought little of it, supposing a snake or rat startled them. Nor did I attach much importance to seeing a number of bones strewn in the margin of the bushes. Now, in the impressive silence of the night, broken only by the moan and tramp of the impatient animals, I began to wonder what those bones could be. The eyes of a thousand head of cattle seemed to stare straight in the direction of the hill where they lay, and for the life of me I could not help looking there also. Was it fancy, or in the glimmer of those bleached relics of the past, did dusky forms with a swaying motion pass to and fro and then disappear? ... Jeer if you will, but in my long experience of the weird Australian bush night-watches, I have never before or since felt the nameless indefinable terror that took hold of me then. it curdled my blood, and the very hair of my head lifted with fright. I cannot tell why, but the air seemed pregnant with fleeting shadows, haunting shapeless terrors."[19]

In spite of his own evil actions towards the Aborigines, Wroithsley approves an act of retribution which culminates in Swordstick's cry of pain and the stampeding of the herd. When they are brought under control he is drawn once again irresistibly towards the sandhill:

> "Were the fleeting forms I had seen among those relics imaginary, or had a tragedy - the sequel to the greater one - been enacted under my eyes? Was it possible that those trees sighing in the wind could possibly unfold it? I don't know how or what it was, but something stronger than my own will impelled me to enter the thicket."[20]

Swordstick's body is found, full of spears. It is an end and a beginning.

Newland laments the passing of the Aborigine, but while he affirms the efficacy of their culture and their attachment to the land, he also demonstrates that European vision and ambition in Central Australia need not be based on greed and exploitation. In particular he understands the fragile nature of the Australian environment, writing in his *Memoirs*:

> It must be acknowledged that the white man's civilization in a country like Australia brings much destruction to animal and vegetable life. He recklessly and needlessly kills birds, and introduces animals that destroy vegetation, while by the indiscriminate use of fire he ravages far more of the beauty of the country than he need.[21]

Newland feels for the inland, for that spirit which runs to and fro like a vast network of ideas, as varied and infinite as the land itself. He shares its dynamic nature - the ever-changing contours and colours, the line of scrub in the distance, the rolling sandhills, the silent dry creeks - pictures which like the sun flash and dance behind windswept branches. He seeks images which, in uniting man and nature, give meaning to each.

NOTES

1. J. Langdon Bonython in his foreward to *Memoirs of Simpson Newland*, Adelaide, F.W. Pearce and Sons, 1926, p.v.
2. *Memoirs*, p.158.
3. *Paving the Way: A Romance of the Australian Bush*, London, Gay and Hancock, 1912, p.370.
4. *Paving*, p.238.
5. *Paving*, pp. 289-90.
6. *Blood Tracks of the Bush: An Australian Romance*, London, Gay and Hancock, 1919, pp.181-82.
7. *Blood Tracks*, p.124.
8. *Blood Tracks*, p.125.
9. *Memoirs*, p.50.
10. *Memoirs*, p.160.
11. *Paving the Way*, p.54.
12. *Paving*, p.64.
13. *Paving*, p.64.
14. *Paving*, p.82.
15. *Paving*, p.83.
16. *Paving*, p.299.
17. *Paving*, p.299.
18. *Blood Tracks*, p.232.
19. *Blood Tracks*, pp.226-27.
20. *Blood Tracks*, p.238.
21. *Memoirs*, p.30.

Home Suite

For Bruce Bennett and his *Australian Compass*

Home is the first
and final poem
and every poem between
has this mum home seam.

Home's the weakest enemy
as iron steams starch -
but to war against home
is the longest march.

Home has no neighbours.
They are less strong
than the tree, or the sideboard.
All who come back belong.

Home is the contraband
alike of rubble squats
and of where food is never
cooked in the old death fats:

Can you fuse a new joint
home in this circuit-tier?
Does each trail a long home
to fold and unfurl here?

Streets of bulldozed terrace
or that country of the Shark,
or with slant cattle-launching
ramps adzed from ironbark -

All soft invisible flag-days
fawn pasts sting with pride:
the world's oldest lamplight
stumbles from inside

as I come to the door
and they're all still there
in Serbia, Suburbia,
in the chill autumn air.

No later first-class plane
flies the sad quilt wings.
Any feeling after final
must be home, with idyll-things.

First home at last
is a rounded way to live
but to tell another You're my home
speaks of a greater love.

Love. It is a recent
and liquid enough term
to penetrate and mollify
what's compact in home.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

The Capricorn

Got my sealegs the second night out on the Capricorn,
staggering drunk from rail to rail
with a knife strapped to my hand under the booms.

A floating meatworks, the nets came up with fish
thrashing silver among scallops, floodlit shapes
dumped like a glitter of shit to the sorting tables,

someone copping a raysting on the hand
and a mulloway grunting its life out on the boards.
Now, parked by the Gascoyne River with a bad dose

of shucker's wrist and a frozen flathead steaming
on the bonnet, my wrist thumping, I see the skipper
holed up behind glass, his face pale green

with radar light, the wipers smearing yelled abuse
from his mouth. We were all half cut, the hip-flasks
of Bundy going overboard like undersize cod,

Guns n Roses blaring through the spray, and a bong
dripping seaslime going back and forth across the tables,
its stem smoking like the funnel of a miniature steamer.

Working fifteen hours, then collapsing with the sun
into bunks that reek of fish guts and years of semen,
tattooed arms draped over the sides, and Canadian

Wayne dreamtalking shark attack and blood.
Then too soon the alarm of engines, up again
to be stabbed by the spines of small bright fish,

the pain wicked, a red-hot wire from your hand
to your underarm, moaning away, still sorting
and no one giving a fuck. The money's good

but you piss it away, riding your stool
the first night back, exchanging bullshit at the bar
of the Carnarvon. The crew a hard lot, young

and scarred, a season on the boats then south
to Donnybrook for the apples. A couple of hours
to record three weeks at sea, the flathead

thawing out like some gothic hood ornament,
the veins in my wrist ballooning, poems and scallops
ripped out wet and fleshy from their shells.

JOHN MALONE

Colony

A colony of mushrooms - fawn,
beige, others ashen grey as
though swept by fire - had pushed
its way among the debris: plastic,
tissue paper, fallen leaves, huddling
together against the cold; hard to see
unless you missed your bus & were standing
around doing nothing -
They looked like small
starfish stranded on a dark shore. I
turned them over: their long
stalks attached them to the ground
like umbilical cords not yet cut. I
stroked their smooth, moist caps, leaving
a black smudge on my fingertips
& for a time forgot I did not even like
mushrooms.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE

Steep Point

for Ross Cusack

The man who drove all night to stand
on the Westernmost point of Australia,
to wait beside his rod, the garfish
bait suspended under balloons, fished
both sides of the tide unsuccessfully,
leaving plastic bait bags, discarded
line, and beer cans to blow around
on the rock.
The line snagged
at the rock's edge, where gulls
snare themselves to the bone, flapping
into death; the bags went under water,
where seals, dophins and whales
mistake them for jellyfish, their lungs
lined with plastic, beached and choking.
He had nothing to say when I pointed
to the humpback whales cruising within
casting distance, their great blue backs
breaking the surface like a pod
of animated boulders, their spray
fogging the horizon.
His silence
would not have been misunderstood
had he looked on in wonderment,
or simply smiled at the slow dark passage
of the largest animals, but he reeled in
the balloons, turned his back and lit
a cigarette, as if the whales were no more
than sections of reef, uncovered then
obscured by the waves. When he left
he walked across a flat grey beach,
his footprints deep lines in the sand.
And I thought perhaps the sleeping
hypodermic of the stonefish
may provoke a response from him -
any reaction, however painful,
being better than the silent air his mouth
had leaked, deadbreath and apathy
fortifying the rise of the plastic tide.

JOHN McLAREN

Security and Violation: Randolph Stow's *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*

By the end of the nineteenth century the frontiers around the globe were effectively closed. During the twentieth century, migration has been from the country to the cities, and from the cities to extermination and refugee camps. Although romantics, and those who exploit the romantic ideology for material profit, may still search for new frontiers in the depths of the sea, on the peaks of the Himalayas or the icy stretches of Antarctica, or on the face of the moon, these places will always be outside the boundaries of effective settlement. The greatest extension of settlement will continue to be the expansion of cities to consume previously wilderness or farming land. The attempts that have been made to extend agricultural settlements by razing forests or watering the deserts have generally led to disaster. They have brought about the misery of Manchuria, the dustbowls of Oklahoma or the Victorian Mallee, the destruction of rainforests in Boreo and Brazil, the salination of the Murray River basin. At the same time, the displacement, repression and exploitation of people which allowed Europeans to subjugate new worlds has bred violence and disorder which contradict the hopes of peace and plenty that first led them into these worlds. Both forms of disaster come together in Africa and the Middle East. But with the closing of the frontiers to further settlement has come also a new recognition of the power of nature and the need to seek accommodation rather than domination. This has led to a literature which seeks to produce a culture based on a relationship of partnership between human and nature, and which looks at wilderness not as a resource to exploit but as a place where we can return to the sources in nature of our human cultures and conscious existence.

Much of this wilderness literature arises from a disgust with cities and the material culture they breed. Like the romantic poets, these writers seek in nature a renewal of a primal energy from which we have been separated by industrial capitalism, but rather than seeking this renewal through contemplation they seek an active partnership which will restore a unity of word and action they associate with the earliest societies of hunters and gatherers. Two contradictory ideas are implicit in their work. One is the idea of man as the lonely hunter, the other the ideal of a harmony between humans and nature. If the symbol of the first is wilderness, the symbol of the second is a garden. The most recent work of prehistorians on the hunting and gathering societies of America, Australia and the Pacific would suggest that the second symbol is the more appropriate.

Just as industrial society produces both the need for wilderness and the threat to it, so the metropolitan centres of economic and political power extend their control over the lives of the remotest peoples of the Pacific provinces. The global economy simultaneously generates demands for more resources and control over the process of production, which becomes steadily more mechanical and impersonal.

Capital is preferred to labour, and the jobs which remain are more tightly organized and controlled. People therefore lose, at the same time, power over their work and over the goods and the environment they produce. The consequent disputes within the provincial communities over the use of resources are ultimately the local expression of a conflict between the metropolitan centre and the provinces. Because the regions have areas which by their nature cannot support settlement, although they can be destroyed by attempts to exploit their weath, it is in the writing of these regions that we find the search for the new balance between land, culture and the individual which the closed frontier of a finite world demands. This writing does not look to the land as a place of escape from society, but as a place where harmony can be restored between nature and culture, between the land and society. This does not require a return to the primitive, but a reworking of culture so that we can understand the ways it has fashioned us to perceive, use and exploit the land. This understanding is itself the first step towards harmony.

The distinctive literature of these places begins when expansion and settlement have finished, and humans are left alone to contemplate their puny culture against the immensity of land and sky. The land which had been the enemy, an object to be subjugated to human will, reveals itself as the continuing subject which ultimately controls all human activity. Individuals can realize their desire only by learning to accommodate its demands. As in the earlier phase, the dialectic continues between the individual and the land, but now its aim is the construction of a new culture of harmony rather than the imposition of established ideas of dominance.

* * *

The search for this harmony is a continuing theme in Randolph Stow's Australian novels. Heriot, in *To the Islands*, has fled from civilization to realize the quintessential Australian dream of a self-sufficient community integrating the noblest of savages with ideals of the Christian religion. The action of the novel begins by forcing him to recognize that his ideal of service is built on the face of domination. Only by fleeing further into the wilderness is he able to restore wholeness to himself, but at the cost of community. By contrast, in *Tourmaline* the community is destroyed by the outsider who takes its members with him into the wilderness, destroying them by persuading them to let him take charge of their lives. He fails to find water, the rain does nto come, and the town dies, leaving only the Law and the Publican to maintain its memory. The opening pages of *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, by contrast, suggest the harmony that eludes his characters in the earlier novels, but the subsequent action disappoints our expectations, revealing the appearance of the garden as illusory.

The two earlier novels are both myths of the incompatible needs of the self for both the independence promised by the wilderness and the community promised by settlement, family and church. In *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, Stow turns from myth to history. While the story of Tourmaline is told in the first person by an anonymous observer, the later novel is told in the third person but reads like an autobiography of its main character, Rob Coram, whose passage from childhood to adolescence occupies the same time and space as Stow's own. This journey takes him from the felt unity of family and landscape through the threat of war and violence to a realization, itself the product of his growing awareness of his place in the landscape, that he can rely only on himself.

In the opening pages of the novel, Rob's place is signified by the merry-go-round, the product of human design that creates a unity of culture and nature and of time and place. The merry-go-round reveals itself only to "an eye concentrated on it (to the eye, say, of a lover of the merry-go-round, a child)"[1](p.1). The careful

description of its ornate design, the "planks polished by the bottoms of children" and the unrusted sections on the stays "where the hands of adults had grasped and pulled to send the merry-go-round spinning" uses the language of an adult to recall the child's perception. But the adult narrator is still outside the scene, placing the boy in his surroundings, and simultaneously placing the merry-go-round in a landscape where design leads out to nature:

> When the merry-go-round was moving it grated under its collar. But now it was still, there were no children playing about it, only the one small boy who had climbed out of the car by the curb and stood studying the merry-go-round from a distance, his hands jammed down inside the waistband of his shorts.
> ... Beyond the merry-go-round was the sea ... It was simply the sea, dark and glowing blue, bisected by seagull-grey timbers of the rotting jetty, which dwindled away in the distance until it seemed to come to an end in the flat-topped hills to the north. (p.1)

The narrator continues to observe this scene, watching as the boy insists that his mother give him a spin on the merry-go-round, reporting their conversation, with its references to a barely-understood war threatening from the north, and telling us of the boy's awareness of living in an old country whose youth has been blasted by the twin curses of the Depression and the Duration. The passage ends with the boy's memory of the day he discovered the reality of time and change, and the narrator's own observation of time that brings and takes away identity as:

> To the north and south the dunes moved in the wind. Each winter the sea gnawed a little from the peninsula. time was irredeemable. And far to the north was war. (p.5)

Only in the next section does the narrator shift the perspective from himself to the boy. The rest of the novel traces the way that time erodes Rob's sense of stillness and sufficiency, setting him apart from the landscapes that have nurtured him and revealing the violence implicit even in these landscapes. The merry-go-round in the sea belongs in this perspective. To the outsider, like his mother, it is only the mast and ironware of a wrecked ship. But for Rob, it exists beyond the jetty. "It was very far away, but he could see the bulge where the iron leaves would be, and the collar from which the iron stays descended to support the seat" (p.14). He knows that one day he will get there, and "stay there always ... and it would be today forever." But the novel's twin irony is that he can reach this merry-go-round of the imagination only by losing today, by becoming an actor in the landscape, not simply enjoying it, and at the same time by leaving the security of the land behind as he strikes out into the unknown of the sea.

II

Once the narrative shifts to Rob's perspective, it takes us into a child's landscape of enclosure and certainty. The child, by definition, has no control over his own circumstances, and can only react to the consequences of decisions made by others. In Rob's case, these decisions are determined by the uncertainties of war. But, although he moves through a succession of houses, each one, even the one sitting in the town, is "a homestead and nothing less" (p.5). Each offers him rooms filled with interesting toys or goods, a garden to explore, the security of family, safety from the distant violence of war and the changes threatened by time. Even when he is forced from this environment into the more public world of school and its savage playground wars, these homesteads still constitute a world set apart from the Australia he learns first from the poems his aunt reads to him. These talk of a land that is "bare, melancholy, littered with gallant bones", clearly distinguished from his

own "green gentle country".

> He had a clear idea of where Australia began. Its border with his world was somewhere near his Uncle Paul's farm in the dry red country ... He built in his mind a vision of Australia that was both brave and sad, which was both what soldiers went away to die for and the mood in which they died. Deep inside him he yearned towards Australia: but he did not expect ever to go there." (pp.68-69)

Although the symbolic Australia offers meaning and challenge to his future, it lies outside his present reality. Like his own identity, it waits to be discovered. The landscape of his present simply is. It is a place to be used for his own satisfaction. Yet, just as the homesteads, the town and their people are the text that writes Rob into existence, they also acquire for him their own symbolic meaning. Each homestead has its own distinctive qualities, together they represent continuity with a prosperity accumulated in the past. Yet the novel shows that this continuity and symbolic meaning are illusory. This comfortable world of his childhood is set apart from both the violence to which the war has subjected his cousin Rick, and the disturbing potential of an Australia that challenges his future. The landscape Rob knows is connected to Europe rather than to Australia, and until he can assimilate it to the violence of its occupation and the threat to its present it is not available for his use. He can only come to know it by manipulating its symbols, just as he can only know war by joining in the symbolic exchanges of the playground wars. But as these symbols separate him from others and from his home, making him aware of himself as a particular identity, they prepare him for life in a world of exchange rather than of simple use. The symbolic merry-go-round is something to be possessed, not, like the one in the playground, simply to be used.

As Rob grows in awareness of his separate identity - his body, his senses, his hidden feelings - , he becomes also more aware of the others who share his land. His uncle's station of Sandalwood had been founded "on the first day of his world's creation". Its shearing shed still has "slits in the walls for rifles" to defend the owners against marauding blacks, and its "Pool was older still, and full of bunyips". (p.19) But behind this world he learns of the treachery and slaughter in the Abrolhos islands and the abandonment of the two Dutch mutineers who became the first white dwellers in that country (pp.113-14), whose presence is held to account for the "white-haired boongs" from the north (p.193). Behind this again lies the Costa Branca of the Portuguese, and then the mysterious world of the Aborigines who have been pushed to the margins, where they are merely troublesome outcasts whom Ernest refuses to employ, even though Mrs Maplestead remembers them as "so colourful, with their bright shirts" (p.55). The Aborigines that Rob knows, and even admires, he recognizes as more Australian than he is, "yet somehow they were not Australian". They are despised, they disgust his mother because they "have bugs in their hair" (p.79). They are remote from the presence in the cave, where his mother fits his hand over one of the prints on the wall:

> He felt the cold rock under his hand, where a dead boy's hand had once rested. Time and change had removed this child from his country, and his world was not one world, but had in it camps of the dispossessed. Above the one monument of the dead black people, the sheoaks sounded cold, sounded colder than rock. (p.56)

For a moment, the world that his forebears have built so comfortably for him becomes alien. The cave reveals the familiar landscape as imposed. Its owners do not yet possess it.

