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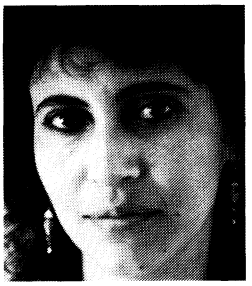

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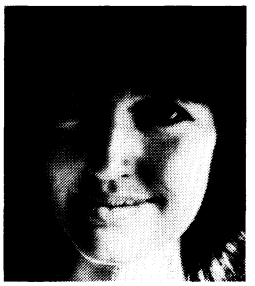

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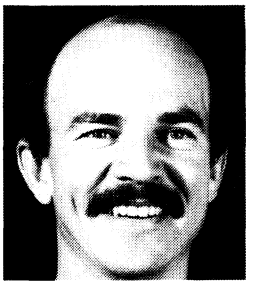

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Cover: John Forrest National Park I, 1987
(mixed media on paper, 83x105 cms) by Inta Goddard.

OBITUARY

Barry Andrews, Head of the English Department at the University College, Australian Defence Forces Academy, and immediate past-President of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature, died in Canberra on 16 May 1987 at the age of 44. Barry was a major figure, and a force for humanity, in Australian literary studies. He was co-author of the *Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* (1985) and the reference guide *Australian Literature to 1900* (1980). He was author of *Price Warung (William Astley)* (1976), edited Warung's stories, and wrote numerous articles and reviews in Australian studies. A memorial service for Barry Andrews was held at St Paul's Chapel, Duntroon, on 19 May 1987.

WESTERLY

a quarterly review

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Correspondence should be addressed to the Editors, *Westerly*, Department of English, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia 6009 (telephone 380 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 contributors — poems $20.00; prose pieces $50.00; reviews, articles, $40.00. 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.

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

Two *Westerly* Indexes, 1956-77 and 1978-83, are available at $8.00 from the above address.

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The Patricia Hackett prize for outstanding contributions to *Westerly* in 1986, has been jointly awarded by the Editors to the following:

Patrick Morgan for his article 'The Literature Of Gippsland' which appeared in *Westerly,* no. 1, March 1986.

Patricia Jacobs for her Stories from the Western Desert in *Westerly* no. 3, September 1986.

MICHAEL DUGAN

Shadow Boxer

In retrospect, I can remember no logical reasoning that decided me to go to the town. If asked at the time why I had gone, I probably would have replied that I was a poet in search of inspiration, or something of the kind.

A poet and editor called Ted had bought, absurdly cheaply, a run-down boarding house in a small town miles from anywhere. He had dreams of establishing it as a 'creativity centre' where writers and artists could live and work in harmony, free from the brutalities of modern everyday existence. In a basement he had set up a small printing press on which to print the little magazine he edited and 'the occasional slim volume'. All this he set out in a letter to his contributors in which he also invited them to come and stay, whether forever or a day.

At twenty-three, with two books — one a slim volume of verse — behind me, I already thought of myself very definitely as a writer with a confident future. I had not long given up the most recent of a series of jobs (work was easy to find at the end of the '60s) to devote myself to poetry. That was how I saw myself at the time, so it was not surprising that Ted's call found a receptive ear.

Overnight to Adelaide and a long drive north on an almost empty road brought me to spectacular hills and gorges and, eventually, to the flat, dusty, mountain-rimmed valley which was the unlikely setting for Ted's projected cultural renaissance.

Ted was spry, balding and in his early sixties, older than I had pictured him from his letters. He greeted me with enthusiasm and beer at the pub next door to his rooming house. Both the pub and Ted's place looked as if they had seen better days but they were both impressive buildings, their solid Victorian stonework defying neglect and age.

In the mid-afternoon the pub was empty save for a sleepy-eyed barman and a couple of Aborigines whose murmured conversation was drowned by Ted's rapid and eager exposition of his plans for his centre. As yet, there were only a few people living there, he explained, but they would form a nucleus and word was spreading. They lived communally in the sense that everyone ate together, contributed to buying food and helped with the house work but, outside these

reasonable limitations, each individual was absolutely free to work and live as one wished.

Our beers finished, he took me next door and introduced me to the other inhabitants. A middle-aged woman pressed on me her privately published volume of poems printed in purple ink on blue paper. After I had read a few of them I was always to think of her as the purple poet. Much of her time during the day was spent, inky and enthusiastic, in the basement helping Ted print the current issue of his magazine.

A young man from New Zealand, only a little of his face determinable through hair and beard, talked to me about performance poetry, dynamic poetry, the poet as 'conscience of our society, man; the only area of committed expression left, man; the only art form that hasn't yet sold out and which can therefore change the universe, man'. His small and painfully thin wife did most of the cooking and often looked bored.

The other 'creative' resident was a life-beaten, middle-aged artist heavily into rocks. Rocks, he said, were the symbolic form of our consciousness, and Ayer's Rock the central consciousness-point of the world. Or something along those lines — I often found it hard to follow his thought processes. He spent a lot of time in the hills that surrounded the wide valley, using reel after reel of film to photograph rocks. Once home, he would develop the film and hang the prints around the wall of his room where he sat long hours producing weird abstract drawings that were very evocative of rocks.

There were also two young men who weren't creative but were boarders in the ordinary way. One had the softest job I had heard of. He was night operator on the telephone exchange in a town where almost all of the population were in bed by eleven. Most nights he got between six and seven hours of paid sleep and, during the day, picked up extra money by driving tourists around the hills. The other was a bank clerk, recently transferred to the town. He thought everyone in the place was crazy and, after two weeks residence, was looking for less eccentric quarters.

That first night the creative group sat up very late, drinking white wine from flagons and talking eagerly of art and poetry. The second night we did the same. On the third, a local schoolteacher visited bringing with him a flagon and a sheaf of recently completed poems. The fourth night I went to the pub with the bank clerk.

By now I was familiar with the town which had been built late last century during a deceptive run of good seasons. Copper mining had kept it going at one time but the copper had long run out. Its main support now was a nearby quarry and the wildflower tourist season. The population, which had numbered two thousand in better times, was now less than six hundred.

They were a thirsty populace for the town still managed to support three pubs, of which the one next to us was considered the seediest.

'The Abos drink there,' the bank clerk explained. 'I hope you don't mind. I go there because all the street lights get turned off at ten-thirty and it's much easier to only have to come home next door.'

I told him I didn't mind at all, and was horrified when he told me that none of the other pubs would serve Aborigines.

'Isn't that illegal?' I asked.

'Dunno,' he replied, disinterestedly. 'It seems to work out all right.'

I had already learnt that Aborigines were very much second class citizens in the town. Many townspeople considered they should never have been granted citizenship at all. Not one Aboriginal family lived on the Adelaide side of the disused railway tracks. According to the owner of the shop where I bought tobacco, the only whites on the up side of the line were broken and alcoholic and 'no better than the Boongs'.

A dozen or so drinkers were gathered in the pub. A small group of Aboriginal men occupied the same corner where the two Aborigines had been drinking when I arrived. I wondered if some form of territorial boundary was observed. The white drinker nearest to the Aborigines was a thin, scraggy-necked old man who drank alone and maintained a continual flow of conversation with himself.

We joined a little group dominated by a fat and friendly German quarry worker who was exchanging stories with the pub's owner. Both were three-quarters drunk. Even drunker was the town's policeman who, I was told, often spent the night on the bar floor.

'You could burgle the whole town if there was anything to steal,' one of the group said, indicating the policeman, 'Still, it means you don't have to worry about closing time.' He also worked at the quarry. He explained to me that he always came to this pub because the other pubs expected you to put on a clean shirt after work. His singlet would not have satisfied any so fastidious a regulation.

I drank several beers and answered a number of questions about the inhabitants of the 'nut house' which was the local name for Ted's creativity centre. Then the door opened and three more Aborigines came in. Two quietly joined the group in the corner. The third, who looked about sixteen, crossed over to our group.

'You new, boss?' he asked me.

I was embarrassed. 'Been here four days,' I replied, 'and I'm not your boss.'

'No way,' he said, 'I'm the boss man.' He laughed and feinted a couple of punches at the fat German who also laughed, reached forward, and encircled the boy's shoulders with a huge, fleshy arm.

'You can punch, Garry,' he said. 'I can squeeze.'

He pretended to do so but the boy wriggled out of his grasp, briefly joined the group of other Aborigines, and returned with a beer in his hand.

'What are you doing here?' he asked me. 'You working here?'

I told him I was a writer and had come from Melbourne.

'Melbourne,' he said as if hearing the word for the first time. 'Why would you want to come here if you're from Melbourne?'

'Might find something to write about here,' I said self-consciously.

'Write about me,' he cried excitedly. 'I'm the best boxer all round this place. Beat anyone in the district. Tomorrow I'm going to Adelaide. Going to train with Jimmy Spice. He trains lots of young Aborigine boxers.'

'Come off it,' one of the drunkers muttered. 'We've heard it all before.'

'I am,' the boy almost shouted.

'Tomorrow?' the German asked.

'Well, soon. When I can get down there. Get a room to stay.'

The other drinkers lost interest. The boy drained his glass and I bought him another. Another Aborigine passed us on his way outside to the lavatory.

'Garry good boxer. Punch. Punch.' He almost fell over in an attempt at emulation.

'It's the only way you can make it if you're an Abo.,' Garry said, shadow boxing with his free arm. 'Like Lionel Rose. You see him beat Harada on television?'

As he drank he became more erratic in his speech, but at the same time more confident that he too would make it like Lionel Rose. He told me about the trainer who trained Aboriginal boxers in Adelaide, and about the people who had seen him fight and had urged him to train as a professional.

'I can drive you down sometime,' I found myself saying eventually. 'I've got friends in Adelaide. I could run you down one morning, go and visit them and then bring you back after you've had a try out.'

'Tomorrow,' he said, 'can we go tomorrow?'

'If you want to. We'll have to go early, though. Can you meet me next door at six?'

'I'll be there,' he eagerly assured me. 'It's my big chance.'

Two older Aboriginal men joined us.

'We're going,' one said in a voice that brooked no argument.

The boy explained that I was taking him to Adelaide in the morning. 'I can try out with Jimmy Spice,' he said, 'then come back here. Go back to Jimmy's later.'

'He's a good boxer,' one of the men said. 'Ought to try out.'

'Thanks for the offer, the other said to me. 'Not easy to get to Adelaide from here. Unless you've got a car.'

'I'll be there. Six o'clock,' Garry said confidently.

'You won't see him,' the fat German said when they'd gone. 'He won't front.'

He was prophetic. At six, hungover and cold, I climbed quietly down the stairs to Ted's front door and waited in the cool air and faint early sunshine. After half an hour of staring at the dusty street and watching the sun come up, I climbed the stairs back to my room and went gratefully back to sleep.

That night we had a poetry workshop. Ted, the New Zealander and his wife, the purple poet, the schoolteacher and myself. Ted and the purple poet read carefully constructed formal poems about the sea, the sky, the bush and wildflowers. The New Zealander chanted what seemed an interminable piece about mother-fucking governments and the Vietnam War. His wife listened listlessly and then read a gentle lyric about the sound of wind through bamboo grass.

'That's great,' the schoolteacher said enthusiastically. 'Could I make a copy to read to the kids?' His own poems were ballads, well-constructed but rather lacking in liveliness.

We discussed every poem, drank wine and talked generally until the New Zealander began a long harangue during which we drank wine and listened. His wife, I noticed, directed a number of interested glances towards the schoolteacher.

The following evening I returned to the pub with the bank clerk. Garry was there when we arrived and detached himself from the group of Aboriginal drinkers.

'How did the try go?' the German asked. I saw his wink, directed at the publican who was, if anything, more sloshed than he had been on my previous visit.

'I slept in,' the boy said, ignoring the German. 'When I woke I realised you must have left. I'm sorry.'

The publican made a throaty noise that could have been laughter, an indication of disbelief, or both.

'It doesn't matter,' I reassured. 'I was happy to go back to sleep myself.' It was only later that I remembered that he had known I was making the trip on his behalf.

'I can come next time you go down?' the boy half stated and half questioned.

'Sure. I'll let you know if I'm going.'

An Aboriginal youth of about twenty walked in and the boy joined him. After a while they began laughing and sparring with each other. This went on for some time, the other drinkers watching.

Both were quick and light on their bare feet but, even with my ignorance of boxing, I could see that Garry was the superior of the two. When they had finished their exhibition the German bought them each a beer.

'You really should go to Adelaide and try out,' he muttered to Garry.

'I will,' the boy said confidently, pointed to me. 'He's going to tell me next time he goes.' I nodded.

He began asking me questions about Melbourne. I tried to give him some idea of its size. About twice as big as Adelaide I explained, with more skyscrapers and a much wider sprawl of suburbs. I told him about the Stadium and Festival Hall, where the big fights were held, but didn't mention that my only visits to them had been to rock concerts.

'I'll fight there one day,' he exclaimed, punching at the air. 'I'll fight like Lionel Rose.'

A few days later Ted and the purple poet finished the printing of the latest issue of his magazine. Its twenty hand-set pages were printed in blue ink on heavy light-green paper, their elegance marred only by printing errors. Works by all of our little group, including the schoolteacher, comprised the bulk of the magazine's contents.

As I had done none of the printing work, I offered to drive down to Adelaide and deliver copies to the dozen or so bookshops and newsagents that carried the magazine. I also agreed to take copies of the purple poet's slim volume and a pamphlet by the New Zealander, *Poems against the universe,* to see if I could interest purchasers.

That evening I told Garry I was spending the next day in Adelaide and could give him a lift there and back.

'I'll be there this time,' he said. 'Wait for me if I'm a bit late.'

I had no intention of sitting and shivering in the cold inland morning again. 'I'll pick you up,' I told him, 'Where do you live?'

He described the house, in what I knew to be a shabby row of former mine workers' cottages. In the morning I had no difficulty locating it.

It was not as derelict in appearance as some of the others in the row, and some attempt had been made at maintaining a garden. Although there was no sign of life, the front door was wide open so that I had to reach inside the hallway to knock on the door. After knocking a second time a woman appeared in the hall, dragging a dressing gown around her.

'You want Garry?' she in the same half statement, half questioning tone the boy sometimes used. 'He said he had to go out.'

'He's travelling with me to Adelaide to try out with a boxing coach,' I explained.

'He said he had to go out,' she repeated.

'Are you his mother?' I asked.

'His auntie,' she replied.

'Do you know where he is? Did he want to be picked up from somewhere?'

She shrugged. 'He's not here. Must've slept some other place. Told me to tell you he had to go out.'

'Okay,' I said. 'Tell him I called.'

In Adelaide I followed the directions that Ted had prepared for me. Most of the booksellers received the magazine with little outward enthusiasm. The Methodist book shop took a few copies of the purple poet's volume; the university book shop took twenty copies of the New Zealander's pamphlet. 'The students buy this stuff,' the bookseller said in what sounded an incredulous tone. Sales of the poetry books in other shops were in quantities of two, one or none.

That evening the New Zeaander was gratified by the sale to the university book shop. 'That's communicating with the power-base of tomorrow,' he said. 'If you can get your message to the students, you get it to the world.'

To celebrate he drank a lot of red wine and opened a bottle of port, all the time alternately ranting and arguing over poetry, politics and publishing until he suddenly passed out. Ted and I helped his wife put him to bed. Later she came to my room saying she needed to talk to someone. She talked a lot and cried a lot and stayed until daylight woke her, when she rushed back to her still comatose husband in case he should wake and find himself alone.

Ted had obviously been observant. Later in the morning he took me aside and lectured me about how we must all trust and respect each other in the interest of harmonious survival. It was wrong to take advantage of a difficult situation between man and wife. As the initiative had not been mine, I found this unfair. I also felt it was no business of Ted's.

He had other complaints. He thought I was spending too many evenings in the pub instead of participating fully in the evening workshops and intellectual discussions of the centre. I felt angry with him, but managed to listen considerately to his advice.

That morning a bulky package arrived for me. It contained a fortnight's mail forwarded from Melbourne by my landlord. Among it was a letter from a publisher inviting me to contribute a title to a series of short educational books. I wrote back immediately, saying that I would phone them in the next few days to arrange an appointment. Then I showed Ted the letter and explained that I would have to return to Melbourne. In spite of our earlier conversation he seemed genuinely sorry that I was going.

'You will come back?' he queried.

I assured him that I would, although it would not be until I had finished the book as I would need access to a central library.

That evening I quite enjoyed the red wine and drinking and talk. The New Zealander was pale amd much quieter than usual. His wife, to my surprise, was comforting and affectionate towards him. Throughout the evening she and I exchanged little more than glances.

In the morning I left. Ted was the only one up to see me go, though the purple poet waved farewell from her window as I said goodbye to him.

As I drove from the town into the wide mountain-rimmed valley I saw a figure walking ahead of me, shadow boxing the air. I brought the car to a stop.

Garry looked up. Surprise became guilt as he saw who it was. He looked away.

'I'm going to Melbourne,' I said. 'Passing through Adelaide if you still want to go there. You could hitch-hike back.' I didn't refer to our previous arrangement.

'Can't go today,' he said. 'Have to do things. Can't go to Adelaide.'

'Have you ever been to Adelaide, to see the city?' I asked.

He shook his head. 'Not yet. Only been to Port Pirie.'

'Adelaide's a lot bigger,' I told him. 'It's a friendly sort of city, though. You'll find that when you get there.'

'Adelaide,' he said, as if playing with the word. 'I'll go to Adelaide. Not today. But I'll go there.' He glanced at me briefly then turned his head again.

'I'll see you sometime,' I said to the back of his head. I tooted the horn as I drove on.

Looking in the rear vision mirror I watched him for a few seconds; head down, punching at the air, short, fierce, angry jabs.

ERIC BEACH

there's no old men in jazz

some musos go electric
when we play it's a gas
you can't try to be eccentric
you only got what you has
are you living on th offbeat
taking it as it as?
yeah there's no old men, there's no old men
there's no old men in jazz

people drinking, smoking, talking,
chiyacking, it's a razz
people dancing think they're walking
it's an ease th music has
it's brilliantine & valentines
drape coat crepe shoes craze ass
yeah there's no old men, there's no old men
there's no old men in jazz

long blonde lady, forties movie,
genuine silver hip flask
cool man hot man lukewarm groovy
dig it bury it doodads
doodads doodads doodads doodads
mama mama mama be bad
yeah there's no old men, there's no old men
there's no old men in jazz

ERIC BEACH

in th 50's

th pubs were like forts
failed footballers (V.F.L.) showed team spirit
kicking a lone knife into a gutter, so that
a pre-war judge sent th soccer player to gaol
th line was drawn
down the middle of the street carlton/fitzroy
fitzroy/collingwood
both gangs playing cops & robbers respected this
dogs, dingoes & backdoor men trapped in alleys
stars flipping 2 UP, heads, tails
sinning sex becoming cabbages & babies
th raunch busting out into rock 'n roll
while cottagers tugged the forelock & went to work
or saluted & went to war
it was round & round like a record
at th P.T.A. fundraiser th chorus line hefted thighs
(y put on a stone for each baby)
a quid was quid, each way or on th nose
with gambling & sex, a cop's wages was pocket money
black & white T.V. & magazines with colour inserts
of horses, th royal family, or both
& in th boarding houses
th doors were busted in round th handles, lost keys
in th booze, working people shaken from th family
like pieces from hundreds of jig-saw puzzles
misfits, 2 legged bits of sky, searching the blues
& in th condemned houses
derroes, plonkoes & poets, painters living like rats
using their whiskers as brushes, putting it on th tab
in greek & italian cafes, where th room upstairs
was furnished with a girl, while downstairs money
withered in an endless game of cards
& mary rainbow collecting bottles down th back lane
with a pram

in th 60's

baby BOOM baby BOOM baby Boom housing commission towers shot up
th trendies began buying up houses round th parks
an aussie pizza ran to 4 quarters — futimania/familica homofiaone/ bambambino
artists still in th condemned houses, cops arriving with vacuum
cleaners looking for junk, a theatre in a pram factory declaring
the summer of th 18th doll by a stretch of th imagination, old blokes
guying caricatures, war heroes picking up glasses for a free drink
in th pub, streets became carparks, gangs onto footpaths wearing
black & white licences round their necks

it was speed novels chrystallised in 3 days in a floating world paint it black
th pubs opened up to electric music & th late night rage
people bought advice between divorces & came to an understanding
with god on long week-ends
vietnam on colour T.V.
& in th boarding house mister jones' heater had tipped onto his
floor & burned thru mister petrovik's ceiling, th doors were still
busted round th locks on cheque days, all th foreign labourers,
all th MEN ONLY
— can't even say that they're lonely

& old mary the bottle — O down th back lanes with her pram

in th 70's

One cop wanted to close down th pub because it was
'a haunt for working girls, tea-leaves & horis'
(prostitutes, petty thieves & maoris)
th other cop said they closed down th kitchen
& used th warm-up trays to sell buddha sticks

a poet lived out in th laundry & a crocodile lived in th fridge
fish on bicycles were everywhere writing bubbles
WAR IS MENSTRUATION ENVY
MARCHING GIRLS/ARISE NOW
'my italian friends' said gough to the crowd (mostly greek)
outside fitzroy town hall
IF VOTING COULD CHANGE ANYTHING IT'D BE ILLEGAL
said th graffiti

& th poet stuck GET OUT OF FITZROY TRENDY pamphlets under th doors
& got disowned by th anarchists, 2 art galleries became brothels in
brunswick street, rents rocketed, block bookings bussed, trained, taxi
-ed & drove down streets blockaded by th council, which established
a NUCLEAR FREE ZONE

& in th boarding house
busted locks, bench meals for 50 cents, round th corner at th little
sisters, jacko died in th park, danny said at least it was a warm
night

& th nameless woman with a pram full of bottles & her pet names for
th snails that have grown too big to slide out of th necks

FIONA PLACE

Waiting rooms; their tea cupped Kindness

Kindness was on the lips of tea cups;
that's how it felt,
like the waiting, the waiting for the doctor,
as though the waiting itself was comforting.

I used to think my waiting would exhaust and destroy him,
as though he would be conscious of its needs,
almost as though the waiting itself was wrong, selfish.

Then one day I learnt to joke about it.
Everyone was waiting that day, it was the morning meeting.
I told them the waiting itself was therapeutic, that the walls themselves radiated comfort, that it didn't matter if he never arrived.
And he didn't arrive that morning.
Nor did anyone to tell us.
But I made them see that the waiting had given us strength, it
may have given our self esteem a battering but we could also imagine
the shit we'd give him when we saw him next.
Providing it was the same doctor.
It was like the tea cups.
Any nurse could hand you a cup — but you had to forget that.
Forget the changing persona and cling onto the kindness of the cup.

But if you stretched the kindness and broke the cup,
it was the plastic vial and no more choices.
Not even waiting.

DIANE FAHEY

Lamplight

Glasshouses flash crystal, platinum-white, against green hills,
one warmly intruded upon by setting sun, as though it held
some radiant bloom which, opening into dusk, glowed with all
the day's spent energy.
Nearby, brown horses in a field, dense bodies
you would think impervious to light, haloed by an old gold
haze their eyes seem to offer, share, the mystery of . . . Hooves still,
or slow as shadows moving in lengthening grass.

I watched in late winter, watched the flickering through glass,
through brown transparent eye, of a thinning radiance, a deepening
sea-darkness. And my breath was a mist I looked through, and the horses'
breath a further mist through which the sun, upyielding,
sank its bright ghost.
Later, the driving home, darkness a settled thing
but for the streetlights — cold, distinct; counterpart of night —
with them no yielding, softening, as in the breath of lamplight
with its hazy edge: a buzzing corridor between brightness, void.

VERA NEWSOM

Untitled
(For Audrey Longbottom)

Now the music that is myself
beats less even, less securely.
This slow heart throb
moves with a quickened rhythm —
half a dozen tiny flutters
like a bird trapped against a window —
then the accustomed metronomic tick,
nothing ominous or hurried,
an engine built to last,
a long distance runner.

Or sitting in an armchair reading,
a sudden gasp, a breath inhaled.
Had I for a moment forgotten
the tedious task of breathing?
Or do I crave the deep intake of air
as when a girl running through a winter landscape
I felt the chill bite deep?
Only the sigh startled this body,
me, this figure, slumped in a chair,
aware of body's weight, gravity's drag.

Easy again, take up the book.
Do I need to look for metaphors?
This visible flesh is my metaphor:
the deep lines etched on the brow,
the integument of tiny wrinkles
round the eyes, the uncertain movement
of the hands — all speak more aptly
than a simile of withering leaves.
But these red bursts of energy that shake me
are like a crimson flare, blue bitter smoke,
autumn's burnt fuse.

