

WESTERLY

stories poems reviews articles

Kenneth Cook on Violence
—Interview

Short Fiction Experiments

Poems by Young and
Established Poets

Essays on H.H. Richardson,
David Ireland,
R. G. Menzies' Suez Speeches

WESTERLY

No. 3, September, 1977

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WESTERLY

a quarterly review

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Westerly is published quarterly by the English Department, University of Western Australia, with assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council and the Western Australian Literary Fund. The opinions expressed in *Westerly* are those of individual contributors and not of the Editors or Editorial Advisors.

Correspondence should be addressed to the Editors, *Westerly*, Department of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009 (telephone 80 3838). Unsolicited manuscripts not accompanied by a stamped self-addressed envelope will not be returned. All manuscripts must show the name and address of the sender and should be typed (double-spaced) on one side of the paper only. Whilst every care is taken of manuscripts, the editors can take no final responsibility for their return; contributors are consequently urged to retain copies of all work submitted. Minimum rates for contributions—poems \$7.00; prose pieces \$7.00; reviews, articles, \$15.00; short stories \$30.00. It is stressed that these are minimum rates, based on the fact that very brief contributions in any field are acceptable. In practice the editors aim to pay more, and will discuss payment where required.

Recommended sale price: \$2.00 per copy.

Subscriptions: \$8.00 per annum (posted); \$15.00 for 2 years (posted). Special student subscription rate: \$7.00 per annum (posted). Single copies mailed: \$2.40. **Subscriptions should be made payable to *Westerly*, and sent to The Bursar, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009.**

Synopses of literary articles published in *Westerly* appear regularly in *Abstracts of English Studies* (published by the American National Council of Teachers of English).

JEAN KENT

Eat a Peach

The marmalade cat had slunk in with the morning, and was sitting, razor-eyed and silent, beside the stove, waiting for breakfast.

In the corners where patches of light reached, little pockets of dust were turning themselves inside out. Stretching up to the sun and yawning, subsiding in dizzy showers of gold.

The cat dabbled his two front paws in the watery shallows of a thin insipid pool, but all the rest of him was grey. He sat there, two buttoned light bulbs, glowing in the dawn.

Outside the light was everywhere. Moving quickly, slipping through the trees and unravelling their hair, sliding over the slippery face of the river and ruffling the grass stalks. Only the curtained windows of the house remained frosted and resistant.

Slinky fingers creep, settle on those glassy eyes.

Slowly—barely a flicker of a lash—quick—world-exhaustive yawn—and then the quiver of morning, the rumpled tumult of covers, sheets, a crack in the curtain through which the thin light sluices.

The sun and the waker swam, flailing groggily. Grayness dissolved. Buttery, the sudden bustle a shock to the gently strengthening light. It seemed to hang about the shadows, stunned. Until chunky sounds of water broke, somewhere within the house. The room erupted to rival the shower—floods of red yellow blue all the colours hidden by the night—so morning had finally begun.

(ii)

Helen was greeted by the cat, a pliant arch of scrambled lemons-and-oranges. Across the room the progression of marbled arcs, preceded by a rusty purr. She bent down and stroked his back, ruffled his ears a little. She pulled back the curtains that were thinly sifting the sunlight into the room. From the refrigerator, milk. The rapid pink tongue dipping in, out, in. She went out into the garden to pick peaches for breakfast.

(iii)

Waking faces at windows. Looking out to determine the nature of the day, saw:

(Graham)—Helen walking out over grass still damp, her heavy plait of hair tangled in sun. He knew, even before she reached it, that she was heading for the peach tree. Health and vitality herself, she would bring peaches for breakfast.

Briefly, he looked out. But he knew exactly how she would walk across the grass to the tree, and did not need to stand and watch what he had already learned by heart. He decided to go down and join her.

(Damien)—The sun on brown arms upreached to a dazzling circle of bright orange-pink peaches in a nest of green. Just at that moment, as he parted the blind and looked out, Helen was standing beneath the peach tree, poised on tiptoe and stretching towards those coloured eggs. His eye flicked open on the scene, and automatically his hands went searching for his camera. If he could only frame it —while all the garden was still huge and soft, to place within it that one luminous jewel. He had the camera in his hands. With held breath, tense face, not daring to pause, he had caught her and framed her, a perfect celluloid miniature; pressed the shutter . . .

(Craig)—Walking across the garden as if she had appeared there for the first time. Her feet still held by the soil. In her skirt, she was carrying peaches, the brown material hooked up to make a cradle for the pinky fruit.

Through the thick trees, the day drifted fitfully. Helen emerged, receded, over zebra crossings of light and shade. In the dark stripes, lost, dependent upon sun for life. It is only Helen, he said, bringing peaches for breakfast. Focusing hard. Then out of the shadows, Graham. So that her face broke, he could see her talking. The shift of reality winded. Suddenly his fingers in the furrows of forehead. Weakly watching two simple humans, a very ordinary pocket of life.

(Gabrielle)—Helen, in the early morning riverdrifts of light. She had woken to find the sun climbing in barley sugar trickles the wall behind her bed; she shook the curtain to make the light dance in the night-wilted room. The window glass bounced and the whole wall was swamped.

And there was Helen, part of some dream waking in the dappled garden. Walking through the dew, leaving a narrow trail of crushed dark grass. She went to the peach tree. Reached up to its orange crown to gather fruit, light dripping on her arms and the twist of yellow hair that hung down her back. Dripping and clinging brilliantly to the massed orange fruit in its shelter of green . . . A Renoir, was it of young girls in straw hats in an orchard, she had seen once . . . Helen, now, under the green and pinky-orange tree, in the trickling morning. Night not quite dispelled, the garden a dark cave. Twinkle of sun at the tips of the trees, paler green tents that quivered with the first breaking plinks and pebbly whorls of birdsounds.

Somewhere, through the trees, the river would be shedding its snaky skin of grey, and tossing coloured plates in glittering chains from bank to bank.

Helen, walking back now with the hem of her dress tucked up around the fruit, was a slow wave that came in crested with sun. Rising up between the islands of shade, subsiding.

Graham came out to meet her. Her face spilt light. The interruption an estrangement, a dilution. Gabriel sighed. The sight was still a yellow stone finely cut inside her, rays fanning out. It hurt.

(iv)

Helen was bringing in the peaches she had picked for breakfast. Running water over them in the sink, water that clung in tiny drops to the pink yellow orange fur.

"There are a few grubs, Graham," she said. "But perfectly ripe." Perfectly.

(v)

In a blue bowl on the kitchen table, a melting feast of perfect peaches, just-picked with a twig and a leaf or two still hanging, little watery pearls clinging to the skin.

(vi)

Biting in through fuzz (Gabrielle), not waiting to peel, but sinking in teeth, eager for juice. Perfect, thinking aah. Can hardly breathe, hardly bear it, but having begun, cannot stop. So heady. Suede skin, against the roof of her mouth, soft clasp, runny flesh, surrender. Ringing, sunlush, so clear. Her fingers wrapped in skins of juice.

Damien, picking up peach, holding in both hands some fragile bird. Eat slowly. His eye running over the blush—near the base it deepens, and I brush the fur with my finger, must memorize all. From the side the small slice I cut drips, like a glass jewel, drops its hide as I peel. Slowly proceed to suck.

Craig, systematically and cleanly running a bone handled knife in careful circles round a peach. A shell whorl falls. Long loping spiral of skin parted from flesh, precisely dropping onto the table. My peach quite bald, quite clean and definite within the limits of its shape. I cut now into segments, neatly, pulling the two halves of flesh from the seed, slicing them. Yellow crescents I arrange in rings on my plate, juicy arcs overlapping. Not at all related to those downy shapes within the bowl. But still I will not eat. Not until the last slice is cut.

Helen and Graham: sharing. Three peaches divisive, uniting. Helen cutting halves, handing equally to Graham. Who peels. Without finesse or pattern. He slices off the skin randomly, slices thinly so that no flesh is lost. The planes of his cutting cross and cross merely as preparation for eating. He and Helen eat. Large simple bites. Helen licks at the juice around her lips, anteaterlike. Graham eats. We are united by this act. The others eat separately. You and I, Helen thinks, as she cuts, peels, eats, are on the same branch now, sharing.

Gabrielle has already finished. Has gulped all down, heedless of grubs. Her teeth now upon the seed, oh I should like to crack it, she thinks suddenly. Sucking the craggy thing and surprising herself—this sudden desire to have something between her back teeth, to smash. "Have another," says Helen. But Gabrielle shakes her head. Watching Damien, still eating. He has almost disappeared, his face a sheet of serenity. While Craig chews methodically, evenly, slowly, leaving little spiky indents of teeth. Damien sucks, raptured. The full peach always before him. The limits of experience stretching like an allday sucker, a toffee twist he must loosen and hold, forever, for as long as the dim taste of peach will linger on his tongue. Will he come back? wonders Gabrielle. While beside him, beyond this peach world of his, ruminates Craig. On every bite, a mark of significance. A thought there in the pressure of teeth on fruit. In the deliberation of food, a philosophical shape around his face, square, emphatic as the seed that alone is left upon his plate. In his cheek (Damien) the seed a nut to swell sweetly, a further part of the whole to enjoy. Now (Craig) picking up with fingers unstained by juice, the seed, squeezes the rough shape within his palm, flickery smile alight within the thoughtful geometry—"the fantastically ugly heart of it all," he says. "Look at it—like the cortex of a brain." And he slips it into his pocket. While Damien blissfully sucks.

(vii)

"You and your paradoxes," Helen sighed. Wiping her hands on a teatowel, the blue bowl empty, the day having begun to revolve around actions and cleaning up. She could see Graham in the garden, cutting the grass with an old scythe. Morning had taken control of the house, leaving no doubt about the shapes and concerns of objects in its path. Every chair and cupboard had become resolute and complete within its own stolid confines. Day surrounding, the people moved in different directions.

(viii)

The peaches that have been eaten.
Slither down.

There is fuzz. On the lives of the people. Growing. As they leave.

Their actions have split. Clean through the heart—the spiky seed drops.

Faces like water where peach nuts have fallen. Watch. As the ripples subside.

(ix)

At his post beside the stove, the cat had begun to stretch. Whiskers clean as whistles, razor eyes. He was arching, slowly.

Voices between the flapping of teatowels—“your first breakfast here”—it was Damien, talking to Gabrielle.

Because she had forgotten that last night she had met these people for the first time, Gabrielle spun in surprise. Half-tripping as she replied, Damien darting to her rescue: between them igniting a furry whip of a tail, as they fell over the cat. In the toffee kitchen they had lashed up a furry squall. A flurry of lemon-orange marmalade erupting over the green kitchen floor and falling at last like a burntout firework in the midst of a tumbling patch of splotchety red geraniums.

Outside. In the uncompromising midmorning sun. There they had to make their peace with him. As he lay, sleekening catty dreams inside suntoasted fur. The cat, who all through their breakfast of peaches, had sat, watching them.

ANDREW McDONALD

Photographers

As I peer down into the view-finder
I see us diminished into small darkrooms,
bending over our magic trays, creating
history. Images grow under our fingers—
places, loved ones brought to life. Only we
are absent, squinting through lenses,
invisible behind the machines we ghost.
We build a past for other lives.
The world pivots under our tripods,
unravelling the times we've haunted,
leaving us our right-to-left vision
and a blank spool emptying to the horizon.

DAMIEN WHITE

At least seven stories about a photograph

A man and a woman are seen meeting on the Acropolis in Athens. From the way they run together, kiss, hold each other, they are obviously a long-established couple. They are holding hands as they return down the steps into the city and may be heard planning how they will first check her out of her hotel, find a double room elsewhere and then collect his pack from the hotel near the station he has found late the night before. In the midst of her packing the woman is seen to take a photograph from her handbag, look at it for a moment, and then proffer it to the man.

We took it at Gatwick, she is heard to tell him, while we were waiting for the flight call.

It shows her with another man. As he looks at it the man's face remains expressionless, and in answer to a question the woman puts to him he is heard to say,

No, I don't have a picture of Maureen.

The woman finishes her packing and they leave, again hand in hand.

* * *

You are waiting at your agreed spot on the Acropolis in Athens well before your agreed meeting time, and you see her approaching when you still have half an hour in hand. At your wave she recognises you and you run together. Probably your fears are not at all apparent then, nor as you walk hand in hand to her hotel. In the course of her packing she pulls out a photograph. Simon has seen her off the previous day and while waiting for her flight-call they have sat together in one of those 3-snaps-for-20p booths in the departure lounge. She hands you one copy, saying she has left the others with Simon. You:

- (a) tell her you'd rather not have it;
- (b) accept it, apparently pleased, but tear it up and flush it away at your next opportunity;
- (c) keep it, because it is after all a photograph of her;
- (d) realise that she doesn't expect you to keep it but is waiting for some comment from you and then the return of the photograph.

She finishes her packing and you leave to find a new hotel.

* * *

In another room in another city the man is sitting at their small hotel table while the woman is lying on the bed writing a letter. Though her hand and arm are casually covering most of the page, the words 'Simon, love' can be seen at its head. At a certain point she starts up and is seen to look through her handbag and suitcase, more and more hurriedly, as if she has lost something. And indeed she is eventually heard to ask the man,

Have you seen that photo, that one of me with Simon.

Their eyes meet as he shakes his head. His lips are seen to be forced together. After checking her bags once more she lies back on the bed, staring at the letter.

I must have left it out when I first showed it to you, she is heard to say, back in Athens.

The man is seen to be gazing at her. She begins writing once again. Before long he looks away.

* * *

You watch as she finishes her packing in that first hotel of hers, after you've handed the photograph back to her, and later you have opportunities enough. You:

- (a) take the photograph and shred it;
- (b) look at it once or twice, look at it showing her so happy with Simon, and then replace it;
- (c) look for it, but can't find it;
- (d) make no attempt to see it again, even forgetting where she has put it.

* * *

And later still, in yet another hotel room in yet another city, the man is heard to ask if the woman has any envelopes. 'Maureen, my love' can be seen at the head of the letter he has obviously just completed, though he has covered the rest of it with another sheet of paper.

Look in the back compartment of my suitcase, the woman is heard to tell him.

And while fossicking there he is seen to find the photograph, hidden between two folds of a Greek National Tourist Organisation leaflet.

* * *

When you find the photograph you look around to see if she'd noticed. On finding she hasn't you:

- (a) slip it into your pocket and later destroy it;
- (b) simply replace it, go back to the table where you've been working, and address your letter to Maureen in Rome;
- (c) pause only a moment before taking it and letting it fall in front of her, being careful to look away before she can meet your eyes.

* * *

Though I arrived at our agreed meeting-place on the Acropolis in Athens three-quarters of an hour before our agreed meeting-time I was ashamed of myself after we found each other, for she told me that she had been waiting an hour longer, an hour in which I had been simply killing time. We went to pick up her gear preparatory to finding a hotel together. And as she was packing she showed me a photograph of her and Simon, taken in one of those little booths at Gatwick just a few minutes before her plane had left. It was very good of her, and, from the little I had seen of Simon last time I was in London, not bad of him. They seemed very happy together.

After looking at the photograph for as long as seemed appropriate I handed it back to her and she gazed at it herself for a moment with a fondness that with all my good intentions I couldn't help but find disquietening. I turned away, an interloper.

And similarly, though I knew how upset she must have been when she thought she had lost it, when she thought she had left it in that first hotel room after showing it to me, I felt that any attempt to comfort her would've been an intrusion. I could only sit back in my chair watching her, watching her as she stared at the letter she was writing to Simon.

But later, almost as soon as I found the photograph, I took it and let it fall in front of her, looking away before I could meet her eye.

MARION CAMPBELL

Peepshow

The front door is pressed back into the shadows away from the garden. Dull white of animal fat, the fibro-cement exterior. Moulded into it, the great meat slab of the painted verandah. The wide overhang of roof bends its shadows around this, darkening the complicated play of passing cloud and reflected leaf venetian blindfolded at the windows. The red cement tongue of path suddenly arrested at the letterbox. The roof heaps up its tile upon tile, variegated green to the big blue. The lawn is luxury. There is a name for it. Superfine. It subtly rashes legs afterwards like the lingering irritation of riverwater. The banksia's roughness against the superfine skin between the legs. Gnarled but strongrooted, it balances again and again away from its history of disequilibrium. The four legs lowered from the tree tilt the feet horizonwards. Knees blind nudge the suburban street unfurling apron lawn upon apron lawn. Drop to a soft thud on the lawn. Something must have provoked the: I'll show you his picture if you like, but that's gone now.

They used to say: the carpet is mushroom wall-to-wall. The carpet is mushroom coloured superfine and even now, mushrooms are the carpet colour digestible as oysters the sea as they slip away, the deepsea smell, the big wet organism contained in the neat membrane. The Chiffonier is pruned back by the frame of the door, but as you advance, turrets arise in all sorts of inextricably complex post-scripts to the first impression.

Pillars wind around their own axes, mirrors snatch glimpses of tree ramifications, syncopated butterfly flights, other accidents. Her pale pale unblinking eyes and the paler stubble, wheaten, of the lashes. Pushing, recoiling, gesturing, recesses and bulges. The key is in one of the recesses, on the cool marble part, below the tier of mini-drawers. It jerks into the teeth of the lock. The door on right pulls away. Sheer sonic veil behind: the crackling static of summer insects. The carpet is uniform wall-to-wall, but it has embossed mounds. They imprint textured welts on your knees and shins. The shoebox is split on the side. Spills its slippery load as it is withdrawn. Photographs. In many the image has retreated into the sepia fog.

Families arranged in precarious little pyramids around garden benches, smarting at the camera-sun. Light enlarges noses astoundingly. Bellies of the children on a brighter plane too. The larger photographs curl around the other ones. Grandma's dynasties of cats. The Mullewa Tom. The Bunbury Cheshire. Tabbies on floral laps on striped deckchairs lightdappled. There he is on the deck of a ship. Shirt blossoming over the belt. Same benign camera-sun squint. The other photographs shuffle him away.

The leg in profile is poised above the other on what must have been a prop of some kind. A few wiry hairs protrude above the horizon of the thigh. This was taken in a gym. The neck is thickly muscular. There is a rush of blood, burns cheeks to a scorch. Carpet imprints floraflora binding me there. The back is arched with great ribspan to where the face nestles, fostered by its curve. The leg must have been lowered after the photograph, the towel unslung from the neck, stretched to a slow whipcrack in the air and then sawtense between the flexed back biceps as he laughs in the steamed up bathroom: Mon! could you fetch my pants. Little beads condense and slow-trickle down the mirror. Is buttock-heavy, calf-heavy, chest tense, eyes puffed as if face were foot-lit. Strokes the overnight beard, engines drone already, heavy-bellied plane. That photograph catches the touch of fatigue, faces of the others darkened too, skeins of cloud rip past, heading for the big one the big one metal belly buffeted in the flux of the canyons of it turbulence turbulence you learn that word at the age of three and cumulo cumulo nimbus as seas receive their human confetti man and man's machine with cloudburst pulverized come on come on collect your speedy particles no full fathom five this just a slight silt absorbed like communion wafer to the flatlapping sea tongue and then the slow ooze osmosis. The journalists blunder past the widow with the sealed face, plunder photographs: sorry Madam we've got a job to do. Headlines, yellow clippings unfurl. Hey! Rita!

The voice cuts hemisphere from hemisphere, wire through the plump cheese. What are you doing there? She is standing in the distended triangle of light at the kitchen door, standing in the crazy whirlpools of illumined dust. Veins stand-out on her hands, knees band-aided, eyes narrowing their glint, face looks convulsed in pain or betrayal. Ah just showing Arlie the fatcotoes the ccccat photos words came out all grated should have cleared throat. She starts towards us and then meditatively lunges at the apple wedged between thumb and forefinger. Dishclatter. Fridge closed. She knows the pull too but would never display the relics in the cardboard sarcophagus.

Brain revulses. Summon up a catalogue voice. Ah yes. Yes. This is the dog on the farm I told you about. Zozo. Kelpie. Good sheep dog. Remember the flies under the peppermint trees. The yellow eager eyes, the spurt of tongue, and beyond the mean anatomy of the gums, the dust-puffed horizon. The photographs slip one behind the other. Not as obedient as cards. The box reloaded, side gaping wide now. The key droops, back in the lock.

Peepshow. Show you my father's body. And yours, blood still pounding in his ears, still with beard growth overnight, yours the unshowable. Showers behind drawn curtains, closed doors. Can't see Arlie's face, still lowered, hair-curtained. And then she tosses hair back. A little saliva beads, balloons at the corner of the lip. A word inflated, sucked back. She knows now. She knows. It's locked up, nuttight in the neat little skull. Then out it comes, the: Yeah . . . in a five second yawn. Hate her furiously for the drawl of it. She can still get up, walk easily down the entrance hall over the mushroom carpet and through the door. She knows. She can even let the flywire door flap back, crush the superfine with foot after foot. Follow her to a pile of blue metal, weed-infested, left on the edge of the block from the building. She kneels. The nylon dress foams around the dusty ankles, she plays limply with the blue metal, streams it through her fingers. She has it. Turning metal to liquid. Sibyl is closed, no oracles today.

—But that wasn't really like him at all. And he didn't pose for it. It was just taken.

—Oh. Really.

The voice changes register on the "y", descends the scale as the metal dribbles from the parted fingers. Hair slides. Hers not wiry, massive. Parts like waterveil around the swan-neck. The downy swan-neck.

—Well what was he really like then this father of yours?
This father. As if it were . . . There is a series. Learn the coquetterie of orphans
slipping from daddylap to daddylap.

—He was a clown.

—Ha a clown. How can you know . . .

I know. I know when I am a witch the siren airqueen and leap from the jumbled
pile of jarrah behind the shed and shout I am Zora born of lightning fed on
firefrost and frisky nights I know

—I don't know. That photograph was taken in a gym. He . . .

—Who tells you. Your Mother?

She has a father with workshop and carpentry set, woodshavings, grows water-
melons, makes the toast for Saturday's breakfast, passes the butter for the sweet-
corn, calls her Bubs, drives the family in a long and polished car, comes in from
work, tie barely relaxed, silk tassles dangling from the dressing gown girdle,
leaves the shaving dregs, foam and whisker splinter on the basin sides, calls out
from mouthful of food as the front door slams: I'm off, bye Mum, bye Bubs,
be good, horn toot, blown kisses.

No clown, no up-side-down acrobat, no shoebox father that. She knows.

ANNE LLOYD

the giver

(for Grant)

Bearing lemons,
wet storm clinging still
to steaming yellow bulb,
you call unheralded.

I am not used to kindness,
nor to men who follow.

You sit there
clutching empty paper bag,
sipping a share of sweet acid
culled from drenched gardens,
ask nothing.

FAY ZWICKY

Identity

'Our greatest joys to mark an outline truly
And know the piece of earth on which we stand.'
So you may say, and I in part accept the newly
Taken exploration of a whispering land,

But voices in the country of the mind
Tame the crueller aspect of my days.
Irresolute as fine weather, I am blind
With memories. Nature was never friendly, her ways

Severed me and serious poets should never be severed,
Should lovers be, namers of colours, shapes, plants.
Not urban neurotics from frustrate armchairs levered
To stare through glass at bird-forsaken haunts.

Nature poets are rarely as tranquil or composed
As they sound. Wordsworth fussed around, man
Speaking to God, not men—delight imposed
On distraction. John Clare ate weeds. Cowper ran

Mad from the world's disease. Their city hell
My heaven, their order my darkness. 'One vast mill'
Can compass rival landscapes. So I'll sell
The poet's soul for memory's Eden, whirl

The glass above the ravenous soil split
Wide in veined caverns, shaped by affliction.
Seeded in flame, hatched to withstand, I'll pit
Double-tongued desert winds against my conviction.

TERRY TREDREA

A Gentleman

Nietzsche: "Are you visiting women? Do not forget your whip!"

I sat peering into my shoes at my reflection. Yes, it certainly was raining. From the verandah I glowered at the sky, which drizzled back with calm authority. I emptied my shoes and slipped them on. Greenhouses all summer, they now felt like blotting papers pasted onto my feet.

"Bloody trapped!" boomed a voice about a foot from my ear. Out of the closing door of the youth hostel staggered a girl beneath a vast rucksack nobbled with little compartments. A lace curtain was draped and pinned around her red satin body. Strapped under her feet appeared to be two small lengths of railway sleeper. Her hair hung in lots of tiny plaits. She seemed to have dressed herself from the contents of an old lounge room.

"Ah well," she slithered from her pack. "Here take this for half a sec.," and swung it onto my lap. I felt like an inverted beetle pinned under a rock. After a long, disapproving look at the white stuff covering the top half of the environment, she placed the rucksack on the floor.

"Ah there you are," I sighed as one emerging from undergrowth.

"And here I'm forced to bloody stay!" Then, accusingly, "What are you?"

I scanned the horizon. My name? religion? parents' occupations? At this stage I was so well shorn, looking like a bald man in an undersized suede cap, that close inspections, especially from articulate girls, filled me with the urge to hide.

"Your guide for the day," I rallied.

"Guide dog, more likely. It's too wet, so piss off."

I decided that she was probably trying to grow a moustache.

"Yes; but off to where can I piss?"

Her mouth smirked, but the eyes seemed remote.

"No." She zipped up her fly absently. "Well yes, o.k. Come on," and she dashed out into the thick drizzle. I fled after. The first puddle had quite a sobering effect.

"I lied," I shouted to her back, "I am a simple hosteller!"

By now were slapping hard down the wet drive like bears in full flight, keeping to the side where trees offered a splotchy sort of shelter. She ran nicely with that feminine awkwardness about the hips. Turning into the main road, she dashed across in front of a truck which broke sharply, and disappeared into a tea shop. I waited in the rain for the traffic to clear.

Behind the shop's vast front windows, five people sat resolved to mind their own business. They were almost all cylindrical or conical old women in rain-coats. One young chap with strong features and glasses was being harangued into reserves of polite stupor by a silver-haired old lady most resembling a

weather-beaten medieval statue. The wind had blown her hair into crazy disarray.

I moved to the darkest corner where the girl sat.

"Sit down," she snapped like a duchess relaxing the rules.

"Most kind," I wheezed, easing myself down in soaking wet jeans.

"Your tea's ordered."

"Black for me." The Indian waitress looked up and smiled inscrutably. She was performing some sacred ritual over the slow and careful collection of cups.

"I don't know why they come here!" the girl stated, eyeing the cylindrical women but earning a frown from the waitress.

"A bit of excitement I suppose," I ventured.

Our teas arrived. Mine was white coffee.

I was trying to find some alternative to 'Do you come here often?' when, from the corner of my eye, the door appeared to be flung open by a rampaging but momentarily indecisive gorilla. The outline of the man's pointed chin, head and ears suggested a diamond shape. As his broad body suddenly lurched again towards us I realised that this must be the truck driver. The man's mouth thrust down and away at the corners through which he hissed breath.

"Hullo," commented the girl to me, taking an abstract interest. He was wet. His face was tired but animated, as if it had been driven over by his own tyres.

"Bloody, bloody . . . ?" He paused, looking first to me then the girl. He settled on me. The cylindrical ladies seemed also to be taking an abstract interest.

"Bloody, bloody!" He calmed down enough to pick up my cup, barely spilling a drop and miraculously by the handle, then splashed it into my lap. Steam rose about my face. Then he dashed the cup onto the floor as if he had toasted my health, and strode to the door neither slowly nor in haste. I couldn't see his face, but a well-dressed man just entering did. He seemed to remember something and vanished back into the street. The door banged shut and open again.

