

# WESTERLY

STORIES • POEMS • ARTICLES • REVIEWS



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# NEARING A HORIZON

*Ee Tiang Hong*

with a foreword by  
Bruce Bennett

Ee Tiang Hong, one of the finest English-language poets in the Asia-Pacific region, died at his second home in Guildford, Western Australia on 27 April, 1990. Born in Malacca in 1933, he was educated in Malacca and Singapore and migrated to Perth with his family in 1975, becoming an Australian citizen in 1979.

Before the publication of *Nearing a Horizon*, which was written chiefly in Western Australia, Ee Tiang Hong had published four volumes of poems, *I of the Many Faces* (1960), *Lines Written in Hawaii* (1973), *Myths for a Wilderness* (1977) and *Tranquerah* (1985). Each of Ee's volumes of poems has shown poetic qualities and illuminated aspects of the 'I' of 'many faces' which this complicated, cosmopolitan and humane writer has chosen to reveal to his readers.

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## OBITUARY

Readers of *Westerly* will be sad to hear of the death of Leonard Jolley on 22 July. Leonard Jolley was The University of Western Australia Librarian from 1956-1979 and was a member of the Editorial Board of *Westerly* for almost a decade, from 1968-1977. The editors extend sympathy to his wife, Elizabeth Jolley, and to their family.

# WESTERLY

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Department for  
the Arts



Government of Western Australia





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## ANDREW BURKE

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### The Pianoless Quartet

5.45 pm I drive to pick-up  
my daughter from Woolworths.  
Hot evening I park undercover,  
browse at "Music Galore". My  
music's in the cheap bins now  
new CDs reviving Bird's bebop,  
Billie's plaintive cry. I pick-up  
Mulligan's pianoless quartet.  
In the Fifties Father sang schmaltz  
while his friend, a Crosby fan  
in cravat and 'velvet fog' voice,  
played "White Christmas" on  
a three-note keyring harmonica.  
We hid outside. Now Nat and Bing  
are in the cheap bins with Duke,  
Miles and Monk. I flick through,  
standing in the mall like  
a Russian doll, Father inside,  
his father inside him. 6pm  
her till rings off, we drive  
through half-deserted streets ...  
To break the silence I share  
my 'pianoless quartet' story. She  
shows me her new shoes

## After Reading

poets and their critics all  
afternoon in the glass-faced  
library devouring pages of  
their sweet'n'sour breaths my  
head has a narrative hunger as  
I ride home on this diurnal  
train I rush to capture the  
passengers' lives the crazies  
straights and damaged ones  
*"I've got it on my mind hey"*  
she who speaks lies down in her  
multicoloured hair with her  
robin tat singing on her tanned  
shoulder-blade the Inspector of  
Rides inspects her his goatee  
bebopping her goatee she  
dresses again in her big jumper  
closing the curtain on her  
sweet'n'sour breasts all the  
inane dialogues of damaged  
strangers become poetic to me  
now *"The next station stop is  
Shenton Park"* as I alight two  
fat black boys run up the  
street holding gaudy balloons

---

# MARY BELL

---

## Mapping Gender

Some ancient Norseman pirate  
de facto navigator on a longship  
must have prowled about our family tree.  
How else account for our urban Father  
with the steel-blue weather eye  
and his year-round obsession with forecasts?  
Come kookaburra-cackle he'd be up  
nibbling news headlines, court reports  
and local politics as appetisers  
for his real breakfast: today's forecast  
taken with many a grain of salt.

Forecasts that missed their mark  
came in for his crankiest comments.  
A man could have more faith  
in his own arthritic twinges  
or invasions of ants in the kitchen.  
Here, smack-bang in the path  
of the pounding South-East Trades  
he would concede our south coast climate  
to say the least was "wayward":  
the same word he used often  
for women making up their minds.  
Sexist talk if you like, but no more so  
than this year's weather whiz kids...  
mosaic maps from satellites there  
at their finger-tips, beamed direct  
to flickering earthly screens  
from the endless suburbia of space,  
yet they still give girlie names  
to uncertain-tempered hurricanes.

But when talk turned to isobars  
or mighty global winds, I'd my own theories  
based on schoolroom tales of older powers:  
that macho gang of gods, never done  
brawling with thunderbolts and strident storms  
and scaring mortals witless here below.  
Whorls and whirlpool swirls on maps  
might mean isobars for some. Not me.  
They were thumbprints made on earth  
by bully-boy Olympians like big chief Jupiter  
or Poseidon causing mayhem out to sea.  
Real lads, those cosmic rowdies.

Years after, I'd a rural lover,  
all his scorched acres nudging sandplain.  
Many a season mourning lost crops,  
watching early wheat shrivel  
when forecast rains failed to fall  
led him to theorise: rain-fall maps  
weren't all the work of weather-men.  
They let their infant daughters help  
sketch in the slanty lines for rain  
on the daily maps. Artistic, maybe  
but none too accurate.

Innocent I was to ask:  
mightn't such misleading mapping be  
the work of weather-men's young sons?

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# MARION CAMPBELL

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## White Window Shopping

if familiar mirrors peeled  
away like skin  
could we set our sun —  
blind selves out there  
on bitumen  
to wait for the hit  
we identify with?

black memories reverse  
against the grain of voices —  
voices we have tried  
without a broken chord  
or swollen tongue to show for it  
when death strikes dumb  
    again  
    again  
black memories reverse  
and as we cop the muffler's heat  
shall we try for street-wise diction  
now, a laid-back line?  
how to repeat that squeal of tyres  
how to score as metal bites  
into our tender bodytexts?

remember times  
when we hoped to borrow  
for our measured sorrow  
a motif from the Nyoongah  
Daily News?

sometimes white violence taps  
the window of the text  
a cry beyond all simulacra

upsets the cool parade  
of syllables and blanks  
pronouns split like mannequins  
bleeding from the neck, the hip, the wrist

of bodies they replace  
and then there's something tacky  
on that glass we can't dismiss  
we try our clothes, our sprays  
*erase*  
*erase*  
but still it's there:  
these memories conduct their smear  
campaign always from the other side

## Human Interest

1.

So much the news  
does not contain.  
A woman from one's own home town

on bail for walling up a husband ...  
62 and 63  
and such dexterity with bricks.

Was the husband gagged and bound  
and clear-eyed too  
we almost ask

as course by course the daylight vanished?  
And what the grievance to supply it?  
Did they have a son between them

off there in another town  
or daughter who might ring on Sundays?  
The paper says 'asphyxiation' —

thoughtful mortar, well-mixed too,  
and easy on the trowel.  
And how did she account the absence

each morning at the corner store?  
Three months or so elapsed, we're told,  
and twice a day the street-end river

rose and fell a foot or two  
as if it might be breathing.  
The names themselves can tell us nothing.

Nothing too of the thoughts that filled  
a long day south in a rented house  
as, staring at the kitchen fridge,

she finishes a cup of tea - dash of milk, how many sugars?  
The fridge is open and switched off,  
an old one that requires defrosting

and has no snap release.  
She would have taken out the shelves;  
they'd be there draining on the board

as now she walks across the lino  
and with a short ungainliness  
climbs inside and grabs her knees;

pulls the darkness shut behind her.

## 2.

A woman in L.A. I think  
had put it in her will ...  
and had the cash to make it happen.

It must have been an early death,  
some cancer just below the smile,  
a sexy hoarseness in the throat

and up there in the hills.  
She wanted to be buried, she had said,  
dressed only in a negligee

and still at the wheel of her Maserati —  
I don't remember how it ended,  
that one day column

inch or two:  
the whole car buried by a tractor  
the soil like hail

sent rattling on the roof,  
the silence and the heavy dark,  
slow staining of Italian leather ...

or if the county intervened  
and found the regulation  
that spelt out coffin length and lid

and ruled a nightgown out.  
It might perhaps have been  
a slice of Forest Lawn,

a flattened slab with name and dates  
but somewhere in the minds of us  
who caught her on page five that day

she's still there in her final moments  
far out in the Mojave desert  
doing a hundred and eighty straight

down a freeway minus lights.

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## MARY WARD

---

### To My Coy Mistress, My Sony Walkmaster

Had we but Time enough, the World  
could be our own. My fingers curled  
around your waist, we'll traipse afar,  
just you and I — but not by car!  
The Ford, or Chev, or Rolls Royce,  
Sedan or ute — just take your choice! —  
Not one improved the lot of man,  
but brought instead just grief and pain.  
The car is simply tool of Death  
and daily doth it snuff and breath  
of reckless and incautious youth  
victims of speed and grog, forsooth!  
All those whose sight begins to fade  
should bring their autos in for trade;  
and when co-ordination slows,  
the automobile, I propose,  
should sacrifice its registration,  
for sake of lives across the nation.  
I shan't risk you, Beloved Sony,  
henceforth we journey by Shank's pony!

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# ROSANNE DINGLI

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## Hymn

Two days after the funeral Cora was her normal self. She poured white wine from an old decanter into unmatched glasses we had found at a flea market. Her newly washed hair seemed lighter than usual. It gleamed in the light coming from the moon, perfectly framed in the uncurtained window.

"I made custard today," she said. "Old-fashioned custard with eggs." She reached for the crystal decanter stopper with a thin pale hand which looked cold and almost blue. The crystal faceted ball rolled in a circular whirl away from her fingers, catching the moonlight and coming to a stop at the edge of the table. In a minute I would rise to turn the light on, but everything was perfect in that light. Cora's skin, the lace table cloth and the almost green wine in the old decanter.

"She was in the choir with me but I hardly knew her then, really," I said, wanting to talk about the dead woman. "Unusual voice. Wonderful black hair which she only grew when she was much older."

Cora leaned away from the window. "When the moon is like this the garden looks like a stage." Then, "I was in the school choir too, remember? But years later. I remember the teachers pulling the thread out of our uniform hems when we'd taken them up too high. I wanted to be like her. To sing like her. There was only one other girl called Catherine and she couldn't sing."

Suddenly, I remembered sitting on the stone steps at school, lifting the edge of my uniform to sun my legs between the tops of my short white socks and the hem of the slip whose length I had long outgrown. I remembered the weight of Shakespeare in a leather bound edition in my lap.

Cora had turned away from the window and the moon lit the hair on her shoulders. Green like the wine. She was too thin. I knew what she was going to do and I wished I could stop her. Before I could rise to turn on the light or say something about getting another lodger, a male one, she had started.

"Virgin martyr of old, fairest of God's flowers above," she sang. I knew the words too. "Champion of our holy faith, pure fountain of wisdom and love,"<sup>1</sup> she went on. Her insistent voice said I should join her. She was coming to the part where we would harmonise, standing on the old stone steps, looking down into the school garden. Mrs Mangion waving the pencil in her hand like a baton. And we kept time.

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1. *Hymn to St Catherine*. Lyrics by F.X. Mangion, 1958.

"Pour *down* on us thy children, thy blessings from above — " Cora stopped. I had not come in with the second voice. For some reason, I felt the same resistance to singing with Cora as Catherine had shown.

"I could never understand why they made *above* rhyme with *remove*," she said in a dull voice.

"We should get another lodger," I said. "A male one."

"Not all women are suicidal, Alma," she said in the same dull voice. I stood and turned the switch. Her fair hair and my own brown shoulder length curls were suddenly flooded with bright light from the central lamp. The window was extinguished, the moon outdone by a 75 watt globe. I wished for curtains.

"Alma! Al!"

I had not realised Cora had left the room. She was calling from the back steps. "Something's happening to the moon," she said. I looked up as I came up behind her.

"An eclipse, I suppose," I started, knowing she would say we hadn't heard anything or seen anything about it in the paper.

"Catherine would have known," we said at once, and fell into a silence of embarrassment or grief or something else which suddenly curled us apart, as if we had stung each other.

\*\*\*

*St Catherine of Alexandria, who died in the early 4th century, was one of the most popular early martyrs. Nowhere is she mentioned before the 9th century, and her historicity is doubtful. According to the legend, which exists in a number of versions, she was an extremely learned young girl of noble birth who protested the persecution of Christians under the Roman emperor Maxentius and defeated the eminent scholars summoned by him to oppose her. The spiked wheel (whence the term catherine wheel) by which she was sentenced to be killed broke, and she was then beheaded.<sup>2</sup>*

Catherine's room had already been cleared. Empty. The moon was not visible through that window. It was uncurtained like all the others in the house, massive frame and double-hung sash formidable in the tiny room.

Her uniform had been the shortest in the school. Her voice the clearest. As children, some of us had been made to stand on a wooden bench behind another line of girls in front, forming two tiers from which our voices would waft down from the small stage over the heads of the assembled school. She had protested giddiness many times, hating the insecurity of standing on a wobbly wooden bench. We had found a solution which for a time countered the intransigence of the teachers. I stood on the lower tier in front of her and she would place a hand on my steady shoulder for the entire time it took to sing the school hymn.

The coincidence of meeting her again years later, in a foreign country, was never really discussed at great length. Catherine had changed a great deal. We wondered if her voice was still clear. Cora would sing a few chorus bars from the school hymn and I would hear her in the garden. I remember joining her once, stopping foolishly when I saw Catherine look at us in something like embarrassment or suspicion. I felt

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2. Encyclopedia Britannica 1983 edition.

the pain in her glance, almost heard the dismayed exclamation she withheld.

"Just because Alma and I are sisters, it doesn't mean we do everything in the same way or have the same ideas," I had heard Cora saying to her in the kitchen once. They were animatedly and jocularly discussing the curtainless windows. Catherine had thought it was very strange and asked if Cora and I had agreed about it before she ever became our tenant.

It was not long after that we discovered how easily her light, questioning moods could change to depressed silences. She went out alone late at night and sometimes did not return for days at a time. Later I wondered if it happened after we discussed our years at St Catherine's, or something she had heard on the radio, or Cora's sudden bursts into song, but I could not remember every instance, or what had happened to trigger off her strange behaviour and dark moods.

Cora had cried at her funeral. Her head had bent suddenly onto a palm full of tissues which fluttered in the warm breeze of a beautiful day. We had been the only ones there. We were unable to trace any of Catherine's relatives.

"It's hard to believe she had no one at all," I said later, remembering her childish hand on my shoulder as we both sang the hymn to St Catherine.

"We knew she was an orphan. Don't you remember feeling sorry for her at school, when there was no one to pick her up on Fridays?" Cora said it in the same way she would have mentioned reading about the eclipse in the paper. Suddenly I recalled it was what we had known best about her at school, what had given her the touch of singularity.

We had continued checking on the shadow's progress over the moon's face all night, coming out into the garden with blankets around our shoulders. The light dulled gradually, resuming its incredible brightness when the eclipse was over. It was so brilliant the washing lines made sharp stripes of shadow across the lawn. We both thought of Catherine, and other rope. But we said nothing.

"They were very nice at the monastery," said Cora at lunch time once. I had forgotten the funeral for a while. It had been Cora's idea. Since Catherine had no relatives to disagree, I admitted it would be suitable to try and have her buried at the monastery which was not too distant to make it impossible. What I remembered were wrought iron gates, brown habits belted with cream rope and the strangely comforting knelling of small chapel bells.

"She must have had a very sad reason," one of the nuns said. Neither of us knew what to respond as there was no reason then we could offer ourselves. We both nodded in a way which made one of them ask if we were sisters.

"Five years apart," I answered, glad to be diverted from talking about Catherine again.

\*\*\*

*After her death angels allegedly took her body to Mount Sinai, where it was discovered in AD 800 and where the once great Monastery of St Catherine still exists. In the Middle Ages, when the story of her mystical marriage to Christ was widely circulated, she was one of the most popular saints. She is the patron of philosophers and scholars. Her feast day of November 25 has been removed from the church calendar.*

"Here it is," said Cora, turning the pages of the art book in her lap until she came upon the painting by Filippino Lippi. Her thin blue hand smoothed the page needlessly. It was a big book with heavy pages of thick glossy art paper. The classic colours of ancient paintings were lit up by the lamp which flooded the room behind her and the hair caught on the fabric of her thick cardigan.

"It hangs in the church of San Domenico in Bologna." Cora read from the heavy art book. *The Mystic Marriage of St Catherine*, I read, over her shoulder. Why was Cora so interested in the subject? Her thin finger traced the mannered outlines in the photographic reproduction of the Renaissance painting. Chubby fingers of the holy child clasping the impossibly long two middle fingers of the saint. Then the eyelid and nose of the saint's profile.

"Not like Catherine's nose at all," I said lightheartedly, trying to gauge Cora's intention.

"She never existed." Cora's voice was dull. I could not find a reply quickly enough. My silence must have seemed like a question.

"St George, St Christopher, St Catherine," she mumbled, like in a litany. I thought of kneeling between hard wooden benches of the church next door to the school. I remembered shafts of sunlight from an open window rake old paintings of similar colours to the one in Cora's lap. The school and church seemed fused together in spite of the fact a steep narrow street wound between them.

It was true, it was like Catherine had never existed. There was no one to give her belongings to, so they had been packed and stored in the roof. There was no one to talk about her to, only snatches of conversation when one or the other was thinking of her. Neither of us had wanted to be the one to go through her things. In the end, it had been Cora.

"Do you remember when they changed the church calendar? My goodness - ages ago. We were still at St Catherine's."

"All of a sudden, anyone called Georgina or Christine had no name day any more."

"Or Catherine."

"Or Catherine. I will never stop wondering why..." I looked at Cora. She had lowered her eyes. At school she had been a tiny lean creature with lowered eyes. Her admiration for girls with confidence and a good voice was apparent from the beginning. Catherine and I were four classes ahead of her and she tagged around after us in the yard.

Virgin martyr of old  
Teach us how best to be free  
Fill our hearts with heavenly zeal  
We beg thee on suppliant knee.

The words of the school hymn filled the room, leaving through the uncurtained window. I wished Cora would stop. I winced as Catherine had winced whenever familiar music was played. Opera, choral strains, piano music.

The piano at school had resisted tuning. It was placed on an uneven tiled floor, pushed up against the wall which hid the winding staircase. We lined up in an arc around Mrs Mangion, whose watch on a loose bracelet rattled against the ivory keys as she played. Soft clacking kept time, as she raised her hand between chords to

direct the singing.

"I found a newspaper cutting in her diary."

"In her diary?" A sense of invasion of privacy filled me. It was silly. Cora had got to know her a bit better than I had, in spite of the age difference. In spite of the fact I had been in Catherine's class and not her. In any case, Catherine was dead.

"She had taken singing seriously." Cora looked down at the heavy book in her lap again. She studied the mysterious painted finger placed horizontally on the rich folds of the saint's loose sleeve. "We never question the un-naturalness of old paintings," she said. I waited for her to continue about Catherine, looked at the saint's hands as they appeared to me, upside down in her lap. I had moved to sit on the rug at her feet. The book smelt of school libraries.

"She even sang at the Metropolitan. I had no idea. *Il Coro del Teatro La Scala di Milano*." She said the Italian words clearly. "You couldn't tell what happened from the way she was here, with us."

"What happened?"

Cora placed a thin finger on the words of the picture's caption, as if to mark a place while she raised her eyes to talk to me. The nail hid part of a word and I could only see *herine*. "She had the clearest voice. A promising future. Nothing was more important than singing. She said a few things. Not a lot. She never spoke about herself very much. She must have refused to acknowledge that part of her life to anyone. After her first attempt."

"Her first?"

Cora lowered her head again and I consciously mimicked the movement. I remembered Cora's singing in the garden, Catherine's faltering; her silent refusal to join in song or to listen to music. How could she have kept it all from us? I saw again Cora's face buried in a tangle of tissues at the monastery cemetery.

I rose and poured two glasses of wine from the old decanter, which was frosted from being taken from the fridge. Cora took her glass and looked up at me, her finger still marking the place in the book.

"She had a kind of...of fervour." *Inspire us with thy fervour*. I wished I had not said the word. But Cora was looking back at the picture.

"Remember how the teachers treated her specially because her name was Catherine? And because she could sing?"

I nodded. I wanted to know what happened. "What was in the cutting - in the diary? Why didn't you tell me?"

"There was so much I didn't know myself. So much she would not talk about. Remember her silent moods? I wondered about her myself. She had scars on her wrists. Wouldn't listen to music. She hated us singing."

"Even in the garden."

"Even in the garden. The hymn. It reminded you of St Catherine's," she said, "didn't it?"

Cora sipped from the glass and looked over her shoulder through the window.

"Too cloudy tonight," I said, knowing she was looking for the moon. "We were lucky to catch the eclipse yesterday." Moonlight on the clotheslines.

"When I read the newspaper cutting I realised why she had tried before and why she did it again. Alma, I had no idea or I would have done something."

"What could anyone have done?" It did not sound as comforting as I intended. "What did the cutting say? Was it in Italian?"

"No. English. It said she lost her nerve and ability to sing. She never went on the stage again. It happened at a concert of Verdi's opera choruses. The journalist made it sound like it was no great loss as she was only a chorus member anyway. She lost her voice. I know how she must have felt."

"She lost her voice!"

"She lost everything. She had nothing and no one else, apparently. For those months she was with us, we were all she had. We hardly realised -"

"How could we?"

In the school yard, the stone steps were crowded with girls in green. Short white socks and polished brown shoes mixed and shuffled on the ancient stone and Mrs Mangion waited impatiently for us to come to order. A pencil was rapped on the leather bound cover of a book and then the only noise left was a twittering from small birds in the church windows across the winding street next to the school.

"We'll start with the hymn, please girls, and keep time. Remember how Catherine sang it yesterday and follow her when she sings the refrain. Remember how she sounds."

## **EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR STUDIES ON AUSTRALIA**

**Third Conference — Copenhagen**

**October 6-9, 1995**

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Short proposals (100 words) to be submitted by

November 1, 1994

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# JESSIE BATE

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## Victory

The man accepted childlessness more readily than did his wife. He had longed for children, but well before the tedious round of specialists and tests was over he climbed off the seesaw of hope and despair, schooled himself to a level plane of apathy and eventually of acceptance.

For the women it was different. As time passed the slow diminishing of their hopes only increased her longing. She would not consider adoption. For her it was not so much the child itself as the bearing of that child that mattered. If she could not have that she wanted nothing else. From time to time the man would wake in the night and find her lying sleepless, weeping silently. Some nights she rose and walked along through the streets. He knew of it only if he heard her come in again, cold and silent.

"Where have you been?"

"Just walking. I like to walk."

Diffidently, he suggested psychiatric help.

"To make me pregnant?"

Her own doctor gave her sleeping tablets.

"Do they work?" the man asked.

"Oh yes. I'm all right."

A week later he came upon all the tablets, hidden in an envelope. A deadly fear gripped him.

"Why didn't you take them?"

She didn't answer, only looked at him out of cold eyes.

When spring came she seemed to improve. She became fanatically houseproud. She cleaned until every surface shone. Then, in the early summer, his firm moved him out to a quiet little township in the Barossa Valley. They chose a house on the outskirts of the town. The woman became animated.

"I shall like living in the country. Look at that garden! Months of work! I'll get it straight."

"Do you think you...?"

She met his troubled look.

"I'm sorry I gave you a bad time. I *am* sterile. I can accept that now."

She seemed to settle in well. She joined the C.W.A., a craft circle, the local choir. Gradually, however, she gave up these activities.

"Aren't you going to rehearsal?"

"There's so much to do in the garden. I'd rather garden."

Housework she did swiftly, competently, from her intense hatred of dirt and disorder. It was the garden which obsessed her. She spent every spare moment in it. It was a miracle of ordered colour and pattern. She could not bear that a flower should grow out of line, a dead branch remain unpruned. The strength of her passion, however, was kept for the weeds. She attacked and harried them constantly, destroyed them with a fierce satisfaction.

"Weeds are only flowers growing in the wrong place!"

"Weeds are weeds. I hate them."

The obsession gripped as strongly as her despair had once held her. Sometimes the man felt he did not know which had been the worst. She seemed to care for nothing other than her garden, but if he commented on its beauty there was little response. It was not a thing of joy to her. It was a battleground where she triumphed over her enemies.

Her hatred extended to the insect world. Bees she tolerated, accepting, though not liking, their usefulness, but anything else was eliminated ruthlessly with spray or powder or a swift blow.

"Leave it! Ladybirds do no harm!"

"They have no right in my garden."

The man's work sometimes took him away from home. He began to extend these trips as much as possible. The woman hardly seemed to notice. He sensed that the absence of a man who smoked, and did not always remember to wipe his feet, was a blessing to her.

One Sunday he went for a walk in the woods. He came back in the late afternoon, and was carefully removing the mud from his boots onto the garden when he saw the woman scowling at him.

"What's the matter with you? It's only soil. The garden's full of it!"

"It's not only soil! What is the use of my trying to keep the garden nice when you bring in all kinds of rubbish on your shoes?"

Looking at her cold, disciplined face he could not now recollect the girl he had married. She never spoke except to reprove him or to issue an instruction. He could not reach her. It was like living with an ice woman.

Unwilling to believe that the woman he had loved was so irrevocably changed he hung on for a further six months. Then he told her he was leaving. Her face showed no dismay.

"I'll provide for you, of course."

"So I should hope! When will you go?"

He left the following day. When he had gone the woman walked purposefully to their bedroom. She looked for a moment at the bed, and a slight smile touched her lips. She twitched off the soiled sheets, and, after a second's hesitation, the blankets also. She put the sheets in the washer, and left the rest of the bedding for later attention. Then she opened the wardrobe and drawers, scrutinising each shelf. She took out all the items he had left, stored them in a suitcase, and then pushed the case into the loft space out of sight. She fetched water and a cloth and vigorously cleaned every surface. She vacuumed and polished with particular care. When all was done she smiled again, and went out into her garden.

When the long, wet days of winter came she kept largely to the house, reading

gardening books, making lists, and often simply sitting looking at her garden.

She became obsessed with the notion that the world outside her garden was a plague city. When she had to go out into it she tried to avoid touching anything. On her return she removed her shoes, washing them under the outside tap, and walked in her stocking feet to the house.

By the early summer her garden was a severe and orderly picture. She spent every moment in it. One day whilst mowing the lawn she noted with disgust worm casts here and there. She treated them, but in her neat bed that night she dreamed of the dark world under the lawns, with worms and unspeakable things wriggling back and forth in the dark. She woke screaming and sweating. The next morning she ordered artificial grass.

