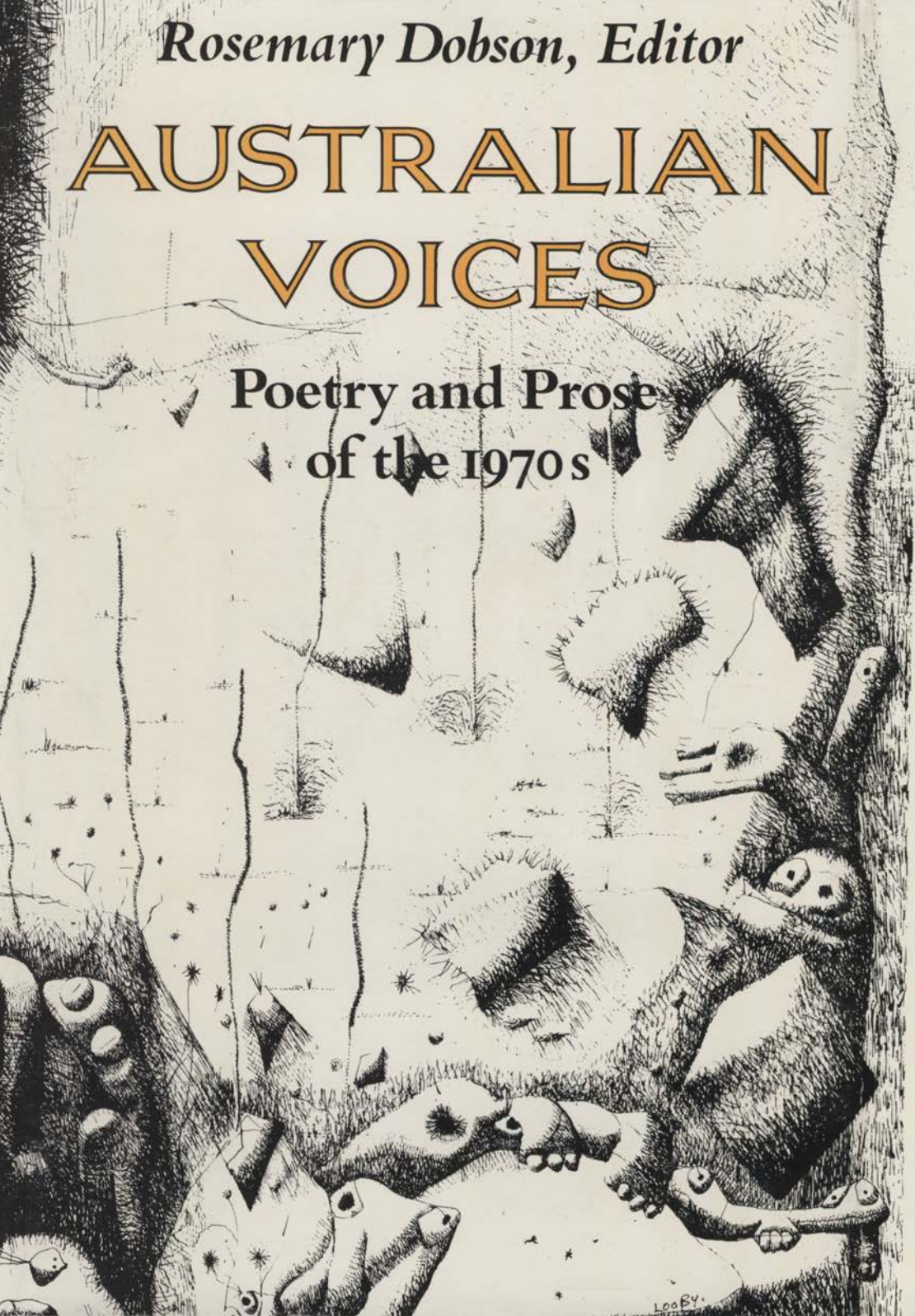


*Rosemary Dobson, Editor*

# AUSTRALIAN VOICES

Poetry and Prose  
of the 1970s



Looby

In choosing the poems, stories, and essays in this volume, its editor, Australian poet Rosemary Dobson, has sought works that reflect the ideas and ideals challenging the imagination of contemporary Australian writers.

Her authors look to the past, finding there material relevant to today or recreating a nostalgic time gone by. They look also to the present, at the perplexities of modern life. The poets, both those of established reputation and those of fresh young talent, look to the local or the international scene, both time past and time present. In their works gathered together here are the authentic voices of Australian writers, voices that are serious and sad, bitter, ironic and funny, wry, gay and irreverent—voices for all seasons.

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VOICES

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Poetry and Prose  
of the 1970s

Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers  
in association with  
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Canberra 1975

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## Preface

The Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers decided to celebrate *Australia 75*, the seventy-fifth anniversary of the federation of the Australian states, by publishing an anthology of short forms of writing to show some of the diversity and richness of contemporary work.

The response to a widely distributed invitation for contributions was overwhelming. A celebration of the arts and sciences together had been called for, but in the event little scientific writing of general interest appeared among the fifteen hundred submissions received.

I relied gratefully upon the advice of many people, but as editor I take responsibility for the final selection. I intended that the work of both established and promising writers should be represented. I chose prose and verse that reflected the variety of Australian life and thought. I looked for writing that was lyrical, pleasing, humorous, high-spirited, or challenging. And finally I chose work that reflected a concern for, and interest in, events elsewhere in the world, since I believe that literatures are enriched by such exchanges between countries.

ROSEMARY DOBSON

Canberra  
July 1974

## *Acknowledgments*

Our debts of gratitude are many, and we acknowledge them with real appreciation. With pleasure we say thank you to—

The Literature Board of the Australian Council for the Arts, without whose generous support it is doubtful whether this book would have come to fruition

Our hundreds upon hundreds of contributors

Our devoted honorary secretary, Mrs L. Rees, without whose arduous and meticulous work the task of administering this anthology would have been infinitely more difficult

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*Saturday Club Book of Poetry*



*Southerly*  
*Sydney Morning Herald*  
*Westerly*

for their courtesy in allowing us to reproduce their authors' works

Finally, to Keith Looby, who has so generously given us permission to reproduce on the jacket a small part of his forthcoming series of drawings, *A Fairy-tale History of Australia*

and above all to

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Canberra Fellowship of Australian Writers

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# The Rand-McNally official map of the moon

*Robyn Ravlich*

Now & then, there's a good day  
that comes sneezy  
with pins & needles;

Quick little sailing boats  
zapping across the harbor  
in colors that are the height of

fashion in that or that sailing group  
& Here, only slow, intermittent  
traffic in the streets.

sweet Alabam  
yabbling sweetly on the radio, oh oh  
takin' it easy like it was

an inestimable custom,  
cuddling on the sofa & soft  
hot-footing it to the crumpled flora

of a bed. & Then, it's quick  
off with your Mick Jagger shirt  
& zip off my denim shorts

(kissing our mouths)  
we're laughing & flying  
to the old Joy, Joy, Joy . . .

Well, a day like this  
where we twine around our silk  
lush ahh of space

& out there, my friend,  
there are serious men who don't  
'lose their heads'

as they measure, refine for the  
seventeenth time, the Rand-McNally  
Official Map of the Moon.

# Zoo

*Gary Longford*

Flowers perfume under our feet  
as streets spring open  
& secrets are carried on the wind.

Buildings grow back into trees  
& people sink up to their knees  
in a forgotten landscape.

Animals roam Insurance Offices  
biting the legs of bemused typists  
& raising cubs by the water cooler.

Cars are confined to the local Museum  
& horses gallop into the Square  
stamping in the radiant air.

Deer travel miles on lifts  
in order to catch a glimpse of the sea  
taking photos to show the deer back home.

A short-sighted cat eats a man by mistake  
& finds him to his taste.  
The craze spreads through the entire race.

The survivors are given a building to live in  
& sightseers throw them pieces of meat  
for screaming & jumping through hoops.

Unfortunately captivity disturbs the species  
& one by one they slowly die.  
Such a pity the animals cry.

## The man fern near the bus stop

*Vivian Smith*

The man fern near the bus stop waves at me  
one scaly feather swaying out of the dark,  
slightly drunk with rain and freckled with old spores  
it touches me with its slow question mark.

Something in the shadows catches at the throat,  
smelling like old slippers, drying like a skin,  
scraped like an emu or a gumboot stuck with fur,  
straining all the time to take me in.

Cellophane crinkles in the fern's pineapple heart.  
The fur parts slowly showing a crumpled horn.  
A ruffled sea horse stands in swaying weed,  
and held in cotton wool, a mouse unborn.

I look down at it now, a tiny toe, a crook,  
remembering voices and growth without choice—  
the buds of fingers breaking into power  
and long fibres breaking in the voice.



# The aura

*Bruce Beaver*

A white full moon above,  
a small white goat below  
in the stilled landscape  
at sunset. So clear the sky  
you said it boded drought.  
We thought of the horny-handed  
farmers grumbling at tea tables,  
then of the silken clothed  
well-to-do Chinese of several  
hundred years ago, sipping  
wine or tea and observing  
the full moon through bamboo.  
The little goat had its nose  
in grass cropping concentratedly.  
The moon soon yellowed until  
it looked its usual hard-boiled  
egg of a self. But in that  
afterglow of sunset the small  
trees performed for us and themselves,  
their blossoming intensified, their colours  
and shapes larger than life with an aura  
only Vincent could have caught and held.

## Such points in time

*Chris Wallace-Crabbe*

Black needles advance,  
Hair floats on the wind  
Of passing love,  
Spontaneous gestures grow  
The brittlest twigs.

Watercoloured  
Long strings of rain hang  
Thunderstorms bent over  
The horse's white flank.  
The night clock sounds.

Civilization will sadly  
Evading love become  
The Sleeping Gipsy  
In her striped robe:  
My whole body trembles.

