WESTERLY

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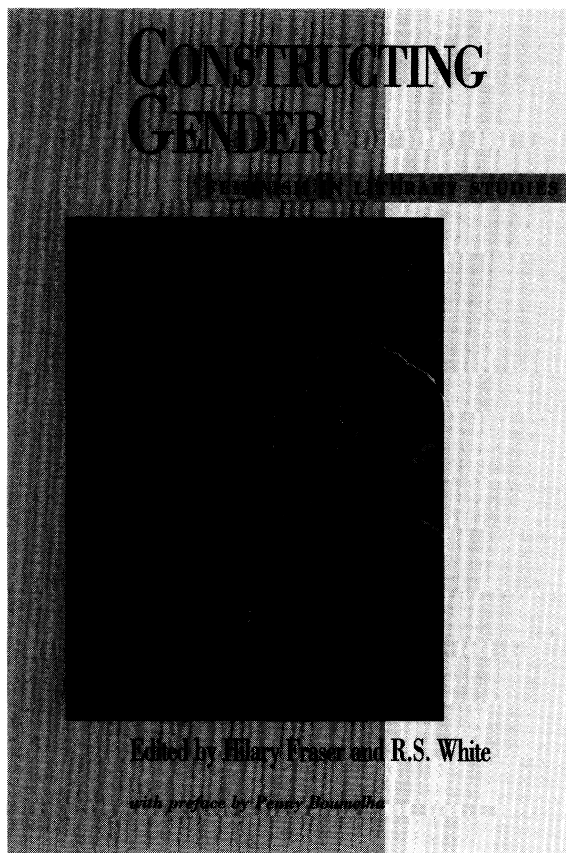
AUSTRALIA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

SUMMER 1994 NUMBER 4 $5.00

... *a valuable addition to feminist literary studies.*

Margaret Harris, University of Sydney



Constructing Gender: Feminism in Literary Studies is a collection of essays, written from a range of theoretical perspectives, on works from the fourteenth century to the present day, examining the ways in which literature has played an integral part in constructing notions of gender - from medieval virgins to the 'modern woman'.

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Australia and the Mediterranean
Editorial Comments

In the current debates about Australian social and cultural identity, as the nation moves towards the magic date of 2001, the centenary of Federation, the emphasis sometimes seems to be largely on Australia as part of Asia. As we commented in the 1993 special issue of *Westerly*, "'Asia' ... has become a political and media obsession". *Westerly* has been more involved with representations of cultural connections between Australia and Asia than any other literary and cultural magazine. However, we believe that this valuable interest in Asia should obscure the multicultural heritage Australia has derived from its European connections. This year's special issue, concerned with links between Australia and the Mediterranean, can be seen as a kind of righting the balance. Australia has traditionally had a sense of itself derived from Aboriginal, British, Irish and European sources as well as, of course, from local conditions of landscape, climate, flora and fauna. The importance of European culture increased markedly with extensive post-war migration. The greater number of those migrants came from southern Europe, from countries around the Mediterranean Sea. This issue of *Westerly* is concerned with explorations of cultural life in some of those countries and of Mediterranean elements in Australian life. The latter are particularly prevalent in parts of Western Australia and South Australia but the contributors to this issue come from a wide range of localities -- with reference to both their current residences and their places of birth.

The issue includes poetry, fiction and articles which provide factual and imaginative renderings of tourism, migration and settled life in Australia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Egypt, Israel, Slovenia and other countries of the Mediterranean. The material presents convergences, harmonies and conflicts, drawing on similarities and differences in matters such as climate, food and the quality of light. While only some deal with people's shifts of their lives between Australia and the Mediterranean region, each is concerned in some way with the transposition of ideas. Sometimes this is obvious, as in George Seddon's factual accounts of Ionia and Venice or artist Ken Searle's re-presentations of Greek myths; sometimes it is embedded in biographical or autobiographical experience, as in the pieces by Carolyn Polizzotto and Hal Colebatch; sometimes it is imaginatively, and perhaps incidentally, rendered, as in the lyrical, satiric and reflective poetry and fiction from diverse poets and short fiction writers included here.

This is the largest issue of *Westerly* ever published, a sign of the wealth of material received. We are delighted with the interest the theme has raised and wish to thank all contributors, including a number of people for whose work we simply couldn't find space. In particular, the editors would like to thank Sheila Downing Riboldi, who acted as an editor from within the Mediterranean region.

ALEC CHOATE

Mediterranean Child

We left behind the last snow on the grass,
sunlight in promise and a lace-frail rain
that seemed a pet's touch on the window glass,
and sailed from England's springtime, mother, me,
my elder brother, coasting sun-browned Spain
to reach Gibraltar, high and browed with warning
with captain father waiting on the quay
while heaven's only Mediterranean smile
was there to light us in with its good morning.
Soldiers and sailors, Spanish townsfolk, Moors,
jostled the seafront in a bright life-style,
a splash about of pageantry and pace
that shouted at me from a huge outdoors
and put its paint at random on its face.

Gibraltar, and my childhood muscled out
beyond the five years of its infancy
towards a boyhood with new worlds to scout.
I started school there, but was quick to learn
this world itself would school me, this silk sea,
this Rock, this Spain, Morocco. In Tangier
my mother, baring my heart to the stern
side of this world, put money in my hand
to give a beggar girl whose eyes looked queer,
or rather were not eyes but sockets, skinned
across and blank. The sleek palm trees that fanned
her ageing face and shaded them with grey
were much more handsome, graceful in the wind,
perfumed with sun and Mediterranean spray.

I saw such beggar children often in
Morocco, men and women too, the shock
of non-eyes, body bones near bare of skin
which ragged clothes and dirt refused to hide,
and though we lived in comfort on the Rock,
secure within its fortress atmosphere,
this world cried me to face its crueller side,
and I was easily hurt when I saw wrong.
I heard my parents, when not meant to hear,
talking of bullfights where I was not taken,
and wondered how they could mill with a throng
that cried for blood, and wanted the bull dead.
Gunfire across the straits left me less shaken
than this red uproar trailing me to bed.

Gunfire across the straits. Licking its tongue,
war murmured to me, making sharply real
the Great War's story and its songs, still sung
around the Rock from every soldier's mouth.
My parents smiled. The Rock was made of steel.
But I must hug my fantasy and sing
my own war songs, trumpet this rumpus south
of us in Spain's Morocco as a war
lit for the child in me, though threatening
our fortress hardly more than weather-thunder.
From our high home, we faced the Spanish shore
and as I watched the Spanish troopships loading,
I squared my five-year shoulders back in wonder
and felt no under-murmur of foreboding.

Sometimes we rode our horses into Spain,
my father and my brother on each side
of me, a groom behind, a chestnut mane
or tail, a sorrel flank, jostling their hues
together with the brightly silver-eyed
accoutrement of bridles, saddlery,
stirrups, and belled along by iron shoes.
The Spanish sun paid homage. People stared.
But once crowds checked us, forcing us to see
a handsome lady with her nostrils slit,
screaming from some mad alley, a knife bared
behind her brightly as she ran. This too
was Mediterranean colour which must fit
into my childhood outlook as I grew.

And there were scenes such as Machado knives
his poems with, one which, when the words return,
brings me a landscape bleak with struggling lives,
both beast and human, *figures against the sky*
and on a hill where autumn colours burn,
two oxen slowly ploughing, while between
their black yoke-weighted heads there is a sigh
of broom and rushes where a basket sways,
a small child's cradle, while behind the team
a man bows earthwards and a woman throws
seeds into open furrows. Beneath the blaze
of crimson clouds and fluid golden green
upon the west, shadow on shadow grows
monstrously. Many times I passed this scene.

But my Rock marched me to a drummer's beat
and held the sun high in a bugler's flare.
Clean boots and bayonets snapped and raked the heat,
though tall men on tall horses were the pride
that made a showground of the barrack square.
My father was my captain who, at times,
showed me giant siege guns couched in the hillside,
told me his unaffected tale of war
and found in Kipling all my nursery rhymes.
My days were fauve, vibrant and rainbow-hued,
yet given fibre by a quiet law,
something my home assumed, but never said,
that here Gibraltar was an attitude,
a weathered Rock that would not bow its head.

The Barbary apes believed in it, the Rock
had skilled them into hard and agile things.
The eagles cruised it daily, eyed my stock
of armour imagery, the Moorish fort,
always the guns, and waiting like their wings
the chill and menace of the anchored fleet.
Two years I shared it with them, not too short
a childhood stay to fix it in my heart,
then back to England, back to my old street
and home, I took it, and my eyes were wet.
My father also took it, or that part
that made him, even out of khaki, seem
as Kiplingesque as ever, and as set
in his demand of action from a dream.

Such was my childhood's Mediterranean
encounter, life-fauve, hectic dark and bright.
I came again as an Australian
with thousands of my youth in battledress
years later, innocent, sure we were right
to volunteer and rubbish Hitler's war,
though at what price we did not think to guess.
My childhood greeted me, the same light shone
somehow, the same sea stroked an eastern shore
that stroked Gibraltar. Here was Palestine,
here Egypt, Syria, here Lebanon
where I would stay more than two years, a stay
that would leave my heart scarred, or was it mine
now that a wounded world had lost its way?

DIANE FAHEY

Aristaeus

A beekeeper, cultivator of wide fields.
One wanton act brings on the tragedy:
the girl wrenching from his grip to stumble
beneath a tree, uncoil a serpent.
No healing arts
can save her: he feels remorseless rancour;
slowly, his bees fall silent, die.

At the very last, Aristaeus sacrifices,
pours out the blood of bulls. After nine days,
bees mill in rotting carcases, swarm
to the tree from which he'll cull them —
beginning again, not knowing the story's end:
Eurydice in the Underworld — rescued, returning;
Orpheus singing her loss, torn to pieces
as he sings, brought finally to meet her.

DIANE FAHEY

Arion*

His chanted words were a sea they swam in —
dolphins wreathing the ship where Arion sang
to save his life. He sang without fear,
with ancient formality, dressed in the dignity
of his minstrel's robes. That set him free
to move through sounds like a dolphin,
inhabit a sea of echoing pathways: his song
was a bright curve woven amongst them.
Then he leapt into water, his dolphin-voyage
a speeding through chill and sunlight —
each fragment of spray a drop of gold-
within-crystal. His homeland began where
that great line of energy broke on sand.
He walked through it, hearing a wordless singing.

* Arion was a great poet/singer who travelled around the Mediterranean on a kind of "tour" until falling into the hands of pirates — fortunately there were dolphins in the offing.

JEFF GUESS

Wish You Were Here

We stuck all your blue postcards
from the Greek Islands
on the white plaster wall
of our rented Australian flat
until they mapped
the eccentric nature
of a scattered beauty:
your new passion for wild crocus
kalamarakia and retsina.
It was winter here —
warmed by a picutre
of your rented room
in the harbour of Milos
and the red and orange fruit
in a market at Levkas.
You got back here in time
for the start
of the third teaching term:
marking essays,
teaching the Russian Revolution
to a yawning class
of Year 11 miscreants.
Though sometimes at lunch times
I would watch your eyes
staring past staff room windows —

wishing you were there.

CAROLYN POLIZZOTTO

Aphra

We cousins are seven, and from us there issue four times that number of children and grandchildren, all descendants of five women, five sisters in fact. Four of them are still alive, and the fifth shows no sign of leaving us, so really not much has changed, apart from the arrival of all these offspring, since they were girls together. They still talk of Aura — *Aphra,* the ship's captain called her — as if she were here. Out shopping together, they choose what she would have chosen, though they stop themselves from buying it, and marvel. She was a famous spendthrift, and is still that way inclined.

When Aura left the Congo in 1955, she spent her last penny on a secondhand Persian lamb coat. Four thousand U.S. dollars it cost, and she wore it all the time she stayed with us, broke, on her way back to Sydney, because she was so cold. My father watched me closely for any sign that, wayward as I was already proving to be, I might have inherited her fatal tendency. "You'd better watch out", he'd warn me, "it's in your blood." I was thus no more than seven years of age when he inadvertently made clear to me this precious connection with my mother's oldest sister. *In my blood?* The long black curly coat, the enticing feral creaminess of its mink collar and cuffs, were a promise of riches to come. Aura wore the coat for thirty-five years, she wore it to all our weddings. She's probably wearing it now, for all I know, when she comes shopping with me.

She's not especially extravagant, at least not with me, and her advice on what suits me is usually good, though I don't always take it. But she's certainly got a blind spot where money's concerned. After her husband died, she wrote radio plays for a living, and the episodes, which paid five guineas each, became her preferred unit of currency. A new hat, a new handbag would be costed in scripts. Income tax wasn't allowed for in these calculations, and her sister Basie would help her out when it was due. To mathematically-minded Basie, it seemed self-evident that, if Aura could live always just a little beyond her means — though perched on the brink of ruin all her life, she never quite toppled over — then she might as easily live just *within* them, but Aura never quite saw the point. Of course, it's not clothes she wants now, when she comes shopping with me, but smells. Gardenias, she asks for mostly, and in season too, though tiger-lilies were her favourite flower in life.

The ship and its captain loom large in our history. Well, you'd expect them to, wouldn't you? the ship our grandmother came to Australia on, with Aura, aged five,

and Rosa, the next sister in line, barely three, and the rest of the dynasty still to be born. It was a German ship, we cousins were told, or at least the captain was German, because he was interned and his ship impounded on arrival in Sydney, the Great War having begun during the voyage out from Greece. A colourful touch, this, and useful for dating purposes, were it not for the fact, the undeniable *fact,* of Basie's birth. Named Basilique by her father, in a doomed attempt to Anglicize Vasiliki, *his* mother's name, she was called Basie from the first, and ridiculed at school. The baby, until Helen and Marie came, and then and for ever afterwards the middle daughter of five, Basie was born in November 1914. "My kangaroo", her mother called her, her first Australian-born child, and she hated it. So the ship can't have arrived much later than February, even if Basie — her father's daughter from head to toe, inheritor of his mathematical gifts, after his death the "man" of the family — even if she was conceived, let us imagine, the night her mother arrived, when Aura and Rosa, worn out by the excitement, were finally, deeply, asleep.

In any case, I know the ship was Greek, not German, because there's a photograph of our grandmother on board. She's wearing a long coat, buttoned up to the neck, and alongside her there's a lifebuoy, with the ship's name printed on it. It's bitterly cold, and she looks so sad, so lost and alone; no eager anticipation about *her*, however one might look for it. If she'd known what was coming, in that frame of mind she'd have jumped over the side, and the two girls with her. To be widowed in 1925, her wretched husband having succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving her with five daughters and his dying words, "*Marry Rosa.*" Marry Rosa off, he meant, because she was the beautiful one, and her rich, steady, imaginary husband would support them all, in proper Greek style. Otherwise, there'd be no money at all; and indeed there wasn't, since Rosa, thoroughly Australianised by now, refused what few prospects there were. She was saving herself for Rudolph Valentino.

Aura and Rosa were nearly left behind in Greece. Our grandmother had planned to leave them with her parents, and go by herself to Australia — probably not even a name on a map to her — and talk some sense into her husband, and persuade him to come back. But at the last minute, we're told, a week or two before the voyage, she couldn't bear to leave them, her two baby daughters, and so they came too. (With Aura's black cashmere cape, lined in red silk, and the hood, and the new French-style satchel, all ready for school.) In our family history, thus was the die cast. Our grandmother never saw her parents again. She never went back to Greece.

And the captain sailed away safely again from Sydney, with his ship, I know that for a fact too, because he took a photo of Aura sitting on her father's shoulders, waving goodbye. Picture it: the thin, sallow man in his twenties, the rollicking, roistering child. On the back of the photograph, just the one word: *Aphra.*

Aura loved the ship. She took all the salt from all the salt-cellars in the ship's dining room and poured it over the side, and everyone only laughed. She fished up some blue salt water in a bottle with a string, but it turned out to be white. Widowed herself, in her turn, thirty years later, she supported her two sons writing plays. *My Husband's Love* flowed out from her fingertips on to the Sydney airwaves year after year, along with short stories, *My Life as a WAAF,* anything to make money. In 1915, she'd taken one look at her first Australian classroom, and known that the cashmere cape, and the hood, and the satchel had to go. She dumped them in the gutter on her way home from school. On her first day.

In 1943, her mother wrote frantically to Basie, now far away in Canada, the letter dictated in this instance to Marie, my mother: "Aura is earning her living with the writing, she is writing day and night, full speed, and the smoke is going out of her brains, of her ears, everywhere. She is thinner than ever but she tells me no matter how bad she looks, she might lost everything, but not her personality. At present Marie is with Rosa and Helen and I with Aura. The flat is big to have two of us but there is no furniture enough for us and is unbearable to live, besides that the children and Aura going round like a blowfly smoking day and night, Aura not the blowfly, especial now that she does the writing for their living. I empty seven ashtrays a day full of cigarette butts and she doesn't waste any matches, when she finish one cigarette she lights the other, she is so thin that we will not be able to see her soon, but, there is her personality..." It was a matter of pride, among her daughters, to write their mother's English exactly as she spoke it.

In her later years, Aura's flat was crammed with possessions. The camel saddle, the brass filigree lamp from Morocco, the vast ebony cocktail cabinet that took three men to lift it cohabited comfortably, émigrés together, with crocheted potholders from charity stalls and a pair of embroidered felt slippers, from Greece. But never for very long. Though she was a famous spendthrift, world famous in fact, Aura did not hold on to her finds. On their passage through time, they paused in her home as at a way station. If damaged, they were restored. They spent a year or two in her company, enriched by her presence, before moving on to their next port of call. Of all the people I have known, none left this life so free of worldly goods as she.

Last year, when she was dying, I'd pop over to see her. We'd sneak out of the hospice and down to Bondi, where once long ago she'd run wild. Far to the north of the beach, I'd sit on the sand near the rocks while she surfed. Eight years old again, but wraithlike, she'd go every day a little further out, making it hard to see her through the sparkling hazy glare. And every day a little later in the day, until I'd feel the chill of early evening closing in. One night we flew out of her room together, to the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We sat there kicking our heels out over the glittering velvet of the city, looking at her tired old body through the lighted window of St Vincent's, far below. Still she was reluctant to leave.

When at last she did die, no one was with her. Her sister Rosa, though, struggling on her sticks from hospital lift to corridor, from corridor to room, on what would have been her last visit, suddenly slipped to the floor in a faint. A mild stroke, the nurses said, but we cousins knew better. So near to Aura all her life, and toiling to her side at the end, when the door to the next world opened to receive her beloved sister, Rosa had almost slipped through.

ROBERTA BUFFI

Perth and Naples — Two "Corrupted" Mediterranean Cities Hanging Between Sky and Sea

> Since the beginning of the settlement of the Swan River local people and visitors walked; rode, or drove up to the top of Mt Eliza and looked back down on the town and river. Painters and photographers have portrayed the scene thousands of times. The portrait is always the same — not in detail of course, but in mood and inspiration. The river is still, the day is clear..., the foreshore is tree-lined and the buildings rise prettily above the foliage. In the immediate foreground are trees and shrubbery providing a frame for the composed scene. The scene itself is an Arcadia — a statement of the ancient pastoral of Virgil and the landscapes of Claude Poussin and his British and colonial Romantic followers through to the city planners of the last quarter of the twentieth century. As Stirling has described the Swan River in the picturesque language of the Romantic era, so Perth has been described in word and picture ever since. In short, the Swan River forms part of the great Western tradition of the pastoral idyll, a tradition which was central to the gentry's quest for internal peace and belief in a harmonious society where men were at one with each other and with nature.[1]

Stannage's description shows Perth as the Australian capital which, from the start, writers and artists — Australian and non — have often portrayed as displaying features peculiar to those landscapes where Virgil wandered while writing his Bucolics.

As George Seddon states, "Perth is by common consent one of the most open, sunny, even-tempered and friendly of societies".[2] Its pleasant physical setting and its benign climate have contributed to establish this positive image of the city.[3]

Yet the Arcadian landscape of Perth is not immune to corruption and this beautifully kept garden city can disclose at times a darker side. According to Dorothy

1. C.T. Stannage, *The People of Perth: A Social History of Western Australia's Capital City*, (Perth: Perth City Council, 1979), 329.
2. George Seddon, "The People of Perth", *Westerly* 25, 3 (September 1980), 97.
3. "Perth has recently become a place that Australians choose if they can. Climate and changes in recreational preferences play a part, as does the setting by beach and river" (Seddon, 99).

Hewett, "like all gardens it [has] a snake at the heart ... the snake of change, sex, adulthood, the journey outwards into the corrupt world".[4] The image of an Eden whose "corruption is partly hidden" since "the worm in the bud is secretive"[5] often recurs in the Perth of Western Australian writers and critics.

For example, Elizabeth Jolley, Tim Winton and Brenda Walker portray Perth as a two-faced city which produces in their characters an ambivalent attitude of both attraction to and rejection of its urban landscape.

Jolley describes her adoptive city as a sort of peaceful Arcadia, a quiet middle-class city where the suburban dream can be easily achieved.[6] However, the image of the suburban idyll coincides with a lack of vitality — both social and intellectual — so as to make the suburbs of the city appear lifeless and boring:

> For the lonely or the heavy hearted the neat streets with the well kept lawns, blank venetians and drawn curtains, as in other parts of the world, seem to be unpeopled and without exuberance of any sort. In other words they seem to be the most sad and depressing places to be in, especially on a Sunday.[7]

To Jolley, Perth sometimes appears reduced to its own shadow, an unreal place, barely perceptible. Its contours dissolve, its blurred image is that of a city which "lies in repose as if painted on a pale curtain".[8]

Perth, perceived by Jolley as a city affected by lack of vitality and both social and intellectual immobility, could be correlated to the Naples depicted by Italian writer Raffaele La Capria[9] who in his recently published *L'occhio di Napoli*,[10] a collection of memoirs and essays concerning his native city, sees Naples as characterised by "un'immobiliti metafisica, alla De Chirico, aleggiante sulla citti, sulle sue strade, sui suoi vicoli, pur nella convulsione quotidiana, un'immobiliti percepibile non so se dall'occhio o dalla mente" ["a metaphysical immobility, la De Chirico, which hovers on the city, on its streets, on its alleys, however convulsive its daily atmosphere is, an immobility which is perceived I know not whether by the eye or by the mind"].[11]

For La Capria, the metaphysical immobility, as he calls it; that is, the odd relationship between objects and physical landscape which creates the image of a motionless unreal world, as in De Chirico's paintings, is perceived as being peculiar to Naples due to the social and physical degradation which affects Mediterranean cities, particularly in recent decades. As he states, "Per capire la decadenza di Napoli e il suo degrado bisogna collocarla nella decadenza e nel degrado di tutto il Mediterraneo. E questo perchè da secoli e oggi con più evidenza, il Mediterraneo ha voltato le spalle alla modernità" ["In order to understand Naples' decay and degradation it is necessary to set this city within the whole Mediterranean world's decay and degra-

4. Dorothy Hewett, "The Garden and the City", *Westerly* 27, 4 (December 1982), 100.
5. Hewett, 99.
6. Elizabeth Jolley, "A Sort of Gift: Images of Perth," in Drusilla Modjeska (ed.), *Inner Cities*, (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1989), 201-207.
7. Jolley, 205.
8. Jolley, 205.
9. Raffaele La Capria was born in Naples. His works (novels, short stories and essays) have been widely translated abroad. Since the 1950s he has written extensively on Naples (*Un giorno d'impazienza* [1952], *Ferito a morte* [1961], *Amore e Psiche* [1973], *La neve del Vesuvio* [1988], *Capri e non più* Capri [1991]).
10. La Capria, *L'occhio di Napoli*, (Milano: Mondadori, 1994).
11. La Capria, 130.

dation. And this is so because for centuries and nowadays even more markedly Mediterranean culture has rejected modernity"].[12]

According to La Capria, the decay and corruption — both physical and moral — which plague his "Napoli-marina, la Sirena-Partenope che si distende dal Golfo ai piedi del Vesuvio, tra le isole e le penisole azzurre" ["marine Naples, the Parthenopean Siren which extends from the Gulf to the foot of the Vesuvius, among the islands and the blue peninsula"],[13] could be wiped out by its own sea, the only element which bears a regenerating process, both physical and creative: "Com'era chiara l'acqua a Posillipo quand'era chiara non la domanda di un nostalgico, perchè la chiarezza di quell'acqua simbolica, momento creativo della memoria che invoca una possibile rigenerazione" ["How clear was Posillipo's sea-water when it was clear is not the question asked by a nostalgic Neapolitan, since the limpidity of that sea-water is symbolic, it is a creative moment of the memory which appeals to the possibility of regeneration"].[14]

The limpidity and the blue of Naples' sea and sky mentioned so often by La Capria recur with almost an obsessive regularity in *Il mare non bagna Napoli*,[15] a collection of short stories written by Anna Maria Ortese[16] who spent the years of her Bildung in Naples and set most of her fiction in her adoptive city. In Ortese's short stories, the female protagonists keep wandering about a filthy post-war Naples which has nothing to offer its poverty-stricken inhabitants but its blue sky and its blue sea. These seem to be the only natural elements which all are allowed to enjoy and own in a cityscape whose pattern is characterised by "vicoli grigi e miseri vicoli infetti" ["grey alleys and infected shabby alleys"].[17] Thus Eugenia, the young girl who lives in one of the poorest areas of Naples, "cominciava a respirare con una certa fretta, come se quell'aria, quella festa e tutto quell'azzurro ch'erano sospesi sul quartiere dei poveri, fossero anche cosa sua" ["began to breathe with a certain haste, as if that air, that mirth and all that blue hanging on the suburb of the poor belonged also to her"].[18]

Ortese's fiction set in Naples conveys a sense of the sky and sea framing an uncontaminated blue shell within which human evils are spread over a decaying physical and social landscape (in "Un paio d'occhiali" [A Pair of Glasses"][19]the buildings are described as being plagued by infectious diseases[20]). In "Il silenzio della ragione" ["The Silence of Reason"],[21] one of Ortese's recollections of youth spent in the Parthenopean city told in first person narration, the narrator perceives the cityscape thus: "Sentivo delle lacrime appena trattenute da una cosa più forte, una paura indefinita di quell'aria così dolce, quel cielo così chiaro, quelle colline lunghe come lunghe onde che chiudevano nella loro serenità tante inquietudini e orrori" ["I felt tears in my eyes barely held back by something stronger, an indistinct fear of that air

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12. La Capria, 11.
13. La Capria, 7.
14. La Capria, 97.
15. Anna Maria Ortese, *Il mare non bagna Napoli* [1953], (Milano: Adelphi, 1994).
16. Anna Maria Ortese was born in 1914 in Rome. She lived in Naples, Venice and Milan and worked as journalist and essayist. She won many Italian awards for her novels and short stories (*Angelici dolori* [1937], *L' iguana* [1965], *Poveri e semplici* [1967]).
17. Ortese, 172.
18. Ortese, 24.
19. Ortese, 15-34.
20. Ortese, 33.
21. Ortese, 99-172.

so sweet, that sky so clear, these long hills which, like long sea-waves, shut so many worries and dreads within their peace"].[22]

By creating a vibrant metaphoric language which has surrealistic and oneiric depictions of Naples prevailing over realistic portrayals of the urban landscape, Ortese sees the sky and the sea of this city as elements which at times relieve and regenerate ("Quant'aria, quant'azzurro...e laggiù il mare pulito, grande...." ["Such air, such blue...and down there the clear sea, so wide...."],[23] "il cielo era di un azzurro chiaro, smagliante come nelle cartoline al platino, e sotto quella luce gli uomini venivano e andavano in modo confuso" ["The sky was a light blue, bright as that printed in platinum postcards, and under that glitter men kept going back and forth chaotically"][24]). At other times they are disquieting and unsettling ("[qualcuno] spiava con indifferenza o malinconia l'eccessiva profondità del cielo" ["(Someone) spied into the extreme deepness of the sky with indifference or sadness"];[25] "quella finestra [...] inquadrava un cielo di un azzurro cupo, così liscio e splendente da sembrare falso ["that window (...) framed a dark blue sky which was so smooth and bright that it almost looked counterfeit"][26]), and they remain necessary to alleviate Neapolitans from their deeply rooted poverty which Ortese describes as generating "quel senso di una morte in atto, di vita su un piano diverso dalla vita, scaturita unicamente dalla corruzione" ["that feeling of a death in progress, of a life which is on a different level from true life, a life which can be generated only by corruption"].[27]

Where "il mare non bagna Napoli" ["the sea does not wash Naples"],[28] corruption is not easily eradicable and even the sky becomes desperately black and menaces an irrevocable decay. As one of Ortese's characters remarks, "qui, il mare non bagnava Napoli. Ero sicuro che nessuno lo avesse visto, e lo ricordava. In questa fossa oscurissima, non brillava che il fuoco del sesso, sotto il cielo nero del sovrannaturale" ["Here, the sea did not wash Naples. I was sure that nobody had seen it, and could remember it. In this gloomy ditch, nothing but the fire of sex sparkled under the black sky of supernatural"].[29]

The sky and the sea are fundamental elements also in Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*,[30] a novel set in Perth in the 1950s and 1960s, which, in a rich Australian idiom, tells of two rural families fleeing to the city and finding themselves sharing the same building in Cloudstreet. Here, the realistic description of a grim urban landscape which "feels claustrophobic" since "even when it's empty it feels overcrowded",[31] a depiction which recalls Ortese's Naples, alternates with the fantastic evocation of a watery landscape in which the Swan River and the sea seem at times to flood the whole urban environment. The filthy streets and squalid suburbs gradually sink and Perth becomes an unreal city which, almost as if moving away from the continent, starts floating under a sky which is "the colour of an army surplus blanket".[32]

22. Ortese, 133.
23. Ortese, 30.
24. Ortese, 63.
25. Ortese, 38.
26. Ortese, 44.
27. Ortese, 102.
28. Ortese, 67.
29. Ortese, 67.
30. Tim Winton, *Cloudstreet*, (London: Picador, 1991).
31. Winton, 237.
32. Winton, 277.

The Perth depicted by Winton is an ugly and chaotic place whose "smell of shit and corruption rises out of the wood, causing the air to go fluid with sickness".[33] Hence, Winton's characters try to escape from an alienating city whose physical and moral decay corrupts the urban environment ("the same old meatmarket with all the girls backed around the walls and the blokes perving in from the doorway"[34]) and retreat into their contemplation of sky and water. Like Ortese's Neapolitans, Winton's Australians constantly feel the urge to be close to the sea, whose vastness instills a sensation of mental and physical freedom ("Sam stood out of his light, smelling the sea, wondering how it could all go this far"[35]), and the drive to look at the sky, at "its colour and promises it [holds]".[36]

In *Cloudstreet* sky and water interpenetrate and become one: "and when Quick looks over the side he sees the river full of sky as well (...)

> Are you in the sky, Fish?
> Yes. It's the water.
> What do you mean?
> The water. The water. I fly"[37]

The sea is regenerating, it is the natural element which gives birth; in it man's life comes full circle since, as Quick states, "we came from it and return to it".[38]

The description of the cityscape and its squalor and decay gradually become less frequent and at the end of the novel Quick "hears nothing but the sea. The sound of it has been in his ears all his life and he's hungry for it".[39] In Winton's novel, the regenerating process finally takes place: Perth's moral and physical corruption is wiped out by the water; by celebrating the benign presence of the sea, Quick re-establishes contact with the city.

Thus Perth's sea and sky stimulate creativity. Jolley writes:

> In an area between the railway line and the sea there are certain places, a bend or a gentle rising of the road, from where it is possible to see the sea. Serene blue surprises in glimpses between the trees and the houses. This smooth blue sea, beyond immediate reach and yet visible from time to time, seems to meet the sky in a quiet gentleness only possible in dreams.[40]

For Jolley, as for Winton, the sea and the sky compensate for the decay which both writers see as affecting Perth's urban environment. This emerges also in Brenda Walker's *Crush*,[41] a novel in which Perth becomes the setting for a murder. Here, Walker's female protagonist, Anna, experiences the contradictions of a two-faced city where political corruption and moral filth hide behind the beautiful facades of buildings:

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33. Winton, 161.
34. Winton, 278.
35. Winton, 238.
36. Winton, 214.
37. Winton, 114.
38. Winton, 420.
39. Winton, 423.
40. Jolley, 205.
41. Brenda Walker, *Crush*, (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1991).

> In this city, the categories can overlap... The Tower is the most prestigious city business address, eighty storeys of massively pure glass and steel concrete.... In between are all manner of opportunists and marketeers: stockbroking partnerships, obscurely titled corporations...[42]

Anna escapes from Perth's grim urban landscape whose moral decay is epitomised by the lifeless body, "deep in the undergrowth".[43] She retreats into her room, in order to write Tessa's story in her exercise book which symptomatically is blue, blue like the sea and like "the blue belly of the sky arching over her [Tessa]",[44] as Anna herself describes it.

Perth and Naples: two cities which in the works considered appear "far away, so close", to borrow words from Wim Wenders's latest film. Both Australian and Italian writers who are concerned with Perth and Naples perceive the physical and social decay which afflicts their urban environments and see the sky and the sea in both cities, characterised by an intense blue, as the natural elements in which lies the possibility of moral and intellectual regeneration.

A Naples which La Capria holds as being the epitome of a decaying Mediterranean culture and a Perth whose Arcadian landscape is considered by Hewett as being "a perfect field for corruption"[45] meet thus within the imaginary world of fiction and become twin cities hanging between the (same?) pure blue sky and sea.

Note

All the translations from Italian texts are by Roberta Buffi.

42. Walker, 46-47.
43. Walker, 15.
44. Walker, 41.
45. Hewett, 99.

JENA WOODHOUSE

North Wind

The number of familiar forms
declines: the shepherd on a rock
is not a man, but memory
ossified. Eudoxía fills her flasks
more seldom at the spring. Her legs
resent the thorny, stony journey.
Blue as wild iris blooms the tough-
stemmed rosemary, crowding pebbled
pathways and white terraces
at Thanopoúli.

The north wind thunders in the sea-
caverns and hidden crannies, croons
in clefts and rock-chimneys in tongues
I cannot speak or name, separating
syllables, annihilating phrase
and speech, reintegrating sound
as threnody; translating thyme and thorn
and wild anemone to stone and snail,
gathering the random notes of bells
in chains of melody.

I hear it humming in the eaves,
a siren-voice, a spirit merely,
pausing to catch its breath,
then moving on, composing freely.

JENA WOODHOUSE

Postcard From a Balcony

Release the shutters, let the pale
light enter with the winter chill
from lowered skies and concrete roof —
tops spiked with steel antennae.

This honeycomb of rooms is warm
despite the radio reports of ships
lost with all hands in lethal seas.

There will be days replete with sun,
rooms whitewashed by the light's
spring tide, sluicing through apertures
in masonry, flooding the dingy streets.

There have been nights when the traffic
howled like furies, sullen, five
floors down, or drummed with the dull
monotony of monsoon rains; nights when I
would start at curlew calling, catching
a siren's wail, or lie alert for moonlit
possums crossing corrugated iron.

I open the shutters onto the balcony,
sensing the season's change, the passing
of December's darker days. Alarmed,
a speckled pigeon darts from near
my feet; a sparrow scrapes a dry
crust with her beak.

JENA WOODHOUSE

Living in Ragaví

The street where we lived briefly
was reached by way of shabby
alleys; animal and human strays
patrolled the garbage sacks.

Bitter-orange trees grew there
and fought for life in leaden
air. A lame man cleaned the street
each day at eight. He'd pause
outside our ground-floor flat, close
to the diaphragm of blinds, then scrape
his shovel sullenly and limp away.

On evenings laced with toxic fog
ateliers hummed joylessly; trapped
in stuffy basements, craftsmen
fashioned teeth and limbs and gums.

April's buds of ivory set
harsh gold fruit too tart
to eat; doves shared
reminiscences of sweetness.

PAT JACOBS

Arrival

Mid-morning. A delicate, barely warming sunlight promises something, perhaps a comfortable place to stay, decent food.

The bus stops in the square and the people push forward, are greeted, disperse. It is the difficult moment: leaving the bus, which for a few hours has been a shelter from action and decision.

The Taverna is there, blending into the traffic, the battered iron tables and chairs spilling on to the roadway. I'm the only stranger, a welcome diversion to the morning. Dark, strong aggressive faces are turned to stare. They discuss me. How can they be instantly sure I don't understand Greek? Would it make a difference? I'm left for their enjoyment for fifteen or twenty minutes before the waiter approaches me.

Nescafe, Pizza, I say. It will give me time to sort myself out.
They crowd me. I am jostling elbows with a grandfather who peers intently.
Why should he be hostile? I stare back. I'm not German, not American. I'm not with a man, so what am I? Let him puzzle over it.

The waiter drops the pizza in front of me, pushing aside the laden aluminium ashtray and used glasses. A thick wedge of bread on a paper napkin teeters on the edge of the tray-sized table. Exhaust fumes from the departing bus add flavour to everything. The old man leans forward to watch me eat.

The hotel I am looking for is the *Cronos.* I flinch from asking; from the apologetic shrug of disinterest, or the vague wave around the corner. The waiter surprises me. In English he says: that is easy, across the square. And it was.

I am the only guest at the *Cronos* and feel like an out-of-season nuisance. Like many others on the island, it was new; roughly built, smelling of damp concrete, but the toilet worked, the hot water worked. A door opened on to the balcony and across the square I could see the men still at their places.

Their dark suitcoats never matched the trousers, suggesting countless weddings and funerals in the past; the durability of cloth said something about their lives: a disdain for the appearance of things? Or a dull monotonous poverty? I have no way of knowing. At least the lack of words gives me anonymity. I need to reveal nothing, explain nothing.

Traffic wakes me. It is mid-afternoon and the shops are open again. I should go out, buy some food and have a look around. They are all assembled again, or have never left. Perhaps they slept there in the sun. Now they watch me cross the square and suddenly, in that moment, I don't like it. It is ... their stillness. There is something brutal yet intense in their interest.

There are no women in the streets. Not even a few ancient crones. It's an odd time of year to come here I know, and I was warned that service would be scant, but this is something different. I begin to walk down the hill towards the water, past eyes and eyes and talk that stops as I pass. I can see a woman coming towards me, old, black-clothed with an apron and bowed misshapen legs. It's a relief and as we draw closer I thrust myself at her through my smile. Anything will do, even curiosity, but she turns her head. I wish I could leave tonight, but there is no bus until tomorrow. I buy some food: bread and cheese and fruit, in a hurry as if preparing for a siege. There is no attempt at conversation. I point and he takes up the articles. I offer money and he drops a few coins in my hand and follows me to the door and watches me go.

There is nowhere to go but further down the hill, towards the water. There is no point in pretending a purpose of my own. They know there could be no real purpose in my being here.

The hill ends, there are no more houses, no more dark doorways. The strange pale sea stretches before me, limpid and calm. It is almost closed in by mountains, the crests still covered by snow. There is no sand. Smooth pebbles of different shape and colour glow in the shallows. The water is cold and soft when I reach into it for a blood red stone. The sun is going, but I can sit for awhile, relax. I have, for the moment, arrived somewhere.

I see him coming, not hurrying, walking steadily, taking shape. He is dark and stocky like the others. I don't think he is old. He is dressed the same: the dark coat and unmatched trousers, the collarless shirt. I try and shake the idea he is walking to me. It's this place. I'm unnerved. A kind of lethargy, not unpleasant, holds me still.

He has slowed down, only a few yards from me, not looking at me. He is walking almost in the water and I notice his shoes are getting wet. He will pass in front of me, between me and the water—and the stony hill behind me.

Now—he has stopped. Looking into the water, ignoring me. I can smell the Retsina. He bends, reaches into the water and takes something, turning to me.
It is a black spiny sea urchin, glistening and alive. He holds it out to me.
As I take it from him drops of water fall from his coat sleeve on to my hand and cling there. He waits, making a small gesture at my nod of acknowledgment, then goes on toward the headland where there is a cluster of cottages I hadn't noticed.

There are odours of cooking as I go back up the hill. The women have come out and sit talking in the doorways. The children are playing a game in the street.
The men are inside the taverna as I cross the square, it is bleak without the sun.

Tomorrow, I will go up to Lasithi.

BRONWEN MORRISON

In Yr Element

Sand. Sand. Sand state sand groper sand bar sand hill sand beach sand grit limestone sand shell grit sand sand spit sand castle sand. I repeat this word, it loses meaning.

My father had a vision. At work in the boardroom the suits have a meeting; my young father with his eyes with the super-long dark curly lashes sees, during a dilemma, an aerial photograph of Perth peeping out from under an envelope. In the very centre is Craigie — a mandala circle within a square of a suburb — the colours are red, grey, brown — red roofs of housing development, grey sand dunes & streets, brown vegetation. This seems to be the answer. He stands up and declares his intentions. Craigie is our mecca.

First impressions of Perth: sand. Go west young man, take your young family, buy a house in the outer suburbs and turn the sand into an earthly paradise. We wheel on into the outskirts, tuck up into a double-brick house with ceilings lower than we'd ever been used to. Dugites love our backyard. Each cul-de-sac in town-planned Craigie has a giant sand hill half covered in pigface, with a steep sand-slide path leading up to the very top.

Sand. With five senses I can detect this. I use my eyes to look closely and imagine in each grain a world intact, a mineral planet. I hear grinding through the back of my head, right down deep under. Sand is not a taste sensation, but the feel of the crunch between my teeth is shiver-shattering. I inhale. Sand smells like salt, dust, things other than sand.