SARAH DAY

Twilights

Each day, twice, light and dark are equal;
a mirror instant of stretched shadows and creeping prisms,
to which the inner eye gives lie
feeling heavily the contrast of dawn, dusk.

Following dark, light makes safeguards facile
for out of morning emerge explorers, priests.
But dusk gives birth to nestlings
and dark behind light awakens hobgoblins.

As a child, my grey homesickness rose like nausea
when suns sank on holidays
chilling through the sweat of rowdy street games with new friends
reminding me of what was too far away.

Today, solitude at dawn cools into loneliness
at evening.
The day's an arc of smaller seasons,
zenith spring plans, questioned, unresolved in autumn.

I think of earlier times
stoneage people skulking into caves
and one another's warmth at nightfall,
separating boldly, hunters at sunrise.

Have I inherited their caution?
A dweller of temperate zones
I envisage tropics assuaging deliberate lines between dark, light.
And I imagine arctic landscapes of perpetual pensiveness.

SARAH DAY

Slow Breaststroke

Mostly things seem remote through aqua
which is a comfort.

Underneath, frogkickers glide in slow motion.
On the surface the earnest count laps.

The screams of those who crash and play at the edge
carry as mute echoes

through air or water, it's difficult to tell,
there's only one element in this bubble,

blue. Nothing presses.
Thoughts drift. There is just the slow even stroke.

The surface is turbulent, the swimming pool crowded
but there's room enough;

we are like those amorphous jelly shapes in the sea
floating through one another

at once perspicuous and contained.
On land one is more covetous of space

and wary of obstacles.
From the air we are coloured baubles, just heads;

a sprouting of superflous limbs
that waver and motion, light-sensitive.

On the waterline, this slow even stroke,
the blue, those distant sounds.

RICHARD HARLAND

Gunther Frick : A Critical and Biographical Survey

It is a sad reflection on the state of the Australian literary scene that the works of Gunther Frick are still almost unknown here — and even where known are still unappreciated. There is a mental daring and ruthlessness about Frick, an unflinching acceptance of consequences, that no doubt makes him antipathetic to the safe and stodgy muddle-along spirit of Australian literature (if one can apply the term 'literature' at all to a practice so persistently inclined towards the middlebrow). As Martin Reid of the *New York Times* expressed it, in the first review to appear in the English-speaking world: "Frick bestrides our future like a Colossus, and for better or worse we have no choice but to pass under his enormous presence".

Frick was born in the small German town of Osingen, near Braunschweig, in 1947, the eldest son of respectable bourgeois parents, and putative heir to the family retail chain of delicatessen stores. From his earliest years he seems to have been an avid reader — but not for long an uncritical one. And, as we can see from comments in his early journals, his criticism was directed especially against the way in which artificial novelistic structures impose themselves upon the real data of experience. By the standards of this prodigious adolescent, even the most seemingly realistic novels turn out to be teleologically predetermined in their presentation of reality, and distorted by hidden principles of consistency, propriety, and relevance.

Frick's own attempt at a more accurate presentation is contained in the unfinished novel *Katherina Bloch,* recently unearthed and published in German. The title is not his own; he gave the book no title, and eventually dismissed it as a failure. But the 'failure' of *Katherina Bloch* is more significant than the 'success' of a thousand run-of-the-mill novels. For Frick here carried the method of pure impartial observation as far as it could go, recording entirely without preconception or selection. Every scene and every impression experienced by the novel's central character, Katherina, is taken down exactly as it occurs. Of course, we may smile at the picture which comes across in the correspondence of Frick's family and friends at this time: young Gunther with his pen forever at the ready, perpetually writing in his "grosses weisses Notizbuch", his big white notepad. But Frick was, as ever, in deadly earnest. When Katherina, in the novel's opening chapter, wakes up and reads the letter in which her husband

announces the end of their marriage and his own departure, it is clear that Frick himself woke up one morning and recorded his every reaction upon discovering and reading the selfsame letter (presumably left out on the bedside table the night before). The combination of violent anger and hysteria, the dry rustle of the notepaper and the sensation of wet tears — everything is captured fresh and new, at the very moment of perception. One might almost think that nobody before Frick had ever truly known the experience of being deserted.

Similarly with the chapters describing Katherina's attempts to start a new life in a nearby town. Frick makes the reader go through the actual physical and mental experience of walking a strange street at night, feeling aimless and frightened and vulnerable, being stared at by the cold hard eyes of male passers-by. He records the peculiar gait required for walking in high-heeled shoes, the warmth of nylon stockings, the difficulty of quickening one's stride when wearing a tight skirt. Everything is described directly as it occurs, with no sense of any imposed story-line or build-up towards a predetermined conclusion. Frick refuses to interfere with the natural flow of events. This is perhaps most clearly evident in Chapter 12, when Katherina is arrested for impersonating a woman, and spends the night in a small bare cell in the town's police station. The ensuing masturbation scene, in which Katherina discovers and becomes excited by her own male genital organs, is one of the most powerful in the whole book. (Predictably enough, it has been condemned in certain quarters for focussing needlessly upon the seamier side of life!)

Following this episode, the novel goes into a new phase. Katherina returns to her bedroom suffering from an identity crisis of metaphysical proportions. Ordinary reality can no longer be taken for granted. There is now a new kind of desperation in the observation and recording technique. It is as though things can not be trusted to stay in place unless they are being described in every detail and for every moment of their existence. Thus the description of Katherina's bedroom, which at the beginning of the novel occupied only a dozen paragraphs, now runs on for upward of 420 pages. In the hands of any other novelist, such infinite and repetitive precision might well seem merely tedious. But not with Frick. What could be more moving, more truly terrifying, than this increasing metaphysical panic of the observing and recording mind, as every detail of description opens up into a hundred thousand possibilities of more detailed description, as the things themselves keep leaking away in the gaps between one moment of description and the next? Indeed, there are several sections of missing text where Frick, evidently looking around the room too rapidly to spare a glance for pen and paper, has allowed his writing to stray right off the notepad and onto the table (v. Kurt Schaffenhausen's analysis of the original manuscript in 'Frick und sein erster Roman').

Inevitably, after about 250 pages, the scope of the observation and recording narrows in. At first, to the surface of the wooden table-top itself, to the most minute notches and whorls and flakes of varnish. Faster and faster Frick's sentences circle over these details, frantically trying to maintain their existence. But even this proves impossible; and the final stage of the novel arrives when observation and recording is reduced to the ultimate scene of Frick's own pen moving across the pages of his notepad. There is something almost heroic about this terminal attempt to keep words in contact with reality. Page after page

is filled with frenzied scribblings: "Der Kugelschreiber geht nach rechts . . . macht eine Schlaufe . . . nach unten . . . einen Punkt . . . geht noch einmal herum . . . nach links . . ." ("The pen goes to the right . . . makes a loop . . . goes down . . . a dot . . . round again . . . goes to the left . . ."). Needless to say, form and content are here so inextricable that no translation can possibly reproduce the impact of the German original. Yet even in German, it seems, the words never quite catch up with the reality that they seek to describe, and the last page that Frick wrote is virtually inarticulate: "unt li rech her li" ("dow lef righ rou lef").

It is at this point that the manuscript breaks off. No doubt the end was in any case inevitable. But, as Kurt Schafferhausen demonstrates in his monograph (op. cit.), the actual conclusion of the manuscript does not represent a final despair on Frick's part but, on the contrary, an unexpected affirmation of hope. For after the last uncompleted "li" is another word that Frick did not write, the watermark imprinted in the paper itself, the brand name of the manufacturer of Universal stationery. It is not hard to imagine the effect that the discovery of this watermark must have had upon Frick, who had been writing without intermission or sleep in a state of whirling delirium. After forty eight hours of focussing continuously upon a very minimum of reality, he came suddenly upon the wonderful word: 'Universal'. It is hardly surprising that he was overwhelmed completely by this 'Ausbruch von Draussen', this irruption-from-outside; hardly surprising that he immediately discarded his novel, left his parents' house, and took the first road out of Osingen.

Such was the origin of Frick's mystical period. Clearly he had become convinced that the whole world was a kind of text specially set out for him to read. There were secret messages and communications everywhere. He deduced his own personalized meanings from chance words glimpsed on folded newspapers and crumpled food wrappings, from graffitti and public notices and fragments of overheard conversation. Often he deduced meanings by spelling words backwards, or by means of puns. The place of manufacture stamped on a fork or teatowel or manhole cover could start him off travelling towards 'Hanover' or 'Switzerland' or 'AEG Industrielwerk Koln'. Then there were the Autobahn signs to 'Ulm 45 km' or 'Munchen 90 km', and the advertising posters that told him to 'Go Faster By Train' ('Schneller Fahren Mit Dem Zug') or to 'Come to the Sun, Come to Dalmatia' ('Komm und Erleb die Sonne, Komm nach Dalmatien'). We shall never know the full story of Frick's wanderings, the countless places that he visited, or at least set out towards; but there is no doubt that the apparently irrational pattern of his criss-cross back-and-forth movements was determined in every detail by the perpetual barrage of messages he was receiving.

Our limited evidence as to Frick's whereabouts at any specific time during this period comes from police records. He was gaoled in forty one towns and cities in Germany, as well as Vienna (twice), Nancy, Zurich, and a small village on the Yugoslavian coastline called Belkovac. Again, advertisements were often responsible. He would obey communications that told him to 'Phone Now on 427-288', or to 'Try the New Volvo', or to 'Taste the Goodness of Real Dairy Cream'. His behaviour on these occasions inevitably brought him into conflict with the forces of conventional society. So did his overly personal

interpretations of signs in shops and supermarkets, when, having followed the directive 'Enter' or 'This Way In', he then sought further directives in amongst the merchandise on the shelves, and was often found sifting through packets of tea that had told him to 'Open This End', or eating his way through jars of jam that had given him the clue 'Twist Top To Open'.

Nevertheless, it was probably only such accidents of interpretation that kept him alive at all. He seemed to have been incapable of recognizing the need for food in any ordinary way. His physical condition had no relevance for him. Degraded, humiliated, penniless, cold, wet, starving, with pavements to sleep on and rags for clothes — yet within his own mind he lived in a state of perpetual spiritual exaltation. Even a cigarette packet or a confectionary wrapper might bear words that could fill him with instant euphoria: 'Quality', 'Extra Special', 'Superfine'. Other words, fortunately far less common, could plunge him no less instantly into the depths of depression, such as the 'Expiry Date 9-11-67' which he once saw on the side of a carton of milk.

We know about the milk carton episode from Thomas Schussnigg, the gifted artist and homosexual who in his Journals later recorded what little Frick ever said about his mystical experiences. It was Schussnigg too who eventually saved the wanderer from almost certain death on the streets of Berlin. When Schussnigg found him, Frick was already unconscious and emaciated to the point of starvation, lying in front of a 'Stop' traffic-sign which had kept him halted and motionless for five days. It took all of Schussnigg's care and love and nursing to bring him through the ensuing two months of brain fever. By the time he recovered, the visionary mental state had burnt itself out, and the period of wandering was over.

Frick lived with Schussnigg for two years. He was introduced to the life of the great metropolis, cafes and parties, galleries and bars. There is a good deal of the influence of Schussnigg, and of the visual arts generally, in Frick's new theory of Immediatism, and in *Berlin Uberspann* (*Berlin Overload*), the new novel which he now immediately settled down to write.

The theory of Immediatism was born out of Frick's earlier experience with *Katherina Bloch,* the failure of which he had come to blame upon the limitations of ordinary language. Ordinary language, he now saw, could only ever describe from a distance, could only ever be *about* reality. It was with the aim of breaking down this distance that Frick proposed to develop extra-ordinary immediacies over and above ordinary language.

Of course, the new novel is much more than a mere illustration of Immediatist principles. Indeed Frick, though sole initiator and follower of the theory, always refused to be categorized as an Immediatist, and, in a famous letter to a friend, wrote scathingly of the "nervous ninnies who dare let literature into their minds only when it's been safely tagged and ticketed". Certainly, *Berlin Uberspann* is not for the faint of heart. Even today, the sheer physical impact of the work can make one catch one's breath. The task that Frick set himself was nothing less than to gather up an entire city's teeming multitudinous existence. The nominal narrative, concerning Hans Bender's search for a particular brand of salami remembered from his childhood, is no more than the thread, the clue to this labyrinth. As critic J.T. Brennermann has pointed out, the great female

womb of the city altogether dwarfs the male salami, which in fact exists only as an unrecoverable ideal in Bender's own mind.

It is the city itself, in all its sights and sounds and smells, that calls forth Frick's most dazzling feats of immediacy. Visual impressions are directly summoned up by the use of differently coloured printing inks: — pale yellow and mauve for an early morning walk through the Charlottenburg; red and black for heavy traffic on the Bismarckstrasse; bright blue and green for a pond and park scene in the Tiergarten; and dense white for an obscure episode in the smog of an as-yet-unlocated industrial suburb. Another technique is used to recreate the barrage of sounds so characteristic of city living: thus in the cafe scene on pages 538-40, the noise of passing cars ("zzzzzgrrrrbzzzzrrrmmmm"), the banging of doors ("datttt! datttt!"), the clatter of cutlery ("klekkk! niktinngg!") and the babble of separate conversations are all printed simultaneously one word on top of another. Reading such passages, one realizes just how inadequate to modern urban experience the old-fashioned linear narrative has become.

Even more striking is the 'impasting' technique used to evoke olfactory impressions. Indeed, one can scarcely speak of evocation at all, so immediately are the impressions there before us as we read. Dust, tar, refuse, car-oil, dog-excrement: for a thousand separate streets, squares and alleys, Frick pastes a finely proportioned blend of ingredients over the relevant page or portion of page. Especially vivid are the shops that Bender visits: — a patisserie is captured with a sweet combination of pastry, ham, and cream; a fruit shop gives forth a rich tang of vegetable pulp; and the many delicatessens where Bender searches for his salami literally rise up off the page with all the authenticity of foodstuffs purchased from the actual Berlin originals of the shops under description.

The 'impasting' technique creates tactile impressions too, as when Bender leans against a wall in the Bahnhof Westkreuz, and the reader, turning the page (p.484), feels the touch of the sandpapery layer of brickdust with which the page has been coated. Or again, when Bender brushes against a parked car in the Lindenplatz, and the page (p.49) is lacquered and polished to a smooth hard gloss. Most famous of all, of course, is the small metal weight that drops out of the book on page 989, striking the reader on the thighs and knees in direct recreation of the blow that a runaway supermarket trolley inflicts on Bender at just this point in the narrative. But this is an extreme case, and its very notoriety often works against it, to the extent that a pre-warned reader tends to shirk genuine pain. More typical, and more subtle, are the snippets of worsted, denim and knitted wool which, attached patchwork-like to pages 791-3, enable the reader to feel on the page the actual sensations of a jostling trip in an overcrowded bus from Templehof to Schoneberg. Judging by the hastily-cut appearance of the snippets, one may guess that many honest unimaginative Berlin citizens made their own contribution, albeit unwittingly, to one of the most exciting avant-garde works of the century!

Alas, that the ordinary reader is no longer permitted to touch the pages of *Berlin Uberspann.* In 1978 the single copy of the novel was acquired by the Berlin Kunstgewebermuseum, where it is now exhibited in a glass case and turned over at the rate of one page a day. Electric fans and ducts convey small measured whiffs of the original text to a suitably impressed audience, consisting,

more often than not, of university students and parties of schoolchildren. The fate of *Berlin Uberspann* is indeed a paradigm of the way in which bourgeois society assimilates a revolutionary work of art by converting it into a fixed and static monument, a literary classic. What could be further from Immediatism than this pre-digestion of experience into regulated daily portions? This prudent sampling from a safe distance? This sanitary enveloping cloud of dutiful respect and awe? What could be further from the living growing organic richness of the novel that Frick created (especially along the Westhafenkanal and around the Siemenstrasse-Bremerstrasse intersection)? Such are the buffooneries perpetrated by our cultural custodians. Already it has been decided that the electric fans should be switched off over certain pages, on the grounds that the odour of 18 year old salami is not suitable for the nostrils of young schoolchildren!

Perhaps Frick had a presentiment as to the eventual fate of *Berlin Uberspann.* Restless as ever, he underwent a crisis of self-doubt and turned his back upon the novel almost as soon as he had finished it. As he wrote in a farewell note to Schussnigg — upon whom he also turned his back — he no longer had faith in the principles of Immediatism. Immediatism, he now declared, was just another realism, just another attempt to offer the reader direct access into a reality existing beyond the novel. And how could one believe in such a reality, when realism itself had never been anything more than a novelistic convention, a particular literary genre established during the 19th Century? Frick here grasped the inescapably conventional nature of all art. The novelist's only answer, as he now saw it, must be to turn the conventions back upon themselves, to show them up for what they are. Such is the principle that carries Frick forward into the novels of his post-naive period.

Compared to *Berlin Uberspann,* the five *Buddenbrooks* novels that Frick 're-presented' over the next five years deliberately hark back to the traditional form of the novel. This can be seen already in the first of the series, *Buddenbrooks* (1972), described by Frick as a 'novel trouvé'. It becomes increasingly obvious with *Buddenbrooks* (1973), *Buddenbrooks* (1974), *Buddenbrooks* (1975), and finally, *Buddenbrooks* (1976). Needless to say, every one of these *Buddenbrooks* recreates the exact characteristics appropriate to an early 20th Century literary classic. But this 'literary classic' is now in quotation marks, as it were, and very much aware of its own existence as a novel. As each successive *Buddenbrooks* re-presents the previous *Buddenbrooks*, the reader is lifted further and further away from the ordinary reality-oriented mode of reading. By the second or at least the third repetition it becomes almost impossible to take any further interest in Tony, Christian, Hanno and Thomas Buddenbrook. The illusion of looking out of a window onto a world disappears, and the reader finds him (or her) self reading words simply *as* words, in their own true opacity on the page. The constitutive conventions have been stripped away to reveal the sheer physical printed presence of the text itself.

Denying the reader his (or her) traditional escape into a reality created *through* the novel, Frick compels him (or her) to a recognition of the reality extending *around* the novel, the contemporary socio-cultural context within which the book exists as a material object. Here it is important to observe that although the text remains the same from *Buddenbrooks* to *Buddenbrooks,* the

particular time and place of re-presentation differs significantly. We know for a fact that Frick travelled widely and immersed himself deeply in the moods of many cities before deciding to release a further issue of the work. Each *Buddenbrooks* thus becomes a challenge, a confrontation with a specific social context. The first *Buddenbrooks,* for instance, was issued in Paris at the time of a ten weeks old bakers' strike, and the reader can hardly help but ponder the question: what does it mean to produce an eight hundred page 'literary classic' when three million people are living without bread? Similarly with the second *Buddenbrooks*, which was issued in Washington when the Watergate scandal was at its height; with the third *Buddenbrooks*, issued in Delhi at the time of India's first atomic weapons test; with the fourth *Buddenbrooks*, issued in Hamburg when the local soccer team was facing relegation; and with the fifth and final *Buddenbrooks*, issued in Frankfurt in the middle of an exceptionally wet summer. After Frick's re-presentations, it is no longer possible to believe in the bourgeois myth of the great universal novel, existing in a pure aesthetic void, divorced from all political, social and climatic reality.

The *Buddenbrooks* novels fueled Frick's growing reputation amongst the avant garde, not only in Germany but also in France, Italy, England and America. The Parisian *Buddenbrooks*, in particular, became something of a *cause célèbre,* and Frick was adopted with fervour by a whole generation of young writers. By the mid 70s, this fervour had disturbed even the complacency of the French literary establishment; and although the later *Buddenbrooks* were still regarded as rather too daring for official approval, the second (Washington) *Buddenbrooks* was awarded the 1976 Prix des Auteurs. Frick once again demonstrated his contempt for the establishment when, instead of rejecting the award in the traditional manner, he first accepted it but then chose to appear for the presentation ceremony in the wrong place and on the wrong day.

In fact, Frick's personal appearances have been increasingly rare and erratic ever since the time of the Prix des Auteurs award. His indifference to the public seems to have increased directly in proportion to his rising public reputation. In recent years, he has so totally withdrawn from view that his life in the literal sense must now be considered profoundly problematic. Yet this withdrawal is no mere 'Romantic' caprice. Nor should we see it as prompted solely by the legalistic squabbles over copyright which surrounded and eventually submerged his *Buddenbrooks* re-presentations. As recently discovered evidence suggests, Frick's withdrawal is a necessary consequence of the latest advance in the development of his art.

This latest advance springs from the radical new theory of 'das Leere' (the Space). The evidence is contained in a brief article which Frick, with typical disregard for prestige and propriety, published under a false name in an obscure Swiss journal of Aristotelian philosophy (*Zeitschrift fur Aristotelische Philosophie*, Winter 1979, pp. 29-40). What Frick proposes in this innocuous-looking article is nothing less than the total elimination of all determinate verbal meaning. The safety-seeking reader who still longs to be told and controlled must be offered no sops. The writer's task is not to hand down meanings from a visible position of origin and authority, but to open up the Space within which meanings will be able to generate themselves. And as Frick makes plain, this is no small task. To form and delimit and send a Space out into the world calls

for deep psychological understanding, a far-reaching grasp of how society works, and specific insights into the creation of attitude and opinion through the agency of the press, the electronic media, the universities, etc. A whole lifetime's career in the production of ordinary on-the-page books is barely preparation enough for the task of holding open the Space.

The theory of the Space lies behind the latest and most remarkable of Frick's works, *Der Samen Selbst (The Seed Alone).* Although Frick published this work under his own name, he completely renounced the writer's traditional position as a producer of determinate verbal meaning. For in the first place, this volume — as the back cover advertisement tells us — is not a book written by Frick, but an account of all the books that Frick has resolved *not* to write. And in the second place, even the minimal determinacy of such an account is cancelled out by the actual pages of the volume, which are stuck and pasted together into a single solid mass, impossible to prise apart. The reader can no longer even find out about the books that Frick has resolved *not* to write.

Scientific ingenuity, it's true, has made some inroads into the original solidity of *Der Samen Selbst.* In 1981, researchers at the University of Minneapolis, USA, finally analysed the organic composition of the substance used as paste, and developed a solvent to loosen the pages without destroying the print. However, the opening of the pages revealed only that every single word of the text was itself unreadable, having been crossed out with heavy black ink. This setback inspired further scientific efforts, and by 1982 computer analysis of the varying densities of the inked surface made it possible to decipher the writing underneath the crossing out. However, the writing underneath the crossing out proved to be only another deeper level of crossing out. Continuing analysis has so far revealed nothing more than five even deeper levels of crossing out underneath the first two. Although scientists remain confident, it is painfully obvious to the outsider that the text is merely becoming more and more finally unreadable. The only thing that has been revealed by the scientific approach is the folly of scientists, and the blindness of their assumption that patience, hard work, and the empirical method will always be able to conquer the unknown.

Outside of the scientific community, the general response has been one of wild guesswork rather than hard work and empirical method. Suggestions and proposals as to possible books that Frick might have resolved not to write have been put forward on all sides. Newspaper reviews, magazine articles, and television debates have generated intense controversy on the issue, while academics, politicians, representatives of special interest groups, and the man in the street have all been canvassed for their opinions. Some of the books proposed in England and America alone include: *Inspector Saffron Takes a Seat; No! — A History of the Negative; Pigmies in my Pannier; Anna Karenina; Where Does It Hurt? — A Survey of Domestic Violence; The Good Book Guide to Excellence;* and *Crossroads in the Seventies — A Compendium of Recent Street Intersections.* Many of the proposals are clearly directed towards the commercial exploitation of Frick's literary reputation: 'Simply Living', for instance, suggested *Vegetarian Secrets of the Great Experimentalists*; 'Home and Handy' suggested *Avant-Gardening — A New Way With Shrubberies*; 'Women's Weekly' suggested *Gunther Frick's Pasta Cookbook*; and the 'Miami

Tribune' in its Book Review section suggested an illustrated coffee-table volume entitled *The Colourful World of Modern Prose.* Most revealing of all was the *Book of Filth* atrributed to Frick by the London newspaper 'News of the World', a book so obscene that it had to be denounced under huge headlines for its "Unthinkable Depravity!!! Bestial Sex Acts Beyond All Human Imagination!!!" This particular review inspired many religious and community leaders to issue public statements on radio and TV, warning and condemning any author who could even contemplate not writing such a book.

The sheer quantity of reviews, articles, and debates in the popular media did not drown out more serious voices, however. Literary and critical journals cast doubt upon Frick's apparent move towards pasta cookery, travelogues and gardening, and argued that such books could not be taken at simple face value. An article by Terence Eldridge on *Gunther Frick's Pasta Cookbook* drew on evidence from all of Frick's previous works to show how the images of tomatoes, vermicelli and boiling water would inevitably have acquired new and unexpected meanings in Frick's hands, while Jerome Anderson in his epoch-making book, *The Impossible Albatross,* proposed a typically Frickian technique of Differentism whereby every word in the *Cookbook* would have had a meaning entirely different to its ordinary meaning. Other schools of critical throught have since put forward such techniques as Assentism, the New Practicalism, Vandalism and Transjudgementalism.

