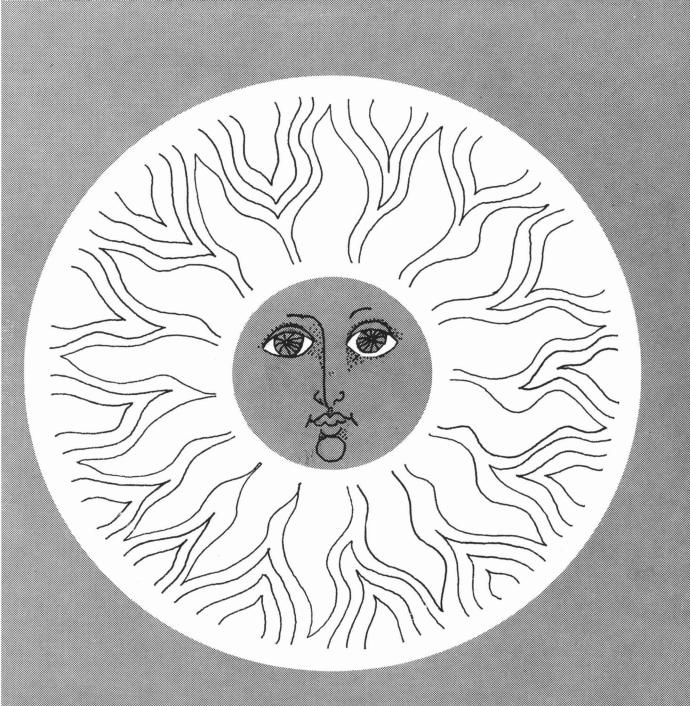
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STORIES, POEMS, REVIEWS, ARTICLES



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westerly a quarterly review

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CONTENTS

STORIES		
Jealous of Ali Maisie	5 9	MICHAEL WILDING LAUREL CUNNINGHAM
POEMS		
Fur Absence Flying over Pennsylvania Chants Populaires Chants Impopulaires Far End Recluse The Lion in Winter Within Melancholy At Sea: Gautier The Land of Dinosaurs David The Violets Lear, Class 71	8 13 14 16 17 18 20 21 41 42 44 45 55	JENNIFER MAIDEN WILLIAM GRONO STEVE SNEYD THOMAS W. SHAPCOTT GEOFF PAGE ROD MORAN HAL COLEBATCH RICHARD MARSH L. R. BURROWS LEON SLADE GWEN HARWOOD FAY ZWICKY
PLAY Extract, Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly	22	DOROTHY HEWETT
ARTICLES Insight and Outrage The Aborigine in the works of Judith Wright Judith Wright and the Bushranger	37 46 51	MARGOT LUKE G. A. BRENNAN J. S. RYAN
Poems of Kenneth Mackenzie: ed. Evan Jones and Geoffrey Little The Mystery of Unity: Patricia A. Morley Aspects of the Dying Process: Michael Wilding The Ship on the Coin: Rodney Hall Mankind's Spies: Graeme Kinross Smith A Dictionary of Austral English: Edward E. Morris Henry Handel Richardson—Papers Presented at a Centenary Seminar	59 63 66	DOROTHY HEWETT VERONICA BRADY BRUCE BENNETT PETER COWAN
Photographs, Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly		STEVEN PORTER

Drawings and cover design by students of the Art Department, Perth Technical College.



MICHAEL WILDING

Jealous of Ali

That there was an outside world of prostitutes and sex was brought to me mainly I suppose by people like Alastair. Ali and the other boarders had this air of sophistication—unprovincial I would call it now, but then there was no other world except the provincial to envisage. Ali told stories of an existence different from mine, but it never amounted to a whole way of life I could ever imagine myself in. I didn't doubt that existence, I could picture it, with Ali's information, vividly. But it was a world I couldn't see myself walking through. It was Ali's world peopled by characters and mapped by landmarks with which he was wholly familiar and which I had never encountered and which I felt I never would.

Going swimming, we used to walk out of the back gate of the school in a sort of column, two abreast under near discipline, and it was on one such occasion as we approached the single storey prefabricated huts of the motor taxation offices that I remember the first mention of prostitutes. I hated going to the baths although I could swim. Ali in this as everything else was doggedly proficient. More doggedly, perhaps, looking back. But whereas I remember only once in the whole time of visiting the baths ever struggling breathlessly to the deep end and in a panic back, Ali refused to show any fear but bobbed happily from the surface to the deep blue floor of the diving pit holding his nose to keep out the chlorinated water, gesturing obscenely with his free hand.

The revelation of prostitutes enthralled me. Ali gave me convincing documentation. But we were both puzzled by the existence of male prostitutes, of whose existence he swore. But why? I remember insisting. And we came to the conclusion that maybe women felt a sexual urge that had to be gratified by financial payment. It seemed to us a very pleasant and lucrative job, and we considered this as, not exactly a future profession, but at least as part of a world that we had not yet really encountered. And we fantastically discussed the possibilities until, approaching nearer the baths, we had to stop in order to appear decorously in our bathing trunks.

Of the as yet unencountered world, Ali had far more acquaintance than I had. There were perhaps eighty boarders in a school of six hundred, and all of them brought this hint of a world beyond the confines of our midland hills. Their skins even were different; they seemed to dress differently, in the same conventional school uniform. And they stuck together very much. Boarders were a genus apart. They had a distinctive house spirit, took their mid-morning break in the boarding house while we in our classroom sucked our milk, and went on walks together on Sundays when I helped dig up potatoes or mow the lawn at home. To make a friend of a boarder, I felt, was an achievement.

It was a friendship begun, as far as I remember, by Ali's kicking me from the seat behind in a divinity lesson; and this set the tone of our relationship. And if our disregard for established religion caused continual trouble and was a factor in his eventual expulsion, the kicking from behind was the stimulus that awoke me from my midland terror. Not only did he bruisingly insist there was another world, but I began to realize it was a world I would have to acknowledge. As we threw board rubbers at each other in later arguments, or slung each other's books around with a fury caused solely by mental disagreements, taken personally, it was this other world I was drawn to approach. Home was one thing, school another, separated by a cycle ride; but Ali asserted a further choice. And London, where in his fifty years my father had never been, began to achieve an insistent possibility. It wasn't that there was any distinction in the fact of his parents' being divorced this seemed curiously, perhaps, irrelevant; but it was his knowledge of Richmond Park and Leicester Square, Piccadilly Circus and Golders Green; his insistence that film was a serious art form—my parents never went to the cinema, and discouraged me from going. It wasn't even that he brought in any cosmopolitan sophistication, or introduced any ideas inaccessible at the public library. But sitting next to him I shared his breath of a quicker way of looking at things, I dodged through heavy traffic more easily, and surrendered myself to the terrors of underground tube trains. I breathed the whisky fumes of his father, and borrowed Ali's keen teeth to jibe at divinity. We turned our attention to politics as well as biblical exegesis, and found both in Tom Paine. I tried to wean him away from rugby and cricket at which I was impossible and he competent; I failed in that, but it was due to him that I took communion only once after being confirmed, and due to him, some years later, that I dropped a girl I had gone through hours of waiting to get to know, because he insisted her hair was cut in a pudding basin style.

His accounts of the sexual delights of Hyde Park, at that stage unexperienced by him, kept me eager with excitement. He lied unscrupulously, but his lies were essentially true; at least, essentially valuable. Again, they brought into focus potentialities unimaginable in my home life of homework and bicycle repairs. Our inseparable friendship, as it became, was disliked and instructions were filtered through to me, accounts of his subversive criminality and implications of undisclosed things. This only made the bond the stronger, the appeal the greater, the effect on me the more important. Our prose styles improved with a new self consciousness of being separate beings in a hostile world, artists alienated from the imperceptive mass. And it was true, for that was how we felt and how we acted; and if we stimulated the world to greater hostility—as if, for us, its hostility was not convincing enough—the greater we noticeably and self-satisfiedly thrived.

And after each holiday he would arrive laden with gifts from the untravelled regions, accounts of an existence that made my own running errands and getting up late cringe for what they were. And in the arched hall, with the school's benefactor looking down on us in his plus-fours, standing legs apart on a tiger-skin rug, Ali would begin his whispered reports from his world; either there, or after school ended at four, when we would sit in the sun on one of the wooden seats outside the science buildings—seats presented in memory of people who had fallen dead in some unremembered battle, that had Ali and I noticed, we would have felt it incumbent upon us to despise—he would narrate exoticisms of his distant holiday and, as I was even then aware, lie of unencountered events.

It was under the arched roof, as we sat officially working on our own at the benched tables running the length of the hall, that Ali told me how some elderly men had tried to pick him up in a tube train; and the roof of the hall lowered, we all sat there in a long row, compartmented by the four tables, and the benefactor looking vaguely towards us as he gripped one of the leather thongs hanging from the roof and swayed with the rocking carriage, and Ali told how the grey haired

man leant across to him, just as I leant across the better to hear the whisper, and, as it would have been put, engaged him in conversation. And whether the elderly man put his hand on Ali's knee, or this was merely suggested by Ali's power of implication. I forget. But at the next tube station—and to me then tube stations were unknown and I refused to inquire of their appearance from Ali—Ali left, and the man followed him, and followed him—Ali all the while peering out of the corner of his eye and over his shoulder and through the masses of cosmopolitan people—into another carriage at another platform, and inside the swaying train and we swaved across from the benches the better to hear the lowered voice, and the benefactor stood, his seat surrendered no doubt to some lady, aloof and refusing to listen in on someone else's private conversation—the elderly man this time sat next to Ali and perhaps nudged his bare knee—we were still in short trousers—with his own suited one, and said something about Ah well, here we are again, fancy that. No doubt he asked Ali his name, and whether he was doing anything and would he like to be shown around London; and I found it impossible to estimate Ali's response. Did he play up to this? He would not, as I most certainly would, have cringed into himself and fallen silent; no. Ali would no doubt in his turn have engaged the man in conversation; and it was a thought upsetting, that Ali would have responded to this distasteful elderly figure who held a brown paper carrier bag; and I felt what might have been a sort of jealousy; if only I could have envisaged Ali's response. But that image refused to develop, and meanwhile Ali continued the story; he got out at the next station, and the man, after the minimum requisite interval got out too, to stand waiting on the platform. But Ali, who had insisted to me that the film, and especially what I now refer to as the B feature thriller, was a form seriously to be considered, leapt through the automatically closing doors the instant they began to slide together, and the tube moved out of the station, with Ali's white face looking through the grimed window at the elderly man standing alone with his carrier bag.

When the bell rang we surged out beneath the tiger's claws into the open morning, the light flooding through the wide doors into that dark hall as if washing across undeveloped film. I kept the fading image with me as I began my ten minute cycle ride home—it was no day to break the seven and three quarter minute record bearing sufficient of its vividness. But I suspected its truth. And I needed to suspect its truth. Yet if it were all fictitious, so that there was no response at all from Ali to such a man, then all his stories of his London of prostitutes and strip clubs, Spanish girls feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square, and pornographic libraries, were disqualified too. If it were not true, I had been cheated of a message from the outside. I had been given a glimpse of a world of tube trains and escalators, that was torn away from me, the poster stripped off to reveal some familiar scene; and I needed to be told that London and sex, no matter what London and what sex. existed! I needed assurance of that life which cycling to and from school four times a day could never encounter. And if it were true, if it were true, then there was that rapport between Ali and the man that my mind could not envisage. Weaving my way through the parked vans and moving cars, past the shops and out towards the flat expanse of the suburbs, the same daily uneventful ride varied only by running occasionally into the back of a bus, I carried with me my choice. And I reflected, cycling along, that no old man had ever tried to pick me up from my quiet world, and I felt jealous of Ali.

JENNIFER MAIDEN

Fur

Golden

& invisible in its own light, the fur tastes subtly of deserts, immaculate as sand it buries her shadow in blond night.

Ruthless

with boredom, she waits inside it & imagines the lonely, dripping kill: the fox: a heavy fool suspended on a fence like Mussolini: heels to the death-horn moon, arms swinging.

A flush of breeze tatters his spilt pockets, mottles

with frost the open glitter of his eyes.

Her legs swing from the tabletop, waiting to drop when a car stops to hear it & stand in greeting: a gloss of mellow scent, life cut cosmetic from best soap & paper, kind, she reassures by silence, her first smile quick as the vein that is harshing beneath a fox pelt's sharp & tiny teeth of warmth on her throat.

LAUREL CUNNINGHAM

"Maisie"

Maisie was a parsnip. There could be no doubt about that once you had looked at her. She was long and thin, and her young mouth and eyes were little brown slits in her pastry-coloured head, and her fingers were long and process-like, and so were her finger nails. Mrs Peel, on the other hand, was a cabbage. She had begun life as a parsnip, but over the years a great deal of bullying from Mr Peel had changed her into a cabbage—the sort that knows that, if it sits still in the garden for long enough, one day a baby will be discovered underneath. It had happened once (look at Maisie), so why not again? But her outer leaves, which should have been tender and juicy to entice a baby, had grown very leathery, and it began to seem doubtful if the miracle would be repeated.

However, there are many kinds of miracles, and one day Mr Peel dropped dead. He had been a pumpkin, very large and tough, but found to be hollow when cut open. He made a great deal of noise when struck, and this noise, like a note which is touched by the physical phenomenon of resonance, used to clamour and boom through their small brown house so that there seemed hardly room for anything else. And indeed there wasn't, it was so crammed with the suitcases and brown-paper parcels of sheets and pillow slips and tablecloths and tea-towels and casseroles and dinner sets and hand-embroidered nightgowns that constituted Maisie's "box".

Despite its appearance, you couldn't say the house was without hope. It sat, like the cabbage, waiting for its day to come, in a little patch of garden dominated by the pumpkin. Perhaps fifteen years had elapsed since he had first decided to stop paying rent and buy. He had lost count of the reasons for delay—solicitors were paid to worry over those things—and meanwhile not a nail or a slodge of paint would he bestow on it, not for all the nagging in the world, not until the papers had "gone through". When they did, he spent his accumulated three-months' holiday painting it outside and in, repairing every hinge and sash, and renewing every pipe and wire. And when it was finished he had a heart attack and died.

The funeral was very noisy. Echoes left carelessly under cushions rose like dust when disturbed by the mourners, and nothing seemed any different until the next morning, when Mrs Peel and Maisie awoke to a world that was filled with silence.

Groping under the bed for a slipper, Mrs Peel stopped, struck suddenly by the unfamiliar woosh on the linoleum. From that moment the slipper was a different object, possessed of qualities she had never suspected. The sheets made a rustling sound when she threw them back; the comb crackled in her hair; the wardrobe doors clicked open and shut; and the droopy dressing gown flapped about her knees. Even her knees had a crunch of their own.

In the kitchen Maisie was staring at the kettle, which had clattered just a little when she put it on the stove. The rush of water in the sink had startled her, as had the small noise of sugar grains falling into a cup. Tentatively she broke an egg on the edge of the frying pan, and was immediately enchanted. She went on breaking eggs until the carton was empty. Fresh bread crust crunched under the knife. Inside her head, her teeth met each other as if for the first time. Her throat made a musical note when she swallowed.

All day long mother and daughter went about, not speaking to each other, just touching and listening, and becoming acquainted all over again with the house they had lived in for over twenty years.

People were very understanding. After the first few callers, who came with raisin loaf and questions ("How will you manage, Lil? Get the pension?"), and were dismissed absently on the doorstep, the neighbours decided to let grief work itself out. "Poor things, they're stunned, they need a bit of time, leave them alone for a while, that's probably best." All up and down the street the message was relayed—self-denial being the only thing left when charity is not appreciated.

Inside the house the women listened in wonder. The voices carried easily through the walls, even through the layers of fresh white paint, even from the fruit shop on the corner, even from the pub across the street. They heard themselves described as "lonely", "skinny", "miserable", "mean", "pathetic", "dull". They looked at each other as the words trickled through the walls, little embryonic smiles filling the air between them. The walls had taken on a peculiar property—whether it was the paint or the recent rarefaction of the air—they had become like magic glass, so that those inside could look out, but those outside saw nothing but the painted wood. Through the glass, at which they sat, listening and watching in the now-unhurried afternoons, they perceived with some amazement that it was the lonely who called them lonely, the pathetic who called them pathetic, the mean who called them mean.

Now that there was no need to launder shirts and sew buttons on trousers, or cook a hot meal in the middle of the day, or polish white circles from beer mugs off the walnut dining room table, the clocks were deposed from their stations and, being ignored, decided to give up the struggle altogether. There were thus an infinite number of hours to be tasted; to be gobbled or sucked at, as one chose; to be picked up at random and discarded; to be frittered away without guilt; to be lost without any remorse; there were huge carpets of them spreading out on all sides, as far as you could see, stretching to the tops of the hills and slipping over, to go on stretching for ever and ever oh the luxury of it!

Other things were different too. The women learned their possessions by their sounds. There was, they found, a definite pitch in the note of a bud opening on a cactus plant. A pencil lying on a book spoke clearly to the pens and rubber. Coins, when not being coarsely rattled in a trouser pocket, held sober communication with each other that far surpassed the wisdom in human chatter. When the women spoke it was very softly, so as not to interfere with all the other conversations that were going on in the house. In any case there was very little need for them to speak, so much had come to be understood.

Mr Peel's old mates, straddling the stools in the pub across the street, would shake their heads at the closed front door and mutter: "Place is like a morgue." "Yair, give yer the creeps, wouldn't it?" "I s'pose they're all right and everything? They haven't dropped dead too, have they?" "Nope. Garbage tins go out every Thursday night, so someone's alive in there." "Poor old Lil. I wonder how they're managing?"

It was surprising how well they did manage. There was the pension, and Maisie's unemployment benefits, and the milk bottle full of five cent pieces; and two women living alone don't need all that much really.

It hardly seemed to matter any more. They were so totally occupied. An inner life had begun to grow—something quite new for both of them. It was growing in the grey mottled splashboard on the bathroom walls; in the pink dimity curtain torn up for dusters; in brooms and forks and soap and knitting wool and potmitts made from coppery wire and bobby pins and string. Each object had its pitch and tone, to be recognized and remembered. Haste was out of the question. It was a matter for absolute thoroughness.

Each fresh object newly explored revealed some new facet of themselves. They were constantly making relationships. With a plug, or a tap, or a carpet. Once Maisie knelt on the kitchen lino and put her ear to the coir mat. It thrilled her beyond words to hear the solid, beating heart. It did not occur to her that it was her own heart that was beating, and that she was really listening to it for the first time in her life.

"They ought to be over it by now", said the pub voices.

"Yair, it isn't natural."

"What do they do all day ever?"

"Search me."

The day came that they might have expected, when the sink got blocked. The plumber sent Christopher Lands.