If you imagine an exceedingly time-lapsed film of Craigie, spanning years ten or so from the seventies to the eighties, you witness a miracle of the suburbs. This is something never seen by people who live here, though they participate in the miracle as coral lavae participate in reef-making. In the shut second of an eyelid, the dozing dunes are bullied of trees, curves, contours; a sandy waste is exposed; the wind moves swathes of sand over newly-laid maze-roads and the first houses go up!; red multiplies and fills in the gaps between snaky bitumen; young greens sprout into lawns like algae blooms; the sand is covered with layers of limestone & brick &

concrete & pine-chips & blue-metal & black plastic & rosebushes & gum saplings & cooch-grass; the buzz of human mechanical activity continues while slowly the pigface creeps back over the remaining dunes; a brief moment where a cyclone sweeps its tail over the suburb and sand piles in imitation dunes over the roads & doorsteps & pocket-perfect lawns of Craigie; insidiously it has entered the houses and they will never be the same, but as quickly routine reasserts control, and so it goes on.

I am standing on the dune in the very centre of Craigie with my oldest friend. It is twilight. From here the suburb, the world stretches away at our feet. We see in different directions. Her dog rolls in the sand. This is the way I remember growing-up. Start at the top, slide downwards, into dimness. A backward progression of memory. The slide begins at our feet. We clamber onto the flattened cardboard box, take one last look, push off, clinging to the box, each other. Sand flies, her dog runs behind us. We pick up speed, the light dims as we head into the shadow of the dune. Sand plumes, sand flies. We fly in different directions, it is soon night.

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MICHAEL SYMONS

Olive Oil and Air-conditioned Culture

The influence of the Mediterranean has permeated all aspects of lifestyle internationally, in particular its diet which has been hailed by nutritionists as the closest to ideal. And wine has always been its natural accompaniment— black label, Mitchelton III (Marsanne, Grenache, Viognier) 1993.

The "ploughman's lunch", if we are to believe the British movie of that name (*The Ploughman's Lunch*, 1983), was an advertising concept, a nostalgic marketing device, only lightly based on fact and aimed at attracting customers back to pubs. This decent enough counter-lunch of bread, cheese and ale might be termed "hyper-real", stamped with all the authenticity of ads.

I write about something of the same current chimera. The "Mediterranean diet" has nutritionists' approval; it carries glamorous connotations; it reeks of tradition; and it tastes good, too. It has already made it onto a wine label (as quoted above). In a recent "Bonus 16-page Zip-Out" in *Australian Cosmopolitan* (issue 252, May 1994), it rates among the "World's Top 10 Diets", along with Weight Watchers, the Beverly Hills, the Mayo Clinic, etc. But what is the "Mediterranean diet"? Where did the idea emerge? Does it make gastronomic sense?

The concept of coherent, desirable Mediterranean eating is not new. Elizabeth David started out as a cookery book author in 1950 with the *Book of Mediterranean Food*. Nutritionists credit the diet's recognition to Ancel Keys, whose studies, commencing in the 1950s, were reported in *Seven Countries: A multivariate analysis of death and coronary heart disease* (1980), and, with wife Margaret, *How to Eat Well and Stay Well, the Mediterranean Way* (1975).[1]

However, certainly in the 1990s, the diet's major promoter has been the International Olive Oil Council (IOOC), described in its publications as an intergovernmental body, based in Madrid and responsible since 1959 for the administration of agreements under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). The IOOC spends impressive sums persuading culinary opinion-leaders of the benefits of both its commodity and the Mediterranean way of eating more generally.

1. The work of Keys is acknowledged, for example, in "Diets of the Mediterranean: A Summary Report", Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust and Harvard School of Public Health, 1993. This 28-page booklet, without editorial credits or page numbers, condenses the discussion at the International Conference on the Diets of the Mediterranean, January 20-23, 1993, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

As an example, in Adelaide on Thursday, August 4, 1994, the council held a "Mediterranean banquet". Cooked by Cath Kerry, the menu had been sent ahead by English-Italian author Diane Seed, whose *The Top One Hundred Pasta Sauces* has sold towards a million copies, and who has now done *Diane Seed's Mediterranean Dishes* for the BBC (according to IOOC publicity material). Next morning, she and another principal speaker, Sydney nutrition publicist Rosemary Stanton, conducted a table olive seminar, followed at the Pheasant Farm in the Barossa Valley by a "feast of the olive" lunch, again created by Diane Seed and cooked this time by Maggie Beer. Local journalists, retailers and restaurateurs attended, as well as sixteen (according to one count) journalists flown from Sydney and Melbourne, leaders of the pack including John Newton *(Sydney Morning Herald)* and Jane Adams *(Cuisine)*.[2]

Somewhat cheekily, as he saw it, Adelaide *Advertiser* food writer Nigel Hopkins had greeted the event with a feature article on local olive oils. But, subsequently, he expressly praised the Mediterranean diet: "For most Australians," he wrote, "there is a comforting cultural familiarity... For South Australians, too, it is especially relevant because our typically Mediterranean climate and proximity to the sea provide us with all the right ingredients".[3] Without explicitly indicating any IOOC input, he quoted the health arguments of Rosemary Stanton, and extracted recipes from the then just published *Mediterranean the Beautiful Cookbook* (in the Weldon "the Beautiful" series).

In another mention, Beverley Sutherland Smith turned her Melbourne *Age* cooking column over to "those versatile little olives". Again not explicitly acknowledging the council, she quoted Rosemary Stanton on the lowering of blood cholesterol "at a talk she gave in South Australia", and continued: "Well-known author Diane Seed gave me some of her recipes for marinated olives, which I have included". She enthused: "Above all, you will find that olives in a dish invoke a world where robust tastes and honest earthy flavours still exist."[4]

On April 12-14, 1994, the council arranged a three-day seminar, "A celebration of the regional cuisines of Italy", at the Regent Hotel in Sydney. As principal guest, English-Italian author Valentina Harris spoke about the foods of the north, centre and south, with corresponding dinners. Again, journalists and other opinion leaders were flown in, wined and dined, and introduced to the olive. As a final Australian example, in March, 1993, the council arranged a debate in the old Parliament House, Canberra, as a public segment of the Seventh Symposium of Australian Gastronomy. The council's public relations company, Scott Consulting, handed out statements by representative speakers, again Diane Seed and Rosemary Stanton.

If journalists enjoy being feted, food and wine journalists presumably enjoy it more. Throwing desirable functions contributes to the power wielded by Philippa Goodrick of Scott Consulting. But bestowing Australian junkets pales to insignificance against being able to offer overseas trips. For the Olive Oil Council also flies our opinion-leaders to conferences in the United States and around the Mediterranean. Among journalists and chefs who have scored jaunts so far are: Stephanie Alexander, Maggie Beer, Pamela Clark, Jill Dupleix, David Dale, Michael Dowe, Rita

2. Details of this and other IOOC seminars and conferences have been taken from invitations, programs and other council ephemera. As well as three personal communications named in the paper, I have also been helped by several other participants.
3. Nigel Hopkins, "A Place in the Sun", *Advertiser*, Wednesday, August 24, 1994, 28.
4. Beverley Sutherland Smith, "Palate pleasers from a tree", *Age*, Tuesday, August 30, 1994, 30.

Erlich, Diane Holuigue, Nigel Hopkins, Lew Kathreptis (who set his Mezes restaurant tables with olive oil rather than butter), Cath Kerry, Bernard King, Steve Manfredi, John Newton, Barbara Northwood, Armando Percuoco, Cherry Ripe and Alan Saunders (who returned from Hawaii with some weeks of interviews for his ABC RN "Food Program").

About fifty overseas trips had been given to Australians, mainly journalists, Philippa Goodrick estimated.[5] I had caught her exhausted, and not just by competition from the canola oil industry. From her groans, it seemed that she came under all sorts of pressure to hand out tickets. It has become a matter of pride for food journalists to receive an invitation. "Aren't you going to Tunisia?" they ask one another. During my interviews, I found eagerness to get to the next event in Morocco. But Philippa Goodrick had to evaluate the possible returns, she protested, and those selected had to hold their own in seminars with "professors of archaeology and the like".

In general, recipients were surprised at the council's generosity, especially since they considered that they would write about olive oil and Mediterranean cooking anyhow. Goodrick agreed that the Council's exercise was expensive. But it was "our strategy", she said, with budgets voted at council meetings. All but one journalist had written something on return, she said. Overall, it was difficult to estimate the IOOC's effect on the Mediterranean diet's acceptance in Australia, "but obviously I tell my bosses that we've been largely successful." (She reports to Dennis Frith of the UK marketing company, Overseas Research Associates.) A council document summarising the world market judges that "Australia's consumption has developed to quite an encouraging extent ... as a result of the promotional activities the IOOC has started in this country." In round terms, our olive oil imports doubled in five years and had reached around 17,000 tonnes in the financial year 1992/1993. (Local production is insignificant, scarcely more than one percent of imports.)

And so, without indicating what had taken her to Italy, Jill Dupleix provided a shopping guide to Mediterranean ingredients in the *Age* "Epicure" section, quoting Rosemary Stanton on the health benefits, and then letting drop that she had spoken to the "handsome Signore Salvagno [an olive oil producer] on my last visit".[6] Over the following two weeks, the then editor of the "Epicure" section, Rita Erlich, produced a sprawling, two-part feature: "We ate extremely well... a group of Australians and Japanese (and later, some Americans) tracking through Puglia and Campania ... in search of the Mediterranean diet, courtesy of the International Olive Oil Council and the Italian Ministry for Agriculture."[7]

Strangely, Erlich's second instalment initially also sounded supportive: "Should we switch to the Mediterranean diet? A seven-country study in the 1960s showed that the people of Greece and southern Italy tended to live longer and healthier lives than most." However, patient readers were in for a surprise, for Erlich eventually raised doubts, largely economic: a massive dietary change would disrupt Australian agriculture, require initial olive oil imports, and put up prices for southern Europeans. From reading the nutritional fine print: "It appears that many of the world's traditional diets — or elements of these diets — are healthful."[8]

5. Personal communication with Philippa Goodrick, September, 1994.
6. Jill Dupleix, "Shopping guide to the 'Med'", *Age*, Tuesday, June 15, 1993.
7. Rita Erlich, "In search of the Mediterranean diet", *Age*, Tuesday, June 22, 1993, 19-20.
8. Rita Erlich, "Changing diets", *Age*, Tuesday, June 29, 1993, 17.

No Sydney restaurant has captured the Mediterranean diet — chickpeas, capsicums, peasanty bread, olive oil — with more excitement than Neil Perry's "Rocket", although Perry has yet to be launched on an overseas junket. "He must have decided it was fashionable from reading all these journalists," Sydney journalist and broadcaster David Dale commented.[9] By Dale's evaluation, based on the number of media mentions, the council had worked out a very effective public relations strategy. While the source was not always given, "you read mentions of the Mediterranean diet, especially olive oil, and you know where it's come from," he said. Especially beyond Sydney and Melbourne, the public relations input seemed more blatant; food journalism struck him as "sweetly naive".

The council had flown David Dale to Spain for a conference on "Food, culture and discovery: From Columbus to the 21st century", October 1-10, 1992. Shifting between Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid, he had watched nutritionists speak against butter, journalists get their stories, cooks their recipes, and he had enjoyed himself. Recalling the use he had made of the trip, he said he had written for the magazine of the Commission for the Future, *21C*, on the paradox that southern European peasants struggled to leave behind that very diet for which New Yorkers paid high prices; he had reported for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on cookery writers lamenting at the conference how they were running out of new recipes; and he had been helped with background for his restaurant review of "Rocket" for the same newspaper.

While Australians have been sent by Scott Consulting acting directly for the IOOC, the international conferences themselves had been held under a variety of auspices. One fairly common link (beyond IOOC sponsorship) is a Boston-based charitable body, the Oldways Preservation and Exchange Trust. Philippa Goodrick said that the IOOC had supported Oldways in its work on the Mediterranean diet for about ten years.

Oldways had held the conference Dale had attended in Spain and, as another example, Oldways, the Olive Oil Council and the Italian Ministry for Agriculture, Food and Forests Resources held an "International Congress on Italian Gastronomy" on March 1-6, 1994, at the Hilton Cavalieri Hotel in Rome. Along with many US and Italian writers, listed Australian speakers included Jan Power (Brisbane) on the "warm welcome for Italian foods and wines at the world's tables", Jackie Passmore (Brisbane) on "what happens when Italian regional cuisines meet the cuisines of the nations of Asia", Stefano Manfredi (Sydney) on "the special role of olive oil", John Portelli (Melbourne) on "the astonishing new wines of Italy" and Rosemary Stanton on "Italy's cuisines as cultural models for healthy eating".

Oldways does not just enlist cookery journalists, but also university researchers. On January 20-23, 1993, Oldways organised a "Diets of the Mediterranean" conference in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the Harvard School of Public Health. Sixty experts, mainly academics, from eleven countries spoke before an audience of close to 300 people, and enjoyed meals illustrating Mediterranean flavours and traditional dietary patterns. A long column of chefs and restaurateurs did food for an opening display, and some of America's heaviest food writers attended.[10]

9. Personal communication with David Dale, September, 1994.
10. "Diets of the Mediterranean", see note 1.

At a second "Diets of the Mediterranean" meeting, held in San Francisco in June 1994, a so-called "Traditional Healthy Mediterranean Diet Pyramid" was refined, and now published as a folded single sheet under the names of Oldways, Harvard and the World Health Organisation. Breads, pasta, rice, couscous, polenta, bulgur, other grains and potatoes form the base of the pyramid. Also to be eaten daily, fruit, vegetables, beans, other legumes and nuts. Above these, on a level of its own, olive oil, then cheese and yogurt. Merely a "few times per week", fish, poultry, eggs and sweets. At the apex, "a few times per month" red meat.

While the conferences tend to be soft, with undemanding and recycled papers, nonetheless, by opting for the academic rather than the blatantly promotional, the IOOC invites quibbling. For example, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, participants argued "that there is not a single Mediterranean diet as such, but only some uncounted number of Mediterranean diets". One of the most notable differences is, of course, wine consumption which in Italy, Spain and Greece far exceeds that in the Moslem countries of North Africa.[11] Officially, the authorities have also agreed that they only speak of some ideal type, namely, the "optimal traditional Mediterranean diet", which is further pinned down (in detailed notes on the back of the "Mediterranean Dietary Pyramid") as "the dietary traditions of Crete, much of the rest of Greece and southern Italy circa 1960", once these are restructured "in light of current nutrition research".

In recent years, nutritionists have endeavoured to get beyond reductionist accounts, lifting their sights above nutrients, through food items and balanced meals to now entire cuisines. Generally, nutritionists now line up behind any "traditional" or "peasant" cuisine (and so why not feature the "Japanese diet", for example)? Especially given the French paradox of high consumption of butter, cream and cheese and yet unusually low heart disease rates, they have been more mindful that key factors are not readily isolated; olive oil can be no miracle explanation. Extra physical exercise is involved. Now social activity has also been demonstrated epidemologically to be protective against heart disease (roughly speaking, the more people sharing the meal the healthier).[12]

But hold on, I am slipping into commentary, allocated to the second part of this essay, which is a reflection on, in a way, postmodernity and how to respond. This is achieved through a consideration of two issues raised by the IOOC campaign: How to regard both the Olive Oil Council's methods and its preferred diet.

Gastronomy and the postmodern plate

In a market economy, things are marketed, and the Olive Oil Council's well-funded campaign is but one voice amid the clamour. These days, even high-profile chefs hire public relations consultants. At another level, probably 1000 food lobbyists operate in Washington.[13] Before worrying overly about compromised journalists, we can recall that even the great Elizabeth David, who came to stand for an intellectual integrity unusual in cookery books, would seem to have gone on junkets.

11. John Mercuri Dooley, "Overview" in "Diets of the Mediterranean".
12. Michael Symons, *The Shared Table: Ideas for Australian Cuisine,* (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1993), esp.177-178. Mark Wahlqvist, "Social activity and food", in Barbara Santich and Michael Symons, eds., *A Multiculinary society: Proceedings of the Third Symposium of Australian Gastronomy,* Adelaide, 1988, 130-135. J.S. House et al, "Social relationships and health", *Science* 241; 540-545.
13. Ellen Haas summarised in "Diets of Mediterranean".

Certainly, that is how I read the opening acknowledgments to *Italian Food* (1954).

Besides, the olive oil campaign is benign in comparison to the marketing techniques of Coke and suchlike corporations, which have thoroughly insinuated their names and interests into prime time and sites, including into ostensibly commercial-free movies through so-called product placement. Getting products onto the screen became a highly rationalised industry during the 1980s, with dozens of companies broking complex deals between Hollywood and advertisers.[14]

This is postmodernity. Indeed, given that the vigorous food marketplace contributes so much, it strikes me as odd that the postmodern condition has rarely been written about in terms of eating. Jean-Francois Lyotard notices in passing:

> Eclecticism is the ground zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong.[15]

I am even prepared to argue that culinary contestation lies at the heart of postmodernity.[16] For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to accept that the globalisation of cooking confronts eaters with unprecedented choices. Our attention is demanded by supermarket shelves, movie and video screens, bistro blackboards, and streams of advertising. We are compelled to understand the forces at work and to work out responses. But how do we evaluate the claims? Where can we turn for advice on whether to go Mediterranean? Presently, none of the conventional humanities responds directly to such questions. But this does not mean that it is impossible to think cuisine through. Instead, I want to show how it is possible to formulate useful strategies by contributing one or two points to what I regard as a gastronomic answer. It should become obvious that a key characteristic of gastronomy is that, with transdisciplinary aplomb, it encompasses cultural, social and physical spheres.

For the sake of argument, let us agree with the Olive Oil Council that we can learn from traditional methods, which can be regarded as more authentic (certainly than Coke culture) in the sense of cultivating more intimate physical, social and cultural ties. Then we can move onto the pertinent issue of whether we should turn to specifically Mediterranean traditions. I propose to examine this by focussing on the relationship between cuisine and climate.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* lists climate first of the major factors as shaping (traditional) cuisine. (The other two are economic conditions and religious and sumptuary laws.) From another direction, Cherry Ripe raises the "absurdity" of eating against climate. Citing a glaring anomaly (to "roast yourself half to death on 25 December"), she states: "It has only been in the last decade or so, with the rise in national self-confidence ..., that the inappropriateness of such food has even been challenged."[17]

To argue this briefly, fresh foods most effectively come locally, and what grows

14. For an analysis of this irritating phenomenon, see: Mark Crispin Miller, "Why Hollywood is all ads", *Independent Monthly*, August 1990, 24-28 (extracted from Miller's *Seeing Through Movies)*.
15. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 78.
16. Michael Symons, "Eating into thinking: Explorations in the sociology of cuisine", unpublished PhD thesis, Flinders University of SA, esp. Chapt. 8. I am also working on a more explicit formulation.
17. Cherry Ripe, *Goodbye Culinary Cringe*, (St Leonards, NSW: Rathdowne, 1993), 194.

best greatly depends on climate. By purchasing locally, too, cooks can maintain closer contact with producers. Less energy-depleting refrigeration and transport are required. Also, the weather influences not just ingredients but cooking styles, meal-times and dining spaces. That is, where the climate leads, cuisine in its several elements follows. In this way, the coconut becomes a readily available basis of equatorial cuisines. Chilli tends to be used in hot humid zones, livening up bland and sweet foods and cooling sweaty bodies.

Simple considerations of climate encourage powerful statements. For example, the sharing of climate can be said to give the various Mediterranean cuisines their very coherence. In fact, as perhaps its best indicator, the olive fails to prosper in any other regime. That is, a shared climate provides a clear justification for the IOOC to proclaim the concept of some overall Mediterranean cuisine. Meanwhile, an alternative culinary vision with Australian advocates is co-called "Fusion", "East meets West" or "Mediterrasian". This style is pushed by the *Weekend Australian's* food columnist Cherry Ripe under the guise of "Asianisation".[18] However, from a climatic viewpoint, "East meets West" can be regarded as an ungainly mix of, broadly, Mediterranean with tropical foods. That is, this type of eclecticism can be criticised as an attempt to break the climate-cuisine nexus. As a further deduction from the atlas, the Australian continent can be seen to encompass importantly different zones, making it climatically insensitive even to urge a single "Australian cuisine". A cool maritime climate gives Tasmanians ready access to good cream, butter and cheese, which actually taste better in this environment. Quite the reverse for Northern Territorians, whose butter melts and whose cows are kept in an airconditioned factory floating like a space-station in the dry tropics.

By comparing climates, it is even feasible to associate parts of Australia with cuisines elsewhere. To pin some labels on the map, the zone north of Rockhampton becomes climatically appropriate for Indian, Thai and South Vietnamese eating. Similarly, Brisbane and Sydney are well-suited for Cantonese. The climate in Melbourne and Hobart suggests (non-Mediterranean) French. Indeed, in the case of Melbourne, not only is the Gippsland dairy region close at hand, but the climate also occasions relatively closeted dining rooms. This is perhaps why Melbourne has more than its share of fine French-style restaurants ("Paul Bocuse", "Jacques Reymond", "Mietta's", etc.).

It is relatively limited areas around Perth and Adelaide that could be considered climatically appropriate for Mediterranean cuisines. Indeed, Adelaide's suitability is such that olives are cultivated in city parks and grow wild in the adjacent foothills. For good reason, the CSIRO has established a Centre for Mediterranean Agricultural Research in Perth.

While one of the historical attributes of olive oil is to enable food preservation and transport, I challenge the wholesale transferability of Mediterranean cuisine. The International Olive Oil Council finds it commercially attractive to talk traditional and regional, but to international audiences. Quite unashamedly, the council espouses a Mediterranean diet — adapted to temperate latitudes with warm dry summers and cool winters — well beyond the Mediterranean region and its climatic analogues. The globalised eating of corporate and commodity marketers presumes and further installs an air-conditioned culture; so far, the postmodern marketplace is without weather.

18. See, for example, Ripe, *Goodby Culinary Cringe*, 7-21.

To return to the other question, our response to the blandishments of the International Olive Oil Council, we should not be surprised when journalists' reports are affected by smooth talk, even if sometimes negatively. But, rather than further dissect the commercial influences, I want to marvel that journalists show any independence at all. In other words, let me pinpoint some of the correctives which mean that food writers do not forever drift with the dollar.

Many lesser journalists seem to view commercial pressures as inevitable and almost a good thing. They regard any espousal of an alternative as idealistic or academic. At the level of the suburban giveaways, journalists wearing "restaurant reviewer" hats act as advertising salespeople, soliciting ads with the promise that they will be "backed by editorial". I am personally familiar with instances where even relatively respected restaurant reviewers also offer themselves as outside food "consultants", advising on menus, winelists, the launch of a new café or restaurant, and so on. The cookery columns of mass-circulation magazines can also be anti-intellectually compliant, with industry-based home economists and even nutritionists left relatively unsupported by critical discourses.

And yet many "quality" journalists are less commercially-driven and, in fact, the higher up the status tree the more independent they seem to get. To understand this increasing distance from the crude marketplace, we need to recognise the power of professionalism. Serious journalists actually feel part of a profession supported by a distinct discourse — notably, a code of ethics, which is partly formal and largely informal. Within the folklore, certain investigative and independent-minded journalists are heroic. If serious journalists fall for blatant marketing, they risk the scorn of peers.

In the olive oil example, flattery is multiplied by inviting the journalists to attend conferences as speakers. This verifies them as experts even beyond their newspaper columns and broadcasting spots. The risk that the IOOC takes, of course, is that this very flattery builds self-esteem and autonomy. Similarly, otherwise competing specialists use the constant round of promotional get-togethers as a chance to share gossip and form collective judgements, which can be healthy and not infrequently against the public relations message. For example, certain participants decided that the Istanbul conference (October 1993) was poorly-organised and counter-productive.

These are the sorts of sociological arguments which can explain why our media are not entirely manipulated.[19] Indeed, it is a sociological commonplace to go beyond simple economic motives to examine status. But even this seems insufficient to explain the relative objectivity of some writers.

Rosemary Stanton's name has cropped up several times in this essay as the IOOC spokesperson in Australia. In biographical notes supplied by the IOOC in 1993, Stanton was said to have combined the writing of thirteen books and 2,300 articles (she writes regularly for *Woman's Day* and *Family Circle*, among other publications) and frequent television and radio appearances with a "consulting business" for government departments, sporting bodies, "primary industry groups, selected sections of the food industry, advertising and public relations companies." In other words, Stanton has worked as a consultant not just to the olive oil marketers but to

19. The sociology of professions has received some attention; see, for example: Terence J Johnson, *Professions and Power*, (London: Macmillan, 1972).

several industries, while at the same time gaining most of her income as an author and journalist in the area of nutrition. On the face of it, she seems to be a complicit professional, readily enlisted on the behalf of crude commercial interests. But there is more to tell.

In a telephone interview,[20] she said that she had been paid a retainer by the Olive Oil Council to answer technical questions on their behalf, but with no additional fee for attending seminars and international conferences. When she had spoken overseas (and she was at that time just preparing to head for Morocco), this had been at the invitation of Oldways, who had then turned to the IOOC for sponsorship for her fare. But I had rung to discuss the possibilities of maintaining an objective voice, and she was able to demonstrate this quite dramatically.

The trouble is that, while enthusiastic about olive oil, she has been highly critical of margarine and its marketing. And the Australian margarine producers happen also to be the major olive oil importers — Flora imports Bertolli and Meadowlea imports Vetta. Therefore, the margarine manufacturers had persuaded the IOOC that her stance against margarine made her unacceptable, and her services had just been dispensed with. "I have been a naughty girl," she said. The margarine people had offered to work out a compromise, "but I wasn't going to back down," she said. "They also thought I was pro-butter, and the only evidence was that I said on *Burke's Backyard* that, on crumpets, a teaspoon of butter wasn't going to hurt". While she was also on the board of the Australian Dairy Corporation, she had made it clear from the start that she would never do anything pro-butter.

Stanton claimed that she had never had to solicit consultancy work. Companies frequently came to her. However, she turned down "99%" of what she was offered. "I'm not short of work," she said. She would not accept a product unless it passed three criteria. "It must be nutritionally beyond reproach; it must taste good; and it must do minimal environmental damage." When it came to margarine, she considered that consumers had been "conned". Margarine did not pass any of her three criteria. Given the difficulties she had experienced in presenting the case against margarine, she even spoke of a "conspiracy". She had direct knowledge of magazine editors who rejected anti-margarine stories for putting valuable advertising income at risk.

As far as Rosemary Stanton was concerned, the majority of Australian research nutritionists were compromised. She was incensed that so much research was funded by food interests, thus shaping the direction of research. While there were some independent nutritionists (and she named a notable exception), many researchers would only do those studies which they expected to produce favourable results.

Stanton gave the impression of being a relatively independent voice. I believed her when she said that the IOOC had approached her based on her existing stance on olive oil. "I didn't change my tune when they came along and won't change when they go away," she said. I suppose we could conjecture that an aura of credibility is important for getting journalistic work. Yet there seemed to be more to it. She seemed impelled by more than money and more than status. She admitted that she had often been accused of exhibiting an evangelical zeal, "only I don't have it for religion".

20. Personal communication with Rosemary Stanton, September 20, 1994.

How can we explain the passion and even fury which so often counteracts dull economy, or, as it has recently been termed, economic rationalism, or as it has quite mistakenly been described, "materialism"? If this were a piece of creative writing, I might be inclined to say that we, and novels, are saved by inspiration, by an unexpected turn, by a tragic stroke, by transcendence. However, this is not creative writing, but gastronomic. I will therefore assert that we are saved by the pleasures of the stomach.

We are saved because ideas are located in society and society in the world. Take the case of Rosemary Stanton and the way she has transformed this present story. We might say that this is a rare passionate nutritionist blessed by some heaven-sent power. But look again at her three criteria of truth. She relies on her eating being nutritionally sound. That is, she is concerned with healthy survival. Secondly, in turning down the lowfat but boring sausage, she relies on her taste. That is, she wants to enjoy her food. And, thirdly, living for her must be environmentally sound, and so she cares about the world. Although not on this list, her advocacy is also plainly fuelled by a desire to share, which is a further notably gastronomic quality.

Among others, Friedrich Nietzsche has noticed the extraordinary absence of an intellectual discourse on eating, let us call it "gastronomy":

> So far, everything that has given colour to existence still lacks a history.... Has anyone yet conducted research into the different ways of dividing the day and the consequences of a regular arrangement of work, holiday, and rest? Does one know the moral effects of food? Is there a philosophy of nourishment? (The ever-renewed clamour for and against vegetarianism is sufficient proof that there is no such philosophy as yet.)[21]

With due care, reviewers for the upmarket press can slaughter a restaurant. Beyond that, food writers are generally not overly analytical or theoretical. Given that gastronomy remains one field which can truly claim to lack theory, it is perhaps premature for Cherry Ripe to declare, when urging a distinctive Australian culinary style: "It's time to put pedantry aside and get positive".[22] We need to be equipped with considerable food intellectualism to be able to sort through characteristically postmodern issues like the determined promotion of olive oil and its showcase diet.

I have told the story of the "Mediterranean diet" as part of an appeal for more attention to cuisine, viewed very grandly as our connection with our world, each other and ourselves. Human eating is examined by nutritionists, by agricultural scientists, and, indeed, increasingly within virtually every established discipline.[23] However, while nothing is more central to civilisation, cuisine remains without its own study within the humanities.

21. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Portable Nietzsche*, translated Walter Kaufmann, (New York: Viking, 1968), 94.
22. Cherry Ripe, "Advance Australian fare, folks", "Weekend Review", *Weekend Australian*, August 27-28, 1994, 15.
23. As an example, an Australian Cultural History conference planned for Melbourne in June, 1995, will focus on food, diet and table manners.

JOHN FITZPATRICK

An Historical Geography of Mediterranean Cuisines

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines some historial and geographical parameters of the inter-related complex of mediterranean cusines. It considers 1) the "Old World Mediterranean" and 2) areas of broadly mediterranean climate in Australia (Adelaide and Perth and their respective hinterlands). And it draws some tentative conclusions about the light which historical trends in the former case may cast on the question of contemporary possibilities in the latter.

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS:THE OLD WORLD MEDITERRANEAN

Mountains, Plateaux, Foothills, Plains:

The sea was not merely landlocked but hemmed in by great mountain chains and plateau regions which often reduced the Mediterranean lands proper to a narrow littoral belt. Mountain barriers were particularly important around the northern shore, where they largely walled the Mediterranean lands off from northern Europe and so radically segmented the great peninsulas that Braudel defines as the Mediterranean lands: a "a series of compact mountainous peninsulas interrupted by vital plains".[1] On the southern shore, the Atlas range ran parallel to the edge of Sahara desert, and thus had much less independent significance as a barrier.

The mountains proper and the high plateaux usually presented too severe an environment to sustain the full range of typically mediterranean cultivation and in this sense served to intensify tendencies towards discrete micro-regions. However, given erratic rainfall and rapid runoff from the mountains, the plains typically required extensive and ongoing investment in both drainage and dry-land irrigation techniques to prevent them from succumbing to contrasting problems of semi-aridity and swamps.[2] Thus the foothills often played a crucial role as the seedbed of regional cultures, for "between 200 and 400 metres [were] found the optimum conditions of the Mediterranean habitat".[3]

1. Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II, Volume I*, trans. Sian Reynolds (in French, 1949), (London: Fontana, 1981) 23, 25-55.
2. Braudel, 60-85.
3. Braudel, 55-56.

Climate, Rainfall and Aridity : The "True" Mediterranean Ecology:

The predominant climate — technically described as "dry subtropical" — was shaped primarily by the radically opposed influences of the Atlantic ocean and the great desert belt, producing the characteristic sharp contrast between cool, moderately wet winters and hot dry summers.[4] A significant proportion of the winter and early spring rains typically came in violent storms, while summer presented an ever-present threat of drought. Even though rainwater-based agriculture was the predominant pattern, with irrigation playing an important but ancillary role, conditions often tended towards the semi-arid.

"Crops and plants must adapt to drought and learn to use as quickly and profitably as possible the precious sources of water... The Mediterranean by its climate is predestined to a shrub culture. It is not only a garden, but providentially a land of fruit bearing trees".[5]

This climate, with its distinctive separation of rainfall and warmth, generated a central band of "true" Mediterranean ecology defined above all by the limits of cultivation of the most Mediterranean of all fruit bearing trees — the olive. "Often the climate of a narrow coastal fringe", this "true" Mediterranean region was distinctly smaller than the Mediterranean as a total complex of seas and littoral regions.[6] It excluded not just the great bulk of France but also substantial northern sections of the Spanish, Italian and Balkan peninsulas, while linking their more southerly regions closely to related regions on the north African and Levantine coasts.

Relationship with the Arid Zone/Oasis Belt:

East of the "true mediterranean" coastal strip in front of the Atlas, the Sahara continued as an undulating plateau "from southern Tunisia to southern Syria...directly bordering the sea". Moreover, this was only the beginning of "the great desert that runs uninterrupted ... up to the gates of Peking"[7] (and also down into the north-west of the Indian sub-continent).

The climatic spectrum of this great belt involved three gradations of arid zone types: from the "hot arid" extreme of Sahara and the Arabian Peninsula to the `semi-arid mid-latitude" pattern predominant in Syria, Turkey, much of Iran and north-west China. But it also contained a chain of lesser and greater oases regions, including several of the greatest civilisational core areas in the ancient and mediaeval world : the Nile, Tigris-Euphrates, Indus and Huang-Ho river systems. Moreover, though irrigation agriculture was undoubtedly the norm here, it too nourished a wide repertoire of fruit bearing trees and shrubs potentially adaptable to the Mediterranean environment, and presented analogous challenges of land and water management to deal with soil which "without constant attention ... quickly reverts to marsh or desert like steppe".[8]

In effect, this entire arid zone/oasis belt constituted another great "inland sea" catchment area of food stocks and practices, whose progressive merging with those

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4. Braudel, 231-236.
5. Braudel, 238-239; all "technical" descriptions of climatic regions used in this article follow the system in *The New International Atlas*, Rand McNally, Chicago, 314-315.
6. Braudel, 234-235.
7. Braudel, 23-24, 171-188.
8. Maurice Lombard, *The Golden Age of Islam*, (trans. Joan Spencer),(North-Holland Publishing Company, 1975), 23. Lombard describes the Arab-era "Damascus oasis", virtually on the eastern boundary between Mediterranean and arid zone ecologies, as "an enormous garden", 27.

of the Mediterranean region made an enormous contribution to the development of the full potential of Mediterranean cuisines. Moreover, from classical antiquity onwards this arid zone belt was linked by increasingly intimate exchange relations to another great maritime catchment area: the Indian Ocean. Since the major new feature brought in via the Indian Ocean was access to tropical territories with high or very high rainfall, many food stocks could not be adapted to Mediterranean conditions even after extensive intermediate migrations. Nonetheless, and especially in the area of spices, it added significantly to the enrichment of Mediterranean cuisines by influences entering from the adjacent arid zone.

Relationship with the North European Temperate Zone :

The other great ecological zone flanking the true mediterranean belt was that of continental Europe north of the alpine mountain system. Two major climate types were involved: the "temperate marine" pattern of northwestern Europe and the "humid mid-latitude" pattern predominant in eastern Europe and the Ukranian and Russian steppes. There was also a transition zone to these northern climate types in the Piedmonte-Lombardia-Emilia-Venezia complex, which the Romans called Cisalpine Gaul and Braudel describes as the southern end of the "German isthmus".[9]

However, these northern ecologies never developed an agricultural symbiosis with the true mediterranean belt comparable to that between the latter and the arid zone/oasis world. The Romans signally failed to adapt their Mediterranean area techniques to the conditions of the heavy, wet soils of the north. And the northern agricultural revolution of the middle ages initiated a prolonged period in which the frontiers of European agrarian expansion moved further *away* from the Mediterranean: first to the great northern forests and plains; and second to settler colonial regions overseas, above all in the enormously productive humid mid-latitude regions of North America. Despite the decline of the Mediterranean as a centre of power, the relative poverty of its soils largely protected it from northern land use practices until the nineteenth century onset of European colonialism in north Africa, and until well into the twentieth century in uncolonised regions like Italy. When the northern impact finally came, however, it was the more profound for coming in an industrialised and highly codified format.

Transport, Communications and the "Inland Sea" Paradox:

Finally, in addition to his emphasis on the strongly segmented and micro-regional character of the land areas in the mediterranean basin, Braudel dismisses the simple notion that the "inland sea" itself was a natural force for macro-regional unity. It was "not so much a single entity as a 'complex of seas'",[10] and in normal pre-industrial conditions this worked to reinforce the tendency towards distinctive micro-regions, articulated above all by a number of vital "narrow seas".

Braudel lists six narrow seas: the Black Sea; the Aegean; the sea between Tunisia and Sicily; the "Mediterranean channel" between Spain and Morocco; the Tyrrhenian Sea between Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and the Italian mainland; and the Adriatic.[11] Of these, the first four all systematically reinforced the intimate linkage discussed above

9. Braudel, 202-206.
10. Braudel, 23.
11. Braudel, 108-133.

between European-shore regions with "true" mediterranean ecology and true mediterranean and/or arid zone regions on the Afro-Asian littoral. But trade and communications patterns in the Adriatic were also fundamentally aligned towards the east — with Venice providing only the most spectacular example. And the Tyrrhenian Sea was hardly less involved in interchange with the Afro-Asian shore, from the interplay between Carthagians, Etruscans and Greeks in classical antiquity to that of the north African Arab powers and the Italian trading cities in the mediaeval era.

In contrast to the role of the narrow seas in integrating smaller regions, Braudel insists on the *barriers* to all-Mediterranean integration posed by the major stretches of deep, open sea to the east and west of Sicily, which he describes as the Ionian and Sardinian seas respectively. Poor in fish stocks, subject to violent storms in winter and to the persistent threat of pirate attacks in summer, they represented "marine deserts ... enormous, dangerous and forbidden stretches, no man's lands separating different worlds".[12] Within the narrow seas, there was "genuine intermingling of populations, and within these limits it defied all barriers of race language and culture". Movements towards integration beyond these limits, and above all attempts to unify the eastern and western "halves of the sea ... were like electric charges, violent and without continuity".[13] The most momentous of these electric charges was undoubtedly the rise of the Roman empire.

ECOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS: MEDITERRANEAN REGIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Climate:

Both the Perth and Adelaide regions substantially exhibit the climatic interplay between dominant ocean and desert influences and the sharp contrast between cool, wet winters and warm dry summers deriving from this. The contrast is especially sharp in Perth. But with a much higher overall rainfall (higher indeed than Melbourne and Hobart in Australia's temperate marine belt),[14] its region seems slightly less of a "true" mediterranean type than the Adelaide region, where the olive readily grows wild and has even been classified as a noxious weed by some local councils.

Mountains, Hills and Plains:

As with the rest of Australia, neither region has really great mountains, though there are more moderate hills, which reflect Braudel's judgement on the special advantages of the "foothills" in the Mediterranean proper. Once again Adelaide, with a clearly defined crescent of substantial hills ringing a seaside plain, is perhaps closest to the mediterranean ideal type.

Relationship with Arid Zone Regions:

Beyond these more immediate "dry subtropical" enclaves in both cases are extensive stretches of semi-desert with a "semi-arid mid-latitude" climate, broadly similar to the Levantine or Anatolian hinterlands of the Old World Mediterranean (the true

12. Braudel, 132.
13. Braudel, 133-35.
14. *Year Book Australia 1990*, (Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1990), 98-104.

desert, "hot arid" pattern similar to the Sahara and the Arabian peninsula begins much further inland). Of course, the close interplay of sea, hills and coastal plains makes for a wide diversity of specific micro-climates, such that parts of the Adelaide hills are said to have a climate closely reminiscent of Tuscany while drier regions on the Adelaide plains have been described as "climatically similar to Tunis in Tunisia and perhaps Derna in Libya". [15] Moreover, at the level of macro-regions, northwest Victoria hosts a three-way intersection between the "Adelaide" mediterranean region, the great semi-arid belt and the "temperate marine" belt covering much of Victoria. On balance, however, the *ecological and geographical* interplay between mediterranean and semi-arid zones is if anything more pronounced in Australia than in the Old World Mediterranean.

Relationship to Regions of North European Climate Type:

In total, the Australian landmass accommodates seven of the twelve major climate types in the world, according to the classification used above. But just as striking as the range of climates is the very limited representation of north European types within that range. The "temperate marine" enclave in Victoria is the *only* region of this type on the mainland (the other being Tasmania). The "humid mid-latitude" pattern, whose distribution is "virtually identical with the world's major wheat production areas", is not represented at all.[16] However, in striking contrast to the history of the Old World Mediterranean, north European agricultural practices played a dominant role in European exploitation of the Australian continent from the onset of expanded settlement, the economy being developed largely as a cheap food and fibre adjunct for industrialising Britain.