Of course, the various suggested lines of Frick's development seem violently contradictory. But the contradictions disappear when the full implications of Frick's theory of the Space are understood. To understand Frick's theory is to understand that all the books and all the interpretations of all the books attributed to him are equally and simultaneously valid — because equally and simultaneously true to the unconscious motivations of those proposing them. What Frick has created, in upward of five thousand titles and twice as many interpretations, is an all-encompassing picture of the mental, spiritual and cultural state of contemporary society!

Similarly with the interviews, which also play their part in Frick's great work. The first interview was published in the 'Toronto Mercury' in 1981, when an enterprising young reporter discovered Frick's hermit hideaway on the shores of Hudson Bay, and brought back a transcript of his confession that the not-to-be-written books were indeed, as the 'Mercury' had suggested, *A Century of Drums, Aftermath,* and *Law of the Pack* (the *Timberwood Trilogy*). Other interviews soon followed. The American magazine 'Teen' claimed to have found Frick living in a luxurious Beverley Hills penthouse, and recorded his views on Life, Art, Romance, Favourite Food and Favourite Colour. *Pravda* subsequently revealed that, on the contrary, Frick had defected to the East, and had admitted that his entire oeuvre was a secret weapon designed by the CIA in order to destabilize the minds of Russia's socialist leaders.

Innumerable interviews have since continued to appear from every corner of the globe. Most valuable of all, perhaps, was the interview conducted on an Amesterdam canal barge on behalf of the virtually unknown Dutch underground poetry magazine 'Noord-Oost Polder'. Asked if his career had now developed as far as it could go, Frick reportedly replied that the current proliferation of his works was insignificant compared to the advances he

expected to be making in the next few years. His readers, reviewers and interviewers, he said, had so far explored only the very borders of the Space. The crucial revolution would occur when his works began to generate themselves, not merely for the *Der Samen Selbst* period, but for the whole of his writing career from the very earliest novels onward. In the same way, he hoped to see the construction of his present circumstances extended to whole life-histories for himself, complete with dates, place-names and relationships. He went on to predict that these new advances would be accompanied by a growing recognition of the critical and biographical survey as the most vital art form of our day. Such surveys, he claimed, immediately before diving into the muddy waters of the Prinzen Gracht, would at long last liberate the ideas of books from the capitalist commercialism of their printing and marketing, would free the excitement of conceptual imagination from the tedium of its page-by-page embodiment, and would inspire the avant garde to future developments of 'play' beyond anything attainable in any other medium.

Perhaps the 'Noord-Oost Polder' interview is the closest we shall ever come to a summing-up of Frick and his works. How could one hope to resume in a single conspectus a writer whose whole career increasingly opens out into ever-multiplying possibilities? Even as we come to the end of this brief critical and biographical survey, do we not feel that Frick has already been here ahead of us, is already above and beyond us, looking down? The task of understanding his work is truly as vast as it is never-ending. Yet this is no excuse for our Australian tardiness in meeting the challenge. At the time of writing, and to the best of my knowledge, not one magazine in this country has presented a review of Frick, not one journal has produced a critical interpretation, not one newspaper has recorded an interview. Are we trying to repress even the thought of Frick? Are we indeed afraid of the implications of his existence?

STEPHEN HALL

Oral History

Touching the paper, white bloodless
tissue, like the peeling after sunburn,
to her nose, to her nose, dabbing.

A cabbage moth fluttering at her lip
collecting dew, carried away on
her proffered hand. Speaking,

a tendon of saliva stretches in her
mouth and vibrates at the start
of her Depression story, rabbit-

catching on the goldfields, as
a girl sat by the hole, club
in hand. Her father skinning,

the baby-flesh boiling and then
the taste, the best. She smiles,
the tendon breaks to a bead

shining stickily on her upper lip,
and the moth climbs gently up
to dab away the memory.

GRAHAM ROWLANDS

How Many Laps?

If a car a day keeps a racing car away
I must know what I'm doing
with his semis his cherry pickers
his dump trucks four wheel drives
back-hoes front-end loaders
tow-trucks tow-bars bull bars.

I cheer on George Fury & Peter Brock.
I put my foot down for Alfredo Constanzo
against Keke Rosberg Niki Lauda Roberto Moreno.
I even know what Andreas DeCesaris' *father*
does for a living. It's a health hazard.

How many laps do *I* have to go?
Will it be on the millionth replay of
the replay of Terry Ryan taking out
the world champion on the 41st lap of
the Formula One at Calder in 1984?

or when The Grandfather Nipper Lacey
vies with Noddy Bishop to be
the best foot of the season
going down the back chute together
just after the starter's
black & white checkered pyjamas
dance the green flag off the ground
on video at the Speedway

that he sees through me to my father
who taught me to drive the car I
bought from him & drove every day of
the ten years of my first licence
& then stopped driving —

sees through my father to me?

BARBARA BRANDT

The Dark

The car's headlights swept the trees as it rounded the curve in the road. Their warm glow highlighted the rocky verges and the spinifex-skirted stalagmites of the ant hills. Above the throb of the motor the emptiness of the bush reached in to grip me. The wind whipped past the half wound down window which I'd opened when the heater had begun to make me drowsy. The cold air washed over me, making me shiver but I was reluctant to close it. Sleeping and driving do not mix well.

I had to be home by morning. I regretted having overstayed my visit. Driving at night is always a worry; the road has an evil habit of disappearing, the trees become dark sentinels lurking in the blackness and the isolation is a fearsome thing. During the day one can see, nothing unexpected can lurch out of the pit to send your heart thudding into your throat.

Fatigue ate at my foundations as the needle of the speedo dropped from its position at the top of the dial. I had to drive faster, I had to get home. I applied more pressure to the accelerator and administered a mental slap for lassitude. Bloody hell . . . some idiot had forgotten his dip switch. I thumped on the horn, still the lights remained, blazing through the windshield. It raced on towards me, now it was passing, it wasn't a car. It covered the whole road. Dust and stones somersaulted through the air hurled by the turbulence of its passage. Pebbles rained onto the bonnet, then with a resounding crack . . . the entire windscreen shattered. The wheel jerked from my hands and I felt the car launch itself. I was rattled about like a marble in a cooldrink can. Slammed to a roaring halt I vaulted forward, the seatbelt wrenched me back, hard. The webbed windscreen collapsed into the car's interior spraying in a shower of glass.

Choking swirls of dust curled through the ragged aperture tainting my mouth and stinging eyes. Somewhere in the morass I could see the mangled remains of a giant ant-hill, it shrouded half the front-end. One headlight still confronted the dust, shining on. I sat very still, winded. Somewhere behind me I could hear a scream receding into the distance.

The motor must have stalled, cooling noises crackled and from somewhere under the hood I heard the hiss of escaping steam — the radiator must have been smashed. A misty cloud seeped through the vents in the dashboard, a hot

smell permeated the car. Mercifully the door handle moved and I tumbled out of the seatbelt's life saving embrace onto the cold stony ground.

Later I found myself slouched at the side of the crumbling ant hill, bathed in the comforting flow of the one remaining headlight. Strange isn't it? Here I am still clinging to the security of the car, longing for the safety of its body between me and the blackness. Speeding down the road it had shielded me, keeping the night outside. The battery's power is fading and over there, through the scrub, the road is empty and silent. Soon the light will go out and I shall be left alone here with my nemesis, the Dark.

My friend Peter once saw a min-min light no more than a few miles from here. He stopped his car and spoke to it. When it didn't reply he shot at it with the high powered rifle, he always carried it in the car, you never knew what could happen out here. The min-min went away.

My father. He was a bushy before he discovered art and Zen Buddhism, he taught me how to meditate. I was never quite successful. If I sat at night I couldn't sleep and if I sat during the day I'd wake up hours later in the corner with my black drapes and cushion transfixed between my knees. I'd try it now but I could never hold the count past two breathes. He'd be disappointed if he knew about that just as I always disappointed him when I couldn't handle staying the weekend in the bush. I'd lie in my stretcher with my back to the hut, out in the open during the summer nights, keeping the fire blazing and watching beyond the glow for something that never came. His place was murder in winter. The chill fell from the night sky and scalded my throat until I couldn't breathe and I'd cry. I'd cry now but if I did that I wouldn't be able to listen. Listen.

Listen to the sound of my own heart, to the flying fox swooping at the beetles bouncing off the headlight and scrabbling over the stones. If my mother was here she'd pray. Why don't I? I always tried so hard to please her and her God, and failed. I thought I was content with the one my little girl bought home from Sunday School, where my mother's demanded so much more.

There is something moving in the dark. I can hear rocks sliding beneath its feet. It bellows, roaring out at me, tearing my soul free from its roots. Am I paralysed? I should get back into the car but my other fears are there, waiting for me.

I always avoided the sea and water because I always had water dreams when I was pregnant. They were beautiful, comforting dreams but I've always been afraid of drowning. I never flew for the same reason. I thought I was so safe in a car. My car, my car is silent. But another car comes. I can hear its drone in the distance. If I was to stand up I may even be able to see the glow of its lights but if I did that then I'd have to walk to the road to flag it down.

Stranger danger. I taught my little girl all about stranger danger. Never go with someone you don't know I told her. I remember once I was late for school. I stopped to shred the flowers off a cork tree and I heard the bell from blocks away. A car drove out of Rocky's Shell Garage and a man leaned out the window. He called me by my name and said he'd give me a ride to school. All the way I thought about the things my mother told me. Never, Never, Never she said. He took me to school.

I've never been lucky. I couldn't get away with it twice. The other car is closer now, I can see it through the trees. Its headlights flick from crest to tree to tree and it rushes by leaving only the burning dust to roll and tumble.

Mary had a little lamb its fleece as white as snow. The headlight has been out for quite a while now. And everywhere that Mary went, I'll bet she didn't go up to the Top Town to buy stupid things like material and lace, the lamb was sure to go. It followed her to school one day, not that school down the road from Rum Jungle with its mangoes for kids for sixpence. It was against the rules, it made the children . . . children.

Don't be a fool. That's what my mother said the night I thought that there was a tiger under my bed. I always had the top bunk leaving my sister to meet the tiger first. One night I thought it had eaten her, I wet my bed.

There is another car. It has stopped on the road. The sky is lifting itself up, greying somehow. Somewhere I can hear voices. They're talking about the skidmarks over the windrow and I can hear them moving around me. I rise up and meet the paling day. It made the children laugh and play to see a lamb at school.

TIMOSHENKO ASLANIDES

Coral Gum
Eucalyptus torquata

Mary Gilmore said this was 'a scented land',
recounting stories, barely believable,
of how from the decks of sailing ships
you could smell last century's flowers
hundreds of miles from Perth,
the petals the teeth of the roaring forties.

Now back from Perth, my wife gives me something from another world:
eucalypt buds like hurricane lamps topped with dunces' caps,
stories of flowers as big as plates hanging from the trees
and nuts so large as to shame any gift Marco Polo could have carried
from any direction. The smell of Cathay
comes direct from Coolgardie: it must have been true.

KIM SCOTT

In Perspective

Today we walked along the railway
One dune behind and parallel to the beach.
We balanced on a line, one on each,
And saw we'd meet, as perspective, proper, told us.

Between us and the dune, a fence.
Barbed wire, rusted, chopped up our view
That was of dune only, sand blank and scraggled.
A gull rose above the close horizon
Rolled its lidless eye, and dipped.

We stayed fenced.

Later, I photo'd myself distorted
Staring back, one eyed, from the lens of your mirror
Glasses.
We snapped ourselves, each in the eye of
The other
        And moved further and further, further
                                                apart.

And you had to get up, to go,
Through lines, grids, fences, dunes and mirrors too.

A sense of perspective.

KIM SCOTT

Our Father, Koo-ee-lung

A grey, mid-winter dawn. Two black
and thin-limbed sons, we rowed across
the glass
of sea which broke, and flowed around
the oars' each probe. Chilled we sat,
face to face,
and left a line of corks,
bobbing.

Dimensionless, or somehow thin, our father
called to us; a strong voice, disembodied,
no part of him, skipping from the shore
as in the net a four cord caught fish
flapped,
the ripples running all ways, always.

You saw his death, met his set stare,
were left as his eyes became as drains.
I, three hundred miles away, hung from
the 'phone and mouthed the beeps.

I wish for lines to join us now.

RAYMOND ALLAN

Can-Can For Two on a Hot Winter's Night

The woman sitting in the corner has a smile on her face. None of the thirteen men reclining in the shade of the canvas tent-fly know why she is smiling, but only two of them care. The first man watches her without blinking; she is looking another way, but even if she was to look straight at him, he would not break his stare. A fly on the crease in her face, just below her left eye, seems quite comfortable — just as the woman is comfortable with its presence. She is twenty-two years old, a geologist on her first long field trip; seven months in an area one hundred miles square. The woman does not know there is a second man watching, for she does not look at him either. If she did look at him, then he would avert his eyes as though he had been caught peering through the side window of a house whose residents he did not know. But he does know her, and her smile. And her laugh. And the small indentation just below her left breast — a scar from some schoolyard silliness, she said.

Still the woman does not look around, or swat the fly, or even acknowledge the presence of the three who are watching, crawling, living off and around her. Instead she chats to one of the friends from high school who visit her thoughts on Sunday afternoons, when there is no work.

There are twenty-nine cans on the table. Beer cans. Fourteen are full cans, the other fifteen empty. Someone is already at the half-way mark. Six cans each, Sunday afternoons; three each on week days. None of the cans can be saved, or held over. The benovolence of the mining giant is never misunderstood. Too many cans and the work would slow and the season would have to be extended; the free, rationed cans are the bosses' way of saying enough is enough. So the men buy no more.

The woman never lags behind; she rarely leads. She drinks her cans with the steady purpose of one well versed in the pretence of ritual. The second watching man is thinking, watching, thinking of a dream he had last night. He would tell them — but he does not wish to speak. He recalls his dream, and dreams of dreaming in another place. A small child in pyjamas running after a ball. A football game and a small child in pyjamas running after a football. A crowd of thousands and a small child in pyjamas.

The first man's eyes have never left the face of the woman, neither has the fly. From another side of the table under the canvas, the man is watching her.

He is thinking of the night he would like to spend with her, but he knows she does not sleep with riggers. She sleeps alone, now — fearfully alone in the midst of thirteen of her fellows whom she loves. But she reads. Never without her folded paperbacks, she has read every book in camp and is beginning for a second time. She has even read the science fiction books she derided for the first few weeks until her own books were read. Now, she has borrowed every book in camp. She would not miss a word.

But the woman does not sleep with riggers, so the first man continues to dream of the night he would spend with her, for his dream is companionship and she rarely even speaks to riggers when they are not working.

There are forty-three cans on the table, twenty-nine empty cans, and fourteen at least part full. Someone is still one can ahead. No-one will know who is ahead until the end of the cans. Then there will be eighty-four cans on the table, and only thirteen will be part full; the dreams will be over, the woman will stop talking to her high-school friends, and everyone will go to bed. But none together. For the woman does not sleep with riggers and now avoids the geologist-watcher-second man.

The football field is empty. The crowds have gone home, the footballers have gone home, and the child in pyjamas was only ever a dream. The woman has not finished her can, but she has begun another. Yet no-one knows this, because she has pushed a part full can into the centre of the table, where the empty cans go, so no-one will know. She wonders if anyone will guess. At the end of the day someone will clear away the empty cans, and find one not quite finished, so she prays they will not guess. The woman never lags behind; she rarely leads. She drinks her cans with the steady purpose of one who will not allow herself to be found lacking. The book she might take out and read is in her pocket, but she does not read it. She has read it before and knows how it will end.

The thirteen men and one woman sit in the shade of the canvas fly, around a table which is long enough to entertain six down each side, and one at each end. The second man sits at the far end of the table and watches the woman. He is remembering the nights he has spent with her.

The woman has finished talking to her school friends, but does not get up. She does not read; instead she sits as still as the fly which is sitting in the crease under her right eye. She does not smile any more, and the second man watching thinks he knows why. He has guessed about the can which she pushed into the centre unfinished.

There are fifty-eight cans on the table; someone could be two cans ahead. But the man knows there are two cans in the middle of the table which are part full. Yet he says nothing, for he has pushed one part full can to the centre. He hopes no-one will know that one of the full cans is his. But the woman has guessed.

The woman is looking at the man at the end of the table. She is smiling at the second watching geologist man at the end of the table. And he is watching her. He is not caught looking into a room that he does not know. For he knows, and she knows, that two of the cans in the centre of the table are part full.

There are eighty-four cans on the table; fourteen part-full. But there are only twelve men sitting around the table which is large enough to entertain six down

each side. The twelve men think that there are only twelve cans unfinished. They do not know about the two part-full cans in the centre of the table, but one of them may guess. The woman is not sleeping with riggers. And the second-watching-geologist-man is not dreaming of the nights he will spend; he is not remembering nights that he has spent. For they will spend this night together.

SHANE McCAULEY

Only a Dream

After a dream that leaves
A coldness, clearly defined, in the
Black room, forced to consider both
Blackness and dreams, the images
Absurd fruit of nothingness, at best
Electrical flickerings, and I claw
Out like the ghost of some over confident
Speliologist — lost in the dark but sure
Of that light glinting way above
Until confusion cuffs my ear
Like a ruffian giant and I
Fall far into the pillow. If we are
The dreams of God, thank Him
For not remembering us
When He wakes.

Assessment

Yet here on a day of shadows
With my wine glass of ambitions
Half-full or half-empty, with
The city air equally indeterminate
In its transgressions, I can sit
Listening to love-songs and ache
With the bizarre shapes of the future,
As if what was meant for flowers
Should take wing instead, clamouring
For sunsets even more beautiful
Than the last, and divide all life
Into different areas of play, one
To love, one to deny, one to quietly endure,
One to embrace and tie down as secure.

SHANE McCAULEY

Old City, Rhodes

Keen for an evening view
Of ancient ocean, we let
The motor-bikes nearly skedaddle
Us, used by now to the flurry
Of Greek manouevres, indifference.

The only siege now is within,
Our English words taking on
New meanings, caught here
Like the 'Alive Lombsters' advertised
In shops, taking back all
We had said of other tourists,
Realizing that any traveller
Is to some extent lost.

Merchants survive conquerors.
Commerce has long sent philosophy
Back to kindergarten. Water-smoothed
Statues as opaque as memory
Here, early hunger subverts
Curiosity, and in these time-dirty
Streets, a remoteness and fear
Settles like a first day at school.

Clouds dim the sea to a grey skin,
A vast stagnant pool. The breeze
Drifts softly to Turkey.

MARY ANNE BAARTZ

"Just A Literary Fart . . ."

'I've nothing to say to you. You're a rat. Piss off.' Grace had a cold. Her head was a woody orange, the juice hardened and crackling. Her throat hurt and she couldn't breathe through her nose. She lay back on her pillow, welcoming the fever because it was something else to feel. The cigarettes were on the bedside table. She looked at them for a full thirty seconds before reaching out a hand. It wasn't until the smoke curled way down deep into her lungs that she felt half human.

It was six-thirty. The people she shared the house with were still asleep. Charlie snored in the next room, but in a puffy, childish way and the sound soothed her a little. Morning noises seeped in from outside — engines coughed and spluttered, dogs yapped at tyres and snuffled around bins, drains gurgled. If she could hear these things and feel the fever it meant she was alive.

"Damn? Why didn't I say: 'I've nothing to say to you *except* you're a rat. Piss off.' That's what I should have said," she mumbled as she stubbed out her first cigarette for the day. She watched the carbon particles arrange themselves in the ashtray. One wisp of air and the pattern would change.

She'd looked good. And she'd been sitting in a classy restaurant. She might have been wearing dirty jeans and shaggy slippers and not have combed her hair. She might have chosen to have coffee in the dingy dive on the corner of Charlotte and Edward streets. It had been a bright day, too. Some days were dull and drizzly — like this morning, when the clouds squinted through the window and dribbled on the sill. She'd looked like a Christmas bauble, shiny and pretty — a touch of elegance in Autumn. He'd have to have noticed how healthy she'd looked; how in control.

"Why did I omit 'except'." She lit another cigarette.

Grace would get up after this smoke. She'd have a shower and wash out her mouth. She loved the tingling feeling after brushing, when she'd run her tongue over her teeth and not feel any fuzz. She'd brush her tongue, too, scrape off yesterday's carrion. They'd made love on a morning like this, when the sun was wedged in the cloud's cleavage. It was long and slow and tender. He was fifteen years younger than Grace but that morning he was Zeus; ageless, wise, omnipotent. She kissed his navel and left the bed — left him lying back with his hands behind his head, smug and glorious, while she paddled out to the

kitchen and made toasted cheese sandwiches and rich, creamy coffee. She'd arranged the goodies on a tray . . . such class! The smile still curled around his lips as she placed the tray between them.

'You'd kill me if you knew what I was thinking at this moment,' he drawled.

'What are you thinking, Darling?' the sweetness dribbled over the toast.

'You'll kill me if I said,' he taunted.

'I wouldn't. Tell me,' the sweetness was drying.

'It's in reference to fart . . . in a literary sense . . .' he took a sip of coffee, but his eyes never left her. The sweetness soured to vomit. They'd just made love, for God's sake! She'd brought him breakfast. She'd loved him . . . Grace said nothing. She dressed her body, combed her hair and left his house. She wouldn't see him again, not if he begged . . .

But he had begged and she'd relented.

'Please, Gracie, let me come over. I need a meal. Will you cook me a meal, please?'

He was drunk when he arrived. She'd spent her energy on the meal. He fell into her bed and pleaded for a stubby. He vomited on her quilt. He was an old man — his eyes were old. She ignored the filthy quilt and took him to Biala. It took them a fortnight to de-toxify him. Grace visited every day. She washed his clothes and brought his meals. She let him nuzzle her breasts. After Biala, he said he was serious and he joined A.A. Grace felt proud. She watched him grow strong, encouraged him, praised him. He told her she was beautiful and he'd die if she left. So, Grace buried the image of Zeus stretched on the bed, and liquid papered the words 'literary fart'. He needed her — he'd said so.

Grace had planted lemon grass in the back yard. She'd make some tea — lemon grass tea was good for colds. It was also supposed to be a purgative. After her tea she'd go to the city and collect her mail. Just around the corner from the Post Office was her special, cosy cafe. She'd have a coffee while she read her letters. She might receive news about her new play. There was a hint that 'Pacific Revue' wanted it. They may have written. Grace cried. How dare he call her a literary fart! Why hadn't she been more careful . . . he's ridicule her for omitting the 'except'. She'd been pleased, too, with her attitude, *and* the words. He'd run away fast enough. But she knew him very well and he'd delight in the omission and the last thing she needed was for him to take delight at her expense.

They'd been so happy after Biala. He'd shown discipline and she'd been careful not to have grog in the house. They'd made love again. She'd just finished folding his washing and stacking it neatly in the laundry bag when she'd heard his car outside. He was early. She went to meet him, smiling. He pushed past her, his face stone. A large paper packet hung off his fingers and he thumped it on the kitchen bench. He pulled a huge bottle of Hexachlorophane out of the packet.

'I suggest you use this, Grace. You've infected me with crabs!'

At first she could say nothing, stuck there between the sea and the sky, squeezed until she found it hard to breathe.

'But — look at me . . . I'm blonde. Blonde all over . . . There're no crabs on me. They hide in thick, dark, curly hair where they can't be seen!' she narrowed her eyes. 'In hair like your's. I've no other lover . . .' Grace stopped defending herself. Her eyes were now slits and she'd picked up the bottle. If he had crabs, then . . . He backed away, out the door, into his car and that was that. Grace hurled the bottle at the fence; the liquid splashed into her garden and killed the pansies. She'd cried over their demise. She mourned the delicate faces and the velvet.

She'd seen him coming. It would have been easy to have taken her coffee and slipped into a less conspicuous pose. She'd had time. But Grace remained where she was. She watched him walk towards her. He looked older. There were scribbles in his cheeks. His skin was the colour of soiled laundry, as if he'd just emerged from someone's pocket covered in lint. She watched him glance through the glass. She saw the flicker of recognition light his dead eyes and she was pleased she was dressed in her sky blue indian cotton blouse with the embroidered neckline and that she was wearing her spotless linen skirt. For the first morning in months, her eyes sparkled. They'd been so tired — ached in their weariness. She was strong — Glenda Jackson, Elizabeth the First. She was sexy — Nastassja Kinsky, Meryl Streep. She was Grace and in control. The light was behind him and she noticed the dirt under his fingernails as he took hold of the door jamb and peered into the cafe.