When it arrived she examined its smooth, sterile bristles with pleasure. Then she got a spade and began to remove the turf. After a while she broke off, gasping. She had made little progress. The ground was hard and dry, the work killingly hard. She went indoors, washed, and sat for half an hour at the window, brooding, massaging from time to time a place where her chest ached dully. Then she picked up the telephone.

The men who came to lift the turf were cheerful, talkative, and efficient. She stood watching them, writhing with inward agony at the sight of their plague ridden boots. When they left she sighed with relief.

She never wrote letters, so seldom received any. Sometimes, though, people came distributing leaflets, or the postman called with a cheque from her husband. Her mailbox was halfway up the drive. After these rare visits from the outside world she swilled the drive with disinfectant. Then at last she had her mailbox moved to a point outside her boundaries. Each time someone stopped to put anything in the box, it gave her a small thrill of satisfaction, as one who had outwitted an enemy. Often she did not trouble to empty the box for a week.

Late in the summer disaster struck. She had a fine hibiscus in one flower bed. She went out to remove a few dead flowerheads and stopped short at the sight of a sprinkle of purple half hidden by the foliage. A weed! A weed had been growing unnoticed in her garden. She recognised it. 'Love creeper' they called it! The name disgusted her. She pulled off the offending flowers, then, peering into the bush, saw that it had been infiltrating for some time. Its strong, tenacious stems had wound themselves round the stalks of the hibiscus, remaining virtually invisible until its purple flowers betrayed it. For a long time she worked, untying the weed, stem by stem, digging it out with her trowel, but always the slender roots broke off. She fetched her fork. Ruthlessly she began to dig out the hibiscus. It took a long time, for it was well established. Then she set to work on the roots of the intruder. The threads seemed to go down into the depths of the earth.

She became aware that she was groping, and looking up in surprise found that darkness had overtaken her. She got up stiffly, mud stained and aching, her heart thudding raggedly. In bed that night she brooded despairingly. The pain in her chest came back. The battlefield she had been forced to leave was etched on the inside of her eyelids, the thrown soil, the white, creeping roots of her enemy. Once more she dreamed of the world under the surface of the garden, and saw it boiling with malignant life. She saw the slim, broken threads of the creeper writhe and twist closer together, join up again, forge deeper into the soil. In the morning she called in the local handyman.

He looked at her orderly garden.

"All of it?"

"Everything. I want no soil anywhere."

"You'll miss your flowers."

She shook her head. "I'm sick of them. Plastic flowers, that's what I want. Plastic flowers in tubs of gravel."

"And this - grass stuff?"

"Get rid of it. It will rot, let things through. I want concrete everywhere."

"Pavers! Nice brick pavers - you can get lovely ones, you know, all shapes and colours..."

She pictured her small enemies, sliming and wriggling their way up between the pavers and shuddered.

"No. Concrete, everywhere!"

At last the work was done. The whole area of her garden was concreted over. Stone pots at the four corners held improbable roses. The woman smiled. She had won. The thought of the impotent life writhing underneath troubled her not at all. Sealed in its concrete tomb it would not reach the surface in her garden.

After a few days she became increasingly aware that one of the four pots was out of line. It irked her, until at last she went out to straighten it. She dragged it painfully to the point she had chalked-marked. As she stood back to appraise the results pain, crushing and suffocating, swept through her body. She found herself on all fours, staring down at the concrete. A minute crack was visible where she had dragged the stone pot.

"They'll have to come back and fix it..."

It was her last thought.

At the funeral the man's only feeling was of depression. Afterward he came back to live in the house for a while, with the confused idea that he might at last understand her, work out what had gone wrong. As time passed the sterile garden, the cold house on which he could not impose his personality, only drained his spirit. He instructed an agent to put the property on the market, and left.

The handyman who had laid the concrete was busy all that season. The flat, marshy area had always been troubled by subsidence, and after a particularly hot summer cracks appeared everywhere in houses and outbuildings. In the concrete garden the minute crack the woman had seen as she died silently opened, stretched and widened. No-one noticed.

One day a bird, searching for food, landed in the garden. There were no pickings, so it took off again, but not before a seed from a tree lodged in its claw had dropped into the crevice, down into the soil below.

With the rains of winter, in the still deserted garden the seed swelled. By summer its green leaves showed above the surface, its swelling roots already beginning to test their strength against the yet unyielding concrete.

## Australian historical fiction and the Popular Front : Katharine Susannah Prichard's goldfields trilogy

"The most urgent task of the writer today is that of recognising how poor he is and how poor he must be in order to be able to begin again at the beginning"

Walter Benjamin, "The Author as Producer"

"The postulated unity of the work which, more or less explicitly, has always haunted the enterprise of criticism, must now be denounced."

Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*

In war-time publications like *Australian Writers Speak* and the "Crisis Issue" of *Meanjin Papers*, writers and critics in Australia proved to be consummate advocates of the Popular Front, affirming a radical-national tradition and identifying with the "common man". Thus they looked to the defeat of fascism and pinned their hopes on post-war reconstruction. My aim in this essay, however, is to argue that in their historical fiction many of these same writers — I am thinking especially of Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark and M. Barnard Eldershaw — went beyond the populist sentiments and organicist aesthetics that characterize such war-time documents. I shall focus on Prichard's goldfields trilogy because it exemplifies the links between Australian historical fiction and the Popular Front.<sup>1</sup> Rather than uncritically promoting the aesthetic and political ideals of the Popular Front, the trilogy interrogates those values — to a point where we are obliged to develop completely different reading strategies in order to explore the complexities of these texts.

This is also a way of confronting the work of Georg Lukács (the "foremost critic of historical fiction", according to Avrom Fleishman).<sup>2</sup> Neither *The Timeless Land* nor

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1. See my essay, "Challenging History Making", in *Australian Literary Studies*, (May 1995) (forthcoming), for a reading of Dark's *The Timeless Land*.

2. Avrom Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1971, xvi. For similar estimations of Lukács's significance, see Andrew Sanders, *The Victorian Historical Novel: 1840-1880*, London, MacMillan, 1978, 9; Harry B. Henderson, *Versions of the Past: The Historical Imagination in American Fiction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1974, xviii; James M. Cahalan, *Great Hatred, Little Room: The Irish Historical Novel*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1983, 9; Laurie Hergenhan, *Unnatural Lives: Studies of Australian Convict Fiction about Convicts, from James Tucker to Patrick White*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983, p.6

Prichard's goldfields trilogy accords with the "classical form" of historical fiction which Lukács derives from Scott's Waverley cycle — not a very promising starting point, if we wish to do more than simply refuse these novels. But when we remember that Lukács completed *The Historical Novel* in 1937, as his contribution to "the anti-Fascist popular front",<sup>3</sup> it becomes possible to draw some interesting parallels between his situation as a critic and the social and cultural milieu of writers like Prichard and Dark. By celebrating the "popular character" of Scott's art, Lukács shows how to unite the interests of progressive elements within the bourgeoisie and those of the working class. He values the "classical form" of historical fiction because it promotes such unity, enabling individuals from different classes to sympathize with the plight of ordinary people and join national struggles to realise truly humane and democratic values. Through interrogating the radical-nationalist tradition, Prichard's goldfields trilogy challenges Lukács's understanding of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, echoing (in a modest but nonetheless significant way) Walter Benjamin's and Pierre Macherey's critiques of Lukács's work.

## What was the Popular Front?

For communists in Australia and elsewhere, the Popular Front signalled a distinct change of direction. Hitherto the Comintern had viewed social democrats as "social fascists" who were guilty of collaborating with the bourgeoisie to preserve the existing order — a policy which had disastrous consequences, preventing any kind of united action against the rise of fascism in Germany. In Australia it led to bitter conflict between communists and members of the Australian Labor Party. When Dimitrov reviewed this policy at the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International in 1935, he urged communists to begin working with other leftist groups in the struggle against fascism. Rather than seeing everything in terms of the ineluctable movement towards world revolution, with class pitted against class, Dimitrov argued that communists should defend democratic rights and national traditions.<sup>4</sup> The Communist Party of Australia began to present itself as the champion of the national heritage in the struggle against war and fascism. This was complicated for a time by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, when Party members became confused, and the Party itself was declared illegal. Yet, even at this moment, in the eyes of many writers — both Party members like Katharine Susannah Prichard and "fellow travellers" like M. Barnard Eldershaw and Eleanor Dark — the Communist Party was aligned with the defence of Western Civilization against fascism at home and abroad, and they were profoundly disturbed by the Menzies Government's repressive measures.<sup>5</sup> Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, Dark's *The Little Company*, and Prichard's *Winged Seeds* all dwell on this moment in Australian history, when plain-clothes men knocked at doors, communists were interned, and supposedly seditious literature was confiscated.

3. Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel*. Trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, 1962; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p.13.
4. See Georgi Dimitrov, "The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International." *The United Front: The Struggle Against Fascism and War*. London; Lawrence and Wishart, 1938. See also Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: a Short History*. Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1969, 48-49; Helen Graham and Paul Preston, eds., *The Popular Front in Europe*. London: Macmillan, 1987, p.2.
5. See Davidson 76, 83; cf. Drusilla Modjeska, *Exiles at Home: Australian Women Writers, 1925-1945*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1981, pp.100-115.

Years later, Len Fox, a member of the Communist Party who became active in the Movement Against War and Fascism, could look back on this period as involving a broadening of the left, as communists turned outwards to embrace popular concerns. He describes people in a "front" organisation like the Movement Against War and Fascism as "warm" and "human." In his account of this era, Nettie Palmer emerges as less a "fellow traveller" than the epitome of the "human" qualities of those people struggling for a better society. Fox applauds her "hard work" and "sincerity" when, after her return from Spain, she tried to convey a sense of the Spanish people's plight to audiences in Australia. He describes her as possessing "true patriotism — an understanding of Australia's past and of what it meant to be an Australian, and of how this could contribute to world progressive movements."<sup>6</sup> According to Fox, such an understanding is evident in Vance and Nettie's reflections on the significance of an Australian tradition in the war time publication, *Australian Writers Speak*.

## Australian Writers Speak

*Australian Writers Speak* shows the contradictory character of nationalist discourse, revealing the ideological limits of the struggle against fascism and the project of reconstruction after the war. Originally broadcast on the ABC, the talks were arranged by the Fellowship of Australian Writers and published in 1942. In the background looms the threat of Japanese invasion, but the real enemy is within: the writers contributing to this colloquium obviously feel that ordinary Australians do not yet share the values they see as basic to the Australian literary tradition. The contributors — which include Louis Esson, Frank Dalby Davison, Miles Franklin, Marjorie Barnard, and Katharine Susannah Prichard, as well as Nettie and Vance Palmer — all attempt to construct a literary history that gives content to the "common" ideals of the Australian "people". Yet while they make various calls to action, they remain uncertain whether such action will really be informed by their holistic ideal of a true human community.

That the talks exemplify the values associated with the Popular Front becomes apparent if we read them alongside Lukács's *The Historical Novel*. Both Lukács and the contributors to *Australian Writers Speak* claim to articulate the values of ordinary men and women, which they see embodied in literature that is close to the "people". They employ similar imagery to evoke this sense of identity between "great" literature and ordinary life. Lukács talks of the need for "a writer to be deeply rooted in popular life" (331-32). Scott was near "to the real life of the people"; he wrote "from their experiences, from their soul" (340-41). Lukács values literature which gives "the impression of life as it is as a whole", where things connect "naturally," in an "organic" way (49, 341). He describes the heroes in "the classical type of historical novel" as "growing" out of "the concrete historical basis of popular life" (335). For the contributors to *Australian Writers Speak*, literature has "roots" in the life of the "people", and it "grows" out of our national life. Marjorie Barnard describes "our literature" as "something which is instinct within ourselves, a community effort, a folk literature ... the product not of a few pen-pushers but of our communal life and

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6. Len Fox, *Broad Left, Narrow Left*, Marrickville (published by the author), 1982, p.27, pp.30-31, p.40.

history." Rather than a "sub-section under the heading of Anglo-Saxon literature," our literature is "a complete organism — a plant small perhaps, but sturdy, grown in the open, and as natural to our country as the gum-tree."<sup>7</sup>

Like Lukács, the contributors to *Australian Writers Speak* stress the national character of literature. We need only look at Louis Esson's introduction to the talks to see how this emphasis merges with the ideals of the Popular Front. This also raises the question of the problematical character of the links between politics and aesthetics as they were understood by writers engaged in the struggle against fascism. For rather than asserting the need for writers in Australia to act in response to the crisis, Esson talks of them continuing to do "their natural work" and creating a culture which shows the achievement of "full nationhood" (9). He quotes André Gide's declaration that "no one was more specifically Spanish than Cervantes, more English than Shakespeare, more Russian than Gogol, more French than Rabelais or Voltaire, and at the same time more universal and more profoundly human." The "paradox" of literature is that "only the writer who is firstly truly national can later become international," that in literature we witness a "triumph of the general in the particular and of the human in the individual" (9-10). In many ways this is an extraordinary statement. A war is raging, and yet, as a way of introducing a series of talks purportedly addressed to these "times of stress" (7), Esson devotes himself to considering the possibility of Australian literature reaching universal heights, when Australian writers will come into their own. It is significant that Esson distinguishes between a writer's "deep" concerns and the "immediate and practical aim" of "cheering" and "animating" "his fellow countrymen with a song like the *Marseillaise* or an oration like that of Pericles or Lincoln" (7). Thus he diminishes the importance of becoming directly involved in politics. We seem to be lost in myth making about our collective identity, at the expense of grappling with concrete issues in the struggle against fascism.

It would also be possible to explain the contradictions in Esson's introduction as resulting from his situation as a nationalist writer of long standing. He is rehearsing arguments developed in other contexts; their applicability to the present is not immediately obvious. Throughout the talks, the contributors try to press the ideals of literary nationalism into a new service, and it is a moot point whether those ideals will prove adequate to the task at hand. The contributors repeatedly affirm the value of literature as expressing the growth of national consciousness, while remaining uneasily aware of what Frank Dalby Davison calls "the context of war and woe in which this series of talks appears" (11). Davison confesses that he himself had difficulty in dragging his thoughts away from "the war and all it may mean to our country and humanity at large" (10).

The ambiguities of nationalist discourse run through *Australian Writers Speak*, with each contributor assuming that as a nationalist consciousness develops so too does a national literature. On the one hand, they describe nationalism as a "natural" phenomenon, as a set of values achieved as people gradually adjust to the Australian environment — an environment which is always conceived as a world of bell birds and gum trees rather than class structure and economic growth. On the other hand, they see nationalism as something which has yet to be achieved, as a general view

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7. Esson, Louis, et al. *Australian Writers Speak: Literature and Life in Australia: A Series of talks arranged by the Fellowship of Australian Writers for the Australian Broadcasting Commission*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1942, p.98.

that Australians ideally ought to share. While the first definition of Australian nationalism gives rise to the familiar story of poets growing accustomed to Spring in September and Autumn in March, the utopianism evident in the second definition opens out onto politics. These two aspects of nationalist discourse do not easily cohere, as becomes apparent in Davison's argument. He asserts that "national unity, to which we are now trusting so much, is the stronger for having been confirmed in the pages of our nascent literature." If it were not for literature, we "would each be living in something like a mental prison cell, each unable to place himself in complete communication with his neighbours" (12). "Largely," writes Davison, "we are known to each other" by the work of Lawson, Paterson, Mary Gilmore, and others (16). The talks in *Australian Writers Speak* are full of inclusive gestures of this sort — the contributors refer to "our novels," "our particular historical past," "our characteristic idiom" — when the emphasis is on unity of purpose and identity. But for that very reason the discourse is full of gaps, always in a dialogical relationship with people and groups (the majority of Australia's population, "average" Australian citizens) which it does not embrace.<sup>8</sup>

What sort of context does *Australian Writers Speak* provide for reading historical fiction of the 1940s? It has not been my intention to give an unsympathetic account of *Australian Writers Speak* or of literary nationalism generally. Though problematic, the tenets of literary nationalism gain peculiar force in these talks through being articulated in adversity, in response to the crisis of 1942. Contradictions of the sort I have described point to the complex ways in which Australian nationalism figures in the historical fiction of the time. Novels like *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* and *The Roaring Nineties* could certainly be read as belonging to the radical-nationalist tradition celebrated in *Australian Writers Speak*. But just as the contributors to *Australian Writers Speak* feel obliged to stake out their claims vis-à-vis competing claims, in an implicit debate with other — inauthentic or un-Australian — attitudes, so these novels test the assumptions of nationalist discourse. Rather than merely echoing the values of *Australian Writers Speak*, the fiction produced by M. Barnard Eldershaw, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Eleanor Dark, and others, questions such values in extraordinarily productive ways, giving rise to rich textual complexities.

## The goldfields trilogy

Let me turn now to the goldfields trilogy. Often criticized for showing Prichard's decline into "socialist realism," the novels in the trilogy vary significantly in style, with each text reflecting critically on the others. I shall focus on significant moments which suggest how each text should be read.

The structure of *The Roaring Nineties* (the first volume in the trilogy) brings to mind other pioneer sagas that celebrate heroic deeds of the past. Just as "the old hands" in Brent of Bin Bin's *Up the Country* vividly recall the brave exploits of the pioneers, so in *The Roaring Nineties* Dinny Quinn likes nothing better "than yarning about the early days".<sup>9</sup> No single event is celebrated in the way the old-timers in *Up*

8. Brenton Doecke, "P.R. Stephensen, Fascism." *Westerly* 2 (Winter 1993), p.67.

9. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *The Roaring Nineties: A Story of the Goldfields in Western Australia*. Introd. Drusilla Modjeska. 1946; London: Virago, 1983. p.4.

*the Country* talk about Mrs Mazere's and Bert Pool's feat in crossing the river in flood ("the greatest flood ever seen by white men in the Yarrabongo").<sup>10</sup> *The Roaring Nineties* is about the efforts of working people to survive, and much is made of collective struggle. From the start of the novel, however, events are related in the form of reminiscences. The tone is set by Dinny's yarns about the old days, as well as Sally Gough's memories. The focus shifts mainly between Dinny and Sally, who share the idiom of the fields and the diggers' values. Thus *The Roaring Nineties* celebrates working class struggle and the link between workers' aspirations and the legend of the 'nineties affirmed by *Australian Writers Speak*. Dinny's yarns are akin to the stories supposedly told by drovers to the clink of hobble chains, and the novel — as "literature" — offers itself as an example of the close connections which ought to exist between culture and the lives of ordinary people.

Even the voice of the omniscient narrator merges with the language of people on the fields. For large stretches of writing, the story is told by an anonymous narrator, who is able to engage in general reflections about the way the alluvial diggers defend their rights against John Forrest and his ilk. This is the stuff of old labour histories, from Brian Fitzpatrick's *Short History of the Australian Labor Movement* to Ernie Campbell's effort to tell the same story "from the viewpoint of Marxism",<sup>11</sup> where a retrospective view produces an account of the continuous struggle of "working people" down through the years, and a variety of incidents (the Eureka Stockade, the strikes of the 1890s, the struggle against conscription during the First World War) are all seen as identical, as actions taken by an always-already-existing working class. When, in *The Roaring Nineties*, the fight over alluvial rights worsens, we learn that "the spirit of working men who had struggled against injustice and oppression all through the ages" burned in the men. There were men there "who had taken part in the great shearing strikes, a few years before," and "talk of Eureka was in the air, and a sober realization of where this fight might lead" (298-299). At times, indeed, the chapters in *The Roaring Nineties* conclude with something like a moral, as though the story could be read as a workers' catechism. When McDonald is forced to attend the roll-up, and his efforts to increase the price of water on the fields are thwarted, Blunt Pick is jubilant: "'It's just like Dinny says,' he chuckled. 'When the workers stick together and organize, there's nothing they can't do'" (136).

What saves this is that Blunt Pick is doing the talking, and, what is more, he is reporting what Dinny has said to him. The way the march of events is interrupted at certain points, and Dinny or Sally comments on the action, suggests a play of perspectives that makes mateship and the other values celebrated seem relativized. It is remarkable how many times events are related at second hand. This is not only because we are constantly reminded that we are looking back on events from a position many years hence, as Dinny and Sally reminisce. Mick Mannion took the chair at the roll-up in protest against the infringements of alluvial diggers' rights: "A little whipper-snapper of a bloke, Dinny said, it was remarkable how Mick controlled the meeting" (299). This could be Dinny describing the meeting to Sally that evening. For all the immediacy of the account of the miners' struggle against the Forrest government, involving the arrest and gaoling of miners, much of it is related as what "Dinny

10. Brent of Bin Bin. *Up the Country: A Tale of the Early Australian Squattocracy*. Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1928, p.1.

11. E. W. Campbell, *History of the Australian Labour Movement: A Marxist Interpretation*. Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1945, 59. See also Brian Fitzpatrick. *A Short History of the Australian Labor Movement*. Melbourne: Rawson's Bookshop, 1940.

said" (see 302, 303, 305). The actual events are at a remove from us, which opens up a space for conflicting interpretations about what went on. When Mick Mannion was speaking, "you could have heard a pin drop," Dinny says (299) — and the inclusive gesture signals that this is something more than an objective account of the events, that we are being invited to share in the struggle to create a better world. But the shifting character of the perspectives also suggests the complexity of that struggle and of any identification with it.

Given the importance of yarning and reminiscing in *The Roaring Nineties*, it is significant that *Golden Miles* (the second volume set between 1914 and 1927) begins by debunking sentimental views of the past. Bill Gerrity — "better known as Bill Jehosophat in the old days"<sup>12</sup> — has returned to the goldfields. Unlike most early prospectors who struck gold, Bill saved his money, turning himself "into a successful sheep farmer, and the sober and respectable father of a large family" (20). Yet he now contemplates throwing everything up and returning to prospecting. The "happiest years of his life had been spent chasing rushes between the limitless horizons of this sun blasted country" (20) — so he reminisces with Dinny, as they tramp along the Boulder road. But the conversation takes place against "a foreign landscape, blasted and sinister." Bill stares "at the torn back of the ridge, the high peaks of dumps round the big mines... the forest of poppet heads... the tall black chimneys sending yellow fumes drifting across the township..." (19). And much of his talk with Dinny is taken up by Dinny's facts and figures about the wealth produced by the mines and the machinations of London stockjobbers. Clearly, the old days have gone, and a new order prevails that is hostile to the values shared by the original prospectors. When Sally meets Bill, she makes a point of trying to cure him of "a romantic hankering for the old days. It was impossible to live in the shadow of a time that had ended: could never be revived" (37).

In *Golden Miles*, the mood of reminiscence in *The Roaring Nineties* is displaced by an atmosphere of foreboding. The first part of the novel is more or less tightly structured around Sally's quarrel with Paddy Cavan and his subsequent departure from her boarding house. Although the events are related retrospectively, this does not involve the kind of reminiscing that characterizes *The Roaring Nineties*. Instead, there is a sense of strict chronological order, as we learn what Sally remembers about "that afternoon" (112) and then "that Sunday" (118), and so on. This is from the Sunday of Bill Jehosophat's visit to the next Sunday — the afternoon which "was the last the family spent, yarning together in a care-free, desultory way" (127). On the following day Tom and his father are arrested because of Paddy's skullduggery, and "never again did they all meet to argue, gossip and laugh with Dinny over his yarns" (127).

Within this framework details are realized with naturalistic force. Monday sees Tom at work, and the narrator gives a full account of working in the mines, from the moment the whistle blows to the end of Tom's day, when the men on the afternoon shift take over. The rigid chronological order of events evokes the oppressive nature of Tom's working week. Not everything, however, is realized from Tom's point of view; the narrative also shifts into a general description of the miners as they commence their working day: "It was a sombre crowd of men which filled the trams... In their dark, shabby working clothes, every man carrying his black crib bag, they seemed to be just what the wobblies called them, wage-slaves" (71). The

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12. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Golden Miles*. Introd. Drusilla Modjeska. 1948; London: Virago, 1984, pp.18-19.

narrator then describes their routine as they prepare to go underground: "A man had to fight his way to his pegs, hang up his decent clothes, and get into his underground outfit, heavy boots and all, pick up his crib bag, 'spider' and candle" (72). This detail does not actually relate to this particular day; it is an account of the routine the men follow throughout the year. We saw in *The Roaring Nineties* how the narrator's perspectives merged with Sally's or Dinny's viewpoints, and something similar occurs here, as we move from details about the day as they are registered in Tom's mind to general reflections about work in the mines. But in the first volume the shift from individual points of view to the omniscient narrator's larger perspectives is comprehended by the idiom of the fields and the miners' values, whereas here the narrator adopts a different tone. As an account of things day in and day out, the narrator's language signifies all that reduces the miners to "an army of men, condemned to hard labour for life" (71).

On the other hand, the narrator's observations are clearly partisan, and it hardly comes as a surprise when this account of conditions in the mines culminates in Tom's avowal to fight the system. Tom "could not separate himself from the struggle of the working class for a better way of life"; "always on the horizon of his consciousness, like a mirage, glimmered that vision of a better way of life" (84). A utopian perspective still informs the narrative, although it clearly differs from the utopianism of the first volume. *The Roaring Nineties* exploits the ambiguity implicit in reminiscing; through celebrating a golden age in the past it suggests that things could be different from the way they are at present. *Golden Miles* also entertains the idea of change, but it is change which can only be achieved through an increasingly "scientific" understanding of capitalist society.

When compared with the yarns in *The Roaring Nineties*, the stories the miners tell each other around their crib in *Golden Miles* show their sense of collective identity has degenerated. Yarning has been displaced by "the desultory conversation which filled the last moments of crib time" (75) — a compelling sign that the miners' spirit has deteriorated since the early days. We might think of Walter Benjamin's characterization of the storyteller as a figure who is becoming remote from us.<sup>13</sup> In Prichard's trilogy, the increasingly oppressive nature of capitalist society is registered through the decline of storytelling. This even applies to Dinny and his mates. As they swap their yarns on Sally's verandah, the old timers seem more and more marginalised. Dinny's yarns were already well worn in the first volume; Morrey laughed over his yarn about the drunken Wardens, although he had heard it many times (*The Roaring Nineties* 408). The impression that there is something clichéd about Dinny's stories, and that with the passing of time his attitudes and values are becoming less and less relevant is enhanced in *Golden Miles*. *Golden Miles* effectively questions the possibility of narrative or storytelling in capitalist society, thereby casting a critical eye over the inclusive gestures associated with celebrating mateship in *The Roaring Nineties*. Everyone still gathers on the Goughs' verandah, where they reminisce and talk about the miners' current struggles. However, the knot of values and aspirations involved in reminiscing about the old days is now always seen against the background of conditions in the mines, which are rendered in matter-of-fact detail.