## Seeing things in their true colours

*Marie Reay*

Papua New Guinea is known to ethno-scientists as a place where the vernacular languages distinguish few colours by name. One tribe, for example, is reported to distinguish only two. And yet Papua New Guinea is a most colourful place. In the part of the country I know best, the Minj-Wahgi area of the Western Highlands, the mountains march along both sides of the valley in splendid blues and greens and browns. Flowers and butterflies and birds spatter the valley itself with a myriad different hues. The people's magnificent headdresses—freshly composed, plume by plume, for each occasion—used to combine numerous subtle and brilliant colours until in recent years a political slogan 'black plumes for black men' relegated the gayest of feathers to the tourist trade and brought a funereal pomp to the massed dances.

I had listed eight colour names, not counting an expression that could designate green by reference to the leaves of trees. But I was uneasy about this list, for although I seemed to make few mistakes in my use of colour names I was not certain that the Minj-Wahgi people and I were really referring to the colours as such by these names. My impression was that we referred rather to some quality or qualities associated with colour. I began to doubt whether the Wahgi language used colour itself as a criterion for classification. The 'colour' names appeared to designate certain categories, and if these were not categories of colour, what could they be? I was certain that they were categories of visual experience. It seemed possible that a 'colour' name might designate some intersection of degrees of lightness or darkness with degrees of brightness or dullness. I tried to stop viewing landscape and still life with a painter's eye, the way my culture had trained me, and to see things as a people might who have no word meaning 'colour'. This

proved to be much harder than sympathising with their religious beliefs and sharing their concern for the future of the group.

A striking and unexpected feature of the Wahgi repertoire of colour names is that half of them appear to correspond to different shades of yellow. Lemon is *terembe*, chrome yellow is *belau*, orange is *gizbig*, and yellow ochre is *kumbas*. The other colour names are 'white' or 'whitish' (*kuru*), 'red' or 'reddish' (*mbang*), 'blue' (*maingegl*), and 'black' or 'dark' (*nganimp*). I could not see why Minj-Wahgi people should select yellow to elaborate in this way. They do not see the categories 'lemon', 'chrome yellow', 'orange', and 'yellow ochre' as constituting any continuous segment of a colour wheel and there is no all-encompassing term for 'yellow'. It seemed that these were simply different categories of visual experience. *Kumbas*, which was defined by reference to objects I could identify as yellow ochre, is not seen as being similar to *belau* (chrome yellow) but in fact travels through the browns.

*Gizbig* is derived from the name of a flower about four centimetres in diameter which grows on a shrub with very dark leaves. Against these the flat, well-separated vermilion petals acquire a startling luminosity. And indeed I found that *gizbig* could sometimes convey this luminous quality even when the orange colour was absent. This seemed to be when the object described was so unequivocally identified with a different colour name that there was no need to specify it. Thus the known colour of the tawny Raggiana plume was *mbang*, 'reddish', but one with a particularly brilliant sheen might be described (more accurately, commented upon) as *gizbig*, meaning 'as luminous as the vermilion of the *gizbig* flower'. But the only other correspondence I knew of between a colour designation and a specific empirical referent was the custom of signifying 'green' as 'like the leaves of trees'.

North and south of the Wahgi River, people speak the same language in versions one could describe, if one had a mind to do so, as different dialects. But the differences in vocabulary without shared equivalents are few, and the differences in styles of thinking

appear to be negligible. It was therefore of some interest to find that whereas the southerners characterised 'white' people as *mbang* (reddish), the northerners were apt to call them 'white' (*kuru*). The most likely explanation for this difference seemed to be that in the early days of contact the northerners were much closer to the self-styled 'white men' than the southerners were and may have adopted the category of 'white' for them through its translation into the vernacular as *kuru*.

Skin colour, however, varies enormously in every part of the valley, and there has always been a component of pale-skinned people in a population whose pigmentation ranges from the black with purple highlights characteristic of the north of Australia and of Buka to the lacklustre pallor of an undernourished European. More often than not, pale-skinned people are named after their skin colour: *kuru* (whitish), *terembe* (lemon), or *belau* (chrome yellow). Three light-skinned people I know well are Kuru (a mature woman when I first met her, and now an old lady), whose skin is pale but sallow; her elder son Terembe, whose skin was pallid in his extreme youth and has now (in his middle twenties) become as sallow as his mother's; and Terembe's wife, Belau whose pale skin is suntanned to something the shade of milk coffee. Mother and son are so similar in skin colour that the name Terembe may have been chosen as a near equivalent to Kuru in order to avoid naming the son after his mother. Most personal names can be given to people of either sex. But although a boy may be named after a paternal aunt, who lives elsewhere after her marriage, he is never named after his mother. Early in his life he renounces his close association with her to spend his time with men and boys, but she remains a member of the same community until her death. In contrast to Belau's skin, that of Kuru and Terembe has a chalky (= *kuru*) appearance tending in maturity to sallowness (= *terembe*). When Belau is standing near her husband or his mother, her somewhat coffee-shaded skin is more a golden fawn or fawnish gold. She has a much healthier appearance than

the other two, partly on account of her skin colour but also because of her rounded figure, which contrasts with their gaunt leanness.

Colour came to my mind when my adopted father, Wamdi, told me there were five distinct kinds of stone for making axes and proceeded to list twelve, grouping them by colour. As he listed them he told me where they were found—at Dom in Chimbu, at Aviamp in the west, and in the territory of Magá group in the Upper Jimi. The stones were black (*nganimp*), dark blue (also *nganimp*, but Wamdi distinguished this group from the black ones by handling blue objects in my workroom), reddish, multi-coloured, and chalky (*kuru*). The clear division between black and dark blue as two groups without any mention of *maingegl* (the word for 'blue') until I myself suggested it, was puzzling. Further, the chalky *kuru* included not only the pale green *nggaima* stone from Dom but also the pale blue *mits-elmi* from the Jimi and two blue-grey ones from the same place. Wamdi added to my confusion by identifying as *mits-elmi* a rather pale stone, with no blue in it at all, I had brought back from Aviamp.

Here was a man who was utterly competent in his own culture. He had had ample experience of trading in stone for axes and of working the stone into axes suitable for displaying as the major ingredient of the exchanges connected with marriage. I wanted to understand his classification of axe-stones and of colour, though I knew very well that deliberate attempts at explanation could introduce their own confusions. He had listed three stones as dark blue, three as chalky or whitish (adding the pale blue *mits-elmi* as a fourth later), and three as black. Only one was listed as reddish, and this was one I myself would have described primarily as 'striped'. One was multi-coloured. Classifying them thus, he was simply describing them. They all had distinctive names, usually taken from the names of the localities where they were found and never referring directly to their colour.

Wamdi had told me that there were five different kinds of stone for making axes, and he had arranged the twelve names in five classes, according to colour. I was very pleased to learn both the

names and the categories together, without having to ask serially for the 'big name' of twelve different axe-stones; but my attempt to say so in the vernacular floundered badly. I began with a comment that he had told me of twelve kinds of stones, not simply five as promised. At this stage Wamdi interrupted and promptly re-grouped the names. Having already explained to me the difference between the black and dark blue stones, he now classed them all together as *nganimp*. His second category was *mits-elmi*, which he said was a general name for the two pale (actually pale blue, he now specified) stones from the Jimi. The pale green *nggaima* from Dom was yet another kind of stone, and the reddish and multi-coloured stones formed the last two kinds. There were indeed, he told me, five kinds of stones for making axes. The classification was still very much on the basis of colour, but the category 'pale' or 'chalky' had disappeared. These pale stones could be classified as either *kuru* or *mits-elmi*: *mits-elmi* was not just another *kuru* stone (like *nggaima*, *mont* and *wei*, but pale blue instead of green or grey) but a general term for 'pale blue stone for making axes', which included *mont* and *wei* (the blue-grey stones). This reduced the number of axe-stone varieties to eleven. The treatment of the colour blue was still mysterious. The word *maingegl*, which I had recorded for 'blue' in my notes, was still not used. Either dark blue was distinguished from black, or light blue was distinguished from light green, but only one of these distinctions appeared in the same list.

I tried to define the colour names I had collected by discovering the range of visual experience each signified. Buna, a young man who had been a key informant when I had been compiling a list of mushroom names and their meanings, helped me to find colour names for various objects at my field base. He identified as *kuru* the stark and glossy white of unexposed 'black and white' polaroid printing paper, the offwhite Swinger camera, a jar of Heinz mayonnaise, and a thermos flask coloured deep cream. The thermos was so much darker than the other objects Buna had indicated that I queried whether it might not be described as *kumbas* (yellow

ochre or brown). No, he assured me, it was 'closer to *kuru* than to any other colour', using a vernacular expression which when taken literally could seem to convey something very different from that. Some 'brown' envelopes and a cardboard carton of canned meat were *kumbas*. The deep fawn of the base of my tape recorder was *kumbas*, too, but the paler fawn (almost bone-colour) of the plastic top was, like the thermos, 'closer to *kuru* than to any other colour'. I asked him whether my tan golf shoes were *kumbas*, but Buna said no they were *mbang* ('reddish') or, really, 'closer to *mbang* than to any other colour'—and indeed, if one forgot the classification tan, they were reddish brown. The brilliant crimson on a Gold Leaf cigarette packet was *mbang wi* (true red). Some oatcake biscuits we were nibbling were *kumbas*; so also were dry bamboo leaves. This seemed to me inconsistent, as bamboo leaves dry to a pallor well within the limits of *kuru*, but I decided to confine my questioning to objects we could both see from where we were sitting. Buna used *kuru* to describe both the gleaming silver of chromework and the gold of my wristwatch, but said of a small bronze object that it was 'closer to red . . .'. We went through blue things (a saxe-blue cup and a mid-blue biro, both *maingegl*), and things that were tending to green but in Buna's view 'closer to blue . . .' (including both aqua-coloured and light green tissues). Buna agreed that the light green tissues were 'green' in Pidgin—though he himself had appeared to use the Pidgin words for 'green' and 'blue' interchangeably—and that they could thus be described as *ontr auegl tangnidl* (the colour of the leaves of trees), but he had not thought of this himself and did not sound convincing.

