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Westerly's editors wish continuing success to this affiliation with *Salt* and the new, annual *Westerly.*

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PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The Editors have pleasure in announcing the winner of the Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contribution to *Westerly* in 2000

Maggie Joel

for her stories "A Mile from Grapple X"
and "In Search of Lost Angels"
that appeared in the No. 45, 2000 edition

AMANDA CURTIN

THE PROSPECT OF GRACE

> The suicide "goes away", and the survivors are forever in the wrong. They are like the damned, who can never make amends, who have no prospect of grace.
> Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*

23 SEPTEMBER 1999

Today a bronze statue is bolted to the sea floor off Fremantle, near the site of the former Robb Jetty abattoir. Here is a horse facing out to sea, away from the shore. It is distressed, head threshing, nostrils aflare with the prescience of blood. Here is its rider, beyond fear, beyond feeling—impassive in bronze in a way he could not have been in life at this, his last sentient moment. Facing the other direction, he takes in what would have been the wake of the horse's wallowing through the aquamarine shallows to this deeper blue. See how he stares at what is now the dog beach. What was he seeing then?

Without, apparently, a trace of irony, the sculptor expresses his hope that this work of art will allow people to see beyond the suicide of Charles Yelverton O'Connor, Western Australia's engineer-in-chief during the period of the colony's most ambitious public works.

This work of art, which alchemises anguish into bronze...

11 MARCH 1902: A FUNERAL OF MEN

The mile-long cortege of 100 vehicles left the O'Connor residence in Beach Street, Fremantle, at 4.00 p.m. According to the *Western Mail*,

there were so many wreaths that they covered the hearse and filled a second carriage. Following were the chief mourners—O'Connor's sons, Roderick, Frank and Murtagh—the pallbearers, the ministerial carriage, the Harbour Works carriage, and 150 employees from the Fremantle Harbour works and the Coolgardie Water Scheme. "It is estimated that about a thousand gentlemen followed the funeral procession, while several thousand members of the public were assembled along the route."

18 MARCH 1902: SUSAN LETITIA

It is unseemly, so soon, to have ventured out alone. It is dangerous to be here, on this isolated shore, the jetty deserted, the smelting works far enough away to lie silent, a smudge of black on the blue and white seascape. One hears stories about women being attacked in the scrub behind the dunes. It is beyond comprehension that she should have taken off her buttoned leather shoes, her fine lawn stockings. The black taffeta skirt, with its layers of petticoats, balloons out in the wind, then collapses round her knees like a sail becalmed.

The breeze is damp with the spray of unseen waves, and it begins to settle on her. As she takes a step forward, the taffeta drags through sand, pulling at the empire-line seam below her heart. Strands of wheaten hair escape the cap of tight little curls and fly. The cameo at her throat sweats.

See the way she looks down. She has never before experienced the sensation of wet sand squelching through bare toes. There are few times in a lady's life when bare feet, hers or anyone else's, are acceptable. Susan Letitia O'Connor has always been a lady.

His blood is here, in this ocean. This is where he chose not-her. Even as she thinks this, she can hear soft voices reassuring, dripping sympathy as they sip her tea.

It was too much...The strain...They ought not to be allowed...

Yes, yes. She is impatient with rational pity, wishes to be free of it and to be alone. Here, where no one will hear, she will say it. *He chose not-me. I did not do enough. I was not enough.* She will sink to her knees in taffeta and scream.

NOVEMBER 1997: RITES

People are jostling shoulder to shoulder. There are furtive glances scanning the cathedral, to see who is here, who is not, what can be gleaned from the seating arrangements, what the appropriate attire is deemed to be for this theatrical version of the rite of last respects. Television cameras pry for the same answers, their lenses met with hostility, or a tear, or both. The whole country breathes with this congregation.

There are tributes, of course: expressions of homage, sorrow and praise for this man in the carved coffin strewn with purple irises and one golden tiger lily. And there are reproaches hushed under breath for the woman in the front pew, barely conscious with grief, garishly made up and trussed in lycra.

A shout comes from the gallery, and a face leans over, flushed and craving, skewed from neck to ear with the knot of a noose. *He's dead, Paula. He hung himself. This is how he died.*

I suppose there may be worse obscenities than this.

BIDDY REMEMBERS

On the morning of 10 March 1902, Bridget O'Connor awoke feeling unwell with a head cold, and told her father she would not join him on their usual dawn ride across the sand dunes and along the pristine beaches of Fremantle. He drank a glass of warm milk and shut the door to his office. His groom saw him just before he rode off alone. "He was looking back towards his own house..."

Biddy went on to marry the wealthy pastoralist Ernest Lee Steere in 1909 and had six children. She tended her family and their spacious home, took a prominent role in the social life of Perth, worked actively for the Girl Guides and the Young Women's Christian Association, opened art exhibitions, wrote letters, pottered around her beloved garden, won prizes for her Wyandotte fowls, occasionally travelled overseas with her husband, took responsibility for her ailing mother's wellbeing, sent food parcels to her artist sister Kate in Paris during the Second World War, and in 1959 became Lady Lee Steere.

In the 27,851 days of her life following that morning in March 1902, was there one in which she did not think, *If only...*?

KINDER

Michael Hutchence was found naked, kneeling on the floor of his hotel room, arms resting on his legs, and a belt—its buckle broken—hanging from the back of the door above him. There were traces of semen on his thighs.

The coroner ruled that it was suicide, citing Hutchence's "severely depressed state", and his chaotic ingestion of substances—beer, wine, vodka, champagne, cocaine, Prozac—in the hours before his death. According to the official verdict, there was no evidence to suggest auto-eroticism. There was no other person involved. No inquest was necessary.

After the first brutal shock is over, Paula Yates contests, loudly, these findings. Her pendulum of grief has swung wildly from accusations of murder against her former husband to tortured self-recriminations, and now it draws to a fragile rest on denial.

It could not have been suicide, she says. He would have dressed. He would have written a note. He would never have deliberately abandoned their daughter.

The corollary she will not say: *He would never have abandoned me.*

KNOWN FOR HER TURNS

The Western Australian Government passed a Bill to secure an annuity of £250 "to sustain Susan Letitia O'Connor for her life".

It was said among family and friends that she was a born actress, known for her "turns". They may have sustained her more than the annuity bestowed on her life by a grateful, guilty legislature.

MARCH 1941: THE KINDNESS OF LETTERS

Virginia Woolf inadvertently rehearsed her suicide, but she learned from her mistakes. Her first attempt was undone by the lightness of the fabric of her coat...

The muddy bed of the Ouse sends eddies around her feet and sucks at her shoes. She tries to force herself down into the soft sediments—but the coat, the damned coat. Its closely woven gaberdine fibres hold fast, proof against the weight of the river. It floats out around her, suspending her here on the surface, resisting her attempts—becoming ever more feeble—to sink into oblivion. She could remove the coat, but the raw resolve has, for now, gone.

In a crisis of courage, she has lost to the stubborn will of a summer gaberdine wrap.

She returns home, tells Leonard that she—so clumsy—fell into the dyke, retrieves the letter she had left propped up on the desk of her sitting room.

This first letter, addressed to Leonard, "Dearest", is itself a death, its words of effacement an erasure. He is patient and good; she is mad. He is responsible for her greatest happiness; she is spoiling his life. He could work, were it not for her; she can no longer read or write. Her gift to Leonard is exoneration: "If anybody could have saved me it would have been you." A kindness.

Ten days later, she leaves her dusting—a chore the maid later says Leonard assigned to keep his wife's agitation at bay—and strides out again over the water meadows, down to the river, this time wearing a thick fur coat. She takes no chances, weighting the pockets with smooth river stones to ease the drowner's leave-taking, necessarily violent because it must defeat the primeval urge to breathe.

It is not until three weeks later that her body emerges near the bank exactly opposite the place where she had gathered her stones and laid aside her walking-stick.

She has left another letter, repeating the words of the first, anticipating his guilt and absolving it: "Nothing anyone says can persuade me."

For Leonard, the prospect of grace.

THE MYTH

Several generations of Western Australian schoolchildren grew up believing that C. Y. O'Connor killed himself after losing confidence in the viability of his Goldfields Water Scheme, one of the most ambitious engineering undertakings ever conceived. The day after, so the story goes, water reached Kalgoorlie through O'Connor's 600-kilometre-long pipeline.

Of course, these details are false. It was not until three weeks after O'Connor's death that the pumps at Mundaring were switched on, and another ten months before the reservoir at Kalgoorlie began to fill with cool, clear water diverted from the catchment of the Darling escarpment. And although O'Connor

was suffering from overwork, insomnia, and relentless vilification by the *Sunday Times* over alleged maladministration of the project, he never doubted the soundness of his design, or that the pipeline would succeed in bringing water to the desert.

To those schoolchildren of the middle decades of the twentieth century, however, O'Connor's death "by his own hand" was a romantic tragedy, as well as an object lesson in the rewards lost to those who give up. A collective sigh, and each child shared the same exquisite thrill of agony for the man of the pipeline legend: *If only he had waited one more day. If only...*

NOVEMBER 1933: TRUE MATES

He was seated in a chair on the back verandah, and may have been there all day and all night and half the next day before drawing his war service revolver to his head and firing.

Hugo Throssell—soldier, horseman, winner of the Victoria Cross, neophyte socialist, failed entrepreneur, loving husband and father, guilt-ridden adulterer, insomniac—left a note pencilled on the back of his will, appealing to the state for financial support for his family in recognition of the toll taken on his health and sanity by his experiences in the Great War. He added a note for his wife, who was away travelling in London and Russia: "No man could have a truer mate."

Katharine Susannah Prichard's grief was compounded by guilt. She had left, in the house, the draft manuscript of a novel dramatising the slow disintegration of a marriage, and the final resort of the husband to suicide. Unable to bear the possible consequences of her art, she dismembered it, changing the ending and swallowing the bitterness of its creative failure like a punishment well deserved.

She remained living in that house, raising her son, channelling her love and fear and hope for the world into a prolific literary career. The Red Witch of Greenmount brewing words.

"It was unlucky", she wrote in one of her novels, "to have bougainvillea growing about the place." It grew profusely around her own back verandah, its fallen petals skittering across the floorboards and gathering in scarlet corners.

DEATH WAS INSTANTANEOUS

The report of the post-mortem examination is too viscerally descriptive to ever have come before the eyes of Susan Letitia.

Well nourished male, it reads. Considerable amount of blood in mouth and nostrils...A stellate wound (six fissured) on vertex of skull in scalp $1^{3}/_{4}$ inches in longest diameter...wound led by a jagged opening into the skull; piece of bone being missing...Slight rigor mortis. Black powder stains were washed from roof of mouth...Haemorrhaging in membranes at points of entrance and exit...Channel through brain on right side...Death was instantaneous...A bullet from the revolver produced would cause these injuries described.

The revolver belonged to his son Roderick, whose deposition stated that he had no idea how it came to be taken from the drawer in his desk. His father, he said, was not in the habit of taking a revolver with him on his morning ride. "He said nothing to me about being worried."

Constable Honner recovered the body and examined the scene, reporting that O'Connor's horse had entered the water at a canter. The tracks came out again near the jetty, which was splashed with wet sand "as if the horse had got a fright." There were no footprints.

The jury's verdict in the "Inquiry touching the cause of death" of C. Y. O'Connor, Fremantle Coroner's Court, 10 March 1902, was: "Death by his own hand...while in a state of mental derangement caused through worry and overwork".

LIKE A PUNISHMENT WELL DESERVED

Katharine grows on the back verandah, all day, all night, so long that she becomes one with the bougainvillea's stealthy possession of the rails and planking. It shoots slyly around her heels, curling across the laces of her shoes. She feels the light scratch of thorns, the pressure against her skin as the canes thicken and set around the shape of her limbs. One green tendril tests the pulse of her throat, then snakes up and across the bridge of her nose and around and around her skull, throwing out pale leaflets, buds, embryonic thorns. It explodes into a wreath of flowers and weaves into her hair and threads and braids, and suddenly her temples are pierced and the skin broken, and she is invaded by these bruise-purple

blooms, dry veins leaking their madness, and she is hallucinating in colours of flesh and blood the unseen but clearly imagined pictures she had by pure will banished and will banish now and will forget.

With a spasm, Katharine wakes, and remembers.

THE LETTER IN HIS OFFICE

An unsigned note, written in pencil, was found on his desk. "The position has become impossible...I feel that my brain is suffering & I am in great fear of what effect all this worry may have upon me— I have lost control of my thoughts. The Coolgardie Scheme is all right..."

He added a postscript: "Put the wing walls to Helena Weir at once." His biographer applauds the fact that the Chief's final words were for the water scheme.

No final words from Charles to Susan.

SUICIDE HAUNTED HER

Katharine Susannah Prichard's life was inscribed by three men she loved, to whom she was Kattie, Kate, Mother. Her son, Ric Throssell, once wrote that suicide haunted her. Hugo's death was not the first. In 1910, her journalist father, Tom Prichard, hung himself after years of unemployment and mental breakdown. His daughter, who had emulated him in her ambitions as a writer and had protected him when his own talents failed, writing his editorials and submitting them in his name, was scarred for life and could never bring herself to face the manner of his death. Hugo's suicide during the depths of the Great Depression blistered these scars, and although Katharine lived another thirty-six years, she did not remarry.

She was never to know that in 1999, Ric, as though conditioned, completed the triumvirate.

1999: "THEY SUNG HIM"

The Fremantle Aboriginal heritage walk gives visitors a Nyoongar version of the history of the port and the way Aboriginal people responded to the invasion by Europeans. The story of C. Y. O'Connor as told by the Nyoongar guide is not one of brilliance

and innovation, of a life cut short by tragedy. There is tragedy, but it belongs to the Aboriginal people whose ancient Dreaming track was drowned by O'Connor's dredging works to create a safe harbour at Fremantle. O'Connor could never be forgiven, and the tribes placed a curse on the man who trapped the spirits of their people in a grave of bilgewater and the salt of foreign oceans.

"They sung him", the guide says. "They got into his dreams."

2000: "A PIECE OF BONE BEING MISSING"

Imagine a boy climbing the twisting tendons of the horse's neck, one hand grasping the top of its head; the other steadying his weight on the solid shoulder of the rider. In the thrill of anticipation, preparing for the momentum of flight, hugging his knees as he hurls himself forward, he may forget to keep his mouth closed; he may shriek as he hits the water. It will gush up into his nose and throat, salt exploding the sinus membranes, burning the whites of his eyes.

The surfaces of the bronze horse and rider have been sculpted smooth to avoid injury: no jagged edges, no risk of damage. But still, there are these tears.

What remains of Charles Yelverton O'Connor here in this place that is said to honour his life? In the smooth, unseeing curve of the rider's face, there is the stoicism of the nineteenth-century gentleman, dry-eyed as he faces the shore and places his son's revolver against the roof of his mouth. Unseen is the despair of a valued reputation impugned by accusations: "blundering corruption", "reckless audacity", a "crocodile impostor flourishing on palm grease." Unheard is the high, reedy wailing infiltrating wide-awake dreams. There is little of him here except—perhaps—embedded in the sand, transmuted by the mineral accretions of nearly a century, a piece of bone.

There is nothing here to show that his wife once stood barefoot on this shore, and fell to her knees. Her tears dissolved onto the black taffeta stained sand, and were borne elsewhere by the tidal breathing of spirit children.

But Susan Letitia stood up, and walked away, and survived, and so perhaps what remains here is the grace of her survival—less dramatic, more heroic, than despair, than grief, than honour.

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TONY HUGHES-D'AETH

ENTANGLED WORLDS: AUSTRALIA AND ITS CONTEXTS IN RECENT NON-FICTION

As an intellectual context the cold war has its limitations. It so shaped those who lived through it that it seems that all intellectual questions must first be interrogated for whether they are supporting the left or the right. The "case" of James McAuley all too often exemplifies this stultifying compulsion with the cold war being warmed up like last night's dinner in the wake of Cassandra Pybus' investigative biography *The Devil and James McAuley* (UQP, 1999). The saga was given further impetus this year with the release of Michael Ackland's joint biography *Damaged Men: The Precarious Lives of James McAuley and Harold Stewart* (Allen & Unwin, 2001) and, to a lesser extent, by the death of A.D. Hope. Peter Coleman, a friend of McAuley and the author of an early study of his literary work, reviewed in remarkably similar terms the rather different works of Pybus, in the *Australian Book Review*, and Ackland, in the *Weekend Australian*. Coleman was scathing about the author's attempts to psychologise the figure of James McAuley, although claims each book made about the "private" life of McAuley, and in particular that he was a closet homosexual, seemed if anything rather coy. Pybus wrote an article in *Meanjin* called "Dogs in the Graveyard" which addressed some of these criticisms and reflected more broadly on the ethics of biography.

A welcome and productive departure from this bleak melodrama is the consideration given to McAuley in Robert Dixon's intriguing study of twentieth-century primitivism, *Prosthetic Gods: Travel, Representation and Colonial Governance* (UQP,

2001). Dixon's is one of several studies that seek to unravel a tangled world. There sometimes seems a perverse nostalgia for the power the cold war had to organise the moral universe, but one of the difficult benefits of the breakdown of that bipolar system is the imperative to know one's world more carefully. In Dixon's study, without downplaying McAuley's undoubted talent and vision, we begin to see his sensibility as caught in the contradictions of Australia's world in the time following World War Two. He was a man of deep, but troubled convictions, and Dixon traces this by examining his career in New Guinea. Dixon uses McAuley's experiences in New Guinea to elucidate Australia's relationship with its near neighbour and the role that it played in both defining and destabilising our national postwar modernity. For McAuley, New Guinea was our "grinning mirror", a land where forces were altering traditional life and newly formed citizens played out a disturbing (for him) parody of modern life. But McAuley was not just a passive observer – he was caught in the game. In Dixon's analysis, McAuley becomes newly interesting, not as a cold warrior who fought the good (or bad) fight, or as a poet embittered (or not) by sexual repression, but as an acute and reflective figure positioned along Australia's sensitised boundaries of exclusion and reflection. More of this later.

Apart from the passing of A.D. Hope, 2000 saw the death of arguably the most profound, humane and influential Australian poet of the latter half of the twentieth century, Judith Wright. Wright was a formidable figure, sometimes leading debates, sometimes leapfrogging them altogether. One lasting legacy of her intellect has been the articulation of an environmental sensibility that whilst drawing on the heavy strain of romanticism that critics like Shirley Walker have discerned in her work, also has an insistence and sharpness that speaks strongly to readers many decades later. To the extent that Australian literary critics have latterly discovered "ecocriticism", Wright has figured prominently. The shadow of Wright falls across two recent works which link Australian cultural works to the environment. The first is Tim Bonyhady's *The Colonial Earth* (MUP, 2000), a study which shows that the issues we now consider "environmental" very much preoccupied Australians in colonial times. Bonyhady, like his ANU

colleague Tom Griffiths, is a practitioner of environmental history, which unlike ecocriticism has a venerable tradition in this country. Bonyhady wrote an essay paying tribute to Judith Wright that was published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* in which he claimed that her truly great work was not her poetry but her environmental history. Bonyhady shares with Wright a lucidity of style, a striking eye for detail and a meticulous and compendious engagement with primary historical sources. *The Colonial Earth* is an important re-evaluation of the attitudes of nineteenth-century Australians to the natural world with which they were in collision. Bonyhady's book unearths environmental concerns – despoliation, habitat loss, pollution, extinction, erosion – dating to the very earliest periods of the European settlement of this continent. Just as Reynolds charts a counter-history of anxiety about Aboriginal dispossession in his recent books *This Whispering in our Hearts* (Allen & Unwin, 1998) and *Why weren't we Told?* (Viking, 1999), so Bonyhady explodes the myth of the ignorant colonial land-exploiter. Despite the issues, this book is far from tractarian, managing rather to take within its compass a range of cultural forms, from political debates in the Tasmanian parliament surrounding the protection of "native game", to a discussion of paintings of the Darling River in flood in the 1880s and 90s.

A rather different work is *Hearts and Minds: Creative Australians and the Environment* (Hale & Iremonger, 2000), written by the journalists Michael Pollak and Margaret McNabb. The work bears the fruits and the scars of the journalistic method. Quite clearly it covers a field – the cultural expression of popular environmentalism over the past 30 years – with a breadth not seen before. There are individual chapters on novels, poetry, magazines, children's books and a number of other forms, incorporating over 1000 interviews (an average of nearly three per page). The book, however, is less interested in separating out what exactly constitutes environmental concerns. The chapter on novels praises Peter Corris for his awareness of inner-city Sydney in his Cliff Hardy detective stories and writes of the "spiritual pollution" in Peter Carey's *The Tax Inspector*. Is this environmentalism? The submerged villain of the book is perhaps modernity itself, although it is hard to see how the ostensible heroes in *Hearts and Minds* will

defeat this adversary by living on hobby farms or designer homes in the Blue Mountains. To be fair to the book's subjects this is not a claim they make, but is a generalised effect of the kind of narrative system underlying this book. This book too speaks of Judith Wright, but stops short of engaging with the more searching aspects of her appreciation of the environmental predicament.

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Last year *Southerly* published a series of essays by younger scholars on the topic of what the future was for Australian literary studies. Cautious optimism was perhaps the consensus, although all contributors saw changes and challenges to the practice of more traditional forms of literary analysis. The evidence of recent publication, however, somewhat belies these fears. A market remains, it seems, for literary histories – particularly if they are compendious and of the Oxbridge persuasion. Elizabeth Webby, who commissioned the *Southerly* essays for her final edition as editor, has edited the *Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (CUP, 2000). Like the annual race on the Thames, this work competes stroke-for-stroke with *The Oxford Literary History of Australia* (OUP, 1998), edited by Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss. In fact, anyone with an interest in this field would certainly want to own both – and indeed they complement each other rather well. Penny van Toorn's consideration of Aboriginal writing for the Cambridge *Companion* adds some interesting new dimensions to Adam Shoemaker's version for the Oxford *History;* likewise Delys Bird can be read against Susan Lever on modern fiction, and David Carter intertwines with Jennifer Strauss and Patrick Buckeridge on twentieth-century literary culture. Unlike the 1980s when the *Penguin New Literary History of Australia*, whose coeditors included Bennett and Webby, was written in clear opposition to the *Oxford History of Australian Literature*, we seem at the turn of the millennium to have reached a point of methodological convergence in terms of the writing of literary histories. The precepts of the Penguin work – in which periods, genres and "literature" are maintained but problematised and in which cultural context takes the place of aesthetic evaluation – seem largely to have won the

day and are reflected in the contributions and organisation of the more recent works edited by Webby, Bennett and Strauss.

Incidentally, this form of literary history will find few finer practitioners than Ken Stewart. Stewart's *Investigations in Australian Literature* (SASSC, 2001), for all its modesty in presentation, comprises a significant corpus of Australian literary history. Stewart's well-known essays on Marcus Clarke, Henry Lawson, Henry Handel Richardson and Christina Stead are all included, as are two classic pieces in literary scholarship, "The Cultural Missionaries, 1855-1915" and "The Australian Short Story Before Lawson". Stewart's meticulous research and fussy, engaging style make for absorbing reading, defining scholarship both inside and outside the canon. The essays also have the gift of concision and in a short space evoke complexities and nuances in the societies they describe, practising a kind of thick description in which past cultures emerge unreduced, brimming with life. Anyone interested in nineteenth-century Australian culture will get good value from this deceptively slender volume.

The apparent consensus in the writing of literary histories masks the enormous variety and change in the practice of criticism in works which operate with a less Olympian perspective of history. These works are involved in the cut and thrust of contemporary debates and the even more bruising world of book reviews. *Authority and Influence: Australian Literary Criticism 1950-2000* (UQP, 2001) allows us to examine and to some extent reanimate significant shifts and moments in Australian literary criticism over the past half-century. The editors of this anthology, Delys Bird, Robert Dixon and Christopher Lee, have periodised Australian literary criticism into four parts corresponding to decades (50s & 60s are combined), but have also discerned a number of transhistorical themes, including issues of (inter)nationalism, professionalisation, the canon and gender/race/class/ethnicity. The book renders accessible a lost world of half-remembered debates and certainly helps to dispel the myth that criticism coming prior to 1980 was without theory. While inevitably selective, this anthology allows a great deal more investigative scope than a discursive/institutional critique a la John Docker or Mark Davis. One of the persistent searches, for instance, is for a public –

someone "outside" for whom this whole activity has a value. Criticism, it sometimes seems, needs its public more than the pubic appears to need it.

The editors of *Authority and Influence* were right to transpose recurrent themes with temporal change. Recent publications prove there is still no single vanguard behind which criticism (literary, cultural or otherwise) is advancing. Eclecticism is the non-unifying theme of the literary studies that have shuffled across *Westerly's* desk in recent times. Certainly the tradition of close reading remains alive. Annette M. Stewart's *Woman and Herself* (UQP, 1998) is a psychoanalytical study of that curious artist and writer Barbara Hanrahan. The most enjoyable aspects of this book are the biographical dimensions and the author promises a biography will follow this critical study. Stewart's analysis is assured and detailed, targeting by the closeness of its attention, the true Hanrahan afficionados. Lay readers will be mesmerised by the reproductions of Hanrahan's troubling woodcuts which mix overt sexuality with grotesque primitivism – as if Edward Munch had decided to re-do the Bayeux Tapestry as an expressionist tableau. And if a psycho-analytical approach to art and literature can still be sustained, then it seems so too can Bakhtinian readings of classic Australian novels. Maria Panarello is an Italian scholar who cut her Auslit teeth in the early eighties at La Trobe. Her *Studies of Indeterminacy in the Australian Novel* (Bulzoni, 1999) takes as its case-studies the works of Furphy, Stead and David Ireland. The study of Furphy's "epistemological doubt" is quite compelling and helps to theorise aspects of his work that have probably been sensed by Australian readers for some time without ever having been laid bare.

Of course close-reading and textual explication have their roots not in a secularised tradition of literary studies, but in the practices of theological explication. This comes through quite strongly in Colette Rayment's appreciation of the works of Melbourne Jesuit academic Peter Steele, *The Shapes of Glory* (Spectrum 2000). Rayment has delved deeply into Steele's *oeuvre*, ranging from the volumes of his poetry, to critical work on Jonathan Swift, and a welter of liturgical writings. Rayment's treatment is a deferential one, allowing Steele to speak in generous servings of quoted material. As the title suggests, Rayment's is essentially a

tropological study, discerning certain "shapes" that pass through all of Steele's work. Of these Rayment contends that figures of emanation and radiance are particularly generative. Steele writes an essay, for instance, on "radiation" in the work of Peter Porter before this term evoked white suits, Geiger counters and seeping interminable half-lives. Steele works in the restless scholastic tradition of Loyola, but chimes intellectually with an optimistic Idealism founded in the recuperative light of the Word of God. And it is a productive faith, financing intellectual risks and adventures.

Emerging from a rather different *episteme* than Steele, is the poet John Kinsella. The filial rippling of God's Word is replaced with the inchoate edges and transient discourse strands of postmodernism. The aptly titled *Fairly Obsessive Essays on the Works of John Kinsella* (FACP/CSAL, 2001), edited by Rod Mengham and Glen Phillips, is the first book-length consideration of the poetry and prose of Kinsella and it makes good inroads into the task of teasing out the significances in Kinsella's proliferating works. Kinsella is not one figure, but (mainly) two. The first wears an Akubra and writes probing vernacular poetry about the West Australian wheatbelt. I met this Kinsella in *The Silo.* The second Kinsella sports a silvered Warholian bouffant and overturns l-a-n-g-u-a-g-e through terroristic assaults on "the contingency of genre". I met this Kinsella recently when I bought a slim volume called *Counterpastoral* at a Vagabond Press book launch in a hotel in Sydney's Chippendale. I was mugged on the way home and, while fifty bucks lighter in the pocket, kept a firm grip on this booklet. In it were poems that still focussed on humans living in-the-land, but this land had been subjected to a kind of ironic digitisation, as if a DNA code was now visible on each strand of wheat. The charm of both Kinsellas is that they occasionally meet, like in "Warhol at Wheatlands", in which a chronically ambiguous artist reflects unreflectively that it "doesn't remind me of America at all", or in "Zone (echidna)", dedicated to Derrida, where this burrowing marsupial and sometime Olympic games mascot "fades amongst the imported hydrangeas" and dissipates in the white noise of Jerry Springer and Dianarama. Forget trying to talk about Kinsella in terms of periods or phases, he does it all at once, inter-referencing and teleporting like the

Cheshire cat. The editors of this collection have assembled a formidable posse to try and bring Kinsella in, and it is an intriguing chase. I personally found the non-Australian readings quite helpful, simply because they tended to hit Kinsella's work at different angles to the way I have tended to in my readings. Xavier Pons' well-considered piece connected Kinsella's different modes by examining some of the poet's metaphorical habits, but also usefully situated his experimental work within the traditions of surrealism. Pons closes by quoting Kinsella: "have arrived nowhere / but hope to move on".

Kinsella's experimental and counter-pastoral poetry will defy many, but others (Mackenzie Wark is one) will find that there is something in his cryptic shards that is cognate with contemporary experience. In this context it makes sense to find a book called *Imagining Australian Space* (UWAP, 1999), edited by Ruth Barcan and Ian Buchanan. It is not a book about astronomy but about a place that can at times be every bit as strange known as *the everyday* or, rather more mellifluously by the French *la quotidienne*. What the essays in this collection seek to elicit is – to echo one of the key thinkers in this field of enquiry – an understanding of how societies produce the spaces in which they inhabit. Elizabeth Dempster writes about the spatialising practices in Australian dance, while Ruth Barcan in one of the livelier pieces evokes "the space of the urinal". The contributions share no common methodology but a broad interest in the conceptualisation of lived environments. Stephen Muecke's piece on the outback moves between Newtown and Alice Springs, the Kimberley and the Leyland Brothers. His point is one that recurs throughout this collection: spatial practices are overlapping and entangled. Sometimes this can take the form of radical, Kinsella-like, discontinuities, in which locality is ephemeral and diffused. But many of the essays, like Sue Martin's on colonial gardens or John Macarthur's on Brisbane's Kodak Beach, show that societies evolve complex technologies for reordering (or "reterritorialising") their spaces. And these spaces are also subject to contest, as Bob Hodge shows in his discussion of Perth's Nyoongar community and the housing policies of successive Western Australian governments. Peter Read writes a moving piece about the way that people remember lost places, like the

towns of Jindabyne and Adaminaby, that were submerged in the construction of the Snowy scheme.

The histories of Jindabyne and Adaminaby are not lost in the mists of antiquity. Australia's paltry colonial history means that they could have sustained settled society for little more than a couple of generations. So why should it haunt us that they are now gone, replaced by planned towns assembled like Lego on the sides of man-made lakes that cover the remains of their Namesakes? There lies in all of this the symptoms of a certain malaise, driven into being by the vortices of erasure and detachment spinning out of modernity's jet-stream. One of the most substantial and sustained intellectual responses to the recognition of these delocalising forces, is the scholarly project of postcolonial studies. Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* (Routlege, 2001) charts the conflicting strands of the evolution of the postcolonial endeavour. In an era where economic efficiency is the only unquestioned rationality, it falls to all disciplines to address themselves to the issue of purpose. Postcolonialism, however, reaches a new level of reflexivity whereby it sometimes seems that the main subject of postcolonial studies is postcolonial studies itself. Huggan is occasionally stuck within this loop, but of course aware of it as well, and his comments from within this loop are nevertheless lucid and insightful. The recurrent moment of realisation in Huggan's book is one of complicity. Does postcolonial analysis decolonise or recolonise? The postcolonial exotic is Huggan's term for the persistent impulses of cultural fetishing perpetrated by the centre against the margins. He sees, as if trapped in some Foucauldian contraption, the critical discourse of postcolonialism continuously struggling to avoid enacting the very processes it criticises. Postcolonial theory values the local and the different, but normalises each of these by a transnational discourse that emanates from everywhere and nowhere – although tending to congregate in the literature departments of western universities. These are not easy questions and Huggan does not shirk them. A striking example, neatly drawn by Huggan, is in his chapter "Prizing otherness: a short history of the Booker Prize" about an institution that has been integral in the legitimating of literatures in English outside of England and America. Here, he writes, is a prize

sponsored by a company which made its fortune servicing the needs of Guyanan sugar estates in the 1830s, which is now televised on national British television and whose outcome will directly lead to the realisation of many millions of dollars in the publishing and film industries. Huggan gives us, as he admits, a kind of sociology of the institution of postcolonial literature, but it is conducted by a participant observer, and is all the better for it.

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While Huggan participates in the discourse of postcolonialism, there is little sense in which, whether at Harvard or Munich, he is someone caught in the material processes of the phenomenon itself. The occasionally scientistic diction of postcolonial theory sometimes tricks you into forgetting that there are people all over the world whose lives are the products of colonialism and for whom the simple addition of a prefix will do little to change their predicament. All of this was forcefully brought home to me in Satendra Nandan's eloquent collection *Fiji: Paradise in Pieces* (CRNLE – PiP, 2000). In a series of reflections and essays, Nandan paints with a mixture of passion and wry humour, the troubled course of Fiji's history and politics that were set in motion by, principally, the Colonial Sugar Refinery (CSR) company and its bedfellow, the indentured labour system. This system saw some 60 000 Indians shipped to the 300 islands of the Fijian archipelago. The first boatload arrived in May of 1879, mainly from land-locked villages in Uttar Pradesh. Through Nandan's elegant prose, the complex story of modern Fiji unfolds with all its ironies, bitter disappointments and resilient optimism. Nandan put the final touches to this volume in the days when the newly elected multi-racial government of Mahendra Chaudri was being held hostage by the armed associates of George Speight. Nandan had himself previously served in the Fijian Parliament with Chaudri, and was in the House the morning in 1987 (also in May) that Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka strolled in with masked gunmen and seized power. Events like these intrude into the mind of most Australians through the evening news, mixed in with other stories of world turmoil. There is often little to place the events in Fiji in context, and even

the so-called analysis of the serious press still tends to present them as the result of some ingrained Pacific island fractiousness that must bubble to the surface from time to time, like the volcanoes that dot this ocean. At the time of writing this review, recent elections have Chaudry back in a parliament that has been voted in on strict racial lines, and the possible coalition partner of each of the major Fijian and Indo-Fijian parties is the party of George Speight, who is currently in gaol facing a number of charges. The price of coalition will almost certainly be the release of Speight. Nandan's book recasts the Pacific sideshow presented in our media, into epic stories of courage and betrayal, and the tangled worlds born of colonialism. Entanglement is a watch-word of much of the historical writing emerging in recent times. One of the great ongoing battles that is fought in this country is to try and keep Australian nationhood simple, uncomplicated and well-defined. Complexity and confusion belong "outside", and have no place in our national histories of settlement and progress. The problem with this vision is that it invokes an Australia that never existed. In this year celebrating the centenary of federation, historians have had cause to revisit the process by which the competing colonies formed into a federated nation. Frank Crowley's, *Big John Forrest, 1947-1918* (UWAP, 2000), subtitled "A founding father of the Commonwealth of Australia", is an invaluable study of this process. Crowley's biography presents Forrest as a figure of immense will and commitment. In many ways, Forrest is the type of the colonial turned national politician, having distinguished himself initially as an outback explorer, before rising to the rank of Surveyor-General of Western Australia and entering colonial Parliament. With the stirrings of Federal sentiment, Forrest fell firmly on the side of the Federationists, and having helped in the success of this political feat, went on to occupy several key cabinet posts in different Federal governments, including defence and treasury, and even a period as acting Prime Minister. However, *Big John Forrest* is not only a definitive biography of one of the most significant political figures to emerge from Western Australia, but a window into the complexities of our supposedly simpler past. One passage, from an address Forrest gave to the federal convention in Melbourne in 1897, struck me as particularly salient:

> It is no use for us to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a great feeling all over Australia against the introduction of coloured persons. It goes without saying that we do not like to talk about it, but still it is so.

One of the classes of "coloured persons" which Forrest was alluding to were the Afghan cameleers who had become vital to meeting transportation needs in outback Australia, and particularly in the north of Forrest's own colony. It seems that we are still not too keen on the people of Afghanistan in this country, although we have lost the courage to speak plainly about this, choosing instead to couch our concerns in familiar euphemisms of economic cost, religious "incompatibility", fear of disease and – as if we were talking about supermarkets rather than civil war – outrage about jumping queues that exist nowhere except the imagination. And if Afghans have no place in Afghanistan, and no place in Australia, then the next most obvious location is undoubtedly Nauru, a land of 7000 people, surely at least double the number of Australians than could honestly claim to point to this Pacific nation on a map. So the process of entanglement continues.