'Gracie!' One of his front teeth had cracked and the rest were streaked yellow. 'How are you?' He was about to step into the cafe — to sit at her table. She looked at him. Proudly. The cup was in its saucer and not a drop of coffee had spilled. The cigarette burned in the ashtray, the smoke shielding her from his sour breath. His body leaned towards her, prickling her skin. His shirt was crumpled. He looked at her as if he wasn't responsible for the death of her pansies. He smiled as if he'd never vomited on her quilt. She sat back, as calm as pink and watched while the crabs chomped into his brain, rubbed their tummies and smacked their lips.

'I've nothing to say to you,' she'd said. 'You're a rat. Piss off.' If she had nothing to say to him, why did she tell him he was a rat?

It had been a good feeling, though, the sun scorching circles and dashes into her shoulders. She'd left the cafe with bells on her toes and the sunlight danced with her. He'd scampered like a long-tailed cat in a roomful of rocking chairs; pictures of Grace in all her grace, mocking the crabs in his brain, chased him down the street. She'd visited Woolies on the way home and bought some pansy seedlings. She'd felt good when she'd stood in front of the mirror and replayed her performance. She was a princess in silk and gossamer and he was a beggar in rags. The feeling stayed with her until the final performance when she realised her mistake.

There was some ascorbic acid in the kitchen cupboard. She preferred vitamin C tablets, crunching on the sweet, orange flavour. Grace blew her nose. Her head ached and the rain piddled. A good downpour might clear her head. Of course, there was another perspective. 'You're a rat' is a comment; a mere thought, a flat statement, a verbalization of an inner assessment. 'Piss off' is a direction, a command. Anyway, it had not been the words he'd obeyed. He'd simply bowed to her power.

A pinch of sunlight squeezed through the clouds. From where Grace lay, she could see the ray jump about on the mirror. It had stopped drizzling and her head felt lighter; she was able to breathe through her nose. The patch of sunlight grew until it tickled her toes. Perhaps she'd plant out the pansies. They'd bloom in a few weeks. Grace stretched and smiled. She'd forget the omission. Just a literary fart would have been pedantic enough to have heard it between the sentences, anyway.

DAVID WINWOOD

Girl

We thought ourselves invulnerable. We, I mostly
with all the kids around me unthinkingly included.
Green men with guns, guards, bombers flying high,
bandaged adults, how irreal they were. The girl
next door took part in a relay with a ladle's cup
tied between her legs, the handle sticking backwards.
Running became fascinatingly cumbersome. I still
can't figure how they attached the strings.

Then,
The accident at the narrow end of our street.
The Excitement. The boy groaned under the truck's wheel.
I couldn't hear it, but was told so by those up front.
In passing we saw the yelling father dragged away.
The elder brother was good at hide and seek.
He disappeared a year later. Drowned. Dredgers searched
for days till, at last weary of their efforts,
he gave himself up. He rose between the barges.

Now,
I can't picture the girl in either of the crowds.
Sometimes I think she must have left the neighbourhood
before. There are nights when I see her, eyes open,
very vulnerable. When I nearly touch her hand. And I
wonder if those wormpale puffed toddler's fingers
kept their grasp on what we lost. To know her walking,
unharmed, through all the Earth's fighting regions:
it is a recurring dream, in which the ladle's end

still points at me. And I want to call after her.
"You are a woman now. Why are you dressed in a spoon?"
She won't answer. She'll laugh at me. She always did.

FAY ZWICKY

For Jim
1947-1986

I

The minnow class swims in,
plaids and checks of older, innocent America.
Clear-eyed high jinks simmer to a stop.

These are the eighties. Jim is gone
who once sat sassy-tongued in class
learning the meaning of poems.

I'm in his home, alive.
He's dead in mine.
What's a poem now?
Nobody has a dime left to cry.

There he stood in plaid shirt and Afro,
lanky 26-year old fresh from Ohio State in Western Australia.
Hello, heart-string!

Have you practised so long to learn to read?
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning?
What was all thaddabout? he asked, dying.

Shade stunts a crop, squinches a singer's voice.
I want to jump at the sun, he said.
I want to stretch my lip.
I want to be black, he said.
I'm here.

This was the morning of the day of the beginning.

Heading round the bend in the world,
returning to the loved and limber land he left,
I'm in America.
The minnows in my class today are black and white.

Is it because we love that we leave?
Or travel dust around the doorsteps we were born on?

Remember, he said, remember.

Fear not, be candid, said old Walt.
Dwell a while and pass on.
Be copious, temperate, chaste, magnetic.
But pass.

Jim dwelt a while, passed on, branded by unfamiliar light.
Home lacked the bold sunlight he craved.
Home lacked the bold energy he loved.
What is home? Where is love?

Remember with every leaf his coming.

II

After San Francisco, the pilot crackles out the States:
unfurling Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma, passionate
peaks and sierras of the west passing,
passing Little Rock, Memphis, Chattanooga, and Atlanta,
passing over endless grasses, shrouded fields snapped shut in snow
telling the copious tale of love in magic syllables, natural
as breathing: Okonee, Monongahela, Natchez, Chattahoochee,
Oronoco, Homosassa, Seminole, Osceola, Econlockhatchee, Tuscawilla,
Mocassin Wallow, Slippery Rock, Apopka,
dropping in night down Florida's wrinkled nose
snorting the Gulf stream, the land charged, infused with
magic names, love's litany.

Did Yirrkala, Djankawu, Ngambek, Mandogalup, Nyuninga, Kondinin
and Wallumburrawang seed Jim's enchantment too?
Sacred morsels of mystery, crumbs of divinity,
red men and black men stirring in their secret places,
dreaming in our yards.

Copious I break sprigs from the tree of death,
copious the yellow-speared grain rising,
copious the question: why?

God talked to himself in the mountains,
stirred from his platform in his secret place:

Folks ain't ready for souls yet.
De clay ain't dry.
It's de strongest thing Ah ever made.
Don't aim to waste none thru loose cracks.
And then men got to grow strong enough to stand it.
De way things is now, if Ah give it out
It would tear them shackly bodies to pieces.
Ah'll set something outside the door of my mind for them
to play with and handle, play with and handle.
Ah'll put this play toy in their hands.
They'll seize it and go away, far away.
Then Ah'll say my say and sing my song.

And he sang creation's birth,
how seeds of earth and air, water and fluent fire
fused in empty space,
how gases burned, condensed, the land turned hard,
the seas rushed into place, stones took men's shapes
and all the creatures wandered in the hills.

He sang and laughed.
Death took his first taste,
tender grass being sweetest at dewfall.

III

Jim died, casually brushing by an *Eclogue*
while the catheter burst and merciful
morphine swam his head into silence . . .

Like this clay growing hard, this wax melting soft,
In the same fire may Daphnis feel my love's fierce blaze.
For Daphnis I burn.
Let my spells bring him home.

The minnow class swims in and out.
These are the eighties.
Our feet are set wandering in strange ways.

Got on de train didn't have no fare
But I rode some
Yes I rode some.
Got on de train didn't have no fare
Conductor ast me what I'm doing there
But I rode some
Yes, I rode some.

From Grand Central through the long dark tunnels out
out into highrise sunlight,
out by zig-zag fire-escapes spidering the charred and blackened Bronx,
cratered bombsites, car-hulks black and twisted,
New York's terrible back yard passing,
passing the battered spires, the appalled sky,
passing along the frozen Hudson crossed with strutted steel.
I see two blacks and a dog on the bank.
They pick their way through withered winter grasses,
blackness, wreckage. They stand a moment looking.
Snow clings to rocks at Spuyten Duyvel, Dobbs Ferry,
Ossining, Croton Harmon, the frozen river leading,
leaden sky darkening in patches, in strange cuts and jags
the ice is breaking up, and clapboard houses sink
beside the riverbank, the ranging hills, shadows of hurrying
tides haunting the river's reaches.

The song is passing, covering the earth, your country.
I am in your homeland, you in mine.
We are no longer innocent.

Well, he grabbed me by de collar and he led me to de door
But I rode some.
Yes I rode some.
Well, he grabbed me by de collar and he led me to de door
He rapped me over de head with a forty-four
But I rode some
Yes I rode some . . .

Staving off old death with song,
Twenty six years old you came.
Forty thousand years old and more you went,
giving in to chance and change, black boy,
rocked to sleep and slumber,
made and unmade by love.

Who put out the lie, supposed to last forever?
Love is when it is.
No more here? Plenty more down the road.
Take you where I'm going?
Hell no! Let every town furnish its own.
Who cares about no train fare?
The railroad track is there, ain't it?
I can jump at the sun, can't I?
I can ride blind, can't I?
I'm black, ain't I?

Darkness.
The brief and infinitely graceful dance of body,
fluid arc of upraised arms,
the dance in air, in empty spaces,
the rush to bite down,
all, all in beauty . . .

Remember, he said. Remember.

Black child, I will.
I do.

ANDREW TAYLOR

A Blameless Boyhood: Australian Poetry about the Great War

Several years ago I was asked to write a review article on two recent anthologies of Australian war poetry. I had no particular interest in war poetry. I had also found the recent near-obsession with the First World War (what I will call the Great War) amongst Australian writers and film makers curious, and I was basically unsympathetic to it. Their obsession with the Great War seemed a strange and rather sad exercise in nostalgia, and also a covert attempt to revive something which most people thought had finally died or been satisfied by the nineteen seventies — "the search for an Australian Identity". However I was working on a book on Australian poetry at the time, and I agreed to write the article, which duly appeared.[1] This paper is thus a second look at the phenomenon of Australian poetry about the Great War.

"Second looks" is really what it is all about. The two anthologies I reviewed then, and which I shall be referring to here, are *Shadows from Wire* edited by Geoff Page, and *Clubbing of the Gunfire* edited by Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Peter Pierce.[2] These anthologies revealed that there are really two substantial bodies of poetry which deal with the Great War. As you would expect, the first body of poetry is roughly contemporary with the war itself: it was written by such people as Henry Lawson, Christopher Brennan, C.J. Dennis, Vance Palmer, Mary Gilmore, Leon Gellert, Harley Matthews and Frederic Manning. The second body of poetry — dealing with the same war — was written a full fifty years later, starting, roughly, in the early nineteen seventies, and continuing up to the present. I shall call this the recent poetry, to distinguish it from that contemporary with the war.

This second body of poetry is written by a very diverse group of poets — but they have three things in common. The first is that they are all too young to have served in the Great War — or even in the Second World War. The second is that none of them, in fact, has served in any war at all, and none has had any first hand experience of warfare whatever, as civilians, or as journalists. The third thing these poets have in common is that with only two exceptions they are all male.

This struck me as very strange indeed. Why should a group of male poets, ranging from R.A. Simpson (born in 1929) to Kevin Hart (born in 1954)

suddenly, and apparently spontaneously, start writing about a war which was over before — in some cases — even their fathers were born?

Before attempting to answer that question, I should point out that the poets were not alone in their interest in the Great War. Patsy Adam-Smith published her documentary on the Great War soldiers, *The Anzacs,* in 1978. Roger McDonald's novel *1915* appeared in 1979, and the very popular film *Gallipoli* by Peter Weir in 1981, the same year that A.B. Facey's account of his war experiences in *A Fortunate Life* came out; while David Malouf published *Fly Away Peter* in 1982.[3] But the existence of two substantial bodies of poetry, each written by a number of different poets, the latter produced a good fifty years after the earlier, provides us with a unique opportunity to compare two views of the war. And it offers the opportunity to see what the latter view, the "second look", has to say about the first.

The first observation it makes about the poetry written contemporary with, or close to, the Great War is that it is not much good. Geoff Page, in the introduction to his anthology, goes so far as to say that none of the poetry "speaks with a directness and truth" found in contemporary photographs. Page, in fact, includes none of it in his anthology, which contains only recent poems. Although this is presented as an aesthetic judgment, it is in fact an ideological act. In Page's estimation, accounts of the Great War by its contemporaries were indirect and untrue. Now, for all our advances in historical research, and despite the growth in confidence and accomplishment among Australia's poets since the early years of this century, it does not seem to me necessary — or even likely — that participants and eye-witnesses should be wrong, and that people writing fifty years later should be more direct and true. What Page's decision really means is that the Great War means something different to him and to the poets he includes in his anthology — different from what it meant to the War's contemporaries and participants.

Roughly — very roughly — speaking, there are four kinds of contemporary Great War poetry (i.e. contemporary with the war). First, there is the stay-at-home patriotic verse in conventional "literary" high style typified by J. Le Gay Brereton's "The Dead":

> Hail and farewell to those who fought and died,
> Not laughingly adventurous, nor pale
> With idiot hatred, nor to fill the tale
> Of racial selfishness and patriot pride,
>
> But merely that their own souls rose and cried
> Alarum when they heard the sudden wail
> Of stricken freedom . . .[4]

Imitative in both style and sentiment of late nineteenth century and Edwardian English models, this poetry is the most conventional, the most predictable, and the least distinctive.[5] For these reasons it is of least concern to us here. The second kind of poetry is also patriotic, but demotic. The most famous example of this kind is C.J. Dennis's poem "The Push" in which a mate of Ginger Mick the larrikin tells the blokes back home what the war has done for his famous friend. This is the last stanza:

Becos ole Europe lost 'er block an' started 'eavin' bricks,
Becos the bugles wailed a song uv war,
We found reel gold down in the 'earts uv orl our Ginger Micks
We never thort worth minin' fer before.
An' so, I'm tippin' we all pray, before our win is scored:
'Thank God fer Mick, an' Bill an' Jim, an' little brother Clord.'

The image of goldmining runs right through the poem. The message is that all Aussie men have hearts of gold, but it takes the war, and an abrasive rub against a few foreigners, to reveal them. This poem celebrates the soldier as digger: digger of gold, like his historical forebears — but this time the gold will be found within himself, because he has become a digger of trenches.

The third kind of poetry is non-demotic, but disillusioned. Harley Matthews' long narrative "True Patriot" is one example; others are by Vance Palmer, Leon Gellert and Fredric Manning, e.g. Manning's "Grotesque", which I find in its brevity quite impressive:

These are the damned circles Dante trod,
Terrible in hopelessness,
But even skills have their humour,
An eyeless and sardonic mockery:
And we,
Sitting with streaming eyes in the acrid smoke,
That murks our foul, damp billet,
Chant bitterly, with raucous voices
As a chorus of frogs
In hideous irony, our patriotic songs.

The fourth kind of poetry is demotic, and disillusioned, and matches many of the songs and fragments of letters and diaries recorded by Patsy Adam-Smith. A good example is Oscar Walters' "One Sunday Morning" where a group of men discuss the Trojan war which had taken place not all that far from where they are on Gallipoli. The upshot of their discussion is that while one man argues that war was "'All 'Ellen's doin'", the other says that no woman was worth all that trouble: "No jane 'e'd ever met was worth a brawl." They end by deciding that there is no explanation for war, and no sense in it.

A reading of the relevant section of *Clubbing of the Gunfire* reveals that Australian poetry contemporary with the War was by no means uniformly bad, nor lacking in immediacy and truth. It also displays considerable variety: demotic and undemotic, patriotic and unpatriotic/disillusioned. Contemporary responses to the war were various and complex, but if we were to attempt a quick summing up, it would go like this: War is a challenge and an ordeal which can reveal a man's true worth (the heart of gold); and yet, in terms of slaughter the price is high, (hail and farewell), and — for the simple and demotic digger — too bloody high.

Let us turn now to the second look at the war, fifty years after. This is by Les A. Murray, and is called "The Trainee":

Ah, I was as soiled as money, old as rag,
I was building a humpy beside a gully of woes,
Till the bump of your drum, the fit of your turned-up hat
Drew me to eat your stew, salute your flag

And carry your rifle far away to your wars:
Is war very big? As big as New South Wales?

What does this poem say about the trainee? First, he feels that he has been *rescued* by the war, rescued from soil, degradation and woe. War is good for him. Secondly, he is extremely innocent: "Is war very big? As big as New South Wales?" (This was the first World War, remember?) This innocence, this naiviety, explains why he feels that war is a good thing for him (though I do not think, in Murray's poetry, this explains it away).

In fact, poem after poem among the recent ones stresses the naivety or innocence of the Great War digger. As Hal Porter's poem "After September 21, 1914 AD' puts it:

innocence
had lost its voice, no longer mattered:
no innocence at all since then,
never such innocence again.

And Murray's "Visiting Anzacs" delights in using the antiquated, ever quaint, slang of the time with its adolescent aura of everything being good clean fun. The poem itself, though, shows an awareness that although the Australian soldier "showed the *battler* style,": he is killed all the same "among hoarse screams and rosemary". Murray's poem, in other words, displays a knowledge which it denies to the soldiers it is talking about.

There is little need here to enlarge further on the evidence which shows that recent poets view the Great War digger as innocent. What is of more interest is why they should do so. It is certainly not in the interests of historical truth. No doubt there was a great lack of understanding of warfare in Australia in 1914. There was a great patriotic rallying, and a belief that Australia would come to the help of the mother country and show her what good stuff her boys were made of. Many young men vegetating in the country saw enlistment as a chance to get away from mum and the farm, see the world and have a bit of fun. Still, Australians were not the only young men to falsify their age so that they could enlist. Nor were they the only writers to get carried away on the rhetoric of glory. The English poet Sir Henry Newbolt actually wrote of Australian gunners these immortal lines:

Their hearts were hot
And as they shot
They sang like kangaroos.[6]

More importantly, the poetry written at the time of the war by the diggers themselves — for example Harley Matthews, Fredric Manning, Oscar Walters — displays not innocence, not naivety, but a profound disillusionment with war, with politics, with patriotism and with authority. It is precisely *their* disillusionment which Geoff Page silenced or censored by his decision not to include any of their poetry in *Shadows from Wire*, and which present day poetry

denies to the Great War soldier — so that *today's* disillusioned wisdom can be heard.

The fact is that today's poets are not trying to set the record straight in the interests of historical objectivity. They are writing a revisionary account of the Great War and its participants which serves present-day needs, their own needs. One could say that they are creating a myth of national origin, a narrative whose function it is to explain why we are — as a nation — and why we are like we are.[7] One thing this myth "explains" is how present-day Australians have come to be "not innocent" or "not naive". These poets inscribe themselves and their — i.e. our — society as "fallen", post-lapsarian and wise; and they are locating that crucial fall from innocence to wisdom around 1914/15 or, to be precise, 25 April, 1915, the date of the landing at Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli peninsula. But we must distinguish between the Christian myth of the Fall and this present one. While the Biblical Fall from Innocence also involved the acquisition of knowledge (eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) it was constituted by an act of knowing disobedience against a just God on the part of Eve and Adam. Thus their fall was not into a knowledge of evil simply seen from outside; it involved an internalisation of evil symbolised by their act of eating the fruit, and was thus a fall into sin. However the Fall that involves us here was constituted precisely by obedience — by a willing and naive, innocent obedience to an authority which turned out to be unjust. Britain, the old colonial power, was unworthy of their sacrifice, while her officers and minions were foolish, lazy, stupid or criminally negligent of human life. Whereas Adam and Eve's fall was from innocence to sin, this fall was from innocence to knowledge — specifically, a knowledge of the evil of bloodshed. Possession of this knowledge is one of the things which — according to the recent poets — distinguishes present day Australians from their Great War counterparts.

The picture drawn by this myth of Australia and Britain during the Great War has clear parallels with the situation between Australia and the USA during the Vietnam War. During that conflict many people — including most of Australia's writers — saw the real enemy as being not the Viet Cong, who were frequently regarded as nationalistic and defensive, but rather our ostensible allies, an imperialist, aggressive, transgressive U.S. Government.[8] Moreover, an Australian Liberal-Country Party governing coalition had committed — even betrayed — Australia's young men to what was considered a foreign, imperialist war. This meant that the enemy, in effect, was now recognised as not simply external, but also as significantly *internal*; and the character of this internal enemy was constituted by its affinity and complicity with what was outside, imperialistic, transgressive of national borders. As one can see, there is a clear nationalistic element in this.

As far as I can determine, most recent poetry about the Great War was written after Australian troops were withdrawn from Vietnam in 1973. In the myth inscribed by this poetry, the concept of the internal enemy is also to be found. However the identity of that internal enemy has changed, and I shall look at that in a moment.

But first, I would like to observe that this myth serves another nationalistic purpose also. Locating Australia's initiation into maturity in a violent fall from innocence, it necessarily predicates something to fall from — a kind of golden

age, an innocent, blameless youth for the nation. Yet Australia's nineteenth century literature, particularly fiction, bore explicit reference to the violence, cruelty and injustice of early white settlement: especially but not exclusively toward the convicts. More recently there has come to light ample evidence of the violence and injustice directed against the Aboriginal inhabitants by the white "settlers" — more justly termed, today, the white invaders from another country across the sea. All this is read out of the record by the present myth of innocence, which instead creates for Australia a blameless boyhood.

By way of conclusion it must be recalled that poetry about the Great War — both early and recent — is largely a male creation. This is significant when one looks at the ambivalence of the Female in it. The Female can be mother or girlfriend. But also, as in "The Clarrie Dunn Fragments" by Les A. Murray, the Female as British or even Australian women can clearly be seen as The Enemy itself, inciting the innocent patriots to enlist and be "offered up" as sacrifice:

> It got me a white feather, that,
> outside a Bond Street shop
> from a hoity-toity dame. She screamed
> when I grabbed her, neck and crop,
>
> and pitched her through the window glass.
> I would not be Offered Up.

She appears in a similar guise in "Home Front" by Geoff Page; whereas in his "Inscription at Villers-Bretonneux" she is treated, like her dead soldier lover, as a victim. In her transgression of clear boundaries the Female is thus another manifestation of the Enemy who can be internal — of us, yet somehow dangerously other.

This is not new. An even deeper distrust of the Female appears strikingly in a poem contemporary with the Great War: Harley Matthew's significantly named "Women are not Gentlemen".[9] In this poem a Turkish sniper on Gallipoli is thought to be a woman because of the unfailing deadliness of her aim. When the sniper is killed and it turns out that he was really a man, the Australian soldiers feel sorry for him: "It was a man, poor bastard, all the time," one of them says. A man is really "one of them", while a woman is totally other. The point here is that the Female is accorded only an antagonistic role, the ultimate antagonistic role, in fact, as she is opposed to the male soldiers of *both* armies. In this masculine discourse, death — the ultimate other — is Female, and all females carry her scent, even into the recent poetry about the Great War.

Given that this myth of *male* innocence was created by male writers, it is not altogether surprising that the place of the Female in this myth is so ambivalent: mother and girlfriend, or enemy and death. In this respect the woman is like the land itself as it so often appears in Australian writing. Frequently characterised as Female, the Australian land resisted anything like that blessed union of Man and Nature which was a Romantic ideal. Instead, she had to be subdued, conquered, dominated, opened up, penetrated, made fruitful. In response, the land could be compliant, but she was also capricious,

frequently retaliating with her unholy trinity of Fire, Flood and Drought. Similarly, in this new myth of origin, the human Female has no role as creator, nurturer or nurse, as Wordsworth would say, of all our mortal being. She is untrustworthy, dangerously transgressive, and thus capable of being the internal enemy. What this means is that a predominantly male discourse has predicted the blamelessness of our young men, while even a cursory knowledge of our history reveals that our national past is not blameless. Blame therefore has to be placed somewhere, and one function of this discourse is to assure that it is placed — or actually *displaced* — onto the Female.

It is possible that the violence of historical white settlement in Australia — which was, in a very real sense, an invasion of another people's country — is reflected in the hostility towards the Female in the myth of our origin: male guilt seeks a scapegoat in the internal enemy. Thus in depicting women as those who betrayed our innocent forebears by shaming them to enlist and thus lose their lives, the myth accounts for our undeniably fallen state, today's lack of innocence. But also, when one considers that Australian society does not actually have an origin within Australia at all, that it came somehow from outside, this myth of origin can be seen as the myth which stands in for, and thus obscures, not only an absence of innocence but also an absence of origin. Specifically, it can be seen as an attempt to create a blameless boyhood where, historically, there have always been grown men.

NOTES

1. Andrew Taylor, "War Poetry: Myth as De-formation and Re-formation", *Australian Literary Studies* Vol. 12, No. 2, 1985, 182-193.
2. Geoff Page, ed., *Shadows from Wire* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1983), and Chris Wallace-Crabbe and Peter Pierce, eds. *Clubbing of the Gunfire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1984). All the poetry discussed here, except where otherwise noted, is drawn from these anthologies.
3. *Fly away Peter* was first published in the USA the year before under the title *The Bread of Time to Come* (New York: Brasiller, 1981).
4. These examples of poetry contemporary with the Great War are taken from *Clubbing of the Gunfire*.
5. The fact that the poem starts with an echo of Catullus's famous "Ave atque vale" only serves to confirm this further.
6. Quoted in Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1978), 44.
7. Such a myth does not, of course, genuinely explain anything. Its "explanation" consists of a narrativisation of what is in effect a condition rather than a series of events (in this case the existence within our national consciousness of a certain kind of knowledge).
8. For example, 77 well-known Australian writers contributed work to *We took their orders and are dead*, "An Anti-war Anthology" edited by Shirley Cass, Ros Cheney, David Malouf and Michael Wilding (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1971).
9. Les A. Murray, ed., *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 123.