Christopher had once been a boyfriend of Maisie's. That is to say, he had been her only proper boyfriend, and it was on his account that the tea-towels and pillow slips and all had been acquired. There had been a magic summer several years before which had been filled with dance dresses of blue taffeta shot with gold, "The West Side Six" vibrating in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall, parties at the golf club and drives in the dark. The things you remembered most clearly. Maisie had thought to herself afterwards, were the smells. Even a mention of Christopher would bring back the scents of frangipanni in a shoulder spray, the petrol fumes that shrouded his jalopy, hot man's breath spiced with booze and the sweat that glowed on his face after a dance. These things staved sharp long after the heartache had become just another dulled piece of her. It was nearly three years since he had been in their house. That last time her father had roared at her to choose between Christopher and him, which was clearly asking the impossible. He had been away, she knew-everyone made sure she knew-and there had been several girls, in particular one who had been in a car smash. Now he banged on the front door cheerfully, as if he did it every day,

"Hullo stranger", said Maisie, who had opened the door.

"Hi woman, can't you fix drains properly yet?"

She opened her eyes in astonishment, then remembered it had been the sink the first time too. He fiddled and whistled and banged metal on metal and demanded cups of tea while he put grease spots all over the terrazzo. When he finally got up to go, he was satisfied that Maisie was looking a lot less like a parsnip these days. At the door he said casually: "There's a Y.A. ball on Friday night. I might pick you up around nine."

In fact he came at ten, after a priming-up session at the pub, but that was an improvement on the old days, and after that there was the football dance and the tennis barbecue. He also came for tea a couple of Sunday nights, and Maisie unwrapped one of her brown-paper parcels and got out the white dinner plates with the lilac borders. After the minuscule sounds she had grown accustomed to, the rustling of paper seemed inordinately loud, at least, looking back on it later, she thought it did.

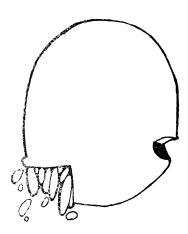
Last time it had been: "We wouldn't be getting married for at least twelve months, Dadda. We're not in a hurry." This time she thought she had better make sure. So did Mrs Peel.

It worked out very well. Mrs Peel moved into Maisie's bedroom that Dadda had done out in cream and mauve, and Maisie and Christopher bedded in the double room, which was quite comfortable really and had venetian blinds. Maisie's wedding dress was made of white crepe cut on the cross, so you couldn't hang it up, and the problem was what to do with it but when she got down the sheets and pillow slips and things there was a ton of room on top of the wardrobe and that's where it finished up lying flat inside a plastic bag to keep away moths.

Her husband, being a plumber, kept irregular hours, so she never put her ear to the coir mat again in case he should walk in and ask what she was doing. She did the messages every morning and people said how nice it was for her and how they had been so worried about her after Dadda died.

"Married life agrees with you", said the butcher wittily. Or, even more wittily: "I hope all your troubles are little ones." This was when she was buying steak for Christopher's hot lunch, or tiny, young lamb's fries because he wouldn't eat that muck they told you was lamb when it was plain as the nose on your face that it was from a bloody steer you only had to look at the size.

One morning Maisie woke up before the alarm and was aware of a strangeness about her. She could not hear her bobby-pins lying on the dressing table, or the light shade hanging from the roof. All she could hear was breathing, not her own but her husband's. He was asleep on his back beside her, taking up three-quarters of the bed. His body inside his green pyjamas felt hard underneath her fingers, and his mouth was slightly open in his orange-coloured face. When she tapped him on the shoulder and said it was time to get up, he gave a peculiar booming sound, but did not wake up. She tapped him harder and got a louder boom. She screwed her parsnip-fingers into a tight little parsnip-fist, and began to beat him on the chest, and at every blow he gave this hollow sound, that filled the bedroom and the street, even as far as the pub: "Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!"



WILLIAM GRONO

Absence

'I see now all these deaths are to one end—whereby I lost a foe, friend upon friend—room...' Another seminar, another year, we're here still.

From our classroom windows we look down on an upstate New York clutter of concrete, clapboard, truncated trees. A junction city; cars. trucks, cars...

Hard to believe it was mostly water once: marshes, creeks and lakes where, alert, assured, the turtle-loving Iroquois would hunt. All

those lovely waterlands of myths and origins, those marshes of meaning, are lost, irretrievably. Absence abides here. Thruways, highways make it easy

for anyone who comes to go. Our patrimony is lovelessness. (Ah, love. Love. That much-advertised resort! To be in love, to escape into ourselves . . . Driving

out, nights, we dream of possibilities, snow wandering the long unlovely streets.) Absence prevails: Hedrington, Berryman dead; friends gone; ourselves

(alert, wary) less than we were, clinging to vestiges, imperfect memories....

Snow falls and the room darkens a little.

We consider.

heads bowed, the poem. 'Soul upon soul, in the high Andes, blue but blind for turns. And this is where the mind stops. Death is a box.' And as we hunt, in our darkening room, for hidden

meanings, snow is falling, the land is hardening, a car is hurtling off a road somewhere, and high on a bridge above a freezing river a man is waving, waving, waving.

STEVE SNEYD

Flying over Pennsylvania

If I explained it to you you would know consciously what now the muscles of your thighs and weary aching lines around (so fine, so spider fine) your eyes and mouth suspect:

that just as that forest there could cover old Stone Mountain abandoned mineshaft ruins and barbed wire around new prisoners

and empty tombs of discarded Indian prophets whose flesh made its getaway as soon as their healing was forgotten and a getaway, rolling the stone away, was safe

and bury crowded tenements, ambushes planned of government or insurgents (the sides change so often, who cares which is which?) & lovers' unplanned teasing hands & bitter rapes by gangs (small change of human intercourse) & orphans of choice or the storm sleeping alone in storm-stained sleeping bags

all equally under one blanket of autumn blood and rust from the high air, discourager of height or sight of works of man where the plane's shadow, travelling black and ineffectual cross, moves visible in its travels only from our height

so likewise seen from far (and any distance between us is 'far') by eye that is not fine enough in its precision to play microscope or entering ant,

skin seems a wall, a barrier, no, for I have skin too, two barriers between us, all strong and so exclusive and even the hollows themselves walled, deceptive barbicans each with a glacis or a spiky moat

yet for a visitor grown small enough

as forest solid from a height, close too is only separate trees, some virile, some diseased, scrub, sumac, rides and openings, caves, hollows, flotsam leaves, sun patterning down through the flattering leaves so skin is not a barrier at all... rather if anything a fence of mouths, a host of aching caves inviting entry, each full of sand and lightly buried bones, child-bodies pushed into a foetus-form and left with pottery dog and necklace made of squirrel teeth and rivershells and oriole down

to be accompaniment to the far Hunting Ground

face skin, come close and small enough as our love briefly wants us to, had we but the ability to follow out our will, and we would meet each upon each (as landing on a giant moon grown, so unlikely, welcoming), an emptiness of screaming dust where atoms all but lost cling desperate to each other to maintain their hold and try out of their separate weakness to build an identity—and at such size it seems there is no reason why two sets of atoms should not intermingle and be joined in one ... 'the red rose round the briar'.



THOMAS W. SHAPCOTT

Chants Populaires

- Percolated coffee chocolate on your lips I lick it off—your laughter bubbles and we are drenched.
- Alone in the house and aching for the noise of children. All day, and not a thing has moved from its position. The chairs rust The cupboard doors stay shut.
- 3. The postman the postman and we never think it could be only bills.
- 4. We have polished the morning you took one end I took the other and our cloth was the texture of two hands together.
- We took the great dividing range and put it in a cup and then we set it upside down to shake the shadows up

and with my easy certitude and your contagious smile it all came out like afternoon. We picknicked for a while.

6. One to bed

is sleepy head

two to bed

we go then three to bed and four in bed is 5 am or so.

Percolator coffee
 toast and we lick our fingers.
 A hundred streets away
 the steam
 of second cups
 is like breath
 on our windows.

Chants Impopulaires

- Leaning against the bar five left-handed drinkers.
 Do they notice too?
 My muscles ache.
 The brotherhood is confirmed.
- So many things, objects
 as I stumble for the light:
 the paintings, the books,
 polished timber, old pewter.
 When I turn my back
 they bare their resentment
 and are impotent.
- Morning. The warm tongue of light growling with love as I raise the blind—you wince, whimper, and turn over. I knew you would do that.
- My feet are cold on the floor and I walk naked to the bathroom out on the back verandah.
 The frost cuts and I say good good good
- But at night I lie in the bath warm and flaccid and forever and when I come out I wonder why you lie so rigid.

GEOFF PAGE

Far End

i

Sixty-five by the time I knew her nipping along in lean black dresses and flat determined hats skirmishing out each day from halls of hardwood to jackhammer mornings trams and concrete wiry old lady from butcher to fruit shop checking the scales watching the decades hitch their skirts hurrying back to the bachelor son home from the war and home from the bank at seven.

ii

He died at fifty. She came north to the next but he too like the first and so to the daughter lost these thirty years to cattle country where wind streamed all the day through stiff grey trees and even an afternoon of streets was forty miles beyond a possibility. no longer checking births and deaths she circles thinly at the edges of the family as it strides down undeflected on its money.

Wrinkles draw in across fine bone towards the mouth.

She enters her ninetieth year.

iii

On a visit this time (a new spring morning) I sit with her and watch her stringing beans the first ones done ten years inside another century. I start to talk of a house she knows (and I have seen) is now a patch of rubbled earth: the tiled front steps go upward into nothing. Between us we put back the details: ferns in the hall the stained-glass door old clocks, lost books the long dark easy spaces. 'A lovely old home', she says three times in as many minutes her mind winding in a sad caprice past faded aunts and menfolk with exhausted hearts back to a bulldozed house. 'A lovely old home', she says again in a way that completely describes it. And I see now that in this spring sun stringing beans at the far end of all her containment

she is crying.

ROD MORAN

Recluse

Strange granites of ocean were in his head;

all futures cancelled, his shadow danced in his head like a tide with the easy bark of gulls at noon.

Amber tides rocked the dumb junk of other worlds, mocked recollection, tin, bottle, in ebb, lap and ebb, as cuttle quietly sung his retreat,

and fish mouthed silences huge and strangely in his head.

HAL COLEBATCH

The Lion in Winter

Zoos are of the future. Poets frequent them, like Rodin or Rilke. They seem to see a comment on themselves. The Different and Becoming Extinct. The preserved curiosity.

Like this lion. Poets are seldom like lions, but occasionally like them manage to smell, to become flabby in concrete boxes and not to mix with their fellow-creatures very well.

The future is in zoos. Poets watch the lion, note-books ready. We wait upon the scene. It is a very cold day. The lion's urine is half-frozen in pools and turning green.

DOROTHY HEWETT

Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly

CHARACTERS

MARY CRACKNELL ... little and pitiless she kept the till

(later CORKER)

known as YUM-YUM . . . forever young.

NED CORKER ... 30-bob-a-week toff of Swanson Street

the Silver Fox
... forever young.

JACK GARDEN ... the Kununoppin Hamlet ... forever 35. the Black Prince

MADDY CORKER ... men shot themselves in the scrub on her

(later GARDEN) wedding day . . . thirtyish.

DOLLY GARDEN ... the 30s Girl ... from 16 to 40.

THE BOYFRIEND ... dangerous and sweet ... George Raft + Frankie Sinatra.

Frankle Sinatra

MR ORTABEE ... an ageing 30s Liberace on the Wurlitzer. the Manager

OLLIE PULLITT ... forever menopausal in a hat. the Old Friend

THE WORKER ... he builds the Crystal Palace. (with overalls,

THE FIVE DUMMIES:

MATE (soft dummy) Ollie's husband.

MRS OUGHT-TO-BE ... Mr Ortabee's de facto. ORTABEE

(chrome dummy in

hammer and saw)

mask)

DONK ... the fireman.

THE TWINNIES ... identical twin ticket takers. (chrome with masks)

BON-BONS AND ROSES FOR DOLLY

A SET in perspex and chrome . . . the FOYER of a 1938 MOVIE HOUSE, THE CRYSTAL PALACE . . . vulgar, friendly, touchingly innocent.

THE FOYER is dominated by huge, highly coloured blow-ups of THE STARS . . . Garbo, Dietrich, Gable, Tracy,

Hepburn, Laurel and Hardy, Crawford,

Harlow, Fred Astaire and Ginger

Rogers.

Large flight of steps leads to huge perspex mirror-curtain, back projection screen. Electric organ (could be cardboard cut-out) in spot.

EFFECTS: NOISES OFF . . . HAMMERS, DRILLS, WHISTLES, CAR HORNS, BRAKES, VOICES.

MUSIC: ORGAN SOLOS AND OLD RECORDS.

PHOTOS:

Ned Corker ... as played by Michael Davis
Mary Cracknell ... , Rona McLeod
Jack Garden ... , Andrew Carr
Maddy Corker ... , Jenny McNae
Mr Ortabee ... , David Clendinning
Dolly ... , Leone Martin-Smith

"Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly" is set in The Crystal Palace, dream factory of the late 30's.

The Crystal Palace was built by the Corkers and the Gardens, Mary and Ned Corker, Dolly and Jack Garden. It is their dream of affluence, their vision of the good life. In Scene II, the granddaughter of Mary and Ned, and the daughter of Maddy and Jack, Dolly Garden, has inherited the Crystal Palace, and all its ambiguous meaning.

MANAGER:

We thank all artisans, craftsmen, workmen, who have contributed to the successful completion of this theatre. (WORKMAN stands, bows, waves, grimaces, is whisked off.) Especially do we thank THE OWNERS . . .

(NED, MARY, MADDY, JACK run to footlights hand in hand like a vaudeville team. MANAGER smiles, waves them back.) The Manager, that's YOURS TRULY . . . (He makes a sweeping bow.)

Architect, builder, supervisor, decorators, painters, plumbers, electricians, carpenters, projectionist, furnishers, linoleums, stage curtains, neon signs, rubber floors, acoustics, proscenium, crying room, bicycle racks, stalls 1/2d, children 6d; reserved stalls 1/6d, children 1/-; balcony 1/9d, children 1/2d. (HE leaps back to the ORGAN.) It is with justifiable pride that we welcome you to our new theatre . . . THE CRYSTAL PALACE . . .

ALL:

The Crystal Palace

MANAGER:

the finest cinema in the Southern Hemisphere . . .

(babbling) vision, initiative . . . courage . . . progress of our state as a whole . . . justifiable pride . . . MAKE WAY FOR THE MAYOR.

(HE sits at ORGAN, begins to play, shouting in rhythm)

ALL:

DREAMS . . . VISIONS . . . SPELLS . . . STORIES . . . (faster and faster, louder and louder, the pink and gold lights

whirl, he is in his seventh heaven.

MARY, NED, MADDY and JACK join in, dancing and singing

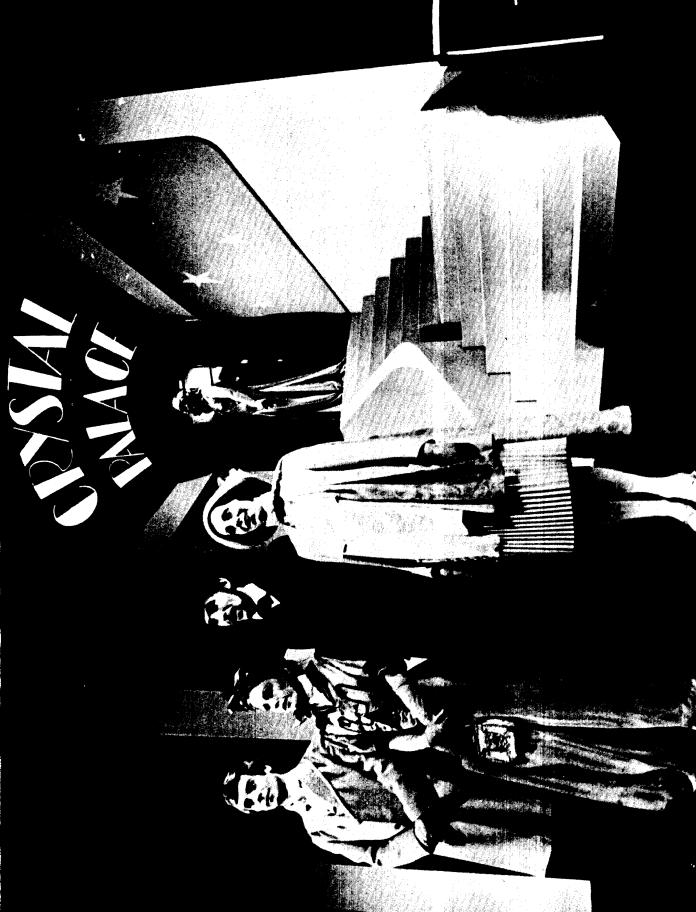
front stage.

ENTER centre OLD FRIEND OLLIE IN HAT like a douche of cold water, dragging her soft dummy MATE. She comes up to MADDY, ignoring the rest. The music dies away, They all

stand frozen in attitudes—still camera effect.)

OLLIE:

It was lovely of you to send us the comps. Mad. Wasn't it lovely of her, Mate? (She shakes him.) I said to Mate, I don't know how many times, wasn't it lovely of Mad. Didn't I, Mate? (shakes him again) She remembers us . . . still . . . not like some. I'll say that for her. She's no snob our old Mad. (Gives MADDY a shove.) Remember the old days, Mad- I often remember the old days. We often remember the old days, don't we, Mate? (Shakes him hard) You had those long golden curls hanging half way down your back, Mad. You got nits in 'em. I never got nits. Remember her long golden curls, Mate . . . with nits in 'em. (Laughs uproariously) Oh! How I envied those curls, nits and all. (ANTHEM starts up on ORGAN.) I envied them. I don't mind admitting it now.





Ooh, there's the Anthem. Come on, Mate. Don't wanta miss that first pitcher. Get your comp's worth, eh? (She nudges MADDY again.) Toodlepip, Mad. See youse in the interval. Toodlepip all. (Waving, she drags MATE off right.

MANAGER plays the first two verses of "Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly". THEY ALL SING.)

ALL:

Bon-bons and roses for Dolly,

She floats down the stair like a dream.

The people all rise, and when I close my eyes, She's THERE, in her green crepe-de-chine.

Her page-boy bob on her shoulders, She's THERE, making eyes at the men,

Silvery sequins a-glitter, Circle the swish of her hem.

(ENTER at top of staircase DOLLY GARDEN, the archetypal 30s girl, dressed in pale green sequined crepe-de-chine, both innocent and showy. She has long golden hair styled in a page-boy bob and is about sixteen. The girl-child wafts down the stairs, the MANAGER plays with frenzy. At the foot of the stairs stand the adoring NED, MARY, MADDY and JACK with arms outstretched to DOLLY.)

NED: Pretty as a scent bottle, darling.

MARY: All for you, my Dolly. MADDY: Our Crystal Palace. JACK: Welcome home, nipper. ALL: Welcome home, Dolly Garden

(THEY sing in chorus "ALL FOR YOU".)

ALL: All for you,

Oh! yes it was ALL FOR YOU, (except

DOLLY) We made it, we created it.

A Dream, a Fable, ALL FOR YOU. A Crystal Palace for a fairytale Alice, a dolly-bird in green, a dream.

All for you,

Oh! yes it was ALL FOR YOU, We made it, we created it,

A Dream, a Fable.

ALL FOR YOU.