As with Fiji, the "news" version of the Afghan boat people takes place in a temporal dimension which is both instantaneous and calamitous, ensuring that all responses are made with the maximum degree of alarm and the minimum degree of reflection. Yet if we take the time to learn the history of Australian relations with Asia, we will see that reactions to this latest "crisis" are simply a reenactment of a venerable xenophobia. This history is pertinently compiled in David Walker's *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia, 1850-1939* (UQP, 1999). In 1921, Captain W.H. Thring of the Australian navy provided a confidential report to the Commonwealth Intelligence Department bearing the title, "Notes on the Racial Aspect of the Pacific Problem". One of the key themes in Thring's report, notes Walker, is the rising influence of the Moslem world. As they used to joke about the middle-class, Islam has been rising for so long it is a wonder that the entire religion has not proceeded into orbit. Walker's book amasses a wealth of material which shows conclusively that Australia's dealings with the region have been shaped by a profound anxiety, although

thankfully there have also been many instances of more productive relationships. In Jennifer M.T. Carter's *Eyes to the Future: Sketches of Australia and her Neighbours in the 1870s* (NLA, 2000), the grotesque sketches held in our National Library show anti-Asian paranoia dating back still further.

Entanglement is not just a national phenomenon but permeates the lives of individuals and families. One day, an Afghan refugee who has confounded the forces of fate and found her way to this country (via Singapore, and the grinning mirrors of New Guinea, Nauru and Auckland), will write a powerful story of the impossible hardship of her life. This book might then perhaps be compared to David Landau's moving memoir *Caged: A Story of Jewish Resistance* (Pan MacMillan, 2000). In Warsaw I once saw photographs which I thought at first were close-ups of a gravel path, but the ants were in fact people and the gravel was the strewn remains of the city once called the Paris of the East. They were pictures of a Warsaw that had been systematically demolished by the German army in retribution for the uprising of 1944. My imagination was not capable of seeing how it was possible to live in such a place, but Landau's *Caged* has breathed life into this physical and moral wasteland. David Landau fought in the 1944 uprising and somehow, with his wife Luba, managed to survive in the sprawling inhuman rubble even as the trains continued to roll to Treblinka. The memoir was published posthumously by Landau's family, who thank Australia, "where so many war-torn, tortured souls have found healing and solace". Despite the horrific events that occur, Landau's narrative is told with a chilling patience and restraint. The story is also characterised by a precision of detail and deft grasp of human frailty reminiscent of Gunther Grass, who also lived through (although as a German) the invasion and destruction of Poland. Landau tells us that his title refers to the cage of memory and history which does not let him escape, even once the physical means of his imprisonment by the Nazi regime were removed.

The Landaus arrived in Australia in 1947. In 1853, nearly a century earlier, Brina Israel arrived in the Swan River colony, where she married another Jew, an ex-convict named Theodore Krakouer. Their first child Abraham, born in 1853, was the first "Hebrew" born in the colony. In 1873 Theodore was certified a lunatic and

incarcerated in the Fremantle asylum, which like that in Sydney's Rozelle, now houses an Arts Centre; in fact, the very Arts Centre whose Press published Terri-Ann White's *Finding Theodore and Brina* (FACP, 2001) in which this intriguing story is related. The book is an object lesson in cultural entanglement. Theodore and Abraham ran a transport service to the Goldfields and their name seems to have become entangled in the wheatbelt country that lies between Coolgardie and Perth. Indeed, the name Krakouer would be made famous by the brilliant Krakouer brothers who, like John Kinsella (also published by Fremantle Arts Centre Press), left the Western Australian wheatbelt for Perth and then bigger things still, with Phil and Jimmy Krakouer playing for North Melbourne in the VFL. It transpires that White is descended from the Krakouer family and this book is in part an autobiographical reverie. White's mode is fragmentary and speculative, merging traces found in documents with her childhood memories of Perth, and philosophical reflections on the process of finding family histories. I once viewed a preliminary version of this work on the net, in which its components were hyperlinked, and certainly White's story is far from linear – but tangled worlds eschew straight lines.

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I want to finish this review by considering two works which celebrate Australian institutions that indicate something of the possibilities of public culture in this country, helping to move us beyond the dismal actions of the domestic polity in an election year, and seeking to genuinely comprehend the complexities and entanglements of our society and our world. The first is Peter Cochrane's collection of commissioned pieces, *Remarkable Occurrences: The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years, 1901-2001* (NLA, 2001). The 15 essays comprising this collection draw on some of this country's most distinguished scholars, including Greg Dening, Joan Kerr, Nicholas Thomas, Tim Bonyhady and Suart Macintyre. Each has taken a different aspect of the National Library's collection and discussed it in the intimate light of their research experience. The title of the book derives from the opening page of the Library's most treasured possession – "MS1" – the

Endeavour journal of Captain James Cook. Cook's diary, and the act of reading it today, is wonderfully evoked by Greg Dening, who intersperses his own memories of working with eighteenth-century copies of the journal (in Nissen huts situated on a wasteland destined to become Lake Burley Griffin) with Cook's own words drawn from the journal. Nicholas Thomas discusses the Pacific collections, while David Walker reflects on the Asian collections that helped to enrich his book *Anxious Nation*. There are also useful essays on the photographic and map collections held by the Library.

Not quite a hundred years old, but well into middle life are the annual Boyer Lectures hosted by ABC radio. There is no other institution quite like it. It seems to bring the best out in Australian letters. Rogue politicians and media barons become suddenly introspective and prone to insight. Muddle-headed academics blossom with an unexpected clarity of purpose, economists become impassioned orators, scientists want to talk about literature and justices of the High Court speak in a language that serves quite passably as English. Entering the Boyer foyer one leaves behind the lab-coat, the dark suit and all manner of academic and judicial gowns and wigs – and dons a crumpled cardigan that may have belonged to Barry Jones. Some Boyer lectures – like Manning Clark's "Telling the Story" and W.E.H. Stanner's "The Great Australian Silence" have become classics, and in the case of Stanner, the phrase has become a by-word for national amnesia. I enjoyed David Malouf's 1998 lectures so much that I begged a loved-one to give me them for Christmas. *The Boyer Collection* (ABC Books, 2001) has been deftly edited by Donald MacDonald, whose closeness to the Prime Minister has made him a figure of some suspicion for many advocates of the national broadcaster. One of the beauties of the Boyer concept is that it involves a series of lectures, usually seven, in which themes can be developed and teased out. MacDonald has had to choose one lecture from each year, which cannot have been easy. Selecting Noel Pearson's landmark lecture, "Mabo: Equality and Difference", meant leaving out Mundaway Yunupingu's wonderful lecture in the same year about Yothu Yindi and Yolgnu culture. The book is well served by contextual material about both the author and the events of the time. As MacDonald

"points out", the essays respond to the "big issues" of their time. The first ever lecture series, just two years after the launch of Sputnik, was David Martyn speaking on "Society in the Space Age", a wonderfully utopian title, redolent of polished metal and friction-free, unentangled life.

PHOEBE ST JOHN

TALLOW'S BEACH

Byron Bay, a back street at night.
Dream landscape of telegraph poles
and a star-rolled sky mirrored on the road
in broken glass.

Walking ahead, you crash without noise
into moonlight, suddenly lit, edged
in silver, burning, and then split
three ways into shadow. Half turning
towards me, you graze silence
as you whisper, gravel-voiced, "he-llo",
and although we have been walking and
talking together for hours, I understand
why you say this: the moment is new.

*

On the beach that afternoon we blinked
into our open books but the sun
had got in, a butterfly of glare
golding large portions of paragraph.
I looked over at one point and
mistook your forearm for my own.
Warm air swathed us, locking, unlocking,
and our conversation was loose, lazy,
weaving sideways like a crab 'til the wind
took it up and roared with it over our

sand-saddled backs. One part I remember,
you said, "I don't know, I could end up
in...Tasmania". I started laughing
and you cut me off. "Shut up", you said,
"I need a Devil". Purple flowers
climbed a dune, their centres white,
fire-bright. Chords of sea-foam gnashed
and zinged, electric. A soccer-ball
cracked on damp sand and rose again,
chequered globe arcing skyward.

Clean beauty. So fraught,
high-pitched. Strung up between poles,
banner-like, full of colour, flown.

My eyes closed against the burn.

*

Later, I crouched by a lagoon.
Waiting for fresh feeling to burst and
brim at my skin, the way black skins of water
bled silver wherever quick-tailed creatures
leapt or shimmied underneath.
When you emerged from somewhere
behind me, your face looked drawn, I thought,
a drawing of sadness. A bush turkey
fleetingly became a black dragon as it
struck its wings drily against sky
and arched its neck, and in the lagoon below,
salmon-pink clouds ignited in a mercurial
sea. You lay your head back
and tears washed over your eyes,
breaking the colours up, riverish.
Four ducks made silently in a row
for the lagoon's far end, for the reed-splintered
and weed-grabbed shadows held together
by the stiff vertebrae of a telegraph pole,

its signal perspective. It caught me by suprise
when all four at once
beat the water with their wings and
heavily ascended, everywhere the air
churning with a sound like applause,
still-perfect V's of wet light
tapering to the points at which they had
launched themselves, the world in their wake
tensed, exacted.

And breaking up already as I turned away.

Wendy Gan

Secret Sydney

In Glebe we swung past frangipannied terraces
To a derelict red-bricked house with a garden
Planted with white washing machines and fridges.
In Beverly Hills, we ate roast pigeon and crab in a restaurant
Called Mas Thai where only Cantonese was spoken.
You called this secret Sydney as you swept me about
Pointing out a green corner door which opened only
On the weekends to reveal nests of egg noodles for sale
Showing me boutiques that sold individual designs sweated
Over by fashion students, cinderella-like, waiting for
Their break. From inside a swaying car I caught a glimpse of
Apple-green, heard wisps of names, saw our car flit by in
Glassy reflections off shop windows. I did not see a
ribboned sleeve
Lovingly stitched. I did not walk through a cool, dark
interior with
Foetal clumps of noodles. The Opera House, when we went past,
Opened up for a fraction before clamping shut like an oyster.

WENDY JAMES

THIS ONE WAS DIFFERENT

THURSDAY A.M.

Me and Gibbo were sent over to check her out when that shitbag Baxter spilled his guts. "Listen Ray," Penman said to him in that smooth voice he puts on — the bastard's good, you've got to give him that — "Listen Ray," he said, "you tell us who else is involved. We know about the other jobs mate, so don't give us any shit — Narrabeen, Lindfield, Mona Vale, we know all about 'em mate — you tell us who else is in it — give us some names, mate — the prick who got away, and there's some girl in it, isn't there? We got witnesses, mate. You tell us about 'em Ray and maybe — I'm not promising anything, right, but just maybe we can do something for you. You didn't shoot that kid, right? We know that, you know that, but what jury's gonna believe it?"

"Only a kid. Eighteen, his first job and his mother sitting out in that courtroom with her eyes all puffed up with crying. Her hair gone grey overnight. You'll be sitting there Rayboy, and the court all looking at that mother and the photos and then back at you, wantin' to cut your balls out, and some other prick and his tart'll be out there, living the high life, readin' all about you in the papers and you're the one who's gonna do time, Ray. You. And the other cunts out there laughin' at their good luck."

"So Ray," Penman said, "how about you give us some names? How about it?"

So Baxter spilled his guts, dobbed in his mates — his cousin, his cousin's girlfriend who'd done the occasional drive for them. "I

didn't shoot the kid," he said, snivelling, "you gotta believe me, Mr Penman. It was Jimmy. It was Jimmy done it, Jimmy, not me."

Shitbag.

So Penman sent me and Gibbo straight over to Manly, where this bird, Megan Murray was supposed to live with this O'Reilly bloke and it's a nice old block of flats just across from South Steyne, bottom flat and the front door's open, and we're thinking she's gone, but we can hear the radio going and see the television flickering and we burst in. We've got our guns out, but there's only this girl sitting cross-legged in front of the tv, playing the guitar. She's sitting right up close to the screen and the radio's blaring and she's playing the guitar, some folky thing, and singing really softly, and she doesn't see us or hear us, she just keeps playing. So Gibbo checks out the house while I stand there behind her with my gun drawn and she still doesn't notice us. The whole thing's really weird, like something out of a movie — Gibbo diving through doorways into empty rooms, me with my gun at the ready, and this girl who just keeps singing away, her eyes fixed on the screen, oblivious.

And she's pretty this girl — I'm saying girl, but I know now that she's over thirty with two kids and hardly a girl — *really* pretty, with dark hair and long brown legs, and she doesn't notice us till Gibbo moves over to the radio and turns it off and clears his throat softly to get her attention. I guess we're both of us thinking the same thing : that maybe we've got the wrong place, it's clean and light and full of air and the girl somehow looks all wrong. Oh, she fitted Baxter's description alright, but somehow she just didn't seem the type. Anyway, she finally looks up and sees us and I know it's her — she goes pale and her throat kind of convulses and "Jimmy," she says, "it's Jimmy isn't it? Something's happened..." She goes to stand up then, but she loses her balance and trips, and she puts her foot right through it, right through the bloody guitar.

We took her back to the station after we searched the flat — there was nothing, no money, no guns, only some camping gear, packed and ready to go. So we took her back to the station, in cuffs though she came quietly, easily, and we handed her over to Penman.

He keeps his soft voice for the boys, Penman. "Can't do it for ladies," he says. "They like it rough, the ladies," he says, "they

wouldn't understand the soft touch. Wouldn't appreciate it. Hard and up the arse, that's what they need," he says, "that's what the bitches deserve." And he was rough on this one, on Meg. Rougher than usual.

"So, Meg," he said. "Meg's what you like to be called, isn't it? So Meg, you're this murderer O'Reilly's current fuck, are you? Good, are you? You'd have to be, cause your bloke Jimmy's had a whole lotta pussy in his time, hasn't he? Or maybe you don't know about the others, eh Meg, maybe Jimmy's never told you about 'em? We've got one of his er ... old flames out in the cells, I believe. Tina McGuire, busted her last night for something or other. Soliciting? Is that right, Stratford? She's a nice sort of a girl, old Tina. Perhaps we should introduce these two ladies, they'd have a bit in common. Could have a bit of a chat about Jimmy, eh? He's had a nice bit of cunt, your Jimmy, he'd be a real expert, I reckon. Got himself a bit of a reputation round here, anyway...."

"So, it says here that you got kids, Meg. These them? Cute. Pretty little things. Nice that you carry a picture about in your wallet, love. Very nice. Sweet. Where are they, love? With their father, eh? Leave him for this prick, did ya? No? Some other prick, then? See 'em very often, do you? Well, you won't see 'em after this Meg. Not for a long while.You'll be going away Meg. Don't s'pose hubby'll let the littlies visit you at Mullawah. Not a nice place for a picnic, not really. Not nice havin' a mother in prison, eh Meg. D'you ever think of that ? What'll they tell their friends, darlin'? What'll your sweet little kiddies tell their friends?...."

He went on like this for an hour or so, the foreplay he calls it, and then he left her with me. "She's panting for it mate, open and panting, hot and wet and ready for it," he says, "you'll get something out of her Stratford, ya softcock... I've greased 'er up for you, mate, she'll be easy."

She was pale and trembling when Penman went, but not crying, not then, and I offered her some coffee, a cigarette. She asked for water instead, but she had a cigarette and when I lit it for her my fingers were trembling too.

"Listen," I said to her, "listen, Meg, you haven't got a record. No shoplifting when you were a kid. No drugs. Not even a speeding fine. You've got kids haven't you? You don't want to end up in

prison, do you?"

"Can I ask you something," she said, ignoring my question. "Could you explain something?"

"Sure. What is it?"

"There was nothing on the news, I've been listening all morning. Why wasn't there anything on the news?"

I started to explain how we'd arranged with the media to keep quiet until the evening editions, how we persuaded them that their silence was crucial to our immediate investigation, but she'd begun to cry then, really cry.

I gave her a tissue, went out and made us both coffee, strong and sweet, and brought it back. She drank it. She wiped her face, blew her nose. I waited.

"Listen Meg," I said again, "this could all be over pretty quickly. You could be outta here now — no charge, no form. You seem like a nice girl, not the type to be mixed up with a bloke like O'Reilly. You just tell me where he's likely to be and you can go. Go back to your kids, your family. He's a bad man, Meg. You don't seem to understand. He killed someone today. A young bloke. Eighteen. You've got kids, what do you reckon it must be like for this poor fella's mother and father. His girlfriend. Tell me where he is Meg, and it'll all be over. You can go home, go home and forget any of this ever happened."

She smiled then, and it was the first time I'd seen her smile, and it was the best smile I've ever seen, don't laugh, the best smile I've ever seen on any bird — models, filmstars, whatever — and somehow, at the same time, when she smiled I felt like I'd never seen anyone sadder. It's hard to remember properly now, but I know that she looked sad, then, sad like somebody'd died, only she was smiling.

THURSDAY P.M.

I went back that evening. It was my mother's birthday and I was meant to be going out to dinner, so I phoned, left a message, organised flowers to be sent. I felt like things were beginning to happen between me and Meg. Not in any personal way, you understand, not that — but you can really feel it when they're about to start confiding. It's a gut feeling, an intuition. You can

sense them struggling to keep it all in. You can tell that they're starting to like you, that they want to trust you. You can tell that something's coming.

So I went back that evening and got Lennie to bring her over for a second interview. She'd been in the cells for a couple of hours by then and was looking a bit the worse for wear. I let Lennie have a go at her first — Lennie's a scary bitch when she wants to be and I thought she might soften her up a bit for me — but Meg seemed pretty composed, maybe even a little amused, by the time Lennie left to get coffee. I lit her a cigarette and sat down beside her. "Ah," she smiled, "here comes the good cop again."

"No," I said, "No, it's not a game Meg. You just seem like a nice lady— I'd be sorry to see you in trouble. I gave up a night out with my parents to talk to you tonight. I don't have to be here. I thought I might be able to help you. I *want* to help you."

She laughed then, and stubbed out her half-smoked cigarette. I noticed she had pretty hands, long fingers, and kind of graceful, elegant. "Well," she said, "Well I can understand that. I think I'd rather be anywhere than having a night out with my parents. But I can't tell you anything, Detective. I don't know where he is, I really don't. He's shot a bloke, he's got a bag full of money. He won't come back for me — what use am I to him? He could be anywhere. Anywhere...."

I thought she sounded pretty pissed-off, sort of resentful — which is always a good sign. It was coming, I was sure of it.

"I didn't really want to bring it up," I said, "but y'know that pro that Detective Penman was talking about — Tina Mcguire. Well Penman's a prick, but it's true y'know. She is an old girlfriend of O'Reilly's, they lived in the Cross together for a while. She had an AVO out on him a few years ago, he belted her up a couple of times. He's not a nice bloke, Meg. He's not a nice bloke by any stretch."

She shrugged. "So what's *nice*, detective? Is your Mr. Penman nice? That friendly lady you just had in here talking to me, is she nice? And what about you — are you nice? Why don't you explain nice to me? Give me some examples. So I can understand exactly what it is you're talking about. Come on Detective Stratford," she said, " why don't you tell me about nice."

I handed her another cigarette and tried to light it, but the fluid must have been low, it hardly sparked. I shook the lighter, tried again. Nothing. She took it from my hand. For her the lighter flamed steadily straight away. She inhaled, blew smoke towards the ceiling. "Come on Detective, she said again, passing back the lighter, her fingers brushing mine, "Come on Detective Stratford," she said, "you tell me all about nice."

"I can tell you about nice," I said, letting my voice heat up a little, "I can tell you what's nice, alright. Nice is having a bloke who doesn't beat you up. Having a boyfriend with a job — who doesn't rob people, who doesn't kill people for a living. Nice is having your little place by the beach, having a decent fucken job, having some decent friends. You know, friends — people you can go down the pub with, play pool with, go to the beach with. Picnics. Kids. People who are more likely to talk to you than rape you. But maybe you've forgotten that people like that exist, eh, Meg? Friends. Family. People who care about you. People who'll look after you. People who love you."

"People who love you? Love," she said, "Love. Love's just an excuse for all kinds of shit. Love doesn't mean nice, or good, or happy, or any of those things. Does love mean nice for you? Do you have nice people who love you? Does love make you feel nice?"

"That's not what we're here to talk about Meg. This isn't about me."

"But I want to know, Detective. You're the one who's giving advice. Maybe you ought to back it up with some evidence. You lot are big on evidence aren't you? Isn't that your thing. You say that love is a good thing. Well, give me some proof."

"You want proof?" I said. "Proof? Well, I s'pose I can give you that. I'm a fucken expert on love, after all. You can ask anyone. It's little things, lady, simple things, things that make you feel good if you're someone like me. Like having your family around you. Finishing work and going home and your wife's got dinner ready and the kids are hanging out to see you, to tell you about school, to kiss you goodnight. And your wife's there and she's hanging out to see you, to talk to you, to touch you. And you touch each other all the time, Meg. You touch her, your hands round her waist, lips on her neck, when she's serving out the meal; your eyes are on her, touching her, burning into her, when you're opening a bottle of wine; your

hand's on her shoulder when you're sitting eating; you're squeezing her thigh under the table. And you put the kids to bed together. Both of you. You sit on their bed and listen, you touch her hair while she reads them a bedtime story. And the kids half strangle you to death when they say goodnight. Goodnight Daddy, Goodnight Daddy we love you. We Love you, Daddy. Everything's warm, everything's happy. You feel good about them. They feel good about you. That's it. Simple. Everything's nice. Nice. That's what love should be."

"Yeah," she said, "That's how it should be, and I had all that once, or something like it . But it doesn't last, does it? That's never the whole story, is it? Is it? There's always something you miss out on, something you don't know."

She was looking at me like she was seeing right into me, like she really understood. Like she knew. And there's been no one else like that — oh, you tell your mates, you try to explain to your family, but they don't really get it, it's as if they can't afford to. As if it's contagious, infectious. But this girl — I couldn't help it — it was as if she had nothing to lose, as if she already knew it all anyway.

"You're right," I said, "maybe there is always something you don't know. Maybe it is all a lie, maybe it's always been a lie. Maybe in the middle of all this niceness the woman you've loved for ten years, the mother of your children, is fucking your best mate. Maybe she's wondering whether she should tell you tonight — you're in such a fucken nice mood — whether she should tell you tonight that she's leaving. That she's going to take the kids, take your kids, Meg, and move in with him. That she's loved him for years, that she loved him even before she married you. That it's nothing to do with you: you've been good, you've been great, you're one of her best friends, she loves you. But she's in love with your best mate. In love. She can't help it.

She's in love and she's going to pack up your life, your nice life, Meg, she's going to pack up your nice life — pack it up and give it away."

"Yeah," I said, "maybe there is always something you don't know Meg, but that's no reason, believe me, that's no reason to give up. It doesn't have to be like that. It doesn't have to be a lie Meg. Maybe sometimes it's for real. Maybe if you try you can make it real."

She was sitting still. Looking at the table. Her cigarette was in the tray, untouched, still burning. I waited. She stubbed the cigarette out, her hand trembling. I waited. Eventually she looked up at me. "Look," she said, her voice soft, but clear, strong, certain. "Look," she started, "I think I'd - " but just then Lennie came in with the coffee.

Lennie marched in, keys jangling on her hip, with a tray of coffee and a packet of biscuits and "I reckon it's about time for a break," she said, giving me a funny look, "Time for a break, mate."

FRIDAY

There was this court case the next morning, me and Gibbo, out at Bidura. A couple of little shitbags from Woolloomooloo. They'd beaten up a tourist — kicked the shit out of this bloke, a gang of them, but we'd only got two. They'd kicked the shit out of him and taken his wallet. A heap of traveller's cheques and fifty bucks cash. Fifty bucks and three weeks later the poor guy's still at Vinnies, permanent back injuries, he'll be in a brace for years. So me and Gibbo had to give our statements, then listen while the legal aid softcock told the magistrate all about the little dears' deprived circumstances, their abnormal family relationships.

Anyway, we didn't get back until after three that afternoon and straightaway I checked with Penman about the Meg situation. I'd hardly slept the night before, thinking about her. I knew I was that close, that she was about to tell me something, that maybe if Lennie hadn't come in .... So straightaway I checked in with Penman to see what the deal was. Could I have another go at her? Maybe me and him again? Maybe that was the combination.

He was in his office with a few of the others — Lennie, Hanson, Carruthers — checking out a wanted poster they were getting together on O'Reilly, laughing at the artist's impressions of O'Reilly's possible long hair, his possible beard, his possible moustache. "Whadda you think, Stratford," he said, handing it to me, "good taste your little bird's got, eh? Fucken good taste."

"Listen," I said, ignoring him, "listen Penman, how about we interview her again. I reckon last night I was getting close, I reckon she's gonna crack, mate. I'm sure of it."

Penman looked at Lennie, then back at the poster. Finally he

looked up at me. "Mate," he said, "didn't you hear?" He sat back in his chair then, stretched his legs out, folded his arms behind his head. "She got bail, mate," he went on, his voice soft, "she got bail this morning, some fucken hotshot lawyer, fucken softcock magistrate. She got bail this morning and disappeared around lunchtime. We're adding her details to the report now."

"Why're you so surprised mate?" Penman asked, grinning. "Why're you so surprised? Thought you'd have worked it out by now. They're all the same, Stratford. They're all the fucken same."

Aileen Kelly

Effortlessly Secondary

for Lucy and in memory of Michael

I stand at the bedroom door in our dark
letting my eyes sharpen
through the swirl of old vision
until I can steer by the clock's glow
as though someone would wake at a light

I shuffle to the bed and lie without encroaching
beyond my territory

Sleep sets me to Inanna's journey
I strip my light music robes of state
abase myself before The keeper has no face
no name there is no parley

Waking at 2 or 3 it is not
to hear you spout easing your bladder
into the city-long sewer that begins
under the privacy of our house

I put on the jug with such a little water

Even in dreams I do not find you
and dawn's flood will never
cleanse my mouth of dusk

JUDY JOHNSON

TEN POEMS IN THE STYLE OF THE LIANG*

The Cicada

The cicada weaves its voice through the forest.
In the west there is a weaving wife.
Her fine flowered silk is tangled.
By sundown her pattern is not finished.

Time flies like the Dusk Wind bird,
Above the faint *srr, srr* of the cicadas' loom.

White, White Moon through the Window

My bed lies empty, lost to clear dust.
I watch my daughter apply beauty-spots.
She plays at sticking them between her eyebrows.
She paints kohl on her eyelids.

The white moon knows what lies inside my daughter.
It will soon undo her scarlet ribbons.

A Lovely Girl's Loneliness

A maiden with cinnabar lips and slim fingers
Strokes a lute.
Who will look on her face?
She, who destroys a city with one chord.

In the Valley of The Secret Orchid

The valley teems with sweet orchids.
I pick and pick but don't yet have one handful.
I have heard the music of the secret orchid.
Plink! plink! slim fingers strum.

My light skirts quiver.
Perfumed air pierces orange mist.

Envy

In the Jasper bedroom I hear bangles chinking.
I smell the fragrant dust amongst flimsy curtains.
My sister's house has lapiz lazuli doors,
Jade cabinets, emerald chains.

My sister holds court with Emperors.
She grooms her sweet face with kohl and cinnabar.
Her eyebrows are moth wings.
The moon shines on her gold lamé dance gown.
I am green, green,
Sinking into the room's cavernous shadows.

Pity me!

Pity me! I was not born a man.
I cannot yearn for the seas or spirited dust.
Because I was born a girl,
There were no gifts heaped at my feet.
When my daughter came along,
There was no celebration.

My husband was sent to the city
Soon after our wedding day.
He left me only his "always love you" pillow.

I lean over my winecup, but cannot drink.
This year's end is slow coming.

Infidelity

1.
How attractive! someone else's wife,
Lifting a palmful of water from the river
To her pomegranate mouth.
Is she close or far, far away,
Pining for her husband's silk-wrapped letter.

2.
How attractive! someone else's husband,
Riding through my town.
This stranger has come far,
Perhaps as far as the border.
His wife has not sewn the stitching on his shirt
As finely as I could sew it.

A Woman once Beautiful has Grown Old

Stars sink below the garden walls.
The pure wind of evening blows.

The silk of a woman's face grows transparent
Stretching over cheekbones under the autumn moon.

There is a mirror in her room that she no longer polishes.
Her image says "I long for you as you once were"
And then "How soon we must part".

The Faith of the Ibis

The beak of the Ibis is as fine as two thin swords.
There is a legend of two swords who were separated.
They cried out in anguish then took on different forms.

The female sank in the river.
The male flew to the city.

Although the river is deep
And the city full of sinister omens,

Divine things do not part forever.

The Ibis can walk on scissor legs through water.
It flies over cities with its beak full of mud.

Freedom

I am a tiny dot in the night, braving the far road.
In this scented season there's always a flowery moon.

Bright, bright stars adorn my carriage.
The Herdboy in the sky turns north-west.
The Weaver looks back south-east.

My heart is set free of its sweetheart strings.
I no longer look for mandarin ducks.

*The Liang Dynasty, Sixth century AD.

VICTOR YE

EAST OR WEST: AN INQUIRY INTO IDENTITY IN TODAY'S CHINESE LITERATURE

China is at present engaged with an unprecedentedly historical mission: building socialism ... based on an open-the-door policy. Such a policy allows for the introduction of some western technologies and administrative methods, which are being widely applied in the economic area and have promoted rapid economic development in the past two decades. Such openness has also brought about a lot of changes in intellectual and cultural life in China. The development of Chinese literature during the past two decades illustrates these changes, which are indicative of both the differences from the past and the challenges in the present.

The following five aspects have been chosen as examples to give a general survey of these changes. They demonstrate how Chinese writers are making an effort to extricate themselves from the terrible nightmare most of them have experienced and can never forget. At the same time, they illustrate how those writers are attempting to devise new modes of literary production by referring to what is conveyed from the west, in order to make up for what they have lost in terms of time and access to internationally-recognised work. The longing to narrow the gap with international movements is, however, modified by the fact that they want to preserve their roots in the soil which their ancestors have occupied for thousands of years and preserve traditional values. This mix of conflict and attempted reconciliation between old and new, east and west, seems to dominate the literary scene in China today: the development of a new type of

literature has to be risked at the cost of losing traditional values which once made China so proud but which gave rise to the long-term exclusion of external ideas. Is there any way to keep traditional values in combination with new ideas and techniques from the outside? Here is the response from the literary experiences of the last two decades in this, the world's most-populated country and one of its oldest civilisations.

Weakening of Political Significance

Traditionally speaking, China is a country heavily charged with political concerns. This was particularly so after 1949. Many writers suffered by being labelled "rightists", and this tendency culminated in the Cultural Revolution when not only writers but ordinary people dared not write or say anything in opposition to orthodox thinking.

When the Cultural Revolution ended, stories and poems were still charged with the central political concerns of the time, including melodrama which complains about the suffering and damage brought about by the Cultural Revolution, such as Lu Xin-Hua's *The Trace of Wound*. Reflective literature and reformative fiction are in the same category. The former attempts to expose and repudiate ultra-leftist politics and bureaucracy and present tragic characters, as in Ru Zhi-juan's *A Wrong-Edited Story*. The latter tends to focus on the reform situation that unfolded in China in the early eighties. The best representative is Jiang Zi-long's *The Appointment of Manager Qiao*, telling how a reformer overcomes difficulties and carries on reforms to boost production in a factory.

However, the tendency towards politically-loaded writing was gradually checked as a younger generation of writers arose. One of the first examples of the kind is *Chen Cun's Death*, which focuses on the death of the famous translator Fu Lei who suicided during the Cultural Revolution. The author, however, does not give an account of physical aspects of the real event, but concentrates on his own philosophical vision of death which transcends time, thus moving away from the political tone conventionally used to deal with kind of material.

Political concerns are further obscured and weakened in the neo-realism and neo-historicism which came into being in the late eighties when the literary magazine *Zhong Shang* set up a special column called "Grand Show of Neo-Realist Fiction." Many writers active in the 1980s could be included under this heading. It is inclined to reject the control of political power over literature and emphasise the return of the original nature of life, or represent the immediate features of life. Essentially it involves the removal of all ideological shadows, and frees literature from manipulation through political power by dismantling stereotypes and bringing the writer's subjectivity into full play. It no longer concerns itself ideologcially with the meaning of life, but is more illustrated in human nature and the varieties of human existence.

The representative writers of this group are quite numerous. Wang An-yi's trilogy *Love in Bleak Mountains, Love in a Small Town,* and *Love in Jing-xiu Valley* highlights an aesthetic of sexual love by abandoning all externally-imposed social and cultural mores, returning to a fundamental nature of life based in human instincts and desires. Liu Heng's *Fuxi Fuxi* is a story of adultery in which he seems to affirm the value of life by reproduction. Fang Fang's novelette *Scenery* adopts a more naturalistic mode of description in presenting many details of the barbarous, mean, and ugly aspects of life in a city-dweller's family. A violent father and a vulgar and voluptuous mother have ten children who are not only undernourished and poverty-stricken, but suffer a great deal in spirit. Fang Fang presents a realistic picture of the nature of existence without any ideological shelter, and produces a shocking sense of newness and genuineness.

Neo-historicism is closely related to neo-realism, but confines its subject matter to the trifles of life in a certain historical period, principally the years between 1912-1949, the so-called min-guo or Republican period. It also tries to exclude issues of political power and to reveal the original nature of social history. One example is Zhao Ben-fu's *The Sword-carrying Man and the Woman,* a legend of the rough life of lower-class people along the Yellow River as they struggle against natural disasters and human evil. The best work of this kind is Mo-yan's *Red Sorghum.* This novella focuses on the love story of a peasant bandit (Yu Zhang-ao) and a peasant woman

against the setting of the anti-Japanese War. It does not devote much space to the political meaning of the war itself, like many other stories of its kind, but concentrates on violence and sexual love, on the rustic, coarse way of living common among peasants at the time. Thus it focuses on human nature without any didacticism.

This apolitical tendency also appears in poetry. Beginning in the mid-eighties, a large group of young poets, mostly born in the 1960s, have set their poetic writings against the poetry that preceded them. Their works present a multifarious and complex trend with the establishment of many schools and styles of art, generally referred to as "the third generation of poets". The most noticeable feature of their poems is a strong sense of individuality and the exclusion of political and cultural ideas, an aesthetic which generally conforms to the neo-realist and neo-historicist principles of fiction writing. The best example is Han Dong's poem "About Da Yan Pagoda" which strips the famous historic building of its cultural connotations and significances:

Da Yan Pagoda
What can we learn about
We climb upwards
and look around
for the scenery
before we come down.[1]

Growing Modernist Influences

After the introduction in China of early modernist writings in the 1920s and 30s, modernism almost disappeared for 30 years after 1949. A heated argument about modernism occurred in the early 1980s when the open-door policy allowed its return. Shortly after that Chinese modernist writings in various genres began to flourish almost overnight.

The first sign was associated with a group of young poets headed by Bai Dao, Gu Cheng and Shu Ting. Their poems are characterised by the use of imagery, metaphor, of general perception akin to symbolism. Because of the new aesthetic sense

the poems convey, they caught the public attention soon after their appearance, and were nicknamed "obscure poetry" due to their difficulty. One of the representative poems is Bai Dao's "Reply":

I don't believe in the blue sky
I don't believe in the echoes of thunders
I don't believe in false dreams
I don't believe in death without retribution.[2]

Modernist fiction follows "obscure poetry" closely, as is shown in Wang Meng's numerous short stories and novellas. Most of them involve psychological descriptions and an impressionistic style, an example is "A Dream of Sea". The story tells of the meditations of an old scholar who, having gone through many years of political persecution, finally obtains a chance to go to the seaside. He has been longing to do this for more than fifty years. Yet he stays only five days before he leaves. This is because "The sky is too immense, the sea too broad and he too old."[3] If Wang Meng and other so-called "returnee writers" (a nickname for the writers once designated as rightist in 1957) regard modernist techniques principally as a way of exposing social reality, the younger writers simply concentrate on subjective mood. One representative is Can Xue, whose application of a distorted or alienated perspective reveals a world of absurdity, deformation and nightmare in the light of gloom, obscenity, fear, anxiety and oddity, in a style reminiscent of Kafka. In her story *A Cabin on the Hill*, the heroine seems to have something wrong with her senses. She feels that everything around her, including her parents, is abnormal. Her father turns into a wolf every night, while her mother causes her daughter's body to swell whenever she fixes her stare on it.

Quite a number of younger writers, including Ma Yuan who is well known for meta-narratives in his series of stories dealing with Tibetan subject matter; Sun Gang-lu, reputed for his language experiments; Ge Fei, well known for his probing of consciousness, and Yu Hua, for his penetration of the nature of human existence, are famous for their modernist techniques. But compared with fiction and poetry, drama is less influenced by modernism. Gao Xing-jian's play *The Absolute Signal* uses some surrealist lighting

and sound to highlight the subjective mood of the characters on stage.

The Function of Market Forces

As the economic system has become market-oriented, cultural and literary production has had to adapt to the new system and has become more controlled by the market. Inevitably literature falls into two kinds: elite and popular. Many writers have had to turn their attention to the market to satisfy their readers' taste in order to sell more books and make more money. Fiction and television series, poems and pop songs are no longer inseparable. In a word, market forces have had a great impact on literary development.