"Hullo," commented the girl again, with a narrowness of conversation I was beginning to tire of.

"Ahggh," I pleaded through clenched teeth, though apart from the stinging bits, the coffee felt quite warm.

"What a cheek that chap had. And he completely ignored me."

The waitress muttered, "Ooo Gud," and began to stir towards the scattered pieces of cup, "Dissis goowin' too fah." She inspected a piece for damage.

"I'll pay for it," I soothed as warmly as I felt able, but she was lost in her piece of cup.

"Gracious pet, there's so many cranks about." The wild-haired old woman was stooped at my side. "But don' choo worry, my son's a parking inspector. Why only last month Stan, that's my husb . . ."

"Aw piss off, can't cha!" The old woman took on the blank wonderment of someone watching a murder on television.

"Piss off! Can't you see he's upset?" The girl gestured at me without looking away from the old orator. I wondered for whose benefit this defense/attack was being made. The woman moved slowly back to her table, much sobered.

The room, too, had lost its mid-morning torpor. Women now seemed to be taking inventory of the contents of their handbags, arranging silverware, counting small change, and the young man was polishing his glasses almost flat, squinting through eyes that seemed tiny and naked.

"Soom won hus to pay fo' dis cup," concluded the waitress after extensive research on the stress points of crockery.

One lady backed, tight-lipped, towards the door like an apprehensive cat. Raincoats rustled, coins clicked onto the counter. A gradual stampede ensued. "Cheerio," someone called; the Indian lady grew darker.

"We'll pay," volunteered the girl, nobly. Then to me, "What's your name?"

"Ernest, but my friends call me Ern. What's yours?"

"Ern?! Are you sure?!" I felt tired. "Well Ern., how much have you got?"

"Money? None, it's all back at the hostel."

"Which is shut. Mine too. Bloody hell."

We stood, eye to eye. Her cheeks were vast and flat like a rock face, from where the small eyes at the top appeared to be looking scornfully down at the world. On either side of her face hung a large ring of metal from the ear-lobe, like a handle or door-knocker. She looked thoughtfully at her toes.

"Ah seys, soom buddy's gut to pey fo' dis cup."

"Look ... er, Ern ... I've already paid for a bus tour this morning, and it's going any minute now. So would y' be so kind ... as to take care of this ..." gesturing at the waitress, "cup business for me? I'd be very grateful." Her teeth shot violently into view by way of a smile.

"No, alright. You go ahead."

"Thanks," she fled instantly. "Y're a gentleman!" Gone.

'Gentleman', Hell. The last person who'd accused me of being that was a very ungentlemanly girl at a party. I'd had to massage her thigh—several times—to correct that impression. But deep inside I knew there lurked a 'gentleman'.

"Jus' you wet fo' de buss to coom in, an' he'll fix you up." The waitress fell naturally to polishing her cups, a bit severely I thought. Her lips had disappeared, and her eyebrows and mouth seemed to be trying to get as far from each other as possible.

I sat. At midday the sun decided to make a sort of leisurely appearance. Later, during the afternoon I counted 2,729 faded little flowers on the wallpaper of the teashop (shouldn't the number have divided by 4 or 3?). I also noted that most of the flies seemed overfed and sluggish. I finally borrowed some money from a striped man of apparent means.

"Excuse me, would you give me thirty cents for a new cup?"

"I dunno, let's see the cup first."

"No, it's to replace one for here."

"Broke a cup, eh?" He had remarkable deductive powers.

"Yes."

"Why not pay for it yourself?" getting into his stride.

"I haven't got the money."

"Then," he concluded revealing the cunning of his strategy, "you ought to work for a livin' like everyone else!"

Eventually he handed me some coins, with a gracious smile. I paid the waitress, muttering apologies to her silent indignation, and slunk from the shop.

Outside the youth hostel, people of all ages thronged around the check-in counter as if held by a huge elastic band.

The girl was at the main fireplace, unpegging undies and socks from a piece of string she'd slung between two inlaid candle-holders. I strode purposefully over to her. She looked at me, and then back at her undies, without appearing to see any difference between me and the undies in terms of reaction level.

"Hi," I tried.

She wore jeans and a baggy cheese-cloth shirt, through which two beady-eyed nipples stared up at me. I suppose she looked up.

"Hullo. Had a nice day then?"

"Well, I would hardly ..."

"Hold these, would you?" I was loaded with underclothes.

"Oh look," I looked, "This afternoon I found some super digs—anything rather than rot in this dump—real flash and everything. So I told the hostel warden that you'd be checking out this evening ..."

"But what ..."

"It's the only way I could get the room. It's a double. I hope you won't mind, just 'til I find someone else."

"Well, no . . ."

"We can go now. It's a hotel run by a really nice family for ten dollars a day."

"Surely they can throw in a grandma and some pets for that price!"

She took the underwear. "Thanks."

"A pleasure. Thirty cents please."

But she was already bustling away, trailing a stocking like an invitation.

ROD MORAN

Lion

I am glad of the bars, thankful
this subversive is penned:
in his skull there are wide spaces,
majesties of freedom, wordless skies.

Here he pads mock grasses,
echoing cement, circles the taut
serrated horizons of wire;
will not provide a spectacle of roar,

rip of flesh, make a circus of death;
quietly cuds a passive steak,
spits out my expectations like bone,
feeding my hatred thereby.

Taunt him, dub him captive-prince,
shower him with peanuts and corn,
he will not admit his station;
yawns smugly with a secret knowledge

inaccessible beyond the bars.
Only once I saw him: his eye's rim
flashed with a sabred glance; forever
I am stalked on my nightly plains.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

Gift

Hours alone in her late sixties
crocheted cream tablemats, doilies.
Clear eyes into their seventies
look down on pale hands. Eyes
lack no wherewithall but will.

She takes crochet from a box
absentmindedly, dismayed by the grip
she'd held on needle and thread
for ten years in her own homeunit
before saleprice and pension are weekly spent
on nursinghome room for the old, for her,
not of her own doing or choice.
She's been difficult, dependent;
relatives tried, did their best.

Ten year old doilies don't
take her back to childhood.
Even in grateful receiving hands
lace poses questions, deprives
old faculties of urgency and hope.
Thought in advance about remembrances left
was clearer then than now, the act
of passing on possessions, passing on.

Nephew, niece-in-law attentive to each word
want her to have her say, resent her
being treated as children shouldn't be
by those selflessly giving themselves
who always must know best.

Geometrical doilies centre from circles,
given, admired, appreciated: form
once again continuous and seamless
when custom is done, young relatives
restoring intent to intention.

There's no time for niece and nephew to probe
the never-should-have-been-said aunt's word
that it seemed useless, the gift.
Anyway, a plane to catch.

STEPHEN GILFEDDER

The Lebanese Milk-bar Owner Describes his Wife

Sunday the Greek
part-time taxi drivers cabs left parked
half-on the nature-strips
changed into black suits
wait and smoke
outside resting on the bonnets
heavy bracelets chinking drumming
on the paintwork
shrugging upright opening doors
the ushering of wives and children

the girl talking astrology and signs
has watched the test pattern on TV
since eight this morning
smoking grass she picked up cheap
there is the sadness in her voice
her childhood she says
she has this feeling
things aren't going right
and begins to crush flowers
between the pages of a book

the man behind the counter of the shop says
his wife is beautiful I've seen her flaunt
her figure after three still good
the night-shift factory hands
come in for papers
their carry-bags full
of lunch-wrappings and orange-peel
I am his best customer
he tells me all the time the best
sending me away reckoning
my celebration in houses of old
immigrants blessing bread with my name
making signs of my sanctity
I trace my finger through the dust
on my neighbour's ageing Ford

GEOFF PAGE

The Stones of Epidavros

A stroll through pines
to the theatre:
stone rows fold round
step up to clouds
then focus on a midwest matron
who drops a coin and shouts
to test her brochure's claim.

*

The museum stores
residual torsos,
gestures that start
from a severed shoulder
and reach off into air.
We try the tumbled
groundplan of the town,
a litter of pale stone.

*

Sulla passed this way
we note (the first destroyer?)
to or from the centre.
Darkhaired girls
in national blue
buy sweets, walk arm in arm
inheriting the air.

*

The bus comes late.
The rain starts in,
softly but cold;
the pines give shelter
only for a time.
It streams down
on the broken faces
of the stone, dampening
tramped earth,
sliding down dry stalks
to crevices, the softer drifts
of soil and green.

*

The stones of Epidavros
lie quietly under the rain.

ANNE PARRATT

On a Journey into Mexico

I

Conquistador
did you move with a fish's fin
whilst the houris called

cold disciplined Conquistador,
did you surprise the blush
on the seagull's wing
as you crawled on the unmapped shore.

We hear still
the bells of the Eucharist
dissolved in your profitless wanderings.

We see now your heritage
left in a furious port,
anchorless.

II

In destitution
women sell their bodies
for as long as they are able

bread upon the shelf
is a rich man's fable
better still
is bread in maw and mouth

kissing each stair to their redemption
fingers of their fertility
pluck their good intention

their crucifixion
is bread upon the table.

PHILIP MEAD

Tiger

Tiger in the night
burning brightly in my hand,
tell me what I know,
whom I love
and when I'll die,
tiger, tell me this.

All along this life we know
tiger, I must follow you;
in your pacing to and fro,
down the cages of your heart
tiger, jump to me.

Jump to me
and knock me down
tiger, bite my heart;
tell me where the world is flame,
explain the hate in every child,
my tiger of the night.

Crack of doom
and crack of heart,
and crack of every bone;
kill me now
and bury my head
tiger, do not spare me.

Break and break our world in two,
make us die for you.

In your eye, and in your heart
burning tiger, let us start.

JOHN KENNEDY

Scott's Magnificent Presumption

Three burst beerbottles in the freezer
and coolant gas roaring like a blizzard
through icy grey coils.
Outside the shelter
lies painless death
if their records are to be believed
and why
should dying men lie?
Inside tho
light the fire
check supplies
update the journal
record all distances & sightings accomplished
check morale
of the declining members
express both thanks & regrets
to the next spring's
rescue party.

Incident Beyond Adequate Description

The World has passed by
my room.
It has simply passed by
to its certain death.
By its standards and mine
hardly an exceptional occurrence.
It has gone
and still yet hums and exists.
(The World has passed by.)

The room is bare,
vaguely receptive.
Its boundaries shimmer in air.

The World will be bulldozed back
to its muddy yellow ancestry.
Doubtless, someone will laboriously erect
a fence round it;
And call it a lethal dose
of ground.
Someone connected with the operation
will applaud on cue,
plant a flag,
and go to lunch ten minutes earlier
than usual.

He will be granted:
first choice of burial plot
spade
mattock
a handful of mixed seeds
and one free beer.

He will drink the beer
and return to work.

The World has passed by my room.
They have little to say to each other.

SHANE McCAULEY

Winter Beach

on the winter beach
sand is only waste
from cement works
seagulls are feather dusters
searching for dust

the water is old
and fishless
and I command it to bellow
as my damp footprints
plod over things once loved

I am not musical
but I listen to the wind
and hear Indian music
and lyrical emptiness
from lands of the horizon

all the dead
that parade the shores
near my castle
call me sandy Napoleon
but seaweed sticks to my feet

frothy as green beer
the starving sea
grasps and sucks my legs
wanting me to yield visions
meant for the shore

City Sonata

cement cowed by shadows
but no dome in sight—
nothing floating
on non-existent waves
and the trees
are too money coloured
to offer shade
without some form of interest—
wayfarers rush back from cities
to their cars
and thank god they have no fines
someone robs a bank
someone is robbed
someone falls from a height
everyone reads the newspaper
everyone has time for love
in the coffee breaks—
stars are only stormbound sailors
in the night

no room here for a nightingale

JAMIE GRANT

Snow Holiday With Aunt

The tourist bus lumbers through air-broad fields.

Cattle wade in tufts that graze taut udders,
A man shuffles toward them, dawn's milk soft
Shadows stretch from sleep-ploughed eyes, the morning
Crowded with light's blunt shapes. The Alps loom
On the mind's horizon, honed edge of snow
Between blue foothills and pool-blue sky.
The journey ends at this blade-roofed chalet:
My aunt waits as the driver wrestles luggage,
Her face drained like a creekbed, her cheekbones
Gaunt as the hills the bus has waded through.
I think of those bone-grey outcrops, ridges
Suspending the country's flesh, farm lights glowing
Like eyes, ringbarked forests spiny on empty
Paddocks.

Later, I learn of her cancer:
My aunt won't survive the year.

Next time

I drive there alone. The country's littered
With driftwood treestumps, dead stone, bone-flat grass.
No cows approach the highway. A tractor
Shuffles in sloping distance. Blue foothills,
Milk-brown fields. The snowcap sharp as a blade.

NOEL MACAINSH

Australian Literature and the Autonomous Critic

One of the salient facts of literary life in modern times has been the passage of the writer from aristocratic patronage, via subscription-publishing, to the relative autonomy of the open market. To this, there is to be added nowadays a still more recent movement back to substantial patronage, this time not from courts and wealthy individuals but from the State apparatus of representative governments. These changes in the conditions of the writer have of course been remarked upon elsewhere. The well-known works of Raymond Williams, in particular, have dealt with English conditions, and the present writer, among others, has sought to understand Australian conditions, particularly with regard to State-subsidy.¹ One could also mention here the growing body of literature by professional economists, on the cost-structure of the arts, a factor usually neglected by literary critics but one which also plays a significant role in the production, nature and reception of literary works.

With regard to this 'sitedness' of literature in a wider context, Brian Kiernan, in his excellent survey of literary criticism in Australia, describes the place of criticism, as follows:

"Literary criticism is part of the total cultural context in which it appears. Critics, in responding publicly to literature (whether it be contemporary writing or the heritage of literature from the past), express attitudes of some social significance. Their judgements, and the explicit or implicit assumptions they base these on have to do with the reception of literary works in the prevailing climate of taste, with the value in which artistic activity is held by their society, with the relationships between writers and the community and, especially in a country like Australia (historically an extension of English society), with the influence of other cultures on their own."²

From this statement, it is clear that Kiernan sees literary criticism as embedded in a structure of relationships that includes not only the literary world with its own internal network of competitive and complementary factors, but a wider world of social and political complexities as well. This structure, or milieu, which everyone who plays a part in the literary world already knows more or less vaguely from the perspective of his own role in it, has received little direct attention as such. It is proposed here, from a different perspective to that of Kiernan, to consider a change that has occurred in the role of the literary critic, paralleling the increased autonomy of the writer.

In the general growth of intellectual liberty, with diminishing influence of the aristocracy and the rise of the middle class providing a wider reading public, the

writer has demanded ever more decisively autonomy for himself and has proclaimed his indifference to the limiting tastes of the public. With the nineteenth century and Romanticism, there began the emancipation of the writer's intention. The kind of disdain for mass-tastes that we find in say the writings of Martin Boyd or even in William Gosse Hay, no doubt finds its parallels in former aristocratic disdain of public-taste, but this disdain never formed a kind of collective doctrine, amounting to an article of artistic faith, as in the theories of *l'art pour l'art*, before the nineteenth century.

Concurrent with the decline of the aristocracy and its alliance with the rising, middle-class intelligentsia, there was an increase in the number of institutions of cultural confirmation and dissemination, such as publishing houses, journals, literary societies, educational establishments. Pauline Kirk, in her study of "Colonial Literature for Colonial Readers", tells us of the vital role played by colonial periodicals in providing a market for Australian literature and encouraging Australian writers to labour and study for the achievement of "literary respectability". She states, for example, that *The Sydney Mail*, the first magazine to encourage locally-produced literature on any scale, was

"of great service to the development of Australian fiction for forty years . . . It . . . provided some standard by which work could be judged in a time when literary craftsmanship within the colony was generally haphazard and uncertain."³

And Henry G. Turner adds another side to this picture when he tells us of the importance of the English publishing-house of Macmillan. Referring to *Robbery under Arms*, by Rolf Boldrewood, Turner writes

"When it was re-issued for the Colonies in Macmillan's Library, with the imprimatur of English approval, thousands read it in Australia who had never heard of its tentative publication in *The Sydney Mail* years before. It may be said in excuse of this neglect, that even an intelligent and interested reader cannot form any very definite idea of the merits of a book that is doled out to him in weekly instalments over a whole year . . . Hence the British critics were the first to fully recognise its merits, because they, and the public whom they advised, were the first to see it under suitable conditions."⁴

The Australian public itself grew and became more diverse. At the same time, the cultural milieu became more complex, such that it gained increasing autonomy from external, authoritarian influence, and became increasingly subject to its own inner logic of the struggle for cultural legitimation. The role of the publisher gained importance as that of the patron declined. Back in 1709, in England, Alexander Pope had written to Wycherly that Jacob Tonson, the publisher, created poets in the same way as kings sometimes create knights. Much the same was said in Australia of A. G. Stephens, who, from 1891 onwards, was the presiding critic of the Sydney *Bulletin's* Red Page, whom writers variously dubbed "Great Boanerges", "The Red Page Radamanthus", "Major General Stephens", and so on. Not only the *Bulletin*, but publishing-houses generally gained a kind of literary authority, as custodians of legitimation and immortality. Here, one thinks of the role of the various presses and publishers, of the degrees of status that their imprimatur could confer. The history, for example, of George Robertson & Co., of Angus and Robertson, of the *Bulletin*, the University presses, down to the obscurities of private, self and 'underground' publishing, suggests a whole continuum of bids for authorial legitimation. Something of the continuing tensions operative in this area is shown by Hal Porter, who, in referring to the publishing of Frank Dalby Davison's *The White Thorn Tree*, writes:

"Tendrils from the literary grape-vine reach me. Frank Dalby Davison's finished his Masterpiece. Publishers are jibbing, even Angus and Robertson to whose stable he's belonged for decades... Time passes, passes. There arrives, under the imprint of a press I've never heard of, an advertisement of Frank Dalby Davison's new novel *The White Thorn Tree*. Behind the drum-beats of the blurb it's possible to hear the cry of the prisoner whose innocence must be proved. There's a brisk order form... Conscious of mis-giving, I fill in the form... partly out of curiosity to see what's been rejected by run-of-the-mill publishers..."⁵

With the general increase in autonomy of the whole writing milieu, there emerges the figure of the autonomous literary intellectual who, from a concept of his own 'integrity', acknowledges no external compulsion but only the inner demands of his own reactions or projects. A. G. Stephens is but one example of this. S. E. Lee tells us that Stephens was fond of saying "All criticism is personal, it represents a subject's reaction from an object", and that "Stephens took himself seriously in his role as 'stern and incorruptible judge', as critic of inflexible integrity." Stephens himself explains an inner dissociation on behalf of his "blood-thirsty Ideal" of integrity:

"You see, in my small way, I dissociate self from critic entirely... as would-be critic I can remorselessly slay father, brother, friend... if the bloodthirsty Ideal demand it."⁶

This dissociation in Stephens was also expressed in the dualism of his asserting that "writers should make readers feel good and hearty", while, at the same time, he was encouraging verse showing

"That his own taste could almost be described by the phrase he applied to Daley: 'a tendency to rather weak Archibaldean sentimentality'."⁷

Stephens' position in the literary network placed contradictory demands on him. He supported the nationalist cause of a paper that had a wide, popular readership; but his literary criticism was subjective, "personal", addressed essentially to the writer, not to the general reader. Like the writers he favoured, Daley, Neilson, Brennan, Quinn, McCrae, he could show a more popular, earthy side of his nature, but his deeper concern was for a higher, more 'literary' kind of literature. He may have espoused nationalism, but his ruling literary criteria of Force, Form and Quantity, together with his Nietzschean ruthlessness of inner-directed judgement, subject only "to the High Court of Time",⁸ suggest nothing that is out of keeping with the imperialist attitude widely current in his age. William Baylebridge, we recall, was able to blend imperialism with the "New Nationalism", largely by dropping off all the overtly English trappings so offensive to nationalists here. P. R. Stephensen's *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* (1936) preserves essentially the same approach. But this was the circle that had had to be squared ever since Australian literature began: how to reconcile local and universal, popular and elitist, the general *Bulletin* audience and the demands of the increasingly autonomous literary network subject to its own inner logic of the struggle for legitimation? It is essentially this same 'network' that is implied when Dennis Douglas, in writing of John Le Gay Brereton and Christopher Brennan, draws our attention to the formation of "a pattern of real weight and significance":

... that they banded together in 1809 to resist A. G. Stephens's autocratic rule of the *Bulletin* by establishing the short-lived *Australian Magazine* as an alternative medium of publication for verse; that Brereton's references to Australian literature in *Hermes*, which he edited between 1891 and 1894, were among the first to recognize Gordon and Kendall's place in the tradition of Australian bush literature; that as Challis Professor of English Literature

in the University of Sydney Brereton established the kind of links between the community of Australian writers and the Sydney Department of English which are commemorated by the position *Southerly* occupies among Australian literary periodicals—these are suggestions towards an understanding of the inner workings of literary history, built upon hints of groupings and debts and affiliations that are in themselves slight and easily neglected, but together form a pattern of real weight and significance.”⁹

Even more explicitly, Professor Harry Heseltine, in discussing the views of Roy Harvey Pearce, in their application to the development of an “inside narrative” of Australian literary history, writes:

“We could, for instance, learn from Pearce a more contemporary (and more adequate) image for culture than James’ nineteenth century-Industrial revolution one of a machine. Pearce would have us contemplate the nexus between the writer and society through the figure of a network, a servo-mechanism of a very sophisticated and complex design. ‘The poet’s particular relation to his culture’, he writes on p. 3 of *The Continuity of American Poetry*, ‘his self-imposed obligation to make the best possible use of the language which he is given—is such as to put him at the center of the web of communications which gives his culture its characteristic style and spirit’. The metaphor of culture as a web, a network in which the poet occupies a peculiarly commanding position, seems to me capable of generating new approaches to our literary historiography which might lead eventually to the goal that Pearce places before all literary historians: ‘a proper literary history, in which we shall be able to comprehend our poetry in its totality, setting the lives and times of the poets against the lives and times of their poems’ (p. 3).”¹⁰

And Heseltine goes on to say that:

“In the more immediate future we might hope to see, for instance, studies of our major writers which would take adequate account of the tangible details of the web of communications in which they lived and worked.”¹¹

According to Raymond Williams, “the radical change of ideas about art, artists and their place in society”, overlaps the industrial revolution in England, with two generations of romantic artists, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, on the one side, Byron, Shelley and Keats, on the other. It shows five characteristic features:

“There are five main points: first, that a major change was taking place in the nature of the relationship between a writer and his readers; second, that a different habitual attitude towards the ‘public’ was establishing itself; third, that the production of art was coming to be regarded as one of a number of specialized kinds of production, subject to much the same conditions as general production; fourth, that a theory of the ‘superior reality’ of art, as the seat of imaginative truth, was receiving increasing emphasis; fifth, that the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius, was becoming a kind of rule.”¹²

Here, we may ask if the aesthetic revolution, which finds its expression in the theory of the higher truth of art and of the autonomous genius, is to be regarded as simply the ideological compensation of the threat to the autonomy of artistic creation and irreplaceable uniqueness of the cultured, educated man through the industrialisation of intellectual society? The distaste for the city that we find in many nineteenth-century Australian writers suggests such a view; A. G. Stephens, for one, wrote of the “criminal aggregation of the people in the coastal cities”¹³; and critical studies on the origins of the “bush ethos”, such as those by Judith Woodward¹⁴ and Alan Frost,¹⁵ throw a revealing light on the experience of urbanisation in the latter part of the last century.

However, to adopt such an explanation would be tantamount to taking a part of the overall reality as the total explanation of that reality, which for its own part, needs firstly to be explained. The small circle of readers that the colonial writer stood more or less in direct contact with is now replaced by a new public, the undifferentiable, impersonal and anonymous 'mass' of readers without a face. These potential customers can confer on the work their economic sanction, which not only holds out to the writer the prospect of economic and intellectual independence, though the former may, as with Kendall, Daley, Gordon and others, prove to be a *fata morgana*, but in itself is not entirely lacking in cultural legitimation.

The existence of a 'literature-market' makes possible a series of specifically literary callings, whether this takes place by new people appearing or by old people taking over new roles; in other words, it allows the formation of a genuinely literary milieu in the sense of a system of relations between those active in cultural production. The peculiarity of this production-system, attached to the uniqueness of its products, namely the double-faced reality, of ware and cultural signification, whose aesthetic value is not reducible to the economic, even though the economic sanction strengthens the cultural sanctioning, conditions also the peculiar nature of the relationships taken up here. The relationships between each individual agent in the system and powers or institutions that operate partly or entirely outside the system are always mediated by the relationships existing within the literary milieu, itself formed under the competition for cultural legitimation represented by a public, which, at least in appearance, is at the same time the determining judge and which never fully identifies itself with the competition for market-success.

It is only from such a viewpoint that we can understand why critics such as Frederick Sinnett, in his *The Fiction Fields of Australia* (1856), should be so consistently preoccupied with the question of how Australian writing "could be distinguished from and compared with other writing in English".¹⁶

For this question is not merely an arbitrary 'critical' one but a question determined both by the nature of the reading public at the time, as the court of appeal for literary success, and by the medial position of the critic himself, seeking, prior to the establishment of specific public institutions, such as the universities, for public legitimation of his role as arbiter of literary merit. Turner and Sutherland, the one a bank-manager, the other a school-teacher, indicate this medial position in the dedication of their book, *The Development of Australian Literature* (1897):

"... To the reading public
we commend it,
To the critics
we submit it with becoming deference."

The monotonous harping on the word "Australian" is ultimately an appeal to the power of collective authority in legitimising certain literary directions and confirming the status of those associated with them. The word "Australian", no matter how innocuous it may appear from discussions of whether poetic diction is adequate to describe local landscape and colourful folk-life, masks complexities of struggle of a similar order to those in social and political life generally; categories of the "timeless" and "universal" show themselves to be no more neutral than those of the "progressive" and "authentic".

It is significant that the entry of methods and techniques copied from the economic sector, such as advertising for cultural products, related to the commercialising of the literary work, coincides not only with the glorification of the artist and his quasi-prophetic mission, with the methodically pursued attempt to withdraw the artist and his universe, even if only through the extravagance of his

clothing, from everyday social life, but also with the declared intention of recognising only the ideal reader, who is an *alter ego*. Whether this reader be an *alter ego* of the future, or not, the point is that he knows himself, in his own production or his understanding of cultural products, to be obliged to the same, specifically intellectual calling as stamps the appearance of the autonomous writer, who recognises nothing other than cultural legitimization. The continuing insistence on the autonomy of the writer's intention leads to a particular ethical attitude, which tends to judge works according to the pureness of their artistic intention and at times, as with A. G. Stephens, perverts itself into a kind of terror of taste.