* * * * * * ACT II

SAME FOYER, but shabby, diminished, tatty, lit with one dim landlady's bulb. The mirror is green with verdigris. Dust and fly specks on the Stars. TICKET TAKER DUMMIES, MRS ORTABEE DUMMY and FIREMAN DUMMY are covered with dust sheets. The organ lists sideways. On the back projection is a wavery VISION.

MUSIC.

ENTER MANAGER left, weary, balding, shrunken, in an op. shop dress suit. He moves to ORGAN, tries a couple of notes. It wheezes asthmatically. He winces and pats it.

MANAGER:

We'll get you an organ tuner. Might do the trick for both of us. (HE moves to MRS ORTABEE, twitches the sheet, but pats it back into place.)

No, better to leave IT covered up. What the eye don't see, etc. And I can't look into her eyes. Her cup runneth over. It's got so I can't look into any of their eyes. The Twinnies, God love 'em, and old Donk, the fireman. To think he once had a whanger that was the talk of the tea parties. They been with me thirty years. We grew old together. (He peeps under the three dust sheets and starts back.) The sleeping beauties! Christ! If the silverfish don't get you, the mildew must. Welcome to Geriatrics Old Home Week.

(HE bows to audience, sings)

Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, Be it ever so humble there's no place like home (voice cracks)

We made it homely. Mrs Ought-to-be and me, old Donk and the twinnies. You couldn't find a nicer family show. No smut. No R certificates then. Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, Laurel and Hardy, and, if you wanted a bit of sex, Clark Gable. Lovely shows! She remembers. Got a memory like an elephant. They all have. (Nods in direction of the dummies) Live in the past y'see. Nothing much up here (taps his skull). Just a trio of dummies, but memories! We've all got our memories.

(Sings) They can't take that away from me, they can't take that away from me.

(HE confronts MRS OUGHT-TO-BE.)

Mrs Ought-to-be Ortabee they called her. She was lovely once, a Latin beauty withered up to an old prune in the ticket box. Ooh! remember (he nudges her) remember Mrs Ortabee how daring we were? I left my wife and boy, we set up a modern menage in the suburbs, pouffes and two china ducks over the gas fire, a bust of Clyte in the alcove, and bead curtains. We never made it legal. She could have gone to Hollywood, become a star of the Silver Screen, but she preferred Ortabee, Suburbia and the Crystal Palace. And what's she come to now! The ghost at the opera, the old Movie BIT.

(HE lays his head on DUMMY's breast.)

Oh! Mrs Ortabee, Mrs Ortabee, forgive me for I knew not what I did. Even if I did get five years for fumbling little boys in the back stalls I was normal once. I looked into your Latin eyes and swam, and swam and SWAM... (Sings and tap dances

Three little fishies and a mother fishy too, And we swam and we swam all over the dam.

(to audience) We all dance to unseen music. We're all fumblers in the back stalls. Don't pretend to be superior. You do it too, and you'll get caught. We're all bi-sexual anyway. All those big Rugby footballers playing bump your bums on the oval. DON'T KID ME! All those lovely little boys with their apple arses, while Mrs Ought-to-be froze in the ticket box, and the glue ran out of her Latin eyes.

(HE moves in front of FIREMAN, looks under sheet.)

Jesus! Has he got rust on his privates! (Pats dummy's shoulder.) Ah! Donk, Donk, no offence ol' mate. It's all shit from the sneezer to the breezer, all poop from arsehole to breakfast time. Standing there, rain or shine, old faithful with his fire extinguisher in his trouser pocket. (Giggles.) Good ol' Donk. Remember how we used to gather in the bio-box, and watch the double feature... the blonde next door stripping to her big boobs with her lights on. "Look at 'er" I said, "her legs go right up to her arse." (He laughs... punches the FIREMAN DUMMY in the guts... shapes up, moves on to the TWINNIES.)

And the twinnies. Always on time. They had faces like bad meat pies left out in the rain, all runny. Suffered from adolescent acne. Never really cleared up. Left pits. (Peeps under covers.) Seem to be one big pit now.

But they were faithful, God! they were FAITHFUL. Thick and thin, they were there. My twinnies. Best little ticket takers this side of the rabbit proof. Oh! we were a great team . . . in the thirties.

(LONG PAUSE . . .

MUSIC . . .)

Only . . . sometimes . . . when the night comes down, it gets lonely. Y'know, when you're used to the crowds, it gets lonely. I take the old mong for a pee round the block, helps to pass the time, but there's not much to it really. Gets very lonely. (HE looks around, shivers.)

It's a palace, a fortress, a tomb. Nobody comes any more . . . (PAUSE)

But it'll come again. It's got to. The old times aren't done yet. Not while Shirley Temple's still playing "Little Miss Marker" on the telly.

(Looks at his watch.)

Time to open up.

(HE sits at ORGAN, elaborate warming up process, with bravado.)

You haven't played anywhere till you've played the Palace. (HE begins to play softly the melody of "Bon-Bons and Roses for Dolly".)

This is the end of Rainbow City, and the scream you hear may be your own.

MANAGER: (singing)

BON-BONS and ROSES for DOLLY, She floats down the stair like a dream, The people all rise, and when I close my eyes, She's THERE in her green crepe-de-chine.

Her page-boy bob on her shoulders, She's THERE making eyes at the men, Silvery sequins aglitter, Circle the swish of her hem.

Shadows in the verdigris mirror,
Dissolve in the dust-laden air,
And I bow from the waist in the moonlight,
To the little green ghost on the stair.

The smoker's stand's full of the butt-ends of days, The foyer's sobbing with silence, In the dark empty stalls, I hear the footfalls Disturbing the mildew on roses.

BON-BONS and ROSES for DOLLY, She's THERE in her green crepe-de-chine, The people all rise, and when I close my eyes, She floats down the stair like a dream.

Now that I'm in life's grey December, And LOVE's an impossible DREAM, I can still close my eyes and REMEMBER, HER... in her green crepe-de-chine.

ROSES for DOLLY

ROSES ROSES

ROSES

(As the music dies away DOLLY GARDEN enters, middle aged and dowdy, moving uncertainly into the light.

MANAGER ages on playing softly under the dialogue.)

MANAGER goes on playing softly under the dialogue.)

MANAGER: Why Moddom how delightful to welcome you.

Why Moddom you must forgive us. You are a little early. Why Moddom, perhaps you'd like to see the continuous show. (HE switches on the CRYSTAL PALACE neon. It reads CRY PALACE. HE continues with his patter.)

It is with justifiable pride that we welcome you to our . . . vintage theatre . . . a little piece of the old '30s preserved in aspic by the National Trust. The Crystal Palace—once, ladies and gentlemen, the finest cinema in the Southern Hemisphere . . . dunlopillopadded love seats, bicycle racks, kinky rubber floors, a pram park, and . . . our pièce de resistance: The Crying Room. Unbeatable atmosphere, thick with memories, verdigris and mildew. The dust rises and you see again those memorable faces . . . Garbo, Dietrich, Harlow, Hepburn, Crawford, Harpo Marx . . . (DOLLY breaks in.)

DOLLY: Mr Ortabee. It's Dolly, Dolly Garden. Don't you know me Mr

Ortabee? Am I so changed?

(MANAGER stops playing . . . moves slowly centre, hand over heart.)

MANAGER: Dolly ... Miss Garden. I'd have known YOU anywhere. But you didn't warn us you were coming. We had no idea, my dear. (HE

bows.)

DOLLY: I wanted . . . why, I wanted, to surprise you all.

(whimpering) (SHE whirls round slowly.)

MANAGER: And you did, Dolly, oh! indeed you did.

DOLLY: Mr Ortabee, I think I should tell you, yes, I really ought to tell

you, that it's all come true, just as they said it would.

MANAGER: Just as they said it would?

DOLLY: I've inherited ... THE CRYSTAL PALACE! All of it ... for-

ever.

MANAGER: From the sneezer to the breezer.

DOLLY: It's all MINE.

MANAGER: And I wish you joy of it.

DOLLY: We must go through the accounts, Mr Ortabee, get the books

straight, meet the staff.

MANAGER: Of course, Miss Garden.

(DOLLY moves round stage, touching various objects, dusting

her fingers.)

DOLLY: We must . . . get things moving. Smarten things up. Get back on

the old smooth footing.

(SHE arrives at the sheeted dummies.)

WHAT ARE these?

(MANAGER sweeps forward, unveils MRS ORTABEE, shabbily

uniformed, her masked face a fantastical old prune.)

MANAGER: You remember Miss Garden, darling?

DOLLY: Charmed I'm sure.

(THEY move on to the FIREMAN.)

MANAGER: And Mr Donk, the fireman. (HE unveils FIREMAN DUMMY,

old as time.)

(DOLLY extends the tips of cool fingers.)

DOLLY: Of course.

(THEY move on to the TWIN DUMMIES and he unveils their

horror masks.)

MANAGER: Not forgetting the faithful twinnies.

DOLLY: My God! NO!

MANAGER: You didn't forget us, Dolly.

DOLLY: You are ALL . . . quite unforgettable.

(SHE comes downstage, struggling for composure.)

It's . . . very dark in here, Mr Ortabee.

MANAGER: We're conserving electricity. Times are bad. There's no denying

it, but we've struggled on. We've kept our end up. (Coughs.)

DOLLY: Mother died. MANAGER: Poor Maddy.

DOLLY: And Dad . . . some years ago.

MANAGER: A lovely man. I often see his ghost sitting at the sound monitor

in the dress circle. He always sat at the sound monitor, twiddling it up and down, first a whisper, then a shout, driving me mad.

DOLLY: I remember.

MANAGER: And Ned Corker, the thirty-bob-a-week lair, and Mary Corker,

little and pitiless, all gone?

DOLLY: All gone.

MANAGER: Their like will not be seen again.

(DOLLY down front.)

DOLLY: When I followed them to the cemetery it always rained. They

were buried in the family vault in the Methodist section under the wings of a stone angel, with the Stag at Bay, two elephants from Bombay, and Tennyson bound in morocco. All except

Daddy.

MANAGER: Except Jack Garden.

DOLLY: Jack Garden was buried in Kununoppin in the dark scrub with

his RSL badge pinned on, and sprinkled with red cloth poppies.

I sang "Abide with me".

MANAGER: Amen.

DOLLY: He didn't belong.

MANAGER: No. He never belonged.

DOLLY: But I belong, and I'm Jack Garden's daughter.

MANAGER: What happened, Dolly? Nothing happened.

MANAGER: Nothing.

DOLLY: What happened to all of us?

MANAGER: We grew old.

DOLLY: And the Crystal Palace.
MANAGER: Old as Methuselah.
DOLLY: Why? Why?

MANAGER: We had our visions.

DOLLY: That's not enough.

MANAGER: We all grow old.

DOLLY: Take me back, Ortabee. Dress me in green crepe-de-chine, brush

my long golden hair, but take me back. Take me up the carpeted

stairway.

(SHE moves slowly towards stairway. He goes back to ORGAN, begins to play "Thanks for the Memory". She drifts slowly up

the stair.)

MANAGER: What about love, Dolly? What happened to love?

DOLLY: Love! (She laughs) A black snake under the African daisies, I

was Maddy Garden's daughter.

MANAGER: What happened to Life?

DOLLY: Shillings and pence! I was Mary Corker's granddaughter.

(still laughing)

MANAGER: What happened to Ned? What happened to the Silver Fox?

DOLLY: Dancing the Merry Widow waltz with a carnation in his button-

hole! Why, the worms got him.

MANAGER: What happened to Jack Garden? What happened to the Black

Prince?

DOLLY: There was only room in the family vault for me.

(DOLLY turns at the top of the stair.)

MANAGER: Didn't vou ever . . . love anyone?

DOLLY: Yes, I loved a little ghost in green crepe-de-chine with a long

golden bob, (she sobs) pretty as a scent bottle. I loved her, Help

me find her, Ortabee. I came here to find her.

MANAGER: Don't look, Dolly. She's gone.

DOLLY: But where? Where has she gone?

MANAGER: Time took her.

DOLLY: If I look in that mirror I'll find her again.

MANAGER: Don't look in that mirror.

(DOLLY half turns, sinks down disconsolately on top step.)

DOLLY: I'm afraid.

MANAGER: We're all afraid.

(DOLLY puts her head in her hands. MANAGER plays and

sings directly to her.)

SONG:

I'D KNOW YOU ANYWHERE

MANAGER: (singing)

> DOLLY, I'd know you anywhere, DOLLY

Your face has fallen in, You're wispy, old and thin,

But DOLLY,

I'd know vou anywhere. That golden hair,

those eves!

(GHOSTLY CHORUS VOICES from backstage.)

CHORUS:

What happened DOLLY?

(offstage)

The magic died.

The CRYSTAL PALACE, it ALL fell down. We all grew old, DOLLY, old with the town.

MANAGER:

But still.

I'd know you anywhere.

DOLLY:

If I look in the mirror Dolly Garden will be there.

I'll make her be there.

(The MANAGER rises with a discord on the organ, and puts

out his hand.)

MANAGER:

NO! DOLLY!

(Echo chamber effect)

... NO DOLLY NO DOLLY NO DOLLY

(MUSIC. Opening "FOXY LADY"—Jimi Hendrix. DOLLY turns and looks in the tarnished mirror. Screams.

MANAGER drops his face in his hands.) NO NO

DOLLY:

NO NO (Echo chamber effect)

NO . . . NO NO

NO NO You haven't played anywhere until you've played the Palace. MANAGER:

(DOLLY scrabbles at the mirror.)

DOLLY:

NO NO NO NO NO

(MANAGER rises and goes to foot of stairs. Faces audience.)

MANAGER:

This is the end of Rainbow City and the scream you hear may

be your own.

(DOLLY, sobbing, takes off her high-heeled shoe and bashes a jagged hole in glass mirror. She stands framed in the jagged

mirror, with a dangerous power.)

DOLLY:

You know my name, Ortabee. BRING UP THE LIGHTS. OPEN UP THE DOORS. I'M COMING HOME. DOLLY GARDEN's COMING HOME, in green crepe-de-chine. Bring me my BON-BONS AND ROSES.

(SHE disappears, limping, through the jagged hole.)

(MANAGER sits on bottom step, and over the shatter of break-

ing glass he muses.)

And I said to Mrs Ortabee that girl is spoilt. Her Grandfather spoils her, her Grandmother spoils her, her Mother spoils her, her Father spoils her, and mark my words, it will come to no good end. But Mrs Ortabee said, "Oh! no, it's all for her. She'll inherit everything, and a little spoiling never did anybody any harm". MRS ORTABEE, why don't you bloody well answer now, MRS ORTABEE.

(MANAGER begins to weep.)

Miraculously everything is transformed . . . lights up, balloons, streamers, gladdies rain down from flies. MANAGER runs about, taking the aged masks off the dummies, dusting them down. HE adjusts a toupee, a smile, puts on an opera cloak, whirls about stage, shoots his cuffs and takes his place at the organ, bowing ceremoniously to MUSIC (last section of "20TH CENTURY SCHIZOID MAN", King Crimson). Cars, police whistles, hum of voices, etc., as in ACT I.

PAUSE... The MANAGER sits stiffly at organ, and ENTER, like zombies staring straight ahead, NED CORKER (in 90's costume, smoking a cigar), JACK GARDEN (in 20's costume, carrying his cornet), MADDY (in 20's costume, carrying a bouquet of roses), and MARY CORKER (in 90's costume, carrying a box of bon-bons). THEY circle the stage, bowing, smiling, in a group, in pairs, to the staff, to invisible people, very much the OWNERS on show. MUSIC (Opening "PURPLE HAZE"—Jimi Hendrix). THEY speak in a CHORUS EFFECT as THEY CIRCLE and REGROUP.)

ALL:

Evening twinnies; evening Donk; evening Mrs Ortabee, Mr Ortabee. Evening. Isn't it a lovely evening? Don't you think it's a lovely evening? It's always a lovely evening. If we keep on saying it's lovely it gets lovelier every minute.

(THEY circle in the opposite direction in CHORUS again.)

So it's a lovely evening. Evening Ortabee, Mrs Ortabee, Donk. Evening, twinnies. Evening, Maddy. Evening, Jack. Evening, Farvie. Evening, Mother. Evening, Yum-Yum. Evening, Ned. Evening, Prince. Evening, Fox. Nice weather we're having . . . for this time of the year, what time of the year, THIS time of the year. Rained like cats and dogs last Thursday, last Friday, last Saturday, last year, this year, never, never seen anything like it. But it's the loveliest evening. Evening ALL.

(A chord on the ORGAN. The MANAGER plays Bon-Bons and Roses as in ACT I. DOLLY enters through the jagged mirror in her green crepe-de-chine, running down the stairs to the sound of HER SONG to embrace NED CORKER, waiting at the bottom of the stairs with the bouquet of roses. NED presents her with the roses, but JACK elbows him out of the way, grabs the box of bon-bons and presents DOLLY with them.

JACK:

Hold hard, Ned, she's my kid, isn't she?

(NED smiles, bows from the waist, throws away his cigar, kisses DOLLY's hand. DOLLY puts the bon-bons on the top of the ORGAN, throws the roses over her shoulder, and glides into a waltz with NED CORKER.

MANAGER. strikes up Merry Widow Waltz.

JACK falls over his bootlaces, and blows one long wail on his cornet.





DOLLY: Thank you, darlings. Thank you all.

(dancing) (SHE blows kisses over NED's shoulder. Everything is noise,

music, laughter, only JACK GARDEN stands aside, sulking, DOLLY breaks away from NED, blowing kisses and takes a couple of swirls around stage. NED watches her fondly, smoking

his cigar. MUSIC STOPS.)

NED: Where are you going pet?

MARY &

MADDY: Darling, don't go.

JACK: DOLLY . . . Come back, Dolly.

(DOLLY runs downstage on to apron.)

DOLLY: I'm leaving with Stan Laurel in a little yellow coupé.

(SHE giggles, and watches fondly as they move like dream figures up the stairs and through the shattered mirror to the music of

"THE COURT OF THE CRIMSON KING".

NED pauses at the top of the stairs and winds his gold watch, holds it up to his ear, shakes it, shakes his head, exits. DOLLY

looks up and down, sigh, taps her foot.

MANAGER speaks from the organ playing softly, "Two Sleepy

People" into "Stormy Weather".

MANAGER: What are you waiting for, Dolly?

DOLLY: It's my boyfriend.

MANAGER: He's late.

DOLLY: He's often . . . inclined to be late.

(SHE walks restlessly up and down, bites her nails.)

DOLLY: I can't understand why he's so late. I gave him a complimentary.

MANAGER: Perhaps he wanted something more . . ah! . . substantial.

DOLLY: Not everybody can give a complimentary.

MANAGER: Perhaps he's changed his mind, Dolly.

Tornaps he's changed his mind,

DOLLY: He's never been this late before.

MANAGER: He's very late this time.

DOLLY: Yes, very late . . . THIS TIME.

(DOLLY grows less cheerful, stands first on one leg, then the other. She goes over to MANAGER, begins to eat the bon-bons

from the box on top of the piano.)

MANAGER: They'll make you fat, Dolly.

DOLLY: FAT! I couldn't get fat in a million years.

MANAGER: But you haven't got a million years.