At the moment the most distinguished writer of popular literature is Wang Shu. Wang's early career is associated with stories of crime and love, such as the best-sellers of the 1980s, *Air Hostess, Play with Heartbeat,* etc. His writing style has gradually turned into a kind of parody, such as *The Game Master and other stories,* which has won him a large readership. The tendency towards commercialisation of his fiction has led him to abandon fiction in order to focus on writing television series. His involvement in television has resulted in a number of successful television scripts, including *Longing* and *The Story of the Editorial Board,* regarded as the most sensational television drama in China. Wang has become a pioneer in the production of commercial television series. Similar to Wang Shu in some ways is Cui Jian who is well-known for his rock singing, with all of the words and music composed by himself.

The commercialisation of literature has also raised some problems. For example *Raise the Red Lantern,* a film script adapted from the novella *A Flock of Wives,* turns on a different understanding of the heroine Song-lian. The question arises; to what extent should the adaptation of fiction remain true to the original? Or, rather, which is more important, the aesthetic value of the work itself, the taste of the audience, or the value of the box office?

Contributions of Tradition

The past two decades have witnessed great changes in the major concerns and techniques of Chinese contemporary literature under the impact of the West and the market. This raises the question of the viability of traditional values. The reply is positive. There have been many successful works based on the employment or reconstruction of traditional values. A common understanding among many writers is that no literature can be established in its true sense unless it is grounded in its national soil, with a particular identify of its own. There seems to have been a return to tradition among many writers since the mid-eighties.

There are two main groups in this category. The first consists of some older writers, who have stuck to their faith in the national cultural character throughout their writings. Most of them were labelled as rightists in 1957 and suffered a great deal in the subsequent twenty years. These terrible experiences made them better able to understand social problems and national culture. Many of their writings are deeply inscribed with their pursuit of various social features in the long traditions of the country. Wang Zeng-qi's *The Buddhist Taboo* is about the monks' secular way of living in a Buddhist monastery; Deng You-mei's *The Pipe* is a legend of a declining aristocrat in late Qing Dynasty and his relationship with a pipe-manufacturer; Lu Wen-fu's *Delicacy-Taker* concerns food customs in Su Zhou; Liu Shao-tang's native land fiction series deal with the picturesque landscape and lives of the rural people; Feng Ji-cai's *The Miraculous Pig-Tail* is about a legendary character's playful fight and game with foreign invaders in the late Qing Dynasty. All these stories are strongly flavoured by Chinese traditional culture.

The second group consists of some younger writers. In spite of general concern for traditional culture, the majority of these writers remained engrossed with the modernist techniques and modes introduced in the first half of the 1980s. It was not until a root-seeking cultural current developed that traditional culture received more attention from the majority of writers, with the educated youth origin writers at their core. The shift in orientation was partly due to political pressure from above and coincided with the

international current of postmodernism. It seemed to take a stand against the modernist denial of all traditional forms, and re-evaluated and affirmed the function of traditional culture. The first representative work is Ah Cheng's *The Chinese Chess Master,* which presents a physically feeble character, Wang Yi-sheng, who with strong spiritual power resists the chaotic forces coming from the Cultural Revolution and devotes himself to the study of the essential laws guiding Chinese chess, drawing on Taoist ideas about the subjugation of the strong by the weak. Han Shao-gong's *Papapa* is an exposition of the history of a primitive tribe, handling local rites, superstition and native slang, and adopting a critical attitude towards backward forms of national culture. It centres on an idiot called Bin-zai who is incomprehensibly and ridiculously worshipped by the local villagers.

Other important works of this group include Han Shao-gong's *Ma-qiao Dictionary;* Zang Cheng-zhi's *The Northern River;* Jia Ping-ao's *An Initial Account of Shang-zhou;* Li Han-yu's *The Last Fisherman,* and Zhang Wei's *The Fable of September.* These works present traditional subject matter, they also give new insights, new values and force to traditional culture. Some of them are even innovative in terms of literary forms, such as Han Shao-gong's *Ma-qiao Dictionary* which tells a story in the form of a dictionary.

Feminism

In spite of the fact that there have been quite a few women writers in China, few of them have had any real sense of the position and needs of women as distinct from those of men. It was not until after the Cultural Revolution that more and more women writers became aware of their place in the historical process.

One of the early women writers with a sense of feminist purpose is Zhang Jie. Her *The Unforgettable Love* portrays the love between a divorced woman and an old cadre who still maintains a loveless marriage, showing that a morally justified marriage must be one based on love. Her more important work about women is Ark, in which three divorced, educated women are thrown into a helpless and desolate predicament without any understanding and

sympathy from society or men. They become alienated and abnormal to the extent that they are hysterical and unable to maintain their existence any longer.

However, feminist writing as a self-conscious trend did not fully arrive until the 1990s, when some literary feminists asserted their full awareness of sex and self-consciousness of gender. Their claim that women's writing has historically been concealed and overshadowed by male discourse in history should not be ignored. They refused to share a public consciousness with men, and insisted that women's writing should be part of women's life experiences. A number of young women, such as Chen Rang, Lin Bai, Hai Lang and Zhuo You-min have been the practitioners of such beliefs.

Chen Rang's novel *Private Life* describes a young woman with a sensitive, lonely and opinionated personality, hostile to public attitudes and conventions. She becomes totally depressed and withdraws completely, cutting off all contact with the outside world. Lin Bai's *An Individual War* shows a young woman, who suffers much from the male world and becomes a narcissist who describes her feelings as those of an individual war. The book is filled with depictions of the woman's sensual experiences in fragments of narration that are embedded with personal perceptions. Zhou You-min's long series of poems, "Women", establishes an image of "dark night," which represents a feminist world that takes shape after male discourse is dispersed, and grows into a totally marginalised and individualised living space for women. She writes in *The Night Consciousness:* "Actually every woman has to be confronted with an abyss of incessantly increasing and confirmed suffering experiences. This is the primitive dark night which guides us into a new world which is specially structured and only belongs to women."[4]

* * *

From this general survey, it is clear that Chinese literature has developed rapidly and vigorously in the past two decades, due to the relaxation of political tension and the greater freedom granted to writers and readers as a whole. This development is not only

located in the quantity of published books or the emergent but in a variety of schools or styles of writing resulting from the introduction of more western ideas and the rediscovery of Chinese traditional culture. However, the literary achievements made so far have been limited in their international impact, and time is still needed for more mature works to emerge, though no one should underestimate the significance of recent accomplishments.

Considering its long cultural tradition and large population, China has great potential for literary and cultural development. So long as the present political stability and economical development continues, further intellectual and cultural development is a reasonable expectation.

China has embarked on a route towards modernisation and has benefited from foreign, especially western, ideas. At the same time, the country is confronted with a powerful challenge to her national identity from outside. East or West is far from being a simple choice. It entails conflict and competition, which is intensified as never before, between western influences and Chinese traditional culture. Nonetheless, one need not worry about the dynamism of Chinese culture, which has survived so many tests in China's long history. Competition, on the contrary, may help to fortify China's ability to foster new strengths. If so, a more self-confident and optimistic nation with a new national identity and more sophisticated science and culture could come into being.

Notes

1 From *Poetry Today*, No.2, 1987.

2 From *Poetry Today*, (a bi-monthly literary magazine). No.1, 1978.

3 From *Shanghai Literature*, No.6, 1980.

4 From "The Night Consciousness," *Poetry Paper*, Anhui, 15 November 1986.

OUYANG YU

UNTITLED

Summer night. The sky laden with great star fruit
Throws down black shadows everywhere
As lights paint the wind on my brown legs
The wind blows the lights into a pond of ripples

The sleepy man tired of his distant desires
Down there, the wild barking of a dog
tonight, my heart laden with great star fruit
Quiet, heavy, and ripe

Tim Denoon

Monsoon

It's a miracle that anything grows here at all.
In the cracked ground near my window
she douses her chili plants
with water from a hidden well.
The plants don't seem to notice
and the leaves stay crumpled
like shrivelled thumbs.
I haven't seen a cloud for weeks
and the sun seems to rise and fall
in a parched monotone.
Even the pigs have stopped snuffling
in the dirt.
She says it will all change
when the monsoon comes
when the rains hit
like a sheet of prickles and tears
and the ground throws up a nail bed
of grass and strangling vines.
It will all change she smiles,
the sodden earth
and the sky crammed with angry clouds.
Even our longing will sprout green ends
like the first fiery nose of the pepper.

JAN TEAGLE KAPETAS

WAGAIT (FOR MY DAUGHTER, AGED 16)

Watching you sleeping on a ramshackle bed
under the straw hats on the wall,
the galvanised iron-
you are all languid south sea island curves
and generous mouth-

I am afraid.

The sun beats hard on the tin roof
and strange birds cry out
in the pandanus
by the sea.

No longer the child
round cheeked,
curly haired, laughing-
a little green bear tucked under her arm-

today there are only your embroidery threads on the table,
your glass with that half inch of juice
you never finish -
the mower in the doorway we never moved.

The sky outside is heartless blue,
the sea, the bush silent as

our piles of books and papers, pens
and promises.

I wonder when you'll go.

The future accumulates on the horizon
like the afternoon monsoon.

SUE HOSKING

HOMELESS AT HOME, STOLEN AND SAVED: THREE COLEBROOK AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

For just one year, 1956, I went to school with Aboriginal children. Alice and Norveen sat in my third grade class at Blackwood Primary, in South Australia. These girls were considerably older than the rest of us, and rarely spoke.

One day Norveen (I'd never heard such a name and called her Noreen) — one day Norveen said to me "I just want to go home, back north, to my aunties and sisters, the little ones." I didn't understand what she meant. Her home was Colebrook Home at Eden Hills. At Blackwood Primary we thought Colebrook Home was an orphanage for Aborginal children who had no relatives.

Suddenly the Aboriginal children weren't there any more. I don't remember asking any questions. It wasn't until Colebrook Home at Eden Hills was demolished in the early seventies that I began to wonder what had happened. It wasn't until last year, when I was looking through State Records for another project, that I discovered that a group of parents had complained about the Aboriginal children at the school. They were accused of stealing — lunches, mainly. The then headmaster had capitulated to the wishes of the parent group. All that remains as a record of whatever happened in those negotiations is a letter from one of the senior masters. Ian Auhl had written to express his view that a mistake had been made.

It is because Alice Millera and Norveen Turner didn't tell their stories of Colebrook Home, and because I didn't ask, that I have been compelled to read autobiographies by Colebrook kids. Two were launched towards the end of last year. They were Nancy

Barnes' self-published *Munyi's Daughter*, and Doris Kartinyeri's *Kick the Tin*, published by Spinifex Press[1].' They appear to be contradictory stories, and they produced contradictory responses, both in the community of Colebrook kids and the community of non-Aboriginal readers interested in reconciliation.

Doris Kartinyeri's *Kick the Tin*, the most recent autobiography, was professionally edited, promoted and marketed by its publishers. They launched it last October in front of a large crowd, including media people, at the newly created Colebrook Memorial Park, on the site of the former Colebrook Home at Eden Hills. It was a moving occasion. Lowitja O'Donoghue, herself a Colebrook kid, spoke. Doris appeared on television on *This is Your Life* and *A Current Affair*. A full page story, titled "A life reclaimed" by Samela Harris, appeared in *The [Adelaide] Advertiser* prior to the book's release (October 21, 2000). The accompanying photograph showed Doris at the base of the Grieving Mother sculpture in the park. The caption reads: "The mother I never had. I broke down and wept when they unveiled this".

The launch of Nancy Barnes' autobiography was a much smaller affair, remembered by those who attended as disquieting and uncomfortable. There were arguments. What is the difference between the two stories? Why was one snapped up for publication and the other rejected?

In *Kick the Tin*, Doris Kartinyeri tells us that she was stolen as a baby from Murray Bridge Hospital, when her mother died. Welfare Officers from the Aboriginal Protection Board placed her in Colebrook Home at Eden Hills without her father knowing (6). She stayed at Colebrook Home until she was 14, was not told that she had a family, nor told that her mother had died.

At 14 Doris was shunted about (57) — removed from Colebrook Home by the Protection Board and placed with a white family of six in the suburbs. She was expected to attend high school and eventually mind the four children, cook for the family and keep house. "No money was ever exchanged" (60). Then, without any explanation, she was taken away again to a house in the hills at Coromandel Valley, not far from Colebrook. There she lived as a servant, and there she was sexually abused by a lay minister of the church.

> This was a traumatic removal for me once again. I felt isolated. I lived in horrible cold quarters separated from the house about thirty yards. They were poorly lit and at night it was pitch dark. I used to be scared coming back after doing the dinner dishes.
>
> Here was this lay minister of the church who I soon experienced as a man who constantly exposed himself to me. At night I could hear him at my bedroom window. I lay in bed frigid [sic] with fright, wondering if he would try to get in my bedroom window. I was too terrified to tell his wife as I knew that she would not believe me. For the first time in my mind I wanted to leave. I felt unsafe and insecure. I wanted to leave but because of my age I didn't. I did not have contact with any of my family, my uncles, my cousins, my father, my aunties, and my brothers and sisters at the time. Because of the Protectors and Sister McKenzie, I had no one to contact. How would anybody know what I was going through? Where is the guiding hand a child is meant to have? (61)

Before she was 16, Doris felt that her life was ruined. "I had lost all my dignity, self respect and, most importantly, my identity and sanity" (62-3). She moved in and out of relationships, carrying her belongings in plastic glad bags (70). Two children. A marriage. Another child. Divorce. She sought the company of Aboriginal people and found it in the Carrington Hotel. Lost to drink, she was arrested and shamed. She was about to leave for Western Australia when a friend rescued her and offered her accommodation at Raukkan, on the Coorong, with the Ngarrindjeri community. It was hard for her to fit in: the lingo was a problem (76). Doris moved out again, to Murray Bridge. She still couldn't fit in to the local Aboriginal community. More drinking. And then she became unwell. The latter part of Doris Kartinyeri's story tells of acute episodes of bi-polar disorder. There is a time when Doris's daughter advises her: "Insanity is the safest place to be, Mum" (101). But Doris survived and is healing. She begins her final chapter with her statement of Aboriginality:

> I am a fifty-four year old Ngarrindjeri mimini [woman]. I am proud to be Nunga. *The battles and struggles of living in two worlds that I endured throughout my life have proven my aboriginality.* (135, my emphasis)

Kick the Tin is a heart-breaking story, one that we recognise and respond to. It slips comfortably into the genre of battler stories that occupy so much space in the Australian psyche. It shocks and elicits pity. Nancy Barnes story, however, doesn't fit the bill. Barnes begins *Munyi's Daughter* with these sentences:

> We are referred to as "The Stolen Generation". I consider myself "Saved".

This is an Aboriginal autobiography that nobody wanted to publish, and few have gone out of their way to read. I'll admit to feeling uncomfortable myself from page one. But now I am wondering about preferred stories. And I am also wondering about the silences in stories like Nancy Barnes'. Is Nancy Barnes' version of a life saved really so reprehensible? Is her crime really that she chose to define her life as something more than suffering, more than survival? Has she deprived the non-Indigenous readership of Aboriginal narratives of what we condescend to give? Pity? Has she failed to observe the line between "them" and "us"?

Like David Unaipon, who, in fragments of personal narrative, written in the fifties, enthusiastically embraced what the white world had to offer,[2] Barnes felt "the need to make something" of herself (63). She seized the opportunities that enabled her to become a fully qualified kindergarten teacher and eventually, in 1965, a Regional Director with the Kindergarten Union of South Australia and first Aboriginal woman appointed to the Aboriginal Affairs Board. Like David Unaipon, Barnes believed in an ideal of racial harmony, and did not expect her achievements to be harnessed exclusively to Aboriginal causes.

> It was a great surprise, or rather, a shock, to learn that I was expected to work only with Aboriginal children. That was not my mission in life. (106)

Yet like Unaipon's autobiographical fragments, Barnes's life narrative embodies the contradictions of a life that is both stolen and saved. While she writes about Colebrook Home as "a loving sanctuary" where she "didn't miss out on anything" (1), this life is defined by absence. The absent mother is not known and cannot be spoken about. Yet she is there, from the first page:

> We didn't miss out on anything as I recall. *Except perhaps our mothers* (1, my emphasis).

Four words, and the title of the autobiography, say all that can be said in words about what is not there in Nancy Barnes' childhood and formative years. Barnes treasures the knowledge of her mother's name, Munyi. For Barnes the very sound of that name is, she says, "motherly" (2). Rather than dwelling on what is lost, however, Nancy Barnes reconceptualises motherhood; she fills the gap with older Colebrook girls who are both mothers and sisters. Ultimately, she devotes her life to an ideal:

> I had not known my mother. In my new work, I could strengthen the mother-child bond of other children, I had so deeply missed. My surrogate parents in my early days, the missionaries, taught me that I could help other people succeed. (101)

Nancy Barnes chooses to tell the story of her public life: a story of achievement and acceptance by a Christian community. This public life is framed by the absent mother, and shaped by the desire to fill that gap. Barnes met her mother twice, briefly, much later in life. She recounts these meetings in just a few pages towards the end of her story. As in Unaipon's autobiographical writings, Barnes' sense of cultural identity keeps shifting. She is recognised by some of the Pitjantjatjara people "as one of their own" (161). While she briefly recounts adventures "with my own people" (162), she is distanced from "them". Recognising something of what is said in Pitjantjatjara (words she last heard at the age of three), Barnes nevertheless cannot converse with the old people who claim her as one of their mob (164). Yet she perceives the irony in having to obtain

permission from the Presbyterian Mission Board to enter the land of her many grandmothers. "It's cruel, really, isn't it?" she asks.

The first time Nancy Barnes met Munyi she recognised her mother immediately: "I could see her in my own self" (165). Yet mother and daughter struggle to communicate, defeated by language. Barnes says she was content just to be with her mother, "there in her environment" (166). It is Munyi who cries. Looking back on her meetings with her mother Barnes reflects, "How much grief this caused Munyi, I could not imagine" (169). The image of Doris weeping for the mother she never knew is certainly more emotive than the awkwardness and discomfort of Nancy Barnes' meetings with Munyi. But how many faces does grief have? Surely more than one? Nancy Barnes keeps her silences, but she does not forget.

> Oh, truly, my memory of this is so vivid, I can hear it all again. Was [Munyi] going to die with anger towards me in her heart? Was she blaming me for our long separation, or for the fact that we now belonged to two different cultures? She was not to blame, but neither was I. We were both innocent victims of a Government policy that did not take into account the pain of those separated as we were. (167)

It is not unproblematic, politically, that one of the first book-length autobiographies by an Indigenous South Australian should be one that distances itself from others who articulate different memories of what it meant to be taken away from their families. In effect, Barnes's autobiography could be read as an endorsement of colonial policies and as confirmation of the view that was used by Leon Carmen to justify the publication of his now-removed novel, *My Own Sweet Time*, under the name of an Aboriginal woman, Wanda Koolmatri.[3] Ironically, Wanda Koolmatrie, a young Aboriginal woman who didn't exist, attracted more attention, locally and nationally, than any other South Australian "Aboriginal" writer in recent years.

Most of us would agree that Carmen violated the protocols when he used the persona of an Aboriginal woman to further his own ambitions, particularly when the view of that persona was that Aboriginal people need not be weighed down with the burden of a

sordid past. But should we extend censorship to an Aboriginal woman who defines herself as "saved" rather than "stolen"? Such a response is not that of the majority, and we can't forget that too many of the stolen generations (particularly the boys from Colebrook Home) are no longer here to say anything at all. Nevertheless, why should we expect all Aboriginal people to tell the same story in the same way?

The meanings of Colebrook are still under negotiation. Geographically, Colebrook Home was a shifting site. It began as the United "Aborigines" Mission Children's Home, an iron shed in the back yard of a boarding house in Oodnadatta, in 1926. It moved to Quorn in the following year, where it was named Colebrook Home, after one of the founders of the Mission — a white man, of course. This is where Nancy Barnes begins her story. In 1944 Colebrook Home was established at Eden Hills, and when that was demolished in 1972, children were shifted to a cottage in Blackwood. Along the way there were other homes, loosely gathered under the umbrella of Colebrook. Officially, the Quorn and Eden Hills sites were Training Homes. The shift to the city facilitated a policy of assimilation, enabling placement of the children in some cases, but not all, as servants. Life narratives change as the site shifts closer to the city.

Let me go back to an earlier Colebrook story: Molly Lennon's *"That's how it was,"* printed by the Aboriginal Heritage Branch in 1989,[4] two years after Sally Morgan's *My Place* became a best seller. In her life story, told to Jen Gibson, Molly Lennon articulates a philosophy of forgiveness.

> It's not the Christian people now that were cruel to Aboriginal people. That was in the past. I know the Church we go to today, our Pastor he's upset by the things in those days. What they did to the Aboriginal people. We've got to forgive. (72)

Gibson tells us in her Acknowledgements that "Younger Aboriginal people [were] critical of [Molly] for remaining loyal to her Christian principles". This was also a criticism expressed in relation to Nancy Barnes, who wrote at length about what she

described as her "life-long friendship" with the Duguid family, particularly Dr Charles Duguid, whom she praises for his efforts "to support [she says] Aboriginal people, both in the outback and the city through the Aborigines Advancement League" (66). Barnes says she was "adopted" as a daughter (66) when she moved to Dr Duguid's home, to become his receptionist. Some of the Colebrook community, however, feel that she has failed to realise that she was, in fact, a servant in the Duguid household. And indeed, for those of us who call ourselves "postcolonialists," it is easier to applaud the overt resistance of Alice Nannup ofr Daisy Corunna, who turned the tables on their masters and made fun of their apparent inability to pour their own tea.

Molly Lennon's story now gathers dust on library shelves. It has never been professionally edited. It's raw. Abbreviated. Incomplete. Interrupted with Gibson's explanations and quotations from policy documents. But Molly Lennon's story is profoundly unsettling. While this is the story of a stolen child, it is also a narrative of unexamined violence and jealousy in the extended family from which Molly was taken away. One of Molly's sisters, who like Molly had a white father, was allegedly murdered. Molly remembers her Aboriginal step-father telling her; ˝We was sorry for you. We knocked the others in the head˝(15). Molly herself was scarred for life by a boomerang used as a weapon against her mother by her stepfather in a domestic argument. In her second chapter, ˝Losing my mother˝, Molly Lennon describes how, as a young child, she witnessed that same step-father set light to the shelter under which her mother was sleeping.

> Flames went everywhere then, my mother just got me and threw me out, a long way from that place and she got burnt! All her head and everything burnt, it was cruel.
> I always think of my mother because she was sitting there trying to take her clothes off. She had one of those dresses that used to have buttons at the back and a high collar. It was like a Chinese dress. He wouldn't try to help her to take the clothes off. No! he just stood there. (10)

Molly's mother died the next night, with her daughter in her blistered arms.

Molly Lennon forgave her Aboriginal step-father. She describes him, as she was taken away:

> The old man was knocking himself in the head, himself on the head. My old stepfather, crying for me. At least he did that for me. Poor old man was knocking himself around although he killed my mother. Some Aboriginal people had step-fathers, they was all right. I still had feeling for the old man you know. (25)

She also forgave the cruelties of former white missionaries. What would have happened to Molly Lennon, had she not been taken away? For that matter, what would have happened to Nancy Barnes, who was disabled by polio? How do we ask these questions without diminishing the significance of suffering attributable to colonial policies? Should we not ask? By refusing to read autobiographies by those who tell alternative stories, however, aren't we really perpetuating colonial practices? Confining lives to boxes, cells, cattletrucks? Refusing the freedom to move? To move on? Giving only pity?

Perhaps we need to think again about the genre of Aboriginal autobiography. Are those of us who read in this genre complicit in the reproduction of otherness, defined exclusively by suffering? The Colebrook Home I knew has been taken away. The fence is gone. Colebrook Memorial Park is now a space for remembering, not without tears, but surely not just for tears. I can now go to a place I never visited before. What I hope, not without anxiety, is that one day, there on the site of Colebrook, I might see Alice or Norveen. And we might talk about how to begin again.

Notes

[1] Nancy Barnes, *Munyi's Daughter: A Spirited Brumby* (Adelaide: Seaview Press, 2000); Doris Kartinyeri, *Kick the Tin* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000).

[2] David Unaipon, "My Life Story," (Adelaide: The AFA [Aborigines Friends' Association] Annual Report, 1951): 10-14; and "Leaves of Memory," (Adelaide: The AFA Annual Report, 1953): 6-9.

[3] Wanda Koolmatrie [Carmen, Leon], *Her Own Sweet Time* (Magabala Books, 1997).

[4] Molly Lennon, *"That's how it was,"* (Adelaide: Aboriginal Heritage Branch, 1989).

Ron Pretty

Tomorrow

Her skin, soft as old chamois.
When I touched her hand
a jolt like faraday: several centuries
of slavery, the tribe of Shem
and the white man's burden
were in those five cool fingers
and the smile, with sceptical
orange lipstick she offered. The voice
was inner London, the smile
was startled deer, but the eyes
were perfect Africa, sub-Sahara
savannah and wildebeest.
Tight plaits parted rigid as a quaker,
a slender sprinter's body. Tomorrow
was in that glance, reticent
and appraising. Tomorrow
we march. And you? Gently
withdrawing her hand. I'll be there,
I lied, reluctant to let her go.
A backward glance
as she entered the underground.
Tomorrow, she said, departing,
where will you be?
Nowhere, I said to myself
and that cool departing voice.

Lorraine Marwood

Enough

Small ladder of daffodils,
yolk cups easing into ribs
of bark, iron bark, trunk
so solid, so car proof.
Younger trees gave way instead,
struck the death blow.
And relatives, friends
bring flowers, fragile
bruising. They scour the ground
for clues, try to catch
the vapour, the very elixir
of the last breath, bring
a fist to mouth, try to stopper
the grief. Yet that one sheaf
of daffodils leaning into tree
catches my eye.

They don't
need to paint a cross on the trunk,
the loneliness of such hothouse blooms
in the dustiness of the sideroad
is death-splash enough.

ANNA MANDOKI

NIGHT SWIMMING

The first time the electricity fails, Ryan is in his hired ute, crossing the Mae Lao River. The streetlamps swing over the road with the vibrations of the bridge. They flicker, flashing in and out of sight, and then they are gone. Ryan turns his headlamps to full beam, cutting bright swathes through the lush, suddenly dark, night.

There was a bar on the riverbank, he'd seen it before the lights went out, and he turns off the main road towards it now. The darkness is thick and close, and he doesn't want to drive on. He doesn't want to sit alone with his thoughts in the silence and the dark. Doesn't want to feel again the silent tension of the marriage he has left behind. He looks forward to the adventure and noise of a local bar, off the tourist track.

The ute dips and rattles on the unsurfaced road, throwing stones up from the tyres. It's fifteen years old, from a backstreet car-hire operator in Chiang-Mai, and all that Ryan could afford. Still, it's served him well, and he's not afraid to be rough with it.

The brightly lit bar has vanished into the night, but Ryan knows he will reach it as long as he keeps the river close beside him. The river can't be seen, or heard over the sound of the engine, but he knows it's there: the rich, rotting smell of it comes into the cab, blown in through his open window on the warm wind. He breathes it in, focuses on it so that it fills his mind and pushes out all other thoughts.

The electricity comes back as Ryan pulls off the road to park, and the bar appears in front of him. There's no gradual fade-in – one

moment there's only blackness ahead, the next moment the bar is there: its neon signs in swirling script; rows of bright lights around the bar; the glowing faces of customers at tables in the open air.

When the electricity fails for the second time, Ryan is sitting alone at a table, a Singa beer in his hand. The lights dim, and then die. He can hear the river flowing, and over it the high-pitched song of cicadas.

Two waitresses walk from table to table, placing candles and bringing soft light to the bar. One of them comes over to Ryan, her dark hair falling in front of him as she bends to secure a candle. She strikes a match, and her face glows. She looks at him and smiles.

"You are from UK?" she asks in slow English.

"No, Australia."

She smiles more widely, and her eyes shine.

"Can I sit with you?" she asks.

Ryan feels a burst of irritation – he isn't looking for that. He's travelled north to escape the cheap bars of Bangkok's Patpong. He is uncomfortable in the company of women, he prefers to be alone.

"Don't you have other things to do?" he asks.

"My shift is end," she replies. She's still standing, uncertain. "The owner, he want you feel welcome. I like practice my English, but if you don't want ..."

"No, it's fine." Politeness wins over judgement. He waves his hand at the empty chair across from him, thinking that at least she will be a diversion, keep his mind from turning to his problems at home.

She hesitates, then smiles and sits, looks across the bar's decking towards the invisible river. Ryan stares down at his hands on the hardwood table, spreads his fingers, feeling the close grain through thickened skin.

"You like the table?" she asks.

He looks up into her laughing eyes. "I like wood," he says. "I'm a carpenter."

"You on holiday?"

He smiles. You could call it that. He does call it that, although Caroline had said it was running away. "Yes, I am," he tells the woman. "Doesn't mean I can switch off my love of wood. Teak is one of the best kinds. Rich grey, and warm, but hard as stone.

People take wood for granted. They don't look at it closely the way I do."

He is most comfortable when he's working with wood, he understands it, has a feeling for it. People are harder for him to understand. He could talk forever about his love for wood, but he could never talk to Caroline. He had never been able to say the things she'd wanted to hear.

The woman says: "It's only wood."

"But wood can be beautiful. Beautiful. How do you say that in Thai?"

"Beautiful? *Soo-ay.*"

"*Soo-ay,*" he repeats.

She laughs. "No, not like that. That way means you have bad luck."

He smiles. "Say it again."

He listens to the sway of the word as she repeats it, this time noticing the tonal rise at the end, like a question.

"*Soo-ay,*" he tries.

She nods. "That's it." Then she asks: "You travel alone?"

He shrugs. "It's better that way. Get to meet more local people, absorb more of the culture." He has taught himself to say this, it sounds convincing now even to him.

She nods again, but doesn't say anything. Ryan wonders how much she understands.

"Where did you learn to speak English?" he asks.

"I live one year in Bangkok—"

Loud male voices come suddenly from behind him, talking over her words, and he turns to look. A group of men in brown short-sleeved shirts, police uniform, guns at their belts, have arrived. They arrange chairs around a large table, heavy boots clattering on the wooden decking.

"I know Australian man," she says, making Ryan look back at her. "Maybe you know him? Paul Johnson?"

He's surprised by this question that's come out of nowhere. Blames it on her poor English, which must make it hard for her to follow a conversation's flow. "Paul Johnson ..." he shakes his head. "I don't think so. Which part of Australia's he from?"

"He from Perth." Her voice is tight, as if she's holding her breath.

He shrugs. "I'm from Melbourne. Never been to Perth."

The candlelight shows her disappointment, but still she smiles.

Then her eyes shift from his face to look beyond his shoulder, and the smile disappears.

He turns around. One of the policemen is standing right behind him, so close that Ryan can smell the sweat on the man's uniform, can tell that he has eaten garlic that day. The policeman's colleagues watch silently from their table. From the river comes the sound of frogs croaking.

"Come with me," says the policeman, in English. He puts a hand on Ryan's shoulder. There is no possibility for refusal.

They walk together across the wooden boards, the policeman's firm, guiding hand on Ryan's shoulder, past the curious faces of the other customers. Out in the parking area behind the bar, beyond the reach of the candlelight, they are hidden from interested eyes. Mosquitoes brush Ryan's skin, but he barely notices them, does not trouble to slap them down. Thoughts race through his mind, stories he's heard of travellers robbed, abducted, or simply disappearing. He is travelling alone, he is a long way from the nearest town, and the risk of this is only now apparent to him. He imagines the things that might be about to happen.

The policeman says nothing, and Ryan is too afraid to draw him into conversation. Ryan thinks of Caroline, wishes he were able to send her some final message, he does not want to leave things hanging and unresolved in this way. But even if he were able to send a message, he has no idea what he would say.

Moving further away from the bar, they walk over uneven ground. Ryan looks down, and can see small stones and holes clearly enough to avoid stumbling. He realises that they should be in darkness, and he looks up from his feet to find the source of the light. Two headlamps shine directly ahead.

As they draw closer, he sees it is his own utility truck that is illuminating the night. Beside him, the policeman's stern face creases into a boyish smile.

"You left your lights on," he says, and laughs at the relief in Ryan's face.

Ryan's sitting with the policemen at their table. One of them pours him a drink, clear as water, an inch of it in the bottom of a glass.

"Mekong whiskey," says the policeman, his smooth cheeks

shining in the candlelight. "You have to try it."

The whiskey is rough and sharp as knives in Ryan's throat. He coughs, longing for water, but his glass is filled again with the same distilled fire.

"You speak very good English," he says.

"We learn it at university," one of them tells him. "In Thailand, you have to go to university before you can be a policeman."

"Isn't it the same in England?"asks another.

"Australia. I'm from Australia," Ryan tells them. "And no, it's not the same."

"You're not drinking."
empties his glass again, throwing it down quickly so as not to prolong the pain. There are already three empty bottles of whiskey on the table, and the waitress brings a new one.

The policemen start telling jokes, at first in English, and Ryan joins in their laughter. After a time, they fall into Thai. Ryan continues to laugh when they do, for a while, then he says: "Thanks for the whiskey, but I've got to go." They nod at him absently, barely noticing as he slips away, back to his old table.

He'd forgotten about the girl. She's still sitting at his table, with a piece of worn paper spread out before her. The paper's been folded so often that it's torn along the creases. She's reading. He sits down opposite her. She quickly folds the paper up and puts it away, but not before he sees that it's a letter, and the writing is in English. He also sees the date: the letter is a year old.

The whiskey has made him brave. "Is that from the man you know in Perth?" he asks.

She looks surprised. He realises the question was too direct.

"I'm sorry," he says. "It's none of my business." He has told her nothing of himself, after all, nothing that really matters.

But she shakes her head. "No, it's okay." She looks out into the darkness beyond the bar, where the river flows unseen.

"Paul has new business. He writes for computers," she says to the water.

"He's a computer programmer."

"Yes. He says he fetch me, when business is good. He want I work for him in Perth."

Ryan says nothing. Her eyes turn on him, and he can't bear their weight. He looks at the candle. A winged beetle, singed by the flame, is caught in a pool of melted wax at the candle's base.

"He doesn't forget," she says. "Does he?"

Ryan watches the beetle struggle on its back, legs waving in the air. "I'm sure he hasn't forgotten."

He notices that the frogs have fallen silent, and then he hears heavy splashing from the river. The policemen have left their table and are down on the bank below the bar. They are out of sight, but he can hear their shouts and laughter rising into the humid air. They're swimming at the edges of the Mae Lao's dark waters.

Ryan smiles. "I could write to you," he says. "When I get home. Would you like that?"

He feels her sudden coldness. She pulls herself straight and holds his eyes with her own, so that he cannot look away.

"I am sorry" she says. "You not understand. I not want ..." she searches for the right word. "... pity."

She stands. Ryan can only watch her as she walks away, weaving through the other tables. He had thought that language was the only barrier. Now he realises that culture goes deeper than words, and human connection must occur at a deeper level still. A carpenter cannot make use of bark, he must get beneath the surface and touch the heart of the tree.

The sound of laughter floats up from the river. He watches her step off the wooden deck, moving from candlelight into night.

He sees her later, walking at the side of the road. His headlights pick her out against the teak plantation trees, her long hair swinging across her back with the movement of her steps.

He slows down as he gets near. The cab window's open – he could call out to her. He wants to tell her that he's beginning, just beginning, to understand. But he fails to find the words. He's right beside her, but she doesn't look up, doesn't slow her pace. She keeps her eyes straight ahead, her hair doesn't falter in its swing.

Swollen moths gather around the truck's lamps. Some find their way inside, beating rice-paper wings in front of Ryan's eyes. He picks up speed, leaves her behind in the darkness. He thinks about writing anyway, finding the address of the bar, and sending his

letter there. He could tell her he's sorry for his mistake, sorry for his heavy carpenter's hands.

His headlights show empty road ahead, and tall, hardwood plantation forest on either side, the tree trunks shining ghost-white. Then without warning, streetlights flash into being, as if they've stepped suddenly out from hiding in the forest. He realises, too late, that he doesn't know her name; but he keeps the words he would have written, repeats them over in his head. He keeps them to use when he gets home again.

Paul Hetherington

Takings

You were wild, searching the rolling shoreline,
bringing back straggles of seaweed, luminous shells,
driftwood, all the carriage of the sea.

This absorbed your years. You painted books
to show the shoreline to all unbelievers,
the smell of the ocean covering your hair.

Now an emptiness. You went away
far into that absence called your future,
barely holding the smile to your face.

Remnant collections remain—your bicycle
with rust in its gears, and cobwebbed driftwood—
I have these. You lived like a gipsy,

knew solitude like some sort of dwelling,
holding your hands against the sets of breakers
then diving for your prized and salty takings.