By the late nineteenth century, when this process hit high gear, agricultural practices were increasingly industrialised and the humid mid-latitude regions in North America were challenging England as the external "northern" paradigm to which Australian producers might aspire. But even by the 1850s, immigrants from Britain came from lands where traditional patterns of land use had for several generations been transformed by large-scale agrarian capitalism and dispossession of peasants. In Michael Symons's words, Australia experienced a "history without peasants", moving from millenia of hunter-gatherer cultures into the era of industrialised agriculture in a little more than one century.[17]

The Tyranny of Transport:

Australia's mediterranean regions, along with the other regions supporting substantial population, developed as largely separate enclaves, though the separation was imposed not by complex mountain networks but by sheer continental size, to which historian Geoffrey Blainey has attached the label of "the tyranny of distance".[18] They were also *coastal* enclaves, located not around an inland sea but fronting several great oceans around the edges of an island continent. However, given British industrial and naval predominance, these oceans presented fewer obstacles to the integration

15. Jennifer Hillier, "Country kid finds Tuscany"; *Proceedings of the First Conference on the Impact of Italians in South Australia*, eds., Desmond O'Connor and Antonio Comin, (Adelaide: Flinders University Press, 1993), 127-129. Lynne Chatterton and Brian Chatterton, "The decline of the granary of Rome", *Journal of Libyan Studies*, 1985, 96.
16. Michael Symons, *The Shared Table*, (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1993), 205.
17. Symons, *One Continuous Picnic*, (Adelaide: Duck Press, 1982),1-54.
18. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance*, (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1966).

of Australia into a core-periphery economic order than did the large seas of the Old World Mediterranean to such integration there, at any point other than the height of imperial Rome.

The second crucial element of transport infrastructure involved in the process of core-periphery integration was of course the railways. These exhibited the characteristic colonial pattern dominated by feeder lines leading to major ports, to link up with the shipping routes to the imperial core. With such priorities, Symons notes, "the ridiculed difference in the State's railway gauges scarcely mattered." Directly reversing Blainey's formulation of the problem, he argues that Australian material culture, and cuisine in particular, was stunted not by isolation but by "the tyranny of transport" which supposedly liberated the country from isolation.

Australian cooking has distinctively lacked ... regional variation. Country fare has scarcely differed from the city. In fact the food is remarkable for being directly derived from styles halfway around the globe".[19]

HISTORICAL DYNAMICS IN THE OLD WORLD MEDITERRANEAN: CLASSICAL ANTIQUITY TO THE ARABS

Though developed in regard to the Australia-Britain relationship, the notions of "the tyranny of transport" and "a history without peasants" provide an illuminating reference point for rethinking the question of the origins and persistence of the Mediterranean cusine complex. Most food historians seem to have an essentially cumulative view of the historical growth of cuisines. Thus they normally associate major phases of imperial and trade expansion with only one type of outcome: the *wider diffusion of food stocks and food related practices.* They tend to ignore the opposite possibility: that *wider bulk transport of food produced in imperial "peripheries" for consumption in imperial "cores"* may actually suppress the potential for complex and broadly-based regional food cultures, whatever the evidence to the contrary in the consumption of elites in both core and periphery.

For most of the pre-industrial era, this omission is probably not a problem, given the enormous costs of bulk food transport by land and the great difficulty of imposing unified imperial control over complex maritime regions — even, as Braudel demonstrates, over the Mediterranean inland sea. But under exceptional circumstances the Mediterranean *could* be so unified, its large seas made to function as maritime highroads and its major connecting river systems — in Egypt and northwest Europe — to function as a partial equivalent of railways for the organisation of interior landmasses. This is what the Romans temporarily achieved.

False Starts and True Starts in the Repertoire of the Mediterranean Cuisine Complex:

With this in mind, I now focus in on the tension between diffusion of food stocks and practices and the transportation of bulk food as commodity in "classical antiquity" and the "Arab imperial phase". Given the nature of the inquiry, both periods will be broadly defined: the former as extending from the emergence of the Persian empire in the sixth century BC to the "fall" of the western Roman empire in the fifth century AD; and the latter as extending from the first great Arab conquests in the the mid-

19. Symons, *One Continuous Picnic,* 85-95.

seventh to the European counter-offensive in the mid-twelfth century AD — though by this stage any Arab predominance in the Islamic world was long gone. I begin with the following lists of plants and plant products for both periods, as an admittedly simplifying "tracer" for overall changes in the basic repetoire of Mediterranean cuisines.

Available In Mediterranean during Classical Antiquity:

Wheat, barley, rye, oats, olive, onion, garlic, broad bean, chick pea, pea, lentil, turnip, carrot, parsnip, lettuce, cucumber, leek, asparagus, celery, mushroom, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, fig, pomegranate, date, walnut, grape, pear, apple, peach, melon, orange, lemon, apricot, citron, strawberry, cherry, rhubarb.

Basil, marjoram, oregano, mint, rosemary, sage, savory, thyme, anise, caraway, coriander, cumin, turmeric, dill, parsley, fennel, anise, bay, caper, fenugreek, mustard, poppy, sesame, saffron, cardamon, ginger, cinnamon, pepper.

Introduced by Arabs:

Buckwheat, eggplant, spinach, quince, almond, pistachio, cane sugar, rice, nutmeg, tarragon.

Probably reintroduced by Arabs:

Artichoke, asparagus, cauliflower, orange, lemon, pomegranate, apricot, date, fig, cloves, turmeric, cinnamon, saffron.

As the existence of *two* Arab phase lists indicates, there were important differences among food historians over the relative claims of the two periods. Many of the more charismatic items on my "classical antiquity" list reached it only after being deleted from an initially much longer "introduced by Arabs" list — with many of these deletions in turn finding their way back to the third "probably *reintroduced* by Arabs" list. I resolved these discrepancies essentially by following those authors who seemed themselves to have surveyed the evidence in depth and to have a principled basis for resolving anomalies in it.[20] But there are also strong contextual reasons for taking the expanded classical antiquity list seriously.

First, competition and cooperation between major imperial states was already well advanced throughout the Mediterranean basin and adjacent arid zone territories for several centuries before the period of Roman predominance. The extent to which this moved the diffusion process over a new threshold is clearly shown in the diffusion of long-established foods from the east to the west of the sea. Even the olive, though cultivated for millenia in the east, seems to have become established as a food crop in the west only from the sixth to the fourth centuries BC, beginning a dramatic ascent in importance there from the third century onward.[21] Second, it seems clear that the hegemony of Rome produced a further step level advance in trade and communications, and the imperial Roman elite were notorious both for

20. Waverly Root, *Food*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980); Harold McGree, *On Food and Cooking*, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1986); Reay Tannahil, *Food in History*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973).
21. Root, 298.

their extreme wealth and their quest for novelty in the area of food.

If the expanded classical antiquity list *is* taken seriously it suggests that the initial transplantation of plant varieties from the great desert/oasis catchment area to the Mediterranean had already been substantially achieved by around the first century AD. However, in addition to the considerable dissent among food historians about how much the Arabs *first introduced*, there is a notable consensus that in any event the Arab phase made a fundamental practical difference in *the longer-term embedding of characteristically mediterranean cuisines.*[22] The implication, then, is a major problem of "dying out" of food stocks and practices from the late Roman era.

This problem cannot simply be accounted for by the fall of the empire in the west. The numbers of the early Germanic invaders were quite small and their elites were in general more interested in enjoying the remaining benefits of Roman civilisation than in overthrowing it.[23] The whole process was hardly more traumatic than military upheavals that took place both during and after my extended Arab phase, without producing comparable regressions in the area of cuisine. Rather than relying on a "fall of empire" explanation, it seems better to focus on *what the Roman empire did at its height* to suppress the capacity at the mass level to sustain complex regional cuisines.

The Impact of Rome:

First, there was a far-reaching *decline and dislocation of the peasantry* deriving from the centuries of intense military conflict through which Roman state rose to domination of the entire Mediterranean region. Between 225 and 23 BC, Keith Hopkins estimates, the "median size of the army was 13% of male citizens" — representing the recurent "absence, on average of 130,000 Italian peasants" from their land for a conscript period of around seven years. Those conscripted in the culminating civil wars (49-8 BC) were around 500,000, and though these numbers were subsequently halved and the army fully professionalised, this still required the enlistment of about one fifth of seventeen-year old citizens for the new average of twenty years.[24]

The burden of military service (which Hopkins describes as a form of ongoing temporary migration) drove peasant soldiers ever further into debt, producing an overall decline in the rural free population from 4,100,000 to 2,900,000, with most of the change probably in the first century BC. In that century and the next the process produced more direct and highly disruptive forms of mass migration of former peasants: to Rome and other cities, to other rural regions of Italy, and increasingly to other parts of the empire. Migration to Rome itself swelled the great urban proletariat, 320,000 of whom were already receiving the "dole" of free wheat by 45 BC. Migrations within rural Italy (almost 250,000 adult males alone between 80-28 BC) typically involved the resettlement of ex-soldiers by powerful generals, but typically "achieved little except to make a different set of poor peasants landless". Migration outside Italy (150,000 adult males up to 49 BC and a further 265,000 between 49-8 BC)

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22. For instance, Ayla Algar credits the Arabs with introducing most of the items on my reintroduced list, at least into Spain and Sicily. *Mediterranean the Beautiful Cookbook*, (Bookworld, 1994), 27-29, 95-99; Lombard states that the Arabs initiated "the Mediterranean garden ... which is utterly different from the garden of antiquity..." *op.cit.*, 168. And even Waverly Root, who provided the most consistent support for the expanded "classical antiquity" list given above, nonetheless declares that whatever appears "typically Sicilian" in cuisine is also "typically Arab"(cited by Algar, 98).
23. Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism*, (London: Verso), 112-120.
24. Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1981),28-37.

seems to have eased the constant struggle for land in Italy itself.[25] But soldier settlers in Italy were said to have often received poor land and made poor farmers, and since elite landholding outside Italy also expanded dramatically in this period, it seems likely that such problems persisted for migrants "overseas".

Second, agrarian production at the mass level was also fundamentally transformed by the exponential growth of slavery. Hopkins estimates that in 225 BC there were around 4,500,000 free persons in Italy, to around 500,000 slaves. By 28 BC the slave population had grown to 2,000,000 (though some estimates are as high as 3,000,000), while the aggregate free population had fallen to 4,000,000, with its composition also being drastically altered by conversion of peasants into urban proletariat.[26]

The expansion of the slave labour force continued into the first century AD and the geographical scope of large-scale agrarian slavery grew, especially in Spain and Gaul. Together with this new labour force for the elite went a vast expansion in their landholding (largely through the dispossession of the peasantry and conquered populations) and huge gains in portable wealth extracted from older and richer colonial territories. These three factors together made possible *a period of large scale agrarian capitalism,* focussing above all on wine and olive oil, but also with a major expansion of pastoral ranching and other forms of specialised food production.[27]

Third, the end of the civil war and the progressive stabilisation of frontiers led to a qualitatively new structure of political and economic integration in which core consumption patterns shifted periphery production patterns towards radical over-concentration on a few key items. A crucial factor here was *the bulk transport of food* throughout the Mediterranean and its major riverine hinterlands. And a crucial precondition of this was the temporary Roman success in overriding the segmented, regional character of the Mediterranean "complex of seas" discussed earlier.

The most obvious index of both the importance of this transport and of the scale and artificiality of "core" demand is the rise and decline of the city of Rome. Not till the early fourth century BC did Rome pass the 10,000 mark: and with "no natural resources, no manufactures, no trade" it had "no commercial justification for growing beyond [it]".[28] However, by the early first century AD Rome was the metropolis of an all-Mediterranean empire, absorbing massive grain imports from Sardinia, Sicily, North Africa and especially Egypt, and with a population exceeding one million. It seems to have held around the million mark till the mid-fourth century — by which point a *de facto* division of the empire had caused the diversion of the Egyptian grain supply to the new eastern capital of Constantinople (330AD). By the mid-fifth century, it was probably around 400,000; and "between the sixth and the ninth centuries the population was whittled down to a few tens of thousands", with regular grain imports from any source having ceased in the 7th century.[29]

The impact of Roman consumption of course extended far beyond demand for wheat. It also had a massive impact on other commodified foods produced and supplied mainly according to market imperatives, with wine and olive oil occupying

25. Hopkins, 66-74.
26. Hopkins, 8-9.
27. Anderson, 61-65.
28. Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of Ancient History,* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 70.
29. Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne and the Origins of Europe,* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 48-51.

a central place. Moreover, one should recognise the crucial role played by three other features of the new "core" demand: the mushroom growth of towns pulled in the wake of Rome in central Italy; the new urban expansion north of the Alps; and the demand of the legions stationed in the newly incorporated northern regions. All three made major additions to the inflation of core demand — the more so because the northern towns and legions represented the extension of Mediterranean consumption patterns beyond the permanent ecological limits of the olive and the temporary limits of established vineyards.

The Impact of the Arabs:

The meteoric expansion of the Arabs beyond the Arabian peninsula began in 634 AD and was played out over a terrain already "pre-packaged" by long-term processes of imperial development across the Mediterranean and the arid zone. In this initial phase, Arab-led armies absorbed all the Persian empire and most of the eastern Roman empire, and went on to mop up other "barbarian" conquerors of former empires to the east and west of this central bloc. By the mid-7th century, the Abbasid caliphate notionally controlled an uninterrupted imperial bloc stretching from the Pyrenees in the west to the Indus valley and Russian Turkestan in the east.[30] These great conquests were achieved with astonishingly small forces, largely because the empires and kingdoms they conquered were exhausted by mutual conflicts and had minimal loyalty from subject populations. For example, the initial force involved in the conquest of Spain was 17,000.[31]

This overarching "Arab empire" fell apart even faster than it was put together. At its height, the Abbasid caliphate was so thoroughly Persianised that many writers treat it as a restored Persian empire; and as it declined, its direct impact on the Mediterranean area rapidly diminished. In the ninth century Egypt re-emerged as a major Mediterranean power centre, for the first time since its absorption by Rome. As Arab power declined, Turks increasingly predominated in the east and Berbers in the west: but other important influences in the Islamic world come from Kurds, Caucasians, and Negroes. By the eleventh century new Christian forces were beginning to play a major role: the Italian trading cities, the Normans in Southern Italy and Sicily and the short-lived Crusader states in the Levant.[32]

In sum, the Arab phase never involved a general core-periphery organisation of the Mediterranean of the sort produced by Rome. Rather than a single great empire, it produced a vast *ecumene*, enormously important for the diffusion of knowledge and techniques, but subject to the normal ecological constraints on large scale movement of bulk commodities. In addition to their general new "diffusionist" impact, the Arabs seem to have made two crucial inputs into the development of Mediterranean cuisines. First, they built on earlier Iranian achievements to produce a virtual revolution in water conservation and irrigation techniques. Second, they produced a major new impetus towards urbanization. In contrast to Rome, these cities drew heavily on their own hinterlands, and "with their abundantly stocked markets and affluent courts, developed almost automatically regional styles of cuisine".[33]

30. Colin McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of Mediaeval History*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1980), 36-45.
31. Lombard, 78.
32. McEvedy, *The Penguin Atlas of Mediaeval History*, 46-69.
33. Algar, 220.

Important those these *positive* aspects were, however, perhaps the most crucial feature of the Arab phase in this regard was a *negative* one. It did not repeat the "false start" experience of Rome. The second great wave of diffusion and re-diffusion of foodstock and practices was not countered by an imposed uniformity, allowing a gradual "settling down" into regional ecological niches and providing the basic foundation on which subsequent accretions — including the often over-stated input from the New World — accumulated and further enriched Mediterranean cuisines.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDITERRANEAN REGIONS IN AUSTRALIA

The Roman impact on the Mediterranean figures in this paper as a morality tale about the British empire's impact on its global peripheries — and especially Australia. Whereas Australia's European history completely by-passed the agrarian-era *longue duree* analysed by Braudel, the Roman era represented an escape from pre-industrial ecological constraints on political and economic integration which — though only partial and temporary — was sufficiently extraordinary in its historical context to provide an illuminating slow-motion analogue for core-periphery patterns of food production and consumption in the contemporary world

To extend the analogy, the decline of Rome might be compared to the declining role of British metropolitan demand after World War II, which culminated in Britain's entry into the European Community and which, in the area of food, was not replaced by either the United States or Japan. Finally, if the suspension of disbelief still holds, we might compare the renewed diffusionist impact of the Arab phase to the impact of Mediterranean and other migrants on Australian patterns of food consumption and production since World War II.

This analogy, I think, helps to highlight the fragile and conjunctural nature of the recent "multicultural" changes in Australian cuisine. When the Roman empire "fell", there was no comparable subjection of the Mediterranean area to "the tyranny of transport" or a "history without peasants" down to the industrial era. But the decline of imperial Britain involved no check to the transformation of the world food order which it had set in motion. The advance of energy intensive transport and storage techniques has rolled on at an exponential rate, and radical new strategies for overriding regional ecological constraints on food production — such as genetic engineering are becoming commonplace. The basic structure of interests created in Australian agrarian and pastoral economy in the era of British hegemony is still largely in place. None of these factors are grounds for much optimism. But Symons is surely right in claiming that if we value the new diversity in Australian food we should pay closer attention to the relationship between food and place — and the accumulated knowledge about how to handle that relationship creatively — embodied in traditional cuisines.

I wish to thank Jennifer Hillier and Michael Symons for many illuminating discussions on the themes of this paper.

DANNY GARDNER

Palermo

After Africa, the queer sensation,
Of embracing Italy again:
The hanging coloured lights
And sing-song cries
Of the Saturday night market;
Music swelling up the street
From the organ-grinder's cart;
Imbuing a movie-house drama
To this town of the Unseen Family.

By day, the run-down, steel-faced tenements,
Shield clothes, hanging, women calling to each other;
Fiats, mopeds, kid's-alley soccer.
Out of nowhere
Bubbles architecture's religion supreme —
A gargoyle-strung piazza,
A figurine-dotted fountain,
Where a fish flies with a man,
Birds mate with angels —
Splashed, here and there,
With the red and black,
Scribbled blood of dissent.

ANTIGONE KEFALA

Christmas Dinner

They were both waiting
slightly stiff in their ease
in the impeccable apartment.
Around them images of country
houses, diplomats in China,
uncles in astrakhan coats.

They were still quoting
Bismark — not a nationality
but a pastime —
they found him full of wit
political incisiveness.

We listened to old carols,
admired the Christmas tree
with the glass angels,
the ancient silver set, saved,
lying exhausted on the table
crushed by ornamentation.

Outside, in the hot night,
the cicadas spun their
metallic threads, tireless
into the empty streets,
the air full of the scent
of frangipanis.

ANTIGONE KEFALA

Family Friend

The last time I had seen him
he seemed arrested
preoccupied with some inner
sound, afraid to make
full use of himself.
Still debonair
but now transparent looking
in his cafe-au-lait suit.
He drove us round the bay
that night, after the party
all of us singing.

Below the bald, sturdy hills
the small cottages   fast asleep
only the traffic lights
and our voices
carried through the windows
to the sea below
in the empty, windy night.

MICHELLE TSOKOS

Memory and Absence: The Poetry of Antigone Kefala

Antigone Kefala is an Australian writer who was born in 1935 in Rumania of Greek parents. At the end of the war she and her family left Rumania for Greece: later the family migrated to New Zealand.

Kefala came to Sydney in 1959, where she has lived since. In her poetry Kefala searches for "the measure"[1] of a migrant voice in an Australian cultural and literary milieu which tends to marginalise such writers. Kefala, however, does not perceive herself strictly as a migrant — rather as belonging to both her present and her past: "a migrant writer or an Australian writer? I feel that I am both and that the positions are not mutually exclusive".[2] In this, Kefala rejects the dichotomy which posits Anglo-Australians against people of non-Anglo-Celtic descent. Adhering to dualities of this kind necessarily imposes limitations on one's identity; in rejecting this mode of thought, Kefala affirms her own identity as multiple and various.

Antigone Kefala's poetry collections — *The Alien, Thirsty Weather, European Notebook,* and *Absence*[3] — span a twenty year period and reveal a consistency of style and concern. The poetry is modern in form and diction, and focuses on the individual's relationship with the past, various states of exile, and attitudes towards death. Kefala's poetry vibrates constantly between arbitrary beginnings and undefined endings. Movement between these polarities is seen to be characteristic of individual experience. The poems work emblematically; employing natural imagery and myth to represent the human world, creating the effect of a "timelessness/that rises out of the earth,/the rocks, the sea/envelops us...".[4] In the midst of such continuous movement the individual attempts to "hold on.../to this tight tope that offers no/support/against the darkness".[5] The tremulous journey upon the tight rope takes the individual into an underworld of experience in which "the terrors of the darkness"[6] became a nightmarish reality. Kefala willingly enters the territory of the

1. Antigone Kefala, "Memory", *The Alien*, in *Absence: New and Selected Poems.* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1992), 24.
2. Kefala, "Statement", in Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley (eds). *Striking Chords: Multicultural Literary Interpretations.* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), 49.
3. Antigone Kefala, *Absence: New and Selected Poems.* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1992). This text contains poems from: *The Alien*, (St Lucia, Makar Press, 1973); *Thirsty Weather*, (Melbourne, Outback Press, 1978); *European Notebook*, (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1988). All subsequent references are to *Absence.*
4. "Suicide", *European Notebook*, 102.
5. "TheAcrobat", *The Alien*, 18.
6. "The Death Cycle", *Thirsty Weather*, 51.

unknown, mapping the ominous "scent/of the great darkness".[7] Kefala's poetry is, in fact, shrouded in "darkness"; for example, thirteen out of the fourteen poems in *The Alien* are set in a landscape of night, darkness or twilight.

Kefala depicts displaced individuals, and the depressive anxiety of the lost soul echoes through her poetry: "the recorded voice, crying out,/alone and desperate in the night".[8] For such individuals, identity is always in a state of contingent and fragile construction; the voices in Kefala's poems are not of final identity, but of vicissitude, not of being but of becoming. This is because identity can no longer be conferred by cross-reference to the fixed points of the past or construed from firm reference points in the present. Suffering from some irreversible loss of the past, the migrant subject can find only a partial meaning by conflating the present with the past. Thus, Kefala constructs fragmented migrant subjects — "figures on a frieze"[9] — searching for something stable amongst the shifting web of signifiers. The speaker in the poem "Nameless" is aware of the "excesses of terror" that such journeying yields, and makes a desperate plea to a nameless "you": "help us to rise/ weightless/ and not to grieve,/the journey, an unbinding/that knows no return."[10] There is no defined place of arrival in Kefala's poetry; the horizons are saturated with anonymity and uncertitude.

"In dreams begins the journey..."[11] is the opening line of the first poem in Kefala's earliest collection, *The Alien*. The phrase immediately highlights the importance of dreams and journeys in the work. It also suggests that dreaming is itself a journey and that the subliminal dream world forms an integral part of the individual's ontology. The title of the poem, "Holidays in the Country", evokes an innocence and simplicity of experience, which immediately contrasts with the brooding "dark" atmosphere of the first stanza. The speaker is remembering a childhood holiday; the aroma of "cherry jam and basil" is temporarily recalled but is overridden by "the black night":

> I watched their shadows moving on the walls
> straining to hear the corners creaking in the dark
> afraid of the black night that fell outside
> in silent, feathered sheets, of the abandoned
> courtyard, save for the big dogs,
> and the far away well.

The adult voices issuing from the darkness suggest a hidden menace which carries into the second stanza:

> When darkness came they talked of Katka,
> of the well, in secret voices.
> Put your ear to the ground, virgin,
> and hear the walls groaning out of dumb mouths.
> The way down cast in mica flames,

7. "New Born", *The Alien*, 14.
8. "Retrospective", *The Alien*. (St Lucia: Makar Press, 1973), 13.
9. "Chorus", *Absence*, 120.
10. "Nameless", *Absence*, 122.
11. "Holidays in the Country", *The Alien*.

burning unheard like eyes; wild men's eyes,
dead men's eyes, glazed now in veils
upon veils of stone water.

The voices hint only at the dead Katka; the reality of death is too confronting. The Rumanian name "Katka" establishes the gender of the character, and the words "virgin ... wild men's eyes,/dead men's eyes" imply a link between sexuality and death. The "dumb mouths" symbolise the silence of the dead and the lost. Speechlessness is a common metaphor in Kefala's poetry: " ... The companion, silent,/faceless ... /weighed with/this speechless suffering",[12] "cried voiceless to warn you/... laughed with soundless voices".[13] The loss of speech may be equated with a loss of existence. In a foreign environment the migrant subjects progressively dissolve: from being "full of promise",[14] to being confined behind "locked doors",[15] to a state of nothingness – "empty vessels".[16]

The last stanza of "Holidays in the Country" makes a "jump" into a transcendent world: "The jump, Katka had said, would bring you/to the other shore." Katka moves beyond a temporal existence into a mythical after-place in which "light" dispels the dark:

A land where hills and trees
are of the purest gold, where glass birds sing,
and where the air, fine powdered crystal curtains
hanging from a still blue sky, chimes in an unfelt
breeze. And you are light, shadowless, falling
upon these fields forever petrified in silence.

The lines contrast the promise of another dimension and of eternal life with the actuality of "the black night ... the big dogs and the far away well." In "Holidays in the Country" Kefala emphasises the dialectic between life and death and the possibility of affirmation emerging from death. However, although the last stanza conjures an image of light, the poem ends with the dominant negative image of "these fields forever petrified in silence." Thus, here, the opposition between darkness and light is not based on a simple dichotomy; the relationship is an ambiguous one because there are "shadows" lurking within the light and a positive aspect can be found in the depths of the unknown.

In some of Kefala's poems the darkness is shot through with light; similarly, the silence is often broken by harsh sounds. In this, Kefala portrays the imbalance that exists between speech and silence, between an intimate understanding of a world which one can name and an absence of meaning resulting from linguistic dispossession. Like the new born, migrants can be consumed by "an eternity of fear", many suffering from a social impotence which renders their world silent. The poem "Family" is set within the context of a return visit to Europe. The speaker depicts the family as possessing eyes of silence, "as if consumed with longing": Marble dusted,

12. "They are Still Coming", *Absence*, 137.
13. "The Death Cycle", *Thirsty Weather*, 51.
14. "The Place", *Thirsty Weather*, 36.
15. "Memory", *The Alien*, 24.
16. "Towards an Absolute Present", *Absence*, 135.

ancient faces / with eroded eyes, / shell eyes of statues bleached by time.[17]

The eyes proffer no reflection; there is a loss of the inter-assurance and reciprocity which anchors individuals to their place of belonging. In the earlier poem, "Family Life", the family's migration results in its structure being broken. The family group disperses into individuals — vulnerable and unable to offer protection, I am "tired, living at home among strangers". Assured intimacy has gone and the speaker now feels estranged from the family.

The individual's search for identity is central to Kefala's poetry. In the poem, "School Holidays", a young girl embarks on a journey that is simultaneously literal and metaphysical:

> The carriage empty
> only the girl
> travelling with her mother
> sensibly dressed
> her blue, forget-me-not eyes
> raised to the window unseeing
> setting down in her diary
> in childish hieroglyphics
> her unformed soul
> still searching for a shape
> in which to rest.[18]

The young girl is in the process of becoming, attempting to fashion a stable self with which she feels comfortable. In Kefala's poetry and fiction the "shape" of identity is never rigid; its boundaries are flexible, allowing certain elements to fade while others gain prominence. Thus, an individual's identity is mutable, and as rendered in her early poem "The Alien", liable to dissolve. The fading of the subject also surfaces in the "Eumenides" section of the poem "Farewell Party". The Eumenides are the chthonic goddesses from Greek mythology who are responsible for avenging offences against mothers by their children and who reside in the darkest pit of the Underworld.[19] The speaker in "Farewell Party" finds "my shape was going from me/ while I watched it".[20]

Kefala's use of myth is more prominent in her poetry than in her prose. The poem, "Memory", is metaphorically located in the ancient Greek drama, Sophocles' *Antigone*. In the play, Antigone defies the extreme powers of the state— specifically her uncle, Creon, King of Thebes — in order the ensure that her brother receives a proper burial. Antigone puts family ties above any duty to the state and chooses to suffer with her brother in exile.[21] The three sections of "Memory" present the reader with the motif of being uprooted and the individual's subsequent search for meaning. The epigraph to the poem is taken from the play: "I please those whom I most should please." The opening lines of the poem address the epigraph:

17. "Family", *European Notebook*, 80.
18. "School Holidays", *European Notebook*, 87.
19. Eric Flaum, *The Encyclopedia of Mythology: Gods, Heroes and Legends of the Greeks and Romans*. (New York: Friedman, 1993), 66.
20. "Farewell Party", *Thirsty Weather*, 59.
21. Flaum, 32.

Were that enough in these strange lands.
Not even our offerings can rest,
aimless in unknown cities.
And the Gods no longer living in our eyes,
neither the ones above, nor the below,
and we, robbed of our release.[22]

The stanza signals the context of exile, both from one's country and from presiding Gods. In this stanza the speaker is Antigone; however, hers is a representative voice and the poem refers to all those in similar circumstances. The second stanza moves into a dream in which a vulnerable "you" is comforted by a maternal "I":

The streets were foreign in the dream.
No one but us,
...
At night time. You small and vulnerable,
complaining of some dark disease that emptied you.
And I afraid. Taking you in my arms as if a child.
Weightless.

The dream reflects the reality of their banishment, alone and afraid in "unknown cities". An unspecified authority also appears in the dream, the word "uniforms" perhaps suggesting representatives of the state:

And when I turned, I saw them near the fountain,
watching us. Their uniforms were blue, glazed in
the light. Then they moved...
... relentlessly towards us,
and I covered you with my arms and cried desperately
in the silence...

The dream poignantly depicts their alienated consciousnesses and the hostile world which now surrounds them. Existing fears of an oppressive state are enlarged in the dream. Memory comes more obviously to the surface when the dreaming "I" recalls "the old desperation".

The poem juxtaposes the past with the present, a sense of belonging with a sense of exile. In the second section the "you" is utterly lost in the darkness, only sometimes recapturing the "far country" of the past. The section begins by recalling images of a distant land:

The wind would stop abruptly and the silence
would fill with moonlight, falling unceasingly
like a blue still rain over the sleeping hills,
and in the deep of night the silk tearing
sound of waves would break over the dead sand.

Such images of the past can no longer be sustained, and the vision is pierced by "the echo of that foreign laugh" which "would come, surprised and unsubstantial in the

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22. "Memory", *The Alien*, 22-4.

stillness". The past would surface, "forced out of you by those black shadows/no one could exorcise". The "you" is distinguished from an "us" uncertain of the unspecified brooding menace of the present "dark world":

> So you coughed to assure us that the unknown
> was not so menacing,
> mindful of our narrow knowledge of the dark world
> and our social ways.

Thus, meaning in the present becomes problematical, breeding only loneliness and fear. Similarly, the past can no longer provide definitive meanings. The "you" attempts to recollect the past but becomes "lost" in the process and can find only fragments of meaning:

> You ... had lost the image and the way,
> had lost now even the recollection of the way,
> and wandered through the broken walls,
> in that far country,
> and sometimes in a stray sunray, some meaning
> of the past would come to you, in strange blue shapes,
> and then before our blind eyes,
> the crystal vision of the world would rest untouched.

The "crystal vision" suggests a reconciliation between the past and the present, yet their "blind eyes" prevent this vision from becoming actualised.

The third and final section moves out of this reverie into an austere world of madness. This is a modern day exile in which the individual is "locked" inside the visible walls of an institution and inside the invisible walls of his or her psyche:

> Inside, past the locked doors, the corridors stretched
> empty, dark. A smell of boiled peas and disinfectant.
> I watched the window not to see you coming, spent,
> unfamiliar,
> lost in that common house, brought by a man in white.

The section depicts a menacing insanity which haunts those who have been uprooted from a time in which meaning was more readily available. A victimised "you" confesses to an empathetic "I" the effects of life in exile:

> "They steal my time," you said in a low voice.
> Then watched the floor as if my presence were too much.
> And in the silence, the white men moved,
> their pockets full of time, their steps so sure
> cushioned by what they stole.
> ...
> Maybe they stole the measure.

Observing the landscaped grounds of the institution, the speaker realises the fate of

the people "behind those walls"; they will find "No Peace". Their memories cannot sustain them in the present, and the poem depicts a sense of human frailty which is apparent in Kefala's poetry as a whole.

Kefala is aware of the complicated nature of the relationship between the present and the past, exacerbated by the migrant experience. In the poem "Memory" "we feasted on the past",[23] attempting to derive some shred of meaning which could not be extracted from the present. The poem, "Thirsty Weather", like "Memory", focuses on the traumatic effects of separation from one's homeland. Here, the search is for meaning within the present, thereby attempting to rid the present of the past. However, no place, either past or present, and no religion, either Christian or pagan, offers any shelter from a "thirsty" reality which is devoid of meaning.

In the poem, Kefala speaks of an eternal thirst because her conception of time is discordant with the conception of time in mainstream culture. Kefala's vision involves a move "towards an absolute present" and a move away from dominant linear models of time. Kefala envisages a timeless world, one which "sheds/ constantly the everyday",[24] an eternal space which secularism assumes closed. In Kefala's thought significant events and human woe are not just historically specific but can be propelled across history; meanings transpose themselves with and against linear chronology.

Kefala is an agnostic poet; her poetry is exploratory and no one religion is given any privileged claim to reality. In the poems, "Service" and "The Woman in Black", the "servants of God"[25] are "crossing themselves in the shadows" "lest the gods/ missed ... the meaning".[26] Both poems reveal the tired vision of the sacred; the gods are "so bored/all of them/with this stubborn persistence", this "tiredness of living/ this resignation to secular decay". The very servants of a faith typify its gradual decline,

> as if they too were peeling with time
> the stucco falling off their faces
> their ivory arms green with moss.

Despite this decline, the "thirsty" still cling, pleading ceaselessly in whispers, as in the poem "Parish Church":

> Pray, and you will see
> how they will step out
> and the lady herself
> the all blessed,
> and all the others
> out of the painted wood.[27]

Kefala contrasts the hope of the parishioners with the pagans on a mountain who "prayed in mutilated voices", and

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23. "The Place", *Thirsty Weather*, 37.
24. "Towards an Absolute Present", *Absence*, 135.
25. "Service", *European Notebook*, 73.
26. "The Woman in Black", *Thirsty Weather*, 43.
27. "Parish Church", *European Notebook*, 77.

... ate the soil, slept with it,
the scent coursing their blood
till they were filled with earth,
took the sheep for lovers
prayed in mutilated voices
in harsh goat tongues they sang
of rocky sites, hard winters...[28]

Neither religion appears capable of providing the "thirsty" with a "measure" with which to gauge a present spiritual reality.

The absence of a positive theology in Kefala's poetry points to a lack of meaning and spiritual comfort in the experience of the individuals in the poems. The expression of an elusiveness and implied meaninglessness in the poetry is emphasised by its free verse form. The poetry has minimal punctuation, muted stress patterns and lacks strong rhythms; even by free verse standards Kefala's is not strongly accented poetry. the form of the poetry creates a sense of unsure definitions: the lines work through hints and implications, and through sequences of images rather than sustained explorations of related image clusters.

This mixing of images is apparent in the poem "Absence", which begins with descriptions of a funeral and is followed by images of water, time, the underworld, light and echoes. Of course, death itself is an absence; one that perhaps yields a new framework of meaning. "Absence" consists of six parts, the first realistic: "The coffin arrived/full of polished brass/then the priest/giving instructions".[29] As in "Thirsty Weather", realism is replaced by surrealism; the "I" becomes swamped by hallucinations in following the Greek ceremony of kissing the coffin:

The first
bent down and kissed it
but the second
kept eating earth from
the golden top of the coffin
munching it
I could see straight
into the cavernous mouth.

Section two depicts a delirious "I" enveloped by "fear on all sides". The "I" imagines being thrown into "the bottomless pit": "then from this height,/greater than I imagined,/they threw me in".[30] The light in the pit is not incandescent, rather it is an "ashen light", dulled by the darkness of the underworld. Shocking images of "tombstones" and "lifeless bodies" insinuate themselves in the speaker's mind:

I was swimming in a sea
of tombstones
as far as I could see
... ambushed by lifeless bodies
floating in the night.

28. "Worship", *European Notebook*, 75.
29. "Absence", *Absence*, 113-8.
30. "Little Deaths", *European Notebook*, 96.

In the remaining sections the speaker addresses a "you" fitfully lost in the darkness, about to be taken into the grip of death. In section three, "time" can be made from many things; it no longer exists in linear terms. The "you" is being drawn into spacelessness and a new sense of time:

> Time now made of lead.
> Time now made of silence.
> ... Time now made of fire.
> Time now a suffocation
> whistling in your veins.
> ... you sink in unsuspecting
> and you drink with greed
> hoping for a release.

Section four depicts the speaker descending into a subterranean world, "searching" for the lost "you": "Constantly searching/in these underground rooms/to find you/ to reach you/to tell you something". The "underground rooms" recall "the locked doors" and "common house" of "Memory", and "the silent room" of "Thirsty Weather". Thus the underworld does not signify a space in which the individual is free to move; rather, it tends to emulate the confining nature of the temporal world. Inside "these underground rooms", the speaker finds "the same shadows waiting,/ speechless, /drinking at the source/of the black light". The oxymoronic "black light" offers the "you" no hope of any ritual resurrection. The "shadows" and the "black light" of the underworld contrast with the vitality of the "red tulip" in the last stanza, emerging from beneath the earth's surface:

> ... from the ground, unfolding
> silently its secret message,
> the red tulip, alive,
> closing and opening its lips.

The "red tulip" is a symbol of life and of the regenerative powers of the earth. Here, the natural world triumphs over the human world — as the "you" remains trapped in death's "underground rooms".

In section five the speaker seeks some kind of purgative materiality, "yet all was in vain":

> I kept stretching my hands
> but could grasp nothing,
> just light, waves of light
> flowing through my fingers
> insubstantial.

The light, as in "The Alien", is uncompromising. In the final section the speaker emerges from the "underground rooms", having found only the "echo" of "you" calling:

You were calling me today
the echo floating
above the muted colours
of the dawn
my name, transparent silk
moving
over the hushed colours
dipped in silence
out into a far away resonance
travelling through space.

Even the speaker's "name", a positive signifier of social identity is "transparent" and disappearing. The loss of positive identification is synonymous with the loss of self. This section of the poem creates a sense of blurred reality through the use of synaesthesia in "hushed colours/dipped in silence". The underworld of experience has detached the speaker from his or her self, with his or her name now "travelling through space".

The poem "Transfiguration" immediately follows "Absence" and refers directly to it. In "Transfiguration" the speaker returns to the underground room inhabited by the "shadows":

Underground. The shadows
crowded in the room.
Then light began to pour
from the arched ceiling,
exploding light
in which they danced
jumped up to touch it
and be made of light,
the light
a rain that they were
splashing in, their hands
reached upwards
bathed in these splinters
of white glass.[31]

The previously "insubstantial" light of "Absence" is now tangible, offering hope and sanctity within the underground. The "shadows" are ritually cleansed by the "splinters/of white glass", and subsequently released from the darkness of "Absence".

However, this is a rare moment in Kefala's poetry; on the whole, darkness and a lack of meaning provide the dominant notes. The collection, *Absence*, significantly ends with the title word, "absence". In the poem "Coming Home", from *European Notebook*, Kefala asks "What if .../we forgot who we are/became lost in this absence/ emptied of memory".[32] In the poetry of this Rumanian-Greek-Australian there is always the possibility of losing oneself in the darkness.

31. "Transfiguration", *Absence*, 119.
32. "Coming Home", *European Notebook*, 104.

HAL COLEBATCH

Notes of a Neo-Neanderthal: Egypt and Israel
An extract from a literary autobiography

During December 1983 and January 1984 I visited Egypt and Israel as part of a delegation of "Australian Academics for Peace in the Middle East" (a loose description of some of us), sponsored by the Jewish Agency and under the leadership of Dr Colin Rubenstein.

These high-pressure tours, mixing seminars with sight-seeing, inevitably have a Disneyland-aspect, but this one certainly did manage to impart a lot of information and experience quickly. Indeed, it went beyond that, as I found myself, to my own surprise, turning from a tourist to, in the end, a sort of pilgrim.

Alexander Chancellor, then editor of *The Spectator,* had asked me, shortly before, to find out exactly why the Americans were in Lebanon. I never did. However, from the literary point of view, this tour gave me some articles and a number of poems.

It was, with hindsight, a strange moment in history. Gorbachov was a recent, unfamiliar face on British television: only the most acutely-tuned ears could hear the first murmurs of the collapse of the Soviet Union that would change the Middle East along with the rest of the world. Egypt and Israel seemed to be teetering on the brink of disaster, and the Jewish Agency's support of groups like ours little more than Quixotic. Peace seemed, wrongly, to be doomed.

Most of the party went direct from Australia. After long battles with Egyptian consular bureaucracy and British Rail's holiday time-table I left Cheltenham in England, where I was living, to join the tour from London at Christmas. London was empty and under snow. I visited Westminster Abbey. At Evensong camera-toting Japanese tourists outnumbered the congregation and nearly outnumbered the choir. This did not augur well, I thought, for the future of Anglicanism. Unlike Henry Lawson, however, I felt no need to carp at the Abbey's architecture.

I arrived in Cairo alone, and found the rest of the party had gone to Luxor for two days. Left to myself, I put in as much time as I could exploring the strange city. By way of background reading, I bought William Golding's *The Scorpion God.* I too, had been reared in early childhood on images of Egyptology.