The striving for autonomy in Australian writing shows itself subsequently to be a decisive factor in the literary milieu. In so far as the writer distances himself from the public and demonstratively rejects vulgar demands, he promotes the cult of form sufficient in itself, the emphasis on what is recondite and *sui generis* in the creative act, and at the same time desires confirmation of his own exclusive and simply inexplicable being. The encapsulation against society, perhaps shown most graphically in the 'sealed-room' imagery of Slessor's poetry and most buoyantly in the novels of Norman Lindsay, though pervasive everywhere, goes along with an intensification of the connections that the members of literary society maintain with each other. In this way, there emerge schools of mutual admiration, small esoterically closed sects. (The present writer has commented on this formation elsewhere,¹⁷ on the intragroup signalling function of literature, particularly in recent Australian poetry.) At the same time, a new solidarity emerges between writers, critics and reviewers. For many writers, particularly poets, contact with the public is only achieved through the critic. But the only recognised critics are those won over to the particular group's aesthetic outlook. In this situation, one in which the critic can no longer look to the public for his legitimization, since the public has largely withdrawn its interest in his role, the critic, who usually represented conservative taste, now aligns himself on the side of the new in writing.

Deeply convinced that the public is condemned to unalterable or at least initial incomprehension—an assumption which, in the society of cultural callings, is so deeply anchored that it is virtually accepted without discussion—this "new criticism" concerns itself with getting justice for the writer. Since it no longer feels itself to be empowered, commissioned by the educated public to make a decisive judgement in the name of an uncontested code of law, it places itself finally, unconditionally at the service of the author. That is, it concerns itself with the painfully accurate decyphering of his intentions and motives, with the means of what, to its own understanding, is a purely expert analysis. Obviously this leads to a state of affairs in which the public is excluded from the game. As Kiernan writes:

"The effect of the 'new' criticism with its emphasis on 'close' reading, on the tracking down of sources and influences, and on the tracing of patterns of imagery can be readily observed in the increasingly 'professional' criticism being published in literary journals today . . . It is criticism turned in upon itself and written for other critics, not for the common reader. While individual texts receive detailed explication, the wider social implications remain unexplored."¹⁸

Or, as John Colmer, in reviewing a volume of 19 essays, mainly on 19th-century Australian literature, writes:

"of the scholarly contributors only Brian Elliott . . . dares to ask what it is all about; the remainder bend themselves to their chosen tasks with disciplined devotion, content that they are engaged in a self-justifying activity."¹⁹

At this point, a distinction needs to be made between works that are virtually created by the public, that is specifically produced to meet public expectations,

and those that need first to find or create their public. At the one end of the spectrum, are newspapers, mass-circulation magazines, market-researched best-sellers, and, at the other end, works that know no other demands than those of the author himself. In between these extremes, lies a spectrum of mixed determination. From this, important methodological consequences arise. If an immanent analysis is all the more appropriate to the works to which it is directed, the more these works themselves are autonomous (naturally at the price of an automising of the method), then it runs the danger of becoming fictive and deceptive in so far as it is applied to those products which are largely derivable from the economic and social conditions of their production. The so-called successful authors are doubtless the most accessible to the traditional methods of sociology. Indeed one can assume that the social compulsion that rests on them, to remain true to a once successful style, to escape the anxiety of loss of public interest, enters decisively into their projects as against the immanent necessity of the works themselves. On the other hand, a writer no matter how indifferent to the temptations of success and how temperamentally inclined to make no concessions to the expectations of his readers, must take into account the social situation of his work, the reflection of which is held up to him by the public, critics and interpreters. And must he not surely, in the face of this reflex, revise his draft? Does not his intention, reflected in an objective determination, run the risk of being changed by this reflection?

So far, it has not been sufficiently noticed that, at least today, the critical discussion of the work represents for the author, not so much a critical judgement on the value of his work, as an objectification of the original conception, such as can be derived from the work itself, and which can be substantially distinguished from the work, as its pre-reflective expression, as well as from any theoretical commentaries on the part of the author himself. Therefore, the relationship in which the writer stands to the critics, that is to the attempt to deduce the artistic conception from his work, cannot be described according to a simple model of cause-and-effect, although the parallel development that occurs between the discussion of the work on the part of the critic and the statements of the author about his work could make such an assumption an obvious one. Does this mean that the effectiveness of the critical discussion is nil? No. In fact, this critical discussion which the writer knows and appreciates, because he recognises himself in it, is no surplus compared to the work, for it constitutes the writer's project in that it names it and challenges it to correspond with critical discussion. Despite what A. D. Hope writes, in *The Cave and the Spring*,²⁰ about the surfeit of critical studies compared to original, primary texts, a field of studies to which he himself nevertheless has contributed, the writer's project entails these studies, not as a surfeit but as a constituent necessity of the work. The work of Patrick White, A. D. Hope, and others, in fact presupposes, comprehends and intends a whole range of writings, including not only the primary texts directly written by the authors themselves, as well as the directly consequential critical material about the author, but also those texts that have influenced him and which he, in keeping with the going ideology of the writer as a unique, autonomous creator, is generally at some pains to play down. *The Anxiety of Influence*,²¹ the much-discussed book by the American critic, Harold Bloom, concerns itself with just this point and should warn us against heeding those writers who would dismiss as mere reductionist 'spotting of influences' the genuine attempt to understand the factors that enter into the structure of their work.

The objectification performed by the critic is, by its very nature and claim, doubtless predisposed to play a particularly important role in defining and developing the writer's conception. But it is only within the framework and through the power of a whole system of social connections which the writer maintains

with the totality of all the factors that form the literary milieu at a given point of time, that is to other writers, critics, publishers, possibly the Literature Board and other subsidising agencies, perhaps journalists, who are obliged to assess the work in the cultural milieu and make it known to the public (and not investigate it critically as a critic proper), does the progressive objectification of the writer's intention come to be realised, does the public significance of the writer and his work come to be formed, which again defines the author since it compels him to clarify his relationship to it.

If we want to investigate the emergence of this public significance then we have to inquire, concretely, who it is that judges and selects, who makes the selection out of the unsorted, unlimited chaos of produced and publicised works, determining which are worth admiring, keeping and prizing. Do we have to accept the common impression that this selection is simply due to certain people of "good taste" who have the courage and, or, authority to lead their contemporaries? Often enough, it appears that way, that the selecting agent is a publisher or a board-member who believes he has a "nose" for the future successful work, or a critic who believes he has a fine sense of what will succeed. In reality, however, certain determinants already come into play with the presenting of the manuscript to the publisher. The reputation of the publisher will like as not have already influenced the kind of manuscripts he receives. The manuscripts will go to a reader, who is probably a respected critic or producer in the field. Poetry manuscripts are frequently composed of poems that already have been published individually in the same journals and newspapers that will review the published book. The critic, who receives a pre-made selection of books for review, will almost certainly note the publisher of the work, so that ultimately with the reading of a single text he must take into account the impression people have of the typical features of work published by the publisher concerned, whether say of the Hawthorn Press, the Oxford University Press, Paul Hamlyn, Wild and Woolley, and so on; the critics themselves are partly responsible for this impression. And does not the critic at times behave as an initiate, who, with the text of revelation that he himself has decyphered, refers back to the author who gave it into his hand perhaps in earlier, manuscript form and who now, in that he confirms the critic's exegesis, also vouches for his calling as a privileged critic?

There is a plurality of social forces, operative in the literary world, which at times compete with each other, at other times cooperate, and which, according to the strength of their political or economic position, as well as the strength of their institutional guarantees, are in a position to impress a more or less extended area of the cultural milieu with their own standards. Thus they demand *ipso facto* cultural confirmation, whether it is for their own literary products or for the judgements they make on the literary products of others, whether it is finally of the works or the literary directions they mediate. If they take up opposing positions among themselves, they do this under an appeal to a 'tradition' which is to be upheld; if they are acknowledged, however, then their claim to this orthodoxy is itself confirmed at the same time. The existence of a canon of literary works, and of a whole system of rules which determines the recognitional procedure, assumes an institution whose function is not only that of mediation and dissemination but also of legitimation.

What is often regarded as the competition for success is in reality a struggle for 'recognition' or 'establishment', fought on a battle-ground which stands under the control of those who claim a monopoly of cultural legitimation and the right to determine this establishment or recognition in the name of deeply opposed principles, in the name of the authority of *personality*, to which the creative writer appeals, and in the name of an *institution*, to which the teacher appeals. Thus, oppositions and complementaries between writer and teacher form the basis of

the cultural milieu. Every writer combines with his relationships to other writers a claim to cultural recognition (or legitimation) which depends for its form and title on his own position in the literary milieu, particularly, however, on his relationship to the university which, in the last instance, guards the final seal of legitimation. That the university has clearly emerged as a recognised and necessary factor in structuring the present-day Australian literary milieu can be seen from the ambivalent remarks of writers themselves. A typical instance is shown by Barbara Jefferis, President of the Australian Society of Authors, in reviewing a novel by Jon Cleary:

"He doesn't, as a rule get much of a break from Australian critics... He doesn't write the sort of stuff that gets set in Eng Lit courses... Nobody is ever going to set it for university study. If that upsets Jon Cleary he can cry all the way to that script conference with his film producer."²²

Here, it seems that commercial success is some compensation for lack of legitimation by the university. But for those, whether government-subsidised or on private resources, who have no prospects of such success, and their number must be large, the struggle for legitimation is synonymous with that for literary existence. The role of the critic, especially the university-critic, has attained a degree of autonomy hitherto unknown in the selection and specification of those literary qualities which are to be considered for assimilation into the 'tradition' and used as material for the teaching-process. Indeed, under present circumstances, if such a critic did not exist, he would need to be invented.

The concept of 'tradition' is of course central here. Of this concept, as frequently employed in Australian criticism, Brian Kiernan writes:

"In this concept of literary 'tradition' meet all the perennial issues of Australian literary criticism."²³

Unfortunately, there is not space here to examine this most interesting concept, nor that of 'development', with which the concept of Australian literary 'tradition' is perennially associated, and which has the diversionary property of deflecting attention from what actually is the state of affairs at any given moment while at the same time implying a degree of historical law and inevitability, an evolutionary derivative of nineteenth century thought, a genetic concept, which simply begs the whole question.

When we recall that the literary milieu, as an autonomous or autonomy-seeking system, has originated from a process of historical autonomisation and an internal differentiation of society, then we can see how the above concepts themselves need to be seen within the peculiar logic of the relationships that form themselves within the literary system and that first make it into a system. At the same time, illusions grown acceptable by habit need to be overcome by showing that this system is not to be separated from the historical and social conditions of its emergence.

NOTES:

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2. Brian Kiernan: *Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1974, p. 3.
3. Pauline Kirk: 'Colonial Literature for Colonial Readers', *Australian Literary Studies*, October 1971, p. 136.
4. Henry Gyles Turner and Alexander Sutherland: *The Development of Australian Literature*, George Robertson & Co., Melbourne, 1898, p. 83.
5. Hal Porter: *The Extra, Autobiography 3*, Nelson, 1975, p. 172.
6. S. E. Lee: A. G. Stephens: The Critical Credo, *Australian Literary Studies*, December 1964, p. 232.

7. p. 228.
8. pp. 233-4.
9. Dennis Douglas, in reviewing *John Le Gay Brereton*, by H. Heseltine, *Australian Literary Studies*, June 1966, pp. 226-7.
10. H. P. Heseltine: Towards an 'Inside Narrative': John Barnes' 'The Writer in Australia', *Meanjin Quarterly*, December 1969, p. 546.
11. p. 547.
12. Raymond Williams: *Culture and Society 1780-1950*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp. 49-50.
13. cf. Patrick Morgan: The Australian Dream, *Quadrant*, September 1975, p. 66.
14. Judith Woodward: Urban Influences on Australian Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century, *Australian Literary Studies*, October 1975.
15. Alan Frost: What Created, What Perceived? Early Responses to New South Wales, *Australian Literary Studies*, October 1975.
16. cf. Kiernan, p. 4.
17. Noel Macainsh: Australian Poetry—The Tradition of the New, *Quadrant*, No. 1, 1975, pp. 51-66, also, by the same author: Symbol, Fragment, Sequence—A New Kind of Australian Poem, *Westerly*, No. 1, 1977.
18. Kiernan, p. 45.
19. John Colmer, review of *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen*, ed. Leon Cantrell, U.Q.P. 1977, in *The Australian*, 17 May 1977.
20. A. D. Hope: *The Cave and the Spring*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1965, pp. 164 ff.
21. Harold Bloom: *The Anxiety of Influence, A Theory of Poetry*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1973.
22. Barbara Jefferis: Review of *High Road to China*, by Jon Cleary, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Saturday, 23 April 1977.
23. Kiernan, p. 47.

R. J. DEEBLE

its not so much

its not so much your breasts	(its the sensitivity)
its not so much your legs	(its the possibility)
its not so much your eyes	(its the tranquillity)
its not so much your lips	(its the femininity)
when you whisper quietly	(its not so much)

HELEN DANIEL

Observer and Accomplice: The Narrator in Ireland's "The Flesheaters"

In *The Flesheaters*, through a narrative structure akin to that of *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, Ireland again deploys an institution to explore the implications of the industrial society for human dignity. In the later novel, the dispossessed and unemployable outcasts, who excite only the gawping curiosity of those within the system, are woven into a tight mosaic-like pattern. Through Lee Mallory's presence, however, Ireland adheres more consistently to the viewpoint of the narrator-protagonist and so draws the narrative into more obvious unity than the novel of the sprawling, chaotic world of Puroil reflected. While Ireland again insistently holds before us the special determinants of Merry Lands' existence, the narrative spills over into the surrealistic and the absurdist in a way that marks it out from the earlier novel and the ambiguity of the institution itself, an ambiguity integral to the novel, stands in clear contrast to the unequivocal rigidity of Puroil.

The narrative of *The Flesheaters* is written in retrospect, in the final retreat of a psychiatric hospital, by Lee Mallory who, like many of Ireland's characters, is driven back into words as the only recourse in a world that is disordered and unassailable. From Merry Lands, which is part boarding-house, part convalescent home, and itself part psychiatric hospital—a kind of halfway house—Lee Mallory has finally recoiled further rather than limped back into the mainstream of society as some inmates have. That the narrative is written in retrospect, with the insights of later experience, is mildly hinted rather than offered as a firm framework, so that we are attuned as much to events and experiences at Merry Lands as to Lee's individual development. It is I think a mark of Ireland's achievement in *The Flesheaters* that he holds these two in rough balance, by contrast with the irritatingly self-effacing narrator of *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*. We have a sense of Lee's own tormented existence and yet we can accept him as an observer (even a spy at times) with the detachment this implies. The felt presence of Lee himself¹ suggests Ireland's greater control in *The Flesheaters* while he yet works through that fragmented, mosaic structure that allows the narrative to at once progress and digress. It is a richly textured novel, hovering between an image of social reality and the fantastic. F. Wilkes has suggested² that Ireland belongs to the 'social realist' school of writers with Hardy and Waten and Cusack for instance; but, in *The Flesheaters* at least, if not in *The Chantic Bird* and *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, there is an impulse towards surrealism and absurdist fantasy which suggests a quite different direction. I am thinking for instance of Walter Adamson's recent novel, *The Institution*, or of Joseph Johnson's *Womb to Let* or David Kaye's *The Australian*, each of which draws on the surrealistic.

The Flesheaters does not create the enclosed and stifling world of an institution like Puroil: it is concerned far more with the relationship between Merry Lands and the outer world and it proffers the institution as, at least in part, a refuge from that world. Merry Lands itself, like the Railway Hotel in Kaye's novel or Professor Longbeard's institution in Adamson's novel, sprawls maze-like with seemingly endless rooms that open onto splintered lives. It is as chaotic in arrangement as the materials with which its excrescences and growths are concocted. As an institution, it is at once a refuge and an emblem of a disordered society, at once a retreat and an agent of social disorder, an ironic microcosm of the outer world. To the dispossessed of a materialistic society, to the poor of a society where worth is coterminous with wealth, to the unemployed in a society that sanctifies function, it is a haven from the righteousness of the Man in the Mercedes or the curiosity of aimless Sunday drivers who peer through its gates. Yet it is far from unambiguous. It brings different threats and different assaults to stamp out resistance or to instil conformity and resignation. Shock treatment, for instance, is routine:

It would begin: "You've been swinging the lead lately. Bludging on the others. Shirking your duties to Merry Lands and to me. We'll show you the Ectoplasm, I think." And the trolley wheeled up, the trolley with the squeaky wheel. And the screams. Then nothing.

Then later, "Where are you? Do you know why you are? Do you know why?" And the dumb creatures staring back into the face of security, of three squares a day. Into the face of authority.

The 'face of authority' is O'Grady, whose very name connotes mindless, senseless obedience, according to the rules of a game whose origin no one can recall any longer. His manipulations, backed up by the authority of drugs, confinement and the threat of shock treatment, undermine Merry Lands' actuality as a refuge, leaving it simply one of the "Branches of the world's great hospital" (p.197), one of the institutions woven into the fabric of society—and as such no refuge at all.

O'Grady himself embodies some of the contradictions of Merry Lands: he is both compassionately aware of the iniquities of society and an instrument of them in the administration of Merry Lands; he both questions social values and, when they favour him, insists on their validity and rectitude; he is both a victim of industrial values and perpetrator of them. He is himself a predator through the commercialism of Merry Lands ("I make a living from poverty" (p.1)); he is insistent on the justice of Danny's retrenchment and derives some pleasure and security from the misfortunes of others. In his sadistic and vicious retribution against Lee, he recalls Big Nurse from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* yet he combines these characteristics with a rather grand version of Merry Lands' purpose:

At Merry Lands we hope to help the poor live their lives with some assurance that they are alive . . . We have no rules here. We make agreements and we keep them. Divide up the work and it's easy to cope. My idea is that the good society is not something you learn about. It's something you live. Here and now. The work program is part of your life here. The government—that is everybody here—decides how much work time we'll have (pp. 7-8).

This grandiose conception clearly (and, for Lee, fortunately) is not translated into actuality. Indeed the novel exploits the gap between the idea and the reality, the nod towards the ideal only a familiar gesture, but it does so without entirely losing empathy for O'Grady. Against the harshness of his attitudes and his pernicious self-seeking, there is also his yearning for some permanent memorial

to his having lived and his awareness that, at base, he is akin to the inmates—like them, cast off by society, dispossessed and scrabbling for existence on its fringes. More characteristic of O'Grady, however, are his dossiers and his "lust for control of his lodgers" (p.102), his diverting little ways of supplementing his income (through whispered suggestions to sleeping inmates about better quarters, his small savings with the milk (p.52) for instance, his hopes of the recalcitrant Basset and, earlier, his sale of his son). On the one hand, he calmly accepts that poverty is incurable and subscribes to Clayton's view that "'All that is not industrial production is therapy'"; on the other hand, he asserts that "'While there's one man with no work the country's sick'" (p.68) and, although bitter about foreign ownership (a familiar theme from *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*), argues that politics must be governed by commercial interest. His contradictions are those of the industrial society, his pathos yet his viciousness also those of the industrial society.

His contradictions, which are translated into the operation of Merry Lands, the inmates also reflect: some are outcasts, the unemployed being devoured by economic forces but eagerly awaiting only an opportunity for readmission to the mainstream of society; others have adjusted to their exclusion and cling to their possessions for their justification; others again have a deeper abhorrence of society and are in recoil from it and from the flesheating, predatory existence it exemplifies. While Danny, John Luck and Jummo are undermined by their eviction and can only cling with desperate faith to the values that consigned them to their present lot, others have discovered shabby but valiant defences, like the bulk buyer or Sam the guerilla. While Clayton calmly accepts that the world is shaped by the flesheating instinct and is impatient only to take his place in it, while O'Grady transforms his dispossessions into commercial enterprise, Lee and Scotty shelter at Merry Lands while they try to learn to tolerate existence. In part, Ireland is concerned to contrast individual reactions to denial and rejection and to discover the nature and limits of human resilience—or of human compromise. Like those of *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, the minor characters tend to be two-dimensional, more compelling in terms of their plights than their individuality, but they are sharply differentiated and the shifting circumstances of each carefully placed within the novel's mosaic structure. Many of them are bleakly comic, the grim reality of their experience twisted into absurdist images of futility and despair. In *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner*, despite the emergence of several major and more conventionally rounded characters (notably the Samurai, the Great White Father and Glass Canoe), the gallery of minor figures was presented directly to the reader, without the mediating presence of a narrator or the private perceptions of a central protagonist. In *The Flesheaters*, the minor characters are substantially presented through the perceptions of Lee, absorbed into his changing awareness of himself and hence are proffered as part of the experience of the observing sensibility. Ireland maintains balance in the portrayal of Lee so that he is both an anguished sensibility undergoing change and a dispassionate observer bearing witness to the circumstances of those at Merry Lands. The narrative has the flexibility to move easily from the inner world of Lee to the outer world of Merry Lands; it is the balance and finally the unity of these two worlds that I want to consider here.

The pressures Lee feels are suggested early in the novel, his failing grip on his own existence clear in 'The View From My Room' where it is only physical sensation that can assure him of his existence in a world he feels is moribund and menacing yet remote as if a distant landscape. The world beyond Merry Lands, steadily impinging on it, sanctifies the flesheating instinct through its institutions and codes: it tears at the flesh of the earth itself, gouging it out and sullyng it; its ethics are determined by expediency and might; it benumbs its

members with drugs in order to feed on them; it dispossesses some so that others may amass more; it teaches Smiler Wright about the folly of compassion and the wisdom of viciousness; it proffers as values per se property, status, conformity. The world that Lee watches, as if a distant and alien landscape, is thrown into relief by the pattern of newspaper headlines that recurs through the novel: with an intransigent sameness beneath the everchanging particulars, there is violence and exploitation, hypocrisy and scheming, crass materialism and indifference to human dignity. The disordered world that throws up words at Lee operates by the laws of the predator and from that world he has recoiled, turned in on himself in abhorrence.

At the start of the novel, Lee watches birds scrambling for scraps and, among them, "A large bird stood there watching, not eating. Shouldering others away from the food. Not eating: shouldering." (p. 2). For Lee, the bird is an image of his society and, in the cycle of spider-wren-cat-dog-man running throughout the novel, there is an image of existence. Beginning with an image of himself as a suffering sensibility twisting away from the flesheating world, Lee has a certain contrary tranquility that is almost self-satisfaction. Ireland sustains the pattern of prey and predator throughout the novel: in Clayton's experiments and graves, in the activities of the nightman, the references to excreta, the procedures of retrenchment, the advertising world and the sequence of liquidations and take-overs in the business world—

... some firms had been taken over again and again, by ever larger corporations. Mouths stretched beyond mouths, ever larger in the distance. Perspective was reserved. (p. 109).

Contrasted with Lee's anguish is Clayton's simple acceptance of the flesheating instinct, as an observable fact of existence that can be disregarded as such, not lamented:

'We are the ransackers of the planet . . . Progress is the worst flesheater of all. Our existence depends on the death of other organisms and the despoiling of the planet. In a jungle only the strongest animals survive. The higher animals—denoted by their capacity and desire for war—survive by slaughter.'

He seemed so anxious to persuade that his tone became bullying. (Crystal) looked up at him with clear eyes, not understanding why she should be scolded.

'What are you trying to destroy?' she asked.

'Destroy. A good word. I like it. It makes me human. I'd like to destroy the idea that we have or can have a gracious, harmless life. Beneath Government is power is violence is death. Beneath existence is power is violence is death . . . ' (p. 133).

As observable fact, this prompts in Clayton no questioning of human existence, no anguish; and, through his experiments, he would make a place for himself in the world and the society that are indifferent to their own wounds. When Lee questions Clayton on the 'truth' of his slogan, "The proper business of mankind is industrial production", Clayton shrugs him off:

'Truth? If it's not fit to stand up by itself, its weakness will find it out. I don't need to prop it up. Truth doesn't need me. Truth doesn't need you. If my saying can break, it will be broken. Truth can't be broken.' (p. 21).

There is a submissiveness to reality, a tolerance of observable fact there which Lee cannot emulate. Even in Clayton's address to the workers' meeting where he laments man's being consumed by the chain of predators he has himself made, his tone is explicatory and dispassionate, not troubled nor questioning. It is a telling irony that Clayton's death is the result of another's instinct to live.

By contrast with Clayton, Lee has retreated from a world he perceives as disorder and finds his role in negation and abhorrence, despite the emptiness this confers on him. His inner emptiness allows him to act as an observer, dispassionately recording the activities of others and acknowledging only the faintly mocking intention of being a voice for those at Merry Lands, those whom he pities as "useless excrescences on the surface of the earth" (pp. 34-5). He is to be detached and insulated against human contact:

Belief was a word he used. To taunt me with. I would never admit I knew what the word meant. I maintained I had no belief, believed nothing, each new moment was an entirely fresh choice. No connexion with a past. (p. 48).

Insisting history is an 'illusion', he yet toys with the notion of himself as an aspiring revolutionary, eager for revenge and committed to destruction: "I was a destroyer or I was nothing" (p. 60). In this period of retreat at Merry Lands, however, violence and revenge are largely putative, objectified more in his 'book of reprisals' than in deed. Above all he sees himself as detached and impartial, at most an innocent taking on the role of avenger in an alien world. The more integral function of the narrator-protagonist in *The Flesheaters* becomes clear as Ireland traces the passage of Lee's self-awareness to at last some seminal acceptance of his own complicity in the flesheating world. From observer he becomes increasingly aware that he is a guilty participant, an accomplice, in the disorder from which he has recoiled. His detachment brings an increasingly stifling estrangement, as if he were a time traveller, able to see and touch "but nothing comes near me and the moving objects out there. I try to push it away with my hands but it's no good." (p. 162). The only real bond is with Crystal and in time he recognises this as only the insidious urge to 'property', to ownership, a poison with which he is infected and which denies him the humanity of Mickey Frail and Trixie. Against their selflessness, there is only his obsessive grasping at Crystal and his cruelty to her which comes to define their relationship. The detachment he would cultivate is steadily eroded as he confronts his kinship with the flesheating world.

The passage to this recognition is not however entirely smooth. Ireland works through the relationship of Lee and O'Grady, which has some of the ambiguity of the relationship of the narrator-protagonist and Bee in *The Chantic Bird* and some of its apparently wilful obscurity. O'Grady's implied paternity of Lee remains obscure as does the role of O'Grady as an emblem for Lee of social disorder—a role more imposed upon him than emerging easily from the portrayal. Yet the sequence of shock treatment and crucifixion has a firmness and taut control that the uncertainties about Lee's relationship with O'Grady does not slacken. During this sequence of O'Grady's revenge on Lee, Lee is remote, observing his own suffering with curiosity until it overwhelms him. It is not, I think, to be dismissed as a nightmare sequence (the wounds remain visible and only slowly heal); but it is the height of the novel's surrealism and is a function of Lee's fear and horror of a world in which he can find no place and a function of his will to revenge, turned back onto himself. At the same time, it is closely related to the ambiguities and contradictions of Merry Lands as an institution. This central sequence recalls the lobotomy scene in *Invisible Man* which, at the heart of the novel, is a focus of the narrator's helplessness and of society's reducing him to a stereotype. And, in a different way, Ireland's scene also recalls the swift recourse to shock treatment to silence dissidents in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and Kesey's use of the crucifixion image in relation to shock treatment. Kesey describes Ellis thus:

Now he's nailed against the wall in the same condition they lifted him off the table for the last time, in the same shape, arms out, palms cupped, with

the same horror on his face. He's nailed like that on the wall, like a stuffed trophy...⁴

The ambiguous nature of Merry Lands has prepared us, in part at least, for such a sequence and the link of shock treatment and crucifixion is a grim image of the fate of the dissident within an institution sanctified by society. When Lee regains consciousness, he watches Clayton's vivisection with some enjoyment and certainly with new tolerance. It is a compelling but complex scene, not entirely clear in its implications but carried through by the power of its central image and, while it induces Lee's temporary acquiescence in the predatory nature of existence and thus the essential impulses of his society, it ultimately drives him into the further recoil of the psychiatric hospital.