JOHN MATEER

BREYTEN BREYTENBACH: THE WISE FOOL AND *ARS POETICA*'[1]

why bother with the word?
- "the bifid route"

and sometimes the language rings a familiar bell
as if I could remember myself out of this predicament
- "the commitment"

The Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach occupies an unusual and particularly important place in South Africa's literary history. From the publication of his first book *die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964), which was awarded the Afrikaans Press Corporation prize, he was singled out as a poet of considerable distinction.[2] In the decades that followed he won many of South Africa's literary awards and several of them more than once. After being published in an Afrikaans-Dutch version, *skryt* (1972) was awarded the Netherlands' Van der Hoogt prize. Subsequent volumes rapidly appeared in French, Dutch and English translations. In 1978 Breytenbach was awarded a special prize by the international jury of the Prix de Septs, in the terms of which he would have a single volume translated into the major European languages. The english translation appeared under the title *in africa even the flies are happy: selected poems 1964-1977* (1978) and was published in London by John Calder, the publisher of many experimental writers and several Nobel Prize winners, William Burroughs and Samuel

Beckett among them. By the time Breytenbach entered South Africa as an agent of Okhelo, a mysterious revolutionary organization for whites who aimed to engage in the struggle against Apartheid, he was well on his way to becoming the most famous South African poet.[3] His consequent arrest and his nine year prison sentence for "terrorism", seven of which he would serve, elevated him to the status of an international *cause celebre*. From then on Breytenbach's name would be associated with rebellion and martyrdom.

In many ways Breytenbach's cultural identity is ambivalent. He is an Afrikaner by birth and language, and the Afrikaner literary establishment had emphasized this by awarding him many prizes. But he was also a cosmopolitan, having lived in Paris from 1961, and as such he was outspoken on cultural and political matters as they pertained to the country of his birth. When invited to speak at a conference on Afrikaans literature at the University of Cape Town in 1972 he told the participants that "their people" were doomed to destruction through isolation and it was "their" duty to do something about it.[4]

During his incarceration he was granted the privilege to write. The poetic works from the period September 1975 to December 1982 were issued as a series of books entitled *Die Ongedanste Dans (The Undanced Dance)*.[5] It is from this series that Breytenbach drew the poems which he would - to use Octavio Paz's term for translation - "transform" into the English and collect under the title *Judas Eye*. The conditions under which these poems were written are remarkable and deserve consideration as they have a bearing on the poetic of *Judas Eye*. As a political prisoner, Breytenbach was to serve his sentence in maxium security prisons. Two of the years were spent in solitary confinement in "Beverly Hills", that is Pretoria Prison. While Breytenbach was allowed to write he was obliged to hand the manuscripts to the commander of the prison in the understanding that the Department of Prisons would retain them and return them to him on the day of his release.

Breytenbach's poetic is, I believe, determined by the context of the poetry's creation. Being in solitary confinement and knowing that his work would inevitably be read by prison censors led to a type of negation of meaning in which images and the play of meaning perform an important role. This context necessitated a

form of reflection, a self-reflexivity that entailed consideration of the "constructedness" of language in a sense similar to that of post-structuralist discourse. As Breytenbach's writings show considerable evidence of his intimacy with Zen Buddhism, I will be examining his response to the problem of Afrikaans and voice by reflecting on Zen practice. Before I go on to discuss the implications of Zen in *Judas Eye*, I first need to consider the problem of Afrikaans for Breytenbach as his relationship with the language is a determining factor in the complex politics of his work.

In his poem "The Struggle for the Taal"("Taalstryd"),[7] the poet's speaker takes up what appears to be the voice of the Afrikaner, addressing the reader from the point of view of the Afrikaner nationalist, exploiting tones that ranges from that of resignation ("We ourselves are aged" and "and who will be able to sing as we sang/ when we are no longer there?") to that of the vengeful ("we had black contraptions built for you, you bastards"). With little ambiguity this poem depicts relationship between the disempowerment of the majority of South Africa's population and the implementation of the learning of Afrikaans. The speaker states,

> But you have not fully understood.
> You have yet to master the Taal.
> We will make you say the ABC all over again,
> we will teach you the ropes
> of Christian National Education
>
> You will learn to be submissive
> submissive and humble.
> And you will learn to use the Taal...

At first reading it seems that the speaker is an Afrikaner addressing the oppressed population. It would be fair to assume that the "you who will serve as bodies for our thoughts", the "bastards" for whom the black contraptions were built, are those "spoilt blacks" who do not appreciate what the Afrikaner believes he has done for them. However, on closer inspection, several impediments to that reading may become apparent. The title itself, "The Struggle for the Taal" ("Taalstryd") connotes the struggle of the Afrikaans Language

Movements and the policy of Afrikaans in "Bantu education" that would lead to the Soweto Uprising. Thus the allusions of the title encourage the reader to imagine that the voice is that of an Afrikaner speaking in favour of the Afrikaner nationalist's political and linguistic imperialism. To some degree the allusion can engender empathy for the speaker as the language struggle of the early Afrikaans Language movements are brought to mind, the reader remembering that at one stage the Afrikaners, too, were an oppressed people. (This aspect of the allusion, of course, is addressed to Afrikaner readers.) On reflection, and as is developed in the poem, the occurrences that are here suggested to be a struggle for Afrikaans are actually incidences of the imposition of that language, examples of the attempts made to subordinate the population of the country:

> For we are Christ's executioners.
> We are on the walls around the townships
> gun in one hand
> machine-gun in the other:
> we, the missionaries of Civilization.
>
> We bring you the grammar of violence
> and the syntax of destruction -
> from the tradition of our firearms
> you will hear the verbs of retribution
> stuttering.

Breytenbach's synthesizing of the terminology of language and the imagery of violence seems to display a regard for the relationship between language and thought similar to that proposed in the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis. [8] It would appear that Breytenbach holds the view that thought can be influenced, if not determined, by language. Ironically, it is this belief that language can determine thought that also underlies the Afrikaner nationalist's desire to force his language onto the oppressed. The result of this type of brutalization is clear when the poet writes,

> Look what we're giving you... new mouths,

... red mouths
so that you can spout the secrets of our fear:
where each lead-nosed word flies
a speech organ will be torn open ...

While the speech is murderous, its grammar violent, its syntax destructive, it is also capable of undoing itself, allowing the victim to enter into the realm of the spoken for through the wounded "red mouths/ ...you can spout the secret of our fear." Perhaps, the fear is that the Afrikaner and the black African have the same blood. Further, the speaker in a schoolmasterly tone, simultaneously one of pleading (heard better in the english) and of threat (more obvious in the Afrikaans) says, "And you will please learn the Taal,/ with humility use it,/ abuse it..." The coupling of "use it, abuse it" in the English has the effect of seeming like a slip of the tongue, a Freudian slip, a truth that underlies the spoken. This kind of "tripping up" of meaning is one that occurs very frequently in Breytenbach's work.

It is possible to take "The Struggle for the Taal" as a gloss of Breytenbach's corpus because in it we encounter the persona of an Afrikaner who speaks out, in what appears at first to be a relatively simple fashion, but which on closer inspection reveals the language's weakness, its ability to expose its own premises. Even to presume that the subjects of the Taal are the oppressed non-white population is to overlook a reading of the poem from the point of view of the dissenting Afrikaner. It is possible to read the work as though "the bastards", those who will be humiliated, are also Afrikaners. The obstacle to this possible, although admittedly unlikely, reading is the image "We are on the walls around the townships" which stongly implies that "we" are probably white and Afrikaner as it is they who believe themselves to be the guardians of the township-dwellers. Nevertheless I feel that it is important to entertain this notion that Afrikaners could be included among the oppressed as the poem's author was in gaol and writing in a language which he would later say was fit only for the inscription of tombstones.[9]

For a poet to be in the predicament of writing in a language that is used to implement oppression is to be in a schizophrenic situation. The advantage of characterizing the predicament as a

pathological one is that it places the writer's responses within the context of the psychological.[10] As I will demonstrate, Breytenbach's counter to his situation is holistic: it is psychological, linguistic, and philosophical. Undoubtedly his internal experience was affected by his being imprisoned, first in solitary confinement for two years and later with other inmates, and by his use of "the oppressor's language". For Breytenbach the trauma implicit in Afrikaans was inescapable: his mother-tongue was partly responsible for the consolidation of the Afrikaner nation, the implementation of Apartheid and for his incarceration. It was responsible for the oppression of the black peoples such that it sparked the Soweto Uprising. It was also responsible for his acclaim as a poet. To assume his point-of-view: if he were to use Afrikaans, he would have to determine its operations, reclaim it from the stigma of its being the tool of the oppressor. One way to respond would be to subjectify it, render it unstable and unofficial to such a degree that in his mouth it would cease being a weapon of oppression and become instead a weapon of liberation, maybe also an object of beauty or a game. Reading his work from this point of view makes its self-reflexivity and labyrinthine nature appear logical. Both of those aspects of his work – its mirroring - non-Afrikaans critics have tended to regard as self-absorbed.[11]

Interest in the self, a concern with the person as a self/non-self duality, is one of the central issues of Zen. Breytenbach's concern with subjectivity, I suggest, is a product of his heritage as an Afrikaner and is closely related to his practice as a Zen Buddhist of the Soto sect. Zen is a well-known but frequently misunderstood school of Buddhism. From a Western perspective it is difficult to elucidate as its followers usually negate the conventions of logic and deny the significance of scripture. Its central notion is that an understanding of, to use a Western term, Being can only be achieved by passing beyond the intellect, and this is achieved through the practice of *zazen*. *Zazen* is the form of seated meditation performed by Zen Buddhists. What occurs during the course of this sitting is "beyond words" and is a form of knowing in which the faculty of direct awareness of Reality is developed to the full. A Zen poet is, therefore, sceptical of language and considers it to be, like

any other type of "conventional" thought, an illusionary mode of Being because it is conceptual and closely related to what is seen as a false apprehension of the nature of existence.

Bearing in mind the particularities of Breytenbach's situation, as readers of a poem in *Judas Eye* we are presented with several complex problems, each of them have implications for reading the poet's voice. As an Afrikaner, Breytenbach is using Afrikaans but aiming to reverse the values instilled in it by the Apartheid regime. As a polyglot intellectual, able to speak several European languages and write fluently in English, French and Dutch, he is able to hear subjective sounds, echoings, interlingual resonances, allusions and connotations that are not available to readers like myself who do not have the facilities of those languages. As someone schooled in "poetry", particularly that of the European languages, Breytenbach's literary allusions and influences are multi-layered and often at the level of image. And as a Zen Buddhist, his scepticism regarding the efficacy of linguistic representation can tend to render the act of writing apparently futile.

Is it, therefore, possible to speak of the poet's voice, that is an identifiable presence in or behind the text, in *Judas Eye*, especially considering the fact that the book is constituted of poems "transformed" into English? I believe that one can, but only if one also accepts that the particularities of Breytenbach's background are seen as having a direct bearing on the mode of the voice. To Breytenbach the Buddhist, for whom words are vestiges of memory, the voice is a tool for remembering, its sounds resembling and mimicking the past.[12] For Breytenbach the prisoner in solitary confinement, the voice is Being freed of the constraints of his present.

In the poem "the wise fool and *ars poetica*" (24-5) issues of the self, its relationship to the imagination and expression, are foregrounded as Breytenbach articulates and often parodies his creative process. The beginning of the poem represents a "descent", like that into the Buddhist "mindless" meditative state of *samadi*. Through this descent the protagonist is taken beyond the creative arena of language, "where sounds sprout... to areas where/ sense and nonsense flourish". This space is one where "strange and bitter

fruit may happen". While the first half of the first stanza reveals what appears to be a recounting of the descent past linguistic thought into *samadi*, in it there is also the implication of the provisionality of the description. When the poet writes, "or so he was told", the exteriority of discourse, discourse on the meditative and creative state, and perhaps also discourse in general, is brought to the reader's attention. If the description up until that point at which it is asserted "or so he was told" is largely a second-hand account of the process of meditation, then the reader is entirely within the realm of the conceptual/subjective. Therefore the reader is unable to extricate the real (first-hand) from the unreal (second-hand) description. If, alternatively, the description is first-hand and the phrase "or so he was told" is simply to "problematize" the account, the reader is made aware that alleged accounts can devalue the authenticity of a first-hand account.

Were it permissible to suggest that Zen has one aim, it could be said that it aims to open the meditator's mind to the reality, the authenticity, the quiddity of Being itself. By "problematizing" the difference between an authentic and an inauthentic account, Breytenbach is following the Zen tradition of rendering groundless what was thought to be well-founded. The undoing of language in this way creates a situation in which the reality or authenticity of inner experience is made distinct from the exteriority of the means of describing that experience.

It may seem from my earlier suggestion regarding the poem "The Struggle for the Taal" that Breytenbach's view of language parallels that of the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, and that the notion that language determines thought contradicts his Zen understanding of language. This is not the case because, following the Zen view, all language is unable to represent the true nature of reality. The discovery of Buddhist *Emptiness* is, at least partly, a recognition of the emptiness of language. In this experience of language words slip easily from one meaning to another. Words are by their nature profoundly involved with the subjective. Moreover, words are constantly verging on the meaningless because their meaning depends on the assumption of self, that is the presumption of a correlation between interior and exterior realities. As Breytenbach (para-)phrases it, "vanity, all vanity; all about him

the barren whords..." Perhaps, instead of simply stating that the meaning of language depends on a correlation between inner and outer worlds, it could be said that, as it is a social phenomenon, language requires social interaction for it to function "meaningfully". It would seem inevitable that for someone in solitary confinement, someone for whom the written page is a metaphoric mirror, the confrontation with "useless" language would expose the importance of the social and thus the vacancy of inherent, as opposed to social, meaning.

Indeed, Breytenbach's gaze is turned towards himself. The "wise fool", the poet-character of this poem, is pictured as a cannibal ("the fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh"), as someone "bullfrogged/ with pride", a monad lost in the desert of "barren whords" that are "as sand upon sand..." In mock prophesy Breytenbach writes:

> ...(thus it is written:
> the offended will spit and shriek against the wind
> but the lips of the fool will devour him
> and darken the nest egg to nought):

Why is it that the fool will devour himself, whereas "the offended will spit and shriek against the wind"? As I read it, assuming that the nest egg signifies meaning, the offended are those, possibly the Afrikaners, who wish to assert their language or meaning in defiance of the proverbial winds of change. The offended have their voices stolen by the wind. The fool is in a similar predicament as regards expression in language. He is, in a sense, "swallowing his words", internalizing his language, chewing what he can neither spit out nor say. Underlying the fool's linguistic dilemma is the possibility of expression through physicality: of the embodiment of voice in the form of expressive non-linguistic or pseudo-linguistic sounds; or of thoughts pictured, as written dream-images.

Before discussing the voice in this poem, an obvious point should be made: there are two aspects of voice represented in it. The first is the poet's commentary on voice. This commentary may be in the form of statement or in the form of enactment; by the latter I mean that aspect of voice which is embodied, rather than

conceptualized (an example of this is "of oh and ay"). The second aspect is the voice in which this poem is taken to have been performed or spoken. This aspect is the poet's or narrator's voice, and it is in this voice that most, except the typographic, elements of the poem are "heard". It is in this voice that the music and drama of the poem exists.

To follow traces of the voice through this poem it is necessary to attune the ear to unusual stresses and demands made on the sonic qualities of certain words. It should be immediately apparent to most readers of english poetry that Breytenbach's work in "the wise fool and makes much of alliterative and assonantal repetition. I believe this is an effect of Breytenbach's being a non-native english speaker. Coagulations of words, like "sounds sprout", "the fool/ folds his hands and consumes his own flesh", "unpolluted by orb or orifice", "well-chewed cast-away", and several other phrases or word-bunches in "the wise fool, make evident his hamming-up of the word's sounds. Frequently, as in "orb or oriface" or "vegetation or visitation", the reader can get the impression that the sounds are playing an important role in the generation of associative thinking and are thus required in the poem. It seems as though one word's sound brings to mind another word, and that the poem unfolds according to an improvizational musicality which in turn generates associated concepts. For example: "a thrumming silence, a calm redolent of smack/ and suck, of oh and ay' leads to the image "he was at sea". To native english speakers this kind of musicality can appear forced, even inept. I caution readers not to rush into opinions of this sort. That would cause them to assume that the poem is not functioning well when it is in fact functioning differently.

There are other non-musical reasons for stressing words, too. It can be that the mimetic sound of the word is most evocative. "Oh and ay" is an interesting instance of pseudo-linguistic wordsounds suggesting movement, the buffeting of waves. Also, there are the specific stresses produced in certain speech acts. When the poem's speaker encourages the reader to look ("look, laid out he was/ in a striped galabia"), he is exhorting in a manner that, while it is recognizable and understandable to most english readers, to my

ear seems particularly resonant with South African english. Its function is akin to the exhortation "listen!" In light of Breytenbach's awareness that he was simultaneously being silenced by his being imprisoned and that he was indeed being heard, because as a poet he was a spokesperson for the voiceless, the appearance that the exhortation seems to imply a preference for vision instead of hearing should be noted.[13]

The sound of that exhortation to "look" rings the familiar bell of South African english. As such, "look" in this context is a word that, eliding the strangeness of the South African english for non-South Africans (causing the word to sound normal or usual to non-South Africans), has most of its significance placed on its conceptual content, the exhortation to the act of visualization. For South African english-speakers this idiomatically stressed word in its imperative form is brought to their attention. They might not understand why, but there would be a slight oddness to the stress, a slight discomfort, a perhaps unidentifiable recognition.

Elsewhere the incidence of an apparently oddly stressed word serves to reveal the Afrikaans that underlies these poems. When Breytenbach writes, "who was *he* to be bullfrogged/ with pride"; placing the pronoun in italics, the poet's interlingual voice is rising to the surface. The Afrikaans for the beginning of that phrase would place most of its stress on the pronoun, whereas a standard english reading would place similar stress on the pronoun and on the word "bullfrog". Besides there is no semantic reason to place stress on the pronoun. Either way, stressed or unstressed, the pronoun performs the same function within the sentence. The only possible reason for the stress is the interlingual: it signifies the existence of a bony Afrikaans beneath the poem's english skin - "Wie was *hy*?"

Evidence of this also appears in the third stanza where an "h" is inserted into "word" ("whords"). As I understand it, there is little for Breytenbach to gain semantically by inserting the "h". There is the possibility that it is a Derridian in-joke, a tongue-in-cheek allusion to "differance". If that is its purpose, it could cause sufficiently informed readers to remark on the nature of this poem as written text, perhaps drawing their attention to other aspects of the poem's language play as "writing". I recognize that that is certainly one

possible intention; however, there appears to be another, a more specific one which has a bearing on Breytenbach's writing in english. By inserting the "h", the letter that to the english reader would appear silent, which would be read as the common silent "h", causing that reader to articulate "word" and "whord" no differently, Breytenbach has surreptitiously inserted an Afrikaans presence into the english.[14] To say the noun "word" conventually using a South African english accent would place more emphasis on the "ur" sound at its center. To say the noun as many Afrikaners would places the emphasis nearer the beginning, producing a sound more like "w-herd". The difference is quite subtle and probably one that depends on the sensitivity of the reader-listener's ear, but it is one that I can hear clearly. Further, Breytenbach's transformation of that word goes beyond drawing out an Afrikaans accent in written english, it also makes present an example of a sound that is common to South African english and Afrikaans. The accent of that word is close to that which is to be found in South African english speech, the pronounciation of "wh" being slightly deeper in tone than that of Australian or Standard english.

Furthermore, Breytenbach's emphasis on the individual word also extends to the word's semantic range. In the third line of the third stanza a familiar english word "moan" is used. To understand it as it would be used in both Standard and Australian english would mean that the wise fool uttered a groan. The implicit "meaning" would then be that he was in pain and that it was indicated by his utterance. If the reader hears it as a South African english word, a different meaning would be recognized. It would be understood that the wise fool is (be-)moaning (in the Australian sense, whinging about) his self. Like "whord", the verb "moan" is not one that would seem to be of remarkable semantic or conceptual importance within the structure of the poem. It is, apparently, largely denotative. Its expressive function to a non-South African reader, perhaps even to a non-native South African english speaker, would be relatively insignificant. But to a reader who recognizes the "appropriateness" of those words they are deeply resonant, and that resonance brings the actuality of the voice's "South Africanness" to life.

One of the difficulties presented to me as a reader interested in the voice of Breytenbach's work is its switching of conventional modes of address. In poems by other writers the type or tone of voice is usually indicated by the mode of address, that mode being the way in which the "speaker" directs the physicality of vocal expression towards the "listener". The mode tends to be indicated by the context in which the "utterance" is presumed to occur and by the type of discourse in which it is functioning. An example of this: at a Christian church service changes in speech register are infrequent. The two or three that would occur are the elevated tone of ritual speech, singing, and the less elevated, although significantly formal, speech of the sermon. Were the limitation on the speech registers be transgessed it would be disturb the norms of the performance and confuse the participants.

In all verbal contexts the voice's range of expression is curtailed and only "appropriate" language is allowed. The social codes which determine our mode of vocal address are so profoundly internalized that it can seem very strange when our attention is drawn to them. In poetry modes of address are largely related to different types of poems. Readers of elegies, lyrics, epics or experimental poetry, in recognizing the type of poem, presume its mode of address, and therefore expect to "hear" a certain kind of physical voice. That "voice" is the voice that they hear when they read. If their recognition of the type of poem is somehow interfered with, either by their not knowing what type of poem it is or by certain parts of the poem contradicting the norms of its type, they may be unable to hear the voice fully. They may be unable to hear it at all. Code-switching, the moving between different types of address, different types of texts, different registers, and different modes of address will inevitably create problems for the reader-listener who fails to recognize the nature of the changes.

The rhythm of the voice of "the wise fool" is that of an internal monologue. The paraphrasings, allusions and other appropriated codes in this poem each have an effect on the voice due to their connoting different modes of address. The result for the sounding of voice is that the mode of voice is constantly undergoing change. Readers who expect the internal monologue to unfold with the dynamic of a person evenly recounting thoughts aloud will be

unable to hear the full dynamic of the poem.

As I hear it, the voice is self-dramatizing. Its complex, jokey self-reflexivity depends on the reader's being able to recognize the type of change of language genre and the concomitant change in voicing. When the poet writes, "for a live dog is better than a dead lion", it is necessary for the reader to note that the text is proverbial, that in this context it is platitudinous, and then to prepare for its correction in the, at least partly, despairing echoing of "vanity, all vanity". Elsewhere there is the shouting voice of prophecy proclaiming, "thus it is written", which is reined-in, both by its being in brackets and by the following image of the offended biting and shrieking against the wind. Later in that same stanza, there are the insults which mimick proverbs and which are uttered with a mock intoning. The irony of the insults "may you swallow an umbrella... may you lose all your teeth except one... may the flies..." is that they are multivalent, their stridency being determined by the pace of voice, which here is very rapid and loud, by the repeated "may..." structure, and by the intensity of the imagery. At the same time there is also a sense of the author's fine control of this section that is characteristic of Breytenbach: a sense that while the voice is able to shout outrageously, the intelligence behind it is aware of the provisionality of the proclaimations and the ultimate absurdity of any pretensions to truth and reality in their assertions. The last point, reflects Breytenbach's understanding of Buddhist philosophy.

In the last stanza of this poem a similar ironic reflection is brought to bear, not on language in general, but on poetry specifically. The voice of this section strikes my ear as that of a narrator, a narrator who is to give us readers the moral of the story-poem. The moral is paradoxical in that it denies itself a "meta-critical" role. Failing to encompass the "meaning" of the story-poem on which it appears it might comment, it averts its role as a moralistic coda, functioning instead as a faulty mirror, the mirror that reflects the images of the carnivore (lion) which itself, on a different level, reflects the cannibal (fool). The "moral" thus prevents the reader from "knowing" the end of the poem. Excluding the reader then becomes one way of reaffirming the authority of subjectivity. The mode of voice of the moral, so typical

of resolution, is in this instance profoundly parodic because it contradicts the norm of its genre.

It may be said that Breytenbach's being an Afrikaner, and using Afrikaans as a poetic medium, has placed him in a situation where language is inherently discriminatory. To overcome its prejudices he was compelled to develop a method of writing that would allow other, non-Afrikaner nationalist ideas free expression. I suspect that his becoming a Zen Buddhist was also part of a process of psychic emancipation. Zen could allow him to detatch prejudicial feelings from what they signified to his self, allowing him, like Buddha, to break the chain of causality.

Following this view, and bearing in mind his being imprisoned at the time of writing the original Afrikaans versions of these poems, I assert that Breytenbach was able to take advantage of the schizophrenic predicament of the Afrikaner dissident. He was able to convert the alienation and feeling of unreality of the dissident's powerlessness into the freedom of imaginative play. Where another poet might have felt suicidal, trapped in a futile situation, Breytenbach the Buddhist was able to recognize that the futility of the situation was akin to the futility of *samsara*, the illusionary nature of the mundane world, and that as such it was absurd. Taking reality to be absurd, Breytenbach responded by making his language, if not absurd in the sense of the Dadaists and the Surrealists, at least predominately anti-mimetic and self-conscious. The *gravitas* of mimesis in writing in general, its ability to depict the solidity of reality, is replaced by the translucent *claritas* of the Afrikaner Buddhist's explorations, where words are as in placable and fleeting as sand in a magical desert.

Breytenbach plays with the voice in the same way that he plays with words: registers, modes of address and conventions are freely integrated. His poetic english is a mimicking of English proper, and his poetic Afrikaans is an implosion of the Taal. Unless the reader of "the wise fool and *ars poetica*" understands the important part played by the "nihilism" of Zen in Breytenbach's work and its solution to the problem of language that the poet inherited from Afrikaans, I believe it is virtually impossible to appreciate the poet's contribution to South African writing and the literature of the wider world.

The Struggle for the Taal

(Translated by Denis Hirson)

"Clean as the conscience of a gun"
- Miroslav Holub

We ourselves are aged.
Our language is a grey reservist a hundred years old or more
his fingers stiff around the triggers -
and who will be able to sing as we sang
when we are no longer there?
As we did when we were alive we will spurn the earth
and the miracles of the flesh which grows
throbbing and flowing like words -
It is you who will serve as bodies for our thoughts
and live to commemorate our deaths,
you will conjure up tunes from the flutes of our bones...

From the structure of our conscience
from the stores of our charity
we had black contraptions built for you, you bastards -
schools, clinics, post-offices, police-stations -
and now the plumes blow black smoke
throbbing and flowing like a heart.

But you have not understood.
You have yet to fully master the Taal.
We will make you say the ABC all over again,
we will teach you the ropes
of Christian National Education...
You will learn to be submissive
submissive and humble.
And you will learn to use the Taal,
with humility you will use it
for it is we who possess the mouths
with the poison in the throb and flow of the heart.

You are the salt of the earth -
with what will we be able to spice our dying
if you are not there?
you will make the earth glint, bitter and brackish
with the sound of our lips...

For we are Christ's excutioners.
We are on the walls around the townships
gun in hand
machine-gun in the other:
we, the missionaries of Civilization.

We bring you the grammar of violence
and the syntax of destruction -
from the tradition of our firearms
you will hear the verbs of retribution
stuttering.

Look what we're giving you, free and for nothing - new mouths,
red ears with which to hear red eyes with which to see
pulsing, red mouths
so that you can spout the secrets of our fear:
where each lead-nosed word flies
a speech organ torn open...
And you will please learn to use the Taal,
with humility use it, abuse it...
because we are down already, the death-rattle's
throb and flow
on our lips...

As for us, we are aged...

The Wise Fool and *Ars Poetica*

thus he decided to go forth
deeper into the region of vowels and consonants
where pure sounds sprout (though also other throatthrusts
and cleverlips cutting short the very breath:
mouse-birds among Adam's figs), to areas
where sense and nonsense flourish where strophes
climb in odd places and strange and bitter fruit may happen -
or so he was told, and mused:
the oppressed goes out in the early morning
to look for solutions or failing all
an ersatz for the bloated fidgetiness; the fool
folds his hands and consumes his own flesh

it was quiet there (unpolluted by orb or oriface),
a thrumming silence, a calm redolent of smack
and suck, of oh and ay; he was at sea,
and deprived of the stick-and-track of needle and map
his eyes slithered over the boned black expanse
scouting for vegetation or visitation or just a flash
that might point the way to the well of inspiration,
even, if needs be (who was *he* to be bullfrogged
with pride?) a ladle of well-chewed cast-away victuals:
for a live dog is better than a dead lion

vanity, all vanity; all about him the barren whords
were as sand apon sand; he scanned his self
in the sand and moaned (thus it is written:
the offended will spit and shriek against the wind
but the lips of the fool will devour him
and darken the nest egg to nought):
"fathead, may you swollow an umbrella
and may it go open in your bowels..."
or: "may you loose all your teeth except one
and that one be honing the ache..."
or: "may the flies settle shuddering colonies
in the clefts of you armpits and the shuttle of your thighs..."

when at last there was a lunar paleness
and he was spent as time and tide, he went
to lay down arms and bones in the desert
(beyond horizons the neon verdict of night-clubs);
and tumbled into sleep: look, laid out he was
in a striped galabia with his lute as mute as a flower,
and a dog-tamed lion alive with the moon's silvery mane
came to sniff his breath and eavesdrop at his ear...

so that no we'll never know
whether the mangy meat-eater
mustered sufficient curiosity or teeth
to make an end
to this poem

Notes

1 This is the title of a poem in *Judas Eye and Self-Portriat/Deathwatch*. London: Faber and Faber, 1987.

2 The list of Breytenbach's poetry publications is extensive. His most easily obtainable volumes are *Judas Eye*, and the comprehensive Afrikaans selected poems *die hand vol vere*. Cape Town: Human en Rousseau, 1995.

3 For an account of the period leading up to and including Breytenbach's imprisonment see his *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*. London: Faber and Faber, 1984.

4 This incident, together with the text Breytenbach presented, is recorded in his travelogue *A Season in Paradise*. New York: Persea, 1983.

5 The series was comprised of *Lewendood, Buffalo Bill, eklips, and ("yk")*. There was to be a fifth volume, *die kus*, but it was not issued. Also included in *Judas Eye* are poems from the collection *Voetskrif*, a volume not published as part of the series. All these books were published by Taurus in Emmarentia, Johannesburg.

6 The Buddhist influence is particularly apparent in *met ander woorde vrugte van die boom van stilte*. Cape Town: Buren, 1973. And *Boek (deel een): dryfpunt* . Emmarentia: Taurus, 1987.

7 This poem, in Denis Hirson's translation, is to be found in *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (p. 356-7) and *in in africa even the flies are happy* . London: John Calder: 1978. p. 93.

8 See *Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* . Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1956.

9 Cited in Dennis Walder's review of *Judas Eye*. "Elbow Room". *PN Review* Vol 15 No 5 1988. pp. 47-8.

10 For an example of Breytenbach criticism informed by Eastern philosphy see P.P. van der Merwe. "Die veelvuldigheid van nul: Taal en wereld by Breyten Breytenbach". Andre Brink (ed.). *Woorde Teen Die Wolke: vir Breyten*. Emmarentia: Taurus, 1980. pp. 107-128.

[11] An example of this type of response is Dennis Walder's "Elbow Room".

[12] Christmas Humphries has described this aspect of Buddhist art: "A sculptor or painter is describing a memory picture, a compound of thought and feeling based on past experience." *Buddhism*. London: Penguin, 1951. p. 208.

[13] Being a painter as well as a poet, Breytenbach often relates visualization to articulation. This issue is beyond the scope of my essay, but I recognize that it may have important implications for the poet's word choice and for his voice.

[14] Several English readers of his text have remarked that "whord" would be pronounced differently, but they were neverthless unable to give a reason for this.

ANDY WEAVER

REMBRANDT: THE ARTIST AS OLD MAN

In paintings, etchings, and drawings, Rembrandt depicted himself, in known examples, nearly a hundred times; all except a few of the earliest lack any trace of vanity.

Frederick Hartt, *Art: a history of painting, sculpture, architecture*

I.
1663
The mirrors want you
to trust your protean
skin, its bric-a-brac of colours,
its folds and pocks, trust
that this has always been
you.

Instead, you've spent
your life
trying to dive under
the shallow secrets
of your skin
and find a face
shaped by something,
anything,
solid.
That face in the mirror
is just an etching
carelessly made by time.

Rembrandt, where are the portraits
of your blood, its centripetal
spin inward? Show us how
it leaves your shaking
arms and hands the way a wounded man
tries to crawl from the battlefield
and find his way home
to die. Show us how, each time
it finishes its cycle, it's caught
at the door to its house
and sent on another forced
march away from the heart.

II.
1664
Hundreds of days without Hendrickje,
thousands of hours since you crossed
the bridge outside your window
together—and the last time you did,
you were too busy to stop
and watch the river like she wanted.
Her hips tickled your fingers
as you hurried her home,
trying to outrun the thunderclouds
boiling in from the west.

One night you realized you could no longer draw
the soft curve of her chin, the lazy curls
her hair dropped onto her neck.

Which of your faces
is the one we should turn to
for comfort, the one that shows us
everything will turn out fine?

III.
1667
When Saskia died, her face
stayed with you so clearly
that your eyes
felt like stained glass,
her portrait melted into each.
Hendrickje spent years
wiping away the memory
of another woman,
and when she died,
your eyes were ready
for her beautiful etching.

Instead, she left you
quickly, a thin cloud
that wisped away
while you stood in your window
watching the river,
its pale blues caught
in the sad lavender of nightfall.

All these worthless
surfaces, the easy trickery
of brushstrokes—tell me
the truth, mirror, come clean:
when could the skin
show the true,
subtle blue of veins,
the blood's desperate,
pointless drive
to rest?

IV.
1668
Now all you have is an empty house,
your treasures and curios sold to pay the piling bills,
two wives and four children lie

in the graveyard. But you stand there
grinning, as though you know some final joke.

The experts say you're alluding to Zeuxis,
that you see yourself in him,
a bitter man caught gasping for breath,
laughing like a crow at a wrinkled old woman
until you fall forward,
dead.

But this is an ugly ending.

Rembrandt, let's call the critics
bitter old men, and
we'll write you a different story:
It's true, you're saying, I am sixty-two years old,
tired, alone and ill, but I'm happy now.
There's no sense in this at all,

but last night I dreamt I held a razor
to my throat. Suddenly, I flicked it
across my forearm, again and again.
The blood fell from my wrist onto the floor
in fine handwriting—

Not yet; your hands have other work.

But the thing about dreams
is that we all wake up,
and the pretty endings, Rembrandt,
are few. Too few, I'm afraid
to give them to the dead.

V.
1669
The whip-shock of age has lashed your body.
Death is peaking over your shoulder,
and you've lost your faith,

not in your God, but in Rembrandt—
now, your work is only the work
of an old draughtsman, a hack,
and you refuse to give this face
your signature.

In the end, to be
unnamed, after all the searching
to finally find yourself
undone, and lost.

ALAN URQUHART

NEW POETRY - 2001

In a radio interview last year, Australia's Olympic Laureate, Mark O'Connor, spoke of the shortcomings of the lyrics of popular music and its failure to achieve the same level of expressiveness and originality as poetry. Yet for all the commercial, derivative and repetitive nature of much (though not all) pop lyrics, it at least has vitality, and a wide, renewable and lasting audience. If this is "failure" what can be said of the "successes" of poetry? The limited publication opportunities, the limited commercial backing, the limitations of funding, the limited audience, the death or contraction of the "little magazines", add up to many black moments, even for "successful" poets, who will generally need a day job to support their habit. One sometimes suspects about the only people listening closely to poetry are poets themselves; others are forced into it by educational curricula only to experience it as the compulsory fun of an assessment event. Most are blissfully unaware. Yet there is a poet in all of us: and nearly everybody has loved a poem sometime. And in the past year, if only people knew, many new poems to admire and inspire have been published, in an incredible variety and vitality. They display, of course, the differences between the purposes of pop culture and poetry. Popular music has a primary purpose to entertain, and only occasionally does it slip into the expressive, always with the support of the band and often the excitement of the concert or the party. Poetry, on the other hand, generally takes its primary mission to explore the limits of expression. And mostly does so, like Keats'

unheard melodies, in silence, and alone. Performance poetry, poetry readings and multi-media poetry remain still relatively rare experiences. Yet this need not delimit poetry from using entertainment and excitement as tools of expression. And this, I believe, is what the best poetry has always done.

And if we are looking for a book that explores entertainment as an essential component of good poetry, one that should be made compulsory reading is the first published collection of Homer Reith, *The Dining Car Scene* (Black Pepper). The volume takes its title from a poem that effortlessly evokes and re-interprets Hitchcock's images from his popular classic *North by Northwest:*

> something more mysterious
> than microfilm and secret agents
> is following the train:
> it has the curve of the Twentieth Century Limited
> in its sights.

The poem draws us into a volume that explores some of the mysteries and limits of the twentieth century, presenting it as a thriller in search of the secret that seeks for the "chance of doing something finally worthwhile". This "something worthwhile" is the emotional punch and urgency explored in his central tour de force poem "Siberia", where a notion of poetry is examined that compares it to the art of boxing. The poem's central epiphany is that "pugilism's a sort of poetry". The poem thus rewrites the cliche that depicts the image of elite sports men and women as "poetry in motion". Reith's discovery, however, is that the reverse is also true: "Poetry's a sort of pugilism", means it should pack the punch of things like popular sport and popular music. It should have the power of

> a left to the body, a right to the head,
> ten seconds and you're in Siberia

And indeed, frequently Reith lives up to this prescription, his poetry providing the knock-out blow to heart and mind, that sends the reader to Siberia. His poems speak urgently and directly of

experience itself, in all its essentials, incorporating and transcending the personal, seeking out the mysterious power of what may be "finally worthwhile", and always with wit and ironic charm. The penultimate poem in the book shrieks the ultimate "Helter Skelter" experience, expressed in terms of "Flying High". The metaphor is played upon with Beatle-like directness and excitement. In the tradition of the metaphysicals, the lover in the poem makes extreme claims: he is born for "flying high", is at home in "aerospace", which, like a knock-out punch, is:

> a dangerous place for lovers
> especially in the cockpit, with all its flashing dials
> and mysterious instrumentation.
> What if you end up being ditched
> in deepwater?