Shepeard's Hotel would have been impressive had anything worked. It had a sort of large, seedy grandeur. The television set produced no picture, the radio only static, the air-conditioner nothing. Water for the shower was tepid or non-existent,

lavatories did not flush, the telephone operator spoke little English but given the state of the city's telephone system this hardly mattered, the lights worked only intermittently, the staff demanded tips for everything and some had unattractive skin-conditions. Otherwise it was fine. I slept most of the first morning, oblivious to the endless, futile toots of car-horns in the streets below, and that afternoon set out to explore.

I was more than a little suspicious of John when he offered me a lift beside the bank of the Nile.

He had, he said, taken a liking to my face, and in the interests of better international relations would like to show me around Cairo. He had wrap-around sunglasses and drove a natty red car. No, he told me, I wasn't to pay for the petrol. But perhaps we might share a meal at the end of the day. It sounded a little too good to be true.

I had visions of being found floating face-down in a canal, minus wallet, or possibly finding myself in some secret, mummy-littered crypt marked for sacrifice before ancient Pharonic gods. I made an excuse, and went back to my hotel.

There, I wrote down the number of John's car, and a description of him, left it where I hoped it would be noticed in time if I failed to return and set out for an afternoon of international relations.

I impressed on John that I was a VIP and had an appointment to meet the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (the latter was true if not the former). Given the ranks of Kalashnikov-toting police ringing government buildings, I thought it would be a brave man who messed with the government's guest (a few weeks later those police, ill-paid conscripts, were to rebel. The rebellion was put down after considerable fighting).

As it turned out, John's motives were not sparkling pure in their disinterestedness: he wanted to get me to shops apparently owned by inexhaustible numbers of cousins where commissions awaited him, but he was no robber with violence or talent-scout for sacrificial rites.

First we called at Number One Cousin's workshop: he was a silversmith, and made me two elegant silver cartouches, written in hieroglyphs. His craftsmanship, in a tiny, primitive foundry, was impressive. In the streets around were advertising posters. The favoured female types drawn on them were blowsy-looking European women with eye-bags and sagging jowls.

The pyramids appeared, grey, seeming almost transparent dream-shapes, looming suddenly huge out of dust and haze.

We turned a few corners, and stopped in the desert: like most Australians, I had seen deserts, or thought I had, but this was the real thing, the desert from Beau Geste — a howling, lion-coloured desert stretching utterly lifeless to the end of sight. Most Australian desert has plants here and there, some from a distance look well-grown. This was nothing but mineral. I imagined some alien space-craft landing here and conducting chemical tests that proved the planet was sterile.

A lushly-watered palm-garden was ten feet behind us, and the teeming houses of Cairo spread round half the horizon. The other half was blank, lunar. Now the great pyramids of Giza towered in front of us. Their photographs do not do them justice. They are mountainous, far larger than I had imagined. To see them thus for the first time makes the mind reel with wonder. When they can so dwarf the gigantic structures of modern man, it is hard to imagine how they must have struck the

ancients, Napoleon's soldiers and savants, or the Greeks and Romans who first saw the works of Ancient Egypt when they were only two or three thousand years old (and who, in Cairo's magnificent museum, are recorded as newcomers and afterthoughts).

We lunched a few yards from the forepaws of the Sphinx. On restaurant tables cats lay suckling kittens, a sight I was to see again at the cafeteria in the Cairo Airport Departure Section. The contemporary Egyptian fondness for cats descends, I have read, directly from the worship of them in Pharonic times. I can think of worse religions, and I love cats, but I can prefer them in more hygienic situations. It made a small poem later.

With John beating off clouds of less nattily-dressed touts, we did explore a little of the labyrinth of dark passages beneath the Sphinx. The whole area is honeycombed with diggings, many of them apparently quite unprotected.

I declined to be photographed on a camel, but photographed John just in case. A gentleman pressed a tiny plastic-looking scarab into my hand. I returned it, congratulating myself on my tough-mindedness. However I gathered I had over-tipped one of the "Watchmen of the Sphinx" when the first bank-note I could find, pressed into his hand, brought him to attention saluting. He was staring after us, awe-struck and saluting still, as we left.

Then it was off to Cousin Number Two, who owned a small perfume warehouse. We drove for miles along the banks of canals, lined with white mud houses and between groves of date palms and eucalypts. The purchase of a minuscule bottle of bath-oil, a wallet and a sacred cat carved in wax seemed to suffice here.

The salesroom was quite impressive, but, hoping to see the inside of an Egyptian middle-class house, I asked to visit the lavatory. My host led me across a court-yard where two Mercedes were parked, into the family home. The lavatory bowl stood in the middle of the kitchen, and the ladies of the house were washing some shirts in it. They withdrew these and (my visit was evidently a novelty) gathered round to watch me utilise it.

Cousin Number Three had embroidered leather cushions, which he explained were very cheap because they were made with child labour and Cousin Number Four had large papyrus wall-hangings depicting the castration of eunuchs, who, with a degree of stoicism that may have been the product of artistic licence, were shown lining up for the scissors as impassively as for a haircut.

A papyrus scroll here, a scarab there, a riding-crop which turned out to conceal a sword-stick somewhere else. A few minutes in the cool, shady alleys of the Old City (a visit thankfully repeated at leisure later). This last suggested that at least part of what is wrong with Cairo is its unsuitable modern architecture. If the modern city appears perennially filthy, it is largely because its streets and buildings function as traps for the dust and sand eternally blowing in from the desert. That quaint warren of narrow, twisting alleys is in a sense not only picturesque but practical. Or it would have been if Cairo's population had stayed the same.

The ghastly side of Cairo was unavoidable: the homeless living in cemetery tombs, the desperate battle to provide housing for the millions who flock in from the rest of Egypt, the bloated bureaucracy that threatens to strangle economic growth, the threat of a Calcutta-like collapse. Yet the city has a fascination, and round the bazaars one could still find traces of an Arabian Nights atmosphere. There were two streams of tourists with no intermingling except perhaps at the Cosmopolitan top:

Arabs from more fundamentalist States after wine, women and song; Westerners after pyramids and tombs.

The day was concluded with a meal at John's "club", a two-storey building which seemed, in a seedy sort of way quite pleasant except for the frightful lavatories (I declined the chance to see where our food was prepared, but was none the worse for eating it) and with a polite request from John that I purchase him a bottle of whisky as a memento of our friendship, which as an Arab he could not buy himself. I could have filled his petrol tank twice for the price of the bottle.

Looking at the bric-a-brac at the end of the day, I decided the afternoon had been well spent. No one had tried to rob me more than I could stand, I had seen a great deal in a short time that I would never have seen any other way (as it turned out, I would never have had time to see the Giza Pyramids and the Sphinx but for John) and some of what I had bought was excellent value. Next time in Cairo I will visit the silversmith again. The cartouches are elegant, the hieroglyphics correct, the silver-smithing of high quality. In a way, John's claim to be interested in furthering international relations was not wholly unjustified. If he continues to part tourists from their money in so gentle and instructive a way, good luck to him.

Next day the rest of the party returned from Luxor. We had interviews with a number of senior political figures, including the editor of Egypt's major newspaper. In the Cairo Museum I spent some awe-filled hours. The statues of Akenhaten gave me a new sense of the word "majesty".

Egypt, it was suggested to us, was not a Third-World country but a low-level industrialised one. There was a considerable supply of consumer goods, but their quality was poor. There were many university graduates, but most went straight from university to the destructive, strangling bureaucracy, pushing pens and wielding stamps in crowded offices, living by bribes, frustrated and useless, doing active harm by destroying entrepreneurial investment and development.

We also visited Memphis and Sakkara, seeing the great step-pyramid there and descending into several tombs with vast stone sarcophagi and hieroglyphs. We attended a Coptic church service in the Old City, an experience like something out of early Evelyn Waugh, and a tiny, ancient Synagogue. It was moving to see how tenaciously the Jews and Christians had clung to their spiritual life through all sorts of persecution, though the Egyptians were through history less fanatically intolerant than some.

Attitudes to Israel were mixed. Some members of our party wore Australian desert-boots and a number of Egyptians pointed to these crying "Israeli! Israeli!" with every appearance of enthusiastic friendliness. The Israeli embassy was hidden away high in an office-tower, unadvertised outside except that it was guarded by Egyptian soldiers with machine-guns in sandbagged positions in the street, and there were more guards within the building. It was invaded by fanatics and embassy staff killed shortly after our visit. One of our party, an old soldier who had fought in the Western Desert, now a professor of English, remarked how well the guards were positioned to triangulate the doorway giving access to the Embassy with three cones of mutually-supporting fire. The question, I suppose, was which side would the soldiers fire on?

The Camp David Accords were two years old, and the peace between Israel and Egypt which had been greeted with joy on both sides had grown cool or cold since the murder of Sadat, though it was still in existence and today seems strong. Israelis

we spoke to in Egypt were fearful that the millions of people pouring into Cairo would lead to a complete collapse and famine which might induce the Egyptian Government to attack Israel again as a diversion. They were anxious to promote tourism (so far this had been a one-way traffic) and, more importantly, to make available the dry-land agricultural techniques in which they led the world and which they argued might be Egypt's and thus their own salvation from disaster.

I am sorry we did not see Alexandria, which has long haunted one small corner of my imagination. Perhaps next time (and for all Egypt's faults, I would like there to be a next time. Egypt is special).

We celebrated the start of 1984 at the Meridian Hotel on the West Bank of the Nile. George Orwell's fated year was to be a happier one than many. A few days later, after rigorous security checks at Cairo airport, we took the El Al flight to Israel. I did not envy the El Al staff in Cairo their job.

After Cairo, Israel seemed a breath-takingly clean and efficient part of modernity. But the rate of exchange kept jumping as inflation devalued the Israeli shekels. Even our left-over Egyptian pounds, which I would have thought among the least of currencies, were snapped up.

At Tel Aviv I saw and swam in the Mediterranean Sea for the first time, and, to my surprise, collected some cowrie-shells on the beach, which I kept in a match-box for Bill Hart-Smith, the Australian poet and conchologist, who valued them not only for their own beauty but also as an indicator of pollution levels (By the time I returned to Australia Bill was too old and blind to carry on. His collection had gone to the museum). I thought they would have been too sensitive to pollution to survive in those waters. The waterfront scene was like "Monsieur Hulot's Holiday" brought to life. The Israelis I met on the beach were eager to talk, grateful in an almost tragic way that some Australians should be interested in peace in the Middle East.

It was idyllic sitting on a sidewalk cafe in the mild mid-winter sun, eating exotically-filled pitta breads, drinking Mount Carmel wine and watching the bikinied or khaki-uniformed girls passing by, finding yet more internal crevices to fill after the discovery of a wonderful kosher breakfast with endless varieties of cheeses, olives, vegetables, fruit and fish.

The cultural life of Tel Aviv, with its orchestras, museums and the genuine and spontaneous love of classical music and high culture among people of all walks of life, was something I have come across nowhere else in the world. Taxi drivers played Mozart on their cassette decks. Tel Aviv had more than 100 art galleries, six resident theatre companies and three concert halls, as well as dozens of symphony orchestras, all in a country in deep economic crisis that could afford little if anything in the way of subsidies. The contrast here with Australia and other affluent Western countries seemed too obvious to need remark. Perhaps, as well as the Jewish artistic heritage, it had something to do with a heightened sense of being alive, heir to so incredible a tapestry of human history, and balancing on an abyss.

In all our political discussions and seminars there was the "Security" question: a euphemism for the extermination the Jews of Israel expected if they should ever lose a war. Left-wing and right-wing had nothing to do with economics but with attitudes to territorial concessions. Russian was looked to as the last reservoir of Jews who could be recruited to the population. We were lectured on some ingenious plans to return limited autonomy to the West Bank. We are told that the egalitarian Australian soldiers who had served there in World War II had inspired the informal

manners and lack of ceremony of the Israeli army. I did not hear what was said to British, or for that matter German, tourists about this.

We spent some time, not nearly enough, in the Old City of Jerusalem. We saw the Temple Mount, the Wailing Wall, the Dome of the Rock, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the tiny colony of Abyssinian Christians, once described with amazement by Evelyn Waugh, living in a heap of box-like lime-washed rooms on its roof.

Strange to wander through the Old City, look up at the roof of a warehouse and see from its fluted columns and Gothic arches that it was actually the nave of some ancient church! Perhaps it was a vestige of the gigantic Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built by St Helena, mother of Constantine the Great, to cover the ground from the site of the Crucifixion to the site of the Resurrection: there seemed to be parts of it everywhere. Strange, too, to take tea in a building actually a fantastic amalgam of Roman, Crusader and Medieval Turkish ruins. At the Holy Sepulchre a greasy-looking priest of some Orthodox denomination was selling candles, counting out the money on the stone of the Sepulchre itself.

We visited, too, the great mosque on the Temple Mount. The mosque was an ancient Christian church, and when we saw it the crusader-built Gothic columns of heavy square-cut stone blocks were being removed and replaced with what our guide described as kosher Moslem columns of polished marble. I, fairly unreligious, was surprised by my rage at this sight. The desire to possess a white horse, a stout suit of mail with the cross of Saint George on the surcoat and a large straight sword seemed suddenly very understandable. Religious fanatics have assailed the Temple Mount from time to time.

All who visit Jerusalem describe it. P.J. O'Rourke gets it right for me:

> Old Jerusalem is a Medieval city, not an adorably restored Medieval city like Heidelberg, but a real one where you can smell the medieval sanitation and smack your head on the dirty, low, medieval ceilings. The fortress-fronted, time-soiled limestone houses are built all over each other. The boulevards are steep, twisting, littered and as wide as a donkey. Some streets are roofed in stone, most have steps cut in the pavement, and they seem more like staircases in a crypt than city avenues. Lamps are few. Signs date from the Ottoman Empire. Each shadow holds some sinister passage or dwarfish portcullis. The place is the original for every game of Dungeons and Dragons. At dawn in Jerusalem, you could be in any century of human civilization.

The New City spreading away outside the medieval walls was less overwhelmingly historical, but also full of beauty and interest. During the British occupation it had been laid down that, in order to preserve Jerusalem's character, all new buildings had to be in stone.

We saw the Crusader walls of Antioch and the impressive view of Haifa from the heights above, as well as the archaeological sites of Ashkelon, and the Holocaust museum and memorial, Yad Vashem, where we all found it impossible not to don a skull-cap as some small gesture of solidarity with the Jews.

What other country can have so much packed into so tiny a space? Like most people on such tours, we visited a number of Kibbutzes, including historic Yad

Mordechai, near Beersheba, the furthest point the Egyptians reached in Israel's war of survival in 1948, supported by tanks and Spitfires, before a handful of outnumbered Kibbutz volunteers stopped them in a six-day siege. Boys had crept out at night from the Israeli trench-line to grab handfuls of ammunition from the Egyptian dead. A wrecked Egyptian tank still marked the limit of the Egyptian advance, and the hulk of one of the strafing Spitfires, along with cut-outs of advancing soldiers, had been propped up to create a replica of the Egyptian attack in the old battlefields. The Jewish trench-line was still there, too, with rusty rifles and a single Bren gun.

In Jerusalem I spent a far too short evening wandering the galleries of the huge archaeological museum. We also saw the museum of Jewish history at Tel Aviv. This was full of things I had not dreamed existed, such as the story of the synagogue that had been built in ancient China, and endured until its people were gradually assimilated, perhaps the only Jewish community in the world to so disappear. There was a game you could play of multiple choices, as an East European Jew of the Nineteenth Century seeking to emigrate: some of the more sensible, rational decisions led your children into Extermination Camps.

We were meeting some politicians in the Chagal-decorated Parliament building when Peace protesters stormed around it, chanting: "How long do we have to go on fighting?" "How long do you want to go on living?" some of the Members chanted back. No, it was not like Australian politics.

We also stayed a night at Kibbutz Hagoshrim, near the Lebanese border before going into Lebanon. There was distant gunfire. Should I be ashamed to say I found the possibility that we might see fighting the next day exhilarating? It made another poem, anyway. I reversed my jacket in the belief its dark side would be less of a target for snipers.

In any event, the Israeli Defence Force stayed close beside us. We visited "The Good Fence" at the border with Lebanon, where the Israelis had begun giving food and medicine to desperate Lebanese (the Jews of Israel defended Lebanon's persecuted Christians when the churches of Christendom washed their hands of them). The IDF officers in charge of us were journalists in civilian life. It was a cool, cloudy day of greys, browns and reds. Looking north into Lebanon past the abandoned shells of multi-storey buildings and across the misty hills we could just make out Belfort Castle, built by Crusaders and still, it seemed, an embattled fortress. Israeli jet fighters flashed through the sky overhead, but, our guides assured us, we had total air superiority. Another poem here.

We visited a new Israeli settlement on the Golan Heights, driving through avenues of eucalypts which gave some of the landscape an Australian look (an experience which, like reading *The West Australian* in London, moved me to no homesickness whatsoever), passing squadrons of tanks we were not allowed to photograph, and saw the Syrian border, with a single Austrian soldier in a United Nations blue beret. Behind a bush I found a discarded .5in calibre Browning machine-gun, too large and heavy to carry off.

Driving back from Lebanon we passed the Sea of Galilee, thirteen miles long and six wide, far smaller than I had imagined. From the mountains to the north and the Golan Heights it looked like a blue pool. In the mountains too was the strange city of Safad, settled in the sixteenth Century by Jews expelled from Spain, and the centre of Cabbalistic scholarship. Everything was so tiny, on such a *human* scale!

The River Jordan was a ditch, its banks heavily patrolled and electronically

surveyed for unauthorised movement. There were the crusader walls of Antioch. In the mountains of Galilee there was snow in the air, but within half an hour we were in heat and palm-trees again. We saw Masada, its plateau littered with stone shot cast from Roman ballistas, and with the Roman camps and siege-lines still to be seen below, and swam in the steaming, surrealistic Dead Sea. Land-Rovers of the IDF passed us, bristling with machine-guns.

The Israeli achievements in dry-land agriculture were more than impressive: the waterless rain-shadow of the Jordan Valley, previously regarded as a worthless wilderness of stone and powder-dry dust, produced vegetables, fruit and flowers so efficiently they were exported by air to the markets of Europe. Israel's expertise in this type of agriculture seemed a powerful pragmatic argument for the Arab States to co-operate with it. Looking into Jordan, we could indeed see plastic sheeting and moisture-traps where the Israeli example was beginning to be copied.

Biblical-looking Bedouins tending small flocks of sheep and goats were still a common sight on the West Bank, but their black tents were seen more and more in conjunction with trucks, tractors and new stone houses, these last usually capped with high television antennas shaped for some reason like Eiffel Towers. We passed missile-batteries we were asked or told not to photograph, our guide making heavy-handed jokes that they were the minarets of mosques.

We drove south to Beersheba and the tip of the Negev desert, passing Gaza. Tels — the burial mounds of ancient cities — dotted the landscape. "We are all mad archaeologists" the guide commented. Orange balls were strung on wires across fields as warnings to low-flying aircraft: with Sinai given back to Egypt, the Negev was the only large space where jet-pilots could train.

Driving toward Jericho after night had fallen we saw a strange sight from the bus windows: suddenly we were passing through mile upon mile of crumbling, empty buildings. Sometimes, in the distance, we would see a dim greenish light in one, and catch a glimpse of a couple of figures squatting round a lantern. This vast, silent, crumbling city was like a science-fiction vision of a post-apocalypse world, or like Canberra in the future. The effect was indescribably eerie.

Next day we were taken to see the excavation of a 10,000-year-old stone wall and tower, said to be the oldest man-made structures discovered in the world. Above were the stark jagged hills of the Wilderness where Christ is said to have fasted and prayed for forty days and nights. There, too, was the ghost city. It had been, our guide explained, a refugee camp until the six-day war in 1967.

The refugees had fled to Jordan where most of them had evidently perished when King Hussein turned against the PLO in "Black September". Now it was empty, but still officially administered by the United Nations. The Israelis wanted to bulldoze the vast crumbling eyesore, but the UN refused to allow this. The UN officials lived in sumptuous houses in the better part of Jericho, administering nothing. I wanted to take some photographs, but our guide warned me against approaching too closely. The houses were, he said, full of fleas. Another poem.

I was surprised to find T-shirts with pro-PLO slogans openly on sale in Jerusalem under the gaze of armed Israeli soldiers, and to meet the editor of a legal pro-PLO newspaper.

I also met Yosse Gullal, an academic and a staff member of *The Jerusalem Post*. Many Israelis had two jobs, partly, no doubt, to cope with rampant inflation — our guide ran a well-known radio talk-show at night — partly, perhaps from sheer

energy of spirit. Talking with Yosse — not for nearly long enough — I began to understand, too, something of the conflicts between the religious and secular sides of the Israeli State.

On our last evening we each received a certificate to the effect that a tree had been planted in Israel in our name. Our guide suggested to me that as fellow-journalists the two of us sneak away and "get pissed". Something must have gone wrong, for he never made the rendezvous. Waiting for him in the lobby, I fell into conversation with a number of students, working at night-time jobs, desperately fearful of the future and the apocalypse their world seemed to be slouching towards. The make-believe crises and pig-sty disputes of Australian politics never seemed further away. A group of green-clad teenage boys and girls staggered in, weighed down with rocket-launchers and sub-machine guns. They looked gaunt and hollow-eyed, but somehow still full of life. Several years later it did not surprise me in the least when, during the Gulf War, the people of Jerusalem so totally refused to panic in the face of Scud missile attacks, with possible loads of poison gas falling on them out of the night sky.

I was at Heathrow a few hours later, waiting for the Cotswolds bus. In my paper was an RAF recruiting advertisement, showing Russian fighter aircraft as targets.

I left Israel uplifted and even awed by what its people had achieved, both in terms of material prosperity and in maintaining a civilised — a profoundly civilised — yet brave society in the face of terrible odds. As the bus carried me into the lovely English countryside, I knew I had supped full with wonders.

Later, I thought more objectively: how reliable or useful are a tourist's reactions? Of course anyone's role as a tourist — and a sort of quasi-official tourist with things laid on at that — colours one's perceptions. Yet in a place like Israel there is no room for Potemkin Villages.

My final feelings, subjective as they may have been, were overwhelmingly of admiration that this besieged society had kept and built so much. There was fear and neurosis that had nothing evidently good about it, electric tension sometimes and desperation in the search for peace, dread at the "abyss of hatred" the Jews felt they faced, yet these were pockets of darkness that could be managed. And beyond them, what riches of wonder! How intellectually, emotionally and spiritually alive it all was!

There is another thing, too: quite apart from the religious and supernatural aspects of the place, nowhere else can one be so aware of the richness of even the purely secular human heritage. Whatever else may be said of the Holy Land, it is not like other lands. Israel is special, and the rocks and stones of the place would be special even if the Jews had not been restored to Jerusalem in fulfilment of an ancient prophesy. It is easy to see how prophets come from those deserts.

KEN SEARLE

Mount Olympus in Australia

The idea for the exhibition "Mount Olympus in Australia" began some time in 1986, when I visited a friend who had on her verandah a black swan potplant holder, made from a rubber tyre. I am always very interested in garden sculpture because it's a form of popular art, and so for my exhibition at Watters Gallery that year I did four paintings of tyre swans, set against different landscapes. This was just the beginning of a long fascination with tyre swans.

By the next year, thinking about swans had reminded me of the line in the Ern Malley poem about "the black swan of trespass". Checking the poem, I realised that I had also been remembering the image of Leda and the Swan, which I knew from the Rubens painting.

I'd had no classical education at school, and knew nothing of Greek myths and legends. Nor had I been to Greece (though I had recently spent a few months in Italy). So I started to read mythology in sources such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*. Amongst the many versions of the Leda story in Graves, I found one in which Zeus took the form of a swan in order to rape Nemesis, not Leda. Nemesis then laid an egg which Hermes implanted into Leda — who later gave birth to Helen of Troy, Castor and Polydeuces.

It was at this stage that Nemesis started interesting me far more than Leda, for while Leda was a victim, Nemesis was an instrument of vengeance who paid people back for their sins and crimes. This was around the time of the Fitzgerald inquiry in Queensland, and I got the idea for a painting depicting Nemesis catching up with Bjelke-Petersen. I did more research about various Nemesis stories, and worked out some of her recurrent symbols. One of these is the whip, another is the wheel, another the moon. She is also associated with apples, and the stage. Now the story-telling element — including the contemporary political story — disappeared, and the painting turned into a portrait of Nemesis surrounded by her attributes. For her wheel, I gave her a car wheel — in the form of a tyre swan, which she is riding. This of course connected back with Zeus.

This painting, "Nemesis" was shown at my 1987 exhibition at Melbourne's 132 Lennox Street Gallery, and was later sold. For the next few years, myths and swans slipped into the background as I worked on "West" — a series depicting Sydney's western suburbs — and "Further West" — based around the Lithgow area on the western plains of New South Wales.

It was in this area, while doing on-site research in a small cement town, that I discovered the yard of an old Polish immigrant — a two-acre block at the edge of town, jam-packed with fantastic sculptures constructed out of found objects and cement. For example, there was a five feet high cement statue of Venus mounted on a car gear box, which could be spun round and round like Duchamp's bicycle wheel. There were also strange antenna-like structures, as well as seesaws and fountains and arches and old tools and implements that had been welded together into abstract shapes and painted in bright primary colours, but were now rusting away among the long grass and scrubby undergrowth. Behind all this, the rock walls of the escarpment loomed down. Though things were going to rack and ruin, the old man was very proud to take me around and show me his treasures; he was lonely and keen that I should stay and perhaps drink some red wine with him and hear about the time after the war when lots of Polish people used to come up from Sydney and camp in his little kingdom.

It was not long after this meeting that I came across a reference to Pygmalion — who, according to Greek legend, was a king of Cyprus and a sculptor. One story went that he had made a statue of the Goddess Aphrodite, which he then proceeded to fall in love with; to reward his devotion to her, the Goddess herself appeared and breathed life into the statue. In other versions the king, lonely in his power, makes a statue of a woman — named Galatea — to be his companion; at his prayer, Aphrodite breathes life into the form.

When I read this story, I immediately thought of the lonely old European sculptor, working at classical images in an alien landscape. I also saw the metamorphosis that happens when Aphrodite breathes into the sculpture as mirroring the process of making art. I filed the idea away till I had time to explore it more fully.

Then last year — 1993 — I decided to work towards a series of paintings based on Greek myths. It was at this time that I discovered the recent book by Robert Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, which provides a framework for connecting various Greek myths. I started to feel the myths as something which had once really happened — and which of course are still happening.

Already, with "Nemesis", I had used Australian landscape and contemporary costume, but this became more and more relevant as I went on with the myths. It wasn't just a matter of convenience for me to use the landscapes around me, but a demonstration of the way mythology works.

It has to be realised that the "Olympian" gods didn't always live on Mount Olympus; they only arrived there about 4,000 years ago. Compared to the 40,000 or more years in which the indigenous Australian culture and religion has been firmly established in this land, the idea of Mount Olympus in Greece is very new.

Just as the home of the gods was once on Mount Olympus, Mount Olympus can shift to a new place. When the European invasion of Australia occurred, the invaders brought their own culture with them in the same way that the invading Aryans from the north and east had brought the Olympian Gods to Greece in the second millennium BC. This culture of the white invaders included Greek as well as Christian mythology. To recognise and document the fact that this happened in Australia doesn't mean that you endorse it, or that you want the new culture to displace the old. However, if you don't put any value on your own cultural background it becomes hard to understand the extraordinary importance of indigenous Australian culture. For Australians of European origin, Greek mythology is part of

their whole way of thinking and speaking and seeing the world, even if they have never sat down and read a Greek myth.

At the same time, the comparatively recent nature of the establishment of Mount Olympus in Greece reminds us that the myths were *modern* stories to the ancient Greeks. When the classical sculptors or vase painters depicted the gods and heroes, they usually showed them in contemporary dress (or undress), and used the latest artistic techniques. They also used the brightest colours available. Therefore, unlike the Victorian painters who depicted mythological stories in an archaic and romanticised fancy dress, the classical approach is actually to depict the stories as if they were happening now. (And of course, if the Gods were immortal, then they would still be alive.)

Once I started to read myths as modern history, time stopped being a barrier and I could find models and landscapes to fit the episodes I wanted to re-tell. At the same time, my own personal experience worked its way into the stories.

By now I was living on a farm in Victoria's Otway Ranges — a place of very boggy soils — and I needed to build a 100-metre road from the front of the house around to the garage. The only way to do this was to go up into the forest with a tractor and trailer, and winkle out rock from a natural quarry; bring it back, unload it, then smash it piece by piece with a sledgehammer and crowbar. I suppose it took me about fifteen or twenty trailer loads, and as many afternoons, to build the road. And as I did it, I kept thinking of Sisyphus, whose punishment was to spend his whole life pushing a gigantic rock uphill. By the time I'd finished the road, I was ready to do the painting.

At about the same time I went back to the idea of Pygmalion, doing him against the kind of landscape that you find around Lithgow in New South Wales and using some of the sculptures that I had seen in the old immigrant's yard. For Pygmalion's body, I used my own, and my 15-year-old daughter was the model (wearing tights and swimming costume and hippy draperies) for Aphrodite. (In other paintings in this series the poet John Forbes has modelled for Zeus, and the detective fiction writer Kerry Greenwood has become Hera.)

The Heracles painting started simply because I like the story of the Twelve Labours, but finding the right landscapes has taken me all over the coast of the Otways.

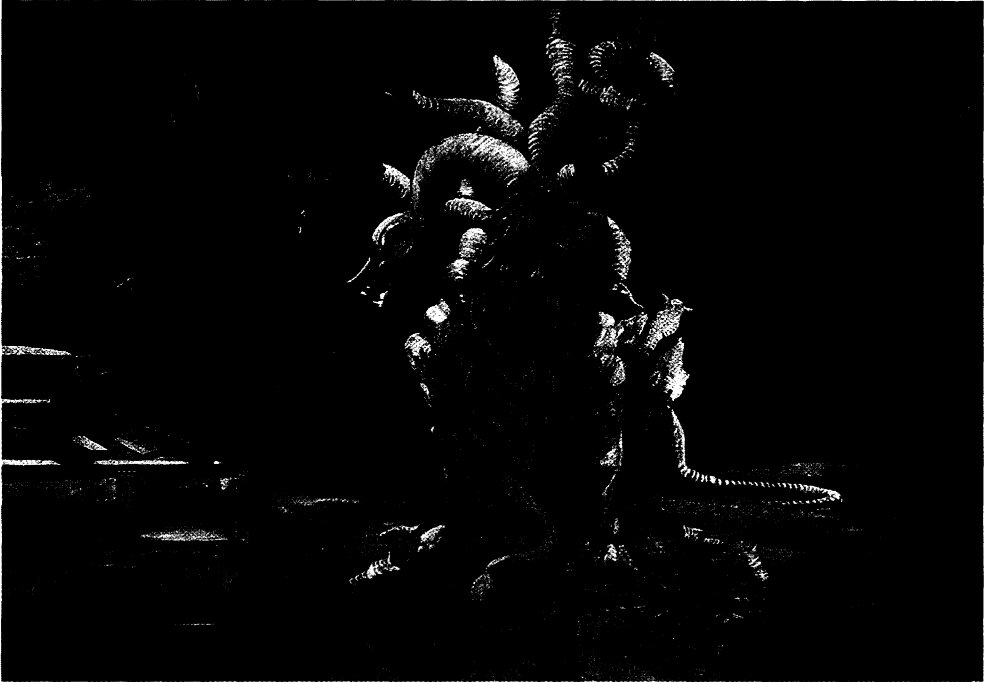
Though Greek mythological figures have been transplanted to Australia, they don't necessarily fit into all Australian landscapes; after all, in their Greek form they belonged in particular topographies and ecologies. Indeed, the actual placing of the Heracles stories was so important that the place is usually included in the Labour's name — the Lernaean Hydra was on the swamp near the town of Lerna, the Stymphalian Birds were on the marsh beside the River Stymphalus, the Erymanthian Boar hunted on the cypress-covered slopes of Mount Erymanthus, and so on. The Hydra — even its name suggests water — would not be found in an arid place, whether Greek or Australian, just as the Stymphalian Birds were water-waders and would have to be found in marshland.

Part of my job therefore with this series has been to find real Australian landscapes similar in those of the legends, so that the stories can work. Once I have found the right place, I do an oil sketch on site, and then bring it back to the studio where I compose it in combination with figure sketches from human models, photographs I have taken of zoo animals, and imagination. This sort of exploration of landscape is

part of a broader, post-regional enquiry that connects with my urban paintings of Sydney's western suburbs and, more recently, North Geelong.

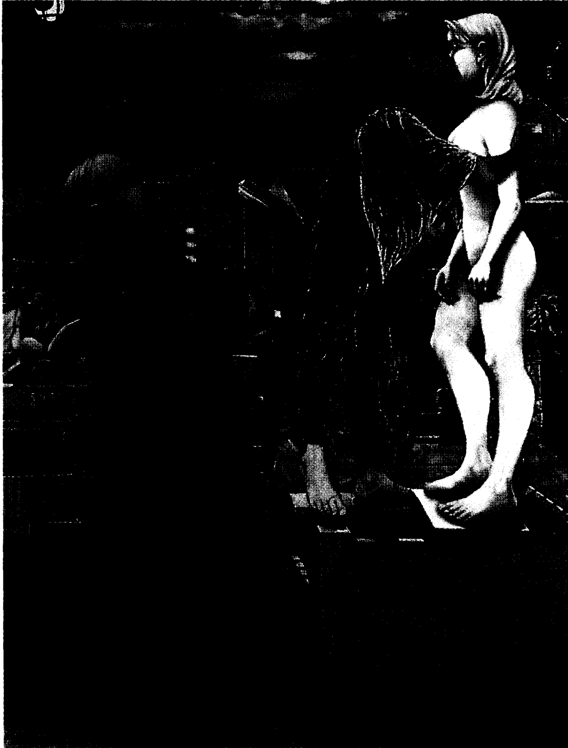
In what I call post-regionalism, though on-site sketching proves the basis and actual landscapes are realistically portrayed, time and space are not bound by realistic limitations. It's a bit like magic realism in the novel, where characters (or things) can live for centuries — or eternity — and can if need be levitate — or fly on swans. Physical barriers can also disappear, so that the eye can see around corners, or past the trees or skyscrapers in the foreground.

In this sort of rearrangement, however, the topography of the landscape sill follows certain natural rules that can't be broken. So, for example, when looking for the landscape to use in the scene of Heracles cleansing the Augeian Stables, I have to find cowpastures situated in the right sort of valley, where Heracles could divert two rivers to flow down and through the cattleyard — because even in a post-regional, mythological landscape, water cannot run uphill.



Hydra

Stymphalian Birds



Pygmalian

Sisyphus

NATALIE DAMJANOVICH-NAPOLEON

Crossing

In my dream my sister sits before me. She has a pen and a pad in front of her and she asks me a question, "How do you make a cross?"

I pause, not to ponder the difficulty of the question, but in awe of its simplicity, "You get the pen and the paper and you draw two lines intersecting each other."

"No." She draws a cross, "X" marks the spot style in front of her with a blue pen.

"No? But how else do you draw a cross — "

She stops me before I go into one of my [incisively rational] tirades. Her face is soft and patient, "What do I have in front of me?"

"A pen. You take the pen and draw one vertical line line intersect — "

"No," she looks at me with her blue-green stare, "No ... what do I have in front of me?" and she points the pen towards me.

I wake up, it is the telephone. Always the telephone or the alarm which is the intersecting line between consciousness and imagination. What I am left with is this puzzle.

Don't you look at their faces every day, and wonder is it her? Don't you look? I see you searching and thinking is it her? I can understand you, for this habit you have of looking at women's faces I have for looking at the face of every city. In every city I search for Venice.

Italo Calvino said [in *Invisible Cities*] that Marco Polo admits to Khubla Khan that all of his descriptions of fabulous cities are but feeble attempts to capture one city, Venice. Napoleon said that St Mark's square was the most beautiful entrance to any city in the world.

When I enter Venice I name it for myself, "The Floating City", because I feel as if it is mobile. The magic carpet of St Mark's mosaiced floor, the water which surrounds and binds the homes and the streets together is like a liquefious land. I see Venice as I have seen Rottnest on a hot day from the sky, where the island looks like a vast lake of water and the ocean is like moving sand, threatening to fill the island of water with its volume.

The Venetians must be able to walk on water. It is fabled that the feet of their boatmen are webbed, and they must wear shoes to disguise this aberration from outsiders.

It is a child-like, storybook fascination I have with Venice. My adult's mind

fights to rationalise the doorways which open onto streets, the barges in the Grand Canal laden with groceries and furniture, police boats and the vaporetti carrying passengers to and from their daily tasks.

We travel to Venezia from Fusina on a ferry and then take a trachetta to arrive on Venice. (The trachetta boatmen in loud, blunt sounds refuse to let people from my tour party take photos of them as they are not gondoliers.) I notice that the Venetians speak a different dialect from the Florentine and that it is somehow proud, mysterious, earth-ridden and deeper in tones.

I understand the way this dialect was shaped when our local guide begins to speak, "Much of the beauty of Venice is the result of practical considerations. Venice is built on mud, clay and quicksand. How did we achieve this? The first wattle huts were raised on a few rudimentary stilts, or sat on a row of logs which had been swept down the lagoon during floodtime. But brick and then stone structures needed stronger foundations, so whole pine logs brought laboriously from the nearest forests were driven deep into the mud, the silt of millions of years."[1]

Instead of my fascination being destroyed it is enriched. Unlike those "adult truths" we learn when growing up that stun us and then sicken us this is a truth which deepens my understanding of Venice and their world.

I now understand their insular history; why they fled the mainland to seek refuge in the lagoons; the Venetians love of the dark, masks and all things concealing; their secret world which they guard and yet they allow to be exploited by tourists.

Understanding does not make it easier for me to leave. I want to lose myself in the streets, cross bridges over countless canals, drift in a gondola and revel in the absence of the mechanical sound of cars which cross the earth and emanate from every city except this one.

It is like the Eden of all cities and I cannot stay, I am not a native, I have been cast aside. So why is it that you keep searching for it in their faces, this thing of innocence, this first woman when you have been cast aside?

I recall the conversation well, it was in Fremantle over coffee, the road shimmered, it was a clear, blue day, so hot it makes you feel wet. A man in a blue Holden yells at somebody sitting beside us in Italian, the sea breeze starts up and you can smell the sea somewhere between your nose and the coffee pressed up against your mouth.

You say, I think I can see her in the sky, I think I can see her in magazines and newspapers, I think I can see her on the t.v., in movies. You hold your coffee with two hands and look up, saying, she is always in the back of my mind.

You had told me you were searching for someone and that the person you were searching for was a woman. Then you laughed, not too loud, and said, she holds a place in my past and my future.

I'm a fire sign, I say, blowing out cigarette smoke, what sign are you?

Cancer.

I answer absently, a water sign...

I'll extinguish your fire, you say with the forthright honesty of a child who does

1. Robert Moore, *Living in Venice*, (London: Macdonald and Co., 1985), 18.

not know the gravity of what he has said.

It is then that I despair. We could never be lovers.

Don't people cross each other's paths, traverse the life of another in the invisible lines of latitude and longitude which makes up the globe of relationships between human beings? I start to feel that I am close to the answer and then it is like there is a boulder I must move to find the truth. My mother always said that truth is what is brought out in a person through their interaction with new circumstances or new people that they may meet.

The tour guide warns us that it is quite easy to become lost in Venice.

Wandering through the back streets of Venice I remember the happiest thing about my childhood was the sound of the coffee grinder vibrating the laminex bench and the tinkle tinkle tinkle of my father's spoon as he stirred his sugar into his coffee. This is not the happiest of my memories, the happiest is the early morning mumbles that I heard absorbed through the jarrah passage way door and the door of the room I shared with my sister, the sounds bent into the shape of the wood and finally passing through my bed covers and into my ears like the warm breath of a missed kiss on my neck.

Why do I remember this now, cloistered in the shadows and light of Venice? I think it is because the sun is like the warm breath of a missed kiss on my neck and the cool shadows emphasise the warmth of the sun's kiss. Walking in Venice is like when I first entered Italy from France, through tunnels, so that when you enter the darkness you sense that you have lost your hearing as well as your sight and before you have time to adjust the sun returns your sight and hearing.

My flowing walk is stopped by a man standing in the doorway of a cafe who sticks a foot out at my chest, a foot from his hand, which is fashioned in plastic in the perfect shape of a foot. I stop to laugh because it looks so real, the foot. He pulls me inside.

I did not tell you about my abduction in Venice, did I? Because that day when I was about to tell you a voice drugged by heat said, I am searching for someone, a woman...

I cried for him to let me go, "Let me go, are you mad?" My voice screeched within those cool walls, but it was as if he could walk on water, this crazed Venetian.

Now I try to remember, how did he lure me with the foot into the dark, peeling doorway, through the unlit, cobwebbed room, down the wet stone steps and skirting through the damp cellar floor up some lit steps which led to a doorway that faced onto one of the tessellated canals?

I felt as if everything was moving forwards, towards me, the canal, the water, the gondola with the horse's head leaning towards me. The madman had thrown his foot into the black floor of the gondola and locked the sides of my arms by grabbing me vice-like and pushing me into the boat as I cried to be let go.

He was smiling and looking forward as he stood at the back of this hideous gondola with the papier mache horse's head and stirred the udder in the water as my mother would use a spatula in a cake mix. I was not quite sure how he had got me here, I could not remember if I had followed him all the way or if he had pulled me by the hand out onto the canal. But now I was at the bottom of the gondola, swaying

its balance as I tried to dust myself of the cobwebs on its floor.