With Rob's growing awareness of others and of the strangeness of the land comes an awareness of his own breeding, of the blood that makes him an Australian,

but by linking him with some people separates him from others. Through the Maplesteads he feels links back to the rebels of the Eureka stockade and before them to stiff-necked Jacobites, but not to Italian fishermen or Greek tomato-gardeners, and certainly not to niggers or convicts (pp.95-96). Like his uncle's prize Merinos, he has impeccable breeding. His sense of being special is strengthened by his identification with his cousin Rick and by the family histories he learns from his grandmother and his aunts. This family that gives him his special quality has through the generations made the landscape in which he feels at one with the world - a landscape, like the merry-go-round, that combines the timeless cycles of nature with the perfection of the human artefact. When Rick returns from the war and the prison-camp, the one threat to its perfection seems removed. Rick confirms this with the lines from Donne that he inscribes in Rob's autograph book:

> The firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end, where I begun.

III

Rick's return, however, marks the end of circling. The first part of the novel takes place in wartime, while the men are for the most part away on war duties. Its world is dominated by women and feminine images of home, containment, completion. The war remains a distant threat. Its end however does not return the harmony Rob had expected. His father becomes a melancholic, and Rick on his return brings into the closed world of the family the wartime knowledge that continues to set him apart. This in turn forces Rob to recognize that adulthood means separation, the loss of community. His father's merry-go-rounds continue to spin happily, but the merry-go-round in the sea recedes to an infinity of the past.

The second part of the novel traces the events as Rick moves out of the family and Rob grows through the last years of childhood to awareness of himself as a potent male and an individual. The countryside is no longer a place that sustains him, but a land to be explored and interpreted in his own terms.

The significant episode in this second part is the destruction of Mrs Maplestead's palms, the refuge of "chambers and passages, reptile-haunted brown caves where secret societies flourished briefly" and from which the boys have sniped at passers-by and spied on adults. It is also the barrier that has kept Mrs Maplestead's house a homestead, separate from the town. Now the palms and the land they stood on are sold to build houses as the town undergoes a transforming spasm of growth. To the boy, the bulldozers and changes they bring are "worse than the Japs". The boy watches as explosions blast the rotting jetties from their bed, he watches "the empty, dirty-windowed shops restored, the poky, shabby shops growing Yankee-flash, the swinging doors coming off the pubs, the verandas and wrought-iron balconies over the streets torn down by order of the council ... the whole run-down haunted town ... reborn, remade, according to standards of beauty and elegance proper in a nation which had done its pioneering in hovels." The development in the town is parallelled by changes in the country, where "bushfires and clearing stripped the Sandalwood paddocks to bare bone" and the "house where he had seen the ghost grew unremarkable behind balconies of louvred asbestos". He wonders "how a world so congruent, so close-knit by history and blood and old acquaintance, had become fragmented into a mere municipality." (pp.214-15)

The process of change that Rob watches symbolizes a nation turning its back both on its history and its landscape, and choosing uniformity and mediocrity in their place. The world Rob had known nurtured a unity of people and environment. The clan of Maplestones may have ignored the violence of the dispossession on

which their occupation of the land was based, but they respected the land itself. Rob comes to see the links by which his forerunners bound the land back through time to the history and legends of their European past, and to accept both these links and the land's difference as his own inheritance. He learns also to recognize the land's imperatives. When he acquires a gun he engages in an orgy of killing until he is sated and disgusted. Only then can he realize the lessons of half his life spent on farms, that a measure of killing is necessary if the land is to continue to nurture its people. This in turn prepares him to venture further into the interior, exploring it by bicycle with his mate, by horse or motor-vehicle with Rick. Rick introduces him to the world of work and the mateship of men, and then takes him still further to the ruins of the mine and the goal, symbols of the convict past that lies across the links back to European romance and Celtic mystery. Rob's progress forwards to maturity and individuality is thus matched by a movement back to the past and the communal identity that has been destroyed by the violence of the settlers against both land and people.

In the postwar world, however, this kind of identity is no longer possible. Rob's Uncle Paul may use his Maltese origins to build a kind of multicultural European identity with his retreat at Innisfail, but his property is only "an eroding island in the river of time" (p.215). The idea of family that unites Rob with his uncle Paul proves fallacious, incapable of sustaining even its own members. Rick finds that, if the prison-camp robbed him of his youth, Australia denies him his ambitions. His attempts at the law and art bore him, he finds himself excluded from the close circle of his family. Its safe world, despite the vitality of the proliferating nieces and nephews, belongs to his past. As he explains to Rick,

> 'I've outgrown you. I don't want a family. I don't want a country. Families and countries are biological accidents. I've grown up, and I'm on my own.'
> ...
> 'I can't stand ... this - ah, this arrogant mediocrity. The shoddiness and the wowserism and the smug wild-boyos in the bars. And the unspeakable boredom of belonging to a country that keeps up a sort of chorus: Relax, mate, relax, don't make the pace too hot. Relax, you bastard, before you get clobbered. (p.273)

While Rick's restlessness is induced by the war, it is Australia itself that drives him to this renunication. Wherever he goes he is reminded of wartime violence. The relaxation he abhors in others is a way of avoiding the violence Australians have known and inflicted. Rob notes that Rick's drawings always return to the same themes of violence and captivity that the implanted culture of the land refuses to acknowledge. Everything he draws reproduces the brutality and subjugation he found in the death camps. When in the closing pages of the book he departs for England, he leaves Rick with only memories of the merry-go-round that had once promised a future of peril but richness. The merry-go-round has not been rooted firmly in the country.

In discovering that he is on his own, Rob also has learned that land and family can sustain only those who give to them. He recognizes the mutual dependence of the perilous beauty of the Australian landscape and those who have learned to work with it. He understands that "Everything we know that's got any sort of - dignity to it, is bound up with the land and the sea" and that people like his "cousin Gordon out mustering, and Eric Larsen getting his boat ready for the Abrolhos" are "like trees" (p.244). But Rick demonstrates that the culture built in the land still has to learn to live with it. The violence at its heart contradicts the nurture to which it aspires, so that Stow's novel reaches the same point as Dorothy Hewett's 'Legend of the Green Country', where "The little sour apples still grow in my heart's orchard,/Bitten with grief, coming up out of the dead country."[2]

Yet Stow differs from Hewett because he writes from within the landowning class. Hewett's poem presents her progenitors as adventurers destroyed by their own greed. The sour apples are those that they planted themselves, and while she admires the daring of the settlers she finds herself condemned to "eat their salt" but to tell her own truth. By contrast, Stow shows the blindnesses and limitations of the Maplesteads, but he also presents them as bearers of the essential truth of the country. Old Mrs Maplestead may eventually surrender to the developers of a new and greedy generation, but she remains free of guilt. The ideals that she or Ernest or George Maplestead represent, as does Eric Larsen, are betrayed by people who have respect for neither the land nor the work of those who laboured to turn it into its present form. In choosing to leave the family and be himself in Europe, Rick is showing himself true to its central, ultimately aristocratic, ideals. The novel constantly describes the unforgiving landscape of Australia's centre, the sad ruins of past hopes, but its characters constantly return to the comfort of the homesteads and their European environments. Rick merely takes this return to its logical conclusion, going past Guildford Grammar and the "redbrick Norman fortress" of St George's College to their European models. The explicit message of the novel is that man finds himself by growing beyond any attachment to people or place. Certainly, Rick shows none of the responsibility or guilt that Hewett shares with her grandparents. He wants to be himself.

Yet finally the novel undermines this viewpoint. It shows that the foreign violence that Rob fears from the Japanese is perfectly at home in white Australia, both in its treatment of the original inhabitants and in its destruction of its own past. More importantly, it shows that the constructed landscapes of Sandalwood or Andarra have no future. As Rob senses early on, his own future is not in this safe country, but in the harsh inland Australia he learns as a foreign country, but to which he already yearns. The way to this landscape is not the romantic return to nature of the wilderness writers, but a journey that requires first the retracting of the links to Europe. Ultimately it will involve the creation of a relationship with the land that will not depend only on this, but will incorporate those earlier Australias of the Abrolhos, the Costa Brianca, and the Cave of Hands. Only then will Australians be at home with themselves and their predecessors. It may be that despair of finding this home eventually drove Stow himself to follow Rick's footsteps and retreat from a land that has remained forever frontier. He has left us with his novels, which offer hope that, as we learn to assimilate our past to the landscape, we may find the vision that eluded Heriot and the people of Tourmaline, but which for a time the Maplestones built around their homesteads. The vision however demands that we leave the security of the homesteads and face the violence on which they were built and which remain at the base of our society's relationship with the land.

NOTES

1. *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968. All pages references are to this edition.
2. *A Tremendous World in her Head*, Dangaroo Press, Sydney, 1989, P.15.

PETER McLESTER

Images of Melbourne

I.

Rain splattering outside: a peaceful feeling
lasting out a Sunday evening. Pizza in South

Melbourne with Enrique, and then the drive
to Moomba, there to meet a friend: a Chinese

artist, drawing portraits under plastic
awnings, flashy features for a flattering

ten dollars: the girl-friend seated near
her man, one eye stuck to the drawing, the other

on his cap, a feature like his moustache
covering the face, and feeling growing on

beneath an attitude. But here, returning
to our car, my thought goes out again

to the south of Melbourne, and to Mr Shin,
working for nine months for peanuts in

his pizzeria, sitting down to eat his daily
rice. *My* mistake, he says, for choosing

martial arts ahead of other things: my son
is now reluctant to follow me in this

and thus the weak line of my choice
continues in his wavering. Behind him

the silver dagger of his cheese-machine
glitters like a disused weapon

and the running tap dissolving frozen prawns,
slumped into the sink, runs on in counterpoint

to talk of gain and safety of investments, of fear
running in one pack foregathered for the exit

trampling on all others who themselves, alone,
seek their escape, from the trembling siren

battling for a quick embrace in narrow exits
for a fire that is not nor ever here will be -

II.

Awaking early in the morning: strange delight
some things of slowly moving hours: child

asleep at mother's breast at five or six
of an afternoon, clock-face sunk

with melting features into secretaries' yawn
which lifts a moment with the cup

of tea, which spills across the mini-
skirt, and legs close up the spot

of joy, the constant joy deferred - pushed
past the evening soapie, bubbling

over in the execution chamber of the mind:
strapped legs and arms and torso

cocooned by gauze of early sleep
and stretching web-like forth

into a spider's fangs and into yet another
day: bland mornings, waking without

God or hope, or kiss that draws
a lover's heart with erect leg

of circling compass, lean the playful
foot, into the widest zone of living's art

as plastic and magnetic cards whirl up
a coded number, and release the gate of sleep

to usher in the secretary, to a day as blue
as when first love ten years ago broke

timeless and afraid, broke open on a summer's
lawn, his cheek pressed sweetly into hers

and spun the midday sun around a blue tarpaulin
of air and heat, not airconditioned memories

five storeys up, forsaken in the breeze
and tugging listlessly all afternoon

her wetted dress -

GRAEME WILSON

Backwater

A Chinese poem in translation

Tonight, at Eastern Slope, I wined too well;
Half-sobered up; and then got drunk once more.
Home around midnight, bang, bang, bang, at the gate
Brought no response but the house-boy's thundrous snore.
Persist? For what? I lean on my stick and listen
To the sounds of the river fretting its moonlit shore.

Not to command oneself, to be shuffled around
At the whims of the world; it irks, it niggles me.
The night wears on. Wind drops. The surly river
Soothes from its snarl to a rippled filigree.
I would give this arm for a boat, for a chance to wherry
My shored-in self to the widths of an open sea.

Su Tung-po (1036-1101)

BARRY LOPEZ

Informed by Indifference: A Walk in Antarctica

The longest flight I ever made - the metaphysical distance between points, not the hours aloft - was from Christchurch, New Zealand, to McMurdo Station, Antarctica. It was aboard a four-engine, propeller-driven cargo plane called a C-130, flown by the Royal New Zealand Air Force. It took eight hours to broach the pacific with two dozen passengers and a full load of freight.

Once airborne, most of us found a niche among the cargo pallets. With earplugs firmly in place to moderate the engine noise, and cushioned by our heavy clothing and parkas, we all dozed and read. Some stared into space. It was too noisy to talk. Every hour or so I moved to a small porthole window and gazed at the vast ocean. In those moments above the cloudless sea, my body vibrating with the plane, I began to feel how remote Antarctica was.

We landed on the sea ice at McMurdo, and then the group of us - scientists, technicians, several official visitors - were driven across the ice to Ross Island, to our respective billets at the American station at McMurdo and at nearby Scott Base, the New Zealand station. I checked in with my host, the National Science Foundation, which runs the American scientific program on the continent; introduced myself to several scientists; and joined a small group for dinner.

It was hard to get the laconic, heavy-shouldered rhythm of McMurdo, the contradictory air of scientific earnestness and military lassitude. When we disembarked the plane I stood for a few moments, bags in hand, staring into the Royal Society Range on the far side of frozen McMurdo Sound. Sunlight pooled there in the glaciers like molten manganese. I did not want the pressure of time to build again; one goes through so much to leave the hammering and hawking of civilization behind. But then the jitney was there, insistent.

The next day I flew with several other visitors in a Navy helicopter to a place called Lake Vanda, about forty-five miles northwest of McMurdo, in the Wright Valley in Victoria Land. The New Zealanders have an advance base there, a cluster of five or six small buildings chained to the ground against the wind. The New Zealanders were gracious but demure. It took only a few minutes to show us around their station - spartan, solar-powered, snugly arranged. Our hosts then served us fresh scones and potato soup. Their hospitality, the cordial welcome that New Zealanders customarily extend to visitors in this peregrine region, is an Antarctic tradition. The richness of those moments is in vivid contrast to the wildness of the land. The pale green buildings are like a pod of dories alone on the North Atlantic.

I asked the station manager if I might return, if there was room. Marvellous, he said. A week later, after visiting with a score of scientists at research bases and field camps, after a tour of Shackleton's historic base camp at Cape Royds and Scott's base at Cape Evans, both in a state of eerie, near perfect preservation,

mesmerising inside in their heroic gloom, I returned to Vanda.

The Wright and half a dozen other valleys at the northeastern end of the Transantarctic Mountains are collectively referred to as the dry valleys. It has not rained here in two million years. No animal abides, no plant grows. A persistent, sometimes ferocious wind has stripped the country to stone and gravel, to streamers of sand. The huge valleys stand stark as empty fjords. You look in vain for any conventional sign of human history - the vestige of a protective wall, a bit of charcoal, a discarded arrowhead. Nothing. There is no history, until you bore into the layers of rock or until the balls of your fingertips run the rim of a partially exposed fossil. At the height of the austral summer, in December, you smell nothing but the sun-beaten stone. In a silence dense as water, your eye picks up no movement but the sloughing of sand, seeking its angle of repose.

On the flight in from New Zealand it had occurred to me, from what I had read and heard, that Antarctica retained Earth's primitive link, however tenuous, with space, with the void that stretched out to Jupiter and Uranus. At the seabird rookeries of the Canadian Arctic or on the grass-lands of the Serengeti, you can feel the vitality of the original creation; in the dry valleys you sense sharply what came before. The Archeozoic is like fresh spoor here.

I took several long walks in the Wright and adjacent Taylor valleys. I did not feel insignificant on these journeys, dwarfed or shrugged off by the land, but superfluous. It is a difficult landscape to enter, to develop a rapport with. It is not inimical or hostile, but indifferent, utterly remote, even as you stand in it. The light itself is aloof.

The dry valleys are breathtakingly beautiful. The air is so clear the eye can fasten effortlessly on the details, the sharp break of shadow creases, in distant mountains, making binoculars curiously redundant. The hues of yellow and brown, the tints of orange and red that elevate the sedimentary rocks above the igneous layers of granite, take the starkness out of the land but do not alter its line, which is bold, balanced, serene. Classic.

The stillness that permeates the valleys is visual as well as acoustical. On foot, traversing a landscape that is immense but simple, your point of view, looking right and left at the mountain walls or up the valley, changes only very slowly. I had sought this stillness; but unlike the stillness I'd found in similarly austere and deserted regions of the Earth - on the tundra of Ellesmere Island, in the Namib Desert - this stillness had an edge to it. I felt no security with the Earth here, no convincing epiphany of belief in the prevailing goodwill of human beings, which always seems in the offing in these irenic places. However the Earth consoles us in the troubling matter of civilization's acquisitiveness, its brutal disregard, this was not the landscape for it.

To say that nothing at all lives here is not true. Algae and other minute marine organisms have evolved in a handful of permanently frozen lakes (the ice of which insulates them from the cold and passes light for photosynthesis). And some yeasts, bacteria, blue-green algae, fungi, and lichens - a group of micro-organisms collectively called crypto-endoliths - live inside the rocks, beneath the first few crystalline layers. A skua occasionally flies this far inland. But the long months of twilight and darkness, the intense cold, the failure of any but the most primordial forms of life to gain purchase here (and so serve as food for others) - these conditions and the wind militate against biology.

During the brief summer, it is warm enough for a few days or weeks to create meltwater; a few inconsequential streams tumble down from the glaciers above the valleys. The sparkling surface of the water is aberrant, a false promise, the land's irony. The only really animate force here is the wind. It blows, always, from the interior, from the west - often, in the spring, at well over sixty knots. It wallops and

scours the mountains, eroding and fracturing, sweeping clear the debris. It is this beast that has, too, made these huge, empty valleys the driest ground on Earth.

