WESTERLY

stories poems reviews articles

Tom Hungerford. profile and story Independence in Broadcasting Discussions of Katharine Susannah Prichard A. D. Hope · Francis Webb · Thomas Keneally Poems. Robert Creeley Gwen Harwood

WESTERLY

a quarterly review

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COLIN JOHNSON

Safe Delivery

For some time he had been becoming more and more aware as the effects of the induced state of twilight sleep left him. The words of the manual were vividly fresh in his mind and he could somewhat comprehend his state. The mode of travel requires that the person submit to a period of loss of awareness. A terse sentence without any elaboration on why it was necessary. But it had to be accepted, for behind the words lurked the many possible cases of failure owing to the lack of submission to the loss of awareness. Satisfied with this thought as he was satisfied with the life-support system surrounding and perhaps a little restricting him, he lay there conscious that the very fact of his awakened consciousness meant that the journey was drawing to a close and that he would have to prepare for his mission. Emergence from the craft is fully automatic. The words from the manual displaced the thought of preparing any programme. Everything had been pre-arranged by better minds than his own and the chances of anything going wrong, although possibilities, were very remote.

For some time, although there was no way for him to measure duration except by the apparent motions of the craft and the very sounds that this motion or motions, seemed to give rise to (some of which appeared to come from without, but this he put down to hallucination and thus had a reason, if one was needed, to support the wisdom of those that had decreed that a loss of awareness was necessary in this type of travel), he had been becoming increasingly aware of the sounds about him. These noises persisted, with variations it was true, all through the period during which he was aware. He was not conscious all of the time, but had a tendency, perhaps owing to the effects of the method that had been used to induce the state of twilight sleep, of losing from time to time the power of perception and with it that of conception. Of course the environment, being closely confined in a semi-transparent sack suspended in liquid to guard against any violent change in acceleration rate and with the breath temporarily suspended, did not make for alertness.

For some time, duration of the period of marked awareness constituted a period of time for him, he had been becoming more and more frightened. This fear had been induced by the multitude of sounds, noises, explosions (major and minor) that have been racking the capsule. In his more lucid moments, for fright (he could almost say terror) often deprived him of rational awareness, he strove to adjust himself to the shuddering motions that seemed to be induced by the sounds. His mind revolved around the thought that the craft was becoming increasingly unstable, and that this could be put down to: (a) mal-adjustment either in his life-support system or (b) in the craft itself or (c) increasing resist-

ance to the passage of the craft or (d) ageing of the components or (e) necessary adjustments being made to ensure a safe termination of the journey or (f) his increased awareness leading to increased perception of all the variations about him or lastly (g) which followed from (f) that the noises, sounds, explosions (minor and major) were part of the functioning of the craft itself and its components of which he had not been aware until his mind had fully awakened. There still remained a further possibility (h) that the sounds were psychological safeguards preparing him for the coming disembarkation. All systems work smoothly and automatically to ensure a safe delivery: thus the words of the manual—but, the adverb smoothly disturbed him. Things were not working smoothly, far from it! The very craft itself from what he could perceive and judge, lurched, jerked, shuddered and moved in other random ways that alarmed him with their absence of smoothness and although, at times, the movements did quieten into a sort of regularity with a vast shuddering sweeping the craft thus giving credence to (e), (g) or (h) the failure of the light suggested that the craft was malfunctioning. Also at these periods there was a marked change in the strange rhythm which permeated everything and seemed to be engrained within everything. It was not a single rhythm (for when his awareness turned to examine it he became aware of its components), but possibly three with a fourth, frightening thought, within his very body. One he traced to his life-support system, a part of which was attached to his body at the centre by a pipe or tube which came through the capsule wall. This rhythmic sound he identified as the movements of liquids flowing into him—but strangely, he could also detect this insistent flowing all about and it seemed somehow connected to a motor source located above him. This machine emitted a vast throbbing that affected all of the craft giving it a vast shudder. And this machine (it must be malfunctioning), the rhythm of this machine, the throbbing of this machine was inconsistent. The variation extended from a rapid series of irregular tremblings to the slow rhythmic shudder which throbbed through the entire craft and his body. And the rate of the shudder, of the trembling, could change without prior warning -more often faster, he noted than slower. The craft has been perfectly designed to do its task efficiently with maximum performance and reliability: but this meant that a certain minimum remained, and perhaps the malfunctioning of the machine above was part of the minimum unreliability built within the craft itself.

Another rhythm, coupled with a tremor and a cause for alarm, was a strange suscisity completely out of rhythm with the motor source. This he was sure was a malfunction: and as he listened to the sound and felt its effects, he became aware that it was his consciousness itself that had given it a rhythm which it did not, in reality, possess. The sound, it was true, occurred at intervals, but the density, variance, duration, length, quality and quantity was so changeable that irregularity was far more descriptive and apt than regularity—as it was for the motor source above. These two noises (only two out of an infinitude of sounds being perceived as creakings, throbbings, sobbings, gurglings, hissings, etc., etc.) occurred over and over again throughout his period of awareness and, possibly, although he had no way of verifying it, also during his period of lapse of awareness, for they were there from the very beginning of the consciousness period to the end. And owing to the duration, short or long, of the period of twilight sleep (the mode of travel requires that the person submit to a period of loss of awareness) he had no way of knowing if the sounds had occurred throughout the length of the voyage or not. What was part of the design and what not, what was function and malfunction, what had a psychological relevance and what had not: he was aware only of what he could perceive about him—which were the shudderings, the quiverings, the abrupt regular-irregular movements that constantly agitated his prison. He was trapped with no chance of escape from a container which wasn't working smoothly to ensure a safe delivery. In fact the roughness of the motions and sounds all seemed to indicate malfunctioning of vital apparatus: of the escape of gases, of the draining dry of nutrient tanks; the leaking of pipes, coughing machines edging towards the silence of death, laboring on with their vital components grinding towards, what?—a complete collapse of the craft itself, a sudden coming to a halt, the termination of the necessary functioning of his life-support system which ensured his safety unto that moment of safe delivery which was becoming more and more theoretical.

For some time, time measured by the multitude of sounds and motions enveloping him, he had been in a constant state of fear, constantly striving to remain aware and become aware of the slightest noise, of the least movement and variation in movement—for, a continuation of the agitation meant his survival, or should—for, he realised that each variation could mean the beginning of the sudden collapse of the craft and the instant rupture of his life-support system and that would entail his death! In terror, he could only huddle there waiting for the moment of safe delivery which, in itself, was becoming more and more a vagary. Fading memory words from an imagined manual created by his psychotic mind. No, he pulled himself together, the manual had been impressed on his brain -but who had impressed it and who had immersed him in fluid and sent him hurtling forth in a capsule, if he was hurtling,—for the irregularity of this world of the craft and of his life-support system of which each and every irregularity he knew and eagerly listened for, and all of which indicated a possible malfunctioning or malfunctionings, seemed to show a certain lack of hindsight by those who had imprisoned him. And each and every change filled each and every time period, and each noise or variation had to be lived through as if it was the last. He felt the need of, he longed for a surety of logic that proceeded from A to B to C to D in an infinitude of ordered fixed sequences, each leading one from the other without the slightest deviation. But this possible ordered logic, if it had ever existed, had long since given place to the irregular, chaotic world of varying sounds and motions, both within and without, that held him prisoner. Everywhere fickle change without rhyme or reason. Even the temperature fluctuated, and everything pointed to a breaking down; everything indicated his approaching termination.

Numbed in terror for many time periods, his awareness clinging to the many sounds, the many motions—each of which could be the end or at the very least the first step towards cessation, towards that complete breakdown of the machinery on which his existence depended—he was not numb enough or even prepared when a great shudder jerked the whole craft and introduced hitherto unknown erratic minor and major motions to the capsule and to his body. Blindly, he reacted in futile random movements till he had exhausted himself and perforce had to lie there without chance of escape or stillness—for, the whole craft pitched and tossed, rolled and warped with the walls of the capsule twisting and buckling. A high pitched scream commenced, continued, and irregular as everything else stopped only to begin again. It ascended and descended a tonal scale (or scales) without fixed notes, modality or chord structure. And the irregular shudders, vast heaves, the buffeting and blows battered the craft until it gave way under the stress. The walls rent, weakened joints gave, the fluid in which he had floated for so long drained away and he found himself beginning to slide headfirst down a narrow fissure, trailing the useless strands of membranes of his life-support system which had failed with the general failing of the craft. Unable to face the termination into which he was fast falling, his mind dived into that state of loss of awareness which had been found necessary for those making this journey.

ROBERT CREELEY

Men

Here, on the wall of this hotel in Singapore, there's a

picture, of a woman, big-breasted, walking, blue-coated, with

smaller person—both followed by a house men are carrying. It's a day

in the life of the world. It tells you, somehow, what you ought to know

•

Getting fainter, in the world, fearing something fading, deadened, tentative responses—go hours without eating, scared without someone to be with me. These empty days.

•

Growth, trees, out windows reminiscent of other days

other places, years ago, a kid in Burma, war,

fascinated, in jungle, happily not shot at,

hauling the dead and dying along those impossible roads

to nothing much could help. Dreaming, of home, the girl

left behind, getting drunk, getting laid, getting beaten

out of whorehouse one night. So where am I now.

•

Patience gets you the next place,

So they say.

Some huge clock somewhere said it was something like sixteen

or twenty hours later or earlier there, going around and around.

Blue Rabbit

Things going quiet got other things

in mind. That rabbit's scared of me! I can't

drag it out by the ears again just to look.

I'll remember the dog, with the varicolored

painted head, sat beside me, in Perth,

while I was talking to the people

in the classroom—and seemed to listen.

GWEN HARWOOD

An Address to my Muse

Dear Sir, or Madam, as the case is, blest being of so many faces, known to the Furies and the Graces, don't be a clown, just slip off those artistic braces and settle down.

Please put off all your other suitors, the ponces and the lusty rooters, the plagiarists and sneaky looters—or break their necks—unload that party of freebooters.

Show me your sex.

How often I've sat late at night wrestling to get my verses right and asked you for a little light, 'Mehr Licht', like Goethe.

You've left me, you hermaphrodite, to drink with Kröte.

Sir, Madam, when the wine is known, the woman's drunk; I'm on my own.Your silence cuts me to the bone.
 Am I freak?Squeeze something from that heart of stone, in mercy, speak!

Male colleagues making open mention of how they're spared the fearful tension of playing the two-part invention which I must learn, would never touch the metric pension I have to earn.

Madam, or Sir, why so aloof?
I shouldn't have to offer proof that we live under the same roof.

—What, are you going?
Pegasus set, with his sharp hoof,
Hippocrene flowing.

Surely a spring where all may drink and turn black sorrows into ink.
Or is that true and blushful pink water restricted?
If it's for men alone, I think
I'll be convicted.

O Muse, Sir, Madam of renown, take off that multicoloured gown, remove the mask, wipe off the frown, we'll name no names, just watch the world, when we lie down, go up in flames.

JOHN BRIGGS

The City Man Comes to the Country

I have come back, come home, drawn from the frantic pulses of my urban roads to these blood-slow capillaries of mazing cart-tracks, from the freeway's tight enclosures to these unravelled latitudes grey with spiky stubble of thistle, and a sawtooth arrow of hills pointing me onward.

I have come back, come home, and here by the back road's dog-leg boundary, a fox's scraggy frame dangles on the wire. The fine finger-thin paws angle their empty questions and the lifeless lean face rots out its cunning. Red sky this night—will the shepherds delight?... I am home but my tongue is silent to the landscape's inquisition.

I have come back, come home, but the silent cutters and combs affirm my hands are useless.

The dribbling skeins of cows wind in to the dairy pointlessly and the windmill's broken vanes rasp out their raillery.

Red sky at morning . . . this draggled cipher of forgotten provinces, claws curved, points me away.

TOM THOMPSON

Freewheeling

There are two people on a mountain road. They are coming toward each other. The woman is walking downhill a little quickly perhaps while the man struggles with a bicycle.

He is snaking his way towards her swaying from side to side in the hot dry sand. The sand squeezes quickly together then out under the tyres. His legs push down into the revolving wheels.

It is a long mountain road, a half bitumen strip flanked with a few feet of white sand to separate it from the bush. One strip of blue-black slung across the landscape. A car whistles past them and the cyclist returns to firmer ground. Legweary he dismounts and walks directly towards the woman.

He is an elderly man in his early fifties, with a strong brown body pushing the green bicycle to the top of the hill. He is looking intently at the front wheel, eyes busy welding strips of ragged rubber to the wheel-base. As he looks up the woman approaches him more cautiously then lowers her own eyes to watch faltering steps...

The picture becomes clearer.

It is in the Blue Mountains, the air a bright silver-blue, trees silver-green. The woman is young and slim and holds her body like a man's. The man appears now not so elderly. In the hot sun perhaps she has mistaken him for someone else, for she keeps staring. At his brown face and wiry frame. At the green bicycle. He stares back and she is forced to take his eyes. He smiles broadly, showing bright white teeth and thin red lips. Her own mouth tightens, she squints. His eyes are blue and the heat so dazzling. They move slowly closer together in the shimmering day...

He is swinging his legs behind him with an easy gait, wearing only dark navyblue shorts and leather sandals. His deep brown arms propel the green bicycle along with ease. She listens... The bush hums to the sound of its whispering tyres on the bitumen road.

His stare strikes hard into her and her body takes the sting, her eyes recoiling to peer blankly above his head. He is staring at her hips, waving under her dress like twin red undulating flags. A cool breeze moves over secret limbs. He keeps intently looking at her, his eyes undress... She finally turns her head away and holds her coat in front of her, protecting.

He kept smiling till they were nearly abreast. She could see that his hair flowed down behind his ears to ride the back of his neck. She's fascinated with his clear bright skin, his bright eyes. His hand rises into the air, hovering. He says softly 'Hello...'

She stopped still. Both are rigid in the landscape.

She wants to say something but fears to speak. She tries to think of something Sociable... He is coiled, still tense. She says 'Who are you?—'. Forgets to close her mouth. He isn't surprised.

Relaxing, leaning one foot on the bicycle, he tells her his full name and address. It is close to her own destination. 'Friends—' she says. She also tells him her first name and address then walks on with no goodbye. She won't look around. She can't. Afraid and blushing, she feels sick—

He folds his arms, resumes smiling as he watches her go down the road toward his house. She is hurrying, getting faster all the time. Struggling to leave the area, clear this point of contact.

She stumbles occasionally down the sloping hillside, over the tyre tracks that slide underneath her passing feet and apparently into the bush... Her mouth is open, panting. She doesn't stop to check. All around her body the landscape tumbles and groans...

The bush hums.

He starts whistling.

She slows down and hears his bicycle sheer a path across the sand and bitumen. The man's strong legs are straining in the sun. Once his feet hit the hot hard ground and she heard the sound of broken sticks. She tries to turn around but her body tells her No.

She walks quickly, faster, to her friends.

With them sitting around the kitchen table, endless cups of tea, talking of Unmarried Mother's Pensions and Social Security. Talk of their fatherless children noisy in the backyard, and their 'husbands', deserted or thrown out, of necessity. She feels a little alien in this brood of Social Martyrs for she felt far less resentful, far less intimidating. Though like them she is still 'waiting for the man'.

She told them about the cyclist and was catcalled with jeers and shocked astonishment. She braced herself for the next barrage with a clear view of his house from the kitchen window-sill.

- —You mean to tell us that you actually met him, went up like that and said something? You talked?
 - -You're not serious Mishka, surely ...
 - -It's part of a crazy game.
- —What on earth did you say? Do you realize what being friendly with a man like that will mean?

She swung around and asked them all exactly what did it mean, but received no explicit answer. More catcalls. Jeers.

-You are aware of course that he is a bloody pervert.

No, she hadn't known or heard. She listened.

-You must be careful of him till the Council moves him out.

'How do you know he's like that? Are you sure?--'

The women shrugged their shoulders and put their tea down. They regrouped for the next attack...

- -We know, that's all.
- -Women's intuition if you like ...
- —It's the way he looks at us. Just like you said—
- -He wants to Undress-
- -He wants more than that!

'You've got no fact. It's just talk and supposition... What about the Council, what do they say? Anything?—'

- -Oh yes the Council's right behind us.
- -Sent him letters.

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-To harass him. You know . . .
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'So does he...' She smiled, letting them ramble on about the dozen other men they knew of 'exactly like him', so grotesque. She shut them off, all this talk of Animals in man. He wasn't like that, she was sure. She didn't say anything more, just left them cowering in the smokey kitchen, all wary and resentful. Bitches.

-You really must watch out!

She said she would and quickly walked home.

She woke up thinking about him in the middle of the night. She closed her eyes only to see the piercing blue of his, patiently staring... She opened her eyes wider to the blackness, to the black night-light. With her head underneath the blankets she moved fitfully, till relaxing with no thoughts of man, man-animals, she could fall asleep.

The man sleeping next to her still snored.

He'd get up in the morning and go away to work.

She tried to see the cyclist again to tell him about the Council. About the women's plans. She didn't like to think that he might be bullied into moving out, on a supposition. A victim of group superstition. So she walked across the fire trail following the tyre tracks through the grey-green bush, tracing the double lanes of brown that snaked toward his house. She kept her head up toward the elevated roadway on the lookout for his bicycle. Bright green amongst the green.

When at last she arrived he was standing in his garden, drying his hands on the warm grass. He asked her to come in. She shook her head and her body held fast to the gate. He rested his arms near hers on the white fence, gently leaning toward her dark frame, talking animated. She told him all about the Council. About the women and man-animals. She laughed. He rubbed his arms and nodded yes, he knew. He told her about the Council's letters and that he wasn't going.

'It's just talk', he said.

'But they're very dangerous people—'

'Don't worry . . . They're crazy women. Maniacs-'

'Yes, well?-'

'I'll stay silent'

'That's what they hate you for. And they've scared themselves'

'I give them neither flattery or ammunition—'

'Just a flattening'

'I'm immune---

They both laughed, unwinding. Bodies quickening in the hot sun under sheets of thin stress. Laughing...

He said, 'Thankyou for taking care of me this way—'

She watched her arms dropping to her sides and her body pushing hard against his front gate. Stop. It stood locked. He had turned around. She was suddenly aware that all 'the crazy women' concerned lived close by and would probably be watching this secret event, so she decided to go home. As he moved towards her she turned quickly away, goodbye. She was carried up the street with his eyes fast.

At home with her other man, her 'husband', she acts in a half-daze, trying very hard to listen to him, to concentrate. Respond to his touch. It's too much effort and her mind is miles away... He keeps holding her to him heavily. She smiles, empty, her body in the dreadful motion of her past mechanical life. She put her

^{&#}x27;So they believe you, completely-'

⁻Of course!

[—]We pay our rates.

hands in this man's eyes and stops, then kisses him blankly on the mouth. She looks at his lips curling into a confused smile. Her Magazine Husband, smiling... She turns away from him and goes into another room to be alone.

That night she wakes up and leaves their bed, being careful to put the blankets high around her other man. He lies dead still. She goes to the front loungeroom windows. Breathing heavily. Listening, each creak. Outside the night is blue and black, the night-bruise covering all window space. Through the webbing of fruit trees she can see the street light, white, thirty yards away... The road black, curving... She visualizes the cyclist on the swerving roadway passing by her house. She wants to get dressed and run outside and warn him of the dangers. Of the others. She watches herself running again and again to tell him, sees herself warning him again and again. Seeing him...

She slumps drunkenly into the cane chair by the front window looking out into the trees . . .

She feels suddenly cold, with the strongest body-fear feeling that this man is near, of his being very close, whirling lines about her. She is pierced with the dread of facing him, of his desire and her own dreadful unknown. About her body she had forgotten. She feels utterly passive, utterly fearful. She opens her eyes wide in the dark and visualizes the cyclist in the bedroom doorway. Peering harder the shadows reorganize into black nothingness. Whirling lines in front of her eyes, collide. She peers blankly into the darkness, into the garden following the circular path towards the front gate. A White blur in the dark... She sits, holding her legs... The garden chair and table have fallen over under the black sky. She peers, concentrates. Imagines his fleeting figure departing down the road.

With her neighbour the next day she was told to watch out for a dangerous cyclist who comes around 'menacing the children'. Her neighbour leaned across the fence—

'Everytime I come to say hello he rides away. Quick.'

'Is that why he's menacing, because he goes away?'

'Of course. He's afraid to face me because I know about him, about him being dangerous... I know—'

'Has there been any attacks?'

'God no! I wouldn't put up with that.'

'So he just comes and talks with the children-'

'Yes he talks with them, menacingly . . .'

As a mother she was told to be careful for her son's sake.

'This man's a pervert. I know the type I do—'

'I'm sure you do ... You'd know ... Thankyou'

She passed it off as more petty hysteria. A case of the jealous mother who can't talk to her children. Or won't. Or... Just like any small town—Unsociable and afraid.

She walked a long time in the garden, laughing, aloud.

She decided to see this man again. She couldn't help it. She didn't want to know anything more about him. That would spoil it. Or anything from crazy women. This was secret. She felt free and would see him. She waited at the top of his street with her small son, just watching. Sitting in the shade at the top of the hill in the heat while her son threw stones into the bush. A little body dancing through different shades of olive-green. The stones, sulphur-white, ricochet. He stops, sits, completely occupied.

She walked over to him and crouched beside him sitting in the sand. He was staring intently at the faint drunken swaying of snake tracks across the dry

crumbly sand. At the deliberate design. He traced the lines with one tiny finger.

She followed his hand with hers-

'This is the track of a wild animal. A snake—'

She drew a long lithe belly on the ground and explained the dangers of the shiny skin, the bite, the eery fascination. Her son was frightened, learning...

'Mustn't touch snake', he said.

'Yes, we must be on the lookout.'

'Snake get very angry--'

He sat firmly shaking his head.

She held him to her laughing aloud. Quelling his boy-fear. So relieved herself that he hadn't found a snake at all. Just tracks.

She felt a little anxiety at home.

She didn't know why as she was unafraid.

Glad to be home. In her own home.

That night she woke up feeling that she had been touched, caressed; that another strange breath was in the room. Was near. The man lay deeply asleep beside her but she didn't want to wake him, he'd want something else. She'd stay quiet. Let him be.

Pulling her legs up under her chin she sat in one bare corner of the bed. Searched the dark gloomy room glowing larger, in some sort of foetal safety. She tried to hurry out of this dreaming to float alone in the deep dark bed... The sheets felt so much like human hands that she slept fitfully, eyes tight-shut... Awake, kicking... Flat out, turning, nightmare into sleep—

She imagined bodies with every sound.

Sounds with every body image.

It is a Saturday and no-one appears to be awake.

There is no apparent sound. No life.

She walks out into the early morning carelessly and looks around for the paper. Her son runs to the front gate, straining, as if to catch a glimpse of something that is quickly passing by.

There are these two figures in the landscape, she fragmented in the silver light. The morning's quiet and still. No birds. Sound.

She sees the white trussed paper in the middle of the curved driveway and walks slowly over to get it. There is no more hurrying as she is quite relaxed.

It is a burning hot day. Black forms on bright white sheets... Her son runs down the road.

She sees the paper, fixed in the centre of the drive. She bends down paralysed to see faint bicycle tracks, the wheel marks swaying around her bedroom window in long drunken animal tracks.

She doesn't touch the paper.

H. W. HILLIER

Dongara

Houses of stone, ant-eaten beams and rusting tin, Accumulators of ancient dust.
History having a hard time to die in peace
As bric-a-brac and names are sifted
And placed "so and so" on shelf and family tree.
The unconsidered trifles of wrecks
Neatly stacked in priority, pyramid piles
Preserved for some eventful seed time
When tourism inflates and brings a welcome coin.

The corner church of eighteen-eighty-four stands still, Whispering Anglican overtures
To a town deaf to all but what it wants to hear.
And widows' mites are dropped on brass plates
As though sound would give appearance of sacrifice.
A baptism, wedding, funeral—
Three lonely milestones of pioneering progress—
Are markers in the historic dust
So that some can say—we passed life by in this place.

MICHAEL ROBINSON

A Public Execution: Quartering by Horses

We pass a bottle around, perhaps Some kind of smoke will billow later, as conversations change. A fat girl postered on the wall hopes to reduce, her anatomy parcelled with dotted lines. We remark

her rump, a special section. Music rocks, will roll more gently later. An occasion or no ocasion, casual gathering of friends, or maybe acquaintance. Somewhere, by dotted windows,

another place, and time, the men with iron and molten sulphur now prepare to execute sentence. Smells of burning, implacable smells, arise, are passed around. This too, is a social, more fashionable occasion.

Behind the windows, genteel ladies, gentlemen waiting their chance. But we, were we present, would doubtless be tiptoe on the sand, near where the horses, the monstrous royal horses, are held by cynical keepers,

waiting. Still, we'd have the view, better than reading in books in any case, listening to pounding blood-lust beaten out by our music.