I try to push all thoughts of panic aside, but the gondola is grotesque, a festival gondola, with a twisted horse's head, its lips peeled back to expose the ghost white teeth. There are other pieces rendering all sides of the gondola with some kind of creature's face. It is unsettling.

"What do you want?" I demand, the romance of Venice falls from my words, is stripped away with one phrase. He does not acknowledge me, but looks forward as if hypnotised by the rhythm of the boat. Then, he does the strangest thing, lifts his leg up and pretends to dance the twist, rocking the gondola like a baby's cradle.

I stand up and try to stop the rocking, "What do you want?" I repeat, balancing like a clown in a circus.

I look into the green water of the canal, I do not want to jump in. There is only the edge of the Venetian's back steps to grab onto.

"What do you want? Are you mad?" I say again, but he refuses to answer me. And what am I to do, feel ungrateful for my first gondola ride? I lie back and enjoy the sun.

It's my mother I'm looking for, David finally tells me. My reply is shocked, oh I'm sorry, I didn't know. I had thought he meant "another woman" when he said, "a woman" earlier.

I have been searching for her since I left Venice, you say. Venice? I ask. Yes, I was born there, it is my home, it is now that the accent becomes apparent to me. But why didn't you tell me before? Before I left for Europe, before I went to Venice? Everything would be so different now if you had told me.

What's there to know? you reply and shrug your shoulders, coffee cup still in both hands.

The way you talk about her she is inside you all the time. I was trying to insulate his hurt with my words, push the past aside.

I guess you're right. I've got Buckley's, though, of finding her.

I know I am right in declining this chance for a relationship. I am not his mother, I am not her and therefore I could never fulfil him, love him totally and that would kill me. I have had half loves before. They damage the soul and ruin the heart. Yes, I know I am right for declining this chance. But how can I ever know, I will never be sure if it was the right thing to do.

I am enjoying the gondola ride, maybe he isn't mad, just a little eccentric. Washing lines traversing the canals! How is it that I never imagined people in Venice hung out their washing? It is so soothing to find something domestic, which indicates a home life within this changeable place. The water hitting the sides of the gondola makes a soft lap lap lap as it moves forward. The terracotta sunlight falling through the gaps in the buildings puts me to sleep. How is it that nobody ever told me before there is such an easy path to bliss? Feeling safe in the silence I turn my back on the madman and face our journey.

"When Jesus sweated blood in the garden before he was to be crucified and asked for the Lord's guidance in his path, 'Not my will, but thine be done', he was asking to know his God. But the Lord does not speak. And Jesus cries, 'I will do thy will, though I know not if it is thy will that shall be done'. In this act he is surrendering himself to the cloud of unknowing. He is offering his love and sacrifice without

knowledge of his resurrection."

He is a madman, he speaks the babble of God, I have seen them everywhere on my travels, in a town square on the Isle of Skye, pacing the streets in London, mumbling in a pub in Galway, all mad and abandoned by God.

When the madman's sermon stops the water-silence falls upon us, a low footbridge looms ahead of us in the narrow canal and he [unconsciously] bends his body to avoid being struck down.

Tchaikovsky's "The Nutcracker" pricks into the silence with the incisiveness of piano notes rebounding off the water and the house walls. How this music magically began at the exact moment of the completion of the madman's sermon I do not know.

"How do you make a cross?"

I think, if only I had the faith of a madman I could answer this question.

GEORGE SEDDON

Two Centres of Excellence in the Mediterranean

1: Ionian Shores: or how to design a medical clinic

To visit Ionia is to be overwhelmed by it; the cradle of Greek civilisation, now a part of the Aegean coast of Turkey — with its necklace of offshore islands, still Greek, and still with their classical names: Lesbos, Chios, Icaros, Samos, Patmos. My wife and I toured the classical remains, Greek and Roman, especially Ephesus, Miletus, Priene, Didyma, and Pergamum, along with a small crowd of other tourists, mostly highly knowledgeable French and Germans. The English were not in evidence! We found them later at Altinkum, a beach resort, turning themselves beetroot red from over-exposure, walking around in the heat eating Mars Bars.

We were overwhelmed by many things, perhaps most of all by our ignorance. I learnt Latin at school and continued it for a year at the University of Melbourne, along with Ancient History, and I later read, indeed taught, History of Science. But nothing had prepared me for Ionia, nor for that incredible overlay of human cultures: the Hittites, the Myceneans, the Dorians, the Persians, Alexander, the Ptolemies and the Hellenistic world, the Roman imprint, the Byzantines, the Seleucids, the Selkuk and Ottoman Turks.

We were overwhelmed by the sheer vandalism of the "Great Powers"; many of the best sculptures and buildings of the Greek and Roman cities are now to be found in Berlin and London; there is, unfortunately, some force in the argument that at least they are looked after in the museums. What was left behind, until very recently, was simply regarded as a source of cheap building material by the locals.

Most of all, we were overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape, by the warmth and friendliness of the Turks, not yet corrupted by mass tourism, although

surely it won't take much longer; most memorably, by the sheer brilliance of Ionian civilisation. Athens had the better Public Relations officers, and was indeed the Glory that was Greece for half of the fifth century, but the Ionian cities were laying the foundation of Greek literature, science and philosophy while mainland Greece was still hardly out of the dark age following the Dorian invasion. The roll call of famous names from the Ionian cities is very long: some I knew from my sketchy knowledge of Greek science, especially Thales of Miletus and Heraclitus of Ephesus. But there are others, many others, whom I thought of vaguely as Greek, who turned out to be Ionian — as we visited the ruins of their remarkable home town, Mr Bean in hand. (Mr Bean is the invaluable Cicerone George E. Bean, a mildly eccentric English scholar who has written four superb guide books on the old cities of coastal Turkey: *Aegean Turkey*, 1966 covers the Ionian shores.)

Homer was Ionian, at least according to tradition, the favoured associations being Chios or Smyrna. Xenophanes of Colophon, Anaxagoras the physicist from Clazomenae, Anacreon the poet, Sappho from, of course, Lesbos; Bias of Priene, one of the Seven Sages of Antiquity, a very variable list, but it always includes Bias, along with Thales of Miletus and Solon of Athens. Remember the paradox of Achilles and the tortoise? Achilles runs a race with the tortoise, giving him, say, 100 yards start and running ten times as fast. By the time Achilles has made up the 100 yards start, the tortoise is still ten yards ahead; when this is made up, the tortoise is one yard ahead — then a tenth of a yard, and so on indefinitely. Achilles never quite catches up, although the lead is reduced to microscopic proportions. The paradox is one of several devised by Zeno, an Ionian — although he lived most of his life in an Ionian colony, in the south of Italy. These amazing Ionians from a coast that is now rather bleak, although beautiful, and lightly populated (except for Smyrna and the tourist resorts), had colonies as far west as Cadiz and Marseilles and as far north as Trebizon on the Black Sea.

Anaximander and Hecateus, better and earlier geographers than Herodotus, were of Miletus: one famous saying of Hecateus epitomises the new spirit of enquiry which characterises Greek and especially Milesian thinkers of the sixth and fifth centuries: "I write what appears to me to be true, for the tales the Greeks tell are many and ridiculous".[1]

Then, above all, there was Thales: one of his many achievements was to calculate the height of the pyramids of Egypt by measuring their shadow at the time of day when a man's shadow is equal to his height. This is an example of pure intellection — a thought-experiment, if you prefer — no research grant, no equipment, no need even to travel to Egypt. How did they do it, or rather, what are the forces that drove the Ionians to use their minds so? Herodotus says that Ionia has the best climate in the world. We found it uncomfortably hot in the middle of the day in mid-autumn, but we had to clamber around the ruins when they were open, at times when the ancient Greeks doubtless took a siesta. The winters are cold — mild by most European standards, but still much colder than Perth, even than Hobart. But the nights are clear, and for at least half the year, calm and warm. The stars are brilliant. There was no television, and being a slave society, there was leisure. The air at night seemed to us to crackle with thought waves, but this doubtless is fanciful. Some quite small societies have been incredibly productive for a time, bloomed, and then

1. George E. Bean, 1979 (2nd. ed.) *Aegean Turkey*, (London: John Murray, 1966), 184.

faded. Edinburgh in the eighteenth century, Dublin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth, Athens in the fifth century. Would that we knew why.

But the Ionian cities bloomed — and bloomed. Thales might have the last word: the most famous of his sayings, "Know thyself", was inscribed on the temple at Delphi. It is often attributed, wrongly, to Socrates, whose bust presides over the inscription at The University of Western Australia. But the saying is Ionian, like so much else.

Why, why? The source of all this intellectual fertility preoccupied us as we travelled, and still does so. It is not even clear what supported it all. The region now is poor, yet it was rich. Ephesus had a population of at least one quarter of a million people at the time of Augustus, although by then it was of course a Roman city. How did they feed and service it? It seems a miracle of organisation, given the lack of refrigeration, simple transport facilities and limited mechanical power. One thing at least is clear — the nature of the decline. They were all trading cities, and almost all ports. None of them are now.

Ephesus had a magnificent paved road running down to the harbour below Mt Pion, with an arcade of marble columns (stoa) flanking it on each side, and a provision for street lighting, which was rare. Now there is no harbour. The river Cayster has silted up the bay so far that only from the highest point can you even see the sea, many kilometres to the west. Priene and Miletus are even sadder, one each side of the Maeander (the Menderes, now), each a port, now kilometres from the sea. Miletus was a great city, and stone lions guard its harbour entrance, but they are now near-buried in silt, and a dyke has been built recently to keep out the destructive flood waters of the Maeander, which has not only pushed the sea back out of sight, but raised its bed and flood plain well above the level of the lower parts of the city. The flood plain now grows cotton, and Miletus is deserted: there is no sizeable town nearby. The same is true of Priene on the northern banks, now very isolated, but well worth a visit, because alone of these cities, it remained Greek, abandoned through loss of its harbour before being made over by the Romans, like Ephesus and Pergamum.

The feeling of the actuality of the past, of sensing the living world of a past culture was, for us, strongest at Priene, perhaps because the relative difficulty of access makes it less visited by tourists. The stone seats for VIP's in the front row of the modest theatre and the stone wash troughs in the gymnasium, with their water running above, and individual water jets issuing from the heads of very small lions, lionettes really, have a touching immediacy. Ephesus is the most crowded with tourists, but it also has the most splendid remains, including a fine aqueduct and the great library of Celsus, which has much of its façade still standing. It also has a brothel and a large public lavatory near the market place which is a hit with the tourists, in its own way also giving that sense of the immediacy of the past. It is both handsome, well furnished and well engineered, with appropriately contoured marble seats, a deep drop into a cloaca that was presumably flushed with running water, and a convenient water channel round the wall for ablutions. What seems a little odd to modern eyes is the intimacy of it all: the seats, many of them, are continuously adjoining. There are no cubicles. *Homo sum. Humani nihil a me alienum puto* (Terence: *Heautontimoroumenos*). There is a possibility, however, that there were wooden partitions which have not been preserved.

If you tire of Roman plumbing, you can go back to Selçuk, the nearest modern

town, supported largely by the tourist trade, and look at the fort the Crusaders built on the hill above the town, in fairly good repair, or at the nearby Basilica of St John, newly restored, with a history that is itself layered; Roman, Byzantine and Crusader. And if you tire of that you can climb down the other side of the hill and look at the handsome and rather early Selkuk mosque. If you tire of that, it's time to go home.

We didn't — we went to Pergamum. Mr Bean says that "Of all the cities in this region, the situation of Pergamum is unquestionably the most impressive. Smyrna on Mt Pagus is superbly placed" (p.45). Elsewhere he says that "Smyrna is one of the pleasant places of the earth" (p.20) with its sheltered position at the end of a long gulf, backed by dramatic mountains. We found it heavily polluted and choked with traffic. The bus station at Izmir, as it is now called, our main encounter, is a kind of merry bedlam, crowded and unbelievably noisy. But Bean preferred Pergamum — "for sheer power and majesty the citadel of Pergamum is unrivalled. A royal city indeed. Some 1,300 feet (396.2 m) in height, it rises between two streams, tributaries of the Caicus. Steep, almost precipitous, on all sides but one, it forms a type of city much favoured in antiquity " (p.45). Priene and Ephesus seemed nearly as steep to us, but Pergamum is certainly impressive — in fact, we took a taxi up from the sleepy little market town of Bergama which lies at its feet, and walked and slithered down.

Pergamum is a city of the Hellenistic rather than the classical world, reaching the heights of its powers under the Attalids, from 241 BC to 133 BC, when Attalus III bequeathed his city to the Romans, who made it and its territories into the Roman Province of Asia. All its rulers were patrons of the arts, especially sculpture — the Dying Gaul is a famous example, rifled from the city of its origin, like so much else. The library was also famous, and German archaeologists are now busy reconstructing it. At its height, the library was said to have 200,000 volumes, and it rivalled Alexandria. The rivalry was intense, so much so that according to one historian (Varro, a Roman writer), Ptolemy prohibited the export of papyrus, of which Egypt was the only source. Deprived of papyrus, Eumenes II turned to the use of skins or vellum, already known in the Ionian cities, but now used on a vast scale. Being thicker than papyrus, vellum was not well suited to rolled books, so the book made up of cut and bound pages came into being, and eventually superseded the rolled book. Thus both the book in the form we know it, and our word "parchment" (Pergamene) had their origins here.

The story comes to a sad end, however. Bean tells it well:

> The rivalry between the two great libraries was finally extinguished when the Pergamene collection was presented by Antony, who did not own it, to Cleopatra, who had other things to do than read it. It was taken to Alexandria, where it survived, somewhat diminished, till the seventh century. Then the Caliph Omar, or his significantly named lieutenant, Amr Ibn el-Ass, reasoning that if a book was inconsistent with the Koran it was impious, and if consistent, unnecessary, ordered the entire library to be destroyed (p.51).

Down the hill from the citadel and through the main streets of the present Bergama, a turn to the right takes you up a relatively gentle hill to a medical clinic, lying well below and to the southwest of ancient Pergamum. This is the famous Asclepieum, second in Roman times only to Epidaurus. Pergamum was moreover

the birthplace of Galen (129-79 BC), who practised medicine for a time at the Asclepieum. Galen and Hippocrates were the most famous of the Greek medical men, and they seemed to have had a fair knowledge of anatomy. Galen probably had adequate anatomical practice, since he was also physician to the gladiators, there being a Roman amphitheatre nearby.

Treatment at the clinic had features which we would call superstitious; it was a religious sanctuary, and under the protection of the God of Healing, Asclepias. But it also had some common sense practices, and some positive features that today's hospitals could learn from. The major elements of treatment were diet, exercise and hot and cold baths, so it was run like a spa or health farm. There was also an extensive pharmacopoeia, but knowledge of what plants were used for what medicinal purposes is scanty. Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) was certainly known, derived from the willow, *Salix*.

But the Greeks believed that you treated "the whole man", not just the body. So there was a library, not for the medicos, but for the clients; a sacred fountain (every hospital should have a sacred fountain) and a theatre. No one could have been bored: there was a constant stream of visitors, patients and learned men, and as Mr Bean remarks "no Greek was ever bored so long as he had someone to argue with".

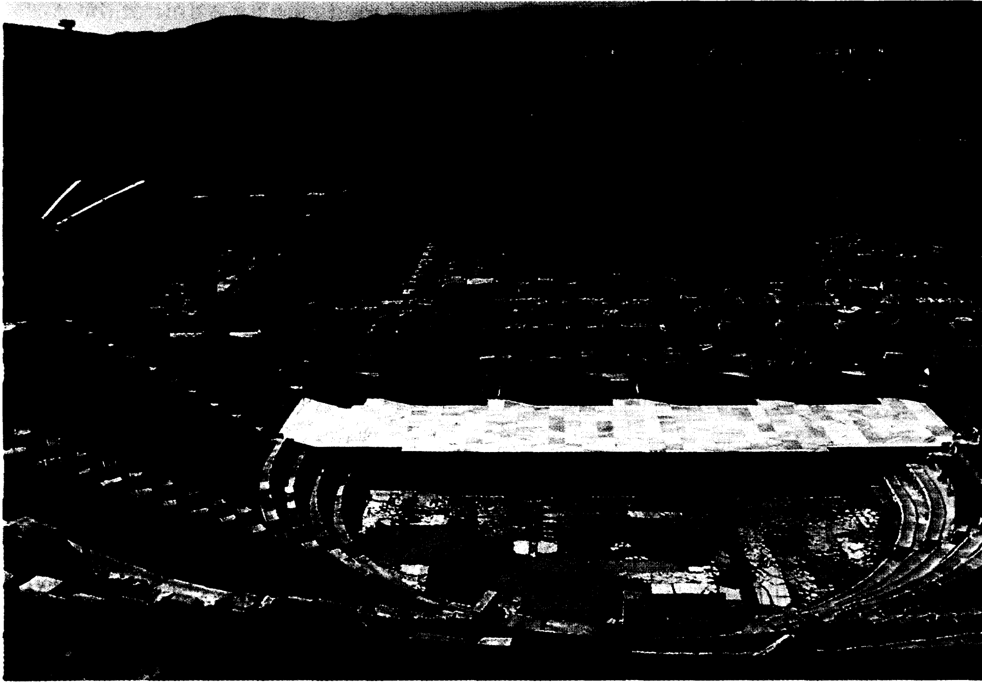
The theatre is the usual half-circle carved into a hillside, and it has a view, not dramatic, but so peaceful and harmonious that I found the worries of the world slip from my shoulders as I sat there. It is one of the most tranquil places I have experienced, inimical to stress. The landscape is relaxed and low key, yet it is also an *ordered* landscape, and it is this perfect, easy proportion that makes it so harmonious.

A young Registrar from Royal Perth Hospital to whom I described the Asclepieum told me that Royal Perth had a post-operative recovery room that lacked an external window, and another that had such a window. An informal study of recovery rates in the two rooms gave a better average rate of recovery in the room with natural light and a window to the outside world. This was not a rigorous, large scale study, but the findings are plausible.

The knowledge and skills of Hippocrates and Galen were kept alive by the Arab physicians Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-98) and extended by Vesalius. Modern medical science, however, began essentially with the seventeenth century English physician William Harvey, who demonstrated the circulation of the blood, driven by the heart, which acted as a pump. The heart *is* a pump, but a pump is a piece of machinery, and Harvey's discovery was a critical component in what the great Dutch historian of science, Dijksterhuis, has called "The Mechanisation of the World Picture".[2] From it have flowed an understanding of functional relations which made possible the wonders of today's technology. But there has been a cost. Checking your mother into one of our hospitals today is sometimes uncomfortably close to checking your car into the garage for a grease and oil change.

If we are to learn from the Asclepieum at Pergamum, ask some key questions of your next hospital or clinic. Is it set in a landscape so perfectly proportioned as to impose its own sense of harmonious order on all who pass through it? Is there a good library? Is there a good theatre, preferably open air, which of course also implies balmy nights under the brilliant stars? Is it a sociable place, with much cheerful human interaction? Above all, is there a copious supply of clear spring

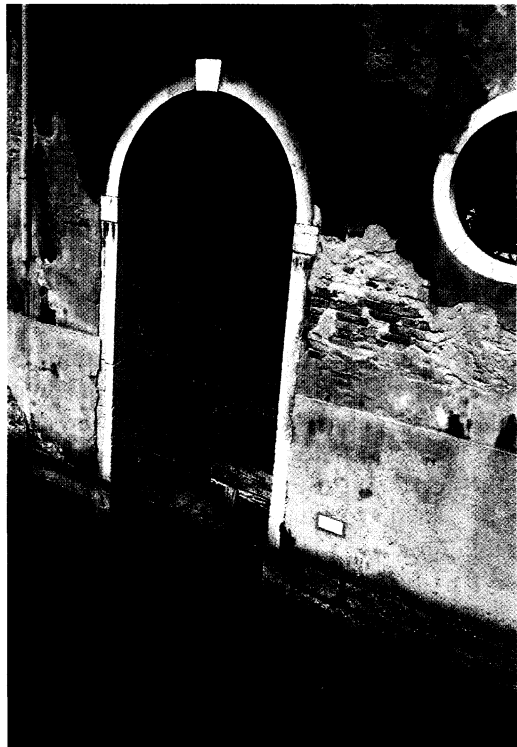
2. E.J. Dijksterhuis, (English ed.) *The Mechanization of the World Picture*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961).



The Asclepieum at Ionia

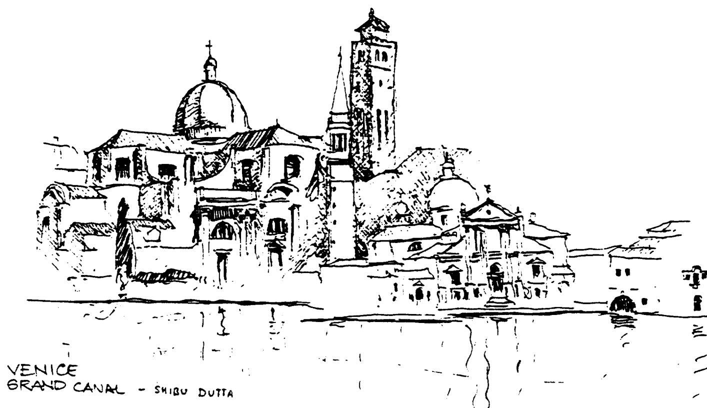
Library of Celsus at Ephesus

Grand Canal — Tramonto



Venezia Algae

water free of all contaminants, or as the Greeks put it, a Sacred Fountain. You will need it, to drink deep of the waters that will purge body and soul of all impurities. *Mens sana in corpore sanum..* In most hospitals in Perth, the Mens is hard to find, and when found turns out to be a small cubicle dedicated to the grosser bodily functions.



2: Venice and That Sinking Feeling

One of the world's most remarkable achievements in environmental management and urban design is that of Venice and the Venetian Republic. It is a great story of adaptation — by men to the exigencies of a special and in many ways very difficult environment, and also of the adaptation of the environment itself to man's own special needs, which in this case included an insatiable thirst for quality in the city buildings — all of them, not just those of the wealthy.

All the world recognises the beauty of Venice, but the long, sustained effort to adapt and manage the lagoon and its hinterland is not at all well known. It was one of the finest examples of landscape planning in the broad sense for well over 1,000 years. Only in the last 140 years or so have all the lessons been forgotten.

One primary objective, pursued from the thirteenth century onwards, was to stabilise the lagoon. Lagoons are essentially ephemeral features; their usual fate is to be filled in by river-borne sediment. Venice itself is built on the remnants of the delta of the Brenta River, flooded by rising sea-levels at the end of the Ice Age. Over the centuries, the Venetians systematically diverted the rivers (by pick and shovel) to the north and south of the lagoon; the major ones diverted to the south were the Brenta, which delivers more water than the Murray, and the much smaller Bachiglione, which runs through Palladio's city of Vicenza (my favourite city in Italy); to the north, the Sile, Treviso's delightful little river, and the Piave — another major river, rising in the East Tyrol, and the site of bloody battles during World War I. The ways in which these great engineering feats were executed were ingenious : the Sile, for example was diverted by canal into what had been the bed of the Piave, and then into the sea near Jesolo, while the Piave itself was diverted into the bed of the next river to the north, the Livenza.

The tides could not wholly be regulated — disastrous high tides, le acque alte, have occurred sporadically throughout Venetian history — but they were controlled in some measure by strengthening the sea walls of the "lidi," the sand bars that fringe the lagoon on its seaward side. The many entrances between these lidi were in time limited to three; these are the Chioggia, Malamocco and Lido entrances. The sea walls were the last of the great works of the Magistrates of the Waters. They were begun in in 1744, took 38 years to complete, and cost some forty million Venetian gold ducats — hardly surprising, since they were built of great blocks of white marble brought from Istria across the Adriatic, the customary Venetian source of marble. These walls are around five metres thick at the base, and some seven metres high, replacing wooden palisades that needed constant repair.

Venetian hydraulic engineering was not perfect, and there were costs, but it worked adequately for most of the history of the Republic. One cost was their elimination of one of the distributaries of the mighty Po, the Po di Tramontana, which emptied into the lagoon north of Chioggia at the southern end of the lagoon. It delivered vast quantities of silt, and was rapidly turning its environs into a *laguna morta,* flooded only at high tides, stinking mud through the rest of the cycle. In five years, thousands of labourers cut the Sacca di Goro, a channel from the Po Grande, the main river distributary, into a bay of the Adriatic east of Pomposa, and water no longer drained through the Po di Tramontana into the lagoon. The results for the lower Po valley and the Delta were disastrous; silting accelerated, the Delta increased three times in area in two hundred years, and the severity of flooding increased. But none of that worried the Venetians. They had protected their own lagoon.

Perhaps they protected it too well. One school of hydrologists today argue that at least some incoming sediment was desirable, to compensate for the lowering of the lagoon floor consequent on compaction under the weight of centuries of deposition. There cerainly is a problem today, but its origins are complex, and the system of management by diversion worked well for nearly one thousand years. It was essential to Venice, and she knew it. She had close at hand, the example of Ravenna, a great Roman and Byzantine sea-port, now high and dry. The Venetians moreover, were sailors, and they knew the great cities along the Aegean coast, such as Ephesus and Miletus, long beached like stranded whales.

The lagoon was her chief defence, and she was never invaded until Napoleon ended the Republic. It was also her only transport system, both externally and internally. Finally, it was her major source of protein: sea-food sustained the Venetians. The level of the tides has always been critical to her functioning, as Ruskin shows so well in *The Stones of Venice;* a few inches lower at low tide and Venice begins to stink, many canals are no longer navigable, and the lower landing steps become intolerably slimy; a few inches higher at high tide and water would come in the doorways, the level becomes too high to get under many of the bridges, and the buildings begin to erode. That is part of what is happening now. Venice may be sinking. It is certainly eroding.

It is besieged by a range of problems. First, there are le acque alte, the exceptionally high tides. These are sporadic natural events, a recurrent feature of Venetian history, always destructive and costly. They generally happen when the spring tides or naturally high tides coincide with strong and persistent winds from the southeast — the sirocco — push and funnel the sea water up the Adriatic between Italy and

Croatia. The horrific floods of 1966 were of this kind, exaggerated further by exceptionally heavy rain throughout much of northern Italy. The water reached two metres higher than normal high tide level, the Piazza San Marco was under water, and waves were breaking against the Ducal Palace. The damage was estimated at forty billion lire.

This was nevertheless an extreme event — recurrent, but infrequent. Various remedies have been proposed, and a good deal of money spent on inflatable barrages, designed to block the three entries of the lagoon when exceptionally high tides threaten. But there are other, less dramatic, but more insidious, problems. One is chemical corrosion, both from sulphur dioxide and other pollutants in the air, which attack the very stones of Venice, and from similar industrial and domestic pollutants in the water and the mud. Venice is built on piles driven into the mud. Great logs cut from chestnut trees have lasted well in the anaerobic environment of the mud, but now it is heavily laced with chemicals which may be beginning to attack the piles.

There was subsidence attributed to the withdrawal of water from some 20,000 deep artesian wells, used to supply the city and industry on the mainland. Many of these wells are now capped and water is supplied by acqueduct. There may also be slow subsidence of the lagoon floor caused by long term compaction of the great layered wedge of sediment that underlies it. The lagoon floor is certainly being lowered, but whether this has one or several concurrent causes is not clear. It is undoubtedly subject to erosion, and this seems to me to be the key problem.

Why should the lagoon floor be eroding? In brief, because no sediment is coming in to replace the sediment now lost daily by tidal scour. The rivers remain diverted. Sand from longshore drift, which once balanced tidal scour, no longer enters the lagoon because of the long moles protecting the three entrances to the lagoon. And tidal velocity is much greater, because the ship channels have been deepened (Malamocco to 13 metres, the Lido-Giudecca channel to 11 metres). Moreover one-quarter of the tidal marshes, which used to dissipate tidal energy, have been filled, for industrial land at Porto Marghera, for the new airport Marco Polo, and so on. Thus more water rushes in and out during the period of the tide, into a significantly reduced lagoon, from which the natural baffles of reed and marsh have been almost eliminated.

Venice conserved and managed its other natural resources as well as it managed the lagoon, and for the same reason — it knew it needed to. The myth of an inexhaustibly bountiful Nature was never a part of the Venetian world view. For instance, it needed a constant supply of good timber for ship-building at the Arsenale, chestnut for the galleys, beech for the oars. Her only reliable sources were the forests above the Canale di Brenta and the Altipiano di Asiago and Monte Grappa, and these forests were conserved with great care throughout the Republic. The forests of Dalmatia also supplied timber, but less reliably. Timber was always in short supply, but that was seen as a reason for conserving it rather than over-producing from a wasting resource. The chestnut forests of the Brenta lasted until after World War II. They were then all felled within twenty years, and are not now regenerating. Fishing was regulated. Stone came from the quarries at Istria and the Euganean Hills, transported through a canal system. Stone is not a renewable resource, but the quarries were regulated. The country estates with their Palladian villas — such as Villa Barbaro a Maser, the Pisani Villa at Stra, La Malcontenta, both

on the Brenta, Villa Contarini, and so on — were well-managed, and the estate workers were generally well cared for by the standards of the day.

The city itself and urban life was also well regulated, by the most stable government Europe has ever known, on which the American constitution was substantially modelled. Urban scale was preserved by regulations on building height. Civic and social life were accommodated in the public open spaces — campi — which came in all sizes from the Piazza San Marco to the Piazetta dei Leoni, Campo Luca, Campo Santo Stefano of middling size, and small ones like the Campo San Lio. There were also internal courtyards. These spaces allowed light into the buildings and air circulation, and they collected water in the central well. The markets were well run, and civic administration was at a high level. Venice instituted the census, and maintained it for hundreds of years. Taxes were fair. It was a tolerant city; Venice never burned a heretic. Its urban services were, and still are in many ways, a marvel of adaptive talent. The taxis, the ambulance, the fire brigade, the police, all go by water.

It was, and still is, mostly a "hard" landscape, made of stone and water, although there is a surprising number of private gardens full of greenery. (*Magnolia grandiflora* is common, some huge old *Wistaria sinensis* are to be seen and roses do well, too). Street trees are rare, although the zattere at Dorsoduro are lined with Russian Olive and standard Oleander, almost trees, and years old. There is no *cosmetic* landscaping, and this is perhaps the most important design lesson Venice has to teach. Get the functional relations right, the scale, the spaces, the proportions. They are what create good urban landscape.

Today, it has nearly all gone wrong. The lagoon is heavily polluted and eutrophic, the fishing is in decline, the city is eroding and decaying, the chestnut forests have been felled, the Veneto is subject to a vast monoculture of maize, the sick fields are suffering from an overdose of superphosphate, so the canals are clogged with green algae, which decay and stink, the very underpinning of the city is under attack, and that splendidly resilient civic pride has gone; all is now geared to the tourists, who swarm like locusts. Mountains of their garbage in its hundreds of thousands of plastic bags is carried out to sea and dumped daily, into that self-same Adriatic to which Venice once renewed her marriage vows yearly with a gold ring, the marriage bed now a garbage dump.

There is adequate knowledge to understand most of these problems and to offer solutions. The eutrophication is due to excessive use of superphosphate on the plains of Lombardy. We have encountered similar problems in some of our estuaries, and tackled them, and are on the way to solving them — in the Peel-Harvey Inlet, for instance. I have explained to the Venetians that we are much better at solving the problems of incompetent agriculture in Australia because we have been practising it longer, while they took it up only after the last war.

Now the Venetians hardly know where to begin, because there is no political — administrative system that corresponds to the Plains of Lombardy; an informal association began to emerge only last year, to tackle common problems. But even if it were strong, there is no equivalent in Italy to the field officers of our Departments of Agriculture, who can go the rounds and talk to each farmer. In any case, the current form of agribusiness is itself the outcome of a political system, the EEC, which is heavily protectionist.

The solution to the erosion is to close Porto Marghera or drastically to reduce ship size, to fill in the deep channels, and probably also to re-excavate some of the

filled land and to shorten the moles to allow some sediment to be carried in once again by longshore drift. One could even dump sand from barges, but it is always better to harness natural processes where that is feasible. Most Italian ports are suffering from decline. As Europe has turned inwards, transport has moved to heavy lorries, not a wise choice. As the environmental costs become more obvious, there will surely be a new investment in rail-freighting; the passenger trains have already had their renaissance. The ports too may revive one day, but there is no sound future for Porto Marghera.

As for mass tourism — the answer is simple, if difficult to impose. Restrict entry, as we now do to many National Parks, after determining their carrying capacity. Yosemite is one; even Wilsons Promontory has a strict ration of camp sites other than that of Tidal River, and would-be back-packers need to book long in advance to get one of the seven sites at Roaring Meg, for instance. Venice is not the place for Pink Floyd, or for Expo. Happily, she will now be spared the latter. One Pink Floyd was enough.

Can we learn anything from Venice, or is it so special as to be irrelevant to our circumstances? If we acknowledge that Venice is in itself a lesson in urban landscape, we can still ask "What is the lesson?" We are in part asking about pathways and forces, in part about shared community values, in part about the way in which a shared design framework evolved, to which many could contribute without that restless striving for originality and the immediately distinctive that characterises so much design today. The concentration on the central functional relations is probably the key. Design marginalises itself if it is concerned primarily with palliatives, as it so often is. Words like "screen" or "conceal" or "soften" all indicate this approach. We would not need to "soften" buildings with trees, for example if we got the buildings and the spaces right. Cities ought not strive to be gardens, or rather, they should strive first to be cities.

Finally, our coastal cities might care to institute the office and the powers of the Venetian Magistrate delle Acque. Listen to his edict:

> Whereas the waters of the Venetian lagoon, its channels and marshes and sandbars, are a natural defence to the city, as the moat and city walls of less happy cities, any man who is found to damage them in any way will be considered an enemy of the State, like one who destroys the city walls elsewhere, and will be dealt with by the full severity of the law.

Inscription in bronze on the walls of the Arsenale, erected under the authority and name of the Magistrate of the Waters.

Had Shakespeare read it ? Had, at least, John of Gaunt?

> This precious stone set in a silver sea
> Which serves it in the office of a wall
> Or as a moat defensive to a house
> Against the envy of less happy lands

Would that he were still empowered to deal with those who have transgressed his edict — with the full severity of Venetian law, that of the Serenissima Republica di Venezia. For Venice was a marvel to the world.

VASSO KALAMARAS

Without end

Drinking wine from cups of ivy-wood
they smelt of resin, ah, the Satyrs
came in springing, glancing slyly
at the Bacchae. They stank of virility
with hair on their hips and with phalloi
tingling, lusciously breathing in
the naked breasts of the women
they were drunk already. Their eyes
glistened under the shadow
of the Ivy adorning them with wreaths,
golden wild hair entwined
in garlands around their bulging and curling
wooden goathorns, making them more beautiful.
The Maenads made a tumult shrieking
with the frenzy of their yearning.
Through their pungent bodies were surging
desires urging them on,
and their companions, who strained now
to glut them with Love, those demented
Maenads. The Satyrs tautened
their bodies like tendons, like cords
of bows with arrows poised
for whichever instant.
And for feasting Dionysus they strewed
fresh green twins as double beds.
He too adorned himself with crowns of Ivy
to take his part in the revelry, for already
their delirious pantings could be heard
as if all were in agony with this force
which God with open hands granted them all,
the unbearable pleasure, without end.

Translated by Khristos Nizamis 1992

VASSO KALAMARAS

I Love

Dark green sorrowful youths without light
in your unworldly mythical beauty
every distant longing talks to the stars.
In the silence of the moorland
in the light
ragged joys
mourn what might have been.
They look at you Death
proudly opposing you.
In the very centre
the cypresses keep watch
dark cool upright figures.
Some lonely wooden crosses
by chance find hospitality in
the tight embrace of deep roots.

Translated by Vasso Kalamaras and June Kingdon

ROS PESMAN

Some Australian Italies

Places aren't important but the idea of place is very important indeed. Kate Grenville.

From the days of the first settlement, Australians have visited Italy in some version or other of the grand tour.[1] The nineteenth-century colonists moved among the ruins of Rome and the galleries of the Renaissance, bought up copies of paintings and statues and *objets d'art* for the embellishment of the mansions that they were erecting in capital cities and in rural pastures. They had their portraits painted and arranged for their daughters to have music and language lessons in Rome and Florence. Sir Redmond Barry, the Chief Justice of Victoria who presided over the trial of Ned Kelly, filled three large exercise books with his account of his pilgrimage of self-improvement through the galleries of Rome and wrote his own history of Italian art.[2] In time the colonial elite were joined on their travels by the newly enriched bourgeosie and their twentieth-century descendants and counterparts. And there have always been those who tarried longer for work or pleasure.

Women artists were among the first Australian residents in Italy. The painter Adelaide Ironside lived and worked in Rome in from 1856 until her death eleven years later. Something of what Italy meant to Ironside can be gleaned from her letters.[3] In the year that Ironside died, the Melbourne sculptor, Margaret Thomas arrived in Rome where she spent the following three years. Thomas has left no record of her time in Rome other than in her short story, *The Story of a Photograph,* in which an Australian woman journeys to Rome to make a name for herself and to be "a credit to Victoria".[4] It was to Florence that another sculptor, the twenty-year-old Theo Cowan, went to develop her art in 1889.[5] Louise Mack and Randolph Bedford appear to have been the first Australian writers to dwell in Italy. Mack lived in Florence between 1904 and 1910 and was the editor for a time of the local English

1. R. Pesman Cooper, "Australian Visitors to Italy in the Nineteenth Century",*Australia, The Australians and the Italian Migration,* ed., Gianfranco Cresciani, (Rome: 1983), 124-141; *An Antipodean Connection. Australian Writers, Artists and Travellers in Tuscany,* eds., Gaetano Prampolini and Marie-Christine Hubert, Geneva, 1993.
2. Redmond Barry Papers, La Trobe Library, MSS 8380.
3. Many of Ironside's letters which are conserved in the Mitchell Library have been published in Jill Poulton, *Adelaide Ironside. The Pilgrim of Art,* Sydney, 1987.
4. *Coo-ee. Tales of Australian Life by Australian Ladies,* ed., Mrs Patchett Martin, (London: 1891), 257-267.
5. Kerry-Anne Cousins, "Theodora Cowan (1869 -1949). The Career of an Australian Sculptor", B.A. Hons thesis, Australian National University, 1989.

language weekly, the *Italian Gazette*.[6] She was a prolific writer of romances which usually included Italy as part of their setting. A villa at Bellosguardo on the outskirts of Florence was Bedford's European base from 1903 to 1906 although his Italy extended through his search for mining investments to the bleak Tuscan Maremma, into the remote poverty-seared villages of the Appenines, to Sardina and to Lecce in the south.[7]

The objectives of the Australian bourgeoisie in Italy were art, history, the relics and sites of antiquity. Their images of Italy derived from English literature and travel guides as did the widely, but not universally held assumption that Italians were a people inferior to the British race, colonial as well as metropolitan. But the northbound Australian pilgrims also knew that they approached Italy from a background different from that of their southbound British counterparts.[8] While Italy was the graveyard of Roman civilisation, Britain had its share of ancient monuments as enumerated by Henry James and thus possessed history and culture. Australians in Italy knew themselves as in the words of Ethel Turner a "crude, unhistoried" people. [9] From early days the opposition of Italy and Australia as the extremes of history and non-history had been put in place, and a land with history was not only the site of ancient ruins but also of stirring actions and famous deeds. But as the Australian protagonists in Shirley Hazzard's *The Transit of Venus* understood: "there was nothing mythic at Sydney: momentous objects, beings, and events all occurred abroad or in the elsewhere of books".[10] Writer Doris Manners-Sutton who lived in Italy in the 1930s and 1940s wrote that when she was young, coming from land with no history, she felt a pang of jealousy "at those others, the lucky ones who live in older, civilized lands who were busy with the making of their history".[11] Caught up in that history as a refugee in the Nazi-Fascist Republic of Salò, she was not so sure. This was "lush" history, the product of those other associations of age — corruption and decadence. If Italy was old, Australia young, then another — compensatory — opposition was that of antiquity and modernity. As one tourist wrote on her arrival in Brindisi in 1879: "Jack says we shall now be able to compare the effete civiliations of the old world with the rapid progress of our own country".[12] Four years later, Thomas Shaw, a squatter from the Western district of Victoria gave his opinion on Rome: "to make Rome a good modern city like Melbourne, half of the houses would have to be pulled down".[13]

While the English might have come to Italy in search of monuments more ancient than their own, much of their response was to climate and terrain. Italy was a world which basked in sun, warmth and light, gifts of nature often associated with sensuality and passion. Encounter with such a world held out enticing promises of liberation and adventure. Louise Mack constructed this experience for one of her Mills and Boon English heroines arriving at Pietrasanta on the coast between Tuscany and Liguria.