Uplifting in the Transantarctic Mountains took place so quickly here, apparently, that the mountains formed in this place along a rampart against the East Antarctic ice sheet (which is the size of the United States). Cut off, the ice cannot flow down these valleys to the sea. Since then, each year's scant snowfall has been shattered and evaporated by the dry, incessant wind before it can accumulate. Only here (and at two other less spectacular sites on the Antarctic mainland, in the Bunger and Vestfold hills in East Antarctica) is the land open to the sky, not buried under ice and snow.

The wind, a katabatic or gravity-driven wind, enters the valleys after falling vertically nearly two miles from the summit of the East Antarctic ice sheet; it comes into the valleys with a discernible hunger, and its effect on the land, which it abrades and lacerates with bits of sand and ice, is often peculiar.

In the Olympus Range on the north side of the Wright Valley, high up on the slope near a place called Bull Pass, I found a thin vein of dolerite, a drab, coarse, grey-black igneous rock similar to basalt. At this outcrop it had broken into pieces, and each piece, sitting on a sand base like a stone on a jeweller's dop, had been polished by the wind to the smoothness and lustre, if not the density, of marble. Yet it was not this, really, that gave them their character; it was how the wind had cut them. They had the faceting, the angularity and curve, the impervious facades, of modern buildings. Even at this scale - hand-size - what lay before me was an imposing field of dark monoliths.

They are called, after the wind, ventifacts.

Insofar as the dry valleys of Victoria Land are known to the outer world, they are known for four things: for these rocks, the essence, in their form, of modern sculpture; for a mineral, antarcticite (calcium chloride hexahydrate), discovered in local ponds so heavily laden with salt they do not freeze in winter, when the temperature rests at -60 degrees and -70 degrees Fahrenheit; for their similarity, it is widely believed, to the rainless deserts of Mars (the Viking lander would have found no life on this ground either); and for a scattering of mummified creatures on the valley floors, mostly young crabeater seals and, rarely, a penguin or skua.

No one is certain why the seals come up here. A good guess is that they are inexperienced. They wander up from the coast, sometimes travelling as far as forty miles inland, hunching their way over the gravel fields with - to judge from a few, fresh trails that have been found - intractable determination. But it is travel utterly in the wrong direction.

They succumb eventually to starvation on these errant journeys; but an animal dead for a decade may be so well preserved that it looks, as one approaches, as if it might move off. A seal more exposed to the wind might over several years arch up in a curve like half a car tyre, head and rear flippers high in the air, its eye sockets bored out, its mouth agape, a goblin.

The taut skin of these desiccated animals feels smooth under the hand and hard, like water-polished stone. The wind freeze-dries their flesh. No predator bothers them. The faces, if they can be said to have an expression, are distraught, catatonic with a sudden, horrible misunderstanding of geography. (It seems reckless to insist that only endocrine secretions and neural structures are here, that naught else abides.) The peculiar cheek teeth, ornate with tiny, interlocking cusps, stand out boldly in their highly evolved but useless efficiency.

Whenever I encountered these animals I found it difficult to leave them. And when I left, often as not, I turned back. They were inconsolable. They had made an error. Their lips parted in some final, incoherent noise. They had, most of them, died alone. Some lay with the clouded eyes of the blind, preserved for years in

abject disbelief.

In a week of ambling, of looking among mountain boulders hoodooed by the wind, of sitting in windless bights amid glacial debris, of lining out like a Dinka on the heels of my hands and one knee to taste the salt ponds, I found the dry valleys unfetchable. Whatever one might impute to this landscape, of beauty or horror, seemed hardly to take hold; my entreaties for conversation met almost always with monumental indifference. I have never felt so strongly that unsettling aloofness of the adult that a small child knows, and fears. It is hard to locate the reassurance of affection in these circumstances. And yet this land informs, some would say teaches, for all its indifference. I can easily imagine some anchorite here, meditating in his room of stone, or pausing before a seal shipwrecked in this polar desert.

Over the years, one comes to measure a place, too, not just for the beauty it may give, the balminess of its breezes, the insouciance and relaxation it encourages, the sublime pleasures it offers, but for what it teaches. The way in which it alters our perception of the human. It is not so much that you want to return to indifferent or difficult places, but that you want not to forget.

If you returned it would be to pay your respects, for not being welcomed.

SYLVIA HALLAM

Peopled Landscapes: Original Australian Land Holding and Land Management in Southwestern Australia

Easy cliches spring too readily to mind and, alas, into print, when we think of the Australian landscape and its first inhabitants - "few", "scattered", "nomadic", "hunter-gatherer", "primitive",... Are these stereotypes valid? Emphatically not. Just a few striking quotations from seventeenth to nineteenth century observers should be sufficient to make us reconsider our prejudices[1]:

> portions of **land under cultivation...**
> (Aucke Pietersz Jonck near the Moore River in 1658[2])

> now for three and a half consecutive miles we traversed a fertile piece of land, literally **perforated with the holes the natives had made to dig this [*warran*] root**; indeed we could with difficulty walk across it on that account, whilst this tract extended east and west as far as we could see.
> It was now evident that we had entered the most thickly-populated district of Australia that I had yet observed, and moreover one which must have been inhabited over a long series of year, for more had here been done to secure a **provision from the ground** by **hard manual labour** that I could have believed it in the power of uncivilised man to accomplish.
> (George Grey near the Hutt River in 1838[3])

> The extensive **burning** by the natives, a **work of considerable labour**, and performed in dry warm weather, left tracts in the open forest which had become as green as emerald with the young **crop** of grass. These plains were deeply imprinted with the feet of kangaroos, and the **work is undertaken** by the natives to attract these animals to such places. How natural must be the aversion of the natives to the intrusion of another race of men with cattle: people who recognise no right in the aborigines to either the grass they have thus **worked from infancy**, nor to the kangaroos they have hunted with their fathers.
> (Sir Thomas Mitchell, 1848[4])

What, then, is the true picture, and what is the evidence? In this brief paper these questions can only begin to be addressed (but I have treated them at more length elsewhere[5]).

* * *

When Britons first set foot on Australian soil they maintained the convenient legal fiction that this land was *"terra nullius"*, not worked and held by any individual or group, and therefore available to white grantees. Nothing could be further from the truth. Those whom Bishop Rosendo Salvado of New Norcia called simply "the Australians" had made this land their own by "hard manual labour".

Salvado emphasises the inviolable nature of rights to the land and its produce:

> Every individual has his own territory for hunting, gathering gum and picking up yams, and the rights he has here are respected as sacred.... Consequently each family regards one particular district as belonging exclusively to itself, though the use of it is freely shared by nearby families. But if an enemy or a stranger is caught there, he is put to death by the owner.[6]

Particular families (matrilineal in the southwest) held particular tracts of land, through their detailed knowledge of its resources and ecology, and by exercising their right o harvest its products and their responsibility to keep it in good heart. Particular individuals also held charter to land by acquiring and maintaining sacred traditions and passing them on to their heirs, by participating in dance and ceremony, song and story-telling and decorating of sacred places, thus owning and managing a network of nodal places linked in myth and ritual. Only some of many potential rights might be activated by usage, and so become capable of being passed on further. Those who held secular, firing and harvesting, rights within any region might not be identical with those who held sacred, ritual, rights - just as, under European law, freehold or pastoral tenements and mining tenements (holdings) are not necessarily or even usually held by the same bodies or individuals. But on a close mesh of marriage and kin ties ensured that secular and sacred knowledge, *lore* and *law*, with their concomitant responsibility and tenure, were held by overlapping sets of people. Similarly every individual's rights and responsibilities differed from, but overlapped with, those of others.

* * *

In November 1847 Bishop Salvado decided to open up a new road to Perth from the Mission he had established at New Norcia the previous year. The road was to head southwest to Bindoon, instead of south to the older settlements in the Avon Valley then west through the forest. Salvado surveyed and marked out forty miles of road in three days. But this took him outside the terrain of his native companions. Salvado described the solemn ceremony in which formal usage rights were granted by the Aboriginal land-holders:

> On the morning of the second day we came across a large number of natives who were complete strangers, except to one of my companions, who was born in this vicinity and had helped me greatly in fixing the direction of the road. This man came forward and explained to his fellow tribesmen who we were and why we were going through these parts. Thereupon the oldest of the natives came to meet us, first embracing the oldest in our group and then all the rest, one after another, with his arms around each of them for more than eight minutes on end.
>
> They all followed suit, with the most profound silence reigning throughout the entire ceremony. The embracing over, there was a mutual exchange of weapons and products of the hunt. Then in a solemn tone the oldest of the strangers addressed our oldest member: *"Nichia n'agna cala, iei nunda cala: n-agna nichia nanap; nunda uoto, colin, buro uoto, mila colin, nanap; iei n'alla babib cumbar"* ("Here is my fire, now it is yours too. I stay here; you come and go, then you come back and go away and come again, and then you stay; now we are great friends.")

Salvado adds a footnote on the word *"cala"*:

> The natives use the word "fire" in the same way that we speak about "hearth and home", to indicate the place that we came from, or more particularly the house in which we were born and bred.[7]

George Fletcher Moore had earlier defined *"kalla"* as "fire;...an individual's district; a property in land", and the corresponding adjective, *"kallip"*, as "denoting a knowledge of localities; familiar acquaintance with a range of country...used to express property in land".[8] Knowledge, usage rights, and property rights were

inextricably intertwined.

Salvado leaves us in no doubt about the seriousness with which his Aboriginal companions regarded ownership of land, and the clear distinction they made between formal perpetual tenure or ownership, and temporary "easement" which his hosts so ceremoniously granted.

In this instance one group of Aborigines grants access to land to another group of Aborigines, and only incidentally to the Europeans who accompanied them. In the southwest in the first decade I know only one record of a formal grant made directly to Europeans.

In 1835 George Fletcher Moore and his neighbour, Edward Barrett Lennard, travelled from their initial (British) grants at Upper Swan, seventy kilometres north along the Darling Scarp to a stream now called "Lennard's Brook" just south of Gingin. Here, as at Upper Swan, 1840s-50s maps[9] show areas of "*warran* holes", where Aboriginal families had harvested one of their staple foods, the native yam, *Dioscorea hastifolia*, or *"warran"* (variously spelt), an indicator of good fertile soils, suitable for arable, or "where the best feed for stock is found. Hence the usurpation of the ground and the secret destruction of the aborigines".[10]

Moore and Lennard planned to take up (British) grants here. Their friend Gear had arranged a meeting with the Aboriginal owners. Gear and the younger Weeip has presumably told their Lennard's Brook kinsfolk that Europeans could provide access to a new plant food, wheat, or the flour made from wheat, which could substitute for meal ground from reed rhizomes or yams. Cogat or Gigat and his family tried to achieve a formal agreement with the visitors. Moore recounts their meeting:

> Natives began to arrive and their numbers continued to increase until they amounted to nearly one hundred men, women and children....all appeared pleased to see us; but it must be confessed that their pleasure appeared mixed up with the idea of sharing our provisions....
>
> "Gigat" invited us to eat some *"Baio"* along with him. This fruit, which is esteemed by them as a great delicacy, is the red-skinned nut which is contained in the fruit cone of the *"Zamia"*. The fleshy skin, for it can scarcely be called pulp, is the only part which is edible, and even this is considered poisonous until it has been steeped so long in water, or buried in earth, as to arrive at a state approaching decay.

That evening a full-scale reception had been arranged, at which the guests' acceptance of choice cuts of kangaroo put them in the position of honoured ancestors, with, of course, reciprocal obligations.

> We found the natives all encamped near us ... at night they entertained us with a corrobery, which was got up on our account.... The several figures did not differ materially from those which are familiar to us, but the words which accompanied each change contained strong allusions to passing events ... these ceremonials ... serve the purpose of historic records. It had been told them that Mr Lennard and myself had grants here, and were likely to form establishments on our respective grounds. This was alluded to in one of their songs, and was expressed to the following effect: that the fires of "Dyandala" and "Millendon" (the names of our places on the Swan River) would soon be removed to Coonarup, and that we should have plenty of wheat, and they would have plenty of bread.[11]

The participants in the dance which accompanied this song wore elaborate body decoration, including arm ornaments of mallee-bird feathers, obtainable only by exchange from further inland. Everything combined to emphasise the solemnity of the occasion. Ceremonial dance, drama and song "serve the purpose of historic records", and of the charter documents to which a lawyer would look in our own society, in reaffirming rights in land, extending temporary easements to outsiders, and establishing irrefutable reciprocal obligations.

In 1833 Robert Menli Lyon equated traditions handed down through time, and their repetition in story, song and ceremony; with the formal documentation handed down in literate societies, and held to constitute evidence of past events and of ownership:

> The whole of each tribe are bards; and their evenings are generally spent around their fires, singing, or rather chanting, their poetical compositions. I have reason to believe their history and geography are handed down from generation to generation orally in verse.[12]

Ceremony constituted charter. The ceremonial places themselves linked the secular world into the parallel world outside of time, in which "dreamtime" ancestors had established those nodal points, and the dreamtime tracks which linked them into a mesh embracing the total landscape.

* * *

We tend to assume also that the Australian landscape as Europeans first encountered it was totally pristine, untouched wilderness, unaffected by human impact. But sparse and mobile hunter-gatherer populations had had, and continued to have, an enormous effect on the landscape. An individual or family holding rights in land held also responsibility for the work of maintaining that land, through performance of appropriate sacred rituals, through secular land management practices (such as firing and harvesting), or both. Improvement of pastures in humid areas and the opening up of forest, or at least zones through the forest, giving easier access and greater mobility to original Australians and to subsequent European explorers and settlers; devegetation, soil erosion and possibility salinisation in arid areas; alluvial deposition along rivers and on coastal plains; the transformation of Australian vegetation from predominantly casuarina and *Callistris* to predominantly eucalypts[13] - all were effects of Aboriginal firing of the landscape, a most important aspect of land management over tens of millennia.[14] As with European land management practices, these may achieve their short-term aims, but with unforeseen long-term spin-off, which we now see to be undesirable.[15]

Firing was mainly a tool of pasture management, to improve feed for marsupial herbivores and thus concentrate them in particular areas facilitating culling. Salvado tells us that:

> he [the native] burns off the old dry grass before the rainy season sets in (the new grass will thus grow more quickly and there will be a more plentiful supply of animal life in those parts)...[16]

Lieutenant Bunbury observed the skill shown in firing, and the importance of its effects on the landscape to European settlement:

> By these fires,...the country is kept free from under wood and other obstruction, having the character of an open forest, through most parts of which one can ride freely; otherwise in all probability it would soon become impenetrably thick,[17]...and the cost of clearing would be so greatly increased as to take away all the profit, and it would change the very nature of the country, depriving it of the grazing and pastoral advantages it now possesses.... It is true we might ourselves burn the bush, but we could never do it with the same judgement and good effect as the Natives, who keep the fire within due bounds, only burning those parts they wish when the scrub becomes too thick...[18]

To fire successfully required close and detailed knowledge - of topography, winds, weather patterns, vegetation[19] - and spawned an equally detailed ecological vocabulary:

> *Bokyt* - vegetation which has not yet been burned.
> *Narrik* - unburned ground, but ready for burning. Land of which the vegetation is abundant and dry, fit to be set on fire...
> *Nappal* - burned ground;... Over this ground the natives prefer walking; it is free from all scrub and grass, their progress is not therefore obstructed...
> *Kundyl* - young grass springing after the country has been burned...[20]

Country most burned would be most frequented. George Fletcher Moore remarks in his *Diary*:

> Over the hills [in the Avon valley] the grants in that locality are less burned, being less frequented by white or black people.[21]

Conversely, country most frequented would be most burned, keeping it open and accessible. Hence:

> *Bidi* - the main path or track, pursued by the natives in passing from one part of the country to another, and which leads by the best watering places,

(providing a path network which formed a secular parallel to the dreamtime track network). In contrast, unfrequented poor soils, like the laterites of the forest belt, constituted:

> *Mundak* - the bush; the wild country; the woods.[22]

What sorts of landscapes resulted from Aboriginal burning? George Fletcher Moore described the area around Perth as the first European settlers saw it:

> the country has the appearance of being well-wooded, but I should not say it was thickly timbered. In some places there are open plains that resemble well-ordered parks.[23]

Landor said the open landscape on the fertile alluvium of the Swan Valley:

> The whole country of the middle and upper Swan resembles a vast English park.