(SHE twirls round stage, pops a bon-bon flirtatiously in his mouth,

kisses him on top of the head.)

DOLLY: Dear Mr Ortabee.

MANAGER: Will you give me . . . a complimentary, Dolly?

DOLLY: I always give complimentaries to my boy friends. (sadly) So many

complimentaries. So many boy friends. Mother says a girl should

be independent.

MANAGER: Independent girls with complimentaries. There weren't any

around in my time. He's not coming.

(DOLLY doing a few dance steps.)

DOLLY: Of course he's coming.

MANAGER: Perhaps he dislikes . . . complimentaries.

DOLLY: Nobody does.

What do you . . . do with your boy friends? MANAGER: I invite them . . . to the Crystal Palace. DOLLY:

God help them. MANAGER:

(PAUSE.)

Mr Ortabee . . . were you ever in love? DOLLY: Of course. I was in love with Mrs Ortabee. MANAGER:

DOLLY: No. I mean . . . really IN LOVE.

MANAGER: I thought I was. We all think we are. I'm in love with you, Dolly.

I'm in love. DOLLY: MANAGER: Are you?

Yes, and he'll come. He's sure to come, because he's in love too DOLLY:

-with me.

MANAGER: Did he say so?

He doesn't need to, and this time it's different. This time . . . DOLLY:

it's for real.

MANAGER: What's . . . FOR REAL? REality. You know. DOLLY:

MANAGER:

DOLLY: Oh! well, you wouldn't. You're old, aren't you?

> (The MUSIC for FOX CINESOUND NEWS . . . ON SCREEN —Centre Still—THE EYES AND EARS OF THE WORLD.)

MANAGER: There's the news, Dolly.

DOLLY: Well! This time he's too late.

MANAGER: Perhaps he didn't fancy the programme. Perhaps he didn't fancy.

(looking at her) Although I can't think why.

(DOLLY moves disconsolately to the far right of stage, scuffing her shoes childishly. The MANAGER goes into his spiel.)

MANAGER: With pride the Crystal Palace presents

(Roll on the ORGAN)

(playing softly behind "Tiptoe through the Tulips" and "Painting the Clouds with Sunshine")

a FAMILY SHOW . . . Drama . . . Romance . . . Suspense . . . and greased lightning action, shot through with happy healthy laughter.

(OLD MOVIE SHOTS OF HITLER, shots of war, shots of Nazi meetings, burning buildings, fleeing refugees, Nazi leaders, Jewish victims, concentration camp victims, etc., should accompany these speeches on the screen plus a screaming tape of HITLER'S VOICE or simulated voice of HITLER, used between the

MANAGER's spiels.)

MANAGER: See living, breathing actuality on your screen, a cavalcade of

spine-tingling events, red lips, bright eyes and eager bodies. Immorality beckons the greatest cast in years in the most appealing

story of a decade.

(TAPE of HITLER screaming. STILL of HITLER on screen.)

MANAGER: An array of brilliant personalities, a tale overbrimming with

human qualities. Men and women thrown together by the wheel of misfortune in the recreation spot of pauper and plutocrat. tainted and sainted, drudge and deb., poet and plumber, all whom

luck has cursed and kissed.

(STILL HITLER, HITLER BABBLE.)

MANAGER: Told with a moving sincerity that brings a mist to every eye.

Tragedy and comedy, hope and despair, vice and virtue, forgotten men, forsaken women, and if you and I were Germans sitting beside our own fire in Berlin we would not be critical of a leadership that has produced such extraordinary results. A speeding dream, a torrent of drama, a surprise packet, a cast that

reads like Hollywood's Who's Who . . .

DOLLY: I won't stand for it. Too late. The bastard's just TOO LATE,

(toming and I'll never see him again. (SHE begins to sob.)

forward, (MUSIC . . . GOD SAVE THE KING . . . PORTRAIT OF KING GEORGE V on screen. MANAGER stands to attention.

ENTER OLLIE dragging MATE.)

OLLIE: I couldn't see for that woman in the bloody big hat. Could you

see, Mate? AND I'm her oldest friend. You'd think she'd have given us decent seats in the balcony. But not her. Oh! no. Not her, with her long, golden, nitty curls. Filthy! It'll be a long time before I forgive Maddy Corker for this one. Mean, mean as Ikey Mo, spoilt as Lady Muck! Always was, ALWAYS. If I've

said it once I've said it a thousand times.

(EXIT OLLIE dragging MATE.)

MANAGER: He won't come now, Dolly.

(He stifles a yawn, rises, dims lights, puts dust covers on dummies.)

DOLLY: (Singing "Listen Darling", soft and unaccompanied.)

MANAGER: Au revoir Mrs Ortabee. (gently) Bon voyage, Dolly.

(MANAGER exits. DOLLY, disconsolate, centre spot.

SHE begins to sing an innocent bump-and-grind song to a slow semi-strip down to cream satin scanties and lace-edged satin bra.

MUSIC . . .)

SONG SOLO FOR DOLLY

LISTEN DARLING

DOLLY: Listen, darling,

The sun doesn't rise in the sky, And life doesn't hustle by, With quite the same thrill, Since you went away.

CHORUS: Today,

(offstage) There is rain in the street today,

But we never meet, I get tired, Just counting the feet going by.

DOLLY: Listen darling,

If I dialed your number today, would you say,

Listen darling,

The sun doesn't rise in the sky, And life doesn't hustle by, With quite the same thrill, Since you went away.

(Trailing her clothes, DOLLY moves out of the foyer, darkened now, and up the stairs to the music. She turns at the top of the stairs, framed in the broken mirror. MUSIC STOPS.)

DOLLY: (passionately)

But it wasn't like that. It wasn't like that at all. I won't have it like that. It was like . . . THIS.

(DOLLY waves her hand like a magic wand. On the back projection screen SPELLS SPELLS SPELLS winks on and off in neon lights. Lighting, golden, mysterious, misty as a Scott Fitzgerald story makes the foyer dreamlike, full of shimmer. DOLLY smiles and disappears through the broken mirror.

ENTER MANAGER, more urbane than ever, in a glittering Liberace coat, and takes his place, bowing at the organ. The foyer is ringed with fairy lights, and three enormous portraits of an incredibly glamourized DOLLY GARDEN are let down from the flies to dwarf even the Stars. NOISES OFF of FANS clamouring for autographs, voices on AMPLIFIER...)

FANS OFF:

DOLLY OO! DOLLY DOLLY GARDEN. ENTER NED, MARY, MADDY and JACK, carrying great bunches of red roses, boxes of giant bon-bons.

OLLIE enters, very excited, in an enormous hat, dragging MATE. SHE holds an autograph book. Camera bulbs flash. MANAGER rises and bows. (STORM of APPLAUSE.)

MANAGER:

You ordered us to star her. We answered with . . .

ALL:

YES YES YES

MANAGER:

And a golden-haired girl is lifted to stardom by a single approving nod from the crowd. She steps to fame in a filmic flash of screen splendour . . .

FANS OFF:

DOLLY DOLLY OUR DOLLY

MANAGER: (holding up hand)

In the first day's rushes she startled an entire studio with her screen allure, and was instantly presented with a leading role and a long term contract.

ALL:

YES YES YES THAT'S DOLLY

MANAGER:

And now a mighty musical production. Dolly Garden's bow to the WORLD and YOU. Europe stood enthralled at this mighty flesh and blood portrait. America worshipped at the shrine of Australia's goddess. A box office Bonanza, the greatest marquee name in show business, portraying another immortal character . . . DOLLY GARDEN.

(A scream of joy, flash bulbs burst like flowers, the MANAGER plays "You're Marvellous", and DOLLY GARDEN comes down the stairs, forever thirtyish now, in platinum wig, a skimpy black lace bra, a black lamé G-string, an open black nylon see-through negligeé, stilt-heeled, feathered mules, and a sultry look.)

MARGOT LUKE

Insight and Outrage

Dorothy Hewett's new play

Responses to BONBONS AND ROSES FOR DOLLY were predictably divided. People either regarded it as an obscenity and walked out, or recognised it as a poetic drama of some complexity and saw it several times.

It closed a week earlier than its scheduled run at the Playhouse and prompted some fiery correspondence in the local press and behind the scenes: disgusted citizens in one corner, fiercely partisan defenders in the other. The defenders accused the audience of failure—the audience the play.

Whilst the Playhouse must be commended for its courage in putting on so original and challenging a play (imaginatively produced by Ray Omodei), it was the wrong venue. Standard Playhouse audiences are firmly middle-of-the-road, and if their recent lunchtime offering Christie in Love, aimed at minority audiences, was safeguarded with delicate warnings about "offensive words", why wasn't Dolly protected the same way? Christie, with its simulated masturbation, necrophiliac sex and bright blue limericks had nice old ladies assuring TV interviewers that they were neither shocked nor offended. Why then did Dolly, a richer, more significant, and in fact less "shocking" play, cause the flurry of hastily gathered evening skirts and distasteful shudders?

The reasons, neatly apportioned to both sides of the footlights, might be examined as follows. Audience failure: false expectations, parochial vanity and sexual chauvinism. Playwright's failure: galloping off in all directions, changing horses in mid-stream, and not knowing her own strength.

The publicity for the play had been misleading—as in fact the structure of the play itself is misleading. Ostensibly the framework—the building and eventual decay of the Crystal Palace, finest cinema in the Southern Hemisphere, is to serve as a background against which the disillusionment of progressive generations is to be played out. The programme itself offered a hint of the expected tenor of the piece. "Bonbons and Roses (by Cadbury) for your Dolly" it advertised with gentle sendup, and in the notes introduces Act III with "It's 1972 and it's a lovely evening. There's fall-out in the Pacific and leukaemia can be fun." This suggests something sophisticatedly sick, very poised, and indicting something on a large scale out there in the world. Tom Lehrer crossed with "Cabaret". In interviews, and indeed in her own programme note the author had made much of her own connection with "The Crystal Palace", her memories and rediscovery of it-and her own past. The suggestion had been of nostalgia, disillusionment, and a revaluation of reality, all triggered off by a local landmark. In some indefinable way an audience might have expected a suburban Swan River Saga. Instead they were thrown into a whirlpool. Far from being a nostalgic trip into local history with

overtones of contemporary relevance, it was an expressionist mosaic of time past and time present, rendered in poetic shorthand and punctuated with songs. At key points there was some uncertainty as to which was fact, and which illusion, there was no reassuring central point of view, because Dolly, the heroine, was overshadowed by the more vital characters surrounding her. Theoretically, this should have presented no particular difficulty to an audience with even a superficial acquaintance with contemporary drama. However, the impact of the emotional assault of the play, and its local reference, triggered off powerful defence mechanisms. There was a mood of resentment, asserting "my life isn't as disgusting as this, and I don't believe anybody else's is either. This play soils our lovely heritage. Keep W.A. beautiful and don't litter with sexual cripples, tarnished dreams and blood-smeared imagery."

The fact that this gallery of grotesques is presented by a woman was clearly felt to be an additional insult. The devastating exposure of emotional sterility in all the female characters, and the creation of Ollie Pullit, a monster of nightmarish crudity and vulgarity, could easily be felt as a sort of betrayal—a woman's insights misused—displaying aspects of the female animal that were better thrust out of sight, instead of ballooning out of all proportion and hijacking the whole play.

Throughout the play there is the impression of daring, original conception, and haphazard execution. The fragmented glitter of Act I comes closest to being totally satisfying, but even here, it is a case of too much, too brief. Juxtaposition of cinema-building and high-speed biography is fine—but how many aspects can be absorbed simultaneously? We are introduced to the three generations, Mary, who falls in love with Ned, becomes pregnant, marries him, and bears his child. She changes from an enterprising young Miss to a hard businesswoman whose eyes glint like beerbottles. She made herself a ball dress in the face of family opposition:

You make a ball dress Mary, she said, and the whole family laughed fit to kill themselves over the Sunday joint. So I tore down the drawing room curtains while they were at Christian Endeavour and went to the ball in crushed jade velvet cut very low in front.

But eventually:

But I'll say this for Ned. He never touched me since Maddie was born. I had a bad time. Too narrow. I'm leaving you Ned.

By now the child, Maddie, has grown up, with a father-fixation, and Ned, rather than having his women-folk leave, having already given up sex, also signs the pledge.

Maddie, who had originally been in love with a young man with embroidered waistcoats and acid drops in his pockets, who had gone on the booze and ended as a bottle'oh, marries Jack Garden, whom they call the Black Prince, and who supplies his own self-portrait:

I'm a dreamer from Bendigo with a touch of the tarbrush, back from the trenches, back from Rose of No Man's Land and Pack up your Troubles, dived off a troopship and swam to Kununoppin through miles of scrub to marry the storekeeper's daughter.

Their daughter Dolly is born in a corrugated iron hospital at 114 in the shade, and thereafter Jack is put out in the sleepout. Act I has established that a cinema is being built, and that the earliest generation has migrated from Victoria to Western Australia in search of a fortune. Their dreams are their own—not focussed on Dolly—yet at the end of Act I they claim in unison that this Palace, the sum total of their efforts, is all for her.

As a poetic portrait of three generations it is superb. The author is at her best in the closely-packed monologues that combine precise detail with comic truncation or surrealist expansion of time. It is significant that the play reads better than it plays, because there is not enough time to savour this element while the stage is alive with movement on several time-levels. But whilst an agile mind can certainly follow the action and relish the linguistic felicities, it is almost impossible to correlate the intended significance of the material with the actual presentation.

The theme throughout is one of youthful hopes and dreams succeeded by disgust and lovelessness. The pattern, set by Ned and Mary, is duly echoed by Maddie and Jack. The true concern of the play would seem to be at this stage to wonder whether Dolly can break out of the pattern. The whole superstructure of the Crystal Palace, although delightful in detail, is an enormous irrelevancy, as is the elaborately introduced claim that this is the great achievement of the previous generations, and Dolly's inheritance.

It ought to work. Succeeding two generations whose dreams come to nothing, inheriting a "dream fact'ry" seems the appropriate climax. That it doesn't, is perhaps explained by the fact that the dreams presented are too feeble, and the reality too powerful.

As dreams go, they are a poverty-stricken lot. Nobody goes off into the jungle and walks out with their hands full of diamonds. Mary, the tough little dressmaker, makes money, turns to Christian Science and hangs on to the wisdom that "there's no sensation in Matter". Ned's great moment was when he rode a horse into a pub and it disgraced itself dramatically. Jack is called a dreamer from Bendigo but his dreams remain mere claims. Maddie's early dream, the young man with gilt hair and embroidered waistcoats is restricted to six lines. Modest dreams, that don't justify the bitter disappointment with real life. Nor is the change from hope to bitterness explored. The women hate sex and the men turn to booze or playing the cornet. Why?

In Act II this failure to create dreams instead of insisting on their existence becomes crucial. Dolly has somehow been led to expect a golden reality, and life cheats her. She has, it is suggested, been deluded by Hollywood fantasies—real life turned out to be quite different. A fair comment. Whole generations of young girls grew up expecting the world to be peopled with Gables and Coopers and Tracys—boyish, sexy, gentlemenly and deeply understanding. But the exact nature of the fraud is left unexplored. A touch of name-dropping, a few pictures of stars—Dolly in film-star pose at the top of a Ziegfeld Follies staircase—is not enough to counterbalance the ferocity of Dolly's disappointment, and self-destructive revenge. We are supplied with the code-words and have to provide our own knowledge, and although Act II successfully bridges the gap between the silver screen and the fumblers in the back-stalls its importance to the Dolly theme is marginal. There is a reprise of themes and events of Act I and a puzzled disillusioned Dolly turning an experience of banal disappointment into a daydream of banal fulfilment.

A playwright can create larger-than-life effects in two ways: letting the spoken word act on the imagination of the audience, or introducing elaborate spectacle. Dolly is expected to manage with a limited number of visual effects: her green crepe-de-chine dress, the stairs and the mirror that leads to the imagined past, and a magnificent lurex couch that whisks her toward heaven. These visual effects are underscored by the theme-song (magnificent pastiche by John Williamson, of a "Lovely to look at" flavour). Dolly has no significant monologue, and the most powerful comment allotted to her is the almost ritual stocktaking of the past with Mr Ortabee.

It is Mr Ortabee in Act II, and more predominantly Ollie Pullit in Act III who have the monologues. In a play relying less on plot and action than on comment,

on verbal self-revelation by the characters, it becomes inevitable that the strongly-realised figures of the manager, Mr Ortabee, and the self-absorbed Ollie Pullit, who are not plagued by dreams but reminisce about a highly coloured reality, should dominate. Ortabee, one feels, was intended as a Chorus-figure, and initially he fulfils the role, but he assumes three dimensions against the thinner, paler central figures, and a first-rate performance by David Glendinning ensured that he was the centre of attention (and interest) throughout the play.

The centre of controversy, Ollie Pullitt, the Old Friend, dragging Mate, her husband, a life-sized soft dummy, around with her, deserves an article to herself. Margaret Ford's performance was faultless, establishing exactly the right mixture of monster and suburbanite. The intention, one presumes, is to use Ollie and Ortabee, the two survivors after all the dreamers have gone, to add a further perspective to the events initiated in Act I, commented on and concluded in Act II, but now re-assessed by outsiders, spectators, less interested in the product of the dream factory than in its more tangible delights in the love-seats. However, the monstrous Ollie is too lovingly created—she grows into a major figure. She continues the theme of lovelessness previously sketched with sharp telling strokes. The restraint of "Sex is nasty, sex is smelly", and the image of the black snake under the bridal fern, are left behind, pushed out of our memory by the blazing antilife account of this lascivious suburban matron, dragging her senile sex-object around with her, and detailing, with relish, her self-induced abortions, the evidence of which she stored in the fridge. Grisly, nauseating, memorable. The spectre of Karrakatta, where her friends are waiting for her, beckons, but even now, in the midst of menstrual flooding and hot flushes, there is a logical consummation of the forces that drive Ortabee, the fumbler in the stalls, and voracious still provocative Ollie, together. Act III is stylistically and emotionally so different from the rest of the play that it cancels out much of what has been established earlier. It is a tour-de-force which audiences are unlikely to forget, at the same time it shows an unawareness on the part of the playwright of the magnitude of some of her devices, and the comparative failure of others.

The thematic imbalance makes it difficult to accept the play intellectually, whilst the wealth of visual and technical invention is diverting but also distracting—diffusing understanding rather than aiding it. Bold strokes, such as the introduction of cardboard figures and the dummy Mate, are brilliant, as is the idea of the Crystal Palace framework for re-creating an era. But it explodes like fireworks when a steady flame is needed for focus. It is a rich, audacious mixture, and one wonders what will finally remain—its insights into a grotesquely recognisable society, or the outrage of holding the tarnished mirror and its fragments up to the society to admire the reflection.

RICHARD MARSH

Within

At break of day I rarely think of you; My thoughts are filled with sunrise, dawn, and dew. I never see your face in passers-by; The rest may look for you in crowds, not I.

When dusk descends, and sunset casts its glow, I yearn not for your hand to hold just so. If truth were told, I'd rather sit and dream And be the first to see the first star gleam.

The moon's fair face reminds me not of yours; With Venus' rise no thought of you occurs. To seek you out I look not far but near:—
I search within myself and find you here.