Pass that bottle to me, I think the joke needs stimulation.

Later, the sounds have dwindled, smoke curls rising, the sky grows pale. Fewer in number, we gaze blankly at posters, someone snores. Somewhere the horses, those monstrous horses, pound the soil.

COLLEEN BURKE

A kind of nationalism

there are times when i dislike the footdragging summer sun

yet i like to hear

its green murmur in winter gullies

feel its welcome in the warmth of a ring of coral trees

has the power

us homewards

It is always there
bound to my bones shackled
to my blood it stirs
in the depths of my head
in the longdark earth
it puts out roots
whenever i leave it nags
me backwards
only the sun

to turn

i thought it was summer at kosciusko

down the valley dark shoals of wind rocksharp come beating at my summer head moving darkly through my mind caught in its hurdy gurdy madness i fall round and round tripping over a wildflower it looks at me quizzically and in my madness i salute you flower raise my hat if i had one before scurrying back to the car huddling myself to sanity with shutwindows heaters and other people

ANDREW McDONALD

Homages for Two Singers

i. Janet Baker

These waves began far out at sea under the winds of Elgar's mind, were blown up the estuaries of staves to you, Janet, where they are reborn like the sourceless winds, or the waves that circle the globe to pulse from my radio. But it is you and not the sea I hear, not his waves but the ones you become creating your song; and since music is feeling, we are one, borne on waves begun far out at sea, circling endlessly...

ii. Janis Joplin

Your song dragged the ball & chain up your throat.

Moment by moment the scream became flesh, b-b-b-baby.

Music was no analgesic till it stopped.

Sampler

Cracker-box, rabbit-hutch, aquarium, it straddles its strait block, turning a bald blank face to the collapsing school across the street: somebody's dream-dump. I watched it go up slowly, rising shakily, with rickets in its cracked green timbers and warps in the hardboard fascias. The proud owners toil in the dirt on weekends, shining with triumph and hardship. Driving home at night, I see them through the glazed cyclops eye of the bare front room. They are finishing the interior themselves; they move about with hammers, brushes, laminex and glue, unknowing and serene as fish. Their heart-beats ripple out through the night. Florid paper advances round the walls, unrolling the yardage of my failures.

The Manichean Syndrome

(24/5/74 & 24/5/75)

for Margaret

Setting forth on the godly tarred whale-road last year, bearing a cake to your birthday party, I was stove in at the rear fender by a white Volkswagen, then hounded and blackmailed for auld acquaintance. This year, I found my white Fiat's front bumper drooping by the kerb, the brackets crumbled with rust like brownies. Ham-strung and stranded in Sargasso Sydney, spurned by policemen and firemen, was finally rescued by a lame mechanic; and bore home the injured part, which now hangs like a dead man's oar from our garage roof-beam. What most disturbs me is the inscrutable malice sinewing these symptoms of godhead—an elbow in the ribs, a kicked ankle in the crowd and push of days.

KERRY LEVES

Cutty Sark

it was not meant for this its timbers age quietly in the salt air and a hull of brass, away from salt water rides on iron sticks

our long eyes peer upwards into the rigging, the unfurled sails imagining accidents

in the hull a row of figureheads extends there are goddesses and admirals, each one telling of the weather it has seen in silence like dignity

we crawl among narrow doorways smelling tar

T. A. G. HUNGERFORD

Green Grow the Rushes

The de Blore place stood on a high ridge of sandstone, looking out over the river to the city on the other side. Its enormous weatherboard and lacy-iron pile used up sufficient space and material for the twenty 1975-type family-kennel "units" which, in fact, now occupy the site. Framed and shaded by huge old trees, with pergolas of wisteria and bignonia, it over-shadowed the low-lying riverside paddocks where we lived, topographically and socially only a rung or two above the multicoloured swathe of vegetable gardens the industrious Chinese left-overs from early gold-rushes had established on the crescent of deep, rich black soil built up by a million years of flood deposits on the southern bank of the river. It offered us a two-sided message—for our elders, what they had missed out on, and for us, what we might attain to: it was in its heyday at a time when youngsters still planned to attain to something other than retirement and the pension.

I used to go up there with my father. He was a piano-tuner, come down in life —as my mother used to remind him whenever the opportunity presented itself. Although now I wonder if she was reminding him, or informing us, that there had been a time when things had been better. Not that he didn't make a reasonable living for those days, even though it was early in the Depression. It seemed as if every second person then had a piano of some sort, and of course, every piano needed tuning now and then. He had his daily bit of business, and there were the occasional dances and wedding breakfasts and twenty-first birthday parties in the Mechanics Institute Hall. Also, he played Saturday nights at the old Bijou, that incredible old fleapit where, nevertheless, overture and entr'acte were studiously observed, and sometimes after interval, a visiting tenor would sing Roses in Picardy and A Wandering Minstrel. With one thing and another, my father made ends meet, and without my mother going out to work. Wood stove, outside copper for the washing, four kids and part responsibility for the vegetable garden must have kept her from wondering what she might have been if she hadn't fallen for my father's winning Irish ways. I don't recall ever having been hungry, other than just-home-from-school emptiness we filled immediately with bread-and-jam or bread-and-dripping, so undermining our health that I near the end of five decades without ever having seen the inside of any but a military hospital—and what I was in there for was certainly not brought on by any diet deficiency.

My father used to take me up to the de Blore place to recite. It earned me the envy of every youngster in the district—not that I could recite, but that it got me access to what was in a way the enchanted castle of our immediate neighbourhood. Old de Blore bestrode our affairs like a great, pot-bellied colossus. He was legendary around the large country town that Perth then was, and for a couple of

thousand miles north of it, as a first-in drover and now station-owner, who had physically battled the blacks for their territory. He had spear-wounds in his back to prove it, some said. He had been a prospector and a mine promoter, a pearler and a camel-master and god-only-knows-what else—and had made money at all of them. A big part of the legend, for us, was that aborigines from his stations were employed in his house, his garden and his stables. Since Mrs de Blore had died years before in a cyclone in Broome, perhaps even before I was born, there was quite a lot of conjecture, which I didn't understand at the time, as to his relationship with the aboriginal women. They worked exclusively in the house, and seemed happy enough, but the moment they became aware of the presence of outsiders my father and me, for instance—they would simply disappear: or if they didn't disappear, they would hang their heads so that their curly brown hair made a curtain before their faces, and you could see their eyes glinting at you from behind. I never saw the men who worked in the stables. The gardeners always seemed to be standing around only half-visible in flecked sunlight under the trees, or ever so slowly dragging rakes or barrows across the lawns and among the roses. Sometimes, in their moleskin trousers and huge felt hats, they squatted in groups on the paths, smoking stick-thin roll-your-own cigarettes, retracted so deeply between their grasshopper thighs that their bottoms rested on the gravel. They never seemed to speak, or perhaps they did so by signs, and their eyes as they watched us up to the house were veiled as with the smoke of bushfires, secret and—to me, anyway—frightening. I was always glad to make the security of the side verandah, crowding my father's heels as we went up the steps to where old de Blore sat in the afternoons. Even then I sensed there were many who had trouble not spitting whenever the old man's name was mentioned, and I had heard him described variously as a tight-fisted old bugger and a damned black-birder and a bloody old gin-jockey, all without being meant to overhear, and without really understanding what I heard. To me, then, he was just another adult phenomenon. I was far more impressed by the horses he used to drive, in his landau, on his way to what my father called "shivoos" in Perth, than by the possibility that he might in some curious way be married to one or more of his black gins—which was the way I understood it from talk suddenly curtailed whenever I came within range of it at home. Old de Blore. Whale-fat, turkey-red, bull-voiced, perclum-blue eyes swimming in pits of raw meat. I didn't learn until years later that he had suffered with the sandy-blight early-on, up north. I just thought he was mad as a meat-axe, and he frighened the stuffing out of me sometimes, even when he laughed.

A fat, red-headed, jug-eared, freckled composite of memory and old snap-shots stares back at me from the bathroom mirror in which little Dinny Walsh so assiduously slicks down his mop with Sunshine soap for his appearance on the de Blore's side verandah. I must have been a smarmy little brute. I could "take-off" people, and I was always the King or the Ogre or the Child Jesus, or whatever it might be, in the school concert every year. Although my Dad was Irish, and hadn't come out to Australia until he was a grown man, he went wild for Banjo Paterson and Will Ogilvie and all that push of horse-and-stirrup singers, and of course, I was the minstrel boy. I think I must have been the only youngster extant who could say the whole of *The Man From Snowy River* by heart—with actions, and what the nuns called "expression". I wonder that people didn't just throw up at me.

My father had a horse-and-cart which he made use of to combine a delivery-round with his piano-tuning, taking things in to town, bringing things out, dropping things here-and-there about the suburb. It used to nark my mother, and I could never understand why he kept on with it. I know now, of course. Making ends meet. In those days, fathers did all sorts of curious things to eke out the "sustenance" from the government. The father of one of my school-mates had a clearing

contract on a bit of land destined to become a football-field. He blew off nearly every finger of both hands, one or two at a time, and in comparison with many other families, his breezed through the Depression on the insurance money. In his own way, my father blew off his fingers rattling around the suburb behind his gentle old Ginger, because I know, now, that it hurt him like hell. His past was of a piece with the names of Lake Way and Nannine and Peak Hill, which were the first words I recall hearing, in casual conversation between my father and my mother, and in long afternoons of old-times talk between them and Sunday visitors in blue-serge and massive gold-nugget brooches. The aluminium nose-peg of a camel was one of my first playthings, yet it was not until I had grown up that I connected them with a time when he, too, had been a sort of legend around the Murchison goldfields, a camel-master at the same time as old de Blore, and chasing the same kind of business.

What with one thing and another, we would be up at the de Blore place every few weeks. When my father had done what he had to do—he was also handy with clocks—old de Blore would settle himself on a big cane chair on the verandah, overlooking the river, and would roar: "Come on, now, Dinny Walsh! What are you going to say today?" I always had something ready, because he would give me a sixpence and an apple or an orange to go with it. Apples and oranges came in halves at our place, and sixpence was my Bijou money, Saturday nights, or fishand-chips when I went to the beach, swimming, Sunday afternoons. I had got to know that his favourite was that one, The Bush Christening. On the outer Barcoo where the churches are few and men of religion are scanty... I think I could say it right through, now, if I put my mind to it. I would stand about four feet away from him, but still in the range of the blast of his breath—rum or whiskey, to this day I don't know which. He would always begin roaring with laughter even before I had begun. Then, I didn't know why, except to think that I was a gun entertainer. Now I do know. What a poor, pompous little shit I must have looked. Heels together and toes out, as the nuns had drummed into me. Bow, with my right hand flat on my paunch, my left clenched in the small of my back—the nuns' training again. And off I'd go. Now, fifty years after, the scene has become formalised in my memory as some sort of Byzantine composition of brittle, coloured glass, in a way not unlike the "tableau" the nuns crammed into every break-up concert, willy-nilly. The smallest and fairest (non Anglei sunt, sed angeli) in crepe-paper wings and white angels' shifts, scared witless on borrowed pedestals and staring down in adoration at somebody's sleepy-doll in somebody else's wicker washing-basket. Old de Blore in his huge wicker basket, my father and me; the ferns in bailer shells about the polished floor of the verandah, the sleeping river, the low, mauve skyline of the city. I can even remember, vividly, the white centres to the heavenly-blue flowers of a plant called "wandering Jew" that spilled over the sides of the hanging baskets. I never think of it, now, without burning for the way I exulted in my degradation, the way I so willingly sat up and balanced the biscuit on my nose for that brutal old bastard.

Sometimes I used to see Miss Honour. Miss Honour de Blore. Even now, just to say the name makes my heart turn over. I loved her with the hopeless love of ten for seventeen. I don't think I even knew it was love. All I realised was that what I felt for her was different from what I felt for the Virgin Mary. Honour de Blore was all but inaccessible, whereas the Mother of God was there every day on the shelf above the blackboard, in the blue-and-gold mantle whose protection we sought in the gabbled Oh-Mary-my-mother-I-place-myself-under-thy-mantle last prayer of the day, before we set out to rob the Chinamen's fig trees on the way home from school. And Honour de Blore almost always wore white, but soft, and so that you could see right through it to the pink or blue underdress she wore, with embroidery on it. She was dark, with deep blue eyes. She had long hair, and

she did it pulled back loosely, red-brown and wavy, into a huge black ribbon bow, stiff as cardboard, that sat there as if an outsize butterfly had alighted on the nape of her neck. Sometimes as we arrived, she stood in the doorway leading into their entrance hall, with the stained glass glowing blue and red and green and gold all around her. Further down the hall there was a white plaster arch with carving on it and crimson velvet curtains held back in the loops of gold cords with tassels, and on either side huge Chinese vases full of pampas grasses from their garden. Sometimes, when we had made our way past the black gardeners down the side path to the steps leading up onto the verandah, she would come out, and would lean her back against the rail to watch us, the blue of the river behind her. Usually, with her white dress, she wore a narrow black patent-leather belt, and almost always she had stuck a red rose or a red geranium in it. Right below her, it seemed, you could see the dark green swathe of rushes beside the river, on the far side of the Chinamen's gardens. Come down the rushes, we would say, when we were little nippers, and we would play explorer or pirate, or would fish for gilgies in the springs. Come down the rushes, we'd say later on, when we were in the district football team, and picking up girls at the edges of the dances in the Mechanics Institute Hall, with my own father, like as not, pounding out the *Pride* of Erin or the Jazz Waltz inside. Come down the rushes.

The only time I ever saw Miss Honour away from old de Blore's was down there. It was a grey-satin evening the colour of a mullet's belly, when the electric signs in the city across the water bled blue and green and gold in wavering lines almost to where we stood on the southern bank. Three of us had been down crabbing in the shallows. We were walking home along a raised mud dyke between two of the Chinamen's irrigation ditches, in the cool, swamp-smelling last light of shrilling frogs and night-herons booming in the sheoaks which then fringed the river on our side. We were cold in our sodden shirts and shorts, and were laden down with our catch and our nets. In single file, like the Chinamen, we were lurching along the path when the Jim or the Jack or the Joe in front said, in a breathless and surprised sort of way: "Uh ... good evening, Miss de Blore." I was last in line, and for a moment I thought he was having us on. We used to talk about her, and about meeting her, and getting fresh with her, in the ways of boys just beginning to feel their oats. In the way, maybe, boys living around Windsor Castle might talk about the unattainable occupants whom they only see, but never get to speak to. But as we drew level, I could see it was she, all right, in one of those luminous white dresses and a scarf around her shoulders. She said: "Hello, Dinnie!" even though it was two or three years since I had been up there to recite for them, but she didn't pause for so much as a second. Almost immediately, she was out of sight in the brown shadows, and when we had gone some distance in the other direction, the one in the lead said what we had all been thinking, I guess. "I wonder what the hell she's doing down here, this time of night?" The one in the middle said, with a giggle: "I never saw any bloke lurking around!" Being last in line, I had the privilege of the last comment, and I know they would have accepted it without question. "Don't be bloody silly about blokes!" I said. "Miss Honour."

Time passes, and usually it demonstrates just how wrong you can be.

That was the summer I got my Junior, which was the big deal in those days. Rather miraculously for the times, I got a job also. In the Post Office, for which I suspect I had to thank the influence of old de Blore—at my father's request, of course. Within a year, I was sent to a country centre in the south of the State.

The "post office Johnny" I replaced had doubled as sports reporter for the local paper, and I was offered the job. I found I had a flair for it, and before long I was submitting pars about all sorts of things, and having them accepted. Then I

got an offer to string for one of the Perth dailies, and finished up drifting into journalism. The war lifted the lid of the oyster for me, and when it was over, I began working my way around, looking for the pearl. The trail led me half-adozen times in and out of Hong Kong, so that before I knew it had happened, that bright jewel had sunk its proboscis into my veins like a true anopheles, and had infected me for life. Only less a disease with me was Macau, and on my last visit, about five years ago, I settled for living there and commuting to and from Hong Kong by hydrofoil. I had a small suite at the old Hotel Belvedere, a Charles Adams pile of flaking stucco and blocked drains crowning a rocky bluff that does sentry over a wide, junk-haunted expanse of the Pearl River estuary. There, of all places in the world, I met Honour de Blore for the first time since she had walked away from me that summer evening in the Chinamen's garden in South Perth, the luminous white of her dress drifting like a moth toward the river bank and the rushes.

I met her one Sunday morning in the flush of spring, when every foot on the hillside below the hotel seemed covered with greenery, and every spray of greenery seemed covered with blossom, and every blossom seemed covered with butterflies, in the Chinese manner: for don't forget it, in Macau you are in China, for all that several centuries of Portuguese rule have scattered the mouldering facades of beautifully-iced churches and convents all across that high ridge overlooking the Baia do Praia Grande. I had been sitting out on that little bit of the terrace which the busy coconut-fibre brooms of the farwongs still managed, somehow, to keep at bay the encroaching tide of rubbish, the by-product of the gross over-population which threatens to sink that exquisite little promontory of the Flowery Kingdom under the waters of the Pearl. The spring was still morning-cool, so I had my back to the warming rock wall. At the other end of the terrace, perhaps forty feet from me, a very well put-together woman was leaning her elbows on the balustrade, her chin in her hands, staring out towards where the misty Ladrone Islands sailed, unseen, like the ghosts of robber junks on the amethyst water. Is it because of what I now know that I can say I suspected from the moment I walked out onto the terrace, and saw her there, that it might be Honour de Blore? In any case, I had been willing her to turn around and put me out of my doubt-which she did, eventually, and stared straight back at me, her eyes narrowed in the bright sunlight. Then she walked over to me. There was no hesitation, no coyness.

"Dinny Walsh", she said. "You're a long way from South Perth."

"Honour de Blore", I said, standing up. "So are you."

We stared at each other for—I don't know. Maybe five seconds. I have no idea what she saw. Like most people, I believe, I hold some sort of appreciation of what I look like. It probably flatters me to myself. It hasn't changed for years, anyway. What I saw was a woman still beautiful, her brown hair heavily streaked with grey, but suiting her, her face lined, but gently. Eyes calm among their crows'feet. Or resigned? Again, I don't know. Whether naturally, or by some artful dodge, her figure seemed hardly changed at all, although perhaps a little heavier. She was dressed with that deceptively simple elegance that cripples bank accounts, in a long-sleeved blouse of some sheer white stuff tucked into a full-bottomed skirt, knee-high, of some sheer black stuff. At collar, wrists, waist and hem, deep bands of Chinese brocade on which the design had been picked-out with seed-pearls and semi-precious stones. After two marriages to extravagant women, I have a pretty lively appreciation of the look, and the cost, of good clothes. It occurred to me at the time that it was costing someone plenty to dress Honour de Blore. It was I who broke the silence.

"Then—what are you doing here?" I said. Maybe, in the twilight of my male chauvinism, as though she couldn't possibly have as much right as I to be rolling around the world, or as much competence to keep herself while she was doing it.

she must have read me correctly, for she said, simply: "I am Li Po. In Hong Kong, of course. Not here."

As she spoke the words "Li Po", the name Hetty Chia flashed through my mind, like the kingfisher's wing that glitters in so much Chinese poetry. I could not even pause to wonder why. I lost it immediately, in my surprise at what she had just said. There are only two Li Pos worth talking about. She couldn't be the Tang Dynasty poet who drowned himself first in wine, and then in a lake, trying to embrace the reflected moon. So she must have meant the high fashion house—not the biggest in Hong Kong, but certainly the most exclusive, with half the world's jet-set clothes-horses on its waiting list. It was above any chatty preoccupation with the right moment to reveal or conceal the knee, or liberate or confine the bust. It meant simply supreme elegance, and its signature was, in fact, the opulent embroidery I had been staring at, and to which my attention returned as Honour de Blore said the name. She caught the direction of my glance, and shook one of the glittering cuffs.

"I'm my own best advertisement," she said, smiling. "As a matter of fact, it's why I'm over here this weekend." She waved to the tangle of pink-tile roofs below us, the teeming cock-lofts crowding crooked lanes from which hundreds of years of European commerce had not been able to remove the ingrained obstinacy of their Chineseness. "There must be three or four hundred women going blind, down there, embroidering this kind of thing for me. I used to get it done in Hong Kong, but ... you know. Trade unions. They're not so particular here." She smiled, and shrugged. "Still the oppressors of the workers, us de Blores. Once, it was the blacks we diddled. Now it's the ... the Chows." She emphasised the word, long discarded, I imagine, except among Australians, in a way that whisked me straight back to my boyhood in South Perth, and my mother saying: Go down the Chows and get me ...

At the same moment, I recalled why the name Hetty Chia had jumped into my mind a moment ago: from a conversation half-heard, during a previous visit to Hong Kong, at a sunset cocktail party in one of those crazy towers of splintered glass that rear like jewelled chopsticks on the perilous dark slopes of the Peak. During the sort of sudden silence when one surreptitiously looks at the clock to see if it is quarter-to anything, someone close behind me had said. "Hetty Chia was to have come, tonight." Someone else, very English, had said: "She owns Li Po, doesn't she? Remarkable flair. Different from most Australians." And somebody else, very Australia, very ocker, said: "I'll say, different! She married a Chow. What price the White Australia policy now?"

I stared at Honour de Blore. "But, if you own Li Po..."

She looked back at me, with an amused smile. I think she must have read me again, or perhaps she was just used to it. She said: "I really can't be Honour de Blore, eh?"

"You are Hetty Chia?"

"For business purposes. Hetty was my mother's name, so I borrowed it. Honour Chia is a bit awkward—and in any case, the Hetty sort of name is in, in the rag trade. I prefer plain Mrs Chia, but of course, nobody will use it." She gestured toward the bench. "But please sit down, Dinny. And I will, too." She sat, as gracefully as I should have expected, and tucked her high-heeled shoes becomingly beneath the bench. As I lowered myself beside her, she said, again with that amused smile: "You most likely would have known my husband."

"Chia?" I spent a moment or two thinking back to Chinese I had met at her level, in Hong Kong and elsewhere. "Maybe," I said, at length. "But I'm afraid I can't recall."

"It was a long time ago," Honour de Blore said. She was no longer smiling. "Chia Kuan Yu. You would have called him Charlie." One of those enormous

black, blue-splashed Macau butterflies landed on the warm rock above her head, and hung there, voluptuously pulsing its wings to the rhythms of that shimmering spring morning. I saw instead a black ribbon bow on a girl's neck, and her leaning against the lacy-iron balcony on the side verandah at old de Blore's place. Behind her and below her, blue-clad figures of Chinamen weeding, tying, hoeing, watering among the vegetables they cultivated in exquisite order to the very edge of the dark swathe of rushes by the river. And any one of them would have glanced up at a call of *Hey, Charlie!* They had names—Sun Kwong Wah, Sook Lee, Yeang Lo Chee. Chia Kuan Yu. But we had called them all, indiscriminately, Charlie.

"Jesus Christ!" I said.

Honour de Blore ignored my exclamation. "My father used to do all their business for them," she said. "They were always up at the house about something or other—leases, bad debts, letters they couldn't understand. You know the sort of thing. He had always done the same things for our station blacks, so I guess it was second nature to him. I used to meet them all, on and off. It is how I met Chia. It was the only way I could have met him. He hadn't been in the country for very long. It was something about his indenture that he came up about. One of the older men brought him. He was young, and beautifully built. A light sort of build, but very strong. Good-looking. And exquisitely courteous. And about my age." She laughed, unaffectedly. "As a matter of fact, he was the sort of bloke, if he had been a pale-face my father would have made good and certain that he didn't get within spitting distance of me. As it was, I think he believed I couldn't actually see a Chinese market-gardener as a man, let alone as a man I might fall in love with. I'm sure he would have had just as much expectation of my falling for one of our abo stockmen." She paused for a moment, and stared at her hands, lying serenely in her lap. "Isn't it strange? Everything against it except that it would happen. Class, colour, religion, language, money. Even probability. Most of all, that. It was so improbable." She looked up at me. It was her damned, uncompromising honesty and lack of side that got me. "The very next evening I went for a walk down to the river, on that raised path through the garden. The night you met me. The first time I had ever done it. And I met him down there, of course. I knew he would be there. And I suppose he knew that I knew."

"And friendship ripened into love, and love into marriage?" I couldn't keep a touch of—what? Disbelief?—out of my tone. She ignored it, and immediately set me right back on my butt.

"Something like that—although we had no time for first steps," she said. She even smiled. "It might be more accurate to say love ripened into intimacy, and intimacy into conception. Because that's how it happened."