The plaited strong bamboo that had been laid on the ground some years previously to form a floor for my field base had yellowed to a chartreuse shade. This Buna described as *mbal ngan kerim*. This phrase described also my portable radio—charcoal grey, but with a rough, dull finish and no lustre to it—but I found it impossible to translate into English. *Kem* or *kerim* means 'he, she, or it throws away'. I asked Buna what *mbal* meant, and he



told me it stood for *mbagl*. This was a tiny fish, some kind of minnow which women caught by dipping their string bags in a creek and whisking them out on to the bank before they could escape. I had never particularly noted the colour of *mbagl* fish; indeed, I had never even had a good look at them. My impression was that those I had seen bore the silvery sheen common to fish in general. Perhaps the rough, dull finish of the radio and the dried-out chartreuse of the plaited bamboo were colours that were left over when some lustre had been 'thrown away'—by weather, perhaps, or the passage of time. The word in the middle, *ngan*, made no sense to me. Buna said it was derived from *ngants*, meaning 'skin'. Could I, then, translate the expression as 'it throws away the minnow skin' and interpret this as signifying colour that is faded?

I showed Buna a sheet of orange-coloured paper, identical with some he had already described as *gizbig* (orange) excepting that it had faded badly. I asked him what colour it was, expecting to hear either 'orange' or 'it throws away the minnow skin'. Instead, he answered without hesitation '*ndi ndom*'. Outside on the veranda I had some bananas hanging which were *ndi ndom*, half-ripe. Not 'nearly, but not quite ripe', an expression which incorporated *ndi* in the term for 'ripe', but just about midway between green (meaning unripe) and ready for eating. It seemed plain that it would be a matter of some subtlety to distinguish accurately between 'faded' and 'half-ripe' colours.

As we went outside I indicated the sky, where a bright patch was plainly discernible between some clouds. Yes, Buna told me, that was the bright (*kuru*) part of the clouds. A very dark cloud was a *djibil* cloud, the word evidently signifying the particular formation rather than anything to do with darkness or lack of brightness or any other quality associated with colour. A golden glow on the horizon (for it was late afternoon) was 'a red cloud'. A dull bluish cloud was *maingil*, simply a colloquial form of *maingegl*, 'blue'. A blue hill in the same direction was also 'blue'. Then we fell to

discussing a light breeze coming just as the mist was rising between the hills, and shortly Buna went on his way.

It seemed to me now that the Minj-Wahgi designation of colour was not a simple categorisation of appearances. Nor would it be accurate to describe it as a categorisation of visual experiences. The experience designated could include, in addition to the visual impact of an object, the knowledge that it had not always been chartreuse but had once been a brilliant viridian, or that although the glow on the horizon was unequivocally golden the sun that made it was sometimes bright red. Two informants, Wamdi and Buna, were not, of course, enough. I would have to go through the connotations of the 'colour' names with many more people, and I would have to be alert for the use of these names in everyday conversation. Eventually, if I tried hard enough, I would find the key to understanding.

Why these New Guinea Highlanders should elaborate yellow, or the pale colours, was still a mystery to me. In their traditional life, yellow was for the Lesser Bird of Paradise, for orchid fibre used to secure the most splendid of decorations and frame the brilliant green of iridescent beetle shards. Yellow was for about half the 'judges' wigs' worn during the pig festival; the rest were red. Yellow, too, for dwelling houses that were newly built. Whether a Lesser Bird of Paradise could be described as 'whitish', 'lemon', 'chrome yellow', or 'faded' could certainly influence its value. But this was by no means the most valued of plumes, and similar conditions of the Raggiana could be described with a single colour for 'reddish' and indications of sheen and fade.

I thought of the cultural emphases these people showed. Anyone could see that the men were obsessed with women and pigs. These were the things they fought over. But pale-coloured pigs were distinguished from the others as *kuru* (whitish), not as *terembe* or *kumbas*. Women as objects of exchange were associated in no way that I could see with shades of yellow: yellow was not prominent in either the adornments loaded upon them when they were bestowed or the banners displaying the valuables given for them.

Women, and men too, with light golden skin like Belau's were reckoned attractive but they were considered more so when they had flat squashy noses that were suitably yielding when partners in courting ceremonies pressed their cheeks together then rolled their faces around so that their noses met. Ghosts, and especially vengeful ghosts, were another cultural emphasis; but such apparitions, when they were visible at all, were white, not yellow. And, associated with ghosts, death could be seen to be something of a cultural preoccupation. Death. There was a yellow mourning clay, but there were also white clays and chalky blue clays. The white could be used, on occasion, for impersonating the ghost; but there was nothing special about the yellow. Death . . . mourning . . . the corpse. In the years I had known these people, I had seen more corpses than minnows. It occurred to me that there is a yellowness about the skin of the cadaver, and that gradations of yellow could conceivably indicate different stages of decomposition. Perhaps the precision with which the colours of life were distinguished could depend upon the successive changes that death sets in motion, from the time life is extinguished to the moment the bones are freed of their flesh. I would have to investigate this further.

## At the water-basin of the Nigatsudo in Nara

*Harold Stewart*

Under a grey-tiled roof devoid of walls  
The agile Dragon, cast in bronze, that wound  
Its greenly patinated coils around  
This basin's lotus-leaf, no longer crawls  
Spirally questing till the Pearl is found.  
Over the fluted lip, a trickle falls  
Still in the tingling air, but hangs a weird  
Fringe of icicles from the Dragon's beard,  
Whose drips, congealing into crystal balls  
Spilt on the mossy granite, have adhered.  
For cold abstractions fix the living flow  
In ice's clear austerity below,  
So that the Spirit freezes in its flight  
And cannot soar to seize the Pearl of Light.



Mona Lisa has walked off.  
 Her weak woman's heart moves one to pity but  
 those woman's wiles of hers hold dreadful power.  
 It glows pale green by day  
 but fiery red at night,  
 hues hid in the blue depths of the alexandrine.  
 Mona Lisa has walked off.

Mona Lisa has walked off.  
 She awed my soul,  
 set my desire aflame—  
 yet her lips only smile.  
 How I do hate her!  
 She sheds no tears  
 but through her scarcely-parted lips discloses  
 a greenish gleam of teeth, like orient pearl.  
 Mona Lisa, cut from her frame,  
 is gone.

Mona Lisa has walked off.

Once my heart shivered at her mystery  
 and plotted to escape yet  
 how it burns me—  
 my strange yearning for that retreating form,  
 vanishing like a wraith, like fumes from an opium pipe.  
 And after, what desolation!  
 That last day in November will not easily be forgot.

14th December.

I called her Mona Lisa—  
 for a while,  
 —the girl at the pleasure quarters,  
 that I loved.

(1914)

## Carnal knowledge

*Gwen Harwood*

Grasshoppers click and whirr.  
Stones grow in the field.  
Autumnal warmth is sealed  
in a gold skin of light  
on darkness plunging down  
to earth's black molten core.

Earth has no more to yield.  
Her blond grasses are dry.  
    Nestling my cheek against  
    the hollow of your thigh  
I lay cockeyed with love  
in the most literal sense.

Your eyes, kingfisher blue.  
This was the season, this  
the light, the halcyon air.  
Our window framed this place.  
If there were music here,  
insectile, abstract, bare,

it would bless no human ear.  
Shadows lie with the stones.  
Bury our hearts, perhaps  
they'll strike it rich in earth's  
black marrow, crack, take root,  
bring forth vines, blossom, fruit.

    Roses knocked on the glass.  
    Wine like a running stream  
    no evil spell could cross

flowed round the house of touch.  
God grant me drunkenness  
if this is sober knowledge,

song to melt sea and sky  
apart, and lift these hills  
from the shadow of what was,  
and roll them back, and lie  
in naked ignorance  
in the hollow of your thigh.



## For Francesca . . .

*John Blight*

Francesca! now in the early hours  
when death is the natural animal,  
and my skin seems black as yours, I light  
my lamp, the pale leprosy of whose glow  
disturbs my after-midnight sleep;  
stretching a ghostly white arm  
reaching for my pen to write of you.

Only my hand like an albino spider  
sidling over the parchment traces this story  
which, somewhere, midnight dictates of you.

Francesca, my totally black Mistress! I  
know now, in waking there is no more  
knowledge than in sleep. There is  
this feeling, only, of my love for you  
heightens the hour, the ceiling of my  
consciousness; but beyond the lamp's glow,  
up, up, all is black as the night still.

## Words in winter

*Grace Perry*

The daughters  
no longer speak  
I do not hear them

having eaten the fruit of our table  
the seeds remain  
and the odour of oranges

one walks the house  
as a ghost  
the body elsewhere

rather the mirror image  
the body with us  
the mind has gone out

and closed the door  
forever  
on us

the other more truly lost  
in a fierce forest  
hides even from herself

I am able to admit it now  
the empty room  
clothes books

all the little landscapes  
all  
cleared away

I dream a child's cry  
and start up listening  
to unnatural silence

old photographs  
renew your living torment  
and my own

## June fugue

*Thomas W. Shapcott*

### I

Where shall we go? where shall we go?

—We shall go to the Museum.

What shall we see? is there lots to see?

—We shall see rooms full of treasures.

I want to see jewels and costumes

pharoahs and mummies

—We shall spend hours

among relics.

We shall be able to look hard

at the blackened wrists of mummies.

### II

Do you remember that June day we drove into the mountains

we sang together all the songs from 'Salad Days' and 'My Fair

Lady'?

—Shall we sing those songs now?

Remember them?

No I was thinking of the mountains. The walking track

through that patch of rainforest.

—And when we reached the sunlight

I picked you an everlasting daisy.