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6. Nancy Phelan, *The Romantic Lives of Louise Mack*, (St Lucia: 1991).
7. Randolph Bedford, *Explorations in Civilization*, Sydney, 1914; R. Pesman Cooper, "Randolph Bedford in Italy", *Overland*, 120, 1990, 12-15.
8. See also R. Pesman Cooper, "Majestic Nature- squalid humanity: Naples and the Australian tourist 1870-1930", *Travellers, Journeys, Tourists, Australian Cultural History*, 10, 1991, 46-57.
9. Ethel Turner, *Ports and Happy Havens*, (London: 1912), 27.
10. Shirley Hazzard, *The Transit of Venus*, (Ringwood: 1981), 37.
11. Doris Gentile, fragments for novel, *No Time for Love*, Mitchell Library, Gentile papers, ML MSS 2897.
12. "The Australian Abroad. By a Victorian. IV. Italy", *Argus*, 17 February 1879.
13. Thomas Shaw, *A Victorian in Europe by a Victorian from the Western District*, (Geelong: 1883),135.

> How wonderful it is, that coming into Italy — coming from grey winter cities into a land flooded far and wide with sunshine. To find the sun again, glittering and radiant, and vivid blue in the heavens after the dark skies of London and Paris, seems like a magic act to one who travels by train direct from one country to another.[14]

For Mack's Australian characters, the experience was different.

> Coming straight from Australia, country of plains and birds and flowers, of lovely colourings, or golden sunlight, deep skies and vivid waters, if dull in the green of its grass, Italy was not the exquisite world it might be to one who comes to it from sober England.[15]

To be unimpressed by the climate was a common response of Australians whose first encounter with Europe was Italy. Those who had already spent some time in the north were more appreciative. For Lionel Lindsay, his move from England to Italy and the sight of the sun "was like coming home".[16] Other visitors noted similarities between Italy and Australia. [17] In Livorno, Randolph Beford mused on "the softness of a Sydney spring in the air". Thus one opposition that the Australians could not adopt with ease from their English guides to and interpreters of Italy was that of darkness and light. But they did take on board the associated metaphor of passage from darkness into light, rebirth.

The journey is not only an event, it is also a metaphor, the most evocative — and the most banal — of all metaphors. Journeys are both passages and rites of passage, the passing from one state to another — in all senses of "state". Thus Louise Mack wrote:

> The Coming In To Cities...
> These are the precious moments of travel, the times one wants to hoard, and gloat over and never let go.
> They come once, and only once....
> Life is never the same again afterwards [18]

One of the story-lines attached to travel is that of transformation, discovery or construction of a new self or new apects of self. And we can meet our epiphany in many places. Other roads besides that to Damascus are the sites of conversion; it was the Acropolis that was a place of enlightenment for Sigmund Freud. But perhaps nowhere in Europe carries so dense a cluster of myths and associations of rebirth as does Italy, the site of the Renaissance.

> It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing on the Capitol, while the barefooted fryars were singing Vespers in the temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the City first started to my mind.[19]

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14. Louise Mack, *Theodora's Husband*, (London: 1909), 233.
15. Louise Mack, *An Australian Girl in London*, (London: 1902), 107.
16. Lionel Lindsay, *A Comedy of Life*, (Sydney: 1967), 206.
17. Pesman Cooper, "Australian Visitors", 138.
18. Mack, *Children of the Sun*, (London: 1906), 281.
19. *The Autobiographies of Edward Gibbon*, ed., John Murray, (London: 1897), 302.

It was in a much less picturesque and romantic Roman space, the Piazza Esedra, that in the 1920s another historian, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, experienced her moment of enlightenment and new self knowledge. Significantly the day marked another rite-of-passage, her twenty-first birthday. Pondering the proposition — *coelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt* — she recognised that although the immutable baggage we carry with us limits our capacity for development and change, travel does confront us with alternatives, other ways of living, other values. In Piazza Esedra looking towards Santa Maria degli Angeli, her private revelation was her recognition of her affinity with the classical rather than the romantic, apprehended in architecture but applying to all forms of culture and life, and symbolically representing earth-bound not sky-borne, stability not aspiration, "scenes made to the measure of man and humanised by his long habitation of labour in them".[20]

Martin Boyd described his rebirth in his 1939 autobiography *A Single Flame*:

> In the autum of 1922 I went to Italy for the first time since I had slept on the Spanish Steps at five months old. I saw the Tower of Pisa from the train and got out there, though I had intended to go straight on to Florence. When I reached the Campo Santo the sun was setting and glowed on the mellow wall of the lovely group of buildings, the tower, the cathedral, and the baptistry. Beyond their faded golden marble were the evening hills. I had an extraordinary sense of illumination. Their beauty seemed to me to reveal something towards which I had been groping, and gave me a sense of a homecoming of the spirit. The next day I had the same feeling in Florence. I was like stout Cortez on the peak of Darien.[21]

Later he recreated the experience for Alice Langton in *A Cardboard Crown* when she arrived at Pisa. [22]

Another Australian who portrayed himself as reborn in Italy was Herbert Michael Moran, cancer specialist, international rugby player and much underrated writer. He lived in Rome in the 1930s where he used his time, energy and pen to reconcile the English speaking world to Mussolini and his invasion of Abyssinia. In his partly autobiographical novel, *Beyond the Hills Lies China,* Moran's protagonist, an Australian doctor who like his creator found Italy in midde age, gave expression to his conversion experience in Rome.

> Yet after those months in Rome he could not ever be the same man again who left Australia, disoriented, dreading the rancours of the coming day. Into his being had passed something out of the spirit of the place...Out of that long flat dull period of living he was now welcoming the florid opulence of light and colour even amid the present miseries.[23]

Shirley Hazzard also portrayed herself as undergoing transformation when she went to live in Naples in the 1950s; it was in Naples that she came to life as a writer and a woman.

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20. Kathleen Fitzpatrick, *Solid Blue Foundations*, (Melbourne: 1983), 196.
21. Martin Boyd, *A Single Flame*, (London: 1939), 167.
22. Martin Boyd, *A Cardboard Crown*, (London: 1952), 122-123.
23. H.M. Moran, *Beyond the Hills Lies China*, (Sydney: 1945), 227.

> It was a great revelation. It was like going to heaven. Bit by bit I began to have this great companion, the city of Naples, and of course to learn all sorts of things there — to change my way of looking at things, to enlarge my way of thinking about things. The year passed with as much interior development in me as the previous four or five years and perhaps even more. For one thing I became joyful ... really for the first time I knew what joy was. It became part of my life, I understood at last what that was ... I should have said, when we were talking about changes that happened to me at Naples, I think perhaps the greatest single thing was the feeling of being restored to life.[24]

It was on her return from Naples that Hazzard began her life as a writer. Her second novel, *The Bay of Noon,* is set in Naples and the city is the real protagonist in the novel. It is the story of a young English girl's encounter with Naples. Hazzard denies that it is her story although she did draw on the facts of her life in Naples. Both *The Bay at Noon* and Hazzard's earlier novel, *The Evening of the Holiday* are stories where love does not conclude in permanence but where life goes on without undue misery.[25] The underlying message is that one should seize the pleasure of the hour. This was something that Hazzard claims she really learnt in Naples.

Despite the earlier Italian sojourns of Louise Mack and Randolph Bedford, it is only since the second world war that Australia has to any extent become home, setting, subject, myth for Australian writers, that Australia has produced its counterpart of the North American generation of Henry James. This literary discovery of Italy followed in the wake of the decentring of Britain in the Australian imagination and the shaking off of dependence on English *ciceroni* in Italy.

Denis Porter, with a backward look to Freud, has suggested that there is a sense in which a foreign country constitutes a giant Rorschach test, that we project on to places perhaps even more strongly than we project on to other people.[26] David Malouf's Ovid in *An Imaginary Life* makes the same observation.

> How can I give you any notion — you who know only landscapes that have been shaped for centuries to the idea we all carry in our souls of that ideal scene against which our lives should be played out — of what earth was in its original bleakness, before we brought to it the order of industry, the terraces, fields, orchards, pastures.
>
> Do you think of Italy — or whatever land it is you now inhabit — as a place given you by the gods, ready-made in all its placed beauty? It is not. It is a created place. If the gods are with you there, glowing out of a tree in some pasture or shaking their spirit over the pebbles of a brook in clear sunlight, in wells, in springs, in a store that marks the edge of your legal right over a hillside; if the gods are there, it is because you have discovered them there, drawn them up out of your soul's need for them and dreamed them into the landscape to make it shine. They are with you, sure enough.[27]

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24. "The Transit of Hazzard. Jan Garrett interviews Shirley Hazzard", *Look and Listen,* November 1984, 39; Giovanna Capone, "Shirley Hazzard and the *Bay of Noon", Australian Literary Studies,* 13, 2, 1987, 172-184. On Hazzard and Italy, see also Laurie Hergenhan, "The 'I' of the Beholder: Tuscany in Contemporary Australian Literature", *An Antipoden Connection,* 33-50. It is worth noting that on another occasion, Hazzard stated that "it was in Tuscany that I became a writer". Shirley Hazzard, "The Tuscan in Each of Us", *Ibid.,* 81.
25. Shirley Hazzard, *The Bay of Noon,* London,1970; *The Evening of the Holiday,* London, 1966.
26. Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys. Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing,* Princeton, 1991, 13.
27. Quoted in Laurie Herghenhan, "Mapped But Not Known", *Australia and Italy. Contributions to Intellectual Life,* (Ravenna: 1989), 101-106.

What longings have Australian writers projected onto Italy, what gods have been discovered there? What has been selected out from the vast repertoire of images and myths that cluster around Italy? Some that might be briefly noted are the oppositions of centre/periphery, belonging/exile, harmony/disharmony, between nature and civilization. There are many others.[28]

If Australia lies on the far edge of the Eurocentric construct of the world, then Italy — Rome — occupies the very centre. For Martin Boyd:

> Rome is the centre of our civilisation the spiritual capital of every civilised European whatever his belief ... there we are all, in a sense, at home[29]

In *Letter From Rome*, A.D. Hope compares his pilgrimage to Rome to that of Bede.

> Bede came to Rome and offered his Te Deum.
> Fresh from a land as barborous as mine.[30]

Later on in the same text he refers to his homeland as:

> Those dim regions
> Where Dante planted Hell's Back Door,...

The first English translation of the entire text of *The Divine Comedy* coincided with the departure of England's rejected people and their gaolers for the Inferno/Paradiso of Botany Bay. They knew themselves to be exiles, and exile has been a continuing theme in Australian writing as it was in ancient and medieval Italian life and literature. Thus in his poem *At Ravenna*, David Malouf reminds us that:

> We are all of us exiles of one place or another — even those
> who never leave home

and that:

> We all die
> under alien skies at a place called Ravenna whether the
> new atlas calls it
> that, or Sydney,
> or Katsangari formerly Stanleyville.[31]

It is worth recalling that the narrator in Malouf's first novel, *Johnno*, is called Dante, and that when he first arrives in Italy feels that his universe begins to make sense for the first time. The historical figure Dante appears in Malouf's poem set in Florence, *The Elements of Geometry*.

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28. For other discussions of images of Italy in Australian writing, Laurie Hergenhan, "The 'I' of the Beholder", Richard White, "Passing Through: Tuscany and the Australian Tourist", *The Antipodean Connection*, 159-172.
29. *Much Else in Italy*, London, 1958, p.136. See also *Outbreak of Love*, London, 1957, 102.
30. A.D. Hope, "Letter from Rome", *Collected Poems, 1930-1970*, London, 1960, 131.
31. David Malouf, *Johnno, Short Stories, Poems, Essays and an Interview*, ed. James Tulip, St Lucia, 1990, 48.

How curious Dante, that our lines
of life should intersect
In this narrow street, you going
Your way to exile's tomb, I seeking
mine.[32]

Malouf's novel *An Imaginary Life* takes as its hero another exile figure from the Italian peninsula, the Roman poet Ovid, banished beyond the edges of the Roman world. The parallel, if not explicit, is obvious. Similarly, Peter Porter has sought out images of exile in Italy. Giotto's portrait of Dante in the Bargello in Florence told him that "we never get home but are buried in eternal exile".[33]

Those in exile at the end of the earth seek to return to their source; in the words of A.D. Hope:

When the divided ghost within us groans
It must return to find its avator

and in those of David Malouf in *Eternal City:*

Always coming here
is like coming back home[34]

Nicholas Jose has suggested that it is this desire or necessity to mend some "lost primordial link" that contibutes to the attraction and importance of Italy for Australian writers perpetually in exile.[35] And beyond the Australian specificity lie all the myths of expulsion and return, the journeying of the people of Israel, Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, the wanderings of Ulysses, the return to the Golden Age, to Eden, to Ithaka, to the womb, to the union of animus and anima.

Defining themselves as exiles, as denizens of the margins of European civilisation, writers who find images in Italy also portray Australians as latecomers to the civilised world. Thus David Malouf begins his poem, *Among the Ruins.*

A late arrival on the scene, I stood in
'59 in the shadow of Titus.[36]

In more prolix language, journalist, traveller and writer Nina Murdoch expressed the same feelings in the 1930s on entering the Vatican museums.

> From then on, I remember only the feeling of being magnificently winged, of treading the air, of making contact at last with the things that really mattered... Any European, any Asiastic even, has grown up within the sight of architecture, tapestries, jewellery, sculpture, paintings, pottery created by the hand of genius before the Industrial Era and the Age of Speed had banished beauty from everyday life. But we here, what have we, who were born too late to share the heritage of older worlds. We must go abroad if we have a lust for beauty.[37]

32. Malouf, 241.
33. Quoted in Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile. Peter Porter and his Poetry,* (Melbourne: 1991), 167.
34. *First Things Last. Poems by David Malouf,* (St Lucia: 1980), 30.
35. Nicholas Jose, "Nuovo Mondo", *Age Monthly Review,* April 1982.
36. David Malouf, "Among the Ruins", *First Things Last,* 30-31.
37. Nina Murdoch, *Seventh Heaven,* (Sydney: 1930), 66.

Murdoch's elaboration of her feelings also belongs to the narrative of modern travel as a flight from modernity, a story line which in more subtle fashion informs the writing of so many travellers in the Mediterranean.

Brian Kiernan has suggested that what links and distinguishes much of Australian literature is a shared awareness of the failure of white Australians to create, develop or realise relationships between society and nature.[38] And Australian writing on Italy often revolves around the interplay of alienation and belonging. As aliens in their own land, white Australians live awkwardly — uneasily — in a place that they have conquered but not possessed. Italy, in contrast, is identified with belonging and thus has surrogate value for the people from nowhere. What Australians have constructed in Italy is the image of a place where millennia of human occupation have created a harmony between civilization and nature. This is a constant theme in the writing of traveller and travel writer Shirley Deane who lived in Italy in the 1950s.

> Here, in southern Italy, the landscape is grand and vast, with its rocky crags, ravines and precipices, but on all sides traces of the hand of man are visible. For hundreds of years man has struggled with it, and conquered it. His handiwork is everywhere — every rocky crag, every pocket of earth, has its terraces of vines or olive trees, stretching wherever the eye can see into incredible, improbable places. By sheer length of centuries and weight of toil man has triumphed here, so one is at ease in the midst of grandeur. The landscape is humanized — not alien and untouched. Between man and the land there is mutual recognition and respect. Here, one is welcomed by the land as well as by the people.[39]

David Martin wrote of the Tuscany in which he lived for a time:

> This is a wine growing region that has been closely cultivated for more than a thousand years, so that every bridge and gate leads to some memorial of man's energy and imagination.[40]

This same theme also informs the Tuscany of poet Peter Porter.

> Here man is the measure of beauty, and here, despite despotism and, of recent years, reaching for easy commercial success, people and landscapes remain in agreement. In Australia, we have hope, Protestant mercantile optimism, and the despair which comes from fighting Nature and losing. In Tuscany a peculiar truce still remains.[41]

What the Australian writers ultimately appear to find in Italy is a people who are at home in their place, who have lived in harmony with the land from generation to generation and who thus belong. For David Malouf who spends part of each year in the village of Campagnatico in Tuscany, the daily age-old rituals of Italian rural life

38. Brian Kiernan, *Images of Society and Nature: Seven Essays on Australian Novels.* (Melbourne: 1981), 180-181.
39. Shirley Deane, *Rocks and Olives*, 13. See also Shirley Deane, *Expectant Mariner*, (London: 1975), 104.
40. David Martin, "To Ceylon", *Festival and Other Stories*, ed. Brian Buckley and Jim Hamilton, (Melbourne: 1974), 101-106.
41. Quoted in Bennett, 168-169.

provide a sacramental existence. Thus the terrorist narrator in his Italian novel, *Child's Play*, visits his father on his farm:

> He is a believer in deep continuities, my father, in the shaping influence of scenes and objects on the inner life; these, and the seasonal routines of the farm. To draw me back into them occasionally, into the rituals of my earliest childhood, is he feels to re-inforce for me the clear line of my movement through space and time, even if it has been a movement away.
>
> I am not so sure. But the place itself, and the slow pace of our lives there, in which even our walking is determined by the slope of a field or the roughness of a path on which rain has exposed all the original rocks, the dependence of our diet on the capacity of the land itself to produce in its various seasons this crop, that vegetable — broadbeans, runner-beans, artichokes, tomatoes, zucchini — imposes its own pattern, and releases us, since it is the pattern of an earlier existence, from what is merely "modern". Or seems to.[42]

What the denizens of Italy enjoy is the consolation of time and history. Poet Rob Johnson encapsulates the same sense in his poem *A Trip to St Peter's* centred on the 64 bus route across Rome. He feels himself to be a dilettante experiencing for the moment what the people around him "have always in their mouths", "the flow beneath history". What time and long history offered from the point of view of newcomers both in their own land and to civilization was the gift of endurance. In J.A.R. MacKellar's 1931 poem *Oxford Street Five Ways*, set in Sydney, a glimpse of an Italian boy riding in a cart sets him musing about the boy's remote ancestors, the Sabines and the sights that their descendents have seen. The outcome of his musing was consolation.

> And thus, I thought, when my sick grief is done,
> Another's glance will meet him in the sun,
> Returning home from market; then will rise
> A Latin mist before another's eyes,
> Shrouding the present with a veil of years,
> Heavy with sadness, too remote for tears.
> Another then will weigh his present pain
> Beside the fall of Rome, and breathe again,
> Strangely content to be with things that pass,
> Suns into shadow, fevered flesh to grass.[43]

The pastoral image of an Italy of harmony and serenity sits uneasily with the modern Italy of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation, of appalling slum housing on the outskirts of the cities, of nasty get rich quick coastal development. The protagonist in Jessica Anderson's novel *The Impersonators*, was overwhelmed by her encounter with Italy.

42. David Malouf, *Child's Play*, (London: 1982), 68-69.
43. J.A. R. MacKellar, *Twenty Six*, (Sydney: 1931), 65.

> In Rome she was too impressed to speak. She could only shake her head. She almost cried. She had read about, yet she had not expected, the impact of all those visible layers of history.[44]

Eventually planning to live in Rome, she makes a return visit to Australia where she is reminded that Europe — Italy — has its concrete, its suburbia, its discontinuities. She agrees, but — "there you do have the consolation of the old". This connection with time immemorial and hence with eternity haunts even the most contemporary of Australian images of Italy.

> A jet of petrol
> from a plastic can
> to an empty tank
> held in the teeming street
> by a man
> with a live cigarette
> balanced between
> ancient lips.[45]

44. Jessica Anderson, *The Impersonators*, (Melbourne: 1980), 222.
45. Helen Carmichael, "Naples", *Quadrant*, July-August 1990, 11.

PHILIP SALOM

Last night, not unusually, was hot and still and me a bit snoozy from the poor sleep the night before — and as I was preparing to go to bed, there came these odd explosions which jolted the building, which is not good bedtime shuffle and story! It were fireworks. Marking some ritual I don't know of, blasting away at midnight in most spectacular display. I could see everything from my east windows — brilliant bursts of blue green fire with reds, oranges and highly unusual streaking angles, the most impressive light discharge I've seen for a long time, and this weird delay with sound, the bang hitting the apartments several seconds after the colour burst. I stayed up, wishing you could have seen it. What wonderful... I want to be the fireworks for you, I want to explode in you, to trail lights down through you, flame like fireworlds in every atom of you. The sky was the body with meridians flashing, nerve-beats and ganglia — or considering our distance apart, and Rome being Rome, stuffed with traffic since Juvenal's day — then a sky full of traffic jam, brake lights and traffic lights, nerves collapsing. In an odd way it has reminded me of Oliver Sacks' comments about the care and cure of patients

THE WARM AQUARIUM

Holidays and half the steel roller doors

are rattled down to ward off summer.

Shop windows are the warm aquarium

of wine and olive oil, finger-thick shells

of ravioli, tortellini and heavy on the shelves

the fat brown bells of new prosciutto.

The shoplight at evening on the pavement

like a sheet of pasta or the white apron

Rico wears when he stands for gossip

at the waterfront of his tabacchi,

his one customer wet-eyed behind lank hair

sits like the afternoon reducing under drinks

some essential level essential no more

as she stands and walks with a lean one

metre from the wall, the gale invisible she

everyday is nearly blown over by.

Rico smiles but who believes him, when

he says it will rain on the twenty ninth?

with
disruption: the
most needed,
success, are those
doctors so easily
no faith in, namely
art, music, the
community and
Hardly surprising
makes him
perhaps obvious, is
the case-studies so
field into fleshed
character and
no mere (awful)
things with facts as
power and the
force therefore.
the user. But who

He breathes out, breathes in. And stares.

I sweat in the air like wax. And think

odd mental pranks: everyone under 30,

over 50, begins to look the same; cultural

imperatives are the scooter not the petrol;

the heart is used up by its isolation...

Like a beachfront pavilion in mid-winter.

Summer. *Chiuso per Ferie* on every door.

neurological
treatments often
most crucial for
same old things
forget, or have
loving attention,
sense of
belonging.
really, but what
different, if
his desire to turn
often used in his
out narratives,
situation pieces,
cold and thin
the dominant
dehumanising
The text leads
wants to follow

out into the cold written there. The world has its own silence and odd way of alienating any of us, but when sick, off-centre, fancy the bends come of clinical decompression. The places we find ourselves in.

PHILIP SALOM

Changes

When I left, the news was all corruption,
with mafioso nuovo: government and big business.
The atmosphere won't rinse. Daily now I think
of Perth with all its blue light calm and gung ho
crimes, and the Asian summer air of Sydney...
as sundown thickens smog in Classic Rome.

The city moves me like strings and drums,
all night the inner drum is brash and drives
up di Trastevere with tricks for tourist cash,
searches for a deal not yet done on Rome's
black market. And any deal worth doing's
waiting to be done, someone will invent it
under bureaucrats who keep the word corrupt
hugged close: veni vedi vici: vendi vendi...

Ambulances beat like circus instruments:
loud and brassy, overdone but on and on
the illness scary and the danger somehow
in burlesque, which makes it all the worse...
Old people cross themselves, and curse.
All day the Polizia, the trains, the trams,
and from apartments the crazy locked-up dogs
that rarely find the streets, howl like Goths
returning. Evening pinks to the whine of buses.

I see swallows drop like loneliness
down the pit of the stomach, in the distance
rise in tiny strings against the light. This smoky,
pale light. Italian light, pink as the sides
of apartments, pink as flamingos made of concrete.
Days, nights: are drum rolled between dreamers,
the rhythm-taking changes, tumbling the old self
by surfaces, while the nervous system counts

by ones... It takes accumulated change
to know inside you what is constant. Knowing
accumulation, noise, I stay watching where
language keeps me thin, and these six months
away from her attempt an old corruption.
The trouble's all my own. Like drumming I
feel the syncopation of her absence in the air.
Flats have chimney stacks, rigging-like antennae.
The nights sail on, silently, above the streets.

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GAETANO RANDO

The Bush and the Outback Through Italian Eyes

Most Italians who came to Australia after 1947 ultimately settled in urban areas. Among the very few who have written creatively about their experiences even fewer have displayed interest in themes related to the bush and the outback. However five narrative writers — Giovanni Andreoni, Giuseppe Abiuso, Emilio Gabbrielli, Ennio Monese and Franko Leoni — have written about non-urban Australia.

Giovanni Andreoni's novel *Martin Pescatore* [1][King Fisher] is the story of a young middle-class Italian bank employee who, tired of the restricting and claustrophobic aspects of life in Italy, emigrates to Australia in search of a new and liberating experience, finding an existentialist *raison d'être* in a spiritual relationship with the Australian bush, a Rousseau-like idealisation which is also found in Raffaello Carboni's Italian works.[2]

Anna Fochi claims that in the first part of the novel, set mainly in Rome, the urban background produces a sense of incommunicability, alienation and schizophrenia. I would suggest rather than schizophrenia a strong sense of claustrophobia. Martin feels "shut in" by a routine existence limited by life at home with his younger sister and widowed mother, his secure but humdrum and subservient job at the bank, the occasional outings with friends, and is often driven to drink in an attempt to blot out his anguish. Although Martin has all the attributes necessary for success he feels that his is an unsatisfying and frustrating life and that he is unable to form any real relationships. His only meaningful relationship has been with his father, a "strong" and "real" man who used to take him hunting. In a manner vaguely reminiscent of Ayn Rand's characters, Martin argues that European social conventions stifle the individual, making it impossible to establish a direct rapport with nature. He longs for a new country where "the life of a man depends on his ability to conquer

1. Giovanni Andreoni, *Martin Pescatore,* (Milan: Ippocampo, 1967). Andreoni is also one of the few Italian Australian writers to be included in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature* which emphasises how in Martin Pescatore (erroneously translated as "Martin Fisherman") the West Australian outback has made a "considerable impact on the protagonist's literary development" (26-27).
2. Gaetano Rando, "L'esperienza australiana di Raffaello Carbini" in Romano Ugolini, ed., *Italia-Australia 1788-1988 Atti del Convegno di Studio (Roma, Castel S. Angelo, 23-27 maggio 1988* (Roma: Edizioni dell-Ateneo, 1991), 59-79, 75-77; see Raffaello Carboni, *Gilburnia Pantomima in otto quadri con prologo e morale per gran ballo antartico,* translated and annotated by Tony Pagliaro, (Dalesford: Jim Crow Press, 1993); see also his *The Eureka Stockade The Consequence of some Pirates wanting on Quarterdeck a Rebellion* (Melbourne: J.P. Atkinson & Co., 1855).

the whims of nature"[3] and, despite the dismay and disbelief of family and friends, decides to emigrate to Australia.

Upon arrival in Melbourne the distance which separates him from his mother, the mundane concern with his economic future and the realisation that Melbourne, too, is an imprisoning city give rise to feelings of fear and isolation. He moves to Tasmania, "a beautiful but somewhat savage isle"(95), and it is there that Martin comes into contact with the bush. He joins a group of logging contractors in a life of hard living and dangerous work, driving large laden trucks along steep and narrow forest tracks. The solidarity necessary for survival imposes an unwritten law that no one should drive in such a manner as to endanger the others. A tall strong Polish driver continually transgresses the law and the others wreck his truck and give him a beating, much to Martin's consternation and dismay at the ruthlessness and determination of his fellow workers. At the end of the season he leaves and takes up a more bourgeois type of employment as a language teacher at the Christian Brothers College, Prospect.

While the relationship between man in his social context (the group of workers) and nature is seen in terms of man's struggle to survive in a hostile environment, the rapport between the individual (Martin) and nature is presented in quite different terms. In rejecting the pioneers' elemental code Martin rejects the conflictual confrontation with nature. His search for a meaningful rapport with nature, which is also seen as an element crucial to the eventual resolution of Martin's questioning of the meaning of life, takes a different direction. Fochi claims that the only example of description in the novel is to be found in the passage about Whitmore Wood.[4] However, in the "European" chapters there are very brief, impressionistic descriptions and, after Martin's arrival in Australia, there are further impressionistic descriptions of the Australian setting — for example, the description of Launceston (93), Martin's reflections on contemplating the green hills and the sea (99) and that of the forest as a living entity in which a primeval and continual struggle for survival takes place (102).

Whitmore (128-129), however, is certainly the longest and one of the very few naturalistic descriptions in the novel. It marks the beginning of Martin's personal rapport with nature. He sees the bush for the first time with "European" eyes, but it is also a place cut off from the outside world, a place of proving and initiation. It is here, after six months of weekend effort, that Martin proves himself by killing the big black rabbit whose cunning had defeated all the other hunters. This "victory" marks Martin's entry into the primeval natural cycle while the weekend hunting forays are in contrast to the weekday world and his society-oriented work as a teacher. At the end of the school year Martin decides to visit the West Australian desert rather than go back to Europe to see family and friends.

In some of the briefer descriptions of the bush there is an interaction between the setting and the protagonist who becomes part of nature. This occurs after Martin begins to delve into Aboriginal culture by reading their myths. The first one is read when Martin begins work with the loggers. Maira the wind is angered by his friend Bibba's request that he see his face and turns into a storm, causing Bibba to seek refuge in a hole in the ground and become a sand mouse. The story both parallels

3. Andreoni, *Martin Pescatore*, 69. All passages translated from the Italian.
4. Fochi, 46.

and contrasts with the following episode, which describes the punishment meted out to the Polish truck driver. Martin's reaction to the violence is to seek a mystical union with nature, thus isolating himself from man and society. Perhaps it is an attempt by Andreoni to conceptualise the Aboriginal Dreamtime. Certainly there is a timeless quality about the relationship with the bush, time and wind being the all-powerful elements which paradoxically create and destroy in a natural pattern which is both eternal and cyclic. Humans in their intellectual and social development have shifted from living nature into a non-life, and it is only by going back to the bush that he can find renewal.

The theme of the bush and the outback is also central to Andreoni's short stories.[5] This collection, together with *Cenere*, is the subject of a brief but interesting paper by Helen Andreoni,[6] which argues that in giving literary expression to the experience of the Italian immigrant in Australia Andreoni presents the complexities of the Italian-Australian community and in effect counteracts Australian-perceived stereotypes of the Italian immigrant, an element which is also found in other Italian Australian writers. The paper, however, does not point out that Andreoni substantially deals with the experience of the Italian immigrant in the rural setting.

With respect to *Martin Pescatore* the concept of the bush appears to be different. The brief but poetical story "Australia"[7] explores a changed metaphysical relationship with the bush and the desert, alien places which refuse to reveal the secrets of their vast emptiness to the immigrant. They reject him yet paradoxically hold him prisoner, thwarting his thoughts of return to his native land. Gone is the mystical communion, the oneness with nature, the bush as a place to learn to love, to regain one's humanity.[8] At a societal level the bush is a place where man reverts to his primeval bestiality, as in "Jimmy Smith"[9], which relates the hunting and wanton shooting of a suspected murderer (probably Aboriginal) by the good white people of a small country town. The bush also contains insidious dangers for those who work in it and is a place of struggle for survival both against nature and against men who transgress the solidarity of their fellows. Its delicate ecosystem has been destroyed by the white man in the extraction of mineral and other riches, leaving in his wake rotting carcasses, flies, stench, and dispossessed Aborigines.[10]

The bush can also be the last bastion of Australian conservatism where class distinctions are quite marked. No subscriber to the Australian myth of egalitarianism, Andreoni presents the New England graziers in "La giornataccia di Montefiore" [A Hard Day for Montefiore][11] as jealous guardians of privilege and tradition who exclude all those outside their caste, especially if they are of non-Anglo-Saxon origin. Consequently Italian farmers are relegated to the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, engaging in backbreaking work for very little material or spiritual satisfaction.[12] In *Cenere* this theme is developed through the argument that it is the

5. Giovanni Andreoni, *La Lingua degli Italiani d'Australia e altri racconti*, (Rome: Il Veltro Editrice, 1978).
6. Helen Andreoni, "From Giovanni to Gio: Fighting the Stereotype" in Millicent E. Poole et al, eds., *Australia in Transition: culture and life possibilities* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 168-170.
7. Andreoni, *La Lingua degli Italiani d'Australia e altri racconti*, 66-68.
8. These aspects, however, are retained in Andreoni's poetic writings and a symbiosis between the bush mystique, the hunt and native culture is presented in one of the short stories in the collection, "Totara", which, however, is set in New Zealand.
9. Andreoni, *La Lingua*, 15-23.
10. See "Australian Felix", Andreoni, *La Lingua degli Italini d'Australia e altri racconti*, 69-76.
11. Andreoni, *La Lingua*, 50-57.
12. See "La Farma" and "Tabacco", Andreoni, *La Lingua* 28-33, 82-90.

dominant economic and political system which exploits the immigrant farmer, thus shattering the expectations which have caused him to leave his native land.

Although Giuseppe Abiuso's main interest as a creative writer lies in community and socially related themes, the bush and the outback are featured in some of his works. The short fiction "Diary of an Italian Australian School Boy"[13] concludes with central character Mario Carlesani planning to drop out of Fitzroy state secondary school and to go to look for work in the Northern Territory, the last genuine Australian frontier where he will join class mate Geoffrey's big brother in the top end's "silent nights all surrounded by those white ghost gums".[14] Mario chooses this method of continuing his investigation of the Australian spirit, a search both initiated and inspired by his sometimes Paul Hogan-like reflections on the nature of being Australian:

> The real Australians are those blokes who hide in the big bush country waiting in the sweltering heat for a bushfire to start so they can put it out in a couple of minutes. The real Australians sit near the Murrumbidgee, killing a few blow flies, waiting for the river to flood, so they can put up banks of sugar bags full of sand, and control the flood and save all the crops of the man on the land.[15]

And the migrant man on the land is the subject of Abiuso's play *L'Amaro della canna* [Bitter Cane] set in the North Queensland cane fields, which depicts the cane cutters' and the farmers' struggle against nature as well as the economic struggle among the various interests in the sugar industry.

Three brief short stories, "Cuore d'Australia"[16], relate the experiences of Giovanni Binetti, Merv and Michael (white Australians) and Jack (an old Aboriginal chief) in the Northern Territory, a place known to few Italian immigrants but which the title itself suggests is the "true heart" of Australia. In this Abiuso seems to pick up where the *Diary* left off, although the characters and the situation are quite different. The men are partners in the illegal supply of opium to the Aborigines of Alice Springs and of Aboriginal women to the white miners east of Alice Springs. However when Michael beats Bombah, Jack's cousin, causing his death, Jack feels called by the ancestral spirits of the Arunta to defend the honour of his tribe and raise it from the degradation caused by the white men. He stalks the other three in the black of the night but since he has only two spears he has to make a choice and kills Michael and Merv. Giovanni is spared because he can speak the Aborigines' language, and has accompanied Jack on walkabout in the MacDonnell ranges. In fact while Merv loathes the Territory and the Aborigines and Michael is there only for the money, Giovanni has developed a rapport with the land. His dual Italian-Australian nature, a sort of split personality, is in a sense placated by the vast emptiness of the outback to the point that he may never be able to go back to live in the southern cities.

A first person account of a strange, mysterious and threatening experience in the

13. Joe Abiuso, "Diary of an Italian Australian School Boy" in *The Male Model and Other Stories* (Adelaide: Dezsery Ethnic Publications, 1984), 100-160.
14. Abiuso, *The Male Model*, 160.
15. Abiuso, *The Male Model*, 128.
16. G.L. Abinso, M. Giglio and V. Borghese, eds., *Voci nostre antologia italo-australiana di novelle, commedie, poesie e ricordi, scritta da emigrati italo-australiana*, (Melbourne: Tusculum, 1979).

outback is narrated in a short story by Emilio Gabbrielli "Incident at Ayers Rock".[17] Rosa B., the Australian-born daughter of Italian immigrants who works as a secretary with a Melbourne engineering firm, goes on a first time visit to Uluru. Fatigue and heat are already taking their toll when during the journey from Alice Springs the driver decides to pick up an odd-looking, malodorous and taciturn hitchhiker who appears in the middle of the desert and sits in the seat next to Rosa, much to her chagrin. The next day, when Rosa climbs the rock, the heat, her tiredness, the effort and tension of climbing up the slippery surface of the monolith, cause her to sit and rest for over an hour at the top in a state of drowsiness. There, as if in a dream, she sees the strange hitchhiker slowly pass by her, suddenly lose his footing and catapult out into space. She descends the Rock in a state of hysteria, and tells the others. Yet although they search at the base of the rock where the stranger should have fallen, there is no trace of him. The others think Rosa may have experienced an hallucination caused by the intense heat and Rosa herself is unsure whether what she thought she saw really happened, but as the months go by these thoughts become obsessive and lead to recurrent nightmares for which she decides to seek psychiatric help.

Somewhat reminiscent of Joan Lindsay's *Picnic at Hanging Rock*,[18] the story is a minutely related account of the protagonist's ambiguous relationship to the alien environment of the outback. For the majority of immigrants and their children Australia is the cities of the coastal areas. They have little or no knowledge of the interior, apart from knowing that it exists, and no interest in its environment. More than on description Gabbrielli concentrates on the protagonist's physical and psychological reactions to her outback experience. Rosa's adventure gets off to a bad start because of the fatigue, the heat and the appearance of the mysterious yet repugnant stranger, a symbol of the wanderer in the outback. Her most intense and positive appreciation of the environment occurs in the few passages where she is able to view the monolith and the surrounding landscape alone. Whereas her admiration of Mt Connor, viewed while travelling in the minibus, is a matter of few words, her contemplation of the colour and majesty of Uluru at dawn, seen so many times in photographs and postcards yet so unexpectedly different in its reality, is a more intense experience. Uluru produces mixed feelings in the protagonist: awe and a sense of magic at its colour and majesty, at the complex processes of nature which have constructed the monolith, at its delicate ecosystem. The presence of man, represented by the ramshackle motel and the tourist complex under construction, is felt to be a profane element. However, the Rock also generates feelings of fear and apprehension, of some hidden and unspecified menace in the vast surrounding emptiness, the steep climb and its smooth slippery surface with the ever-present threat of sending the unwary tourist hurtling to his death.[19] It is these latter feelings which become predominant, and is an implication that the hitchhiker's fall is in part willed by the protagonist, because of her hatred for the stranger, a "dreaming" which is made to happen through the magical aura which pervades the area. The resultant effect is Rosa's rejection of Uluru and hence the outback.

17. Gaetano Rando, *Italo-Australian Prose in the 80's* (Dept. of Languages: University of Wollongong, 1988), 196-210.
18. However in the preface Gabbrielli suggests that there are parallels with Camus' *L'Etranger* and Pasolini's *Teorema* as well.
19. This sense of the city dweller who feels threatened by the vast majestic grandeur of the bush and the outback is also found in contemporary Anglo-Australian writing. See, for example, Michael Wilding, "I am Monarch of All I Survey", in Don Anderson, ed., *Transgressions: Australian Writing Now*, (Ringwood, Penguin, 1986), 157-164.

Although most Italian immigrants have settled in urban areas and consequently have had no direct experience of the bush or the desert, many, at least initially, were employed in farming and construction projects in the country and sometimes in remote areas. Even those who settled immediately in urban areas had a fleeting contact with the bush during their stay at Bonegilla in the first months after arrival. When immigrants speak about their experiences at Bonegilla they invariably mention (as well as the terrible food) the bleakness and desolation of this God-forsaken place near Albury-Wodonga.

Bonegilla and the surrounding countryside provide the setting for Ennio Monese's short story "Essere Australiano" [To Be Australian][20] which relates the experiences of a group of seven young men who have been in Australia for a month. Desperate to get out of the camp and start earning money they decide to consider a proposal by Mr Lockward, a local landowner of German origin who wants them to clear forest land in order to cultivate tomatoes. The view from Bonegilla is, however, certainly not one to encourage optimism for what lies ahead, and they reject his proposal when Lockward takes the group to look at the land, since the atmosphere in the bush is dank and menacing with signs of an approaching storm, certainly different from the type of bush they were used to back in Italy.

Only one member of the group, Giacomo, has a further experience in the bush. When he is punched and insulted by a "typical" country town ocker at Wodonga he is helped by the Aboriginal, Tolo, who takes him back to the Lockward property where he is living temporarily in a makeshift hut. While nature vents its fury over the head of the injured Giacomo who has already been soaked by the rain, the two men get to know each other. Tolo is a nomadic hunter who retains a meaningful relationship with the bush. He seems to have formed a constructive cultural compromise between a traditional Aboriginal life, and the presence of the white man. However, Giacomo seems to learn nothing from the experience, since when Tolo asks him why he came to Australia and whether he likes the country Giacomo's reply, "one comes to Australia . . . to find one's humanity",[21] vaguely reminiscent of Andreoni's Martin Pescatore, makes Tolo smile.

Judging by the conclusion "Essere Australiano" seems to consist of a choice between Melbourne or the bush, with an unequivocal preference for the former, a conclusion which is diametrically opposed to that of Andreoni. Most of the characters vote with their feet by departing immediately for Melbourne, and Bebe's suicide provides a tragic ending for one of the group. Unlike Anderson and Abiuso, there is in Monese no admiration for Australian nature, which is described solely through European referents.

A more positive conclusion, for Australia if not for the protagonist, is presented in Franco Leoni's "La memorabile biografia di Carlo di Priamo, vignaio da Poggibonsi" [The memorable biography of Carlo di Priamo, wine maker from Poggibonsi].[22] It is a whimsical and well told tale of an Italian revolutionary who, during a clandestine visit to London, falls foul of British law and is transported to Australia in 1842. During the voyage out he is befriended by a Dr Lindeman and is consequently assigned to the good doctor on arrival to the colony. The two settle on a farm

20. Abiuso et.al., *Voci nostre antologia*, 156-167.
21. Abiuso et.al., 166.
22. Gaetano Rando, *Italian Writers in Australia: essays and texts*, (Dept. of European Languages: University of Wollongong, 1983), 232-238.

in the Hunter valley and Carlo decides to make an Australian chianti. He eventually gives the doctor the recipe for making the wine and leaves him to enjoy the financial benefits, settling in Botany Bay. The story presents the theme of Italian farming success in Australia although it does constitute a departure from historical reality since German immigrants, not Italians were the founders of the Australian wine industry.