Now, of course, something like that would be a breeze. Things were different, then. While she had been speaking, half my mind had been remembering about an Australian woman, a friend of my parents, who had married a Chinese much older than herself, a respectable, moderately wealthy sort of bloke who otherwise would have been considered a fabulous catch for this particular suburban belle, in Perth particularly. At my local-football-team level, the comment was all about the legendary sexual prowess of the Chinese, and how she must have heard about it. The only adult comment I ever heard was my mother's tight-lipped observation to my father, when she thought I wasn't around. They might at least have spared a thought for the unfortunate children! I don't know what that woman's life was like behind her own door, but it must have been sheer hell outside. She was immediately, completely ostracised, of course, but she was hounded as well, with the kind of Christian brutality you encounter only, still, in Australian middle-class xenophobes. I felt a sort of horror that Honour de Blore might have been subjected to anything like it. I also could not credit that old de Blore could have let it happen.

"But what about your father?" I said, following up the thought. "Surely to God he didn't ... well, didn't go along with the deal?"

"There was no orange-blossom festival at the old homestead, if that's what you mean." She gave me a wry smile. "When I knew I was pregnant, I told him. He nearly shed his skin. Him—with a tribe of half-caste kids on every one of his stations. And still sleeping two or three nights a week with one or another of the abo housemaids. Then I told him who the father was. He didn't even answer me. He never spoke to me again."

"You mean, literally?" My mind was full of that mad, red face, those eyes that had glittered at me from their pits of suffering flesh. "Never again, not one word?"

"Literally, never again, not one word. And he disinherited me, into the bargain."

"So what did you do?"

"Chia and I got married. I bought him out of his indenture, and we came back here to live."

"But all of that must have cost you plenty?" I said. I couldn't see the apprentice market gardener having the kind of money implied, so she must have footed the bill. "How did you manage, if your father had cut you off?"

"My mother left me a packet when she died," Honour de Blore said. "And the house—it was hers. So was all the money, for that matter. It was she gave him his start." She glanced at me, quizzically. "You know she was drowned, don't you? In a willy-willy, up at Broome?"

"We used to hear it talked about, when we were kids."

"I bet you did. But you heard wrong. She committed suicide. She just followed the tide out, one morning. And didn't turn back when it did."

"What do you mean-followed the tide out?" I said.

"You've been in Broome?"

"Lots of times."

"Then you know how far the tide goes out on that coast. Miles, in some places—and you've got to be damn careful when it turns. But not her. She was born there. She didn't get back because she didn't mean to."

"Who told you? Who told you it wasn't in a willy-willy at all?"

"He did. My father. When I was fifteen."

"Then-why didn't you put him in?"

"My word against his." She shrugged. "He said that if I passed it on to anyone, he'd have me committed. And he would have. I can hear him now. You'll be in a strait-jacket before your next period's due."

"Jesus," I said. "And I always thought you had it made. I used to look into your hallway, and the stained glass, and the velvet curtains. And the gardeners, and the ponies in the stables. And you, with a red rose in your belt. Jesus Christ."

"I think, now, he was mad," Honour de Blore said. "When you get older, you piece things together out of what you heard, and saw, when you were a child. And didn't understand. For instance . . . do you know why he used to pay you to recite?"

I had been listening to her, but looking down to the roadway, where a skinny little woman was calling the tiny Chinese pineapples she carried in two baskets at either end of a pole across her shoulder. If Honour de Blore hadn't been there, I would have run down the steps and bought a couple. They were the sweetest things I've ever eaten. The word "recite" brought me back. For a split second I was on that side verandah bowing and smarming my way through some bit of ballad, with actions and expression. Old de Blore roaring in his huge wickerwork chair, my father never saying a word at the top of the steps leading down to the garden. I swear, I could smell the huge creamy trumpet lily that overhung the end

of the verandah. "Well—why?" I said. And knew as I spoke that what she would tell me would kill me. "I thought it was because I amused him, or something."

"He hated your father for some reason. They were running camel-teams in opposition, once. Lake Way to Sandstone, with mining machinery. Did you know?"

"I didn't then, but I do now." I felt again in my hand the cool, sharp edges of the aluminium nose-peg I had played with as a child. With it, my father had directed a camel across that blood-red never-never long before the days of walkie-talkies and surfaced roads—on the great, high-wheeled, lumbering waggon behind his team, perhaps, a choice load he had snatched from under old de Blore's nose. Young de Blore then, of course. "Did they have a run-in?" I said.

"Probably. Whatever it was, he knew it crucified your father to have to watch you being a good dog for him. Wagging your tail for the sixpence, or the apple, or whatever it pleased him to throw at you."

I managed a laugh, but I don't think I had ever felt my heart closer to breaking. Not for me. For that poor, funny, pompous little bugger old de Blore paid to make a goat of himself in front of his father. "I suppose you used to have a good laugh, too, when I'd gone?" I said, lightly.

"I thought you were so good," Honour de Blore said, so gently that I knew she was well aware of how I felt. "I really did look forward to your coming up with your father. You believe me?"

A very proper amah in black satin trousers and a white linen jacket led two little Chinese girls out onto the terrace. There was one of those vermillion-painted shrines against the balustrade, and they made a beeline for it. The amah lit the joss-sticks, and with immense solemnity and self-importance, the little girls stuck them in the tray of sand at the base of the shrine. They stood back, their hands closed together in front of their noses, as we do. The one who was facing me went crosseyed, trying to peer around the church-roof of her fingers. "What was your kid?" I asked Honour de Blore. "A boy, or a girl?"

"A girl," she said.

"I suppose she'd be married, now?" I said. "Does she live here, in Hong Kong?"

She didn't answer me immediately. The little girls had finished their devotions, and were now, just as solemnly, playing stone-scissors-paper. She watched them for a moment, and then looked out over the estuary, her face away from mine. Fairly obviously, she was commanding her composure, so I waited for her to speak. When she did, it was quite matter-of-factly, as if she were discussing some acquaintance. She looked straight at me.

"When I first came here, with Chia, I bought a place out in the New Territories—out beyond Sha Tin," she said. "You could, then. Dirt cheap. And so beautiful. I still live there."

She seemed to want to steer clear from talk of her child, so I said the first thing that came into my mind. "And your husband, too?"

"The Japs killed him, when they took over," she said. "We stayed in the house, and when they came, he went to the door. They must have thought he was a house-boy, or something. They bayonetted him, there in the hall. I saw them do it. They shunted me off to the compound, out at Repulse Bay. I stayed there for the duration. When I got out, after the war, I couldn't trace my little girl. You see—she looked quite Chinese. She would just have got caught up with the mob. I know the amah took her, and hid her—and then the amah was killed." She glanced away, briefly, to the tumbling roof-tops of the slums, crowding the Belvedere's high stone wall. "For all I know, she could be down there. She could be one of the women going blind, doing embroidery for me." There was nothing I could say,

and it seemed she had said all she wanted to say, because she turned again to me and closed the past up, like a book finished. "So I became Li Po."

"Just like that."

"You go so far, and it's all against you. Then ... it's as though they'd had their fun. You can't put a foot wrong." She shrugged. "But it really doesn't matter, any more."

"Why Li Po?" I asked, for no reason other than that it would push our conversation further along in the direction she seemed to want it to take, away from her husband and her child. To say nothing of all she had been through before she had ever got so far. "Was he such a hot dress-maker?"

I think she knew what I was up to, because she followed my lead without missing a beat. "Why not?" she said. "When he writes things like: The dragon roars, stopping the thunder, and bamboo rustles, breeze-driven, in the courtyard?"

I gave her the two lines leading into her quotation: The fierce sun scorches, blazing, then black clouds come, pouring rain from above. I had done a lot of reading in ancient Chinese poetry, mainly because some of it is among the most beautiful ever written. As the best of everything Chinese is among the best of all time. She glanced at me, in real surprise.

"We're a long way from The Bush Christening," she said, smiling.

"We're a long way from where I used to say it."

"Indeed. I guess South Perth has changed a lot?"

"There's a twenty-storey block of dinky little flats where your old home was," I said. It seemed to say as much as could be said about what had happened to that dreamy river-bank where, in my memory, it is always summer.

"I know," Honour de Blore said. "I own them."

I was incredulous. "You mean, it was you had that beautiful old place bull-dozed?"

"He wouldn't die, until I did," she said, simply. She stood up, and walked over to the balustrade, and leaned against it, as she had been when I had first seen her, that morning. Looking out across the estuary. I felt it in my bones that she was leaning against another verandah rail, looking across another stretch of water—and when she spoke, I knew I was right. "I wonder who walks who down the rushes, these days?"

"There's no rushes," I said, and felt some satisfaction, to pay her back for the house. "They bulldozed them, too. For a carpark."

She glanced briefly at her watch, then walked back to me. "I've got an appointment, Dinny. It's been good to see you again." She was above all that banal nonsense about let's lunch one day, soon, or don't forget next time you're up this way. I was thankful for it.

"Are you ever coming home?" I asked.

"You can't." She held out her hand, palm upward, a curious gesture as if she could see in it what they had put in pickle for her in the years ahead. Or in syrup. "You'll find out one of these days, maybe. It's like the gins used to say, up on the station, when I'd tell them it was time they stopped going walkabout. No-more, Missus."

She took my hand, shook it, dropped it, smiled at me once more, and walked away toward the steps leading down to the roadway. She did pause there for a moment, though, and glanced back at me. A big mok-min-fah tree was spreading the first of its mushy, blood-red blossoms just above her head, a famous Macau cure for tummy-trouble. By the time I was back in Australia, they would be a blood-red carpet on the terrace, and the locals would be coming from far and near to gather them.

GRAEME KINROSS SMITH

T. A. G. Hungerford

Malise grinned sideways in silence, and they watched the Japanese from the cover of the thick creeper behind which they crouched. The Japs were all naked, and the westering sun gilded their bodies strangely, even beautifully, as they skylarked on the sand. While the Australians watched, four of them pounced on a fifth and, swinging him by his arms and legs, hurled him out into a deep pool. He came up spluttering and shouted something at the group on the bank. They shouted back in mirthful derision, pelting him with banana peel, and a couple of them made the same lewd and unmistakable gesture that both Evans and Malise had made a thousand times in similar circumstances.

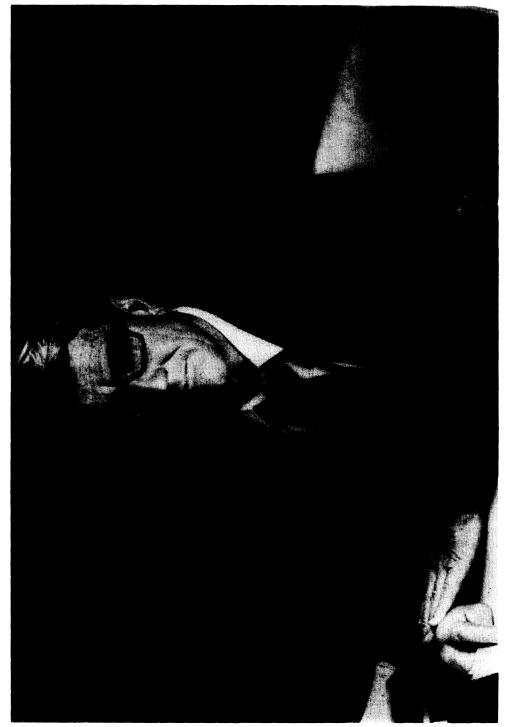
from The Ridge and the River.

Tom Hungerford sits in the wood-pannelled office in the Premier's Department high above St George's Terrace. Twelve storeys below the Perth traffic moves, and beyond is the broad blue sweep of the Swan River in the sun. Hungerford's voice is quiet, husky, but definite.

"When I wrote Ridge," he says, his fingers drumming the desk in time with his emphasis, "I wrote it so that someone a thousand years from now could pick it up and know what that jungle fighting was like. I was in New Britain, New Guinea and Bougainville during the war—and the book could have been set in any one of them, but the Bougainville campaign was the basis for it. It was a very dramatic period in my life—in anyone's life who went through it. I was in a commando group. We did map-making. We harassed. We captured prisoners, set up a lot of ambushes, gathered information. I can read passages from The Ridge and the River now that were written straight from experience—and they can make my hair curl. They can fill me with a dreadful nostalgia for the men who died or who have come back and changed."

Despite the cataclysmic effect of the two world wars on Australians who took part in them, remarkably few major pieces of creative literature have arisen from them. The Ridge and the River is one of these. For its treatment of the war in the jungles against the Japanese it has more than once been bracketed with books like Nicholas Monsarrat's The Cruel Sea, which describes the horrors of the war in the North Atlantic, and Irwin Shaw's account of the land war in Europe, The Young Lions.

"Of course that jungle war now seems unreal," Tom Hungerford says. "The terrain meant that if you wanted information you had to get it on foot in small commando groups. We didn't like the title commando, by the way. It seemed to make out that we were cashing in on the tradition of the British commandos—Narvik, Dieppe and so on. When we started training down at Derby, near Wilson's Promontory, we were called the Australian Independent Companies. A much better title. Because we were completely independent of bigger formations. We had



T. A. G. HUNGERFORD IN HIS OFFICE IN THE PREMIER'S DEPARTMENT, PERTH.

our own smallarms, our own tucker, our own guides. But later we were dubbed commandos, and moreover 'cavalry commandos'—Jesus!" Hungerford takes off his glasses, toys with them. "Now I was born in 1915," he continues. "I remember the aftermath of the First World War. Friends of my father came to the house and talked about the fighting. And in the 1930's, when you could sense the second war approaching, I used to worry about being caught up in trench warfare when it came; that was the sort of war I'd heard about. I didn't envisage the sort of war that came about and in which I was embroiled."

It was the first time he had seen a Japanese unarmed, undressed, helpless, playing, and he was afraid with a strange new fear. The Jap he had been used to seeing was always cruel, foreign—a remote face and a shapeless figure half screened by the cover of an ambush position, or a waddling, armed ape who might have raped European women in Hong Kong and would like to do the same in Perth or Sydney. A stinking thing sprawled beside a track, unhuman offal for jungle insects to swarm in. But these men in the creek, playing, unaware, stripped the same as any other man.

Tom Hungerford looks long out the window. He expels his breath slowly on the memory. "Just to experience those years in the islands was a revelation in so many ways," he says. "You see, we'd finish a job at midnight, say, on a track. In pouring rain. And we'd lie down on the ground, put our packs under our heads and go to sleep. In the mud. And were physically and psychologically able to do it. It was an eye-opener as to the extent to which one could be stretched—physically and mentally stretched. Not that one wants to beat the drum about what one did. It does now seem unreal. We were enclosed, you see. The world outside didn't exist, in a way. To stay alive every day was our main objective. The end of the war—even the bloody beginning of the war—was just too much to think about. Just to survive; that was it."

When the leading Japanese was about to step out of the water he could delay no longer. He tapped Wallace on the shoulder, nodding. The Bren-gunner nestled his cheek against the butt, wriggling his body in comfort behind the gun, and slid the change lever forward with a click. His face was pale, and his eyes strangely flat as he pressed the trigger. His ears filled with the exhilarating clamour of the gun, his body trembled violently against the earth as the cordite drifted back, making his nostrils smart; his teeth bared in a terrible grimace and a foul word, repeated over and over again, jerked across his lips. Time ceased to exist for him, and he became as coldly automatic as the gun behind which he lay.

At the first shattering bursts, Wilder, beckoning to Manetta, bounded from cover and ran, bent almost double, towards where he had seen Evans and Malise. Vicious white chips of foam flicked amongst the Japanese in the river. Screaming with fear and agony and defiance, they broke up, flailing wildly in the rushing water. The last of the party, knee-deep on the farther bank, turned and ran in panic to the shore, where he crumpled in shallow water, writhing on the sharp rocks. The man floundering behind him bent over him and dragged him a few feet, then fell across him, his face torn away by a ricochetting slug. Waters once green were suddenly red, and then as suddenly green again; two dark blotches bobbed and danced amongst the rapids downstream, and another threshed and screamed in the shallow water nearest the Australians.

The first Japanese, at the outbreak of the fire from the Bren, flung himself forward and miraculously escaped. As Wilder raced toward Evans, whom he could see swaying on his knees, he saw also a big bearded man of splendid build who charged up the slope, roaring shrilly with rage and hate. They converged on each other swiftly, with the wounded men between.

Wilder, his Owen dancing on his hip, unconsciously breathed a prayer and pressed the trigger. Manetta, drawing level with them, did the same, and the



T. A. G. HUNGERFORD TALKS BOOKS WITH MRS McCUTCHEON, PROPRIETOR OF THE WELL-KNOWN BOOKSHOP IN PERTH.

Japanese stopped as though he had run into a glass wall, staggered, screamed, and charged on. For a few feet only, then he pitched headlong. Evans, not a yard from where he lay, swayed out of his cover. Laughing softly, he smashed feebly at the black cropped head with the butt of Malise's rifle...

Thomas Arthur Guy Hungerford grew up in South Perth, a ferry-ride across the blue river from where he works today as a Public Relations officer for the Premier of Western Australia and other government ministers. "It was a beautiful place," he says, looking down on it from his window. "Perth was a much smaller enclave then. There was jungly bush all along that shore—streams, birds, swamps, gilgies (you call them yabbies). We used to go prawning, birdsnesting, fishing. We all had canoes—tin ones. We got money by paddling across the Swan to this side to sell the crabs we caught. It worried the lives out of our mothers. Later I swam a lot of long-distance races. I trained by swimming across the Swan. We were a poor community—but happy. There was an upper-crust area at the western end. We always called it "the other end". Most people down our end ran a cow or a horse. And there was a polo ground where I used to hold the horses between chuckas. It was a barefoot existence. I don't think I possessed a pair of shoes until I'd finished at the convent school and South Perth State School and had come over to Perth Boys School."

Then came the tough years of the Depression and the war. After five years of jungle fighting Hungerford had to collect the strands of his life again. His parents had died before the war began. The commando group he had fought with was immediately disbanded. He volunteered for the Canteens Service of the Occupation Forces in Japan, going through Morotai to Tokyo and then to Kure. It was round-the-clock work, servicing not only the Australian forces but the whole of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. Attacks of malaria put Hungerford in hospital more than once.

Out of those years in Japan came Hungerford's first book, Sowers of the Wind, written later in Canberra. (The Ridge and the River, his first book published, was the third written. His publishers, Angus and Robertson, after the consternation and furore that had arisen from the publication of Robert Close's book, Love Me Sailor, asked Hungerford first for a less "objectionable" book than Sowers of the Wind, which was an unvarnished account of Australian soldiers in Japan, and, as it had to be, an unflattering one.)

Tom Hungerford's eyes are firm and compelling as he leans back in the chair. "Sowers of the Wind grew out of my concern at Australian mistreatment of the Japanese during the Occupation," he says. "I felt that they were sowing a wind of hatred for the future. I got to know the Japanese pretty well—grabbed a Jap grammar, learned enough of the language to get by, went to dances and practised speaking it, asking questions. I was invited into their homes—even to a Japanese wedding. But not many of us were—a lot of our blokes were there for the sole purpose of taking it out on the Japanese, and they did."

Six months after the first atomic bomb had been dropped, Tom Hungerford stood in what remained of the streets of Hiroshima. No reconstruction had begun. It was a scene of complete desolation. Similar terrible destruction wrought by convenional bombing raids was evident all along the coast. The miles of docks and dry docks at Kure were filled with debris, bombed shipping, military trucks, office furniture. "We had to clear it all before things could get moving again," Tom Hungerford explains. "The attitude of the Japanese there was quite fatalistic. Of course I couldn't tell what they felt in their hearts, but they'd say, 'B-29 come' and spread their hands as though it were an act of God. 'B-29 come. Denki nor,' they'd say. I heard it a thousand times. 'B-29 come. No electricity.'"

Hungerford's attitude towards the Japanese was soon modified, now that he came to know them as people. He made good friends among them. He could see them now as a people caught up in a war as he had been, trying to win it, as he had been, under orders. "The men who conducted the Saipan Terror March were not these men," he says. "There was no bitterness among the middle-aged Japanese. But when the younger soldiers came back—they came later, after being held in prison camps—they were bitter. They weren't accepted by the community in many ways and they came home to find us in control, commanding their homes, their families, their resources. Everything good we had. They were very bitter."

On his return from Japan Tom Hungerford toyed with the idea of going back to the islands as a plantation overseer. But the plan fell through. In the jungle during the war he had promised himself a long holiday if he survived the fighting—one month for every year of the war. So he stayed in Sydney, living at Middle Harbour in a boatshed belonging to an aunt. He loafed, gardened, sailed a skiff on the Harbour, sometimes going into town for a drink with his army mates.

Eventually Hungerford became bored. It was a good sign, he says, that he had got the war out of his system. Providentially he was asked to write for the Australian War Memorial's "Stand Easy" series. He set to and produced six stories. He was promptly asked if he would edit the whole series of publications. He agreed and plunged into the work in Canberra, writing Sowers of the Wind at the same time. But he felt surrounded in his work by the public service mentality. He resigned when Sowers of the Wind was published and took a holiday in Western Australia. On his return to Sydney he freelanced and wrote stories for the Bulletin. Then he was asked to undertake the writing of the biography of William Morris ("Billy") Hughes. He agreed, but found very soon that Hughes was difficult to work with. The former Prime Minister simply would not impart any information. After working as Press Secretary to Hughes for a time—something not envisaged in the contract—Hungerford's frustration got the better of him. He walked out.

Like Sowers of the Wind, Hungerford's second novel to be written, Riverslake, arose from a deep-seated concern at injustice. It was the period of post war immigration in Australia. A friend working at one of the Canberra migrant camps had mentioned the prejudice that was rife there. Hungerford took a job as a kitchen hand at Eastlake camp, near present Narrabunda in Canberra, to see it for himself and to write about it.

"Eastlake was a jungle—a jungle," Tom Hungerford says emphatically. "There was murder there; rape, buggery, suicide. The lot. And a terrible feeling of desperation and disillusionment among the migrants. The Australians lumped them all together as 'Balts' and vented their anti-Balt feeling on them. I saw a lot of the active xenophobia of the good old Aussie labourer. I watched uncouth, beer-sodden sots lording it over educated men. It made my blood boil. That's what Riverslake came out of."

Since the early 1950's, when *The Ridge and the River* was written and published, journalism and public relations work have been the staple of Tom Hungerford's life. In the mid 1950's he was offered a place with the Australian News and Information Bureau. He put aside the trip to Europe that he had been about to embark upon and took the job for a trial period of six months. He stayed in the position for 15 years. He accompanied the Queen's tours of Australia, wrote up the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne, travelled in Antarctica, and covered Australia's length and breadth in a way that he could never have managed as a private individual.

Then followed a period as Press Officer in the New York office of the Consul-General where he publicized Australia in articles and toured to give lectures on the country at Universities and colleges and to professional groups. It was in New York (" a very vital and interesting place") that Hungerford met the Australian

boxer, Tony Madigan. Hungerford became fascinated by Madigan's life story, and especially his virtual adoption by a rich lawyer-sportsman. He wrote a novel about New York in which the central figure, Charlie Dangerfield, is loosely modelled on Tony Madigan. The book was called *Shake the Golden Bough*. "Tony was one of those people who knows that nothing will ever happen to him—that he'll always fall on his feet," Hungerford explains. "Some of that went into the character of Charlie Dangerfield."

In the mid 1960's Tom Hungerford was recalled to open an office of the News and Information Bureau in Perth. Shortly after, the mineral boom in the Pilbara region of Western Australia began. The pace of work mounted for Hungerford. He wrote masses of material, entertained visitors to the state, conducted tours, planned itineraries. In 1967, heeding doctor's advice, he resigned in order to do less demanding freelance work and book reviewing. In 1969 he spent a year in Hong Kong and Macao and wrote a novel and an illustrated travel book on Macao as a result. This writing and his travel on the islands provided the relief he needed from the treadmill of government publicity. Back in Australia, he wrote the text for his book on his home state—A Million Square. It was illustrated by the brilliant photographer, Richard Woldendorp, a man with whom Hungerford had worked in the News and Information Bureau. The two re-travelled much of the huge state together in preparing the book. Since that time Tom Hungerford has held his present post with the Government of Western Australia in Perth.

The abiding impression of Tom Hungerford is of an active man. His sixty years are, as it were, something of a surprise to him. He is decisive, forthright, full of enthusiasms and plans. He still swims and plays tennis and squash. After a day spent in writing, he reads. "I'd commonly read for three or four hours a night, probably four nights a week," he says. "I'm insatiable." He haunts Mrs. Mc-Cutcheon's bookshop off St. George's Terrace in Perth, dwelling on the appearance of new books, talking literature. He delights in entertaining and in travelling. He has never married. "But I've been married a few times without dispensation of Holy Church," he says, laughing. In late 1975 he plans to retire and devote himself for a time to his land in the hills some eight miles from Perth. He is determined to go at last on the long-postponed trip he has planned through the Americas, Britain and the Continent, Israel, Ethiopia and parts of Asia. "And I've got a lot of writing to do," he adds. "There are some short stories due for a collection. I'd like to do another novel. I've got some ideas for plays. And there's a book I've always wanted to write, an autobiographical one about South Perth as I remember it, when there used to be a swathe of Chinese market gardens along the river. When we were kids, wherever you looked there would be a Chinaman shuffling along the footpaths in his blue dungarees ... Yes ... I'll write about that ..."