Lee's function is in part that of the detached observer, narrating the events of Merry Lands, its inmates and their circumstances distilled through his consciousness. The fragmented, discrete nature of the narrative, which allows Ireland to capture much of the diversity and range of Merry Lands, yet allows for the tighter unity which springs from our sense of the developing consciousness of Lee. He becomes both witness and participant but, in the final section of the novel, after the deaths of Clayton and Crystal, is reduced to the most fundamental questioning of his being, with a profound distrust of himself:

Was. Was. What did it mean? Is. What does it mean to is? Does it matter if nothing means?

Perhaps the world I have made for myself is nothing more than the view others have of me. Or the view inside my perspex prism.

There is this frightening sense of having been confined, closely confined since I was a child; how can I have confidence in myself as a separate identity? This me that I show you, it is probably a false two-dimensional outer self; inside is a detached ghostly inner self: which is the one I use to confront the world of other egos? (p. 199).

His 'perspex prism' has revealed to him an endless cycle of things feeding on others, where perspective is reversed, with 'mouths beyond mouths' ever opening to devour. Now the prism is changed to reveal within him, in his inner world, mouths opening beyond mouths, closing over him and confining him so that he must doubt even his own existence. He recalls his horrified awarenesses of his kinship with people—people he can see only as hideous mutations. His revulsion against the world has deepened and swelled rather than worked towards resolution, because of that kinship. It yields no sense of 'belonging', no acceptance, because of the depth of the abhorrence that has preceded it. At the hospital in which he is now confined, he can believe only in the accidents of existence, the 'tentativeness' of being and the absurdity of humankind. In his emptiness and recoil from himself is a burden heavier than recoil from the outer world which sat almost easily upon him at the outset of the novel. He can now only reach back into the past for meaning and, through writing, try to reconstitute his broken world:

... the emptiness within me has found me out. I'm hollow. Any world will do. I can't get life from actions of my own, only from others' actions and the traces they leave in my memory. The life I draw from these words is all the life I have. The people who made the movements and the emotional currents, like electricity, in the air—they're gone. They're hidden from me; I from them. Only in words they live again. (p. 202).

In his hollowness, he is driven back into words as the last recourse but, with a final ironic twist, that recourse is itself a kind of feeding on others' existence. It is a recourse too that reinforces our sense of the novel's tight unity: the

fragmented narrative structure, the glimpses of so many inmates and so many incidents in their existence at Merry Lands, and the narrator who is both observer and participant, have all been tightly balanced in the struggle of Lee to determine his place in the order of existence and to evolve some sense of self. The interweaving of events and characters within Merry Lands and his own struggle to see through his perspex prism marks Ireland's achievement in this novel.

Laurie Clancy has suggested that, in contemporary American fiction, there is a turning to the writer as "the last possible hero".⁵ Lee shares with the Samurai and the narrator-protagonist of *The Chantic Bird* an ultimate resort to the written word in the struggle for meaning and for self-awareness. In the midst of his despair, there comes a tentative note of affirmation. Released from the knot of love for Crystal and his "long death resumed" (p. 202), he can yet contemplate being able to

write words which represent what no one has ever seen. Instead of reviving the dead, I'll be creating new life. And this new life, through new words, will keep me alive a bit longer. And the work of putting them on the paper, well, it's something to do between now and dying. (p. 202).

With this final phrase, the one Lee has intended for his novel, Ireland recalls the earlier conversations of Lee and Scotty which have, early in the novel, established the motif of the role of the writer. Scotty is a kind of absurdist counterpart of Lee, echoing many of Lee's own attitudes and acting as a measure of Lee's changing self-awareness. He too has sought detachment, apart from others in his tree house with a kaleidoscope of words; he too has recoiled from an empty and offensive society to the refuge of Merry Lands, with only his conviction of the significance of the artist to sustain him. He is a richly absurdist character and yet often a moving emblem of Lee's ultimate recoil from himself. Like Lee too, his solitude becomes a prison and his destination a psychiatric hospital. From scoffing gently at Scotty, Lee moves through a benevolent tolerance to anger at his self-deceptions and finally to a consuming empathy. This development in his attitude to Scotty becomes an index of his self-awareness. Through words, Lee can at least bring some order to his existence ("As for the words, I *do* manage to live a little through them." p. 202), as Scotty finally cannot. Scotty is left adrift among meaningless sounds and words that do not touch reality.

Wilkes has argued of *The Flesheaters* that "the deliberate attempt at a richly-textured symbolism spends itself in ambiguities which merely compound confusion".⁶ The novel attempts to work on many levels, perhaps too many, so that it suffers from its own ambitiousness. The social determinants of Merry Lands and its inmates are insistently clear; the curious closeness of O'Grady's administration and the assumptions behind the social structure is presented with a firm and sure irony; Lee's abhorrence at the flesheating instinct manifest in social values and the development of his self-awareness are also powerfully realised; and there is too the sheer inventiveness of the novel, with its absurdist conception of Merry Lands that often yields a sharp-edged irony and black comedy. The integration of these aspects of the novel—and they are, I think, integrated—gives it a surface of almost bewildering density and complexity. Ireland's approach is bizarre and surrealistic but, as Adrian Mitchell has pointed out, "it is easy for us to re-insert the perspectives, spatial and moral".⁷ Its structure in a sense echoes Lee's vision of mouths beyond mouths, the diffusions of his perspex prism, but it retains balance and remains controlled because of Ireland's insistence on the grim social facts underlying even its most surrealistic images. Ireland's indictment of the industrial society in *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* is here extended into the plight of the dispossessed but at the same time the novel reaches out beyond the social dimension into a vision of all existence as predatory. The

industrial society here is but a paradigm of the flesheating order in which Lee must finally accept his place and begin to tolerate his complicity and guilt.

NOTES:

1. One of the ambiguities of the novel is the question of Lee's gender: the novel seems to me almost wilfully obscure on this point. While I had assumed Lee was male, Laurie Clancy, for instance, had assumed the opposite (in "Defeated Derelicts", review of *The Flesheaters*, *The Age*, 5 August 1972). There is no conclusive evidence that I am aware of either way and, given the relationship with Crystal and Clayton, obscurity on this point is irritating.
2. p. 122 "Some aspects of Satire in the Australian Novel", Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New England, Armidale, 1974.
3. p. 92 *The Flesheaters*. This and all subsequent references indicated in text are to the 1972 Angus and Robertson edition, Sydney.
4. p. 18 Picador, Pan Books edition, London, 1976.
5. p. 495 "The Artist as Hero: Contemporary American Fiction", *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. 31, No. 4, December 1972.
6. p. 380 op. cit.
7. p. 13 "The Many Mansions: Recent Australian Fiction", *Ariel*, Vol. 5, No. 3, July 1974.

TOM THOMPSON

Marine

Trawlers, nets-full, plough sea
Wave-crash forming half loops round the point.
A woollen-capped man stabs bream,
Scissors flashing bright blood on wet rocks.
Weed and jelly strung along the tide
Sea wash toning corrugated sands—
A trawler strikes the north arm,
settling into rhythms up the beach.
Waves surge the sleeping gradient
Against whose edge whirlwinds of light collide.

VERONICA BRADY

‘A Thick Crumbly Slice of Life.’ “The Fortunes of Richard Mahoney” as a Cultural Monument

Every literary text, it can be argued, is a cultural object “with a causation, persistence, durability and social presence quite its own”.¹ *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, Henry Handel Richardson’s monumental attempt to construct an Australian classic, is quite particularly concerned with this social presence, and expresses it as much perhaps at the unconscious as at the conscious level. For not only does Richardson consciously set herself the task of documenting with meticulous precision the circumstances of colonial life in mid nineteenth century but also, unconsciously, she reflects the pressures of the culture she describes, though admittedly at a later stage of its development. Attempting to speak for and about Australians, yet writing as an expatriate, she may well be more aware of her audience and more influenced by their expectations than many writers. Certainly, her work seems to me to suffer from a curious ambivalence. On the one hand, the naturalistic method she adopts signals a determination to tell the truth but also to limit the definition of truth to what can be verified empirically or rationally, a determination as responsive to the pressures of her society, if also as heroic as Flaubert’s or Balzac’s to theirs. But on the other hand, there are clear indications within the novel that she has other designs than those of naturalism upon her material and that in another time she might in fact have written a tragedy. No doubt there are also personal factors at work here as well, since the story of Richard Mahony is substantially the story of her own father. However, it is my contention that it is pressures from her society which deflect her from the full tragic vision implicit in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*.²

Potentially, Mahony’s story is the classical stuff of tragedy. Gifted, sensitive and imperious, he is destroyed by these very gifts which are not merely in excess of the actual needs of his situation which is the note of the tragic hero. The construction of the novel, in particular the division into three novels and within these novels the subdivisions into parts, also indicates a bias towards the dramatic, implying a grouping of subject matter around high points of the action and of characterisation and an interest in architectonics as well as in narrative.

Yet in execution, the story becomes more like a case study, an unrelenting account of Mahony’s decline into madness, of the effects of this decline upon his family and of the colonial society in which his ideas and behaviour seem so preposterous. Significantly, it seems that most of Richardson’s readers support this naturalistic approach, regarding the book as a triumphant example of realism, and critics generally have confirmed this reading. In the discussion that follows, however, I should like to look at the impulse to another kind of novel which also

exists within the trilogy and argue that the work as a whole is seriously flawed by the ambivalence which exists within the writer and within her culture as well and disables her from realizing either the perfection of naturalism or the perfection of tragedy.

As the trilogy is structured, the intention to delineate a tragic action seems clear. The Proem to *Australia Felix* sets the story in a cosmic perspective, announcing a conflict between the human spirit and powers which control its destiny, in this case the powers of the land. Furthermore, in the image of the miner buried alive, the novelist predicts Richard's end, sounding a note of tragic inevitability. Throughout, in scenes like the encounter with Tangye and the fate of the wretched carter in *Australia Felix*, in Cuffy's nightmare about the drowning dog in *The Way Home* or in the beating of the horse in *Ultima Thule*, the novelist keeps Richard's fate before us, predicting it in Tangye's words and in exemplary images like the dog and the horse. So, at the end of *Ultima Thule* in the description of Richard's grave, we return to the idea in the Proem of the man buried alive. But here the novelist turns it to positive ends, implying, as at the end of a tragedy, that the hero's spirit is now at rest, all passion spent; "the rich and kindly earth of his adopted country [having] absorbed his perishable body, as the country itself had never contrived to make its own, his wayward, vagrant spirit".³

Moreover, as in classical tragedy, the hero's fate seems meant to be exemplary. The Proem suggests that the story is about a situation which is trans-individual; if the miners are to be destroyed on account of their greed for gold Mahony's destruction echoes theirs, though his greed is for wealth of mind and spirit. So *Australia* becomes a kind of stage where the conflict is played out between man's aspirations for wealth and power and what Lawrence, speaking of Hardy's novels, calls the "terrific action of unfathomed nature". Thus the book reflects that vision of Australia as the Utopia that failed which is so strong in writers like Lawson and, much later, Patrick White or Thomas Keneally. For if the quest for Utopia arises from a "revolt against the human condition in the shape of existing circumstances, which meets the obstacle of impotence and evokes in the imagination an 'other' or a nowhere, where all obstacles are removed",⁴ *Australia*, for all its promise, is the place in which existing circumstances prevail. As Tangye, the failed chemist whose failure predicts Mahony's own, tells him, this, "the hardest and cruellest country ever created",⁵ gives the lie to all the illusions of "the Land o' Promise and Plenty" which drew people to it from the Old World. Here "every superfluous bit of you—every thought of interest that [isn't] essential to the daily grind—[is] pared off" (*A.F.* pp. 285-6) and one thought alone prevails; "to keep a sound roof over our heads and a bite in our mouths" (*A.F.* p. 265). The description in the Proem also insists on this grim view, suggesting indeed that this defeat of hope is justified. For the settlers are convicted here of a particular kind of hubris which leads them to defy the proper order of things. In their search for gold they have violated the proper relationship with the natural world, tearing the earth apart, and the opening description of the diggings at Ballarat presses his point strongly. "The whole scene had that strange, repellant ugliness that goes with breaking up and throwing into disorder what has been sanctified as final . . . All that was left of the original 'pleasant resting-place' and its pristine beauty were the ancient volcanic cones of Warrenheip and Bunिंगong" (*A.F.* p. 5). Moreover, this violation is the direct product of the "dream . . . of vast wealth got without exertion . . . a passion for gold" (*A.F.* p. 8) which leads them to disregard everything else but its satisfaction. "The intention of all alike had been to snatch a golden fortune from the earth, and then, hey, presto! for the old world again" (*A.F.* p. 8).

A naturalistic writer might have recorded these facts, of course, but Richardson also introduces another dimension, attributing a life of its own to the land,

making it a kind of moral presence and endowing it with a will of its own. "Lying stretched like some primeval monster in the sun, her breasts fully bared" (*A.F.* p. 8), it has already judged these intruders, has already, without their knowing it, taken "them captive—without chains, ensorcelled without witchcraft" (*A.F.* p. 8) and is only waiting her moment to destroy them, in spirit by the crass materialism which the novelist appears to despise almost as much as Mahony himself, or in body, as with Mahony.

Now it is in this vision that I locate the origin of the ambivalence we are discussing and of the consequent disjuncture within the novel. Tragedy depends upon that sense of values beyond the material evident here which gives rise to its vision of suffering nobility. But even the world Richard Mahony inhabits will not support this vision since it has little knowledge of anything but material values. More seriously perhaps, Richardson herself owed intellectual allegiance to that strain of scepticism which filled educated Europeans of her day with the overwhelming sense of inner despair and melancholy which is also apparent in *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony*, particularly in the unsparing realism with which she details the decline of a proud and sensitive man into helpless madness. Therefore, when, early in the story, Mahony wrestles with questions of religious belief, the writer may well be rehearsing her own problems, attracted to faith but committed to intellectual honesty. In this sense Tangye's assertion that Australia "is no place . . . for the likes of you and me," (*A.F.* p. 283) [i.e. Mahony] his words illumine more than the situation within the novel. A culture which questions the existence of God or the gods and insists instead on circumscribing the truth to what can be empirically observed or explained in rational terms allows no place for the tragic vision to which the Proem suggests Richardson's work is aspiring and clearly her conscious loyalties lie with empiricism and rationality.

Yet it remains that, unconsciously perhaps, she is drawn to another vision of life. Apart from the evidence of the Proem, this is apparent also in the strange complicity with her protagonist. In truth, Richard resembles a Madame Bovary or Hjalmar Ekdal, characters condemned by stern realism as mere dreamers and destructive to themselves and others. But Richardson does not always manage to stand outside her character and regard him as objectively as Flaubert and Ibsen manage to do with their characters. Indeed, it might be said that, allowances being made for the difference of some fifty years between the novelist and her protagonist, his intellectual situation rehearses her own. Both experience a sense of social alienation and profess a kind of fatalism on the one hand and yet are also aware on the other hand of a great longing for God and hope. If one sets aside for the moment the medical explanation of Mahony's fate, it might even be said that his story is essentially that of his battle for his soul, a battle which I am arguing is repeated by the author in the structure of the novel.

In its attempt to get whole and even account for the fate which overwhelmed her parents and herself as a child Richardson may have been influenced by her reading of Freud. But, like her hero, she might also acknowledge more metaphysical ambitions, "trying to pierce the secret of existence to rede the riddle that has never been solved—What am I? Whence have I come? Whither am I going? What meaning has the pain I suffer, the evil that men do? Can evil be included in God's scheme?" (*A.F.* p. 177). Certainly, there seems to be more sympathy with him in these longings than with the obsession with money and success which grips most people in colonial society. Moreover, in the last extended moment of self awareness before he lapses into insanity, in the scene in which he wrestles with the temptation to commit suicide, Richardson allows him to satisfy his ambition, at least to a certain extent, and to glimpse an answer to these questions. Whether the impartial reader or even the sceptical strain in the novel

itself agrees with him and supports his feelings at this point is another matter, of course, a matter I shall discuss presently. But to my mind there is no doubt that another strain in the novel witnesses to a profound sympathy with this aspiration in him, the pressure towards some transcendent explanation.

The scene with Tangye dramatises the conflict between these two strains, significantly indicating that the novelist's emotional sympathies are with Richard, even if her intellect sides with Tangye. Summing up his despairing vision of the futility of an existence like theirs in a land like this where material concerns alone seem to matter, Tangye declares: "I'll tell you the only use I'll have been here, doctor, when my end comes. I'll dung some bit of land for 'em with my moulder and rot. That's all." (*A.F.* p. 284) To which Richard retorts, "and pray, does it never occur to you, you fool, that flowers may spring from you?" (*A.F.* p. 285). In this context, this exchange serves to highlight the difference between the two men, Tangye the realist and Mahony the idealist whose ideals are ultimately the product of a kind of impotence before the facts. But in terms of the total structure of the trilogy, Mahony's words point towards the conclusion of the whole work, the description of the grave by the sea with the grasses growing over it and suggest that the novelist's feelings as distinct from her intelligence lie more with his point of view than with Tangye's. Despite the hard-headed realism which reaches its climax in the last volume of the trilogy in the unsparing account of Richard's disintegration and Mary's battle for survival, at the very end she relapses into a conclusion which can only be called sentimental since the facts do not justify the emotions the words attempt to generate. Suddenly renouncing the view of him as the pitiful victim of madness, "like Tom fool in 'the King of Lear'" (*U.T.* p. 178) as she sees him at the end of the suicide scene, in these last moments Richardson presents him as triumphant, declaring in effect that his spirit has at last reached that transcendental realm to which it always aspired and therefore endorsing that aspiration which the sceptic in her has identified as mere illusion. More, she echoes the vision of light at the climactic point of struggle with the impulse to suicide. As there he saw himself as one with the Creator like "a drop of water in a wave, a note of music in a mighty cadence," (*U.T.* p. 176) so here his spirit is one with "the rich and kindly earth" (*U.T.* p. 279). Clearly, then, something in Richardson would like to believe in the gods, and see human existence not so much as an end in itself but as a bridge to something more. But the intelligence which had given its allegiance to the world of Ibsen, Freud, Nietzsche and so on, insisted with them that the gods were dead. Instead, the task was to explain the world and the fate of people like Richard Mahony, renouncing all consolations and all illusions.

So it is then that Richardson set herself consciously to write the monumental naturalistic account of the rise and fall of the fortunes of Richard Mahony, an account as careful in its documentation and seeming to reflect the determination to eliminate all emotions, all delight for the senses which informs the scientific writer as the writer tells her story from the outside, mostly keeping her distance from her characters. Even the figure of Cuffy, obviously the surrogate of Richardson herself as a child, indicates this dubious triumph of understanding over emotion, for the child never comes alive. His baby-talk is the calculated language of adults' convention and his responses to the most painful situations tend to undercut rather than intensify the feelings they arouse. Indeed, it is almost as if he is there to exorcise any ghosts which may still haunt Richardson recalling events she once lived through for, despite moments of passion, Cuffy appears as an essentially sensible child, mostly self-possessed and trying to make sense of his experience. Maybe, too, the fact that, rehearsing the past, the novelist casts herself as a boy instead of a girl, like her choice of a male pseudonym,⁶ indicates further this commitment to intelligence, this determination in the writer as in her

character to make the animus the controlling intellect, prevail over the passionate, intuitive anima.

However, this triumph of understanding over emotion is dubious in its effects, mainly because, to repeat, Richardson is unable to sustain it completely, surrendering at times to the claims of intuition and feeling. The result is the curious uncertainty which becomes most evident precisely at those climactic points which demand steadiness of tone and purpose. Thus the concluding moments of the whole trilogy tend to falsify rather than bring to culmination the progress of the action. *Ultima Thule*, as we have said, represents the triumph of realism. Sparing neither herself nor her reader in her account, Richardson traces the progress of Richard's disease to childlike dependence on Mary. Correspondingly, while Mary might have been presented as a figure of valiant grief, the novelist stresses the practical, pragmatic nature of her heroism. As Richard fades out and she becomes the centre of the action, her values also tend to prevail, sheer survival becoming the most important if not the only good. So the change of tone in the last moments, and the reversion to a tragic perspective with its suggestions of the primacy of spirit, represents a kind of intrusion, as the author forces an interpretation which the facts will not really bear as if her nerve had failed and she is unable to sustain the full implications of that sceptical vision she has pursued so vigorously, especially in this last part of the trilogy. Even as far as the Proem is concerned, there is little justification for speaking of the "rich and kindly earth" of Australia. On the contrary, nearly everything in the novel, not only what happens to the Mahonys, but also to people like John Turnham, Purdie or Tully Beamish, insists upon its essential harshness. Equally, to say that "it would have been after [Richard's] own heart that his last bid was in sound of what he had perhaps loved best on earth—the open sea" (*U.T.* p. 278) is to oversimplify and distort in the interests of comfort rather than truth. It is true that Richard loved the sea, but mainly because it represented for him the possibility of escape, either back to England or, when he found he belonged there no more than elsewhere, back again to Australia. Far from being consoling, therefore, his affinity with the sea appears as part of that restlessness and love of illusion which worked so disastrously upon his own life and on those he loved. No doubt the intention here is to use the sea as a symbol of all that is unlimited and to remind the reader of Mahony's fascination with the "mystery of things". However, once again the naturalism of the novel as a whole contradicts these implications. Coming at the end of the last book which has documented Richard's illness so painfully and so convincingly, the suggestion of a triumph of spirit fails to ring true. On the contrary, the impression may be that his preoccupation with matters of spirit may have been merely a symptom of his disease. As for the thought that he has been taken up into infinity, resting there where "on all sides the eye can range, unhindered, to where the vast earth meets the infinitely vaster sky" (*U.T.* p. 278), he is represented in his last lucid moments struggling to keep control of his life and himself. As he realizes, his life has been characterised by an "iron determination to live untouched and untrammelled . . . to preserve [his] liberty of body and mind . . . to be sufficient unto oneself asking neither help nor regard, and spending none" (*U.T.* p. 274). Set against this determination which, incidentally, has some affinity with the naturalistic writer's heroic commitment to live without illusion, the conclusion rings very hollow indeed with its tired Romantic implications, its echoes of Shelley's *Adonais* whose spirit is made "part of that loveliness he once made more lovely".

On the other hand, if one allows the tragic impulse within the novel to work, this last scene can be supported by the crucial scene in which Richard rejects the thought of suicide. In this reading, in fact, this scene becomes the climax of the action, the point at which the hero makes a conscious choice of his destiny,

determining to follow it through to the end, defying the suffering he knows to be in store for him. So this decision culminates in a moment of vision, the great light which overwhelms him, bringing with it the "beatific certainty that his pain . . . his sufferings . . . had their niche in God's scheme" (*U.T.* p.176) and all that he is one with the rest of creation all pressing towards some mysterious fulfilment, "as surely contained in God as a drop of water in a wave, a note of music in a mighty cadence" (*U.T.* p.176). In this vision Richardson seems to be preparing us for the kind of apotheosis which occurs to the tragic hero, as to Oedipus when he is taken up by the gods at the end of all his sufferings. She is also presenting his decision not to commit suicide as a heroic moral action. As he wrestles with despair, it comes to him that his life is not his own to take, but belongs to his Creator. More, that Creator himself has known this same struggle and emerged triumphant from it. This example of Christ "the Great Martyr" who emerged from "the most famous agony known to history" (*U.T.* p.174) spurs him then to see suicide as an act of cowardice. "What was he about to do? He a coward . . . a deserter? . . . abandoning his post when the fire was hottest?—leaving others to bear the onus of his flight, his disgrace?" (*U.T.* p.175). But not only does his decision to go on living represent an act of heroic obedience, it also commits him to others. The "iron determination to live untouched and untrammelled" mentioned earlier figures in this perspective as pride, the deadliest of sins, and, as his vision of unity indicates, he is now determined to give himself rather than hold aloof. In this perspective, it is appropriate that at the end of his life he should be taken up into the larger harmony.

Unfortunately, however, the other impulse towards naturalistic explanation is also at work here. The meticulous way the novelist follows the movement of his thought in this scene from the initial sense of despair through the sheer horror as he waits, nerves at stretch, for the shriek of the mill whistle and then resolves to put an end to this agony by killing himself to the final decision to go on living and the vision of light which follows from it, summons the intelligence to work on the emotions recorded here. Moreover, it is clear that initially Mahony is at the point of mental breakdown. The description of him sitting in the surgery waiting for the mill-whistle lays stress on physical facts, noting that it is not merely his nerves but also his muscles which are "at stretch", and presenting his mental agony in terms of stark bodily experience, "the slow torture . . . the refined torture of physical inaction, the trail of which may be as surely blood-streaked as that from an open wound" (*U.T.* p.171). Similarly, the stress on the beating of his pulses, the ticking of the pendulum and the oppressive silence of the room emphasises the physical basis of his mental distress. Even at the height of his moral struggle, when, looking back over his past life he convicts himself of "pride . . . a fierce Lucifer like inhibition" (*U.T.* p.174), there is a hint of another, more naturalistic explanation in the change from the word "pride" to "inhibition" indicating a movement from moral to psychological categories, a movement which is reflected also in the physical implications of the metaphors used to describe his revulsion from others as a "withdrawal of oneself because of rawness . . . a skinlessness . . . on which the touch of any rough hand could cause agony" (*U.T.* p.174). The implications here are almost behaviouristic, confirming the naturalistic explanation of Mahony's fate that it was the result not of tragic hubris but the workings of the syphilitic bacteria which caused his disease. Even at the height of what a tragic reading would call his spiritual struggle, there is a suggestion that flinging the phial of poison away is less the result of heroic choice than a kind of reflex action "with a movement so precipitate that it seemed after all more than half involuntary, he lifted his hand and threw far from him the little bottle of chloroform, which he had clutched till his palm was cut and sore" (*U.T.* p.176).

Throughout his life, Richard's feelings have tended to explode like this. Discontented with life in Australia and with himself, he suddenly decides to go back to England, for example, and then, just as suddenly, finding himself equally dissatisfied there, he returns to Australia. Hence, of course, the ironic force of the Latin tag Tangye quotes to him, "coeli non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt", a tag whose implications echo throughout the length of Richard's restless life. So, his vision of light and his decision to go on living may be only another gesture typical of the man who tends to take refuge in illusion, preferring his subjective vision to the claims of reality.