JEAN KENT

Now That the Rain has Gone

Now that the rain has gone
lifted from the morning like a widow's veil
we stand at the window: new people, waking

Over chrysanthemums' soggy fists
a white moth, solicitous as a handkerchief
dabs and dries with wink-quick wings

The woken eye of the morning
spreads wide, warily . . .

Sunlight startles
the five nylon ropes of the clothesline
slung above the garden's lap: lanes

in a swimming race suddenly
off the springboard of a petal, the white moth
dives

butterfly-stroking shadows
as transient as the touch
of fingers on a face — we stand at the window

watching, believing
now that the rain has gone
that we have also bruised in the night

only to bud like those waterlilies,
the coloured pegs like them, we peer
at the sun-stung surface, ready to rise

from dead men's floats.
The morning pools, deep and warm.
We stand at the window. New people. Waking.

Carol is Trying to Cry

Winter. There is no holding back the cold.
This window which should bear bouquets
of beatific leaves is buffeted now by cloud.
Breezes brush banks of grey
dragging through sky feathers of white
flotillas of migratory birds it is an epiphany
in its fashion but Carol sees none of that.

Carol is trying to cry. The broken sky

drops mackerel scales all over her eyes.
Loss and waste crowd out
her life. If I do not listen now
while the wind is picking clean
the last bones of her distress
tomorrow she may take too many pills
just before someone she wants to love
is due to visit. He will lift her back to life
her aching throat and numb fin-hands becoming his
as together they tread water, teasing death
until he cannot help but care. Why
she threatens me now can't I be her lifesaver
first? She would like her counsellor
to splutter up with her to be transfigured
by her ducking and to dream too
of floating out the window.

Carol is trying to cry. Behind her eyes

she waters a garden of fear. Philosophical hedges
distance her from me. To be or not to be —
surely the answer must be hers, not mine.
Ripe for damage, her life like a small dark fig

rots deep in seas of Moreton Bays —
I feel myself flapping, clasping shadows
hanging upside-down bat-black
while she falls before the starved beaks of bulbuls.
Unrescued, seed scatters the room.
When she cries, jungles fall and ominous pips
as minute, as dangerous as eyes wash down.
Over her I hold an umbrella of batwings.

At last, Carol is no longer trying to cry.

She is dry as a glass vase
all the dead flowerstalks and dirty water
thrown out — even my radar detects no screech.
It is winter. My garden is bare. Clear-eyed,
the window bears emptiness bountifully in its arms.

DAVID BUCHANAN

On Poetry: An Argument

Once i thought
that poets wrote
to communicate their ideas.
And when two
unknown to one
another wrote of *wax*
melting like tears
the coincidence
became providence —
an affirmation of Heaven.

Now when two poets
unknown to one
another
write of *wax*
melting like tears;
i am merely presented with an image
to which i may lend meaning;
as they chose those words
as the Carpenter would do wood:
for its colour, grain
and consistency of form —
from which to craft
a chair
in which we may sit.

PETER KIRKPATRICK

The Tough Guys Tumble

Before the movie, coffee for the drunks
in a trendy cafe, where a New Wave comic
was gagging, dumped by his own Last Wave jokes;
and the two drunks were loudly rude about him,
wise-cracking like an earthquake fissure
in the polite silence.

Well I ask you,
what could their mate do but hold his cappuccino
for a mask, draining it to china whiteface,
till the drunks could be shown it's time to go?
And when he stands to give that stage direction,
just guess his reaction to the stage whisper
of a man in black, masked by dark glasses,
who hisses, "So long, arsehole."

"What?!"

"So long,
arsehole . . ."

Thrill to his outraged innocence
as he cries (drunker than he'd esteemed himself),
"Step outside, Bozo!"

Follow him to the courtyard
and see him shed his armour-stiff tweed coat,
uncoil his varsity scarf like a pet python,
and affect Les Darcy, set for Homerics.
Watch the man in black step up, take off his glasses,
and prove himself a sobering head higher than
our hero. Cringe, when Achilles then says,
"Look, this is silly . . ."

Enter the wondering drunks,
smiling and blameful. Exit the man in black,
smiling and damnéd. The audience departs,
politely silent.

Left there centre-stage,
Vesti la giubba sobbing from every pore,
what would his Newtown-bred, War-torn dad
have said? With one drunk's arm consoling
his coat-shoulder, he soldiers on to a film
called *Eraserhead* at a theatre called
Valhalla.

MICHAEL HEALD

Impression of a Student Bedsit

Little room to improvise
between the two postures.
A plastic bin with scraps
around its mouth, a bike
leaning bonily against the wall,
dispelling the sense of indoors.
In the corner a vine
of darkness, that flowers fiercely
some nights as he looks up
from the brightened page.

GEOFFREY BEWLEY

A student of the dance

From the Golden Temple's roof they could see miles across the roofs of the town. The low sun was reddening behind dust and smoke. Bates could hear traffic grinding in the streets outside.

The American girl, Denise, was looking at the Canadian couple's map. "So, where are we now?" she said.

"Here," Pauline said. "Here's Delhi. So it's this far to go."

"What's the train?" said Jean-Luc. "The Northwest Frontier Express?"

"Mail," Bates said.

"Right, Mail. So how does it sound, eh, riding into India on the Northwest Frontier Mail?"

"We still have to get the tickets," Pauline said. "The guy said, check back at five. It's nearly that now."

The grey-bearded sentries with pikes and swords watched them leave the Temple. At the station the reservation office clerk checked his list again. He was fat and clean shaven with black-framed glasses, and he studied it for some time.

"This was three seats, three," he said. "Now is it you are wanting four?"

"If you could," Denise said.

He read the list again and looked at the clock. Finally he fished out a handful of tickets and stamped them, and pushed them across. There were four after all.

"Half a day to buy a train ticket," Jean-Luc said outside.

"Good going," Bates said. "It gets harder after here."

"That's right, you were here before."

"Half a day to buy a ticket?" said Denise.

"It's not a terrifically efficient country," Bates said. "In Delhi it takes a day."

"Oh, wow," said Pauline.

Denise looked at Bates, and then looked away.

They had a meal in a vegetarian place near the Temple as the night came on. Trucks and taxis driven by Sikhs honked and rattled by. Two boys with hair tied in topknots served thick dal soup and thin chapatti bread.

"It's so good being in a Hindu country at last," Denise said. "I mean, it was so bad getting here. All those Moslem places on the way."

"You had trouble?" Pauline said.

"Well, not me, I was careful. Because you've really got to watch out with those guys. I mean, the way they treat women in their society, you hear so many stories. I was watching out all the time."

"You think India will be so different?" Jean-Luc said.

"Well, it's a totally different culture, you know. Because they're all Hindus here, and that's a kind of open and tolerant religion. It's a very open society and they're not so obsessed about, well, sex and like that, and so Indian women have a much less restrictive role. I studied all this back home."

"You know all about it, then," Pauline said.

"Well, I've been looking forward to it for so long, and I read everything about India that I could get. As a matter of fact I'll be studying here, too."

"Studying what?"

"Dance."

"Indian dancing?"

"Yeah, I want to learn it if I can. I want to learn Bharat Natya. Do you know what that is?"

She was looking at Bates. "Well, not off hand," he said.

"Well, it's probably the most sacred form of Indian dance, It's regarded as being as sacred as the Vedas. It's a temple dance. It expresses the values of true love and devotion. The hand movements tell the story, and you kind of keep time. And if you want to learn it you've got to come here, there's nowhere else you can go."

Bates had noticed she had a slightly flat, duckfooted walk, but she was fit and small-waisted and well made. She did have an awfully artistic look about her. When she smiled she looked very bright and wide-eyed.

"So you came all this way," Pauline said.

"Well, it's not just the dance," Denise said. "I mean, it's the whole culture, and the dance is just part of that. And, like, my mother's American, and my father was French, so I've always been, like, going from one culture to another and not being a part of either one. So I've been able to find a culture that really offered me something I could relate to, that I wasn't just stuck with because that's where I was born. So all the time in New York I was studying dance, but I was also studying the East and India and the religion and art and culture, and planning it for years. And now, this is it, you know?"

"It's your dream come true," Jean-Luc said.

They got their packs from the Temple and took motor-rickshaws in to the station. It had been empty but for beggars in the morning and afternoon, but now the platform was crowded with Indians and their families and friends packing into the train. They handed their tickets to a conductor.

"So, you and you must come this way," he said to Pauline and Denise. "You and you must go in here."

They looked at one another. "I thought all together," Jean-Luc said.

"No, no, no, you see, you are two and two."

"But not the girls on their own, all that way."

"But this is what the ticket is saying, you see."

"Look, swap tickets," Bates said. "I'll take Pauline's. Then you go with her, and Denise comes with me. Is that okay?"

The conductor waggled his head, okay.

"What about me?" Denise said. "Don't I have any say?"

"Well, there's not much else we can do. Or you could stay here and try and get it tomorrow."

"No," she said. "Okay, I'll go."

They all shook hands and the Canadians climbed on board. Then the conductor led the way through the crowd, past the beggars and luggage and trolleys and up through another door. The carriage was already full of people. Bates and Denise followed him over roped baskets and holdalls blocking the floor.

"You sit there, there," he told them.

Four young Indians were already in the eight-seat Second Class compartment, and a couple of suitcases stood between the seats. Bates lifted both packs to the luggage rack opposite their own seats, side by side at the door.

"Do you want the corner?" he asked.

"No, I'll sit here," she said. "You go there."

A fat Indian boy smiled at her and made room. People stared in through the window and the doorway as the train filled up. Two more young Indians came in and took the last seats on the other side of the compartment, and Bates pushed the door shut. The air was stale and sticky, but the crowd pushing was worse. He leaned across and tugged open the window as the train shook and rattled and the dark faces on the platform started to slide past.

Then the station and the town were gone. Outside the window there was nothing but night. They all looked at one another in the train's weak yellow light. The boys were looking at Denise. They talked in their own language in low voices. They appeared to be all Hindus, dressed in loose shirts and sandals.

"Hello," the tall boy opposite said suddenly to Denise.

"Hello," she said. She smiled at him. One of the other boys giggled.

"Hello, yes," the tall boy said. "Excuse me, please. You are travelling to Delhi, isn't it?"

"To Delhi, yes," she said.

"You are a married couple?" he asked. He glanced at Bates.

"No, he's just somebody I met."

Two boys nudged one another. The tall boy smiled. He had the beginnings of a moustache over his mouth. "So, we can talk, please?" he said.

"Okay, sure."

"Sure," another boy said, and they all giggled again.

Why was she in India? She told them about the dancing. One of the boys didn't understand. Another explained with effeminate hand and body movements, and they all laughed again. What did she think of India? She gave her explanation again about the religion and the culture. Bates rested his head on the seat's cracked leather and shut his eyes. She answered all the questions earnestly. The other boys discussed her answers in their own language and laughed each time.

The train stopped once in open country. Presently it stopped again, and there were lights and people on a platform outside. There were voices and feet in

the corridor, the compartment's door rattled, and three more Indian youths slipped in. The boys on the seats pushed along to make room for them.

"These are our friends," the tall boy said.

Bates pushed the door shut and braced it with his boot. There was a latch at the side, and he clicked it down. Somebody rattled the door from outside.

"No, no," one boy said, and he reached for the latch. Bates held up his hand and the boy sat back.

Then there were white eyes and teeth outside the window. A boy was leaning in, pushing an arm and a leg over the glass, and the boys nearest helped him through. Two others followed him before the train jerked and started again.

Six Indian boys squeezed along the seat opposite. A couple took friends on their laps. The fat boy next to Denise pushed up against her and smiled at her. Someone had closed the window, and someone else had passed round cigarettes. They were all watching Denise again. It seemed the latecomers were hearing all about her. One put his hand on her knee, and the others all laughed when she shook it away.

"This is terrible," she said. "How can they do this?"

"Friends of yours," Bates said.

"But I mean, the conductor's got to move them out."

"No, I don't think it works that way."

"Can we get out of here?"

"Not unless you want to stand all the way."

"But I've got to. I mean, I've got to go. I've got to take a piss, you know?"

"Well, any time you like."

"I mean, can I ask you to watch my pack while I'm gone?"

"What do you reckon?" he said.

"Well, thanks. Okay."

He slid back the compartment door. Denise picked her way though. One of the boys said something, and all the others burst out laughing. One made a hissing noise, and the others hugged him and slapped him.

There was more talk, and then one boy got up off another's knee. He was one of the three who'd climbed in the window. He groped across the compartment, and lowered himself into the space Denise had left. He settled in and smiled at Bates, and Bates stared sideways back.

The door rattled. He let Denise in. "Where's my seat?" she said.

"Right here," Bates said. He stood up then, and made her sit in his corner place.

"Where do you sit, then?" she asked.

"Right here," he said.

He faced the boy in her old seat, and smiled at him and beckoned him to move. The boy hunched and shook his head. One of the others said something. Bates braced himself on the door's frame with his left hand, and grabbed the boy's collar with his right, and yanked him forward and up out of the seat.

The boy's eyes widened and his mouth fell open. He pawed at Bates' arm. He looked as if he were about to cry.

"Back there," Bates said. "Get back there, okay?"

He showed his fist in the boy's face, and the boy backed on to a friend's knees.

He looked round then at the others, all sitting still. He sat down in the narrow space by Denise, and braced again and shoved the fat boy farther along.

"You'll make them mad, doing that," Denise said.

Bates shoved again until she had room. "How do you feel?" he said.

"I don't know. Not too good. My back hurts from sitting, you know? I think I need to lie down."

"No chance of that here."

"Well, yeah. Yeah, I know."

There was no weight on her, and she could move about in the corner of the seat. But in a few more minutes he heard her moan.

"There is one place you could lie down, if you want to," he said. "Do you think you could get on that rack up there?"

"I'd be glad to try," she said. She moaned again.

"Come on," he said, "you're a dancer. Just dance on up there."

He gave her a leg up, and she rolled on her side in the net. She settled facing the bulkhead, pillowed on the edge of her pack. The train's movement bounced her, and he took her belt and tied it across the rack's frame so she couldn't tumble out.

Another Indian had found room by the window, pushing the fat boy along. Bates wagged his finger. "Uh uh uh," he said.

The fat boy stopped and tried to squeeze back. Bates levered sideways until he was free of the boy's slack weight. He relaxed with his shoulder in the angle, where he could watch the Indians and Denise and their belongings on the rack.

They stopped at another station, but the door stayed shut. The Indian boys were quieter now. It was after midnight. The movement of the train seemed easier. Some of the boys were swaying and bobbing, sleeping where they sat. There was nothing but night outside the window. Bates let his eyes fall shut against the dim light and smoke.

He couldn't have said what woke him. Perhaps it was a chance violent movement of the train. But he found he was looking at the back of a lean boy in a white shirt, standing with his feet between two friends on the edge of the seat opposite and his face level with the luggage rack. His right hand was touching Denise's hair. She looked to be asleep. He was tugging gently at one of the pockets on her pack.

One boy sitting spoke suddenly in a high voice, and all the heads turned. The boy on the seat stopped still, and his face came slowly round. He poised to jump, but there was nowhere he could go. Bates took hold of him as he stumbled down.

"Now, give it back," Bates said.

"Nothing, nothing," the boy said.

"Nothing, truly, mister," another said.

Bates looked at them all and then hit the boy sideways in the head, once, not too hard. The boy howled like a cat. He didn't resist when Bates felt his pockets. He had nothing there.

Bates had the boy by the shirt. He lifted the latch and slid open the compartment door. The boy cried out as he pitched through and tripped in the corridor. Bates latched it behind him, and braced it with his foot at the floor.

On the rack Denise was still asleep, apparently. He closed the pocket on her pack. His webbing zipper bag looked untouched.

"He took nothing, truly," a boy said.

Nothing else happened after that. The Indian boys were silent. The fat boy was careful to leave enough room. Denise didn't move in the luggage rack's net.

Then the boys were moving at the window, and it was light outside. The train was crawling past small filthy huts and yards. Presently Denise turned over and opened her eyes. The boys were all trying to lean out the window, chattering. Then there was a long crowded platform, and the boys all pushed out into the corridor as the train slowed. One reached up quickly and felt Denise's bottom as he went.

She turned too late to see. "Somebody touched me," she said.

"Just a friend," Bates said.

"Was it you?"

"Not me, no."

"Was there some kind of an argument last night, while I was up here?"

"Just something with those guys."

On the platform they looked for the Canadians. They couldn't see them around. They got past the station's porters, cripples and beggars and caught a motor-rickshaw in the street.

"Where to now?" Bates said.

"Somewhere to sleep," Denise said. "I've got some addresses, but first I've got to find a place to sleep."

"What sort of a place?"

"Anywhere. Okay, somewhere cheap."

"Panchkuin Road is pretty cheap."

"Yeah, there, okay."

The motor-rickshaw rattled down hot bright dusty streets crowded with Ambassadors, Morris Minors and Fiats. Denise leaned against Bates with her eyes shut and her pack on her knees. The turbaned driver stopped at the cheap hotels and Bates made her get out to see. The first was too dirty and the next two were full, but the next was okay. The fifty-rupee room had a shower and a fan that worked. They took turns in the shower and dried themselves modestly, and lay on the separate beds to sleep past the middle of the day.

In the afternoon Bates woke. Denise was sitting up on her bed, barefoot but dressed.

"I could use something to eat," she said.

"Do you want to go out now?"

"Well, yeah, why not?"

"It'll be pretty hot out there."

"Yeah, but I think I need to get something inside me."

"Well, okay, then. Why not."

Outside it was the hottest part of the day. It had been hot in the room, but the open air met them like the stifling gust from an oven door. The street was lined with open shops under big slanted awnings, where the merchants sat like white-eyed idols by their scales. Between those patches of shade the whitish dust lay thick on the roadway. A fat sour-faced man in white pyjamas glared

at Denise from the seat of a trishaw creaking past. A big-bellied child was sitting howling at the edge of the pavement. A scabby yellow dog with half a tail padded out of their way.

"Oh, wow," she said. "Something sure smells along here."

She was looking away from things. She appeared to be trying to smile.

"After a while you get used to it," he said.

At the corner of the street three leper women were sitting in a line. They made crying faces and held up their speckled stump hands as Denise went by.

"Don't look," Bates said. "Look away."

Rotting vegetable stuff was heaped in the gutter, where it had been washed up by rain. Another yellow dog was lying mixed up in it, bloated and drying. Flies hummed round its head and tail and two stiff legs stuck in the air. Bates stepped wide of it and walked on. Then he noticed he was alone. Denise had stopped still behind him in the street. Her shoulders were hunched and her hands were over her face.

Bates took her by the arm. She was shaking and her hands were wet.

"Hey, come on," he said. "Come on. It's okay."

She shook her head and sobbed harder. He held her lightly with a hand around her back.

"Come on," he said. "You're all right. You're okay."

Two Indian boys passing on bicycles stared at them. He kissed the top of her head. Presently she straightened and lowered her hands and backed away.

"I've got to go back," she said. "I'm sorry. Can you take me back?"

"Okay."

"I mean, I was, I don't know, it's the smell and that thing, and it just got to me all of a sudden."

"No, that's okay."

He led her back past the dog with her eyes shut, and back up the street again. He left her lying with her face in her pillow. She wasn't hungry any more.

He checked the New Delhi Post Office for mail. He went to the Kwality Restaurant on Connaught Place for a mixed grill, and read his letters there. He came back to the room at sundown, and Denise was awake then.

"I took two Valiums," she said. 'I was asleep for hours."

"That's probably the best way," Bates said.

In the morning he took her to the Kwality for breakfast. This time she knew not to look at too many of the things they passed. She ate vegetarian and he had a grill again.

"See, I came here for something, for the dancing," she said. "So now that I'm finally here I do want to stay. And I've only got seven hundred dollars, and I want to stay a year, so I'm going to have to look for work. Do you think I could do it that way?"

"Maybe," he said.

"Well, I've got to do something about it. And I've got to look for that place to live, because I want to move there today."

They went together in a motor-rickshaw to a street lined with trees a couple of miles out in the suburbs. A bearer showed them into a shady house and a decent-looking old woman in spectacles and a white sari met Denise. She knew of the dancing school. She had room for Denise to stay.

They rode back to the hotel, and Bates carried out Denise's pack and balanced it on the motor-rickshaw's seat for her.

"Okay," he said. "You're on your own from here."

They shook hands in the street while the Sikh driver waited. "Good luck to you too," she said.

"Listen, how much money have you got? How much did you say?"

"Seven hundred."

"And you've got a ticket home?"

"No, that's it. That's the lot."

"To get back to New York?"

"Well, back to Paris."

"Listen," Bates said. "Have a shot at the dancing, but then if you think you've had enough of it, if you're sick of it here, all the dirt and the shit, then drop it and quit and head for home. You can always do that."

"No, I'll be okay, honestly. I mean, yesterday, you know, I was just kind of tired, and it all came at me and it got to me like that."

"Just remember, okay?"

She smiled slightly. There were dark circles under her eyes. "You're a gentleman," she said. "I'll say that for you."

"Don't spread it around," he said.

She looked as if she might say something else, but she only smiled again and climbed into the motor-rickshaw.

"What place, sar?" the driver asked.

"Just the lady," Bates said. "Same place, okay?"

"Acha, sar," the driver said. The motor-rickshaw's engine coughed and popped, and he put the thing in gear and it sputtered away. Bates saw Denise gripping her pack, waving with her free hand. There was no chance to say good luck again.

ELLY McDONALD

Pet

An image of a girl, smiling
A whitebread girl with small milkteeth
Sharp like a cat's.
A narrow-faced woman with thin lips
A wide-stretched grin
Fixed. Pinched. Anxious eyes
Mistrustful, guarded — slanted slits under
Claw-slash brows
He loves her.
He loves her long-limbed
Awkwardness, her stiff-necked
Elegance — the memory of how
She loved her cats.
Love. Memory. Shrill cries on the wind.
He takes in stray
Women and dreams
Of spilt milk.

WARRICK WYNNE

Nana

She is smaller than ever;
though she says I am bigger,
and I have to stoop
to kiss her cheek
that is cold.
Here, in her shrinking unit,
it is always dusk.
The cars flicker outside
like mercury
and she is a shape in a room.
'That's a funny cup of tea',
she says crossly,
though she must have seen most
of what cups of tea
are capable of.
The rich dark liquid
is honey-lit
as it uncoils like rope
from a silver teapot.
'Yes', she says,
'she's got your father's hair',
to my daughter,
who sleeps in the carry-basket,
six weeks old,
wrapped in crotched warmth
with all those cups of tea
to look forward to.

PETER PIERCE

'Weary with travelling through realms of air . . .': Romance fiction of 'Boldrewood', Haggard, Wells and Praed

I

'Rolf Boldrewood's' *Robbery Under Arms* (1882-3)[1] and *In Bad Company* (1901)[2]; Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885)[3] and *She* (1887)[4]; H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895)[5] and Rosa Praed's *Fugitive Anne* (1903)[6] are books written both from the centre and the periphery of the British Empire at its zenith, by authors acquainted with one another or with one another's work. Each book imagines the history of a 'country'; invents elements of its past and speculates on its future; entices readers with a confection comprised in part of fancy and in part of shared, if imperfect information concerning strange lands. The settings of the romances are apparently disparate: a bushrangers' hideout nicknamed 'Terrible Hollow', the lost kingdom of Kukuanaland, England in the year 802701 A.D., the colony that Praed rechristened 'Leichardt's (*sic*) Land'. Together — though misleadingly — these settings might suggest not only the lands over which the British had dominion late in the nineteenth century, but the territories which they might still aspire to conquer — in the remote regions of the earth and also in the future. In fact, each novel reflects not a desire for imperialist expansion but a marked and common anxiety regarding the fate of the Empire at large and of its individual possessions. In their historical imaginings, distinctive as these are, none of the four authors rests securely in dreams of or designs upon the future. Each is chastened by a belief that the cyclical processes of history will undo the grandeur of any empire (though Wells held longest to the possibility of a regenerate future). Nor do the four authors find respite in the past, replete as it is with archaeological evidence of the mournful decline of races, some of which have left not even the memory of their names. No consolation in the present can be gained either by forward or by backward glances. The historical witness of these novels (and of their authors) is to a restless consciousness — a subliminal, premodernist consciousness — that both fears and desires the futures that it imagines, the past that it recollects.