ROD MORAN

Swimmer

Hesperus clouds bank, break across the sun; the bay races beachward. Sideways through silence and grey slants of sun, I roll in the quiet of the ocean's belly—listen how these mocking gulls chant my drowning.

BARRY LOWE

Shot Gun

Impossible, I thought, that this dawn can keep on rising Always so pure and resolute; Cleansed in the night's eye; Insidious in its slow deliberate movement. Soon it will silhouette her Just above the cluttered dressing table. The blurred outline of that swelling mound of hers Will force me to leave the sight of my own subjection. I will hide, my head pressed hard against her shoulder As a mist of corrupted dreams nags over me.

Thomas Keneally's "The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith" and Frank Clune's "Jimmy Governor"

Even a casual study of Frank Clune's Jimmy Governor¹ suggests that this history embodies the raw material for Thomas Keneally's The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith² (winner of the Royal Society of Literature Award in 1973). Keneally confirms that a chance reading of Clune's book in 1970 gave him 'a hint of what the whole subject meant' and led him to research certain reports of the Governor brothers' crimes of 1900 in the Sydney Morning Herald, The Bulletin, and The Sydney Mail. When he came to write The Chant at Wimbledon, England, in 1971, he consulted Clune's history 'as a guide to what happened next and to the movements of the brothers'.3

This is not to admit plagiarism of Clune's book in any real sense, but it does uncover the selection of historical details upon which the novelist's creative intelligence was initially able to work. What Keneally usually seeks when doing historical research for his novels are events and ideas that 'reek of human, poetic, dramatic and symbolic veracity and resound in his imagination'.4

That Jimmy Governor 'resounded' in Keneally's imagination is obvious first on a merely superficial level, in that both authors were preoccupied with the plight of half-castes in white Australia. Passages in Clune which must have affected Keneally are those which 'modernise' the racial problem in terms of the hero's personal dilemma. For example,

Jimmy Governor was not a primitive aboriginal. There was as much white in him as black, yet, while belonging partly to both races, he belonged fully to neither. This was his tragedy and he brooded on it. (p. 24)

But on a more complex level of moral meaning, Clune interpreted the irony of a certain historical coincidence in the year 1900: in Ch. viii of Jimmy Governor he reminds the reader that the sensational hunt for the brothers occurred in the same year that the Federal Constitution of the Australian Colonies was enacted by the British Parliament, and that the Constitution made no provision at all for aborigines. Keneally must have been strongly stimulated by such material, and one example of his development of the satire inherent in this collision of historical events is his scene of argument among the white hunters (Dowie Stead, Dud Edmunds, Toban and company—p. 106) which exposes the irony of federated

Sydney, Horwitz, 1959; 1970 reprint. All page references are to the 1970 edition.
 Sydney, Penguin, 1973 reprint. First published Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1972, but all subsequent page references are to the 1973 Penguin edition.
 Letter to the writer dated October 1975.
 Keneally, "Doing Research (2) For Historical Novels", The Australian Author, January 1975, 2027.

^{1975,} p. 27.

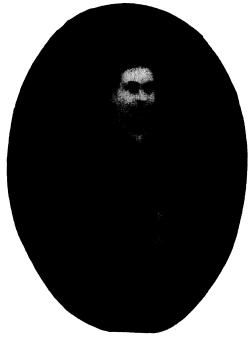


MRS GOVERNOR
Wife of Jimmy Governor

Portraits from The Sydney Mail, Sat., Aug. 4, 1900.



MR MAWBEY
MRS MAWBEY



Australia sending mounted riflemen to kill distant Boers for the British, when the Boers' basic policy had been the same as their own—to keep the black men 'in their place'. The novelist's general thrust is aimed against the patriotic white man's figurative and physical rape of aborigines; but especially singled out for satire is nation-conscious, blue-eyed grazier, Dowie Stead, who hopes to enlist in the army, and whose racial prejudice is rooted paradoxically in his lust for a lubra. Layers of this kind of moral meaning are drawn together in the novel's last pages; Keneally associates a cartoonist's symbol of Federation (the drawing of a smug woman) with the spectacle of strong-armed farmers in a show-ring fiesta, exulting in themselves and their new nation's coming-of-age while black men lay forgotten and shut out from their ancient cultural heritage. To round off his ironic drama of pastoralists (white-skinned and on horseback) versus fugitives (pigmented and barefoot) Keneally moved the date of Jimmie's hanging forward from January 1901 (the date of Jimmy Governor's execution) to April, evidently to coincide with the celebration of Sydney's Royal Easter Show on 'crucifixion' day. Although Keneally acknowledges his use of the countryman's weekly, The Sydney Mail, as a source of information for attitudes of Australians in 1900,5 it is safe to assume that Clune's recognition of the above coincidence first prompted Keneally to research the Mail, and that the regular featuring of N.S.W. Agricultural Shows in issues of the Mail of 1900, with full pages of show-ring photographs, might well have been the specific source for the author's bitter ending to The Chant.

Keneally's dramatization of Jimmie Blacksmith's 'war' on the world seems almost certainly to have derived from Clune's observation that 'Ned Kelly had declared war on the police, but Jimmy Governor had declared war on the people' (p. 143). This must be regarded as germinal in any interpretation of Keneally's frank admission that Clune's book gave him 'a hint of what the whole subject meant'. The simple narrative structure of *Jimmy Governor* can be summed up as a classic pattern of provocation leading to violent revenge and prolonged pursuit; and in his early chapters, Clune selects those biographical events which contain the potential for vengeance on the part of the sensitive and ambitious 'hero'. This build-up of motivating and provocative detail should strike the Keneally reader as significant. Clune, after dwelling on Jimmy's mixed parentage, suggests that the boy abruptly left his job as a uniformed police-tracker at Cassilis N.S.W. because of his deep desire to be a free man, and his resentment at always being termed aboriginal. (Keneally uses this idea, but complicates it and moves to another dimension of drama with the affair of Harry Edwards, whose suicide-corpse hanging in the police cell generates a sense of guilt in Jimmie Blacksmith that is part of his reason for later violence.) Clune's moral selection of details continues to create a framework of provocation through his emphasis on Mrs Jimmie Governor's white skin, his listing of her pained reactions and the effect of these upon her husband. Take, for instance, her disappointment with her new home (the slab hut at Breelong, N.S.W.), her shame over the arrival of Jimmy's relatives to form a conspicuous blacks' camp around her, all of this only adding to the contempt in which she was held by the Mawby women (the Newbys in Keneally). To emphasise society's rejection, not only of the half-caste but of his white wife as well, Clune's choice of words to open his history are those spoken to Jimmy Governor by the Mawby's boarder, Helena Kerz (the model for Keneally's Petra Graf): 'Pooh, you black rubbish, you should be shot for marrying a white woman!' (p. 7). Clune's groundswell of protest about the injustice of such an attitude is made explicit:

They were alone now—two against the world, social outcasts—but not entirely friendless. Jimmy's dark-skinned relatives did not think it a disgrace that

⁵ op. cit. p. 28



MISS KERZ

Portrait from The Sydney Mail, Sat., Aug 4, 1900.



Sketch from Truth, Sunday, Jan. 20, 1901.

NOSEY JOE

their kinsman had married a white girl. The purity of their race had been too often sullied by the intercourse of their womenfolk with white men, outside marriage, for them to feel that the sanctified marriage of a half white man with a full white woman was a shame. (p. 27)

Obviously the powerful reach of Keneally carries such plain moral comment on historical events into another dimension of meaning. This is the strangeness and the reality of fiction—it empowers raw historical 'facts' with a deeper kind of social and psychological 'truth'. Guided by Clune, Keneally emphasises the illfated marriage of his hero to the pregnant white girl (Gilda), but he skilfully makes it a matter of more complicated narrative structure as well as a stroke of dramatically associated events: the Anglican wedding ceremony is linked with Tabidgi Jackie's fictional delivery of Jimmie's initiation tooth, and these two events frame the opening flashback-biography of The Chant's first sixty pages. Jimmie's rejection of the symbolic tooth represents his open rejection of his tribal laws (especially laws on marriage). His attitude of contempt for the tooth is made credible by the preceding narration of his longing to be a white landowner with a white wife—someone as ripe and respectable as Mrs Healy (derived from Mrs O'Brien of history). The tooth-tossing is also structurally important in that it prefigures Jimmie's efforts to ignore his brother Mort's warnings about the bad portents of women's blood, and it links with Jimmie's mouth wound and the feverish delirium of self-awareness in 'Kaluah Convent'-a complete departure from history.

Clune's straightforward complaints about racial prejudice thus become the raw material for Jimmie Blacksmith's drama of confused identity, a drama charged with images of blood, sex and human carrion. Such imagery communicates the social reality of growing desperation and despair, a disease that infects not only the half-white hero, his relatives and the degenerate blacks at 'Verona' settlement, but also the drunken white men who reel into lubras' huts as a matter of addiction.

In the character of Petra Graf (Helena Kerz) the two books are peculiarly linked. Even Clune himself, in his treatment of Helena, moves beyond history into the realm of fiction—he dwells upon her scandalised attitude to the marriage of Ethel and Jimmy, and even hints strongly at a sexual attraction felt by the white schoolteacher for the handsome and educated half-caste. Expanding upon this, Keneally allows his Petra Graf to tread down the Blacksmith couple with withering scorn, and in the slaying of the Newby women, it is the silencing of Miss Graf and the sight of her split belly that seems to fascinate Jimmy Blacksmith. In Jimmy Governor, Helena's fiance Herbert Byers is the original for Dowie Stead, the fiance of Petra Graf in The Chant, and here the selection and interpretation of detailed incident provides an enlightening example of the novelist's use of Clune's book. Herbert Byers looks with grief upon the mutilated body of his fiance, and produces a £5 note, swearing that he will find Helena's murderer, soak the note in his blood, and keep it afterwards in her memory (p. 84).) Keneally's Dowie Stead is not a sentimental bushworker like Byers, and is already out of love with Miss Graf before her death. Typical of the mounted white pastoralists who are satirised in The Chant, Dowie only toys with the novel idea of dipping a £5 note in her murderer's blood, and that merely as a gesture to impress the Newbys (p. 91). But the very notion of blood-soaked money here confirms the strong influence of Clune.

Possibly Clune's love of anecdote led him to expand upon the character and the predecessors of 'Nosey Bob' Howard, famed Sydney hangman and sheriff's valet, who had lost his nose years before when kicked by a horse, and who officially executed Jacky Underwood and Jimmy Governor. Jimmy was Howard's sixtieth hanging; and this digression by Clune must have driven Keneally to hunt up the

well-illustrated Truth article of Sunday, January 20, 1901 (p. 5), which Clune must certainly have used. That this article 'resounded' in the imagination of Keneally is evident from his mention of Truth in his scene between the ghoulish Knoller and Mr Highbury the butcher-hangman of *The Chant* (pp. 92-4). Further evidence of Keneally's personal reading of this Truth report (at Clune's prompting) exists in his actual notion of a Sydney hangman who kept a butcher's shop, because the Truth article describes a former Sydney hangman who was also a poulterer or chicken-butcher, and it makes a point about the peculiar link between killing chickens for sale and slaughtering men for the State. One can claim that Keneally's Mr Wallace Highbury the painstaking butcher, cleaving his steaks as a daily occupation, and performing neat official hangings with exquisite care, not only derives from 'Nosey Bob' and the chicken-butcher, but belongs to the author's own curious attempt to refine brutality by means of his precise, almost detached accounts of carnage (with chilling effects upon the reader). Again, the butcher's precision is easily associated in the reader's mind with Jimmie Blacksmith's intentionally deep cleavages of the fleshy Newby women, prophetic of Jim and Jackie's deaths at the careful hands of Mr Highbury.

During his account of the long pursuit for the murderers, Clune capitalises briefly on certain entertainment-value inherent in newspaper accounts. Besides creating some narrative suspense about the state-wide chase itself, he gives details of quaint tricks devised by the fugitives to throw police and civilians continually off the scent. But Keneally uses the fact of contrast between civilized and primitive methods of travel back and forth over the dense N.S.W. ranges to develop his irony about Jimmie's inner conflict—that is, between the black and white parts of his being—and the irony of the hero's divided heritage informs the novel's general structure. Whereas in the first part of *The Chant* the hero longs to be white, in the second section Jimmie the fugitive loses his white aspirations and becomes more truly aboriginal, superior to his pursuers. He and Mort travel like trained 'Tullam' men, sensually close to the earth, along ridges and courses that no horsemen could hope to follow. Keneally ignores the bush-tracking methods of Byers (Stead) that are reported by Clune—the satiric novelist keeps his groups of hunters always mounted, armed and even more ineffective than their historic originals.

The climactic wounding of hunted Jimmy Governor in mouth and buttocks by Herbert Byers and his friend Bob Woods is reported with veracity by Clune, but Keneally does not give his Dowie Stead any credit for the shooting—the hero is wounded by an unnamed marksman in the mouth only, and the shot in the buttocks is not mentioned. This departure by the writer of fiction from the official reports about who fired the shot is a part of Keneally's sustained antipathy to the attitudes of his Tory-like Dowie. Again, his omission of the extraneous detail of the buttock injury is understandable, because from the time of the shooting of Jimmie Blacksmith, the mouth wound receives great imaginative play from the novelist.

Keneally's use of Clune as a guide to 'the movements of the brothers' proved to be only a basic expediency, a time-saver for the novelist as he initially set to work at Wimbledon. To develop properly a study of the extent to which Keneally goes beyond Clune and beyond history, would require another extensive paper, to discuss for example, Keneally's reduction of the number of actual murders, the matter of Gilda's all-white baby, Mort Blacksmith's exuberant loyalty and loss of innocence, the introduction of Mr. McCreadie, the asthmatic teacher-hostage, whose personality operates to divide the Blacksmith brothers and to lighten the desperate events of the final trek. The whole cultural fabric embodying tribal law and totem power which deepens the reality of the aboriginals and half-castes' social and spiritual plight can perhaps best be understood in Keneally's creation of full-blood Tabidgi Jackie Smolders (drawn from old Jacky Porter and perhaps

Jacky Underwood). The tribal chants of Tabidgi and Mort thrum through the book with lyrical power, and almost ritualise it into a kind of danse macabre. Tabidgi Jackie's beliefs about the totem of Emu Wren refer the reader in the opening pages of The Chant to anthropological sources and a thematic complexity that far transcends the bland moralising of Clune, until at last in the climactic Convent scene Jimmie experiences a strange blending of Christian and tribal understanding.

Yet each author pursues his own purpose in his own way, and this paper is not a critical comparison of their achievement, but the study of a source which reveals the creative mind of the novelist at work; and it is safe to assume that if it had not been for Keneally's chance reading of *Jimmy Governor* some time in 1970 The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith would never have been written.

LINDA BLAGG

Childhood House

There's a cupboard full of yellow newspapers Under the bed, old souvenir books of famous London places
The window is very loose, dangerous
The drawer under the cupboard full of stale linen—stuck
The room smells musty
No one sleeps there any more
Old fashioned clothes in the wardrobe and a chipped potty—stained.
Interrupted here near nude by an outsider.

JENNIFER COMPTON

A Star on the Canvas

I'm going to show them how brave I am—
I'm going to lie laughing under the elephant's foot,
I'm going to put my head in the tiger's mouth
And swing from the trapeze by my little finger without a safety net.

They're going to hold their breath at the sight of me In white spangles and a silver cape with feathers Turning back flips and standing on my head on the slack wire Singing in contralto juggling thirteen silver balls.

I'll be in the centre ring with a spotlight With top billing and a star on my tent When I can tap dance on a blue and yellow beach ball While my trained sea lion whistles Ole Man River.

They'll be queuing for my autograph When I put on baggy pants and a red nose And fall on my face with my foot in a bucket So they can have a good time and cry with laughter.

And I'll be in centre ring with top billing In white tinsel with a spotlight in my eyes Dripping sweat into the sawdust and smiling, Gathering in a bouquet with blistered fingers.

Give me Credit

I want to love you baby in an old and unaccustomed way I want to tickle your fancy and see what kind of childlike game you play, You're kinda like I was and kinda like I could be If I wasn't like I am but still I can see, I can see. Hypnotise me with that easy flair I lost so long ago Mesmerize me with possibilities and don't let me say no, Put yourself on the market, let me see what money can buy I'm loaded baby but still the price is much too high. On my way from there to here I spent it all On my way from then to now I spent it all. I bought fame and fairweather friends and crates of chateauneuf du pape, I bought sunny Sundays and black midnights and one huge gilded trap, I bought tricks and treats and black silk sheets And fun and games and well known names And I'm bankrupt, wiped out, flat broke, on the streets-Can you spare me a dime, can you spare me the time? I'll give you everything I haven't bought If you'll give me everything I can't afford.

ANDREW DONALD

"The Milkmaid" Oscare Gustave Rejlander: 1857

hands poised with the ladle in the milk-can, you look down quietly at the black and white cat taking a sample out of its bowlyour heavy cloak clothes your slender and secret body. your face is dewed fresh with a complexion as clear as the milk you are so familiar with. this morning you are far from the timber desks and rusting nibs. at first light, the sun illuminates your flower-patterned cloak; your long hair, parted carefully, glows as soft as pollen on a spring day. you ladle the milk to the outstretched bowl how many steps have you climbed and reflected upon the stillness of the morning? there are still shifting shadows around you but the heavy sun will surely warm them and they will fade away as you shall as the sun edges its way across the grey/golden sky.

From a photograph exhibited at "Victorian Photography", (Cultural Centre, Melbourne).

Sincerity and Flight – 100 Years of Australian Poetry

In selecting the poems included in *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (1972), the editor, Professor Harry Heseltine, states—

Generally, I have been guided not only by what personally pleases me but also by what I believe to be essential to an undesrtanding of the development of our poetry.¹

The resultant collection of "essentials" appears to be the fitting occasion for some retrospective observations.

In his Introduction to the Penguin anthology, Harry Heseltine finds that "The Creek of Four Graves", written by Charles Harpur, "with whom the tradition of deliberate poetry starts in Australia", is both narrative and heroic.² This poem is the first exhibit in the anthology. On looking at it,³ we find that the narrative concerns the journey of a "master" and his four men. The poem begins—

A settler in the olden times went forth ...

Charles Harpur was born in the year 1813. The First Fleet arrived in Australia in the year 1788. In view of these dates, we might well ask, what did Harpur mean by "the olden times"? What impulse prompted him to use a romantic convention in a factually inappropriate situation? In my view, there is more in this than meets the eye; it is not enough to say that he simply, unthinkingly repeated a convention. However, I will set this aside for the moment.

Back to Harpur's narrative. The master and four of "his most bold and trusted men" go into the "wilderness". At night, the four men sleep, while the master keeps a lone watch. Suddenly, "painted savages" burst in upon the sleepers, clubbing three of them to death. The fourth sleeper "who had with misery nearly all his days/ lived lonely" is described as rising to his knees; he is a "poor wretch" who, out of despair of his life so far, wants to hold on to "life's poor chances". He is blinded with his own blood, and another blow finishes him. Four gone. The master, "chilled with horror", and more from instinct than conscious thought, fires a shot, then flees into the darkness. He runs for his life, jumps into a creek, and—

There in its face a cavity he felt,
The upper earth of which in one rude mass
Was held fast by the enwoven roots
Of two old trees, and which, beneath the mould,
Over the dark and clammy cave below,
Twisted like knotted snakes. 'Neath these he crept...⁵

We hardly need the poet's mention, immediately before these lines, of "The daily prayers of spotless womanhood/And helpless infancy...", to guide us to the symbolic resonance of this refuge. We are told that the master hid in this refuge till it was safe to leave, and then—

Renewed his flight, nor rested from it, till He gained the shelter of his longed-for home.⁶

That is all; except perhaps for the final mention of the old trees which "moan the ancient dirges that have caught/The heed of dying ages...". Where is the heroism? Harpur's poem is a tale of fear and flight.

A few more points about the narrative. The standpoint of the narrator, at the levels of space and time, is accompanying and contemporaneous with the action; that is, the narrator himself is also in "the olden times"; except that, at both the start and finish of the poem he establishes a "distancing" effect by adopting a standpoint contemporaneous with his reader. The narrator's standpoint in space is chiefly that of a close accompanist; he is a sixth and non-interacting observer of the band of five men, with whom he travels. After observing the murders, the narrator flees with the master, moves a small distance away from him in hiding, in order to observe the "savages", follows the master to his home, and then returns alone to the creek to witness the graves in a later age.

Th narrator's standpoint at the psychological level is external to the three men who are killed first; that is, any thoughts or feelings these men may have are only to be inferred from the described facts of their behaviour. However, with regard to the fourth man, as well as to the master and the savages, the standpoint is internal but not identical; that is, the narrator tells us what is in each mind in turn, as an all-knowing observer. There are of course other levels of 'standpoint' but only those of space, time, and psychology are noted here. They will be returned to later, since they undergo significant changes in the subsequent course of Australian poetry.

Another feature of Charles Harpur's poem, a romantic characteristic, is its emphasis on feeling, its pathos, as against a thoughtful meditation of its subject. The balance here is in favour of subjectivity, as opposed to objective vision; and this, despite the poem's copious reference to the physical world—a point already well noted by Harry Heseltine when he writes—

There is, indeed, little or no evidence that literal realism in any way commanded Harpur's primary allegiance.⁷

Furthermore, and this is a basic point, Harpur's poem, despite its objectively impossible standpoints on the levels of space, time and psychology, is patently sincere. This sincerity is not an aesthetic concept but is a moral and romantic concept. It has the assumption that the poet speaks in his own person and, that if he is not identical with the hero of his tale, he is at least identical with the narrator, who is himself an unambiguous, always self-identical person. Of Harpur, the poet, we can say that he is sincere, subjective, and also, having regard to the 'stand-points' mentioned above, an exponent of conventions which, in modern eyes, are tantamount to conscious self-deception.

The loss of credit that this conscious 'self-deception' has undergone appears to be the essential factor that distinguishes present-day Australian poetry from that of earlier years. The reader nowadays no longer believes in the inventions of the poet, and he holds the poet's putative feelings, inclinations and views for mere fictions; that is, the reader not only takes the literary ego, behind which the poet conceals himself, for a pure construction, but he also takes the persons with whom the poet surrounds himself in his work, and the events by means of which the poet brings these persons into relationship, as fictions. Additionally, the ego of the poet

appears to the modern reader as a personification of conventional attitudes; his characters appear to be moved like chess-figures and the events in which they are involved bear the character of artificial patterns of action. However, these considerations will be resumed later in this review; it being first necessary to note other "essentials" of our poetical beginnings.

The second poem in Professor Heseltine's anthology is again a Harpur piece, the well-nown "A Midsummer Noon in the Australian Forest". Despite the seemingly total difference in subject-matter, this poem is a mild repeat of the flight motif of "The Creek of the Four Graves"; in place of "the dark and clammy cave below" in which the master hides, the narrator of this second poem tells us that he lies "hidden . . . in this grassy cool recess"; in place of the dark "savages", he hides from the "noon's scorching eye". The "water" of the first poem is present here as a "cool murmur" and as a "cooler comfort". The only creature that moves in the light is non-human, a "beetle". The Bush is still; the poet lies hidden in it. All this of course may simply appear to represent Harpur's peculiarities of subject: matter.

However, the next poem, by Adam Lindsay Gordon, born 20 years after Harpur, is called "The Sick Stockrider", and it begins with the well-known line—

Hold hard, Ned! Lift me down once more, and lay me in the shade.9

The narrator here is a sick man who looks back over his life as he lies waiting to die. His life has had its high points, mostly of physical exhilaration, but the human fates that he now recalls, name by name, his "comrades of the old colonial school", have ended in violence, in the "horrors", in "trouble". At the end of the poem, the narrator pleads—

Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave ... 11

It is time for him to die.

Henry Kendall, born six years after Gordon, opens his "Bell-Birds" with—

By channels of coolness the echoes are calling, And down the dim gorges I hear the creek falling...¹²

Here, speaking in the first person, the poet tells us that the light "struggles" down, and that the bell-birds he paeans have calls "softer than slumber". A new note, however, in this by now familiar theme, is the mention of "the city and alleys", a note which soon grows loud in our poetry. The poem concludes with an interpreting of the bell-birds as—

Charming to slumber the pain of my losses With glimpses of creeks and a vision of mosses.¹³

Kendall's next poem here, "The Last of His Tribe", tells of the past and present condition of a native, from the standpoint of a narrator who knows all, except the future:

He crouches, and buries his face on his knees, And hides in the dark of his hair For he cannot look up to the storm-smitten trees Or think of the loneliness there; Of the loss and the loneliness there.¹⁴

Who is really being described here? This fiction, of presuming to know how it is with other people's troubles, as a means of describing one's own, is progressively

given up in the later course of our poetry. More and more the standpoint becomes exclusively external, as in reportage.