You were always bringing me things.

### III

Do you remember the images the children said:

'Why don't trees have two legs?'

'Daddy, look at the broken moon'

'Mummy come in come inside, you'll get the dark  
all over you'

Children are so unlike.

They all draw bodies of sticks and daisies and circles.

#### IV

Where is that human hand? where is the Egyptian mummy?

I'm sick of stuffed birds like things the cat brought in.

—It is a hand small as yours. But very dark,  
dried out, like a bundle of sticks.

Where is it? now show me. Show me.

#### V

The attendants are bored. The children stop  
and then laugh, they move on. It is nothing.

How shall I tell them the curse is true?

That out in the sunlight their shoulders are fingered  
that already the things they bring in as Everlastings  
have the smell of museums. That once having drawn the circle  
you will get the dark all over you.

Brownie box — from *Cameras**Graeme Kinross Smith*

Touchy at school, a worrier,  
aperture and focus  
still mysteries to me,  
at least I could wrap hands around the black world  
and confront its witching suddenness—  
the sun across a track, my brothers' faces—  
and with a ginger finger  
press the shutter button, feel even then  
the tiny kick inside . . .

But prints showed only  
private beauties flattened,  
except where once or twice  
I'd jostled up some echo  
to be kept for years—but still  
framed far too large.

# Falling

*Keith Harrison*

As an awkward kid I prayed beside this bed;  
I know each chip and nubble at the head  
for when I knelt here sometimes I'd imagine  
a wild acanthus or a fruited vine  
might shoot from the wood as I stared and said:  
*God bless us all and make us prosper.*

And now, a ten-year exile, slowly returning,  
I stare once more at the cold dawnlight burning  
the same pepperina—and still the milkman's nag  
clops up the hill and whinnies into his bag.

Not quite what I prayed for, not really  
what I meant. I curl against your warm body.  
The bed's too narrow, and your knees sharp . . .  
*Move over, love, or I'll continue falling.*

# Norwinch sleeping

*Andrew Taylor*

For reasons known  
only to itself  
(maybe to Konrad Lorenz)  
my cat has described a perfect circle  
and is sleeping within it  
like an animal scone  
like half an orange 11 inches in diameter  
like the knitted top of a head

usually when it's sleeping it twitches  
stalking birds  
down the long slanting  
lawns of a dream  
or its ears listen to what I say

not today  
it's beyond us now  
it's animal geometry  
a feline planet  
it can be anything or nothing  
not even its name washes ashore  
if I touch it  
it makes a noise like the sea



## Mr Jefferson's tune

*Hal Porter*

It's a dry tune, very brief and inornate, yet . . . yet . . .

Every once in a while I catch myself humming it, this subdued air, this reminder of loss. Then I remember from whom it was filched, and how, and where, over half a century ago. To link us to lost things there are only images in the mind: it's the reminder of loss shapes these images.

The name of the tune? It's nameless, for who knows its name, who now living knows? Who cares but I? Is there anyone else, any one at all, anywhere, anywhere at all, of all the millions gracing or blemishing the Earth . . . ?

When, matters not where, but always at periods of solitude, the most forlorn tune flutters as if abstractedly into being, well do I recall that little country town.

Oh *well*—in the minutest detail, not a dog-eared leaf missing, not one asterisk-sized spider on its rigging of silk, not a demi-semi-thought nor nuance of feeling, not one iota of silence. Just as Troy was a fable exposed as fact by pick-axe and shovel so, by a wordless instrument nearly not a tune, is that country town of 1917 a vision unearthed for my delight, my regret. No need for grief. Grief would be an admission of failure: enough to be just a shade regretful, to feel a shadow no more than the shadow of glass, a repining faint as the odour of rain.

It's a tune that instantly calls up the Indian Summer of that year in one little Australian town. No Hun Zeppelins slither, silver and fearful, through the Tiepolo sky. WAR is nothing but a newspaper word, a black arm-band in Main Street, a passer-by widow in her home-dyed weeds, or a returned soldier wearing his mutilation as proudly as the most costly of decorations—a uninhabited sleeve folded back and pinned up, a shrapnel-gammy leg rigid as a statue's. In the streets and grassy lanes no battle-cries.

The gutters run only with lively rain-water making sound but not noise, or with the bloodless first fallen leaves.

It's a tune that calls up the 1870 Cornish elms arching over the home-town back-street we live in, its roadway of sparse gravel through which a dove-grey earth shows like soiled flour, its drains fringed by elegant betasselled weeds, its footpaths with rosettes of dandelion and plantain plugged flatly in.

It's a tune that stereoscopically reconstitutes the done-away-with and the dead.

Once more the dandified blackbirds dig pits in our windfall Gravensteins; our ermine-white, deaf cat with phosphorous-blue eyes again sprawls indolently as a sultan under the Lizzie Vidler fuchsia; from the house next-door or next-next-door can be heard the rare tinkle, languid and sugary, of an old-time telephone; the dead announcing gifts of gossip or disorder or love to the dead.

Father sits unseen in his button-studded leatherette arm-chair, within the house, behind the white weatherboards, behind curtains of Nottingham lace, silent as a pared-down hero revolving, perhaps, hitchless piratical schemes, or thinking, perhaps, 'To become, after all, no more than a man—how commonplace! how paltry!' Corsair hands, concave torso, perplexed and handsome face: his whole body is irrigated by an ardent but Church of England blood. He grasps at fame-riddled futures. Something always numbs his grip at the moment of grasping. The scent of invisible tobacco fumes from his invisible meerschaum, with *its* perplexed and handsome face (but little and Tibetan), deserts him and the house to breed with the out-door scents of Chile jasmine and lemon-scented verbena and the sun-warmed box hedge. Butterflies! They stitch from sunflower to sunflower, yet haltingly only, wearily. Their wings are frayed and fading. Theirs is a transient longevity: summer and their summer are nearly over.

Look! Here comes the cylindrical ginger dog called Ginger, elderly, senatorial, slaving neatly as a snail with suspicion although pacing with gravity past the lined-up pansies. They are all faintly ferocious, moustached, looking craftily sidelong like so many

yellow-velvet-visaged Kings of Spades. Impossible to believe that, at night, when the mist is grounded by its own opalescent weight, Ginger's is the hoarse but passionate baritone upbraiding the untrodden-on moon. Since he's here in the garden, affected off-handedness and all, yet squinting through his intemperate eyebrows, Mother cannot be far off—he thinks she belongs to him.

Yes! Here she is!

She moves among the world-weary, threadbare butterflies. With fingers I know are kind, she now touches a white pompon dahlia crimped as a Clouet ruff, now one with quills of silky velveteen crimson as a rooster's comb. There is, however, menace in her kindness. She's really ruthlessly picking roses, the last of the roses. Scissors flash.

She sees me while at the same time tilting up by one finger-tip the meek face of a rose, of a victim, and looking into it with the blind raptness and rapture of a priestess bent on sacrificial murder. She's fastidiously about to use those scissors, to kill with love without pity. She says at the rose but to me, 'I wondered where you were.' The closing blades glitter, and utter 'Die!' Can a rose scream?

The floral pallor of Mother's face has been toasted by summer. On the tawniness her eyebrows, scant as Mona Lisa's, scarcely show. 'I want you,' she says, and she does now turn her slaked, aquarium-green eyes on me, 'to get the basket from the kitchen-table, and go to Mr Jefferson's. I've written the list. It's in the basket with the vinegar-bottle.'

The list is written—violet ink—in Mother's astringent, Italianate, Notre-Dame-de-Sion-Convent script and looks like a cryptic jotting from Elizabeth to Essex, or the formula of an apothecary's dubious potion. Two words confound me: I am six years old. Mr Jefferson, the grocer, with a froth of beard like God's, is 80 at least, perhaps 87, or even more. It is from him I absorb, that day, the few staves of a nameless tune without words. Humming it, more than half a century after, remembering it all, everything, I . . . well, I

smile although everything's gone, all of it's gone. From this the heart must not shy back.

All gone: elms, elegant weeds, footpath dandelions of 1917, windfall Gravensteins, meerschaum with tiny perplexed Tibetan face, white dahlia and crimson, Lizzie Vidler fuchsia, that season's tarry-carmine and lime-yellow roses assassinated by Mother.

All dead: blackbirds that mined the windfalls; voluptuous and enigmatic blue-eyed cat; lovelorn ginger dog; edgy, weather-beaten butterflies; Father in whose cropped, carbon-black, and lubricated curls one's eye instinctively seeks the vine-leaves and the muscatels; Mother, leery but gay, sustained by a resigned wisdom, young and sunlit in her gardening apron of Italian cloth; and old old Mr Jefferson.

All gone. All dead. I smile. I too shall be wings gone to powder, eyes and claws to dust; I too shall be an inscription on a tombstone; I too have, long ago, come tranquilly to relinquish any notion of being immortal, to compromise with the commonplace truth that no one is denied the bonus of death. There's fortunately no advance from this, no retreat. One has no more to do than stand always on the sword's dazzling edge, on its menacing but reassuring certainty. Memory alone is unable to compromise. The writer of this is less I than memory.

In the depths of years, layers of decades down, they all lie—blackbird, butterfly, cat, dog, Father, Mother, Mr Jefferson. I alone, the hanger-on, unskilled in gesture, straining for cues, groping for lines, now barefaced or in a mask, now with a toy pistol or a wilted primrose, always stumbling in and out of the wings, seem drastically miscast. The others are flawless, perfected, unerring, hermetically sealed in silence. They lie in this silence, fortunate and elusive (drawn away to that which is no concern of the living), moveless, sightless, voiceless, nerveless—and heartless; but hardly safe. When my current of recall is switched on by that nearly tuneless tune, what chance have they? It's certainly no time, for example, to offer fate an opportunity of changing its programme. The tune goes on and on, and . . .

Look!