Where trees had been ringbarked "scattered lofty dead trees" rose amid waving corn, showing their original size and spacing.[24] The land would grow enormous trees. Captain Chidley Irwin had built his house just west of the river near Upper Swan church of "timber cut down on the estate".[25] But such trees did not form a continuous cover. Early (1840s) large-scale maps of the Swan properties show "Open Level Country. Thinly wooded with Red Gums".[26]

Further south down the west coastal plain, close to the Vasse (Busselton), John Bussell had rhapsodised about the country his family were to take up as "Cattle Chosen":

> The country here was so clear that a farmer could hardly grudge the fine spreading trees of red and white gum and peppermint the small proportion of ground they occupied only to ornament.[27]

This sort of parklike countryside, where big trees grow in clumps, implies that their seedlings are inhibited from establishing themselves outside the clumps. In an English park it is stock which inhibit growth. In the Swan and Avon valleys, and other belts of similar country, it was Aboriginal firing. Hank Lewis has shown that American Indian firing also produced parklike landscapes in the comparable Mediterranean-type climate of California.[28]

Such firing was closely controlled. Each patch of "warran holes" shown on the 1840s maps[29] of the Swan valley lies within a "dogwood thicket", that is a patch of

thick undergrowth which has not been burned, but deliberately preserved from burning, to protect the delicate *Dioscorea* vines, while the general area around it was burnt clear of brushwood. J.L. Stokes saw how this was done on a foray north from Albany during the visit of H.M.S. Beagle in 1840:

> On our way we met a party of natives engaged in burning the bush, which they do in sections every year.... Those to whom this duty is especially entrusted, and who guide or stop the running flame, are armed with large green boughs, with which if it moves in a wrong direction, they beat it out.[30]

Further north along the zone of open country east of the jarrah forest, Dale described the Avon valley in 1830 - ''resembles the term so frequently used of a demesne or park". It was "open grassy pasture thinly wooded."[31] Moore saw there "open, level and grassy country" and found the soil "a rich loam, producing patches of grass wherever a tree had been burnt".[32] Irwin in 1835 observed in the York area "Plains, resembling park scenery, and bearing fine pasture for sheep...ornamented with clumps of trees and shrubs...".[33] Open parklike country stretched from York northward to the Victoria Plains; and southward beyond the site of Beverley. Here Landor tended flocks in "a broad valley abounding with grass and scattered gum trees", wandering to "an immense grassy plain, eight or nine miles wide, without a tree upon it" and observing the Aboriginal managers of this pasture driving game - "multitudes of kangaroos, - I believe I might say thousands - of all sizes came rushing past me".[34]

Even the moister forest areas, between the Avon valley and the coastal plain, were much more open than they later became. In September 1831 a group of European settlers, including George Fletcher Moore and the Governor, Sir James Stirling, left Guildford, under the guidance of Ensign Richard Dale, "to commence a settlement on the other side of the Darling Range". The convoy of horsemen set off along a "native path" up the Darling Scarp, with no less than three carts, drawn by a total of seven horses and four cows, and reached Mount Bakewell ten days later, with no bulldozer ahead to clear undergrowth from their path.[35] They passed through:

> open forest land, characterised by its growth of timber, with little brushwood below...[36]

Dale's description contrasts starkly with today's degraded secondary regrowth, choked with undergrowth. Other accounts show there was considerable Aboriginal movement along relatively open corridors maintained by firing along wide valleys, like that of the Woorooloo Brook, and around watershed swamps like Darkin Swamp.[37]

* * *

Aboriginal patterns of habitation and movement, harvesting and managing plant resources, plus quarrying of ochre, stone for tools, etc., did not have a negligible effect on landscape. Their rituals also made their mark, in painted or engraved rock faces, stone arrangements, carved trees, etc. Europeans became aware of the effects of occupation patterns and ritual usage from the earliest stages of white exploration and settlement.

It is a fallacy to imagine that Aboriginal groups wandered willy-nilly over the landscape, searching for scarce resources. Rather they concentrated for much of the time in certain quite limited areas, where they could be assured that abundant tuber crops - large areas of *warran* diggings (the yam *Dioscorea hastifolia*), or swamps, billabongs or lake margins with abundant reed rhizones (*Typha angustifolia*) - would

mature in their season.

James Drummond, the colonial botanist, knew the reed plant was:

> of great importance to the natives, as furnishing a great part of the food of their women and children for several months of the year.[38]

Moore recorded large groups of people camping near his "Millendon" property, where the Swan emerges from the Darling scarp onto the rich alluvium of the coastal plain, digging reed roots in the autumn and early winter. They gave him:

> a piece of bread made of the root of a flag which they call *yandyett*. It tastes like a cake of oatmeal.[39]

These were the original Australian dampers, and equally "daily bread". "Great numbers" of Aborigines were around in the spring,[40] when a new crop of yams would be available from the "warran holes" on the northern boundary of the property of his neighbour, William Shaw. These also were a seasonal staple, forming "the principal article of food of the natives"[41] both at the end of its winter and spring growth, and again after the summer dormancy, as soon as the first rains moistened the soil to make digging possible.

Groups might move between several areas, frequenting, for instance, valleys within the Darling scarp in the winter, the yam grounds of the Swan alluvium in the spring, and the margins of swamps and lakes seaward across the coastal plain in the summer and autumn. For instance Jenna, Weeip, Imbat, Coondebung and their kin are associated both with the scarp area (Upper Swan), and with lakes to the west (near Wanneroo).[42] Where several staples occur close together - e.g. yams, reeds and zamias as Walyunga - large groups of people would be able to frequent the area at almost any time of the year. Young men were always extremely mobile, moving from mother's and maternal uncle's land to wife's land, participating in rituals with father and father's brothers, visiting distant kin, accompanying European expeditions,[43] while women, children and older men would stay around the same base for longer periods. Jesse Hammond, who had been familiar with southwest Aborigines over most of his life from the middle years of the nineteenth century, explained that there were some places where there would always be somebody camping, not always the same people, but someone.[44]

Women's labour provided the reliable basic plant staples. The men's contribution, though more prestigious, was less dependable and less essential, as Daisy Bates explains:

> In the very hot weather...and in the rainy season also they [the men] prefer to remain within the shelter of their nuts.... Their women, however, must go out daily and gather roots and small game for the family, until such time as the men feel disposed to resume their hunting. All vegetable foods are collected by the women...[45]

Hammond comments that:

> when there were roots, the children were given the largest share of them and less of the meat.... They always liked, too, to bring back not only plenty of meat but an abundance of roots to roast.[46]

Fixed plant staples, harvested mainly by the women, were thus the mainstay of the Aboriginal diet, functioning as fields of dependable crops, and controlling patterns of occupation, movement, and land use. The staples were, moreover, supplemented by a great variety of other foods in lesser bulk, which added variety and interest to the diet, and ensured that it was nutritionally more than adequate.[47]

I shall not attempt to catalogue the great variety of foods on the Aboriginal

menu, but simply illustrate this from two areas. Robert Menli Lyon, writing in 1831 of the Perth area,[48] exclaims:

> Every bush as well as every sheet of water supplies their commissariat. Their rivers abound with fish and their forests with game.... The kangaroo, the opossum, the swan, the pelican, the duck, the emu, the wild-turkey, the cockatoo, the pigeon, the quail, the frog, the zamia,... each furnishes its number of repasts at the proper season.

Bishop Salvado's list for the less productive Victoria Plains region also starts with the men's prestigious foods, and almost ignores the women's staples:

> Kangaroo, dingo, opossum, bandicoots, rats and other four-legged animals, emu, turkey, wild duck, various kinds of birds, assorted snakes and lizards, white ants, tree grubs, birds' eggs, snakes' and lizards' eggs, frogs, toads and some small fish, wattle gum, mushrooms, tubers of different kinds, insects' nests, nuts and seeds of the zamia palm...
>
> ...in the very place where a white man would die of starvation, a native eats to his heart's content. He can use all sorts of things for food and practically everywhere he[?] finds edible animals and nutritious tubers or bulbs.[49]

Whether we consider Aboriginal skills in culling big game, and in maintaining and concentrating their stock of kangaroo by improving patches and corridors of good pasture; or think rather of the women's skills in knowing the great variety of plant products in their range, and in harvesting the staples in such a way as to maintain and improve their productivity; or whether we focus on the way groups maintain their attachment to estate through their custodianship of its stories, songs, dances, ceremonies and sacred sites - in all these aspects of the relationship of Australians to their land, we see that the essence of proprietorship lies in knowledge and skill, close and familiar acquaintance with a stretch of country, which constitute the **lore** by which a group maintains the ecology of its terrain, and the **law** by which it holds it in perpetuity.

NOTES

1. All emphases are mine. S.J.H.
2. R.H. Major (editor), *Early Voyages to Terra Australis, now called Australia: a collection of documents and extracts from early manuscript maps ... from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the time of Captain Cook* (London, Kahluyt Society, 1859; 1963 edition, Australian Heritage Press), pp. 57-62.
3. George Grey (later Sir George Grey), *Journals of two Expeditions of Discovery in North-west and Western Australia, during the years 1837, 38 and 39...* (London, T. and W. Boone, 1841), Vol II, 12.
4. Sir Thomas Mitchell, *Journal of an Expedition into the Interior of Tropical Australia, in search of a route from Sydney to the Gulf of Carpentaria* (London, Longman, 1848).
5. More detailed discussions will be found in various earlier accounts I have written over the last two decades, e.g. *Fire and Hearth, a study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in south-western Australia* (Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1972); "The history of Aboriginal firing", *Fire Ecology and Management in Western Australian Ecosystems* edited by Julian Ford (Bentley, Western Australian Institute of Technology, 1985), pp. 7-20; "Yams, alluvium and 'villages' on the west coastal plain", *Archaeology at ANZAAS, Canberra* edited by G.K. Ward (Canberra, Canberra Archaeological Society, 1986); "Aboriginal land-holding and land-moulding in southwest Western Australia", *Proceedings of the Fourth New Norcia Humanities Symposium, Holy Trinity Abbey, New Norcia, May 1988* edited by Vincent Moleta (Nedlands, University of Western Australia, 1988); "Plant usage and management in southwest Australian Aboriginal societies", *Foraging and Farming: the evolution of plant exploitation* edited by David Harris and Gordon Hillman (London, Unwin Hyman, 1989); "Aboriginal women as providers: the 1830s on the Swan", paper delivered to the Centre for Western Australian History conference on "New Trends in Western Australian History", April 1991; *Aborigines of the Southwest Region 1829-1840* compiled and edited by Sylvia Hallam and Louis Tilbrook, Volume VIII of the *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, general editor Rika Erickson (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1990).
6. Rosendo Salvado, *Memorie Storiche dell' Australia* (Rome, Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1851), in English translation by Father D.J. Stormon as *The Salvado Memoirs. Historical*

memoirs of Australia and particularly of the Benedictine Mission of New Norcia and of the Australian natives (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1977), pp. 130-1.

7. Salvado in *Memoirs* (edited by Stormon 1977), p. 66.
8. George Fletcher Moore, *A Descriptive Vocabulary of the Language of the Aborigines*, first published in 1842, but most accessible as reprinted in 1884 in the same covers as his *Diary*, but paginated separately (London, Walbrook, 1884; facsimile version, edited by Tom Stannage, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1978), p. 39.
9. Upper Swan plans by Phillip Chauncy, Assistant Surveyor, 1843, Swan Folios XIV and XIX; Lennard's Brook plan of locations 113 and 115 by Phillip Chauncy, 1850, Map Swan 4; Battye Library, Perth.
10. The Reverend John Wollaston in his *Journal* for 1 March 1853, quoting the colonial botanist James Drummond, *Wollaston's Albany Journals (1848-1856) being volume 2 of the Journals and Diaries (1841-1856) of Revd. John Ramsden Wollaston, M.A., Archdeacon of Western Australia, 1849-1856* edited by A. Burton and P.U. Henn (Perth, Paterson Brokensha, [1954]), pp. 144, 170.
11. *Perth Gazette* 26/4/1835, 2/5/1835, 9/5/1835; George Fletcher Moore *Diary of Ten Years Eventful Life of an Early Settler in Western Australia* (London, Walbrook, 1884; facsimile version, edited by Tom Stannage, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press), p.262; Sylvia Hallam "A view from the other side of the western frontier: or 'I met a man who wasn't there...'", *Aboriginal History* 7 (1983), pp. 134-156; Hallam and Tilbrook (editors) *Aborigines of the Southwest*, entries under Gear, Cogat, etc.
12. Robert Menli Lyon "A glance at the manners, and language of the aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia; with a short vocabulary" *Perth Gazette* 30/3/1833; also reprinted in *Nuyngar: The People: Aboriginal customs in the southwest of Australia* edited by Neville Green (Perth, Mount Lawley College, 1979), p.156.
13. Gurdup Singh and E.A. Geisler, "Late Cainozioc history of vegetation, fire, lake levels and climate, at Lake George, New South Wales, Australia". *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society, London* 311 (1985), pp.379-447.
14. See Rhys Jones, "Fire-stick farming", *Australian Natural History* 16 (1969), pp.224-8; Sylvia Hallam, *Fire and Hearth* (1975); also "The history of Aboriginal firing" in *Fire Ecology* (1985).
15. A remarkably prescient discussion of the long-term effects of burning on "desertification" in Australia is given by Duncan Merrilees, "Man the destroyer: late Quaternary changes in the Australian marsupial fauna", *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* 41 (1968), pp.1-24. More recent evidence is largely buried in scattered and very technical journals. For a now outdated summary see Hallam, "The history of Aboriginal firing" in *Fire Ecology* (1985).
16. Salvado's *Memoirs* (edited by Stormon 1977), p.164.
17. This had indeed already happened in Tasmania.
18. Lieutenant H.W. Bunbury, *Early Days in Western Australia* edited by W. St. Pierre Bunbury and W.P. Morrell (Oxford University Press, 1930), pp.105-6.
19. There are a number of detailed accounts of the complex ecological knowledge and practical know-how involved in present-day burning practices in northern Australia, particularly by ecologist Chris Haynes and anthropologist Hank Lewis; C.D. Haynes, "The pattern and ecology of *Munwag*: traditional Aboriginal fire regimes in north central Arnhem land", *Proceedings of the Ecological Society of Australia* 13 (1982), pp.203-14; H.T. Lewis, "Fire technology and resource management in Aboriginal North American and Australia", *Resource Managers: North American and Australian Hunter-gatherers* edited by N.M. Williams and E.S. Hunn (Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1982), pp.46-67; H.T. Lewis, "Burning the 'top end': kangaroos and cattle", *Fire Ecology and Management in Western Australia* edited by Julian Ford (Bentley, Western Australian Institute of Technology, 1985), pp.21-31.
20. Moore's *Vocabulary*, under alphabetic entries.
21. Moore's *Diary* for May 1834, p.219.
22. Moore's *Vocabulary, passim.*
23. Moore's *Diary* for March 1831, p.32.
24. E.W. Landor, *The Bushman; or, life in a new country* (London, Richard Bentley, 1847), pp.98, 65, 99.
25. F.C. Irwin, *The State and Position of Western Australia; commonly called the Swan River Settlement* (London, Simpkin and Marshall, 1835), p.57.
26. Chauncy map, 1843.
27. J.C. Bussell, "Mr Bussell's journal of an expedition to the River Vasse, from the Blackwood", *Journals of several Expeditions made in Western Australia, during the years 1829, 1830, 1831, and 1832* compiled by J. Cross (London, Cross, 1833; facsimile edition, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1980), pp.186-203.
28. Lewis, "Fire technology", *Resource Managers* ed. Williams and Hunn (1982).
29. Chauncy maps, 1843. See, for example, the section reproduced in Hallam, *Fire and Hearth* (1975), p.58.
30. J.L. Stokes, *Discoveries in Australia, with an account of the coasts and rivers explored and surveyed during the voyage of H.M.S. Beagle in the years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43* (London, T. and W. Boone, 1846), Vol.II, p.228.
31. Ensign Richard Dale, "Journal of another expedition to the eastward of the Darling Range, under the direction of Ensign Dale, commenced on the 25th October, and concluded on the 7th November, 1830", *Journals of several Expeditions* (1933), pp.62-72.
32. Moore's *Diary* for 17 September 1831, p.70.

33. Irwin, *State and Position* (1835), p.64.
34. Landor, *The Bushman* (1947), pp.67-8.
35. Moore's *Diary* for 6 September to 8 October 1831, pp.66-82.
36. Dale, "Journal of another expedition", *Journals of Several Expeditions* (1833), p.72.
37. Hallam and Tilbrook, *Southwest Aborigines* (1990), passim.
38. *Perth Gazette* 28/5/1836.
39. Moore's *Diary* for June 1833, p.220.
40. Moore's *Diary* for October 1833, pp.231-4.
41. Moore's *Vocabulary*, p.64.
42. See alphabetic entries in *Aborigines of the Southwest Region 1829-1840*, compiled and edited by Sylvia Hallam and Louis Tilbrook, Volume VIII of *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australians*, general editor Rika Erickson (Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1990).
43. See entires for these same young men and others in the *Dictionary*.
44. Jesse Hammond, *Winjan's People: The Story of the South-West Australian Aborigines* edited by Paul Hasluck (Perth, Imperial Printing Co., no date [1933]), p.20.
45. Daisy Bates, *The Native Tribes of Western Australia* edited by Isobel White (Canberra, National Library of Australia, 1984), p.241.
46. Hammond, *Winjan's People*, pp.40, 42.
47. Hallam, "Yams alluvium and villages", *Archaeology of ANZAAS* ed. Ward (1986); "Aboriginal land-holding and land-moulding", *New Norcia Symposium* ed, Moleta (1988); "Plant usage and management", *Foraging and Farming* ed. Harris and Hillman (1989).
48. Robert Menli Lyon "A glance at the manners and languages of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Western Australia". *Perth Gazette* 30/3/1833, 6/4/1833, 13/4/1833 and 20/4/1833.
49. Salvado's *Memoirs* (edited by Stormon, 1977), p.160.

FRANCIS HEALY

Wimmera Miracle

Drifts and sheets of nightfall winter
maidens floss are gathered and tucked
then loosed and fluffed to scatter and
ruffle at the fringe and in folds of
the endless, ancient plains and rounded
hills of the west.

Sheer silk, a blue white gleam in the
clear, sharp dawn; and gilded by the risen
sun it shines and shimmers, so brief, so
rare in this wide and wearing land of summers'
rasping wind and wavering dreams of heat

that a working day is suddenly a carnival,
children stop from school to delight in
postcard play while neighbours gather to
watch, then join, and even veteran males,
fixed to the cult of rock hewn pain, are
suddenly pardoned and laugh again for
everyone is thrusting though the crust around
their lives - petty lies, fears and feuds
of generations' gulf this day are forgotten -
even a crackling remnant of catholics and
masons, slipped together, are joking, even
pub propped husbands and wearied wives, whisked
back to the lights of their youth, are bright in
in their eyes and talking while the fat
publican and mayor, wearing a wide possessive
grin, waddles warily for snaps of Main Street's
newly glazed and frosted, treacherous rink.

The whole land, waking with a silent miracle,
has opened a seam and forced a pass through
narrowing thoughts, routines and paths; and joy
is sparkling with sun through the morning's
tremor and tremble of glass.

VERONICA BRADY

The Environment: A *Bran Nue Dae* or a Very Ancient One?