As the Brisbane-Sydney express slowly traverses the Hunter Valley, a stranger (obviously Italian) enters the compartment and tells the story to the bored and heat-stricken passengers, offering them a drink of cool Lindemans white wine. The initial part of the story describes quite graphically the heat and the deafening chorus of the cicadas. As in Gabbrielli's story the heat provides a blurring of the distinction between reality and fantasy and it is in this atmosphere that the mysterious stranger begins to tell his story, overcoming even the resistance of one of the passengers, a truck driver, who is convinced that the contribution of Italian immigrants to the development of Australia is insignificant. When he finishes the stranger leaves as abruptly as he had come but this interlude has brought about a change in that the passengers are able to view the countryside through which the train is passing with a new and deeper meaning.

By comparison with the works written by Italian immigrants to Australia already discussed, the outback is presented as a key element of a universal order in the narrative of Stanislao Nievo, one of Italy's leading contemporary narrative writers and the only one to have dealt with these themes.[23]

In the short story *Il tempo del sogno* [Dreamtime],[24] the protagonist, Santino, a Sicilian who has emigrated to Western Australia and was taught to converse with volcanos by his Aboriginal wife, undertakes a journey to the Bungle Bungle hills in the Kimberley desert which constitute a contact point with the world beyond the material one. The purpose of the journey is to contact his recently dead wife, Wandina, with the help of Kuneg Oondon, a friend who speaks with the dead and has promised to be his interpreter. Nievo concentrates less on physical description than on the magic nature of the place and its people, since they provide a key to one of the great mysteries of life and a connecting link with worlds beyond apparent reality. The Aborigines are a people without volcanos, but they come from that time, they read the wind, write with sand, listen to the mountains, they fit in everywhere since they have kept in touch with the earth. The Bungle Bungle hills have the ability to travel over the ground, propelled by a magnetic force that moves them all together on a surface no one has ever seen. These unique properties make them ambassadors of the Dreamtime, a place of origin for some creatures where men and nature speak to each other. Through their fascinating hypnotic dance the hills tell Santino that he is to travel to Mt Etna in Sicily where he will be able to meet Wandina once more.

The outback thus provides a vital link in Santino's quest for communication with

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23. Italian fiction works set in Australia have been few and far between: *Il Continente misterioso* (1903) by Emilio Salgari is a Kipling-like adventure yarn about three white men who bravely conquer the dangers of the Australian outback, complete with hostile natives, in the successful accomplishment of a mission; *In Australia con mio nonno* (1947) by Luigi Santucci is a fanciful tale of the strange animals and even stranger cannibals who inhabit the Australian jungle; Filippo Sacchi's *La Casa in Oceania* (1932) is a story of Italian immigrants in the North Queensland sugar belt and presents some striking descriptions of the environment. Of these three writers only Sacchi had actually visited Australia.
24. Stanislao Nievo, "Dreamtime" [trans. from the Italian by Gaetano Rando] in Manfred Jurgensen, ed., *Riding: Out New Writing from Around the World*, (Brisbane: Outrider/Phoenix Publications, 1994), 403-420.

his dead wife which is also a quest for an ideal state where barriers do not exist and all beings can talk freely to each other. It is the hypothesis of a utopian state related to a post-scientific context and achieved not by technical means but through the warm flux that pulses in the heart of all creation. Even the Bungle Bungle hills in the Australian desert and Mt Etna, the Italian volcano have this ability since "beyond the . . . geological data something more alive, something bigger and more important, exalted him. It was to do with the childhood of the world, a time common to all creatures when men, animals and things talked to each other, whispering in secret moments to those who listen".[25]

The Northern New South Wales bush provides the setting for some of the chapters of *Le Isole del paradiso* [Islands of Paradise].[26] The first part of the novel is set in Melanesia in the 1880s and relates the ill-fated attempt to found the colony of Nouvelle France at Port Breton in New Ireland which brought to Australia the immigrants who were to found the rural settlement of New Italy in 1882. Although only a few chapters are set in this country, Australia is an important element in the novel since it is the Australian bush which provides the immigrants with a second chance, allowing them to achieve their dream which was that of establishing farms of their own and enabling them to shake off that state of dissatisfaction which had led them to leave their native land in an attempt to seek elsewhere the resolution to the questions of life and destiny.

Nievo's postmodern vision of the Australian bush and outback as a place of spiritual discovery and renewal is unique among Italian writers although some parallels can be found in Andreoni. Abiuso, on the other hand, considers the bush and the outback as deposit of Australianness and it is there that the immigrant must direct his search for a sense of belonging to the new land. For Gabbrielli and Monese the bush and outback are places which instil fear in the individual, leading him or her to seek refuge in the urban environment. Leoni's fanciful story of the founding of the Australian wine industry is the only one to parallel the real life experience of Italian farming success in Australia (in places such as North Queensland and the Riverina) which have constituted a highly visible aspect of the history of Italian immigration to this country. Despite these examples, few Italian-Australian writers have written about the bush and the outback. Perhaps this is due to the lack of direct experience most writers have had with this environment or perhaps because they do not consider such material worthy of the narrative art.

25. Nievo, "Dreamtime", 406.
26. Stanislao Nievo, *Le Isole del paradiso*, (Milan: Mondadori, 1987).

FAY ZWICKY

Letter from Claudia in the Midi

I used to shoot in Kenya.
You'd never think I started life as Muriel,
forty head a day, a hundred cartridges:

zebra, wildebeest, marabou,
jackal, wild boar, leopard,
the largest birds alive.

I know you don't approve,
stuck in that boring place,
all that sand and miles of sky,

missing your indifferent kids.
Still writing poems are you,
way above my head?

You were a weirdo back in school,
your nose forever in a book. You tried
to ape my nerve but even when you jumped

the moving tram, fell off. You didn't
even wince at those trite Colombian candlesticks
I sent you when you married.

Or the witchy card, "Congratulations!
It's a Baby!" on your first. We can't
all make the team.

The blackbird's song's seductive
and my voice has dropped an octave,
Gérard says. "*Tu deviens homme.*

I'm off to Paris for a week."
"Get lost!" I say. My handyman
takes pot-shots at the olive trees.

His sons are savages and want their lunch.
I scream abuse and burn their traps
laid near the kitchen tiles.

The cats are watching me. Gérard's
a swine. Mushrooms sprout around the oaks,
those little yellow flutes push up

the moist dark soil, pink hoods are rising
under the umbrella pines. There's singing
from the valley, the yearly fête, and

open trucks piled high with glistening grapes
are trundling past. The countryside is rank
with harvest's sweet sour smell.

I drive to Grimaud every day, car open
to the wind and pass Alain the handyman
rearing like Ben Hur behind his truck wheel

"Ça va?" he shouts, "Ça va?"
and I shout back, my deep cracked voice
vanishing in the wind.

Neither of us cares. Sometimes I drive
to Beauvallon, a sickle-shaped white beach,
cool off in water swept clean by Mistral,

small yachts offshore, sails billowing
down in slats. I'm hardly visible these days
in 50's bathing gear. If some hulk's eyes

hover round my way, they settle on some
plumpish *poule* or anorexic pout left over
from the tourist season, topless on the sand.

Pig-tailed blond, piquant brunette,
not here to swim. The passing men will turn
and smile, even with wives in tow.

Midday, and they all clear off. What bliss
to be alone with all one's ugly thoughts:
how old and despicable one has become

compared with Françoise, Éliane, or Rosie
(Gérard's latest). Beach-bored I wander
barefoot to the car, relieved my hair has

bleached without peroxide even if the poor
old skin has lost its sheen, no longer golden,
with a pouch or two. But you're above

such things, writing your life away
under that clear blue sky. I like your letters
better than yourself. You say you welcome mine.

We both have tigers in the blood. I shoot
at mine and miss while you put yours to sleep.
Death's toughening, softening us for dust;

you shocked by me and I laid waste by you
is kid stuff to his watchfulness, the biggest
tiger of them all. Back home, the table's laid.

Pain de campagne, butter, great hunks of Gruyère,
tomatoes straight out of the garden. I'll start on
Château Neuf du Pape 1964, the year they tied my tubes.

How delicious it will taste when drunk alone.
Write soon. Can't promise to reply but then
I never could keep promises.

Your ever-unreliable
and charming friend

Claudia

HAL COLEBATCH

Galilee Guesthouse

Coffee and leather armchairs, candlelit,
card-playing in corners, glassware, jumping flames
in open fireplaces. Drinks to hand we sit
watching the beards and spectacles at games.

Mount Carmel wine. The candlelight
in gold and silver points on polished glasses.
Wall ornaments, china, tableware
the keepers of the passes.

Comfort. Mozart somewhere. A warm room
in a pleasant club-land scene.
The candle-flame jumps before the faces
of the card-players dressed in green.

A click of cards, a murmuring of voices,
a certain heightened feeling in this place.
Cold wind outside. Here, well warmed and tended,
we watch each player's face.

A snowy wind from hills of stone and mud.
We chatter with liqueurs, lingering thereon.
The candles flicker to the distant thud
of guns in Lebanon.

No ambiguities, no ounce of doubt
in this Now at least, this moment pinned.
Gold and silver bubbles, thin bands of steel
with candles in the wind.

GRAEME HETHERINGTON

Van Diemen's Land Remembered in Crete

(1)

Emerging from the dunes the queers
Flash cocks at men who walk alone.
Why not, I wonder, on my way,
Bored stiff and womanless for months,
To swim among and perv upon

The inaccessible Greek girls
And topless tourists round the bay,
Have random, casual sex and get
The dirty water off my chest?
No need can rout my fear of men

Descended from Hell's Gate's old lags
With threepence in one hand and string
Fluttering undone from their flies,
Their whiskered wet red drunkards' mouths,
My father calling the police.

(2)

Assembled on a playing field
We looked into the morning sun
While 'Slide', the Head, a rowing man,
Said crabs were caught from toilet seats,

That masturbation sent you blind
And shamed your mother's holy name.
Through half-shut eyes the whole school watched
His injured, stiff forefinger wag,

Froth fleck his old man's purple lips
As on he raved about God's wrath.
I raised my hand to shield and see
A white tower rising from the trees

Beneath which tiny people move,
Its stone-hard length tumescent in
Pulsating light before it blows
Like Moby Dick and disappears.

(3)

I've seldom liked the island's males,
Tamed bullies from our prison-past
Turned surly sport-champs with a grudge,
Who as remittance-men and pimps,

Touts, forger-artists, larrikins
Too sickly for a life as Ned
Became the crippled hanging judge,
The sneaky, safely sensitive

Rich Menzies-voting poet-type,
Their women formed by alcohol,
Hulks, convictism, poverty
And church into cringe-ridden mates

As nasal as a bad violin,
Gauche, strapping lasses hard as nails,
As wooden as the cross and sour
As vinegar to take to bed.

(4)

A stunning dark blue, soul-wide day,
The ineffable Aegean
Will not stay so for long. Grey clouds
Inevitably shadow-stain

A scene too beautiful for me.
A man snarls at a crippled dog
That cringes, whines, curls up and begs
Deep down inside, like me, for death.

IGOR MAVER

The Mediterranean in Mind: Bert Pribac, a Slovene Poet in Australia

The Slovene part of the Mediterranean coast on the Adriatic Sea can perhaps best be described by means of a metaphor: it extends to where olive trees can be found, it is an atmosphere, *un parfum.*[1] Bert Pribac, a Slovene poet who migrated to Australia in the fifties, testifies to this fact. His fine lyrical poems are populated by olive trees, as well as cypresses and eucalypts. Pribac unites the two worlds, Slovenia and Australia, in his writing.

Bert Pribac was born in 1933 in the village Sergasi in the Slovene part of Istra, south of Trieste on the Adriatic Sea. He studied comparative literature in Ljubljana and in 1959 — for a number of different reasons[2] — passed through various refugee camps in Europe, and arrived in Australia with his young family. The beginnings were tough. He worked as a cleaner, an Australian mail clerk and a librarian. He later acquired an M.A. degree in librarianship and worked for the documentary service of the Australian Health Ministry in Canberra, where he has lived most of the time since coming to Australia. He has also prepared Slovene radio broadcasts and is very active in the Slovene Cultural Society in Canberra.

Pribac sees himself as a divided person. In his interviews he refers constantly to his "spiritual split", which in his view is the result of a feeling of "two homelands", Slovenia and Australia (hence the title of his latest collection of verse, *The Beautiful Vida and Other Poems from Two Homelands*, Canberra: The Lapwing Private Press, 1987): "When the Slovenes shut themselves into their Slovene homesickness, they become a nation apart, as they are no longer in Australia. They are somewhat split; a national schizophrenia, I would say, you are half Slovene, half Australian."[3] Bert Pribac began to publish his poems in the fifties, prior to his migration to Australia, in the Slovene magazines *Mlada pota, Most* and *Meddobje.* Some of these will be discussed first in order to be able to follow Pribac's poetic development in Australia.

One of the first published poems by the then twenty-year-old Pribac is "In Istra" (1953):[4]

1. Cf. F. Braudel, ed., *La Méditerranée: Les hommes et L'héritage.* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986).
2. An interview with Bert Pribac, *Obzornik Presernove druzbe*, (Ljubljana, January 1989), 40-49.
3. An interview with Bert Pribac, "Doma je lepo, v Avstraliji pa ne dosli slabse" ("It is Great at Home and in Australia not Much Worse"). Knjizevni listi, *Delo*, Ljubljana.
4. Bert Pribac, "V Istri" ("In Istria"), *Mlada pota* 11, no 6,1953-54, 17-18. Translated by Igor Maver.

With us here in Istra
The autumn is beautiful:
The vineyard on the slope
Is clad in golden yellow
And sweet red
Seethes in the pitchers
In our homes.
Cypresses and olive trees
In which the southerly wind is caught,
Are always green
And the leaf of a palm tree
Never withers by the sea.

Although written in simple poetic language this extract shows certain recurring qualities that are present in all of Pribac's work. The poet is, for example, extremely susceptible to colour impressions and hues in the natural landscape; thematically he often deals with his native Istra, the peninsula jutting into the Adriatic Sea in its northern part, while the characteristic elements of his verse seem to be a cypress, an olive tree and a vineyard. Similar Impressionist-Romantic poems published in *Mladina* and *Bori* are "The Song of Autumn"[5] and "A Spring Morning".[6]

The poem "Complaint"[7] again features the poet's sensitivity to colour, while the speaker of the poem is identified with a lonely sea-gull, which reveals a silent yearning for far-away places that indeed came true for the poet, who only four years later arrived in Australia:

In the clear blue autumn
Swam into the waves
A lonely sea-gull...
Has not my happiness gone with it?
Far, from far away is the blue gull!

In 1962 the Slovene Club in Melbourne published the first Slovene book in Australia, Pert Pribac's collection of poems *Bronasti tolkac* (*The Bronze Knocker*).[8] The introductory poem "Desetnika" ("The Tenth Daughter and Son") thematically and symbolically opens this book. According to old Slovene beliefs and folk-tales, in the patriarchal society daughters were considered a burden for their parents; in addition in feudal times peasants had to give one tenth of their annual produce to their land-lord. By analogy, the tenth daughter (or son) had to leave home. Pribac likens this sad fate to that of the migrant who is expelled from his homeland. In this case the bride and bridegroom are both tenth children; when married they soon realise that their migrant life will be full of hardships and sorrow, although they hoped for "the sun in the nadir":

5. Bert Pribac, "Hesenska" ("The Song of Autumn"), *Mladina* XIV, no 20, 21.5.1956. All the extracts from Pribac's poems are translated into English in this article by its author.
6. Bert Pribac, "Pomladno Jutro" ("A Spring Morning"), *Nori* 1, no 2, 1955, 76.
7. Bert Pribac, "Tozba" ("Complaint"), *Mlada pota* IV, no 7, 1955-56, 354.
8. Bert Pribac, *Bronasti tolkac* (*The Bronze Knocker*), (Melbourne: The Slovene Club, 1962), 13.

The tenth daughter and son got married,
both used to dusty carts
and sticky thirst
for heated ways.

Pribac's habit of using motifs from Slovene ballads and folk-songs is also visible in the next poem "Tri breze" ("Three Birch Trees"), which with its repetitions, direct narrative stance and "leaping and lingering" narration introduces a balladesque tone. Three birches growing by themselves in the middle of the meadow, are one day felled for no reason, so that three young men with their three (folk-number) brides can find no shade. Parallels between the felled birches and migrants with their "cut roots" are obvious. This poem was written bilingually.

Another well-known Slovene folk ballad "Lepa Vida" ("The Beautiful Vide"), which appears in several versions, deals with the supposed kidnapping of the young, beautiful Slovene girl Vida, who had lived on the shores of the Northern Adriatic Sea. She is taken as a kind of love-prisoner of a black (Arab) seaman to an overseas land, where far away from home she deplores her fate and her vain hopes to return to her native country. In his reinterpretation of this Slovene folk ballad Vida, metaphorically stands for Slovene emigrants, and the speaker expresses his hope for another metaphor — the sail that "drowns in the waves of her yearning". The sunken ship with the sail thus represents the vain hope to return home, which is reduced to dreams:

The sail is gone,
to carry her
beyond the distant, warm horizons,
from where only dreams
of the sad homestead come.

In another the poem "Daljna, hladna morja" ("Distant, cold seas") the poet feels like a shipwrecked person, symbolically also a "drift outcast" of the nation. Emigrants, like tenth children forced to abandon their homeland, appear metaphorically as "uprooted trunks of trees" and ardently long for their native soil, which is depicted by the poet perhaps a little too nostalgically and melancholically with the typical elements: chestnuts, pines, buckwheat and wheat fields and vineyards.

Bert Pribac often uses in his poems the images of Karstic (the Karst: the limestone area in the Slovene Littoral region) stones that seem to him less cruel than those in the "harsh" Australian landscape, although they are blunt, heated by the warm sun in the Karst, for they are "kinder than these lands without warm eyes" in "Se kamni doma", ("Even stones at home")[9], olive trees which cannot be found in the Australian landscape "grow" in the poet's heart and thus point to his state of mind, which he himself describes as "bitter fatigue". There is, however, a notable difference between Pribac's early attitudes to home ("Where are the distant, cold seas/of chestnut trees, and pine woods,/patches of buckwheat and cornfields,/vineyards built in terraces/ lying below the native village?") and the later, growing acceptance of his adopted country.

9. Bert Pribac, *Brontasi tolkac*, (*The Bronze Knocker*), p.16.

I shall go back
one day
between motionless olive trees
in summer heat...
This sea of long distances
has killed my soul
to a bitter fatigue —

In his study of the poetry of Australian Slovenes, Mirko Jurak stresses the importance of guilt for having left the native country, which is noticeable in the poems by Bert Pribac: "Immigrants are compared to unconscious stones, which were taken by a storm to the middle of the ocean, to an encircled place, similar to the one made by children when playing games. Immigrants are like vine twigs easily moved by the wind, sometimes transplanted into foreign soil. Such similes, which appear very frequently in Pribac's poetry, are often accompanied by the image of the wind, symbolising since Shelley's time the changes which take place in three worlds: that of nature, society and within the poet himself."[10] Such yearning to return home is expressed in the poem "Listje v vetru" ("Leaves in the wind"),[11] in which the speaker of the poem feels guilty for having "given away his peace/to the winds/blowing over barren fields".

Particularly suggestive is "Samote, samote" ("Solitudes, solitudes") from the second part of *The Bronze Knocker*, for it opens up a new dimension of Pribac's existential loneliness and alienation as an immigrant. Comparisons of heat and cold are symbolic; the cold atmosphere, usually negative, reminds the poet of home; grass scorched by frost, snow, bora and cold foggy days. Despite the fact that the poet has been living in Australia for a number of years, the odour of its "warm winds" still does not make him feel at home and the scented juniper trees announce the forthcoming spring. It is significant to note that immigrant poets often use the image of a beggar, a vagabond or tramp who wanders aimlessly around the world (cf. the poem "Pepel moje podobe", "The ashes of my image"). As a native of Istra, Pribac is extremely susceptible to climatic conditions; heat and cold clearly trigger off his reminiscences of home or Australia, respectively:

I have been left all alone
with an empty bundle over the shoulder
and I have lain under
damp oaks...
to be greeted in murky mornings
by cold fog instead of warm dawns.

Certain explicit parallels exist between the poetry of Bert Pribac and that of T.S. Eliot. For example in the poem "Dezevne ceste" ("Rainy roads")[12] a beggar asks for alms, for "a handful of goodness" or "Eno zajemalko casa" ("A ladle of time"), a clear

10. Mirko Jurak, "Types of Imagery from the Old and the New Country", *Australian Papers*, ed. M. Jurak, (Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana, 1982), 60. Cf. also Mirko Jurak "Pesnisko ustvarjanje slovenskih izseljencev v Avstraliji" ("The Poetic Creativity of Australian Slovenes"), Knjizevni listi, Delo, 14 October, 1982.
11. Bert Pribac, *The Bronze Knocker*, 19.
12. Bert Pribac, *V kljuna golobice* (*In the Beak of a Dove*), (Canberra: The Lapwing Private Press, 1973), 40.

reference to Eliot's line "I have measured out my life with coffee spoons" in "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock". The world is seen by Pribac as fragmented, composed of "a heap of burnt potsherds", reminiscent of Eliot's vision of the world as "a heap of broken images". Water in Pribac's poems symbolises both purification and destruction, because the waters of the Monaro plains have brought into the valleys the ashes of the Aborigines, thus also linking the immigrants with the Australian soil. Mirko Jurak described the image taken from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" (The Fire Sermon, III, 11. 182-3) and used by Pribac in the poem "Waters of the Monaro Plains"; one thematically linked with Eliot's thought about a dying civilisation.[13]

> By the river of Murrumbidgee I stood
> and listened to the murmuring of the waters...

Particularly illustrative of Bert Pribac's views of Sloveneness and its emigrant fate is the poem "Ljudje zatohlih palub" ("People of stifling decks")[14] in which the poet expresses his deeply felt pity for the nation of "tenth children", scattered around the world, either dying under "the weight of eucalypt trees" or because of viper bites "in the estuaries of the Amazon" (a reference to the Slovene diaspora in South America), everywhere the Slovenes have been driven in their Virgilian exile. The necessity to leave home is depicted by Pribac as an integral part of the history of "a small, downtrodden nation" or, as a result of the then difficult economic and political situation in Slovenia.

> At home Man
> sells his soul for a slice of bread,
> which is stuck in his gullet
> as a knot...

Bert Pribac's second collection of verse *V kljunu globice* (*In the Beak of a Dove*), reflects the significance of natural elements in a Whitmanesque transcendental sense, elements that reappear in his poems: wind on the Karst, grass, cypresses, olive-trees, rain, soil, and so on. Images from his native Istra are numerous again (vine, olive-trees), although in comparison with the first collection, *The Bronze Knocker*, there is a noticeable difference. The poet is no longer merely depressive and schizophrenic about his immigrant fate, for he is convinced that his children will take roots in this new land to "win" it. This is exemplified by amassing images from the "old" country Slovenia and the "new", adopted country, Australia. These poems deal with general ontological questions of Man's existence and position in the universe, which are masterfully interwoven with the theme of an immigrant "exile". Such is, for example, the poem "Spomin na vietnamsko vjno" ("A Memory of the Vietnam War") in which the title of the collection is explained: the poet has put his "restlessness into the beak of a dove", thus "run away into the unknown on the pointed wind". Immigrants are compared to shipwrecked persons on the ocean, who, to his mind, do not need clear indications for the future, because their natures are restless and adventurous leading them on a constant search for the unknown:

13. Mirko Jurak, "Types of Imagery from the Old and the New Country", *Australian Papers*, Ljubljana, 1982, 60.
14. Bert Pribac, *V kljunu golobice*, 43.

Therefore do not light candles to the shipwrecked
  people on the ocean
for they will not be able to find their way
into the wonderful constellations of the stars
and although the tempest ruffles the waves,
their ship was not broken on the dark crags:

In their dreams is captured the entire universe,
and there are no crags or lights in it.

Bert Pribac's poetic development thus leads us to believe that after having lived in the country for ten years as an immigrant, he started to consider Australia as a kind of new, adopted homeland, which of course cannot replace his native homeland, but which inspires him with a hope that generations to come will accept Australia as their native home. It is significant that in interviews between 1963 and 1983 Pribac describes the influence of Pushkin and the Slovene "Impressionist" poet Srecko Kosovel. He further admits to starting to feel the "new homeland" as part of his identity, for "both languages are mixed, countries and people, eucalypts and oaks or cypresses". In a lengthy published talk (1989), Pribac described the state of poetic creativity of Slovene immigrants in Australia, as well as his recent verse collection, published both in English and Slovene, *Lepa Vida in druge pesmi iz dveh domovin; The Beautiful Vide and Other Poems from Two Homelands* .[15] The poet asserts that he no longer feels the urge to write the kind of poetry that would express a yearning for the "old" country and that his verse is no longer as nostalgic as it was in the early years after his arrival in Australia. *The Bronze Knocker* is certainly characterised by a pathetic, nostalgic and even elegiac tone, which is gradually replaced by reality as it is for other Australian Slovene poets:

> The poetry of the Australian Slovenes is no longer merely nostalgic, for it introduces the acceptance of the new world, just as Askerc dealt with the Orient and Zupancic with Paris, etc. We are a part of the world, which we are experiencing in a typically Slovene manner.[16]

Many poems by Bert Pribac have been published in Slovenia by the Slovene Immigrant Centre in Ljubljana in the two *Anthologies of Australian Slovenes* (1985, 1988) and the anthology *Lipa sumi med evkalipti* (*The Lime-tree Rustles among the Eucalypts*).[17]

Among the poems that describe the poet's creative vocation and/or the definition of poetry ("Dreaming to be a Poet", "The Essence of Words"), "Travel Diary" is especially interesting for its satirical poise in depicting the poet's visit to Piran, a small, old town on the Adriatic coast, situated near Bert Pribac's native village Sergasi. Coming back after many years he feels alienated; he is neither a native nor a tourist and generally feels estranged from Istra altogether. The image is an Impressionist one, with an intriguing, subtle irony implied:

15. Franc Horvat, "Jodra scra plovejo domov", *Rodna gruda*, 30, no 10, 1983, 15-16, also in Obzornik Preseranove druzbe, 1989.
16. Horvat, 15-16.
17. *Lipa sumi med evkalipti* (*The Lime-tree Rustles among the Eucalypts*). (Ljubljana: Slovene Emigration Centre, 1990).

After having lived twenty five years
under the southern cross,
and now being a tourist myself,
I feel estranged and I wonder
if I am really still one of them.

Pribac's poems feature intimate memories of his native Istra by the Adriatic coast. Istra is sometimes merely the background of events described and in these instances becomes a clichéd image, although most of the poems are characterised by an ambiguous combination of poetic images from Slovenia and Australia. This study reveals the fact that the poet's early works are still very much coloured by a pathetic nostalgia for the abandoned homeland, while from the seventies onwards he feels attached to both "homelands", without any "geographic schizophrenia". If the early poems of Bert Pribac still bear elements of the baroque and nostalgia, the more recent ones are mature,[18] written in an original and concise poetic diction. Thus they belong in any contemporary anthology of Slovene lyrical poetry, regardless of the fact that they were created on Australian ground.

18. Bert Pribac, *Prozorni Ljadje (Translated People)*, (Ljubljana: MK, 1991), a selection of his best verse.

ANTONIO CASELLA

The Flowering Broombush

I am now at liberty to tell you where Dan del Monte lived: turn left from Toodyay Road into Nankita, then left again down a dirt track at the end of which you'll come to a rusty sign above an old pipe-and-wire gate warning that "TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED". The sign proclaiming Dan's unfulfilled wish for the world to let him be.

We met back in '66 when we were both working in Wittenoom. No, not in the mine, at least not me. No way you'd get me down that rabbit warren. Dan, he was different. Every day, he made his way down to the entrails of the hill, worked his shift, came back dusty and exhausted, and never complained.

"The bloke's a natural," said the men.

He was without doubt the best scraper in the business, able to shift some 30 cubic metres of dirt a day, no problem. He made more money than the bosses, nearly as much as Guido Fini, the legendary driller.

Dan was unashamedly a loner, sometimes he disappeared for a couple of days. Nobody knew where to. I expected he had a woman somewhere, Hedland perhaps.

People felt ambivalent about Dan. Though they respected his ability to work hard, he was also disliked with an intensity that defied logic. At a work party held in the pub Jim O'Byrne, the Irishman everybody kept clear of when he drank, started picking on him.

"Why 'r you always keepin' to yerself! Aint we good enough fer ye, hey?"

Dan took his glass to the other side of the bar. Later Jim followed him out to the toilet and got stuck into him. It was painful to watch. Dan hardly reacted, as if he wanted to get done. He ran back to the barracks, panting in wheezy spurts. I sat by him as he slowly settled, feeling more embarrassed than sorry. His passiveness was too close to cowardice for me. However, I became less inclined to damn him after I heard his story.

* * *

Dan was born Carmine del Monte in a mountain town of the Sicilian interior that had changed little since feudal times. In '41 his father had been called up to fight the war and Carmine must have been a parting gift, or burden, to his young bride before he set off to meet his death somewhere in Russia.

His mother did not fare much better. Several weeks before Carmine was due, a violent duststorm hit the town. China rattled in the credenzas, trees were uprooted, old houses unroofed, the bronze church bells tossed in the wind. His mother lay in bed listening to the persian shutters hammer against the wall, heralding the pangs within her.

The midwife rustled through the door in her taffeta shawl, rubbed the dust out of her eyes with the tips of her middle fingers, took one look and saw that this was a doctor's job. Someone ran for him, hurricane lamp in hand, banged on his heavy, green-painted door, calling up to his bedroom balcony. He came begrudgingly, crossed the piazza with its monument of a bayoneted soldier, descended a steep-staired embankment that led to an underworld of dark alleys, holding a handkerchief to his nose and grumbling all the way that a doctor should be entitled to a night's sleep like any ordinary being. He arrived at the house just in time to save the baby. Pity about the mother.

Carmine was left in the care of spinster Aunt Domenica, or Za' Mimma as he came to call her. Everyone drew a sigh of relief that a good home had been found for the "miracle baby". Death and miracles were not so rare in San Luca. In the early part of the century a landslide tore away some one third of the town and carried the rubble down to the lower folds of the mountain.

Surviving an impossible birth was the first of several extraordinary occurrences that marked Carmine's life. When he was barely ten months old he was left unattended; Za' Mimma swore that she had strapped him in but could not explain how he managed to fall into the brazier of burning ash. For some days it was feared for his life, or at least his sight. Za' Mimma made a vow to San Benedetto, the Patron Saint of the town, that if the child was saved, she would dress him in monk's habit 'till he started school. In fact the infant survived, and with perfect vision. Naturally Za' Mimma kept her vow and Carmine spent the first five years of his life dressed in a monk's cassock. And that's how he came to be nicknamed "U Santuzzu": the Little Saint.

* * *

Za' Mimma had a small subsistence holding some one hour's distance on foot down an impossibly steep track. Autumn bore the fruit that the summer sun had nurtured, and two or three times a week Za' Mimma made the trip down to the orchard to stock up.

First she picked the prickly pears, using a bamboo cane with a tin can tied to the top end. This she positioned over the fruit, gave the cane a twist to release the pear off the cactus. While Carmine brushed off the prickles with a clump of reeds, Za' Mimma went ahead and got the figs and the grapes, then she packed them into the cane basket. She made a soft bed at the bottom with vine leaves for the prickly pears; placed more leaves to separate these from the grapes and finally another layer for the figs.

Then Za' Mimma folded her head scarf diagonally, twisted it, twirled it into a coil, sat it on top of her head on which she balanced the basket. Up the stony path she trekked talking animately with people she met along the way, her back straight, the basket as if glued to her head.

At the end of the steepest climb, the track reached a comparatively flat stretch.

This was a point of rest. Within living memory a natural spring gushed out of a gash in the rock viscous with algae. After the landslide it dried up. Now all there was left was a massive *ginestra*, a broombush, for that reason the spot was called La Ginestra. She put down the basket on the stone wall and heaved a great sigh.

"Madonna mia che fatica."

Carmine kept a look-out for the occasional lizard to appear through the crevices, watch furtively, and slither away. He was a dreamer, oftentimes dawdling behind, distracted by a bird or an ant's nest or spider's web.

"Hurry up Carmine," people teased him, "Za' Mimma will give it to you, if you make her wait too long."

Sometimes he was given a ride on a mule or a donkey. Everyone felt protective toward *L'Urfaneddu'*, the little orphan.

One night in summer Za' Mimma sat on the step of her terrazzo stairs with a couple of women, enjoying the cool. Neighbourhood children hurled stones into the dusk and the bats, mistaking them for giant moths, gave them chase. Suddenly an unexpected commotion.

"Zia! Za' Mimma!" cried Carmine as he ran to bury his head in her lap.

Thinking that a stone must have hit him, the women turned on the other kids.

"We didn't do anything," they protested.

Carmine pointed towards the orchard wall where the land fell sharply into a ravine no longer visible in the dusk.

"Look ... the light."

"What light?"

"Over there ... a man with a lamp, running."

And because they were all staring at him: black, inscrutable, judging faces in the dark, Carmine started to cry.

"There was a man there. I saw him."

Za' Mimma took him to her and rubbed the back of his head soothingly.

The news spread with the sunlight the next morning. Saverio Labbado known as *Lu Zoppu* had been murdered at La Ginestra. What gave this news added spice was Carmine's "vision". Had the boy really seen something? Quite possibly, quite possibly. People started to whisper. Definitely something strange about that boy.

The next time they were at La Ginestra, while Za' Mimma hurried past crossing herself several times out of respect for the soul of the murdered man, Carmine stopped and there, in the dust, he saw blood stains like tiny grape bunches. After that he never called past La Ginestra without depositing a flower on the spot.

That year it was a particularly warm autumn. Luminous days under a powder-blue sky. On the second of November, the day of all Souls, Za' Mimma, like everyone, set forth for the cemetery with a bunch of white chrysanthemums. Carmine too laid flowers at his mother's grave, but retained one single stem in his hand saying,

"I want to take this to La Ginestra."

"No, Carmine, not today."

"Why?" he whined.

"It's too far, and I am tired."

"I want to ..."

His tantrum was attracting attention. Za' Mimma was embarrassed. This fetish seemed to her like an unnatural and frightening obsession. Then again, the boy was

merely asking to pay respects to a dead person, so she gave in.

The next morning the first travellers to reach La Ginestra were treated to an extraordinary sight. The broombush had burst forth in a great spray of yellow, out of season.

People came from all the surrounding villages, brought along their children, sick aunts, grandparents to witness the miracle of the flowering broombush. The parish priest gave an impromptu sermon:

> "There are miracles surrounding us everywhere, only we have lost the ability to see them, our sins impede us like a blindfold...."

At this point the Priest saw Za' Mimma appear up the track with Carmine in tow.

" ... it takes the little innocents," he proceeded significantly, "to alert us to the Lord's miracles... "

And suddenly everyone's eyes were on Carmine. It was the focus that the congregation, desperate for saints and miracles, needed. Barely-restrained excitement gusted through the crowd. Carmine refused to proceed. From the crowd, a woman holding a sick child in her arms yelled what was in everyone's mind.

"Vardate ... vardate ... U Santuzzu!"

As the people advanced in a wave towards him, Carmine turned and fled.

He went and hid in the sacristy. There he sat by the window watching kids kick a soccer ball on the piazzale in front of the church, when three figures emerged from a sidestreet: two tall men flanking a short figure wearing, what looked like, a long garment.

At first he thought it was a large woman, attended by her sons, on a pilgrimage to the church to beg a grace at the holy relic of San Benedetto. But it turned out to be two "carabinier'", escorting a handcuffed man to the police station. He was a stocky man wearing a cap and a rug of yellow and red checks.

"I froze as his eyes fell directly on me. They were dark, untamed and cynical. Somehow the soccer ball had come into my hands and the kids were calling for it. I held on to it, for security, wavering between fear and fascination. He didn't look anything like I thought a murderer should. He didn't look guilty, or vicious, or bitter. Just defiant, like it was him against the whole world. And for some perverse reason I was on his side. I knew this was the man I had seen running at dusk. I realised too that the flowers I had been laying at La Ginestra were meant for him, the murderer."

* * *

How Carmine came to migrate, he didn't say, and I suppose it doesn't matter. Nor did he explain why he decided to change his name to Dan. I can only surmise that he wanted to leave "Carmine" behind.

In 1967 the Wittenoom mine finally closed and we parted company. Back to the city I decided to go and study full time. In the subsequent years I put myself through law school, married, had a family.

All this time I had no idea what happened to Dan and frankly I was too busy getting on to care. When his telephone call came I had all but forgotten him.

"Syd Lacey?"

"Yes."

"Dan ... Del Monte ... Remember? Wittenoom Gorge?..."

Pause, as the sad face of the man I knew more than fifteen years before came into focus.

"Dan, 'course I remember." I sounded more enthusiastic than I felt; something about his tone warned me off.

"Listen, I need legal advice."

"I see ... " I was pleased that he knew I was a lawyer, "what's the problem?"

"Well, you won't believe this ... "

Over the telephone he spun some weird story about being harassed by a local sect.

"They'd been camping out by the stream off and on for a few months; then one time I went away for the weekend, Monday morning I came back to find them in my loungeroom."

"That must have been a nice surprise for you. What did you do?"

"What could I do? There was a dozen of them ... they said they were holding a prayer meeting."

"In your house!"

"They reckon it's got subliminal consciousness, whatever that means."

"I bet you were pleased to know that ... "

I laughed but I could tell that Dan was in no mood for my sarcasm or humour.

" ... did they take any stuff?"

"None that I've missed. They just left the place in a mess. Since then they keep coming back. They've been around twice this month already."

As a lawyer I'm used to people contacting me with unlikely stories. So I took it all with a pinch of salt. Besides, if he was telling the truth, it wasn't a lawyer he needed.

"Have you contacted the police?"

Pause, I could hear him mull this one over for a moment, then, "I'll think about it," and hung up.

It all sounded bizarre. I sensed that there was more to the story than he had told.

It wasn't particularly surprising when he didn't get back to me. It happens frequently enough. I thought no more about it until I read in the newspaper:

MAN FOUND DEAD IN FARMHOUSE

> *A man living alone on a Gingin farm was found dead. His name was Carmine del Monte, otherwise known as Dan ... police are investigating ...*

Over the next few days I looked out for a follow-up report on the case. Nothing.

I am not an obsessive person, but this was one case that niggled at me. Was he murdered? Suicide? The following weekend I decided to drive to Gingin.

From the front it looked like any old, run-down weatherboard farmhouse. I nearly turned back then, on a hunch, I decided to investigate. At the back of the house, tucked away from view I discovered a Mediterranean orchard: a couple of olive trees, fig tree, vines, a vegetable patch invaded by weeds. And then, further up the slope, just below a large protruding boulder a magnificent shrub of broombush in bloom and not a person in sight.

ROSANNE DINGLI

The Summer Man

It is now sixteen or seventeen years since I have seen Maria. The saltpans are dry. Whenever they are dry I think of Maria and her long-handled spade; how she would shovel salt without bending, how her hair would fly in spite of bands and pins and flicker about her face and neck as she worked up to her ankles in salt.

I sit here and look out towards the black road which leads to the pans. I can just see the top of the tarred barn where we store sacks and sacks of salt. I would stack them. Carmine kept bringing them in the barrow as Maria filled sack after sack. There was a young boy or girl from the village who would sew the tops, sitting on a stone wall not far from Maria, so they could talk. Shovel and talk. Talk and sew.

Their hats wobbled in the sun on necks like stalks. They were beige mushrooms, if you came round the road and caught them like that. Beige or gold mushrooms moving slightly in the middle of all that white. Like snow it was. The pans had been there for ever. No one on the islands remembered when they were not there. There had always been pans hewn out of the ancient rock, it seemed. The limestone divisions between pan and pan were smooth, worn by the weather. No sign of tool on any part of the stone. Rounded and smoothed by the sun, rain and seawater which rushed in over the divisions in the winter, levelling the whole place under brine. After about May, the rain would stop. The heat would begin in earnest and no more seawater entered through the mouth from the bay. So the pans held warm sea; then hot brine, then plates of salt would appear and the shallow pans would gradually turn white with crystals shining in the sun. The blinding white was visible from the road. From the tarred barn it was almost impossible to look towards the centre of the pan field without protecting the eyes.

Inside the barn, the smell was overpowering. Fresh salt does not smell good when it is newly sacked. It stinks of seaweed, dead organisms invisible to the naked eye, debris caught between the crystals and annihilated by the potent properties of sea salt. It stinks of dead sea creatures, stagnancy. But we no longer smelt it ourselves. I stacked sacks all day, knowing passers by on the road would hold their breath until they passed the ancient black barn. We were called *Is-Salini* because of what we did, what our family had done since time immemorial. We were the salt family and no one remembered a time when we were not. No one knew who had built the barn or carved the pans out of the rock except that it had been one of us Salini, centuries ago.

Maria knew some stories. She could relate myths passed mother to child, anecdotes about the salt pans, legends concerning Salini of other times. I guessed it was what she spoke about with the child who came in to sew the bags.