Nevertheless, there is no denying the claims religious ideas as well as feelings are pressing upon the novelist here. Hitherto the novel has revealed her interest in the writings of mystics like St Theresa, Giordano Bruno, Glanville and Swedenborg, but this interest seems to be more a matter of emotion, a feeling that their vision corresponds to longings within Richard and perhaps also, by implication, within herself. So Richard, the man who prides himself on his intellect, is drawn to the "spirituality [which] outstripped intellect", the "mysteries at once too deep and simple for learned brains to follow".⁷ At this stage of the story, this interest only serves to increase the distance between his sense of reality and common sense, and most readers probably share Mary's exasperation with him here and earlier as he pursues his studies and neglects his family, friends and ordinary obligations. In the scene under discussion, however, his religious impulse operates rather to direct him back to others and to the claims of the actual. Similarly, the intellect begins to work upon instead of merely surrender to his feelings here as he attempts, in effect, to direct them and to construct a world-view which will account for and accommodate his situation, particularly the existence of pain, not merely reject it as an obscenity as naturalistic explanations do. Significantly, this view seems to take up points made by Tangye in the scene of his meeting with Mahony which reveals so much of the novelist's thoughts and purposes. Notably, here Tangye offers a vision of God to match his grim philosophy of life as "the old Joker who sits grinnin' up aloft [waiting] to put his heel down—as you and me would squash a bull-ant or a scorpion" (*A.F.* p. 282). At this stage, Richard is both prosperous and conventional and will have nothing to do with such ideas. But at the point of despair, facing the knowledge of impending madness, he sees differently. For him now God is no impassable and remote being: in the person of Christ he is in some senses its victim himself. Moreover, going back upon his earlier thought that scientific evidence had discredited forever the "fable of the Eternal's personal mediation in the affairs of man" (*A.F.* p. 175), he now seems to believe that God is in a sense responsible for his pain, setting it up in fact as a "test—God's acid test . . . failing to pass which a man might not attain to his full stature" (*U.T.* p. 175). It is this belief, of course, which accounts for the ecstatic vision of unity in which all things, pain as well as joy, are seen to be contained in God.

Seen from one point of view, as we have seen, this vision may be only the product of what Johnson called "the dangerous prevalence of Imagination", the desire to heal one's pain by retreating into an imaginary world in which the gap between reality and desire is miraculously closed. Yet viewed in another way, Mahony's position may be worth more respect. Indeed, read in the light of William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Tangye may be offering Richard the kind of negative hierophany James speaks of there in chapter seven. He argues that what he calls "healthy-mindedness", a confident trust in the present order of thought and feeling and in the power of human beings to understand and control their destiny, is "inadequate as a philosophical doctrine, because the evil facts which it refuses to account for are a genuine portion of reality. The normal process of life contains moments as bad as any of those which insane melancholy

is filled with, moments in which radical evil gets its innings and takes its solid turn. The lunatic's visions of horror are all drawn from the material of daily fact. Our civilisation is founded on the shambles, and every individual existence goes out in a lonely spasm of helpless agony".⁸ Unlike anyone else Richard meets, Tangye is prepared to face this truth, and here, when his own experience brings him to it, Richard in his turn is perhaps grappling with his kind of God, one whose monstrous aspect may be too much for a conventional morality though it is reflected in the *Book of Job* and in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. Seen thus, Richard's desire "to pierce the secret of existence" (*A.F.* p.177) may in fact be satisfied here, at least as far as he is concerned. More crucially to the present argument, if this is so, then the ambition of the novelist, hinted at at the beginning and end of the work as a whole, appears as similar to that of the American Transcendentalists "to free man from the delusions of a split universe which . . . had reduced human life to a fragmented state".⁹

Richard's version of unity also throws new light on the working of scenes like the one in which the carter whom Richard has ruined despairingly slits up the bellies of his pet rabbits or where Cuffy has a nightmare of the drowning dog or where Richard, losing control, lashes the horse he is driving unmercifully. If the universe be unified, as Richard sees it in his vision, with each level of reality reflecting and bound up with all others, then the mutilated rabbits, the dog and the horse work as types of Richard's own fate. More, they establish more strongly within the action the structure of his fate for, as Erich Auerbach argues, a figural interpretation like this establishes a connection between events and persons in such a way that the first points ahead to the second, while the second involves and fulfils the first. The despairing carter in some sense prefigures Richard's fate, and it is significant that in the last stages before his final breakdown, he dreams once again of this man (*U.T.* pp.164-8). So, too, when in Venice Mahony comforts Cuffy, overwhelmed by his nightmare about the drowning dog, telling him that cruelty like this is unusual and that in any case people like them must always act kindly, the scene is grimly ironical: very soon Mahony himself will be the victim of cruelty of a larger cosmic kind, and in no position to be merciful to anyone, even himself—hence, indeed, the fury of frustration which drives him to whip the horse in the other scene mentioned.

In effect, then, the suicide represents the crux of my argument that *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* contains the impulse to write two works, a naturalistic novel and a tragedy. In terms of a tragic action, this scene dramatises the moment in which the hero, having passed from the stage of autonomy now moves towards theonomy to acknowledge the claims of the gods. Having learnt that he is not master of his fate, he now enlarges his spirit to move into another dimension, at once more terrible and more beautiful than man's. So here the link is forged between spiritual values and the natural world which accounts for the fusion between them evident at the end of *Ultima Thule*. Unfortunately, however, although the potential is there, neither this scene nor the novel as a whole works at this tragic level. In fact, the main effect of Richard's vision at this stage the action has reached is perhaps to confirm the sense of his disintegration. Moreover, the novelist's conscious intention seems to confirm this reading since she ends the scene with Cuffy, switching her point of view from inside Richard's mind to the eyes of the child who stands at a distance, neither comprehending nor apparently even sympathising but seeing him rather with a strange detachment as "Tomfool in the King of Lear" (*U.T.* p.178). Whatever else may be involved in bringing Cuffy's point of view to bear, it is clear that it ends the scene with a picture of Richard covered with mud, at the end of his tether and pitifully helpless, clinging to Mary for support and confessing to her what seems a failure when he says, "Oh Mary, I couldn't, I couldn't" (*U.T.* p.178). More-

over, Cuffy cannot even understand what he is referring to, asking himself "What did it mean he said he *couldn't* be lost? Why not?" (p. 178), stressing on the one hand no doubt the child's incomprehension of his agony but also endorsing Mary's point of view which regards his conduct here as of a piece with what has gone before, exasperating, if also to be pitied and agonising.

Most of all, however, it is the style which refuses to support the tragic impulse within the novel and Richardson betrays some awareness of her problem here, as elsewhere, when she has Mahony reflect on a *Life of Jesus* he has read, retelling the story from a rationalistic standpoint, and condemn it as a "savagely unimaginative work" (A.F. p. 176). Nor is it just its scepticism which makes him uneasy but also its style. Laying "all too little weight on the deeps of poetry, the mysteries of symbols, and the power the human mind drew from these, to pierce to an ideal truth" (A.F. p. 176), the work begs the question it purports to face, the question of God. So Mahony resolves that "his own modest efforts would be of another kind" (A.F. p. 176). But if his intention here reflects Richardson's own, the style of *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* represents the failure, not the fulfilment, of this intention. With the exception of scenes like those already discussed, the scenes in which the carter and his rabbits, the dog and the tormented horse work at a more or less symbolic level, there is little or no use of metaphor or symbol and descriptions are based on observation or on historical research rather than belief. By and large, as in most naturalistic novels, thought and emotion are registered mostly from the outside, in terms of physical objects, by descriptions of the weather, for example, as in the account of John Turham's death on a blazing summer day or of the external environment, in the emphasis on the cold and damp, and the precise documentation of social detail during the Mahony's time in England. To a large extent, it is by their reaction to their possessions, and to the fashions and customs of their society that we come to know the characters, Richard being characterised by withdrawal from them, Mary by acceptance, even at times delight in them, as for instance, in the party she gives in the early days of their prosperity in Ballarat. As a result, the scenes in which the novelist attempts to trace the movements of Richard's thought give an impression of weightlessness, of abstraction from reality, and the fact that it is only Richard's thoughts, very seldom anyone else's, confirms this impression. For the circumstantial documentation with which Richardson surrounds her characters allied with the matter-of-fact unemotional style, implies a distrust for speculation and a commitment to physical fact as to the only form of truth. Mary, not Richard, obviously lives by this commitment, and the style is not the least of the reasons which draw so many readers to regard her and not Richard as the centre of value in the novel.

By and large, then, her prose conveys the feeling that the social background against which the characters perform is perhaps the determining factor in their lives, and one might even interpret the Proem's insistence on the power the land exercises upon individuals in this way. However, for all its commitment to physical fact, the style also witnesses to the ambivalence we have been discussing. A strange feeling of strain also emerges. Many of her sentences are nervous, highly punctuated, moving with difficulty and pausing frequently to qualify or to allow what has been said to sink in as if the writer were unsure of herself or of her relations with her readers, unable to assume their agreement and trying to clear a space within which her imagination may move, released from this anxiety. Thus nouns tend to predominate over verbs, and verbs indicating states of being over verbs indicating positive action. In the crucial last moments of the whole trilogy, one sentence¹⁰ loses direction completely, lacking a main verb to carry it to its conclusion as if to witness, even here, to her inability to make connection between her ideal interpretation of Richard's fate with the real world. Essentially,

that is to say, her vision is revealed as intransitive, self-enclosed. And this, to recur to the parallels between the novelist and her protagonist, is precisely the predicament in which Richard Mahony also finds himself, overwhelmed by a consciousness of himself which little or nothing in the world outside him will support and bereft therefore of any standards of objectivity and generality.

To conclude, then, *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* offers striking confirmation of Lucien Goldmann's proposition that a work cannot be understood fully "as long as we remain at the level of what he wrote or even of what he read and what influenced him. Ideas are only a partial aspect of a less abstract reality, that of the whole, living man, and in his turn, this man is only an element in a life made up of the social group to which he belongs".¹¹ The social group to which Richardson belonged, the people she met as an Australian expatriate in Leipzig, London and in her readings of Freud, Schopenhauer, Ibsen and so on, only tended to intensify the ambivalence we have been discussing between the impulse towards the transcendent and the contradictory impulse to trust only the evidence of sense and reason. Like her protagonist, however, she was unable to make a choice between them, clinging to the hope of some compromise between them as he clung to the conviction that there was no reason why "the evolutionary formula should be held utterly to rule out the transcendental formula" (*W.H.* p.168). So on the one hand her novel invites a naturalistic explanation of Mahony's fate, providing the material which has led doctors to identify his disease as a form of secondary syphilis while on the other hand it poses metaphysical questions about the nature of the universe and of the individual's place in it, the conflict between values and the problem of God and of human suffering. Unlike Richardson, however, most of her readers opt for one or the other of these two approaches, the naturalistic reading being most popular, reflecting the prevalence of a one-dimensional sense of reality within present culture. Nevertheless, the attempt to force any such universal explanation upon the novel is to falsify what is in fact a monument to a painful state of dividedness, to the sense expressed by Heidegger of being suspended in time in a culture which exists "too late for the gods and too early for Being".

NOTES:

1. Edward W. Said, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism", *Contemporary Literature*, XVII, 3 (Summer 1976), p. 337.
2. I am aware that Richardson spent most of her adult life in England. Nevertheless, the presuppositions underlying English culture were and are substantially the same in Australia, even if they appear here in a vulgarised, less intellectually sophisticated form.
3. *Ultima Thule* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1971), p. 279. Hereafter referred to in the text as *U.T.*
4. Frank E. Manuel, *Utopias & Utopian Thought* (London: Souvenir Press, 1973).
5. *Australia Felix* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1971), p. 286. Hereafter cited in the text as *A.F.*
6. I am also aware, of course, of the other more practical reasons for this choice.
7. *The Way Home* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1971), p. 169. Hereafter cited in the text as *W.H.*
8. W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (London: Collins, 1975), p. 169.
9. Charles Feidelson, *Symbolism in American Literature*.
10. "But, those who had known and loved him passing, scattering, forgetting, rude weeds choked the flowers, the cross toppled over, fell to pieces and was removed, the ivy that entwined it uprooted." (*U.T.* pp. 278-9).
11. *The Hidden God* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 7.

MARGARET SCOTT

Peace and War

Peace was sunny summer afternoons.
The streets with names of earls and ancient towns,
Carnarvon, Limerick, Salisbury, Clarendon,
Were cool beneath the plane trees' heavy shade;
And somewhere, always calling distantly,
A boy tacked to and fro on a bicycle
And wove the sleeping shadows to the sun.

War was night and winter, fog and flame;
Waiting, peering, skipping along the queues,
Leaning in whining boredom against a skirt,
Watching the quick shove of the packaged smile
As the tired butchers carved a scrap more bone,
And walking home to tea on smashed brown leaves
With a little bit of snugness in the bag
To toast before the air-raid sirens cried.

In middle-age one walks with hands outstretched
To day and night, to cold and warmth, to child
And woman, balancing the need to mend the fire
Against the vision of the chair legs stuck
Like a crazy cross for order in the dawn
Above the smoking rubble of the street,
And wonders if a pack of bones can serve
To make a feast of sun-lit certainty.

ANDREW McDONALD

Terminus

All England's parched a desert brown
as we ride into London from the airport.
The green legend's quite overwhelmed:
gardens and vacant lots cluttered with coarse weeds,
debris, dead cars. In our tourist double-decker,
we pass above it all on flyovers, looking dully out
on the grimed blank slabs of council flats.
The view's shattered by a rattle of stones
on sheet metal: looking down, I see four boys,
bodies corkscrewed with their final wrenching of hurling;
and floating up serenely towards my window,
a wedge of concrete the size of a sandwich.

At Kew

On the opposite platform, a big-boned woman
turns her secret smile to the sun. The slow
peaceful thump and rasp of hammer and saw
pulse through the warm air. Kindly old folk
with pruning shears, baskets of roses, beam down
from life insurance hoardings. Walking to the Gardens
I pass two milkmen ambling in their horsedrawn dream.
In a tall shaded drawing-room, a harpist plays
Greensleeves—truly—I would not lie to you.
Nothing is invented, but the undying legend
of rural England, ignoring the flocks of jets
that drop howling on Heathrow. Yesterday I flew in
and saw it all, small, irreducible, silent.

London, Underground

Half an hour before his first day at school,
I hug my son to me, as we talk of the school's pets:
he's softer than any rabbit, older than a tortoise.
In the class-room, he quickly finds his own locker,
recognising his name; in two minutes,
he's wrapped in a plastic apron and red paint,
leaving me to slip away from a calm goodbye
that must stretch far beyond these snug horizons.
Outside, I lean against a splintered fence,
despairing over its roughness.

And today my father is sixty-one. He writes
from San Francisco, "Little news at this end, the days
dribble by"; he's down to his young-man's weight,
coddling his old heart. A daily trickle of letters
from Sydney bleeds the future to a white blank.

Running for the tube, I dodge past
my sixth cripple in two days, and slip
between the slamming doors. A dropped paper
headlines: "Handsome Andrew joins the jet set."
The train stalls in the tunnel between stations;
perhaps this will be the last stop of all, leaving me
stranded here forever between these broken legacies.

Horse-chestnut

The hands of long leaves, yellowed
at the edges, droop their weight of autumn,
dropping green quarters of split spiked pods,
chambers of soft pith darkening in the air.
On the path lies a slim packet, a month of
plastic bubbles popped empty through a slip of foil.
Waiting for me on the grass is this morning's fall,
smooth, glossy as the sleek flank of a horse,
glowing in the grey light, the fine skin veined
with contours marking their slow summer's
curved growth. The fibrous hearts blur
through silky navels, white pupils in brown eyes
clouding, seeking the earth. The gardener rakes daily;
all week swarms of boys have stripped the trees,
scoured the ground for globes of winter honey:
soon they will be shrivelled and skewered,
dangling from strings, dulled by battering.
A chill birth and no bed for these naked ones,
these spilt seeds of vegetable love.

SWEENEY REED

Touch in Bloom

To have loved you so far
but not to have touched you
is to have tried
and held myself back.
To have broken a silence
with silence
is to have heard you
asking me not to.
To have cried when you touched me
and not to have shown it
is to know that you tried
but held yourself back,
knowing I was asking
you not to.

BARBARA GILES

Sunday morning walking with my father

My father showed us trees,
bole, bark and branch,
the year in a leaf.

My father showed us plants,
bee fumbling the flower,
red berries for children.

My father showed us earth,
in the aggregate rocks
the beginnings of history.

He never spoke of people.
These we encountered later,
difficult of study, hard to classify.

MARIAN B. McLEOD

Audience and Argument in the Speeches of R. G. Menzies and Krishna Menon on the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956

The circumstances and events of the Suez Canal crisis in 1956 provided a significant rhetorical opportunity for spokesmen of the Commonwealth—one that brought forth two main themes, enunciated most clearly by Robert Menzies and Krishna Menon, whose speeches at the London Conference I shall examine to reveal their distinctive integrative rhetorical features, as well as to evaluate their merit as oratorical literature.

President Nasser's sudden and apparently unforeseen nationalization of the Suez Company on July 26, 1956, abruptly burst the calm complacency of those returning home from the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London at which, according to Prime Minister Sidney Holland of New Zealand, "there was no thought of this crisis developing".¹ The shock of Suez drew an angry denunciation from Anthony Eden, who viewed the matter as "a seizure of Western property", and declared that "a man with Colonel Nasser's record could not be allowed "to have his thumb on our windpipe", since the canal was "an international asset", and Britain's "essential interest must be safeguarded, if necessary, by military action. . . . Even if Her Majesty's Government had to act alone they could not stop short of using force to protect their position"; he rejected referral of the problem to the United Nations Security Council, for the "precedents were discouraging".²

Among the Commonwealth countries Eden's view of the Suez crisis seemed at the outset not to provoke serious disagreements. As the crisis developed, however, it was clear that there was no single unified Commonwealth point of view; different government views are discernible in the speeches of Menzies and Menon. These divergent views seem both rooted in and expressive of differing views of the Commonwealth itself.

The Australian reaction, led by Prime Minister Menzies, gave unequivocal, wholehearted support to the initial and subsequent British behaviour; support of British militancy made sense to Australians, who were accustomed to think of the Suez Canal as vital to their economic well-being. The Indian position, as enunciated by her principal spokesman, Krishna Menon, then Minister Without Portfolio, was as supportive of President Nasser as the Australian position was denunciatory. India was a canal user; thus, Menon's stance was to express concern equally for both sides in the dispute, and to stress the role of Third World nations in securing a rational, pragmatic settlement.

One of the early opportunities for expression of differing Commonwealth views was provided by the First London Conference, convened on August 16, and to which were invited the twenty-four principal canal users. Canada and

South Africa alone of the eight Commonwealth nations did not attend, since they did not qualify as users. By the time the conference opened, all the nations invited were in attendance except Greece and Egypt—the latter declined on the ground that no outside body had a right to discuss what she regarded as her internal concern, but she offered to convene a users' conference to guarantee free passage through the canal.³

When the London Conference closed a week later, two plans had been produced for internationalizing the canal: (1) the American plan, supported by Menzies, which recognized Egypt's right to nationalize the canal, created an international managerial body, and gave it "effective sanctions"; (2) the Indian plan, promulgated by Menon, which permitted the international body to function only in a consultative way with the controlling Egyptian authority.⁴ The American proposals were eventually approved by a majority of eighteen nations, which ultimately appointed a committee of five under the chairmanship of Menzies to present their plan to Nasser.

An examination of the conference speeches of both Menzies and Menon reveals their underlying assumptions, as well as their choice of speech materials designed to harmonize audience differences and secure acceptance of their proposals. The audience of nations gathered for the conference, while united in seeking continued free passage through the Suez Canal, were far from agreeing on any plan for this accomplishment; moreover, they did not all subscribe to Britain's view that Nasser's move was illegal and that the decisions of the conference should be imposed on him. Menzies, who was Eden's principal supporter at the conference, shared these views and agreed to the twin objectives of Anglo-French policy: international control of the canal and its enforcement by the withholding of transit dues from Egypt should she refuse to agree to such a plan.⁵

It was Eden's opinion that Anglo-French policies would receive the support of the Afro-Asian nations, whom he described as "alarmed that Nasser might be allowed to get away with his pillage".⁶ In fact, most of those nations fully supported Nasser's right to nationalize the canal and were apprehensive because convinced that the military preparations of Britain and France meant that they really intended a settlement by force rather than by negotiation. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru spoke for these countries when he said: "In Asia as a whole, with its colonial memories, great resentment has been aroused. Threats to settle this dispute or enforce their views in this matter by the display or use of force are the wrong way. It does not belong to this age and it is not dictated by reason".⁷

India's position was extremely important, for she was not only a member of the Commonwealth, but was friendly to Egypt and had been in close consultation with her prior to the London Conference. It was India's position, a conviction which she shared with Russia, that the conference could reach no final decision, since that required Egypt's agreement; like Russia, she felt that international control was unnecessary and that primary reliance should be placed on promises of fair behaviour by Egypt as a sovereign country.⁸

Thus, before the conference convened, basic differences were obvious between Britain and France on the one hand, and the majority of participants (including India and Russia) on the other. The United States occupied a position somewhat between the Anglo-French view that the crisis was mainly political and that a settlement by force should not be ruled out, and the Asian-Russian view that the crisis was chiefly economic and Egyptian sovereignty must be respected. Dulles was fully aware of these differences, but felt that the conference could at least be a means of gaining time for diplomacy, moderation, and reason.⁹

One of the principal addresses, because representative of the majority position, was Menzies' speech to the London Conference on August 18, 1956. As a delegate to the London Conference, Menzies had an opportunity not only to bridge the

gap between the United States and Britain, but also to seek to harmonize the aims of Asian nations with the views of the three powers. Since Commonwealth membership was shared by countries on both sides of the argument over legality and internationalization, it presumably could have served as the ground for establishing agreement between them. There was also the possibility that Menzies could have chosen to speak independently—to hear both sides and form a disinterested opinion. On this occasion, however, while Menzies does attempt to speak to both sides, he seems to combine the roles of advocate and arbiter, for he urges the adoption of the American proposals as the means of solving common problems.

Menzies' rhetorical task, then, included the necessity to restore unity between the United States and Britain as a step toward the fulfilment of his larger purpose of mobilizing conference support for international control of the canal. In the process he made some accommodation to Asian views to the extent that he waived questions of the legality of Nasser's action; however, Menzies would not relinquish tripartite insistence on the establishment of an international regime for canal management. His course was dictated as much by logic as by emotion, since a disagreement between Britain and the United States would obviously lessen the chances for success of their objectives. His decision was also influenced by the fact that both countries were indispensable to the conduct of Australian foreign policy.

Menzies would have found little difficulty in speaking for the American plan, for there were many points of similarity between American and Australian views. Both countries shared the primary, tangible concern for efficient operation of the canal. In the matter of the use of force, the American view was that force should not be used unless every possible alternative had been attempted. This was in keeping with Menzies' view that force, although a very real aspect of diplomacy, should nonetheless be a veiled threat, to be invoked when all other attempts at settlement had failed.¹⁰ America's colonialist reservations appear not to have been important to him. Eden had been susceptible to American pressure from the outset of the crisis; his wavering approach to the Suez problem no doubt made it easy for Menzies to support the specific proposals of Dulles, whom he described as "the man of the Conference, clear, eloquent, moderate but grave".¹¹

Menzies' support for Anglo-American views did not mean that India, Pakistan, and Ceylon were unimportant to him, for maintenance of friendly relations with those countries and other Asian nations was the third element in Australia's triangular foreign policy; however, the Commonwealth connection, which Menzies had on numerous instances cited as an important "third force" in the world, and he asserted which "must remain our first preoccupation", was apparently consigned on this occasion to a secondary position.¹² In overlooking Australia's Commonwealth associations in Asia at the time of the Suez crisis, Menzies gave the impression that the British aspects of the Commonwealth were more significant to him than its Asian elements.

No doubt Menzies' choice in this case was influenced to some extent by his view that the Commonwealth had been changed, not wholly for the better, by the admission of India as a republic in 1948: "in one stroke, the common allegiance to the Crown ceased to be the bond of union, and the 'British Commonwealth' became the 'Commonwealth'."¹³ In Menzies' view, such changes inevitably made it more difficult for Commonwealth prime ministers to arrive at any common view of events; unless the Commonwealth countries could present "constructive views to the world as representing a group of nations", their effectiveness as a "third force in the world" would be severely impaired.¹⁴

In addition to Menzies' regret over the passing of the old Commonwealth ties, his feelings toward India were further affected by his apparent personal dislike of

Krishna Menon, the Indian representative to the conference, and to a degree by a distaste for Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru himself.¹⁵ When Menzies learned that Krishna Menon would substitute for Nehru at the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London in 1956, he expressed his regret that "that dreadful man . . . Menon is going to be there"; his feelings toward Nehru were reported to be little better, having been derived from the unfavourable reactions that his former professor and mentor, Sir Owen Dixon, had to Nehru when Sir Owen served as United Nations mediator in the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan in 1950.¹⁶ Such items may be discounted as trivial, but they should be viewed in the light of Menzies' reservations, expressed at the time of India's independence, concerning the capacity of the new Indian state for self-government:

I have grave fears about the fate of the institution of self-government in a country which, quite obviously, has not reached the stage at which the majority of its people are, by education, outlook and training fit for self-government. . . . The action . . . may precipitate very great civil disorder in India.¹⁷

Nor would Menzies have felt sympathetic to Indian attempts during the 1950's to assert the role of the Third World: the neutralism of the uncommitted countries must have been anathema to his legal proclivities for disjunction. One must conclude that psychological, emotional, and logical factors impelled Menzies to support Anglo-American rather than Asian views at the conference, although he went at least part of the way to meet them. In Menzies' view, harmony was essential among Australian, American, and British views; this was the critical core of Australian foreign policy and other considerations, including the Commonwealth and Australia's Asian policies, took second place.

Within the limitations of Menzies' identification as a spokesman for the western powers and an advocate of the internationality of the canal, he sought strategies that would conciliate his audience and enable him to win their approval. He attempted to establish a relationship with his audience that revealed him as their colleague, trusted adviser, and fellow canal-user rather than as a legal expert or an avowedly nationalist spokesman, in which roles he had characteristically been seen. He attempted to show himself as a preserver of common economic interests rather than of national interests. Had he been too authoritarian he might have destroyed communication, for there were some who did not concede his authority.

Nevertheless, Menzies' speech is marked by individuality. For example, while he agreed with the general opinion of the conference in accepting the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, he made no concurrent affirmation of Nasser's legal right to take such action. In fact, in a brief *paralipsis* Menzies reserves his private opinion that nationalization was illegal:

For myself, I believe that the long-standing contract with the company, and its intimate association with the 1888 Convention, possessed an international quality which excluded it from nationalisation. But that does not matter for the purposes of the present debate. The deed has been done. . . .¹⁸

Thus, while Menzies professes to waive the issue of legality, he manages to insert material which not only implies his unfavourable estimation of Nasser, but also enhances his own ethos by suggesting that his disposition is to compromise rather than squabble over legal details.

Menzies does not neglect to employ emotional proof, although his use of it in the body of his speech is sparing. In the following passage, illustrative of his customary method in this speech of combining emotional appeals with a plea for

reason, he appeals to his audience's fears of the threat to their economic stability should the conference not solve the problem of the canal: "If the Conference fails,/then/quite plainly the harmony of the world will be left in jeopardy; and if the Conference succeeds then, as I hope to show in a few minutes, every nation in the world, including Egypt, will secure peaceful advantages."