There I am, six years old, about to start off with the time-grey basket, the bottle-green bottle, and the Tudor *billet-doux* or noxious prescription in Mother's bitter-sweet calligraphy:

1 Tin Treacle	1 Bottle Malt Vinegar
2lbs. Brown Sugar	2 ozs. Turmeric
1 Cake Sand Soap	1 Bar Glycerine Soap

See! Now, there's Father coming out of the front door still wickedly wearing his shocked morocco slippers, still sharing a Pipe of Peace with his own secret disappointments, yet as magnificently and threateningly erect as a villain king or the envoy from a celebrated disaster. There we are—he, Mother, I, and (like a fourth presence) the smoke from his mouth and the scalped head of the meerschaum Tibetan. The smoke blue-milkily unfolds, twisting this way and that, intertwining with itself as though it intends to form a picture, scrawl an intelligent criticism or, on the other hand, compound a terrifying augury no one desires, something such as, 'There'll be no more death forever and forever!'

An edgeless and glowering loneliness monopolizes Father, a heroism of the kind praise cannot touch. He bends down to stir two alien finger-tips in the seductive powder-puff fog of the cat's belly. Cat yawns hexagonally, indifferently, showing fangs white as nougat, cruel as thorns, lording it in the immunized zone it occupies between sorcery and disdain. If Mother is everything to the dog, Father is nothing to the cat which senses that *it* is the luxury, not he whose greatest vice is a one-way intelligence, who has to a nicety the cheerless technique of self-indulgence.

At last I am off to Mr Jefferson's.

Mother closes the white wooden gate behind me with the hand not holding the agonized roses, and—listen now!—calls out to my retreating back in its newly-ironed blouse, 'And don't drink the vinegar.'

Really! *Really!* Hers is the art of delighting and destroying. She's the charming, loving, melodious one who can make Destiny sound as if it were merely the name of a one-horse town. She's also the

one wary of niggers in wood-piles, Greeks bearing gifts, snakes in the grass, dust under the Axminster, a possible charnel-house beneath the parquet, a sin in a son.

That's one of the drawbacks of the dead: they never say what they haven't said or do what they haven't done. We invoke them from the edge of the abyss, expecting something more, some magic or glamour we've forgotten, but they seem to take sides against us by being no more wonderful and noble than they were, no less trite and underhand, as boring, as mean, as feckless, as timid, as unalterable as ever. The incurable sadness of the living: to be tied wrist and ankle to memories nothing changes. If her voice still falls into the 50-odd years of silence behind me like a glove with a rein-holding hand in it, better so, better so. Death, then, has not changed her, any more than the Hundred Years' War, the Great War, any war, any cataclysm, has changed the nature of vital things: the spade, the stew-pan, the stool, the bracelet, the quilt, the mother, Mother.

Changeless though cantankerously ever-changing, light-hearted yet iron-minded, she is tricky and perverse. She grows, for instance, only the pelargoniums which smell like anything else but pelargoniums; like nutmeg, citron, balsam, peppermint, even like a rose. She cherishes plants, some of which she calls mingy or stinky or dowdy, some of which she decidedly can't bear, because of their names which romantically excite her: Solomon's Seal, Eve's Cushion, Grim the Collier, Moses in the Bulrushes, Gardener's Garters, Nun's Scourge, Aaron's Beard, Sailor with the Navy-blue Eyes. She's doubtless quite capable of coddling an ebony tree not because of the tree itself but because castanets and xylophones are made from its wood, a teak because its odour is leathery, a linden merely on behalf of its hat-blocks and tisanes. A string-saver, she is also as spend-thrift as a tycoon's mistress. A frugal hoarder of petticoat lace, *diamanté* shoe-buckles, camisole edgings, and every sort of button, she is nevertheless always losing things: her thimble, pince-nez, darning mushroom, ivory crochet-hook, lawn handkerchiefs embroidered with lily-of-the-valley, Marie Corelli

novels, the fringed leather strap she beats me with when I sinfully lose things. She is, as it were, deciduous, and has a drawer of widowed gloves. Her fallibility could not be more striking. Although her garden and her gardening are antidotes to vehemence and iniquity, she can, while gardening in the garden, be iniquitous enough. She, who relishes drinking vinegar, announces my weakness to the street, the town, the world:

‘And don’t drink the vinegar!’

I shall run away. I shall be Robinson Crusoe, Hänsel, Wandering Willie. I shall turn corner after corner, arrive at the railway-station, and go off in the train with its plumes of boiling smoke. First of all, however, Mr Jefferson.

Not far to his place, and nothing unchaste on the way. Not far, and, despite all those decades, I remember every inch and incident as one remembers every hair of a dentist’s eyebrows. Doubtless watched by Mother and the fainting roses and the blood-stained scissors, perhaps by Father above his yashmak of smoke, certainly by our sunflowers which miss nothing, our chimney-pots, the steel-blue slates of the stable-roof, and by our Scots pine which is having its sooty-green fur fondled the wrong way by the cisiest of breezes, I cross the road.

Over there, directly opposite our white picket gate in its white picket fence is a scabby, high, deal gate set in a higher, badly dented, corrugated-iron fence. Stones have been thrown, as at a witch’s hide-out. Along the fence-top uglily writhe the muscular self-wrestlings of a wistaria, Miss Grant-Smythe’s wistaria.

Miss Grant-Smythe is one of those lucky—or embittered—people who live alone. She is an old maid, last of a family that has come down in the world, and left nothing but the carapace of former glory behind the stone-pitted fence: a large house with dry-retching terra-cotta gargoyles, seemingly glued-together shutters, and dare-devil chimneys, lofty and elaborate, forever starved of smoke. Here (Mother concludes, and says), here she exists on old novels and privations, on dreams of the past, and dog’s-meat broth.

'All women go mad when they live alone like Her Ladyship', says Mother, pitiless because snubbed, tenacious of her prejudices, tactless as a tigress before little pitchers. 'Mad, mad, mad—living on the smell of an oil-rag because she's too stiff-necked to sell that folly of a place, and move into a cottage. Bats in the belfry. Mad as a March hare. Mad . . .'

Perhaps Mother speaks some of the truth; so often she doesn't bother to speak any if it water down a venomous nostrum. Miss Grant-Smythe is probably merely a professional sufferer, a woman who has some penury of the spirit more dangerous than poverty itself, more sustaining than the scraps she must nurture her gentility and snobbery on. After too many years spent dining opposite an autocratic mother, a gambler's widow, opposite the glitter of her jet bodice impenetrable as a breast plate, opposite her Amazon's mineral eyes, her diamonds and demands, perhaps Miss Grant-Smythe should—the matriarch dead—have committed a lack-lustre and tactful suicide that discomposed no one. Not she. Hers is the desperate etiquette of the survivor for whom there's nobody but self to survive for. She has the combined serenity and vitality of those who have lost everything. It's easy enough for a condemned man to put on, for the last showy hour or so, an imitation of faultless behaviour, a fake bravery. It cannot be easy for her to face the deep dark water of the looking-glass, pull on the decayed gloves, and come out, time and again, time and again, like an escapee from Grimm's Fairy Tales, through the paintless gate once always painted. As I reach the wooden foot-bridge over the drain, she comes out.

She comes out sidling, nose in the air. She's dolled-up in the raiment of a decade before, in what was once splendid and costly, the whale-boned lace collar of her blouse gripping her martyr's neck, the ailing ostrich feathers of her hat shuddering as, with the neurotic intensity of an ascetic, she locks the gate with a large iron key. She is her own warder. Behind the cobbled web of her veil her ice-grey, wandering eyes swivel towards me with a stare in which there's not a trace of cordiality. Why should there be?



Who am I? A gutter-boy with a basket of stones to throw? An angel child with an insulting charity basket of calves-foot jelly and mutton pies? Street-Arab or goody-goody how could I serve her famished senses? the sexless, ageless regard of the obsessed, the Byzantine stare leaves me. With an out-of-date gesture of one gloved hand she reaches behind to bunch up the shabby burden of her earth-sweeper 1907 skirt. I see that the hem is frayed by the floors of . . . of what? The board floors of cheap-jack shops? The poor people's Potato Market? The pawnbrokers? The harsh stairs of the years?

'She can't,' I seem to hear Mother say, 'even afford a cat.' Catless, scarecrow-delicate, straight-backed, despite soles and heels fit for the fire, she hurries airily away from her locked No-Man's-Land.

Next to Miss Grant-Smythe's is a double paddock barricaded against human invasion by a man-tall paling fence and barbed wire—another sort of No-Man's-Land. Summer, autumn, winter, spring, never a Friesian cow with Nebuchadnezzar grass hanging from her lips; never a scruffy State School boy planning Robin-Hoodery among the docks; nor a boar in apparent Coventry arguing with the ground in catarrhal grunts; nor an old codger lipless as a cat fractiously scything; not even one ubiquitous and larrikin fox-terrier elevating a leg to baptize a thistle. Passing it I do not pass a spectacular battle-field like one of those Over There, Over There, but I do pass one: the Billion Years' War is still on. No aurora borealis of cannonading and bomb-burst prettifying an horizon, no magnificent and soothing thunder, but my mental antennae inform me that uncountable creatures are there on the war-path, that incredible violence and frenzy agitate unseen the jungle I'm a Gulliver to, that there are underground tumult and butchery going unceasingly on, massacres in the dungeons of the sub-soil, multi-faceted eyes spying on carnage I should be glad not to be able to see, insect screams and cannibal crunchings I should be happy not to hear.