With his vision of a better world, Tom still fights the battles Dinny and his mates

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13. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov." *Illuminations*. Ed., introd. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. London: Fontana, 1970, pp.83-109.

fought in the past. And yet Tom has also developed his understanding of the struggle through reading which Dinny finds "too tough for him" (59). A glance at Tom's bookshelf — on which we find Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and other books by Emerson, Edward Carpenter and Frederick Engels — shows that as a worker Tom has lost his innocence. The values of the early days no longer suffice to guide him in the struggle against capitalism. Tom has been through "the university of Kalgoorlie" (61), acquiring a knowledge of social conditions from experiences shared with other workers, as well as from his reading. Yet will the fight ever really be won? How, asks Tom, is it possible "to arouse decent men, workworn and drugged by their deadly toil, to the need for thought and action?" (76-77) While Tom has attained a firm understanding of class struggle, he does not know whether his knowledge will ever fully be put into practice. His knowledge — by definition — has no immediate connection with the miners' fight; its ultimate impact on their struggle remains a matter for debate.

This uncertainty is evident in the text's ambivalence about its status as narrative. Although *Golden Miles* stresses the need to develop a scientific understanding of class struggle, this does not exclude narrative or storytelling as a means for realizing a better society: Tom and his wife, Eily, throw themselves into a range of activities in their efforts to further the workers' cause. Storytelling has, however, been problematized. One of the most memorable images of communication in the novel occurs when Treffene makes his statement after being condemned to death for a crime he has not committed. Treffene had taken the blame for Coulter on the understanding that Coulter would provide for his children when he was gone. When they are both sentenced to death, and Coulter fails to honour his promise, Treffene tells the true story: "In black and white, there it was, like a crude drawing done by a trembling, unskilled hand: revealing all the weakness and misery of the man who had made it, and yet giving an impression of reality" (357). *Golden Miles* also gestures towards reality, with a picture of class struggle which — even though it might only be a "crude drawing" — is meant to contribute to the fight, but it remains haunted by the fact that we have all been condemned and that there may be no forestalling the inevitable.

This question is pursued in *Winged Seeds* (the final volume in the trilogy). Dinny is still sitting on Sally's verandah, reminiscing about the old days and hotly debating the current struggle with his mates. The focus now moves to young Bill Gough, who in every way is worthy to succeed Tom as a fighter for workers' rights. He is, in fact, preparing to address a public meeting of the League for Peace and Democracy: the struggles associated with the Popular Front now figure in the trilogy, as the story details the debates about fascism before the outbreak of the war. That the narrative has shifted even further from the perspectives of *The Roaring Nineties* becomes apparent when Bill calls Dinny and his mates "a lot of old stick-in-the-muds" and urges them to do something about "the dangers threatening us today".<sup>14</sup> However, as in *Golden Miles*, the experiences of the old prospectors are still seen as an invaluable part of the workers' heritage. In his speech Bill makes a point of acknowledging the way types like Dinny had contributed to "the good fight" (48).

Indeed, the paradox is that the distance between young people like Bill and the older generation is not necessarily viewed positively. Tom Gough's understanding

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14. Katharine Susannah Prichard, *Winged Seeds*. Introd. Drusilla Modjeska. 1950; London: Virago, 1984, p.32.

of the workers' struggle made Dinny's generation seem limited. Now, as Bill Gough follows in Tom's footsteps, Dinny and his "parliament" (246) seem more marginalised than ever. When it comes to unravelling the complexities of international relations and working out the best path for Australia to follow, Dinny himself always looks to Bill for advice, as does Sally. Yet Bill experiences a conflict between his personal concerns and political commitment which suggests he is at odds with his role in a way that Tom was not. While ultimately he decides to immerse himself in revolutionary struggle, this means sacrifice rather than personal fulfilment. As he rehearses his speech, he is preoccupied with Daphne's relationship with Wally O'Brien; snippets of his speech are juxtaposed with his thoughts about her situation. Although he finally decides that it is "more important to arouse people of the goldfields to realization of the dangers of fascism and the menace of the international situation, than to go to a dance and rush round trying to look after Daphne" (39), this does nothing to resolve the tension introduced into the narrative. The very fact that he has had to weigh up these two sets of concerns signifies a problematical relationship between his political ideals and the circumstances of his personal life. There is no disputing that his commitment is genuine; the question is not one of the authenticity of his avowal of the workers' cause. His political objectives, however, remain abstract, only remotely connected with the exigencies of the moment. He seems to have even less of an idea where his ideas will take him than Tom Gough.

Again, as with *Golden Miles*, this uncertainty about ultimately achieving socialist objectives is evident from the way the text situates itself. Bill's diagnosis of his own generation is that it needs "winding up to the problems of our own time" (49). Pat and Pam are busy winding themselves up, and their response to conditions on the goldfields implies a model by which to judge the text's own account of goldfields life. Or perhaps it would be better to say an "anti-model",<sup>15</sup> for Pat and Pam are at a remove from working people, despite the "intensity" of their revulsion for the way the miners have been exploited (145). Significantly, Pam is always sketching; it is thus that we can compare Pat and Pam's reaction to the goldfields with the text's own status as a record of goldfields life. When Dinny and Sally take them to visit the Aborigines and other outback types, we are effectively invited to reconsider the values celebrated in *The Roaring Nineties* and the form that celebration took. Yet Pat and Pam are the ones who are made to seem limited through this comparison between past and present, not Dinny's and Sally's generation. Pat and Pam can appreciate the "humour," "kindliness," and "indomitable spirit" of people they meet (169). However, as they are entertained in the station kitchen, they feel as if they are "taking part in a play" (168-169); the struggles of Sally's and Dinny's generation are ultimately no more real to them than that.

When Pat and Pam tell Bill how their eyes were opened "to everything" while they were in London, one is struck by the cerebral nature of their commitment: "We did see life in the slums of London, and learn what the extremes of wealth and poverty do to people. We were convinced that a system which causes so much misery and injustice has to be changed, and that we ought to help to change it" (68-69). The very fact that this talk about "seeing" life and being "convinced" about the need to overcome "misery" and "injustice" comes from twins who are named Pat and

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15. Ross Chambers *Story and Situation: Narrative Seduction and the Power of Fiction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984, pp.29-31, pp.33-35.

Pam suggests they are miming a discourse. For all their protestations to the contrary, they are living as Paddy Cavan's daughters, and their commitment only relates in a very loose way to their very comfortable circumstances. And yet it is not that they are being ruthlessly parodied here. We have seen that this disjunction between socialist values and lived experience also features in Bill's thoughts and feelings. *Winged Seeds* asks how the educator is educated,<sup>16</sup> and it does not find an answer. Bill follows Tom Gough's example, whereas Tom's own son, Dick, eventually dissociates himself from his family and aligns himself with the wealthy and powerful. After becoming entangled with Wally O'Brien, Daphne comes good and declares her unswerving loyalty to the workers' cause. Pam holds fast to her ideals and remains in the struggle, whereas Pat eventually abandons everything and marries an American. There is no predicting anyone's politics through examining that person's circumstances and upbringing. And, on the other hand, it is always possible for something of value to emerge from the clash of ideals, experience and education that the characters undergo, in much the same way that the condemned man in *Golden Miles* is finally able to communicate "an impression of reality," although his version of the events is "like a crude drawing" (*Golden Miles* 357). There is an analogous moment in *Winged Seeds*, when Pam shows Paddy the sketches she has done while on the excursion with Dinny and Sally. She has drawn Kalgoorla, as well as other members of her tribe. Paddy stares "at the bold outlines of Pam's drawings as if he were seeing the ghost of these people he had once known" (175). When, however, she shows him her drawing of Maritana's son, Ralf, Paddy dashes the book from her hands. Unwittingly, she has unearthed the misery and corruption on which Sir Patrick Cavan's wealth rests.

## Beginning again

As a whole, Prichard's goldfields trilogy conflicts with her declared support for the Popular Front. This is despite the fact that *The Roaring Nineties* lends itself to analysis in terms of the aesthetic ideals promoted by *Australian Writers Speak*. Through combining the old prospectors' yarns, it gives the impression that it is close to the people, that it is an organic whole in which everything combines "naturally". But this is a textual effect, and subsequent volumes of the trilogy throw the "world" of *The Roaring Nineties* into an increasingly problematical light. The remaining volumes test the ideal of organic form, showing the limits of its applicability to the modern world. Of course, this development could be described negatively. *Golden Miles* and *Winged Seeds* have, indeed, been criticised for combining increasingly abstract elements that disrupt the sense of narrative unity, as Prichard tried to meet strictures of "socialist realism".<sup>17</sup>

16. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*. Vol. 1. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969, p.13.

17. See Modjeska Introd. to *Winged Seeds*, ix; Carole Ferrier, "Jean Devanny, Katharine Susannah Prichard and the 'Really Proletarian Novel'", *Gender, Politics and Fiction: Twentieth Century Women's Novels*. Ed. Ferrier. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985, 114; G. A. Wilkes, "The Novels of Katharine Susannah Prichard." *Southerly* 14.4 (1953): pp.220-231; cf. Kay Schaffer, "Critical Dilemma: Looking for Katharine Susannah Prichard." *Hecate* 10.2 (1984), pp.45-52.

In *Winged Seeds*, there are certainly moments when we have a sense of closure. Dinny applauds the Port Kembla workers for refusing to send pig iron to Japan, as though he can speak on behalf of the whole Australian working class. Because of her relationship with Bill, Sally comes to represent all Australian mothers whose sons are fighting the Japanese; at moments she even assumes the mantle of omniscience and lives through the terrible conditions in New Guinea with soldiers there. But these moments say more about the Popular Front's uneasy combination of working class ideals and nationalist objectives than the limits of "socialist realism". In *Golden Miles* and *Winged Seeds*, the connection between "man-as-individual" and "man-as-social-being", which, according to Lukács, is embodied in realist works (both the "critical realism" of bourgeois society and "socialist realism" of socialist countries), is precisely the point at issue.<sup>18</sup>

Through broaching large international issues, the goldfields trilogy could be said to expose the limitations of the Lukácsian understanding of "realism." While this produces an impression of ambivalence instead of a clear enunciation of an alternative aesthetic, there is a sense of a new beginning rather than the conformity to external strictures and closure often imputed to Prichard's last work. In 1934, in an address delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Walter Benjamin defined "the most urgent task of the writer of today" as "that of recognizing how poor he is and how poor he must be in order to be able to begin again at the beginning".<sup>19</sup> Benjamin himself felt that Lukács's ideal of realism was irrelevant to the tasks facing writers in the modern world, and he has sometimes been criticized for the fragmentary nature of his observations when compared with Lukács's fully elaborated aesthetics. His understanding of the "poverty" of the writer, however, may ultimately prove a better basis for creative activity than Lukács's work, just as the goldfields trilogy makes a new beginning by putting the ideal of organic form behind it.<sup>20</sup>

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18. Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*. Trans. John and Necke Mander, 1963; London: Merlin Press, 1969, p.20, p.31, *passim*.
  19. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", *Understanding Brecht*. Trans. Anna Bostok. Intro. Stanley Mitchell, London: NLB, 1973, p.97.
  20. Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*. Trans. Geoffrey Wall. 1978; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, p.78.

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# PADDY O'REILLY

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## Inheritance

*After my brother died I came home from another country, where I had all but forgotten that I ever had a family.*

I have been losing my memory for a long time now. Each year another room of my mind is shut down and closed off, like the wings of a mansion where guests have stopped coming. Old friends, events, places, all white sheeted and still, cluster in the recesses of my forgetfulness, only trembling when disturbed by light. Any light, any thought penetrating these dark rooms is painful. The pain is dense and its origin is difficult to locate.

*I had to decide what to do with the family house and all of its contents.*

I pause at the front gate. I am fifty years old, unkempt, thin, pale. My knees itch as if ants are crawling over them so I bend down to scratch. I wait with my head still bowed toward the footpath. I wait for the tongue of the house to reach out and scoop me up.

The house has been waiting for me to come home. I can feel its sudden interest, a creaking of the joists, a shudder in the walls. The dead inhabitant of the house is waiting to hear my story and to judge me on how I have spent my years away.

*The day I arrived to clean up the house, a year after my brother had died, I stood outside the gate for a long time.*

The house is mine now. I have avoided the cataloguing for a year since I heard that this museum of a home had fallen to me. Inside there will be spiders and mould, but there were spiders and mould even while we lingered inside. My mother and my brother and I lived in the house while it disintegrated around us.

After the house came into my hands, into my arms, I wanted to rent it out to tenants, thinking that new life would drive out the ghosts. But no real estate agent would take the job. Anyone can tell, as soon as they step inside, that this is a house already full of tenants.

A faint voice greets me. My father calls to me from hell. Is that you, sweetie? What have you been doing?

*As soon as I stepped inside the house, the forgotten past came alive and tore the darkness from my memories.*

He's got a present for me. Every morning he gives me a present, pretending each time that it will be a surprise. I take the small bag of nuts and sweets, kiss his withered cheek and run out of the room, calling goodbye. I thank him every time. I feign surprise and delight every time. Children know what they must do. He has always given me sweets. Sweets for my sweet. Caramels and walnut creams, rocky road, licorice, peanut brittle, soft centre chocolates. Every day a handful of sweets. My teeth come out of my gums already rotten.

The sweets never taste quite right, so I cannot pass them out at school any more. Despite the strange taste, my friends at school cannot help wanting the sweets because the colour and the glistening sugar tempt their short memories. But I am embarrassed to hand the sweets around, so I huddle in the corner sucking off the bitter outer layer and forcing down each one. I'm eating his medicine. The sweets taste of sulphur. They are bitter sweets. They smell of illness because he hoards them in his medicine drawer. But I eat them anyway.

He holds out sweets in his palm. I take them to school. The teacher says to me in the playground, You're a lucky girl always to have sweets, aren't you?

*Some things became clear.*

My gaunt father watches me on the running field. He has his camera ready for when I win the race. There is no doubt that I will win the race. If I lost the race, he would not be there. So I win the race, I win every race, I win every contest, I excel at everything. Then he dies, and I never want to win again. The fear is gone. I am relieved not to be winning, and yet a part of me takes over his role. I am relieved not to have to win, and I despise myself each time I lose. Now that I have spent so much time refusing to do anything right, I wonder whether I could win even if I tried.

*Some things I will never understand.*

Two ambulance men carried the old man away on a stretcher. He was naked, skeletal, a towel was draped across his groin, his left hand trailed on the ground. With each breath he took his ribs sprang out like two large hands around his body, then caved back into his chest. The family stood around silently and watched him ride away. No-one went with him.

The whiteness of his naked body left an afterimage in my eyes. A long pale form appeared behind my closed eyelids but, like a flat, smooth river stone, the form had no features. As if I had already forgotten the details of him.

*I had always believed in ghosts, especially ghosts who tell stories.*

Even before my father died the rooms of this house harboured ghosts. They were not the ghosts of people, but the ghosts of thoughts and deeds. They were ghosts born of dread. He had given birth to a new ghost each time he neared death. For seven years he wandered through the passageways of dying, and five times

when he approached the last door he tricked the waiting doorman with another ghoul wrenched from his bitterness. When he was finally dragged through the door, he left the house crowded with his creations.

The day we heard he would not come back, his room was as dark as ever, protected by the drawn blinds. In my childhood nightmares the room had been full of unborn children and cripples and half-human things. They cavorted with the spooks under the bed, making odd choking noises through the night like the sounds of stifled laughter. Now the bedside lamp was still alight, and the tangled bedclothes formed a human shape.

He had often described to me his terror that some day, when the door of his bedroom had accidentally blown shut, a fire would start. No-one would hear his shouts. Flames would take the bedclothes, then the posts, then leap across to his hair while he lay unable to move. I used to picture him burning, his head wreathed with fire and his face dancing with rage as the beasts under the bed reached up to take him. I imagined not being able to hear his shouts.

*On the first night in my old bed, I had the same dream that I had so many times in that bed. When I woke, I wondered why I had chosen to sleep in that particular room.*

As soon as I open my dream eyes, the yellow floral curtain begins to move. Just a flutter. The flowers are delphiniums, strange yellow delphiniums, painted huge to please a baby's eye. The curtain starts to swell. I look away, examine the other shades of darkness and find nothing.

The door swings open and light bores through my eyelids, through my eyes, into my brain. My father is shouting. I can't understand what he's saying. He moves two steps inside the room, still shouting his unintelligible accusations. I slip further under the bedclothes. He stops shouting. He steps back out of the room, the light snaps off. I look back to the window and see that the curtain is still.

*When I looked through the photograph album, I realised that life in our family after he died became slovenly, in just the way he would have hated.*

After my mother stopped any pretence at maintaining the house the paint peeled off the weatherboards and the stumps sank. The plaster crazed like an ancient fresco, webtrails of smoke darkened the walls, the bathroom blackened with mould. Torn blinds fringed the windows and the garden grew wild except for one rose bush that my mother tended like a child.

As soon as I turned fourteen, I started smoking cigarettes. Every night my mother and my brother and I sat in separate rooms and sucked the poison from cigarettes with all our strength. Clouds of smoke rolled out of the windows on hot evenings. The house was on fire. We were burning ourselves up, puffing until our chests ached, as if we wanted to self-immolate in a monstrous family gesture. The early morning hours were filled with our sleep's coughs and asthmatic wheezes.

*It took time to sift through everything.*

He has been dead for thirty years, yet his willpower holds the house together, keeps the odd stripe of paint sticking to the walls and seals the dust in the plaster.

His will emanates from the bedroom where he festered, a creative man with no art but the manipulation of his family. Although the bookcase in the lounge room is crammed with expensive books on modernism and the impressionists, he never actually painted pictures. Instead, we were the failed canvasses that he felt he must attack again and again with his brush.

Black water runs out of the tap. The water was always tinged with rust from the pipes that were laid in the twenties. Now it is black and spurts out noisily as if the tap is having a fit. The kitchen shudders and moans with the effort of pushing the water around. Black water pouring endlessly out of the tap. Perhaps something has died in one of the pipes or dirt has seeped in through rust holes. The refrigerator still works and the stove splutters but makes a flame. It's not so long, really, since people lived here. My brother stayed here for years expecting me to come home and take the house I had inherited away from him.

There are school reports and LP records and bottles of old medicines, the detritus of family life. Photographs of me fill a whole drawer. I place the photos in piles according to year, then sort them into good photos and bad photos and try to choose a couple to save.

*The burning photographs made flakes of black ash that floated above me for a while, then settled on the garden like black petals, like tiny letters of condolence.*

As I stand next to the incinerator, feeding the fire, the smoke billows up and into my nostrils. I begin to sneeze. First one small sneeze, then another and another until I am helpless in a wave of uncontrollable sneezes. Tears run down my cheeks and smear the ash that has caught on my skin. By the time I stop sneezing my face is streaked with black and the photographs have burned to a pile of white ash.

There is a moment of confusion, near panic, before I realise that the muttering voice is my own. The babbling, the melodic chatter. As if I'm talking to ghosts. I wonder, Where did this tenacious woman come from? Why does she beat this tattoo on the walls of my heart?

*After four days, the water from the tap began to run clear. I drank to quench the terrible thirst that had overtaken me.*

## I Can Hear You

### Her Dream

I'm falling. Landed with a thud. I'm stuck in a box. Can't breathe. Can't open my eyes but can sense a stream of light filtering in from somewhere. The box is too small but I fit in here easily. Can't understand. Banging on the side, trying to get out. Trying to push my head through the hole. It was big enough for me to get in but now I can't get out. How did I get in here, anyway? Less and less air every second. I don't belong. Help me I'm dying.

### Her Awakening

Everything is so dark. Can't open my eyes still. Stuck together with glue or something. Trying my best. I can hear you. I just can't speak. Don't leave me. Help me I'm dying.

### The White Hospital Room

Tubes, cords, a machine with a green screen. Lots of white. The walls are white. The sheets are white. She is white. Six red roses splash colour across the whiteness.

### The One She Tried to Impress

— Hi Jodie how are you? You look okay. A bit pale maybe, but that's expected. I bought a tape for you to listen to. I hope you can hear it. They said you can.

(I can)

— It's one we used to listen to before ... you know. You'll remember. If you can hear it.

(I miss you)

"As I watch the sun go down  
Watching the world fade away  
All I want to do

Is kiss you once goodbye..."

— Jode, you gotta come out of this. I've gotta hold you again. I'm sick of just holding

your hand. It's cold.  
(I know. Won't warm up)  
— You're so stupid sometimes.  
(Know that too)  
"...we'd march for love and pride,  
Together arm in arm..."  
(Don't turn it off)

## **The Doctor In The Corridor**

— Just be normal. Talk to her like you normally do. Tell her what's going on at school. Things like that.  
— Okay.

## **Dreaming Again**

Falling again. Landed with a thud. Stuck in the box again. I'm so scared. Can't get out. No-one can hear me. I want to get out. Calling out but can't open my mouth. Can't make any noise. Someone's outside the box but they can't hear me. I can hear her though. Help me I'm dying.

## **A Visitor**

— ...And Tony and her are back together. Hey, after what happened they banned spray deodorant at school. I have to use a roll on after P E now and I hate that. Mr Rich said to say hi. He's coming in next week. I hope you don't get a history lesson.  
(I miss school.  
I miss home.  
I want to go home.  
Let me out.)  
— Hey, Jodie, when are you going to get better. I'm sick of having no-one to talk to. Why did you copy them? They don't think you're a square. It's just that you know about things. You're smart...  
(If I was smart  
I wouldn't be here.)

## **Her Pain**

I've got a headache a bad one. It hurts so much. Something's inside my head pushing out. Wish I could cry. Hurts so much. Why did I do it? Help me I'm dying.

## **Regrets**

I missed the Cure concert.  
"I wish I'd stayed asleep today...  
I never thought this day would end...  
never thought tonight would ever be..."

I'm so stupid. Used to think I might as well die but now I'm so close I just want to live. Hanging over the edge just about to fall. But something's holding me back.

## **A Different Dream Feels Like Reality**

Leaning against the tree and watching with interest she sees them drop her box into the ground. A greyish mist swirls around the feet of her loved ones. Her mother. Her father. Her sister. And The One She Tried To Impress.

(But I don't want to die yet.

Let me out of here.

I'm not going to give up.

I'm sick of resting.)

## **Mum's Visits**

— Jodie. It's your mum. I feel like I'm talking to you on the telephone. I wish you'd just open your eyes and talk back to me.

(I wish I could)

— Come back...I'm not angry with you.

(I know mum. Stop crying.)

## **The Nurse**

A nurse stands behind the glass window. She stares through the glass and notices with pity that the mother's tears are falling on the sheets. She looks old. The wrinkles around her eyes are more pronounced without the heavy makeup that usually hides them. The nurse takes notes on her clipboard. And then walks on.

## **Dreaming Again**

I'm floating near the roof. Can see my body on the bed. This is the strangest dream yet. I look yuck. My hair is so limp. Needs a wash. Mum's pressing a red button. I'm scared. I want to go back. Help me I'm dying.

## **Outside The Room Again**

— I'm surprised she's lasted so long...dangerous for the heart...weakened considerably...coma may last years...life support...turn it off...for the best...up to you... vegetable... it's up to You.

— No. I don't want her to die.

## **Trying Hard**

Wish I could open my eyes. Wish I could move my hand. Trying my best. See. Too hard. Did it. See. Moved my hand.

— She squeezed my hand. Does that mean anything. Do it again Jodie.

(I'm trying. So hard.

Takes too much.  
Just want to go back to sleep.  
Want to live.  
Help me I'm dying.)  
— I think you were imagining it.  
— No. Come on Jodie, do it again.  
(I'm trying.  
God knows I'm trying.)  
— Jodie. No. I won't let them turn it off. Please wake up.

## **Dreaming Again**

Falling again. Landed with a thud. Stuck in the box again. I'm so scared. Can't get out. No-one can hear me. I want to get out. Calling out but can't open my mouth. Can't make any noise. Someone's outside the box but they can't hear me. I can hear her though. Help me I'm dying.

## **Positive Attitude**

— Jodie. Let's see what we can achieve today. One of my patients was in a coma for 16 months before she woke up. Try squeezing my hand. Just to let me know you're still there.  
(I'm trying...  
There.  
Now let me sleep.)  
— She squeezed my hand. Quick get the doctor.  
— Open your eyes Jodie.

## **Frantic**

Frantic now. Don't let me die. Trying my best to open my eyes. Trying to wake up. Can't just leave me like this. Brains okay. I'm just such an idiot. Maybe I should just...

## **Sister's Help**

— Jodie. It's me. Mel, your little sister. Do you remember me?  
(Course I do.)  
— I brought your diary in. Do you want me to read some to you?  
(No you little sneak  
give it back.  
Don't tell mum what I did.  
Don't do what I did.)  
— Mum. She's moving.

## Dreams in Austerica: A Preliminary Comparison of the Australian and the American Dream

The theory that utopian thought depends on, and is to be judged according to, a particular temporal conjunction of concrete historical circumstances overlooks the fact that the dream of a perfect society, at least in Europe and in the "new worlds" that European culture predominantly formed, has long since become an indispensable element of intellectual history. In Europe the dreamers located their ideal order for the most part in the distant past or future, or — and frequently on top of this — in some unattainable geographical realm, and made of it the ideal counterpart and point of orientation for experienced reality.<sup>1</sup> The pioneers of the "new worlds" on the other hand thought rather less about distant territories and more about orientation in the here and now; rather than simply project their hopes and longings into the far reaches of time and place, they tended to think of their own geographical refuge as the Promised Land. Their concrete political demands reflected, and drew their legitimation from, a teleological concept of national history, and it is for this reason too that the phases of nationalism in the "new worlds" have always been marked by reflection on what constitutes national identity, and by the articulation of visions of the future: by the question, in other words, whether and to what extent history and politics were in step with the national utopian dream. The "new worlds", which Fernand Braudel has called *translations*, in the sense of parallel translocations, of the old Europe, are similar without being identical to their original model.<sup>2</sup> Significantly, their discussion of utopia reflects an early stage in the history of the old world; for the political, linguistic and literary growth of the incipient European nations, indeed their whole cultural formation, took place according to Klaus Garber "in constant recourse to and vital discussion of the chiliastic visions and imperial aspirations of Judaeo-Christian and Roman antiquity, as well as of their

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1. John Dunmore, *Utopias and Imaginary Voyages to Australasia*, A Lecture delivered at the National Library of Australia, 2 September 1987 (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1988), p. 9.