The advantages that Menzies sets out in the body of the speech, when examined in the framework of the whole speech, are an essential part of the argumentative, enthymematic structure of the speech, for they connect the conclusion—that international controls (Dulles' plan) must be adopted—to the stated needs of freedom of passage and respect for "Egypt's legitimate territorial rights". Menzies encountered difficulty, however, in gaining Asian and Soviet support for the Dulles plan since it mandated the establishment of an international board of control. The Russian and Indian delegates envisioned a board which would have only an advisory function; therefore, since they did not agree with Menzies' definition of an international presence, they could not really accept his proposals. Menzies' statements about the board are brief and general: control, he says, "ought to be in one set of hands . . . the fingers of which represent a variety of nations with no dominant interest in the possession of any one nation". Perhaps with such generalities he hoped to gain wider support, but the creation of such a board, with its designated function of control, was the very thing which was the sticking point in the proposals. In the minds of some of Menzies' audience, colonialist exploitation was synonymous with such a controlling presence; Shepilov subsequently called Menzies' speech "an expression of colonialism in a somewhat modernised form".¹⁹

The speech also shows that Menzies uses elements of style so as to elicit the responses that will help him accomplish his purpose. One of the chief characteristics of his style in this speech is its conversational quality, which provides an impression of self-confidence, sincerity, and easy association with equals that could be helpful in countering any audience feeling that he intended to force through action at their own expense. The absence of legal terms and obscure expressions contributes to the simplicity of his style, as does his occasional use of such expressions as "In our own homely phrase, they amount to pushing something down Egypt's throat". His choice of language provided admirable clarification of his points, as in the following illustration:

I myself am rather attracted by the idea that the right method in terms of form would be for Egypt as the owner, as the landlord, to grant to the new authority a perpetual lease under which it would pay a rental adjusted from time to time as the business of the Canal grows. . . . Egypt would secure from this property a substantial, steady, and assured return.

Menzies frequently inserts important qualifying and modifying elements into his sentences so as to enhance the clarity of his speech; they are not confusing circumlocutions. His proclivity for qualification is a marked characteristic which no doubt derives from his legal training and seems designed to suggest his concern for accuracy and to attempt to counteract any impression that he is doctrinaire in his approach to the problem.

Examples of parallelism, an attribute which conduces to the impressiveness of the speech, are so numerous that only a few need be quoted: "Nations east of Suez and nations west of Suez"; "the advantages of an open canal or the disadvantages of an uncertain one". Another element of impressiveness, which is characteristic of both legal and eighteenth-century literary style, is the triadic expression of ideas, as in the following excerpts: "canal works, canal maintenance, and canal development".

On the whole, Menzies' speech is well conceived and exhibits many compositional excellences. The exigencies of the situation surrounding his speech on that occasion, however, made it nearly impossible for him to succeed; his failure to persuade the Asian and Soviet delegates should be attributed not to any weakness in form or manner, but to the impossibility of discovering any means of harmonizing the mutually exclusive aims of the two audiences.

The impelling need to find suitable ground for agreement led Krishna Menon to produce an alternative line of argument, including a plan which was compatible with Egyptian sovereignty and that he insisted had the virtue of being acceptable to Nasser, in contrast to the Dulles plan, which he correctly assessed as anathema to that country.²⁰

In brief, Menon's plan, which gained the support of Indonesia, Ceylon, and the Soviet Union, was designed to safeguard the interests of users by mandating compensation, providing for canal maintenance, guaranteeing non-discriminatory access, and providing for United Nations action should Egypt violate users' rights. Egypt's sovereignty would be guaranteed; she and her people would work the canal.

Analyzing the reasons for the failure of the Indian plan, Hugh Thomas, in his book, *Suez*, theorizes that Menon's authorship was the source of discord: "India who could have exercised an influence for compromise was unfortunately represented by Menon, who always maddened British Conservative politicians and who acted as Egypt's advocate."²¹

Menon himself felt that Dulles' double-dealing and temporizing was largely responsible for the failure of the conference to reach consensus:

It all turned on 1888: I think Dulles played a double game here; probably he talked about it one way to us and to the British differently. He was the person who actually killed the London Conference. We could have got an agreement in London if the United States played the role that she had to and did play afterwards, at the United Nations.²²

Apparently the crucial factor was Menon's *ethos*; there is some basis to assume that if someone other than Menon had presented his proposals, there would have been a greater chance of their success. Menon, like Menzies, had to remove or minimize unfavourable impressions of himself held by some of his audience. In Menon's case those perceptions arose partly from his frequent, intensely emotional condemnations of United States' economic penetration as neo-colonialism,²³ and partly from the fact that he was seen as a spokesman for Egypt, for he had remained in constant touch with Ali Sabry, Nasser's "observer" who was in London during the conference.

Menon sought to counter those impressions as inimical to the success of his proposals by identifying himself as sharing his audience's need for the economic security that an open canal would provide, and by assuming the role of mediator and colleague. Stressing the urgency of the situation, he reveals his good will to his audience when he pledges that his only concern is "to assist if we can in opening the way for a peaceful settlement. . . . Whatever contribution my Delegation makes in this matter is directed to that end."²⁴

Furthermore, Menon takes the role of conciliator when he declares that he has no wish to place blame: "So far as my delegation is concerned it is not our business at the present stage to enter into discussions of . . . rightness or wrongness. . . . We have to take . . . their leaders as they are." Such statements tend to create the impression that Menon is completely sincere in his efforts, thereby enlarging his capabilities as an arbitrator. The impression that he seeks conciliation not confrontation is reiterated throughout the speech and is effectively combined with his final moving appeal to his audience to act

not as parochial citizens of one country, or as parochial people in one part of the world, but with full responsibility and realisation of our obligations to the international community and our appreciation of the ways in which settlement can be reached. I plead with you to adopt the part of conciliation and not the part of dictation.

To offset any unfavourable impression that he is a special pleader for Nasser, Menon articulates a distinct Indian view. While he says that Egypt was within her rights in nationalizing the canal company, he points out:

My Government would like it to be stated that there are, in the manner in which the nationalisation was carried out, features which have led to the present aggravated situation. We would like to have seen that nationalisation carried out in the normal way of international expropriation, where there is adequate notice, and the way of taking over is less dramatic and does not lead to these consequences.

And later in the speech he reinforces the point in a more succinct way when he says, "We cannot speak for the Egyptian Government—we can only convey to this conference what is our understanding."

The sense of Menon's candor and individualism would also be promoted by the clear, straightforward way he states his basic assumptions to his audience. He says: "No final solutions . . . are possible without the participation of the country most concerned." These sentiments are repeated in various paraphrases throughout the speech and give thematic unity to his message.

Menon eschews the use of narrow legalistic grounds of settlement and asserts instead the need for practical common sense, thus seeming to underscore the impression of his own good sense, as in the following passage:

So we will not approach this problem from an academic or legalistic sense but with a full sense of the reality of its impact upon countries all over the world, particularly the countries of Asia, and so far as we are concerned, with understandable self-interest, our own.

On the whole, Menon's strategies in the use of *ethos* seem well designed to foster trust in him, thus facilitating communication. His efforts to establish the impression of his probity, sagacity, and good will are linked with appeals to the audience's desire for security and their fears of the economic ruin that would attend any interference with trade through the canal. When he presents India as a user nation who has the same concerns as other participants in the conference, he builds a strong emotional identification with his audience. Their fears are legitimate, he says, given the "context of tension and suspicion and fear . . . alarm that is felt in the minds of people about the grim prospect if failure of our efforts should eventuate".

But an important part of Menon's strategy of playing upon the audience's fear is to focus that fear not on Nasser, as untrustworthy, but to translate it into a fear of failure of the conference. Nasser, Menon says, must be taken at his word. Menon insists that Egypt would carry out her promises to honour user interests; however, he offers in support only Nasser's own assurances—evidence that would hardly be very effective with listeners who agreed with Britain that Nasser had wronged them and must be punished. Menon might have enhanced his persuasion had he been able to establish Nasser's probity and thus mitigate audience fears. Menon's appeals to economic security and common interests would have been extremely salient to all of his audience, but the forcefulness of those appeals was impaired when he claimed that Egypt must be given primary responsibility for safeguarding that security.

In developng rational strategies in his speech, Menon bases his arguments on the assumption that Egyptian sovereignty must be respected because, as he says, "the rulers of Egypt are really the only people who can guarantee freedom of navigation". Throughout the speech Menon reiterates the warning that Egypt would nver accept any derogation of her authority: "responsible public officials of Egypt will not be favourable and will not take kindly to the imposition of a regime that is not their own". Since Menon's assumptions were not shared by all of his audience, the strength of his arguments would thus be diminished. A more serious weakness, however, is that he does not successfully overcome his listeners' mistrust of Nasser. In this regard, his flat assertions of Egypt's reliability are insufficient. Since he eschews the role of apologist for Nasser, he might have employed more strategies of adjustment to audience concerns.

A feature of the argumentative strategies in Menon's speech is his use of refutation, which he combines with organizational techniques of elimination of residues. He demonstrates the impracticality and undesirability of Dulles' plan, arguing at length that India's proposals are feasible and ought to be acceptable since they are built on the common ground of mutual usership.

Menon's use of language shows both clarity and appropriateness. His style is not marked by any striking figures; however, his orderly presentation of points is noteworthy on account of his skilful use of rhetorical question and answer and authoritative transitions such as "thus" and "therefore", which impart a sense of command and direct address to his speech.

Menon employs numerous refutational strategies, but they are not couched in the language of acid invective and disdain so common in many of his speeches. There is deliberate restraint in his speech on this occasion, as when he remarks almost euphemistically on "precautionary military movements of a character which has created alarming reactions". And, at the end of the speech he makes a very understated reference to the adverse effect that the imposition of international control would have on Asian and African countries when he says:

But we are even more concerned, if I may say so, at the dreadful consequences which would in effect reverse the currents that have been set in motion in regard to the relations between the Western countries and peoples, including the peoples of Asia and Africa, during the last thirty or forty years.

In sum, Menon shows considerable ability to use speech materials that seem designed to enhance his personal credibility in the role of mediator. With the exception of his neglect to discover a means to overcome unfavourable audience reaction to Nasser, his methods seem well-chosen for his purpose, despite the fact that he was not successful in persuading his listeners to accept his proposals.

The presence of both Menzies and Menon on a common stage affords an opportunity for comparison. There are some observable similarities between the two speakers in their use of argument and adaptation to the audience. Both men represented the views of powerful and important segments of the audience; each was labelled a spokesman for another party. Hence, to a considerable extent each attempted to modify prevailing impressions of his *ethos* and to portray himself as a conciliator. While neither speaker used his customary methods of invective or biting sarcasm, Menon appears more controlled and restrained than Menzies, whose frequent forthright digressions in the form of *paralipsis* reveal a tinge of animosity that seems to belie his moderate stance. At the same time, Menzies' style is more interesting on account of his conversational tone and homely figures.

Both speakers present their proposals in general terms, but with clear articulation of basic assumptions and well-defined appeal to practicality and common sense that does not rest on argument from legal authority. It is in the matter of basic principles that the two speakers are most far apart; furthermore, neither

is diligent in seeking strategies of common middle ground, although each cites the necessity for accommodation and consensus.

Having examined the speeches of two equally capable men who represented different sides of the argument, it seems apt to conclude that there is a distinct set of rhetorical commonplaces available to the diplomatic speaker, and that these are derived primarily from the constraints and restraints of the speaking situation itself and the necessity for the speaker to discover means of communicating effectively with the audience in that situation.

NOTES:

1. Quoted in James Eayrs, *The Commonwealth and Suez: A Documentary Survey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 6.
2. Anthony Eden, *The Suez Crisis of 1956* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 51, 53-54 respectively.
3. Egyptian statement on the Anglo-French-United States statement of 2 August and the invitation to the London Conference, 12 August 1956, cited in Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Documents on International Affairs 1956* (New York: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1959), pp. 168-173. Hereinafter cited as *RIIA Documents*.
4. Full texts of both proposals in *The Suez Canal Conference (Selected Documents): London, August 2-24, 1956* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1956), pp. 5-7.
5. Eden, pp. 86-87.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
7. Text of speech by Nehru; in *Manchester Guardian*, 9 August 1956, p. 1.
8. *Manchester Guardian*, 15 August 1956, p. 5.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Robert Gordon Menzies, *Afternoon Light: Some Memories of Men and Events* (London: Cassell, 1960), pp. 165-66.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
12. Press conference in Ottawa, reported in *Manchester Guardian*, 27 July 1956; also Menzies, "The British Commonwealth of Nations in International Affairs", in *Speech is of time: Selected Speeches and Writings* (London: Cassell, 1958), p. 8.
13. Menzies, *Afternoon Light*, p. 188.
14. Press conference, cited in *Manchester Guardian*, 27 July 1956, p. 7.
15. Kevin Perkins, *Menzies: Last of the Queen's Men* (San Francisco: Tri-Ocean Press, 1968), p. 250.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*, 18th Parliament, 1st Session, 190 (19 March 1947), 855.
18. Menzies, "Speech of 18 August 1956, to the London Conference" (London: Australian News and Information Bureau, 1956). Subsequent quotations of the speech are from this text.
19. Text of a speech on 21 August 1956, in *RIIA Documents*, pp. 177-86.
20. Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 64.
21. Hugh Thomas, *Suez* (New York: Harper, 1966), p. 65.
22. Brecher, p. 64.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 311.
24. Krishna Menon, "Statement and Proposal at the 22-Power London Conference, 20 August 1956". Text in United States Department of State, *The Suez Canal Problem*, Documentary Publication 6392 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), pp. 159-178. Subsequent quotations of the speech are from this text.

GRAEME WILSON

TAO : BUDDHA : ZEN

THE USE OF NOTHINGNESS

Enfelly thirty staves, and there's a wheel;
But the worth of that wheel derives from its empty spaces.
Take clay and make a pot, the use of which
Derives from the emptiness that clay encases.
The walled space of a house gains yet more worth
When pierced with window-space and a gaping door.

Useful as are the things we know we use,
The use of nothingness is worth yet more.

Chinese: attributed to Lao Tzu (604–c. 535 B.C.)

TORCH

Those whom their passions drive, like those who race
Bearing a lighted torch against the wind,
Will find hot flame licked back into their face,
Their skin burnt black, their very flesh unskinned.

Chinese: Anonymous translator of the *Sutra in
Forty-two Sections* (c. 317–c. 380)

THE PRINCE OF HUAI-NAN

The Prince of Huai-nan proposed to live for ever.
He downed all sorts of potions, he studied breath-control.
Mad about books on magic, he learnt the whole lot backwards
As he dined from an ivory plate and supped from a lapis bowl.

With spoons of the purest jade in shining golden cauldrons
He stirred unearthly mixtures of muds and cinnabar.
He called up heavenly ladies to charm his purple chambers,
Bright-robed ladies summoned from some far-distant star.

Fingering pearl ear-drops, these insubstantial creatures
Danced and sang divinely at the instance of his art.
But, ah, their spirit-natures, their lack of solid substance:
For all their pretty preenings, they broke the Prince's heart.

Chinese: Pao Chao (414–466)

DIRGE FOR HENG CHIEN

The dew on the scallion-leaves,
how soon it dries;
Yet falls to shine again
at the sun's next rise.

But man, once gone, is gone:
when he dies, he dies.

Chinese: Anonymous
(written in 202 B.C.)

ABSURDITY

If, here and now, I'm happy,
It were indeed absurd
To worry, lest in some next life,
I prove an ant or bird.

Japanese: Otomo no Tabito (665–731)

THE FAST OF CHU CHUAN

For thirty aching years
you sat and stared at a wall,
Forgoing the sweets of this world
for a sweeter nothingness.
Sometimes you even laughed
at the bell's daft dinner-call:
To eat or not to eat,
how could it matter less?

Chinese: Po Chu-i (772–846)

DREAMS

How do we bring ourselves to think
Dreams are but dreams, to say
Only in sleep can dreams be seen?

Myself, I see no way
To think this momentary world
Less momentary than they.

Japanese: Mibu no Tadamine (860–920)

THE IDENTITY OF CONTRARIETIES

From this frail boat far out on a lotus lake
I fish. I fish for what? If you can make
Your heart perceive that all things are the same,
White black, yes no, your very name no name,
Then, all things being equal, do not whine
That you catch one where that man catches nine.

Let fools be hooked on numbers. It is more
That those who fish are thereby angled for.

Chinese: Yu Hsin (513–581)

AS FOR THIS WORLD

As for this world, it matters nothing.
That way, this way, more or less,
Mighty palace, dingy bothy:
All are shapes of nothingness.

Japanese: Semimaru (c. 940–c. 1000)

COLD MOUNTAIN

What road, you ask, will bring you to Cold Mountain.

There's no such road: no road which you could find
Beneath that ice whose glaze resists bright summer
And, under hottest suns, breeds only blind
Blankets of fog. Don't hope to find the way
By finding ways to match me on all fours.
Your heart and mine are nowise like each other.

Think. If they were, Cold Mountain would be yours.

Chinese: Han Shan (late 8th century)

DOCTRINE

The body's a mere lightning-flash,
a flicker quickly gone.
Spring brings on the vegetables
but autumn sees them die.
Pay no least attention
to the world's daft goings-on:
They disappear, like dewdrops,
in the flickering of an eye.

Vietnamese: Van Hanh (c. 940–1018)

THE UNCARVED BLOCK

To be, some day, re-born, all wood contains
Red-rooted fire quiescent at its core
Deny it as you may, the truth remains:
Flame burns more fierce the deeper you dare bore.

Vietnamese: Ngo Chan Luu (959–1011)

FOLLY

For the brief time of its being
Even a dream can be
Relied upon: but how deluded,
What a fool is he
Who lives his life believing real
This world's reality.

Japanese: Izumi Shikibu (979–1033)

SELVES

I've been, no doubt, both cow and horse
At different times along my way,
With all my being bent upon
Bundles of bean-stalks, hods of hay;
And, no doubt too, I've been a woman
Finding my needs fulfilled in men.

Indeed, if I am truly I,
Over and over and over again
The wheel of change must alter me:
But if, impassioned, one resists,
Pinning oneself by love or hate
To such fool things irrealists
Consider real, then one becomes,
Thus thing-enslaved, oneself a thing.

Things are not Self. The wise must wait
Through endless years of hoof and wing,
Through fur and fin and cloven flesh
For no-thing; for enlightening.

Chinese: Wang An-shih (1021-1086)

COMING CLEAR

The clouds are breaking up, the sky comes clear,
The river sweeps southwest in one smooth reach:
Mirk-tatters trailing from the overcast
Drag on the pebbles of that narrow beach.

Perched on a wall, some damp and angry magpie
Shakes out wet feathers as it scolds the sky
Where, grumbling still beyond the towers and roof-tiles,
The last dark heads of thunder lumber by.

As the oppression lifts, I feel I'm owed
Some compensating peace for foul times past
And search for dazzling words to celebrate
The world re-born, enlightenment at last.

Sharing with none the splendour of this evening,
This insight offered at the edge of night,
I lie in bed and stare at the Silver Torrent
Whose dazzling star-shine floods my soul with light.

Chinese: Chen Yu-yi (1090-1138)

SOULSCAPE

With what a depth of sadness
The moon's white splendour lies
On fields of withering grasses
Where the insect-cries
Weaken, weaken, weaken
As the light intensifies.

Japanese: Saigyō (1118-1190)

THE MEANING OF EXISTENCE

In the loneliest part of the mountain,
There I learnt at last
The meaning of existence. Listen,
Listen to the wind blow past.

Japanese: Fujiwara no Yoshitsune
(1169-1206)

FUTURE BUDDHA

When, by whatever means, it's understood
That nothing is ever born or ever dies,
Then Buddha, born to his last buddhahood,
Ends the long round of re-birth and demise.

Vietnamese: Tran Thai Tong (1218-1277)

MODALITIES OF DREAM

After ten years brothel-based
How solitary seem
This mountain, these wind-musiced pines,
Those cleanly clouds that stream
White, white, white for a thousand miles:
Yet all no less a dream.

Japanese: Priest Ikkyū (1394-1481)

AFTERWORLDS

Since life on earth must end, really I do not care
Where, at my death, my so-called spirit flows.
Wherever that may be, man will be alien there:
What difference, then, the name by which it goes?

Chinese: Tang Yin (1470–1523)

ZEN TEACHING

The bay was full of moving boats.
The master pointed. *Look at those.*
Can you, from here, he asked his pupil,
Stop those boats? His pupil rose
And drew the shutters. *Without hands,*
The master said in pleased surprise,
You'd not have done it. Almost smiling,
Thus, that pupil closed his eyes.

Japanese: Anonymous (14th century)

SECLUDED LAND

The river's breadth
 moats off the world's red smear
And the sounds of torrents
 drowns what the world would say.
Not even fishing-boats
 may anchor here
Lest, thereby linked,
 this land be drawn their way.

Korean: (Yang Paeng-son (1488–1545))

SELF DISCOVERY

She was wading near the temple
Catching crabs and water-shrimps,
When, head bent above his prayer-beads,
Looking up, he caught a glimpse
Of her wetly bending figure.

Whoomph! His holy mind went blank.
Prayer became a stuttered gabble
And his sacred papers sank,
Scattered on the winds, to perish
Soggy in the lotus-tank.

Beads a-dangle, robe a-flutter,
Hither and yon he flapped around
To find that girl, but still not knowing
What to do if she were found.

What a laugh! To see a scholar
Turned into a quarter-wit
By a glimpse of bending buttock
And the outline of a tit;
Flummoxed where his daftest novice
Knows the way and follows it.

Vietnamese: Anonymous (14th century)

BUDDHIST PRIEST

Neither a Chinese nor a Vietnamese
But something else of an outlandish kind,
Bald and in stitchless robes, he contemplates
Long rows of ricecake-offerings. His behind
Beams, as he bends, on some half-dozen nuns
Who, in the background, occupy his mind.

Every so often, with enormous effort,
He taps small bells, a timbrel, a flat gong.
At other times he hums, makes chanting noises
To save poor souls like us from going wrong.
Pray hard, my lads! You too might rise to plant
Proud buttocks on a lotus all life long.

Vietnamese: Ho Xuan Hong (late 18th century)

THE HUMAN CONDITION

Consider the lot of man:
This hugger-mugger mess
Of dream and irreality.

Virtue and wickedness,
All that a man can suffer,
Achieve, enjoy, forgo
Is but a dream within a dream,
An I within an O.

Yet, if we dwell in a dream-world,
How may a mannikin
Do better than to love that dream
His dream proceeds within?

Korean: Anonymous (16th century)

PRIEST OF THE MOUNTAIN TEMPLE

The priest of the mountain-temple
Was fond of bouncing ball,
But no-one in that temple
Had any toys at all
So he stuffed a cat in a paper bag
And, when he kicks it now,
Bam goes his foot on the paper bag
And the football goes *miaow*:
Bam, bam, bam, he kicks his ball,
Miaow, miaow, miaow.

Japanese: Anonymous children's song

TEMPLE

By the westwall gate in dawn-light
chill as a buttercup
I left for the temple. Showers
had cleansed the temple-stairs.
There was no-one there to meet me
as the clean red sun came up,
But the courtyard rang with voices
of the wind-bells at their prayers.

Chinese: Wang Shih-chen (1634-1711)

OFFERING

Violets and dandelions
Jumbled in my begging bowl,
These I offer to those Three
Times of Buddha which control
The past, today, all time to come
For the long safety of my soul.

Japanese: Priest Ryokan (1757-1831)

PERSONS WHO DIG THE GROUND

All those who stir
From earth's green sepulchre
Wake only to begin
Digging back in.

Japanese: Hagiwara Sakutaro
(1886-1942)

ANONYM SIX

Things like odour, things that exist
Now, but already cease to be:
Things that do not exist, like time,
Yet have real superfluity.

Things that cannot, come what may,
Ever be snagged on a brick wall:
Things that can't be given names,
Things, like light, innominable.

A horsefly in the flat
Light, its humming wings,
The intonation of things,
It is things like that,
Things that no tongue can utter
Are the heart of the matter.

Japanese: Tanikawa Sakutaro (b. 1931)

JOHN RYAN

An Interview with Kenneth Cook

An unscripted interview between Kenneth Cook and John Ryan, taped on Monday 17th January 1977, at the conclusion of a Summer Residential School held in Armidale on *Violence in Recent Australian Writing*. Kenneth Cook, novelist and scenario writer, and Bob Herbert, dramatist, were the writers in residence while John Ryan, of the Department of English, University of New England, was the Director.

Although violence was the theme, the following, the transcribed text of a video tape, may be seen as a general preview of the work of Kenneth Cook. Where the texts referred to may not be clear to the general reader, they are further defined in the end notes.

* * * *

JR: This interview is a sequel to the just completed seminar, *Violence in Recent Australian Writing*. Ken Cook who is here and is known to the public in various capacities, has agreed to summarize, free from the lecture-discussion situation, some of his views. It will, I hope, be an illuminating interview and much more succinct than our diffuse work of the last three days.

I thought, Ken, of starting you off with the question that you posed, or statement that you made as the title of one of your own talks two days ago, to which you have the short title, 'Never Go to University?'. Would you care to make some comments about the way in which your career has evolved and has of course influenced your writing.

KC: Yes, that remark is particularly flippant. It arises from a notion I have, or a situation I have observed. Anybody who has the capacity for writing—and that's only in the context of writing—I mean, doctors and solicitors and lawyers, all the tradespeople, should go to University—but the impression I have is that anybody with the quality which is possessed by a person who writes, shouldn't go near the places. It seems to be that something is ground out, dried up, faded away and not, just not, allowed to flower. Now, this could be totally wrong—maybe it is only true of the type of writing I am interested in.

JR: Yes. Now it is not necessary that we force you to go through your lecture or the long sub-title given before.

Could we perhaps move from that title to what it was you did after school?

KC: 'After School' is a funny phrase, because I went to Fort Street and was probably the most unsuccessful student in the history of that school. More or less being forcefully evicted, just on the ground of incompetence, a well-behaved boy but just totally incompetent, at roughly the level of what they used to call the Intermediate Certificate.

I simply wandered around, doing the usual bits and pieces, and, being totally unqualified for anything and singularly immature, very young and very lazy, I took up the only possible, suitable, permanent employment which of course is journalism, which hasn't changed in the twenty odd years. It still only requires those particular qualifications.

JR: And you actually went into this, when?—at the end of the second war period?

KC: No, I'm only forty-seven. It was well after the war, actually. I was fishing around, doing odd jobs. I went into the clerical bit and was a pathology technician's assistant in a hospital, and all that sort of thing. I was nineteen when I took up journalism, which must have been about 1946. Up here, by the way, I think it is up here, on the *Richmond River Express* (in Casino).

JR: I know you were originally reporting for a newspaper.

KC: Yes, I was fired from there after four months on the general ground of incompetence, and the fact that I didn't wear socks which seemed to upset the people of Casino. I gather they had a deputation because they couldn't stand the thought of a reporter wandering around without socks. Then I got various jobs. I worked for the O.U.P., went to the *Wollongong Mercury*. I graduated to the 'university' of Sydney newspapers, and worked with the *Daily Mirror*, all the really horrible things.

I imagine actually that it was at the *Mirror* in Sydney, where I first got some total inkling of how much I objected to the sensual violent quality in the Australian scene—which we are going to talk about later—when my editor wandered out to me and said to me,

'Hey, Cook, there's a bloke just had his balls ripped off in a motor-cycle accident. Go out and see how he feels about it.'

I was struck with the extraordinary insensitivity of the man, the paper, and the whole environment I was working in. But that's a bit premature.

JR: One question that I should perhaps have put before that. You say you were working in these rural newspapers, and, obviously, you could be doing almost everything in the reportage line. But what kinds of material, I mean, were you news, or . . . ?

KC: News. Oh, and after that, you can do anything. You sit down and write articles about this, that, and the other thing, which, if the editor happened to like them, he would print.

JR: One of your books, *Chain of Darkness*, makes it fairly clear that you do know something about the reporting of news from, well, several media points of view.

KC: Yes. Well I eventually went into the ABC which is the last refuge of the incompetent and stayed there for seven years or so before I became even too incompetent for them.