L. R. BURROWS

Theophile Gautier: MELANCHOLY AT SEA

The gulls, frolicking, wheel and shriek, And the wild sea's white chargers rear Fiercely upon the waves and shake Their tangled manes in the raw air.

A drizzling rain, as dark descends, Dowses the sunset's furnace-glow; And the soot-belching steamer bends Its black plume down and trails it low.

More ashen than these scorified Glum skies, I voyage to the clime Of coal and fog and suicide: For felo de se no fitter time.

My eager desire drowns in these Salt deeps the mantling spume turns pale. The ship waltzes on swirling seas. The breeze strengthens to a gale.

Oh, I am heartsick with despair! The ocean sighs distraught and heaves Its swelling breast as if it were A friend who understands and grieves.

Come, love's vain tribulations, all Spent hopes, illusions buffeted Off the Ideal's pedestal: One leap into the furrowed flood!

Into the sea, griefs of past years Who still revisit me to press Scars of the wounds you gave, till tears Of fresh blood weep old bitterness.

Dream-troubling ghost, into the sea! And you, regrets with deathly pallors In a heart seven swords pierce bloodily Like the racked heart of Our Lady of Dolours. Into the surge my phantoms plunge And for a frantic moment bob Struggling till arching breakers lunge Down and engulf them with a sob.

O treasures miserable and dear, Soul's ballast, life's unwieldly freight, Sink! and as you founder here To the sea-bed I'll follow straight.

Tonight, rocked by the sounding billow, Swollen, livid, so changed that none Will know me, on the sand's dank pillow I'll slumber in oblivion . . .

But on the deck a woman stays, Seated apart, wrapped in a cloak. Young and lovely, she lifts her gaze And holds me with a long, long look.

And in that look, spreading wide her arms To my distress, speaks Sympathy: Like sister or mistress, she smiles, she charms. Welcome, blue eyes! Green waves, good-bye!

The gulls, frolicking, wheel and shriek, And the wild sea's white chargers rear Fiercely upon the waves and shake Their tangled manes in the raw air.

LEON SLADE

The Land of Dinosaurs

Our small party rests on the rare green grass that has settled this novel oasis. Aged genitals squat limply against their gaping thighs. When first we had to jettison our rags we were a little embarrassed. It was hard, first up, to keep our members quiet as naked breasts and soft wisped groins were shyly shown. But deprivations deprived us of our stirrings and here there are leaves and feathers, trees strained with crops. The apples are shot with grubs, the lemon trees are powdered with suckling aphids and their attendant ants and a flock of crimson parrots strips the ripe fruit from the almond trees. This must have been some conservative nut's private garden. Still, we have our share of unriddled fruit and the juice of the lemon tastes almost sweet; there are even those of us who feel that, given time, we might stomach a bird. The smallest of us takes his mother's milk that has revived. We must nurture him for he alone remains intact and we can only hope that time may stay his mother's menopause so that her little Adam may beget no Cain, no Abel, but a tiny rib to make a new beginning.

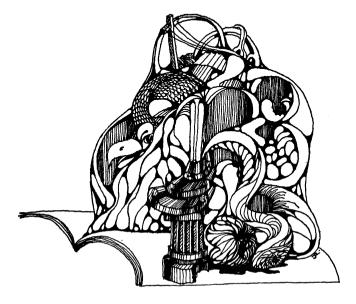
David

The City Square was an afterthought, a product of the City Fathers' middle life: men paused as the Town Hall and St Paul's Cathedral dwindled to development, their dominance forfeited by default. David Buonarroti, the well known poet, stood in the middle of the square. Well, known well, that is, to those who did not know him. He himself denied such knowledge.

A book of poems lay on his outstretched hand like an open bible on a pulpit. Windowshopping women turned their eyes to other things. A passing priest took a seat and watched.

A horsey woman, eating lunch, worried an apple against her lap like a poetess polishing indigestible words. Sappho was strange. Poetry is a male affair.

Yes, he said, I will tell you: every evening, by the Station, in the playground, children use the time their parents waste on journeys home. Swings, slides and see-saws cycle to dark. A girl and boy rock, see and saw. The girl drops off and sends her tiny counterpart rocketing towards the ground. Her elder sister runs to his rescue, brakes the runaway see-saw, brings him gently back to earth.



The Aborigine

in the works of Judith Wright

The most forlorn of all Australia's human figures is the aborigine, yet few visits by overseas dignitaries are complete unless they see a corroboree, or a rain dance, or a boomerang thrown or hear a bull-roarer or in some way make an acquaintanceship with the existing remnants of aboriginal culture. This is more often wished on the visitors than sought by them and appears to be the Australian's way of showing that this, at least, is one piece of cultural tradition that is entirely Australian and owes nothing to the European half of what Judith Wright describes as "the double tree". That we have succeeded, to a large extent, in promoting this view is borne out by the fact that as many overseas people appear to have heard of a relatively minor aboriginal painter, Albert Namatjira, as have heard of Sidney Nolan who would be an important artist by any standard. The "Jindyworobak" movement was another manifestation of this urge to find roots for Australian culture in what F. H. Mares describes as the "very scattered fragments of aboriginal myth and ritual".1

The White Australian's attitude to the aborigine is, however, ambivalent; his attraction to the aborigine extends only to the "myth and ritual". The true attitude towards him is a compound of exasperation, rejection, unease, guilt, neglect and, all too often, complete repulsion. The feeling of repulsion has much less to do with "racism", as it is popularly known, as with mode of living. Probably it is not much different to the feeling a clean, well-fed, upper-class Englishman feels towards a rather unhygienic, uncultured slum-dweller. Certainly it is not the same attitude a racist from the southern United States of America feels towards the Negro. If any analogy were to be found in America it would be in the American's attitude towards the Red Indian problem. It is partly a pauper problem, partly a tribal problem and partly a clash of cultures.

Judith Wright, in her prose and poetry, does not suggest any solution to these problems, but she shows her usual perception in the manner in which she defines the White Australian's attitudes towards the aborigine and in suggesting reasons for these. In *The Generations of Men* she describes the incredulity of May Wright at the phenomenon of Aborigines embarking on a walkabout:

Migrating like birds, they were driven, she felt sure, by the same instincts, and she felt for a moment the deep emotional repulsion that was half attraction, for a way of life so unconscious and unquestioning. It was the repulsion of will and intellect from their own opposites—the kind of fear that had prompted white men to kill and kill, not because of the little damage that the blacks could do to them materially, but because of the threatened deeper damage, the undermining of a precarious way of life that existed by denying what the aboriginal took for granted.²

Judith Wright sees this complete inability of the white man to comprehend the aboriginal as a basic difficulty and it is referred to again in her short stories where she speaks of the unfathomable eves of the aborigine:

So dark you can't see the pupils those people carry a kind of mystery inside them, hidden by those eyes. You can see into white people by their eyes, but never into dark ones.³

"Will and intellect" lose their relevance when confronted with occult and instinctive forces and it is this element of mystery, she considers, that has provoked the white man's suspicious violence and left him with a permanent feeling of guilt towards the aborigine.

"Bora Ring" is her best poem on this theme, indeed it is one of the best poems she has written. A. K. Thomson describes it as "the perfect lyric" and adds:

This is a typical Wright lyric. It is short, stanzas are repeated with slight variations, the words are simple with simple speech rhythm, and there is no end rhyme. The imagery is beautifully all of one piece and the whole poem has that unity that only great lyrics possess.⁴

Perhaps it is extravagant to describe it as "the perfect lyric" for it lacks the true singing quality one expects in lyrical poetry, but it is a sensitive, evocative poem of a quality and brevity that justifies quoting it in full:

The song is gone; the dance is secret with the dancers in the earth, the ritual useless, and the tribal story lost in an alien tale.

Only the grass stands up to mark the dancing-ring: the apple-gums posture and mime a past corroboree murmur a broken chant.

The hunter is gone: the spear is splintered underground; the painted bodies a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot. The nomad feet are still.

Only the rider's heart halts at a sightless shadow, an unsaid word that fastens in the blood the ancient curse, the fear as old as Cain.

R. F. Brissenden sees the poem as "the epitaph" of the "Jindyworobaks" and it could be interpreted as such with the song of the aborigines lost, the dance and ritual buried with them, the spear splintered and the painted bodies only a forgotten dream, but it is certain Judith Wright did not intend it so, for she refers in *Preoccupations in Australian Poetry*, to the "Ern Malley hoax" as the "cruel destroyer" of the rather pathetic "Jindys". Her purpose in "Bora Ring" is to voice a lament for the passing of aboriginal culture. This sadness is suggested in the eerie loneliness and desolation of the abandoned "Bora" ground, its old dancing ring recalled only by the erect, sharp grass and the aborigine song and dance, by the murmur and broken chant of the trees that "posture and mime" the old ritual. The guilt of the white man is implicit in "the fear as old as Cain" while the persistent spectral impression she invariably associates with the aborigine is conveyed by the reference to the "sightless shadow" and the "unsaid word".

This ghostlike association is emphasised in *The Generations of Men* where the poet's grandmother, May Wright, recalls that her husband:

had once told her how, riding over a bare plain in a drought, without long grass or cover anywhere, he had seen to his surprise a warrior standing alone by one dead tree on the plain. He had called out and ridden across, for he did not know of any tribe near, but when he came close there was no one there, and never could have been—⁵

The same incident is referred to in "At Coloolah":

Riding at noon and ninety years ago, my grandfather was beckoned by a ghost—a black accounted warrior armed for fighting, who sang into the bare plain, as now into time past.⁶

This virtually supernatural identification of the aborigine with the country, she sees as arising from his religion and ritual, while at the same time attributing to it the true reason for the white man's feeling of unease towards them. She says the aborigines:

Were bound to the land we took from them, by the indissoluble link of religion and totemic kinship, so that our intrusion on the land itself became a kind of bloodless murder, even where no actual murder took place.⁷

The aborigine's religious link with the land has placed him in a special dimension not only incomprehensible to the white man, but mystically part of the land itself and has conferred on him a quality of timelessness.

Images which she frequently associates with timelessness; the sun, the trees, roots of trees, the dusty soil, the sea, the ever-restless wind; predominate in her poems on aborigine themes. Jimmy Delaney in "The Blind Man", sitting in the sun-drenched dust is "coloured like the dust, is of that dust" and "none better" than he "can speak in the voice of the forgotten dust".

In "Half Caste Girl" little Josie is restless still under her "rootwarm" cover and:

"Moves her long hands among the strings of the wind."

It was the dying pepperina in "Old House" and the apple gums in "Bora Ring" that still clutched the fragments of the aborigine's song in their wooden fingers.

The wraith-like inhabitants of this vanished aboriginal world have become a permanent shadow in the land "where the dead men lie" and in "Niggers Leap" the mournful funereal sound of the sea provides a background for one of her most memorable poems on the tragic clash between European and Aboriginal. The poem has its origins in an historical incident described in *The Generations of Men*. As Albert Wright reflects how the early pioneers "spent their lives, as his was spent, in destroying one way of life to make another" he recalls the incident that gave the name to the New England landmark and which inspired his grand-daughter's poem:

they had killed Paddy's people, driving them in hundreds over the cliffs of the tableland to die on the rocks below—for spearing cattle, for rebellion against the dominion of money and prosperity.⁸

The poem's contemplation of man's powerlessness against inexorable forces, as revealed in this past incident, reminds that the cry of the falling aboriginal is not only the cry of his passing culture, but of ours too. His death and the death of his people are an ominous reminder of our own ephemerality. We can only measure our days by their nights, our lives by the extinction of theirs and our words by their terminal and permanent silence.

This theme is powerfully emphasised by what Brissenden describes as "the sure and subtle integration of image and theme, the exact and evocative use of words".

Even the choice of "Nigger" in the title has a special significance suggesting as it does the derogatory opinion the white man has of the aborigine and this precise appropriateness of words is sustained throughout:

'lips' and 'cools' for instance function perfectly at every level in the sensitive precision with which they suggest the actual approach of evening; in the way they strike an unobtrusive harmony with the central sea—metaphor of the poem; and most of all in their faint but distinct overtone of imminent menace. Lips not only suggests the sound and movement of the rising tide, but also that dark throat of the sea which has engulfed 'many islands in its good time'.

An awful macabre finality is conveyed by the harsh imagery and alliteration in the lines:

.... be dark, O lonely air.

Make a cold quilt across the bone and skull that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff and then were silent, waiting for the flies.

Despite the tragedy so powerfully depicted in this poem it is notable that her reference is to universal man rather than simply the aborigine. This is characteristic of her poetry and is commented on by Vincent Buckley:

She is not precisely offering an indictment of our treatment of the aborigines; that sort of complaint is not really in keeping with her general attitude to poetry. Although the suggestion of guilt and terror is unmistakably there, she is making a point not so much about man's injustice to man as about the general catastrophe of life in which the aboriginal cultures, like all others, have been implicated. Her concern is, in a way, a moral one, and it is a concern with the calamitous nature of life itself. 10

The clash of the two cultures is inevitable and it is almost as calamitous for the white man as for the aborigine. In examining himself on the murder of Paddy's people Albert Wright reflected:

What other solution could there have been of the problem they had presented by their very existence? With the land his people needed they had lived in the closest of ties, the most stationary of balances; losing it, as sooner or later it was inevitable they must do, they had only the alternatives of death or transformation in their very selves—to die, or to serve an idea utterly foreign to them, losing in that service all their own wisdom and traditions; and they had refused to serve.

.

Albert began to understand that this was where the danger lay, the mortal wound the blacks had known how to deal in return for their own dispossession. "You must understand us or you must kill us", they had said, and understanding would have meant—something beyond the powers of white men, some renunciation impossible to be made....

To forgive oneself—that was the hardest task. Until the white men could recognise and forgive that deep and festering consciousness of guilt in themselves, they would not forgive the blacks for setting it there. The murder would go on—open or concealed—until the blacks were all gone, the whites forever crippled.¹¹

Seen in these terms it appears that she considers the problem to be largely an insoluble one. The white man is scarcely even blameworthy. The real enemy is the old enemy—Time, and the white man simply Time's destructive agent. Judith Wright's writings on the aborigine show not only a concern for the plight of the aborigine but a deep compassion for the insoluble dilemmas of all mankind. Even if her poems on the aboriginal theme can offer no more than this in the general sense, they will be accepted in the specific sense as a sensitive lament for the passing of the grace and richness of Australia's only antique culture.

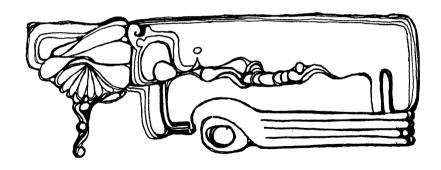
NOTES

F. H. Mares Thomson collection, p. 92.
 The Generations of Men, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, p. 92.
 The Nature of Love (Judith Wright short stories).
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- 6 Preoccupations in Australian Poetry, Judith Wright, Oxford University Press, Introduction, p. 17. 7 Ibid.

8 The Generations of Men, p. 161.
9 Brissenden, A. K. Thomson, Critical Essays on Judith Wright, Jacaranda Press, p. 92.

10 Thomson collection, p. 53.
11 The Generations of Men, pp. 162, 163.



Judith Wright and the Bushranger

A haunting

While it might be held that the figure of the Australian bushranger has seized the public imagination at various times, because of the career of actual Ned Kelly and that of the fictional hero, Boldrewood's Captain Starlight, himself a composite of Thomas Law or 'Midnight', George Scott and others,¹ and so well-known that he may be enjoyed in the gently mocking modern portrait by Randolph Stow in his Captain Midnite (1967), there is a third bushranger, a composite of history and literature, who may live quite as long in the folk memory, by reason of his appearance in a series of documents from one family.

He is, of course, the figure in the writing of the Wrights, an idealized version of that not so dangerous New England bushranger, Fred Ward or Thunderbolt, whose province extended from the Hunter Valley, through the Moonbi Ranges to the Queensland border. This fixing of a literary identity, like a number of other historical and cultural images, has come about by the publication, in a limited edition, of the memoirs² of the late Phillip Arundel Wright, the father of the poet.

This slim volume makes it clear that there was a considerable sympathy between the poet and her father, by virtue of attitudes expressed both in the poetry and in the memoir, drawn from his diaries, and only being worked up for possible publication at the time of his death, in August 1970.

Lord Casey, in his Preface, calls the book

"a highly interesting and simply told story of a practical and far-seeing hardworking life on the land, with mounting success ... (by) a generous and fair-minded man with a sense of humour and respect for those worked with and under him." (p. 2)

It is also something of a quarry for those seeking to trace the development of ideas central to the poet's work. For her father stresses pride in lineage (p. 3); the epic of the Wyndham family (p. 5); sections of the life of May Wright after her husband's death (p. 5); eccentric "swaggies" (p. 52); Ted Chalker, the original for "Bullocky", and Jack Purkiss, immortalized in "South of my Days" (pp. 71-2); concern for the aborigines (pp. 61-2); the fauna of the mountains (pp. 55-61), or the man-caused changing of the "ecosystem to that which had always obtained" (p. 51).

The section, 'Land and Management Problems' (p. 65 ff.), concludes with the prophetic words:

"Land is the basic commodity of all human endeavour, and I could never stand by and watch it being exploited or destroyed by people who farmed it merely for the purpose of personal gain." (p. 74) At a number of points *Memoirs* supplements *The Generations of Men*, "but much more deserves to be recorded" (p.5). Yet it is clearly based on similar sources, since it simplifies details of the family history, and refers to "The Dinton-Dalwood Letters" (pp. 8-9), the fuller letters themselves, preserved in the Mitchell Library (p.9), his brothers' letters (p. 14), his mother's brief memoirs. These corroborations clarify the situation with regard to the more ambitious family history or "imaginative biography" as Manning Clarke called it.³ The historian's concern as to the use of the materials, "diaries and letters, family tradition, and her own imagination" was partly allayed by Judith Wright's list of sources for her biography of her forbear, George Wyndham (1801-1870),⁴ and it is indirectly rebutted by Phillip's sketch of the same persons.

But these remarks have been something of an aside, an indication to students of the poetry that a new and fascinating work has appeared which sheds illumination, direct and indirect, on Judith Wright's imaginative writings.⁵

The best known of her references to bushrangers occurs in "South of my Days", published in the *Bulletin* in August 1945, and in *The Moving Image* the following year.

Or driving for Cobb's on the run up from Tamworth—Thunderbolt at the top of Hungry Hill, and I give him the wink. I wouldn't wait long, Fred, not if I was you; the troopers are just behind, coming for that job at Hillgrove. He went like a luny, him on his big black horse.

The poem was attacked by James McAuley⁶ who thought it advertised "its free access to colloquial speech" and he challenged its "matey hearty knowingness ... outbackery". As Phillip's comment indicates, it owes at least as much to the anecdotes of those simple bushmen who stayed with the family all their lives, in particular to "one of the most conscientious men" (*Memoirs*, p. 72), her "old man" of the reverie poem.