2. Fernand Braudel, "Europa außerhalb Europas" in Fernand Braudel, ed., *Europa: Bausteine seiner Geschichte*, transl. from the French by Markus Jakob (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1989), pp. 123-148, 123.

derivatives and corruptions in the middle ages".<sup>3</sup> This similarity in development is no accident, for the settlers or conquerors from Europe brought to their hosts a dominant cultural matrix (be this English, French, Spanish or Portuguese), on which the host culture could call, alongside its own autochthonous traditions, as a defining reserve of spiritual force on its path to nationhood. It is this circumstance that constitutes the similarity of these "new worlds" with each other and with Europe, and at the same time delineates their difference from the old world.

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One aspect of that difference is the extraordinary vitality of thought predicated of the future. Jürgen Habermas has recently pointed to the widespread erosion of utopian vision in Europe, where changes in the means of production, the conceptual interlocking of every problem with every other one, the acute difficulty or indeed uncontrollability of many processes and, not least, the fear of atomic catastrophes have contributed to an inexorable decline in visionary activity.<sup>4</sup> Such a diagnosis cannot so safely be made of thinking in the "new worlds" and certainly not of Australia, a country whose path to political nationhood has long since been travelled, but whose intellectual and spiritual development is still very much in process.

In Australia utopia still represents an important point, and power, of orientation. However contrary current historical experience may be, utopia is an ever-present force. Nicholas Jose sees it against the background of a society's drive to find a direction and a source for its collective development: "The search for that elusive center is the great Australian dream, as much today as when the early explorers perished in their quest for a life-giving source, ..."<sup>5</sup>

Werner Weidenfeld has distinguished between personal, collective and political identity. For him, too, collective identity is the sum of that knowledge which we use and need to orient ourselves as a society; for him, too, it is "an amalgam of memory and future projection".<sup>6</sup> Of its three constituents, history, present experience and projection, it is the Australian history, or rather the felt deficiency of that history, that has had the most powerful effect, both in a positive and in a negative sense.

Australia probably is the oldest inhabited continent of the earth, but the relation many Australians feel to their brief national history is one of marked distance. When contemporary historians still debate the possible economic or military reasons behind the establishment of the penal settlement at Botany Bay,<sup>7</sup> the real issue is the obstacle presented by the beginnings of Australian history to the search for national identity. Australians to this very day experience those beginnings as a blot intensi-

3. Klaus Garber, "Zur Konstitution der europäischen Nationalliteraturen: Implikationen und Perspektiven" in Klaus Garber, ed., *Nation und Literatur im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit*, Akten des 1. Internationalen Osnabrücker Kongresses zur Kulturgeschichte der Frühen Neuzeit (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1989), pp. 1-55, 1. See also Stephen Alomes, "Visions and Periods: '1890s', '1940s', '1970s'", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 20 (1987), pp. 3-11, 3: "In Australia ... visions of the future have been influenced by the Judaeo-Christian tradition with its sense, romantic or material, of progress towards a better order."
4. Jürgen Habermas, "Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien" in *Die neue Unübersichtlichkeit*, Kleine politische Schriften V (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985), pp. 141-163.
5. Nicholas Jose, "I think I'm Something Else" in Stephen R. Graubard, ed., *Australia: The Daedalus Symposium* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1985), pp. 311-342, 314.
6. Werner Weidenfeld, "Die Identität der Deutschen — Fragen, Positionen, Perspektiven" in Werner Weidenfeld, ed., *Die Identität der Deutschen: Fragen, Positionen, Perspektiven* (Munich: Goldmann, 1983), pp. 11-47, 16-17.
7. Ged Martin, ed., *The Founding of Australia: The Argument about Australia's Origin* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1978).

fyng their sense of alienation in their own country. To this is added the guilt of history in the shape of white Australia's treatment of its Aboriginal peoples. The long isolation of the continent favoured a development sparse in great and demonstrable historical events, and the regional separation of the individual colonies hindered any common, unifying sense of history. The political federation of 1901 lacked any document comparable to the American Declaration of Independence; indeed Australia's entry into world history began with a disaster, the pointless loss of entire regiments at Gallipoli and in Flanders. From a European historical perspective these may have been minor events, small disappointments, but in the Australian mind they reinforced the conviction that a sense of direction belonged to some future utopia: the present held only anticipation. In the words of the colonial poet Barron Field: "We've nothing left us but anticipation ...", and "Anticipation is to a young country what antiquity is to an old";<sup>8</sup> or, as Les Murray, perhaps Australia's greatest present-day poet, has put it: "... we tap and probe the future / and the great past for legends, patterns, tales / in which to see, and move, and know our nature".<sup>9</sup> The utopia of the Australian dream is so ineradicable and so frequently diametrically opposed to concrete historical reality, because it is the vehicle of that central coming into being of collective identity which is Australia's ongoing experience.

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With the U.S.A., Canada and New Zealand, Australia belongs to that group of Anglo-European cultures which, transplanted overseas, took root in territory already cultivated by other races, whose writing on the colonial "text", be it Aboriginal, American Indian, Inuit or Maori, the white settlers (or conquerors) either could not, or did not want to read. It can be defined as a palimpsest.<sup>10</sup> Militarily, politically and economically superior, and convinced of their right to colonize, the newcomers either deleted that writing altogether or wrote over it so heavily that the dominant Anglo-European matrix for a long time concealed it from view. The majority of these colonizers, who wrote over the autochthonous text, belonged to different generations of the same family of Anglo-Europeans. As individual members of this family they may have had different social, educational and religious backgrounds and thus divergent opinions on a number of matters. What they all shared, however, was a common cultural language. Consequently, their outlook on a variety of vital questions was shaped by the syntax and vocabulary of this Anglo-European cultural grammar. The second writing reveals that these colonizers had not only brought along their Anglo-European style of thinking and speaking, but that they had also developed a characteristically Anglo-European "handwriting". This makes itself felt in the cultural sign system they imposed on the autochthonous text and is easily detectable e.g. in architecture, in the political and juridical organisation of the

8. Barron Field, "On Reading the Controversy between Lord Byron and Mr. Bowles" in Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell, eds., *Bards in the Wilderness: Australian Colonial Poetry to 1920* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1970), pp. 18-19, 18.

9. Les Murray, "Shorelines" in *Selected Poems: The Vernacular Republic* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1980), pp. 11-13, 12-13.

10. The concept goes back to Gérard Genette, but has been used in the Australian context by Susan Hawthorne, "Palimpsest" in Drusilla Modjeska, ed., *Inner Cities: Australian Women's Memory of Place* (Ringwood, Penguin Australia, 1989), pp. 189-198, 190-191; see also Con Castan, "The Greek dimensions of Australian literature" in Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley, eds., *Striking Chords: Multicultural literary interpretations* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), pp. 55-64, 62.

commonwealth, in social codes and ideologies, in central cultural and aesthetic norms, in the special way of making one's bed no less than in the composition of literature. The second writing can be described as an echo-text of the Anglo-European original text.<sup>11</sup> The historical affinity of these echo-texts renders questionable the attempt to claim utopian vision as proper to one nation of colonizers alone, as has been done, for example, by American literary critics in respect of the American Dream. Thus Kenneth S. Knodt, extolling the uniqueness of the American experience, argues: "What seems to make the American dream unique is the coming together in one place of so many separate dreams: the search for freedom, the discovery and settlement of a vast wilderness, the exploitation of rich, natural resources".<sup>12</sup>

All three elements are equally present in the Australian Dream. What differentiates the two lies far more in the specifics of epoch and perhaps also class, though considerable preliminary work still needs to be done before utopian concepts in the various literatures of the "new worlds" can be compared with any confidence. Robert Weisbuch has in this sense pleaded for a broader approach arguing that

Perhaps the most dissatisfying aspect of theories of American literature consists in the claiming as uniquely American themes and strategies that are universal as stated or common to many literatures if generalized a bit.<sup>13</sup>

For in their essence the American and the Australian Dreams are specific socio-historical variants of the chiliastic visions with which the peoples of Europe formed their early history and out of which they generated their national identity.

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The Australian Dream is older than Ian Mudie's poem of the same title which in 1943 launched the concept into literary and critical currency. It is peculiarly difficult to reduce the various and frequently conflicting ideological strands of the Dream to a precise conceptual structure. Sociologists, historians and critics have all attempted definitions which show the heterogeneity of the emotional and intellectual forces crystallized there. Ian Turner, whose collection of texts still represents the most useful anthology on the subject,<sup>14</sup> dispenses with definitions altogether and shows instead a panorama of collective and individual hopes and anticipations. T. Inglis Moore, on the other hand, sees three principal directions of thought united in the Dream: "... the Vision of Freedom, the Hope of Australia Felix, and the Ideal of an Australian Utopia".<sup>15</sup> For the editors of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature*, the Australian Dream is "... a phrase that has been used to describe the hopes and anticipations that have been traditionally held by Australians for themselves and

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11. Horst Priessnitz, "The Bridled Pegasus, or, Is there a Colonial Poetics of Intertextuality?", *European Perspectives: Contemporary Essays on Australian Literature*, a special issue of *ALS*, ed. Giovanna Capone, *ALS*, 15,2 (1992), pp. 14-31.

12. Kenneth S. Knodt, ed., *Pursuing the American Dream* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1976), p. 2.

13. Robert Weisbuch, *Atlantic Double-Cross: American Literature and British Influence in the Age of Emerson* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. xii.

14. Ian Turner, ed., *The Australian Dream: A Collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the present day* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968).

15. T. Inglis Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971, 1976), pp. 264-290, 269.

their country".<sup>16</sup> Stephen Alomes extends the catalogue of components still further stressing its practical and intellectual components — "from plans for housing reform or bridge building to Christian socialist images of a future Australia ..."<sup>17</sup>

In the light of this proliferation Patrick Morgan has distinguished two versions of the Australian Dream, a greater and a lesser, related to each other as consecutive stages of development:

In its larger version it is the belief that the whole continent was to be an isolated paradise free from the errors and wrongs and lies of the Old World ... [...] a reduced version ... is the quarter-acre block with its detached home and garden, as a refuge from workaday cares.<sup>18</sup>

Morgan had already, eight years earlier, compiled a list of ideological convictions underlying the larger version of the dream, and although these will never be found *in toto* in a single text, their traces are everywhere apparent, both in literary and in non-literary texts. The list includes the following ideas:

The South Seas are the antithesis of Europe; in Australia a new society, even a new civilization, is being created; Australia is free from the wrongs, divisions and greed of the Old World; there are no rancorous conflicts over religion, over class and over competing ideologies; the quintessentially Australian element is "The Land"; Australia is a "record-less land", preserved in its pristine state down the aeons of time, while other civilizations have risen and declined; she is a vast island continent, surrounded by oceans that enclose and protect her; she is able to be self-sufficient and self-sustaining and will develop naturally and spontaneously into a great nation.<sup>19</sup>

Behind these points lie ideas and emotions deeply rooted in history. Indeed a further list would reveal the myth of the antipodes, alive since classical times in the yearning for the Isles of the Blessed; the pastoral tradition; the South Seas romanticism of 18th and 19th century Europe, rejuvenated by the reports of earlier navigators; the English Enlightenment philosophy of progress; English intellectual and social history of the 18th and 19th centuries; Irish mythology and anti-British radicalism; Scottish philosophy; English Romanticism; the myth of the Golden West;<sup>20</sup> the influence of the United States — all these factors have been in various ways influential in the specific structuring and development of the Australian Dream.

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The complexity of the Australian Dream, as well as its similarity with the American, becomes evident when one compares, however briefly, the forms taken in literature

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16. William H. Wilde, Joy Hooton, Barry Andrews, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1985), p. 53.
  17. Stephen Alomes, "Visions and Periods: '1890s', '1940s', '1970s'", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 20 (1987), pp. 3-11, 3.
  18. Patrick Morgan, "My Country Large or Small", *Quadrant*, 34,3 (1990), pp. 30-36, 30.
  19. Patrick Morgan, "The Paradox of Australian Nationalism" in Peter Coleman, Lee Shrubbs, Vivian Smith, eds., *Quadrant Twenty-Five Years* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland Press, 1982), pp. 207-217, 208-209.
  20. Bruce Bennett, "Myths of Innocence and Experience", in Anna Rutherford, ed., *Populous Places: Australian Cities and Towns* (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), pp. 238-253, 244; see also Ffion Murphy and Richard Nile, eds., *The Gate of Dreams: The "Western Mail" Annuals, 1897-1955* (Fremantle, W.A.: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1990).

by its various component ideas. Jürgen Schäfer has already worked these out for the American Dream.<sup>21</sup>

The historians Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager saw in Thomas More's *Utopia* the archetype of the American Dream; for More not only initiated the modern tradition of utopian thought as such, but his book, soon after its publication, began to be linked in the mind of its readers with the recent discovery of the New World.<sup>22</sup> It was, however, the peculiarity of America's intellectual and social history that gave to the American Dream its specific force.

The Australian Dream, too, has European roots. The myth of the Antipodes, which since antiquity has been associated with expectations of a total otherness,<sup>23</sup> both positive and negative in its effects, prepared the European mind for the discovery of the southern hemisphere. In Thomas More's time the Garden of Eden was sought not only in a fictive New Atlantis or a legendary El Dorado, nor only in the really existent Bermudas, but also in that not yet explored world that was counter to all known worlds:

Given the fact that the utopian impulse stems from our desire to attain the opposite of what we have and know, it was perhaps inevitable that from Asterusia to Utopia and the Land of the Sun, the north-western European mind sought the ideal world at the extremes of the known: east, south, beyond the African-Eurasian landmass.<sup>24</sup>

Thus in 1605 Pedro Fernando de Quiros founded on one of the islands of the New Hebrides, which he mistook for the sought-for *terra australis*, his "Austrialia del Espiritu Santo", with a New Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>25</sup>

In contrast with the New World of America, Australia stood from the very beginning not only in the light but also in the shadow of the antipodean myth, as well as of her *de facto* historical development:

She seemed either a prison, a land to be escaped from as soon as possible or to be endured till death, or, to the few who saw Utopia in her, a new country, a country of hope and faith.<sup>26</sup>

Australian writers have frequently seen in their country the chance to realize a utopia of which Europe was no longer capable. Three characteristic texts, from Marie E. J. Pitt, Bernard O'Dowd and Louis Esson, illustrate the point. In the second part of

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21. Jürgen Schäfer, "'The American Dream': Literarische Spiegelungen" in Josef Becker, ed., *Weltmacht USA: Sieben Augsburger Universitätsvorträge* (München: Vögel, 1976), pp. 33-50.
  22. Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager and William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, vol. I (New York: Oxford UP, 1930), p. 36.
  23. Brian Elliott, "Antipodes: an Essay in Attitudes", *Australian Letters*, 7,3 (1967), pp. 51-75, 51; see also Alan Frost, "Botany Bay or Arcady: Nineteenth-Century Images of Australia", *World Literature Written in English*, 11,2 (1972), pp. 33-52; Alan Frost, "What Created, What Perceived? Early Responses to New South Wales", *Australian Literary Studies*, 7,2 (1975), pp. 185-205.
  24. J. W. Johnson, "The Utopian Impulse and Southern Lands" in *Australia and the European Imagination: Papers from a Conference held at the Humanities Research Centre Australian National University May 1981* (Canberra: HRC ANU, 1982), pp. 40-57, 55; see also W. T. James, "Nostalgia for Paradise: Terra Australis in the Seventeenth Century" in *Australia and the European Imagination*, pp. 59-85; Gavan Daws, *A Dream of Islands: Voyages of Self-Discovery in the South Seas* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1980), pp. 2-21.
  25. G. Arnold Wood, *The Discovery of Australia*, revised by J. C. Beaglehole, foreword by O. H. K. Spate (Melbourne: McMillan Australia, 1969), pp. 117-118; see also James McAuley, "Captain Quiros" in *Collected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1978), pp. 109-176, 157-158.
  26. Judith Wright, "Australia's Double Aspect", *Literary Criterion* (Mysore), 6,3 (1964), pp. 1-11, 2.

her poem "The Promised Land", Pitt outlines the conjunction of man and history that Australia drew to herself:

Dreaming they found thee, when the noontide splendour  
Of Europe's pride had dwindled down to grey,  
When Greece and Rome had sunken in surrender  
To baser triumphs of a lesser day.  
Dreaming they found thee, Oldest of the Old  
With youth eternal on thy forehead bold.<sup>27</sup>

More specifically, in the famous final stanzas of "The Bush" (1912), O'Dowd places Australia within the history of Old World utopianism, seeing in her the heir to every positive feature of the counter-worlds that European thought had generated:

Bacon foresaw her, Campanella, More,  
And Plato's eyes were with her star aglow!

She is the Eldorado of old dreamers,  
The Sleeping Beauty of the world's desire!

She is Eutopia, she is Hy-Brasil,  
The watchers on the tower of morning hail!<sup>28</sup>

For Louis Esson, Australia is not a geographical locality but, like the west in American writing, a mythical concept removed from time and place. It is identified with the utopian principle itself. Thus in a dialogue between a mystic, a stranger and their host, the mystic replies in the following terms to the question "Terra Australis, was not that the Great South Land De Quiros sailed for?":

Yes, but Australia is not, Bernard O'Dowd tells us, restricted by geographical boundaries. She is everywhere, in America, India, Italy, ancient Persia, in modern Ireland, too; Greek philosophers dreamed of her, meditating in the Academe, in painted stoa, in the garden of Epicurus — and Indian teachers under the bo tree — and prophets who "dimly taught in old Cretona." William Morris, who was a seer, found Terra Australis in Chaucer's England. Spanish captains like Balbao and Ponce de Leon and De Quiros sought her over seas; and the world today still strives to pluck out the heart of her mystery.<sup>29</sup>

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The vision of intellectuals at the time of the American Revolution was determined by Berkeley's philosophy of history, according to which the empires of the world had constantly moved towards the west — from Greece to Rome and from there to the

27. Marie E. J. Pitt, "The Promised Land" in *Selected Poems of Marie E. J. Pitt* (Melbourne and Sydney: Lothian Publishing Co., 1944), pp. 2-10, 4.

28. Bernard O'Dowd, "The Bush" in *The Poems of Bernard O'Dowd: Collected Edition*, with an Introduction by Walter Murdoch (Melbourne and Sydney: Lothian Publishing Co., 1941), pp. 187-209, 208.

29. Louis Esson, "Terra Australis: Fragments of a Conversation", *The Heart of the Rose*, 1,1 (1907), pp. 13-16, 14.

Iberian peninsula and to Britain, whose present heir was North America: "Westward the course of empire takes its way".<sup>30</sup> To this conviction was linked the hope for an age of coming political and cultural greatness. This idea of the *translatio imperii et studii* underlay the gradual shift of the frontier, the boundary of settlement and civilisation, towards the west; it informed the pioneer spirit and the historical optimism of America and made the wilderness into a place of unrestricted personal freedom.

Robert Dixon has pointed out that the idea of the cyclical decline of the great world empires and their movement towards the west was welcomed not only in America but also in the early history of Australia.<sup>31</sup> William Lisle Bowles opened the third book of his epic poem "The Spirit of Discovery" (1804) with a prognosis of future greatness for New Holland,<sup>32</sup> and in 1805 J. H. Tuckey pauses for a moment in his travelogue in order to indulge "the contemplation of future possibilities" for the young colony. He muses:

I beheld a second Rome, rising from a coalition of banditti. I beheld it giving laws to the world, and superlative in arms and in arts, looking down with proud superiority upon the barbarous nations of the northern hemisphere ...<sup>33</sup>

Thomas K. Hervey is convinced that Australia has in the east, like America in the west, a great and glorious future before her;<sup>34</sup> the same thought recurs in the writing of William Woolls<sup>35</sup> and Michael Massey Robinson.<sup>36</sup> Its best known formulation is in the final lines of W. C. Wentworth's *Australasia* (1823),<sup>37</sup> and in the anonymous "Address, Supposed To Be Spoken By a Young Australian on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Colonization of New South Wales" of 1837.<sup>38</sup>

The idea passed into Australian thought as a *topos* that was still alive in the early years of the Commonwealth. Thus Percy Russell proudly compares the founding history of his country with that of the great empires of the Old World:

Where 'mid the records of old Rome or Greece  
Glows such a tale?...  
Forth stands Australia, in her birth sublime,  
The only nation from the womb of Peace!<sup>39</sup>

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30. George Berkeley, "Verses on the Prospect of Planting Arts and Learning in America" in A. C. Fraser, ed., *Works*, vol. IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901), pp. 364.
  31. Robert Dixon, *The Course of Empire: Neo-Classical Culture in New South Wales 1788-1860* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 2-46.
  32. William Lisle Bowles, "The Spirit of Discovery or, The Conquest of the Ocean. A Poem in Five Books. With Notes, Historical and Illustrative" [London, 1804] in *Sonnets and Other Poems and The Spirit of Discovery* with an introduction for the Garland edition by Donald H. Reiman (New York and London: Garland, 1978), pp. i-xxii, 1-216, 110-111.
  33. J. H. Tuckey, Esq., First Lieutenant of the Calcutta, *An Account of a Voyage to Establish a Colony at Port Philip in Bass's Strait, on the South Coast of New South Wales, in His Majesty's Ship Calcutta, in the years 1802-3-4* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1805), pp. 189-190.
  34. Thomas K. Hervey, *Australia; With Other Poems* (London: Hurst, Robinson and Co., 1824), pp. xx-xxi.
  35. William Woolls, *Australia: Moral and Descriptive Poem* (Sydney: Stephens and Stokes, 1833), pp. 68-70.
  36. *Odes of Michael Massey Robinson. First Poet Laureate of Australia (1754-1826)*, with an Introduction by George Mackaness (Dubbo, N.S.W.: Review Publ., 1976); see e.g. pp. 29-31, 86-90.
  37. W. C. Wentworth, *Australasia*, with an introduction by G. A. Wilkes (Sydney: University of Sydney, Department of English, 1982), pp. 22; see also pp. 15-16.
  38. "An Address Supposed To Be Spoken By a Young Australian on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Colonization of New South Wales", *The Australian Magazine* (Sydney), 4,466 (Friday, December 29, 1837), pp. 156-157, 157.
  39. Percy Russell, "The Birth of Australia" in Douglas B. W. Sladen, *Australian Ballads and Other Poems* (Melbourne: The Walter Scott Publ., 1888), p. 171; see also Douglas B. W. Sladen, "To Australia" in *Australian Lyrics* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden and Welsh, 2nd. rev. edn. 1885), pp. 77-82, 82.

Joan Torrance reclaims the *Pax Romana* as Australia's heritage.<sup>40</sup> Lance Fallow challenges the allegation of Australia's lack of history with the argument that in comparison with Egypt, Greece and Rome, let alone the modern nations of the Old World, Australia has a far older past.<sup>41</sup> The aim of these arguments, and the source of their frequent pathos, is the concept of an historical teleology that might properly be called Australian, and the corresponding desire to root the future utopia in historical evidence.

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Like the United States, Australia indisputably possesses a frontier history and literature, notwithstanding the geographical, historical and intellectual differences between the two countries, which have given the concept of the west and of the frontier itself their specific emphasis.<sup>42</sup> One of these differences becomes evident in a comparison of Frederick Jackson Turner's famous definition with the definition John Greenway formulated for Australia. For Turner the frontier is "the meeting place between savagery and civilization":<sup>43</sup> not a firmly sited, but a mobile demarcation line. In his comparison between American and Australian notions of frontier, Greenway comes to the conclusion that the specifically Australian concept of frontier lies in "the unexploited ecological range of any human sociopolitical group"<sup>44</sup>: a static definition in contrast with Turner's dynamic one. When Archibald MacLeish in *New Found Land* (1930) identifies America with the west, the identity relies on the fact that the west, for MacLeish, is a place in the geography of the imagination rather than of the North American continent.<sup>45</sup> Henry David Thoreau infuses this mythical topography with ideas both of *translatio* and of utopia:

Every sunset which I witness inspires me with the desire to go to a West as distant and as fair as that into which the sun goes down. He appears to migrate westward daily, and tempt us to follow him. He is the Great Western Pioneer whom the nations follow. We dream all night of those mountain-ridges in the horizon, though they may be of vapor only, which were last gilded by his rays. The island of Atlantis, and the islands and gardens of the Hesperides, a sort of terrestrial paradise, appear to have been the Great West of the ancients, enveloped in mystery and poetry. Who has not seen in imagination, when looking into the sunset sky, the gardens of the Hesperides, and the foundation of all those fables?...

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40. Joan Torrance, "An Australian Anthem" in *Twixt Heather and Wattle* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1902), pp. 37-39.

41. Lance Fallow, "Australia" in *An Ampler Sky* (London: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 48-49.

42. E. J. Brady, *Two Frontiers* (Sydney: Frank Johnson, 1944), pp. 236-38, 297-299; H. C. Allen, *Bush and Backwoods: A Comparison of the Frontier in Australia and the United States* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1959); Mary Durack, "In Search of an Australian Frontier", *Texas Quarterly*, 5,2 (1962), pp. 10-15; Robert L. Johnson, "The Road Out in Australian and American Fiction: A Study of Four Spokesmen", *Southern Review*, 1,3 (1965), pp. 20-31; Roy W. Meyer, "The Outback and the West: Australian and American Frontier Fiction", *Western American Literature*, 6 (1971), pp. 3-19; John Greenway, *The Last Frontier: A Study of the Development of the Last Frontiers of America and Australia* (London: Davis-Poynter, 1972), pp. 117, 121-122, 128; Henry W. Wells, "Verse of the Australian Frontier", *The Literary Half-Yearly* (Mysore), 18,1 (1977), pp. 218-234; Susan K. Martin, "Go Further West Young Man: The New (True Blue) Frontier of the American Imagination", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 32 (1992), pp. 47-59.

43. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1893* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1894), pp. 199-227, 200.

44. Greenway, *The Last Frontier*, p. 128.

45. Edwin Fussell, *Frontier: American Literature and the American West* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1970), pp. 3-5.

To Americans I hardly need to say, —  
"Westward the star of empire takes its way".<sup>46</sup>

Not all Australian texts conform to Greenway's definition. The west may be associated, for instance, with that Western Australia<sup>47</sup> that Dutch seafarers called *Terra Aurifera*; it may equally be associated with a delocalised region and, not infrequently, even with the westward movement of civilisation and empire conjured by Thoreau. Henry Kendall laments the loss of Eden, which, as the mythical "fair Hy-Brasil", sojourns somewhere on the western ocean's waves, moving the mind of its contemplator to yearn for the vanished gardens of Paradise:

But beyond the halls of sunset — but within the wondrous west,  
On the rose-red seas of evening, sails the Garden of the Blest.<sup>48</sup>

For the author of "El Dorado, 1887", endless miles of barren salt scrub lie along the path "Westward, Westward, and West again ...", before the traveller, as in Erasmus Darwin's "Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, near Botany Bay",<sup>49</sup> is confronted with the vision of a civilised landscape wrung from the wilderness:

Then the whisper of riches beyond a dream!  
See the lonely hills with the camp fires gleam,  
Hear the creaking wheels of the gathering band -  
Who toil and moil in the thirsty land,  
Till, quicker than birth of fabled Rome,  
Spring cottage and chimney, and spire and dome ...<sup>50</sup>

Barcroft Boake in "A Vision Out West"<sup>51</sup> sees the achievement of the settlers, who have transformed a recalcitrant nature into a pastoral Arcadia and a mercantile idyll, in much the same light. James Lister Cuthbertson's "Westward" calls on his fellows to take possession of the unknown west, with its promise of wealth and happiness,<sup>52</sup> and George Essex Evans's "The Women of the West" praises those women who have exchanged the comforts of the city with the hard life "On the frontiers of the Nation ...".<sup>53</sup> For A. B. Paterson the west is the Promised Land which awaited the settlers as Canaan did the Israelites:

Between the mountain and the sea,  
Like Israelites with staff in hand,  
The people waited restlessly:

46. Henry David Thoreau, "Walking" in *Excursions. The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*, vol. IX, New Riverside Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1893), pp. 251-304, 268-273.

47. Greenway, *The Last Frontier*, p. 193.

48. Henry Kendall, "Hy-Brasil" in T. Inglis Moore, ed., *Bell-Birds and Other Verses* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1988), pp. 199-200, 200.

49. Erasmus Darwin, "Visit of Hope to Sydney Cove, near Botany Bay" in Dennis Davison, ed., *The Penguin Book of Eighteenth-Century English Verse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), pp. 109-110.

50. W. M. K., "El Dorado, 1887" in Marjorie Pizer, ed., *Freedom on the Wallaby: Poems of the Australian People* (Sydney: The Pinchgut Press, 1953), pp. 60-61, 61.

51. Barcroft Boake, "A Vision Out West" in Brian Elliott and Adrian Mitchell, eds., *Bards in the Wilderness: Australian Colonial Poetry to 1920* (Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1970), pp. 142-143.

52. "C" (i.e. James Lister Cuthbertson), "Westward" in *Barwon Ballads* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1893), p. 4.

53. George Essex Evans, "To the Women of the West" in *The Secret Key* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1906), pp. 8-10, 9.

They looked towards the mountains old  
And saw the sunsets come and go  
With gorgeous golden afterglow,  
That made the West a fairyland,  
And marvelled what the West might be  
Of which such wondrous tales were told.<sup>54</sup>

Finally John Steele Robertson sees the promise of this land as task and destiny:

Do you hear the West a-calling, brother mine? [...]  
'Tis the voice that through eternity and time  
On the strong soul of man lays its behest,  
And the burden of its ever beating rhyme  
Is "Ever to the Westward lies man's quest!"<sup>55</sup>

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The American west held the promise of unlimited freedom and the mythical allure of the garden of the world. For J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur the farmer with his plough was a figure superior to that of any pioneer or trapper. At the heart of his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) lies the thought that the wealth and moral stature of America have their origin not in the ports of the East Coast but in the new lands being brought under cultivation as the farmers moved constantly out west, and that these farmers were thereby the chief guarantor of the political system of the young republic.<sup>56</sup>

In Australia this role was played not so much by the squatters as by the settlers. The lonely bushman who turned a barren wilderness into fruitful crop and pastureland was celebrated not only in Adamic terms as the creator of a pastoral utopia, but also as the economic backbone of the country:

The trees to grub, the land to clear, Australia's sons of toil  
Shall worthily its blessings share, true workers of the soil;  
Whilst herds upon the hills increase, they irrigate the plain,  
And their labor yields a hundred-fold, in wool and golden grain.

Australia's sons your homestead make, with willing heart and hand,  
The work begun, the glory take, the backbone of our land;  
The land of corn, and wine, and oil, and blessings from the skies,  
And generations yet unborn shall call it Paradise.<sup>57</sup>

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54. Andrew Barton Paterson, "Song of the Future" in *Bards in the Wilderness*, pp. 130-134, 132.

55. John Steele Robertson, "The Pathway of the Sun" in Bertram Stevens, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Australian Verse* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1912), pp. 220-223, 220.

56. Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp. 123-132.

57. James Ninnis, "Settlers in the Australian Bush" in *Australian Poems and Songs: Descriptions of Australian Life, Character and Scenery* (Melbourne: Rae Bros., 1891), pp. 186-87, 187; see also Andrew Kinross, "Ode to Southland" in *My Life and Lays* (Ewercargill: John Ward, 1899), p. 71; George Randall, "Come out, ye men that strive and toil" in Ian Turner, ed., *The Australian Dream: A collection of Anticipations about Australia from Captain Cook to the present day* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1968), pp. 77-78.

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The frontier and the west, according to Turner, were decisive in forming the American character with its mobility, optimism and individualism, its mistrust of old world social structures, its love of freedom and its insistence on the equality — in principle — of all men. St. John de Crèvecoeur even saw a new human type coming into being.<sup>58</sup> Australian writers, for their part, foresaw the birth of a new *homo australiensis*, Frank Cowan with Whitmanesque pathos, Arthur Adams full of wonder at his superhuman feats: "Rearing his cities in the sand, / He builds where even God has banned ..."<sup>59</sup>

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St. John de Crèvecoeur's words: "We have no princes, for whom we toil, starve, and bleed: we are the most perfect society now existing in the world. Here man is free as he ought to be"<sup>60</sup> could, understood as a programmatic statement and predicated of the future, have been written in Australia. It is not possible in any final sense to determine whether the aversion towards the moral failure of the Old World, the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity and the radical egalitarianism of Australia were the fruit of the antipodean myth, the heritage of the French revolution or the result of the particular history of Australian colonization. What is certain is the universality of the conviction that Australia would develop into an ideal community. Charles Harpur praises his country as "the Shiloh of Freedom, expected so long",<sup>61</sup> where happiness is guaranteed not just for a small minority, but for all:

Till felled by gold as bards have told,  
In the Old World once it grew,  
Though there its fruits were always sold,  
And only to the *Few*:  
But here at last, uncurst by caste,  
Each man at nature's call,  
Shall pluck as well, what none may sell, —  
The fruit that blooms for *All!*<sup>62</sup>

Henry Kendall conceives the future in terms of a community in which there is no oppression,<sup>63</sup> and the verse manifesto "The people's cry", published in *Boomerang* in 1888, pleads for the abolition of class barriers and the equality of all men — a condition that St. John de Crèvecoeur saw in America as already realised:

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58. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, introduced by Michael T. Gilmore, reprint of the London edition of 1782 (London: Dent, 1971), pp. 40-41.

59. Frank Cowan, "[Extract from] Australia: A Charcoal Sketch" in *The Australian Dream*, pp. 149-155, and Arthur Adams, "The Australian" in *The Oxford Book of Australasian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1918), pp. 206-208.

60. St. John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, pp. 40-41.

61. Charles Harpur, "The Emigrant's Vision" in Elizabeth Perkins, ed., *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1984), pp. 448-449, 449.

62. Harpur, "The Tree of Liberty" in *The Poetical Works*, pp. 9-10, 10.

63. Henry Kendall, "The Far Future" in T. T. Reed, ed., *The Poetical Works of Henry Kendall* (Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1966), pp. 241-242.

Give us here no lower classes  
 And no mighty "upper ten",  
 Give us but a freeman's standing,  
 Give us each our rights as men,  
 Free to stand before our fellows  
 As the "peer of any man",  
 Equal now as at creation,  
 Fettered by no social ban.<sup>64</sup>

Henry Lawson's "Shearers" or "Second Class Wait Here"<sup>65</sup> would simply be two further documents from a wide range of texts, all of which prove the radically democratic and utopian impetus — frequently on the American model<sup>66</sup> — of the Australian social dream.

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Wordsworth believed in the divine power of nature as the creative and ordering force of the universe. He was a mystic who believed that the man who subjected himself to nature could perceive the beauty, the immanent finality and the divine indwelling in all forms of life and being.<sup>67</sup> The American romantics, and above all the transcendentalists sought this experience in the grandeur of the American landscape. They believed that the union between God and the world could be restored, that God revealed himself in nature, and that man could encounter God either directly in nature or through mystical immersion in her beauty. Drawing both on German idealism and English romanticism,<sup>68</sup> transcendentalism endowed nature and the landscape with the status of a connecting link between man and God.

The reception of continental European thought in Australia — even that of the English romantics — is still waiting to be researched. Thus it is not yet certain whether Australia had any clearly definable romantic period;<sup>69</sup> what is certain, however, is that Wordsworth's influence was ever-present and can still be felt today.<sup>70</sup>

64. "Demos", "The people's cry" in *The Australian Dream*, pp. 158-159, 158.

65. Henry Lawson, "Shearers" in David McKee Wright, ed., *The Poetical Works of Henry Lawson* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975), pp. 103-104; "Second Class Wait Here" in *Poetical Works of Henry Lawson*, pp. 126-127.

66. Thomas Heney, "Salut à l'Homme — Walt Whitman" in *Bards in the Wilderness*, pp. 119-120; see also Joseph Jones, *Radical Cousins: Nineteenth Century American and Australian Writers* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1976), pp. 42-100; see also John Docker, "Politics and Poetics: Bernard O'Dowd's *Dawnward* and Nineteenth-Century Charismatic Poetry", *Southerly*, 2 (1993), pp. 13-33.

67. Herbert Piper, "The Background of Romantic Thought", *Quadrant*, 2,1 (1957-58), pp. 49-55, 54.

68. James D. Hart, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* (New York: Oxford UP, 1965), s. v. "Transcendentalism".

69. Piper, "The Background", pp. 49-55; P. H. Johnson, "Turnips and Romanticism", *Agricultural History*, 12 (1938), pp. 224-255; James McAuley, *The Grammar of the Real: Selected Prose 1959-1974* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1975), pp. 120-132; James McAuley, "Wordsworth once more", *Quadrant*, 20,6 (1976), pp. 40-49; A. D. Hope, *The New Cratylus: Notes on the Craft of Poetry* (Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1979), pp. 127-145; Andrew Taylor, "Bosom of Nature or Heart of Stone: A Difference in Heritage", *Literary Criterion*, 15,3-4 (1980-81), pp. 144-156; David Carter, "The Death of Satan and the Persistence of Romanticism", *Literary Criterion*, 15,3-4 (1980-81), pp. 59-82; Andrew Taylor, *Reading Australian Poetry* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland Press, 1987), pp. 22-35; Sydney Watson, "Sydney Clouts and the Limits of Romanticism", *World Literature Written in English*, 28,2 (1988), pp. 210-232; David Denholm, *The Colonial Australians* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Australia, 1980), pp. 137-159; R. G. Hay, "The Environmental Movement: Romanticism Reborn?", *Island Magazine*, 29 (1986-87), pp. 10-17.

70. See e.g. John Blight, "Why I Write About the Sea" in *A Beachcomber's Diary: Ninety Sea Sonnets* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), p. 56:

Now if you listen to me, you may understand  
 why I don't read Wordsworth, any more, for his fields and  
 woods.

Wordsworth and the English romantics held a powerful fascination for colonial writers. They legitimated what Australian poets felt as their task of encountering an alien, uneuropean landscape on the one hand and an Aboriginal culture on the other.<sup>71</sup> Charles Harpur may have admired the "giant-minded Emerson"<sup>72</sup> more intensely and have criticised him more sharply, but he still felt himself indebted to his mentor Wordsworth, who had taught him to see nature and its landscapes with new eyes.

How much, O Wordsworth! in this world how much  
Has thy surpassing love made rich for me,  
Of what was once unprized.<sup>73</sup>

What Harpur most values in Wordsworth, however, is that he

As with a golden chain, links every part  
Into a kindred value — one bright whole,  
The ocular robe of a great central Soul.<sup>74</sup>

The experience of God in nature and the desire for union with nature is the theme of many texts, of which Alexander Russell's sonnets "Times of Transfiguration", "Art and Nature", "On the Mountain", "They Shall See God" and "Aimings at Communion"<sup>75</sup> are particularly rewarding examples. To Bernard O'Hara nature brings memories of "The vale of Avalon", "lost Atlantis" and "Hy-Brasil".<sup>76</sup> Christopher Brennan, however, is perhaps the most intense of all these readers of English romanticism and American transcendentalism;<sup>77</sup> his *Towards the Source* and *The Forest of Night*<sup>78</sup> are both shot through with the idea that man, with the help of nature, can regain his lost Paradise and once more enjoy union with the Divinity.

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The Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 19th century gave new direction to the American Dream. While the realist, and later on the naturalistic novel concentrated, in the European fashion, on depicting the glory and the misery of industrial progress, the American Dream found expression in the utopian social novel and in popular success stories in which the fascination of social advance supplanted the vision of the wide open spaces.<sup>79</sup>

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71. Piper, "The Background", p. 49.

72. Charles Harpur, "Emerson", and "Emerson at the Worst" in *The Poetical Works*, pp. 633-34; see also Elizabeth Perkins, "Emerson and Charles Harpur", *Australian Literary Studies*, 6,1 (1973), pp. 82-88.

73. Harpur, "Wordsworth's Poetry" in *The Poetical Works*, pp. 423-24, 423; see also his "To William Wordsworth" in *The Poetical Works*, p. 423.

74. Harpur, "Wordsworth" in *The Poetical Works*, pp. 817-19, 818-19; see also John Bernard O'Hara, "Wordsworth" in *A Book of Sonnets* (Melbourne: Melville and Mullen, 1902), pp. 3-4.

75. Alexander Russell, *Voices of Doubt: Australian Scenes and Other Poems* (Adelaide: E.W. Wigg, Melbourne: S. Mullen, 1884), pp. 175-182.

76. John Bernard O'Hara, "Kennst Du das Land" in *At Eventide: New Poems* (Melbourne: Edward A. Vidler, 1922), p. 34; see also Frederick T. Macartney, "Absolution" in *References: Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1941), p. 37.

77. Joseph Jones, *Radical Cousins*, pp. 108-117.

78. Terry Sturm, ed., *Christopher Brennan* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1984), pp. 5-30, 30-83.

79. Schäfer, "The American Dream", p. 42.

John Docker has shown that William Morris, Edward Bellamy, Ignatius Donnelly and their fellows were well known in Australia; they were read, discussed in the colonial context and imitated.<sup>80</sup> A whole *corpus* of texts can be advanced as a basis of comparison with the American experience, among them Price Warung's "The Strike of '95: A Story of the Passing Time" (1893), S. A. Rosa's *The Coming Terror; or The Australian Revolution* (1894, as *Oliver Spence, the Australian Caesar* 1895), William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise* (1892), C. H. Spence's "A Week in the Future" (1888-98) and above all Joseph Furphy's *Rigby's Romance* (1905-06). The fear becomes articulate in these works that the New World might well come to resemble the Old.

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At the latest with Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and Edward Albee's *The American Dream* (1961), American literature begins to doubt the validity of the Dream and its principal ideas. In the serious literature of the later 20th century one looks in vain for an unconditional acceptance of its promises.<sup>81</sup> The grand vision of a new sociopolitical order has failed the test of reality. It may remain as an unattainable ideal, but the downside of such collective utopian dreams is the pressure to conform and to prescribe the future, and this, as the title of a contemporary anthology — itself derived from Hemingway —,<sup>82</sup> *American Dreams, American Nightmares*,<sup>83</sup> expresses, is felt with increasing urgency today. Nevertheless the Dream is still alive — not only in political rhetoric — as a distant and ever-receding American ideal.

Australian writers already asked themselves at the turn of the century if the country would in fact develop into the longed for Paradise,<sup>84</sup> and one can hear the obstinate determination in the voices of E. J. Brady, Marie E. J. Pitt and Max Dunn as they admonish their countrymen, despite all the depressing circumstances, to believe still in the vision of the Dream.<sup>85</sup> Rex Ingamells and Ian Mudie deplore the exclusion of the Aboriginal population from that vision,<sup>86</sup> and when Furnley Maurice returns from the war, he no longer recognises the land which he has personified as his beloved. She has gone with strange men; her beauty and her innocence are lost.<sup>87</sup>

Corruption comes not just from mammon: the inability of the average man to live up to the ideals of the Australian Dream is another strand in the critical dialogue. Again and again the figure of De Quiros is cited<sup>88</sup> as a shining example to a nation

80. John Docker, *The Nervous Nineties: Australian Cultural Life in the 1890s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Australia, 1991), pp. 105-149.

81. Schäfer, "The American Dream", p. 49.

82. Ernest Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not* (London: Cape, 1937), p. 232.

83. David Madden, ed., *American Dreams, American Nightmares* (Evanston: Southern Illinois UP, 1972).

84. Bernard O'Dowd, "Australia" in *The Australian Dream*, p. 264.

85. E. J. Brady, "Dreaming Too" in *Bells and Hobbles* (Melbourne: George Robertson, 1911), p. 128; Marie E. J. Pitt, "Hold Fast To Thy Dream" in *Selected Poems of Marie E. J. Pitt* (Melbourne: Lothian Publ., 1944), p. 121; Max Dunn, *Portrait of a Country* (Melbourne: The Anvil Press, 1962), pp. 12-13.

86. Rex Ingamells, "Australia" in Brian Elliott, ed., *The Jindywoorobaks* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979), pp. 22-25; see also his "The Gangrened People" in *Selected Poems* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1944), pp. 29-33; Ian Mudie, "This is Australia" in *Poems: 1934-1944* (Melbourne: Georgian House, 1945), pp. 37-39.

87. Furnley Maurice (i.e. Frank Wilmot), "Echoes" in Geoffrey Dutton, ed., *Australian Voices From 1805: A Continuum* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1976), pp. 111-113; see also his "To God: From the Warring Nations" in *Eyes of Vigilance: Divine and Moral Songs* (Melbourne: Commonwealth of Australia, 1920), pp. 71-80.

88. Marie E. J. Pitt, "De Quiros's Dream" in *Selected Poems*, pp. 2-10; Douglas Stewart, "Terra Australis" in *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), pp. 105-198; James McAuley, "Terra Australis" in R. G. Howarth, ed., *Australian Poetry 1944* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1945), p. 59; see also David Rowbotham, "So Dream" in *All the Room* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1964), p. 20; Amy Cumpston, "Australia" in *The Towns of the Earth* (Sydney: Elizabethan Press, 1969), pp. 46-47.

that is in danger of sinking in a morass of spiritual conformism, intellectual lethargy, cynicism, materialism and hedonism. To prefer the rhetoric of imperialism and conquest to the protection of Aboriginal culture, not to mention the conservation of landscape and nature is to betray the ideals of the Dream.<sup>89</sup> As Chris Wallace-Crabbe bitterly remarks, Australia is on the way to becoming a paradise of fools: "We are the final children of the earth / Whom knowledge has not scarred ..."<sup>90</sup>

In the last 30 years Australia has undergone far-reaching demographic change. The traditional establishment of white anglo-saxon protestants is on the point of yielding up its authority. Australia has become a multicultural nation in which the norms and values of the WASPs are no longer universally recognised as the bedrock of identity. The Aboriginal people have now themselves taken up the demands of white idealists, and are actively campaigning against their oppressors.<sup>91</sup> There has been a change, too, in the consciousness of white Australia. A growing sensitivity towards the dark side of the country's history, too often veiled in a euphoric utopianism, an awareness of open and covert racism and of the degrading treatment of Aboriginal and other minorities has sharpened Australian perceptions for *The Dark Side of the Dream*<sup>92</sup> and made its dreamers tired, angry or sad. Judith Wright confesses:

No one but Harpur called her [i.e. Australia] the land of equals,  
the new Utopia.... Go away, we're tired;

we're tired of being asked about tomorrow.  
Today the profit. Today the hideous old,  
the rising price of uranium, beef and gold.  
Today, for the dreamers, the totally useless sorrow.<sup>93</sup>

The unmasking of Utopia as an illusion is not, however, the same as a simple denial, and Leonard Koza discovers — or rediscovers — the Australian Dream in the biblical land of Ophir; it is a fictional construct now, devoid of any function in reality; it exists in the collective memory of poets and there alone:

Farewell, brave Ophir, farewell.  
Though time is up,  
Your work is done.  
You'll live in your poets as they lived in you.<sup>94</sup>

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89. A. D. Hope, "Australia" in *Collected Poems 1930-1970* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972), p. 13; Leonard Mann, "Australia" in *The Plumed Voice: Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1938), pp. 43-44; Judith Wright, "Australia, 1827" in Rex Ingamells, ed., *Jindyworobak Anthology, 1947* (Melbourne: Jindyworobak, 1947), pp. 36-37; Judith Wright, "Australia 1970" in *Collected Poems 1942-1970* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1974), p. 292; Peter Porter, "Phar Lap in the Melbourne Museum" in G. A. Wilkes, ed., *Australian Poetry 1963* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1963), pp. 25-26; Geoffrey Dutton, "Thoughts Home from Abroad" in *The Australian Dream*, pp. 343-344; Len Fox, "Lucky Country" in *Gumleaves and People* (Potts Point: Len Fox, 1967), pp. 18-19; Harry Roskolenko, "Australia Today" in *American Civilization* (Melbourne: The National Press, 1970), p. 40; Leon Slade, "Australia" in *Slade's Anatomy of the Horse* (St. Lucia: U of Queensland Press, 1972), p. 33.
90. Chris Wallace-Crabbe, "Terra Australis" in *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), pp. 39-40; see also Davia Campbell, "The Australian Dream" in *Selected Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1978), p. 71.
91. See e.g. Kath Walker, "White Australia" in *My People* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1978), p. 17; "United We Win" in *My People*, p. 75; "The Dawn is at Hand" in *My People*, p. 48; "A Song of Hope" in *My People*, pp. 40-41; Kevin Gilbert, "End of Dreamtime" in *End of Dreamtime* (Sydney: Island Press, 1971), p. 7; "Anthem: The Blessed Land" in *End of Dreamtime*, p. 8.
92. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the postcolonial mind* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1990).
93. Judith Wright, "At a Public Dinner" in *Alive: Poems 1971-72* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p. 18.
94. Leonard Koza, "Farewell, Brave Ophir", *Poetry Australia*, 8 (1982), p. 63.

But the memory of many Australians is still that, like Bunyan's Christian, they had set off once on an arduous journey to a land that had held some promise for them.<sup>95</sup> It is a radical self-awareness that despite everything can determine an Australian's experience of the European counter-world. Thus Marion Halligan writes:

*O brave new world ...* Australia is no more a new world than the one Miranda imagines Ferdinand's self-seeking companions have come from. We smile ruefully as she speaks; how wrong can you be. But Shakespeare also means us to understand a truth as well as irony in her words, that it is by ordinary and unprepossessing people that new worlds are made. I spent six months in Paris and loved it and looked forward to coming home and was sorry to leave. I thought a lot about Australia while I was there. It's undoubtedly a stupid country often and some wicked men have power here and where are its people of vision? But seen from Paris, ... it is a place of opportunity. Or am I imagining it?

Of course, that's my job, to imagine it, I mean in the technical sense of turning it into fiction. My imagining is meant to be a way of getting at the truth. Only its honesty will save it.<sup>96</sup>

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The Australian Dream has complex roots in intellectual and social history; its effect on the literary and spiritual development of the nation has been deep and multifarious. Indeed, as T. Inglis Moore has said, "To explore fully the ramifications of this complex utopian concept in Australian history and literature would require a book in itself".<sup>97</sup> Until this book is written, one is, perhaps, best advised to proceed cautiously in attempting any demarcation of the Australian Dream from its American equivalent.

For all their radical similarities, however, two factors seem to distinguish the Australian variant of the dream: a stronger emphasis on the collective, as opposed to the individual pursuit of happiness, and (albeit *cum grano salis*) a somewhat less religious, more this-worldly founding of utopia.

Not the happiness of the individual but the perfection of society as a whole was the aim and the goal of the fifth continent's dreamers, both political and literary. When, for instance, Prime Minister Bob Hawke in September 1983 characterized the specifically Australian contribution to the system of social insurance, he did so in the following sentences:

95. Leonard Mann, "The Delectable Mountains" in *The Delectable Mountains and Other Poems* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1944), pp. 43-56, 55.

96. Marion Halligan, "New Worlds", *Australian Book Review*, 142 (1992), pp. 33-40, 40; see also Helen Daniel, ed., *Millennium: Time-Pieces by Australian Writers* (Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Australia, 1991).

97. T. Inglis Moore, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*, p. 275. See also Frank Hinz, ed., *Songs of Australia* (Frankston, Vic.: Bayside Press, 1977); John McLaren, *Australian Literature: An Historical Introduction* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1989), esp. chapter 14; Nan Bowman Albinski, "Visions of the Nineties", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 20 (1987), pp. 12-22; Nan Bowman Albinski, "A Survey of Australian Utopian and Dystopian Fiction", *Australian Literary Studies*, 13,1 (1987), pp. 15-28; Vincent Buckley, "Utopianism and Vitalism in Australian Literature", *Quadrant*, 3,2 (1959), pp. 39-51.