I hear instead, far off, many blocks away in Main Street where the trees wear iron corseting, red-faced Mr John Fanning the

town-crier squeaking out something, news of a church bazaar or Rowing Club Ball or end-of-season sale or strayed jinker-horse, in the spaces between the distant, tinny, tolling interruptions of his hand-bell. All the other bells of the town are fasting in their towers, St. John's too, the big one I once see spitting out sparks like red-hot tacks from its open-work aerie at a New Year's Eve bell-ringing. As well as the town-crier and his bell I can hear, but also not see, a skinflint skylark making its miniscule complaint, miles up, and can just see a hawk, not so many miles up it seems, pressing his killer's breast against the stream of wind he swims on, an upper Ganges of air, a swift and steady Nile, not a militant wind intending to charge and torment the Earth, or a mad-dog hurricane to worry it like a mastiff. How, and how long ago, did you die, hawk and lark? Where is the town-crier, and the town-crier's melancholy bell?

The double paddock, cutting right through the block, is a pause between gardens and trees and houses. Beyond this mute and secret battle-ground it's possible sometimes to examine lingeringly a rainbow's architecture of seven-coloured vapours, and disorderly sunsets of a certain kind: the sun, in a flurry on its way to Madagascar, glowing like a monkey's bottom, tangerine.

Next is Carter's. Their front fence has many missing teeth; so have the Carters. Their gateless gate-posts wear skull-caps of lichen. On *their* footpath, dust like gunpowder spurts up and over my boots because every last blade of grass is worn away by the livid bark of the soles of the barefoot Carter children, so dirty, so ragged, so shrill, and so many that they cannot choose the sauce they are to be served up in. They would seem, therefore, to have the right or, even more, the obligation to be unhappy. Not so. Far from. Near-destitution can enliven more than wealth and its duties. Refinements and restrictions being alien to their barbarian notion of happiness, happy they are, dazzled by their own vulgarity, their savages' freedom. They play Jew's harps and mouth-organs, and beat on kerosene tins, and swear. All they could need is advice on how to be embarrassed. With their water-colourless eyes and

soiled flaxen hair, their mouths outlined by cheap raspberry jam dried black, they have been disenbogued into time, one a year, year after year. Impossible to count them.

Mrs Carter is Miss Grant-Smythe's absolute counter-pole—rhinoceros-huge, voluble, ungirt, a breeder notorious for unloading her progeny, as though unwittingly, beside the wash-trough of nappies tattered as regimental flags, at the wood heap with an axe handle still gripped in her grimy fat paw, and, once, in the Ladies' Parlour of the Railway Hotel. Fecundity haunts the Carter's ramshackle domain. It seems not only because of Mrs Carter who lows rather than speaks, and her Little Tich of a mate, a Shire Council gutter-sweeper lithe and sinister as a trapeze artist. Is she some fertilizing principle more vigorous than herself, powerful beyond the celestial bedevilment of tricky planets, of spots on the sun? It does appear so.

In spring the Carter's apple-tree, arthritic and—surely?—impotent, becomes amazing, rather of the ratherest with blossoms more like Flower Show roses than blossom. Dolichos creeper rampages over house, sheds, wash-house, dunny, concealing them, chimneys and all, at one and the same time rupturing the decayed boards and warped roofs and holding them together. Come December the Carter hydrangea bushes erupt into cauliflower-sized blooms, lightning-blue, greenish-pink, foolscap-white; and their weeds and grasses wax taller by far than anything the annual imprudence of spring and summer can manage for any one else—the pale-eyed, pale-haired tribe of Carter gutter-snipes batter Hottentot jungle-trails through them.

Now, as I pass by with Mother's basket (Mrs Carter waving at me with feigned pleasure, and beefing out some incomprehensible platitude), it can be seen that Indian Summer has dried the hydrangea blooms papery; all their colours have oxidized to other colours, to verdigris, chartreuse, lovat-green, or are brindled by the browns of tortoise-shell, rusted tin, foxes, and cinnamon. Only the exaggerated apple-blossoms have partly played false, have lapsed into plum-small, sea-green fruit, scarlatina-flushed on one

check, each as indelible as a diamond bangle, each the abode of a seemingly steel-jawed grub, a grub like a drill, otherwise how could there lie outside each tunnel entrance, small as a beauty-spot, that neat sawdusty pile of frass? Meanwhile, as I pass, seeds tiny and black as fleas, minute as hundreds-and-thousands, as fine and pungent as mace and pepper, are to be sensed spraying down in their millions from the Carter's prodigious weeds.

To think that all of this—the Carters, Miss Grant-Smythe, the hawk and the lark, the hydrangeas and the Billion Years' War, the 1917 daylight in my eyes and the 1917 dust on my toe-caps—would have vanished as if thrown into a bottomless well if Mr Jefferson's tune hadn't the power to bring them back, with every attendant sound and stillness, every visible gesture and tint, every unseen insect and seed.

Mr Jefferson? The Common must be crossed before the gigantic peppercorn tree in the backyard of his shop can be seen. In that space of time, people with the best intentions in the world can shut up shop, or die. In that space of time, all over the world, many do—but not Mr Jefferson.

The Common is deserted except for a troupe of cabbage-moths on their way elsewhere but briefly performing amateur acrobatics over the Pond's depression which, when full, has the outline of the Sea of Galilee. That day it is an ignoble archipelago of puddles the area of meat-dishes, or no larger than saucers. In wetter times frog-spawn like frothed-up egg-white clings to the half-submerged tussocks in the Pond; on some winter mornings every blade of Common grass is rigid and sparkling; every leaf chitinized by a sugar-white frost; the Pond locked down under its own-shaped pane of glass.

By daylight the Common, then a place to cross over, seems flatly to state, 'Behold me then, just as I am!'—not large, abraded rather, in its way menial and quite unpretty, treeless, shrubless, and diagonally scored by a couple of crooked paths, narrow and boot-top-deep trenches worn by the short-cut-taking soles and heels of those on the way to Main Street, to school, church, the doctor, a

wedding, a ball, to a picnic or a war or a lover or the city, on the way to anywhere and any one . . . and often not ever to return. By daylight one does not bother to saunter or dawdle even though passing over for the last time; one is inclined to step it out at an angle by one or other of the crooked, now-meeting, now-parting paths. Why loiter midway when the circus and the grave, the answer and the final destination, are on the other side?

At twilight, on summer evenings, how different! The Common then extends itself; the gas-lamp at the corner, touched into radiance by the tip of the lamp-lighter's wand, seems farther off and taller than it is in its whirling ring-a-rosy of Christmas beetles, and moths bent on suicide. Children (how many alive today? how many dead? how many part-alive, part-dead?) play self-terrorizing games in the dusk, longing to be defiled but on their own wild terms. There's the exhilaration of disaster at hand; perhaps the stars corroding the sky will start to sleet down, and that longed-for extravaganza *The End of the World* will take place. No such luck; dusk becomes near-dark larded with nerves. Bats from unthinkable somewhere convulsively flicker into existence, more and more of them; the corner of the eye can't keep up. The crickets suddenly, all together—warned by what, of what?—cut out.

'Who's going round my house tonight?' wail the children, and for the first time falter in their game.

Which of their number—or who at all—answers, 'Only poor Old Tom?'

'Don't steal any of my fat . . . ' They cannot go on.

At this sort of hour the outskirts of the Common are ringed about by nineteenth-century presences such as poor Old Tom, Jack the Ripper, Spring-heel Jack, Sweeny Todd . . . mute spectres but dreadfully alive, limping and loitering in ragged opera cloaks, waiting for the gas-lamp to die down before they . . .

Voiceless already, the game ended, their eyes glittering, the children hasten, run, run, run, to where the lamps are lit in houses, to where the shadow of an aspidistra or a dressing-table or a mother

on the holland blind restores their voices, and lets them ask for raspberry vinegar or a blood orange, at least makes them hope for some token of safety and love—a kiss, a father's rebuke, a mother's smack.

The Common isn't always a space to hasten through or from: on Guy Fawkes' Night the bonfire makes it into a warm room, an uncourtly *salon*, a garish nursery. There could be walls sombrely papered, far-off doors locked against Old Toms and ghouls, drawn-down blinds and closed velvet curtains: night contrives to be them. Thus sealed in, parent-overseen but sanctioned to maffick, we children plunge about in a triumphant madness. Hurling like ghosts through each other we fiercely destroy the enclosed hours of a chamber invented by a poet whose name we cannot guess because it is our own: the chariot of fire has crashed to Earth, halted in this rotunda of transparent flames and speeding shadows and shocks of sparks and spangles, this dazzling foyer which might well be the figment of an unstable mind—ours. Ha!—there are no bats, no cats, no dogs: this is not for them. There appears much noise, but there isn't; and little of the little of it is human. The fire itself spits, writhes, gesticulates, hating everything now that it has eaten the guy to nothing. Beyond its reach the fireworks work. The adults stand still, more or less herded together like Inquisition martyrs awaiting their turn. If one of them softly laugh it isn't in reply to another's soft laugh but to some inner and nostalgic solicitation. Only we, the children with brains like Catherine wheels, are beyond the evil of thinking, and only we—howsoever shy or fastidious tomorrow, howsoever withdrawn and touchy yesterday—give ourselves utterly up to a temporary égalitarian lunacy although each recognizes no one but self and flames. We could be riff-raff at the storming of the Bastille as we reel about brandishing shapes of fire in the luxury of bitter smoke. We could be kindergarten devils rehearsing hell. We could be idolators as we stand effigy-still, our vermilion faces tilted back to exhale a sensual chorus, 'A-a-h! A-a-a-a-h!' when a rocket, eagle-high, languidly

puffs out a mare's tail of emerald meteorites and silver filaments against God's Satan-black firmament . . . 'A-a-a-a-h!'

Next morning the thistle-down polls of the Carters, that uncompassionate brood, are disdainfully to be seen wandering and curtsying like those of mushroom-gatherers as they glean for leftovers. It's obvious that their ancestors are unlikely to have been dukes or popes. Now and then they let off a second-hand cracker. The outburst is non-military, muffled, as though daylight holds a hand over something's mouth.

I walk past the bonfire scar. It's almost mathematically circular. Four months after the warlike gala of Guy Fawkes' night nothing grows on it. Nothing ever does. I and basket and bottle move off the Common. There's Mr Jefferson's peppercorn tree: not far to go. Four houses behind four gardens, and I shall hear him humming the . . . is it really a tune?