JR: Now we are obviously moving through the steps that were influential for you. It is often quoted, bewildering perhaps, and too much filled out for

the record, that you have made several hundred films. What sort were they, and when did you start doing this?

KC: Well, this is a lot later. You see, the great advantage of being a journalist is that you tend to go everywhere and see everything that is happening. So, out of the journalistic experience from the ABC came the subjects for the various novels I have written up to that point. I was with the ABC until I was twenty-nine or so—in that period, I actually wrote *Wake in Fright* and another novel 'Banish the Girl' which actually was published later. *Wake in Fright* was published¹ and quite successful and Penguin took it, after a general jump-around. It was then that I decided I had found my true vocation, so I resigned, and wandered around the world with my family.

But very smartly I discovered there was no money in serious writing, so I came back to Australia and took up film-making, and I made documentary films, and—oh, well—have more or less been doing it, on and off, ever since. We made about 400 and sold them to the ABC, in a very short period. They were mainly children's documentaries, scientific stuff, historical pieces and what have you.

JR: From this film-making strand in your life, it is quite clear that you derive this ability to see in frames, with montage effects. They were obviously working on you, subconsciously or consciously, over a long period of time.

One question that might be put to you at this stage is whether you were living in England since your own books were published there, or did the British publisher, Michael Joseph, seek you out in some way?

KC: They didn't seek me out. I gave my books to an agent in Australia and he sent them overseas. You see, then—which is now, what? . . . eighteen years ago—the whole prestige of writing and, indeed, the financial returns, lay in being published overseas. Of course, it's been completely reversed now. I have been fighting hard and managing to struggle back, and I am now first published, as my future works will be, for the time being, in Australia. Simply because it's much more profitable.

JR: Yes, I see.

KC: But no, I didn't really live in England. When I was 'living in England' I was really living in Spain more than I was there. The answer to the question is 'No'. I was published overseas simply because I sought the overseas market.

JR: Thank you. One aspect, of course, of that period is that quite a number of persons who have read your work and reviewed it in depth encountered it first in England, or in English editions. What was the early reaction, say in Australia, to *Wake in Fright*, soon after its original publication?

KC: It was surprisingly successful everywhere, *Wake in Fright*, in terms of critical acclaim. Quite astonishingly so, to my mind, because as far as I was concerned, I just sat down and wrote it in six weeks. Because I had in fact had a contract with a publisher, and I just cast my mind around for a story, being totally unaware, at that stage, of what I was about. I simply felt that I had in what is virtually simply a narrative incident, and would compose it with a certain amount of technique. I was just going to correct an illusion, to show it wasn't like that at all.

Broken Hill, which is what it's all about, had had, many years previously a tremendous emotional impact on me, as being the last place on

God's earth, and I realised that I had a tremendous emotional thing about it—and also a great deal of technical information about how people did go and shoot kangaroos, drink and carry on, and just casually I wrote it down, as it occurred to me. It was a very low key thing and I was very surprised at the critical acclaim it achieved.

JR: So this image which a lot of people have of their almost finding you through the film is a kind of latter day popularity, but the other acceptance was there all the time.

KC: Oh, that's the other, the 'critical' acclaim. You see the book probably sold no more than four or five thousand copies, although it went into Penguins, so it probably did do 20,000 copies, until the film came out. Then, of course, it just sold countless thousands of copies. Oh no, any 'popular' fame, and that's the word I want, any widespread fame I may possess, arises purely from the film.

JR: I know that you, perhaps, classify your works in a different way to some of us, your readers, but you have done some which are pure visuals. One is called *Money Menagerie*,² a little picture book, isn't it? And there's the one³ which the whole family did on a trip to Italy, which brings in the faces of the whole family. That is a composite, to some extent, isn't it?

KC: Yes, it is.

JR: I think you have said that you do popular writing, which in a sense is what yours is. Well, do you have two styles, or have you basically changed from the more popular to something different.

KC: Yes, it's two ways of writing, but it's not two styles, I don't think. It's two totally different attentions. You see, there's one level of work in which I find it very hard to actually say what I want to say. It's the level of writing I do take terribly seriously. I have all sorts of emotions that are totally subjective where I think the value and success in them relies upon my capacity to actually convey the truth, about which I get all strong minded and feel very definitely that one must try to convey—it's a funny word, you can't say reality, but truth is the best I can do on the labelling.

On the other hand as a professional writer, I mean one who writes to make money, I do, under necessity, write stuff purely to entertain, which I see as a perfectly desirable and good human function. But there're two levels of activity, entirely. I love being applauded for making people laugh, and I have done so curiously successfully, it appears in this latest thing I have done the *Eliza Fraser* book,⁴ which is a load of rubbish, but it's a readable piece of stuff for people to read in the toilet, or in the bath. People are entertained.

JR: Is it something of an accident, or, probably, your amused attitude to the past,⁵ that the fun books which have a certain element of bawdiness and rumbustiousness in them, are the historical ones? I was thinking here not only of *Eliza Fraser*, which is being widely read right now, but also of *Wanted Dead*,⁶ which is another one from Australia's colonial past.

KC: It's just a thing. There was a market at that time for bushranger books. I was broke. Sam Horwitz gave me £500. I wrote the thing in two weeks. I quite enjoyed it, and still quite enjoy that book. You know, I'm very fond of the Hornblower books, and that type of relaxing adventure writing. I don't do it a lot because I do feel that one's energy be reserved for what

one thinks as one's serious books. I might be quite wrong here. Perhaps the most valuable thing I could do would be to write light-hearted stuff that amuses people. I don't know, but that's not the way I'm working at the moment.

JR: And it's probably very pretentious to try to see some of your more moral dichotomies or distinctions in books which are at a lighter level. The central figure in *Wanted Dead*, for instance, is an innocent who, in some very simple way, is not unlike your other central characters but he is not possessed of so many dimensions or sensibilities. Would you agree?

KC: Yes, I do agree with you. You know, my total obsession is always this innocent. If you analyse it, it goes through everything I write even, funnily enough, *Eliza Fraser*. Although I deliberately distorted the main character to be my usual sort of vaguely amused person, bemused innocent, as the case may be. Now everyone generally takes the line that this is a matter or projecting oneself into a situation. I don't think it is, so much as virtually creating a (black) area around which the environment can have an impact.

I prefer to think that the general issue of the innocent is my theme, whereby I persuade the reader to take the place of the person to whom the thing is happening. If that is remotely coherent?

JR: Oh, yes. I think it is, and it's very helpful. Now, about the other books. Is it unfair to you, if I say that perhaps you have 'entertainments' and 'novels', in the Graham Greene sense, but that there is a distinction there?

KC: That is not unkind, in fact it is extraordinarily flattering.

JR: Right, well, that's perhaps for posterity to judge, or for us when you have finished the line.

What do you feel about the books? What are you doing in the ones that you hope will be taken seriously?

KC: Well, quite honestly—and I don't expect anyone to believe me in this, because it sounds so like a pose—I regard them as all codswallop in a common factor—except this last one (*The Man Underground*), which I have coming out shortly. I always regard my past work as utter rubbish, because I haven't begun, in my mind—No, that's quite genuine. The writing is immature and badly put together, and I can't read it, any of it—except, curiously enough, the light ones.

JR: Well, for you to hold these views is fair enough, but, before we come too far forward, how about your novel on Vietnam? It was, I think one of the earliest written by an Australian, and certainly one of the most serious, on that whole general dilemma.

KC: Mm. If I allowed myself to like one of my previous books, I would like that one, although it is just shot to pieces with faults. It is a series of polemical positions and the like, and it falls short of being a novel to a large extent, because of those pieces. But if this is justifiable, I don't know. You see, just how much of the stuff is creative, if you take yourself seriously, as all writers do, although they'd deny it at the drop of a hat?

You see, so much of that writing like—

JR: *The Wine of God's Anger?*⁷

KC: *The Wine of God's Anger, Stockade*,⁸ 'I'm damned if I know' (the television play)⁹—arises out of a tremendous sort of emotional reaction against particular circumstances. In that case, it was the Vietnam War, totally. And you do get carried away at the time, but when the emotion is gone—

JR: Yes, I understand.

KC: They seem a bit over-blown.

JR: Now the date of this?

KC: *The Wine of God's Anger*? Oh, it was seven or eight years ago. Yes, it's earlyish in my writing, though in terms of the Vietnam thing, it was at its height.

JR: But you would let it be said that it was early in terms of the rising Australian consciousness, shall we say, as opposed to the work of John Rowe,¹⁰ and others?

KC: Yes, that is so.

JR: Well, I suppose the next question is one you have grown accustomed to. The title of this seminar was 'Violence in Recent Australian Writing', and it is very clear that whatever one means by violence, this is a central area in almost all your work.

Would you like to either define it, or use it as a starting point for discussion?

KC: Well, if I were to try to condense all the discussion which went on during the seminar, it has to be considered, in the way in which we are talking about it as Evil. Violence is a neutral quality, in fact. The way in which we talk about it, the way in which it has come to be used in common language, is as an Evil, not an evil thing, but as Evil. That the wrongdoing is violence. Now, it may take a physical form, or a mental one or something other. And if I have got to define it, I would say—and particularly after the discussions which we have had on it—I would say that it is simply evil. This, of itself, introduces a whole philosophical ramification of good, evil, and whole existence.

JR: Now I imagine that most (Australian) novelists who discuss evil, even if they use it in a miasmic way, about a convict environment (e.g. in Hal Porter's *The Tilted Cross*),—will particularize this, so that one can see an actual evil person, in the way in which he treats others. I say this because some of the anticisms and critics of *Wake in Fright* seem to take the view that all the people whom the young schoolmaster meets in Broken Hill, are trying to give him something.

It's a leading question, but is it not fair to say that the book, *Wake in Fright*, and a number of others, for example, *Stormalong*,¹¹ have as a character an actual person who is demonic? In his manipulation of other people, and in his treatment of them as things?

KC: This is precisely so. In the case of *Wake in Fright* it was the 'doc' (Tydon) who was an Evil Man. They are all based on people I knew—they are all dead now, but the characterizations are totally libellous. He was just a very evil man. At that stage I wasn't prepared to say so, though. I simply recorded actions I had seen and dialogue that I had heard—and changed for the purpose of dramatic presentation, and to avoid libel situations.¹²

He is a hateful man, as distinct from an evil man in my eyes at that time. I'm still not sure that I am prepared to describe any man as Evil in fact.

JR: Not even the one who harpoons his imagined enemy in *Stormalong*, the brutal Harry Maine? the coldest character in your books?

KC: No.

JR: Because they are still human beings, and with freewill? In spite of what they do.

KC: Well, the whole issue becomes so complicated when you start to try and work out the whole notion of determinism, and people's own capacity, their will and conscious making of decisions.

JR: The limited decisions many of them can make?

KC: Yes, the limited decisions they can make, but having made that reservation, yes, they are evil men.

And again, that particular man in *Wake in Fright* is a man I observed; the man in *Stormalong*, a well-known character on the water-front, is a very evil-acting man. They go right through to the very much later works, as you find in the Damsterdam things—one is in *Blood House*, which came out a year or so ago. It is curiously successful. And there is again this figure of total evil. And in the last one,¹³ that coming out in April (1977) you have got the epitome of it, the totally evil man, the complete manipulator. I find it fascinating, but I don't understand these characters—utterly hateful.

JR: Now, this violence as a manifestation of evil, in some of the books, is quite clear, the action of one individual against another. In some of the pursuit-action books, for instance, *Stormalong*—although that is not exactly a 'pursuit' book—the society is not being indicated. Whereas, in one like *Chain of Darkness*, in which I think you have said you made a slight and vague indication as to what country it was, in order to avoid too much identification with events that were the source or the seedbed for the writing—Is it not fair to say of that book where there is a chase and then a manhunt, that, in a sense, many people are implicated and found out, if not indicated, that they are shown up for their own blood-thirsty natures, preying upon each other?

KC: That is a feeling I keep on getting constantly, which I was trying to illustrate in that book. It always seems to me that the work scene, or the criminal scene, or the social scene, do have a remarkable connecting strand to the guilt in a society. I know this is pretty obvious thinking about a society.

JR: —and it manifests itself in particular individuals? or in particular instances?

KC: It manifests itself in individuals but it resides in a society. You can home in on this which became so terribly obvious and which destroyed to a large extent any form of moral coherence in argument during the Vietnam war when you had society, this Australian society, for the first time being sheerly, unequivocally guilty, and nothing happened. Everyone was going around, living and all the normal things. You could, however, say, 'One of this society has gone off and murdered his wife, or a policeman. He is guilty. Chase him?'

Then the whole society goes out, in a curious mindless way, and drops bombs all over the place for no reason. The disparity of guilt becomes very confusing and very worrying.

JR: Well, there are certainly levels of guilt in the *Chain of Darkness* plot, the pursuit, the media, the ghoulish public. One can work back and back from the actual foreground, from the actors who then become watchers, as opposed to those who are nominally not participating, but who make most of the meaningful decisions, even if by default.

Is it fair to say that there is, as you see it in a society, in our society, a bystander group, a malign group, or is this just a basic strain in humanity?

KC: I don't know. But this is a great problem which is constantly exercising my poor little mind. You see, we can take things like *Wake in Fright*, and look, as I have in life, at these people operating. They are utterly and completely destructive to anything of goodness or responsibility under the sun. And yet they are completely innocent. It is a grotesque mindlessness which they evince in all their actions. They seem to be able to exist in this world without any concern for the horror which is lying all around them and to be happy.

But this sort of thing is not possible. That's the frightening thing. You actually seem to be going around, biting your fingernails down to the bone, and saying, 'My god, the world is falling apart, isn't it dreadful', and a bloke says, 'Have a beer, mate?' Christ, you just fall apart.

And it's not evil, at that level. Those people are at a different level from the Doc, say, who appears to be a much more mindful manipulator, penetrator and feeder on pain. These people don't feed on pain, they can't even taste the thing.

JR: The Vietnam book, unlike the others, is in fact much more concerned with a static situation, thinking, talking, no chase. Do you feel that that was an easy medium for you to work in?

KC: Well, it was really all—it was mainly a working out of my personal quarrel with the Catholic Church—that is what it was all about, this great thing. It got you where you are, as I was, a very formal Catholic, and then suddenly finding yourself on the side of and for the wrong people. The Catholic Church was madly sending the bombs to Vietnam. And you were suddenly finding this tremendous organization to which you had this very deep allegiance, had suddenly adopted the uniform of the other side.

That's what that was all about, the great argument there. Plus all the rest of it, the qualifications of horror, that they were actually going around killing people for insufficient reason.

JR: Certainly, your book points up the humanity of all the combatants and civilians, and the mutilation experienced by very ordinary and innocent people.

KC: Yes, it was killing people for insufficient reason. I have not reached the stage yet where I don't think you can kill people or shouldn't kill people, under some circumstances.

JR: Many of your plots, and situations, although they are completely distinct, can, in an analogical way, be put against some of the works of Graham Greene, particularly the development from action stories involving seedy characters to the more moral works concerned with greater or even cosmic

injustice towards the residents of the Third World. This is so, not least because of your experiences with the Catholic Church. You have been disillusioned, you have been handling contemporary violence, although your writing span is a later one than Greene's.

I'm thinking of the reportage element in both of you, and in the getting involved in the contemporary wars of both your times,—is that analogy a helpful comment for the general reader, without your emphasis or quality necessarily being compared with Greene? Does that help in trying to come to grips with your work?

I might also remark that you have felt yourself involved in a change in the use of prose and have referred to the changing style used by Graham Greene, Nigel Balchin, and Eric Ambler.

KC: You are very kind, but to compare me with Greene is perhaps excessive praise.

JR: Oh, as a stylist, an early student of cinema,¹⁴ as a user of the language and as a creator of the novel of pursuit.

KC: No, when you consider what he did with *The Quiet American*, and put it beside me what I attempted pitifully, with *The Wine of God's Anger*. Oh, no, I wouldn't mention my name in the same league as Greene. I might hope to achieve his level in thirty years' time. In fact I regard myself as the same sort of writer, at vastly different levels of competence.

NOTES:

1. *Wake in Fright* was published in London by Michael Joseph in 1961 and by Penguin Books (Australia) in 1967, 1971, etc.
2. *Money Menagerie*, issued by Pergamon Press, Australia, in 1970 is one which 'demonstrates visually the precise relationship between animal and human life in a limited field' (*op. cit.*, p. iii).
3. *A Letter to the Pope*, from a Sixteen Year Old Australian Schoolgirl, by Patrician Publications, in association with Alpha Books, 1969.
4. *Eliza Fraser*, Sun Books, 1976.
5. *Eliza Fraser* ends with this sentence, 'So we all sailed away into history, which naturally got the whole story wrong' (p. 175).
6. First published by Horwitz Publications in 1963. Gold Star paperbound edition, 1972.
7. *The Wine of God's Anger* (1968).
8. *Eureka Stockade* was first a musical play, then a film (Stockade), (1971), and released as a script, in 1975 in Penguin Australian Drama.
9. 'I'm Damned If I Know' was first staged on television in March 1972.
10. *Count Your Dead*, A Novel of Vietnam (1968).
11. *Stormalong*, a tale of the Sydney waterfront, was first published in 1963 in England by Michael Joseph, and re-issued by Gold Star in 1972.
12. *Chain of Darkness*, Michael Joseph (1962), and Penguin Books, 1971, etc. is similarly a work whose precise location, in Sydney, and the country around, is left deliberately vague, so that some have read it as being set in Florida.
13. i.e. *The Man Underground*, published by Macmillan Co.
14. See his early criticism, (1935-40) *Graham Greene on Film* edited by John Russell Taylor, Simon and Schuster (1972).

BOOKS

The Salvado Memoirs. Historical Memoirs of Australia and Particularly of the Benedictine Mission of New Norcia and of the Habits and Customs of the Australian Natives. By Dom Rosendo Salvado, O.S.B. Translated and Edited by E. J. Stormon, S.J., Perth, University of Western Australia Press, 1977. xx+300. \$13.95.

No one seriously doubts the reality of Bishop Rosendo Salvado's achievements: a suburban nomenclature committee has seen fit to decide upon his name for a projected residential area north of Perth; a statues commissioner of Tuy (a Galician province of Spain) made Salvado one of his local-son projects; and at least one guide at St. Paul's-Outside-the-Walls, in Rome, will describe the room where the Bishop died as the "Salvado Room". More significant, perhaps, is the extent to which his name has become synonymous with the Benedictine community he established at New Norcia, some eighty miles north of Perth. In its magnitude, architectural style(s?) and unexpectedness, New Norcia connotes both folly and heroism, those inevitably paradoxical aspects of the physical testimonies to spiritual faith which Christian missionaries have left behind them, especially in North Africa and Asia-Minor. It has become commonplace among West Australians to praise the eclectic and very uneven collection of religious artifacts held at New Norcia as priceless masterpieces (a conviction held most strongly by those who have not inspected them), and a parallel to this may be detected in the extent to which the buildings at New Norcia are used as an architectural metaphor for Salvado's personality—a romantic imagination expressing itself in tangible actions and measurable works of heroic proportions. There are, however, some remarkable works of art at New Norcia and, happily, it seems that we will soon be able to evaluate the reality of some of the Salvado myths against much more evidence than is presently accessible. Unlike the case of Matthew Gibney, an early Catholic Bishop of Perth whose spontaneous braving of

the fire at the Glenrowan pub (in order to offer religious succor to the bushrangers) has made him a *cameo* role in the productions of the Ned Kelly myth-makers company, there seems now to be a real chance that the nature and extent of Salvado's achievement will become available for both disinterested and enthusiastic evaluation. Inferences are to be made, at last, from *data* other than that which architects and builders have left behind, or which does no more than establish the demographic parameters of Catholicism in the New Norcia area.

At first sight the *Memoirs* seem to provide an inauspicious beginning: the brevity of the period they cover (only his earliest experiences in Australia) and the circumstances of their composition make them seem unlikely material from which to shape a paradigm of Salvado's achievements and personality. Written from memory, in Rome, during an enforced stay in Italy (1850-3), the *Memoirs* (*Memorie Storiche dell' Australia*) grew out of a rapidly composed *Memoria Storica* which accompanied Salvado's polemical justification of his friend, Father (later Bishop) Serra against the accusations of a Mr Butler, one of Bishop Brady's supporters in the stormy and litigious disputes which characterised the Catholic Church's early days in the Swan River Colony. The *Memoirs* themselves do nothing to establish their polemical origins, but their editor and translator, Fr Stormon, demonstrates how Salvado's *Diaries* provide an important context in which the *Memoirs* need to be interpreted. Moreover, the *Memoirs* were written in Italian by a man whose native tongue was Castilian Spanish, and, arguably, could have been substantively emended by Dom Mariano Falcinelli. Fr Stormon too easily describes all this as "a small problem of literary and linguistic interest", and although his decision in favour of Salvado's responsibility for the text is most plausible ("What seems to be decisive is that the book does not read like a patchwork: it has a unity of style, through which a clearly recognizable character, that of Salvado himself, is clearly visible"), the bibliographically inclined will not find sufficient evidence in this edition to accept or reject this conclusion.

Translation, of course, is a slippery business, but essential if Salvado's reputation is to be at least as well understood outside as it may be inside the Spanish Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, near Barcelona. Fr Stormon out-

lines the various translations, and attempted translations of the *Memoirs*, the very number of which attests to the intrinsic interest of the work. His role, however, is more than that of translator: he alters Salvado's arrangement of the parts and chapters of the work, preferring "readability" to the "logical order [of Salvado's] own time". An introductory chapter on Oceania ("devoid of value today") is omitted, as are an introduction and preface ("no longer relevant"). "On the other hand", continues Fr Stormon, "I have thrown into much higher relief the racy story of the Mission, and the rich and important study of native life and customs." A comparison of the *Memoria Storica* and the *Memoirs* suggests that the intended centre-piece of the later work was the history of the Mission and it is this principle which underlies the editor's rather drastic structural emendations. Less readily acceptable has been his decision to prune Salvado's occasional Polonius-like prolixity ("I have had sometimes to reduce his verbal exuberance, and to cut a straight path through the more elaborate convolutions of a few sentences"). Although one hundred folio pages of Salvado's endeavouring to be laconic ("Herewith what I have made it a point of honour to express with the soul of brevity") might prove indigestible, omissions can make impossible interpretations which clearly indicated textual re-organizations permit. For Fr Stormon, as for the earlier translators of the *Memoirs*, as well as for the present reader, it is Salvado's personality that compels, and a few stylistic lapses might not be as off-putting as Fr Stormon seems to fear.

The first part of the *Memoirs* concern "The Origin and Development of the Benedictine Mission to the Natives" at New Norcia, and narrate an attempt to establish "the great dream of a native civilized settlement, Christian but thoroughly indigenous (perhaps suggested by South American precedents)". The dream was never realized, for reasons which Salvado perhaps never understood, but Salvado's account of it is a compelling one. Part of his achievement is, of course, the documentation of a new world (although this is the more single-minded concern of Parts 2-4 of the *Memoirs*), and the precariousness of existence in that world gives the *Memoirs* the same kind of excitement that inheres in the diaries and journals of discoverers, and in frontier literature. It is not only the facts themselves that

compel, just as it is not only the observed phenomena of external nature that compels readers of Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne*; it is the mind and personality of the observer as well, the personality of the man to whom the brave new world *is* new.

It is no more than a truism to assert that Salvado was, above all, a missionary, and in one sense the paper on missionary needs that he was unable to present because of the premature ending of the First Vatican Council (of 1869-71) establishes (like the *Diaries*) an important context for the *Memoirs*. The events of his life were co-ordinated within a liturgical framework, and his grief and joy often found their proper expression in ritual. Some of his emotional responses are couched in mechanical conventionality ("The Prince of Darkness seemed anything but pleased, since before one had gone far one of the carriage-wheels broke, though all one suffered was little loss of time"). Yet next to such passages are to be found psychological testimonies to religious experiences which seem wholly convincing ("We were so deeply moved that as we emerged from the cell we were practically trembling"). It is a significant achievement of Salvado's narrative that, without didactic insistence, he can show a *Te Deum* to be a spontaneous and appropriate response to joy.

The humanity of Salvado is nowhere more attractive than in his disarmingly humorous and wry self-mocking. The *Memoirs* are discontinuously sprinkled with amusing details of Salvado's predicaments: seasick and seeking a place to sleep on deck he settles down on two large coils of rope: "I had scarcely got off to sleep when I felt the ropes being pulled and the next thing I knew I was upside down with my feet in the air. I stayed this way for some time, not knowing what had happened for the night was pitch-black. Finally I realized that the sailors had had to alter the sails and had pulled on the ropes without thinking twice about the recumbent shape there." Later, having no water and promising to eat whatever his native companion, Medemera, can cook, he finds himself confronted by the sight of damper being made from flour and spittle: "'Unhappy man', I said to myself. 'What a *cordon bleu* meal awaits you.' But [I had] given [my] word ..." Terrified that he might be destroyed by the beaks and claws of "a cloud of five or six thousand [parrots]", and disconcerted by specu-

lations that he might be a cannibal's victim, Salvado projects an image of himself as a comic victim: "I wore my usual monastic habit, but was in a very sorry shape indeed. My tunic reached only as far as my knees, and from there on was a thing of rags and tatters; my black trousers were patched with pieces of cloth and thread of all different colours; my socks, after I had darned them, looked fairly respectable, but my shoes—a good pair which I had bought in Italy—had parted company with the soles somewhere in the Australian bush, so that my toes were kissing Mother Earth. Add to that a beard which had been growing for three months, and which needed more than a touch of the comb, and a deep tan on my face and hands, close enough, for all intents and purposes, to the colour of the natives. Altogether I cut a comical and pitiful figure." But this image is evidence of an endearing and wholly sympathetic modesty. Salvado's physical and moral courage are beyond dispute, and many of his actions, such as his treks through hostile country and one-man concerts to raise money for the starving at New Norcia, are genuinely heroic, although his accounts of them are neither pompous nor vitiated by false modesty.

The remaining three parts of the *Memoirs* establish a context for the early history of the Mission and where most derivative, as in Parts 3 and 4, are least interesting. Even here, however, his emphases reflect his mind: the return to Australia of the Aborigine, Bennelong, is seen as at least the equal of Governor Hunter's arrival from England, and his errors concerning natural history demonstrate in a particularly concrete manner the attempts of a European sensibility and imagination to make sense of unfamiliar aspects of the environment. In an interesting Appendix (II), Ronald Berndt evaluates, especially, the ethnographical aspects of the *Memoirs* and the various ways in which Salvado's profound interest and concern for the Aborigines reveals itself. Like this Appendix, the Endnotes represent the work of men other than the editor (who scrupulously acknowledges his debts and indicates which notes are his own), and a certain stylistic eclecticism tends to jar. The gap between Berndt's primarily declarative and somewhat stolid prose and Geoffrey Bolton's livelier irreverences ("Captain Charles Fitzgerald ... a fair-minded but autocratic old salt") is sometimes

difficult to bridge. Aborigines, too, become Aboriginals.