For if Australia is to have something special to say to the world ... then that special Australian contribution must turn on this central question of whether or not we have succeeded in securing, for all our people, fairer shares of the nation's wealth and a larger measure of genuine equality.<sup>98</sup>

Although the well-being of a society depends on that of its individual members, and although there are Australian voices too that express a thoroughly individual drive for happiness, one may agree with Judith Wright's analysis that "Where the American dream made use of the competitive individualistic element in life ... the Australian dream emphasises man's duty to his brother, and man's basic equality ..."<sup>99</sup>

Another difference, long taken for granted, must in the light of recent studies be described in more carefully differentiated terms. Australia was founded at the time of the Enlightenment and its character formed by men and women who shared the preoccupations of that period. Eighteenth century science seemed to have established a universe which no longer needed God as an explanation of its development and further progress; at most He was the distant First Cause of a cosmos which got on quite well on its own. If this was the attitude of the upper classes, it had its counterpart in the hatred among the convicts and their descendants for the British establishment, with which virtually all the religious confessions were intimately connected.<sup>100</sup> This too led to an areligious, if not anti-religious spirit spreading through certain strata of Australian society. If Australia is frequently described as the Garden of Eden, it is a garden from which God, not Adam and Eve, has been banished, and, where the biblical sequence of events has been retained, God appears in the role of a treacherous villain from whom the Australian Adam wrests, with the power of love, new paradises hewn from the wilderness. Furnley Maurice turns Milton's epic upside down when in his sonnet "Paradise Regained" he makes Adam say:

Come outward, Mate of mine; the Lord

Hath trapped us; banished and denied  
The arboured walks of Eden wide ...

In spite of God and all His power  
By thy soft body of caress  
Our disconcerted love shall build  
New Edens in the wilderness.<sup>101</sup>

On the other hand, however, Richard Ely has detected in his analysis of public reactions to the war in the South Pacific and to the sending of American troops to

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98. Bob Hawke, "Social Security" in John Cook, ed., *National Reconciliation: The Speeches of Bob Hawke, Prime Minister of Australia* (Sydney: Collins/Fontana, 1984), pp. 87-95, 87.

99. Judith Wright, "Australia's Double Aspect" in C.D. Narasimhaiah, ed., *An Introduction to Australian Literature* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1965), pp. 1-11, 11.

100. Alan M. Grocott, *Convicts, Clergymen and Churches: Attitudes of convicts and ex-convicts towards the churches and clergy in New South Wales from 1788 to 1851* (Sydney: Sydney UP, 1980), pp. 280-284.

101. Furnley Maurice, "Paradise Regained" in Frederick T. Macartney, ed., *The Sonnet in Australasia: A Survey and Selection* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, rev. and enl. edn., 1956), p. 43.

Australia an extraordinarily vivid, puritanical sense of religious covenant, which saw in the defeats of the allies a punishment for the loss of faith, on the part of the chosen people of Australia, in their divine calling.<sup>102</sup> It remains for future research to investigate the extent to which this virulent religious sentiment latent, it seems, at least in certain social classes, may have influenced the shape of the Australian Dream. There are sufficient indications that the dream possesses a Puritanical, Protestant element alongside its secular mainstream.

*The Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (1853), translated by John Rae into English blank verse, is an early case in point. The translator and versifier feels a certain affinity with the Old Testament prophet, whom he portrays as an historical figure who experiences in a colonial situation the rise and fall of a mighty empire, and foretells the restoration to greatness of his own people.<sup>103</sup> In Edward Francis Hughes's *The Millennium* (1873), the powers of heaven and hell ally themselves with human auxiliaries and join in battle for the New Jerusalem.<sup>104</sup> The epic reminds one strongly of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Bunyan's *Holy War*.

Hughes does not localise his Puritan Christian Jerusalem, although British heroes are active both in storming and defending it. Theo[philus] Gum, on the other hand, gives it an unmistakably Australian setting.<sup>105</sup> Gum's christian Utopia comes into being in South Australia, whose parliament enters into a covenant with God and decrees with all the vigour of law the divine sovereignty. Gum sees the Kingdom of God as spreading from South Australia to the whole country and then to the New World in its entirety; it is for this reason that it bears the name of Zion, while the Old World is Babylon. Neither religious confession, nationality nor colour will determine entry into this Kingdom, but simply the following of the Golden Rules laid down in the fifteenth Psalm.<sup>106</sup> At the heart of the Kingdom lies the New Jerusalem, constructed according to a plan whose geographical location the author outlines with a map (see end of article) and describes in the following words:<sup>107</sup>

The capital of the Millennial Kingdom, in its widest sense, will be the whole continent of Australia. Its twelve gates will be the twelve divisions of its coastline, three on either side. But the capital itself will be in the centre of the continent.... It will be the most wonderful city the world will ever see.<sup>108</sup>

102. Richard Ely, "The Forgotten Nationalism: Australian Civic Protestantism in the Second World War", *Journal of Australian Studies*, 20 (1987), pp. 59-67; see also William James Lawton, *The Better Time to Be: Utopian Attitudes to Society Among Sydney Anglicans 1885 to 1914* (Kensington, N.S.W.: NSW University Press, 1990); see also the findings of Sue Murray, *Bibliography of Australian Poetry 1935-1955* (Port Melbourne, Vic.: D. W. Thorpe in association with National Centre for Australian Studies, 1991), p. vii; Alan W. Black, ed., *Religion in Australia: Sociological Perspectives* (North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991); Tim Prenzler, "The Influence of Religion on Australian Political Behaviour", *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 38,2 (1992), pp. 274-288, 275.

103. John Rae, *The Book of Isaiah, Rendered into English Blank Verse; With Explanatory Notes* (Sydney: W. and F. Ford, 1853), p. xxii.

104. Edward Francis Hughes, *The Millennium; An Epic Poem* (Melbourne: Privately printed, 1873); see also Nanzie Gordon (i.e. Annie Ross), *An Idyll of Eden: A Lost World and a World Re-Claimed* (Melbourne: R. G. Ferguson, c. 1942).

105. Theo[philus] Gum, *God's Plan of the Millennium* (Melbourne: The Specialty Press, c. 1922).

106. Gum, *God's Plan*, pp. 18, 20, 28-29.

107. Gum, *God's Plan*, between pp. 38 and 39.

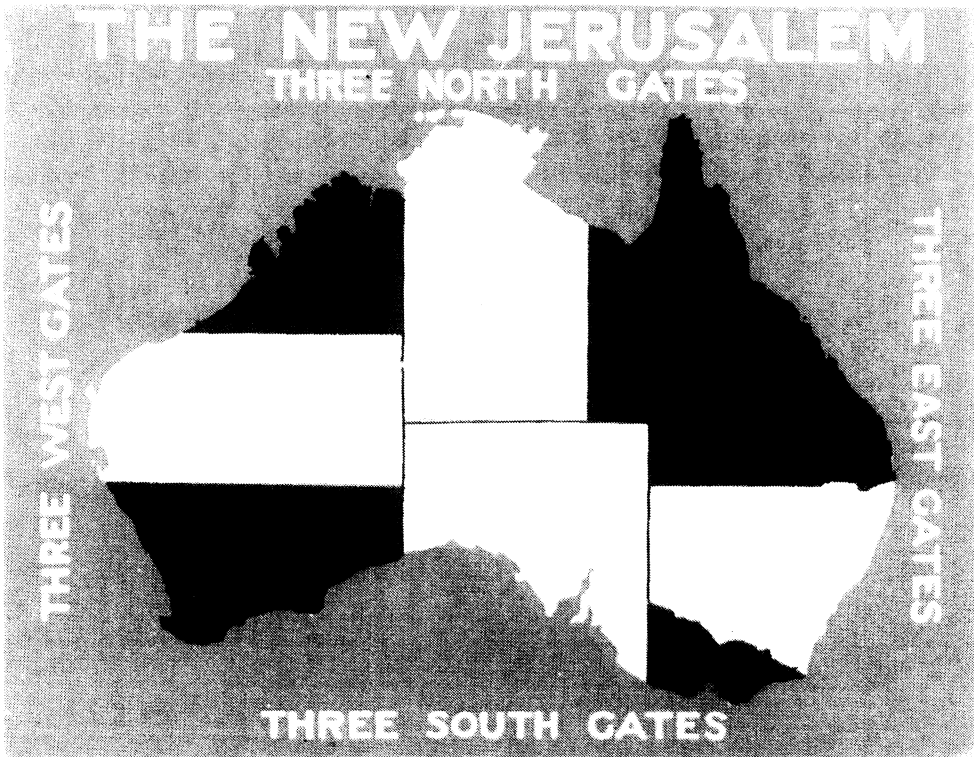
108. Gum, *God's Plan*, p. 89.

Such undertakings as these suggest in truth that "The long held view of Australia as a deeply secular society is subject to increasing challenge".<sup>109</sup>

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In *One Last Glimpse* (1977), James Aldridge has written a fictional account of a car journey made by Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald in 1929, first described by Hemingway in *A Movable Feast*. When Kit, the young Australian chauffeur from whose perspective the story is being told, is first introduced to the two literary giants, it is Scott Fitzgerald who recognizes the family relationship between the American Adam fallen from grace and his younger Australian brother. Addressing Kit, he ponders:

"In fact, now I come to think of it, that's exactly why we need you, Kit. You're the stuff we were once made of. You can be there as a constant reminder of what — bleeding and wounded in our prime — we once were. I call on your youth and your innocence, Kit. That is, if you don't mind".<sup>110</sup>



109. Tim Prenzler, "The Influence of Religion", p. 275; see also Dorothy Green, "Sheep or Goats? Some Religious Ideas in Australian Literature", *St. Mark's Review* (Canberra), 86 (1976), pp. 3-29, 4; Allan W. Loy, "Australian Poetry and Religion: The Question of Method", *St. Mark's Review*, 91 (1977), pp. 14-29, 16.

110. Richard Aldridge, *One Last Glimpse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, Australia, 1978), p. 19.



a stacked curve unpacks itself  
silently  
this fact is huge  
and fills the lungs  
they swell with it and resonate

twin amplifiers of the heart

let this image strain  
and the lungs fly off

blood wings

beat their breath to

peaks that can not hold

somewhere a  
wave

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# STEVE EVANS

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## Travelling Salesman

on the far reaches  
of a week's cheap hotels  
chasing the sales charts' hopeful peaks  
in country towns  
and warm farm kitchens  
driving with the window open  
to keep flies out of  
your thermos tea

nights in damp hotels  
a briefcase of papers and samples  
a detective novel and a photograph  
for company  
fly-specked mirrors  
bare pillows and globes  
a briefcase of graphs and targets  
the subtle threat in a Head Office  
letter of congratulation

scones with farm-wives  
while hoping for a break  
in the tractor's repair  
the papers thumbprinted  
flour and grease  
by their signatures  
(if they sign)

here and there the graces  
over offered meals  
you were about to receive  
or when your coat hung on a nail  
shirt sleeves furled  
to help a calf's entrance  
to this world

other salesmen —  
visiting us  
while you visited their families  
something familiar in that walk  
as they closed the gate on leaving

other salesmen —  
one drowned in the claw-foot tub  
of a shared bathroom  
down your hotel corridor  
his graphs sprawled on an unmade bed  
like the ruined shed you passed  
its leaves of iron spread  
across powdered ground  
and you looking through his wallet  
for a telephone number

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# TANYA AQUINO

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## Honey

You are a dangerous fascination,  
a sheet covered accident *victim*,  
a tongue on a sore gum,  
Honey.

When you smile at me  
it's probing *blunt* and eager fingers in a sticky wound,  
stretching the edges like *taffy*.  
How far, *Honey*,  
before I begin to bleed?

*Even now*, after so long,  
when there's only a think scar left of you on me,  
I'll turn around half way through a meal with a friend  
and *stab it* with my fork  
just to see how healed I *really* am.  
Just to make sure I haven't finally forgotten you,  
Honey.

But this is absolutely the *last time* I sit on a car bonnet with you  
discussing the *politics of pain*  
and whistling up my cherished private ache  
to dance on the end of its chain  
for you,  
Honey.

## Decent Hard Working Australians At A Cafe On A Wednesday Afternoon

"I thought they were supposed to be poor."  
Her finger slipped into the handle  
and she raised her cappuccino.  
"Isn't that why they're on strike?  
How CAN they afford to drink afterwards?"  
She lowered her cappuccino,  
recrossed her legs  
and cut the conversation  
like a pair of scissors.

I read the student essays,  
questioned assumptions  
and searched for a number  
to write on the last page.

At the table next to mine  
I heard  
how He buys houses and sits on their value,  
how He sells them every two or three years,  
how She wants to do that too,  
how Paul Keating pays half He's losses  
and never sees He's profits,  
and She is looking to dabble  
in shares      how He plays that game  
and served an eight year  
apprenticeship  
learning about the stock exchange,

how there's people down there  
who are real sharks.

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# ETHEL WEBB BUNDELL

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## Night at the Office

Toilets were the worst. Celia hated cleaning toilets, especially the Men's. Did they spray the stuff all over the walls deliberately? Tonight, after the Christmas party, it was worse than usual, but not much worse.

What was it about men? Everything sloppy, smelly, hard to clean. Hard to please, too. The Boss would be around soon, poking into corners, behind doors, trying to find a place she'd missed. And when he did, and he always found something that didn't suit, he'd rouse on her.

Men were hard, too. They weren't really safe to be around. Cleaning offices; anything could happen to you, on the job, in the car-park. She'd have to be extra careful tonight; this wasn't the only office building where office parties had been held. And it wasn't only the office parties; a lot of people drank a lot more around Christmas, anyway. There was more of the stuff around, more conviviality, more goodwill.

There wasn't much goodwill around where she was in her life, nor where she lived. Her Housing Commission flat had been broken into four times in the past three months. It was a place to scuttle into, and out of; a place of drawn curtains and locked doors, and silence since the television and the radio had gone. The stereo went ages ago.

She glanced around, nervously. Black night outside the windows; inside, air-conditioned no-weather, hushed.

Shouldn't have taken this job. Hospital cleaning, now, that would be better; more people about, more interest, more variety, and at Christmas staff with bits of tinsel in their hair. Though, she'd heard stories about the sort of thing you had to clean up, sometimes.

Celia wheeled her trolley with the large bin, vacuum cleaning gear and tray with its bowl of water, into the Women's, next door.

Not that women were much better. They let the paper-towel baskets overflow all over the floor. Someone should explain that it's possible to kick or stamp them down into the basket, to make more room. You don't have to touch the things.

And someone should tell them that cigarette butts thrown into the toilet, float; and someone, Celia, had to fish them out. The thick green rubber gloves were clumsy, but she wouldn't want to be without them. And tonight, a used condom floating in Number Four. Must have been some party!

There were six people on this cleaning team; two women and four men, including the Boss. The other woman, Maria, spoke no English. From Croatia, or some European place. The Boss was Italian; two of the men, Vietnamese; and the other a big, shuffling man with downcast head and nothing to say. Celia thought he might be a bit simple.

They were shut up in this night building together, each with their quota of floors, except the Boss, from six until ten every weekday evening. They weren't really a team, there was no team spirit, just individuals doing a job. Celia didn't know them, didn't trust them. She felt isolated. Front doors locked, where could she run for help?

Hunching herself together, she moved on. It was much more dangerous at Christmas.

The coffee room was awash, as usual. What sort of homes did these people come from? She reflected that what belongs to everybody, belongs to nobody. Methodically, she washed mugs, put them away, cleaned up spilled sugar, spilled coffee, threw tea-bags into the bin and scrubbed away the stains on the bench. She mopped trodden-in canapes from the floor.

Tonight there were bottles for the re-cycling bin.

Someone had left a paper plate of titbits, plastic wrapped, and a card to wish The Cleaner a Merry Christmas. Celia smiled her half-smile as she placed it carefully on her trolley.

Then out into the open, Level Three, green screens and partitions, makeshift office space. Anything, anyone, could lurk or lie drunk in here, behind a partition, among the potted plants.

At least she didn't have to water the plants. Some company took care of them; removing them when they died, or looked sick, that sort of thing. Sometimes there would be a man, almost always a man, working late, and that threw the routine out of whack. She'd have to remember to come back to that section later. It was so easy to forget. Then there'd be complaints, and the Boss would go mad with words, or sometimes fists, if it were the foreigners, who didn't know their rights.

There was a man working late, tonight. He was watching her. She didn't like men watching her. Had he been there at the party? Was he drunk? What sort of man, and for what reasons, would he be working late after the office Christmas party?

Shapeless in her grey cotton uniform, and her youth long gone, she knew she wasn't attractive in the usual sense. But men want only one thing, she knew, and she wasn't sure how much they cared about what sort of package it came in.

Her earliest memories of Dad... Then Mr Aldrige, next door. That had been after a Christmas Party, when she was thirteen. He'd been into the cherry brandy and said she was pretty enough to be on the Christmas Tree. He'd been sorry after, and given her a book. She couldn't now remember what it was; she'd thrown it away years ago. Brian was different, kind and loving at first, but by the time he left, she was glad to see him go even though it was two days before Christmas. She'd given him his present, new pyjamas, to take with him, and wondered why he laughed.

She still wore her wedding ring. She felt it might be a bit of a put-off. But you never can tell; never trust a man.

She moved to the other end of the floor, dusting, emptying waste paper baskets, cleaning away coffee rings, and vacuuming crumbs from the dark green carpet,

section by section.

Dark carpets are the devil to keep clean and many the bawling out she'd had over specks she was sure had sprung up behind her.

The man put his papers away in the filing cabinet, locked it, then picking up his briefcase and jacket, headed for the lift.

"Good night. Happy Christmas." Floated up into the air-conditioning.

Celia didn't hear. She made a practice of not hearing. Doesn't do to get too familiar with men, especially when you're on your own in a desolate office at night. She'd watched videos of things happening on desks and on carpets, or against filing cabinets. It wouldn't do to take chances.

At a steady pace, she finished Level Three, then took the lift to Level Four, to start all over again with the Men's.

She'd worked as far as the coffee room when the whirring of the lift alerted her that the Boss was on his way. Or someone.

She took hold of the mop with both hands.

It was the Boss. He had a shred of tinsel in the top buttonhole of his shirt. It made her uneasy. There was a waste paper basket not emptied on Level Three.

Plastic bag in hand, she immediately headed for Level Three and the waste paper basket. It was best to do these things at once, rather than risk forgetting, and the Boss screaming his head off in Italian.

He'd actually been reasonably polite, and that worried her. Why was he being nice? What did he have in mind? He had a wife and five children, she knew. He was always yelling about how he had to support them and how could he make any money with this hopeless crew he had working for him? But having wives and children wouldn't be counted on to stop men when they had one thing on their minds.

She went back for the mop. It gave her a sense of security.

By five minutes to ten she was finished, everything put away in the Cleaners' Room, uniform on its hook, ready to leave.

It was pay-day, and she hurried to the front desk where the Boss had the envelopes and the book to be signed.

She liked to get there reasonably early, so not to be last in the queue. It didn't do to be too early or the Boss might think you'd skimmed on the job and everything was held up while he made another inspection, and the other people grumbled about having to wait.

This time she'd left it a bit long and she was second last, behind the Vietnamese and before the big man.

The Boss smiled, showing stained snaggle-teeth. There was an extra ten dollar bonus for them all. The crew received the news in silence, perhaps they didn't understand.

Celia grabbed the envelope, scrawled a signature, and hurtled out into the car-park, keys in hand. She'd read somewhere, that keys held between the fingers were a good defensive weapon.

There was a firm hand on her arm. She spun round, keys at the ready.

The big man took them from her. He opened her ancient Datsun and held the door for her, handing her the keys.

Bewildered, she sank into the seat behind the wheel.

As he closed the door, he said gently, handing her a card-sized envelope, "Good night. Have a Happy Christmas."

## The Way You Appear To Me

Appearances. I don't want to appear fat but I have gained weight so I try to think of what I can wear that will minimise this. Recently I've lost a few kilos so I'm feeling a little better about my appearance. It's mainly Rex who'll be sure to notice and comment, like he did the last time we had lunch, which is partly why it's been three or four months since we last met.

It had been a hot day. I wore a loose floral blouse and black trousers, loose also. That morning I'd had a free facial at a department store. As the saleswoman finished my makeup I looked into the mirror and saw, illuminated, what I perceived to be, the gross ugliness of my features. I sighed within, confronted once again with the truth of my appearance. I was not beautiful.

Yet, I agreed when she remarked how the makeup had brought out my eyes. Every aspect of it was truly awful, as though it had been applied in the dark. The lipstick went over the lipline, the artificial fullness mocking my naturally thin lips. My skin looked caked and my complexion had been transformed into a repulsive mud hue. The sadness of my reflection continued with my eyes circled darkly so that my small eyes diminished in the blackness. At that moment I saw something real, something I'd kept hidden which now was revealed in my self pity.

I quickly realised that I had less than half an hour till I had to meet Rex for lunch so I rushed into a chemist and bought some cleanser, toner, moisturiser and makeup base which set me back about one hundred dollars. I went into the ladies room at Myers, a place of great solace with its television playing in the large rest area, where "Days of Our Lives" seemed to endlessly play. I was so distressed as I removed the botchy makeup, I must have been a sight. However, the other women around me busily repaired their own faces. It was one of those rare moments of visible truth.

Then, at five minutes to twelve, I ran up Collins Street, stopping briefly in the foyer of his building to check my appearance. I looked good, or so I thought then. On my way up to Rex's office I felt a creeping self-consciousness as I saw myself reflected in the heavily mirrored lift. I tried smiling at myself, to try and see myself as he would. Rex was at his desk, reclining and talking on the phone, unaware of himself or of me. Finally he noticed me and waved me over.

"Who else is coming to lunch?" he asked. I felt a little sweaty. A week earlier I had called for a chat and we'd arranged the lunch but I hadn't invited anyone else. So Rex started ringing around but everyone was out or busy. It was just me and him.

He was uncomfortable. So was I.

On the way down in the lift he told me that a guy he used to work with in Turkey was in the office that day and wanted to have lunch with him. Rex had to find him to tell him he couldn't make it. For a moment I had thought that he wanted to invite him along. That would've done it. I'd have been sitting mutely by as these two old mates caught up with each other. I began to feel like a real nuisance, an obligation. Wasn't he the one who'd asked when I was coming in to lunch? As he spoke to me in the lift, I looked intently at him, looked seriously at his face, looking hard to see him. He grinned and affectionately and very lightly touched my hair.

I'd forgotten that it was hot. We stepped out from the civilising influence of the air conditioning and almost at once were confronted with the strong hot wind. King Street was one of those unpleasant streets that had become a wind tunnel. Rex turned and began walking. I strode alongside him, with the wind rubbing against our faces. As we waited at the traffic lights I felt increasingly awkward and Rex seemed to be as abrupt to me as the wind.

Then he turned and faced me. Looking me up and down, he commented matter of factly, "You've gotten big!" And he didn't mean tall. I was desperate for some degree of pleasantness and wondered how long I could keep up a front.

"Oh," I replied lightly, "I guess that's so, these things happen." As though my changing body shape was one of life's natural happenings that I could reflect on calmly. But I was mortified. I felt hideous, just as I had earlier that morning in the department store. With the ridicule setting my cheeks a deeper pink I feigned interest in the passing traffic, turning my head slightly away to hide my lack of composure from Rex.

What did my changing body shape have to do with him, anyway? I raged within. Then Rex softened, patting his mildly increased girth, he added, "Well, I shouldn't talk, I could lose a bit." Now of course the conversation turned to food. "Do you like sushi?" he asked as we proceeded up King Street. My pleasantness was momentarily overcome as I squeaked out a "No!" I was in no mood for raw fish. I was in need of something familiar, something I could eat without embarrassing myself. He stopped abruptly and turned around. "Well, we'd better eat at the pub then," he said, flatly.

My relief was short lived as I realised he meant the Waterside Hotel. All images of a civilised lunch dissipated despite admonishing myself that the Waterside was a nice place to eat. The event was nearly saved as Rex informed me that the hotel had a nice formal dining room, and indeed it did, but in the doorway was a large black-board signalling my fate: DINING ROOM RESERVED FOR PRIVATE FUNCTION.

We shuffled around the corner of the narrow corridor and slid ourselves into the small space set aside for counter meals. There lay arranged a few tables and chairs, all remarkably small. As I wondered at the dimensions, Rex guided me into my seat. Our table was bang up against a yellow tiled wall which gave the room a nauseous urinal feeling. This room was smaller than the average lounge room and already it had at least twenty men in it, I being the only woman.

I endeavoured to savour my surroundings. The stench of beer and the sight of grisly unshaven men clutching transistors to their ears reminded me of my childhood and being sent into the pub to get my father. Once he ordered me a gin squash when I was eight. A grown man too embarrassed to order his daughter a simple lemonade, I still don't understand it. I shared this recollection with Rex. With a mere

shift of facial muscles he conveyed disapproval, mixed with a "why did you tell me that?" kind of grimace. I had broken some kind of rule.

In my small chair by the wall I shrank to fit the scene. His distaste at my too-personal remark made me feel loose in my shoes. With my bright face smiling, my eyes warmly conveying ease, I tried not to hear or see the dissonant forces at work. My friendly blue eyes offered acceptance and understanding as I diplomatically sidestepped Rex's abruptness and he warmed to my nice-person demeanour; his own blue eyes outsparkling mine.

He looked as though he completely filled his shoes, as he filled his suit, as he fitted his skin so neatly; no hidden seams. Unlike me. I kept my seams fuzzy, no telling where my seams were. My soft, too white flesh didn't lay meekly on my frame, it covered my bones in generous mounds. There was nothing wrong with that, but this generosity left nothing hidden. Yes, these are my breasts, my hips, my thighs; that all could survey, protruding unshyly, that my clothes would try to keep unknown. My body was okay, it was me, that mystical force that drove the body, that was wondering where this lunch would go next.