The first house is Mrs McKay's. How people and gardens differ on a short walk in 1917. The left-hand square of Mrs McKay's garden mirrors the right-hand one. Dead-centre of each is a globular cumquat tree decorated like a man-made confection with china-white blossoms, and fruit of all degrees of ripeness, and of every size—pin-head, pill, moth-ball, cherry, walnut, tombola. An unbelievably scoured path of black and white tiles, draught-board, runs between two equal plots of borage; the star-shaped flowers bend their unshaven necks with a unanimous sky-blue indifference, and exude an odour of cucumber. The path goes directly to three slate steps flanked by bulbous, fluted marble urns, and the veranda—also draught-board-tiled. Cast-iron pillars, hop-pole Corinthian, support the veranda roof painted awning-like in wide green and white stripes. Each side of the steps a grapevine mounts a pillar. Both vines, virile and insolent as cat-burglars, swarm along the eaves. From their mingled leafage intermixed bunches of ink-blue and yellow-green grapes hang heavily down. The day is suddenly sumptuous. Behind the corrugated-iron awning thus bordered by a luscious Provencal frieze, Mrs McKay, a long-time cripple, reclines on a rattan *chaise longue*.

Because, from the waist down, she is closely swathed in a tartan plaid she demi-resembles a stranded mermaid. Her unswathed half, ageing but vigilant, is more Romany than otherwise. Elaborately fretted tortoise-shell combs jut at angles from her insubordinate, ivory-coloured hair; her eyes are a sparkling, gipsy black; her nose is so arched and minatory that her Christian names could be Hauteur and Malice, or she the witch who tries to sabotage the artful dodges of fairy-tale swineherds, tailors, cobblers, and millers intent on marrying princesses. Her glance, piercing yet flattering (for whom does she really ransack that country-town street?), catches me level with her front gate. She puts on delight, arrests me with the sound of my own name, invites me in. Her voice is a girl's, Scottish. Walking up the path, perhaps I don't blush, but my emotions do. When I have mounted the steps, and am close to her, she inclines her dark lips nearer as if to nibble me, tells me I am a handsome laddie, touches my hair, prattles on. At last, with an invalid's stylish certainty, she rings the bell for her daughter to come and cut me two bunches of grapes. The bell makes a sad crystalline tinkling: it is the size of a morning-glory, is of turquoise-blue glass, and hangs around her neck on a long silver chain fine as string.

Here is the daughter, Miss McKay the dressmaker, with whom I've heard Mother talking gores and gussets, voile and *crêpe de Chine*. She opens the front door from ajar to full. Oh, how ready I am covertly to observe, for there, in the hall, rears up the astounding Chinese vase taller by much than I, an over-shapely whopper, scarlet and cream, peppered and pimpled with gilt. One of Ali Baba's thieves could lurk comfortably within it. Does one? Though tortured by wanting to, I am too shy and well-brought up to ask to look, to climb a chair, and peer. I miss an opportunity; deny Mrs McKay a pleasure, and myself a letdown. She dies without knowing I've even noticed the vase that secretly, not a word to any one ever, haunts me for years. Too giant for flowers, sitting on floor rather than what-not or occasional table, what else could it be except funk-hole for one of the forty? Who would own a vase



to keep only air in, or nothing more burly than a daddy-long-legs? Where is the vase now, other than in Mr Jefferson's tune? And what has happened to the blazing scissors of Miss McKay?

She too, has gipsy eyes; they too, sparkle; but her hair is both coppery and black, and controlled as well. Her eyebrows are soot-coloured plush. Four pairs of scissors of different shapes and lengths, and a cherry-red velvet pin-cushion the contour of the heart on a playing card, swing from her waist on cords. The heart's fat richness is pierced by one thread-dangling needle only—not a single pin; but two rows of pins, one with white china heads, one with black, are lined up twinkling on her bust. As she reaches up to capture the bunches, and sever them with the largest scissors: *Grapes, I think, don't feel pain in the same way roses do!* and I notice the arm-pits, sweat-mellowed to indigo, of her black dress. See how relentless and immodest is memory, that unflinching and unflinchingly faithful associate: the sultry afternoons of 1917 summer, the hours bowed over the Singer Sewing Machine, all are there in the discoloured patches beneath a dressmaker's so graciously uplifted arms. The past becomes the present; the present takes on the aspect of the past: sand in an hour-glass repeatedly turned upside-down.

Hurry. Hurry and hurry. How full of magic and inconveniences this world of flaws and privileges for, now, having dallied in that placid trap with its extravagant vines, its mammoth vase, and bell of glass, I must hurry and hurry to Mr Jefferson's without looking sideways or even backwards to where the mother and daughter, a sort of wax-works tableau inset with jet eyes, watch me as I go down the path, and open the gate. I feel my shoulder blades growing a little hump and hear the McKays tranquilly crying out some rigmarole of farewell. In the basket, wrapped in the starling's-egg-blue tissue paper of an old dress pattern, are the grapes, one bunch shaped like Africa, the other like India.

Next second, it seems, I am in Mr Jefferson's crowded, narrow shop, panting a wee bit, disturbed a mite, as if idling with kindly women has been a deed smacking of evil, and I've been sidetracked

into naughtiness even though my blouse smells of the bees-wax Mother rubs the flat-irons with, the very odour of cleanliness and merit.

Watch!

For the very first time in my life I am alone with Mr Jefferson; always before I've been with Father or Mother. Today, this day now, I know no more about him than I do that day then—he's old, very old; he wears steel-rimmed spectacles mended at the edge of one rim with sealing-wax; he's profusely bearded; his white apron is hooked together behind his back by a gadget whose head is a penny-sized brass heart; he is . . .

Listen!

He is humming the brief tune, perhaps six staves, no more than eight.

That he doesn't say anything as I tender Mother's list, and says not a word all the time I'm there, is a choice of behaviour I cannot find it in myself to be astonished by nor aggrieved at. Talk from adults, I've already learned at six, usually means questions of desolating triteness, or information of the wrong colour. Anyway I prefer looking to talking or listening so, while he slowly reads the list, and slowly turns, and s-l-o-w-l-y scoops out sugar from the bin into the brown paper bag, and s-l-o-w-l-y s-l-o-w-l-y weighs it on the golden scales, putting some in, taking a skerrick out (meanwhile humming the little tune), I am free to look, as it were body and breeches and all.

I start at the ceiling where, high up, under the cobwebbed little skylight, hang silhouettes I can discover no third dimension in or put no unequivocal name to—cauldrons for a wizard perhaps, pirate frying-pans, medicine knapsacks for a missionary, soldiers' Bible-cases. Still hanging high, but recognizable, are dust-pans, tin buckets and wash-up dishes, japanned trays, and brushes of every sort: scrubbing-, hearth-, stove-, crumb-, boot-, bottle-, white-wash-, all somehow suspended in long bunches like the dehydrated fruit of haggard palms on desert islands. I am more at home nearer the saw-dusted floor. I see the holes punched in a magnified

snow-flake pattern through the seats of the two slender bentwood chairs for lady customers; the portly glass jars of black-and-white-striped humbugs, barley sugar, toffees, and liquorice all-sorts garnishing the cedar counter with the air of loot from galleons, treasures prudently arranged in a secret cavern by picturesque and fiendish men. That zikkurat of golden discs cannot merely be brass weights; those obese sacks must contain gem-beknobbed chalices and rubied infidel orbs beneath the camouflaging top layer of potatoes, Spanish onions or swedes; the shelves aspire to fabulous glooms only the spiders have precisely charted, they and Mr Jefferson who, I know, knows everything, and the place for everything. Within his radius, within that country town, far from the uproar and glamour of battles, the wild scatter of cities, the terrible urgency of feet, all keep their places—Mrs McKay checkmated on her chessboard veranda; Mrs Carter almost submerged in her out-of-hand weeds; Miss Grant-Smythe, her own accomplice and turnkey, delivered over to the habits and customs of pride; Father enamoured of suffering because he doesn't really know what suffering is; Mother . . . she's the jaunty apparition with feelings . . . aware that fair weather, like an autumn leaf, holds by a mere thread, and transfixed at the point, 'No heart beats for ever.'

I?

Mr Jefferson sees me as I really am, even now, a little boy more in love with what he sees than what he's told, and yet, without telling, he tells me what to see. I listen to his tune, and learn it.

As I record the sawdust caulked into the cracks between his floor-boards, and the vanilla pods in his dusty glass jar, and the wooden tap of his vinegar cask (he turns it s-l-o-w-l-y above Mother's green bottle I musn't drink from), and the disposition on his shelf of packets of knife-cleaning powder, whitewash, fireplace rattle, and black-lead, I can't help but know that his mind has wings, is off and away, and that the humming is the sound of those wings.

Yes, I've learned the tune by the time he's written out the docket and, as a gift, folded three humbugs into a cone of white paper.

As he hands the basket to me it's possible that the look he gives with it can be translated, 'Take care, young shaver, take care. You have the weakling's habit of loving only what's proof against all bitterness.' He doesn't say anything. He keeps on humming, while I, compelled at last to look where I've avoided looking, stare reluctantly past him at the one thing in his shop that terrifies, the Dutch Cleanser woman with her face terribly hidden (why?) within its bonnet, the faceless woman eternally running, eternally in pursuit . . .

Leave me there, sated and gift-laden and horrified; leave me there where I remember I am.

I do not remember the going home, but do that the basket is heavier, oh much, and so much that I must trudge like an elderly man, with the turmeric and the treacle, the scented soap and the harsh, the musky grapes and the acrid vinegar . . . and Mr Jefferson's tune.

Leave me there wondering, now, at sixty, what I do not wonder, then, at six.