The reader is drawn through a series of gut-wrenching experiences on the roller-coaster of ordinary extra-ordinary experience, where the technical mysteries of the Twentieth Century Limited end up in the cock-pit of an old-fashioned rhetorical question, relating the meaning of experience to its risk. What's exciting about Reith's poetry is the way it can speak directly of experience, but also capture the ambiguity and ineffable nature of its possibilities.

This contrasts with poetry that seeks directness by addressing its audience by means of personal performance. Such performances frequently deliver the knock-out punch on the night, but the morning after, some of the excitement has gone. This could perhaps be argued of what seem to be records of some of May Carroll's hilarious performances in *i wanted to throw your things out on the lawn* (Cornford Press). Carroll speaks urgently to her audience in the vernacular, with the wit and comedy suggested in the title of the title poem, addressing themes popular amongst devotees of popular culture: broken relationships, beer, toilets, god and the late unlamented C.E.S. This is an entertaining, lively and unpretentious record of ordinary (if grungy) experience - yet reading it in book form is to experience Siberia as a hang-over, rather than the feeling of being "sent" there. Jacob Rosenberg's *Behind the Moon* (Five Islands Press), on the other hand, gives notice of the pain of the

gulags of Siberia, but recollected with a tranquillity that belies its subject matter, lost in the traditional imagery and devices of the sonnet form. It is sometimes difficult to remember that Rosenberg is addressing the very alienating twentieth century themes of the holocaust and the experience of being a holocaust survivor. Rosenberg attempts to express the spirit and dignity of those who did not survive, and explores the meaning and ways of coming to terms with the pain of that experience. Yet if Rosenberg's language tends to dilute experience, he will always find an audience interested in his subject. Thus, oddly, like Carroll, his poetry contains a popular element - if directed to a very different audience. Carroll's poetry is pure attitude, while Rosenberg's represents a temple for his reflections. It is experience at a distance. If the poetry of neither delivers the "knock out" punch, both go a few successful rounds in representing their own particular contests in survival.

Another result of Five Islands' support for the poetic enterprise this year (far and away the most prolific), is Brook Emery's first collection: *and dug my fingers in the sand.* This former icon of popular culture (sun, sand, surf, centre-fold) has brought his instinct to bear on what I think is the poetry book of the year, containing the accumulated wisdom of his age. The poems display an undeniable maturity and an easy conversational range that yokes an impressive erudition to the reality of experience firmly anchored to the eastern seaboard, which is rediscovered in its historical context. If Reith's poetry sends one to Siberia, Emery's transports one across the universe, or at least to Bondi (which some may regard as its centre). Emery's descriptions of physical phenomena are as obsessive, precise and accurate as those of Robert Gray. His imagination has the curiosity and reach of an all-round renaissance man. He experiences first hand the operation of Newton's laws of motion in the experience of diving; of Archimedes Principle in the depths of Bondi Baths; Emery experiences time with a geological grasp of the ages and the eras, and has an astronomical perspective of the earth in space. His book begins and ends by turning scientific, historical and geographical wonder into genuine poetry.

The closing sequence of the volume, constitutes Emery's Revelation - "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" - locating his source of wonder in a school assignment on astronomy:

> At thirteen I looked deliberately into the night sky.
> I should have been doing it months before. I was supposed
> to plot the phases of the moon, its rising and repose ...

The assignment is finally awarded an ironic "C" for its imaginative rather than scientific qualities, yet the insight gained on South Head's Christison Park is akin to that of a later-day Keatsian Cortez, and begins Emery's metaphysical rampage around the physical world. If this sounds capital "R" Romantic, then Emery's poetry isn't: it is never pretentious or obscure. It is always ironic, precise and conversationally urbane as it opens the reader's eyes on explorative trips as various as the Blue Mountains, the NSW coast, the 18th Century Pacific and the *Mares* of the Moon. Like Reith's, the book is always on edge, the excitement of the edge, usually on the littoral (literally) between the Great Dividing Range, and Emery's true element, the sea. Brook Emery establishes a new mythology of the Sydney Basin, finding its place between what is past and is passing, in a language that distils what is to become, from a coign of vantage somewhere out there in the cosmos.

Dorothy Hewett's twelfth volume also contains the accumulated wisdom of her age. But she looks back over her life from a pinnacle deliberately sited only *Half Way up the Mountain*. Rather than a celebration of inspiration, it is a reconciliation with life's limited achievements. In the volume's structure, I am reminded somewhat of Samuel Beckett's Malone waiting to die. The opening section, "From a Dark Cottage", is a series of poems on her "present state" – to employ Malone's term – that presents vignettes on how she is coping with growing old half way up the Blue Mountains. The "dark cottage" is inhabited by images of night, falling asleep, senility and death: there are the eccentric neighbours, descriptions of the "Old Women of the Mountains" and the "Death of a Cat". The poems do not depress, however, they are wryly observed and about a coming-to-terms with age and death which is completed by opening vistas of meaning onto the past in "The Moonlit Creek":

> but I'll be looking out on the garden
> when evening falls
> when the darkness under the trees
> gives way to a radiance of light

There is a dream-like tension as the poems move between a fear of dying and an acceptance, to almost an embrace of death as a release from life into a sort of second childhood ("I am child again ..."), which is cue for the introduction of the second sequence of poems "The Sunlit Plains" – where, again like Beckett's Malone – Hewett entertains herself with stories from the past. Unlike Malone, however, there is no question of identity – Hewett is very much her traditional self – romantic, cynical, Bohemian, sentimental, radical, opinionated, prolix. She relives a multi-faceted life from a childhood in the Western Australian wheatlands, to the volume's final section "Salt Harbour" set in the Sydney of the author's prime. If this book works, it does so because of the sense of the vibrant personality of the author reliving her life and confronting again many of the issues that have arisen and now pass before her. There is the life of the plains, her family, the animals, "Strawberry, Buttercup, and Daisy" and the farm itself:"we helped build and destroy". The confrontation with things past and destroyed recurs; the Bohemian Sydney of the Cross in the fifties, the dead poets, "Sylvia and Keats", Ezra Pound, Lowell, and John Forbes – one of many tributes this year to the late ebullient master of Australian post modernism. In the last poems we witness an Australian poet who foresees her death, and comes back to the rag and bone shop of her heart:

> we are the ones
> who know the truth of the modest compromise
> nothing can be well done only dreamed of
> and botched in the execution

Yet despite this Malone-like pessimism (except for the memory of having once had idealistic dreams), the volume is vibrant with faith in opinion, personality and relationships. In a sense it is *because* Hewett acknowledges a pinnacle only half way up her mountain to perfection that this volume is more successful than some of her others, with its vision of the universal drama of human limitation.

Rosemary Dobson's *Untold Lives and Later Poems* (Brandl and Schlesinger), like Hewett's, are very much the poems of old age, revisiting people from the past to immortalise their characters in

typically economical vignettes. There is little sentimentality in *Untold Lives* and nothing sensational: in contrast to Hewett, the focus is on the subjects themselves, as opposed to their significance to the poet. The poetry is quiet, reflective and sharp as ever. The "sometime academic", for example, "who at graduations seemed to murmur ″my dear child″ to graduands is devastatingly revealed in the final lines:

> In all that company nobody divined
> That he was drowning kittens in a pail.

The wisdom bequeathed to Dobson by age is not only to have a real understanding of people (arguably a lifelong talent), but to have the freedom to reveal people in time, to show how "what they were then" turned into how they finished up. "Remembering Kitty" is a fine example of this, as Dobson recalls the seductive nature of Kitty's laughter as a child. Yet she goes on to evoke how this liveliness is squandered in her "Spend thrift" and vain age, until she died:

> A widow twice in her house alone,...
> Her soul like thinnest chiffon floated free
> And – not to be handed on, Kitty's alone –
> Her laugh went with it, up and up, away.

These poems will be remembered among Dobson's finest. The second section of the book, however, is more personal, involving her own experiences confronting death. The elegy for her husband, Alec Bolton, "A Marriage", is poignant in its realisation of the "empty spaces" left by the departed children and dead husband. There is the contrast between the memory of the cluttered family home, when "we never could walk .../ direct /Through the furnished rooms", and the ″now″ when:

> I can cross the room
> From any direction
> To single chair
> The single bed.

This poem captures the sparseness, dignity and poignancy of Dobson's imagery, which, if she is indeed in the seventh age of Woman, she's doing a lot better than Shakespeare's blokes.

The same may be said for Vera Newsome, whose *High Tide* (Five Islands Press) completes the wisdom of the elder stateswomen of Australian poetry. If the volume celebrates the high tide of life, it is very focussed on how the ever rising tide of time obliterates our ephemeral works in the sand:

> I write my name at the sea's edge.
> The tide will come, blot out
> all I have known have done.

Thus begins the final poem in the book. In its simplicity and directness there is an urgency and desire to get things down before they pass away forever. As in Rosenberg's *Behind the Moon,* the imagery is taken from nature, but here it is effortlessly made new again, the poetry revelling in all its ambivalence. As in Hewett and Dobson, the overall themes revolve around facing death, aging and loss. Yet if time is the figure of loss, removing health, vigour, and loved ones, it is also the figure of salvation:

> Can mind remain untouched
> when body cries
> with a vexed longing
> for the dead dream
> of netting the ball
> catching the wave ...?
> But there is a space to meditate, time to remember.

We see here the uncanny contrast between her directness and ambivalence that generates the tension in the volume. Newsome veers between the endurance of being cared for - as she is treated like a child after her stroke ("The Stroke") - to an almost transcendent perception:

> So much to know. This? This?
> What is its meaning? Touch savours.

Language fails.
Yet we know, we know.

This frenzy of experience is held in counterpoint by the final line of "Afterlife": "There is no future memory". At other times death seems a consummation devoutly to be wished, when adopting the persona of Lazarus, Newsome upbraids Christ for disturbing his glimpse of paradise to bring him back to life for selfish propaganda purposes. Overall, this is a poignant, moving volume, with touches of macabre wit.

In contrast to this direct, lyrical expression of the experience of aging, Jean Crawford in *Admissions* (Five Islands Press) attempts to trace the experience of a psychotic admitted to hospital, firstly as an emergency, then as a potential neurology patient and finally into a psychiatric ward. The poet poses as Ariadne tracing the perceptions of the patient Ruth, and the perceptions of Ruth by those around her. In this way, Crawford boldy explores the limits of expression. The experience is harrowing. Yet this illustrates the central conundrum for the fate of poetry if it is to be read, understood and enjoyed widely. In trying to express the maze of perceptions, the experience remains just that, a maze, despite the author's perceptiveness and verbal originality. While the older women speak of experience with a depth and directness that give that "knock out" blow, Crawford's enterprize tends to remain in the realm of the obscure.

John Kinsella's *The Hierarchy of Sheep* (Fremantle Art Centre Press) is founded in direct experience, but also too frequently wanders off into unfounded obscurity. An example of this can perhaps be identified in his tribute to John Forbes. Not that I think Kinsella's tribute ["Ode to John Forbes (*or* Ring of Bright Water)"] is not sincere, but it is perhaps too sincere in its flattery. For this volume continues Kinsella's "counter-pastoral" project, incorporating elements of post-modernism (*a la Forbes*) and post-structuralism that unnecessarily detract from the power and expressiveness of Kinsella's natural talent. Present in the volume are his usual great strengths in evoking a variety of images, moods and scenes, mainly from the West Australian Wheatlands and other scenes of Perth and the South West.. The description of "Rainwater Tanks in Summer" or the account of Uncle Clem's theories on

lightning strikes ("Uncle Clem reckons quite a few"), or the tension between cockatoos, tourists and the inhabitants of a cemetry up "Ensign Dale Court", are charming, poignant and witty as ever, enriched by an understated sense of subversive irony, where everything is different to what it seems. This volume attempts to take such experiences and events out of their local or personal context and situate them globally - perhaps the modern equivalent of "universality". If Hewett's poems constitute an elegy for the death of her life in the Wheatlands, Kinsella's poems attempt to capture and describe without sentimentality the processes of their changing. In contrast to the poems of *The Silo*, which depicted the farmlands as a sort of eternal Arcadia, the poems in *The Hiearchy of Sheep* are on the move, largely bereft of the first person pronoun, invaded by "cut out boutique pastoralists" ("Sheep at Night") and often deconstructing themselves with phraseology such as "the freelancing/ narratology of marketing boards". While I'm happy to accept Kinsella's satirical point here, I struggle with the words. The poems also re-evaluate to some extent Western Australian experience from the perspective of the English Fenlands, where Kinsella partakes in the traditional Australian project of self-definition through travel. Yet for all the post-modern satirical - say Forbesian - jibes at the forces of globalisation that have transformed Kinsella's Arcadia, many of the poems seem out of their element. "Fencepost", for example, begins as a thoughtful and interesting meditation on that very pastoral subject of its title. But towards the end, the poem loses confidence in its project and demolishes itself with an allusion to the art of Tom Roberts as a form no longer capable of encapsulating modern experience:

> A Tom Roberts painting becomes a lost refrain -
> information breaking up, the field enclosed -
> without pain.

Kinsella's opinion may well be correct that modern art is about information "breaking up", and that modern fences may well be painlessly virtual rather than barbed, but for the poem to work, it can't be simply stated as a surprise ending, if the perception is to succeed as anything other than an opinion. As in the poetry of

Tranter and Forbes (to just mention the leading Australia exponents of this idea), the "breaking up" must be embodied throughout the fabric of the poem. By and large, Kinsella's fenceposts remain very traditional objects, and if they are breaking up, it is probably due to the more traditional processes of change and decay than the information concerning them. In other words, Kinsella's pastoral project is still too, too successful, and the counter-pastoral project sits like an uneasy superstructure on top. Fortunately, however, Kinsella is too good a poet to be sunk by its weight.

John Foulcher's new volume also dabbles with the post-modern - but not obscurely. In *Convertible* (Ginninderra Press), he also pays tribute to John Forbes with gentle remonstration - "The future's not so empty John" - as he tries to work out how much of Forbes' scepticism and cynicism he is prepared to accept:

> let's crouch in the fo'c'sle of the empty present
> stubbly with living
> as we search *for minor* continents [my itlaics]

Indeed, Foulcher's new poems (as his earlier ones) are "stubbly with living" as he discovers the "minor continents" of everyday existence. As the title suggests, Foulcher's project is not counter-traditonal: rather his aim is to *convert* the traditional. A nice example is a poem entitled "The Body", written for his wife, in the context of her priesthood. In this poem, Foulcher, like some latter-day Solomon, converts the words of the sacrement ("This is my body,/Take eat, Do this in remembrabce of me") in such a way as to pay transcendent tribute to his wife. As he remarks, if the body is a tent (as claimed by the chaplain at his mother's funeral) Foulcher declares he wants to "pack my tent away and move in with you" (his wife). Thus Foulcher converts very literally the theological idea of marriage as union of body and soul into the reality of a living metaphor, a real relationship.

As in Kinsella's work there is the discovery here that things are not what they seem - yet it is constantly found that they are more than they appear. This not simply discovery, but an uneasy wondering, an ordinariness composed of a "braille of love and contempt/ at the heart of the poems". Foulcher claims: "It's a gift

being average, and mostly more true". He makes this claim against an unnamed "great" but "weird" poet as his new book tries to convert the imagism of his earlier work to a more complex sort of wonderstanding of the invisible glue that exists between people. As if to emphasise the sense of being average, the book concludes as it opens with a prose poem. The volume opens by quoting a warning sign: "No swimming/ submerged objects". It concludes well above all submerged objects on a peak of the Snowys, where:

> Here, I seem so alone in the world, so happy ...
> voices rise from the fire, like sparks
> shimmering a bit. Tonight we'll all tend to our
> blisters, there'll be stories and jokes,
> food of a kind; a billowing temporary sleep.

And thus in the contradictory nature of these poems, balanced uneasily between presence and loss in the necessary temporariness of fulfilment, Foulcher deconstructs by reconstructing ordinary, traditional relations into something new.

Phillip Hammial's *Bread* (Black Pepper) reminds me of an exhibit I saw a few years ago in the Pompidou Centre in Paris. I do not recollect the artist, but the work featured the supine figure of a man that sat up every minute and beat its bronze head against a brass bell. The wit, the repetition, the hollow resonance, the post-modernist statement peering at itself again, and again, describes Hammial's sparkling triumph. The attitude of the audience to Alice's music, in "Music" speaks volumes about Hammial's post-satirical attitudes:

> Alice tried them all - flute, clarinet, trombone,
> bassoon, French horn and tuba.
> None of them would work.
> The audience thought that the squeaks, flutters and
> hisses were deliberate.
> She became the darling of the avant-garde.

Thus Hammial's work misses as it hits, demanding an audience that is itself sent up, the only position it really enjoys. Such

knowing is the only thing it can know. The most pure of the post-moderns in this bunch of poets, Hammial achieves a catchiness hard to resist, a satirical campness whose wit is always one step ahead. Black Pepper's third offering, Andrew Sant's *Russian Ink*, brings so-called normal experience back into focus, as it is explored in the vernacular. "Stories of my father" is an effective elegy that brings the reader in touch with the personal side of Sant's talent, while the "Green Man Poems", perhaps less successfully attempts a sort of mythic comedy. The verse novella, "Summertime", is probably the section of the book that succeeds most fully. It chronicles the experiences of the new nineties, share-owning family - with the satirical inversion that it is now the non-sensitive new age women who work the market while the bewildered husbands attempt to make sense of the cryptic notes left on the phone pad. As the comedy unfolds, Sant deftly exposes the mythic layers surrounding summertime holidays and resorts, the ultimate dreams of every investor, until they are revealed bathetically as "The ritual holiday at the beach". This dream of our entrepreneurial heroes is defined by Sant's anti-hero Jim as: "nothing bar wild proximity to place and season". The poem and the book end when Jim and his wife Wendy:

> open the glazed
> doors onto the garden and, barefoot,
> toast what might be an island sunset.

The killer word "might" catches Sant's understated sense here, his good humoured satire and self-satire entertains as it subverts.

Andrew Sant's novella contrasts in its simplicity with the complexity of Alan Wearne's second verse novel, *The Love Makers*, the first book of which is called *Saying all the Good Sexy Things* (Penguin). Centred on Australian popular culture of the sixties through to the eighties, the book contains a galaxy of characters who entertain using a lively vernacular, remaining recognisably true to their eras – the swinging and not so swinging sixties – and settings – Sydney's Sutherland Shire and Melbourne's St. Kilda. The poetry explicitly explores the popular, with allusions to pop songs, political slogans of the day, the language of Religious

crusades and advertising jingles that form the consciousness of the characters. From a *Puberty Blues* view of life (which one is reminded incontestably of) in the early sections, the novel develops into the love life of Barb in the 70's and 80's. Acute, accurate as Wearne's observations, his sense of character and ear for the vernacular are, I'm not sure how far they transcend the popular culture they depict. Barb's search for meaning in her love life is in some danger of being read as soap opera, and the characters are largely as stereotypes. Yet perhaps this is no matter, and is a mark of the book's readability and success. It is approachable and enjoyable poetry that one often forgets is poetry as such. Embracing the "ordinary", it does so without the deliberate sensationalism and exotic features of Dorothy Porter's *Monkey Grip*. Wearne concentrates on saying the good sexy things, and promises better things to come.

Philip Salom's *A Creative Life* (Fremantle Art Centre Press) moves away from the popular. Perhaps the worst thing about the book is its punning title, and perhaps that is because it tends to be too overloaded with significance. Taken from a typographical error of an American composer who wrote: "How strange and exciting it is living this cretive life" – the volume sets out to explore the creations and accretions that have formed and informed his life. Dedicated to the memory of his father, Salom's new collection evaluates the life that accretes to him through his "Kin Ships" (another awkwardly punning title) between generations. Salom's own son, belonging to the putative "Generation X" is "echoing back to A": a "post-post-modernist without even knowing it", victim of "the needle of what isn't – and isn't well./ A to X swallowed like an overdose". Yet if Salom agonises over one he has "kinned", he also worries over the probable approbations of the one who has "kinned" him, his own father, who, hauntingly, he imagines staring:

> at my sparse hair, then calls out: Yellow!
> I say yes, I've coloured it before it all falls out!
> And he stiffens, sucks back air between his teeth.
>
> As if he hates me or is scared ... *Here I am, Dad.*

This example of the tension between the notion of generation as accretion versus creation perhaps efficiently captures the wit, emotion and economy of the book. At the intellectual level then, the title is appropriate: but the poems themselves pack an emotional punch that belies its cleverness. His prize winning poem, "Preservation: Things in Glass" explores the age old conflict between loss and creation, which is exactly the conflict revealed not only between the generations, but in the very act of generation itself, resolved not only in the traditional acceptance of change, but embraces change in an original way as the process of accretion.

Drowning Ophelia (Sunline Press) by Roland Leech, is unfortunately a good example of the hard times poetry has fallen upon: a book full of prize winning poems by a recognised poet, needing self-publication. A pleasant collection of poems from the west, Leech wanders from Ophelia's madness to the conquest of the Incas, from Darwin's great voyages to the travels of Ulysses – both Homer's and Joyce's. Like Brook Emery's, Leech's poetry displays an impressive erudition, imaginatively interwoven into authentic meditations which mostly steer between the Scylla and Charybdis of pretentiousness and bathos. In some poems, such as "The East Timor Poems", there is a raw passion and anger that stands as an interesting parable on mixing the normally immiscible: politics and poetry. The silence about the Dili massacre, which fuels the poems' anger, has exploded into a resolution of sorts since the poem received its "Second" in the Newcastle Competition. If the crisis has passed, as is the ineluctible nature of politics, the poem lives on as a testimony, perhaps, of the power of poetry to voice popular opinion and maybe even contribute to political change.

Eminent Indian poet, Keki Daruwalla, also exhibits an impressive learning in his millenium collection. *Night River* (Rupala) seeks to unravel the various paradoxes and enigmas surrounding life and its significance. If this is the subject of most poetry, it is absolutely explicit in Daruwalla. In "Letter from Helsinki", for example, the poet describes for his mother the effect of witnessing a *Kelwala* dance:

The good fellows danced and the evil ones danced,
They intermingled and I didn't know which was which.
That has always been my trouble, Mama,
Figuring out the face from the mask,
Good from evil, dream from reality.

This has the seer-like quality of popular philosophy I associate with John Lennon. Yet if Daruwalla has a strength, it lies in his ability to evoke the dance before he tells us what it may mean. His themes range from Indian history ("Partition Ghazal") to "Exile and the Chinese Poets", from Greek mythology to French existentialism (Camus' Meursault from *L'etranger*). There is a sort of universalism to Daruwalli's perspective that transcends location - a man who finds his sense of reality in an amalgam of Eastern and Western culture that is his own. "Happiness" he tells us, "lies in the familiar, the penumbra that one can sense". Daruwalla seems familiar with most things: his poems give a strong sense of his "penumbra": yet through them we constantly glimpse the ideal. It is a surprise to find such overt Platonic thought in a volume out of India: yet it is of such surprises that the volume is constructed to keep the reader reading.

In contrast, *Water Wood Pure Splendour* (Orchard Pavilion Books) by Agnes Lam embraces a more quotidian outlook. Sensitively and honestly expressed, Lam writes of her friends and family in East Asia and America, of home and profession, in language that is straight forward, though never prosaic. If she writes of the ordinary, it is with a lightness of being that floats it beyond the mundane, overall creating a poetry that reaches out after those parts of life difficult to express. In Hong Kong or Singapore of the nineties we are everywhere. Thus *Water Wood Pure Splendour* travels well, expresses an insight into Chinese-Anglo culture in a manner that cleans the palate and refreshes the mind. Lam's simplicity is the obverse side of femininity to that presented in Five Islands' Meredith Wattison in *Fish Wife* and Annemaree Adams in *The Dogs*. Both take on the ordinary too – but the ordinary of subjective being. Exploring the internal and intrapersonal, Wattison uses domestic imagery from the kitchen and the bedroom, reaching out toward the mythic in her "Sir" series, where the role of femininity is explored and exposed "like the naked sensuality of the

sea". The poems intrigue as they locate the emotional equivalent of the everyday in the exotic and the archaic, capturing and inspiring the imagination. Adams also explores the intrapersonal, but her muse draws her sexuality toward the political and the social – exploring the real roots and real ends of sensuality in a way that is often confronting. Adams sets her dogs loose, hedging the reader into an uncomfortable re-evaluation of attitudes, lurking as skeletons in the closets of the mind. Yet in so far as these poems are political, it is never the politics of ideology and anger. It is the insight of a wisdom that is as rare as it is passionate.

If the books I have so far mentioned have in different ways and to different extents sent me to Reith's "Siberia", there are others that speak with that same urgency, symptomatic of a truly vital form. Lesly Walter's *watermelon baby* (Five Islands Press) contains lively and passionate accounts of parenting and family life. Tricia Dearborn's *Frankenstein's Bathtub* (Interactive Press) is Australia's own Mary Shelley, creating great art, wit and new perspectives out of old body parts. Clayton Hansen's humorous mixture of prose and poetry in *The Ventriloquist's Child,* also from Interactive, makes for some compulsive, entertaining reading. In more painful mode, there is real urgency in X. Duong's *refugee Refugees see the East Timorese* (Integration) whose ironic title masks an experience deeply scarred by political and military thuggery. There is also a collection of "Greatest Hits" of the nineties: *New Music: an Anthology of Contemporary Australian Poetry* (Five Islands Press), whose editor, John Leonard makes a shrewd selection of the best poems of the last five years, under a title that makes explicit the connection between poetry and music. Other anthologies include new voices from the N.S.W. Central Coast *Close Up and Far Away* (Central Coast Poets Inc. 2000), an interesting collection of West Australian poetry, *emPOWa* (P.O.Box 16, Scarborough, 6922) and Adelaide's *Flow* (Friendly Street Reader 25). In these last collections, the vitality and breadth Australian poetry is made clear. Unlike Pirandello's characters, this poetry is clearly not looking for an author. I hope it finds an audience.

WAYNE MACAULEY

SIMPSON AND HIS DONKEY GO LOOKING FOR THE INLAND SEA

I, Simpson, and my donkey, Murphy, have been eighty-six years on the road now, looking for the inland sea. This trip will be our last. Fair weather has accompanied us for the most part, but three days ago it rained. We were a little west of Diggers Rest and four days out of Melbourne. It came upon us quickly, boiling black clouds on the western horizon and a sudden blast of wind from the south. Murphy became bogged in a roadside ditch and I could not get him out. He snorted, irascibly, each time I tugged at his rein, and for one terrible moment I thought he was giving up on me and wanted to go home. But I got him out in the end. That night as he slept I saw the shiver coursing through his flanks and knew he had caught cold. The next day the shivering grew worse and small rivulets of clear snot fell from Murphy's nostrils. I've plied him with oranges, but he eats them reluctantly. Since yesterday morning I've carried the pannier bags myself. I hope to make the Sunset Country before the week is out; perhaps the dry air there will put him back on his feet.

He's a good animal, I can't deny it, a little on the mulish side at times but old enough for me to forgive him his pertinacious ways. (I do not know the ratio of donkey years to human but he cannot be too shy of eighty; I am either twenty three or a hundred and nine.) We've been through a lot together, Murphy and I, but the beast has stuck by me where many other donkeys and no doubt many more humans would have given up years ago. He's from India, originally. What he thinks of our enterprise, I cannot say: not even

I, his lifelong companion, can penetrate that inscrutable look. Perhaps he simply has nowhere else to go, nothing else to do: better a futile journey than a more futile staying at home. I've studied his face often these past few days for a sign of his present thinking but the look is more inscrutable than ever. Can anyone understand a donkey, what goes on in a donkey's mind? I am more qualified than most, but no wiser than a century ago.

* * *

I wasn't always looking for the inland sea, it was never my intended vocation. Help-mate to the dying; that was the lot I was burdened with and one which - with no false modesty - brought me some measure of fame and a steady supply of good quality cigarettes in those earlier, far-off days. I still wear the red-cross armband, threadbare now with age, but help-mate I am no more. A wanderer rather, in search of - I was going to say myself. We brought the bloodied racks of bodies back to the hospital tent, drank what little hospital brandy we could find, then journeyed out into the terrible cacophony again. A man and his donkey, I have a photograph of us somewhere, in my pannier bag I think: me a rough-headed youth smiling a smile that could almost be a grimace, Murphy looking disdainfully for God knows what reason at my foot. That was the Great War, they called it the Great War, and I'm sure it was great for some, but somehow the greatness of it got past Murphy and I and we had to content ourselves with the trivialities of blood and broken limbs. A wounded soldier once called me over to his bed and asked me in all innocence why I risked my life and that of my donkey to bring all these half-dead fighting men back from the front. At the time I could not answer him and turned his question over in my mind for days. Lasseter was his name. He gave me a vial, a small glass vial, with a clear liquid, water, inside. Rub a little on your forehead, he said, if ever you get in trouble - I could use it myself but I'm past caring. A good man. And yes, I had all but forgotten the little vial (the second assault had started and those weeks were weeks full of hell) when one morning on my way back down Shrapnel Gully I took a sniper's bullet through the heart. I lay where I fell, gazing up at Murphy braying in lamentation, until

in the blind panic that only death's nearness can bring I uncorked the vial and took a swig.

Eighty-six years, it's a long time, by anyone's estimation. Lasseter is long since dead. Don't worry, I had said - how easily said! - I will fill the vial again. He gave me the map that his father had given him - but I have trouble reading it now. I could once close a cut finger just by passing a hand over it, turn back a common cold with a grin. But my eyesight is failing, my bones have started to creak, my healing powers are not what they were. We follow the vast network of fissures and gullys inland, leaning on charity where we must, paying our way where we can. In the pannier bags I carry herbs, plant extracts, small animal parts, all the little tricks I've picked up along the way. In the empty vial I keep the locust egg that a Talmudist gave me and a sliver of deer's antler that I got from a Chinese. I draw on the haberdashery of knowledge I have accumulated, from people I've talked to and books I've read, and fill in the gaps extempore. I mark my face and utter ritual incantations of my own invention, I crush crusty snail shells with a mortar and pestle and keep the dust in a Vegemite jar. But the physician cannot heal himself. My bones are cold in the marrow, my heart speaks to me out of tune. Without the miracle of the vial-water all my healings are second-rate.

* * *

On the fifth day following the rain we decamped to a hayshed near Toolern Vale. I made up a decoction of aniseed, raisins and valerian root and gave it to Murphy two-hourly. He seemed to improve a little but then the weather turned foul again. I was reluctant to push him more than was necessary and we stayed there two more days drying out. On the third I foolishly lit a fire and burnt the hayshed down. We moved to Barkstead, a journey which with Murphy still sick took longer than it should have and by the time we'd set up camp in an abandoned farmhouse there I realised to my consternation that we had been twelve days out of Melbourne already and had barely covered fifty miles. I could not let any more time get away from us, so we walked from Barkstead to the highway and took a ride in the back of a farmer's truck. Cattle had

been in there, or sheep perhaps; it stunk of manure and damp straw was piled up in one corner and covered by a tarpaulin. The truck had barely pulled away when Murphy began braying inconsolably. He's smelt the excrement, I thought, and become prey to some obscure animal lust. I tried to quieten him, fearing the farmer would abandon us then and there, but he only brayed all the louder. I heard a groan, then saw the tarpaulin move. I gingerly pulled it back. Murphy suddenly fell silent.

Her name is Laura, that's all I can get from her. The farmer was reluctant to part with her at first but in the end I bribed him with the few precious dollars I had - I don't know what came over me; inveterate Samaritanism I suppose. I tied her securely to Murphy's back and led her in off the highway to a picnic ground by a creek where I cleaned and dressed her wounds. "Laura", she said, and fell silent again. I prefer not to think too much about what went on in the back of the truck but I imagine it involved the farmer and probably one or two more of his mates. I know I will never get the story from her. She will not speak to me, not even to say Thankyou. I gave her a powder and passed the wine cork over her. In the bean tin I mixed the last of the beetles and made a poultice from it. She suffered my ministrations uncomplainingly, like the patients I have dreamed about.

We stayed there a week at the picnic ground before setting off again; Laura now riding side-saddle, me walking ahead with the rein. Though barely conscious when we found her she now sits atop Murphy with an almost regal air, brushing away flies with a switch. Her appetite has returned and she devours the rations I offer her; she has gained weight noticably, and Murphy sinks noticably further under it each day.

* * *

Six weeks have gone by and we've barely covered ninety miles. O fateful day that I found that girl in the truck! I have even begun to harbour ill feelings towards Murphy for having alerted me to her in the first place: we've had nothing but bad luck since. Murphy's cold has become pneumomia, a crepance in his off-hind has begun to fester, I lost my compass somewhere on the road from Stawell

and spent two days trying to find it. We are now just outside Dadswells Bridge and have been here for the better part of a week. I've tried to talk to her, convince her that as much as I might like to take her with us, under the circumstances I can't. We're looking for the inland sea, I say, and it will be a long and terrible journey ahead. She seems to listen: she looks me in the eye and politely waits until I'm finished before bowing her head again. But she's made no offer to go. I wake late in the morning from a terrible sleep to find her already astride Murphy with the switch in her hand and that faraway look in her eye.

I've taken to the bottle; try as I might I can find no other way to still these sounds of warfare in my head. They started the night I found Laura, faintly at first, as if from a distance, and then louder, until they have now become the deafening roar that almost bursts my skull. Whistling shells, machine gun fire, barking orders, cries of pain. I go to the back door of a country pub at closing time and beg for a bottle of brandy and a carrot for Murphy to help us on our way: Lest we forget, I say. The old regulars dutifully whip around amongst themselves and the publican returns with my booty wrapped up in a brown paper bag. I accept it graciously - You will be blessed with many children, I say, in the fullness of time - and disappear again into the night to rejoin Murphy and Laura at our camp on the outskirts of town where I slowly drink myself into a stupor. Laura says nothing, but behind her supposedly vacant eyes I'm sure I see a look of reproach. Murphy stands a little way off, chewing on his withered carrot, his eyes deliberately averted to the ground.

* * *

I don't know how much time has passed, I'm not even sure where I am, but things have taken a turn for the worse. I must have been suffering from the tremens. Hastily and against my better judgement I'd diverted our party to a small north-western town - the name escapes me now - on the strength of a rumour that there was a hospital there where Laura might get treatment for her wounds. She had started bleeding again, crimson rivers down the inside of her thighs. But the hospital had either closed or not yet

opened: I stepped back and forward in front of the doors until my head began to spin. In the end I broke a window and climbed inside. I walked the corridors, in each room four empty beds. I prised open a cupboard and found a bottle of pills - a paregoric, I presumed, with my decidedly outdated knowledge of such things - and a bottle of methylated spirits. Like matches in the hands of a pyromaniac. I was unhinged for three days and suffered from the most violent and confusing hallucinations. Not since I first smoked opium in Egypt have I experienced such intoxication. Under the influence of this hallucinosis I led us boldly inland (It won't be long, Laura, I said), but we missed the Sunset Country completely and ended up in the Little Desert, south of Nhill. A stark, inhospitable place. I pulled out my maps in utter despair, for I could not find myself on them. Is that possible; to suddenly and completely disappear from the face of the earth? Dead trees, dead grass, grey dust and sand; we lurched from one useless landmark to the next. Flies hovered in clouds above us, Murphy's wheeze was a broken accordian. We finally made camp beneath a tree which for some reason I thought I recognised and gave ourselves over to sleep. That night in my dreams I heard the beating of wings; when I awoke in the morning Laura was gone, a fine layer of dust on her bedroll. Murphy brayed like a wild beast and brayed all morning long. Around midday I began digging a hole at the base of the tree, convinced that in some other time I had buried a bottle of brandy there and then as I dug even more convinced that this bottle of brandy was in fact the inland sea I'd been looking for and that by finding it and drinking from it all would be well again. But it was the wrong tree, it must have been the wrong tree; I dug all day and half the night, found nothing and collapsed; exhausted. In the morning I left Murphy at camp, took Laura's switch in my hand and began to move from tree to tree, using it as a divining rod. This is why she carried it, I'm utterly convinced of that now, and this is why she left it behind, so that I might use it so. I criss-crossed the desert with the stick outstretched before me, Murphy hobbling at a distance behind, braying for me to return. Crows wheeled above me, morning became noon, the stick quivered ceaselessly in every direction but it was not until I'd dug three fruitless holes that I realised it quivered not for water or liquour but because of my

trembling hands. I tried to still them but I couldn't. In the end I hurled the stick from me and saw it slither into the grass.