Thunderbolt is one of the lost men of *The Generations of Men*, New England's folk-hero and even reminiscent to Albert Wright of the heroes of Walter Scott and of Byron. Albert thought of him particularly at the time of the robbing of the Wallabadah coach (1859) and would have liked an encounter with him,⁷ while his wife May, the poet's grandmother recalls events of forty years before from the turn of the century

She remembered how, in her own childhood, the plains over the range had seemed to her wild and uncivilized, almost a legendary place; bushrangers had ridden there ... and tales of Thunderbolt had haunted the valley with excitement and alarm. (p. 190)

A little later than the publication of *The Generations*, Judith Wright issued Range the Mountains High (1962), described by T. A. G. Hungerford as "a gentle and satisfying book by a poetess whose prose is as delightful as her poetry". It is an account of 1870 (the year of Thunderbolt's death), and of a family, fresh from Ireland, seeking to join their father, at a gold mine many miles inland from Port Macquarie, and their relationship with a guide who proves to be the bushranger, Dick Falconer. As its writer points out,

"The idea for this book comes from a story still told round Uralla, in New South Wales, about the bushranger Thunderbolt. It is said that he once escorted and cared for a woman and her two children, who were riding from Port Macquarie to join the rest of their family on the New England Tablelands, in the days before a road existed in that rough and steep country." (Preface, p. 7)

The text, which was revised in 1971, has a fine understanding of human relationships and it is not so much a thrilling story set in a colourful period of the early days in Australia as an exploration of emotions and feelings of those caught in some trap between generations, in age and in society. The two younger members of the Cherry family, being neither children nor adult, see the colonial society with fresh eyes, while their mother, a young Irishwoman, proves both resourceful and possessed of a pleasing initiative. In one sense, she is an improvement on several of Boldrewood's more formal young women, and there are many echoes of Robbery Under Arms in the text, in both phrase and situations. Thus, for example, the bushranger's young friend, Harry Reilly, is a much pleasanter young fellow than the alarming Billy the Boy.

Yet this novel for the young in heart possesses most value for its sketches of other lost men of the third quarter of the nineteenth century,—the subsistence farmers, the Reilly family, with their echoes of Boldrewood's Marstons; young bushrangers lured to their inevitable doom by a love of horseflesh and a sense of bravado, from which there is no going back; and the loneliness of the shepherds, the "bush-hatters", who "begin to forget how to speak English" (p. 80) and withdraw to a world of glider-possums, the howl of the dingo and the differing cries of owls and mopokes (*ibid.*).

The writings of P. A. Wright, as well as *The Generations of Men*, serve to fill in a number of useful details concerning the poetry, and not just for the poet's but the familial legendary interests, as in bushrangers, and in Fred Ward in particular. The Aboriginal ghost, seen by Albert in full daylight (*Generations*, p. 90) recurs in his granddaughter's poetry.

And walking on clean sand among the prints
Of bird and animal, I am challenged by a
driftwood spear
Thrust from the water; and like my grandfather
must quiet a heart accused by its own fear.

Just before her grandfather's death, he is imagined as having a vision of all Australia's white civilisation

'like a house haunted by the ghost of a murdered man buried beneath it. The thought recalled to him suddenly that tall warrior standing on a plain where no warrier could have been, beckoning him.... He was overtaken by a deep shudder at enigmatic memory. Yes, they were all haunted—his generation.' (pp. 156-57)

Similarly, the style of a half mad shepherd at Collymongol (*Generations*, pp. 24-5) is repeated in reference to "the very old, the weak-witted, the worn-out" at Nulalbin (p. 35) or the even more poignant account of those for whom the arrival at Avon Downs of men from the world outside was too late:

Only the old hatter-shepherds, in from the out-stations with their flocks for the shearing, were disturbed and made unhappy by the world's irruption into their vegetable lives; they skulked outside there was no message or news from the outer world that could touch them any longer. (p. 47)

The *Memoirs* make it clear that the waste of young men, pressed to carry the burden of a missing elder, had occurred again and again in the family, and the thrusting of pioneering youth onto the exhausting frontier went on long after the mid-nineteenth century. So it was with their father, Albert (1840-1890), who was the son of a colonist caught between two worlds and two generations, as he himself realizes on his return from years on the Dawson River—

He would never love it, for he was of the lost first generation yet in the fight to master the land, it had in fact begun to master him. (Generations, p. 98)

While there is a streak of the incurable romantic in all the family, seen in young Phillip's response to America and Europe in his tours (*Memoirs*, pp. 9-13, 26-33), in May Mackenzie's attitude to the events of the 1820's in the Hunter Valley as having become "stories.... with the quality of legend" and "a tradition" (*Generations*, p. 4); in her husband's interest in the novels of Walter Scott and Wilke Collins—or to them all in relation to the Chinese of Northern Queensland or Hong Kong, it is fairer to see one and all as dreaming romantic dreams, while locked in a hard and relentless struggle with the land which, as a physical being, is only subdued by heroic endeavour.

Judith Wright's romantic sympathies are related to the quixotic and idealistic amongst her own family—May Mackenzie's father, the colonial experiencer Hanks, or her own eldest uncle Arthur, or the Richard Mahony-like Albert Wright. Perhaps naturally, they are more appealing to her reader when they concern the dispossessed, the aborigine, the poor mad shepherds, and the bushranger, all thrust aside as the country is become "no longer a place of hardship and adventure" (Generations, p. 4).

Literary criticism has tended to by-pass the spare prose of Judith Wright, but the appearance of her father's memoirs, together with the themes of her novels, make it clear that certain figures, familiar from much-loved and anthologized pieces from *The Moving Image*, gain much of their archetypal quality from their personal significance to three and more generations of her family. Her familiar bullock-driver, remittance man, shepherd, old man, and madwoman behind the hedge, are to be joined by the more glamorous bushranger,—Falconer—The Hawk—Fred, or Thunderbolt—in the beautiful feat of empathy which is no historical tapestry but rather inspired by a devout admiration for her subjects and a profound desire to rehearse the lot of those caught in the missing generation, whom time had sought to obliterate.

NOTES

- ¹ See R. B. Walker's Introduction to the Macmillan of Australia editions of Robbery Under Arms (1967, etc.), pp. vi ff. A fuller version of this is in his "The Historical Basis of Robbery Under Arms", Aust. Lit. Studies, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1965), pp. 3-14.
- ² Memories of a Bushwacker, by Phillip A. Wright. Armidale, The University of New England, 1972. Pp. 117, with many photograph illustrations, \$3.00.
- ³ In his early review of *The Generations of Men*, in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 33 (1959), pp. 106-06.
 - ⁴ See Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 2 (1967), pp. 630-1.
- ⁵ Her reference to the killing of Paddy's people, "driving them in hundreds over the cliffs of the tableland to die on the rocks below—for spearing cattle, for rebellion against the dominion of money and prosperity" (p. 155) is illuminated by her father's reference to the actual Paddy (*Memoirs*, p. 20).
- ⁶ In 'Some Poems of Judith Wright', pp. 119-130, of Critical Essays on Judith Wright (1968), selected by A. K. Thomson.
 - ⁷ P. 28, The Generations of Men (1959).

GWEN HARWOOD

The Violets

It is dusk, and cold. I kneel to pick frail melancholy flowers among ashes and loam. The melting west is striped like icecream. While I try whistling a trill, close by his nest our blackbird frets and strops his beak, indifferent to Scarlatti's song.

Ambiguous light. Ambiguous sky

Towards nightfall waking from the fearful half-sleep of a long afternoon at my first home, in Mitchelton, I ran to find my mother, calling for breakfast. Laughing, "It will soon be night, you goose", her long hair falling down to her waist, she dried my tearful face as I sobbed "Where's morning gone?"

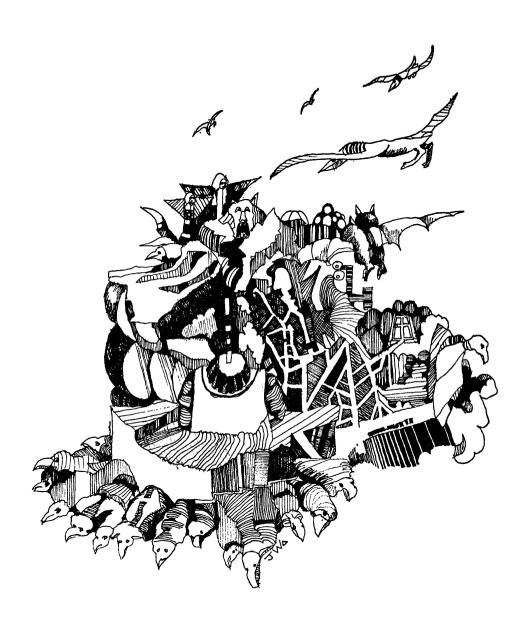
and carried me downstairs to see spring violets in their loamy bed. Hungry and cross, I would not hold their sweetness or be comforted even when my father, whistling, came from work; but used my tears to scold the thing I could not grasp nor name that, while I slept, had snatched from me those hours of unreturning light. Into my father's house we went. young parents and their restless child, to light the lamps and the wood stove while dusk surrendered pink and white to blurring darkness. Reconciled, I took my supper, and was sent to innocent sleep.

Years cannot move nor death's disorienting scale distort those lamplit presences:

a child with milk and story book; my father bending to inhale the gathered flowers, with tenderness stroking my mother's gold-brown hair.

Stone-curlews call from Kedron Brook.

Faint scent of violets drifts in air.



FAY ZWICKY

Lear, Class '71

Trendy misses
In your gypsy dresses

Combing down your Images of death, Today's theme is Renunciation: Violets dwindle On your breath, Sunlight lilts upon Your hair. Look, will you, a Moment at the Sequence of Suffering ... Have you, Miss Hardcastle, another Word for it? Avoid it then By all Means-The rest of you Take Note. Miss Hardcastle's father, Bauxite magnate knows Never to give away: (a) lands (b) knights (c) retainers for: To be powerless Invites Attack. He countenanced violence In the nursery; Miss Hardcastle orders Her fear with a Moral, and young Mr Middleton wandering In the meadows of her Hair, yields to Formal justice.

As they (and you) Grow older your Teachers will become Somewhat evasive on The subject, Resort to delicate stratagems To give the iron ball a miss, To skip the rack, To pare the teeth of: Serpent Vulture Tiger Bear Wolf Kite and, need I remind you, Dog Coiled in the Obedient mind, Images merely. 'Microcosm of the Human Race'—a Regrettable Overstatement but One suggestive of Profound Truth to be: Defined Analyzed Expanded Qualified For Next Week.

To suffer ripeness,
If it come,
Extends at present
Beyond the bounds of
Your curriculum
And the Administration
Chooses to grant
Us
No extension.

BOOKS

THIS ROUGH MAGIC

"This rough magic I here abjure. I'll drown my book."

(The Tempest)

Evan Jones and Geoffrey Little: *Poems of Mackenzie*: Angus and Robertson, 1972. 231 pp. \$4.95.

In recent years Kenneth Seaforth Mackenzie's reputation as a major Australian novelist has risen remarkably, and in this first relatively complete collection of Mackenzie's poetry, the editors, Evan Jones and Geoffrey Little, have enabled reader and critic to see, steadily and whole for the first time, his comparable poetic achievement.

For anyone even vaguely aware of the problems involved it has obviously been a labour of love, dedication and industry. The poems have been scattered everywhere in libraries and private collections, many of them difficult to decipher in Mackenzie's obsessively minute handwriting.

"The Moonlit Doorway," published in 1944, is out of print, as is Douglas Stewart's collection, "Selected Poems", made six years after Mackenzie's death. "Our Earth" was published only in a limited edition of 225 copies in 1937.

The editors call their book "not quite a collected poems", but within certain limits they have tried to be as comprehensive as possible. The limits were a number of very long poems, unfinished drafts, trivia, chance exercises, occasional personal verse and poems of very markedly uneven quality.

Of the 195 poems printed here, 69 were originally included in "The Moonlit Doorway" and 56 in Stewart's "Selected Poems". The remaining 70 poems have not been previously collected, the majority have not even been published.

To collate these poems in chronological order, as far as was possible, four collections of papers were examined in the Fisher Library (Sydney University), the Mitchell Library (Sydney), and the National Library (Canberra), plus a small collection owned by Mrs Kate Mackenzie (Mackenzie's deceased wife), and a few manuscripts in other private hands.

The dating of the poems provides an invalu-

able record for tracing Mackenzie's quite extraordinary development as a poet, from the derivative romanticism of the early poems to the strength and economy of his later work.

In spite of Mackenzie's difficulties, economic, psychological, and social, his whole life style was based on dedication to his craft, and his major achievement as a poet was the final creation of that unmistakeable, individual, painful, reflective voice, sometimes faltering, sometimes strong, at the heart of those poems.

Mackenzie said in his youth that his aim was "to experience everything", and perhaps he got his wish, but, like most romantics, the experience was destructive and scarifying in the extreme. The burden of provincial romanticism was a heavy handicap, and it is part of his measure that, in destroying the romantic egoist and poseur in himself, he triumphantly achieved the artist.

Western Australia has produced only two major poets and novelists: Kenneth Mackenzie and Randolph Stow. Both left their native state because of its provincialism, lack of artistic opportunity and anti-intellectualism.

"New Holland is a barren place, in it there grows no grain, nor any habitation, wherein for to remain . . ."

It is a measure of the extension of horizons perhaps that Randolph Stow leaving Western Australia in 1966 should go naturally to live and work in England, while Mackenzie in 1934 only got as far as Sydney, in spite of his constantly reiterated dream of searching for another Eden overseas.

But paradoxically he did have a lost Eden. Mackenzie's favourite poetic landscape was always alive with images of orange orchards, distant dark mountains, rivers flowing into wide estuaries, little streams, curlews crying ... images of his birthplace, Pinjarra on the Murray River. He found similar, if grander, scenery at North Kurrajong in the Blue Mountains, where he spent the last eight years of his life. Kurrajong and that lost boyhood Eden of Pinjarra became for him twin refuges in an increasingly hostile universe.

Both Stow and Mackenzie share this obsession with the West Australian landscape, and celebratory images of pastoral innocence are central to their image of man in the world.

As novelists, both Stow and Mackenzie are

often seen as innovators of a poetic vision of the Australian experience, (Mackenzie with his first novel, "The Young Desire It", and Stow with his first novel, "A Haunted Land") and because they are both poets, as well as novelists, their allegiance to language and style is complete, and relatively sophisticated.

But here the analogy breaks down. The type of innocence exhibited by Mackenzie in 1934 would, I hope, be impossible for a young writer in the late 1950s. Mackenzie had the vision of a provincial boy obsessed by Utopian dreams of himself as THE ARTIST. In quest of this dream he sailed for Sydney and Norman Lindsay with his vitalist philosophy and Vision school of poets, apotheosizing the Australian artist and sensual love in a wowser Australia that gave all its allegiance to sporting heroes.

The small group of people in Perth, and later in Sydney, who believed in Mackenzie's gifts seem to have been more destructive than useful. It was all very well for the small amateur drama group, the Perth Five Arts Club, to call Kenneth Mackenzie (or Kim) "this wonderful person" and "outstanding genius" who "lived for his art", and Norman Lindsay, in the relatively safe haven of Springwood and an established reputation, to preach his seductive and dangerous theories about the responsibility of the artist being only to his art. The more practical, Kenneth Slessor, was dumbfounded, when the penniless Mackenzie walked into his office at Smith's Weekly in 1934, "a very good looking young man in very patchy trousers, opennecked shirt, and slippers" and announced: "I'm going to make a living out of writing poetry." In a sense Mackenzie was never to lose that conviction. The world owed him a living because of his gifts.

His sister, Catharine Hills, speaking of him in 1967, said: "Mackenzie, born an artist, shuddered at the idea that he could be considered a man. He never reconciled his creative and his human self—the artist and the man."

Paradoxically it was, I suppose, this kind of absolute dedication that kept him going.

"It is the poetry I have to write, the years and years of work and practice in it that lures me to whatever future I can foresee", he wrote in 1936, and in 1937: "When I'm really working nothing and nobody have the right to interfere, because nothing and nobody matters to me at all except the work."

It was the one faithful dedication of his life,

and in the end it paid off. The fact that he did his best work when his life was outwardly in ruins has been emphasized by Evan Jones in his monograph on Mackenzie.²

In that last period he wrote the novels "Dead Men Rising" and "The Refuge", and his last and best poems; those poems which had "become intellectually and technically disciplined at last".3

Numerous images of Mackenzie over those years illuminate his dedication to the artistic conscience that was never eroded away: Mackenzie, the conscript soldier, reading the proofs of "The Moonlit Doorway" in the Cowra Prisoner-of-War Camp in 1944; living in abject poverty in the shack at Kurrajong, weekly income £2/15 sickness benefit, going without food for days, drinking everything and anything, wandering through the bush in a stupor, often falling and injuring himself seriously, but still planning a new novel "by the end of the year". That novel, thought by many critics to be his best, was "The Refuge".

1953 was a very bad year in his life but he is still writing to Catharine Hills:

"I have a great mass of poems from which to select, for whatever I was doing with and to myself, I never stopped writing, so that's something."

Outwardly his life was the archetype of the romantic artist, unemployed, unemployable, an alcoholic womanizer of considerable physical beauty, who died young. Inwardly his life was a series of desperate expedients against poverty, near madness, even the threat of actual physical destruction. His jobs were many, and seldom lasted long: dishwasher, gardener, labourer, station cook, journalist, film and book reviewer, clerk and, finally, his last job, yardman at the Exchange Hotel in Pinjarra.

Only in those early years in Perth did he manage to keep intact his dream of the inviolable artist, and this was largely due to youth and the assistance given by an indulgent mother. He "lived for his art" in a sombre little room in Lombard Chambers, St George's Terrace, collecting the material for his second novel, "Chosen People", published 1938, and doing a very little itinerant journalism for The West Australian.

He was always to have an ambivalence towards his birthplace, a nostalgic longing for a lost safe haven, compounded not only from the river flats of Pinjarra, and that small lost city far away on the banks of a river, but his ideal image of himself as romantic innocent, a kind of young Shakespeare.

A year after he arrives in Sydney he is writing "Little Lament".

Say how I shall this grief contain that cannot any way be eased? O when shall I go home again where my lost childhood has not ceased.

The longing to put a stop to time, to look in the mirror and see again that golden headed young man Norman Lindsay described as "a charming person, handsome in looks, a witty conversationalist and gay, fascinated with the adventure of art", stayed with him all his life, and was at last translated into the safety and serenity of death yet, in becoming absolute for death, he becomes absolute for life. The precious transcience of life's moments is made brilliantly clear by the paradox of "playing his game of brinkmanship" as Evan Jones calls it.⁴ There is even an echo here of Keats's stasis, to hold the moment in trembling certitude, one timeless instant, before it falls apart.

Mackenzie is the watcher, self-conscious, outside, observing or trying to impose a pattern on those random events he can never wholly or unconsciously share, because he is the artist. It is as if he is enclosed forever in a "bell of glass", Sylvia Plath's fatal bell-jar.

... a bell of glass touched; and in the frosty grass below, like echoes out of dreams, the essences of Gruner's sun run and evaporate and rise....