Just as the narrative, the story in the old sense, becomes increasingly documentary in standpoint, so does the psychologically differentiated and individualised hero become an anonymous being, a chance representative of the human condition. He soon becomes nameless, and only occasionally, apparently involuntarily and unintentionally, is he mentioned by his given name.

For example, Francis Webb, born in 1925, has written a poem called "Harry", in which a "moron" is described exclusively from a close external standpoint while he writes an imbecilic letter. "Harry", no surname given, becomes representative:

Transfigured with him we stand Among the walls of the no-man's land...¹⁶

And Wilma Hedley's "Isaac", ¹⁷ again no surname, is representative of a Jewish child in an Australian school. The poet reports Isaac as saying:

Of course you know my ultimate fate, the real sequel, I'm bloody well named in a capitalist land to become an equal.¹⁸

Thomas Shapcott's "Party in Room 21" reports of transcience:

Peter, Bob; Helen; Nell. These present names we know enough to wrap a week, a year, a place around; enough to pin this moment to.¹⁹

Often, the bearer of the narrative is simply 'he' or 'she', or is referred to by his occupation or role at the time. Grace Perry has a poem reporting on the medical examination of a man, whom the narrator is "powerless to heal", and who is referred to anonymously as "Red Scarf".²⁰

Kenneth Slessor's "Beach Burial", 21 with its convoys of nameless dead sailors provides here an interesting contrast with Bruce Dawe's much later poem, "Home-Coming",22 which also treats of the war dead. With Slessor, born in 1901, the subject is confronted with hints of a saving meaning and with the 'sincerity' of an older generation. The details of Slessor's description are so selected that a sense of symbolism arises, implying a transcendent order of values and a life after death. The values of this 'two-world' system are virtually reversed in Dawe's poem: the details are sharp and random, such as the eye might range over without selection, while any transcendent 'order' they may imply is suggested as highly questionable, if not absurd and horrifying. With Dawe, born in 1930, the qualities of meaning and sincerity are irrelevant in mediating the data of typical experience; the poem gives the impression that any attempt to 'save' the enormity of the situation by any 'meaning' at all would be impertinent; it is the literal truth of the senses that counts. Kenneth Slessor, when he speaks of his dead seamen as "gone in search of he same landfall",23 requires of us a certain respectful suspension of doubt: Dawe does not.

However, the way to this latter-day anonymity has by no means been a simple progression from the individuals and "characters" of the past, but is solely one aspect of a complex development that can be characterised, along with the earlier, more palpable examples from Harpur, Gordon and Kendall, in terms of variations of the 'flight' motif so persistent in Australian poetry. These attempts at flight can be interpreted as renunciations and protests against the implicitly entered rules of social play. In retrospect, it has been the release from the obligation of sincerity that has marked the beginning of the attempts at flight in modern Australian poetry; this release being sought by the poet in order to emancipate himself from

the conceived shackles of the past, from the traditions of superseded practice, and from the conventions of the poet's own present. Some of these attempts at flight had been prepared for a long time back, others have only settled in recently.

After Kendall, it seems that Victor Daley, born 1858, and Christopher Brennan, born 1870, most clearly mark the end of the flight into romanticism, and its collision with a new order of things, symbolised by the city. Daley reports

The day is fading and the dusk is cold... Out of my heart has passed the high intent...²⁴

And Brennan, also reporting, states that

The land I came thro' last was dumb with night, a limbo of defeated glory, a ghost...²⁵

The City, for Daley, has "Death in her heart!" For Brennan, the city shop-fronts "stare phantasmal, weirdly new, in the electrics' ghastly blue..." Both Daley and Brennan are of particular interest in marking a crisis of sincerity. There is a note of Brennan's, in the Mitchell Library, which reads "To be finished God knows when, because it's all bloody rot"—referring to his as yet unfinished *Poems 1913* and, in its all-too-human way, marking to my mind an agony of failing commitment, which is also present in his poetry. Daley, in a different way, exhibits this crisis of sincerity by the contrast between his 'romantic' poetry and the entirely different poetry he wrote under the pseudonymn of "Creeve Roe".

The work of Harry Hooton (born 1908) affords an almost ludicrous example, in his "Moonlight", of the later, changed position of romanticism:

Oh I've got to write a poem about the moonlight—
Oh dead world! Diana! Disc of silver!
Oh dripping beams through leaves a-quiver.
Oh tremulous adjectives and ings, pleasant participles.
Oh men and maids beneath you in infinite combinations—
if only
This could be the last poem written about you thus for
all time...²⁸

The flight of the first post-romantic generation from sentimentality, subjectivity and naturalism has characterised the decisive step in separating the present century from the one before. On looking back over the numerous "characters" described by Henry Lawson, we find that "Middleton's Rouseabout" is "the type of a coming nation"; he has no "idears".²⁹ Furnley Maurice, born in 1881, ranges over the possibilities of life on the land, while contemplating "The Agricultural Show, Flemington, Victoria", and faces up to the fact that "I just sit in a tram and pay my fare".³⁰ But such allusions to the 'facts' are, at this stage of our poetry, only a minor part of various flights, whether they be into the heroic, rural past, into a nymph-and-satyr world of phantasy, into "beauty", into evolutionary ideology, or into vitalist 'joy'.

The hero and the narrative, in the sense of the literature of the last century, come to be seen by the modern poet as empty, stereotyped constructions. The avoidance of artificially produced situations, of complicated actions, of sudden, surprising turns and crises suggests that the modern poet is not willing to accept human existence in its generally administered state, and that he wishes to see it reflected in its genuine, unfalsified form. More and more, the remarkable happening has to be stamped with the phenomena of something lying well back in history. The news of events that were once related to us in the form of the saga, of the epic, of the tale, reaches us today as vouched for information, and the latest poems persist in actuality and reliability.

Along with the narrative and the hero, psychology, in the sense of analysis of character, has also undergone radical change. The psychological process may be depicted in the poem as accurately as ever, like the realistic details in a surrealist picture. Nevertheless, the changed function and method of psychology is one of the most significant features of contemporary Australian poetry. The narrative element that remains nowadays in poetry is hardly 'gripping' in the old sense, but is reduced to atomised perceptions, inappropriate to the hero as substrate and focus of the action; there are no protagonists that would move in a special psychological sphere of being, in contrast to the mere reality of things. The de-psychologizing of the modern Australian poem exhibits a series of steps in the disintegration of the psyche as the substrate of the narrative element in the poem. In naturalistic poems, soul and character signify the counterpole to mere objects, and psychology signifies the argument between subject and object, ego and non-ego, between one's own and what is alien. But psychology comes to mean something else in our poetry, namely, not merely another hemisphere but the totality of all reality that appears worth presenting. Psychology, from being a counterpole to the external world, becomes a crossing of inner and outer; from being merely a part of modern poetry, psychology becomes the whole.

The flight from the hero as a psychological unity makes itself ever more decisively apparent. The path of fate of the bearer of the narrative no longer revolves about a crisis or a central conflict nor strives toward a solution of a problem of the soul as the aim of events, but transforms itself into a flood of promptings, occasions and associations, into a stream of consciousness, an inner monologue, a conversation without a partner. The emphasis in Australian poetry has shifted to a heterogeneous continuum of experiences that is capable of taking everything up into itself, of consuming everything, everything objective and concrete. The turning away from the subjectivism which had been current since the ebbing of romanticism, and which was finished with the end of impressionism, has led, under the pressure of disillusionments during the two world-wars and after their conclusion, to an illusionless objectivism.

Another significant feature of this new movement of freedom directed against the past is the flight from hedonism of every kind. Since the end of impressionistic strivings of style, perhaps exemplified best in Shaw Neilson, the early Slessor and James Picot, Australian poetry has avoided with special persistence everything beautiful and pleasing, comfortable, agreeable and effortlessly enjoyable. The fact that enjoyment of poetry is not a pure and unalloyed pleasure has been obvious for a long time, and the fact that this enjoyment has presented the reader with a difficult problem in achieving adequate response to significant poems has already shown itself in relation to older forms of poetry; Brennan being a predominant example here. This problem, however, has grown more difficult still, to the extent that resistance against the familiar and congenial has become a principle of antigracefulness and has also revealed itself unconditionally to be a principle of antiexpressiveness.

The dispensing with the easier effects of poetry indicates not merely the earnestness which is attached by the modern poet to the adequate reception of his poem, but it also strengthens the shock effect which prompts the reader to grasp the presentation from a new and more revealing point of view than would otherwise be the case. This effect would hardly occur without a certain violence, without a deviation from the usual and generally accepted order of things. The grotesqueries of Kenneth Slessor,³¹ the Reichian ebullience of Harry Hooton,³² and the sadomasochistic phantasies of A. D. Hope,³³ are way-stations here.

To the extent that our poetry resorts to flight from all the proven means of its art and, in the intervals of relevance and contemporaneity, gives up, one after the

other, sentiment, the story, the hero with the psychological motivation of his behaviour, it declares itself free of the adventurous, the excessive, the grandiose and the rhetorical, as forms of the fictive, the lying and inauthentic, and finds its last resort of flight, into the true and real, in the banal. Poetry becomes undemanding, inconspicuous, unprovocative; it learns to live with the most modest means.

For example, Robert Adamson, born in 1944, in a poem entitled "Towards abstraction/possibly a gull's wing" reports of his experience on surveying a beach. The opening line reads:

The most disconcerting feature is an absolute flatness ...

Throughout the poem, the poet is faithful to this "flatness", which he clearly values. He writes:

... I am completely indifferent to the sad way that fellow moves over the sand ... who? ah, let's be pure in observation, let us drop opinions—

This "purity" guides him in noting the facts of observation, including his own responses. Nevertheless, his stance is not easy to maintain. He has already confessed that the flatness is "disconcerting", and when he reports at the end of his poem how the man he is observing kicks a dead tern, he also tells us that the feathers of this bird "catch fire", which works on the reader as a flash of transcendence, suggesting the possibility of yet another "flight" of a traditional kind. Nevertheless, the priorities of observation and "opinions" are clear.

In the later poems of Professor Heseltine's Penguin anthology, the elements of beauty, melodiousness, timbre, elegant movement of line, the "beautiful places", have lost their former value. To quote from Vivian Smith's "Dialogue":

Let's face the facts: this is a botched-up job; these days, these verses don't belong to art.³⁵

The anti-impressionism of the present is directed against all beauty as the expression of a harmonious existence. The poetry of today is in principle non-beautiful, non-demanding; it destroys the colourful "painterly" values, the powerful poetic speech-images. The flight from the purely decorative and charming intensifies itself to a style that is counter to both impressionism and expressionism, eliminating all trace of the nineteenth century. The poet apparently wants to write from the intellect, from his understanding of modern poetry as he reads about it, and from criticism. But it is not the freedom and joy of rationalism that comes to validity here but the resistance against the easy joy of the senses and a criticism against the purely instinctual. Hence the sombre, the depressive and the tortured.

Hugh McCrae, born in 1876, might still have been able to claim, with some indulgence from his reader, that—

I blow my pipes, the glad birds sing... I am the lord... I am the lord of everything...³⁶

But Peter Porter, born 1929, might reply—

how nice just not to be here at the fifth concert of the series³⁷

Or, further on, Michael Dransfield, born 1948, could advise:

wake up...
Keep moving
wherever you stand is ground zero
a moving target is harder to hit³⁸

The images and music of speech lose their former brilliance. The newer poetry certainly consists in speech-forms, but in those that dispense with every external beauty that exists in itself. As Andrew Taylor, born 1940, puts it, in his "The Sistine Spiders":

Cracks in masonry and plaster sceptically explore this artistry.³⁹

The poet tends more and more to free his creation from all obviously artificial elements, all that is purely constructed and mediated, and to reduce his material to original untouched, unmanipulated perceptions. But apart from the question of whether and to what extent this is possible at all, it remains doubtful whether such perceptions can be brought to expression directly without some degree of falsification. The epistemological question is complicated by its combination with an aesthetic one, namely, the question of the existence of the poetry of the present. Perceptions can only be formed, communicated and received with the aid of a formal system, a linguistic, musical, visual or haptic apparatus. The expressive means of poetry, however, are not only essentially different from the matter that is presented, thus falsifying the true nature and purity of the perceptions right from the start, but they are also highly artificial and form with these perceptions a kind of unity in which the original quality of perception is no longer present. Since the aesthetic problem becomes a linguistic one, that is, a problem of mediation, the question arises of the right and capacity of such a poetry to exist. But this is a problem for the poets themselves, for poetic sensitivity to cope with as a spur to further creation. I note in passing, however, that Professor Heseltine has not thought it worthwhile to include examples of visual poetry in his anthology. This kind of poetry offers a radical approach to the 'mediation' problem by an appeal to the eye, additional to that normally involved in reading, and seeks to realise an ideal of complete objectivity.

The diminished role of subjectivity in Australian poetry has made itself apparent in a crisis of sincerity followed by a tacit declaration of the irrelevance of sincerity. Additionally, we can say that all the attempts at flight undertaken by our poetry, that is, the emancipation from the affects and from hedonism, the sacrifice of the 'story', of narrative, fabular or visionary order, of the hero and his psychological motivation, run on into the flight from the mediation of 'messages' and norms of behaviour.

Without it being critically remarked upon so far, the role of the Australian poet in the last few years has shifted fundamentally. Less and less is it a matter of assenting or dissenting to views, interpretations or convictions about "life", and more and more is it an exhibiting of the relativity, conditionality, limitation of views, interpretations and convictions, as a phenomenon of language. Citation and collage are the keywords here. Poems, or better, texts employing these devices are an increasing feature of the latest poetry, and they imply a radical attack on content, in the traditional sense, and on social relations. The modern poet, when the microphone is put up to him has "nothing to say" and, when pressed further will say that his task lies solely in transmitting his perceptions. But it does happen that even with the best of intentions, he does not always fulfil this task, nor limit himself to it.

REFERENCES: The Penguin Book of Australian Verse, ed. Harry Heseltine, 1972, p. 27.

² p. 30	²¹ p. 159
³ p. 55 ⁴ pp. 59, 60	²² p. 391 ²³ p. 160
⁵ p. 61	24 p. 75
6 p. 62	25 p. 113
⁷ p. 30	²⁶ p. 77
⁸ p. 62	²⁷ p. 114
⁹ p. 65	²⁸ p. 213
¹⁰ p. 67	²⁹ p. 96
¹¹ p. 68	³⁰ p. 131
12 p. 69	³¹ pp. 146, 147
18 p. 70	32 pp. 213-215
14 p. 70	³³ p. 195
¹⁵ p. 364	³⁴ p. 456
16 p. 365	35 p. 403
17 p. 369	36 p. 125
18 p. 370	37 p. 384
¹⁹ p. 422	³⁸ p. 458
20 p. 371	³⁹ p. 453

ALAN ALEXANDER

Sonnet on Your Pregnancy

A lovely thought it is, that you should keep In safety, this, the spring fire I have sown, I look at you when you are just asleep And pace your breath till breathing makes us one, And stammer something to the bedroom dark Which brings outrunning joy back home again, And set the silence of my love to work To intercept imaginary pain; How strange it is to see the dawn come on When all the workhours are already by, The ending now of all that warm concern, My mouth and eyes which gave so quietly Taking their rest now as you climb awake, Shunning the world which you so blindly seek.

Pain's Amalgam with Gold

Francis Webb's "Around Costessey"

"Of pain's amalgam with gold let some man sing."
(Ward Two)

Out of the knots and extremities of Francis Webb's life has emerged a poetry of frequently oblique, but always strangely compelling power, the circumstances of which have rendered the apellation "suffering" almost a commonplace in discussion. By contrast, the use of the motif of suffering in the poetry itself, and particularly the later poetry, is totally devoid of sentimentality and excess. "Around Costessey" crystallizes a tendency, in some respects an ascetic tendency, in Webb's poetry, to see artistic and metaphysical vision as inseparable from physical and emotional mortification. Suffering becomes a part of a process rather than a facet of tragic alienation, an inevitable aspect of the process of spiritual transcendence in which the poet is constantly engaged.¹

"Around Costessey", despite its setting, is peculiarly Australian in character. Like many of his contemporaries, like the novelists Patrick White and Randolph Stow, and like other poets as various as Judith Wright, James McAuley, Kenneth Mackenzie and A. D. Hope, Francis Webb's art is a development beyond earlier stock responses to environment towards a symbolic view of it as a projection of consciousness. Now, in a totally un-Australian setting Webb can employ the dynamics of a psychological drama that has its roots deep in the historically developed Australian conception of environment. The poem, like all Webb's later poetry, especially that in The Ghost Of The Cock is also a development of his own initial attitude to reality. Webb had always looked upon the true perception of the definite, proximate world as providing the path to metaphysical vision, but in the later poetry the path becomes an increasingly inward and painful one. The tendency, developed in the exploration poems, to see the environment as a spiritual landscape becomes more intense, so that the path of vision is one that takes the poet through the strata of internal experience. The different subjects of the poems in "Around Costessey" therefore provide various existential loci for this process, and their very particularity and disparity enhance the universality of the poem.

The site of "Around Costessey" is the country around the Norfolk village of Costessey, about five miles northwest of Norwich on the Wensum river, but any connection between this montage of impressions and events and that district is

¹ Whether it is the suffering man brings upon himself by his own fallen nature and his inability to realise his existential potential, as in "On Some Lines Of John Barbor" ("man has fought his freedom to the death"), or "Legionary Ants" ("For this is our mind for today—never creation—But all nakedness"), whether in "Derelict Church" or "Kookaburra On Television" ("What are those laws of harmony and peace—But joy and guffavings which never cease"). Whether it is the suffering of the physically afflicted, as in "Song Of Hunger" or "Back Street In Calcutta", whether the suffering of the artist's vision, as in "Argument With The Sunday Times" or "On The Forgotten Artist", the pain never intrudes upon the poise of the poem by dwelling on itself, but leads on to some deeper understanding.

entirely arbitrary. The poem dwells upon several characters, from King Harold to Anton Bruckner, but in no way is the poem about these people. It alludes to the Norfolk landscape in several ways, but it is not a poem about Norfolk. Perhaps the closest thing to a unifying strand in the poem is the motif of suffering, but neither is it a poem about suffering. "Around Costessey" is about none of these things, but it does have a focus of energy which synthesizes them all, a universal centre which incorporates all the particulars, and this takes the form of a consciousness in the text, a projected consciousness which unites the poems by its attendent themes of struggle and transcendence, of pain and vision. This consciousness is more explicit than a Weltanschauung because it is dialectically involved with modes of existence presented in individual poems. It is more than a theoretical postulate because it complicates itself in the activity of essentially human responses. The central consciousness is the same consciousness in each poem, experiencing different modes of existence, an identifiable particular universal striving to discover both the dimensions and the essence of its existence.

The first poem, "Hastings" is a good introduction to "Around Costessey" because it reveals the extent to which one must become involved in the language to enter the Costessey world. Thematically, it also establishes the essential element of conflict upon which the series is to pivot.

Pasture, embryo hills, The Dwelling by the Waterside, Cotesia, open eye.

This is the landscape of the spirit seen in its primal innocence, unaffected, embryonic and enlightened. "Cotesia" was the Anglo-Saxon word for Costessey before the Norman invasion, and "open eye" while indicating vision, also states at the very beginning, since Harold was killed by an arrow through the eye, the inevitable union of vision and suffering which is to motivate the series. Although Hastings, the scene of Harold's defeat at the hands of his cousin William, is over one hundred miles south of Norfolk, the battle remains, in the context of "Around Costessey", the dramatic historical analogy of a spiritual enslavement. The defeat of the spontaneous, the simple, the free spirit, at the hands of oppression, pomposity, greed and war, is illuminated by the usurpation of the Costessey landscape.

The two neutral ravenous mills Munch apathetic rye. Buried the old laissez faire. Totalitarian herald, Deride the schoolboy Harold, Twirl militant arms in the air, Munch acstatic florin and tanner.

This usurpation is incorporated in the description of the mills which are both apathetic users of the land, and indicative of a malevolent principle of oppression. The poet overlaps these categories by a framework of "Gestalt" effect in the language by which the principle and the observed object share in similar attributes. The technique goes beyond metaphor because the consciousness in all the poems responds to the characters, the historical situation, and the landscape, and it is important to remember that the topography of this world, here, as in all the poems, is an antithetical dimension of that consciousness.

The Domesday book was the survey of all the lands of England made by William the Conqueror, and derived from the idea of "Doomsday" or "Judgement Day", referring to the "judgement" of all the men of England. This extrinsic

² Webb, F. Collected Poems. Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1969, p. 199.

information, like all the other feudal terms in the poem, is given special symbolic weight as indicative of regimentation and the suppression of freedom.

So four strict carucates of land; Villein, villein, villein; Pannage for one hundred hogs (Illiterate Harold is slain); Bordars, plough-teams to hand With the secret documents, logs.

All the terms refer to the dynamics of a social organisation which evolved into a feudal system after Hastings, and again they create the Gestalt of a connotative framework. A "carucate" was the amount of land that could be ploughed by a team of eight oxen in a day and was the amount tilled by the villein; the peasant farmer, or the bordar; the farm labourer, while the "pannage" was the right to graze hogs in a forest. They not only indicate the establishment of a new feudal order but also show the way extrinsic meanings fit into the corporate structure of the poem. The implications of Hastings for Harold, for the ordinary peasant and for the symbolic landscape are indicative of an inner conflict caused by the exigencies of man's being-in-the-world. This kind of conflict is the a priori ground upon which the principle of suffering works in the series, being the conflict of antithetical tendencies within the consciousness.

In a sense this existential conflict sets the ground for the special category of suffering in "Our Lady's Birthday" which is not only the pain of birth, nor only the pain of the Virgin's birth, but the pain which attends the introduction of some vision of infinite capacities into human experience. Essentially this is the function of the poem, to show that the recognition of the infinite dimension of Being which exists beyond all conflicting tendencies, is contingent upon a condition of suffering. Characteristically, the poet associates the sun with Christ, suggesting that the birth of Mary is the metaphoric hour before the sun reaches its apex over the earth, the hour "where Calvary is begun and sunset foreboded". This time the landscape is anthropomorphised to show those aspects of human activity which are "bound, stalled, limited" and it is this sedentariness which makes the emergence of vision so painful. But the poem goes to the centre of its concern when it says

For the Immaculate as for Original Sin It is pain to begin: From womb of grace to pedantic midwife earth, Sharp oxygen needles plotting in her two old hands;

With this image of nativity, what is actually being born into the consciousness is a focus of release from the limitation of earth, that is, from the restricted category of existence which earth represents. The "sharp oxygen needles" are an interesting premonition of "Ward Two" in which the bubble of air from the pneumoencephalograph is the agent of suffering and illumination. But at this stage the suffering is an extension of the conflict presented in "Hastings" because it accompanies the clash between sedentary limitation and limitless vision.

Then a breast of valour made vagueness as the sky Over automation's oceans and rifled lands. So these the hours of your birth Transcribe a primitive sacred agony; But you are the child crying, small rapture and paroxysm In the lewd snake-bodied wind.

³ Collected Poems, p. 200.

And you are an arch hurled across the wicked chasm By your Playfellow, of the matchless mind.

The primitive sacred agony of the birth is an immediate dimension of the conflict between the oppressed, the "automated" and "rifled" plane of consciousness and a free vision, a chasm of alienation over which "the Immaculate" represents the arch in this poem. The final couplet shows Mary as intercessor, thrown by Christ, her "Playfellow" before the beginning of time.⁴ The "matchless mind" has overtones of the Hegelian concept of Being as "absolute thought thinking itself" and it is this absolute capacity of mind towards which the consciousness in the text is straining.

"The Horses" reconsiders the question of Being through a number of existential strata. One might ask at what level of being the dialectic of conflict disappears, and the poem proposes the imaginative possibility of the "vegetative soul".

The vegetative soul is the dedicated rhetorician: Yellow knuckles of gorse are eloquent; motion Is the psyche entire whose fullness is a naked growing Ungirt with passion or reflection.

Grass meanders intoxicate in green simple action, Little hills troll the pastoral catches, allowing Hosannas of Saints in sober gesture alive

As flowering cherry along a drive.