* * *

Murphy's sleeping, I think he's sleeping; I lie with my head on his belly and can hear a faint gurgling inside. I look up at the sky, an infinite sky, through crusty half-closed eyes. I see Laura naked, again and again and again and again and again and again and again, ankle now thigh now waste deep in water, splashing it over herself. It's a dream. I've dug beneath a dozen trees, have dug up half the Little Desert, and need to rest for a while. But tomorrow I'll start again. Tomorrow I'll find the inland sea, the inland sea or the bottle of brandy or perhaps if I'm lucky the two transmuted magically into one: tomorrow, or the day after, the day after surely. I'll dig all day if needs be. Yes, the day after surely.

Mark O' Flynn

Spider

All day
and night too
that spider has not moved
from its barren vantage on the wall.

Affixed like a brooch
or a windblown thistle
waiting for the moment
some hungry impetus

invigorates it
to scurry across
the ceiling in pursuit
of midges, house flies

smaller members of its genus.
But for the moment
it is still as a stain;
remains the icon

in my children's sleeping consciousness,
curious how the seven legged
huntsman received his limp,
and does it hurt? Terror is only

a human moment.
The sun visor dropping
its unexpected cargo in the driver's lap.
Even the Flick signs

cause a shudder of instinct
leaving you destitute
in your cubic metre of freedom
where every visible spider

lurking in the dust
is the innocent source
of revulsion, made human,
made manifest.

Margie Cronin

Substitution

Start the same but don't rhyme.
Rhyme but start differently.
The cat's that jealous since you were born that she's been throwing up all her meals.
Even edentulous, you have frightened her back from herself.
Your small fingers and coy smiles must appear to her as disagreeable weapons and the black of her eyes widens around you as if from a natural flood of light.
In this case, she thinks, the prominent trees mean everything they have marked and where love is landing has fallen prey to substitution.
She decides that despite the inconvenience of a boot to the stomach, she'd prefer to piss indoors.
Just maybe rhymes with baby. *I'll be a cat for longer than that.*

MICHAEL ACKLAND

IMPRISONED VOICES: FORGOTTEN SUBTEXTS OF COLONIAL CONVICT FICTION

Colonial literary treatment of the convict system is generally regarded as being either moral or sensational in its broad tendency. After all, the first "Australian" novel, *Quintus Servinton*, excused both its author's hubris in essaying the pen and its felon subject matter on the grounds that it "might convey useful and instructive precepts under their most attractive guise" (QS xxxiii).[1] Similarly, Mrs Vidal and Caroline Leakey could have joined Henry Savery in "def[ying] the hand that may be lifted against the moral tendency" of their convict fictions (QS xxxiv), where assignment and other schemes for rehabilitation feature prominently. These concerns yielded to portrayals of the more violent excesses of the system in the writings of Marcus Clarke and "Price Warung". Each writer, it is agreed, made ""free" use of fact" to present, in Hergenhan's words, "the spirit not the letter of the system as he saw it".[2] Their fiction is intent on revelation. Clarke, after a brief fact-finding trip to Port Arthur in 1870, reported how locals "begged that the loathly corpse of this dead wickedness called Transportation might be comfortably buried away and ignored of men and journalists. But", he added ominously, ""the smell of it" remained--remains" (MC 529).[3] And in *For the Term of His Natural Life* the decaying cadaver of "a monstrous system of punishment futile for good and horribly powerful for evil" is exhumed (MC 530). A generation later "Warung", maintaining that "the Transportation System ha[d thoroughly] knitted itself into the fibres of our national being",

made comprehending and extirpating its legacy his mission. Not surprisingly, subsequent commentary has not expected concealment, in the form of covert or encoded subtexts, in colonial convict fiction. Yet the peculiar position of convict authors, as I shall argue, made them almost inevitable and throws considerable light on interpretative dilemmas raised by the writings of Henry Savery and James Tucker.

Irrespective of whether free man or felon, colonial novelists concurred that portraying the convict system was fraught with considerable risks. As Clarke signalled, the reach of the establishment was long: "Officialdom, with its crew of parasites and lickspittles, may try to palliate the enormities committed in the years gone by; may revile, with such powers of abuse as are given to it the writers who record the facts which it blushes for" (MC 530). To this threat "Warung" added, in *"The Henry Porcher Bolter"*, his own conception of potential mental impairment produced by long immersion in the corrupting details of transportation. Ostensibly the story explains how the author, as a schoolboy, became interested in the penal system through his friendship with an escapee who had stolen another man's certificate of liberation and bribed a magistrate. Since then the bolter had amassed a library of gargantuan proportions in a cottage near the final home of famed reformer Peter Lalor. Books filled every corner of his house, leaving hardly enough space for a man to "worm" between mountains of printed matter. A veritable "bibliomaniac", the old man `lived in his books, and died among them"--but not before he had initiated the author-to-be into the arcana of the system (PW 4). Obviously the story serves to increase "Warung's" authority, yet it can also be read as a projection of his actual situation.[4] For all its physicality Porcher's house resembles the authorial mind, laden with indispensable historical matter and in touch with radical thought. The schoolboy and the bolter recall aspects of himself: his early innocence and the man he threatened to become through prolonged exposure to the system, a "raucous, [surly] ... hater of the human" (PW 4). "Warung", too, was a bookworm who claimed he had built up a collection of "10,000 manuscript and printed items worth a total of 2,000" related to the convict past (PW xviii). He also inhabited a fictional name or pseudonym stolen from others,

and the writerly freedom he enjoyed depended on a comparable manipulation of evidence which would not necessarily stand the test of objective judgment.[5] Finally "Warung", like Porcher, never escaped his dread knowledge of transportation, so that in him idealistic and misanthropic tendencies existed together in uncomfortable, at times scarcely sustainable, proximity.

These dangers, social as well as psychological, appear minor when compared with those faced by writers condemned to transportation, who depended not only for the paper on which they wrote but for their very lives on the penal system. Authority had many options for avenging itself on critical or refractory convicts; displeasing compositions could simply be destroyed. Solzhenitsyn, in a moving scene from *The Gulag Archipelago,* is summoned to the commandant's office where he witnesses a pile of manuscripts, among which lie perhaps unread masterpieces, being fed to a roaring fire to keep the Siberian cold at bay. Such scenes, though unrecorded, were probably reduplicated in antipodean penal settlements, and the colonial censor was ever vigilant. Orally transmitted works aside, the preservation or publication of more ambitious texts, to judge from extant writings, presupposed that the work be morally uplifting and supportive of the ruling establishment. But this ruled out neither veiled authorial motives nor subversive subtexts, as the cases of Savery and Tucker demonstrate.

So disparate are Savery's major compositions, *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land* (1829) and *Quintus Servinton* (1831), that commentary has raised the possibility that he was not the author of both pseudonymous books. The known facts of his life, however, clearly point to him as their author, and the switch from irreverent satirical sketches to didactic fiction reflects apparently a shift in creative purpose, as an initial escapist impulse gave way to a desire to plead implicitly for his own release.[6] In each instance writing was a perilous undertaking, in that his potential liberty was at stake. *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land,* written during a fifteen month stint in a Hobart prison, appeared initially as instalments in the *Colonial Times* between 5 June and 25 December 1829, and so contravened an official decree of July 1828 which forbad convicts writing for the press. Arguably Savery's pseudonym, "Simon

Stuckeley", comments on this predicament. Not only was the surname Stukeley well know through its association with the antiquarian William Stukeley, who shared Savery's fascination with Stonehenge, but more germanely it was linked to a notorious Quaker. This Simon, according to West's *History of Tasmania* (1852), tried to convert the Grand Turk in Istanbul. His attempt was met with a threat of decapitation, followed by assignment to an asylum, to which he responded: "I said the world was mad, and the world said I was mad; and they out-voted me".[7] Though not deemed mad, the hermit is accused in various instalments of being a caricaturist and dangerous acquaintance, while his publisher was successfully prosecuted for libel, for the hermit produced sketches of local rather than representative interest that made contemporaries wince. The targets of his satire are diverse, from medical practitioners to professionals at "law and jaw" (H 103), from weddings to orphanages and sheep raising. But government practices are spared his lash. In fact, the hermit is so commendatory of them that he sought to forestall criticism through an imaginary interlocutor who charges him with '"cr[ying] up the Governor too much"'. This draws forth barely disguised sycophancy. '"You would not have him [the hermit] scold when it is not deserved ... merely because the Government are concerned, would you?"' (H 175). Savery had no desire to see an official inquiry into the authorship of the instalments. Hence he was careful not to provoke the wrath of the local potentate, nor to alienate official good-will, being well aware like "Stukeley" of the need to '"always court the powers that be, there's never any knowing to what fertile *plains* they may prove an *avenue*"' (H 86).

Wish-fulfilment and compensation were less obvious but important spurs to composition. As the hermit conceded in the final instalment: "It was entirely my own pleasure that led me, a few months ago, to appear before the world as an author" (H 180). Part of this pleasure came undoubtedly from casting off the demeaning role of a felon for one appropriate to his breeding and knowledge: that of a satirist seeking to reform mankind and thereby to help a fledgling community. He could also dilate on matters close to his heart, from business affairs to womankind, presenting himself as "an admirer of the female character, when it

shines in its native lustre, free from acquired specks and blemishes" (H 117). Importantly, too, the sketches not only helped pass the long hours of incarceration, but they set him free imaginatively. In the guise of hermit he circumambulates at will in society, enjoying the best fare of the governor's table while criticising his cooks and servants, and undertakes extensive excursions to settled areas beyond Hobart, in some of which he worked as an assigned convict. Authorship thus emerged as a means of rewriting his lot strongly in his own favour, and of appearing as a public benefactor - an experience which encouraged the creation of – *Quintus Servinton.*

The novel, unlike the sketches, was clearly intended to further Savery's prospects in the colony. Whereas the identity of the hermit remained a secret, the ensuing book, although published anonymously, was so close to its author's case as to invite identification, with the corollary that Savery was offering his past, as well as his putative reform, for public scrutiny. With his sights now set on a ticket of leave, his earlier displays of authorial pride and moral superiority were curbed in favour of requisite humility, while he covertly sought to meliorate his actual sins, which ranged from forgery to attempted suicide, as the regrettable excesses of youth. Thus Servinton, in most respects, is a paragon of virtue. "Naturally any thing but intemperate" (QS 115), he eschews drink, lewd or boisterous behaviour, and "prefer[s] business ... to the syren" (QS 132). In addition, "a dishonest thought had never entered his heart" (QS 213). His weaknesses are self-confidence and ambition, coupled with impatience under constraint. Repeatedly the reader is asked to weigh "the active restlessness of his mind, the towering grandeur of his projects", against "the uniform correctness of his private life" and motives (QS 316). Further exculpation comes at the outset from a gipsy prophecy to Quintus's father that, on returning home, his wife will have given birth to a son destined to a chequered career, marked by threats of violent death as well as disasters "from thirty to forty" (QS 3). The details fit his career exactly. All seems preordained, though Savery frequently rephrases this in more orthodox terms, as in a moment of extremis in the antipodes: "twice, was the victim in the power of the destroying angle - twice, did it seem that, no human means could have averted the arrow, when a Providence whom he had too much neglected

and despised ... stepped in with its interposing aim, and rescued him from destruction" (QS 282).

The other major area of refashioning concerns his wife Eliza. Salacious tongues accused her of a shipboard romance with the newly appointed Attorney General, Algernon Montagu, and, on learning that Savery had lured her to Hobart with a false account of his circumstances, she resolved to return to England. He slashed his throat. In the novel Eliza's counterpart, Emily, is an impossible ideal: loving, forbearing, intelligent and entirely devoted. She answers Servinton's need for "accomplished and elegant female society" (QS 140), makes him the centre of her existence, and manages all things well. No blame is attached to her throughout the narrative. When privy to his secret thoughts she unfailingly sets Quintus right. Nor does she depart from the strictest propriety during the long southward voyage, or act precipitously once she has landed in the colony. Consequently Quintus can assert his "most unbounded confidence in your good sense, your correct principles, and your affection" (QS 376), while the narrator underscores that "Quintus, with all his faults, was decidedly formed for domestic life--was ardently attached" to his wife (QS 234). Also Emily, unlike Eliza, does not abandon him to his fate in Hobart. She returns to England only at his biding to plead his case before higher authorities, demonstrating, as Emily maintains, that `"a wife can always help her husband"' (QS 355). In short, Quintus "would as soon have renounced his faith in a superintending Providence, or in his Redeemer, as in Emily" (QS 349). Was this portrait of the couple simply wish-fulfilment on Savery's part? Or was it a gesture of appeasement as well as an attempt to sway Eliza to act in the manner of her fictional counterpart? Had Savery not abandoned all hope of conjugal reconciliation? At the very least her portrayal reflected favourably on her spouse, and kept alive hope of his improvement in accordance with Emily's dictum `"that it greatly depends upon the wife, what the husband is like"' (QS 326).

Finally, in this rose-coloured version of events, even the local governor regards Servinton's efforts benignly. He is "inclined to shew him any little indulgence that came within the established regulations" in appreciation of "the struggles he was making, towards recovering his station in society" (QS 333). But this, like

other crucial details, was far removed from actuality.[8] Lieutenant-Governor Arthur stated categorically: "Savery is a Man of whose real reformation, notwithstanding the strong testimonials of his conduct from Home and in this Colony, I have but a very faint hope".[9] Later events would confirm this negative verdict, and that the novel signalled no abiding change in its author. He remained morally weak and liable to repeat old offences, as well as a skilled fabricator of misleading documents.

Nevertheless, *Quintus Servinton* fulfilled its tacit purpose. It made, in effect, a dual case for commuting its author's sentence: the offender has genuinely reformed and, like the hermit, through the moral tenor of his writing he has "done the State some service" (H 180). To pious souls, at least, its portrait of a peccant but regenerated young man was apparently convincing. An early admirer of it remarked: "If Mr Savery wrote this Book he cannot be a bad man, and I think he has atoned for his offence against Public Justice" (QS xxiv).[10] Nor could the administration have been displeased with a work which stressed the humane aspect of its procedures, which argued that a "more than average share of talent" (QS 307) among criminals provided a fortuitous starting-point for the colony, and which praised "the excellent classification of modern date, in places of confinement", that allegedly limited severe personal suffering as a feature of transportation to the first two decades of settlement. Less partial readers were not so easily persuaded. A review in the *Athenaeum* noted that the book "might have been infinitely better, had there been a spice more of human infirmity ... but really we nauseate a little at such unadulterate virtue - it wants the seasoning of vice and error".[11] Savery, however, was not primarily concerned with verisimilitude or engrossing his audience, but with appealing through Servinton for his own liberation. It came a year after the novel's appearance when he was granted a ticket of leave, which afforded apparent confirmation of Servinton's assertion that "there are no difficulties, however seemingly great, that are not to be conquered by perseverance" (QS 57). Yet Savery's own end belied this sanguine adage, and his short spate of creative writing owed more to imprisonment than perseverance. In 1840 he was convicted for a second time of forgery and banished for life by Algernon Montagu to Port Arthur, where

he succumbed to the hell of despair against which Servinton had preached so upliftingly.

Related interpretative problems are raised by the pseudonymous oeuvre of James Tucker. Again there is the issue of whether seemingly disparate compositions were produced by the same pen, with an additional conundrum thrown up by unexplained inconsistencies in his main protagonist, Ralph Rashleigh.[12] Their resolution is, I believe, again to be found in the conditions under which his works were created. Whereas Savery's education saw him exployed primarily in clerical capacities, Tucker had much broader experience of the penal system. Like his fictional hero Ralph Rashleigh, he first encountered hard labour at Emu Plains. Thereafter he was overseer of a labour gang in Sydney and a "special" in Port Macquarie, working variously as clerk, storekeeper and draughtsman on government-related projects. At this former penal hell in Tasmania, old and ailing convicts outnumbered the able-bodies, and a benign regime encouraged Tucker to compose plays under the aegis of the Port Macquarie Literary Association. It had been founded in 1840 and an empty barn adjoining the government store served as a theatre. For its audience Tucker is alleged to have written lost satiric skits like *Makin' Money* and *Who Built That Cosy Cottage?*, and he is sometimes credited with three novels, only one of which has survived.[13] His extant plays, *Jemmy Green in Australia* and *The Grahame's Vengeance,* represent the dominant genres of the day, respectively comedy and tragedy. They have been tentatively dated to 1845, the same year in which *Ralph Rashleigh* was perhaps begun;[14] however, commentary has failed to explore this conjunction, as well as the insights these works provide into the convict author's preoccupations.

Tucker's plays are the work of a competent dramatist, determined to push local theatre beyond tame adulation of British usages and culture. Personae are deftly sketched, dialogue is terse and well-paced. The "special" was clearly writing with performance, as well as a potential censor, in mind. In the colonies, the stage was widely regarded as a powerful instrument for moral guidance which could reform vice and reinforce authority. Tucker therefore could not attack the status quo directly, but he dramatises

both grounds for questioning it and the prevalence of self-interested action. *Jemmy Green in Australia: A Comedy in Three Acts* is an early treatment of the New Chum fleeced theme, popular at the time in the song "Billy Barlow in Australia". Characters like Smash, Plausible, Wheedelem and Smooth see to it that Jemmy is parted from his cash by bogus property development, by overpriced, feral stock and by other forms of "barefaced robbery" in the aptly named country of Gammon. In effect, Jemmy is "roasted alive by a lot of "orrid savages" (JG 80), as his sweetheart had feared, though ironically his tormentors are white rather than black. And even Green is not an entirely innocent party, given his announcement at the outset of having heard "vot fine fortunes vos to be picked up by any vun that vos vide avake ... and as I'm a real Londoner, no vun vould find it were easy to do me" (JG 43). The locals are merely "vider avake" and sharper. Overall the text shows little respect for a society riddled with greed and hypocrisy - characteristics which recur in Tucker's blank verse tragedy.

The Grahame's Vengeance or The Fate of James the First King of Scotland by "Otto von Rosenberg" is a study of justified rebellion in the face of misrule and tyranny. Throughout James I is presented as a "fell tyrant" bent on enriching himself at the expense of his nobles, and on enslaving his subjects. One of them, Sir Robert Grahame, is pushed by banishment and the murder of his wife and children to commit regicide. The anointed king dies unbecomingly under a flurry of blows in his privy, where he has fled for safety, while his assassins are spurred on by the thought '"Twere criminal to spare the tyrant"' (GV 70). The Grahame is the play's unequivocal hero, whereas the highest authority is depicted as "the Scottish Nero" (GV62). More unsettling still, Tucker's drama implies that concepts like traitor or justice are ambivalent rather than clearcut, or as Sir Robert instructs his brother:

> Malcolm, 'tis ill success alone forms rebels;
> For if rebellion or revolt be prosperous
> Then are all its leaders styled the first of patriots. (GV 34)

History, privilege and conventions express, then, not immutable decrees but the will of the victors. Superficially both plays were

hearty divertissements.[15] Covertly, however, they strip authority, whether invested in kings or attorneys like Cunningame and Cheeter, of automatic reverence, preach retribution on "miscreant tyrant[s]", and empower each individual to seek his own good in a world ruled by might and craft rather than impartial justice.

Ralph Rashleigh was born of the same constellation of ideas, but they are treated here with greater circumspection because its subject is the very convict system in which the author found himself. Outright rebellion could no longer be affirmed, even if James I had numerous counterparts in the antipodes. For instance, the sadistic commandant of the Newcastle limeburners is described as a "petty imitator of the haughtiest monarch that ever wore a crown", or as a "modern Caligula" (RR 226). Administering the lash is his vice. The agonised cries of victims gratify his soul, and he furiously strikes his scourgers to redouble their efforts until his cane breaks, providing a "*splendid specimen* of a British officer" (RR 227). Yet Tucker, apart from using heavy irony, leaves the incident to speak for itself. Instead of a didactic tract, he produces a picaresque novel which depicts Rashleigh's criminal career in England, including his formation, life-style and robberies, followed by the vicissitudes of penal experience in Australia. No aspect of the local system is praised. Convicts are constantly portrayed as the victims of authoritarian caprice, liable to maltreatment of every kind as well as starvation and without legal redress. This theatre of penal cruelty is interrupted by the protagonist's enforced sojourn among bushrangers, and ends when he becomes one of a group of escapees who are hunted down by aborigines bent on revenge. Ralph alone survives. He is adopted by an elder of the tribe and later wins a pardon when he saves two shipwrecked women and their child. A key factor in securing his release is the moral probity he has shown in Australia. He never kills except in self-defence. He is not brutalised by degrading servitude, and he is punished in the colonies only for trivial or imaginary offences. He is, however, the focus for eyewitness accounts of brutality and injustice which are at times so shocking that the author interrupts his narrative to stress that this is not a sensationalised depiction of penal proceedings, but reflects information `gathered from the different persons consulted as authorities, the *most favourable* of whose representations have

been selected" (RR 225).

In short, Tucker provides a comprehensive critique of transportation, yet contrives to avoid official displeasure. Hence professionals within the penal machinery are normally spared direct accusation. The horrors perpetrated are attributed to lackeys, or felons seeking by various shifts to improve their lot or decrease their sentences, like the sadistic Joe at Emu Plains who "delight[ed] in oppressing his men as much as possible" (RR 77). Ralph is saved from this overseer's lies by one conscientious magistrate among three: a newly arrived officer from England. Other overseers, however, are able to revenge their confrere amply in this "execrable system of tyranny and intolerable oppression" (RR 85). Nor do the convicts' sufferings necessarily end when, after a period of penal constraint, he is assigned as a labourer or servant to a settler. Instead, as Rashleigh learns at Arlack's farm, he has exchanged one form of tyrant for another, who regards his government men as machines to be worked ruthlessly for profits until they collapse, whereupon they can be replaced by fresh victims. The felon usually has two options. He may either abscond to become a bushranger, and then pillage to survive, or stay "to endure all the acts of petty tyranny and overbearing malice that minds, intoxicated by the acquisition for the first time in their lives of almost unlimited power over a fellow being, alone could either conceive or prompt the execution of" (RR 143). Such accusations are compellingly dramatised, as are the scarcely tolerable sufferings of convicts in a realm fixated by the lash:

> Still the Woodboy scorned to betray any pain, until the "Captain" cursed and swore like a maniac that neither one nor the other of the scourgers was striking at all! And he set a third operator to punish the second, a fourth to punish the third, and so on, until the whole six scourgers were pegging away at the backs of each other, the first one flogging the woodboy, and the commandant himself lashing the last with his horsewhip. (RR 222)

The boy's offence, which provoked this scene bordering on madness, was to eat the scraps given to the commandant's pigs.

As in *The Grahame's Vengeance*, tyranny inevitably produces its backlash, though Tucker takes considerable pains to distance

himself from the new tyrannicides.[16] This he does by making them vile bushrangers, and through the strange role that Rashleigh plays as their unwilling bondsman once they release him from prison. Foxley, the leader of the group, slaughters his former masters and overseers, hunting down unrelentingly those under whom he suffered as a felon. They have escaped the law, he claims, but he will see justice done: "I'm judge in this here Court, and I never acquitted a tyrant like you in my life" (RR 156). So Huggins, an overseer renowned for leaving prisoners dangling by their handcuffed hands from a beam, is staked out over an ants' nest and eaten alive. Sympathy for this fearsome tribunal is abrogated by its lack of mercy and by Foxley's own outrageous crimes. At times he burns alive or rapes innocent females, and he kills callously. Rashleigh registers abhorrence at these deeds, and is inevitably distanced from the scene either by falling into a swoon with horror or by a blow to the head. His humanity is always vindicated. He fails, however, to slip away from the band, where he serves arguably as a marker both of authorial detachment and of guilty complicity.

The author further absolves himself from the charge of approving atrocities by stressing the unreliability of convict verdicts. Tyrant, readers are told, is "a term used ...to designate any person ... who may perform his duty more strictly than is agreeable to the exalted notion these worthies entertain of the deference and consideration with which they ought to be treated" (RR 173). The resulting conflict of perspectives is dramatised through the portrayal of McGuffin. The outlaws remember him as "McGuffin the tyrant", a pitiless inspector who could administer floggings without trial. One bushranger recalls him ordering the lash for a fifteen-man iron-gang as well as its overseer, and underlining his arbitrary power with the explanation: "Why, to keep the hair out of your eyes, to be sure, you rascal!" (RR 187). Another evokes him on horseback, a scourger running at his heels, "sarving [sic] out stripes to all and sundry". Yet McGuffin displays "indomitable" courage when captured by Foxley's band (RR 189), and not only escapes but eventually hunts the bushrangers down. He also points out that such rogues deserve a thorough whipping. Nevertheless, the narrative as a whole lends credence to the bushrangers' complaints

and they are allowed to die bravely. The last of them, McCoy, is game even as a condemned prisoner, exhorting those in chains to "turn out like men . . .[against] the blasted tyrants" (RR 208), and he pushes his appointed executioner off the scaffold. The majority of the bystanders, unlike the horrified main protagonist, are on McCoy's side.

Although Rashleigh, through a series of symbolic transformations, becomes redeemable, no hope of a saving metamorphosis is held out for the convict system. Instead, it is depicted both as a finishing school in inhumanity and as an ongoing source of corruption, sewing the seeds of violence in its victims to ensure a never-ending cycle of cruelty. The endless line of flagellators, at whose end-point is the commandant who beats his subordinates, is its appropriate emblem; tyrants, toadies, sadists and hypocrites are its progeny. Ralph, through immersion in this "great cesspit of the moral filth of the colony" (RR 211), is physically and morally tested. His prison slops are replaced by sheepskin bearing the government brand. Next he is reduced to an Adamic state, which is the prelude to his last bid for liberty. It ends, however, in his forced adoption by the aborigines, complete with male initiation ceremonies and colouring agents which darken a complexion already "embrowned" by "suffering and toil". Finally, he shakes off superficial signifiers, literally losing a layer of skin to emerge in pristine whiteness, fit to receive his conditional pardon. The English criminal has been turned away from the paths of idleness, the convict has progressed from savage to civilised freedom. Bemused, his friends regard this new man, enabling Tucker to reflect on the force of first impressions and habit. The novel concludes with Rashleigh speared by "bloodthirsty barbarians", and the orthodox reflection "whom the mock philanthropy of the age characterises as inoffensive and injured beings" (RR 303). An attentive reader will recollect, however, that aborigines alone were capable of turning away from the lex talionis, and that the primitive hardships of their existence were more attractive than a return to penal servitude. Ostensibly *Ralph Rashleigh* focuses on one man's progress, but its covert subject is the system which blighted the author's adulthood and endangered the very order and civilisation it was meant to foster in the colonies.

What exactly became of Savery and Tucker is unclear. Savery was prone to black depression and the sickening irony of being tried and condemned by his wife's putative lover could only have fed his bitterness. In the hospital at Port Arthur he was seen prostrate on a stretcher, a "scarce-healed wound o[n] his attenuated throat" - a pitiful figure with hollow eyes far removed from his origins "in the very first circles" of Bristol. The sight awoke in the dramatist David Burn "sentiments of the deepest compassion mingled with horror and awe. There he lay, a sad - a solemn warning".[17] Savery died fifteen months into his sentence, perhaps by suicide. Similarly, Tucker's further life, after being granted a ticket of leave in 1847, is shrouded in conjecture. It seems he went to the gold-fields in New South Wales, was briefly imprisoned in Goulburn, and issued with a ticket of leave for the Moreton Bay district in southern Queensland in 1853. During this period he apparently passed his manuscripts for safe keeping to a Maitland acquaintance, Alexander Burnett. Twelve James Tuckers died in New South Wales and Queensland between 1849 and 1890, and no confident identification can be made. 1888 has been suggested as the likely date of his death, as has 1866, when a James Tucker expired at the Liverpool Lunatic Asylum from "decay of nature".[18] What remains of both felon authors are their works, pre-eminently their fictional tales of individual reformation. Ostensibly these vindicate the imperial establishment, but implicitly they attest to the constraints under which each man wrote. Their works are also a timely reminder that to stress the terrible suffering caused by the assignment system is not to indulge merely in black-armband history: the convicts' ordeal was real enough, as was the virtually irresistible suasion exercised by the system on its inmates, while these men's actual lives testify to the human wastage that could be produced by favourable as well as barbaric treatment within the penal system.

Notes

1. *QS* denotes a page reference to Henry Savery, *Quintus Servinton: A Tale Founded upon Incidents of Real Occurrence*, ed. Cecil H. Hadgraft (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1962); H to Henry Savery, *The Hermit in Van Diemen's Land*, ed. Cecil H. Hadgraft (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1964); MC to Michael Wilding, ed., *Marcus Clarke* (St.Lucia: University of Queensland

Press, 1976); PW to Barry Andrews, ed., *Tales of the Convict System: Selected Stories of Price Warung* (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1975); JG to James Tucker, *Jemmy Green in Australia. A Comedy in Three Acts*, ed. Colin Roderick (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1955); GV to James Tucker, *The Grahame's Vengeance, or The Fate of James the First King of Scotland*, ed., Colin Roderick (Townsville: James Cook University, 1996); RR to James Tucker, *Ralph Rashleigh* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1975).

2. Laurie Hergenhan, *Unnatural Lives: Studies in Australian Fiction about the Convicts, from James Tucker to Patrick White* (St.Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983): 8.

3. This and ensuing quotations are from the third instalment (Argus, 26 July 1873) of a series entitled "Port Arthur".

4. As Hergenhan justly remarks: "one has to listen carefully to hints and overtones which heighten the symbolic nature of "The Bolter" (*Unnatural Lives* 66).

5. A brief overview of his fictional methods is given by Andrews in PW xviii-xxviii.

6. In the Preface the novel is described as "a biography" and "no fiction, or the work of imagination" (QS xxxiii), while in the Introductory Chapter an anonymous author claims the book is based on Servinton's own autobiographical manuscript (QS xl).

7. The link with West's *History of Tasmania* is made in Cecil H. Hadgraft, "In Quest of a Quaker: A Note on Henry Savery's Nom de Plume", *Australian Literary Studies* 1 (1963) :57-8.

8. For an account of further divergences between the fictional hero and his author see Avis G. McDonald, "The Bitter Banishment of *Quintus Servinton*", *World Literature Written in English* 28 (1988): 66-74, where they are read as evidence that Savery, "as pure wish-fulfilment, constructs a nostalgic idea of home, of gentility, of belonging" to minimise "the harsh sense of exile to the antipodes" (71).

9. Letter to Goderich, 27 December 1827, quoted by Hadgraft (QS xxix).

10. From one of more than seventy testimonials that accompanied Savery's petition for remission of his sentence in January 1832. The writer, James Grant, believed he could "know more of his [Savery's] principles from his writings than any other source" (QS xxiii).

11. 28 January 1832, cited in McDonald, "The Bitter Banishment of *Quintus Servinton*" (74).

12. The basic dilemma is, in the words of Adrian Mitchell, that "Ralph Rashleigh is two kinds of hero" that "do not reconcile" (Fiction section in Leonie Kramer, ed., *The Oxford History of Australian Literature* [Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981): 43. His shifts of character or stand-point have been variously explained. According to J.J. Healy, they occur because "Rashleigh is never more than a thinly veiled *persona* of Tucker's internal gestures of self-discovery and apology" ("The Convict and the Aborigine: The Quest for Freedom in *Ralph Rashleigh*", *Australian Literary Studies* 3 [1968]: 247); Robert Dixon sees him as an observer of "Tucker's essay on the course of empire in New South Wales" which sacrifices characterisation to satire ("*Ralph Rashleigh*: A History of Civil Society in New South Wales", *Southerly* 41 [1981]: 315); and Hergenhan discerns in his changes an attempt "to align him with respectable society, and law and order", and more generally a "self-vindication [that] seem[s] pitifully limited, unappealingly self-comforting" (*Unnatural Lives* 25, 30).

13. See Colin Roderick's introduction to *Jemmy Green in Australia* for further details.

14. See Harold J. Boehm, "The Date of Composition of *Ralph Rashleigh*", *Austalian Literary Studies* 6 (1974): 428-30.

15. These implications were probably lost on his listeners (which was just as well for the playwright) for, according to eyewitnesses cited by Roderick: Tucker strained the intellectual capacity of his audience, since Delaforce on one occasion remarked to Charles Dick that he "was hard to follow" (JG 27).

16. Similarly, he depicts the earlier tyrannicide committed by Bright with detachment, although

the scene clearly shows that the man is driven to violence by unwarranted and sadistic punsihment (RR 88).

17. The encounter took place on 9 January 1842. Burns' description is reprinted by Hadgraft (QS xxvii-xxviii).

18. This was the date preferred initially by Roderick (JG 28 and RR xi), though later he conceded the evidence was inconclusive (GV 13).

Catherine Swanson

Lunch with a Stranger

She could be in school on this clear, cool day,
but she has drifted in the sand, swallowed by the white noise
of water and now the murmur of her own thoughts
in a small restaurant on the beach. She has a journal, a pen,
and a wish to be everywhere at once.
Breakers make one last stand before collapsing into foam
at the feet of migrant sanderlings. Beyond the shore
an oil barge crawls along the horizon, but she's not on it.

She barely hears a sketchpad hitting the table,
a chair scraping next to her. When she looks up
she can't get her eyes back from the glare of the water.
He's an artist, he says, coming slowly into focus.
She sees a day-old beard, salt-and-pepper,
that sweater they all wear, New York men on a day off.
He puts his hand out, tracing her name on the marbled cover
of her notebook. He wants the right face, you see,
the heart's doorway, and all those freckles.
The best work is done outside.

So this is what she'd been waiting for, a story she could walk into
like a beachcomber, words no boy in school can say.
Light shimmers on the waves as they step away from the restaurant.
She sits in the sand, hugging her notebook, the wind
tapping her skin with a thousand droning fingers,

his face lost in a glint. A small dust devil swirls behind her,
and the sound of his pencil is the ocean's stroke.

Her hair is all light, he says,
leaning forward to brush it from her face.

Billie Livingston

Crack in the Fishbowl

Riding a Hamburg city bus, I let my eyes glaze out the window: people blurred on dogs on benches on shrubs; my ears catch snatches of German. It's grey today, so much like Vancouver I hunger for home, pang blue for rain hanging plump dollops from fall-gangly trees.

We come to a stop, pick-up and let-off, and my eyes rest on an old woman peddling her bicycle, full basket on her handlebars, long grey curls flitting free of their pins down her nape. She is the prettiest part of today. *Take me home to your ginger house and teach me to knit in German.* I want to kiss her cheek.

Something rotten, a crack, a beetle, bites into her tire and rocks her, slams her sideways into the pavement. My forehead, all my fingers press the window. She crouches up from where she fell, hand over nose, blood streaming through fingers like water from a tipped vase, a crack in the fishbowl.

German-less, I am mute, gasping for air, for water. She kneels and picks up groceries, cupping her nose.

Blood still draining from her small fine head, the accordion doors close and the bus begins to inch ahead. Panic wells in me, leadens me, just my mouth opening slow as flowers, closing, opening. A young man stops on the other side of my glass, touches her shoulder, helps her stand. We lurch forward; I work my jaws, breathe through my shaking throat.

MICHAEL CONNOR

THE FINAL SOLUTION

When he licked the black stuff it reminded him of something. Of a little, black, squat-bellied tar machine. It used to be towed behind a green council truck through the seaside streets of his childhood. It had a nozzle. He was sure of it. There was a nozzle at the end of a tube through which hot tar was sprayed onto the roads. But the smell. He could almost smell it again. A sweet smell. The sweet tar of childhood. The elusive and haunting savour nearly bought tears to his eyes.

His tongue troubled something else. A node of vegetable matter. Or animal. His tongue worried the troublesome and unidentified obstruction. He drew his head up slightly and tried to focus on the undistinguished blat of stuff. He almost focused. He addressed the matter seriously, "Men and women of Orstraaaalia," he said. "I come not to praaaise Kimmy but to bury this troublesome salad."

"Not in the middle of the road you won't mate," said a distant voice.

"Are you sure this is him?" said another.

"Of course I am. Turn him over and look then."

"I have. That's why I asked."

"Clean him up. Wash him up. You won't know him. Wake up Edward," said the voice addressing him firmly. "It's all right. You've won pre-selection. You're going back to Canberra. The people want you back. The Party loves you again."

A safe seat, even without the Green preferences, the women's vote and the reconciliationists, sent him back Qantas Business

Class. The black tarmac of the roadways became something he contemplated from a distance and brought no more clean, sweet smelling memories of childhood.

In rapid succession the leader, his leader, of the Opposition died. Shortly before the funeral of his large old enemy he was re-elected to the position. The unpopular PM called a snap election which broke his party and Edward Chippen became the father of his country, again.

On election night when the old familiar voice, though perhaps somewhat huskier and more statesmanlike, began the refrain beginning "Men and women of Australia", the applause in the Tally Room was so loud and so prolonged that he was unable to continue. Several of the hardened television anchors, who had mostly worked in his office when he was last in power, were so moved that their transmissions were hindered by unrehearsed and almost lifelike emotion. Many tears were shed throughout Australia that night.

Chippen bought a new broom to the governance of the country. He also reconciled many old enemies, buried party feuds, opened new windows of opportunities, apologized to everybody - including the Japanese, and closed the door on old traditions. Every day the new regime planned to turn over a new leaf.