Wilbur Smith's contemporary novel, *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* (1984)[7] affords an unusual retrospect of this account of the historical imaginations of four late nineteenth century authors of romance fiction. Smith's plot needs to be recounted: a one-legged Rhodesian, turned best-selling author through the vehicle of a pop history of Africa, has writer's block. He receives an offer from

a C.I.A. man who pretends to be from the World Bank to return to Zimbabwe, there to gather intelligence on the Mugabe government. He teams up with a beautiful woman photographer: he will write the words that will accompany her pictures of Zimbabwe in a book designed to boost its tourism. With bitter memories of the guerilla war (where he lost a leg), the author also has friends in the new government. One of these (in truth a crook) allows him to buy back the family farm. An ex-friend is falsely accused of and gaoled for ivory poaching. The false friend betrays the writer. Zimbabwe reverts to tribal conflict between the Shona and the Matabele. The writer loses his farm, kills some pursuers, frees the framed former friend, who is now a friend again. Together they go on a treasure hunt to find the enormous cache of diamonds hidden by the Matabele chief Logenbula. They find the diamonds (stolen from the workings at Kimberley) in a cave. Logenbula is there too, turned into a stalactite. The adventurers are buried alive by the forces of the villainous politician but intrepidly escape — with the diamonds. The bad Zimbabwean is exposed, the good one is restored to government, the one-legged author marries the lady photographer, regains the farm and writes another book. *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* ends with him being welcomed home to the accompaniment of a Matabele chant, which signals that the future of Zimbabwe can be assured if whites are allowed to run large scale pastoral enterprises while liberally employing black labour.

The notable resemblance of episodes in *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* to the latter part of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*[8] signals who Smith regards his mentor in fiction of African riches and romance to be. So does his presentation of a layered, recessive past. In the recent past lie divisive memories of the historical/heroic age of British imperialism and white control. Further back (though resurfacing in the present) are the recollections of tribal conflicts within the country. Still more remote are tales of Boer pioneering during the seventeenth century and furthest away (though paradoxically freshest in the author's mind) is the pristine Africa, teeming with unthreatened wildlife. In the Zimbabwean future two courses are possible: a Communist leaning government, hostile to the West, or one that will work in harmony with whites who return to farm the land. Smith proffers a myth of reconciliation. In this myth, treasure secures the national future. At the same time, it bears solemn witness to the dignity of the past, the heritage upon which that future will be constructed. In the less comfortable nineteenth century romances of 'Boldrewood', Haggard, Wells and Praed, treasure has no such redemptive function, the future is not serenely anticipated, the past offers no simple, humanistic reassurances.

Intending to be one of the originators of romance fiction in Australia, Thomas Browne called his writing self 'Boldrewood' (from Scott's *Marmion*) and added 'Rolf' because it sounded Norse. Less fortunate than some of the characters in his novels, he did not enrich himself through either pastoral enterprise or by prospecting for gold. The government provided for Browne, who held positions as a goldfields commissioner in various towns in New South Wales and Victoria. Like Haggard he was a magistrate, a club man, a Tory in politics who had a deep if sometimes anxious belief in the future and the beneficent purposes of the British Empire. In his fiction, 'Boldrewood' was determined

to discover in one of the colonies of the Empire 'the domain of legend and tradition' which he deemed essential for the creation of romance. Scott and Cooper were his models as reclaimers of outland regions for historical fiction; Haggard was soon his more successful contemporary.

Instead of feeling hampered by the lack of an intelligible, European style history and its deposits in stone in Australia (as was 'Australie', lamenting 'Too new, too new, to foster poesy'), 'Boldrewood' gave the real circumstances that he appropriated for his romances the semblance of historical remoteness. In *Robbery Under Arms*, his tale of 'the wilder aspects of Australian life', he exploited and conflated exploits of the previous generation: the Turon gold rush of 1850, the robbery at Eugowra Rocks in 1862. 'Boldrewood' hoped that Australia's real and its imagined bushrangers, its Gardiners and Starlights, may 'in a few decades . . . take rank with Dick Turpin and Claude Duval'. Starlight, the cavalier bushranger who is the anti-hero of *Robbery Under Arms,* muses that 'People think a great deal of a dead man now and then in this innocent country'. Bloodshed adds historical resonance. The factitiously dense and distant past of the gold rush, bushranging and murder in this romance became for 'Boldrewood' a guarantee that there might be a national future. The Turon rush was an epitome of the vibrant, macaronic peopling of Australia. 'Boldrewood' invented a newspaper headline for his novel which proclaimed of the rush that 'It will revolutionise the new world. It will liberate the old. It will precipitate Australia into a nation'. Whether true or not of the rush in history, the quotation speaks covertly of 'Boldrewood's' literary ambition.

In his short novel, *In Bad Company* (1901), 'Boldrewood' converted even more recent events into fabled history. The Queensland shearers' strike of the early 1890s (that is, less than a decade earlier) became 'The Shearers' War'. Sympathetic to bushrangers, or at least distinguishing among them like Cooper between his good and bad Indians, 'Boldrewood' was enraged by the shearers, whom he described as 'outlaws in the worse sense of the word', members of a 'guerilla band' promoting 'social upheaval' and even threatening 'civil war'. The genesis of the Australian national song, 'Waltzing Matilda', lay in an incident of the strike. 'Boldrewood' would have had no truck with 'Banjo' Paterson's depiction of a swagman driven to suicide by the persecution of squatters and troopers. Paterson heard the story while staying at Dagworth station. In his novel, 'Boldrewood' writes of how Dagworth had to be defended 'against a lawless band humorously describing themselves as Union Shearers'. This was his appalled vision of a possible national future. It is the antithesis of the dreams of a 'pastoral paradise' that are also ventilated in the novel.

The collection where *In Bad Company* appeared also reprinted a number of sketches, among them 'Boldrewood's' discourse on 'The Australian Native-Born Type'. He begins by praising the Australian merino as 'superior to the best imported' varieties. When he turns from sheep to people, 'Boldrewood' asks:

> Then the heat, the constant eating of meat, the locomotive, speculative habit of the land — do not these produce a variation of type? How *can* they be like people born in the green Motherland? is eagerly asked. My answer is that — 'race is everything'.

Thus the national future may be subsumed within or postponed on behalf of the imperial future. Urged on by commitments of colonial troops to the Boer War, 'Boldrewood' imagined this meant that future generations in Australia

> for ages to come [will be] jealously claiming the proud title of 'Britons of the South', and as such, when the world's war-dogs bay around the sacred standard of the Empire, [will be] eagerly emulous to be enrolled among the 'Soldiers of the Queen'.

One unlooked for literary consequence of the political (and quasi-religious) hope that 'Boldrewood' expressed here would be the devaluing of his indigenous romance material. Nor did he foresee how later Australian authors would regard the British authorities as a more insidious enemy than the Boers. The ironic theme song of the film '"Breaker" Morant' was 'Soldiers of the Queen'.

The future envisaged for Australia in *Robbery Under Arms* is less militantly imperialistic than in the short novel *In Bad Company*, which had concluded with the wish that young Australians would be both 'an honour to their respective colonies and a valued addition to the loyal subjects of the British Empire'. 'Boldrewood' added: 'that Empire, in whose cause they are, even as I write, sending the flower of their youthful manhood to a far-off battlefield'. In one of his last books, *The Ghost Camp* (1902)[9], which is set in the Monaro region, 'a wild and desolate land; dreary, even savage to the unaccustomed eye', the muses again in his fond way on 'What sons for the Empire should these Australian highlands rear, to do battle for Old England in the wars of the giants yet to come!' With the Boer War over, this may reflect the specific expectation (and the kind of qualified welcome) of the Great War to be found in Haggard's and Kipling's writing of the same period. At a long remove from the likely battlefield, 'Boldrewood' shows more relish than they did.

Recuperating from a broken English romance with a lady named Montresor, the hero of *The Ghost Camp* finds a real fortune through no exertions of his own in a silver mine on the west coast of Tasmania. Though *The Miner's Right* (1890) and *The Last Chance* (1905) as well as *Robbery Under Arms* also dwelt on sudden acquisitions of fortune through mining, 'Boldrewood' appears to believe that wealth thus obtained is less real or reliable than that which comes from pastoralism. In *Robbery Under Arms* he details carefully the great riches at the Turon: 'the Boennair nugget, dug at Louisa Creek by an Irishman, that weighed 364oz 11dwt. It was sold in Sydney for £1,156. There was the King of Meroo nugget, weighing 157oz; and another one that only scaled 71oz seemed hardly worth picking up after the others . . .' Yet these tangible objects of much price are converted into cash, which is swiftly spent on ephemera, as though the miners cannot believe (any more than Starlight's bushrangers) that riches gained by chance can purchase them an enduring future. In *The Ghost Camp,* the colonial silver is repatriated to England, where presumably there will be more authentic purposes for which to spend it.

Before he leaves Tasmania, the hero of *The Ghost Camp* organises 'a large fashionable party to the weird, gloomy solitudes of Macquarie Harbour', thus paying homage to the romance landscape in the recent past popularised by Marcus Clarke's novel *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1870-72). Then he

turns his back forever on this romance precint in the antipodes to enjoy his English earldom and his new bride, the veritable treasures that have fortuitously come his way. On that precint, 'Boldrewood' also turned his back. Now near the end of his career, and writing from the comfortable confines of the Melbourne Club, he had apparently surrendered his earlier, if ambiguous hopes for 'the Australian native-born type'. Desirable futures are to be had in England, or in the military service of its Empire. Yet in spite of this gradual loss of faith in what was distinctive in his own writing, 'Boldrewood' had created the most romantic location in Australian colonial fiction. Invested with a mysterious past and its traces, used as an outlaw hideout, finally a valley of gold, 'Terrible Hollow' is by turns characterised as refuge, way station to hell, idyllic trysting place, cemetery. 'Boldrewood' provided himself with more possibilities than he had space or inclination to use. By a couple of years, he also anticipated another late Romantic fastness, the lost kingdom of Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines.*

The quest in Haggard's novel has several objects: to find the brother of Sir Henry Curtis, to find Solomon's diamond mines. Yet this is also a quest for knowledge. The narrator, Allan Quatermain, the grizzled elephant hunter who will lead the expedition, says that:

> here and there you meet a man who takes the trouble to collect traditions from the natives and tries to make out a little piece of the history of this dark land. It was such a one as this who first told me the legend of Solomon's Mines . . .

Quatermain means 'dark' in the sense of unknown and mysterious, rather than benighted, and this is the true excitement of the quest for him. Haggard's tale of fabulous treasures in the African hinterland was interpreted with such literalness that several British parties set off to find Solomon's mines during the following year. Yet the riches to be gained in the novel are — like the Turon gold — not durable. Haggard is offering no imperialist fantasy of plunder. Having made fortunes in this first novel, Quatermain, Curtis and Captain Good abandon them willingly in the sequel, *Allan Quatermain* (1887) to undertake another quest whose objects are intangible: adventure, the satisfaction of curiosity regarding the existence of a fabled lost race. And they are in recoil from the jaded civilization of England. As Quatermain admits, 'the thirst for the wilderness was on me; I could tolerate this place no more; I could go and die as I had lived, among the wild game and the savages'. If this is an atavistic dream, it is not fulfilled, for Quatermain dies among a lost *white* race, whose ruler Curtis becomes, guaranteeing to preserve its state of 'comparative barbarism'.

In both romances, the characters' most important discovery is chastening knowledge, not only of the complexity of Africa (for which Haggard had a respect that made him refuse to generalise or patronise) but of the melancholy cyclical movement of history in which all races are implicated. This movement can be morbidly attractive. Quatermain says that another of his interests in the tale of the diamond mines was its claim on his historical sense:

> this story of an ancient civilization and of the treasures which these old Jewish or Phoenician adventurers used to extract from a country long since lapsed into the darkest barbarism took a great hold upon my imagination.

In the journey to Kukuanaland, the travellers have the illusion of moving backwards in time, from the present of British rule, to the sixteenth century Portuguese enterprise in Africa, to the indefinite past when the Kukuanas 'came down hither like the breath of a storm', at last to the discovery of the monumental remains of Solomon: the three giant statues called 'the Silent Ones' and the treasure caves of the king.

Norman Etherington has argued[10] that this regressive journey is an encounter not so much with history — vanished races, ruined cities — but with the characters' own pasts: 'the layered personality which Freud conceptionalised as superego, ego and id is Haggard's major theme'. In the course of the journey, 'first to go is the top five per cent of official civilization which is as unserviceable in this terrain of the imagination as Captain Good's immaculate clothing'. Etherington adds that

> Beneath this layer of personality lurks still another, more elemental and horrific, which is literally unconscious. In the heat of battle Haggard's combatants, whether Zulu, Viking or English, succumb to bloodlust — go beserk — and kill without restraint.

The design of Haggard's romances is more openly avowed than Etherington suggests. Curtis, likened to an ancient Dane, is said in battle to perform as 'his beserker forefathers'. But the solace of this historical regression is always temporary. Curtis resumes a courtly mien and quits the country. All the Europeans are in accord with the determination of the rightful king of Kukuanas to keep his country free of 'traders with their guns and gin . . . praying men to put a fear of death in men's hearts, to stir them up against the law of the king, and make a path for white men to follow on'. This criticism of the instruments of imperialism is the iconoclastic burden of the novel, put into the mouth of a black African. Within a few years, Haggard actually made a black warrior the protagonist of *Nada the Lily* (1892), a romance based on Zulu history. But this was no optimistic forecast for southern Africa. Andrew Lang responded accurately to the book's threnodic tone when he spoke of it as 'the epic of a dying people'.

The atavistic reversions which Etherington remarks in *King Solomon's Mines* have another significance to which he does not attend. The personal regressions in time and the archaeological evidence of the certain passing of civilizations also hold promises for the future. Like many of his contemporary authors — Rosa Praed, E.L. Grant Watson, Louisa Lawson, Conan Doyle — Haggard had a qualified belief in reincarnation.[11] If the ancient Dane can return to life in Curtis, if the evil witch Gagool can seem a constant renewal of her former selves (significantly she is likened both to a corpse and a child), then future incarnations will equally be possible. To impress the natives of Kukuanaland at the dangerous first meeting with them, Quatermain announces that 'all time

is before us, for we do not die'. In context, this is a satirical view of the world-gathering pride of British imperialism, a sentiment which is reproved in other ways and places in the book. Later Quatermain assures himself that

> Truly the universe is full of ghosts, not sheeted, church yard spectres, but the inextinguishable elements of individual life, which having once been, can never *die*, though they blend and change, and change again forever.

The Kukuana maiden Foulata, who has fallen in love with Captain Good and dies thwarting Gagool, expresses the reincarnationist hope more simply: 'Say that if I live again, mayhap I shall see him in the stars'.

Haggard rejects the fervours of imperialist conquest even as his imagined lost lands excite such fervours in others. Although not immune to the lure of treasure (he went on a fruitless hunt to Mexico in 1891 to seek the lost fortune that Cortez had taken from the Aztecs), Haggard preferred to work for such schemes as soldier settlement after the Great War in America, Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. He was animated by the desire for 'imperial unity', if in a more practical spirit than 'Boldrewood'. This sober public toil on the future's behalf, Haggard valued above his career as an author. Yet his desire to be occupied in imperial projects may have been a means of distracting himself from his anxiety for its future and from his personal spiritual anxiety. The assurance that he sought for himself increasingly was of his return to another life.

In *She* (1887), the romance that followed *King Solomon's Mines,* Haggard offered two versions of immortality. The eponymous heroine has passed through a subterranean, life-giving flame, at a place 'where the vital forces of the world visibly exist'. She can effectively live forever. Bored and under-occupied until another of Haggard's little groups of European questers reaches her, She is amazed to find that the handsome young Leo Vincey is (in her conviction and presumably in the author's) the reincarnation of her Egyptian beloved Kallikrates, whom she had murdered from sexual jealousy two thousand years before. While Vincey had entered another life (as Kallikrates reincarnated), She trusts in the secret flame to make her eternal. Venturing into it a second time, She ages, shrivels, seems to die.

Now She was too valuable a literary property to be disposed of so readily. Haggard revived her three times, notably in a sequel *Ayesha* (set in Tibet) and in an African romance where She encounters Quatermain. In *She* itself, the chance that somewhere there may be a 'fluid or essence' which enables immortality keenly prompts Haggard's imagination. The prospect also worries him, as She's fate shows. Yet her extraordinary case allows Haggard to pass over the reincarnation of Kallikrates as Vincey as routine, comparatively credible. While the person who found She's secret flame 'could no doubt rule the world' (as She thought to overthrow Queen Victoria and seize the British Empire — an acceleration of the historical cycle that is forestalled), the more modest prospect of living again, in future ages, and of having lived before, is surreptitiously endorsed. It is as though the imperialist desire for political rule

has been superceded by a longing for private dominion over the past and the future.

On 24 July 1904, Haggard wrote from Norfolk to Mrs Campbell Praed to congratulate her on a recent novel, probably *Nyria* (1904), the story of a Roman slave girl whom she believed to be a former incarnation of Nancy Harward, the woman with whom Praed lived. Praed had come to London with her husband in 1875 and soon felt that, compared with Australia, 'this was the real thing'. The Australia which is the setting of a score of her novels is a sphere of youth, romance, the uncivilised. In a letter of January 1890 to the Irish M.P., her friend and literary collaborator Justin McCarthy, which reveals among other matters the intimacy of English literary life, Praed wrote:

> Mr Rudyard Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* are the literary sensation at the moment, and when I came home it was to find him — quite a young man, unaffected, unconventional, and an altogether delightful companion at a dinner party — the lion of that season. He had somewhat diverted attention from another novel, *Robbery Under Arms*, by 'Rolf Boldrewood' — Mr T.A. Browne — a compatriot of my own, — which had brought into the jaded heart of social London a savor of wild adventure from the Australian bush, and to me, a whiff of the distinctive, acrid, aromatic odour of the gum-tree forests of my youth.[12]

Susceptible as some of her characters to the redolent scent of eucalyptus, Praed persistently returned to Australia in her fiction. In *Fugitive Anne* (1903), she employed the form of the lost race romance, which Haggard had popularised. As J.J. Healy has shown,[12] she was also influenced by C.L. Sclater's postulation of the lost continent of Lemuria that once extended from Madagascar to Malaya, of which — as Praed herself noted — 'the largest part that remains to this day is Australia'. Though her social and personal allegiances were now firmly with England, Lemurian Australia was attractive to her as what Nathaniel Hawthorne called, in an analogous context, 'a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon'.[14] Bolder than 'Boldrewood', who gave historical patina to recent events, Praed tasked herself with imagining the survival of a prehistoric past in Australia.

Sub-titled 'A Romance of the Unexplored Bush', *Fugitive Anne* is notionally set 'a little over twenty years' into the past. Its plot is so ludicrous that the author may be signalling that it is only a necessary encumbrance, a framework for the discoveries about Australia that will occur within the book. When her mother loses their Queensland station, Anne is forced to marry the 'coarse, powerful' Elias Bedo. In England she failed as an opera singer and was not recognised as the rightful claimant to a title. Sailing down the Australian coast, Anne jumps ship near Cooktown, abetted by her Aboriginal confidant, Kombo:

> '. . . the whiff of the gum-trees make a woman of me once more. No, not all the musical academies of London and Paris can change me from what I am, a Bush girl to the bones of me. No, not even if that wonderful fairy story were to come true, and I were really Anne, Baroness Marley, in the peerage of England.'

If the audiences of European academies have not been impressed with Anne's voice, the Aborigines are. Kombo tells here that it is the voice of 'Baiamé, the Great Spirit, whose word made the world'. This follows her singing of 'Avé

Maria', which seems to the Aborigines to have broken a drought, so that Anne becomes 'a legend in the lands beyond those of the Mongar' and is named 'Yuro-Kateena, or Cloud-Daughter'.

Shortly Anne's inland journey begins. She is fleeing a tribe which massacred the white family on Kooloola station, an episode by which Praed recalls her traumatic childhood memory of the killings at Hornet Bank in October 1857, the sort of recent historical incident that 'Boldrewood' transmuted in his romances. In Praed's novel, it is another part of the fanciful revival and revision of her own past which is a major, self-indulgent attraction of the novel for her.

Anne's is no purposeful quest such as that undertaken in *King Solomon's Mines*, but one for which she has to invent reasons as she proceeds: 'I wish that I had been a man', 'I've always longed for adventure and discovery'. Kombo foreshadows what Anne, and the chivalrous Danish anthropologist, Hansen, who accompanies them will discover: 'a mysterious race of red men who were Tortoise worshippers'. This sets Hansen speculating 'upon the possibility of a prehistoric race dwelling in the unexplored heart of Australia', whose religion he deftly connects with 'the old tradition of the lost Atlantis'. While Hansen is busy deciphering the meanings of 'much-worn hieroglyphics' and 'a druidic circle', the free-falling movement into the past is now so headlong that any bearings are hard to take. If the circle of stones gives 'somewhat the idea of Stonehenge', they also 'seemed a relic of some race of Titans rather than of human beings like themselves'. Praed counterpoints Hansen's conjectures with Anne's excitement that Australia should harbour 'these traces of dead-time glory'. The Aborigines have left nothing so satisfactory. Forty years earlier than it would for A.D. Hope, Australia has become a land of fecund paradox — 'the oldest and also the newest of the world's continents'. Its unexpected antiquity makes unnecessary 'Boldrewood's' fabrications of a lengthy human history in Australia.

Forced to depict in detail the life of the lost race of the Aca, Praed collapses into plagiarism of Haggard. She invents Keorah, a High Priestess who is a pallid version of She, and through whom Praed can voice an iconoclastic opinion for her own time. Haggard's She expected political dominion in the public and sexual realm. Her female subjects, given that example, had attained equality with men. In Keorah, Praed writes, 'the elementary instincts of that sex so long held in unnatural subjection had arisen triumphantly and were wantoning in their emancipation'. Lost race romance enables such dreams of a future where women enjoy freedom and exercise power in the eventual realisation of their instinctual desires. To this hope Praed subscribes, without being much interested in the means of its future political realisation. The imaginative realm of Keorah and the Aca is ostentatiously destroyed, as though Praed guessed that her male readers would wish it to be. Hansen and Anne return to England, where the latter does become Baroness Marley. Wrily signing off, Praed mentions 'the work they are about to publish entitled "With Cannibals and Acans in Unknown Australia"'. Praed's own book expresses a concern for personal liberation, not for the future of the emerging nation that she had left. However Australia's claims on her literary time and on her most verdant memories are given substance through the romance of *Fugitive Anne*.

When, in *King Solomon's Mines,* the natives are puzzled that men from the stars need to sleep, Quatermain explains that 'we are weary with travelling through realms of air'. This suffices for the moment, but Quatermain's travail to reach Kukuanaland has been anything but an easeful, aerial journey, and he is unsympathetic — in theory — to the kind of mystification that this comment represents. The protagonist of H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine* is the sort of aerial voyager whom Quatermain pretended to be. His activities in the far future parallel acts of imperialism of the late nineteenth century: he is the discoverer of indigenous peoples unknown to his own society and — perhaps returning to their time — will seek to change what would otherwise have been their destiny. 'I intend to explore time', the Traveller announces to his sceptical audience. Wells comprehends the hubristic attraction of ranging across time, rather than wearisomely trekking through space. His Traveller is compelled by the desire to find unexhausted territories, unbroached frontiers and Wells invents them for him — not in central Australia or the African interior, and emphatically not in the past — but in his own land, many millenia into the future.

Recollecting his first journey through time, the Traveller does so as in a vision: 'I saw huge buildings rise up fain and far, and pass like dreams. The whole surface of the earth seemed changed — melting and flowing over my eyes'. This accelerates the panoramas of human transcience that Haggard's and Praed's characters were given; foretells the similitude of the future to what can be discovered as a law of the past. The coming race which the Traveller finds is no hardy band of fit recruits for the Empire, but 'fragile [things] out of futurity'; stunted folk 'on the intellectual level of one of our five-year old children'. The Traveller's first illusion about the hotter, lusher world of the future is that it has reverted to a paradisal state: 'There were no hedges, no signs of proprietary rights, no evidence of agriculture; the whole earth had become a garden'.