This provides a conception of essence unattainable by man. The existence of the vegetative soul is the celebration of its being, and this is in direct contrast to man whose existence is the continual reminder of unrealized capacities of being. But worse, he is bound to further suffering by the construction of his social existence, the imposition of the collective will. The River, the flow and occupation of which is imaged in terms of urban life, symbolizes the totalitarian compulsion of human society.

With the Wensum comes consecrated ordered Wish. From weedy tenements the spying suburban fish.

The use of this metaphor shows an uncanny similarity to a passage by D. H. Lawrence which throws some light on the cast of mind which prompts the "dreamer" plucked from his city streets.

It seems to me absolutely true, that our world, which appears to us as the surface of all things, is really the *bottom* of a deep ocean: all our trees are submarine growths, and we are weird, scaly-clad submarine fauna, feeding ourselves on offal like shrimps. Only occasionally the soul rises gasping through the fathomless fathoms under which we live, far up to the surface of the ether, where there is true air. I am convinced that the air we normally breathe is a kind of water, and men and women are a species of fish.

But sometimes the soul does come up, shoots like a kittiwake into the light, with ecstasy, after having preyed on the submarine depths. It is our mortal destiny, I suppose, to prey upon the ghastly subaqueous life of our fellow men, in the submarine jungle of mankind. But our immortal destiny is to escape, once we have swallowed our swimmy catch, up again into the bright ether, bursting out from the surface of the Old Ocean into real light. Then one realizes one's eternal nature.⁶

⁴ Though not substantiated by background reference, this interpretation seems to be supported within the poetry by a reference in "Ward Two" which says of the Christ figure Harry, and Mary; that before time and air were stretched across the earth, "they have sported and are one".

⁶ Lawrence, D. H. Lady Chatterly's Lover. Heron Books, London, 1969, p. 317.

The river in the poem is not only the compulsion of social existence, but an area of impotence and limitation in the consciousness from which the dreamer desires to free himself. It is the same "eternal nature" Lawrence speaks of to which he wishes to escape.

The horses themselves represent a stage of existence only a "phylum" apart from the fishes, a stage at which, though individuals, their minds and bodies are involved in an interpenetrating world of experience. Although they almost seem to achieve a vegetative celebration of their being in their attitude of pure stillness, they are denied it by the "eroding flies" of conscious existence.

Minds, as bodies, are ancient galls and wrongs. Flies would erode this hackneyed summer weather. Memory, rumour, and an hour spin in the guise Of the buzzing swarming flies.

In the final stanza the poem speaks of the "dreamer" who is the one who extends the boundaries of human experience, the one who discovers new dimensions of being. But he can only extricate himself from the river of ordinary existence at a cost of great suffering and perhaps death.

He will give his body to the gesticulating
Green grass without forethought. He will lie beating, awaiting
The perfect town of water, going, gone.
He is the listing hulk or bale of straw
In silt of the organic; pang of law
Tides him into the rivers and the sun.
Light plays throughout his muddied floating things,
His action, desire, his gift of tongues.

Yet again the striving of the consciousness for that dimension of being of which it has been made aware is thwarted by the limitations of existence. Like a fish who strives to live in the air, the dreamer is left a "listing hulk" to be carried away on the tide with all his other "muddied floating things". But the dreamer is archetypically human. In contrast to the vegetative soul, the fish and the horse, he has "his gift of tongues" and this reveals the consummate skill Webb shows in constructing strata of meaning in his poetry. The movement from plant to fish to horse to gift of tongues, implicates the poem very broadly in the evolutionary development of human existence. The dreamer then, is indicative of the whole process of human development, and though this development seems to reach an impasse at the point where man envisages the eternal nature to which he can aspire but cannot reach, the tenor of the poem is strongly Lamarckian, suggesting that man's aspiring spirit can assist the rate of his evolutionary development. The ease with which the particular universal can embrace the wide ranging connotatons of human development is a stunning example of Webb's facility with language.

The poem "Gerard S.J." is based upon the book Autobiography Of A Hunted Priest by John Gerard which gives the account of the arrival in England of the recusant missionary priest in 1588 and his subsequent capture and torture by Topcliffe, the Queen's chief inquisitor. The poem is divided into two sonnets, the first of which, based on Gerard's arrival, continues the theme of the consciousness in the text realizing its dimensions by its entry into different, and in this case dangerous modes of existence. Gerard's entry into hostile country (spending much of his time in Norfolk) repeats that engagement with areas of conflict that has

⁷ Collected Poems, p. 202.

⁸ Trans. Philip Caraman, Image Books, Doubleday, New York, Fourth Ed., 1962.

been the fundamental experience of the consciousness. But again the poem uses the extraneous material to fit into its own world, for whereas Gerard actually arrived at night, he is seen in the poem to arrive at daybreak so that the opportunity to stress the spiritual illumination of the activity will not be missed. The poem depicts the same kind of entry that underlay the progression of "Our Lady's Birthday", the entry of the light of vision into the dark topography of conscious existence.9

The second sonnet is a brilliant and moving account of Gerard's experience of torture at the hands of Topcliffe.

> Topcliffe is earth's face. His volcanic whim Has hung me here suspended by each wrist, My senses rapier back and forth for him, Lava's upon his beard and prodding fist. His face is splintering (should his face exist). Passages from some old forgotten hymn Sway like cloaked figures, meditate, and twist: I dangle, Topcliffe dangles. Which grows dim?

The first sentence sums the whole confrontation of the poem, the conflict of spirit and material world which has lain as the ground of suffering in the series, the conflict of the aspiring and "fallen" levels of consciousness. 10 There is a clear advocacy in the poem that the inner spiritual hostility which Topcliffe and the earth represent, should be actively engaged, that the conflict should be faced till the Topcliffe barrier is breached.

> If this should not be death, I'll pace again The fenland of his temples and the shale Of the pocked skin below his cheekbones, ask A cloud to bawl and beg some show of rain, Till there erupt from his the rose-en-soleil Dangling and swinging. That is all my task.

The fragmentation of sensibility in the conflict is a superb vivification of the interwoven emotional and symbolic categories of the poem. But most important is the indication that out of Topcliffe, out of the earth, out of man's limitations bursts forth the "rose-en-soleil", the infinite, the eternal nature. The passage is certainly dramatic, but its full power is lost if we fail to transcend the historical context and see it as an integral part of the whole poem—a triumphant new discovery of the same consciousness that has been active throughout the series.

The concept of the outreaching spirit is often associated in Webb's poetry with music but "Scherzo and Adagio of Bruckner's Ninth" shows an element of struggle and emergence, one encapsulated in the introductory parenthesis (And a tree, fishlike, engaged for its instant with air) which fixes it firmly in the context of "Around Contessey". Bruckner usually adhered to a fairly strict descriptive formula in his symphonies in which the Scherzo conveyed the Dance of Life, and the Adagio, the Song Of Faith.¹¹ These were the only movements of the ninth

11 The full formula is:

Webb's poetry.

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⁹ An interesting comparison can be made between the poem and p. 35 of the above edition of the Autobiography.

¹⁰ Though I would not wish to over emphasise it, the name Top-cliffe has a definite resonance in the poem's allusion to earth-bound limitations of consciousness.

I. Drama Of Inner Conflict (With the soul as hero)

II. Adagio; The Song of Faith (Prayerful communion with God)

III. Scherzo; The Dance Of Life (The joys of life in nature)

V. The soul's decisive struggle and the triumph over opposition. from Thompson, O., ed. The International Cyclopaedia of Music and Musicians, J. M. Dent and Sons, London, 1956, p. 247.

It can be seen how the element of struggle in the music strikes a responsive chord in

Bruckner finished before he died and both operate in the poem to emphasize the triumph of the artist over those limiting aspects of consciousness which are again embodied in images of the material world. There is, however, an extra sense of the confinement of this world in which the poet is closely involved.

For certain it is on a day very like this one
That he breaks the submarine and constricting circuit
Of doctors and nurses—patiently woven algae—
That he rises to this sun so rotund and benign.
—Old man, they have torn the Stocky Vienna apart,
Plotted each motion of the bowels and sluggish timpani
of the heart
Cock-crow is the thermometer; fingers caress the wrist;
All love is become this mothering smothering beast..."

The implications are identical to those in "The Horses" and the antipathetic hospital imagery initiates the physical decay and tonal decline dictated in the following stanzas. When Bruckner appears to meditate upon the majesty of the sun, the serenity of the lounging cattle, or the energy in creation (this flower.... Panning talents of fire from old marl and stone), he is undermined by the apparent hypocrisy of Hans Richter, or by his own decaying life (symbolized by the decay of the organ of St Florians), 12 or the cheap and fickle adulation of the students. All these conflicts enact the antagonism through which art can elevate life by demonstrating the aspiration toward its metaphysical capacities, and consequently the cumulative impression of the poem is one of immense dignity.

But look, even the portly sun bows down to this man;
The silver river prostrates itself; cattle and old houses
Go down on their knees; only the wind rising up and up
Where he shakes, taps homeward, with his acolyte shadow
behind him.
—Old man, old man....

The question that has been asked by the poem: "Where is the light at its most exacting, most truthful?" is answered by the obeisance of the sun, for in one sense the light emerges from the creative being of the artist. One senses that Bruckner, not only as artist, but as sufferer, gains in his apotheosis something of the triumph sought by Gerard—the eruption of the spiritual "rose-en-soleil" out of adversity.

"The Tower"¹³ is a climax of "Around Costessey" because it locates a central consciousness in the Costessey world, establishes metaphorically an ontological centre to the various modes of existence within this world. For the first time the persona examines the conscious activity that has been central to the series.

...... and the mind
Fretting and hammering at itself will drag
A landscape, a universe, to be refined
Out of its nature, drifting in rotten slag.

¹² Hans Richter was an admirer of Bruckner and performed a great service to the composer and perhaps the world by ending a boycott on the performance of Bruckner's symphonies (caused by their alleged Wagnerian subservience) with the production of the Fourth Symphony in 1881. Again the poem uses the evidence for its own purposes and Richter becomes feline and hostile.

St Florian's is an image of both art and mutability in the poem since it was the monastery where Bruckner was taught, where he received his first appointment as organist, and where he was eventually buried beneath the organ.

¹³ Collected Poems, p. 204.

It now becomes clear that the experiences of the series represent the mind hammering at *itself* to refine the gold, the existential essence. "Around Costessey" has dwelt upon the necessity of suffering in this refining process but now the consciousness suffers in a new way as it considers the possible facticity of its accomplishment, that any transcendent conception, being a refinement of mind cannot throw off the impediments of existence.

The poet enters the world of the poem to struggle with a genuine objectivity as he sees more areas of conflict in the very nature of philosophical conceptualisation.

Yes, I have seen Costessey in every weather Enslaved and bowing in the rubbing heat Upon the abrasive sand of self deceit At the time of gathering the stones together; Seen sun, tree, river, all distorted, straining With lever and pulley;

The very ground upon which the consciousness works to refine its nature is the ground of self deceit, something which throws new light on the nature of the internal conflict with which the poem is engaged. But all the aspects of this psychic landscape, sun, tree, river, appear to be striving to erect the tower as the emblematic construction of their metaphysical capacities, suggesting that the revelation of Being is an essential part of the life of the consciousness. Therefore, although the tower appears at first to be something merely decayed and worthless, the intruding poet sees that its centrality, its immanence, invests it with a symbolic value both for the surrounding environment (bush and grasses, juvenile pigeons) and more importantly for himself as observer because he sees his initials on it though they last only an hour (Webb having been an airman visiting England when he first saw Costessey). The relevance of the symbolic consciousness which Costessey represents to the observer is focussed in the last stanza.

But on this Easter Monday I will drink Your Costessey to the dregs, and likely think To find in these red stones the selfsame taste. For out of my soul one hundred times before Has leapt a ghostly thing, bare in its power, As faith, and to the ceaseless causeless war Brought truce, bearing itself like this old tower.

The war is part of the inevitable inner conflict, the "fretting and hammering" of the mind at itself, and it is ceased by the vision of inviolable centrality that this tower represents; a ghostly thing perhaps, but bare in its power as Gerard's rose-en-soleil, bare as faith. The taste of Costessey resides in these red stones, and the significance to the observer is that an essence can be distilled out of the chaotic features of existence.

"The Tower" is a new development in the series because instead of showing the consciousness trying to break through the limitations of its being-in-the-world, it attempts to represent the absolute as distillable, and that in this way the "arch" can be made. The objectivity of the poem therefore stands as a good introduction to the role of art in the process. "In Memoriam; Anthony Sandys, 1806-1883" though it purports to be about a very little known painter of the Norwich school is actually an exploration of the nature and function of art itself. There is no space here to fully plumb its riches but it gives a new dimension to the progression of "Around Costessey" by its insistence upon the power of art to act as a catalyst in the process of spiritual discovery.

¹⁴ op. cit. p. 206.

December's bird again—what shall I say? Your canny brushstroke and beatitude And hallowed second, bravely out of fashion, Leap beyond Hydra, in eternal motion. My gropings broaden into hour and day Awaiting the wash of your great altitude.

The poet apprehends something beatific in art's capacity for illumination. Sandys' canny brushstroke, his hallowed second, are beyond fashion, beyond earth and the cosmos itself as they leap beyond the constellation Hydra into eternal motion, create a transcending arch of their own. 15 The function of art is reflected in the reaction of the poet when he refers to "the wash of your great altitude" and again in stanza three says, "My hungry frame traps light, I stand erect."

"Self Portrait" shows how this experience of art must be not only a matter of observation but participation, and sums it up in a couplet which demonstrates a breathtakingly concise view of the activity of art.

> An outline of fullness soberly embraced By shadow of widest meaning is creation.

Though the artist proposes the outline of fullness, in a sense proposes his own self portrait, the meaning of art resides in a wide shadow of involvement in which it may act as a catalyst. When comparing his own capacities to transcend limitations with the artist, the poet says in "Death", "your talents beg his eye/For shaping a causeway between earth and heaven", and it is clear that this causeway is the same causeway of vision which was introduced in "Our Lady's Birthday" and has preoccupied the consciousness in the poem ever since.

The pattern of the series has consistently united suffering with vision and in "Art" we see the catalyst qualities of art, its illumination and power of vision as inextricably related to the raw edged nerve of the artist's sensitivity.

> I see him in a sense as strapped to his chair, Bloodstained with erudition, unafraid; Into the studio earth comes floundering Under swag of gifts to embrace the senses, sting, Or to do both often. So he sups keenest air, Coughs into laundered silk, with windows wide.

The poem goes on to point out that the artist bares himself to experience so that through the awareness of conscious experience he might reach through to the dimension of the spirit, that the Norfolk Broads might "engage those Broads of the spirit" and in this process beauty itself is the "tongue of fire, of the Holy Ghost".

In its turn, the following poem, "Rookery", 16 focusses on the landscape of the consciousness in a different way

> To unseat that fell principle roosting in the mind Man tightens, peers for a scapegoat in his hunger To where you wink and dice with barmaid wind Or guffaw halleluia fathoms beyond our anger.

¹⁵ This interpretation refers to the southern stellar constellation by the name of Hydra, which, on reflection, I consider to be the more likely. But there is another dimension given to the poem when Hydra refers to the many-headed snake of Greek mythology. Sandys' art then leaps beyond the Hydra headed monster of man's limited sensibility and debilitated existence, leaps beyond those aspects of human habit and experience which turn life into stone.

Also there is a resonance in "Wild Honey"—"Shall ascent be a travelling past the grey snake, the will."

18 Collected Poems, p. 208.

To unseat the "fell principle" of its limitation and inadequacy, the consciousness projects it upon some myth laden object—the rook, the atonal singer "ticketed round with scurrilities of poets". But guilt cannot be exorcized in this way. The mind, the Costessey world, is the rookery, the nest of the evils it calumnates and this is the existential basis of the conflict and suffering through which it must rise.

But the consciousness does break through its limitations in the series, and though the process occurs in some far more exploratory ways in "Ward Two", the poem "Around Costessey" locates a focus of transcendence in Thomist terms, seeing the immanence of God in reality, and in these final poems, the immanence of Christ and the Cross in the consciousness. In "Father Jones" the poet uses the well tried metaphors of solar permanence and the regeneration of the seasons to establish the idea of transcendence in the context of continuation

> Early September. One might say summer is dead. You, Father, were passing; But I weigh elemental strategies overhead That have this coffined sun heave Ripping its cerecloths, have flowers forget to grieve, And the haystacks massing.

And even since your death autumnal earth around Bears, bears;

The paradox of a coffined sun is answered by the fertility and productivity of the natural world which provides the poet with an imagistic basis from which he can consider the metaphysical regeneration of the human spirit. It is this regenerative tone which marks Webb's attitude in other Norfolk poems such as "Beeston Regis" and "Mousehold Heath" but here the emphasis is on the example of a friend, and the assurances of metaphysical sustenance.

> If in mortal autumn such prodigies Of building, benedictory weather, Can gird the pacific leafage and young trees Against infiltrating wind, rain, What passionate stellar building when again Father, we come together.

Though the earth has symbolised a limited plane of consciousness in the series, the inevitability of life in nature becomes a paradigm for metaphysical experience.

In its final poems, "Around Costessey" enacts the kind of progression that remains implicit in all its parts, a Lamarckian evolution of the consciousness; through limitation, conflict and suffering, through art, into dignity and spiritual illumination. The conclusion of the series in the mood and context of epiphany, is a natural culmination, and a characteristically Thomist culmination of the poems' exploration of metaphysical dimensions in the consciousness. And though many poems touch on the concern with Being which is to develop in Webb's later poems, the conclusion in "Good Friday, Norfolk" rests upon the concept of immanence.

This poem, though one of the most difficult in the series, is most clearly explicated by the fact that Norfolk is an inner landscape. One part of the Catholic Good Friday liturgy is the unveiling of the Cross, 19 and in this poem the Cross

¹⁷ Collected Poems, p. 209. 18 Collected Poems, p. 209.

¹⁹ An interesting connotation also lies in the fact that the Cross is unveiled in three stages: "The priest holds the Cross and unveils the figure of the Crucified in three stages. At the same time, in three ascending keys, the following chant is sung: 'Behold the wood of the Cross, upon which hung the salvation of the world!' The people kneeling in adoration respond: 'Come let us adore!' Parsch, Pius The Church's Year of Grace, The Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1964, Vol. II, p. 334.

is unveiled in such a way, using metaphor and overlapping categories of meaning, that it becomes vitally present in the Norfolk environment. Just as the Tower seemed to distil the essence of the consciousness in an immediate and palpable way, so the Cross becomes an image of the possibilities of the spirit, through the concept of Resurrection.

The darkness which descended upon Calvary, the "Place of the Skull", is in many respects the darkness of mind in which the persona "slouches around", a darkness of death, and a darkness of limited vision. But the "birdcall", the song of the December bird which had seemed to embody the special magic of Anthony Sandys' creative vision, is now seen to exist within the universal consciousness.

I blunder through intimate birdcall, marvelling: Our squadron of tiny charities must go mounting To feather the sweeps of eclipse, to ripple ponds of the sky.

The flight of the birds is likened to man's soaring spirit which climbs through and around the darkness, till "truth veers into joy", and this is counter-pointed with one remaining Pilot bird, paradoxically twisted but also nested, negotiating in its very being, as a Christ analogy, the dialectic between suffering and new life.—
"The tiny Pilot nested, twisted upon His Cross."

But as well as this union of death and rebirth, of darkness and light, the more "stolid flanks of land", man's historical, social, and generally limited plane of consciousness "know His Cross". They too give evidence of the claim made in "Around Costessey", that the transcendence of the ordinary is an existential possibility. The energy of the series converts this possibility into an admonition as the poet sees the Christ analogy compelling the innate potential of rebirth and illumination in the human spirit, the "sunrise" over the ploughed lands of the consciousness.

The time is propitious. Dawn in gardener's dress Stands close to us; Word of ploughed lands, of sunrise, and a Cross.

The dual themes of suffering and discovery extend throughout Webb's last volume of poems and reach their most explicit statement in "Ward Two" when the poet urges; "Of pain's amalgam with gold let some man sing". Webb himself has sung of this amalgam, his poetry has pronounced the alchemy of suffering. Just as the Hermetic alchemists desired to reveal the essence of all matter, the materia prima, so they also attempted to refine gold from ordinary matter as a demonstration of this principle. Suffering produces exactly this kind of refinement in Webb's poetry, where the consciousness "hammering at itself" extracts a conception of Being that lies at the centre of Webb's thought.

Because the poet uses the subjects of this series in such an individual way, because the thematic and historical disparity of the poems forces us to turn more and more towards the central unifying concept, the poem has an important bearing upon the whole question of literature and ideas. The incorporation of extrinsic systems into the criticism of literature, whether they be historical, philosophical or biographical assist the reader to *locate* the world of the literary work of art, but not to define it, not to limit it within any preconceived pattern. Certainly a large amount of information assists our understanding of "Around Costessey" but just as often this material is used arbitrarily by the poet to suit the needs of the poem. Describing the parameters of the poem's world can never enclose its meaning. This is the mistake of historicism; the blindness to the fact that literature creates its own world, a world which only comes to life in the dialectic between the work and the creative propensity of its readers.

"Around Costessey" has a world of its own, which can be located historically, philosophically and biographically, but can only be realised imaginatively, because it is finally an internal and symbolic world. Its excellence lies in the method which allows an involvement in the separate emotional situations of the individual poems, but which focusses even the greatest complexity of particulars upon the suffering and conflict of human consciousness in its struggle towards pure vision.

JAMIE GRANT

Yacht Harbour

Early morning: the anchorage rests. A copse of masts
Shades the breakwater, by the jetty's Plantation of winter limbs.

Swans glide like yachts between hulls, Plunge hosepipe necks In the scum. The water's a perfect mirror. A heron examines its own reflection.

Humans might have ceased to exist. Stillness Perfects itself, Framed by the swans' faint conversation. You lean on a bench in the shaven park.

Nothing can happen to flaw this blade-thick peace, No harsh dog bay In the copse of glass. Silence embalms The suburb you're leaning on. Nobody moves.

Dead sea-toads bloat on the shingle. The calm Is eternity.

Till a lawnmower explodes into life.

A derelict reels from the Gents.

MEDIA STUDIES

Independence in Broadcasting

Independence has become a chameleon word, coloured by the needs of the user. For commercial broadcasting interests it is too often a shibboleth to justify unallayed greed; for the Australian Broadcasting Commission it is a notion sometimes invoked to minimise public scrutiny; and for public broadcasting stations it may be a discriminatory basis for excluding access to one group whilst granting it to another. The danger of this eclecticism is that independence may become a word written in invisible ink, unseen by those State interests who by their very nature most threaten the concept.

The value of independence must be related to the purposes of broadcasting. I take it that these purposes are to entertain, educate and inform the Australian community, and in so doing to achieve an adequate and comprehensive balance as to subject-matter. Broadcasting should reflect the nation's cultures as they are and as they are evolving, being neither too doggedly populist nor too self-consciously avant-garde.

These purposes of broadcasting are not easy to achieve at the best of times; they require a delicate, sensitive and self-aware touch. The point of independence is that no barriers to the achievement of these purposes should be unnecessarily erected. The sorts of barriers which most typically are sought to be erected are financial and ideological; and since money is the only ideology of so many influential Australians, it is often difficult to tell which is which. Recent attacks upon the ABC by commercial broadcasting interests illustrate this.

The front-man for these attacks has been a Mr D. L. Foster, who is Federal Director of F.A.R.B. (the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters). Its sister organisation, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations—drolly known in the industry as FACTS—has attacked in close co-ordination.

The first idea which Mr Foster has tried to

get across, presenting it as if it were an historical fact rather than a plank in his own little platform for utopia, is that there are two kinds of broadcasting doing quite distinct things—the commercials dealing with programmes of popular appeal and the non-commercial sector confined to minority and special interests. "By taking account of the differences in the commercial and national services", Mr Foster states, "Australia evolved a dual system of broadcasting in which the two main elements are complementary rather than competitive." The line he is pushing is that the ABC should not aim at all to cater for general tastes, it should be confined to serving freaks and egg-heads. Mr Foster warms to his specious theme: "It was never intended, and never should be intended, that the ABC should waste public money providing what the commercial stations provide for nothing." (sic.)

Mr Foster's second theme is that there should be a single broadcasting authority to regulate the whole of the Australian broadcasting industry, including the ABC. At first sight this might seem relatively innocuous. But the point becomes clearer when one bears in mind that Mr Foster's scenario includes appointing persons with commercial sympathies or commitments to this single authority. Thus the ABC could be readily contained within the subsidiary role which Mr Foster contemplates is suitable for it.

There has been a third move in this game of trying to castrate the ABC. It comes from the Australian Association of National Advertisers. This body has recently offered to place advertising on the ABC. This would truly be a trojan gift. It is important to see how this ties in with the campaign of the commercial broadcasters.