"It stinks in here."

"Does it?"

"It's you. You're smoking aren't you. You've taking up smoking again," she said.

"It makes me feel good. Something to do with my hands. Keeps my weight down. Only cigars. I like them," he said. "I've stopped the booze."

"I heard you had to. You'll lose votes with that in your mouth. Why do they let you?" she asked.

"Only in private," said the Prime Minister. "They let me do it in private."

"No cameras?" she said.

"God no. Only in private I tell you. How are the kids?"

"They're all right. How's she?"

"She's all right. Busy. Always busy."

"So was I. I was always busy."

"I remember," he said.

"I'm surprised they let you have a second."

"Term?" he said. "The people wanted me."

"Wife," she said. "I didn't think divorce was allowed."

"This is the new century," he said. "Besides *60 Minutes* said it was kosher."

"Still seeing them are you?" she asked.

Proving that every day was a new beginning was tiring for the PM. Every day, in the luxury of his office he proposed and disposed of the fate of the nation. He reviewed the press, drank his coffee and ruminated to his staff. "Can't we do anything? The *Achievements of the Second Chippen Government* will be a mighty thin book" he said beguilingly.

"If it finds a publisher," murmured someone at the back of the room.

"*Slither and Co.* could be interested. I've got their address," said the one who wrote his words.

"Look Edward, what we want, and I speak for all the Caucus here," said the Media Liaison Officer Attached to the Prime Minister's Office, looking over his shoulder, "is for you to do not very much."

"Not much?" said Chippen.

"Nothing in fact," said the minder.

"But the people voted for me. They elected a reformist Prime Minister. They have my record."

"They elected a drunk we pulled out of the gutter before he ate his own vomit," said a smiling young woman.

"Food poisoning," said the Prime Minister.

"Relax. Enjoy the power. Just don't do anything. Remember what a mess you made of it last time."

"Of course he doesn't mean mess Edward," said the Minister of Recreation and Pornography. "He's too young to remember. But there were certain problems last time."

"Oh God, don't anyone mention the Big Picture," whined a young voice as its owner mimed the attachment of a clothes peg to her upturned snub nose.

"Whenever you did anything you ballsed it up," continued a

relentless young voice.

"Isn't that sexist?" asked a second.

"So this time," said a lower grade third voice with pretensions, "don't do anything. The country will respect you for it. Look up to you. God knows, after the conservatives they are tired of change but. Sit back, reap the benefits. You deserve it. Especially after the first time."

"But why the webbed feet?" asked the Prime Minister.

"The polls. We polled. They said they wanted a more colourful PM. Just slip your arm through here."

"And that thing?"

"Goes with the legs."

"But not the beak. Never the beak," said the PM.

"Don't you realise that the highest rating figure ever on TV was a bush kangaroo? Association will work in your favour," said the holder of one yellow plastic thing. "This'll be great. Left foot first, Prime Minister."

"But an emu," said Chippen.

"It's patriotic. And besides a used car mob has rights to the kangaroo," said the young man holding out the right foot. "You'll be a hit."

"The country needs cheering up Edward. Polls say so." said the Minister for Anti-Mining-Logging-and-Fishing. "And too long to wait for Christmas. You'll be great."

"Anyone got the tail feathers bit? Got to think of the younger voters PM."

"Look in the mirror, sir. You look just great. Your country will be proud of you."

And the image of Chippen PM smiled contentedly back at himself. "I've only ever wanted to be loved," he said through the slit for his mouth to the mirror. "Only ever wanted to be loved by the men and women of Australia."

"You are, you are," sang the caucus of voices from the best and bestest in his office.

ELIZABETH STEPHENS

MINA LOY'S LAMENT

Where are you, Arthur Cravan?
I have worn out this harbour with waiting.

My skin has crusted, my feet taken root.
Waiting has made me a statue, miraculously weeping.
The faithful will come and gather my tears.
Griefs flicker at my feet like candles.

Fishermen with hands starred with scales like sequins
cross themselves as they pass. In storms they will say prayers to me,
Our Lady, Star of the Sea.

And all the women sharded beetle-black,
who move like mirages in the rotten-seaweed air,
and all the net-menders by the seawall
and all the street-vendors with tin toys sharp as knives,
fear me as a monument to their own tragedies.

Tuna-boat masts sway like out-of-time pendulums.
Even the gulls could be calling your name: Arthur, Arthur, Arthur.

The world has become an echo of your absence.
The streets hold their breath.
And my head is like the inside of a bell, tolling for you.

MADELEINE BYRNE

WAR BRIDE

Cordite is taken from a wooden box. It is cut into strips. Sewing by hand, effort is made not to prick skin or messily fasten the material together. Moving the needle closer to puncture the hessian, black and white newsprint advertisements filter breath and tiredness. Cordite is taken from the box, cut into strips then placed inside a square of rough fibre. Fingers move closer and closer to the material, slowly but with urgency as if drawing blood. The material is folded. Cordite is taken from a box, cut into strips then placed on the washed-out material.

Past open-air markets, where potatoes are sold illegally, sand coloured suburbs stretch hesitantly to the north. Streets, filled with factories and warehouses, surround the city centre. In the early evening, the sky is orange grey. Smoke particles congeal in the atmosphere. Cordite is taken from a box — cut into strips, placed inside hessian. Black canvas obscures natural light. A silver needle is threaded, held up against a thumb. Under a tin roof, air is thick with oil fumes — a stink that remains on clothes even after they have been boiled.

A silver needle is threaded with cotton. Soldiers originally reported missing are now believed to be prisoners. Electricity saved means more power for production. Fight hard, work hard, play hard. The fine physique of our service personnel is built upon a national love of sport. Folding the material, cotton binds the hessian into a secure bag. Bending over to the side, cordite is placed on the metal table. The explosive material is cut into strips.

Inner cleanliness is more important than ever. The key to our liberty is in our hands.

Closer and closer, the thread buckles and falls from the needle's eye. Pinching two fingers together, the thread is licked quickly then turned towards the fluorescent light. Hessian is flattened into an even square, then creased in half. With careful stitches the needle moves across a designated line. From the wooden box, cordite is cut in strips with a heavy knife turning brown at the blade centre. *Excuse me. Don't look now, but I think that you're being followed! In fact you are being followed!* This is your "austerity conscience" — speaking in clear tones that you can't mistake.

How many lights were burning in your house last night? A needle sews a line, carefully and evenly to create a hessian bag. The hessian's uneven texture is reminiscent of sea-grass, or malnourished grasses that grow near sand dunes. In human hands, it smells of salt. Cordite is smokeless. If ignited in the open air, it burns. Chemicals merge and create a propellant that is waterproof and unaffected by climactic change. Cordite is taken from a box. It is cut into strips. Sewn in a line. Put in a pile.

Taking the explosive from a wooden market box. Cordite is placed on the metal surface. It is cut into strips. Hessian is placed underneath it. A needle, threaded with white cotton, sews hessian into a square. During the lunch break, the supervisor — a man in a beige trench coat, with sealskin brylcream in his hair — makes speeches from the back of a utility vehicle. *Production for Victory must come first. Never scrimp on your effort, our boys in the jungles of New Guinea depend on it.*

Their lives depend on you. Cordite is taken from the box. It is cut into strips. The supervisor surveys employees who wear scarves and leather belts around their waists. Society ladies wearing imported linen dresses and open-toed shoes visit the workshop. They arrive after lunch. Uniformed drivers wait outside in limousines. Cordite is placed in a pile. One winter afternoon, a lady carries a fur-coat over her shoulder. The white fur looks as if it were sewn with silver thread, under pools of artificial light. Cordite is taken from the box — lined up on the table and cut into strips.

Stains on the knife blade are geographic. The stains resemble archipelagoes. Graphics decorated with arrows, found in daily

newspapers. Organic in shape, rusted electric orange brown, not unlike birthmarks or bruises. Hessian is sewn in constant strokes. From the wooden box on the floor, cordite is taken. It is cut into strips. Sewn into a hessian bag then placed in a pile. Young and old suffer the martyrdom of headache depression: nervous headaches, depressed headaches, morning headaches.

Electric trams are crowded with people, overwhelmed by armpits that smell of bleach and garam marsala — an itchy smell like the canvas of uniforms. Bending over, shoulder blades crease. Cordite is taken from a wooden box. It is placed on the metal table. The popping sound of chewing gum the colour of white paste. Footpaths are painted with yellow "keep left" signs. Hessian is folded in half. Cordite placed beneath it. Sewing along the line, the hessian is folded together.

Cordite is taken from a box. It is cut into strips, placed on hessian, folded in half. Put in a pile. Firemen wear khaki-coloured steel helmets. Engines are decorated with camouflage designs that fold in on each other. Wire netting covers windows. Sandbags at the base slouch like overfed torsos, ready to burst. *Are you able to recognise the face of the enemy?* His face is that of a humourless, ruthless and mystical fanatic. Reaching over into the box, a hand touches the base. A splinter embeds itself under the skin.

Hot air is blown on the palm and fingers. Noise in the factory is constant. The whirring relentless sound of industrial machinery is deafening, even though it comes from an adjacent room. Cordite is placed on the table, cut into strips then put inside hessian. With utmost delicacy, a silver-coloured needle sews the material with graceful movements. The cordite is enclosed. Explosive material is taken from a box. It is cut into narrow strips, then placed on hessian.

The material is sewn evenly and put in a pile. A hand reaches over into a wooden box. Every penny counts. Yesterday we might be lavish. Tomorrow freedom will come again. Cordite is placed in a pile. It is cut into strips. Put inside hessian, sewn in careful gestures on a blue-pencilled line. Cordite is taken from a wooden box on the floor. During the break, women eat on stairs outside the building, to get some fresh air. Factory employees are not allowed to wear rings, hair clips or brooches.

Before the twelve-hour shift begins, women put on special shoes (without nails) provided by the factory. Cordite is placed on the table and cut into strips. Put into a hessian bag, sewn in small stitches into a perfect square. Bending over to reach the explosive substance. Cordite is cut into strips. It is put inside a piece of hessian. Sewn in half. Put in a pile. Cordite is taken from the box; it is put on a metal surface, then cut into strips.

The newly married, or recently bereaved, drive cars at low speeds through emptied suburban streets. Windows in solid, newly built houses are covered in black paper. Neighbours visit anyone thought to be breaking the light restriction laws. In geranium-filled gardens, middle-aged fathers conduct air raid rituals. Cordite is taken from the wooden box. Wood splinters at the corners. Black ink spells words and letters. The explosive is cut into strips.

Basic food items are scarce. Hessian is folded in half. Thirty thousand American soldiers have recently arrived. Tent cities emerge on parkland, near the university. There are shortages of fruit, vegetables and beef. Sloping against the line, a needle threads the material. *Did you get involved today, in the youth rally at the stadium?* Fibre separates with the movement. Cordite is placed on the metal surface. *My goodness, the General's wife shopping — photos in the paper. She has a Malaysian amah to look after her children.* Cordite is taken from a box.

It is cut into strips, placed on the table. Two fingers join together, as cotton threads a needle. *She is such a well-dressed lady. A friend who works there — you remember, Fay O' Halloran who works at the Myer's millinery department — tells me, she always says please.* Sewing against the line, the hessian is sewn together. Then put in a pile. There are few cars on the streets. White camellias and concrete storks enclose each garden and cream-brick house. Taken from the box, cordite is placed on the table. It is cut into strips, enfolded in hessian. It is put in a pile.

The rough fibrous material is harsh against fingers; the cordite is sewn together. In the well-ordered suburbs, the shapes of modern houses recollect the depression years. Car headlights are on low beam; black covers emit a pink light. Daily struggles revolve around darkness. Cordite is cut into strips. The knife is discoloured. Sewing against the line, the metal is hidden. Regulations determine

the use of artificial light. Bad lighting, bad ventilation and eyestrain are the main sources of absenteeism.

Held up against the light, a silver needle is threaded. In one factory, lighting is so bad that blood vessels break behind employees' eyes. Sewing against the line, the cordite is placed in hessian. Fluorescent light bulbs that release a cool light, one third incandescent, are preferred. It is not comfortable to look at the sun. Cordite is cut into strips. It is put on the table. Sewn together in rapid movements; it is put in a pile. It is not comfortable to look at a sheet of water glistening in the bright sunshine.

Cordite is taken from a box. When walking at dusk, the air-raid siren shrill in the skies, it is easy to fall into nostalgic reveries about home. Threaded against the light, cotton is held between two fingers. Hessian is folded, then put in a pile. Cordite is taken from the box. In the morning before work begins, the air hovers like an etched template from a more temperate hemisphere. The explosive is cut into strips, sewn together, then put in a pile. In the half-light, figures appear without notice. The mist makes human forms diffuse.

Cordite is taken from a wooden market box. Cut into strips. It is placed on material, sewn along the line — marked by a blue pencil. A river, filled with brown water, moves in inexplicable currents. In circles and other less familiar geometrical forms. The grass is cold. In the middle of a brownout, a bridge emerges like a silver blade in the darkness. Metal collects the ever-diminishing light. Cordite is taken from the box and cut into strips. Threading the needle against the light, the material fastens together. Near the unfinished railway station, with clocks that never show the correct time, there is a public hotel.

Cordite is taken from a box. Cut into narrow strips. Feeling against the line, the explosive material is put in a pile. The hessian material is stained with a permanent smell of shallow water. On public thoroughfares, fourteen-year-old girls wander about in short-skirts (coloured red, white and blue). Cordite is taken from a wooden market box. It is cut into strips. Rouge on their lips and cheeks, the girls drape themselves over foreign military personnel offering gifts: orchids, boxes of chocolates and silk stockings.

At Hatcher's Drycleaning, telephone numbers are put in

American soldier uniform pockets. A needle is threaded, against the fluorescent light. Noise, a mild braying of electric fans — the air opens behind a door, women's voices are head. Cordite is cut into strips. Hessian folded. Put in a pile. Few women wear clothing recommended by government. The siren suit, with its sensible brown material and minimised use of cloth. Dresses made from discounted fabric officially entitled border love. Battle of flowers. Cordite is taken from a wooden box.

The explosive is cut into strips. Sewn evenly along the blue-pencilled line. A hand reaches over into a box. Men return with strange illnesses — night sweats and heat that ferment inside bones. Cordite is put on the table and cut into strips. The explosive is put inside hessian and sewn in careful movements along on a line. Cordite is taken from a box. Cut into strips. Exotic birds, rivers overflowing with scales — mosquitoes and sweat of fear. In human hands, hessian smells like undergrowth.

Every inch of cartilage can be felt under the skin. Physical gestures move from the automatic to the exhausted. At night on empty trains war brides sleep fitfully. There are no lights at railway stations. Suburb names have been removed to confuse invading armies. Official notices ask: *Is your journey really necessary?* Chest pain feels like bloody fibres rubbing electric. Dry and short of breath. Fingers smell like explosives. Cordite is taken from a box, cut into strips. Placed inside hessian. Sewn in gentle movements against a blue-pencilled line.

Every truncated breath merges with the deserted streets: the endless aureole of newly built suburbia. The corrosive stench of explosives encircles an eye. Sleeping women lean against windows covered in black paper, taped at the corners. In the city, where cars crawl home on the silver metallic bridge, public gardens are pitted with trenches. Deep holes turn the earth inside out and return it to the surface. A fingernail marked by oil rubs an eye. The nail avoids the duct — the tiny flesh inlet where tears form.

Near the river filled with brown water, palm trees create black silhouettes. At the elephant skin base of the palm trees, women meet soldiers. Despite posters warning against gossip, people talk. Beside the public hotel in a lane filled with rubbish bins and cobblestones, it is said, women commit indecent acts in return for

liquor. *How about it then, come on. Come on sugar. I'm not here long. The jungle is waiting for me.* Reaching behind her back, the zip on her dress braces like a snake. The silk-polyester material of her dress falls to the ground.

She winces a little, when the cold touches her naked arms. She moves closer towards the crowd. She hears the soldiers cheer. A rapid stain of colour reddens her cheeks. The girl, with wide, wheat-country hips, stands up straight. She winks at the uniformed men who throw money at her feet. *Honey, come on now. Don't let me die before I see it — from the Japs, or curiosity.* She wriggles out of her slip, bending over to unfasten clips on her stockings. Pushing strands of mousey coloured hair from her eyes, she blushes. Cordite is taken from a wooden box, cut into strips. Then put in a pile.

Deb Westbury

Blue

Colours are words' little sisters...
I've loved them secretly for a long time...

I'm very close to young Crimson, and brown Sienna
but I'm even closer to thoughtful Cobalt with her distant eyes and untrampled spirit.

Rolf Jacobsen

(i)
They moved to the new housing estate
when she was ten, to a street named for Jack Lang.
Her father could not have approved,
he was on the side of the bosses.
Before he and the childbride were thirty
there was a new company car in the driveway
and four daughters lined up in matching dresses
waiting to be photographed.

After school, on weekends, she rode her bike
around the cul-de-sac in restless widening circles,
making the blue gravel fly
like cinders from the cracker night bonfire
she built there every year.
The scarecrow on top she dressed in her father's discarded blue overalls.

(ii)
The east coast cities and their suburbs
are fusing like a Mondrian;
square miles of brick and grey cement,
azure rectangles of backyard pools, the margins
of intersecting roads and canals.

By now the creek at the end of Jaylang Place
is build on, filled in, or channelled.
A girl whose last name was Kiss
once lived on its embankment. Her eyes
and skin and hair were foreign.
A strangeness of words and cooking smells
came out of her windows.

Before the houses grew over everything
the sisters would go on their bikes over the small bridge
and past the Kiss house, to play in the bush.
Sometimes Blue laid her bike down on the bridge
and walked into the creek bed, feet sinking
in the mud and green slime.

(iii)
Summer made a cake of it, layers
of brown and cream, orange and red clay
so appetising, the consistency
so much like warm butter
she plunged in with both hands,
making all the creatures she knew
and had imagined.
A mother who was bigger and stronger,
a brother who might call the love
out of her father's heart,
an angel to protect her;
they all crumbled where she left them
in the first rain.

Now she's somewhere high and far away.
The creatures of her hands emerge whole
and tempered by the fire.
She paints their wings and cloaks
with the colours of her sisters,
of the mother who didn't grow,
and the blue-eyed son she made
out of her own body.

FLOORWALKER

Robyn Greenfield always brought loads of money to school - neat clean notes in her plastic wallet that her mother gave her every morning so she could buy her lunch.

Robyn was tall with big buck teeth and a scared laugh, like she wasn't sure if she'd said the right thing or even if you liked her. Her father was a wharfie. He knocked off by lunchtimes most days and sometimes we'd meet him in the Centennial and he had a face like rare roast beef and he'd buy us red lemonade and packets of chips and he'd laugh with us at first and tickle Robyn but then he'd get quiet and Robyn would say "Come on, we'd better go home."

Her mother was tall, with black curly hair and she worked as a floorwalker in Ball & Welch's in town, looking out all day for people who stole things from the shop. I could imagine her craning her long white neck, watching people standing too close to the tables with the bags against their stomachs, or keeping an eye on the changerooms for people trying to smuggle things out under their clothes. Sometimes I'd catch her looking at me with narrowed eyes as if she thought I'd stolen something.

Robyn lived over the railway line in a street full of factories and I went to her house after school. She earned heaps of pocket money because she did all of the housework before her mum got home from work at night. She'd vaccuum the rugs, sweep the kitchen and make all the beds. When she heard her mother's key in the lock she'd jump up and get a cold can of beer out of the fridge and pour it into a glass.

Her mother walked through the house, inspecting each room. She never smiled or called out, just walked through, like she was walking through the store, looking for thieves.

"Haven't you got a home to go to?" she said to me every time and then she'd laugh her sharp laugh and Robyn would laugh and I'd join in. She'd take a long sip of her beer and say, "Get Mum's slippers will you Rob?"

Robyn had a double bed and a soft frilly cover on it and a pillow that was white fluffy dog and you pulled open a zip in its stomach and put your pyjamas in there.

"I hear you want to finish school, go to University," Robyn's mum sucked hard on her cigarette and frowned at me through the cloud of smoke. I just shrugged as if I hadn't much thought about it. "Robbie's going to work with me as soon as she's old enough to leave school," her mum said. I nodded. "That's the thing about Robby. Robby knows her place."

When tea was ready, Robyn had to go up to the Centennial to tell her Dad to come home. Sometimes she'd meet him halfway, and they walked home together. Other times, she told the barman to remind him. One night her father came home and her mother served up sausages and baked beans and he said he was sick of fucken sausages and he picked up the plate and threw it at the wall. The next day after school Robyn and I scrubbed at the wall but the huge stain like blood was impossible to get off.

On Saturday nights Robyn went with her Mum and Dad to the RSL and one night I stayed over and they took us both. I had on a frilly green dress of my sister's, with a ruffled neck and white lace on the front. Robyn wore her mother's clothes and because she was so tall, and her mother let her wear makeup, she looked like an adult. She wore a short black skirt and a cream satin shirt and a string of her mother's jet beads. Her big teeth stuck out even further from the dark red lips but I didn't tell her that because all of a sudden she looked like a stranger. She wore a pair of high heels and she had trouble walking in them but she towered over me and I felt small and stupid in my sister's dress.

The RSL was really just a big upstairs room with a band down one end and a bar in the middle, with tables and chairs on one side for the ladies, and stools on the other for the men.

As soon as we got there, Robyn got us both a drink of Coke but when I tasted it it tasted bitter. The music started up and it was rock and roll and we started dancing, and Robyn was laughing a lot and waving to the blokes who stood around the bar and I wanted to sit down, because they were all looking at us and I thought her dad might come over and tell us to sit down.

We had some more Coke and I drank the lot because I was thirsty and Robyn said, "Careful!" and laughed. Then everyone was up dancing and a bloke came up and asked Robyn to dance and she got up and twirled off with him and I drank some more and wished she'd come and sit down again because I didn't know anyone here and they were all yelling and laughing and smoking and the room was so hot and all of a sudden I felt sick.

I went downstairs and just made it to the gutter and vomited everywhere. But it didn't make me feel any better. I sat on the kerb and put my head between my knees but I nearly had my face in the sick and that made me feel like doing it again.

I sat on a park bench on the opposite side of the street and I could look up at the windows of the RSL and see people screaming and the music sounded tinny from here and I could see people spinning past the windows with their arms sticking out, shrieking and laughing. I let my head drop on my chest and I must have dropped off because when I woke up the music was much slower and only the occasional couple waltzed past the window.

I didn't know what I was going to say to Robyn and her parents about where I'd been, I was too ashamed to tell them I'd been sick. I'd tell them that I remembered I'd left something behind at home and I'd just nipped back there to pick it up.

I climbed the stairs again and the smell of beer hit me as I got to the top. The carpet was sticky under my feet. I couldn't see anything when I got to the top because they'd turned the lights down low and the man in the spangled jacket was singing Blue Moon and Robyn wasn't at our table, she was sitting on a bloke's lap and they were kissing and her mother was swaying by the window with her arms around the neck of a man who wasn't Robyn's father.

A man came over and asked me to dance and I had no where to sit and no one to talk to but I couldn't dance. Dad tried to teach me

a few times. "Just relax," he kept saying to me, "follow where I lead." But I hopped and skipped and stepped on Dad's toes and I felt like an awkward horse or something and after a while he gave up and I heard him say under his breath to my mother. "It's hopeless."

But I got up and danced with the man and it was slow enough that it didn't matter, and he didn't seem to know where his feet were taking him either and we moved around the room and his hands were sweating and he kept looking at me and smiling and I could feel his hand pressing into my back, and a wet patch where his hand was. Then in a dark corner he pulled me close and tried to kiss me, he got his mouth on mine but it tasted horrible, all cigarettes and sweet drinks smell and all wet and I pushed him away and he said, "Ya cocktease" and staggered off.

He was headed for a group of men at the bar and I was sure he was going to go and say something about me and what if Robyn's dad was one of them? I'd die. I wanted to hide but I had to wait for Robyn and her mother to go home with them. But they hadn't even noticed that I'd been gone before. They wouldn't notice me leaving now. I'd left my things at Robyn's house but I could walk home from here, it wasn't far and I could pretend in the morning that I had to go home for something important that I'd forgotten, or I had to get up early to go to Mass or something.

I walked back down the stairs and along the street. It was leafy and green by daylight but by night it was dark and the leaves of the trees hid the streetlights. In the distance, a train rumbled. Up ahead was the subway that cut underneath the track but it looked like a black mouth and I as too scared to go inside. I crossed to the other side of the road so I wouldn't have to pass it. Up ahead, a possum looked down on me from its place on an electricity pole. Its eyes shone like spotlights, unblinking in the dark. It watched me pass. Now I was coming up to the station, and our road. A divvy van turned into the street and headed towards me. I turned into the nearest house, and pressed myself flat against a wooden fence beside a huge bush that smelt of oranges and the van slowed. A dog next door was throwing himself against the wooden fence, barking and thudding his body against mine. The van passed. A light came on in the front room of the house whose garden I was in and I ran

out, jumped the low front fence and ran up the street under the shadows of the trees.

All the shops were shut on our road but they left their window lights on and once I got to the supermarket windows I felt safe. But by the time I got to Jeff the butchers I started to worry. I stared in at the plastic parsley and the white trays laid out in neat rows in the window. What would I tell Mum and Dad? And I didn't have my own key, I'd have to wake them up.

I slowed down, I dawdled. I stopped and stared in each window I came to - Joe the barber's with its pole that lit up at night, his photos of young men who all looked like Elvis with blonde, brown, black hair, in turtleneck, crew neck, v neck jumpers, side on to the camera or front on, staring straight at you. They didn't look like any of the young men I knew. Joe got his photos from Italian magazines. Maybe all the boys in Italy looked like that.

There were lots of Italians in the Expresso Bar right opposite Joe's but they didn't look like these pictures either. They sat around for hours in there playing cards and drinking coffee or standing in the doorway of the shop, looking out onto the street. Tonight there were only a handful but the man behind the coffee machine came out to watch me as I passed on the street.

It must have been after 9.30, probably 10.30 I thought so Dad would still be up reading. I knocked on the shop door but it was Mum who answered it because the sound carried up to their bedroom overhead. Then Dad was there. "What's wrong," Mum said, "where's your things?"

"I thought you were staying at Robyn's," Dad said.

I shrugged. "I just felt like coming home."

Mum leaned toward me and sniffed. "She's been drinking!" she said to Dad. "Have you been drinking?"

I shook my head. I just wanted to get up the stairs and into my nice clean bed.

"Leave her alone," Dad said. "Let her get some sleep. She's come home, that's OK."

The next day was Saturday and I went down to Robyn's at lunchtime when I knew her Mum wouldn't be back from work yet.

Robyn let me in and we went and lay on her bed. "Man," Robyn said, "I got blind last night! And that Lex was all over me like a

rash. What happened to you, anyway?" She rolled over, clutching the pyjama dog. "Your mum was on the phone first thing, I don't know what she said, but Mum slammed the phone down."

I felt stupid now. We could have shared this lovely white fluffy bed and tried on different makeups all morning and instead I'd been helping out at home just like any other Saturday.

Later Robyn walked as far as the station with me, carrying my bag. We stopped in at the Centennial on our way past. Her mother and father were at the bar, her mother perched on a stool with her long white legs twisted around each other like snakes, a cigarette trembling in her fingers.

"Here you are," she said when she saw me. "Robbie, get yourselves a lemonade." Then she leaned over and put an arm around my shoulder and pulled me close and whispered to me so no one would hear. "Think you're better than us, do you?"

ARCHNA SAHNI

THE LAST MAN

That the eyes mostly delude
can be a good thing:
unfocus them and you can
blur the summer burst of colour
near Sukhna lake* into a Canadian autumn:

this is what I make us
walk into, into a moment
neither past nor present
but close to a goodbye.

You lower your mouth
over mine. I am heady with the taste
of the wild berry you have just eaten
(there are no berries near the lake),

and weary with the effort
of loving. Your haste declares you
to be a man on your way, and I am
weary with fitting the pieces together
after each parting, of shaming
the spirit into masonry
after the mind's vagaries and
the body's lusts have taken their toll.

I grow bold in my dreams.

In the dream I had of you,
you were
the last man.

You arrived like a prophet.
You were the prophecy.
Standing on the edge of my world,
you pointed to what lay behind you:
the blue sky, nothing –
and pronounced, "I am the last man."

I smile feebly recalling the dream,
I smile at the silliness of all dreams,
as I enter the breach
between dream and the real
which is the space
within your arms.

And I wonder
if you can tell how much is despair
and how much desire in my eyes,
as I pull you down to the grass
and into my dream
as the last frizzled
clot of sunset
tapers into a red eye
that closes over us.

* a lake in Chandigarh, India

KATE WHITFIELD

THE FOURTH WALL

The sculpture in the city square of a flock of pigeons taking off in fright, frozen in bronze at the moment of escape, had become a mental trigger for Thomas. Every time he passed it in the morning, appraising it admiringly, he would think of the superior beauty he could create if sculpture were his chosen artform.

Winter was receding, and in the brighter morning light both sun and cold glittered on the birds' newly polished wings. The several that remained forever on the ground stood in puddles from last night's rain. The contrast of the shining birds against the dark, slick pavestones inspired him and lifted him for a moment above the sluggishness he had been feeling. Two men entered the square together, and passed between Thomas and the sculpture. He noticed that neither of them even glanced at it, and shook his head.

After a few minutes he continued along his usual route to work, much longer than necessary to detour past the sculpture, and to take him through the most architecturally pleasing parts of the city. Every morning he felt like a tourist.

Finally Thomas turned down a narrow street, oblivious to its rich breakfast smells of coffee and warm bread. He quickened his pace with purpose as he threaded past café tables, and freshly groomed people. Of all the streets in the meandering route from his house to the theatre, he would avoid this one if he could.

As he came past each morning, many of the shops and buildings were still shuttered and locked, but there was one doorway that remained always open. Even trying not to breathe, he always

knew exactly when he was approaching it, this small, unremarkable opening with its concrete steps leading up and away from the street.

As he walked past the concrete stairwell the smell of decay found him and clung to him, his daily reminder of the body left inside that no-one wanted to find.

He resisted, as he did every morning, the pull inwards and up the familiar concrete stairs, and with an effort lifted his heavy legs to continue on to work.

In the theatre he was extremely useful, helping to rig lights, rearranging sets, ironing costumes. Often he would sit in the stalls and prompt, though the actors missed their lines less often than he would have liked. He disliked most of the work, and would have been happier never to see the clumsy innards of the stage, but it was only a matter of time before someone would notice his talent and he would be living the life he was meant for, under lights with a black gulf before him, being someone else, and finally a part of something truly beautiful.

But some days as he locked the stage door at the end of a rehearsal, all the others having left before him, he would realise that he had not witnessed a moment of the day, not spoken a word to anyone, perhaps hardly even moved, afflicted by the vision of the woman lying dead in her small flat at the top of the concrete stairs.

Sometimes he tried crossing the road, but the extra distance made no difference to the potence of the smell. This time the pull was worse, and Thomas felt himself moving towards the hole as certainly as if he were water flowing down a drain.

He looked up at the window above the stairs. The curtains were open, and the bland statuette of a cat along with a few vulgar greeting cards stood arranged on the sill, exactly as they had been when he left. He crossed the street, thinking of the way she had sat down on her couch as if she would never get up again. Seeing her face for the last time as it mirrored his own disappointment so exactly and beautifully, he thought of a performance he had once been moved to tears by. In the final moment of the play, immediately following the death of her beloved, a woman had

been lifted bodily off the ground as if strung up by her grief, plucked from the earth to hang hopelessly, never to come back. His lover's sinking had been the same. As her heart broke he could see her body shutting down, her bloodflow disrupted, her organs slowing to a gradual stop. And as he shut the door behind him, he felt her spirit flutter past him like a dead leaf in the breeze.

He stood on the footpath in front of the concrete stairwell, the rotten organic smell beginning to suffocate him. He had never confronted death before and understood it only through books. But the foul smell and the vision it summoned of a young woman's body defeated by decay persuaded him once more it was something he should not see, and he let her lie another day.

He was close but so far from his dream when he took flowers on stage to the actors on closing night. He had done it several times now.

Off-stage, this had never appeared to Thomas as the moment of triumph, though strangely it seemed the actors themselves enjoyed it best. The finest moment for him was always the second of completion between the last line of the play and blackout. It was as if, during the brief pause in darkness, the inhabiting spirits that had shared a period of their lives fled the theatre, unwilling to corrupt perfection with their continued presence. This left only the actors, bizarre creatures to Thomas as they accepted their flowers without noticing him. They were like gaudy guests at a costume party, imitating something exotic yet themselves still so terribly ordinary. He watched them in doubt as their lacquered faces disappeared briefly among the petals, emerging again with brilliant, accomplished smiles.

He called this space between perfection and everything else the fourth wall.

A single moment in his life had taken him behind this barrier. He had been sent to collect the bouquets for the evening's presentation. The florist was on the same street as the theatre, and he strolled down to it on a windy, high-spirited day, straight past the concrete stairwell that meant nothing to him at the time.

Floral perfume attended him delicately, but Thomas only noticed that there was no-one in the store when he entered. He walked through the moist air towards the door leading to the back of the shop.

At the door, the vision revealed itself to him in an instant. Through the window in the back wall a grey cityscape gathered like storm clouds, and the watery light fell onto a woman in the centre of the room. A great pile of white roses was heaped across a large table, and the woman was immersed in it. She was looking down, and strands of dark, straight hair fell across her face, gleaming as if wet. With only her head and arms visible, her hands moving gently amongst the petals, the woman seemed to be swimming through a frothy sea.

Tears came to Thomas's eyes as he looked at the picture. Standing still, he gazed unnoticed for several minutes, admiring the composition, colour, use of light. When he sighed the figure looked up in fright, and startled him.

The moment passed, but rapture carried Thomas through the next ten minutes. Afterwards, he couldn't remember those ten minutes at all, as if his own life had been frozen at the same moment that the image began to move. All that was important was that he would see her again tomorrow.

He could still think of the first time he saw her and weep at its beauty. Later, the memory was the only reason he stayed, as the shape of her face and the gleam of her hair were still the same, and looking at them helped refresh the image for him.

Most other things about her puzzled him. In a moment of elegance she would stand in the slanting afternoon light of her window arranging flowers in a vase, her long, delicate fingers guiding the stems towards perfection. But looking at her more closely, it hurt him to see those beautiful hands with dirt under the fingernails, the luminous skin marred with scratches from thorns.

Another time, with her disappointingly dingy flat transformed by candlelight, they sat close together talking. He was telling her of his dreams and a tear shone romantically in her eye. He leaned forward to kiss her, but missing his intention she turned her head to watch the approach of her grey cat. The cat leapt onto her lap, and after kneading her clothes for a few moments, lay down to go to sleep.

She asked him if he knew anything as nice as the trust of another living creature, or being loved by one who didn't need to love you.

She told him to touch the cat, to feel how soft and warm it was, but Thomas was already leaving the room, looking for a book of poetry that would give him what he sought.

There were moments when he puzzled himself; watching her face change as she read good and bad news in the newspaper, or when she mumbled quietly and worriedly to herself when she was in a hurry. And when she came home from work one day, an unnoticed caterpillar on her sleeve, his strange rush of feeling seemed entirely undeserved.

One evening at the beginning of winter he waited in his lover's chilly flat while she worked late, sitting down to become immersed in a book until her arrival.

He was entirely absent from the room until he felt a sudden weight on his legs through four points of pressure. He watched in annoyed amazement as the cat trod about his inconveniently placed legs. He still held the book open with one hand, while he reached back and rested his other arm across the back of the seat, pulling his body away from the domestic spectacle.

Finding a spot with room enough to balance on, the cat curled into a ball and lay down on Thomas, purring. Thomas looked at it for a while. Finally he decided to tolerate it, and turned his attention back to his book. But shortly afterwards, a vague sensation made him disturbingly aware of his own body. Only when he relinquished the book did he realise that he was slowly stroking the cat, and that it was, in fact, marvellously soft.

It became clear that he was losing sight of what he knew he wanted. There were several Sundays when she had persuaded him to visit friends or walk through the park instead of going to the gallery. There were days with her, occurring more and more frequently, when he did not even open a book. At first he thought he should simply spend more time away from her – back in his home with his books and paintings – but his house felt airless and cold, and he always returned to her sooner than planned. But when he realised he had been spending less time at the theatre he knew that the issue was more serious.

He stayed on after the next closing night. The audience was long gone, and the cast and crew had left for their usual party. Most

things were packed up and the entire theatre was dark, but Thomas switched on the stage lights, dressed himself in the sweaty costume, and went out on stage to summon the spirit of Romeo, separated from his love by unfeeling fortune, but believing, truly, that by the laws of love and beauty they would be allowed to come together in the end.

Many times he had played this role, in his house and in these stolen moments on the stage, and he had felt all of Romeo's overwhelming love and intensity. He had cried Romeo's tears many times, but tonight he could not do it. No spirit came to fill his body, and in his head were only thoughts of whether she had stayed up for him, and something she had said that morning about why he had never been to an audition.