A man in a coat with metallic lining sidled up to our table but before I knew what he wanted Rex had dismissed him with the wave of his arm. Now we looked across at one another and smiled. We exchanged considerate enquiries as to each others' health, happiness and future. I admitted that I had not been feeling well, despite others remarking to the contrary and he readily conceded, adding that I did look overweight. I could now only attempt to somehow appear to enjoy the lunch and his company because inside I felt as though I was hugely deformed, that this was obvious to all and that I must accept it matter of factly. But acceptance didn't fit easily with me, at least not today.

But I began to suspect that the way I was feeling had as much to do with the way I saw myself as it had to do with anything Rex had said. One of the greatest things about Rex was his honesty and candour. I'd always admired him for that strength, along with his compassion and kindness. He had a gentle and forgiving heart, there was a sweetness in his character that had endeared him to me. And I had always felt comfortable and secure in his presence, never imagining his words would do anything but protect me. I tried to feel close to him.

Soon, after he gallantly ordered and paid for our lunches, the spiralling (downwards) of my self esteem could abate; as his friend from Turkey and another middle-aged man pulled up two chairs at our table.

Rex did point out to Tom and Geoff, if those were their names, that a nearby table lay vacant. The implication seemed to evade them and for a moment Rex and I were one, in our joint exasperation. As I listened to their conversation which circled around the various inequities, disappointments and general grievances within their lives, I could see that Rex wasn't feeling all that comfortable. Tom and Geoff were impervious to my presence or saw no need to alter their stance on any matter.

One of them, Tom or Geoff, began a tirade that covered women, migrants and his distaste for inner city living. On this last point his prejudices were strangely cross-linked as he explained, righteously, that in certain ethnic groups the women had to walk several steps behind the men. And the women, he noted, meanly, did not dress like real Australian women, which he seemed to consider himself an authority on. He'd recently bought a semi-detached house in Brunswick and the conclusion to all this was that he didn't want to live in the same street as any of these

people but it was all he could afford. The tone of injustice in his voice was obviously embarrassing Rex.

Ironically, Rex appeared concerned that Tom and Geoff were offending me with their stridency. Quite hastily the lunch was over. Rex ushered me out, as though not a minute too soon, away from the effrontery he'd felt too keenly for me.

Today there are six of us having lunch. Everyone is laughing over a joke but as I sit across from Rex I wonder if he's recalling that moment when we left the Waterside hotel. There on King Street walking slowly towards his office, an air of sensitivity linked us, unexpectedly.

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## MARTIN R JOHNSON

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### Lunchbreak/life-pause

Full-bellied and dozing with rain  
splashing on the roof, wind swarming  
through the trees, radio signal crackle  
in the speaker, warm in my fur-lined coat  
and boots for work,

a voice; a woman snaps my dreaming  
with her black/white tongue: "Y'know?"  
she says, punctuating every phrase  
that flooded out her heart and past  
life with wine,

and friends and family dying one by one  
in culverts by the park or prison cell,  
or at the end of a raging fist,  
"all we want is a house to live,  
and a bus to take us to the funerals"

the stiff wind tugged at my sleeve  
like the unknown fingers of her hand  
as I went between the trees, starting up  
my chainsaw to resume my life  
like the announcer signing off.

## At Last, The Messenger Has Come

He pulls me to my feet, me,  
Ruth, the prophet's daughter,  
and I see he is naked above  
a pair of white socks. Looking  
down, I notice I too am naked,  
my body amazingly smooth, pink  
for a woman of eighty-five.  
The messenger's skin is warm,  
soft as a puppy's and whiter  
than wool, his eyes as blue  
as tears, as gas pilot lights.

I shiver and he puts his arms  
around me. We are standing  
on my father's grave and the ground  
beneath our bare feet is humming,  
is clear as ice. Looking down I see  
my mother and father, side by side  
in the ground, looking the same  
as the day they were buried,  
except Father's beard has grown  
long and wrapped around Mother  
like a white blanket, and Mother's  
hair, grown long too, lays beneath  
their heads like a pillow.

Under our feet, Father's hand  
opens, and I see the Prophecy  
tattooed there, warm and worn  
in his palm: *BORN. A SON.*

This is crazy, I say, shaking,  
laughing. It always has been,  
the messenger says, holding me.  
I remember Sarah, who  
was ninety-one when she laughed  
in her tent and ninety-two  
when she bore Isaac.

We lay together in the grass  
as my mother long ago told me  
men and women did. And in the sky  
above us biplanes and monoplanes  
circle, singing: *GLORY! GLORY!*  
or maybe *A BOY! A BOY!*  
"How is it possible," I ask, "for me  
to bear a child?" The messenger's  
smile is like lightning.  
All things are possible, he says.  
All things. And down below  
I see my brother Eli, old  
as Methuselah, waiting  
in the doorway of my house.

## Sailing from Byzantium

I.

I have left those sages, left their cooling  
Fire, let them pray in plenitude by walls  
Pock-marked with their ages, all ruling  
Passions gone, their words tumbling down a well.  
What need have I with blunted, drooling  
Wisdom that intrudes, destroys my counsel?  
Such knowledge have I taken, the universe  
Has forced all thought like coins from out my purse.

II.

Let the young lie in one another's arms,  
Past caring and denial, past prophecy  
And perspicacity: the scholar learns  
Little that will warm his bed, heed his plea,  
Or add one minute to his gnarled span.  
Let them sing like the sea-wash, let them be.  
I would, for such simplicity, sail again  
Into childhood's murk, through adulthood's rain.

III.

A young man, though, not so grand a product,  
A flashy coat with threadbare lining, bold  
Until he sees a mirror, rude conduct  
Little troubling him, nor words of the railing old  
Who can no longer strut or dance or select  
Their chance from lottery bowls the fates hold.  
For my monument a pile of leaves waiting  
For a fire, or ice on which to go a-skating.

IV.

No such form as hammered gold would I take  
To live again, but something corporeal  
And small, a lizard or perhaps a snake  
That lives in hedgerows outlasting gale  
Or drought, a fish not comprehending its lake,  
Fly that copulates in air, the darting eel.  
Leaving behind all of Byzantium  
I would sing of nothing, all that hasn't been.

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DAVID KELLY

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## Weightlift

His wide placed hands feet at home  
on the barbell's cross-hatched chrome.  
From a calm and easy stance  
he moves into something tense  
becoming hard like the iron  
and programmed for the grooved line  
that he will force the weight through.  
His arms do what they're told to:  
a motion firm, yet fluid,  
pistons and great weight upward.  
Wedlock of mind and body  
will keep it high and steady –  
an inverted triangle  
of hard bar, harder muscle.

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# DOROTHY WILLIAMS

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## Mouse

*"Wee sleekit tim'rous  
cow'rin' beastie!"*

Living in error,  
he's never read Burns.  
Feast interrupted  
he turned boldly  
set his dainty feet  
among soiled tissues  
and biscuit crumbs.  
Steadfast eye-beads  
glistening jet,  
alert dispassionate,  
commanding respect.  
Good morning, Mouse!  
With instant decision  
he hickory-dickoried,  
wrist, shoulder, hair,  
materialized  
two rooms away  
and vanished.

Modestly retired  
behind an afternoon poster  
he was quite unconcerned  
about a carefree tail  
curved against the wall  
in negligent caress.

Again he goose-steps  
on my midnight ceiling.  
On the shelf, the trap  
lies limp and still.

### The Last Man of Letters?

Jack Lindsay (1900-1990) may have been the last great man of letters. Along with a great deal of editing and translating, his curriculum vitae includes almost every literary form. Poems, novels, histories, biographies, plays, articles, reviews and a vast correspondence clattered off his portable Remington. More than 150 published books. In old age he admitted that when he saw a list of his works he thought of someone chained to a typewriter, "a horrid example of verbosity," though what he claimed to remember of his life was "gardening, bathing, going for long walks, contemplating nature."

Jack Lindsay deserves to be more widely appreciated. Today he is probably known less in his own right than as a son of the artist and writer Norman Lindsay, a fact that would doubtless irritate both men. Their relationship was fraught, marked by years of separation in Jack's childhood, a period of idolisation in early adulthood, a bitter falling out in the late twenties, and many decades of unbridged distance during which there were intervals of friendly letters but no real reconciliation.

There are many reasons why Jack Lindsay has remained relatively inconspicuous, but the main one was his insistence on being a generalist, an old-fashioned "man of letters." During his lifetime well-educated lay readers steadily faded as a cultural presence and commercial force, but Jack tended to be suspicious of the modern academics which to a large extent replaced them, while his attempts to reach a popular audience were only moderately successful. In an era of professionalisation, specialisation and commercialisation, he clung fiercely to the belief that the intellectual's work is tainted by the pursuit of money, power or easy prestige. He deliberately addressed a wide and diverse audience. "To write only about what I already know thoroughly seems to me a tame job," he once claimed. The breadth of his outlook made many uncomfortable: his poetry seemed too philosophical, his politics too poetic, his fiction too political, his history too literary, his anthropology too historical.

Like many contemporary "public" intellectuals who mediate between and interpret specialist fields, he was happy to communicate in any available medium. In his seventies he was sending treatments (unsuccessfully) to BBC television. But while interdisciplinary approaches today appeal chiefly because they facilitate communication (among specialists, and between specialists and "the public"<sup>1</sup>), for Jack eclec-

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1. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* University of Minnesota Press, p.42.

ticism was a prerequisite of human liberation, of what he called, in his old-fashioned romantic way, "brotherhood" (in the nineteen thirties) or "human unity" (in the sixties).

Even among sympathetic readers Jack's work inspired bafflement and indifference as well as admiration and fascination. How did he sustain his enormous enthusiasm and energy?

One resource was the English dissenting tradition: the Puritans' high-minded salvationism, faith in the validity of inner experience, anti-establishment scorn for the hypocrisies of "the world", and esteem for work as a sign of grace, all fused in the vivid figure of John Bunyan's Pilgrim. The Lindsay clan noisily sprang from a Calvinist background of the kind which shaped Milton, William Blake, William Morris, Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells. Jack also gravitated to political radicalism and in 1936 subscribed to the grand narrative of Marxism. Connection to the Communist movement, though sometimes troubled, inspired much of his work, although during the Cold War it also abetted his obscurity.

Norman in his typical way commented that "my son Jack, in order to get rid of me, became a Communist... These reversal antics of the son to the father only make me laugh. I heartily endorse them. Families can't split up too soon."<sup>2</sup> For Jack Communism was the logical outcome of a long immersion in Plato, Blake and Nietzsche. But he clung to the Party and a redemptive vision of Leninist politics long after common sense should have disillusioned him. Perhaps after all there was something in Norman's crude psychologising.

In reality Jack was no more a typical Communist than Blake was a typical Christian. The fundamental concept of his system was not exploitation but alienation, a concept avoided by the mature Marx. He depicted history in almost Manichean terms as a struggle between the self-division of alienation and a "higher level of human unity," the yearning for which is manifest in religion, art and politics. Marxism, in Jack's reading, reconciles the contradictions between these different modes of struggle. Religion and art are symptoms of alienation, and at the same time expressions of hope in its eventual defeat. A constant disciple of Zarathustra, Jack was always against "everything that submits to the divided situation and sees it as an eternal characteristic of human life".<sup>3</sup>

Jack's historicism is not far removed from cultural philosophies like those of Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade. Powerful mythic images recur in his work: two striking examples are the Transformation (studied in different ways by alchemy and the obscure materials science of rheology, both long-term Jack Lindsay interests), and the Goddess (Aphrodite, Helen, Cleopatra).<sup>4</sup> Such images function like archetypes, although he did not use the term, probably because of its vagueness and overtones

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2. Letters from Norman Lindsay to Margaret Carnegie, La Trobe Library MS 8585, Bay 9, Shelf 9/3d.

3. Decay and Renewal: Critical Essays on Twentieth century Writing ed Michael Wilding. Sydney: Wild and Woolley 1976, pp.443-444.

4. See "Alchemy" in *The Passionate Neatherd: a Lyric Sequence London Aphrodite* 5 April 1929 p.322; *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* London: Frederick Muller 1970; "Aphrodite" *Vision: a Literary Quarterly* 1, May 1923 p.11; *Helen Comes of Age* Fanfrolico Press London, 1927; "Helen Young" in *The Passionate Neatherd: a Lyric Sequence London Aphrodite* 5 April 1929 p.331; *Helen of Troy: woman and goddess* London: Constable 1974; *Last Days with Cleopatra* Nicholson & Watson 1935; *Cleopatra* London: Constable 1971. Jack's daughter was named Helen.

of idealism.<sup>5</sup>

Two crucial archetypes for Jack are the Initiation and the Shaman. The tripartite structure of initiation rites was analysed by van Gennep in 1908: separation (removal from society, dying), liminality (asociality, death, transition) and incorporation (reintegration with society, rebirth).<sup>6</sup> The rite of initiation is a universal expression of the need for unity: the initiate symbolically dies, throwing off the old life, and is reborn to a new life, restored to wholeness. Jack would claim that the pattern forms "the structure of all significant works of literature." He points out that Aristotle's analysis of tragedy corresponds closely to the initiation pattern: the separation of the initiate (*parodos*), the representation of death and resurrection (*peripeteia*, *kommos*), the revelation of sacred objects (*anagnorisis*), the teaching of hidden truths (*stichomythia*), and the transformed return of the initiated to the community (*exodos*). "The person who undergoes the experience of the artform is no longer the same person; he 'has died and been reborn'."<sup>7</sup>

The shaman archetype is closely connected with initiation.<sup>8</sup> The shaman "lives all the while at the point of tension which others feel only during their initiation".<sup>9</sup> He or she experiences a crisis of depersonalisation, typically associated with ingestion, fragmentation and dismemberment, which takes him to the brink of madness or death and leads to the acquisition of visionary powers: flying, shape-changing, clairvoyance, communication with animals and spirits. These powers enable the shaman to benefit his community by enacting a performance that incorporates dance, impersonation, and frequently illusion or trickery. The shaman fuses the pursuits of wisdom and utility in a *performance*, a symbolic re-enactment of ecstasy which heals by dramatising an ordeal of revelation.

The shaman pattern "combines much of the functions distributed later among poet, doctor, scientist, priest... the shaman takes over much of the group rituals and carries them on in complex dance-song-mime performances all on his own, especially assuming the role of leader and guide into the unknown... we might say that the shaman represents the individual who, at a different [social] level, becomes a particularly talented artist or scientist."<sup>10</sup>

*A Short History of Culture* stresses the dance aspect of the shamanic performance, sketching a materialist version of the theory, also advanced by Eliade, that "dance always imitates an archetype or commemorates a mythical moment."<sup>11</sup> Jack argues that rhythm is a biological phenomenon, stemming from the need for economy of effort in the tension between an organism and its environment. Conceptual systems like religion, art and science develop from the patterns of dance and work. They

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5. Eliade regarded archetypes as exemplary models or paradigms "revealed at the beginning of time and having superhuman and transcendental origin", the source of the ultimate meaning and value of all objects and acts (Lynda Jentsch-Grooms, *Exile and the Process of Individuation* Valencia: Albatros ediciones Hispanifolia 1986, pp.16-17). For Karl Jung they were fundamental elements of the unconscious, systems of readiness for action, not representations but representative possibilities. He believed them to be inherited attributes of brain structure, but also compared them to old riverbeds, to the immanent presence of a crystalline lattice in a saturated solution, to invisible wave-lengths of the "psychic spectrum", and to the sea to which all rivers wend their way (C. G. Jung, *Psychological reflections: A New Anthology of His Writing 1905-1961* ed J. Jacobi. Princeton: Princeton University Press 1970, pp.39-42).

6. Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1960.

7. *Decay and Renewal*, p.238.

8. The word derives from the Sanskrit *sramana*, and came to Europe via the Siberian Tungus, but there are comparable figures in many cultures, known as sorcerer, wizard, cleverman, karadji, wingirin, jongleur, giocolare, Gaukler, boh-moh. Gloria Flaherty, *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century* Princeton N. J.: Princeton University Press 1992.

9. Flaherty, p.43.

10. Flaherty, p.414

11. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader* Harper Colophon: New York 1975, p.138.

consist of "forms and images generated out of the productive sphere, the life-process, and developed through surplus energy in rhythmical fantasy, with the result of deepening men's grasp on reality."<sup>12</sup>

Jack Lindsay discovered the germs of these ideas in cultural theorists like Jane Harrison and the Chadwicks.<sup>13</sup> They provided him with an emotionally nourishing model of the role of the artist and intellectual and were also acted out in his personal life, as *Fanfrolico and After* shows.<sup>14</sup> They are a key to the aesthetics of his writing, which at its best and most characteristic conveys a sense of furious movement, of flows and counterflows, sudden twists and turns. It is as if reality is a turbulent body of water, the surface in the utmost confusion. The direction of movement is only intelligible away from the surface, in the depths. "The great artist will be found to exist somehow at the heart of the movement, the conflict, whatever may be the terms in which he interprets his position. In this sense, then, the most powerful and concentrated individuality will be found, if plumbed deeply enough, to reveal the social essence of the situation."<sup>15</sup>

Interest in the shamanic aspects of poetry, art and philosophy is widespread in Western intellectual traditions and can be traced back from Joseph Beuys to Arthur Rimbaud and the Romantics to Paracelsus and beyond.<sup>16</sup> The image of the shaman is found in Plato, Jack's earliest intellectual paragon. In the *Symposium* Socrates is playfully compared to the pipe-playing satyr Marsyas, whose tunes "are capable of sending men into trance and so distinguishing out those who yearn to be initiated into sacred mysteries."<sup>17</sup> *Theaitetos* pursues the idea more seriously, depicting wisdom not as penetration or immersion, but as a shamanic flight.

When the philosopher drags a man upwards until he is ready to abandon such questions as "What wrong have I done to you or me?" and to consider justice and injustice in themselves... or to cease quoting lines about "the happiness of rulers" and "men possessed of wealth", and concentrate on the meaning of rule and all the business of human happiness and misery... then indeed our philosopher comes into his own. This time it is the other who feels dizzy — dizzy from hanging at such an extraordinary height and gazing downward from mid air... (the philosopher has) acquired the kind of discourse which alone can properly celebrate the life divine, and the life of truly blissful men.<sup>18</sup>

But this *rising above* was not for Jack. The intellectual should not be separate but

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12. *A Short History of Culture: From Prehistory to the Renaissance* London: Studio Books 1962, p.16.

13. Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual*. Oxford University, 1948 [1913]; H. Munro and N. Kershaw Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature*, 3 volumes. Cambridge University Press, 1932-1940.

14. *Life Rarely Tells*, Ringwood Vic: Penguin 1982, pp.493 ff, especially pp.721-753.

15. *Decay and Renewal*, p.373.

16. There are striking resemblances between Jack and the 18th century German polymath J. G. Herder, an early advocate of the shamanic theory of art who linked Chaucer, Spenser and Shakespeare with the magician-poet skalds and bards of early Northern Europe, Siberian shamans, Orpheus, and the troubadours and minstrels of the middle ages (J. G. Herder, "Von Ähnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst," *Samtliche Werke* ed Bernhard Suphan, Vol 19. Hildesheim: Georg Olms 1893). Both produced large and diverse outputs, in which poetry and history are central. The *leitmotiv* of their mental travel was organic unity, the vital co-existence of many-in-one and one-in-many. They condemned the "mechanism" of Cartesian method and were fascinated by the strangeness of time, the way the past is always immanent in the present (Jack Lindsay, "The Concept of Time in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*" *Sinn und Form*, *Thomas Mann Number*, 1965; "Time in Modern Literature" in Frank Benseler (ed), *Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Georg Lukacs* Luchterhand: Neuwwid and Berlin 1965, both in *Decay and Renewal*).

17. Plato *Symposium*, § 214-215.

18. Plato *Theaitetos*, § 175-6

must plunge in, even at the risk of being swallowed or cut up. In a 1963 essay on "The Alienated Australian intellectual" he upbraided Australian writers for "jeering" at their national culture. He complained that they were "quite outside the thing they describe: they are cut-off and view the idiot scene from the other side of the asylum wall." It was the duty of intellectuals to respond to the pressures of alienation from *within* the "idiot scene."<sup>19</sup>

For Jack Lindsay human freedom was "a question of the extent to which the individual realises his place in the living and moving whole of the moment, and to which he is able thereby to achieve an integrated wholeness in himself and in his relations to the outer totality." "Born out of struggle," it is "the moment of precarious balance which has unbalance before it and after it" and "somehow includes these two imbalances inside itself, as the present including both past and future in its dynamic transition."<sup>20</sup> The moment of freedom is a dancing outside the determinations of ordinary existence, an opening to what Eliade calls "hierophanic time."<sup>21</sup> The river of history flows to an inexpressible sea, and as the artist drowns in it he — or she? — catches an ecstatic glimpse of its immensity.

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19. "The alienated Australian intellectual" *Meanjin* 22/1, May 1963, in *Decay and Renewal*, p.248.

20. *Decay and Renewal*, p.387.

21. *Myths, Rites, Symbols*, p.162f.

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# CHOCOLATE WATERS

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## The Wild Man of Ninth Avenue

usually has yesterday's lunch enshrined on his lapel,  
"Gotta dollar?" he rasps.  
He's a high-class beggar,  
wears snakeskin pants and Cole Haan shoes  
that may have once walked Wall Street.  
Now he hangs out in the lobby of my bank,  
accosting unwary ATM users and  
raving about the evils of the Pillsbury Dough Boy.  
It doesn't matter where I go:  
the newsstand, the drugstore, the flower shop, Manhattan Plaza.  
"Hey lady, gotta dollar?"  
Last week he was terrorizing my local hang-out,  
lurching from table to table,  
some unpleasant secretion emerging from his nose,  
intimidating the patrons into handing over \$2.50.  
When the maître d' objected,  
the wild man punched him in the nose.  
He spent the night in jail for that.  
Next day he was back,  
grinning from the front page of my *New York Post*,  
headlining the latest article about the helpless homeless.  
I learned the wild man's name:  
Frank. It figures.  
Everyone I have ever disliked has been named Frank.  
Uncle Frank who pinched my crotch with  
his adult hands when I was eight.  
English teacher Frank who humiliated me  
for pointing out the "patently obvious."  
My fiancé Frank who married himself.  
Frank was at my bus stop yesterday.  
There was something icky protruding from his beard.

"Hey lady, gotta dollar?"  
I rummaged through my pockets.  
"Frank," I said,  
"Here's my heart."

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## OUYANG YU

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### **A Blind Fortune-teller Tells Me That**

If you are ugly  
You must have a beautiful wife, or vice-versa

If you have children now  
You must have turned your love elsewhere

If you were solitary in your childhood  
You'll remain so until your death

If you love moon more than sun  
It is proof enough that you are not loved

If you love thinking more than eating  
You are destined to suffer for life

If you love freedom more than serfdom  
You have not been used to the bars of prison

If you love poetry, my friend  
Better like me, give up your sight and go blind

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# TRACY RYAN

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## Psych Ward

### 1. Wake

At night the torch passes  
divining who sleeps -

who's touched  
by that unprescribable  
angel  
stirring the dead  
waters.

You thought  
oblivion would be better  
like sleep but bigger:  
a king wave.

.Instead you were dumped  
here and now, by day,  
we expect you to talk  
with a mouth full of grit  
a splitting head and  
by night  
to recede  
open or shut, like a shell.

## 2. Clay

It is colder & warmer than flesh & there is  
no centre to get at no  
end to it there is always  
more infinitely  
connectable,

it moves even  
under your feet  
like a fluid,

collects  
impurities  
which must be wedged  
out or worked with -  
every flaw a potential  
feature.

There is no plan to follow here, only  
what the mass itself suggests,  
you read it  
like an ink blot  
the eyes of a  
dreamer at lights  
out sensing the pulse.

Ready to feel  
your way in  
blurring the edges of  
earth & water it fits  
second skin  
takes your fingerprints  
& forgets them

Pick a tool peel back  
the accidentals  
surgeon or  
murderer as  
you choose

### 3. Phone

The voices are not  
here in our head  
but out in the real  
world.

They call.  
They decide  
when we will leave  
how we will go.

They say they tried  
earlier but  
couldn't get through.

This is the ward's hot-spot,  
this is where words crowd out,  
force connections.

This is where we learn  
each other's names.

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# JAMES SIMMONS

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## Living Together

Oliver's wife was drawn to men  
she said she despised. He could imagine  
her turned on by a British soldier,  
her little convent hands grown bolder  
reaching for loins in her frank way  
in the permissive society  
of privacy and drunken night,  
yet frightened of the social light  
being turned on. The cruel eyes  
of her own abused people despise  
her natural voluptuousness.

Such inward wars must have been less  
in the flush of love, but she had to feel  
daily eroding disapproval  
from her old mates, family, tribe.  
Domestic joy could seem a bribe to her,  
not him. The private weather  
of house and child, living together  
was nourishing, never a drag.  
She was his anthem and his flag,  
his king, his country, his religion.  
A bitchy friend was a clay pigeon  
their jokes and kisses could shoot down.  
a disapproving aunt's grey  
rejection drowned in love play.  
Details of Maeve's old loves, confessed  
thrilled him to hear of to the last;  
but his old flame grew yearly colder.  
He might have been a British soldier.

## REVIEWS

Jill Jones, *The Mask and the Jagged Star*, Hazard Press, Melbourne, Christchurch, 1992, 55 pp. *Flagging Down Time*, Five Island Press, Wollongong, 1993, 83 pp.

Jill Jones' first collection of poetry is filled with images of threat and breakdown; surveillance and panic; the soured and decayed. In a world where "there's been mass electro-convulsive therapy," poems focus on isolating and regulating mechanisms. Individuals move through familiar space experiencing panic: with no clear destination, the tram's apparent safe sway breaks into sudden swerves and "you slide on the wooden seat towards the open doorway." Of:

Hyperventilating in the supermarket,  
lost somewhere in a labyrinth  
of pet food, popcorn and poison,  
running aisles of obstacles and temptation,  
realising your health depends on memorising  
the food additive code,...

A sense of shattered community pervades; home is no longer a place but notion the poet carries in the "right-hand pocket" of her jeans, a myth like that of orderly Australian "lawns and fences."