(A Signal)

All today. The endless hours stretch like elastic bands impregnable. No wife, no child, no musts. Only the sun all day, and the cool air that pours out of the east, and the unstable flies like metal flashing. A task done is a done task, a dun thing, wingless sunk in the past of now, all today. The sky a coloured and empty wine glass trapping my flesh that wishes nothing less than all today and in it to be trapped like a plucked flower under a glass turned down and clapped over it so it shall not fly away... (All Day)

Sometimes at night when the heart stumbles and stops a full second endless the endless steps that lead me on through this time terrain without edges and beautiful terrible are gone never to proceed again.

(Caesura)

But the paradox is of course that only death can free the living creature from the tyranny of time, and so it is by inexorable steps that Mackenzie comes to death as a liberator. At the still centre of the turning world death lives, and it was here that he taught himself to articulate the fine art of dying in his poems.

Are you ready? soul said again smiling deep in the dark where mind and I live passionately grain rasping across grain in a strangled question-mark—or so we have lived lately.

(Two Trinities)

The escape into death was always the way out for him from intolerable pressures. Peace and richness, the precariousness of love and relationships, everything was suspect and most of all himself.

One of Kenneth Mackenzie's earlier achievements was his attempt to deal meaningfully with sexual love, a subject always notably absent or luke-warm in Australian poetry.

As a young disciple of Norman Lindsay he shared Lindsay's obsessive sexual themes and imagery, his self conscious and basically Puritan adoration of the naked body. It might look like Eros, but was more likely to be the overreaction to Methodism. Mackenzie's earlier poems are thick with erotic images of moonlight, white kisses, golden women, cold lips and marbled flesh, Harlequin Fool, the pagan deities, Romantic archetypes like Don Quixote, Francois Villon, and Don Juan, "poor, bold, immaculate spirit", are all closely related to Mackenzie's own view of himself as dreamer, fool, sinner and lover.

The atmosphere is gilded, lush, melodramatic, prophetic, gothic, with a pantheistic identification with the Earth; there are echoes of Norman's pans and goddesses sculptured in his Springwood garden, Hugh McCrae's fat nymphs, and Slessor's early poems full of candlelight, murder and rain as backdrop for swashbucklers and dipping cleavages.

There was always for Kenneth Mackenzie a destructive horror that lay, silent, waiting, in the love situation, a bed seen in the cold depths of a mirror, a climax close to death, a post-

coital depression, an eternally virgin woman grown brutal with lust, "lip-sealed, arm-cradled, bold, in the brilliant game". His dream-figure was the woman who played the role of serene receptacle, a passive, maternal reflector of the male, "with your cool graveness of a painted angel". Sex could then ideally be the moonlit doorway to escape and rest.

But basically nearly all his love poems are concerned with a fear of disordered passions, lovers as self-destroyers. The pleasure-pain principle lies at the heart of sexual pleasure.

Who cried out in the night?
I did, my heart replied, because a hand in the dark
squeezed me cruelly like ripe fruit within you until I was emptied out into the night.

Mackenzie's fantasies about death and sexual love, image and reality, perpetual innocence, the teasing expectancy that is never fulfilled, the fear of commitment and responsibility, are all reflected in the considerable body of his love poetry.

The best of these are the love poems written in camp in 1942-43, "The sorrowful velvet ribbon", "Appearance: Post 2", "Dawn: Post 3", and "The Tree at Post 4", based on nostalgic memories, and controlled by distance and sadness.

In the same way the cool discipline of the sonnet form helps to control the eight love poems grouped together, written in 1944.

"Women in all possible ways have scratched the itch to write more than any other of God's notable phenomena", he stated in "Writing Poetry—the why and how" (Southerly No. 4, 1948). Most of his poetry, he added, with typical swagger, was "written in bed".

But others of "God's notable phenomena" were responsible for some of his most magical poems, the subtle, restrained and heartbreaking lyrics to his children, "My child, blown fine as dust", "What have I done?", "The Children Go". The closeness to animal, bird, flower and field of the born countryman is reflected in "The old Field", "In the Orchard", "Kookaburra", "Before Sunrise", "The Snake" which

"carries death within its mouth", the nest "Moulded in cobweb".

In the compassionate hospital poems, first published in *Westerly*, Mackenzie empathizes with the sick men in the closed world of the ward, "that pain enchanted place", echoing with the colloquial rise and fall of the voices of Burgess, Joe Green, Old Young, and Eddy.

There are the desolate poems that mirror his own self distrust, "Simple Mathematic", "Legerdemain", "The Conductor".

No you are wrong. I do not love me. I you fool am no more I with some half-mad half made identity than I am you. But I am whole and so no person but like this flex powerless....

(The Conductor)

These taut contemplative lyrics with their cadenced rhythm and sustained unbroken unpunctuated lines were the proof that poetry was, as he wrote in a letter in 1952, his "natural game".

And it was a game he played to the end. Those endless debates of body and spirit, were cut short at his death by drowning at forty-one in a creek near Goulburn. The coroner's finding was accidental death, but many of his intimate friends believed it was suicide.

He had presaged that death in a poem written ten years previously, titled "Heat".

"Well, this is where I go down to the river", the traveller with me said, and turned aside out of the burnt road through the black trees spiking the slope, and went down, and never came back into the heat from water's ease in which he swooned in cool joy, and died."

Was this a psychotic sensibility? Does it matter? He went down into the dark places of the unconscious, "the half-smashed reflection", and we communicate with that broken voice struggling with its own obsessions and limitations. The judgment is only in the power of the poetry, and the wonder is that Mackenzie managed so brilliantly to free himself from his earlier posturing, that fatal easiness and facility of the blank verse line, to a control of diction and rhythm, a wide range of modes, and the ego burnt out of him.

¹ Randolph Stow, *Tourmaline*: Macdonald, London, 1963.

² Evan Jones, Kenneth Mackenzie (Australian Writers and Their Work series): O.U.P., Melbourne, 1969.

³ ibid.
⁴ ibid.

[&]quot;No matter. I have borne the divine current that filled with radiance my little room."

(The Conductor, 2 Oct. 1951)

DOROTHY HEWETT

Patricia A. Morley, The Mystery of Unity: University of Oueensland Press, 1972.

If literature matters—and I believe it does then the state of criticism matters too. Unfortunately, The Mystery of Unity, a study by Patricia A. Morley of the novels of Patrick White, suggests that all is not entirely well with criticism, not at least if this book is to become a patterns for others. True, in some respects this is an able and percentive study. It offers an account of themes and structures in White's work giving a clear sense of his overall concerns which Mrs Morley sees as essentially religious. In particular this approach clarifies the distinction White makes between the natural man whose end is death and the new man. White's heroic type, for whom the familiar world swings open to reveal new and richer possibilities of existence. This sense of an underlying unity to White's oeuvre enables her to account for specific images and narrative themes—the theme of the lost child, for example—in illuminating fashion. In this way Mrs Morley throws light on White's fondness for radical metaphor and word play suggesting that as devices of poetic concentration and compression they belong to his symbolic sense of the universe.

Yet for all that this book leaves me profoundly uneasy. Very early in my reading I found myself in strong disagreement with both its premises and procedures. In the epigraph to chapter two, for instance, Mrs Morley quotes Sartre, evidently with approval, to the effect that the "novelist's aesthetic always sends us back to his metaphysic. The critic's task is to bring out the author's metaphysic before evaluating his meaning." But is this so? Are we not here back at the old and profitless distinction between form and content; profitless because it gives an impression that "meaning" is somehow separable from the experience the work initiates. In reading White, to take the case in point, does one skim off the "meaning"—as Mrs Morley tends to do-and convert it into some kind of moral and religious uplift, leaving behind the experience one has had with the language, structure, rhythm and tone of the work as the mere dregs as it were? To my mind this experience is part of the res and not merely ancillary to it; what happens to us we read is the work and the critic's task is to submit himself in the first place humbly to it. Mrs Morley on the other hand tends to use the work for her own hortatory ends. Concerned to systematise, she has little to say about the discordant rhythms, the oppressive insistence on textures and on revelations breaking through and shattering the facts as commonsense knows them which bother so many of White's readers and which ought therefore to be the critic's point of departure, constituting as they do the means by which the "vision" occurs.

By definition, literature should preclude any complacency either about or in language since it is precisely by means of language, words in action, by the psychic experience from which they derive and to which they lead, and not by means of abstract ideas, that it works. Intellectual exposé, it seems to me, belongs to philosophy rather than to literary criticism. Hence Mrs Morley's failure to provide any extended discussion of the vexed question of White's style is a serious omission and to my mind discredits her study since it casts doubt upon the perceptiveness of her response. To illustrate. She quotes (on p. 35) a passage from Happy Valley which seems to me manifestly incompetent writing, a passage which bludgeons the reader in a way which destroys the balance between writer and reader, fact and fiction, upon which the novel largely depends. Mrs Morley, however, seems unaware that writing of this kind has made White a problematic figure, even a dangerous one if one takes George Steiner's point that any debasement of language is a step towards barbarism.

But Mrs Morley and George Steiner are poles apart. He cares too much perhaps for the cultural implications of literature whereas she lives in a happy land untroubled by thoughts of the cultural consequences of the novels she describes, prepared to accept rather than contest the value of White's achievement. In truth her criticism appears to be a matter of applying labels rather than of evaluation. When the archetypes have been identified—Northrop Frye's influence is evident everywhere—and she has given some account of their metaphysical implications Mrs Morley's work, it seems, is done. Unfortunately then the novels themselves are on the way to being superseded—"Criticism can talk, and the arts are dumb", as Northrop Frye put it. I would prefer to think, however, that criticism is only beginning at this point and ought to make way for the work not impose on it. Mickey Mouse and Superman, after all, also bring archetypes into play and might well

lead to elaborate explication. The real question is surely the means by which the archetypes act and the quality of this experience they enact.

This study, however, is reluctant to question. Its tone is almost uniformly adulatory and Mrs Morley is reluctant to allow any weakness in White's novels, even the earlier ones. True she finds The Living and the Dead a little less than great but in general she seems to place White quite cheerfully on a level with Shakespeare, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Nance Lightfoot, we are told, is "far more complex than Shakespeare's bawdy women" (215) and the imagery in Voss she pronounces "more intricately worked than in Dante's Divine Comedy" (118). Now I, too, admire White but this kind of indiscriminate praise will not do. For one thing such comparisons obscure rather than illuminate White's uniqueness. The claim that he has "done for twentieth century Australia what Shakespeare has done for seventeenth century England and Dostoevsky and Tolstov for nineteenth century Russia" (13), for instance, is vague, inflated and misleading. Shakespeare's plays stand in one kind of relationship to his culture, Tolstoy's novels in another, Dostoevsky's another, and White's are different again. If he has any real affinity it is with Dostoevsky, I suppose, but even here the real issue for criticism is surely to understand the way in which White's radical attempt at the redefinition and reevaluation of reality is unique. To put him in such august company quite misrepresents his position, turning him from a radical into an establishment figure.

As a result Mrs Morley seems more or less unaware—because she is not an Australian? of the outrage White frequently offers to the ordinary sense of things in our culture. At other times, disturbingly, she condones the source of this outrage, as when she accepts a solution for characters in the novel, the retreat to an Edenic paradise, which she disallows for the "normal human being" (241). Would not an alert critic say here, with Dr Johnson, that a solution of this kind represents the "dangerous prevalence of the imagination", an evasion of the painful facts of our human condition which is both selfindulgent and misleading? Personally I think that this objection can be answered—indeed it must be if White is to be accepted as a major novelist—but Mrs Morley's approach does not help us to do so.

She is writing, of course, within a tradition of criticism of some significance today. But it is precisely this tradition which I would question for it is dangerous for critics to turn into categorisers. Important as it may be for the scientist or collector of butterflies to get his labels straight, literature is different from butterflies, as uniquely unclassifiable in itself as people are. Indeed to the extent that a book embodies the movements of what we call spirit in man to that extent it defies quantification. Labouring to reduce White's novels to their archetypal components. Mrs Morley makes them all sound like one novel whereas, tracing his development, other critics have been impressed by the shifts of tone and change, sometimes a radical one, of mood and structure from novel to novel. The Solid Mandala, for example, represents a marked recovery of balance after the barbaric splendours and distortions of Riders in the Chariot and criticism might profitably concern itself with the nature and implications of such changes. Instead, Mrs Morley is content to categorise, to point out, for example, that White writes in the "low mimetic style" and that his works have a "comic structure". Informative this may be, but I am not sure how it helps my responses to the novels. At times, in fact, such labels become positively misleading. When Mrs Morley tells me, therefore, that "the spirit of joy ... breathes through all (White's) novels" (245) or when she compares his vision with Teilhard de Chardin's affirmation of the goodness of physical creation, I wonder whether she and I have read the same books. Most readers, after all, have found in White a distaste for the ordinary, a physical disgust and an impatience with the present shape of things quite different from the optimisitic vision Mrs Morlev writes about. In fact a central problem for criticism has been to come to terms with a vision which appears to endorse a kind of neurotic withdrawal from the ordinary world into what is a form of Gnosticism, a wisdom reserved for the few. Mrs Morley, however, dismisses this problem, declaring that White's treatment "of suffering and of things ugly and repellant reminds us that beauty in art does not mean the merely pretty and attractive" (234). But what does this mean? And how precisely does White do this? And what do words like "beauty", "pretty", "attractive" and so on signify anyway? And where do they occur and with what effect in White's novels?

Glossing over questions of this kind Mrs Morley reveals a disturbing insensitivity to the implications of her own words and of White's as well. Thus she remarks on a "self-destructive element within Theodora (in The Aunt's Story) as the grub is within the rose" (69), apparently unaware that a humane critic might be as concerned for such a person as a gardener for his roses. But fictions for her, it seems, have little application to facts. Otherwise, how could she record without comment or question that "drunkenness is a favourite device for White for justifying apocalyptic remarks at a 'realistic' level" (103). One does not have to be a disciple of Marcuse to believe that the health of a culture depends in some measure on the quality of its fictions and that to condone what is destructive in fiction like this may represent a kind of "trahison des clercs". In this respect the hostility of many of White's Australian critics which Mrs Morley notes only to sweep aside may be a more responsible critical position than hers. Again, let me say that I do not agree with their conclusions but that I do believe that their objections need to be debated, not merely set aside.

In effect The Mystery of Unity reflects a dogmatic cast of mind which is reinforced by the archetypal approach which inhibits the free play of mind, the honesty and openness of response which seem to me the necessities of criticism. Thus Mrs Morley tends to impose her views on rather than derive them from the work. She identifies the novels as comedies, therefore, because they "conclude with an upward movement" and Northrop Frye has taught her that "comedy's movement is towards inclusion, with characters who at first appear undesirable becoming more attractive as the piece proceeds and finally taking their place in the human family, the Divine Comedy's cast" (231). But there is surely a radical difference between the kind of order and the kind of family affirmed at the end of Dante's great poem and of each of White's novels. Again, they differ from "comedy" as Shakespeare wrote it or from Augustan comedy. "Comedy" used thus becomes a term so loose as to be not merely meaningless but even destructive of meaning; while it is true that the action of comedy is inclusive, not every kind of inclusiveness pertains to comedy. It might not be so misleading if the category "comedy" were based on experience, on a sense of the novel at work, but for Mrs Morley, working deductively from the pronouncements of Northrop Frye, the category directs the experience. She accounts for the defeat of Mrs Goodman in *The Aunt's Story* therefore by explaining that "in comedy ... the tyrant is unsuccessful" (174). Delight in the work derives, it appears, from watching it satisfy a genre-checklist.

My objection, then, is that this approach sells the experience of literature short. It also robs the critic of any real power since it leaves him acquiescent rather than critically responsive to the work. So Mrs Morley is able to record her satisfaction with White's novels but not to seek for the causes of her satisfaction. True she implies that the action satisfies because it fulfils its archetypal pattern, and this in turn presumably because it thus resembles a ritual action. But why does ritual satisfy? And what is to be said of the easy slide from art to ritual? Isn't this another category confusion which obscures rather than illuminates? But then one wonders how far Mrs Morley wants to illuminate, her concern being, I suspect, with words rather than with facts—witness her praise of Nance in The Vivisector, the prostitute with a heart of gold, a literary type if ever there was one.

So, too, with the game of hunt-the-symbol she indulges in, straining symbolic value even from a cocktail cabinet. No doubt White himself is something of a symbol-monger though to a decreasing degree in his later novels. But whatever is to be said of it in an artist, a tendency in a critic to turn objects and people into events in some larger metaphysical drama distracts from the facts of the work in question. For example, Mrs Morley is so preoccupied with the structural implications of Mrs Godbold's confrontation with her husband in the brothel in Riders in the Chariot that she misses the genuine human pathos of the scene, finding it uproariously funny. Her misreading of The Vivisector reveals a similar tendency to schematise what is actually a much more complex experience. Mrs Morley wants to make Hero a centre of value in the novel—in the interests of simplicity. Indeed, she quotes Hero's resolution "to live with such Dreck as we are and find purpose in it" as the epigraph to chapter 11, perhaps because these sentiments reinforce the claims she makes for White as an affirmative writer. An attentive reading suggests, however, that Hero's position here is opposed to Hurtle's and that, far from endorsing it, the novel as a whole condemns it. Their journey to Perialos has proved a disappointment but where Hurtle in his honesty and integrity is prepared to accept this Hero makes the coward's option seeking for accommodation with the present state of things which the novel reveals as evil and meretricious instead of pushing on further as Hurtle does in quest of some ultimate state.

Such misreadings, I suggest, point to a fundamental desire to rewrite White's novels and turn him into a Christian apologist, a cross between Tailhard de Chardin and a latterday Tolstoy. As a Christian I sympathise with this impulse, but in the interests of truth, I think, it must be resisted. For one thing, Mrs Morley's approach is far too selective. There is no extended discussion, for example, of White's preoccupation with the problem of pain, a preoccupation which she acknowledges elsewhere. For another, this approach is high-handed. While it may be true that White writes about man's "eternal quest for meaning and value" (13), it is insulting to imply that only Christians can share these concerns. In fact White's picture of God, of man and of the relationships between them seem to me to be quite often at variance with orthodox Christian views. In The Vivisector especially he seems to set out to assail orthodox pieties in a way calculated to disconcert rather than reinforce them. True, as Mrs Morley notes, White has affinities with Kierkegaard here, but she ought also to accept the corollary, that this makes White an uncomfortable writer whose enemies are the complacencies she seems to want to make his work serve.

Intelligence, perception and wide learning, all of which she evidently has, are therefore not enough. What is essential is rather for the critic to respond to the work as it happens and let it be itself, not forcing it into preconceived categories. It does not do, after all, to identify the nature of the action if one misapprehends its implications. Not that Mrs Morley does not care in her criticism about these implications, but she cares, I think, about the wrong things, about reducing the works to an overall philosophical scheme, for example, or supplying a history of fools or of the iconography of fish or defending White's orthodoxy as a Christian. All of these things are all very well and interesting but they are not really germane to a proper criticism. A novel is not an argument nor is it, despite Matthew Arnold, a kind of spilt religion. Rather it acts to arouse the individual to an awareness

of himself and of his situation. In turn therefore criticism ought not to present a series of closed authoritarian statements but a debate about this experience and the ways in which it is presented, a debate in which the critic is not so much in possession of but possessed by his perceptions. Mrs Morley no doubt would agree in theory; literary meaning, she argues against the tendency to turn art into propaganda. "is hypothetical and autonomous. It exists for its own sake, as a detached pattern whose meaning is primarily inward or self-contained." (18). But the containment is not an achievement that is past, it is still to be fought for, against the pressure both of the work and of the world in which it is situated. So, too, criticism is not a refuge from the challenge of experience and the chances are still to be taken. The best proof of any critical theory, I suppose, is in the way it steels us for this risk.