But this is paradise undermined. The Time Traveller learns that man has 'differentiated into two distinct animals': the gentle, vegetarian, indolent Eloi who live above ground in the sunshine, and the cannibal, frenetically busy Morlocks who dwell in subterranean gloom. Like Haggard and Praed, Wells used his romance fiction to make topical criticisms. He emphasised the logical outcome of 'the present merely temporary and social division between the Capitalist and the Labourer', though by such a fictional means as to suggest that the division is irreparable. *The Time Machine* ironically inverts stock elements of quest romance. The world that the Traveller discovers has no treasure in it — no reefs of gold or caches of diamonds or lost races that establish the material, historical and hence the literary value of the imagined 'country'. Going forward in time, the Traveller paradoxically regresses: his audience hears 'the soft padding sound of his footfall'; he gobbles his mutton down and recalls the pleasurable longing 'to kill a Morlock or so'. His vision of the future discourages all imperialist ambitions; it confirms the pessimism of Kipling and Haggard rather than buoying such insecure optimism as 'Boldrewood's'. While the Time Traveller secures a personal dominion over time, his reward is to see 'the life of the old earth ebb away', as his machine stops in a remote future, on the desolate shores of a viscous sea, where monstrous crabs are the only visible living things and a red sun is huge in the sky.

The quest for treasure is a common factor in these novels. In *Robbery Under Arms,* where treasure is mined or stolen, it is in either case quickly forfeited. Real wealth lies in pastoral pursuits. For Haggard's travellers, the fabulous horde of diamonds is soon relegated in importance by dreams of further adventure. The real — literary — treasure in Praed's *Fugitive Anne* is the discovery that Australia has a remote, historical past. Once that 'past' is proven, its function has been served, and the Aca are capriciously swept away by volcanic explosion. Seeking the priceless treasure of knowledge of man's future, Wells' Time Traveller finds instead the disheartening results of 'a slow movement of degeneration'. This is akin to von Nordau's theory, rather than to any cyclical motion that would promise glorious new births of empires.

The metaphor of treasure aptly links this inquiry into the historical imagination of these four authors. Treasure is dead stuff that has been accumulated in past ages (by human or geological activity) and is reanimated or at least reclaimed in the hope that it may redeem and secure the futures of those who win it. In Wilbur Smith's coarse fiction, this is the simple and sanguine outcome of the discovery of Logenbula's diamonds. But the authors of the generation before the Great War took no such comfort. The sardonic, deflating ends of Haggard's, Praed's and Wells' books are one sign of that. No imagined treasure, borne from the past to provide for the future, can fully assuage their disquiet. The treasures variously discovered or abandoned or not in existence at all in these romances allow no purchase on the future. That has to be sought by other means. 'Boldrewood's' historical fictions are a way of enfranchising Australia as a nation, but his persistent emotional adherence to the British Empire puts such a future in doubt. Haggard's commitment was to the supra-national cause of imperial unity, but this was qualified by his conviction that the end of the Empire was not far distant. Such is the witness of his romances, some of which are also the vehicles by which he considers the possibility of reincarnation. The world of public affairs fascinated Rosa Praed, but even more than Haggard she wanted the private solace, the more manageable self-dominion that the doctrine of reincarnation afforded. To a greater degree than the other three authors, Wells was committed to imagining, again and again, 'the shape of things to come', but the future was for him the subject of increasingly gloomy projection.

The works of this group of authors witness to a malaise of the historical imagination. Severing past from future, the Great War would soon remove the burden of a cyclical view of history; realising their worst fears for the future, it would end their anticipatory dread. The war would provide abundantly in the present those instructive ruins once only to be found from bygone ages; it would lead the next generation of authors selfconsciously to savour their own time and the presumed absence of historical constraints upon it.

1. 'Rolf Boldrewood', *Robbery Under Arms* (London, Remington, 1888; serialised in the *Sydney Mail* from 1 July 1882 to 11 August 1883).
2. 'Rolf Boldrewood', *In Bad Company and Other Stories,* (London, Macmillan, 1901).
3. Henry Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines* (London, Cassell, 1885).
4. Henry Rider Haggard, *She* (London, Cassell, 1887).
5. H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (Heinemann, London, 1895; serialised in the *New Review* 1894-5).
6. Rosa Praed, *Fugitive Anne* (London, J. Long, 1903).
7. Wilbur Smith, *The Leopard Hunts in Darkness* (London, Heinemann, 1984).
8. It is interesting to note that Haggard had to answer charges of plagiarism over both *King Solomon's Mines* and *She*. He countered the first in a letter to the *Athenaeum* of 10 July 1886 titled 'Fact and Fiction'. The matter is discussed in Peter Beresford Ellis, *Henry Rider Haggard: A Voice From the Infinite* (London and Henley, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp.122-3.
9. 'Rolf Boldrewood', *The Ghost Camp, or the Avengers* (London, Macmillan, 1902).
10. Norman Etherington, 'Rider Haggard's Imperial Romances', *Meanjin,* vol.36 no.2, July 1977, pp.189-199; a revised version of this article later appeared in *Victorian Studies,* vol.22 no.1, Autumn 1978.
11. 'If it could be proved, how much more interesting would be our lives', as Haggard put it in his autobiography, *The Days of My Life* (London, Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1926), Vol.1, p.255. That Wilbur Smith may be a follower of Haggard here as well is indicated by his treatment of the reincarnation theme in *The Sunbird* (London, Heinemann, 1972).
12. Justin McCarthy and Rosa Praed, *Our Book of Memories: Letters of Justin McCarthy to Mrs Campbell Praed* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1912).
13. J.J. Healy, 'The Lemurian Nineties', *Australian Literary Studies,* vol.8 no.3, May 1978.
14. The remark is from Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous Preface (dated 15 December 1859) to his romance *The Marble Faun* (1860).

RACHAEL OFFER

The Smell of Mushrooms

There is the smell of mushrooms and the coal
fugwarm of the dairy.
flank to honest flank the cows stand
steam-mugging and muck-flipping mothers
tails still chasing the flies of summer.

To the swampburp of frogs
friesians huff breaths of sparklegold dusk
and thin reeds push up
the darkcold soil.
The paddocks, bladebright, soften
hills bruise
and the evening stumbles on the scrub stubble
of its five o'clock shadow
(the quarry, a blindman's slash)

The flesh cools.
Patio bricks slime and chill underfoot
and unattended toadstools leer,
squeezing from the cracks.
Under the appleblossoms
the sad smiles of poplar leaves
mildrew and rot
sheltering slugs who meld together
in their own private greysome gloom.

The pine trees walk and whisper
whilst, through the bouganvillea and lattice,
higher than the keening of the pines
mourning a midnight sun,
the stars winkle and pierce
like sharp blue
crystalstab shards.

LAURIS EDMOND

The Written Word

Leaving's a little death. Packing,
I see already its wake of signs
and messages, to be witnessed
by another woman who will draw
my long red curtains, take books from
my shelves, sleep in my bed.

Cards left on the window sill
are leaning, a bit drunk, very knowing,
ripe with love and friendship's
intimate knowledges of me
which they won't bother to conceal
or care if they distort, for her.

So it must surely be
with a whole existence's accumulations;
the pronoun that begins our breath,
the violent 'I', becomes at last
a dissolving froth of words
that follows us away

and others will of right come in
and occupy our days and nights
and breathe our air and walk about
the great rooms of the world
when they have cleared away
the litter of our correspondences.

Green

The young woman wearing a knickerbocker suit
of elegant dull green walked, slow and cautious,
gripping a stick on which she almost leaned
without altering a scrupulous erectness.

I came abreast; her eyes looked straight ahead
as though to find each separate step
by an unwavering vigilance; I glimpsed
the emaciated cheek tanned by make-up

felt the quivering white electricity
of will that could so charge
a dying animal that had already shrunk
into a long-desired exhaustion

and here present it, masked and chic,
with the whole length of the world to walk
before the seething footlights of Fifth Avenue
of a summer afternoon at five o'clock.

RORY STEELE

Remember How We Will Be Children

We remember how we will be children
Nursery years ahead;
The big printed books that taught us to read
Help us to unlearn instead
Continence, arrogance, freedom to speak
All you want. The weak
Watch where they tread.

Spring is snug in the black buds of winter,
Time's grandparent tense,
But tomorrow for old men and babies
Makes little sense.
Good old days, simple times, hanker these back,
They were grim; and smack
Of mental defence.

Today in the full fledge of science
Those long in the tooth
Can with plastic and chips and new organs
Get back bits of youth;
Ordinary miracles, nothing too strange
Or impossible : now change
May synthesise truth.

In playgrounds first lessons in chaos,
Brutes sort of conform;
In a dark hall the seniors assemble,
Ephemeral fads then perform;
Sundown clouds clamber as night starts to fall;
Who wants to recall
The probable storm?

The Crow and the Baby

Hard drawled bird call without consonants asks
What point there is, condemns all truth as trite,
As irony : experience comes too late.

Crap, claptrap, shrieks the infant king, see
The given world is rearrangeable, so might
Is wrong, may will, and winners hesitate.

Family of crows like black sheep baa
With pecked-out eyes, spare themselves the sight
Of drought ahead dead certainly laid down by fate.

Off with their heads! And four and twenty tasks
Are to be jumped to, bottles, clothes and pies await
The hopeful yells of short-fused gelignite.

Soft ground sets under me like quick cement, turns cold,
A car starts cursing, other sounds drown out debate.
The sun of a sudden comes up in the campsite.

BRUCE DAWE

"Last seen 12.10 a.m. . . ."

What price the doggedness of one loving family
against the ravening dark?
On railway station walls, on hoardings
this mighty mother has contrived
a poster image of her daughter lately torn
from the early morning road where, at that time, the traffic passes
at a rate of ten or twelve per minute
(she has calculated *that* out, too).
Plagued by phone pranksters giving false locations,
advised by acquaintances to give up the quest,
warned off the roadway by police for accosting motorists
with a photograph of her daughter (dragged
into a car as into Grendel's cave — shoes, purse
found elsewhere later),
now her broad anguished face
sinks out of sight from broadsheet and from tabloid,
sinks also from the screen that bore her sorrow
momentarily our way . . .
A police spokesman says, "At night
the city streets are full of predators."
We know . . . But we know love
— and *that's* implacable too.

BOOKS

Colin Johnson, *The Song Circle of Jacky* and *Selected Poems*, Hyland House, 1986.

We do not often speak about the politics of publishing, about the way in which some voices are stifled or reduced to silence, marginalised or appropriated and misinterpreted. When people do not speak or, better, are not spoken into existence, there is a sense in which they cease to exist, even for themselves. This is increasingly true today for poor people, the unemployed, the aged and all those who do not live up to the values of our culture, do not live out our myths of pleasure, possession and consumption. But it has been true for Aboriginal people and their culture for two hundred years. So the appearance of *The Song Circle of Jacky* is significant. Not that it is the first book of poems by an Aborigine. Books by Kath Walker, Kevin Gilbert, Jack Davis and, more recently, Lionel Fogarty, have already been published. But there is a sense in which Colin Johnson is different, more politically aware. True, Fogarty's poems may be more radical, express the anger and frustration of Aboriginal language in its own language, without concession to white readers. But even as he attempts to be faithful to his own experience as an Aborigine, Johnson has an eye to the white reader, using its strangeness as a provocation, a tactic to undermine complacency. The epigram sets up the figure of Jacky in his strangeness:

> Jacky him bin sit listening to the wind;
> Jacky him bin walk listening to the wind;
> Jacky him bin sit talking to the wind;
> Jacky him bin walk following the wind

But "Song One" in a sense translates this strangeness, speaks him from the point of view of the European spectator, assessing him in its opening lines in terms of European culture:

> Jacky's features worn and craggy,
> The face of the cliff behind his place,
> Worn and fissured with the care of his race,
> Seeing them come and seeing them go,
> Bodies bent or straight, weak or strong —
> Seeing them go and wanting to follow,
> First he must fix his self and his self

Though its referents are not, the language, and thus the sense of reality and possibility, are ours. The point, I think, lies in the subtle unease this sets up, an unease evident even in the title, "Song Circle", not "Cycle". "Cycle" describes a recurrent period of events or phenomena, a complete series. It presupposes continuity, harmony, a larger order of things, the order celebrated in a traditional Aboriginal Song Cycle like the Arnhem Land cycle translated and published by Ronald and Catherine Berndt, whereas "circle" merely describes a movement, the completion of a round, an event complete in itself which closes itself off without suggestion of any further recurrence — that, of course, is the hope; that Jacky's sufferings will have an ending. In the meantime the point is to speak out from the present, from the suffering, to expose it, more perhaps to the white reader than to the Aboriginal.

In this sense the territory the poems inhabit is doubly strange, a kind of no-man's land, neither fully Aboriginal nor fully European, somewhere between history and the old myths:

> Once men were mythologies;
> Once spears were clutched;
> Once our words ran together,
> In complex sentences of interest;
> Now we have become monosyllables,
> Lonely in straight streets.

As the title of this poem, "Hide and Seek", suggests, Johnson is playing a game of hide and seek, not just with the enemy without, European culture, but with an enemy within, a self which is part accomplice in its own destruction, part antagonist to it, necessarily involved with a culture in which he finds no place save that of the outsider.

This, I think, is what makes this book such a disturbing one. The awareness implicit in it is that the act of writing and, even more, of publishing is also a kind of betrayal — Aboriginal poetry was originally spoken, not written, danced out, not merely sung, a song danced to ancient Aboriginal rhythms. But publishing means writing in English, accepting the language of the conquerors, agreeing to tell the story in its terms. True, the acceptance is not final. Our European sense of reality remains something oppressive and open to question, not firmly or irrevocably set in place. Throughout, there is a sense of absence, of something not sayable, not even thinkable, in the terms in which it is being expressed. "City Suburban Lines", for instance, opens with a series of assertions which seem strangely void of content, the real content being the implicit denial of what is described:

> Their roads are straight;
> Their streets are straight;
> Their fences are straight;
> Straight are the bricks
> of their walls,
> As straight as the lines
> Of their vehicle — minds,
> Rushing in straight thoughts
> To straight feelings.

The voice which is speaking here is strangely divided, using the grammar which is architectual as well as linguistic, as the assailant. Yet the triumph is that somehow that voice, and the self behind it, survives. Somehow, for all the familiarity of language and form, the poem pushes in the direction of another mode than mere reading, seems to demand some bodily gesture.

For most of us most of the time, reading offers a confirmation not only of our sense of self, of our possibilities and our possessions, physical and psychic, but also of our world, of our ability to read and master and thus confirms our place in it. This is even more true of poetry which does not so much signify as perform, since the place of performance is usually where we live and as we live in it. But Johnson's poems take us elsewhere, undermine the illusion of self-sufficiency, of the rightness of our position. In them we see ourselves and our experience through the eyes of the other we have consistently denied and repressed, the Aboriginal inhabitants of this land, see ourselves from "the other side of the frontier", as they see us:

> Terribly distressing,
> Whites go on and on,
> Australians wrecking the land
> Aborigines pass a bottle,
> Discuss relatives and strategy;
> Whites go on and on and on
> Without accepting our land
> ("Song Six")

As Jacky rehearses his identity, his kinship groupings and his relationships with the land and the ways in which he fits into them, we find ourselves displaced, "A people a long way from home."

Johnson is a sophisticated reader, he knows his history and the classic indictments of colonialism in the work of writers like Sartre and Fanon. There is a sense in which the violence implicit here is the therapeutic violence Fanon speaks of which is the concomitant of self-emancipation. Rejecting the terms which ensure subordination and humiliation in "Watch Your Step", a poem about police violence, or claiming his own right to protest in "N.A.C. Song", for instance, Johnson transforms the outsider's situation. Deliberately and freely choosing it, and thus turning the reader into the outsider, he liberates Aboriginal and European alike from the superstition of power, and the ratio of power as something immovable.

Evidently, then, these are poems which highlight the present crisis of criticism, posing with utmost energy the question; for whom does the critic write, the question Wole Soyinka puts so urgently in his essay on the role of the critic of African literature, "On Barthes and Other Mythologies":

> For whom does the critic write? For Mr
> Dele Bus-Stop of Idi-Ono? Or for the

Appointments and Promotions Committee of the Learned Journals International Syndicate of Berne, Harvard, Nairobi, Oxford or Prague?!

As Soyinka goes on to insist, all criticism is socially situated and socially conventional. It also has social consequences. To subject the *Song Circle of Jacky* to the test of an educated middle class taste, for example, would be to co-opt the poems, to attempt to capture them for the society, culture and world-view which they specifically reject and contest. It would also be to succumb to the superstition of power which it is criticism's task to contest. Similarly, to complain that the language as well as the content of these poems is extreme, perhaps unbalanced, is to fail to see that, to quote Soyinka again, in times of social confrontation language can be used as "a holding device, a massed coil before the release of the spring." What Johnson is interested in and seeks to release is the energy within the massed coil. And this, it seems to me, is what the critic ought also to focus on. This is not to say that she or he ought necessarily to endorse these energies. But it is important to be aware of the historic moment, in Soyinka's words, "to point the way towards the avoidance of the resistance to and the triumph of humanity over the mutilating agents of history."

The voice which speaks in these poems is not one but many and fraught with history, laden not only with memories of the primordial Dreaming but also with the experiences of the present, of football and Anzac Day, of Westerns and Vietnam, of African rhythms and songs of Ned Kelly, of Rastafarians and Hindu gods and goddesses. But it is also a voice which we have at worst tried to silence, at best have not listened to, and it is this which gives the poems their heroism, a heroism of defiance.

> Underground — don't try to find us;
> Underground — how we hunt, aching
> For the best of all of us.
> Dried up tears in cheap hotel rooms
> ("Song Nineteen")

You do not read poems like this for pleasure. There is little aesthetic distance. But the language has to be taken seriously because it has the weight of experience, of history at the personal as well as the public level, behind it, and thus makes assertions about real people and real lives.

It is this link with history which gives these poems their power and importance, making manifest what is generally unexpressed. As Jameson has remarked, while it is true that history is not a text but the absent cause which largely determines our lives and destinies, it becomes accessible in textual form. So Johnson gives voice to an Aboriginal Balayang, put to death by the settlers of Port Phillip in the 1830's:

> Sweeping sadness of Balayang: Barman one with a problem;
> Sweeping sadness of Balayang: miserable, upset,
> Mean and bad, hanging there upside down.
>
> ———————
>
> Sadness of Balayang, sadness of Balayang: sadness, sadness.
> ("Song Thirty-Two")

The feeling here is at once human and political, and it drives the reader to the rediscovery of her own involvement in the story it tells.

Individual poems may be full of memories of this kind, of memories of defeat. But on the whole, the impression is a triumphant one, the triumph of the poet's refusal to bow to the expectations and demands of our culture but to preserve his own position, his excess of vision and comprehension, insist upon his difference, his own constructions of reality and values in this description:

> This hooked throwing-stock of peninsula land,
> Burjil fashioned it.
> With beak and claw he scored the earth,
> The waters rose,
> To erase the shape,
> For Eaglehawk to see
> As he flew high
> Scattering,
> To drift down upon the land.

The seedlings of the Bunurong
To grow from earth as bird from nest.
("Song Twenty-Six")

While the poet here seems conscious that his sense of reality is different, he continues to assert it and his right to it. In turn this assertion makes for the anger expressed, for example, in "Song Eight".

They give Jacky rights
Like the tiger snake gives rights to its prey;
They give Jacky rights,
Like the rifle sights on its target.

There is nothing 'literary' here about the language or the feeling, only an urgent drive to insist that in life as it is lived thought and feeling are one. It is this drive, I think, which generates the lyrical quality of some of the poems. "Song Twenty Eight", for instance, has overtones of Bob Dylan:

I know that I am —
No jargon, please —
I know that I am,
Water and earth
Mixed with a little wine
Don't tell me who I am:
A child cries in me too often;
My mouth curves too often
In sadness these days.

The voice here belongs not just to Aborigines but to youth culture generally, which gives it added potency. There is no need here at least to find ways of linking language with social upheavals and sufferings. They are given in and by the language of the poem and its overtones.

In other poems, too, the self finds release from the clamp of mere self-expression, finds a place outside in its own sufferings and is thus able to give form, a kind of completeness, to them. Jacky's voice is thus not one but many, contains the earth and the animals as well in the echoes of the old traditions in it. But it also contains the voices of the present; Anzac Day Marchers, the roar of the crowd at V.F.L. Park or voices in the pub. So Jacky hears the last siren blending with the last trumpet and past, present and future appear in a larger perspective.

So, however Europeanised he may seem at times, Johnson remains the Aboriginal artist, a kind of magic man who must deal with forces beyond the self, with the gods and the demons, on behalf of his people, suffering out of their story in his own body. But undermining the isolation and self enclosure of the printed text in this way he places his poetry squarely in the story of all our lives. This means that these are not easy poems to read, for the non-Aborigine at least. But they raise in a new and urgent way the crucial question of the responsibility of the critic not just their own limited literary culture but to the story of humanity, "to point the way towards the avoidance of, the resistance to and the triumph of humanity over the mutilating agents of history." (Soyinka). As we move towards 1988 that responsibility becomes more, not less, important.

Veronica Brady

NOTES

1. Wole Soyinka "On Barthes and Other Mythologies". In Henry Louis Gates (ed.), *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, New York, Mathuen, 1984, 29.

The Moving Shadow Problem, stories by Peter Murphy, University of Queensland Press, 1986 (hardback).

Laconic and obsessive at the same time, Peter Murphy's new collection, *The Moving Shadow Problem,* adds a distinctive and impressive voice to Australia's tradition of literature via the short story. And it is voice rather than story that is the source of fascination and enjoyment in this book. This is made clear from the beginning when we find ourselves reading the script of a farewell speech to old Blake, whose "concern for his fellow workers can be seen no less in the shadows under his eyes than in the golden integrity which shines through them"

('Beyond The Moving Shadow Problem'). Blake, "a master of the possible", has devoted many years of his life to solving the problems that beset clerical life in high-rise city buildings. For instance, "no one has assessed the shades, warps, defects and incidental traits of writing implements more stringently than Blake." We are treated to a detailed account of the heroic achievements of this mystic clerk — in particular his "virtuosity in handling the worst of all our scourges, the Moving Shadow Problem" — colonial style cooling fans that made "excruciating patterns of shadow flicker across paper as officers struggled with crucial decision-making and sorting of information".

These stories follow the excruciatingly funny and frustrating patterns that emerge as their narrators wander in the grey mazes of a Kafkaesque world gone beyond unremitting trials suffered by a sensitive soul into a comedy of absorption in the minutiae of existence.

There is the cleaner who acquires a cat oblivious to the rats infesting the building he wants to keep pure. Above this, there is the voice of the narrator as he dissects the mysteries surrounding two episodes when the cat was thrown into filing cabinets with a rat in attempts at generating some show of spirit by the cat:

> I have always been a believer in autopsy, chiefly because it gives events a finality. In both struggles between cat and rat, there are elements of mystery which distress me. How is it that the cat escaped both times? I know the locks on metal cabinets: they can withstand the attacks of an enraged gorilla, to say nothing of a cat, with or without the assistance of a rat. Did the cleaner allow the lock to engage only partially, and, if so, why? Had he allowed an emotional involvement with the cat to dilute his previously pure commitment to vermin extermination? Why is it that the cat was able to escape, but not the rat — which was subsequently clubbed to death with the boots of a new member of staff, who has recently been promoted? ('The cleaner')

We don't exactly learn anything from this but, as the narrator says of the experience of job interviews, "once you've been through it a few times, you feel at home." ('Looking For Work')

One of the fascinations of this writing is this feeling of being at home in a recognizable part of the modern urban world, and its psyche, but at the same time finding surprising locations for our essential identity: ". . . because I'm more of a commuter than a home-owner or a worker, what I often remember is getting to places rather than what comes after that" ('The Chapter On Love'). The places visited are modern, bureaucratic, too large to comprehend in one lifetime. In 'The Appointment', the narrator attempts to answer a work advertisement only to find some mystery connected with the phone number, the street number, the entrance to the building, and the nature of the organisation. In 'The Little American Executive' there are security procedures, turnstiles, long trestle tables, a chained book for signatures, and under a table an empty spider's web that still manages to look occupied. There is an attempt to buy a simple cassette of Irish music from the Irish Information Office, and once again, the narrator has trouble uncovering even the correct doorway to the building. Then, with his nose pressed to the keyhole of the right, but locked door, he becomes aware of himself as a figure crouched by a door: "It occurred to me that you're in a very awkward situation if you can't explain what you're doing."

This web of confusion spread beyond the story out into the cafe where I was reading when the man at the table next to me realised something similar in his attempt to show his companion how to solve an economic problem. He said, "If I jump a step I can probably work it backwards." And this is what the man by the keyhole did, as if an invisible missile had shot through the keyhole and got him in the eye. It is the strength of Peter Murphy's stories that they lift our heads for a moment so that we observe in a slightly more stunned and astonished way. The self-

parody that lies not far beyond the voices in this writing provides a neat little joke at the end of this story of The Irish Information Office. And at the end of the conversation at the cafe table next to me, the problem-solver told his companion, triumphantly, that the mysterious variables in their equation were "the weights of the unobservable factors."