One would not - or better perhaps, should not - think of Aboriginal people in connection with "Green" issues. The Green Movement's concern with the environment, with the natural world which surrounds us, is very different from traditional Aboriginal people's sense of the world they live in. For though it is taken for granted, it is not merely their milieu, something outside but an aspect of living, like breathing, the larger life in which they live and move and have their being. As Bill Neidjie puts it in *Story About Feeling*, for instance, the wind can be seen as the blood pressure of a cosmic body under which tree, grass, stars work with one another:

> Tree, grass star ...
> because star and tree working with you.
> We got blood pressure
> but same thing ... spirit on your body,
> but e working with you.

"Reality", after all, is a social construction, and reality for Aboriginal people does not involve the same separation of self from world which we assume in our culture - the separation which has given rise to the concerns of the environmental movement and has, indeed, created the notion of the "environment" itself as the world which exists "out there" more or less independent of us. What we need to do here, therefore, in discussing a range of recent books written by Aboriginal people about Aboriginal people is to consider this question of the difference between our two cultures and see what emerges for an understanding of its significant.

First of all some thoughts on the difficulties involved. On the one hand it is difficult for non-Aboriginal people to read Aboriginal writing properly yet, paradoxically, it is all too easy. Reading is always culturally conditioned yet our western culture constitutes the great problem for Aboriginal people. The rape of the soul which they have undergone since 1788 was not just a matter of physical violence. It was also a matter of culture, of a systematic and sustained attempt to destroy their beliefs, values and whole way of life and turn Aborigines in effect into white people. True, this attempt was not entirely vicious. Most of the settlers were, and many non-Aboriginal Australians are still, absolutely convinced that our European culture is the only culture worthy of that name and superior to all others. We are civilised, we believe, and all others non-civilised, if not savages. If we try to assimilate others to our ways, the argument goes, that is only for their own good.

Racism, the conviction that we, our people and culture are superior to all others is a pervasive feature of Australian society since it is based on this belief in our superiority and our right to the land. As David Headon puts it in the Introduction to his collection of Northern Territory writing, this dominance of European interests

has therefore tended to reduce the realities of black/white relations "to a melancholy footnote".

> Inattention on such a scale cannot possibly be explained by absent-mindedness. It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of landscape.

Aboriginal history and culture may be, as Paul Carter remarks, the prehistory which our history has to face. But very few of us are aware of this. As we read and write history it tells the story of our triumph over the wilderness and its savage inhabitants. In terms of our present concerns with the environment, however, this inattention to the original people and their culture is maybe one of the reasons why we are faced with such environmental problems. We needed to declare the land empty if we were to occupy it and thus to write out Aboriginal people and their culture. But one result of that declaration was that we thus also write out Aboriginal knowledge of the land and the skills with which they had for thousands of years so carefully cultivated and preserved such a fragile environment.

For all of us, then, the emergence of Aboriginal writing is important. For Aboriginal people it means writing themselves back into the society which have not only excluded them but rendered them more or less invisible, even to themselves. Thus Aboriginal writer Maureen Watson reflects on her experience as an Aboriginal child:

> Black reflections aren't in white mirrors, you know. We live in our land. We are, we have all around us people who are not of us. We have in our land - there are people all over our land - who are not of our land. Aboriginal people might as well be in a foreign country, you know?... Everywhere around us are the reflections of a foreign race, a foreign people, and they are making us foreigners in our own country.

In writing about themselves as Aboriginal they are thus writing themselves out of invisibility and into history, helping to develop self-confidence and pride, even pride in the indignities which they have had to endure and which have not destroyed them, thus in Maureen Watson's words, "holding up black mirrors for black reflections".

For non-Aboriginal readers, however, the situation is quite different and more complex. Reading Aboriginal writing, it is all too easy for us to continue the old history, to attempt to assimilate it into our culture, to read it entirely in our terms and ignore our aesthetic judgements on it, demanding that Aboriginal writing conform to our standards, even to use it for our own ends. Aboriginal writer Kevin Gilbert notes, for instance, a "whole new education industry" which has arisen "where it would appear that every student is doing his or her PhD English thesis on 'Aboriginal literature'" and also - though Gilbert does not say this - many academics making reputations writing about it. This is not to deny good intentions, the desire to understand Aboriginal culture and to make amends for the past. But it is to note the difficulties involved. If it is true that Aboriginal writing is by definition political, what Gilbert calls "freedom writing", part of the struggle to regain identity, dignity and power, then those of us belonging to the culture which has denied this freedom, need to allow them to write from where they are as they are, from the fringes of our society - this, of course, is the thesis of Mudrooroo Narogin's essay on Aboriginal writing, *Writing From the Fringe.*

This also means respecting Aboriginal writer's right to devise their own forms, and to be more concerned with the political than with the literary. Most of the books discussed here, for instance, have more to do with matters of fact than with fiction since it is more important for them to write themselves back into history than to transform matters of fact into fiction. They must establish the conditions for its

fulfilment before they celebrate desire.

Just as importantly, the style here is mostly colloquial, the voice of people speaking rather than writing, and this is true even for a sophisticated writer and thinker like Jack Davis. *A Boy's Life*, autobiographical reflections of his childhood and youth, is written simply, recording facts and experience innocently without introspection and without speculation. But this is entirely appropriate since on the one hand traditional Aboriginal culture is oral rather than written and on the other hand Davis is writing about a situation of dispossession in the language of the dispossessors, English. Moreover, the point of his writing is sharing, to speak for and with others who shared his experiences. So it is important to preserve the personal quality. Writing, after all, represents a kind of closure; the book becomes an object in itself a substitute for personal communication. What is written down is by definition at a distance and what is written about exists in the past tense. But for Jack Davis as for all the other writers here, this past lives in the present, continues in its effects which they feel still in their bodies as in their social relations. Besides Aboriginal culture is a matter of participation and involvement rather than abstraction. Just as the individual self is not separated from others or from the world but part of one living whole, so past, present and future and fused in the one experience.

The first book to begin with for us non-Aboriginal readers, is perhaps David Headon's collection of writings about the Northern Territory, *North of the Ten Commandments*. As a non Aboriginal Australian, Headon sets up the historical context of Aboriginal writing in the Northern Territory and thus also, due allowances being made for the fact that settlement in the Territory occurred more recently and perhaps more brutally, for Aboriginal writing in the rest of Australia. Most of the extracts he chooses, from diaries and explorers' journals, letters, newspapers, fiction and poetry, are by white people. But there are some significant transcriptions of Aboriginal recollections, and commentaries on their situation and on white people.

The book's shape and scope appears in its headings and in their arrangement. The first section "Origins" sets side by side Aboriginal myths about the beginnings, the deeds of the great ancestral figures of the dreamtime, and non Aboriginal accounts of the first sightings of the coast, the first settlement and subsequent explorations. The headings of the following sections suggest the grim story of the collision between the two cultures: "Bond-Piled Spots", "The Whites Dig In", "The Black View", "Pilgrims" (the adventurers, explorers, prospectors, outcasts, Afghans and Chinese as well as whites of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), "My Spirit My Country" (which contrasts Aboriginal belonging with the adventurer's placelessness), "A Bastard of a Place", "Sites and Sighting", "Darwin the Mad Capital of the North", "Adventurers, Incongruities, Incredulities", "Nature's Stage" - for the white man the place was not home but a kind of bizarre display of what was strange and uncontrollable, from floods and storms to white ants, geckos and crocodiles - "Sprees, Drunks, Race Meetings", "Opening Up the Country", that is, stories about drovers buffalo hunters and missionaries whose opening represented and ending for many Aborigines, "Rock Belong Jesus Dreaming" about the attempt to replace Aboriginal beliefs with Christianity and, finally, "Hand On Like Done" in which Headon's sympathies emerge and his belief that Aboriginal people will survive and that, despite everything the Territory is and remains theirs.

Read in the context *North of the Ten Commandments* sets up Diane Smith and Boronia Halstead's *Lookin For Your Mob*, a handbook about ways and means for Aboriginal people who have been taken away from their people and their country to find them again takes on even greater poignancy. For a long time one of the central white commandments was that Aboriginal children, especially half-caste children,

should be taken away and assimilated into white culture. This is a book to contest that view and to redirect history, helping regain their Aboriginality.

In *Hidden History: Black Stories From Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations* Deborah Bird Rose rewrites the history of pioneering days from an Aboriginal perspective. The "heroic pioneers" of legend were also great destroyers of Aboriginal people and culture, the bringers of fear, invaders and persecutors. It is a grim story: stolen women, sexually abused and enslaved, and men killed or treated also like slaves in their own country. Victoria River Downs Station, romanticised in the white story of settlement was for Aborigines a "death space:

> Europeans bought and sold human beings, children were captured, placed and used as household adjuncts, women were captured, raped and used to track their relations; the hunters became the hunted, like vermin to be exterminated, as slaves of sexual and murderous violence.

These stories turn Xavier Herbert's words, used by Headon as one of his headings, from fictional exaggeration to grim reality: "All over the land were bone-piled spots where 'lazy Aborigines' had been taught not to steal the white man's bullocks". Seen through Aboriginal eyes, the white man is not a figure of civilisation but of brutality, armed with a gun, proving himself and dominating by violence rather than persuasion.

Exaggerated as it sounds, this throws light on the violence detailed by Aboriginal people in these books and by many whites themselves in Headon's collection. In the latter it is also clear that many tended to project their own violence outwards upon the Aborigines. One passage, for instance, accuses them of cannibalism, the ultimate sign of savagery and all that is grotesquely different. It could also be argued, however, that it is also an image of the white occupation which also consumed people and dismembered them from themselves and their culture. According to Michael Toussig, the accusation of cannibalism also betrays the whites' deep-seated fears of themselves being consumed by the differences they experienced in the land and in its inhabitants, an unconscious fear on the part of the devourers of being themselves devoured.

Whatever is to be said of these speculations, the whites evidently projected much of their own behaviour on the Aborigines. They are "treacherous, not men but wolves", "monkeys", and must be given no quarter". As one settler put it, there must be no concessions to "sickly sentiment" until "the soil is ours". Nor was there much attempt to deny the violence. A letter to the *Northern Territory Times* in 1885, for instance, describes a recent raid against local Aboriginal people, remarking that "it was difficult to say how many natives have been killed altogether" but concludes that it was probably "not less than 150, mostly women and children".

> Some may call this justice [the writer goes on] others may say that it is not exactly right, but then how is the country to be stocked unless something of the sort is done.

It was a matter, it seems, not just of taking the land but of emptying it of people so that it could be filled with cattle. Hence the phrase "Go for the breeders!" which one of Headon's extracts says "echoed through the territory". If the women and children were killed off, settlement would be assured.

True it appears that the women also had their uses. One pioneering cattleman wrote; "Aborigines certainly did have their good points - and particularly the women". Men could be made to work as stockmen when their spirit had been broken. But "None of us would have come up here and lived like a hermit. Even the married blokes liked a bit of variety in their lives. The lubras were the real pioneers". One passage headed "Bringing In A New Wild Gin" describes the

process providing this variety, hunting down a woman as if she were an animal, and bringing her back chained, running behind her new master's horse. As another writer notes, station owners were like medieval barons with their *droit de seigneus*, the right, they assumed, to claim any woman on their estate.

If one sets these stories in the context of the Aboriginal, Bill Neidjie's

> I give you this story
> This proper, true story
> People can listen

They become a powerful indictment of the myth of settlement. For Aboriginal Australians history is anything but a story of progress and Australian society anything but a society in which everyone has a "fair go". Hobbles Danyarru sums it up in his reflections "Captain Cook":

> Now Captain Cook didn't give em fair go people
> All over Australia today
> That before he should have given him a fair go,
> Askem people, Aboriginal people.
> They own the Northern Territory.
> Because Captain Cook should give em fair go
> Whether he says 'gooday'.
> Whether he says 'hello',
> That's be all right.
> But my people,
> My people Aboriginal people
> They been fright for Captain Cook.
> He's a white fellow.

Nor is this just in the past. The post primary boys at Papunya today, for instance, see "white fellas" as crude, greedy, gross, essentially uncivilised and destructive to the environment as well as to people.

All this, then, is an ironical comment on the hopes of the exmplorer John McDouall Stuart who wrote in his journal on 23rd April 1860:

> We gave three hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civilisation and religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilisation and Christianity is about the break upon them.

Elsewhere, too, we see just what this "liberty, civilisation and Christianity" meant for Aborigines. Barbara Cummings' *Take This Child : From Kahlin Compound To The Relta Dixon Children's Home* tells the story of children taken from their parents and sent to white school separated not only from their families but also from their culture. Nevertheless some Aboriginal people were able to fight back and to survive in their own way. *Wreck Bay: An Aboriginal Fishing Village* describes the way in which, driven away from the rich coastal area around Jervis Bay, the people returned at the end of the nineteenth century and have survived to this day, using their traditional skills living by fishing and defending their rights to the land against encroaching developers and white holiday makers.

In *Growing Up Walgett* Cilka Zargan gives a picture of life as an Aborigine in a NSW country town, where living as fringe dwellers in country which they and their ancestors inhabited for thousands of years:

> This book [as one of them, Pauline Dennis says], shows what happened to my people. Children these days know nothing about Aboriginal culture. In olden days, children never thought about drinking and stealing or coming to town.

They also tell how all this came about, how in the early days even the convicts were able to take their pick of Aboriginal women and the land was taken from them

and jobs denied them. Few Aboriginal people in Walgett have jobs, most of them depend on welfare and without incentives and with little interest in a curriculum which is alien to them and their story most children leave school early:

> Nothing to do
> People stare at you
> I don't care, let them stare.
> There's nothing I can do,
> Nothing to do but drinks and fights.

Yet for all that, the traditional feeling for the land and one's place in it remains. So Vanessa says,

> I don't think I'd be the same if I went away from Walgett. Here you know people and get along with everyone. To me it is "home sweet home". Once you live in Walgett all your life, you don't like leaving it.

But the book which perhaps gives the clearest view of Aboriginal life in between cultures, where most Aborigines have to live - traditional culture survives relatively intact only in remote areas - is Jack Davis' autobiography, *A Boy's Life*. Davis' mother and father were Aboriginal, but they had been obliged to come to terms also with white culture. His father worked for Bunnings at the timber mill, and was obviously a first class and valued worker, and his mother was as good a manager as any white woman, cooking, sewing and looking after a large family. As a result they had little knowledge of their own traditions when the boy sensed presences in the bush he saw them in terms of "gnomes and fairies", for instance, and his father even seems to have been a little embarrassed by the boy's questions. But bush skills remained. His father knew how to supplement their diet with bush tucker, for instance, and loved to take the boys with him into the bush. The Davis boys, too, could out-run, out-swim and out-climb any of their white friends - there is one lively story, for instance, of the white boy, whose family rejoiced in a sea captain grandfather, climbing up a tree with them for a dare, unable to get down again.

For once, Davis' is a success story, the story of one Aboriginal boy who has become a successful writer and distinguished citizen, though this is presumably only the first instalment since it ends with his father's death and the break up of the family with Jack going north to work as a stockman, still a typical Aboriginal "nobody". It also shows the odds against which he achieved his later success. As we said, not surprisingly, his parents seem to have more or less given up on their own Aboriginality and to have made some kind of unconscious agreement to become part of white society - they sent Jack to the Moore River Settlement (which he was later in his plays to show up as a place of humiliation and degradation, almost a prison), for instance, to get an education and a better start in life. But it was there meeting old people "just sitting staring into the fire" and watching young Aborigines become embittered and hopeless, that he took stock, saw through white promises and realised the need to hold on to his identity as an Aborigine and thus to his dignity. But it was also there it seems, that he began to understand the worth of songs and stories of a culture that might give life rather than the death he saw around him.

> Nobody seemed to question why or when people died, though there would be lots of wailing. Somehow, I thought, there was too ready an acceptance of dying.

The rest of his career shows his struggle to give life, keeping the stories alive. This brings us to the last of these books, the text of the musical *Bran Nue Dae*

which was the great success of the 1990 Perth Festival, has since toured triumphantly throughout Australia and is soon to go to London. It is appropriate to end with this book, however, because it represents a triumph of spirit as well as of theatre. Written by Jimmy Chi, it draws on the resources of the whole community of Aboriginal people in Broome and celebrates their life, resourcefulness, humour and sheer will to survive, enjoy life to remain at home in an environment which has in so many ways turned against them. There is no acceptance of dying here, but neither is there any bitterness or hate. White people appear as blundering rather than brutal, out of our depth in comparison with Aboriginal subtlety and adaptability. Few others believe in them, it seems, but Aboriginal people continue to believe in themselves - and so, when they act this out on stage, to compel our admiration. As the final chorus bas it, they and we are

> On the way to a Bran Nue Dae
> Everybody everybody say
> On the way to a Bran Nue Dae
> Everybody everybody say

To come back, then, to the question of the environment, each of these books in its own way directs our attention to a larger definition of the environment. It is not simply a matter of physical space but of psychic space also, history and culture as well as nature. If we in this country have damaged the land we have also damaged the people and the culture who lived so intimately with it. Perhaps one answer to our environmental problems is suggested in Bill Bart-Smith's poem "Reconnaissance" which begins with the image of a group of armed white men marching into the wilderness:

> They are soon lost.
> The trees flow back silently
> across the hole that was made;
> Men have gone into it armed
> and become as nothing;
> Of their purposefulness and commotion
> Nothing remains.

What remains, however, is another way of being in the world, summed up by Riley Young Winpilin in a statement in defence of his land in 1985: "this ground is mother. This ground, he's my mother. He's mother for everybody. We born top of this ground. This is our mother. That's why we worry about this ground.