At present, the advertising industry is going through a phase of growth; commercial broadcasting takes 40% of advertising. But, because the quantities of such advertising are controlled by A.B.C.B. regulations, there is no further

growth possible in that sphere; how convenient it would be if the ABC could soak up the industry's over-capacity. One does not have to possess magical powers to foresee the subsequent development of the plot. First, the ABC takes, let us say, \$20 million of advertising. Second, the Government says that the ABC appropriation will be reduced by \$30 million, for it would not be unreasonable to expect a further \$10 million to be raised by advertising revenue. Next, the advertisers decide one of two things: either that ABC programming does not in its present form justify more advertisements (thus creating pressure upon the independence of the Commission) or that the whole "experiment" of advertising should cease, thus leaving the ABC in the lurch financially and possessing the independence only of the beggar to choose from whom he will or will not beg. Which of these courses would be followed would be significantly influenced by commercial broadcasting interests, they being as we have seen an integral limb of the advertising industry.

That, then, is the neat little scenario by which the independence of the ABC would be lost. By contrast, the inroads into independence made by the system of having to seek funds annually from Parliament seem almost negligible.

Why do commercial broadcasters wish to destroy the independence of the ABC? It is, I believe, a mixture of money and ideology, fortified by guilt. The ABC's very existence is a continuing reproach to the tawdriness, cynicism and parasitism of commercial broadcasting in Australia. Moreover, commercial broadcasting's self-imposed servitude is in craven contrast to the attempts of the ABC to utilise its independence creatively and sensitively. The servitude I refer to arises out of the obsessive quest for profits.

Commercial broadcasting had a total revenue in 1975 of just over \$207 million. This was virtually all derived from advertising. The cost of commercial broadcasting is thus spread through the community, something to which I have no objection. But, in passing it is worth noting that the more prosperous economic groups proportionately contribute more, inasmuch as they consume more of the goods and services which are advertised, yet the same groups listen to or watch commercial broadcasting less than average. It is also worth

noting that commercial broadcasting is not, as Mr Foster seems to imagine, supplied for nothing; much of it may be worthless but it is certainly not free.

Advertisers, of course, will more readily fill the order books of a station that has a large audience than one that has a small one; and so the ratings race arises. This has a pernicious influence on standards. In television, programme controllers know who to aim for at any given time—usually, it is the bored, lower-middle class housewife in her forties. She has finished rearing the work-force of the nation, now she controls the T.V. knobs of the nation. Relentlessly, the lowest common denominator is raised to the jangling status of a Target Audience.

How degrading it all is—the assumption that she feeds contentedly on the same fodder all the time, the certainty that she won't hit back by turning off, the conviction that her life can be fulfilled vicariously, the bland confidence that she will remain conditioned.

But there is always a rub. In the case of commercial T.V. it is that the broadcasters are themselves helpless passengers on a runaway chariot, though for the time being they have not noticed this, imagining they are simply on a money-printing carousel. It is running away because, quite simply, he who pays the piper has an unpleasant habit of wanting to call the tune. Thus ad-men, responsible to no-one, truly faceless people, set the standards.

It is all very subtle, of course. At first, because a show-let us say a cowboy dramadoesn't get the ratings, the station decides for itself to switch to a cops-and-robbers show, with which its rival has been capturing ratings. Then, gradually, it comes to pass that, next season, there is a narrower range of shows available, at least from America. Why is this? Because in America advertisers dominate programmes before they are even made. Like Roman Emperors at the Coliseum, anonymous moguls from Madison Avenue view pilot episodes of proposed new series; and the thumbs go up or down. This year doctors and nurses may get the go-ahead, next year negro comedy, the year after military dramas, etc. Australian commercial T.V. stations, having failed to develop any serious production capacity of their own, must take what they can get.

The squeeze gets even worse. Costs of producing T.V. material are immense; so the in-

dustry "rationalises"—at the production level by a merging of studios, at the transmission level by networking arrangements, and of course at the advertising level. Inevitably, less material is being produced. There is, in fact, a world-wide shortage of T.V. product.

Lemming-like, Australian commercial T.V. companies can see only one solution-screw the next guy. So they rush to tie up American companies. As supplicants, forelock-tuggers from a bereft local industry, they have no independent bargaining power. So, for the favour of purchasing one good film, they invariably buy at least five others which are telecine fodder. And having bought them, they can show them with impunity, for their rivals are in an identical position. Or they enter into contracts so incredible that even Alice would have been flummoxed; the best recent example is an eastern states network's commitment to buy, sight unseen, all T.V. product made by Warner Brothers and M.C.A. for the next eight years. Which brings us to 1984.

In a context like this, to talk of independence is gross self-delusion. The commercials now have none, because when they had it they did not now what to do with it.

The way back to independence will be long and hard. The much maligned "Australian content" rules are the first step; commercial T.V. stations must get used to thinking of themselves as potential makers of programmes, not merely transmitters of electronic signals. But, because of cost, the cheap and the ephemeral are irresistibly tempting—quiz shows, visual agony columns, etc. More is needed.

There is in my view a strong case for subsidising the production of T.V. drama and documentaries through a body comparable to the Australia Film Council. Such an arrangement might take various forms—direct handouts to named productions, co-ordination of joint productions by more than one T.V. company, the establishment of a children's Television Workshop, etc. But the point is this: far from reducing the independence of the commercials such moves would increase it. For the dependence we must beware of is over-dependence upon alien interests. The advertising industry, domestic or foreign, is such an interest; it must be kept in check.

Moves such as these could perhaps be fortified by a reduction of commercial channels to no more than two in each main city of Australia, as was suggested by the Edgar Committee Report to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board.

The irony is that, once the commercials were unchained again, they would see how they can benefit from the ABC's independence, and the ABC would undoubtedly benefit from the challenge of the commercials. Independence would truly flourish.

I seem to have got away from broadcasting generally, and particularly from public radio-broadcasting. This is because the points I have tried to make are easier to illustrate on the cruder canvas of television. But comparable points are true across the whole area of radio. The crux is that every part of the system must benefit if every other part is operating at somewhere near its optimum. A strong broadcasting system can assert its right to independence and then show it can do something with it.

RICHARD HARDING

Brian White, White on the Media, Cassell Australia Ltd., Sydney, 1975. 220 pp. Hardback.

It is difficult to know whether to take this book seriously. Not only is it incredibly over-written and contradictory in parts. But one could argue that nobody should take it seriously when the author himself says this of his book in the preface: "This book does not seek to offer solutions nor does it claim even to be offering suggestions... There are many assertions in it, which some will ridicule and on occasion the assertions will be unsupported by evidence and thereby open to that ridicule."

This is what the author himself says of his book. Now perhaps you think that Mr White is being unduly modest. If so, try this from the dust-jacket (which has been written by his publisher): "Brian White does not actually set out to prove anything; indeed he only offers the scantiest evidence in support of the assertions he makes." Since both author and publisher apparently see the book as a joke, it would be hard to criticise a reviewer who shares this view.

The obvious (and admitted) limitations of the book are a pity. The Australian media is virgin territory so far as serious academic or journalistic writing is concerned. Few Australian media executives set down their thoughts on paper after leaving the industry, whether they leave under normal circumstances, or with disgust and disillusion. Only one Australian newspaper editor-John Pringle-has written anything which attempts to tell the general public of the workings of the Press, and his experiences. Proprietors and senior executives say nothing. Often academics who try to study the media, merely display their own naïvety—and offer nothing of value. A good example of this, though at a lower level, is the recent report to the ABCB on programme standards. Mr White spent 20 years working in Sydney radio, and commanded a large afternoon audience. His comments and interviews were usually incisive and informed. The fact that his book is so bad is, I guess, because either he chooses to say little (why this should be so, I do not know) or that he finds it exceedingly difficult to put his thoughts on paper. (This is a common affliction of electronic media people—they cannot write.)

The other fault of the book is that Mr White has (apparently) treated it as an invitation to write on a multitude of other subjects on which he can hardly be described as an expert. Australia and the USA, Australia and China, Australia and the car are all dealt with at length. He even throws in a chapter called "The Absurdity of Australia". Few of these chapters offer much analysis of the media, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Mr White decided to write a book on just about everything he ever talked about, on radio. This is the result. Why he has called it a book on the media, escapes me.

It would not be so bad if his thoughts on these subjects were original, well thought-out or even interesting. They are none of these things. Any reasonably well informed person interested in Australia's relations with the world would have seen, or read, it all elsewhere.

If you think I am being harsh, you should read the relatively small section of the book on the media. It is abysmal. For a man who has spent so long in broadcasting, it is almost a disgrace. All the issues which one would have expected to be discussed in some sort of depth are ignored, or mentioned only in passing. The concentration of ownership of all parts of the media—one of the highest concentration levels

in the world—is glossed over. The quality of commercial broadcasting, the question of Australian content, the problems of increasing Government regulation, the desirability of access, children's programmes, the violence issue, the problem of bias, the challenge of cable and satellite systems—all these are topics which should merit some intelligent analysis.

If this were not enough, the book is full of the strangest sections, which make you read them a couple of times over, thinking that you have missed the vital sentence—which would make the section intelligible. For example, White tells of a party after the 1972 elections, when he and his wife were talking to Gough Whitlam. Says Whitlam (holding White's child): "You two weren't married when we met you in New Guinea (in 1971) were you?"

White writes: "I've long thought that was the most intriguing question I've ever been asked. What made him ask it? Why was it relevant? My name had at that time been put forward for a very senior government position, which I hadn't won; was that the reason? Had he already read the ASIO file? My younger brother, on his personal staff, may have let something drop, but whatever the case, why should he raise it anyway? I have never liked him since, for wanting to know."

As I have said, the inadequacies of the book are a pity. The Australian media is a fascinating area of study. Bearing in mind the size of the advertising dollar in this country, and our small population, we have a good media. It is true that we have made little progress in some areas such as access, Australian content, wider ownership and higher quality of programming and editorial content. But our media has been fighting to establish a viable level of profitability, which has only just been established—especially in television. Now that colour has improved television profitability beyond most executives' expectations, further progress can be expected from this part of the media. Probably less progress can be expected in print media (because of growing profit problems in most, though not all, companies). Certainly commercial broadcasting has been too concerned for far too long with sales, to the virtual exclusion of all else. The manner in which radio broadcasters objected to the Labor Government's handing out licences for new forms of radio, was all too indicative of the feeling among commercial broadcasters that they own the airwaves.

If Mr White had attempted to deal with the media in a more serious, detailed fashion he would have filled a neglected hole. Looking at his book, it would appear that the subject was a little too big for him.

GEOFF HASLER

Rupert Murdoch: A Business Biography, by Simon Regan. (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1976. \$7.95).

It is impossible to review this book without indicating that other reviewers have already pointed out many substantial errors of fact. Ross Campbell, for example, in his Bulletin review of April 10, remarks that Sir Lloyd Dumas is called Sir Alexander Dumas, like the author of The Three Musketeers, John Fairfax is described as a rival of the young Rupert Murdoch (when he died a century ago), while Sir Frank Packer, whose features should be reasonably well-known, is given the face of Ezra Norton in a caption. He is also credited with having been a professional boxer, etc. The Age review of April 10 lists yet other errors. As Campbell says:

... The inaccuracies abounding in the Australian section raise doubts as to how reliable the author is on other matters ...

If accuracy is essential to a good journalist, so is the possession of a crisp and precise style. For a journalist, writing about the newspaper world, Regan's style is woeful, and one wonders, indeed, how he managed to secure employment in the industry in the first place. Here are a few examples, chosen by opening completely at random:

Unlike in Australia where Murdoch was a political force to be reckoned with he quickly found his direct political influence in England to be very limited... when he first arrived the *Sun* had not yet been born to his mould... (p. 100).)

When a new scandal is being produced, the second floor of the *News of the World* building is like a maternity ward in a madhouse. Everyone shouts at each other and loses patience (p. 134).

This reads and sounds something like the English of a caricature Bombay Babu. It is followed on the next page by a grand mixture of metaphors:

Long before Murdoch hit the scene the *News* of the World had become supreme as a muck-raking organ. It worked out an almost watertight technique of exposure which is probably still the most professional in the world... (p. 135).

Cadet reporters could well be presented with this as an example of how not to write. But the abundant purple passages are worse, especially if one believes that today real professional journalists set themselves, whatever else they may be, as the last guardians of English style:

The News of the World, Murdoch quickly found, was a strange, independent animal with a loudly belligerent attitude to everything, including him. Journalists are similar creatures wherever they are found in the world, but Fleet Street breeds a special type. Fleet Street is aggressive, rude, drunken, hypocritical, disillusioning, bitchy, backbiting, sex mad and completely incestuous. It harbours a kind of man who drinks far too much, is amoral and often immoral, who is conceited, aggressive, theatrical, embittered, ruthless, rude, and whose status is normally based on exactly how much of an animal he is prepared to be in his political dealings with his colleagues ... All journalists secretly love the place however much they bitch about it ... (p. 135).

The reader is also told Sydney newspapermen "literally" muckrake.

One could go on quoting at some length, getting the sort of perverse pleasure from subtly fractured English one gets from a Taiwanese guidebook or the dialogue in an Inspector Ghote story in this "Business Biography", but I will content myself with only one further example:

Fleet Street beckons with an evil gleam in her eyes and journalists accommodate her vicious charms by abusing her in the most lascivious of fashions. They succumb to each other grudgingly—sometimes like two dogs in a dusty street. At other times because, like Albee's backbiting anti-heroes, they actually desperately need each other (pp. 135-136).

The author says in his preface that "Rupert Murdoch was far from keen for this book to be written", and said that if a book was to be written about him he had several friends in journalism he would like to do the job. One can see why. An accurate but uninspired piece of professional journalism, with its facts and figures correct, can be a useful reference. A book which gets its facts wrong or badly slanted can, if written with enough skill and beauty, be a pleasing artifact, or even very rarely reveal some deeper insight. But it is very difficult to see how a book both inaccurate and very poorly written can have any value at all.

The decision-making processes in publishing houses are, of course, very mysterious, and more than one prominent Australian writer has commented on the oddities and inconsistencies of Angus and Robertson's policies since the Barton-Walsh takeover. Possibly this book was published and then lavishly promoted because it was thought Murdoch's status in Australian

politics would be sufficient to guarantee sales, or possibly on the theory that the newspaper world contains the glamour and fascination of some high mystery.

Certainly there is a story in Murdoch. There are a lot of stories in Murdoch. Under Simon Regan's nose is the story of how a Fleet Street tycoon fights Britain's deepening economic nightmare, when newspapers are probably the most sensitive of all indicators of the general business climate, with their incomes so tied to advertisers. What is the real, as distinct from the theoretical, role of the Press Council? The present state of Capital investment? New technical processes, labour redundancy and the whole jungle of British Industrial relations? But stories like that need a lot of hard work to dig up, not a reliance on an ability to produce "colour" and drop big names.

HAL COLEBATCH

KATHARINE SUSANNAH PRICHARD

Ric Throssell, Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers: The Life and Letters of Katharine Susannah Prichard. Angus and Robertson: Melbourne, 1975. xiii + 273, \$6.65.

Autobiography was never easy for Miss Prichard; and it very nearly proved impossible. Her first attempt was covert, although the ostensible fiction of The Wild Oats of Han only transparently veils a circumstantial account of her Tasmanian childhood. Written in 1908, it was not published until some twenty years later. The delay was prophetic: the projected sequel, "Cuckoo Oats" never became a novel; and the Memoirs which she had begun by 5 August 1951 were only partially completed twelve years later, with the publication of Child of the Hurricane. A reluctant biography, which had its beginning some fifty years earlier in notes for a novel, Child of the Hurricane deals with only half of Miss Prichard's life, and the portrait is mistily impressionistic, sometimes wholly occluded. Mr Throssell observes that his mother "hated the idea of writing her memoirs, and found an excuse, whenever she could, to hide behind the aunts, uncles and cousins who surrounded her as a girl and the great persons she had met and interviewed abroad". What can be discerned is a romanticised persona, barely recognisable, even to Mr Throssell: "... the naïve young lady of Child of the Hurricane was a stranger ... although I once found a picture of a young woman leaning dreamily against a paperbark in shadowed bushland ... inscribed 'sweethearting with Jimmy in Ferntree Gully', and the beauty and serenity of it still haunts me." The stuff of which the second part of her Memoirs might have been made appeared in her polemical apologia, Why I am a Communist, in 1956, and in her novels. The inhibiting problem was at once stylistic and personal: "... the first person way of writing doesn't please me. I feel too self-conscious all the time, don't lose myself, as I usually do when I'm writing creatively-on an objective framework, at any rate. I'd like to do a new novel next year ..."

For Mr Throssell, the problem was a different one, but by no means wholly dissimilar: the subject of his biography is not only a major figure in Australian literature and a significant one in Australian political history, but also his mother, and part of her biography his autobiography. Moreover, his Foreword raises fears that a stated preoccupation with privacy might prove incompatible with the responsibilities of a biographer (at least since the time when Cromwell directed his portrait painter to include warts and all). An initial annoyance with an un-named M.A. student, whose Freudian pre-occupations led him to attribute Miss Prichard's Marxism to a subconscious hostility to her father, is unnecessarily repeated later in the book. The animus seems misplaced, since the interpretations were based on errors of fact (and Mr Throssell's account and the origins and growth of Miss Prichard's political views sets the records right), serving rather to give rise to suspicions that Mr Throssell seeks to avoid psychological probing, whether Freudian or any other kind. Rage against "a conglomeration of specious psychological theorizing" is succeeded by a rather simplistic attack on literary critics since Leavis, the complaint, "microscopic vivisection was the rule" picking up Wordsworth's "murder to dissect" notion. Mr Throssell makes some attempt to place his mother's critical attitudes in a rational perspective: "Katharine did not understand the importance. .. It was a recipe Katharine learned...", and he succeeds best when describing the emotional impact adverse criticism had upon her: "Katharine took [G. A.] Wilkes to be a youthful critic 'who doesn't know the first thing about criticism'. 'The thing doesn't really affect me', she assured her friends. But it did. She was hurt and discouraged . . . 'The debunking of K.S. seems to be a favourite pastime of Sydney University', she grieved. And later ... showed something of the pain that her pose of defiant resignation was usually intended to hide ..." At times, however, he fails, or does not attempt to differentiate his own views from those of his mother: Wilkes is praised for "a

more serious 'reappraisal' of the work of Katharine Susannah Prichard [because?] he bestowed rare praise upon *Intimate Strangers*", and condemned [because?] he declared the gold-fields trilogy "a monument of lost opportunities". One must assume that the responsibility for at least one vitriolic coda is Mr Throssell's: "Wilkes took up the propagandist cry against the books of the [goldfields] trilogy, clothing the journalists' naked accusations in decent academic dress... [his] statements, ex cathedra, for all their sonority, were less persuasive than [those] of the ... M.A. student's groping explanation..."

In dealing with Henrietta Drake-Brockman's monograph on Miss Prichard, in the Australian Writers and Their Work series, Mr Throssell is temperate and perceptive: "... a carefully constructed and correct account of Katharine's life and work, distinguished by a sincere search for personal understanding and mature critical judgement." His eulogy of Jack Lindsay, on the other hand, is so fulsome that it is very nearly unbelievable: "... He was at home with the complexities of dialectical materialism as he was with the history of ancient Rome, Greece and Egypt, or the culture of the Renaissance. Classicist, philosopher, historian, novelist, poet, playwright, critic, biographer, linguist ... immense erudition ... humility ... creative genius ..." One feels, however, that at least part of the reason for these accolades is that, like so few others, Lindsay found the goldfields trilogy to be "the peak of her literary achievement". There is, of course, a strategy behind all this: the logistics of Mr Throssell's balancing of praise and dispraise of various accounts of the life and work of Miss Prichard establishes the need for his own study, and sets out his critical and biographical ground rules. But the need for his book was beyond doubt, and much of his polemic unnecessary.

What principally distinguishes Mr Throssell's study of Miss Prichard from all earlier studies is the access he has had to unpublished material, and it is the way in which he handles these sources that raises in a crucial manner the extent to which he has fulfilled the responsibilities of a biographer of an important literary figure. In the light of F. W. Bateson's recent complaint (TLS, 9 April 1976, p. 430) that inadequate deciphering and bald deletions from the Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth seem to suggest that someone was exceptionally

anxious to conceal something, it is difficult not to be alarmed that the burning and/or concealment of Miss Prichard's papers did not stop with her death: "Most of the work was done when I arrived at Greenmount on 2 October 1969, an hour before her death. The letters which she believed to be of more than personal interest she had put aside. Shortly before her death she at last agreed that these should be preserved. The remaining private papers and unfinished manuscripts were burnt, as she wished." Mr Bateson's complaint was merely that infra-red photography was not used on the Wordsworth papers: students of Miss Prichard may never see her papers at all. Mr Throssell cites his mother's wish not to be seen "in deshabillé even in manuscript", and implicitly rebukes the prurient interests of the muckrakers by paralleling what Leon Edel describes as Henry James's "rage for privacy" with that of Miss Prichard. He does, however, reject his mother's evaluation of her letters: "[They] are Katharine herself." And they are at the very heart of his biography of her.

His dilemma is a personal one, and he is engagingly candid about it: "I had not intended to write about my mother. Only in the course of preparing this biography did I discover that Katharine hoped that I might write the story of her life some day. I cannot attempt a dispassionate study. I can pretend to no cold, academic impartiality. Mine is a personal picture." There is a decorum in his study which seems to derive from his intuitions of Miss Prichard's implicit directives to her biographer. At times, this is highly effective, as when he commences chapters with a carefully detailed account of the garden at Greenmount, framing his narrative, as Miss Prichard so often did, with a loving account of wildflowers and trees. At other times, the decorum of restraint can be annoying. Allusions, such as to the "Preux Chevalier", a middle-aged friend of her father's with three children of her age, who "[preyed] on her fear of suicide", or of her rejection of the elderly lover (which seems to foreshadow Arthur Henty's hopeless love for Sophie in Black Opal), are too circumstantial not to be titivating.

Elsewhere, he moves with greater assuredness, especially in admirably lucid and economical accounts of how notebook entries grew into novels such as *Working Bullocks*, *Haxby's Circus* and the goldfields trilogy. Impressive,

too, is his analysis of the latent volatility of the material out of which Miss Prichard fashioned some of her finest works: Brumby Innes, The Cooboo, Happiness, and, above all, Coonardoo. When Brumby Innes was staged, it was with the expectation that the "real Brumby Innes would be unlikely to meet himself", while long after Coonardoo had been published, and despite the introductory disclaimer that its characters were not the people of Turee Station, beyond the Ashburton, Miss Prichard replied to the suggestion that Hugh was an idealization, and Coonardoo a symbol of the land by stating: "I had models for Hugh and Coonardoo. When the book was published I was always afraid that Geary would come some day and take to me. Hugh did: appalled that a man's inner conflict should have been so revealed... Coonardoo? She is an aboriginal woman I was close to (in all but the end which happened to another woman) ... I'd rather Coonardoo was thrown on the scrap heap and forgotten than be regarded merely as background and poetic symbolism ..." What emerges from all this is, of course, a guessing game (Who were the models?), but, more importantly, an invaluable insight into the creative imagination of Miss Prichard. In this, Mr Throssell has substantiated what could previously only be inferred from internal evidence of the novel itself.

Such insights are the prerogative of the highly implicated biographer. In Mr Throssell's case, none is more impressive than those which emerge from his discussion of Intimate Strangers. The notes for this novel ("a study of the married relation, urban, and as close as possible") were begun in 1928, but it was not published until 1936, some three years after the depressive suicide of Jim Throssell. In reexamining the close parallel between the death of his father, and the suicide of Greg Blackwood with which Intimate Strangers was intended to end, Mr Throssell opens wounds which would not have been opened by a biographer with an obsession for concealment. It may be that Jim Throssell saw a rough draft of the original ending of the novel while Katharine was away in Russia; it is clear from Mr Throssell's account that Miss Prichard was tortured by guilt in this matter. However, although Mr Throssell's explanation seems the right one: "Elodie and Greg were fiction", it is no convincing proof of this to cite his mother's "reluctance to reveal the intimate details of her life as a young woman in Child of the Hurricane", or her wish that her personal papers should be destroyed. In Mr Throssell's opinion, "it would have been entirely contrary to Katharine's character and to the whole method of her work up to then, and after, to make herself the central figure of her novel and to expose the naked yearnings of her own heart". In this, he is probably right. But he does not distort the evidence in such a way as to make this an easy conclusion to reach, either for himself, or for his readers. And such distortion would have been very simple to accomplish.