The word 'story' is, as often as not, misleading when we talk of short stories. Fiction has all modes of writing at its disposal. Peter Murphy's stories here have the quality of a mind and eye both rambling and obsessively meticulous. Through absorption in each detail, a whole world is suggested. If these details are either morbid or absurd we are left with the question of whether something central has been accurately observed or whether the peculiarity of the writer's vision has produced a warped impression — and even then, if we can point to the oddities of the viewer as responsible for the scene, we still have to account for our own recognition of the landscape revealed. There is the doctor doing his rounds of his terminal patients:

> His face is resolutely purposeful as he moves around the wards — a cabinet-maker measuring his timber. There are three stages of dying in his notes, so he divides his terminals into three categories and treats them accordingly . . .
> The wards are like rows of mousetraps in the even hospital light. The trap he stops at first contains an elderly mouse, her head lapsed absently down the sides of the pillow. She can scarcely speak. Seconds after a shadow of recognition crosses her face she has just enough strength to mumble,
> "Good afternoon, Doctor."
> "Good afternoon," he echoes in acknowledgement.
> He avoids using names unnecessarily. His memory has been known to fail at times, causing complications. . . . ('Terminals')

It is the voice of a hygienic, methodolical, but hugely insensitive investigator handling a mosaic of unsavoury images that is both evoked and parodied again and again.

At times there are scenes as brutal and bloody as any of Flannery O'Connor's climaxes, but always perceived from the distance of a disengaged observer who, unwilling to act, is still compelled to learn whatever can be glimpsed or overheard. In 'The Chapter On Love', for instance, the story ends with a bashed dog whose blood has sprayed a railway waiting room: "I never learnt what had happened to the dog or what happened to it afterwards. A few days later I heard some students in my carriage talking about what they'd seen from the train, but it wasn't clear whether it was before or after I was there. They seemed to know more about it than me but there were disagreements. I could see they were making some of it up . . . and, in any case, I couldn't hear very well."

The detached observers in these stories are not just separated from the world of objects but from women as well. When, on one occasion the narrator speaks as a woman ('The Jester'), the story loses that edge of comic obsession to become a litany of unrelieved trivia and pathos. There is an extended description of the suburban housewife's day in 'The Small Businessman's Wife' — a day structured round a visit by another woman whose conversation rambles from the efficacy of metho for cleaning windows to her husband's hobby farm where the "breeders" haven't been served by the bull yet:

> After her friend's departure, she has just enough time to polish a piece of furniture before the children arrive. Selecting a small rag, she applies the mixture with a brisk rub, then, after allowing a minute to pass, as per manufacturer's instructions, buffs up with a shammy. Crouching on all fours to bring out the detail of a gryphon's claw, she sees herself, tensed slightly, reflected in a mirror across the room — forehead peering upwards — but hasn't time to notice the phrase "served by the bull" darting across her brain like a cockroach reaching safety in the centre of darkness under a table.

The woman crouched here is not the clownish man who fumbled with insight as he crouched outside the Irish Information Office. An

atmosphere of not quite specific threat and pain increases throughout the story of the small businessman's wife, coming to a final gesture at the letterbox: "As she releases the latch, it swings open with unexpected force. Bent slightly forward, she drops her hand into the cavity as if into a nest, looking about her, upwards . . . nothing there but a handbill".

Women in these stories are angry, in pain, shocked, at a distance unrelieved by an urge to investigate that can at least promise involvement. In the words of one woman (in 'Approaching Substance'), they are "dead as well as alive."

These stories seem to be in awe of pain and isolation when it's observed in women, but with the men, all modest frauds who seem to be working their way up or around, there's a vigorous urge to observe: "My investigations are not pointless, but seem, rather, to elucidate pointlessness." (in 'Cain Toads')

For all the characters presented here, it is an animal that comes to dominate the images, as a symbol can come to dominate a dream. In 'Cane Toads' Peter Murphy has allowed this creature that's perhaps more Australian than the Koala or the barbecue, to invade our literature and establish its place in a remarkably vivid story.

The consistent value in Peter Murphy's stories is that he doesn't give us too much. He knows how to give us the best of each situation subjected to this meticulous and obsessive observation.

Kevin Brophy

Gerald Murnane, *Landscape With Landscape,* Penguin, 1987, $11.95.

If I were to say 'If I were to say . . . ,' what grammatical purpose would the first person pronoun serve except to answer the question, Who speaks? In any discourse, though, the sign 'I' represents a space that can be filled by an infinite number of subjects, especially when its referent (the proper noun to which the first person pronoun refers) is left unnamed. In literary discourse, the humanist temptation is to fill that space with the name of an author if it has otherwise been left empty or blank.

And so, in the most recent fiction by Melbourne writer Gerald Murnane, *Landscape With Landscape*, the reader is doubtless tempted to accept the 'I'-narrator of the opening story, 'Landscape With Freckled Woman,' as a sign of Gerald Murnane. When the narrator of this story begins,

> I was the only man among nine women. Together we formed a committee of ten, with myself as treasurer.

— we might well presume that Gerald Murnane is speaking in the first person. We might even suppose that *Landscape With Landscape* is a kind of autobiography, an assumption which is later borne out, perhaps, upon discovering that the narrating 'I' is a Melbourne writer of prose fiction.

But what happens when the narrator speaks of a story in the first person he is working on, called 'Sipping The Essence,' which appears as the succeeding narrative in Murnane's book? And what happens when the narrating 'I' of this story tells us of his own short fiction, 'The Battle of Acosta Nu,' which appears in Murnane's book immediately afterwards and which, again, is told by a narrating 'I'? Thereafter, the narrator of each story in *Landscape With Landscape* lays claim to the succeeding narrative in the text, which is always narrated in the first person.

One explanation is to continue to believe that Gerald Murnane is the speaking 'I' of the original story and that each succeeding 'I' is a fictional character of Murnane's invention. But the last story, 'Landscape With Artist,' contradicts this theory insofar as the narrating 'I' refers to a story he wrote in the past, 'Landscape With Freckled Woman,' which is the first of the stories in Murnane's book.

'First' and 'last,' therefore, need to be placed in inverted commas, because the sequence of the stories that forms *Landscape With Landscape* isn't linear but circles back on itself. And circles have no beginnings or middles or ends; they enclose blank spaces, or open up chasms, but the origins and destinations of their boundaries are untraceable.

A book that has as its metaphor a circle? And a title that sounds as if it belongs to a painting in an art gallery?

How should we read *Landscape With Landscape*? What kind of fiction is it?

There's at least one sign that it's not a collection of short stories: which is to say that there is no table of contents at the front of the text, as you would expect to find in an anthology. What we have heretofore called 'stories,' then, might better be described as 'chapters'; though this is not a very satisfying description of Murnane's text either, since it invokes a set of humanist assumptions about novels that the text declines to fulfil — assumptions to do with consistency (of character, time, and place) and continuity of action and plot.

Which leaves, I suppose, no other way of delimiting *Landscape With Landscape* than to claim it as an instance of textuality, a piece of writing netted in a trace of discourses and representational practices through which meanings emerge against a socio-historical backdrop. All writing, of course, partakes of this semiotic interplay of signs; but some writings are more conscious of doing so than others.

Gerald Murnane's writing is of this self-conscious kind, though not in a way as to be so conspicuous that it threatens to disappear up its own aporia. Indeed, one of the pleasures of Murnane's text is that it seems almost to lament the passing of literary innocence: of those pre-modernist times when the words on the page were put there by a sentient individual who had something to say, and who could give expression to thoughts and feelings through the untroublesome medium of language.

But Murnane has read too well the fiction of Borges and Calvino to allow 'innocence' to go unchecked by irony. Consider, for example, the following passage (the ellipses are mine):

> The life he led in his twenties was much more scrag-like than mine; yet I am sure that I have drunk more than he has, and that even if he gets to have a hundred of his paintings and prints displayed in every important gallery in Australia he will still be far from knowing what I almost knew on certain nights in the winter of 1960 when I staggered away from the fire-place . . . and out into the frosty night . . . until I found myself on some level patch of grass . . . and stood there convinced that I was about to see with utter clarity a vision . . . of the complete text of the work of fiction that had waited for all time in a universe of possibilities for me, its author . . .

In another piece of writing, perhaps, such a passage might be read as a confessional anecdote, causing the reader to wince at the cliched masculine fantasy of the writer driving himself to get blind drunk in order to 'see' more clearly. In this writing, though, we are prevented from filling the space created by the narrating 'I' with the name of Gerald Murnane and thus from reading the foregoing as if it were an emblem of autobiographical import.

And what prevents us from doing so? Firstly, the passage is taken from 'Landscape With Artist' in which the narrator reveals himself to be the 'author' of 'Landscape With Freckled Woman' whose narrator is the 'author' of 'Sipping The Essence,' and so on to and fro. To find Gerald Murnane in this writing, then, is to search for a real person among words and sentences and punctuation marks. And that such a quest is clearly absurd the writing frequently lays bare in passages similar to that which appears in 'A Quieter Place Than Clun,' in which the narrator is a character 'created' by the narrator of the preceding story, and so on to and fro. (This

narrator, it should be said, was a teenage poet):

> I decided to include the poem below in this story when I understood that the young man who wrote it was not myself but a character in a work of fiction and that as soon as I began to write about him I became an author of fiction. (Since the previous sentence is part of a work of fiction, a certain young man and the man he might have become are doubly difficult to imagine anywhere but in fiction. [The sentence just ended is also part of a work of fiction, as is this sentence . . .])

But if this quibbling kind of fiction with its too fashionably self-conscious a narrator is not to your liking, you'll be doubtless pleased to learn that in the book's closing paragraph ('closing,' in inverted commas) the narrator of 'Landscape With Artist' denies ever having started the sequence that lead to such cosmopolitan doubletalk:

> Yet I have read enough to know [he says] that such fiction would seem nowadays merely modish, that my self-conscious narrator would seem only a figure of artifice and not a means of telling the truth. And so I decided never to write such a story. And I keep to my decision.

Which can only mean that *Landscape With Landscape* is a book that does not exist, written by an author who is nowhere to be found. Or that it's one of Australian fiction's most beautiful lies: a book that after all retains its innocence, untainted by trans-Atlantic irony, and written by an author with a simple faith in the power of language to say what he has to say.

I've got my money on something like the former option. But you'd be mad to wager everything on a two horse race.

Niall Lucy

Robert Drewe, *Fortune*. Picador, Sydney & London, 1986.

Robert Drewe's books often exhibit disrespect for conventional divisions between fact and fiction. They are, accordingly, controversial and immediate. The most recent, *Fortune* (which won second prize in the National Book Award), is controversial because the events which Drewe recuperates and insists that his public consider include some of the scar tissue of Australia's historical conscience. *Fortune* draws on the fate of a Western Australian diver, treasure-hunter and vigorous litigant, whose challenges to authority had disturbing consequences.[1] Drewe creates a character, Don Spargo, who has a great deal in common with the original treasure-hunter (or, at least, with the character which press accounts attributed to him) places him in a recognisably distorted Western Australia and speculates about the extent to which those in authority were prepared to avenge his defiance. This story, then, uses the historical to verify a consideration of specifically Australian challenges to power and abuses of power.

Fortune's mingling of the historical and the fictional creates the inverse of the controversy which was associated with the New Journalism practised in America by Tom Wolfe (among others). In the case of the New Journalism, which introduced novelistic strategies into reportage, it was said that stories were not journalism, but an inferior kind of art: imagined, not found. Wolfe would have it that narrative, in the past few decades, has become too self-conscious, too artificial, and in his scheme of things (which values an unspecific "realism") journalism has had to defend a position which novelists surrendered.[2] The view that fabulous or self-conscious narrative is incapable of confronting recognisable experiences and questionable ideologies is, of course, untenable, but obviously writing which addresses historically recognisable injustices has a particularly urgent moral force.

The close correspondence between Drewe's journalistic account and his fictional account may be illustrated by comparing a passage from his feature while on Perth, "The Light Stuff", published in *The National Times*, with a corresponding description in *Fortune*. In "The Light Stuff" Drewe writes of Western Australia's fear of obscurity and documents local efforts to put Perth "on the map" — including literally beaming up at John Glenn during his orbit:

> . . . we turned on all our lights, in *every* room, *all* night, to welcome Colonel Glenn. And yes, he *saw* the glow and *remarked* on it. . . . So we were pretty definite we were on the map now. . . . [The Lord Mayor] found it incumbent on him to accept NASA's air ticket to New York an an honoured position in the astronaught's motorcade through Manhattan. At home in Perth this was seen as very sporting of the Lord Mayor, since he had originally opposed turing on any lights at all. . . . As every Perth reporter knows, however, the real man of the hour was Bill King, the town hall roundsman for the *West Australian*, who had suggested to the Lord Mayor turning on the lights in the first place.[3]

There is a similar description in *Fortune*:

> The city turned on all its lights. Every living room, kitchen and street lamp blazed. One hundred and twenty five miles up Glenn saw the glow, remarked on it from his capsule, and thanked the people for their gesture. . . . The City of Light would finally put Perth on the map. . . . Already the Americans had invited the Lord Mayor to take part in New York's tickertape parade for the space hero. No one told the Americans that the mayor had actually opposed the suggestion to turn on the lights and had fought it bitterly in the city council. The mayor certainly didn't tell them it had been the brainwave of a shrewd reporter, to beef up the news on his town hall beat.[4]

These passages (which characteristically emphasise the significance of the reporter) are so similar that the reader might wonder about the distinction between the writer as journalist and the writer as novelist, and pause to question the definitions of each which *Fortune* offers. According to Drewe's narrator, journalism is limited, fragmented and superficial, "imagination and subjectivity" may be lost in the newsroom. Journalism, too, encourages a particular kind of inauthenticity: the illusion that "nothing was real until it was reproduced". Its hierachies of signficance, its omissions and selections, ignore what Drewe calls the "larger truth of a chaotic universe". Journalists and novelists share this ordering facility. But the novel, though potentially larger, has a different kind of limitation: it eschews the radical coincidence which abounds in life. Ultimately, the reader may become impatient with these speculations. Each kind of writing has claims to truth and yet neither is equipped to define what constitutes truth. As the passages about the City of Light demonstrate, differences between journalistic writing and the novel which uses recognisable people and places may be so slight that the real differences seem to lie in the circumstances of their publication, rather than in claims about the representation of "truth" or "the universe."

The most banal of distinctions between journalist and novelist — the length at which the novelist is able to write — allows Drewe a degree of complexity in *Fortune*. He uses this to depict characters who are almost metaphors for different kinds of representation and different kinds of moral engagement. The relationship between these characters and the central figure is, at times, tenuous, but this serves to emphasise their significance in terms of the narrator's preoccupation with representation. There is Linda Silver, a private eye, whose job requires "the same genius for lying and adoration for the truth as [that of] the poet". There is Leon J Levinson, cartoonist and exponent of the continuous line — a line which the narrator uses to speculate on causation and coincidence in his own narrative. There is the comic strip creator, Len Lawson, whose art is parasitic on American forms and whose graphic talents allow him to exercise a talent

for duplicity and rapacity. The most interesting character of all is the narrator, whom Len Lawson calls "Bob", as if to prompt the reader to conflate the narrator and the author, Robert Drewe. Although the similarities between narrator and author are evident, their differences have more interesting consequences for the narrative. Like Drewe, the narrator is an ex-journalist and novelist. Unlike Drewe, the narrator is a failed novelist. And Drewe allows the narrator the odd cliché, the occasional awkwardness, as if to emphasise the distinction. As with so much of this novel, there is a consciously shifting alliance between fact and fiction and Drewe exploits the complexities of this alliance. The point is, ultimately, that the strengths of this combination enable it to question the abuses of power which *Fortune* documents.

In *Fortune* Drewe directs his spotlight on the gap between the popular myth of the knockabout Australian, fighting for glory and principle, and the ambiguous and squalid fate that such a fight could entail. Drewe seems to suggest that we might have a larrikin image, but the larrikins among us attract the most persistent or inventive repression. Writing about an instance of such repression can seem very sensational, or very necessary.

Brenda Walker

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Penny Sutherland, of the local ABC, for detailed information on this subject.
2. Tom Wolfe, *The New Journalism*, Picador, London, 1975, pp. 1-52.
3. Robert Drewe, "The Light Stuff", *The National Times*, 21st Feb 1987, pp. 21, 24.

Fay Zwicky, *The Lyre in the Pawnshop. Essays on Literature and Survival 1974-1984.* University of Western Australia Press, 1986, pp.297, $15.00.

One enters Fay Zwicky's *The Lyre in the Pawnshop* through a thicket of preliminaries: first the portentous subtitle — 'Essays on Literature and Survival' — then epigraphs from Herman Melville and Walter Benjamin, finally a Preface from A.D. Hope which praises this 'selection of her most incisive and challenging articles'. Drawn from their miscellaneous places of publication and utterance (newspaper reviews, radio broadcasts, retrospects on the works of individual authors), these 'essays' attain coherence from the stance of forthrightness and passion that Zwicky takes from the beginning. The central strength of *The Lyre in the Pawnshop* is as a work of social rather than more narrowly literary criticism.

Dicta abound, nowhere more so than in the powerful opening essay, 'Disinterested Motives?'. There Zwicky avows her own preferences:

> the difference between the learner-as-teacher and teacher-as-teacher defines my own love of writers vulnerable to experience like Tolstoy, Whitman, Melville and D.H. Lawrence as opposed to my guarded respect for writers who seem to have been born old, like Ibsen, Sartre, Kierkegaard and Strindberg.

Then she moves outward, to admonish:

> Australians tend to see the future not as emerging from the past, but as something shaped from the material of the present by an act of will which cannot function till it has been liberated from the past.

To such people 'their own country a hundred years ago is a place more sterile, enigmatic and inhospitable than the Moon'. This is justly said, and although one might want to add that sanitised, sentimental versions of the Australian past sometimes commercially prosper, Zwicky's implication that Australians will themselves to become beasts without memories is compelling. The critic's burden is therefore in part to act as protector of the past. Even then, as Zwicky shrewdly notes, there is for the teacher 'the subtle and insidious illusion of being able to reclaim the lost'.

The second essay in this collection, 'Influence and Independence', is a fair sample

of what Zwicky wishes to argue about, and of how she argues. Her method is to begin with an assertion, here that 'the will to the annihilation of civilised consciousness underlies much of our fiction and poetry', then to illustrate what she has asserted, here by passing reference to the work of Cowan, Stow, Adamson, Mathers, Bail, Moorhouse and others. A sense of the integral relation of social and literary development in Australia is one of the hoariest *topoi* in our literary history. It can be found in G.B. Barton's books of the 1860s; it was essential to the enterprise of H.M. Green. In the same spirit, Zwicky speaks of (and assumes) 'the nihilistic context', elsewhere the 'barren context' into which Australian writers have to fit. Little effort is made to analyse this context. Rather it is taken for granted as a deficiency and deprivation of Australian society that impedes its authors.

Chris Wallace-Crabbe's essay 'The Solitary Shapers' is a presence in Zwicky's comparison of Australia with 'the older, more sophisticated culture of the United States'. By contrast with its idealistic origins, 'our founders were soldiers and convicts, paradigms of the oppressors and oppressed in reluctant exile'. Thus

> From the very beginning . . . there was an impoverishment of metaphor and symbol for the spiritual seeker, and no place for the emergence of anything as philosophically directed as the Transcendentalist movement of New England.

At the least, the history of Australian utopianism is neglected here. However Zwicky's interest by now is polemical rather than historical. Hotly she draws on more received wisdom about the direness of Australian culture and rhetorically asks:

> How can the artist survive in a society that lops off the heads of its tallest flowers or stunts their growth by reserving its highest accolades for the mediocre?

There is here a note of despair, as though for a moment anyway Zwicky doubts the critical mission upon which she has embarked. 'The metaphor of adolescence recurs when thinking about Australian development', she complains. The next long, typically discursive essay elaborates upon that complaint.

'Speeches and Silences' is another philippic against aspects of Australian life, occasionally made strident by the intimation that the critic will remain in *stasis*, in pre-adult life, like the society and the writers which are her material. These are some of the key generalisations and contentions of the essay:

> Our novelists shy away from allowing in their fictions the presence of any fully-fledged, mature, humanly fallible women, giving us instead monsters of virtue or bitchery, symbols of rejection and the fear of sexuality.

From the literary observation, Zwicky moves casually to a social one:

> What I seldom (if ever) feel is that these human inhabitants of Australia have experienced the capacity to love . . . all seem dismally meaningless, as if the sadness of some deep-rooted hollowness had penetrated every corner of their lives.

Then there follows one of her familiar rhetorical questions:

> Where are those poems that construct and elucidate desire, affection, closeness, fondness, tenderness, loving identification, certainty, delight, excitement, bliss, rest, to name but a few?

There can be no objection to a writer abandoning literary criticism out of a conviction of its inutility, and assuming instead the mantle of social prophet. This is what Zwicky is on the way to doing. The literary and the social evidence for her fulminations are not distinguished from one another. Thus she summarises the work of Randolph Stow 'as fairly typical of the sensitive Australian male's attitude': 'that desire to be released from society's claims, from the burden of success, women, family, and materialism'.

While another of Chris Wallace-Crabbe's essays — on 'the absence of love' in Australian literature may have influenced 'Speeches and Silences', Zwicky's truest mentor here — and in general in the prophetic role that attracts her — is never mentioned by name in *this* essay. Zwicky writes that

> Merely finding a language, learning to talk in a land where there are no conventions of conversation, no special class idioms, and no dialogue between classes let alone no prevailing *literary* language presents problems of a unique order.

Early in *Love and Death in the American Novel,* Leslie Fielder said

> Merely finding a language, learning to talk in a land where there are no conventions of conversation, no special class idioms and no dialogue between classes, no continuing literary language exhausts the American writer.

Zwicky declares that

> To write about the theme of love in Australian literature means having to be aware of the fate of certain European genres in a world of alien experience.

Fielder: 'To write, then, about the American novel is to write about the fate of certain European genres in a world of alien experience'. In the body of her essay, Zwicky steadily abandons Fielder's larger literary historical ambitions and narrows her attention to Randolph Stow. The bold metaphorical sweep of *Love and Death,* its sense of renewing the possibilities of literary history is — on the evidence of the quoted sentences — the sort of project that Zwicky endorses for Australia, but it is one that her own work has not yet accomplished.

Zwicky works more authoritatively in a smaller compass and with authors who are her contemporaries. In the essay 'Love and Language', she sentimentalises Donne's 'To His Mistris Going to Bed', then humourlessly misreads Rochester's 'The Imperfect Enjoyment'. Much more persuasive is her cool reappraisal of her feelings about Les Murray's poetry, which she says leaves her 'excluded, mystified, and defeated'. Thus 'Murray's voice doesn't seek to befriend but to distance'; 'Murray's view of Sydney puts away childish things'. In her fine and sympathetic summary of poetry that does not engage her sympathies, Zwicky concludes:

> Murray's combination of emotional frugality and prophetic afflatus defines him as a colonial stoic with messianic intent, both protecting and reducing his humanity through language, and aware of what is being reduced.

In other places Zwicky can be less sympathetic, as when she judges 'poets like Philip Martin and David Malouf, both academics armed with defensive wit, whimsical nostalgia, still sad music and triple level controls'. The judgement of poetry is the most heavily politicised arena of Australian literature. Zwicky's preferences are revealed by the poets to whom she devotes essays: Stow ('The Price of Silence'), Dobson ('Reclusive Grace'), Dawe ('Ambivalent Ockerism'). Her dislikes are canvassed in crabby asides:

> The current rejection of past values, the elevation of the new for novelty's sake, and the sound of baby booties stamping for attention doesn't make it easy for a quiet voice to be heard.

Zwicky is often a censorious and not always a specially close reader. When she castigates a Brennan poem because it exemplifies 'the rhythmical creation of Shelleyan Beauty with a capital B', both the tone and the judgment indicate that the influence of Leavis on her criticism remains strong. The adversary position does however encourage her most incisive writing. Of Peter Porter she decides that

> Despite a very real intellectual sophistication, Porter can sometimes be self-protectively evasive to an irritating degree in relentless bursts of one-line virtuosity or baroque irrelevance.

In the end, good wishes to the contrary, Australian writing disappoints Zwicky. She turns gladly to commentary on Paul Celan, to an interview with Denise Levertov, to an explanation of how she became able to write 'Kaddish', thus to identify with the Jewish faith and to join a cosmopolitan rather than an Australian community of writers. *The Lyre in the Pawnshop* has many social and literary insights in its miscellaneous contents. Its major cultural significance may turn out to be the pessimism that the essay show about 'survival' — of Australia, its literature and the vocation of the critic. It is of more desolate and barren times that Zwicky prophesies.

Peter Pierce.

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