Maria also knew what happened to the sacks after they left the barn because she had once ridden on a big truck laden with them. I remember her tiny form. She sat on top of the sacks in the back of the truck, holding on to the hessian ears of one of them. Although she must have been afraid of the movement of the vehicle, she smiled. She smiled in excitement and fear of an unknown destination. She had never been further than the barn, or the white house where we all lived, until then. What could she have been — five, six? All I remember was her little red face under the enormous straw hat and that tentative smile.

When she came back she was full of stories and descriptions, but what tumbled out of her mouth first was disappointment at seeing the sacks torn open and emptied onto a large mound, an ever growing mound of salt.

"After all that filling, sewing and carrying and stacking," she said, her little worried frown making us all smile in sympathy. "After all the work we all did. They undid it faster than you can think. Faster than it took us to do!" But then she described the factory in her simple words, and how the people were kind to her and gave her cold lemonade in a real glass and fresh bread smeared with tomatoes.

Maria's memory of the factory and where all our work ended stayed with us for some months. It lived through some of the winter when we would stand at the brink of the pans sometimes and watch the sea roll over the mouth at the bay to fill the pans.

Sometimes it rolled in majestically, on slow fat waves with hardly a sign of foam. Sometimes it hardly lapped over the stone divisions, and we could see through the calm surface where each pan started and finished: the grand tessellation in the rock, carved before any of us could remember. Sometimes, when the *grigal* blew, huge waves crashed through and the whole spread of the bay and the flat plateau of pans was a savaged frothed place, whipped with wind and pieces of debris. Flotsam and jetsam ticked the pans later, in the calm which followed.

The children had the job of wading through each large pan, picking up debris and bringing it back in a big basket after each storm. They would find bits of sandals and shoes, driftwood, cardboard and twine. There were gloves, bottles and chair backs. A village child once found a big white bone, bleached by the sea and the sun.

All the children knew, it was indelible in them. It was woven into stories and tales. They knew they were never to enter the pans after the plates of salt had started to form.

As Maria grew up she listened to stories told by her mother and the aunts, my self and her grandmother and the old uncle who could not work because of his age and the ulcers on his shins. She grew more and more beautiful. And as she grew more lovely she became more silent and sweet. There was a kind of wistful air about her. She listened to the stories and repeated them as she worked to the child sewing sacks. She shovelled salt and told stories, sheltered by her enormous hat. Sometimes she wore huge rubber boots, to shield the skin of her feet from corrosion of the salt.

"This salt," she would say. "It can eat into anything. It is like soda." It was not like that at all, of course, but the aunts took it to be rebellion of the young; a growing need to escape the work of the family and flee to the village. And from there — who knows? We had seen her look in the direction of trucks and cars as they drove past

on the black road near the barn.

She would look at the drivers — mostly young men — and the wistful look would come upon her more strongly. When the truck was there to be loaded with sacks for the factory, she no longer crowded around and made a nuisance of herself as she did when she was a slip of a girl. She stayed away, sitting on the sea wall, dangling her legs and talking softly to the child from the village. Occasionally she would look at the truck driver and look quickly away again, out to sea.

Maria knew the story of the monument. There was a shrine in the middle of the salt pans, a stone cross on a cairn of carved boulders, with a plaque of memorial which no one could read, even if it were legible, after decades of erasure by the weather. Maria would move her fingers over the low relief impressions which had once been letters and words, to tell the child what it had said. What the stories said it had said. What she thought it had said. She would look up at the cross and tell the child why it was there.

"See this carving? This is the face of the summer man. These are his worn features, taken by the sea and the sun, which no one remembers any more." Her fingers explored the carved face above the plaque. The eyes were two shallow hollows and the nose was all but gone. Only the chin and neck and the top of the well-defined head remained to show it had once been the likeness of some local man.

"The summer man was the man of the shovel. He would do my work, filling sack after sack with salt from the pans which had dried in the rainless, tideless hot days between July and September. He digged and digged, spaded and shovelled. He knew never to go over his ankles into any pan. If it goes over your ankles, it means the salt is still wet. He knew he should never step into a pan which was not completely dry. But he did not know exactly what would happen if he did." Maria looked down at the child and pointed. "The pans closest to the mouth are always the last to dry. You know that. Everyone knows that. I do those at the end of August, well before the first storms. They have to be perfectly dry. They are the deepest and the closest to the sea. They are the most dangerous."

The child nodded. It was information she had heard before. Everyone knew everything about the salt pans. It was passed mother to son to daughter since a time no one could remember.

"The summer man was impatient. In spite of what he knew, he once stepped deep into a pan. He was over his knees in thick, hot salt. Moist salt. Although he remembered, he moved. He stepped into the pan closest to the mouth, which reached nearly to his waist. The summer man was in — nearly up to his waist. Someone from the barn saw his head and shouted. Several voices from the barn sang together, but the summer man did not turn. When they looked again he was gone. There was no hat, no head — nothing."

"What happened?" asked the village child, holding on to her own hat as if to make sure it would stay on her head.

"No one knows. They never found him. They found no body, no clothes or hat. They found only his long handled spade. He was eaten by the raw salt." Maria was silent then. She touched the carved face again and swept light fingers over the worn letters. The child looked up at the cross. "Is that why they put up this shrine? What was his name?"

Maria shook her head and picked up her shovel again, resuming the filling of the last sack.

I look from the barn at the dry salt pans. There is no one there now. Soon the work will start because the pans closest to the road are completely dry. I walk down to the edge and crouch. My fingers graze the pattern on the flaky plated crystalline surface on one of the pans. It is dusty, and sand has collected in corners. There are some straps of algae which the children overlooked in their search for rubbish.

Soon they will start the sacking and stacking. I do not stack any more. I merely count now, standing in the clearing in the middle of the tarred barn watching my son do what I used to do so effortlessly until a few years ago.

It must be fifteen or sixteen years since I last saw Maria.

"I do not want to be a summer man," she said once.

One of the young ones had joked she could never be anything but a woman, and a beautiful one at that, setting all of us laughing.

But the aunts and I, and her mother especially, knew what Maria meant. There were only two ways out of the Salina. One was the long black road and the other was the mouth of the bay into the Mediterranean, past the deepest salt pans. If I look out past the mouth, I can see the ghost of an oil tanker slinking on the horizon.

I remember her standing with her hat in her hand, her bulging cloth bag at her feet. She gave her long handled shovel to the village child. "You know how to do it," she said simply.

When the truck left, laden with salt sacks for the factory, Maria went with it. This time, she did not ride on the sacks in the back, smiling fearfully as the truck turned the corner. She sat near the driver and waved strongly and solemnly, with brave but sad eyes. The last thing she probably saw before the truck turned on the road was the cross on the monument: the memorial to the summer man.

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The Churchill Trust invites applications from Australians, of 18 years and over from all walks of life who wish to be considered for a Churchill Fellowship to undertake, during 1996, an overseas study project that will enhance their usefulness to the Australian community.

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The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust
218 Northbourne Avenue, Braddon,
ACT 2601.

Completed application forms and reports from three referees must be submitted by Tuesday, 28 February, 1995.

PETER PORTER

Pines of Rome

As ghosts of old legionaries, or the upright
farmers of that unbelievable republic,
the pines encrust their roots among the rubble
        of baroque and modern Rome.

Out by the catacombs they essay a contradiction,
clattering their chariot-blade branches to
deny the Christian peace, the tourist's pale frisson,
        a lost intransigence.

Look away from Agnes and the bird-blind martyrs,
the sheep of God's amnesia, the holy city
never built, to the last flag of paganism
        flying in mosaic —

So say the pines, however Papal, like the chill
water of the aqueducts, refreshment from a state
insistence — when they buried the Christian martyrs
        they ambushed them with joy.

Rome is all bad taste and we are no exception
is their motto. Small wonder that Respighi, "the last Roman",
includes recorded nightingales in his score
        for the Janiculum.

And the scent of pines, as we dine at night
among the tethered goats and Egyptian waiters,
is a promise that everything stays foreign
        which settles down in Rome.

Therefore I nominate a Roman pine to
stand above my tomb, and order a mosaic
of something small and scaly to represent
        my soul on its last journey.

The Cocks of Campagnatico

The heart grown old can't fake its scholarship
And won't attempt that glib insightfulness
Which once it made a moral landscape from:
This village, half its human figures and
Its cats and dogs enthroned in windless sleep.
Law's brutal now; a German bus deep-parked,
The gang of no-ones-in-particular
Kicking to death a pigeon — how may they be mapped?

Only within the self can scales be hung.
Ignore mere detail says the ageing conscience,
Encourage emblems any mind can hail.
And so the roosters of the valley stir
As if to answer such a challenge, though
They're late, their tubs of sun already full,
And beautifully redundant to themselves
Propose and repropose the Resurrection.

The Third Man in the Boat

One salt foot in the bay
of tears, the beginning
of a new way of speaking to men,
Mr. Shelley has come ashore
to a bonfire which will inflame
the literatures of Europe.

And with him, not given
a phoenix fire but cypher
to his lyrics and biography,
Mr. Williams, famous
by association, gulped down
by the same unlettered wave.

Call up Mr. Vivian,
the third man in the boat,
longer at sea and simpler in fate
who had only the kiss
of the Mediterranean
to place him in eternity.

REVIEWS

George Seddon, ***Searching for The Snowy, An Environmental History.*** Allen & Unwin, 1994. xxxci+336 pages. Illustrated. $34.95.

Searching for The Snowy flows like the river itself, twisting and turning through a landscape frothy with observation. George Seddon's prose pushes the reader through hard gullies of technical thought. In alluvial plains the prose slows and sweeps outward like poetry. Everywhere ideas jut upward resembling snags, catching the reader, first making him notice then ponder his intellectual surroundings, the platitudinous currents of mind that determine how a person sees the world. School prepares us for life inside buildings. Between walls we analyse the outside, often seeing things not as themselves but in terms of distorting comparisons. The best way to think about a landscape is to travel through it. The good traveller, a George Seddon, travels both light and heavy. While Seddon carries knowledge of real matters like hydrology and geology with him, he jettisons the battered but pervasive platitudes that so frequently order and colour observation. In literature, for example, the exploration of a river is more often than not a psychological journey in the course of which the protagonist progresses or develops. Huckleberry Finn journeyed toward a kind of Hell, if Hell is thought as a hot place in which people are enslaved. On the journey he was tested, and as a result he grew morally and spiritually.

Only four bridges cross The Snowy during its five hundred kilometre course, and no road winds continuously along its banks. Seddon travelled the length of The Snowy, but to do so he made a series of trips over time. Instead of a journey burdened by the expectation of self-knowledge, he travelled to see the river. Over time, of course, is the way to see almost anything. In writing an environmental history Seddon explores how people have changed the river and the surrounding landscape through time and then how the river has influenced people. In discussing how people see the river, Seddon examines how we look at each other. Place and time determine the fictions by which we live. Seddon examines how we look at each other. Place and time determine the fictions by which we live. Aboriginal peoples, Seddon notes, have been described as Noble Savages, children, Economic Man, and of late as admirable Ecological Man. Such formulations reduce complexity and diversity to an abstraction, stripping real people of their identities, thus destroying truth. As it has been with human beings so it has often been with the landscape. Behind much of western man's thought about the natural world lies 19th century Romanticism with its celebration of the primitive, the yeoman farmer, the simple, and of Wordsworth's "vernal wood" teaching us more of man and moral good than libraries, or all the sages.

Seddon has learned from both books and observation. To write an environmental history, one must be something of an intellectual polymath. Seddon knows a great deal. Moreover he writes with grace and decorum. He writes so well that drainage faults and steam capture become not only matters of interest but the stuff of imagination. Seddon knows flora and fauna. He is able to describe the long-term effects of fire. He knows how ranching changes landscapes. Cattle, for example, compact the soil and eat out the sweet grasses. Gullies form when land is overgrazed. Weeds spread. Animals and plants vanish. This environmental history will enable people to read the land better. *Searching for The Snowy* is a book for many climates and places. Reading his book will change, for example, how one sees cattle stations in The Kimberley.

As much as *Searching for The Snowy* describes a landscape, so it also describes people, many admirable, a few reprehensible, practically all gritty. Seddon tells people's stories: farmers, cattlemen, dam builders, and

Aboriginals where possible. He drinks tea in kitchens with old wives, literally old wives who know their bits of the land. Stitched together the pieces produce a tapestry, a chequered oilcloth, one fit for wooden tables and sturdy knowledge. Seddon pays particular attention to the names of places. Names make places ours. Names appear and then vanish, marking changes in culture. At a time, though, when the great forests of the world are being pulped, when topsoil is being scraped away in the search for minerals, naming is especially important. We should be stewards of place. Becoming a steward of something as vague and abstract as the land seems almost intellectually impossible. In contrast people seem to find it easier to become stewards of particular places, Barrow's Pond or The Snowy River. Naming is the first step toward close observation. After the name one learns the relationships between things, be they people or stones and trees. With names come stories, and that landscape that once seemed forbidding becomes familiar and familial, a place to cherish and in which to live harmoniously as one knows how.

George Seddon has written a marvellously intelligent book. He enables the reader to see, even feel the pulse not simply of The Snowy but also the history of man and the river. The book is not a tract, yet it instructs. The prose is often poetic, yet facts glisten through the sentences like rocks on a riverbed. Seddon's explorations are also seductive, making the reader dream of wandering his own world, be that world large and wild or small and domestic. Seddon urges people to notice their surroundings then study them so they can appreciate them. He knows, of course, that our explorations like his will not solve any of the problems facing industrial society. The river does not provide answers. Perhaps the only people capable of finding answers are the naive and ignorant, or those narrow folks who already know answers before they explore. Nevertheless, wandering a landscape might broaden vision and mind.

Searching for The Snowy is a grand book, teaching a delighting. For people who live far from the river the book contains a sheaf of pictures that turn paragraphs green and blue. Australia's monuments are natural, not man-made. They are, however, influenced by man, for better and for worse. More books like *Searching for The Snowy* might just make people tread softly and reverently.

Sam Pickering

K.K. Seet, *Death Rites, Tales From a Wake,* Times Books International (Singapore) ISBN 981-204-185-0.

Chinese lore abounds in superstition. In a home where a death has occurred, all mirrors and reflective surfaces have to be covered (otherwise the freed spirit, struggling to depart the mortal realm, may be held back by a desire to retain its earthly image). 666 may be the dreaded sign of the beast to Christianity, but in Cantonese six is *luk*, a homophone for prosperity, so 666 portends threefold riches. In order to provide defence against nocturnal demons, it is believed that each person has a mystic light on each shoulder. Trouble is, the demons of night are aware of this and will make their approach from behind you, knowing that if you turn your head to look backward over a shoulder, the light on that shoulder will be extinguished.

Given this rich diversity of material, it's hardly surprising that the supernatural tale has become a market-leader in contemporary Singapore. At the 1989 Singapore Book Fair, Russell Lee's *True Singapore Ghost Stories* became a sensation when its initial print-run of 6000 copies sold out before the Fair had ended. The book remained Number 1 on the *Straits Times* best-seller list for twelve consecutive weeks, and in 1991 Lee (and his "team of Ghostwriters") produced *True Singapore Ghost*

Stories - Vol II. The lurid tales in Nicky Moey's *Sing a Song of Suspense* (1988) won a wide audience, and so did the stories in a more sober-spirited work, Othman Wok's *Malayan Horror: Macabre Tales of Singapore and Malaysia in the 50s,* which appeared under the prestigious Heinemann Asia imprint and served an "archival" function by preserving popular stories of this kind.

The literary value of these works is near-zero, but it is undoubtedly this literary under-usage of such promising material which prompts a sophisticated work like K.K. Seet's *Death Rites: Tales from a Wake.*

The wake is for Fanny Gan, a successful Singaporean business executive who has been killed at the prime of her life. Not having used her will to specify exact requirements for the wake, Fanny Gan has to endure modern Singaporean expedience: her coffin lies in state under a huge canvas tent (emblazoned with the logo Chop Woh Hing of Sago Lane) and, even more ignominiously, this tent has been erected in the parking lot of her condominium. Chinese paper lanterns adorn the periphery of the tent (despite Fanny's sense that these were tacky props best left to Hong Kong swordfighting movies), and instead of the Slow Movement from Mahler's Fifth Symphony, which she had coveted since its use to mark Dirk Bogarde's passing in *Death in Venice,* the music is a traditional concoction, a "clamorous drama of cymbals and gongs, shamanistic chants and incantations". Thus Fanny Gan's wake becomes an image, ironic and comic, of contemporary Singapore's love-hate relationship with the new and the old, the traditional and the newfangled, the outmoded and the economically approved:

> All this hullabaloo raised the heckles of the other residents in that condominium, the majority of whom believed that traditional Chinese funeral wakes suited the void decks of HBD blocks, but were rather an eyesore and an ear-strain in the upmarket ambience of a condo.

Death Rites is not about the wake itself; as suggested by the sub-title, *Tales from a Wake,* it deals with the stories told by those night-owls who linger (over a bottle of Oxtard XO) through the long midnight-to-dawn watches. It is decided that the night hours are to be filled with the telling of ghost stories (for "fear could well be an antidote to grief") and it is further stipulated that they are to be "atmospheric, fully dramatized stories with well-portrayed characters, not mere anecdotes or trifling accounts like some of the piffle collected in some collections of horror stories". The substance of the book, then, is a series of tales of spooky happenings.

Seet spins these tales with an aficionado's relish (the biographical note says he "confesses to writing ghost stories for a laugh") but also with sharp literary acumen. Apart from some ironic echoes of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and, more latterly, Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club,* there is a delightful, all-out variety to the pieces as Seet ranges through material that might have come from Stephen King, or *The Twilight Zone,* or from Peter Carey. There's the young male only-child who develops a close relationship with Patty, an invisible friend; the muslim dispatch-rider who has a supernatural encounter in the incongruous glass-and-steel modernity of Shenton Way (Singapore's business district); a "macho" male finds himself besmitten by a fearsome creature masquerading as a sexy girl in a high-cut red *cheongsam;* a tale of haunted dentures (the book's low-point); and the story of the couple whose life to come is ruined on their wedding night in hotel room 666.

Academic criticism does not easily cope with such material, one reason being that contemporary theorising has ignored (or disdained?) a staple literary ingredient such as suspense, which is reductively categorised as a blunt and cliched tool. There are, in fact, numerous varieties of suspense, and whilst some (it is true) are grinding and resonant, others can be as light and sparkling and subtle as the best champagne. Seet's suspense, to close the metaphor, is Dom Perignon: there's not terrified anticipation of blood and gore,

but rather the pleasant *frisson* of an awareness that the text has moved beyond time and space. Some of the story-resolutions *are* familiar, but one can never guess *which* resolution will conclude a particular story.

Part of Seet's literary acumen is his deft ability to maintain an ironic distance from his material. The accounts of the wake itself are quirky and idiomatic, and very quick to pounce on satirical opportunity:

> "If a pregnant cat leaps over the coffin by chance, the corpse could spring up," cautioned Mrs Chan, who passed a circular to all the denizens of the condominium requesting pet animals to be tied up during the two nights [of the wake]. She claimed that there was a rational basis to this belief, which had to do with static electricity transmitted by and interacting between the two entities.

In contrast with the idiomatic liveliness of the wake interludes, the ghostly tales themselves are "straight", their long sentences unfolding narratives which soberly take themselves oh-so-seriously. But then, joyously, when each tale is done, a rush of other voices deconstructs the tale and its mood: alternative scientific accounts of the supernatural are suggested, or psychological causes are adduced, and other wake-guests strive to "top" the last tale with one of their own. The material of the standard ghost story is deliciously enhanced.

Seet also uses his fictions as vehicles for satire. A Taoist priest, for example, is revealed to be an insurance salesman moonlighting for some extra income — but this doesn't matter, for Taoist priests are an extinct breed (for "Most chinese of the younger generation are Christians or agnostics") and the moonlighting substitute will have been well-trained for his task. Only commitment is lacking.

The delightful aspect of the satire is that it rests upon sharp observation yet is not sharp or harsh in tone. Seet's outlook is superbly wry:

> After a round of chants and prayers, the musicians started their threnody while the arch priest conducted his group through its paces, three times round the coffin, reciting their cabbalistic verses. This was followed by the ritualistic burning of assorted paper effects: a crane as harbinger of news, and a horse to bear the deceased to her other-worldly destination. That initial batch of sacrificial items having been duly despatched, the motley group of priests and musicians sat down to a hearty meal prepared by the caterer.
>
> Mo Lian inspected the rest of the paper objects, which would only be burned after the cremation the following day. She stared in disbelief at some of these.
>
> "Credit cards, passports, compact disk players, cellular phones, microwave ovens? I say, someone is turning Chinese funeral articles into a major industry." Even while she frowned at the way traditional Chinese customs were being exploited by shrewd entrepreneurs, she felt she had to tip her hat to the ingenuity of some of those paper concoctions.
>
> "Rather be safe than sorry," Mrs Chan confessed. "We don't want our Fanny to lack anything."

Van Ikin

***Provisional Maps: Critical Essays on David Malouf*, ed. Amanda Nettelbeck**, Nedlands, Centre for Studies in Australian Literature, 1994, pp.206, $18.00.

Amanda Nettelbeck introduces her new collection of essays on David Malouf by suggesting that he has a "consistent interest in the processes of mapping, of history-making, of identity and place"(i), hence the title of her book. Provisionality suggests the multifarious interpretative positions that can be adopted by the reader of Malouf's work. Yet when reading this collection of essays from a range of critics, poets, academics, musicians, I was struck by the force of Malouf's presence in their interpretative practice. While they critically map his artistic achievement,

Malouf, the public figure, provides the direction.

The centrality of the man in the interpretative process is figured in the inclusion of Beate Josephi's interview with Malouf from the Adelaide Writer's Festival in 1992. The observations Malouf makes in this interview regarding the illusionary nature of innocence, the "otherness" of fictional time and the importance of the imagination are all issues echoed in the critical readings. Many of the essayists quote directly from this interview, and a range of others, as a way of identifying their reading position. The result is a certain sameness in interpretation, so that an "accomodation of different perspectives" outlined in the introduction is not fully revealed by the essays presented here.

The collection is divided into three sections. Section One, "Identity, Culture and History", includes essays by Thomas Shapcott, Samar Attar and Dennis Haskell's reading of *12 Edmondstone Street* for his discussion of "Individual Identity". The section which is most clearly connected to the collections' title is Section Two: "The Mapping of Bodies and Spaces".

Gillian Whitlock's essay on "Regional Writing" explores the construction of regionalism in Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street* and Jessica Anderson's *Stories From the Warm Zone.* In both works the weatherboard house is a key symbol and Whitlock suggests that: "'The Queenslander' — a bungalow on stilts — is, perhaps more than anything else, an icon of our regional difference"(76). Whitlock argues that this house, although set in an urban landscape, nonetheless "retains the qualities of wilderness and impermanence"(76), elements of chaos that are prevalent in Malouf's work. Whitlock's analysis reveals the extent to which Malouf's evocation of a regional identity is contained within the topography of "The Queenslander" resulting in "the house and the household becom[ing] part of an organic entity, an ecosystem"(78). From Malouf's house Whitlock moves to the spaces in Jessica Anderson's collection, *Stories From the Warm Zone,* where she establishes a contrast between Anderson's female child narrator and the male child narrator of Malouf's *12 Edmondstone Street* who, Whitlock argues, positions a solipsistic template on sexuality and space that symbolises the "drive to autonomy and mastery which defines masculine individuation"(82). Whitlock suggests on the other hand that the female child narrator of Anderson's stories recognises the centrality of the mother in the space of the house. The mother has been displaced in Malouf's work in which the house has become a space "to practice mastery and the power to name"(83). Here, the discussion of elements of regionalism are intersected with a gendered reading.

A Freudian interpretation of Malouf's work is arguably complicated by his homosexuality, as Leigh Dale and Helen Gilbert acknowledge in their essay that attempts to "map" the "Topographies of the Body". While Andrew Taylor in his essay, "*The Great World,* History, and Two or One Other Things", states that in *Fly Away Peter* "violence and sexuality are linked"(37), he does not include a discussion of how sexual preference affects his historical model. However Dale and Gilbert, using Malouf's own acknowledgment of the centrality of the body as a point of departure, analyse "the breaking down of borders between bodies and landscape"(91). Moving from *Blood Relations* to the "Inspirations" sequence of poems, Dale and Gilbert explore the connections "between sexuality, language and imperialism"(96). They suggest that the homosexual body, at times represented as a performative self in Malouf's work, offers "significant possibilities for transformation of the colonised body"(93). The reading offered by Dale and Gilbert challenges traditional critical boundaries and categories by using gender and post-colonial theory to interrogate Malouf's representation of homosexuality and colonialism. Such mapping of the homosexual and colonial body "may also prompt a re-valuation of the artist figure in Malouf's oeuvre"(99). This essay demonstrates how

effective re-valutions can be and suggests the variousness of the reading experience that Malouf endorses in his interview with Beate Josephi.

Amanda Nettelbeck's essay, "Rewriting an Explorer Mythology: The Narration of Space in David Malouf's Work", maps the Australian landscape, physical, cultural, social and political in Malouf's work, focussing on the "tension in Malouf's writing between an imperative to reconceive dominant ways of 'knowing' and a desire to recuperate them"(104). Using the work of Paul Carter, Nettelbeck explores the elements of Malouf's mythography that attempts to represent an Australian identity shaped by the processes of exploration. These "explorer narratives" are symbolised by an open-endedness that Nettelbeck argues is the "post-colonial impulse of Malouf's work: colonial patriarchy's tradition of claiming space, and thereby the conditions of knowledge, is made questionable by a perpetual evasion of resolution"(107). This essay is persuasively argued and consistently linked to the parameters set by the title of the collection.

The essays in Section Three are assembled under the broad title "Questions of Form and Narrative". They include a reading of *Remembering Babylon* by Peter Pierce. In this essay Pierce analyses the intersections between the problems of history and form as they are manifest in Malouf's latest novel. The other essays, which deal with Malouf as librettist, with his "sublime discourse" and his textual connections to Heidegger, emphasise the diverse interests that inform the controlling motif of mapping.

Overall, this collection of essays provides a new and important contribution to critical practice. The essays, particularly those in Part Two, offer insightful, articulate readings of Malouf as a central creative figure in the Australian landscape.

Sally Scott

Osvaldo Bonutto, A Migrant's Story, University of Queensland Press,1994 (first published 1963), pp. 97.

The Italian cultural group has provided something like half a million people to this country's mix of population (not including those born here). Yet there are few studies on it. Gentilli's authoritative work, *Italian Roots in Australian Soil*, comes to mind. Alfredo Strano's *Luck Without Joy*, on the other hand, is more of a discussion of the migrant experience seen from the point of view of an educated man. It is one of many works of its kind, though most of them do not offer the same level of insight.

There is, in fact, a surfeit of personal accounts by migrants, usually hard luck stories of more-or-less admirable people who have overcome formidable odds. Harmless, well-meaning works designed no doubt to cast the migrant in a good light, whilst giving mainstream readers a glimpse into the world of migration out there on the fringes of society. These books achieve a number of useful outcomes. They make the migrant feel vindicated for some of the injustices he/she has suffered, they restore some level of self-esteem, and they allow the mainstream the luxury of a glowing sense of justice and charity, much like giving to Care Australia. More to the point, they give the particular publisher access to government funds set aside for "multicultural writing".

Such publishing is all part of a Culture of Allotments allowing each individual or group a space in which to operate. But if a migrant dares leave his/her allotted niche and venture out into the mainstream with pretensions of being taken seriously as a writer then the gates will come crashing down as fast as you can say "multiculturalism". Multicultural writing which purports to support linguistically disadvantaged groups and bring them into the mainstream has managed to do exactly the opposite, ensuring that they remain at the margin. It helps little that migrant stories have a way of sounding much

like one another. The character and circumstances may change but the sentiments expressed are essentially the same.

A Migrant's Story is just what the title says; it tells the story of Osvaldo Bonutto who arrived in Australia in 1924 at the age of 21. With typical pioneering spirit he got down to work, doing the most menial jobs, like bush clearing. Eventually he went into business, was instrumental in setting up the tobacco industry in North Queensland, married, became an Australian citizen, even ran a pub (surely a gesture of assimilation with the dominant Anglo-Aussie community). He could be forgiven for assuming that sixteen years on, and with all that behind him, he would be considered part of the community to which he had given so much. Yet one morning in 1940 the police knocked on his door and took him away to be interned, "for security reasons".

He was accused of having "often spoken or written in defence of Italy and Italians". Bonutto admitted to being proud of his country of birth but rejected the suggestion that this constituted a disloyalty to his host country. Released for lack of evidence, he was re-interned several months later, this time until the end of the war. Documents released in 1963 revealed that Bonutto, like so many internees, had been a victim of a massive conspiracy. Yet this book is no accusatory diatribe. The internment covers merely one chapter. Such discretion reflects well on the author who is gifted with a great heart and faith in both himself and his fellow human beings.

As is usual with this kind of personal account the technique is anecdotal. The stories, sometimes humorous, sometimes pathetic, illuminate the socio-cultural milieu of the times, the hardships, the unashamed racism, the mateship. Bonutto's initial reaction upon arriving in Fremantle in 1924, could not have been more positive: "This is indeed the Land of Plenty, the Promised Land of poor, willing-to-forge-ahead migrants who are looking for a better deal in life", but in reality jobs were scarce and the locals were not particularly welcoming.

The young man and his fellow migrants were left to their initiative, to improvise, to make do. Shooting the odd rabbit supplied protein. He found conviviality and friendliness too, like the two passengers on the way to Queensland who, at every train stop, ducked out to buy a bottle of beer each and share it with Osvaldo.

The anecdotes serve to underline those personal qualities useful for overcoming adversities. Bonutto is no meek, hat-in-hand migrant come to beg favours. On the contrary he is a plucky young man not averse to giving even a magistrate a lecture on fairness and justice.

Quite apart from a dogged nature and a certain innate, peasant wisdom it helps to have a sense of humour. One story which illustrates this is that of the local priest who fooled the nuns into believing that a speech he gave in Italian over the local radio was a direct broadcast from the Pope: "The good nuns promptly genuflected, made the sign of the cross and eagerly listened to the long-awaited speech".

It helps also to have a pragmatic approach to life. When he decided to go into the hotel business Bonutto was confronted with a slight hitch: "I soon realised however, that a single man was greatly handicapped in the hotel business." No problem finding a ready solution for this resourceful character: "I decided, therefore, to ask a girl, whom I had met in Texas [Queensland] shortly after she had arrived from Italy, to marry me".

It is in such naive self-exposure that for me the best moments of this tale reside. Indeed, apart from its historical relevance, the story gives us self-revealing glimpses into the character of an imperfect human being (but all the more lovable for that). He is a hardy Mediterranean; dogged, confident, self-opinionated, loyal, wise; a man able to overcome hardships and intolerable injustice by virtue of a culture that instilled in him a love of fellow human beings, and a commitment to

his family. In that sense he is representative of the tough, pioneering migrant.

Neil Byrne, in a commentary on the book, observes that "Curiously enough the internment of Italians does not appear to have left a legacy of bitterness." The explanation is given obliquely by Bonutto. "I have no intention of suing the Federal Government for damages caused by wrong internment ... when I think of Senator Maher, who risked his whole political career for a principal of justice ... my vacillations and doubts vanished and my love and loyalty to Australia remained unshaken ..."

Here is a text which can be read not merely as the sentiments of one Italian migrant, but as the expression of a life attitude of a whole culture.

Antonio Casella

Simone Lazaroo, *The World Waiting to be Made*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, $16.95, 1994.

Simone Lazarro's novel *The World Waiting to be Made*, recipient of the 1993 TAG Hungerford Award, provides a sensitive searching of questions of nationality, ethnicity and identity as it charts the multiple journeys of its nameless Eurasian narrator, who emigrated from Singapore to suburban Perth as a child. This novel investigates layers of colonisations, displacements and marginalisations as the protagonist moves towards a reconciliation of the conflicting cultures in which she is placed. The protagonist of the novel is arguably trebly displaced as her cultural identity shifts between Malacca, Singapore and Australia; and doubly marginalised, for the ethnically Eurasian are a group who are shown to experience disparagement and discrimination within Asia as well as within a relentlessly racist Australia.

As the narrator journeys through her childhood and adolescence in Australia, she experiences a fragmenting of identity, a consequence of the irreconcilability of Eurasian cultural identity with the homogenising and alienating dominant Australian culture. As a child, the protagonist feels "burned with shame," when she overhears her neighbours say that Malacca is the "'[s]ame sorta place as Singapore. Place of slow runners and easy lays'" (39). Similarly universalist and disparaging constructions of Asian people are evident within the narrator's description of her experiences at school, where she becomes the archetypal representation of Asia. Extreme cultural insensitivity is exhibited by the teacher who says that "above us are the dark steamy peoples and the yellow peril", subsequently turning his objectifying gaze upon the protagonist, asking the class: "[a]nyone seen any natives of South East Asia? Very dark, fine features. A bit like that girl over there, but darker" (79).

The chasms in the protagonist's identity are particularly evident throughout her adolescence. She resists the dominant Australian culture's objectification of her as a representation of Asia; yet yields to the constructions of the desirable young woman, and employs Australian cultural mores to resist the construction of the "good woman" in Eurasian culture. Her response to her father's disgust with her appearance and her "itchified" behaviour is to comment, "[m]y poor father. Australia had gotten into his women. They had turned on him" (103). The internal conflicts that ensue as the narrator attempts to cope with the tensions between the culture of her inheritance and the culture of her spatial surroundings are mirrored in the conflict between the narrator and her sister. The narrator claims that she "became full of disgust for her [sister's] goodness and politeness. She didn't have to worry about doing things that would conflict with my father's ideas on what a good Eurasian girl should and should not be able to do" (108). The anger towards her sister explodes: "I wanted to make her swear dirty things. I wanted to make her hawk her spit. I looked at her small

feet, curled one on top of the other under the table: '*Asian* feet, I sneered'." The adolescent desire to cut away the appendage of Asianess is conveyed through the image of the appendix: "'A redundant organ. Serves no purpose,' the surgeon concluded. I closed my eyes. How perfectly his words described the Asian in me" (110).

Perhaps the most scathing picture of a monolithic Australian culture is contained in the narration of the protagonist's journey to the remote Kimberley Aboriginal community. The Aborigines' cultural dispossession and alienation make this a pertinent site from which to engage in a criticism of the dominant Australian culture. The narrator is depicted as having more affinity with the Aborigines who have also experienced cultural displacement, than with the other teachers. The parallels between the immigrant and Aboriginal experiences are poignantly portrayed through an interaction with an Aboriginal woman who is concerned about her daughter moving away from traditional Aboriginal culture:

> I wanted to ask her: Patsy, how do you reconcile so many different beliefs from different cultures? When Patsy made that gesture with her hands under her breast, I saw: *Your culture's what's in your heart.*
>
> *I longed for my culture to be as clear in my mind as Patsy's was in her heart, but I could see that for people like me born into communities whose moorings had been shifted and controlled by sailors from afar, there was no real certainty (198).*

As well as this moment of communion and understanding, the depiction of the experiences of this time also hold the moment of greatest alienation from an Australian society which is depicted as having a false belief in its homogeneity. This occurs as the protagonist is leaving the community and she is confronted with the objectifying and marginalising gaze of white Australia. She describes:

> Debbie and the other teachers as a group: They were sitting on the verandah of the house opposite in their short shorts, legs splayed, polystyrene stubby holders in perpetual transit somewhere between their burnt mouths and their wide chests, staring at me.

She concludes by saying that their "gaze upon me made me a stranger to myself as well as to them" (203). The description of this gaze however, works as much of the novel does, in exposing and the critiquing the attitudes of an Australia that believes itself homogenous, impervious and secure; making conspicuous its active marginalisation and oppression of those who are different. Whilst in the Kimberleys, the narrator is stripped of her name by the Aboriginal community, having it replaced with the term "Nabirru". The loss of name equates with the narrator's feeling of a loss of identity, as shown when she comments: "That sums me up, I thought. No name of no-man's-land" (202). Significantly, it is after this experience that the narrator begins her quest for identity, deciding to "go in search of Asia" (209).

The journey into Asia is prefigured in the text by the constant interspersing of the narrator's experiences of growing up in Australia with anecdotes about relatives in Asia, and mythological and legendary stories of Eurasian culture. These stories are alternately the "Floating Stories" of the protagonist's mother, or the "Survival Stories" of her father. Ironically it is her Australian mother rather than her Eurasian father who makes the most concerted effort to maintain connections to Eurasian culture. Her floating stories "were told as if they were still happening. They seemed to bring our past right into our present, so that it seemed unanchored to any particular time or place" (36). The story of the inimitable "Infinitely Great Grandmother", a Malay woman whose Portuguese fathered children were amongst the first Christao Eurasians, and who was the creator of the Eurasian cuisine, is presented as a role model by the narrator's mother. "'Infinitely Great Grandmother was a powerful traveller. Her children were the first Eurasians,' my mother

concluded, 'and proud of it. You are descended from them. You are Eurasian'."(49)

It is a desire to rediscover this pride which initiates the narrator's journey to Singapore and Malacca, a searching for "all the ... parts of my life that had been lost to me")209). This journey leads to the discovery of new conflicts and contradictions as well as finally being a source of reconciliation. The protagonist is forced to purchase a "range of faces to wear" to accommodate her Singaporean relatives' expectations of their "Australian cousin". Remarking that she was "struggling with the unmanageability of the various selves I'd purchased, and badly in need of a prayer" (203), she travels to Malacca to visit her Uncle Linus, a spiritual figure who is both revered and ridiculed within the family. Upon meeting Uncle Linus she finds that: "I could not get my tongue to tell him: *I am lost, and I don't know what I am*" (258), yet her uncle intuits her feelings and provides a conciliatory response, saying that she is one of the "in-between" people who have looked "... *for a world waiting to be made.*" He then identifies the persistent deferral of "the world waiting to be made" by migrant communities, and makes a claim for the importance of self-realisation:

> "Australia wasn't the first world waiting to be made, you know! Many of my generation thought that *Singapore* was ... Generations before them, Malacca represented the world waiting to be made. They looked ... for a world waiting to be made ... because they felt ... *unrealised* in themselves" (258).

The narrator ultimately achieves a form of self realisation, remarking whilst on the journey back to Australia that: *"I'm not afraid of unfamiliar country. Now I have a home to live in wherever I am."*

The World Waiting to be Made is written from a perspective which forces reconsiderations of discourses of nationality and identity. The novel voices a challenge to the Australian Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony that constructs oppressive understandings of Asian otherness. It contains a satisfying interweaving of many different kinds of stories, both poignant and humorous, and charts a young woman's journey towards a tentative reconciling of conflicting cultural demands. This reconciliation is not simply a discovery of identity, an assertion of the unification of a previously fragmented self, but an acknowledgment of the proliferation of influences that combine within the lives of the in-between people.

Kate Temby

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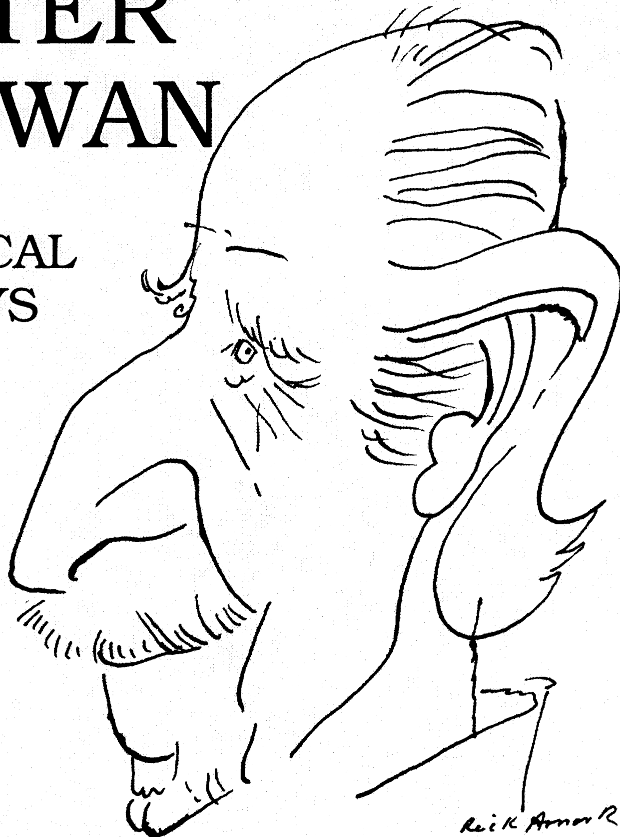

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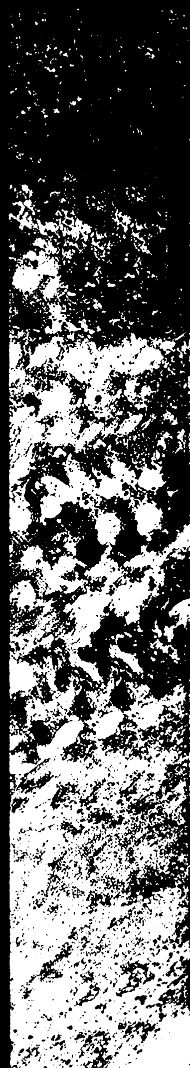

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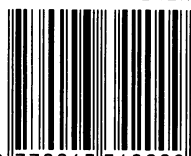

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