The events of Miss Prichard's life were numerous, and although Mr Throssell describes his role as merely "scene-shifter, and [occasional] prompter in the wings", his narrative is both lively and coherent, mainly because of his skill in presenting discrete accounts of the literary and political strands of her life without sacrificing a sense of their inter-relatedness. He is most persuasive when least didactically insistent: a fascinating picture of Miss Prichard's artistic self-consciousness and development as a writer emerges from a subtly discontinuous series of extracts from her letters. Almost effortlessly, Mr Throssell presents a case for a re-reading of the often excellent short stories, whereas his extended defence of the goldfields trilogy does not make this reviewer prefer it to Coonardoo, Intimate Strangers, or even Working Bullocks. In view of Mr Throssell's own very considerable skills as a writer, it is surprising that he should need to cite such pedestrian judgements as those of John Sleeman (Beckett's Budget, 9 November 1928) merely to show that the TLS was then, as it is now, capable of even worse banalities. Or that he should need to score such gratuitous points as: "... instead of an eagle, the faculties of English hatched a flock of fledgling peewits: instead of visions, chirrupings in the grass."

Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers is dedicated to "The good friends and comrades of Katharine Susannah Prichard". It will reach, and be welcomed by the far wider audience of those who admire her works, whether passionately or dispassionately, many of whom may well hope that more of the extant letters and notebooks will be published in the future.

JOHN A. HAY

The Katharine I Didn't Know

-A personal comment by John K. Ewers

In the autumn of 1950 my wife and I made one of our few visits to K.S.P. at Greenmount. As we had no car, it was a complex journey by bus from one extreme of suburbia to the other. I forget now what we talked about during the afternoon-probably the three months' walkabout I was planning to the centre and north of Australia that winter. It certainly wasn't politics; Katharine and I never discussed politics. She smoked her usual endless halfcigarettes, plain ones not filters, which she broke carefully in half and inserted into a holder. I never discovered whether this was an economy measure or a way of cutting down on smoking for health reasons. We had not intended to stay for the evening meal, but she insisted and afterwards said quite suddenly,

"John, why don't you send your two wheatbelt novels to my Polish publishers? You won't get any royalties. Mine all go to rebuilding a village destroyed during the war. But I'm sure they'd be interested."

I had no feelings one way or another about rebuilding Polish villages, but Men Against the Earth and For Heroes to Live In are among my favourite bits of writing. I could foresee difficulties in translating their folksy idiom, but thought maybe Polish people would like to read about the struggles of pioneer wheatfarmers battling from scratch against drought, a world war and a depression. So I packed them up and sent them off on 15th June with a letter explaining they'd been written as one book and that was how I thought they ought to be republished. The replies came when I was hitch-hiking somewhere north of Capricorn. The first, acknowledging their arrival, said they would "opine" my books and write me "definitively" about them. The second regretted they could not publish them "because these works whatever extremely interesting and valuable are not suitable for the Polish readers for want of social problems". When I told Katharine this she said, "How strange!" but I doubt if she was really surprised.

I said earlier that we never discussed politics. We'd had our big clash on that subject during the first year of the W.A. Section of the Fellowship of Australian Writers. The Sydney Fellowship with which we were affiliated was planning a book, Australian Writers in Defence of Freedom, to which selected writers had been invited to contribute. There was to be a Preface which all interested writers could sign. Kate Baker had written to me praising the project and, in particular, the Preface which Miles Franklin had read to her. This came to me as President and I raised my objections to it at an early meeting in 1939. In the wordy war which ensued, Katharine stoutly defended it, so I gave notice of a motion to amend the Preface so that, instead of opposing only Fascism, it should also oppose interference with liberty in (a) democracies such as ours was supposed to be, (b) fascist countries and communist countries. Members who thought politics should not be discussed at Fellowship meetings mostly staved away next month, but Katharine was there and I stepped down from the chair to put the motion. After an orderly debate it was defeated by a small majority, but I think from that night onward there was a kind of armed truce between us. I learned later that the Victorian F.A.W. also found the Preface unsatisfactory. Anyhow, the book in question was never published.

I'm not sure whether Katharine was at the annual dinner in October when I gave my Presidential address, The Great Australian Paradox, in which I criticized the so-called democracies for the disparity between wealth and poverty and their treatment of writers. But afterwards another member came to me and said, "We didn't know you felt like that!" His use of "We" instead of "I" was very revealing. It should be made clear that at no time did Katharine ever occupy an executive position in the W.A. Fellowship. On its inception in October 1938 she and Walter Murdoch were made Honorary Life Members. Murdoch seldom came to meetings. Katharine came when she could but not regularly. However, she kept a watchful eye on our proceedings and there were members who idealized and idolized her. During the 21 consecutive years I was on the Executive (including three later terms as President) I felt I could sense when a proposition was put forward by such a person that it had emanated from Greenmount. Usually they were relatively harmless—a suggestion for a certain speaker at the next meeting and so on. Katharine did not seek to impose her political ideology on the Fellowship.

Actually there was less difference between our outlooks than either of us may have thought. Towards the end of his very good book, Ric Throssell records an interview she had with Ellis Blain of the ABC in which, in reply to his question whether she would like to see a system of Communism established in Australia, she said,

Hardly Communism. I would like to see a socialist Australia on the terms that the people of Australia wanted and were willing to support. But I would not like to precipitate any action that would force a change too rapidly.

Throughout her life and in this book she equates the Russian system of government with socialism. To me it is State Capitalism and, as I made clear in Writers and the Peace, my address at the end of my second term as President in 1946, capitalism contains within itself the seeds of war. In my late teenage years I was thoroughly grounded in the theory of socialism by a radical aunt and uncle, and in my view it is not something established by violence or maintained by oppression and suppression. But Katharine and I never argued about it. I found her a softly spoken, gentle and kindly person whom I respected for her courage and for her writing. Until I read this book I had no idea that so much of her work was written under such difficulties. I saw little of her in her later years and was quite unaware of her prolonged illnesses.

Prior to the formation of the Fellowship in 1938 I met her only four times. The first was a hello-goodbye affair in Albert's Bookshop just after the publication of *Coonardoo*. I may even have had under my arm the copy of that book I had bought there when Mr Albert—surely one of the most knowledgeable booksellers Perth has ever had—introduced us. I was not game then to ask for her autograph, but did so later and she kindly obliged. She merely smiled wanly and gave me a limp and not very cordial handshake. I never knew her to smile any other way but wanly. If she had moments of joyful,

spontaneous laughter I never experienced them. Our second meeting was a couple of years later at the home of Henrietta Drake-Brockman whither I had gone seeking information about books on Aborigines, a subject on which I was planning to write a thesis for my Teachers' "A" Certificate but which I abandoned in its embryo. I wasn't feeling too bright that day, headachey and out of sorts, a condition not unfamiliar to writers through sitting too long and too cramped over their writing. I said jestingly that I sometimes wished I could escape from my bodily ills so that I could write the better. Katharine said, "Oh, I wouldn't want to lose the pleasures of the flesh, Mr Ewers". Again there was that wan smile. I replied, "Neither would I!" but her remark gave me the impression that she somehow lacked a sense of humour. And when you look at her writing, can you find a single belly-laugh anywhere in it?

Our third meeting was in July 1935 in the office of Basil Kirke, Manager of the ABC in Perth. I'd given a couple of Sunday night radio talks on Australian literature and Kirke thought we should have a committee to draw up and organize a series. So he called Katharine, Henrietta, Walter Murdoch and I together. In the course of the discussion he mentioned they were going to broadcast Money Street and suggested they might do Coonardoo next, adding with a twinkle in his eye, "Expurgated, of course!" "Oh no," retorted Katharine hotly, "all or nothing!" I doubt if she sensed he was joking, nor that Murdoch was also when he suggested dead-pan that in the Australian literature talks perhaps Mrs Throssell could do one on Mrs Drake-Brockman and Mrs Drake-Brockman could do one on Mrs Throssell. In the end, the series was left very much in my hands. I gave most of the talks, which suited me very well for the following year I was planning marriage and a year or more abroad with my bride, for which we would need every penny. When our cargo boat was wrecked at Geraldton we indeed did, for we then had to go by a much more roundabout and expensive route—tourist on the Strathaird to Sydney, steerage on the Aorangi to Vancouver, by Greyhound bus to Los Angeles and across to New York, and third class on the Queen Mary to Southampton. It was this change of plans which led to my fourth meeting with Katharine.

In New York we met C. Hartley Grattan with whom I had corresponded and in early 1938, a few months after our return, he wrote from Sydney where he was on a Carnegie Fellowship to say he would be in Perth in June and would like to meet some writers. He wrote to Katharine to the same effect and she got in touch with me, asking me to arrange a dinner for him. This was held on 6th June at Billett's Cafe in Gledden Building and led to the formation of the Fellowship of Australian Writers (W.A. Section) which held its first meeting in October of that year.

From what I have said you will see that I knew Katharine Susannah Prichard only very slightly, although our acquaintanceship lasted for many years. After reading Ric's book I feel I know her much better. It is not easy for a son to write his mother's biography and keep it objective. This he has achieved by referring to her always as Katharine and not as "my mother". That there was a very close bond between them is shown not by anything he says of her, but by what she says in her letters to

him. We see the dedicated writer that she was struggling against adversity and tragedy, while also being actively involved in the politics that to a certain extent marred some of her writing. Less convincing is his account of the personal relationship between his parents. This is something I believe no biographer can ever fully penetrate although, God knows, lots of them try! That's the province of the novelist who, when he creates people, becomes God for the time being.

I attended Katharine's funeral which was exactly as Ric describes it. But all funerals, Christian or Communist, have an air of unreality. For my part, a packing-case carried in a spring-cart drawn by a shaggy-maned old horse (if such a vehicle or animal could be found these days) would be better than the conventional undertakers' ornate and expensive trappings of death. Wild Weeds and Wind Flowers is a splendid, well-written book and Ric Throssell is to be congratulated on what must have been, under the circumstances, a very difficult and sometimes painful enterprise.

BOOKS

The Prophetic Voice

A Late Picking: Poems 1965-1974: A. D. Hope. Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1975. Hardcover.

'The man alone digging his bones a hole; The pyramid in the waste—whose images?'

When A. D. Hope asked this question in Pyramis or The House of Ascent in 1948, he was trying to reconcile the ambiguity of the creative consciousness in the image of the Egyptian Pharaoh: the artist/priest snagged in tension between the heart's passions and that clearsighted perception of illusion which cuts him off from other human beings. In this early poem the artist's work becomes a monument to his self-assertion in a spiritual wasteland, and there was some admiration implied for "those powers that fence the failing heart:/Intemperate will and incorruptible pride". By invoking Blake, Milton and Swift and the hovering presence of insanity, Hope showed continuing awareness of the dangers and glories of over-assertive individualism to man as social being and as artist.

The poet's gift was seen as a force which he was obliged to control with caution and humility. Paradoxically, it was also a daemonic power by which the poet was more or less passively possessed, a power desirable but also potentially malevolent. Much of his earlier work kicked off from a dissociation and conflict within the personality: reason against passion, morality against desire, individual feeling against the collective organism. Had he, like Auden, been able to wield his wit in a sophisticated cultural context in which irony is a perfectly legitimate weapon and the pursuit of excellence part of the cultural fabric, he would never have been labelled "alienated" or "nihilistic" as he has been in the Australian context. His resistance to the glib insignia of grass-roots nationalism, his awareness and use of the whole European tradition have often prejudiced his audience in this country which equates sincerity with sloppiness, wit with barren ingenuity.

What, then, has become of that "intemperate will and incorruptible pride" as part of the

artist's equipment? What now bolsters the "failing heart"? And was it such a failing heart after all? The appearance of this new collection would suggest that the heart has always been there and in a very healthy condition too, waiting its rightful season. In the best poems, the tensions from which all great poetry emerges still exist but without lash, strain, sweat and jolt, the opposing forces are integrated and fused in a state of wholeness and spontaneity. And the courage and distinction involved in this achievement demand humble and sympathetic recognition on the reader's part.

That it has not been a comfortable route is evident in a poem of 1971:

The drug of custom helps us to adjust; If it did not, how could we possibly bear Our civilization for a single day? Although the edges of its knives are wet, The dripping red is easy to forget. Your own, or someone else's? Who can say?

Just keep on putting one foot after another; The horror is blunted, like the ecstasy. Illusions of normal living serve us, brother, To keep the heart conditioned not to see What in his passionate age drove Goya wild: That old, mad god eating his naked child.

Under Sedation

If this is the mandarin recoil from reality of which Hope has so often been accused, then his critics have no eyes and no ears. The terrors have always been real enough, both from within and without. The torture of extreme selfconsciousness in an alien environment produced work in the past expressive of frustration, hostility and shock against a world with which the younger man felt unable to come to terms. Hence, there was occasional faltering of tonal control and the release of cruelty in poems such as Observation Car and, to a lesser extent, Conquistador. The strong sexual overtones seemed, nevertheless, peripheral to the underlying network of guilt, repression, and recrimination shrugged off in brutally comic diction. The pain of this dualistic world lay in Hope's attempts to reconcile a powerful and selfconscious sexuality with a most intense idealism. He could only speak of the former with driven and often near-frantic puritanical violence, and has been (until this present collection) somewhat ambiguous in his expression of the latter.

It has become almost a cliché of Australian criticism to remark the prevailing melancholy

of many writers, the short step from fatalism to nihilism with echoes of Ecclesiastes booming away in the spinifex like the mysterious boum of the Marabar Caves:

Then I looked on all the labours that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

Ecclesiastes II:xi

A chill sense of loss animates Hope's awareness of desolation in a life of necessary compromises:

Patch and mend, patch and mend; Borrow and scrape or lavish and spend As much good fortune as God may send: Naught shall avail you; All things shall fail you; Nothing shall profit you in the end.

Patch and Mend

—despair in the face of doom wrought by time and death. But Hope goes beyond wry homiletic pessimism in the best poems in this book -two wonderfully moving elegies for fellow poets whose Jewish fate might, but for the grace of God, have been his. Against the terrible odds of our century, he invests the memory of Gertrud Kolmar and Osip Mandelstam with stoic courage, an impersonality capable of being matched with the impersonal forces that destroyed them but not what they represented. The phrase, "the grace of God" is no mere rhetorical figure to Hope—the search for grace, for closer connection with the God of suffering man pervades these poems with a transcendent urgency directed towards learning "the art of coming home".

The Book of Job has always held a special place for poets of tragic persuasion, more especially for those whose experience has given them a sense of identification with the Jewish character. John Berryman, in his posthumously published autobiographical novel, *Recovery*, drawn to Judaism, found that "no other nation of antiquity ever came to the point of regarding itself as chosen not for its own advantage but for service. A bearing attraction." A particularly pertinent attraction to a writer trying to keep the artist's role in communal perspective for, like Hope, he too was aware of the potential hubris of the poet raging in the wilderness,

forced into a secular prophethood by surrounding spiritual sterility. Berryman also referred in the novel to his "unique devotion to Job". Apart from the formal attractions of its dramatic presentation, Job's questioning of his creator becomes the questioning of a whole generation about the sense of its historic fate: "Why do we suffer what we suffer?" The "Why" is not a philosophical investigation of the nature of things but a religious concern with the ways of God, a God who contradicts His revelation by "hiding His face" (13:xxiv).

Where was He, too, that night you mused in the dark,

Dog-tired, half-starved, the Terror just closing round,

Taking incredible comfort from St. Just's joke:

"Men perish that God may live"? Did His Covenant Ark

Go before you to Auschwitz, his ram's-horn sound

Till the gas-chambers of Jericho breached and broke?

The personal fate of Gertrud Kolmar becomes a universal issue:

When they knocked you down and a jackboot kicked in your teeth,

Did you sing with Job: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust"?

Or did you remember St. Just and the poem you made,

That gay, that terrible poem confronting death:

"We have always been Bluebeard's wives; we almost must!"?

That was your answer to God and games he played.

In Memoriam: Gertrud Kolmar, 1943

The unquestioned assumption and affirmation of God's presence is there from the beginning as is the notion that everything comes from God. In this compelling poem, Hope never forgets the dripping edges of the knives, makes passionate and direct identification with those who have taught us "that calm at the worst, when the spirit goes free", acknowledges his debt to the dead:

Whistling past your cemetery in the black Storm of our century of hate and dread, I, who have lived in shelter all of my days, Bring you, before the Lord of the Keys gets back, Word from all those still doomed to those who are already dead,

Those able to recognize all and yet still able to praise.

In Memoriam: Gertrud Kolmar, 1943

The theme of approaching ripeness for death runs through so many of the poems: almost as if the moment of death might be the only worthwhile moment of life. Just as Job's protest may be interpreted as either the greatest religious experience or the greatest blasphemy, so ripeness can promise as well as threaten. Ripeness, then, becomes equated with God—enclosing all, answering all, justifying all:

God never speaks, they say, to a drunken man

Yet each of us proffers his draught of love to drain:

Each of us seeks in the other, as best he can, This respite from his pain.

Under the Weather

The first-born child in a world of horror knows its suffering as determined by the archetypal example of Isaac's preparation for death at his father's hands. Especially if it is a product of that severe ethic which feels responsibility to the gift of talent:

These cannot take life for granted as others do,

They shrink from kinship and kind; they have learned to greet

A kiss with caution, joy with a settled calm; A celebration warns them they are taboo And a caress reminds them that human meat Torn at the summer solstice becomes a charm.

The First-Born

The lyric or elegiac tone predominates over the satiric in most of these poems; the voices shored against his ruins, haunting his inner ear, come from private and personal sources, memories of the loved and the loving:

Who would suppose to view her then, the tender

Bloom and dazzle of wildfire, and the stance Of unripe grace, the naked eloquent glance, Time could so tame or age despoil her splendour?'

On an Early Photograph of My Mother

On behalf of his son, he mourns the loss of heroes of a simpler boyish fantasy world—Hercules, Samson, Roland, and Robin Hood:

My unripe soul, groping to fill its need, Found in those legends a food by which it grew.

Whatever we learned, the heroes were what we *knew*.

We were fortunate indeed.

The Sacred Way

The same innocent romanticism is carried over into the quest for love:

But where shall I find her? Where, As I grope through these winter storms, Is the house, the hearth, the stair Where I held my love in my arms And slept in the folds of her hair?

Winterreise

Parallel with this lyric strain runs the precocious articulacy of the boy whose language ripened before his emotions ever saw the light. This gives us playful, teasing paradoxes of the intellect in poems like Exercise on a Sphere or O Be A Fine Girl (MW to M31), with a good deal of heterogeneous yoking to keep his metaphysics warm. It also gives us the very funny latter-day prophet of Country Places crying "Woe unto Tocumwal, Teddywaddy, Tooleybuc!", his rage de-fused in the wilderness of his "beautiful" "prosperous" and "careless" country, the note of sadness never far away:

They have cut down even their only tree at One Tree;

Dust has choked Honey Bugle and drifts over Creeper Gate;

Country Places

The elegiac note is again sounded in Hay Fever where, despite the skittish title, Hope effects a perfect integration of his persistent dualism, a rich and deeply moving affirmation of the stresses and resolutions of birth and death—the complexity and order of man's emotional and spiritual links with the natural world that can't be stuffed into moral or political categories. It implies an understanding, generalized but precise, of the interplay between images of Arcadia and of death and, in the classical pastoral tradition, amounts to a statement of accord between the notion of poetic immortality and time's threat:

Time, with his scythe honed fine, Takes a pace forward, swings from the hips; the flesh

Crumples and falls in wind-rows curving away.

Waiting my turn as he swings—(Not yet, not mine!)

I recall the sound of the scythe on an earlier day:

Late spring in my boyhood; learning to mow with the men . . .

I set the blade into the grass as they taught me the way;

The still dewy stalks nod, tremble and tilt aside.

Cornflowers, lucerne and poppies, sugargrass, summer-grass, laced

With red-stemmed dock; I feel the thin steel crunch

Through hollow-stalk milk thistle, self-sown oats and rye; ...

... dandelion casts up a golden eye, To a smell of cows chewing their cuds, the sweet hay-breath:

The boy with the scythe never thinks it the smell of death.

Hay Fever

In a late poem in his collection, City Without Walls, W. H. Auden gave an autobiographical sketch which included the lines:

A childhood full of love and good things to eat: why should he not hate change?

Profile

They might have been Hope's words as the son/father grows to painful acceptance of the God who "provides all", joy and suffering, continuing to hope that the "next vintage will not be too bad" (Spätlese). Because of the social and cultural changes with which he is out of sympathy, the public persona which he has maintained with so much tact says less to his successors than the voice beneath it, a prophet's voice, older and more archetypal than the institutions to which he has given worldly allegiance. We would do well to listen.

FAY ZWICKY

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

ALAN ALEXANDER was born in Strabane, Northern Ireland, emigrated to Australia in 1965. Is in charge of Creative Writing units at W.A.I.T. A contributor to Australian literary journals and anthologies.

JOHN BRIGGS lives at Camberwell in Melbourne, and works as a real estate valuer. His poems relate his "experience and personal contacts as a husband, father, friend, and as a valuer and one-time accountant, to a concern for self-understanding and the exploration of personal identity."

COLLEEN BURKE was born and has lived mostly in Sydney, spent a few years in Melbourne, and travelled overseas in Ireland and England. She is a community worker in Glebe, Sydney. Has published a collection of poems, Go Down Singing, and poems in various anthologies and magazines. Compiled and presented two workshops at Australian National Folk Festivals.

ROBERT CREELEY was born in Arlington, Massachusetts, U.S.A. He is well known as a Black Mountain poet in the school of Charles Olson. He founded and edited the *Black Mountain Review*. Since 1966 he has been teaching at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He visited Perth in April 1976.

ANDREW DONALD lives in Heidelberg, Victoria. Published a collection of poems, Far From the Paling Fences, and poems in poetry and literary magazines. Interested in prose writing.

JOHN K. EWERS is a novelist and short story writer. He lives in Perth and has held office in W.A. Writers Fellowship and Australian Society of Authors.

MERLE GOLDSMITH is Tutor in the Department of English at University of New England, Armidale.

RICHARD HARDING is Associate Professor of Law at the University of W.A. He is a Commissioner of the ABC and was associated from the outset with the University of W.A.'s successful application for an F.M. radio broadcasting licence.

GWEN HARWOOD has published three books of poems, is a contributor to literary magazines, and has written opera librettos for Larry Sitsky, James Penberthy, and Ian Cugley. Now lives in the country in Tasmania, "combining poetry and manual labour with music and messing about in small boats". Working on another opera with Larry Sitsky and a song-cycle with James Penberthy.

JOHN HAY is a Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Western Australia. He has edited anthologies of short stories and a recent edition of Katharine Susannah Prichard's Working Bullocks.

GEOFF HASLER teaches in the School of Human Communications at Murdoch University.

H. W. HILLIER is a minister in the Anglican Church. He has published poems and stories in the rural press. "A struggling dramatist."

HAL COLEBATCH was born in Perth and is at present a doctoral student in politics at the University of W.A. He has published short stories and poems, articles and reviews, and writes for radio. His first book of verse, *Spectators on the Shore*, was published in 1975.

T. A. G. HUNGERFORD—See profile in this issue.

COLIN JOHNSON is the author of a novel, Wild Cat Falling, and a number of short stories, published mainly in Westerly. He is a West Australian who has travelled extensively in Asia (see interview Westerly 3, 1975).

KERRY LEVES was born in Sydney, graduated Sydney University. Various occupations. Awarded an Arts Council Young Writers' Fellowship in 1974, travelled to U.K. Published in poetry and literary magazines.

BARRY M. LOWE is a journalist for a Melbourne suburban newspaper, and student at Gordon Institute of Technology. Has been writing for about eighteen months and hopes later to write full time.

NOEL MACAINSH is a poet and critic, contributor to Australian and overseas journals and anthologies. His books include Clifton Pugh, Eight by Eight, Nietzsche in Australia. Lives at Black Water, North Queensland, and is in the English Department at James Cook University.

ANDREW McDONALD was born in England, teaches English Literature at Macquarie University. A number of his poems have been published in Australian literary periodicals.

ROD MORAN is a graduate of Melbourne University, at present studying for a postgraduate degree there. Walter Murdoch Prize, University of Western Australia, in 1970. Published in Australian literary magazines and periodicals.

MICHAEL ROBINSON is a postgraduate student in English at the University of W.A. and lives in Nedlands.

GRAEME KINROSS SMITH lectures on creative writing in Australia at Gordon Institute of Technology in Geelong, Victoria. Author of *Mankind's Spies* and joint author, with Jamie Grant, of a book of poems. At present working on a two-volume illustrated book of profiles of Australia's major writers to be published shortly.

FAY ZWICKY is a Senior Tutor in the English Department at the University of W.A. She is a contributor to Australian literary journals and anthologies and has published a book of verse, *Isaac Babel's Fiddle*.

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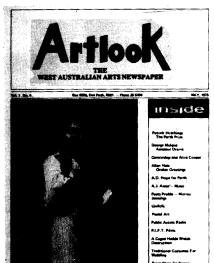
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