NOTES

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LAURIE HERGENHAN

The "I" of the Beholder: Representations of Tuscany in Some Recent Australian Literature

Perceptions of any region, including "foreign" ones, must bear some impress, no matter how indirect, of what David Malouf has called a "first" place, of a writer's "home" region, its geography and the customs it fosters, including the customs of the imagination.[1] Places only exist in relation to others, and "first" places, pace Wordsworth, have a particular shaping power. As Peter Conrad says in his recent autobiography of growing up in Tasmania, "When you leave home it travels with you".[2] Walter Pater also noted such an influence on a first *house* in the "process of brain-building", of aesthetic shaping of the mind, whereby "inward and outward [are] woven through and through each other into one inextricable texture...".[3]

Perceptions of Tuscany as a region must draw in turn on a specific regional sense, on memories and attitudes that are rooted in the local and particular, and only through them, in the national. In Australia the sense of the regional, which is primary, has tended to be overshadowed if not swallowed up, by concepts of national identity. These have been dangerously attractive to unconfident post-colonial cultures such as Australia's, clinging beneath a sheltering but enclosing umbrella. Such notions of nationality can flatten out the diversity and difference which a sense of region can alternatively encourage. Regionalism, present from the beginning in Australian literature, is a relatively new concept in its criticism - like the related interests in multiculturalism and in Aboriginal literature, both of which also encourage the break-down of a homogeneity of national identity. The challenges of feminism with its championing of difference may have prepared the way for this. Northrop Frye has commented, "The political sense of unity must be balanced by an imaginative sense of locality"; assimilating one to the other, he continues, will produce either "the empty gestures of cultural nationalism" or "the mind of provincial isolation now called separatism"[4] - in Australian, not Canadian terms, parochialism. One current example of the "empty gestures of nationalism" is the Liberal Party's catchcry of "one Australia". Whose, and for what political purpose, one might ask?

Regionalism then, is something to be recuperated from Australian literary history to off-set the pursuit of oversimplifying national identity. This recuperation has begun in appreciation of the local but not limiting qualities of such writers as Randolph Stow and Dorothy Hewett (both W.A. born), Barbara Hanrahan (SA), David Malouf (Qld) and Les Murray (of the country town of Bunyah, NSW). It is writers, too, such as Malouf and Murray, who have taken the initiative in conceptualizing the necessary role of regionalism. As Malouf puts it, "What I mean to suggest, at least problematically, is ways in which thinking and feeling may be intensely local - though that does not necessarily make them incomprehensible to outsiders, and it is the writer's job, of course, so long as we are in the world of his

fiction, to make insiders of us all."[5]

Tuscany presents itself to recent Australian writers as a region, a collection of particular places dispersed in a varying countryside. Though Florence is a centre it is not cut off from locality and not overwhelming, like London, Paris, New York. It is interesting, then, to look at creations of Tuscany in terms of the varying regional sense which Australian viewers bring to it from their own past and in which national identity is subsumed rather than dominating.

This is a speculative, elusive aim and I have chosen a selection only of recent writing and of literary forms: Peter Porter as poet, Malouf mainly as essayist, Shirley Hazzard as novelist. Unfortunately this omits a number of other writers, including Rosemary Dobson, A.D.Hope, Kate Grenville, Janine Burke, and does not allow for a comparative approach involving writers of other nationalities.

Peter Porter was born and grew up in Brisbane at a time when it was considered a drawback for an artist to live even in the main Australian metropolitan centres let alone such a provincial, overgrown country town. This was shortly before a number of younger writers put Brisbane on the literary map, and it was the cultural emptiness of the city rather than its sub-tropical attractions or drawbacks that seem to have left its mark on him. Porter is aware, though, that "the mind is so infinitely complex a machine for recording, remembering, inventing, that no one explanation of how it works will ever satisfy. It is ... an infinitely complex lens on what happens."[6] The use of the camera metaphor here suggests a certain way of collecting and processing material through a roving eye/I. And Porter's personae do rove around, indeed they ransack European culture, mainly as mental travellers. His recent comment on Peter Conrad's autobiography of a return to his roots, Tasmania, has some relevance to Porter himself:

> Too rich has been the cry (mine too) as each new Conrad book has appeared. But which other cultural custodian can arrange such striking vistas, where Sterne, Wagner, and Burt Reynolds are likely to be on display in the one exhibit?[7]

Such are the "vistas", of artists and artifacts, that Porter himself often presents.

Porter transforms his cultural exhibits through the lens of poetry. His is not "a rootless intelligence", as he sees the younger Peter Conrad's to have been. Porter's belonging, always tenuous and transitory, lies paradoxically in his own special sense that "some of us feel at home nowhere".[8] For this sense involves continual attempts to come to terms with outsiderism, to achieve glimpses of some transcendence, as in his ideal of "the permanently upright city", the ideal of a determined metropolitan, Londoner. Other expatriates, like Stow, live in small places more accessible to nature. While Porter's sense of uprootedness must owe a great deal to a common European twentieth century feeling it may owe something to a youth spent in the Brisbane where he had to apologize for writing poetry, to be excused as "not being a relentless masturbator [as it were] only an occasional one".[9]

In writing of experiencing European works of art - music, architecture, literature - he has written in the face of criticism, as though to defy any suggestion of the secondhand or of the colonial outsider. He is paradoxically declaring his emancipation from his origins yet asserting them through what seems a characteristic indirectness of viewing. "I am sure," he writes, "our experience of works of art is just as real and important as the obviously overt actions of our lives."[10]

Porter's combination of directness and indirectness is also mirrored in his practice of earlier years of being a mental traveller rather than the physical traveller he has become: "For years I believed that what I wanted from foreign countries was all in books, or even better, in scores and records."[11] But his habits have changed and Italy, especially Tuscany, appears to have become one of his main haunts and

has figured in his poetry.

What are some of Porter's main ways of presenting his experiences of Tuscany, his modes of perceiving? This of course depends on what he looks for. In these generally reflective poems he seeks, and sometimes finds unawares, in art and historical associations, some moment of transcendence which can release him, temporarily at least, from self and from a fallen world of pain, boredom, or lack of meaning. At the same time he gains access to the elusive poetic impulse. At Lago di Bolsena the local miracle, a renewal of Christ's redemptive blood, is beyond reach in a mythic past. At Pienza, Pius II's ideal city evades explanation-seeking tourists but is also removed as a living possibility for the poet. In "An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany" there is no fulfilment for the dead or the living. Thus, generally, wholeness in the past cannot ransom the present, except for moments.

Outside his poetry Porter has commented that "everything is always in the present in the permanent Museum of the imagination [and] in this sense the grand tour still exists".[12] But the gap between past and present is always felt in the poems. While the past may be "pristine" the present is "on the dole" ("Pisa Oscura"). His Tuscan places are "ghost towns" like Pienza.[13] Pisa's ghosts are "sullen", yet unlike Australian ghost towns - which figure in say Randolph Stow's and in Russell Drysdale's work as derelict places invaded by a physical desert - the Tuscan places are much inhabited. It is the spiritual ideal that is withdrawn. "At Lake Massaciuccoli" the ghost of Puccini, who took out his artistic disappointment by shooting ducks there, has "gone into the mist".

Throngs of modern tourists, the counterparts of pilgrims, are part of the strategy of Porter's Tuscan poems. They are a foil for the persona's insights, but in the main they are sympathetically treated, seeking like him to satisfy a spiritual hunger. Their guidebooks are an emblem of both the hopes and preconceptions that can blunt appreciation:

> The mind is made of Guide Books, factitious
> Chapters of a biassed history.
> ("Pienza Seen by Prudes")

In "About on the Serchio" there is "no cure for the eye/and its pronouns" amid the water and sound pollution. At "Lago di Bolsena", "Pilgrims with books in their hands try exorcizing pain by long looks at lakes" (a Tennysonian echo) until "the picture [photographs?] is captured and killed for their dreams".

It is the less well-known tourist places that Porter writes about and his experiences are presented often as unexpected insertions into the mundanity of life. It is not on a big place and big moment that he concentrates. This kind of decentring, which is both a colonial inheritance and appropriate to the viewing of a region like Tuscany, is linked with a predilection for things on a small scale. In Pienza "A little/Renaissance is put in the palm of a hand". In Pisa it is "This Lilliputian Church" of della Spina which transports the imagination ("Pisa Oscura"). It is typically not the Pisan tourist mecca of Piazza dei Miracoli which attracts, but this neglected "jewel-box", more eloquent than Dante's faction-ridden account of the city. And it leaps to mind, not as the persona lies on a reflective couch from which Wordsworth summoned his host of golden daffodils, but in London in Porter's kitchen, "midway from sink and freezer". Moreover, the original glimpse was of the church "tucked in between a lorry and the sky", not of a grant vista. The "ageing spirit's rage" which set Yeats sailing to the monumental city of Byzantium, sends Porter to an off-centre part of "dried-up" Pisa, a city he enjoys less and less. Porter admits that in the days when he didn't travel he lacked any sense of *genius loci*. Yet "the unexpected valency of place" which impels "Pisa Oscura" is felt in all his

Tuscan poems.

In "The Cats of Campagnatico"[14] Porter speaks self-mockingly that "we who love Italy have no home/And come from nowhere, a marvellous patrimony". Perhaps here, as well as wryly noting the surrogate value of Italy, he echoes and answers a jibe in a *TLS* review by fellow-expatriate Clive James calling him (Porter) "The man from nowhere".[15] For "nowhere", like elsewhere, can be a potent place for the Australian-born and may exert some influence, amongst many others, on a cosmopolitan poet.

In contrast to Porter, Malouf has made his home region of Brisbane the centre of his work. Malouf has commented:

> ... any one man might only have a single place to speak of, the place of his earliest experience ... the place you get is always in the real sense of the word, fortunate, in that it constitutes your fortune, your fate, and is your only entry into the world....[16]

In Malouf's first novel, *Johnno*, the protagonist, Dante, gradually discovers Brisbane as a unique place, as nurturing and responsive to his imagination instead of being an end-of-the-world town which one character compares to Dante's hell. Malouf found his subject matter in the personal myth of place, in the way it might be transformed variously into art by the diverse self and its multiple perspectives. *An Imaginary Life* can be seen as Brisbane/Australia transported or translated to Europe in a reversal of the usual process. And Malouf speaks of

> how the elements of a [first] place and our inner lives cross and illuminate one another, [affecting] how we interpret space, and in so doing make our first maps of reality, how we mythologize spaces and through that mythology (a good deal of it inherited) make our way into a culture.[17]

According to Malouf himself, then, something of the setting and the very perceiving processes of *Child's Play*, his novella using terrorism in modern Italy, and his autobiographical essay "A Place in Tuscany" might be traced back to

> the topography of the place [Brisbane] and the physical conditions it imposes on the body, to ways of seeing it imposes on the eye, and at some less conscious level, to embodiments of mind and psyche that belong to the first experience and first mapping [not of a town but] of a house.[18]

As Malouf says these are "open", and one might add elusive, considerations. My aim in this paper is tentatively to follow up possible connections between Malouf's ways of perceiving such a "first" house, evoked in his long autobiographical essay, "12 Edmondstone Street" and in another essay, "A Place in Tuscany" the village and environs of "C", his home away from home where he lives and works for about half of each year. While, typically, Malouf seems to set the terms of discussion of his own work, experience has shown with similar essays that his work outstrips such terms, that it is always, in the words of his poem "Wild Lemons", taking place "up ahead" awaiting our arrival.

"A Place in Tuscany" is, on the face of it, a description in two parts of a small town, and its inhabitants and environs seen through the years of the Malouf persona who lives there, hovering between outsider/insider. One can view it as a "mapping" of a place which is "other" and which as such is created partly in transposed terms of Malouf's original place, or rather through the very ways of seeing which this original place fostered.

The first part of the essay ends: "Such are the conditions of this world". This is ambiguous, suggesting both a particular place and also that "this world", the larger notional sense of being human must be a product of such a local place.

For the sake of brevity connections between Malouf's Brisbane and Tuscan

essays on place may be grouped around notions of geography, space and time which are also seen as determinants in the two pieces, as in all Malouf's work. We might also look for correlatives in the Tuscan place of the "shifting" views and vistas with their enticing "variety and possibility" and their "drama of intellectual play" of perception, all of which are encouraged, Malouf speculates, by the peculiarly disordered hilliness of Brisbane and resulting elusiveness of its river,[19] as well as by the interior of 12 Edmondstone Street.

"A Place in Tuscany" begins with "early maps" or creations of the town and located it geographically between on the one hand the "wild country towards Siena", a counterpart to Brisbane as an "unmade place" with its 'call of the wild' invitation to nomadism, and on the other hand the distant vista - only a glint really - of the sea (another Brisbane counterpart). The sea in Tuscany appears at times to Malouf while he works as "a flash at the corner of my eye". "At such times" he continues "the whole plain comes alive in all its details of fields, pasture, vineyards, olive groves, and the mountains as ridge after ridge of impenetrable *maccia*". (A vista of variety indeed of the cultivated and the wild, and particularly enticing to the eye/I.)

The so-called "characteristic sights" of this surrounding landscape wear two faces, a dramatic combination of the familiar and the strange or even sinister. Haystacks in moonlight are "primitive temples" yet impermanent (like Brisbane's "tree-houses"). Dolls, to scare off birds, are tied to cherry trees "like hanged babies" (71).

The cuisine of the region is in itself an allegory about modes of perceiving for it "prepares" the "ordinary" in "as many different ways as possible" so as to "make the necessary palatable" (72). A recipe for art?

The central piece of "A Place in Tuscany", part one, concerns Malouf's house there. It is and is not his house or "place" because occupancy is still shared with the original owner, Agatina (her husband is very much a subordinate figure), and it is known in the village as "Agatina's house". It is referred to in this double, ambivalent way throughout, and this seems to emblematize the ways in which Malouf, a kind of lodger in his own house, has acquired the family folklore, customs and history - a whole mental set - indirectly, and though these have been initiated into this "other" place. Similarly, in his "first place" in 12 Edmondstone Street, "a complex history comes down to us, through household jokes and anecdotes, old habits, irrational superstitions ... [and] folktales" (9).

The local history Malouf acquires in and through Agatina's house is a literary creation, both oral and written. It includes stories of both World Wars (as does the Brisbane house). Her brother's involvement in 1917 is told "in the high rhetoric these people reserve for such occasions, and in a language very close to Dante's ... of high literary art" (75). So each place has its own ancestral languages. The brother's letters were used to prepare a local history of the village fallen in 1919.

Thus the past and the dead are alive in Agatina's house, just as the village dead "are still living here in the cemetery", which glows at night like "an alternative village", each grave with an electric candle. All this historical village continuity with its vistas onto time is a kind of extended family history comparable to that acquired in Edmondstone Street. Hence the village, like the Brisbane house, is complete and self-enclosed "even without its walls", but its self-enclosure reaches beyond them. Its history stretches much further back than Brisbane's, but only through present memory. While the village is ancient, with space and time made concrete, its buildings piled "century on century", it is still physically "in the process of being made", thus touching on the motif of life as continual process which is so fundamental to Malouf's work. As in the Brisbane house for the child's imagination, in Tuscany time is "concrete or it has no meaning" and geography "gives out at the first horizon" (78). Time "is too continuous or present to be

thought about and space too small" (79).

There is a reciprocal acquisition between Agatina and Malouf: She has "acquired" Malouf's Australia in the sense in which he acquires the family and village history. She "*locates*" Australia in an empty area of her experience between Poland, "where Papa Woytila comes from, and New York, where a grand niece recently spent last summer" (79). The acquisitions are perceptual ones, located in the country of the mind by means of particularized, localized ways of perceiving which have their roots in place.

Part II of "A Place in Tuscany" is on the surface a 'record' of the making of a short feature film on David Malouf, 'writer in residence' at "C". It wittily points up just how much of a creation this is, rather than a "realistic" slice of life. Thus Malouf takes a filmed walk "from nowhere to nowhere" (one remembers the great, arranged walks of fiction as in Proust), the script and movement are created from inside the Director's head, sound effects are added later and so on. This second section throws a retrospective light over the first to suggest how much it too is a creation, a creation in words of *a* place, that is one of the many places that "C" could be perceived as representing. Hence the village is "its own world", just as any local place is. But it is not static. It is constantly recreated by varying minds, for the mind too is its "own place" in the sense of possessing its particular modes of perception.

As a writer who grew up in Sydney and has lived in the Far East, England, Italy and the USA, Shirley Hazzard, like Peter Porter, writes as a cosmopolitan, apparently able to set her scene anywhere. Italy remains a favourite setting. Her recurrent theme is in her own words "an unprecedented loss of geographical and, to some extent, national and even social sense of belonging", unprecedented because it is caused by the peculiar "fractures" of a later twentieth century world where belonging has been blown to "smithereens".[20] In her realization of this theme, however, as in her use of outsiders, often in terms of nationality and expatriatism, one may speculatively sense some pressures of the divided sensibility of Australian post-colonialism.

The Evening of the Holiday focuses on a brief love affair whose literary presentation draws much of its effectiveness from a dispersed, unspecified Tuscan setting (though there is one episode in Florence), partly urban but mainly of varying landscapes. (Hazzard has identified this setting as Siena and its environs.) As in Porter's and Malouf's work there is an aspiration towards wholeness, but in terms of personal relationships. Hazzard's work is more hopeful than Porter's, for while her characters' search exceeds their grasp, causing pain and loss, some consoling sense of coherence emerges from their strivings.

The Evening of the Holiday frustrates the glib conventions of a visitor's love affair in "romantic", "passionate" Italy. The novel's very title sets up the ambivalence of dislocation in a quotation from Leopardi, pointing up how festivals must end and the "seriousness" of normal life be resumed. Similarly in the novel, the love-affair of the visitor, half-English half-Italian Sophie, with Tancredi, an Italian from Sicily living in Tuscany, an affair which begins on the evening of a summer festival, must end some months later in early spring.

The narrative depends on a series of scenes notable for a delicacy of feeling. One of these takes place at a garden fountain of a villa. The fountain is old, "attributed to Pisano, but probably even older" (19). Sophie finds it lovely with its "ripples of green light" and its "light rushing sound" (18). Her gold bracelet falls into the shallow basin and she has to reach her bare arm in to fish it out. For Tancredi, her reaching hand and forearm, momentarily transfigured by water, had seemed in that instant to form part of the [Pisano] design". It was for him a moment

of genuine feeling, of recognition "as if he had encountered a friend totally unchanged after an absence of twenty years" (19). This vision, rooted in the particulars of place is suggestive of the reaching out for coherence, and thus becoming part of some continuity if not permanence which exists within human life and across lives and centuries. This incident begins the love affair. Sophie's involuntary action reminds Tancredi of an old man's request that she should "refresh my memory" of the fountain by reporting back to him. This is what she has done in a figurative sense, and what she continues to do in her role of outsider, giving a new sense of enjoyment to sights which Tancredi takes for granted because they are so familiar. She in turn is to be initiated into more of an insider's sense of Tuscany, just as she is to learn from her love affair.