VERONICA BRADY

Michael Wilding, Aspects of the Dying Process (Paperback Prose 1): University of Queensland Press, 1972. 116 pp. \$4.00 Cloth. \$2.00 Paper.

Rodney Hall, *The Ship on the Coin* (Paperback Prose 2): University of Queensland Press, 1972. 127 pp. \$4.00 Cloth. \$2.00 Paper.

Queensland University Press are to be commended for their introduction of this series, which makes available recent short fiction and novels in cheap paperback form. While there is nothing luxurious about the format of these books (printed and bound, of economic necessity, no doubt, in Hong Kong) they are pleasant and readable. The first book of the series is a selection of nine stories completed over the last half dozen years by Michael Wilding; the second is the poet Rodney Hall's first novel.

Collections of stories by a single writer can be more satisfying than the often fragmentary anthologies of work by miscellaneous writers. Provided that the writer's work is interesting enough, a reader may gain satisfaction by exploring his central preoccupations and his technical and emotional range.

What becomes evident in reading Mr Wilding's first volume is that his range of concerns is narrow. From beach to pub to party to bed (or not to bed) is a recurrent cycle in these

stories. Yet within this apparently sterile (though usually well lubricated) circuit a remarkable amount of emotional friction is generated. And the author usually manages a nice balance between intensity of feeling and ironic detachment as his recurrent persona, a young academic-cum-writer looks on, becomes involved, then distances himself again from the social antics of the Sydney "push".

The title story is not the most satisfying in the book but it illustrates Mr Wilding's main preoccupations. The central figure, Graham, is a writer and university lecturer whose commitment to these roles is as fluid as he allows it to be. On one of the rare occasions on which the author overtly transcends his character's perceptions he comments that Graham "was committed to a life style of spontaneity", a paradox which the author observes wryly and exploits ironically to some extent in the action by showing his character caught in fascinated infatuation by the girl of our commercially inseminated dreams, the blonde innocent of milk advertisements. Like Jude Fawley's obsessive desire for Sue Bridehead in Hardy's novel, Graham's blind infatuation is bound to be rebuffed by this thoroughly modern coquette:

"She seemed, in her lightness, chirrupiness, sunny happiness, her constant chatter and movement, a girl who would always be resting hands gently on whoever she was with, always arousing that tactile excitement, touching, stroking, enlivening. Yet she was not true to that impression. She was like a butterfly always hovering around flowers, twigs, branches, always exciting the stamens with a fluttering hope of contact, but rarely brushing against them."

The author is for the most part too close to his character's excitement to observe his imprisonment. Even the realisation of the girl's "beautifully shaped hollowness" does not release the young man, though the dream-breaking crockery-hurling finale provides both revelation and relief.

The story's title, 'Aspects of the Dying Process', gives promise of more than it offers in the story and the pun on "dying" is clever rather than illuminating. Yet there are many fine touches, in particular the authentic idiom of today's post-permissive generation, together with its unspoken undercurrents of sexual needs, desires and frustrations and the games that conceal or give form to these forces.

In this volume Mr Wilding can be seen experimenting with different techniques, often with considerable dexterity. In 'As Boys to Wanton Flies' he builds up a vivid image of a child's hysteria at the invasion of threatening Australian insects on his clean neat upper middle-class English outlook. This story is balanced against 'The Altar of the Family', in which an Australian boy's introspective habits are impugned by a father who tries to demand his brand of masculinity from the child. In each case the child is victim.

In 'Odour of Eucalyptus', Lawrence's 'Odour of Chrysanthemums' is less in evidence than a Jamesian style of hesitancy, obliqueness and qualification which the author uses to ridicule his well-brought up but coy and essentially frigid Miss Thorn. For example, asked if she wants a second sherry:

"Oh no", she said, more or less each time, accenting equally each syllable, oh no, with a pleasured surprise and with an automatic reply, as if embroidered on her bosom were written, for all to see, one only. And that enabled her to be just that slightly knowing, that teeny weeny bit superior, because after all, you ought to have known, oughtn't you, that I don't take another, do I?

By contrast, 'And Did Henry Miller Walk in Our Tropical Garden' immediately advertises its literary ancestor, as the first sentence further testifies:

I woke up to the noise of Ross Bilham's wife's God knows whose fathered children.

It would be possible to multiply instances of Mr Wilding's ability as a parodist, a gift which is not always subsumed to the larger claims of his stories. But at his best he combines a sharp satiric wit with keen powers of observation and sympathy and his stories have the unmistakeable stamp of the here and now.

Australian fiction is short in the area that the American critic Robert Scholes has termed 'fabulation'. The future of the novel, Scholes claims, lies with 'fabulators': with cinema killing fictional realism (because it does similar things better) fiction ought to give up its attempt to 'represent reality' and rely more on the power of words to stimulate the imagination. A number of questions about the nature and varieties of fictional realism are of course begged here, but it also seems fair to admit that, in the Aus-

tralian context at least, recent fiction has been vivified most by the 'poetic' novelists, White, Stow and Keneally. Yet none of these authors has written a satiric fable of the kind that poet Rodney Hall has attempted in his first novel, The Ship on the Coin, subtitled 'A Fable of the Bourgeoisie'. Ironically, one of the satiric targets in Hall's book is the juggernaut which allegedly threatens to crush the novel—that distorted image of reality which films create.

In intention and scope The Ship on the Coin invites comparison with Voltaire's Candide, which Hall's representative of sanity in his mad fictional world is conveniently discovered reading. Both fables satirise social and political institutions and mores: behind one lies the disastrous Lisbon earthquake of 1755, the Seven Years War and North American uprisings; behind the other lies Vietnam and its social and political repercussions across the world, particularly in America. It is only fair to add that Voltaire's witty fable reverberates with philosophic suggestiveness where Hall's remains firmly planted in its social and political levels; and that where the one is panoramic in scope the other deals with a more restrictive set of allegorical situations.

As a fable of our time however, The Ship on the Coin is often witty and deftly satirical. Its chief targets are the business world and the mentality of blind obedience of the brainwashed middle-classes. Though Hall's cast consists chiefly of Americans he has said that his novel "is not an attack on the American people but on what is being done to them and through them". The vehicle on which his allegory is mounted is the voyage of a quinquereme, one of those ancient ships which arouses poetic associations with Nineveh, Cleopatra and, possibly, John Masefield's verse. A stroke of genius by a businessman who reads Masefield for ideas (Who but a businessman would do that?) leads to the re-vamping of a disused quinquereme. The aim: tourist travel on the Mediterranean.

Eager tourists, enthusiastic for anything new, buy their expensive tickets for the purpose, as the ads tell them, of "reliving the experiences of galley slaves of Classical Times". Their blindness to the various deceptions that they suffer is a result of the cloud of secrecy behind which their slave-masters (the President? Pentagon?

Giant Corporations? Travel Agents?) shelter, as well as their own mindless desire to submit and obey, content to believe in cant appeals to their 'social responsibility'. So the ship of state sails on towards disaster (which, ironically, means military victory) in the coming storm. For as it becomes increasingly mindless, so it becomes increasingly disciplined and efficient as a weapon of war.

The author aims to give us two sides of the coin: the 'father-figure in commerce' is one side, the ship of state the other. It is evident that obverse and reverse are both sides of the one coin. However, some of the best writing in this novel is that which reveals the business world: the young executive, eager to please those above him and keen to prove that his domestic life has not castrated him, is wittily lampooned; and the burgeoning industry of tourism is parodied in advertisements that approximate uncomfortably to our daily reading. The other side of the coin (the last two-thirds of the book) also contains inventive situations and verbal wit, marred occasionally by over-expliciteness as the tone becomes more sombre, the ship of state more nightmarishly dangerous.

This is a first novel of considerable virtuosity. It augurs well for the development of a new element in Australian fiction.

BRUCE BENNETT

Graeme Kinross Smith, Mankind's Spies—resource books—how writers work: Cassell Aust. Ltd. 32 pp. \$1.50.

This useful resource book is attractive in design and colour, and wide-ranging in the selection of writers who comment on their craft. The comments of those most deeply involved in novels, the writers themselves, are always illuminating, often provocative, and should certainly offer a challenge to teachers and students. Perhaps a book like this will jar the reader into a new—or even initial—response to the novel and to creative writing. A fairly solid jar is needed. The attractiveness of layout and colour of this book is in its own way an admission of how far the once simple black and white of a page of prose has faded in its ability to attract and hold an audience.

This lively book offers in fact something of a nostalgic journey to greater days of the novel

¹ Robert Scholes, The Fabulators: O.U.P.

and of writers who acknowledged a craft, a way of life, an almost total involvement. It is also a reminder of the loneliness of the novelist's job, a solitariness which has no place in the world of the dramatic writer, the television or film scripter, who has politely but surely been elbowing aside the novelist. All writers are mankind's spies, and though this book draws most heavily on the novelists for comment, it is not limited to them. For teachers and students, as for a great many general readers, it offers a reminder and a challenge.

Edward E. Morris, A Dictionary of Austral English: Sydney University Press, 1972. 525 pp. \$10.00.

A Colonial City—Selected Journalism of Marcus Clarke, ed. L. T. Hergenhan: Queensland University Press, 1972. xlii 481 pp. \$12.00.

A bewildered reading public, or the remnants of one, might be forgiven for thinking of Australian publishers as remarkably resembling that species of Australian caterpillar whose individuals join nose to tail to form a chain. A chain that moves apparently haphazardly through the bush, and whose front end may even join its rear end to form a slowly moving circle going nowhere.

Not long ago some member of this species discovered Australiana, the chain formed, and the debris in the shape of poorly researched, shoddily published, ill digested refuse still litters the bush—or the remainder tables. Because, of course the chain then discovered remainders and circled many a dank bit of undergrowth.

Now it seems to be the turn of reprints. Almost anything can be reprinted. Almost nothing newly published. The bemused reader may wonder why if a book can now be rushed into a paperback reprint, or even a glossy hardback re-issue, it was ever allowed to go so easily out of print. But the chain circles in mysterious ways, and the slowly moving backs that barely agitate the dusty ground are mute.

In fairness it should be admitted that not all publishers joined the chain, and that not all reprints are of such dubious value. Two reprints which show imagination and willingness to run a risk as great as any involved in original publication are a Dictionary of Austral English, and a selection of the journalism of Marcus Clarke.

At a time when few enough students entering university show any enthusiasm for, let alone knowledge of, their own language, anyone publishing a dictionary might be reckoned to run a very grave risk indeed. But there could well be a considerable number of readers for this largely forgotten dictionary of "Austral English".

Originally published in 1898 the Dictionary recorded Australianisms, and offered definitions, origins, and textual quotations. An early criticism of the book was that it was too much concerned with the flora and fauna of Australia, and that opinion is echoed by Sidney J. Baker in his *The Australian Language* in 1945.

Perhaps today this may seem less obvious, and less of a fault, and such listings have become in fact a source of considerable interest. These entries offer a valuable source of the early recording of the birds and animals of the country, and for their naming. At times there is a melancholy humour in these notes, as for that under "Porcupine Parrot: ... Western Ground Parrakeet... As they frequent the dense porcupine grass, in which they hide during the day, a good dog is necessary to find them ...". Sheep later did the job much better.

As Baker shows in his own book, a great many words and terms did not find a way into Morris's dictionary. But one may look on the book now not so much in the light of its omissions as for the lively interest it offers in terms and derivations long forgotten, or never known. Jumbuck, for instance, assumed as school folk lore-or is it?—for most Australians. Morris's derivation from "aboriginal pigeon-English for sheep" may still surprise. Or how many of those walking the secure if dull streets of Perth, in little danger from the more serious aspect of what the term implies, realise that the phrase "doing a perish" is attributed as "modern slang from Western Australia". The list could be extended surprisingly, and once taken up the dictionary is hard to lay aside. This is at least partly due to Morris's idea that "a dictionary should be (built up) on quotations", and as he says, "these are very copious". The quotations, or illustrations, are a reflection of the reading of the time, in digest form probably unsurpassed in this respect, and a source of interest in themselves.

In one of its initial cartoons The Melbourne Punch has Mr Punch as Perseus diving somewhat heavily out of the sky on a winged steed to slay the dragon of Government about to attack Andromeda, an attractively topless Victoria. Andromeda is chained to a rock bearing such slogans as Old Chummism, Irresponsibility, Squattocracy. The sword Perseus is about to wield is Satire.

Marcus Clarke was later to find Mr Punch's weapon directed at himself, but only because he had proved worthy of Punch's notice. His journalistic writing was to grow from this kind of social climate where the sword of satire held a value. So it is not surprising that much of this collection of Clarke's journalism retains a liveliness and bite. Then, in that Australia of the eighteen-sixties to the eighties, libel suits had not become a way of life, or of making a fast buck. Clarke might have been amazed at our own age where people sue newspapers, newspapers sue one another, politicians sue anything, and sportsmen sue their faintest detractors. In Clarke's day one man might horsewhip another in the street, and even the ladies pursued this pastime. The odd duel might be fought. And personal enmities took strange forms. But the fear of the written word had not yet developed, comment was expected and answered, as Clarke shows clearly enough in his article Journalism and Personalities. In fact it might be a study worthy of Clarke to discover where Australians developed their total fear of that sword Punch wielded, what it was in the Australian sun so thinned our skins.

To most, Clarke is a novelist, and a one book novelist. These journalistic pieces reveal almost another man, perhaps only after a time does it become clear that this is in fact the novelist, and more may be revealed from these pieces than from straight biography. The articles when coupled with the sensitive introduction of Dr L. T. Hergenhan tell a great deal about Clarke, and A Colonial City must go alongside Brian Elliott's biography, and the Penguin His Natural Life introduction of Stephen Murray-Smith.

But the pieces are rewarding in themselves. How much of the Melbourne of those years of the latter half of the nineteenth century emerges from them—the streets and slums, the life of what Clarke called Bohemia, the manners and morals of politicians and the wealthy, the down and outs and the social climbers; reviews of books and writers, a study of Australian language in *The Language of Bohemia* worth reading beside Morris, parodies such as the excellent take-off of Adam Lindsay Gordon, the perceptive comments on Australian landscape in the

notes on paintings by Buvelot and Chevalier (this last so often quoted in fragment). And it is surprising to be reminded how much Clarke was a part of this time, how much he became a part of this city in the relatively few years he spent in Australia. It rejected him in the end, perhaps, but not as soon and as totally as it would today. A good deal of Clarke's journalism may have dated, inevitably, but some of his pieces are as much of now as then—Melbourne Larrikins, or The Vulgarity of Melbourne Noveaux-Riches (for Melbourne read Australian), The Model Sharebroker—dated?

As Dr Hergenhan comments, Clarke used satire, irony, and humour as his journalistic weapons. How well he used them this book shows. And the book itself is a most attractive production.

Henry Handel Richardson: Papers Presented at a Centenary Seminar: The National Library of Australia. 62 pp. \$1.00.

If Clarke is thought of as a one book writer, it is perhaps not so surprising to discover that Henry Handel Richardson may not even achieve that stature.

"It was disturbing to find a few weeks ago that Brennan was not even a name to many educated people, while Richardson is known to many young students, if at all, chiefly by a school-story or by the first part only of her major work *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*."

No one connected with education today would be likely to dispute Dorothy Green's remarks in introducing her paper at the Centenary seminar, nor her comment: "Some of us here may have little taste for anniversary celebrations, and indeed, in most other civilised countries and among savage tribes they would be unnecessary."

Later, in discussing the relative neglect of Richardson's work, Dorothy Green suggests "It is easy to see why Brennan has received scholarly attention, while Richardson has not", and points out that "symbolic poetry and poetic novels are fashionable, the so-called naturalistic method is not". One is reminded in passing that the disfavour the "so-called naturalistic method" finds itself in has led to the enthusiastic reception of a good deal of over-lush verbiage in the form of poetic-symbolic novels in Australia, and

that the worst excesses of these can be hailed with rapturous shrills of delight. Anything however trite—in fact of a triteness even the worst of naturalistic writers would have shuddered at —can be seen as of an ultimate significance and importance. Criticism of course has its own caterpillar trails.

One of the more peculiar gyrations of such trails has for some time been the assumption that *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* can only be assessed as a novel by reference to its origins. Such a trail evidently sniffs around the finished work of art as inedible, and seeks those bits and pieces which went into the making of the work.

There is, then, a case for anniversary celebration, and the papers given at this one must go a long way towards correcting a lack of critical attention to Richardson's work, and to awakening the kind of informed interest which, however regrettably, still seems to be lacking.

The four papers of the seminar now published by the National Library are—Richard Mahony, Walter Lindesay Richardson and the Spirochaete, by Alan Stoller and R. Emmerson; The Aurora Borealis: Henry Handel Richardson as a Translator, by Dymphna Clark; From Gravel Pits to Green Point, by Weston Bate; 'The Nostalgia of Permanence and The Fiend of Motion', The Henry Handel Richardson Centenary Lecture, by Dorothy Green.

In their different ways the papers offer an interesting and valuable view of the origins of The Fortunes of Richard Mahony, and the way Henry Handel Richardson worked. It scarcely needs saying that none of those who presented the papers subscribed to the idea that the trilogy "might have been written by a retired grocer". And while the papers deal widely with the materials that went to the making of the novels, neither are the speakers among those who feel that the origins have somehow to be safely dis-

posed of before a pronouncement can be made on the value of the finished work. In fact all these papers in providing an insight into the background of Richardson's work, from aspects of the medical history of Mahony and Henry Handel Richardson's father, the influence of German and Danish writing on Richardson, a fascinating glimpse of the real and the imagined Ballarat of the novels, all these papers offer as well a comment on the naturalistic method. And they would indicate that one of the things that has been wrong with the naturalistic novel in Australia is that too few of its practitioners have ever understood the naturalistic method. Patrick White's well known comment that he was determined to prove that the Australian novel was not "necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism" need not be disputed as a comment on the novel in Australia. The pity is that the naturalistic novel has been thought of—conceived perhaps—in the spirit of iournalistic realism.

These papers indicate how poor a conception that was. And how little it fits Richardson's work. They amply bear out Dorothy Green's comment that "Richardson... would have been amused to find herself dismissed as a slave to scientific fact, a purveyor of merely clinical records." Perhaps Richardson's understanding was great enough for amusement. She might have been excused quite another reaction.

Few enough seminars are rewarding, when the words have faded and the room emptied, but this one surely was, and the publication of the papers contributed to it is some recompense for those who did not attend. And a guarantee that the words remain as an essential source for a writer as important as Henry Handel Richardson.

PETER COWAN