Counterpointing this sense of crumbling modern life is a desire for "bushfire friendship razing the neighbourhood." Days when it doesn't seem "so hard" to love all that "ordinary and forgotten suburban ritual." Where points of surveillance are exchanged, and you are no longer the observed object, overlooked by balcony strangers following your every movement. Instead, you share a Sunday breakfast, croissants and strawberry jam. These are the "familiar rooms" and the "little rituals" which equal security for the poet. Where we "get in touch" and participate in "restructuring reality again."

*The Mask and the Jagged Star* thus maps the topography of urban life, setting up an insistent tension between stasis and flux.

Speakers are sometimes stationary, situated on balconies, or in elevated windows, watching scenes which form, dissolve and then reform. At other times speakers travel on trams or taxis, fixing hard-edged images in memory as well as texts.

Tension also characterizes the caustic rehearsals of relationships in these poems: when couples come together as well as fall apart. For example, "in our privacy" evokes momentary pleasures, when lovers choose to remain together "in our own capsule/with no windows" and "only an occasional glance/at the escape hatch." In contrast, we also read of "close calls," as in "Conversations with the engine running", where the speaker ditches a potential, but oppressive lover one night:

... i open the door and run  
decide to be like myself as if that's cheating  
the neighbourhood is cheering as i race  
down the driveway...

These short quotations are perhaps misleading, since all of Jones' poetry is not so demotic in style; but the daily, the domestic are certainly important focuses. Perhaps most characteristic of the collection is "soap opera salad", a poem which has been popular with my students. Here the "trivial," domestic image serves as Eliot advocated for the "objective correlative." The remains of a meal, uneaten during a domestic confrontation between lovers, signify emotion. Feta cheese sours while the poet:

...watches cold chardonnay  
bleed out of my glass in sympathy...  
and the cheesecake sagged and the coffee  
had already  
packed its bags and gone...

The poem also works through the irony, inversion and irresolution characteristic of Jones' work. For example, "soap opera" begins, "in our last fight you said pain was romantic," reminiscent of some of Margaret Atwood's acerbic portraits of "romance," such as in *True Stories*. Typically Jones allows no

resolution, the reader is uncertain to the end if "last" signifies the most recent or the final argument. The form, a dramatic monologue, adds to the undecidability; since the lover is present as addressee, we can only be sure that relationships are continually (re)configuring.

One of the reasons I like this collection is it has for me strong affinities with the work of New Zealand women writers I admire, particularly Janet Frame (the almost surreal rendition of suburban detail) and Katherine Mansfield. While I recognize this may be merely my own personal link, Jones herself declares her affinity. In "For Katherine Mansfield, one hundred years away," she quotes Mansfield's desire to "write *just the plain truth like a liar can tell it*." The poem also alludes to Mansfield's habit of collecting copy from the windows of moving vehicles in the phrase, "the traveller gazing through the window." Both these concerns with seeing and with telling are prevalent throughout *The Mask*. This link to Mansfield is perhaps not so idiosyncratic since both writers show concern with the immateriality of human life, the "meaning" of experience or of memory, as well as an interest in immanence of things.

Jones' second collection, *Flagging Down Time*, is also preoccupied with the architectonics of relationships and structures in space and time. Here too is decaying cityscape: midnight taxis, bars, discos, dust and broken buildings. The familiar tropes, food, the traveller, the focus on detail, and the immaterial "which one day could form something solid." This interest in the immaterial is announced in the first poem, "The power of a room" where the poet contrasts "things fixed but not permanent" with the immateriality of memory, specifically in memory of strong physical sensation, the "taste of varnish from old windowsills," or the "sound of wind that rattles windows," or the "way the air touches you, if its free or heavy." Jones' poems seem to suggest that living is about continually adjusting to new living arrangements and rebuilding memory.

We also find the same lyricism of longing

that characterizes the first volume, as in "The lamp and the sky." On the last, late night before shifting house, the speaker is solaced by a single reading lamp:

And halfway across the pillow  
of the half empty bed  
you begin to think this small light  
is stronger than the stars  
that can scarcely penetrate the city's glare.

Jones' poems are about desire, about knowledge, about knowing what we desire. But where the first collection is quirky, humorous and characterised by a colloquial voice, the second is more sombre, characterised by formality in form and voice. Not only is there an absence of humour, but also a sense of possible belonging. There is more travelling, fewer homecomings. The speakers seem destined to remain outside houses in the dark, going home alone, waiting in transit lounges in airports, caught alone "pacing up and down the empty corridors of the phantom zone." Or as the title of one poem suggests, "not quite belonging, anywhere, sometimes," where the speaker says:

"I'm sitting on top, always,  
of something deeper, with nowhere else to  
go,  
packing and unpacking, all over earth."

I look forward to Jones' third collection, hoping perhaps for the grace of the second collection and the humour of her first.

**Susan Ash**

**John Mateer, *Burning Swans*, Fremantle, Fremantle Arts Press, 104 pp., \$16.95.**

**Kate Llewellyn, *Crosshatched*, Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 110 pp., \$14.95.**

Which is more important to a poet, an ear or an eye? Contemporary Australian poets tend towards the eye, and these two collections show different effects of this choice. Much as I

do not wish to dispraise a young writer's first book, John Mateer's *Burning Swans* seems a little premature. The poems range from confessional verse, to "experimental" work (as the blurb calls it), and a concern for issues regarding Mateer's native South Africa, which includes "virtual translation" of his own verse written in Afrikaans. The "experimental" pieces are the least successful, often employing images which are brilliantly awful, but the use of which remains opaque, as in "That Stone" where the poet considers faces in a pub: "I peel mine off and flick / it away like a used condom". What I assume is meant to be taken as confessional poetry shows (as one would expect) concern with selfhood, sex and relationships, but much of this has difficulties with tone; suffering, I feel, from an inability to consider itself in any way other than totally serious. There are exceptions; "Chinese Curse" and "Discoveries" both, in their different ways, have witty endings. The poet's haunt is, suitably enough, North Perth which is figured as a kind of Antipodean beat version of the "City of Dreadful Night":

I hugged you for luck. Some homeless kid  
stared, half lost between us and the drug of  
the dark. I can hardly see. We'd looked in  
the windows of the Arcane Bookshop. *The  
Naked Lunch* was there with a new ugly  
cover that plaintively proclaimed "now a  
motion picture". (Fifteenth of April 1992)

There are moments when the interest in sex and violence converge, as in the discomfiting poem "Meat", and the concern for style sees a number of poems (too many) composed of a series of *non sequiturs* (such as "Other Midnights"). The difficulty in evoking discontinuity, the displacement of the self and such-like is that the poetry merely "becomes" these things. One is left with the feeling that the claim in "A Nonapologia" is unfortunately apt: "I have nothing to say / and I'm saying it..."

Unlike Mateer, Kate Llewellyn is obvi-

ously an established poet. Her fifth collection, *Crosshatched*, is to my ear (or eye) her best so far. It has the wit and the style of her previous collections, along with a broadening of scope and deepening of tone. Llewellyn is principally a poet of wit: who else could write of breasts the way she has, or describe feet as "our full stops" (in *Figs*)? Her prose works show that this wit can sometimes become fey, but in *Crosshatched* feyness is rare. This is probably because the collection is her most disciplined. (The punctuation of these poems is a nice development). "Men" indicates that her wit is as strong as ever, beginning "He is such a gentleman / that even when he's making love / you're astonished that he knows how". Other poems use punch lines which explode the poem's preceding argument, such as "Peace", which ends "I love peace / but it bores me".

Llewellyn's imaginative inventiveness is most apparent in the "mythical" poems of Section II, which are monologues or verse epistles by various mythical or semi-mythical women: such as Joan of Arc, Penelope, Dido (a technique previously used in *Luxury*). The poems re-write tragic or semi-tragic events as comic and domestic. (One can see why reconsidering myth has become popular with a number of feminist writers.) The lack of a comic trajectory gives "Pilate's Wife" a certain *frisson* that the others lack:

I tended the man  
as he grew feebler,  
going over and over the event,  
more and more convinced  
he'd had no choice  
except this future.

"Queensland Holiday", a fantasy in which the poet invites various Russian writers (such as Chekhov, Akhmatova and Pasternak) to stay, almost suffers from being too clever, but is redeemed by the wonderful ending, in which the poet is left "to post their letters, / to be peacemaker and cook." One of the collection's best poems, "The Chair" is also one of the simplest. The chair of the un-named Van

Gogh comes to stand, through becoming a "work", part of the artist's "prayer, / work."

Llewellyn is obviously a poet of the eye and examples abound, as in "Beach Walk": "The sun was falling / as if a child in China / pulled it like a kite". Her tonal control is mostly successful and at times is spot on: "We decorate our tiny trees / and the rain decorates a million" ("Blue Mountains Christmas"). There are, however, times when she overloads her images, as if impatient to reach the desired effect, such as "What is white / but the colour / of space and love?" ("Portrait of Man and Two Mares".) For all that though, Llewellyn's metaphorical imagination is on a tighter reign than previously; there are less of the strangely anarchic metaphors, such as this from *Honey*: "The details of life intrude like gorillas" ("Rome").

The poems in the last section demonstrate Llewellyn's enduring interest in the domestic, particularly food. These poems are just as successful as the poems to do with food in *Figs*, though "Potato" demonstrates a facility which Llewellyn's verse has suffered from in the past: "Baked, boiled or fried, / this little brown fist of food / is good when other fashions fade".

If there is a point of connection between these two collections it is a prosodic one: both, in general, maintain extraordinarily short lines. Due to the lack of regular rhythm this, perhaps ironically, can lead to a feeling of prose chopped up into lines. A longer line, as can be seen in Whitman and the Psalms, allows the development of a sense of cadence. The "breaking down" of the measure that Pound and William Carlos Williams (amongst others) expounded, has long ago lost the sense of a midway point between traditional prosody and the completely unmetred line, so it perhaps a little quixotic to lament its loss at this stage. Llewellyn's lines usually depend on syntax for their break and thus have a kind of sense to them, but her diction often naturally forms iambs which can lead to strangely metered lines, as in these trimetric lines in "Magpies": "They sang as if to praise / the

fountain in the tree". Occasionally this can lead to false expectations (as in the second last stanza of "April in Leura"), producing a strange sense of disjunction when the metrical line does not appear. Mateer's diction can be so thick as to impede any sense of flow, as in "Childish Star":

...Whoever  
countered their greatest fear stares  
unbendingly at the night-sky,  
questioning the obscure with its own  
intensified silence, with statements to  
provoke, if not themselves, my promulgate  
dawn.

This, if anything, shows the difficulty of making generalizations of free verse prosody, but it reminds us too, that poetry (however mysteriously defined) is as much to do with music as with vision, and that both are disciplines not willed into existence. Ironically, the difficulty of producing a sense of cadence in free verse may have produced an ideal of poetry which is image-based: poetry of the eye, rather than the ear.

### David McCoey

**F. Sionil José, *Three Filipino Women. Novellas*, Random House, New York, 1992.**

Founder and Secretary-General of the Philippines PEN Centre, publisher and bookseller, F. Sionil José is also one of the Philippine's leading writers. In *Three Filipino Women*, José explores the lives of three very different women, and, unerringly, the social, political and cultural fabric of his country. In these three novellas, impressions of the Philippines are confronting and unavoidable: the heat and poverty and backroom exchanges, dense vegetation and crowded cities. Nobody here has clean hands, nobody lives here who does not suffer.

Much of the delight in this text came for me from this encounter with the exotic, the unknown. But this fascination is allowed only

limited play. Time and again, José raises the cloth to the light, and it is rent and grubby as well as beautiful. Wealth and poverty, social concern and self-interest, desire for freedom and hunger for power, have been woven on the same loom. In the flowering vine, the *cadena de amor*, which grows profuse pink white in even the poorest areas, there lives a spider. Long of limb and with a small body, this spider is an excellent fighter. Without compunction, it will attack its own kind. This is the way of the world, and this is José's Philippines: the powerful tear the weak apart.

In the first novella, "*Cadena de Amor*", the narrator presents to us, documentary style, "the political biography of a woman whose personality has considerably altered our view of domestic politics during the last decade" (4). This text is a multi-layered exploration of a complicated personality, but, if it is a personality of contradictions, it is because the country in which Narita Reyes holds power is the site of many contradictions also. In a country where "the family is the beginning and the end", where patronage is "the old Filipino standby", and where wealth and power are the barriers from poverty, the narrator Eddie offers a telling insight:

That was the night I should have quit but I did not have the sense then to dichotomise my vanity, my needs, from the full meaning of integrity. I glowed with self-importance; I was an agent of change, and were it not for the likes of me, the forces of decay, of evil, would triumph. And looking at myself at the time I now realize why the technocrats in government today — for all their objectivity and decency — will never leave the corrupt regime not only because they have power and prestige but because they feel that without themselves in government, it could be worse. That, of course, is their highest form of delusion (50).

Ermi of "*Obsession*" is a prostitute; Roly, Ermi's would-be lover, some kind of pimp. It is the voice of Roly that tells Ermi's story. The telling is generated by his desire to possess her: how to do this when to make love to her

is to do what every other man has done? Like Eddie, Roly comes to understand that his own self-interest, his own activities, have rendered his behaviour as tainted as any form of prostitution. Although Ermi continues to work well beyond financial need, her prostitution is not the worst kind:

The obscenities in this country are not girls like Ermi either. It is the poverty which is obscene, and the criminal irresponsibility of the leaders who make this poverty a deadening reality. The obscenities in this country are the palaces of the rich, the new hotels made at the expense of the people, the hospitals where the poor die when they get sick because they don't have the money either for medicines or services. It is only in this light that the real definition of obscenity should be made. There is so much dishonesty today, not just in government but in business. Perhaps, sex is the only honest thing left (104).

Malu of "*Platinum*", is a political activist and idealist. Her life under the Marcos regime follows a pattern that is inevitable and inescapable in its outcome. It is not surprising that Malu's idealism should be so easily destroyed. The voices of Narita and Eddie, Ermi and Roly and Teng-ga (the narrator of this third novella), are voices troubled by their own relation to power, by the ease, and disease, their positioning causes. Against these, Malu's activism has only very limited agency.

An intriguing issue for me, and one of which perhaps the text is only half-aware, is the extent to which the three male narrators exercise control over their subjects. The title of the text may belong to them, but all three women are contained by the men in terms of narrative and physical desire. Interestingly, this has the effect of blurring textual focus: if sex is "the only honest thing", desire itself can often obscure. It is the independence of the women that so frustrates their narrators, all in the name of love: for Eddie, love is mixed in with his own desire for power; for Roly, because he seeks to possess the prostitute Ermi; and for Teng-ga, because his wife Malu

gives her life for her people before she gives herself to him.

The novellas then are as much about the lives of three Filipino men, and the subtler thread running through is the one of their desire to possess. If, as I suggested, the male narrators in part obscure the stories of these women, and it is only an imperfect reproduction we see, it is partly because their stories are presented through men's eyes, and partly because the world in which the women seek their own desire, is so very much an imperfect one.

But perhaps the delight of all fiction is, as Eddie discovers, that it is a process of frustrated desire: *Ligaw tingin, kantot hangin* (courtship by looking, fucking the wind).

### Georgia Richter

**Marian Eldridge, *The Wild Sweet Flowers: Alvie Skerritt Stories*, University of Queensland Press, 1994, 293pp. \$14.95.**

Marian Eldridge's first collection of stories, *Walking the Dog* (1984), included three Alvie Skerritt stories. In the first story, "Aubade", the reader encounters Alvie in her early teens, resentfully accepting the domestic responsibilities which the fourth pregnancy of her apparently indolent mother has imposed upon her. Later in the book, in the story entitled "Nuclear", the perspective shifts to that of Alvie's father, the shop-steward at the local paper mill. Mrs Skerritt is still expecting and, to his horror, Ray Skerritt finds himself driven by lust into bed with the matronly woman who has been temporarily hired to help in the house. In the title story, which concludes the collection, Alvie becomes infatuated with an insouciant young school teacher, despite her recognition that he is a con-man.

Eldridge's literary terrain is somewhat similar to that of Gillian Mears, insofar as both writers portray unpredictable and often destructive familial relationships, conducted

within Australian country towns. Mears, however, does emphasize the bleak and the grotesque to a far greater extent than Eldridge. Whereas many of Mears' stories are set in rural New South Wales, Eldridge focused for the most part on life in Victorian country towns in *Walking the Dog*. In her second and third volumes of stories, the range of settings becomes far more cosmopolitan.

Alvie Skerritt returned in five of the stories contained in *The Woman at the Window* (1989). In "Primavera", Alvie spends her school holidays at her aunt's house in Melbourne, and sets out to seduce her aunt's stepson, Philip Jennaway. In "Harvest", the Skerritts and their relatives, including Philip, visit Alvie's grandmother on New Year's Day. Alvie, who has not reciprocated Philip's enthusiastic correspondence during the intervening months, has to decide whether to take him seriously and establish an overt relationship with him. Because she thinks her friends will be impressed by Philip, she chooses to do so.

During Alvie's next visit to Melbourne, her aunt discovers the two teenagers asleep in Alvie's bed. This story, "Storm", ends with the imminent arrival of retribution, in the explosive form of Philip's furious father. The next story, "A Love Story", depicts the couple some years later, as tourists in Rome. Philip is now a university student and aspiring poet. In the final story, "The Woman at the Window", the Skerritt family drives to Canberra for a holiday, without Alvie, who has refused to accompany them. Her absence in the story and in the family circle is palpable, as is the absence of an explanation for the ending of her relationship with Philip.

These eight stories are re-published in *The Wild Sweet Flowers*, the only noticeable alteration being the name of Alvie's youngest sister, now Kate rather than Lurlene. However, the resituating of these stories, amongst eleven new stories which substantiate the history of Alvie between the ages of fifteen and thirty, and which flesh out the previously introduced characters who people her world,

invites the reader to bring a fresh response to them. The volume begins on the morning of the wedding of Ray Skerritt and Joan Lafferty, who is already pregnant with Alvie. Before he proceeds to the ceremony, Ray clumsily farewells another girl whom he loves. The idea of "the road not taken" — of choices blundered into, which will affect lives unforeseeably — recurs throughout the Alvie Skerritt stories.

The title story, the longest in the collection, is placed between "Harvest" and "Storm", and is centred upon Philip's mother Rose — or Rosamond, as she has re-styled herself. Rose herself once wrote poetry but, unlike her son, was discouraged early from regarding herself as an artist.

*So lay me by the wild sweet flowers of spring  
There let me lie or was it And let me die?  
Ere cold night falls  
My spirit calls  
And so I die*

She was very young. Her mother, who caught her writing it, said it was unhealthy, all that imagination in a little girl.

It is Rosamond who, Aunt Chrissie had informed Alvie in "Primavera", had refused Philip's father "his conjugals". Rosamond's extreme ambivalence about sex would account in part for her initial dislike of the cocksure, vulgarly painted and inquisitive Alvie Skerritt, who is staying in her home in order to attend her son's school dance. Alvie Skerritt has that rare, unearned ease about her body that makes some adolescents so irritating: to acknowledge that the irritation is actually envy would be too humiliating. Since her divorce, Rosamond has carefully seduced a series of men, having learned that "if you want a man to listen, you have to bloody pay him." Although Philip regards his mother as a slut, she receives no pleasure from her sexual encounters, other than a sense of power.

In "Nightshift", Alvie is viewed from another perspective, that of Beet, a middle-aged woman who works on the night shift at the post office, where Alvie has her first job.

Beet, like Rosamond, is irritated by Alvie's casual self-sufficiency, and is too distracted to notice that an unassuming workmate is attempting to woo her.

In later stories, Eldridge supplements the adventures of Alvie and Philip in Europe, sending them into the communal house of some German socialists at one point, and on to infidelity and the eventual disintegration of their relationship elsewhere. When Philip returns to Melbourne, Alvie stays on in Oxford. In the portrait of Alvie's temporary lover in "Kiss a Thief", Eldridge captures with acerbic accuracy a certain kind of Oxford student from the colonies, one who quickly acquires trendy political theories and an accent which could engrave steel, while remaining secure in the knowledge that he can always return to the home he has been reluctant to acknowledge. Alvie's infatuation with the repellent student is an aberration in her otherwise pragmatic management of her life. When she and Philip meet again after some years, Philip is considerably less innocent than when they parted.

Eldridge has dedicated *The Wild Sweet Flowers* to Gwen Harwood "who wanted more of 'that Alvie'." Harwood's choice of the demonstrative article is apt — whether Harwood meant it this way or not, Alvie Skerritt is the sort of girl who attracts this kind of expression of disapproval or suspicion, perhaps because of her penchant for recession fashion, or because her very overtness leaves her somehow elusive. In the end, Eldridge's Alvie and Philip aren't particularly "nice" people. They hurt other people, and sometimes simply use them, in their search for the meaning of their own respective lives. Alvie and Philip are plausibly quirky human beings whose motives, like those of our acquaintances, are never fully accessible to us. Perhaps Eldridge will continue their unconventional, episodic love story in another book.

**Heather Neilson**

**Adib Khan, *Seasonal Adjustments*, St. Leonards, NSW. Allen and Unwin, 1994, pp.297, \$14.95.**

As Alison Broinowski illustrated in her pioneering work, *The Yellow Lady* (1992), Asia and all things Asian have long "played the muse" to Australian artists. More recently, however, the focus has shifted slightly, and the portrait of Asia we are offered now is increasingly one seen through the eyes of Asian born Australians. In *Seasonal Adjustments*, his first work of fiction, the Bangladesh-born Adib Khan leads us on a journey back to his birthplace. As the novel's main narrator tells of the daily situations he encounters during his first return to Bangladesh in eighteen years, he is constantly forced to reposition himself, both as a Bangladeshi coming home, and as an Australian away from home. "[L]ooking at life with borrowed eyes" (7), the Bangladeshi/Australian Iqbal Ahmed Chaudhary moves (un)easily between two cultures, two languages and a number of places. In its thematic and structural modes Khan's novel is reminiscent of Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* (1983), since in both novels a literal journey acts as a catalyst for a more personal one of self-discovery.

*Seasonal Adjustments* is a novel about belonging and displacement: "... for the migrant the word *home* is fraught with ambiguities"(61), and to be a migrant is to be always yet *never quite* at home. As the narrator remarks:

You live in a perpetual state of conflict, torn between what was and what should have been. There is a consciousness of a permanent loss. You get sick of wearing masks to hide your confused aloneness. You can never call anything your own, But out of this deprivation emerges an understanding of humanity unstified by generic barriers (143).

This is Khan in full flight, railing against the evils he perceives in any society — greed

and bigotry, envy and hatred: "A Bangali can be just as indifferent, mean, egotistical, loving, creative, heroic, generous, humane, cruel and greedy as an Australian" (143). It is also Adib Khan at his most philosophical, and didactic, but his analysis of the condition of migrancy and exile are remarkable in spite of it. The outsider in Iqbal's Australian self writes thus of his Australian father-in-law:

What makes me unacceptable to Keith, even dangerous, is not my colour or my background. It is my refusal to uphold what he considers to be the immutable virtues of every Australian — a blind devotion to the RSL, a life-long membership of the Liberal Party and an undying belief that Australia should draw all its spiritual and cultural sustenance from Europe, even in the distant future (86).

Keith is typical, in an almost Lukácsian manner, of that Australia which sees itself "as an emblem of civilisation in a region of unenlightenment"(71), an Australia which views with unease the current political and cultural *rapprochement* with Asia. As an Asian/Australian writer and an academic Khan is clearly aware of the issues which currently pull at the heart of our sense of national selfhood. And for the migrant the question now is not so much "*Where do you belong?*"(9), but, more importantly, "*how do you belong?*". The novel is then clearly concerned with the ways in which an Australia of the future will recognise, and incorporate the richness of its diverse peoples and their cultural backgrounds. Keith is also a staunch Catholic, and there are lengthy debates between Iqbal, a lapsed Muslim, and Keith, whose portrait as the upholder of the Christian faith against the invading hordes of bowing and leg-crossing infidels at times verges on caricature. Interestingly, in its focus on the dis/similarities between Christianity and Islam, *Seasonal Adjustments* is suggestive of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, if only by its studious undoing of dogma and ignorance. "Doubt is the central condition of a human being in the twentieth

century", wrote Rushdie. "Doubt is a sharp, shooting pain which strikes without warning" (9), echoes Khan somewhat more melodramatically. Doubt is also the "constant variant", to borrow Khan's own words, in the migrant's experience: a persistent ambivalence towards the past, the present, and the future. Khan's propensity towards a well reasoned argument frequently takes the novel into the realm of the philosophical treatise. It is only his sharp wit and the biting tone of his satire which ultimately undermine the novel's ponderousness:

With some trepidation I make my way to the dining room. All pretensions of civilised behaviour have disappeared. The guests elbow, shoulder and shove their way to the row of tables against the wall. Like hyenas feasting on carrion flesh, they drool and gnash their teeth as they lean over the family's finest china to pile their plates with bread, rice and meat (135).

The use of a Bangladeshi/Australian narrator deeply ambivalent about the extent to which he no longer *feels* Bangladeshi but who simultaneously hesitates to call himself Australian allows Khan to explore the complex process

through which prolonged migration destabilises, and contextualises, the notion of a "national identity". Slowly, as he immerses himself in the "spiritual womb"(2) which Claire, his Australian friend encouraged him to seek, Iqbal Ahmed Chaudhary realises that to "go back ... and find the past" (2) is not always easy, if at all possible. "Nothing is different ..." (4), he comments on his arrival in Bangladesh, but nothing is the same either. For what the migrant/exile would have called "the past" — his or her past — has long been re-created by, and through the daily rituals and experiences of the vast majority who stayed behind. Peter Carey, another Australian writer, is fond of claiming that in post-colonial societies we are freer than most to "make ourselves up". As Khan demonstrates in *Seasonal Adjustments* the migrant and exile is only too aware of this (li)ability. This is a well written, and deeply felt work, and the journey which Adib Khan's narrator invites us to take to his "imaginary homeland", Rushdie's "Indias of the mind", is truly an enjoyable one.

**Tony Simoes da Silva**

*Westerly* apologises for the typographical errors in Michael Denholm's review of *Australian Women Artists* by Caroline Ambrus which appeared in the No. 1 Autumn 1994 issue.

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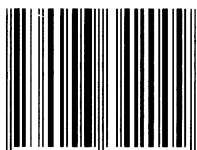
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