The Tancredi-Sophie relationship expresses subtle and shifting balances between ambivalent feelings. She is inclined to be too serious, he finds it hard to be serious having "a grace and lack of earnestness". She is more controlled, "impersonal", afraid of commitment fearing the "disturbance" of love; he is more spontaneous, unthinking. These opposed but non-schematic qualities, have overtones of national difference and are heightened by it. They also represent of course conflicting qualities within the human spirit. They in turn echo the fractured nature of modern life but they also echo back through the ages.

The characters' responses to the diverse landscape of Tuscany, including countryside and garden scenes, develop these feelings as the affair progresses and offer those shifting perspectives or vistas which Malouf cultivates in his own way. The "utilitarian piazza" where the lovers first meet alone has "a general effect of space and colour" and it is "totally lacking in haste or violence", providing the setting for a "long afternoon" quality.

On the first excursion into the idyllic countryside of "endless golden hills", the cypresses, the modern cooperative white farmhouses, "[are] bathed in a beautiful light". Tancredi's feelings rush out to greet it with "an easy Latin intensity", while Sophie feels the barriers of expatriatism. Faced not with the touristic side of the landscape, but with it "now revealed in all its true domestic purpose", she "felt like an outsider at the feast" (42-3). Her "indifference" to the landscape echoes her wish to avoid the "troublesome" live encounter, to remain "undisturbed". Here Hazzard typically effects a subtle marriage of landscape and feeling.

A visit to Tancredi's farm introduces Sophie to an even more "domestic", localized and earthy side of Tuscany, the side Malouf but not Porter captures. The farm is rooted in time. Build on the ruins of a monastery, it has a barn with an ancient, decaying fresco which, along with the fountain, is the only other art object to feature in the novel. Its decay seems inevitable. The Madonna's "erased" face suggests to Sophie a lost "mislaid" wisdom, and marks the turn of the tide in her love affair when she must face its inevitable termination as best she can (90-93). Since the remaining fragments of the fresco have nothing to suggest "the splendour of the whole", it emblematizes the novel's theme.

For the novel revolves around the possession of love and its loss. The use of pairs of characters and generations echoes the central relationship; and introduces variations on this theme; Tancredi's father and Sophie's aging aunt Luisa were lovers, Luisa stands in some contrast to her "impersonal" deceased half-sister whom Sophie resembles. (The novel is about youth and age, about present, past, future.) As the love affair ends, Luisa dies, and both events are seen not simply as a termination, but as making a satisfying if painful "completion" in the sense of contributing to the coherence of things if falling short of perfection. This gives the lie to Tancredi's fear that the loss of parting is an "outmoded thing" in modern life (108). It seems to Luisa that her life had reached if not "completeness" a "sufficiency"; or, if not "perfection" then "a now manifest continuity" (111). The

younger generation of Tancredi and Sophie live in a more fractured world but their affair, though disrupted, contributes to this overarching sense of things, to the novel's delicate celebration of "the intricate, lasting nature of any form of love". It is a more hopeful view, if guardedly so, than Porter's conclusion to "An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany": "It is not fulfilled, it is only done".

I have aimed in this essay to speculate about the ways Tuscany as a region figures in some recent Australian writing. This depends in turn on the varying senses of other regions which the beholders bring to their viewing. Northrop Frye has speculated that it is less "the famous problem of [national] identity, of 'Who am I?'" which has perplexed post-colonial sensibilities but "some such riddle as 'Where am I.'" The choice is not really between the two questions for they are inextricable. Where we come from, where we go to, along with our many ways of travelling and seeing, must be bound up with who we are. A national culture must play some shaping part in this, though its diversity and changing nature must be allowed for. Both of these aspects are apparent in representations of Europe (in itself diverse) and of other places in Australian writing. Just as the views of Tuscany of the writers considered here differ from earlier ones, such as those of Randolph Bedford, an individualist-traveller if ever there was one and more interested in mines than art,[21] so they differ from those of even more recent ones, such as Kate Grenville (*Dreamhouse*) and Janine Burke (*Second Sight*). Australian travel literature, in the most inclusive sense of encounters with a "foreign" other, offers a rich and relatively untapped resource for studying some of the finer registrations of national culture and consciousness and at the same time for demonstrating the adventurous reaches of Australian imaginations.

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REVIEWS

Paul Hetherington, ***Acts Themselves Trivial,*** Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 100pp. $14.95.

Fremantle Arts Centre Press receives over two hundred manuscripts a year, and a great many of these are poetry. The press presently publishes three poetry titles a year, so it is with great interest and expectation that each title is received by the poetry-reading public of Australia. I don't know how many people are in that audience except to say that a poetry book that sells a thousand copies is a best seller. Most sell between three to five hundred copies.

So it was with some eagerness I opened Paul Hetherington's first collection, *Acts Themselves Trivial.* I am sad to say I did not enjoy it - but, I hasten to add, it may be because I am so emersed in poetry that I ask too much of the poet.

What Paul Hetherington delivers is a gentle poetry with the occasional sharp image, concerned mainly with past romances, home addresses and domestic affairs:

> I watch the moon, the stars,
> my life stopped
> like a dinghy becalmed.
>
> On either side
> lights of houses, here
> the sky's dark wash
>
> and recollection, years
> of hoping I'd make a catch
> I could live on all my life.
>
> But no fish surfaces,
> only a hook jagging
> through cold currents.
>
> ("Cold Currents", p.46)

Necessarily I have chosen a short poem. For a long time the short lyric has been the favoured form of Australian poets, although this is now changing with masterly long narrative sequences by Les Murray and John A. Scott and concept collections like Phil Salom's 'Sky Poems'. This short lyric is fairly typical of the poems in *Acts Themselves Trivial.* It is reflective, recollective and the poet is disappointed. In these poems he is feeling his emotional pulse and charting it.

To the poem: first sentence, inviting if not exciting. Second, a strange syntax ("the sky's dark wash/and recollection") but with an attractive narrative substance, the fishing angle. After all his 'I am left alone' poems I read a colloquial meaning into this search for a lifelong-sustaining catch. Third, a bleak image: I am in doubt as to how much to read into this - is it no fish equals no partner, no 'good catch'? Are the 'cold currents' our existential path through life? The poem's earlier tonal weight has not lead me to expect a deep metaphor so I am not convinced my angst-ridden interpretation would be appropriate. But without it what value is the poem? That youthful note of hope in the second sentence would be its only interesting feature.

I have spoken of sentences and not stanza formations on purpose: the sentence is Hetherington's basic building material. This is welcome on one score - that too much writing which is presented as poetry today is in fact unmusical choppy phrases all-in-a-row adding up to nought. It also has its own danger, that dull syntax in the sentences will lead to a prosaic flatness, and this does happen with Hetherington's verse. Witness these sentences from 'Windows' (p.94): "The past is a house where I lived for twenty years." This is a direct first sentence, a door opener, and spells out the theme of the poem clearly. This beautiful clarity is then diffused by the wobbly sentences which follow, sentences Hetherington as an editor would not accept from prose writers:

> My past was a rambling place - in it love longings,
> either cardboard caricatures, or elaborate marble creations,
> and my sense of past was my sense of self,
> so strongly insistent I doubted the present existed.

Is 'love longings' a two-word noun? That is the only way I can make sense of the next line. Tightening the sentence, making more concrete the phraseology, would communicate a crisper way. And where is the music in his sentence?

Bear with me: I am reading these poems closely to pinpoint my own disappointment with this collection. Other readers I have spoken to, some who have heard the poet read these poems, disagree with my harsh judgement and say the poems are easy to relate to and refreshingly gentle from a male (modern) poet. I am not entirely negative, there are sharp moments in the poems:

Adelaide, again: in Victoria Square
a warm wind tugs my shirt
and two dishevelled drunks
ask for a dollar.

The way the wind tugs and the drunks ask is nicely evocative, a quirky motivation. The most frequent mode in this collection is everyday observation evoking emotions through language as inconsequential as the event itself. Many don't rise above this level. For my tastes, poetry should be more dynamic and imaginative, especially in a collection published by a nationally respected press. If you like your poetry directly accessible and unchallenging, with a touch of domestic nostalgia, this collection could be for you. I like more music and a deeper intellectual or emotional challenge.

Andrew Burke

***The Wollaston Journals, Volume 1 1840-1842*, eds Geoffrey Bolton and Heather Vose with Genelle Jones.** University of W.A. Press, 1991 284 pp. illus.

The reappearance of Archdeacon Wollaston's journals is something of a surprise. Their previous publication in two volumes under the editorship of Canon Burton and Canon Henn in 1948 and 1954 seemed to offer most of his lengthy reporting of the years he spent in the early Swan River settlement. This new projected three volume publication in its first volume provides an unpublished section of the journals, and an extended view of that great number of deceptively commonplace entries Wollaston so faithfully, almost remorselessly, made.

The introduction to the present volume gives a background to Wollaston's life before he decided to emigrate which helps an understanding of his writing in a new country, and the biographical notes which are now provided are in particular of value in adding a dimension to the people Wollaston met and commented on from day to day. This kind of information and insight could not be gained from the original editions, the people remained names well or little known, often not known at all. Indeed the view of them offered by the present footnotes was difficult to gain at all at the time of the first publication, and would have entailed so many digressions from the text it seems probable no one ever bothered. Set at the foot of each page these biographical notes give, it seems fair to say, a new interest to the entries.

This first volume is bound and published in a style uncommon at the present time, and not attempted in the previous editions, a reminder of a time when even best sellers and publications for younger readers appeared as most beautiful publications. It is perhaps not irreverent to suggest that in fact the cover of this volume is reminiscent of Guy Boothby's famous *Dr Nikola*. And hardly to be anticipated from the earlier edition, this first volume shows illustrations in black and white and color from drawings Wollaston made during his voyage to the Swan River,

The previously unpublished account of the voyage reveals a good deal of Wollaston, his ability to manage events, and to manage people whether they much wanted to be managed or not, his sense of irony and some humour, both qualities at times lost in the later stress of his daily work. Wollaston was no passive passenger, suffering without protest whatever this kind of travel brought. As the voyage progresses there is a change of tone, a growing sense of certainty, of self confidence. His opinions are before long as firm and at times as dogmatic as they must have seemed to his fellow colonists later.

Wollaston began the voyage with an Englishman's pride of that time and his country's achievement.

> The docks themselves are a sight which every Englishman should see; for they will give him more enlarged views than he ever had before, of the great wealth and commerce of his native country.

He may have needed this assurance at his first view of the harbour facilities of Fremantle.

Wollaston saw people clearly, if not deeply. He did not show much charity to those who disagreed with his beliefs, or, often enough, his opinions. Perhaps this mellowed in the days the journals later reflect, most of his own opinions and beliefs must have been put under real enough strain. On the voyage his opinions of his fellow travellers are scarcely hidden. One individual particularly irked him by a stubbornness, and what might have seemed to Wollaston a contempt, a man he called 'the infidel'.

> This man, I dare say, is annoyed at my having disputed his dogmas of infidelity in the presence of his Shipmates, altho' I did so in the kindest manner. He is a great drunkard, and I fear, poor fellow, a lost man! He affects a great deal *literary* knowledge, talks of Alexander Pope and Dr Johnson, and fancies himself somewhat of an oracle. We know all this nonsense must be got rid of before his eyes can be opened to see his *true* state.

The journal of the voyage revealed Wollaston's habit of saying something but revealing very little, an ability valuable to him in the lengthy accounts he was to write, but probably irritating to those friends he supposed would read them. The entry of February 17, page 60, is an example, and perhaps an illustration of an odd lack of charity, at least in a man of his calling, an unwillingness to consider the possibility of other views than his own.

His first opinion of the new country was what many had already felt, and stated. The appearance from the sea was 'most uninviting', the trees wanted 'freshness', on a hot day 'the hazy, African-looking, atmosphere *hangs* like a Pestilence'. Like most of the settlers he found it hard to realise the extent of the burning of the bush by the Aborigines. He described this plainly, and noted '"The bush" presents a most striking and instructive picture of *life* and *death*'. The new settlers and the Aborigines before them used this land, and in some aspects neither spared it. Wollaston never did really like the place. He became used to it, at times he looked to it as he hoped it might be, developed to something different, but he was hardly sensitive to the kind of beauty of a new landscape, of trees and plants that were scarcely known, that Georgiana Molloy so clearly revealed. His writing is a sober reminder of a landscape unlike anything the prospective settlers had been too often led to expect. Some of the American settlers long before may have found a New England. It was more elusive about the Swan River.

The newcomers did not really expect the original inhabitants either. Wollaston wrote a good deal about the Aborigines and his descriptions are of considerable value in their prosaic, matter of fact observance. He recorded what he saw. He never quite came to terms with them, and his understanding of them was no deeper than that of most of his fellow colonists. On his travels in the bush he was uneasy at meeting them, though he admitted they had no intention of causing him harm. But in his contact with them about the sparse settlements he was open and at first sympathetic, and recorded a good deal of fact perhaps in danger of being lost in generalisation at the present time. He did not share very strongly, if at all, the expectations of some of his fellows that these people whose society had been destroyed might become the happy converts of his calling. Rather ironically he conceived a plan for taking the Aboriginal children from their parents and setting up a school for them on Rottnest Island, a plan some elements of which echoed through another era. His justification for separating the children he stated bluntly and apparently with belief.

> Of course the Children must be, as in primitive times, voluntarily given up by their Parents - wh wd readily done, for there is no stronger tie among these poor savages than that between an animal and it's offspring.

Yet he noted elsewhere the indulgence of the Aborigines to their children. He probably considered, as his age did, that indulgence to children was never particularly desirable.

It is tempting to suggest he did not much understand some of the adults of his own race either. His calling did not prevent his displeasure at people who disagreed with him, or at the attempts of his and other people's servants to discover an independent attitude. That they had come to this strange and difficult place with in fact some idea if finding an independence, material and social, did not seem to occur to him. Or if it did, he did not much approve of it.

The present volume contains the voyage and the first part of the Picton Journals, ending at December 1842. By this time Wollaston had seen 'the most important event of my life', the opening of the new Church at Picton, built by himself and his sons and the assistance of at least numbers of the settlers of the district. He had become familiar with the people of the Colony from Governor and government officials, settlers, labourers, and servants, to some who were quite lost in this place and fitted nowhere, and he had come close enough to the land itself to force some kind of subsistence from it, if still aware of its strangeness. His opinions of all these things, people and place, he expressed clearly and openly, the journals are a view of a great deal of the early Colony.

They take on a new life in the present publication.

Peter Cowan

***Leaves from the Forest,* Roger Underwood,** Ed. ISBN 0 7316 03522 p. 119
***Echoes from the Forest,* Roger Underwood,** Ed. ISBN 0 959 4592 6 X p. 113

Leaves From the Forest and *Echoes From the Forest* offer a range of personal recollections related to forest management in practical terms and reveal the nature and philosophy of many men (and women) who have served as forestry officers in Western Australia as well as other parts of Australia.

While many people would argue that the purpose of forests (like that of animals and of human beings, for that matter) is simply "to be", others regard them as renewable resources to be used in the same way as other primary products are used - as marketable commodities. Yet - even if there is no exploitation of forest products; even if no further felling, for wood chips, for timber as building material; no clearing, for farms, roads, dams, or towns were permitted - forests, it seems, do have to be managed if they are not to be decimated by spontaneous fires exacerbated by uncleared forest litter, attacked by disease and damaged by introduced fauna.

There has been a world-wide process of change in recent years in attitudes to forests and their management, evolving from the early assumption that forest industries could be a strong basis for development, especially in third world countries, through growing doubts about the consequences of such development, to denunciation of forest development which it may be argued, impoverishes the many and enriches the few. And tropical forests, in South America for instance, are under even greater threat through uncontrolled exploitation than are forests in this country. Arguments that short term gain - food in return for a felled tree - is more important than the long term benefits of wise ecological policy are powerful if one is starving. On the other hand, policies advocating the sustainable development of natural ecosystems are replacing short sighted and often *ad hoc* (or self serving) practices in most countries.

Yet what is "natural"? Karl Marx is quoted in *The Fate of the Forest* by Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn as saying that "the nature that preceded human history no longer exists anywhere". Is this because of the inevitable (natural) process of change? Or purely because of human intervention? The composition of a forest will change, with communities of trees undergoing a constant evolution of adjustment and adaptation especially if there is a major climatic change as happens during the interval (in quite short geological time) between two glacial periods.

In *The Purpose of Forests*, eminent international forester, J C Westoby, writes "In the early days of my exposure to forestry I had occasion to discuss forestry problems with very many foresters, foresters of every conceivable specialisation. Had I believed implicitly everything they told me, I would have been driven inexorably to the conclusion that forestry is about trees. But of course that is quite wrong. Forestry is not about trees, it is about people. And it is about trees only insofar as trees can serve the needs of people."

This anthropomorphic view apparently enraged one reader. Scrawled over the page (mercifully in pencil) was the annotation "fucking wanker". The juxtaposition of opinions seemed in some ways to illustrate the polarisation of attitudes towards forests. Roger Underwood's two collections of stories affirm the claim that forestry is about people.

A Conservation Strategy for Western Australia compiled in 1983 listed major uses of forests as water conservation and wood production (the latter to regulate use of forests to a level that could be sustained by forest growth); the production of honey, seeds, wildflowers and sandalwood; recreation purposes; flora, fauna and landscape conservation; for scientific study and education; as a public utility through which powerlines, roads, townsites, water pipes, railway and telephone lines may pass; and mining. In addition, there is the need for forest protection (against fire and insect pests). It is interesting to see how these uses have changed and to consider what shifts in emphasis have taken place. Certainly there appears to be more resistance now to mining and interference by public utilities than there has been in the past.