He stared at the boards beneath his feet, uncomfortable in his ill-fitting costume. The only meaning he attached to his life had been taken from him by a woman who, beautiful as she was when she slept, snored.

Spring was rising up through the small spaces between buildings and footpaths and roads. Its organic exuberance would not be extinguished by layers of concrete and asphalt that were metres thick. Jasmine tumbled over the wall behind Thomas's house, and he blamed it for the sickly smell drifting through the rooms, making him feel ill.

Finding it difficult to move, he lay in bed for a long time before rising. The cold of winter still pervaded his house, but he sensed the riot outside and preferred to be where he was. There was no Vivaldi, no Monet, no impressionism at all out there, nothing to draw him from inside his walls but another day of fading hope at the theatre.

On the street, flowers seemed to crowd him from all unlikely places – on traffic roundabouts, on café tables, in people's hands. With a sudden happy surprise of recognition, he admitted the symbology was too strident to be ignored. It was time to go to her. If spring was this powerful, he could garland her with flowers and she might depart with as much beauty as she arrived in.

He recognised the familiar stench from much further away than usual. As he approached the concrete stairwell he was worried he

might throw up. When he reached the open doorway, the nausea and a paralysing guilt made it hard to lift his feet.

He grasped the smooth wooden banister and stepped up onto the first of the stairs. He was in the narrow, cold tunnel, and now inside he felt he was sealed in. He fought the desire to fall down on the concrete and not get up. Two steps from the top he paused, and placed one hand on his heart; it was either beating so fast he couldn't feel it, or not at all. He could see the bottom of her door and sense the stillness beyond. He wondered how the smell could hit him in such waves, when everything inside was so still.

Then he was at the door. It was closed and locked, and stood between him and her while decay did its last work. Even the smell grew fainter as the dust sifted down from the shape of a human to a characterless pile on the floor. Faced with no other option, he knocked.

The stillness continued but the smell returned, creeping up on him from behind, engulfing his head and threatening to pull him backwards down the concrete stairs. Then the door opened.

She stood alive in front of him, wearing baggy pants, a t-shirt and slippers, her hair tied roughly at the back of her head. Looking inside, he recognised more of her bland ornaments, sitting on shelves alongside piles of newspapers and magazines, and dirty coffee cups. Though he couldn't see any, the smell of flowers emanated from the room. Tears came to his eyes, and he couldn't speak.

She raised her eyebrows and said hello. The smell of death still shrouded him, trying to pull him down the familiar stairs. Standing and waiting for him to respond, she looked across to the kitchen where the kettle had just boiled, and he saw the daisy tucked matter-of-factly into her ponytail. The cat curled like a vine around his leg and pulled him forward into the bright living room.

Paola Bilbrough

Itinerancy

Returned from Mexico he spent all year travelling
between a city terrace with an untidy garden,
and his mother's house in a southern spa town.
A town full of braided sour dough loaves, glass beads
and claw-foot baths of sulphuric water; soft and brown as old tea.

I could never predict when I'd see him, sometimes
recognising him in a queue or the dreamy-dim
of a movie as the credits rolled. He'd grip my arm
with a warm hand, wrist covered in whorls
of dark hair, spine glowing pale, skin stretched tight.

Always on the way elsewhere, he'd crack his joints,
rotate his head, trying to settle into his own body.
Once I ate dinner at his house; the other guest
was five years old with a name from *The Mists of Avalon*
Night fell and we dressed her in a Che Guevara T-shirt,

tucked her beneath crimson chenille in a room filled
with Freda Kahlo postcards and reproductions
of Flemish Madonnas. I had an urge to try on his shirts,
lining the back wall like an audience. All in a state
of disrepair: frayed cuffs, pearl buttons split.

I wanted to push up his sleeves, inhale river silt
and sandal wood. Instead I wound his hair in tight rosettes
and my fingers came away velvet-slick with oil
Outside, a plum tree dropped fermenting fruit and the child slept;
her breathing filling the room: wind through bamboo.

Elizabeth Campbell

The Conductor

Head thrown back as if
he had just been shot or
perhaps
in wonder –
you are straining
that his empty hand
express
your dormant trigger-fingers,
lying
on complicit knee and armrest.
You seethe like mud.
His gestures,
perilous as
a neck-hung violin, the
irresistable
forward force of the strings –
they swoon like
pistons
and his elbows upwards and
upwards
like a drawing of water.
He rummages the sound,
caught
in the span between seat and
breathless

seat, slumping and
wearing
his wet hair,
he crafts your passion like a whip.
Cracks
sound through your body like
years,
a wingspan – like a life
yoked
to an intolerable music.

GABRIEL

Where's Gabriel now that visited my cell?
I call, I call, I call – Gabriel!
Gabriel! Gabriel! Gabriel!
– *"The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation"* by Henry Purcell

It is a fast, sick climb to these
higher registers – the denser air
the thinner sound. It is not union
we want but intercession, the diviner's
dipped stick – we adore the messenger
that gives tongue to namelessness
that brings more words
into the fold. Our ears call –
we adore the voice. Up here
the intervals are closer
the visits more piercing as she trades
bodily resonance for
head-voice, for a higher note.
Pig-headed, hankering, we adore the voice

as she calls silence an abandonment
passion a first cause,
as she sings through her scalp
as she seeks the angel in her cell –
she will bawl him out
she will bring him into the fold of words.

DOUGLAS KERR

HISTORY AND THEIRSTORIES: A REVIEW OF SOME RECENT AUSTRALIAN AND ASIAN FICTION

"The past is not dead," said William Faulkner spookily. "It is not even past." It is a novelist's idea – a historian would probably not put it like that – and novels, which conventionally tell their tales in a historic tense, are one place we are used to looking for a confirmation of this necessary sense of the presence of the past, its representation. The novel is a relative of historiography, if one with a rather disreputable past of its own, and not averse to impersonating its more respectable elderly sibling. Thus *Robinson Crusoe*, the first novel in English, advertises itself solemnly as "a just history of fact", and Defoe still had his fingers crossed three years later in recommending *Moll Flanders* to the reading public as "a private History". But – leaving aside the fact that they tell lies – novels are indeed as close as we may get to a just history of private life, the history of the way people live, what they think and feel and say to each other: a history with the unimportant bits left out. A trawl through some of last year's Australian and Asian fiction - and there is space here only to cover a few of the many fine works published over the last year – shows the novel is as hard at it as ever, muscling in on historiography's territory. An historical self-consciousness – perhaps not the same thing as that great critical fetish, a Historical Sense – is stimulated by anniversaries, of which Australia has had its share in recent years; and the millennium itself, with its journalistic chorus harping on about endings and beginnings, probably played some part too in the particular

fascination of this recent fiction with the writing of history, and the undead past.

History comes in many guises, and one of these is the story we tell to remind or convince ourselves of who we are. Postcolonial writings in particular inflect the past in this way, and this work of reclamation upon the past has kept postcolonial writers busy telling the old stories of new nations. Whether Australia is postcolonial (or post-colonial), has always been postcolonial or is not postcolonial yet, or enough, depends on what you take this slippery word to mean. It is probably not a question that bothers Peter Carey much, yet his novel *The True History of the Kelly Gang* (University of Queensland Press, 2000)[1] in some ways makes a classically postcolonial move, reclaiming a part of the national past that has been silent, or traduced in other tellings, and holding it up to the light for what it may have to say about the people in whose name it is reclaimed. In this way literature performs one of its oldest functions, telling the stories of ancestors. A culture's choice of its ancestors is a defining act. Sometimes we are dealt the wrong ones, with tragic consequences, and then if we are lucky we may be allowed to discard them and invent a new set.

Peter Carey and Ned Kelly were made for each other; the surprising thing about this book is that it has only now been written. Carey's real coup, as all the reviewers have pointed out, has been to find not just a character for the outlaw, but a voice in which his history comes alive. It is a remarkable invention, and Carey doesn't put a foot wrong in four hundred pages, avoiding the limitations of the voice (the relative poverty of vocabulary for example) as surely as he exploits its strengths. The stylistic effects are not complicated – the full stop is almost the only punctuation Ned uses; he confuses the modals *was* and *were*, and so on – but Carey makes this narrative a vehicle not just for pacey action, but for lyrical flights, humour, moments of great tenderness, and a strong feeling for place and atmosphere. He also manages the feat without ever patronising his hero.

> Soon as we rounded the spur Joe spoke urgently into my ear You see that Sergeant's adjectival repeater mate? I smelled Joe's smile it were a sardine can peeling open in the dark.

> That's the effing Spencer he said I put my hand across his mouth telling him to shut his hole. O that's a beautiful thing that Spencer. I punched him in the chest but were very pleased to see him laughing in my face for Joe Byrne when happy were a mighty force. I told him I would buy him a damn Spencer once we was out of our dilemma (271).

There were not many books around but Ned Kelly was a careful reader of Shakespeare, the Bible, and *Lorna Doone*. Somebody declaims the St Crispin speech from *Henry V* before the Kelly Gang's final battle at Glenrowan, and a double point is made. First, that the history of Ned Kelly really could be as much of a national epic as the story of Agincourt became for the English. And, more troublingly perhaps, that although the past may not be dead, the making of heroes is something that answers less to the past than to the complex and sometimes hardly admissible needs and interests of the present, as interpreted by a Shakespeare or a Peter Carey. *The True History of the Kelly Gang* is as much about truth and history as it is about the gang. Ned himself is in quite a modern sense a celebrity, as aware as Bonnie and Clyde of his press reputation, anxious in his way to manage the news, and annoyed when his story is not told right. The whole narrative is moved by his need to set the record straight for the child he will never see. He often refers to contemporary press accounts and witness statements about his doings. After quoting one such, he says: "It is more or less true about the horse stealing but there is no mention of how I earned Mrs Goodman's enmity you will notice that true & secret part of the history is left to me" (227). Behind the truth claim of the protagonist of this anecdote lies the different sense of the fiction writer's assertion of title to the true and secret part of history itself.

Ned Kelly as narrator becomes, in the course of his own story, as much the focus as Ned Kelly as bandit hero. Forced into crime by poverty and injustice, his ruling passion is to get his story known, in the belief that publishing the "true history" of the unfairness visited on his family will secure them justice. Meanwhile the gestation of his daughter, to whom his story is addressed, coincides with the gestation of the writing itself. Indeed the whole book is haunted by writing. At one point the gang take refuge in a

shepherd's hut, whose walls are crudely papered with pages of *The Illustrated Australian News*. Ned rigs up a sort of hurdle, and mounts it so as to be able to read the upside-down news of eighteen years before, plastered to the ceiling. (What he reads about is news of the American civil war, and this is where he gets the idea for his famous body armour, from reports about the duel of the ironclads the Monitor and the Virginia.). In this tale possessed by the glamour (and betrayal) of writing, Ned is finally given away by a language-man, the schoolteacher Curnow, who also gets his hands on the manuscript of the True History. By this time, with his pathetic faith in his message of petition to the government, Ned Kelly has become textualised in several senses. "My 58 pages to the government was secured around my body by a sash so even if I were shot dead no one could be confused as to what my corpse would say if it could speak" (354). Before his death, the hero and his story have become one and the same thing, as they must be for us.

This important and often beautiful book picks up where *Jack Maggs* left off, in the construction of Australian myths. Ned Kelly the outlaw is at least partly aware of what he means to the people around him, in wresting a measure of agency from the extraordinary hardship and endemic victimhood of their lives. This is a part of the myth too, and it is not impertinent to wonder what cultural need is being answered by the choice now of this romantic victim of oppression for an ancestor, rather than the vicious but equally Australian bushranger Harry Power, for example, or the cruel squatters or corrupt police. Ned Kelly himself has a gratifying theory of the essential and historic opposition of his country's people to injustice, for "they was Australians they knew full well the terror of the unyielding law the historic memory of UNFAIRNESS were in their blood and a man might be a bank clerk or an overseer he might never have been lagged for nothing but still he knew in his heart what it were to be forced to wear the white hood in prison he knew what it were to be lashed for looking a warder in the eye and even a posh fellow like the Moth had breathed that air so the knowledge of unfairness were deep in his bone and marrow" (342).

A myth of a different sort is at the centre of Phil Leask's *The Slow Death of Patrick O'Reilly* (Black Pepper, 2001). There are three main

narrative strands to this intricately woven novel. The Patrick O'Reilly of the title is a tramp, but also a semi-legendary figure, dangerous and immemorial, who is believed by some to have roamed the Tasmanian forests for a hundred and fifty years. His story mingles with that of Bernard Laurent, a war-weary Frenchman who jumps ship in Tasmania and wanders into a secluded valley looking for work; and with that of Clément Hébert, another Frenchman who came to the island in 1802 and left a journal of his years wandering in the forest (and turns out to be the ancestor of the current Patrick). From early on, there is a self-consciousness here about place and story, land and history. The Frenchman who has come to Tasmania also seems, appropriately enough, to have landed in a storybook.

> At last, he [Bernard] felt pleased to be ashore, wandering through the Tasmanian bush, wandering through the old stories that spilled out of everyone he spoke to whether he wanted to hear them or not, as if the whole country was awash with things that had happened and had to be talked about, things that had to have a life of their own, filling every space in this huge, wild, empty landscape (29).

Phil Leask writes powerfully about place when he is looking at it, but his view is too often obscured by a portentous and romantic insistence on the mystic numen of the land. You can see these moments coming by the length of the sentences, and their cumulative effect can be irritating. There are important and interesting issues here, about "development" and land ownership and the relation of human beings to nature, but they are often steeped in a metaphysical solution that sometimes seems to mean a good deal less than it says, a Tasmanian sublime. "Now it was coming to a close, the dreamlike wanderings of an old man who had lived a life like no other, living with no thought or need for tomorrow, since today was forever and forever was a part of him, like the great, broken, immutable rocks that rose up around him, and the wind and the rain and the sun and the snow, and the lakes that one day would vanish beneath the sea..." (263). Phil Leask should perhaps be introduced to a really ruthless editor. "A country

as young as this cannot have lost its history, not so soon," thinks Bernard (67). But there is just as much history as you want there to be. Patrick O'Reilly is the direct link with the past, with the earliest white settlement of the island, and with the state of nature; there is a story worth telling in his death.

Peter Carey and Phil Leask have written novels about history. Arabella Edge's *The Company: The Story of a Murderer* (Pan Macmillan, 2000) is a historical novel. It is inspired by and based on the wreck of the Dutch East India Company flagship Batavia off the western coast of Australia in 1629, and it is narrated by the apothecary Jeronimus Cornelisz, the mutineer leader, psychopath and murderer. Jeronimus has a background of libertinage and possibly satanism in Amsterdam. We are perhaps told more than we need to know when it is explained that his mentor Torrentius casts his horoscope and predicts he will return as a boulevardier in Paris, inciting revolution from his Bastille cell. His sadism is the point of the story, yet it's debatable whether such a story is best told from the inside; Jeronimus tells the tale chillingly enough but in the nature of things he is not best placed to understand it.

He has already been at work inciting mutiny when the ship strikes the reef. About two hundred and fifty souls make it to a small group of islands, among them Jeronimus who comes ashore clinging to a cedar gargoyle of Beelzebub from the wreckage. There they make shift to survive for forty days during which the apothecary establishes control as "Captain-General of the Coral Shoals", increasingly ruthless and crazed, before the rescue ship comes and he is tried and hanged. Arabella Edge is pretty good on realisation, colour, and (as far as I could tell) period detail, including her brief but striking evocation of Amsterdam in its Golden Age, the capital city of freethinking, and seedbed of mercantile capitalism. But Jeronimus himself, though he generates some vivid narrative, is not a very interesting consciousness, and in the end, in spite of the intriguing title, the novel is not entirely successful in drawing connections between the company and the murders. We are hardly offered an insight into evil or madness. The Captain-General is one of Nietszche's gentlemen, he is bad and gets worse because he is able to, at first getting rid of people to improve his own chances of survival with his rapidly corrupted sidekicks,

and later becoming arbitrarily cruel because he enjoys it. A hint at the link between the business of the murderer and that of the Company is his treatment of his captive Lucretia, a beautiful bride voyaging out to a marriage of convenience in Batavia. She is objectified and possessed like a prize, a jewel or a painting. She resists in the only way open to her, by stubborn silence.

I was reminded a little of Barry Unsworth's excellent *Sacred Hunger,* another account of a descent into violence and madness in the context of the capitalist rapacity – the "sacred hunger" – that built the European empires. I was also reminded that we have just celebrated the centenary of the genre's strong precursor, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.* It remains to be seen whether this essentially twentieth-century vision will continue, or mutate, in the new century.

Closer to the historical pole of historical fiction is John Toohey's *Captain Bligh's Portable Nightmare* (Duffy and Snelgrove, 2001). This retells the story of Captain William Bligh and eighteen crewmen, crowded into a 23-foot launch by the mutineers of the Bounty, and their journey of 6,705 kilometres across the Pacific to the Dutch East Indies. Bligh is not a endearing hero, and the journey itself was prolonged by his refusal to risk contact with the natives of several islands where they could have made landfall, and at least found food and water, on the way. The point is made that Bligh's former commander, and Oedipal shadow, the great Captain Cook, was less paranoid about the Pacific Other; on the other hand, Bligh was to die in his bed. Bligh's great journey was really a triumph for Enlightenment self-confidence in a year, 1789, when revolutionary turmoil was to overtake it in Europe. It is a gripping story, though not especially well told by John Toohey, a better historian than novelist, who has devised a rather awkward generic mix of fidelity to sources with new-journalistic ventures into empathetic interiority, and occasional dollops of background on such matters as the diseases of sailors, and the intellectual atmosphere of the Scottish Enlightenment. This seems to be a marriage of fiction and history where the partners cramp each other's style. There is a bit too much speculation on what Bligh was thinking of as he scribbled in his logbook (often roast pork, forgivably) to make a completely reliable history, but not enough to make a satisfying novel.

There is no ambiguity about the genre of Kate Lyons' *The Water Underneath* (Allen and Unwin, 2001): here is a novel and no mistake. And yet the considerable strengths of this book are more lyrical than narrative, at least on first impression, and more with the evocation of place than event. It is indeed a full-blown modernist text, with its densely organised imagery, complicated time scheme, and opaque record of the thought processes of characters who are a mystery to themselves. There is an unexplained death, of a mother and baby, but this is not a mystery story in the conventional sense; though we will discover the facts, the truth (Conrad's distinction) will remain indeterminate. Twenty years after a disappearance, bones are washed up from the lake. This is where the story begins, but it moves back as much as forwards, and no reassuring detective waits at the end of the trail; the novel's journeys are in fact endless.

The history here is that of an outback mining town, both vacuous and oppressive. "That was the worst of it. You couldn't get out of it, not really, not on foot. You could walk and walk on one of these roads and a few miles outside the town borders you were nowhere. There was nothing there you could imagine except the absence of here" (48). This overwhelmingly unpromising place is in transition, from the 1960s to the present, from the harsh realities of mining to the heritage trail of outback tourism, "a glossy approximation, with none of the dirt, none of the squalor, none of the holes" (196). But this a novel full of holes, the odd and sometimes irritating gaps and leaps of its incomplete narrative record, the communicative chasms between characters who are inarticulate and, in the case of the central character, the part-Aboriginal Frank, shielded by elected silence from the unspeakable past. It is this silence that sets two women, Vonnie and her daughter Ruth, on the road to their own destinies, one tragic and the other incomplete. In a story where memory is not doing its cultural work of giving people something to share – theirstories – Ruth the orphan is left holding the inadequate remains of the past in the form of traces, something buried under the roots of a tree, a half-remembered fragment of childhood experience, the falsifying records of epitaphs, and the blurred sepia photographs of dead miners, now that only nostalgia is mined after the minerals have run out.

> They stand erect and unsmiling outside tin cottages. They are waiting for history to arrive. When it comes it will be sudden. It will leave them receding through a tunnel of unused years. It will be cholera, typhoid, fire, flash flood. The sudden surrender of thrice-gutted earth.
>
> Men stand in unfailing readiness, in unaccustomed daylight, implements in hand. Picks and lamps and shovels, these things give them gravity, they prop them up. Famous yet nameless. Like Frank, known only by tools and deeds. Inside the dark mouths of doorways, like shadows or sepia ghosts, lurk their absent wives (228).

This is distinguished writing, and a brave and skilful first novel which ponders the relation between the body and place, and the question of what it might mean to inhabit a country. To my taste it goes too far in its modernist opacity and sacrifice of cohesion, especially if you compare it to the formal simplicity of a novel like *The Kelly Gang*. *The Water Underneath* is a glittering artifact. Set in unremitting and blistering heat, it has a cool heart.

A more expansive "private History", postcolonial and transpacific, is to be encountered in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's novel *Joss and Gold* (Times Books International, 2001). It starts in Kuala Lumpur in the sixties when the young graduate Li An marries a dull but worthy research scientist and joins in the busy chatter of Malaysian nation-building, only to find that as a Chinese she may not be considered as integral to the new nation as its majority Malay Muslim citizens. Enter Chester, a Peace Corps volunteer with whom she develops a slightly risky friendship. Things build to a climax in the overcharged anti-Chinese riots of May 1969, during which Li An and Chester are thrown together for a single night of love. The second part of the novel takes an unexpected turn. Instead of following the fortunes of Li An, who has a baby on the way and some explaining to do to her husband, the narrative moves to the USA, ten years on, to pick up the story of Chester. This is a novel with a pronounced sag in the middle; in the American section, with the dimly apprehended Chester and his uninteresting circle, something goes flat in the narrative. Much of the early energy returns in the last section, when Chester returns to Asia, to

Singapore, where Li An, now divorced, and her daughter and most of her friends have fetched up. Here we see how Li An has established a successful career and is bringing up her daughter in a female household with the help of her mother-in-law and an unmarried friend. For a while the story seems to be shaping itself into some variation of *Madame Butterfly*, as Chester tries to get the child to come and stay with him and his wife in New York, but in the end a more prosaic modus is worked out.

Here we have a full house of the postcolonial thematic repertoire of race, ethnicity, nationality, identity, language, education, the family, tradition and modernity, with a strong attention to gender politics. Li An herself begins as a predicament rather than a character, but grows more substantial, and though she prospers in the face of adversity there clings to her something of the melancholy which seems to be the signature of the Chinese Malaysian condition. Around her, the voices of a racialised nationalism mingle with others that insist that she is Chinese, with all the obligations that title can be said to bring with it, especially for a woman; and these identity-forming pressures clash with her rather naïve enthusiasm for the colonial canon of EngLit which she has imbibed as a student. By the end, in Singapore, we can understand her innate toughness, but also what has been abandoned as the price of accommodation to materialism and the success ethic which is the other side of the coin of "big city tolerance and anonymity" (246). This is a valuable essay in a familiar mode, with a set of middle-class young people finding their feet and their identities in Asian modernity, in relation to the colonial past, the national present, ethnic cultural traditions and beliefs and a changing sense of the possibilities of gender. It is not Shirley Lim's fault if the men in her story are uninteresting. (If we are dealing with myths of ethnicity, this one is as feminine as Peter Carey's is masculine.) There are two strengths in particular in this book. The dialogue, which is flat when the scene is Westchester County, comes alive and expressive in the various forms of Asian English. Second, there is an admirable attention here to the body, to registrations of heat and cold, pleasure and discomfort, to body language and the secret inner work of the somatic life. The frenetic bodily life and generous feelings of the young Li An – dashing around

on her motorbike, expounding Keats, enjoying rojak or ice cream – are curtailed and disciplined with disappointment and responsibility, but at the end of the story it seems as if something of that earlier warmth may be returning. "A muse of feelings she thought she had forgotten, more than words, more than poetry, returning to the spaces inside her body its silent and eloquent touch" (306).

If the loves and estrangements of Lim's characters have something to say about relations between the East and America, there is a more structural dialogue in Nigel Gray's *Strangers* (Stone's Publishing, 1999), which takes the form of a series of letters exchanged, in 1988 and 1989, between Adrian, a social worker in a dying seaside town in England, and Harri, a failed actress making a new life for herself in Australia. Adrian makes contact years after a very brief encounter which (at first unknown to him) has produced a child, but the two will never meet. Nigel Gray manages the epistolary form with great skill, as the picture gradually emerges with each letter responding, often angrily or mischievously, to the previous one, laden with memory, confession, and a halting approach to love. Though there is much to admire here, in the end I found the book disheartening and claustrophobic, as much because of the form as of the desperate lives it reveals. Claustrophobia, of course, need not be claustrophobic for the reader. It is one of the themes of Robert Drewe's brilliant *The Shark Net* (Viking, 2000), his memoir of a provincial boyhood and youth in a Perth suburb in the fifties, interwoven with the story of a multiple murder. I mention it here, though it does not come into the remit of a fiction review, as one of the best new books I have read for years.

Speculative historical fiction is a little genre of its own. What happened in what Hitler called his "lost year", the year after the defeat of the German army in which he served, in 1918? In *The Day We Had Hitler* Home (Picador, 2000), Rodney Hall would like us to suppose that the temporarily blinded German corporal was sent, by a combination of bureaucratic muddle and the endemic accidents of war, to Australia, where he was welcomed into a bourgeois family in the mistaken belief that he was the son of acquaintances of theirs. This is a novel about the modernist age, the age of aeroplanes, cinema and fascism. It starts off, as the jocular

title signals, as a sort of historical farce, with the mix-up of Hitler's arrival by mistake in a boat bringing Australians back from the European war, and the need to return him to German soil. But it develops into a serious examination of just what largely unadmitted connections might be found between the "Hitler" and the "Home" of the title. A novel with some similarity to William Boyd's equally enthralling *The New Confessions*, this story takes its initially quite innocent heroine, Audrey McNeil, from Australia to Weimar Germany. The story begins, in a sense, when Australia did, making its first formal appearance on the international stage in 1919 as a signatory of the disastrously punitive Versailles Treaty. There is some fun with the farcical espionage story, as the sullen Corporal Hitler is smuggled out of Australia by air, but this is followed by Audrey's ten years in Munich, where she is as slow and unwilling as everyone else to recognise what sinister shapes the history of her own times is there assuming, until she witnesses Hitler speaking at a rally. She pursues a career in film – the great modernist art – where she puts together a record of the life of the city which she believes to be a simply aesthetic project, only later realising that it is a political document, and a tragic one. The novel reflects on itself in the way that Audrey considers the relation between art and life, "watching the rise of violence in the streets as no more than material for my film" (253), until her eyes are cruelly opened; the Senegalese lover, her first, is beaten to death by fascist thugs. The last part of the story tells how she manages to smuggle her lover's child to safety out of Germany, a grim balance to the earlier smuggling of the incipient Hitler out of Australia a decade before.

The book is beautifully shaped, an instance where a fine aesthetic judgement reinforces the strong political freight of the story, whose themes come home in several uncomfortable senses when Audrey with her grim experience of Nazi racism returns to an Australia, and a household, where racism is just as firmly rooted. This is a really good novel, faultlessly confident in its period evocation, but also one in which, without being anachronistic, the structure of an imagined past is firmly linked to an urgent engagement with the present. The story of Audrey's family, absorbing in itself, also stands in front of the story of the emerging nation, which stepped forward in 1919 and yet wanted,

and perhaps still does, to believe itself in some lucky way immune or exempt from the burden of history. "Espionage being all the rage and the new subject for movies, doubtless our best defence was the fact, universally acknowledged, that nothing ever happens in Australia" (110). This is when they are on their clandestine and strangely – but how ironically – innocent journey to deliver Hitler back to the German soil he will soon be making speeches about. The happy conviction that history is something that happens to other people is the real virginity that Audrey has to lose in her story.

When a book is prefaced by a complex family tree, like Maggie Blick's *Remembering Malcolm Macquarrie* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2001), we feel we know what to expect. The diagram turns out to be an essential reference point in a story that covers a century or so, shifting back and forth in time over the decades, telling and dropping and resuming different strands of family history. It is a difficult and ultimately under-rewarding book, but a courageous one; it covers a lot of ground, and in the end it may be truer to the actual texture of family memory – with its repetitions, confusions, unexpected rhythms, unfinished subplots – than more stately and tidy essays in the genre like *Buddenbrooks* or indeed *Roots*. The Malcolm Macquarrie of the title was born in 1910 and lives until 1997 but the centre of the story, if it has one, is his step-grand-daughter Alison "Tubby" Murray, who is fascinated by the old man as a child, attends his funeral at the time of another crisis in her own life, and keeps returning to him in memory up to the time of her death – which occurs, I think, when the story ends, some time around the middle of the twenty-first century. It is a saga which encompasses births, marriages, divorces and deaths, journeys and returns, disappearances and reunions, family secrets, the dismal gloom of adolescence and the crazy gaiety of old age. It is a story without straight lines, however. Not only does it shred its chronology – moving in the space of four chapters, for example, from 2004 to 1946 to 2013 to 1997 – but it shifts across the perceptions, memories and dreams of most of its cast of characters, in varying modes from lyrical to realistic to metaphysical. It is easy to get lost - it doesn't help that there are three Malcolms and three Alisons in the family – and in the end there is a question whether these people were interesting enough to sustain the effort.

There remains however the fascination of watching Maggie Blick ring the changes of a remarkably resourceful technique. The texture of the novel puts you in mind of textile, perhaps the cross-stitch that Alison (one of the Alisons) enjoys – "Millions of coloured dots, and this beautiful picture surfacing before her eyes" (148). But probably a better image of the mnemonic processes of *Remembering Malcolm Macquarrie* is the red, lint-infested patchwork bag that Tubby carries round in her crazy old age, an image that seems to take on symbolic weight near the end as the researcher, possibly a relative of hers, who is studying Tubby's case tips out the contents of the bag onto his desk.

> Maybe this thing he calls dementia is something else entirely. A kind of prison of the mind where doors long held shut by the force of culture come creaking open, and contents spill out in disarray for those around to piece together. A kind of wakeful dreaming, a resolution of the past, a purging. He repacks emuram's [Tubby's] personals, and absently rubs his bruised head. Emuram has awakened something in him. Memories, shame, a sense of the fluidity of things. Not fixed. Not determined by any outside force. But free. (244)

In this twenty-first century novel, whose story reaches forward into the still unlived, there is at least a suggestion of envy as the man of the future contemplates the messy ragbag of an old woman's memories. Her memories are the traces of her freedom, and it is unlikely that freedom can mean much in a posthistoric future.

Notes

1. Since this article was written, *The True History of the Kelly Gang* has been awarded the Booker Prize for 2001.

Notes on Contributors

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Paola Bilbrough is a Melbourne poet who is currently working on her first novel as part of an Asialink fellowship in Japan.

Godfrey Blow is a West Australian artist who has had many solo exhibitions beginning with his first in London in 1976 and whose work is held by several major and regional galleries, principally in Western Australia. The painting used on this cover comes from his most recent work in which he is concerned to explore symbols derived from natural forms that give an insight into the nature of existence.

Madeleine Byrne has worked in France, Slovakia, Britain and the US. She lived in a Slovak village for a year and has written a manuscript about the experience entitled "Landscape of Ghosts." She speaks, French, German and Slovak.

Elizabeth Campbell was born in Melbourne in 1980. She lives, writes and sings there. Her work has recently been published in *New Music Contemporary Australian Poetry.*

Michael Connor after working in publishing and bookselling, is currently completing a history PhD at the University of Tasmania.

MTC Cronin has had six books of poetry published, the most recent being *Talking to Neruda's Questions* and *Bestseller* (both Vagabond Press, 2001). Another collection, *My Lover's Back: 79 Love Poems*, is forthcoming in 2002 (UQP).

Amanda Curtin works as a freelance book editor and writer. She has won the Katharine Susannah Prichard Short Fiction Award, the Golden Key Honour Society's Literary Achievement Award for Excellence in Fiction, and the Lee Steere History Prize.

Tim Denoon is a Sydney writer whose poetry has appeared in various journals in Australia and the USA. He has recently returned from an Asialink writer's residency at Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi.

Wendy Gan is a young Singaporean writer presently working in the University of Hong Kong as an assistant professor in the English Department. Having been displaced several times over through the years has given her much to think and write about.

Paul Hetherington has published five previous volumes of poetry and *Stepping Away: Selected Poems* will be released in 2001. He won the 1996 Australian Capital Territory Book of the Year Award with the collection *Shadow Swimmer.* He is publisher at the National Library of Australia.

Sue Hosking teaches in the English Department at the University of Adelaide. Her article is part of a larger collaborative project with an Aboriginal group.

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth teaches in the English Department at the University of Western Australia. His book, *Paper Nation: The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, 1886-1888,* was published by Melbourne University Press in 2001.

Wendy James has had stories published in various journals and anthologies. She is currently writing a historical novel.

Judy Johnson's first collection was published by Five Islands Press in 1998. Her second collection *Splinters* won the Wesley Michel Wright Prize for poetry and is to be published by Black Pepper Press in 2002.

Jan Teagle Kapetas is a poet whose work has won many awards, She has worked as a writer, tutor, playwright and project facilitator in community arts for more than twenty years. She is currently completing a Ph.D. in Community Cultural Development at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, Perth. W.A.

Aileen Kelly is a Melbourne adult educator. Her poetry has won the ASAL Mary Gilmore Award and the Vincent Buckley Prize.

Douglas Kerr is Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Hong Kong, and has worked on the literature of the Great War (*Wilfred Owen's Voices,* Clarendon Press, 1993) and on Western writing about the East in the colonial and postcolonial period, from Kipling and Conrad to Theroux and Timothy Mo. He is currently finishing a monograph on George Orwell.

Billie Livingston's first novel, *Going Down Swinging,* was published in Spring 2000 by Random House Canada. She has just finished a short story collection and is working on a new novel.

Anna Mandoki is an accountant and writer of unpublished novels. She also has a degree in psychology, which comes in useful sometimes. She has lived in London and Budapest, and is now based in Melbourne.

Lorraine Marwood has recently moved from a dairy farm of 25 years, to Bendigo in Central Victoria. Her first volume of poetry *Skinprint* was published by Five Islands Press in 1996. Lorraine also writes children's poetry.

John Mateer is a poet and art critic. he has recently edited a special African issue of the internet poetry journal Slope http://www.slope.org, and the latest publications of his own poems are *Through the Silent Bushland of Skin* (Vagabond, 2001) and *Loanwords* (FACP, forthcoming 2002).

Mark O'Flynn's second collection of poems *The Good Oil* was published by Five Islands Press in 2000. He lives in the Blue Mountains and was recently funded to write a play about Eleanor Dark and Eve Langley.

Ouyang Yu is currently based in Melbourne with 20 books of literary translation, poetry and fiction published in both Chinese and English, and 7 or 8 books of various genres unpublished. His latest book of poetry is "cunt sequence" written in Chinese.

Gina Perry is a Melbourne based writer of fiction and non fiction. Her stories have appeared in a number of literary magazines and leading Australian newspapers. She is Arts Victoria's writer in residence at the Melbourne Metropolitan Meat Market.

Ron Pretty is a publisher and founding member of the Poetry Australia Foundation. His most recent book, *Of the Stone: New and Selected Poems*, was published in 2000. A revised edition of his book *Creating Poetry* was published in September this year.

Archna Sahni has lived and studied in Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai, Chandigarh, and Toronto. Until recently a college lecturer in Chandigarh, he is currently completing a PhD thesis that compares the story of Draupadi in the *Mahabharata* with its modern Indian depicitons, and has recently compiled a book of poems.

Phoebe St John ordinarily lives in Melbourne, where she completed a BA at the University of Melbourne this year. She is currently in New York for a period of six months, doing some writing there.

Catherine Swanson a former social worker and ethnographer, currently lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA. Her work has been published in various countries and has appeared in *Artful Dodge, The Dalhousie Review, Grain, North Dakota Quarterly,* and *Passages North,* among others. She is working on a book of poems as well as a book of essays.

Elizabeth Stephens is a doctoral student in the Department of Critical and Cultural Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney, where she also teaches creative writing and critical theory. She has published poetry, short stories, and criticism in a range of journals, both here and overseas, and has won a number of prizes for this work, including the tertiary section of the National Short Story Contest.

Alan Urquhart teaches at the Sydney Institute of Technology, reading and writing some poetry.

Andy Weaver from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, has published poetry in various Canadian literary magazines, including *Grain, Prairie Fire,* and *The Fiddlehead.* He is currently working towards a PhD in English at the University of Alberta.

Deb Westbury is a poet, sculptor and teacher who lives in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. She is the author of four collections of poetry – *Mouth to Mouth* (FIP 1990 reprinted by Cambridge UP 1998 and 2001), *Our Houses Are Full Of Smoke* (A&R 1994), *Surface Tension* (FIP 1998) and *Flying Blind* (to be published by Brandl and Schlesinger in 2002).

Kate Whitfield works as a writer and editor in Melbourne. Her short stories have been published in several Australian journals.

Victor Ye is a Professor of English at the University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, and Director of the Centre for Studies of Australian Affairs and Western Culture.

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Victor Ye on East or West: An Inquiry into Today's Chinese Literature.

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REVIEW ESSAYS

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Alan Urquhart on Australian and Asian Poetry.

Tony Hughes-d'Aeth on the year's work in non-fiction.

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