The *Memoirs* are essentially miscellaneous, and reflect the broad spectrum of Salvado's interests. Fr Stormon's editing makes the history of the Mission the main concern of this volume, and properly so, although it is the history of a beginning only: the main story falls outside the time-scale of the *Memoirs*. Focussing attention upon the Mission tends to make this reader impatient with Parts 2-4 of this volume: why should the history of a beginning be surrounded by supplementary material of Chuzzlewittian length and complexity? Tentative answers are advanced in the critical apparatus, but not with any consistency. Part of the answer inheres in the *Memoirs* themselves: a fascinating but radically incomplete paradigm of Salvado and his works is presented, and we want it fleshed out. Fr Stormon's elegantly printed volume makes the *Memoirs* accessible and leads one to study them closely. Ironically, however, the principal result of such a scrutiny is an increasing awareness that the *Memoirs* don't tell enough of the story, and a suspicion that they don't tell it as well as the *Diaries* would. The *Memoirs* may be seen as a fascinating but preliminary document, depending for their full meaning on other documents. A heavy burden of responsibility falls upon Mr Russo, whose biography is so often referred to as to appear advertised, and upon all Salvado scholars, who must make his other writings available to the many frustrated students of this extraordinary missionary and humanist.

JOHN A. HAY

Poetry Regained?

In the Sun's Eye, Poems by Alan Alexander (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1977, \$3.25).

Does literature written in Western Australia have a flavour of its own? and if so, what is this flavour? Is it merely of local appeal or does it have something to offer which is more widely valuable? *In the Sun's Eye* raises these questions, for this is a first collection which I for one cannot imagine appearing anywhere else in Australia at the moment, given the

obvious talent and promise of the poet and the curiously old-fashioned quality of form and theme. Here is a poet in mid twentieth century Australia who begins his career invoking Yeats's words (which in fact gave the book its title) "Look up in the sun's eye", taking his turn with the poets of Ireland, "Wishing it well in metaphor" (p. 49). Insisting on his vision of the world in a poem dedicated to his students in his Creative Writing Class he sees the world as "this labyrinth of love" and calls for

Life-glad, creative gaiety
Where the lips move
Naming and renaming,
Human, royally human. (p. 42)

True, Vincent Buckley writes out of a similar vision, but in recent years seems to find it increasingly difficult to sustain. In any case, there was always a note of pain in his poetry, an awareness of an underlying terror, which is absent from Alexander's poems. Again, while Les Murray also delights in the physical world, there is a quality of Australian toughness and masculine garrulousness which is absent from Alexander's rather more fine, more delicately formed poems. Of the younger poets, Robert Adamson or Kris Hemensley, each in his different way in quest of transcendence, of an intuitive awareness of the mysteriousness, of things, would be at home in Alexander's world. But his loyalty to traditional forms, to the rhythms and cadences of the speaking as against the hallucinatory voice and to the accepted shapes of things set him apart from them. For him, it is still possible to rely on commonsense and to praise the way things are, and it is this quality of innocence which one recognizes from other West Australian literature, from the conviction which pervades the work of Randolph Stow and works like Mackenzie's *The Young Desire It*, for instance, that it is a good place in which to be a child, to Dorothy Hewett's rage at the innocence which she conceives to be her inheritance. Yet where these others present the innocence as somehow corrupt and corrupting, something which disables for existence in the adult world, Mr Alexander claims this as the poet's proper environment. Indeed, at first one is tempted to wonder whether this is Australian poetry but belongs rather to Ireland, not merely because the voice which speaks in the poems has the

cadence and intonation of an Irish accent but, more importantly, because at first the world it creates seems alien. But "Australian is not so much what a gum tree looks as what a gum tree means", as Ray Matthew remarked once, and gradually one begins to feel at home in the country of these poems and the self speaks to our experience, above all the experience of being in exile—some of his finest poems turn on this theme, the poem about the pioneer, Georgiana Molloy, "Nuytsia Floribunda", "Snow" about Osip Mandelstam, the Russian poet who died in exile in his own country under Stalin, "Bruno", about the Renaissance philosopher condemned to death for his philosophy, "Sonnet for C. Y. O'Connor", about the engineer who designed and carried through the scheme to bring water to the W.A. Goldfields whom time "had down / With the bludgeon of her slow-conceiving" (p. 18).

One begins also to recognise the very simplicity, the confidence, the large health of soul to which these poems testify as something once very important to us as a people with possibilities still before us. There is something very challenging about the poet who can celebrate friendship, the birth of a child, moments of suddenly surfacing perception when the natural world offers an epiphany as, for example, in "Bottlebrush" which begins:

The Albany bottlebrush has come in season
Chafing the glass world I live in, a world
Sweeping with rain towards the resurrection,
Brimming with smells and channel sounds
below
As moments of bush and water come and go.
(p. 44)

But is there not also something dangerously naive here also? Does not this poetry ignore that ineradicable evil which so many of the best writers today wrestle with within their own hearts as well as in the world about them? For my part, I would prefer to turn the question back upon the questioner, arguing that all art is necessarily selective and that it might also be said that many contemporary writers ignore what is also indisputable, an impulse towards belief in the goodness of things, and a proper pride in being human. True, this belief must be justified realistically, must not be accepted as a matter of mere wish-fulfilment. But the vision of *In the Sun's Eye* rises out of solid and substantial experience, a life fully and

honestly lived—bodied forth in the poems with which the book begins which take us back to boyhood in Ireland.

Looking back, I hear the crying of the gulls
Lifting from the sea, and the roar of life
Along the wind-sharpened road taking
Its time at the mountain's foot.

(Son of Mourne, p. 4)

This is very fine, and if this poet has had the privilege of a life still in tune with the earth, this is all the more reason why we should welcome him as he shares this experience with us. For despite the fashionable notion of art as a kind of disease, one can still welcome health when it appears and hope that it may be contagious.

Essentially, what I am arguing is that this poetry may be exemplary in the sense that it expresses the possibility that one may still live and write heroically, remaining in charge of one's life and one's world. Nor is this mere romanticism for in fact the poetry rests upon the evidence of the life. As "Ballad of a Country Boy" puts it, leaving Northern Ireland, caught up in strife and anger, was the price of "acquiring a speaking voice". Coming to Australia represents a kind of making of self which leads to the making of poetry. So imagination provides a metaphor of larger significance,

Saying yes to the terrified self
That the childhood stance might be undone,
Took the sea and the turn of the stranger's lips
Capsized in the stare of a different sun. (p. 6)

Where other poets remain precious, then, he speaks to a wider audience, echoing their experience, and the self-deprecatory tone with which he ends his poem, joking about himself and his sense of exile confirms this alliance: the poet is also a sociable person.

That being said, what can I add
Unless I recall the dog at home
Who, having sniffed a strange place out,
With one eye drowsed but the other wild,
Made three half-turns and sat down. (p. 6)

An easy domestication of the high romantic tradition of poet and Australian as outsider.

This is confessional poetry of a kind. But where poetry like Lowell's or Berryman's assumes an audience of high sophistication and higher tolerance to anguish, this speaks more widely, assuming that the world as well as the

self may be a centre of value. Where often in their case the heroism they celebrate is that of the non heroic, the defeated, the loveless, the rejected and the impotent, Mr Alexander is more positive—and consciously so. "Spaces", for instance, plays with traditional Waste Land images, bits of paper blown on the wind, a shabby waiting room and a weedy railway track leading to a cutting but instead of ruin, speaks of Love which arises from "my quick, my yielding centre" (p. 47).

At the very least, then, these poems remind us of what Australian poets may need to remember, that the poet today belongs not just to one but to several traditions, and that it is a loss for us all to insist on any kind of orthodoxy. Mr Alexander understands the tradition on which he draws, what he calls his inheritance, "Yeats, Joyce, distinguished others", Blake in particular looming large with his sense of the God who "only Acts and Is in existing beings and things" and his passion for minute particulars. Thus he, conceiving himself in Blakean terms:

Artist among men, another son
Troubled with space and carrying
A fiery mixture as he goes,
Speech with earth and sky in it
To sweeten others journeying. (p. 49)

Moreover, this poem, the title poem which is in effect his apology, suggests that he owes something also to his present environment, to the

... place of silences
Where certain sturdy roots have spread
and show a flowering at last:
Here, among adopted things,
Here, where I am, is space indeed. (p. 49)

His isolation and the comparative lack of literary politics and innocence of literary fashions directs the poet outwards to the world and to speak to a more general audience. Parochial this poetry may be, therefore, though in the best sense of the word meaning deriving from a particular place. But his release from the pressures of the cosmopolitan modernism which weighs so heavily elsewhere in Australia may be a gain for poetic humanity. Similarly, the old-fashioned concern with traditional forms and cadences makes his poems more, not less, available for the public reading now becoming so important for poetry in this country—and elsewhere. Indeed, the main weakness of these

poems on the printed page, the tendency to write long, involved, loosely punctuated sentences whose syntax seems somewhat confused, evaporates in the performance: the cadence becomes their form of syntax.

Western Australia then, is a place where it is possible to preserve one's poetic innocence. It is also—and this needs to be said—the place of the Fremantle Arts Centre which has published this book, the fourth in its series of W.A. writers. For not merely do the people at the Arts Centre, Ian Templeman and Terry Owen in particular, know how to publish a book that is economical as well as beautiful to look at—*In the Sun's Eye* is illustrated with drawings by Memnuna Vila-Bogdanich which are less illustrations than artistic responses to the poems—they also gather people of all kinds to the Centre not merely to talk and learn about but also to practise the arts, so that their publications and exhibitions grow out of a living climate of appreciation, the kind of climate in which poetry like Alan Alexander's may flourish.

While I do not want to argue for any kind of literary secessionist movement, it does seem to me nevertheless that this book represents a kind of poetry appropriate to Western Australia which is not, perhaps, entirely the same as the rest of Australia. Nevertheless, if the poetic possibilities of *In the Sun's Eye* are realized more widely it may be that Western Australia will figure as extensively on the map in psychic as in physical terms.

VERONICA BRADY

Three Gargoyle Poets

Lyndon Walker, *The Green Wheelbarrow* (Gargoyle 21, 1976); John Jenkins, *Blind Spot* (Gargoyle 23, 1977); Peter Annand, *Ducks and other poems* (Gargoyle 22, 1977).

Young poets are commonly advised to wait, to hang back on the first book, and there are those who'd say that a publishing venture like the Gargoyle series is catering to disaster. It raises the expectations of the poets it gets into print and maybe lowers—over a period—the expectations of its readership. It's a view worth thinking about, especially in a population as small as Australia's and at a time when pub-

lishing outlets are plentiful. On the other hand there are various routes to a state of excellence, and a poet isn't necessarily harmed by a bit of flattery. A sensible writer will probably see his appearance with the Gargoyle imprint not as a dream realized, but as the start of an extended labour by which, if he's lucky, he'll release himself from his fuzzy native material and emerge into power and clarity. The Gargoyle pamphlets are fine aids in this process. They are clean and unpretentious, allowing poet and readers an uncluttered view of the early serious work. Considered from this angle, each of these collections has something to recommend it.

All three poets are well under 30; Lyndon Walker and Peter Annand are already on their second books. Walker's voice is that of the sensitive pessimism that was one of the bequests of the preceding generation, though he updates it slightly with a touch of the late-hippy agrarian. His romanticism seems his own: he's not at this stage come under the influential vogue for mystical celebration now strong in American verse. If some of his poems are weak in construction almost all are valuable for one or several striking details. Here and there his conceits may be strained (what is it that makes poets put their less strong work near the front of a book—or is it merely that readers are unduly sceptical to start with?) but the shortcoming is probably in the language rather than the sensibility since the pure, the definitive notion takes only its origins from the imagination: it's finished—or finalized—by the poet's verbal power. And this increases with practice. So that lines that misfire may still hold promise of future success.

A couple of Walker's poems give the impression of having written themselves—not in the cliché parapsychological sense, but almost literally. There tends in these to be doubt about the intention and the piece lurches from line to line by verbal suggestion or (even less than that) by nothing but rhythm. Ending up lamely like one of these rivers that heads off the wrong way and eventually evaporates or loses itself in sand. It goes without saying that however libertarian—however extreme their commitment to indiscipline—poems lack conviction without some hidden guiding principle. The shorter the poem the more vital this coherence is. Lyrics can't depend for their appeal on the slow accumulation of minutiae which eventually come together as a persuasive world-

view. In his less good poems Walker is still writing out of a strong poetic emotion but he lacks any definite aim—a fact which can be tested by checking his first lines against their conclusions. By and large there is a firm initial statement (“Jesus I come in tight . . .”, “Thru the coudung and decaying forest . . .”) reflecting as it probably does the onset of the scribbling mood. But the spell sometimes breaks before we get through twenty lines. The “Virginal at a Party with Ezra Pound” in fact makes deliberate use of this tendency. It falls out of its emphatic initial line down through a confused and buoyant tumble, which in this case Walker halts with an exact, witty illustration.

... tonight i'm light
and stupid as i ever was, knowing
that showing what you feel
is like giving
a thief full knowledge
of everything you own and the hours
you will and won't be home.
But there is so much living in her i can't help.

There's a nice touch on the brake with the parahrime (own/home) and the first full stop. And the pop simplicity of that last line is a perfect counterpoise to its anxious predecessors. But this is only half way through the poem, and confusion peeps in again with a consequent loss of shape.

There are others of Walker's poems though that resent the illusion of having been thought up whole. The one immediately after “Virginal . . .” displays a contrary arrangement. “We Go to See the Exhibition of a Friend” has a somewhat scattered opening and for much of its length is a predictable gallery sketch. But it's enlivened and held by a humorous coda.

Another piece that's irreproachable from an organizational point of view is the 14-line “Transposition”. Frankly self-regarding (it's addressed to the ego in the mirror) it has a cleverness, a coolness, and hangs together in such a way as to suggest Walker's most effective when he can put on one side his bundle of emotions and scrutinize himself rationally. Where the sluggishness occurs it seems to derive from a too-close involvement; when he can be detached he gives himself room to pose, to develop his talent for rapid movement and surprise. This isn't to say of course that he should

stunt his emotions but in order to assume shape they have to have proper room. A poem is essentially a *dramatic* construction which doesn't thrive on stasis or too-prolonged thought. The poem “Flea” illustrates the fact. It's a warm and disabused monody on one (or two) legacies of a brief affair:

i've got you under my skin
there's no denying it
the other night i was undressing
and found you
in my underlove

in my room
you can hear the sound of a flea drop
and all the expectations like playful lovers
piling in on top

Again at the end this poem's a letdown—the guise is dropped for an inopportune emotionalism (at least, it can read that way)—but otherwise it could stand up to that other flea of Donne's.

It's not possible to suggest a future from a booklet of 21 poems, but if his more confident pieces are also his later, Walker has identified the importance of clarity and is moving in that direction. His title poem, while describing a personal incident, is presumably also a reference to Carlos Williams' lines: its method—if less total—has the benefit of Williams' sanction. In time Walker may feel he can rest in his images without attaching emotive or whimsical entails.

A poet's best writing is sometimes his least typical because its energy is generated by auto-criticism, either of style or character. Owen's work for example relies for its pungency only in part on the War—underlying that is an expression of contempt for the Owen whose horizons were blurred by pre-war England. The poems are an act of personal retribution: they're unfinished not only because of the physical conditions of their writing (some of them in fact were written away from the front) but because of the inchoate nature of anger. In one respect the poems are destructive of Owen's self.

In a less intense way the same thing is true of the first poem in John Jenkins' book. If it's among his best, perhaps that's because it's a criticism of what follows. Not that the other poems are lacking in interest. Some of them are the familiar objectivist cryptograms, in

which failing stamina and a lack of coherence take refuge in a kind of truncated muttering. But elsewhere the technique is careful and suggestive as in the short piece "View", where self-conscious coolness is poised delicately against lyricism, and instead of the usual closing of possibilities we're allowed to feel the mechanism is idling nicely and capable of lift-off.

Detachment is a feature of much of the work that's included here. One of the sources of Jennings' imagination appears to be film, and his visual effects are good: as when he refers to leaves "drifting like small fish among the trees" or a magazine beauty's "giant smile, all cover". It's the visual effect that's seductive; that it also produces distance may not always be desired or desirable, though this has every appearance of being cultivated. Take for instance the distinction in the opening line of "Three Slides":

You see the objects resting against ('touching') one another . . .

Here is an obvious dissociation from the least smirch of sentimentality, and the very deftness carries us along, so that we fail to notice how the parenthesis catches our attention away from the crucial "objects"—these are never defined though they form the subject of this first "slide". That, as it turns out, may be just Jenkins' points. He calls this section "Tentatively There" and comes as close in it to writing about nothing as perhaps it's possible to do.—The remark's without irony: Jenkins is concerned with—well, not exactly *nothing*—but an abstraction just this side of it:

Another object now. Milkily. You sense it, or imagine it, and
two brown hands, then, extend through the
milky air—touch
it—and rest upon thin ricepaper sheets, folding
them.

Ricepaper, for the time being, is as substantial as we get.

Unless this is a *poème-à-clef* and the key's disappeared, the poet is trying something equivalent to painterly abstraction. The attempt is interesting though doomed to unsuccess since word's can't be got to disembodied themselves easily, and finally, when they have, we're left with little more than unproductive symbols.

Hieroglyphics, sort of. The idea of 'objectifying' is novel and curious but its limitations become clear when we get to the final slide, and the conflict between abstraction and poetry's true interests slips out into the open. For the life in part 3 throws down Jenkins' assertion that "Nothing is happening" and is also a rebuttal of the two previous slides. Although the eye—the visual organ—maintains its efficient patrols ("lights of the city discharge like bright popguns", "The city is inter-sections, squares, parallels, cuboid blocks") it can't keep out the potent impression that assault the other senses. It remains pretty chill, and light and eyes are everywhere, but memory—and even emotion—are welling up into the cracks.

The weakness of this approach is that while the distance purports to be simply a matter of technique, it determines what the poem will recognize. Too much is excluded. An unsympathetic reader might argue that there's little capacity for feeling and that the point of view is egotistical: the poet exercises through his eyes a tyranny of feeling: he only recognizes objects that come within his vision and the mere act of seeing brings them under his control. According to this argument the 'objectivism' must seem a confidence trick: nothing exists in its own right and only the poet's placing of it is judged to be of interest.

But a less extreme and perhaps fairer assessment would take into account the *difficulties* of feeling. That one or two of Jenkins' poems fall back on the arcana of chopped lines and missed connections is true, but the question worth asking is What imposes such a stragem?

The answer in part was given by Walker earlier—"showing what you feel / is like giving / a thief full knowledge / of everything . . ." Styptic writing—writing which is clipped and cerebral and difficult to fathom—is more than likely evidence of a shy sensibility at war with itself and ill at ease with its audience. No doubt this isn't a permissible remark, but it seems on occasion we could guess at the emotional age of a poet simply on the grounds of how much he lets himself communicate. Not that any rule would stand up in such a tricky area. But given the kind of upbringing that most of us are saddled with, it takes time and practice before we can feel; and describing our feelings takes much longer. For some reason this is accepted

in everyday life but poets are thought to be exempt. The earliest published work of many well-known writers—Lowell would be one example, Dylan Thomas another—has kept so close to the ground it's almost impenetrable. Obscurity has its uses but more often than not as a retreat.

This could sound like a glib way of attacking some modernist poetry; but even if we take abstraction (for instance) on its own aesthetic tenets we might still come to the conclusion that it's *easier* than a poetry of feelings. It consciously limits itself from what is slippery and complicated.

If we test these notions against Jenkins' "Six Poems for the Television Generation" we find that only one of the six readily communicates itself, and that the obscurity of the others coincides significantly with certain technical traits: the short line, graceless movement, a number of high-level abstractions ("futurity", "densities", "relative realities") which tend to be polysyllabic, and the further use of quasi-painterly jargon ("clustered dots", "dimension", "surfaces").

All of this of course is there by design; Jenkins' concern is "the oblivion / of a landscape / without man"—an interesting topic. But how much more illuminating this concern is in the one supple verse that's jumped onto the page complete. The fact that it's amusing doesn't detract from its implications:

the foothills of Dakota
are in front of the fire
the fire is watching the television
the television is watching the toes
the toes tap the foothills
of Dakota.

When Jenkins digs down through his uncertainty and comes upon what Robin Skelton's called his "word-hoard" he shows himself to be a poet of imagination and wit:

hip Rose
our 'tea lady'
would always bring her
brim-lipped autumns in auburn cups
telling them one by one
and burning . . .
her mouth reigns there
from the open poems,
and so cool
to take a sip
and grow clearwater blooms
through her two bright eyes!

If in some of the other pieces a pre-selected style—selected out of nervousness—has forced and crabbed his responses, here he and his memory are firmly in the hot seat: they're pushing the verse along and the language is skipping for them.

This is also true of the poem mentioned first, the one that starts the book. "Read This!" is written in part in the adman's vernacular, about 150 lines, and though it breaks the basic rule that poets shouldn't write poems about poetry, it runs off with its subject merely on account of its brashness. It dishes out equal satire at the preciousness of closet verse ("celluloid cannot please this way. / Movies and TV are so crass . . . There is no 'special place' / For your own imagination there.") and the philistinism that neglects or merely uses art. One of the minor delights of the piece is its way with paragraph headings: "A Truly Distinguished Pleasure" (about the art of reading); "You're Great!" (a shameless address to the reader); and (naughtily) "There's a Lot going on under the Bonnet of Today's Poetry." The whole sequence is characterized by bold gesture and movement and apostrophe to the reader (still not exhausted despite its exhaustive use). All these are guarantors of vitality. The caricatures paraded are in each case just right—the necessary and sufficient. But the serious achievement of the poem is in terms of the language. Jenkins takes the various barbarous dialects of admass—the dialects of fraud ("Today's Poetry is / definitely for you. Today's Poets are about accurate design.")—to point up their crudeness while also turning them into instruments of self-revelation. There are so many strong passages it's hard to choose one to quote, but here's the start of the section "What It Takes":

Sure, I'm a businessman. And a tough one. I have
to be, with my responsibilities. You don't go to top management levels unless you have what it takes. And it takes what it's always taken: brains, toughness, the ability to make decisions; and something else that looks like luck but is more like horse-sense. You either have it or you don't. And I have it. Business is a fulltime activity with me, it's my ballgame. But that doesn't mean I don't know how to relax.
That's why I read poetry . . .

He might be damning himself but his vigour's also a comment on the literati; he has after all got poetry in its place. It's refreshing to come on a writer who's willing to side with business against its tormentors.

The prose fragment with which Jenkins' book finishes is also ambiguous in tone. It's studied writing, but an addition to our thinking about popular culture. The topic—"The Very Beautiful Women"—is suited to the narcissistic style, which holds detachment and sympathy in balance.

Annand's is sometimes a mechanistic sort of universe populated by fragments almost as much as flesh and blood. It's a place where sheep are "rods of amber wrapped in wool" and where again interest is more on the observer than the thing observed. In "Motorway" landscape is reduced to a canvas—"Starting at the top, / a very big sky ... the lights will hit on the yellow soon"—and the value of the physical world is diminished correspondingly. The canvas technique is used again in "Cadbury Castle", damaging an otherwise fine poem. Apart from being commonplace such as approach is too easy, it represents an insufficient engagement with its subject. At his best Annand displays a sure touch; his prevailing mode's ironic and the attention is constantly attracted back to the poet with the question Yes, now what use will he make of this? There's vitality in the poems but within a self-conscious framework: he's an intelligent poet and curious about his intelligence.

All this is out of phase with the ascendant Australian styles—especially with Australian pastoralism, where concern for ecology is well on the way to developing its appropriate aesthetic. This is illustrated in Walker's poem "Technology" based as it is on a wish for man's organicism and on a distrust of his passion for casual interference:

snakes were no problem;

At just the touch
of the chain saw
they flew apart.

For Annand the separation between man and environment is not only given, it's the source of some of his deepest emotions. By this he casts himself in the European mould: nature's otherness is valued, but because it's instructive.

Taken in itself—without the human component—its value is neutral.

So the Downs (the Wiltshire Downs) are "solid, intriguing shapes under lawn" where we—the men—walk, repelling other entities "like the wrong end of a magnet". A sunset prompts "an idea for a long series / of graphics, based on a rectangle / of lurex green" and in doing so is validated, though not without some gentle self-mockery on the poet's part. The mainstay of Annand's presentation of the non-human is what used to be called the pathetic fallacy: the attributing of qualities that only humans are known to possess. An owl slips through the dark,

the mouse-juice in its beak
feeding impatience;

fidgeting the set of bright talons;

wrapped in the scandalous legends
of generations of looking
incomparably lovely;

ready

to have your eyes out.

The influence behind the lines is unmistakable as Hughes', and Annand is writing here in a manner which has been used to great effect by the middle generation of English poets (a manner that's entered Australia with David Malouf's work).

Humour is one of the attractive qualities of *These Ducks*, a fact which reminds us, if we still need reminding, that the root of all art is in entertainment, and that poetry in the 20th century has come dangerously far from that premise. A genuinely funny writer—that's to say one whose jokes are serious—is worth any dozen of dour experimentalists (not that experiment is inevitably dour). Even when his jokes are intentionally doubtful (he says of a suicide "she had a point, / we didn't much care / for her") they bring Annand close to his reader. And laughter promotes such a complication of responses, being naturally schizoid.

Many of these poems have to do with the problem of limits—the inadequacy of friendships, the brevity of life, teleological doubt—none of which is inevitably depressing. This compound of interests has roughly the same status in Britain as vitalism in American writing, and taken sympathetically it enhances our

perceptions to an equal degree. When Annand writes of what's dead and buried at Cadbury or Birsay, the living gain stature from it. His "Elegy for an Orcadian Fisherman" is representative of this mode. It chiefly describes the recovery of a drowned man, and its defect, as often, is a slight morbidity; a dwelling on the grotesque. It enlists the submarine romanticism that is almost a genre of its own (think of the "Sea Graveyard", of Tennyson's kraken and Hardy's Titanic):

His skin seemed silver,
the water clear as amethyst, when we dived
and beat the crabs from his knuckles
and took him aboard . . .

But quite explicitly it's life in death we're dealing with; the divers find the fisherman on the ocean floor "walking his lobster lines", behind him his "pots silently bounding, like dogs". The abiding impression is the strangeness of it all, and the strangeness promotes our own self-awareness and the awareness of being human. We observe the recovery and are ourselves under the eye of another and alien species:

Astern, watching, stood seals.
Our only real
amphibians. Fey.

Perhaps feyness is our point of contact, the seals and ourselves being fugitives together.

There is a similar passage in "Five Poems of Absence" where Annand imagines a blue whale nudging the intercontinental cable as he phones his wife or girlfriend ("its search for . . . a

mate has led it far from its parish"). By its strangeness the imagined event distances the human relationship, but at the same time draws the humans nearer to each other and closer to the searching whale. The bathos (they go on "chatting through this most remarkable event") concedes our pettiness but perhaps lodges our vulnerability too.

The humour already mentioned derives in part from a dislike of too much protestation—Arthur's knights are very well so long as when they gallop from under their hill to reawaken Britain, they're seen to be "coughing and adjusting their belts". It's the tone of an urbane civilization whose tolerance is easily parodied but which ascribes genuine worth to the small details of existence. "Spring Soliloquy" says it nicely. Annand catalogues his day and puts himself on the mat:

didn't go to the zoo alone
though the polar bear cub
wouldn't be getting younger
but spent two pounds in the corner
music shop, your green money
virile as magnolia

did the week's washing-up
missed half of 'Dr Who'
cooked spaghetti

You have a talent, don't you
for wasting these things.

The conclusion's surprising—but isn't life after all the sum of these trivia; aren't they what's valuable?

LES HARROP

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Published by the Department of History, University of Western Australia

Distributed by University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, W.A. 6009

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