Leaves From the Forest and *Echoes From the Forest* present an experiential approach to

forestry from the point of view of local foresters. The stories in these two books are told with warmth, simplicity and humour and if it weren't for some of the tough personal experiences one might also say, with nostalgic romanticism. Some foresters find themselves in a double bind - torn between their love of forests and the destruction of the forest as the economic pressures dominate - a conflict which overstrains the integrity of all but the best of them. A retreat into romanticising the old days is perhaps a way of quieting the conscience.

Ron Kitson, who began his forestry life as a faller concludes his piece, *From Faller to Forester*, with these words "I've been responsible for planting twenty times more karri trees than I ever chopped down - and the spot where I did most of my falling is now a National Park!"

Becoming a Forester by J Havel is a fascinating microcosm of West Australia's rural social history, beginning with the migrant experience in 1948, and is told with honesty and humour. He also offers a reminder of ever present danger as he recalls acting as a lookout for "widow-makers" - dead limbs that would come loose as a tree was felled. Jim Williamson's *Sandalwood Survey in the Great Victoria Desert* is a beautifully constructed piece. He understands the concept of story, links traditional forestry methods with those of the space age (those angular and dramatic patterns on the LANDSAT photograph which were so intriguing) and, after paying tribute to the hospitality of station owners, mourns the fact that "as we travelled back from the healthy beautiful desert country into the pastoral areas the land became tired and impoverished."

One of Roger Underwood's own contributions tells the story of *Three Fires 1969/70*. In a dramatic minute to minute retelling, he chronicles the events from dawn of December 30th 1969 to late on New Year's Day 1970. "It started with an easterly that blew hot, strong and bone dry from deep out of the Nullabor for about four days straight." His story reads like a military campaign, with the possibility of casualties. *"flank fighting...a heavy strike...at the point of headfire..."*. I found it interesting that in a paper he gave in 1990, *Forestry and the Media*, he is critical of the media, perceiving television coverage of a forestry operation in terms of a battlefield "' chainsaws *scream*; sap *bleeds* from trees...a logging coupe looks like the *Battle of the Somme*...timber workers are depicted as *storm troopers directing a blizkrieg of destruction*". And, in an item in the May 1991 newsletter of the South-West Forests Defence Foundation the writer (Roger Underwood perhaps?) uses the same style and tone to describe CALM's reaction to the *Four Corners* (mid 1990) program *The Wood for the Trees* ..."his [Dr Shea Executive Director of CALM] *propaganda* team *swung into action firing off the first broadside* the same night...issuing a *constant barrage* of faxes...". It is ironic and perhaps significant that while Underwood is sensitive about the impression of military conflict given by the media, he uses the same imagery to get his own message across.

But to return to the books in question. There are other kinds of horror stories. Steve Quain's story of the Muddy Swamper, for instance, in his piece *Unforgettable Incidents*. A log had rolled off the back of the truck towards one of the forestry workers. "The landing was a quagmire of mud and he couldn't escape. He was simply run over, buried by tons of rolling log....but he was able to dig himself out. Physically he was completely unharmed."

There are moments of lyrical description, as in Jim Williamson's picture of dead trees burning in water (*The Fire At Stirling Dam*). "Sparks carried by the wind set alight the shredded bark on the trees in the dam. In turn the wood of the trees soon caught alight. Sparks from one tree...set alight to other trees...The tree crowns burnt brightly, like candelabra, and the flames were reflected in the rippling water beneath them."

Barney White's *Wilderness Experience* is set in the forest east of the Shannon River where White was required to assess (the hard way) the resource of the forest using a map, that was almost bare of any detail - no roads, no landmarks "entering this area was like walking the plank". The story is full of natural suspense, with the pathfinder going missing and while he was apparently found, I felt a bit cheated not being told how.

In *A Dedicated Chainman*, Jack Bradshaw relates how a young chainman working unseen in thick, swampy ti-tree and wattle country obeyed orders to "pull on", "pull tight" and "mark" so implicitly that he ended standing with the chain held high above his head "up to

his armpits in the icy black waters of Treen Brook."

The stories from *Echoes From the Forest* draw upon sources beyond Western Australia and include one by a woman forester, Tammie Reid, and another by a forester's wife - Irene Batini. Both books are one-sided in their approach, intentionally so - no awkward questions are being asked and the stories are essentially descriptive, reflective and reassuring. As a result one feels compelled to ask those questions. What about over-burning, over-cutting and the kind of mismanagement many environmentalists see as devastating a natural resource? Are there any satisfactory answers? A recent paper, *Forests for the Future*, put out in 1990 by the Department of Conservation and Land Management in WA points out that without proper management there would be severe degradation of forest ecosystems and that balancing the uses of the forest with the sustaining of the forest has become a major preoccupation. Is it also possible to balance the risk-taking urge for commercial usage of forests - hoping for the best, against the cautious and gloomy prognosis of ecological disaster if...?

Leaves From the Forest and *Echoes from the Forest* won't provide the answer to those oppositions, but they may encourage apologists for commercialisation on the one hand and "arm-chair" conservationists on the other, to do some further reading.

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Julie Lewis

Chris Wallace-Crabbe, *For Crying Out Loud*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990.

This is a collection of poems as much about language and naming as the life forms and feelings and pains of placement named within it. Therefore it is apt for me to state that in the past Chris Wallace-Crabbe was one of those poets whose work had no very clear focus for me and thus had made no lasting impression. But why? What is it about a poet's "personality" and language style that can throw you off without you quite deciding why, except to know by contrast: other works by other poets which draw you in regardless?

Looking at the first poems in Wallace-Crabbe's new collection reminded me of his strong preference for adjectives on nouns, and his frequent use of abstract phrasing in a deliberate attempt to sort through abstract themes, especially the ever-present philosophical problem of "knowing", the difficulty of finding meaning, along with the poet's placing it as well as searching for it in the language of the poem itself. Among the ready ironies of a grammar that follows rules and words which seem to have determined meanings. Despite his wit, his learning and a very agreeable tendency to push for unexpected connections between events, I had found his poems a fresh but slow-moving mass of water. Too abstract for me. Seeing the apt epigraph by Wittgenstein, I thought this would be a book of more of the same. Well, in some ways it is:

> Somewhere inside my being
> the enzyme calpain has played a part,
> for every performative occasion
> making a collage of neurons.

But there's nothing like reviewing to make you look more closely (if you're prepared to). A few poems later I felt a change, a shift and a clarity - and he had me. The wit of "The Evolution Of Tears" introduces a sense of loss and grief which resounds throughout the book. Referring to the human-ness of grief and speculating on how it shaped our forebears:

> We cannot know.
> Tears leave no grooves on archaeological sites,
> a broken heart has never been trowelled up;
> the *lacrimae rerum* do not resemble objects
> though misery be hard as a stone in your hand.

His obsession with the naming and defining characteristics of language as a means for knowing and remembering, are set against a strongly ironic understanding of forgetting and losing - as in "The Life of Ideas." Collectively, his poems speak through this; a momentum is building up in the early poems, where life is constantly questioned, the gypsies of the poet's childhood:

> one is always driving
> past something without concern
> until it proves too late
> to record the social wound

and then suddenly the realisation that he doesn't know whether there are any gypsies left to drive past any more "under the Southern Cross./ Nor where the clean past has gone." Or sitting in a high-rise building in the U.S. waiting for congenial news from Australia which doesn't come, there grows a sense of uneasiness/ wariness of time having slipped away amidst the attraction. There are images of sky, of flight, particularly of falling. It becomes clear this is a book about mortality.

Then follow the two poems "My Surviving Sons" and "An Elegy". Two poems which burn suddenly with intense grief over the death of the poet's son, which throw a fierce meaning on the previous images of flight, fall and loss. The theme is laid utterly bare:

> so that I wish again
> it were possible to pluck my son
> out of dawn's moist air
>
> by the pylon-legs
> in that dewy-green slurred valley
> before he ever hit the ground,
>
> to sweep under his plunge
> like a pink-tinged angel
> and gather him gasping back into this life.

Many poems of falling continue this shift into displacement as the poet searches desperately at times for signs and meanings, as if now seeing life differently, and not willing to believe in it, be fooled by its glamour and brightness. And always powerfully catching its ironies and vagaries through his favourite lodging of nouns.

I realised that a study of the final lines of many poems show again and again this clash between the power to live and the apprehension of 'dying'. a warning perception of gap, a loss between signified and significance - the ibis of one poem, "like pens" writing "Live", then swimming down into "mere west". And later, after noting, of the language and meaning the poet inherited, "the signified was quite inadequate" there comes the final line: "We swim along with it. We swim and drown."

There is much pain and much perceptiveness here, but by no means is the book heavy. The tragic is unadorned but Wallace-Crabbe is too various for that alone and the book sparkles with a paradoxical freshness in many of its poems. He displays a deep determination not only to hang on, but to know as far as possible and both define intellectually *and* feel, his pervasive new world. His life, shifting in residence between Australia, the U.K. and America, is caught into many of these lines as he persists. This is a book not of abstractions and their discussion but of clarity and fire in the gaps. Hurt by life and more so by death, irked and let down by the shortcomings of language, he yet finds consolation in these. There is a liberation happening in this. He has won me over, too, with his passion and courage.

Philip Salom

J.S. Beard, *Plant Life of Western Australia,* (Kangaroo Press, Perth, 319pp, $49.95)

In 1961, then newly appointed Director of King's Park, John S. Beard took charge of a State government funded project to create a botanical garden for the cultivation and display of Western Australian native plants. To ensure success of the project exhaustive research had to be carried out, not merely covering plant species but also plant communities. The ensuing research into the conditions under which plants grow in the wild took 17 years to complete. The resulting maps and accompanying text, originally published by the University of W.A. Press appeared in seven volumes. The present book is a more concise and accessible account for the general reader, with the additional benefit of over 500 previously unpublished colour photographs (culled from the 2000 originally taken). The author's ambitious intention, that it should be both a scientific record and a source of pleasure, is amply fulfilled. Clearly aimed at the intelligent layman it takes no aspect of previous knowledge for granted, yet avoids being patron-

izing. Of course, it is impossible to guess at what level of expertise the knowledgeable botanist would wish to move on to more specialised information, but for the non-scientist with an enquiring mind the book is lucid, informative and aesthetically pleasing. Particularly successful is the integration of the scientific perspective with that of the casual enquiry, not unlike a dual language text, in which the reader effortlessly leaps between the familiar and the lesser known, gradually feeling at ease in both. Thus, if a photograph of the paradoxical dwarf giant banksia growing at William Bay catches the eye, there is a brief caption explaining the reason for the anomaly.

> (e.g. Fig 3.38): Certain plants are amenable to adapting themselves to the windswept coastal environment by submitting to dwarfing, notably *Banksia grandis,* elsewhere a forest tree but frequently seen along the coast reduced to a shrub. As is usual in these cases the floral parts remain of normal size.

This caption is typical - concise enough to satisfy a passing curiosity but encouraging further exploration of the main text for more detailed ecological data, be it about bioclimates, geological processes or land management. Even the contentious issue of tree felling is discussed, where appropriate.

There might possibly be a danger that the dual scope of the book could work against it, with the serious reader suspecting its 'coffee table' attractiveness, and the traveller with a more superficial approach being intimidated by the wealth of information. This would be regrettable, as both elements enrich and reinforce each other. Whilst the scientific aim is to present an exhaustive survey of plant communities extending over the entire state of Western Australia it creates a unique sense of place, both more subtle and more original than any self-consciously picturesque travel book. Again and again the reader is made aware of previously unrecognised connections. A certain plant grows in a certain place for a certain reason. The rocks beneath the flora determine the shape and character of the landscape - and this is what it looks like.

The very fact of being presented with an appropriate vocabulary and a botanical and geological context creates new perceptions. One wonders, for example, how D.H. Lawrence would have reacted to the 'endless hoary grey bush' if his imagination had been trained to recognise the particular beauties of peppermints or tuarts or the multitude of acacias. Similarly the present-day traveller, driving miles to see 'the spectacular western wildflowers' blindly races past seemingly monotonous landscapes, missing their endless variety and hidden beauty. Of course, knowing a grevillea by name is not a magic password to more general appreciation. The particular grevillea is related to its terrain, its terrain to its shaping influences, and the environment seen as a part of the whole geography of the state of W.A. If the charts, diagrams, tables, maps and detailed descriptions represent the hard scientific backbone of the book, the photographs go beyond mere illustration, in the way they reveal a strong visual sense of composition and manage to include the human element without straying into the territory of the family album. Here and there among typical views of savannah, forest or desert may be discovered solitary figures of the author's wife or collaborators to give a sense of scale to impersonal landscapes, and even the occasional bogged vehicle to hint at the physical exertions that made the glossy pages possible.

Presumably the inclusion of the photographs was intended primarily as a visual accompaniment to the text, but it is impossible to ignore the fact that many of them are outstandingly beautiful in their own right. There are portraits of individual trees, be they wandoos or marble gums or glimpses of jarrah forest; there is a study of mulga in the Murchison that might be a Fred Williams painting. Alongside such familiar sights as everlastings at Payne's Find there are the less obviously picturesque and haunting views of trees killed by fire or salination, and in a rare departure from the strictly floral there is an amazing flock of budgerigars at Glen Ayle Station. Throughout, the accompanying captions retain their lively, informative character. The total effect of the book goes beyond its stated aims of providing an accessible and enjoyable survey of the plant life of Western Australia, or even a spectacular journey in the company of a superbly knowledgeable guide. It is, in fact, a full-length portrait of the natural features of the State, and in some indefinable way gives a new dimension to a regional sense of identity.

Margot Luke

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

DELYS BIRD — runs the MPhil in Australian Studies and Women's Studies at The University of Western Australia.

LAWRENCE BOURKE's book *A Vivid Steady State: The Poetry of Les A. Murray* is to be published this year.

VERONICA BRADY — is an Associate Professor in the English Department at The University of Western Australia; she has published widely in Australian literature.

ANDREW BURKE — has worked in Perth in radio and as an advertising copywriter. He has published a number of collections of poems.

PETER COWAN — has written novels and short stories, most recently *The Hills of Apollo Bay.*

FRANCES DEVLIN GLASS — is a Senior Lecturer, Languages & Literature, Victoria College — Rusden Campus and a co-editor of *The Annotated "Such is Life".*

SYLVIA HALLAM — taught archaeology for many years at UWA. She retired to York in 1989 and is now an Honorary Research Fellow at UWA.

FRANCIS HEALY — works a small farm in the south of Tasmania. His three obsessions are poetry, chooks and sex.

LAURIE HERGENHAN — is editor of *Australian Literary Studies* and general editor of the UQP Australian author series. His publications include *The Australian Short Story: A Collection 1890s–1990s* (1991). An earlier version of his article was presented at a conference at the University of Florence in 1989.

FIONA KIDMAN — writes fiction and poetry. Her latest book is *Wakeful Nights: Poems Selected and New* (Vintage 1991). She lives in Wellington, New Zealand, and is holder of an Arts Council Scholarship for 1992.

ANTHONY LAWRENCE — lives in Carnarvon, where he is writing poetry and hunting down the elusive Cobia. His next book of poems, *Three Days out of Tidal Town*, is due out soon from Hale & Iremonger.

JULIE LEWIS — is a writer of short fiction and biography. Her latest book is a biography of Olga Masters, recently published by UQP.

BARRY LOPEZ — lives in Finn Rock, Oregon, USA. Winner of the National Book Award for *Arctic Dreams*, he is interested in writing 'real geography'.

PAT LOWE's first book, *Jilji* (with Jimmy Pike) was published in 1990. She is now working on a series of children's stories.

MARGOT LUKE — formerly taught in the German Department at the University of WA. She has published fiction and criticism in Australian journals.

JOHN MALONE — is a South Australian secondary school teacher, adult educator and writer of test books on poetry writing.

JOHN McLAREN — is Professor of English at Victoria University of Technology (Footscray). His numerous publications include *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction* (1989).

PETER McLESTER — was born in England, and received a strong Anglican upbringing, before coming to Australia. He is interested in deconstruction and feminism, and in feeding canaries to enervated cats.

MICHELLE MEE — lived in Poland for six months in 1986. She taught Magda and Masia English. She now lives in Canberra.

TOBY MILLER — teaches Communication Studies at Murdoch University. He has also worked at Griffith University and UNSW as well as in government and the ABC.

LES A. MURRAY — is one of Australia's best known poets. His latest books are *The Daylight Moon* and *Dog Fox Field.*

NGARTA (JINNY BENT) — was one of the last Aborigines to live in traditional tribal ways in the Great Sandy Desert. She now lives in Fitzroy Crossing, in the north of Western Australia.

SUE NICHOLLS — fast writing student in the Department of Creative Arts, Wollongong University. She has taught creative writing.

RON PRETTY — teaches creative writing at the University of Wollongong.

DEBBIE ROBSON — lives in Narrabeen, N.S.W.

PHILIP SALOM's fourth book of poems is *Barbecue of the Primitives.* Since then he has published his first novel, *Playback.* His latest book of poetry is due out in 1992.

IAN SAUNDERS — teaches postmodernism and literary theory at The University of Western Australia.

GEORGE SEDDON — is Professorial Associate of the Centre for Studies in Australian Literature at the University of WA, and is author of books on the environment.

ALAN URQUHART — currently teaches at Randwick TAFE, and is working on a book of poetry.

GRAHAM WHITE — was for many years Regional Librarian of the North Western Library, New South Wales, and has travelled extensively throughout Central Australia.

GRAEME WILSON — was born in London, has lived in Hong Kong and now lives in Devon, England. He has published a number of translations in *Westerly.*

DEBORAH ZION — works for the National Centre for Australian Studies, at Monash University, a position she took up after living in Europe for three years.

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