Where had Mr Jefferson's mind flown to on the vibrations of his humming that day over half-a-century ago? Had it flown seventy years farther back? Eighty? Was he remembering a tune he'd learned as a boy? A tune picked up from a drunkard's fiddle at a public hanging? A barrel-organ in a whaler's tavern? A harpsichord in a pioneer parlour roofed with thatch? A whistling in the dark by his grandfather?

How old is the nameless tune old men take in as little boys, and haphazardly hand on to little boys who will become old men, and . . . ?

Whose tune is it that calls up the dead and done-away-with, and the woman with the hidden face tirelessly running, relentlessly in pursuit?

# Uncle

*Graham Rowlands*

Avoiding the punch of the buffer  
coiled to strike  
out of the machinery of Depression,  
my uncle jumped the rattler.

The 3 feet 6 meeting 4 feet  $8\frac{1}{2}$   
pincergrip of industry run off rails  
forged his mind between narrow lines  
when no coke or coal fed furnace.

Until he ran away to work in railways  
with no work, he schooled  
in a two and two arithmetic.  
Now logic fails him on a decimal point.

Death means nothing to me  
he said, long survivor of the '30s  
as marrow fills with old school chalk  
still hard, though brittle now, my iron hero.

## Feliks Skrzynecki

*Peter Skrzynecki*

My gentle father  
Kept pace only with the Joneses  
Of his own mind's making—  
Loved his garden like an only child,  
Spent years walking its perimeter  
From sunrise to sleep.  
Alert, brisk and silent,  
He swept its paths  
Ten times around the world.

Hands darkened  
From cement, fingers with cracks  
Like the sods he broke,  
I often wondered how he existed  
On five or six hours' sleep each night—  
Why his arms didn't fall off  
From the soil he turned  
And tobacco he rolled.

His Polish friends  
Always shook hands violently,  
I thought. . . . *Feliks Skrzynecki*,  
That formal address  
I never got used to.  
Talking they reminisced  
About farms where paddocks flowered  
With corn and wheat,  
Horses they bred, pigs  
They were skilled in slaughtering.  
Nine years of forced labour in Germany  
Did not dull the softness of his blue eyes.

I never once heard  
 Him complain of work, the weather  
 Or pain. When twice  
 They dug cancer out of his foot,  
 His comment was: 'but I'm alive'.

Growing older, I  
 Remember words he taught me,  
 Remnants of a language  
 I inherited unknowingly—  
 The curse I damned a crew-cut, grey-haired  
 Department clerk with  
 Who asked me in dancing-bear grunts:  
 'Did your father ever attempt to learn English?'

On the back steps of his house,  
 Bordered by golden cypress,  
 Lawns—geraniums younger  
 Than both parents,  
 My father sits out the evening  
 With his dog, smoking,  
 Watching stars and street lights come on,  
 Happy as I have never been.

At thirteen,  
 Stumbling over tenses in Caesar's *Gallic War*,  
 I forgot my first Polish word.  
 He repeated it so I never forgot.  
 After that, like a dumb prophet,  
 Watched me pegging my tents  
 Further and further south of Hadrian's Wall.

## Spots of time

*J. M. Couper*

Wordsworth, maybe you should be alive at this hour.  
I met one of those lasses you kept on coming across  
and this one was on the hop deliciously anxious  
running pleasant-titted loose to the nor-easter.  
I was a traveller then upon the shore.  
It didn't make me feel like you or your Leech-gatherer.

Man, though, for sheer mortality, you spotted it bone-bare.  
Wordsworth, as I sit after, stealing those breasts from the breeze,  
for real or recollected they're not lascivious  
and you can have them back again as grave as you please:  
that vanishing day, the dark-brown breasts of her  
come in the scutter of life across the sand to me there.

Under the gaudy umbrella her indolent Abraham  
drenched in the rude of summer barely stirs.  
A damsel is better than a naked daffodil  
to quicken the world at your feet fleet, neat, and beautiful:  
nicked into time with you and me and her man  
and singing with all the music in that material body of hers.



# Esplanade spring

*Christine Churches*

First sighting of the season.  
I watch them side by side  
creased by hibernation;  
resting now and then along the pier  
to sip the sunlight off the sea.

They come in pairs,  
seem to avoid contact with others of the species.  
Notice how their tongues creep out  
to moisten words before they talk;  
eyes dull with the small back-room—  
they pay by the hour for the radiator.

He holds the sunshade over her,  
filters in soft sepia the Edwardian sun.  
Waves ruffle like petticoats on the sand,  
sea-gulls flounce in frilly air.  
They savour sunlight delicately.

Only the young  
suck it up with one gulp  
through a plastic straw.

## An end to innocence

*Jennifer Strauss*

The summer the tall trees flowered in flame  
 Bursting and banging like fifth of November crackers,  
 The white crane stayed two days on our back verandah,  
 Avid for water but wild to the sounds of speech  
 Floundering on scorch-sore feet to the furthest edge  
 Away from scraps of food I brought to woo him  
 Murmuring over and still maternal incantation,  
 Soothing 'Don't fret, don't fret, come then,'  
 Until the girl in the kitchen, flushed from the stove,  
 Snapped pettishly 'Oh, why do you go on?  
 You ought to know by now the bird can't talk.'

The third day he was gone, and on the splintering steps  
 My father wept for his ruined farm, green crops  
 A bitter taste of fly-ash in the mouth, and in the ear  
 Reverberations of a stock-count told in bullets,  
 One for each beast quick fire had forgotten to finish.  
 Frantic to adult tears I cowered away  
 Crying 'Don't cry, don't cry, please don't,'  
 Until the girl in the kitchen, swatting flies,  
 Sighed wearily 'Oh, how you do go on!  
 You ought to know by now your dad can't hear.'

Before that day  
 I never knew a grief  
 Could not be cried or comforted:  
 My ears are ringing yet  
 With the pain of the dumb and the deaf.

## My father: a selected listing of his faults

*Morris Lurie*

1. He steals. I don't mean in shops, stores, at the supermarket, or anywhere like that. He's not that sort of a person. But invite him to a wedding, engagement party, *barmitzvah* or *briss*, and the first thing he'll do is pocket a bottle of Scotch. Sometimes two. My father is a small, round man (sloping shoulders, broad back), who walks with a side-to-side roll, hands deep in the pockets of his unbelievably shapeless gaberdine coat. That coat! He wears it summer and winter. I don't think it's ever been cleaned. His most recent exploit was three weeks ago, at the big Slonim wedding (the cream of Melbourne society, and us), where he not only slipped a bottle of Johnnie Walker Red Label into the left-hand pocket of his famous coat, but then, before everyone sat down, proceeded to swipe about sixty cigarettes from the tables, where they had been put out in little glasses for the guests to enjoy after their meal. And as if that wasn't enough, he then had to present himself, bulging and clinking, to *der alte* Mr Slonim, and accept not one but two fine Havana cigars. My father neither drinks, smokes, nor plays the host at home.

2. He picks his teeth. At the table. With wooden household matches which he first sharpens to points with one or another of his many pocket knives. He has a knife shaped like a lady's leg, another like a fish, a third that's square with four blades, one on each side. He has nearly twenty knives, each one of which he made himself. He makes them at work, during spare moments. Currently, he's experimenting with glues, for a knife that's going to have pictures cut out of magazines on the handle, sealed in and protected by thick, clear plastic or glass. I covet the fish, but he won't even let me touch it. Or any of them, for that matter. He says they're too sharp. 'They're not for little *pishers*', he growls. (I'm practically

sixteen, for God's sake.) My father's knives are his pride and joy. No one is allowed to touch them. So I sit and study them from a distance, after dinner at the kitchen table, coveting madly, while he rudely picks his teeth.

3. He snores. Like a buzz saw. Like an electric motor. Like a pneumatic drill. My parents, bedroom is at one end of the house and mine is at the other, but distance means nothing. Down the passage they come, around the corner, under my closed door. *Ah-ah-ah-ah . . . chrrop! Ah-ah-ah-ah . . . chrrop!* The whole house rattles and shakes and throbs. I ask my mother (married eighteen years) how she copes. 'Ssh,' she says. 'He's your father.'

Well, O.K., maybe he can't help it. He had pneumonia when he was young—there's a deep, frightening scar on his back. He suffers from kidney stones. Forget the snoring.

4. Another *personal habit*. Upon which I won't elaborate, but you know what I mean. And I'm talking about in public places, too. In front of strangers.

5. His clothes. His taste. What taste? He wears anything with anything, layer upon layer, and then that coat on top. He's a balloon. He's a walking secondhand shop. He's a disgrace. It's embarrassing to go down the street with him. He wipes his shoes on the backs of his trousers. He rips off his tie without undoing the knot. He wears the same shirt for a week, and would probably wear it for ever if my mother didn't finally steal it away. O.K., how he looks is his business, I suppose, but let me come into the house with a new jacket or tie and straight away there he is with his sarcasm. 'A prince', he mocks. 'A real gentleman.'

6. My father is a master scoffer. Three examples will do.

(a) I go out to work in the garden. You should see our garden. My father is a destroyer. His pleasure is in pulling things up. Which is why I rarely go out there, but when I do, he stands behind me, criticizing my every move.

'Don't pull that one!' he shouts. 'Leave it! A beautiful flower, what are you pulling? And look where you're standing with your big feet!'

(b) he doesn't like the way I shave. I use razor blades. He uses a straight-edge cut-throat. Which I tried, just once, thinking it would please him. I cut myself on both cheeks, came into the kitchen swathed in toilet paper, and instead of sympathy got a clout.

'You've ruined the edge!' he shouted, banging me on the back of the head.

(c) he says I study too much. I don't go out enough. I'm always sitting down with a book. '*Gelernte mensch*,' he calles me, employing a brand of sarcasm I can't even describe.

7. Well, where's his ambition? Doesn't he want to better himself, improve his circumstances? No. Absolutely not. He still works in the same factory where he worked before he met my mother—he's a kind of mechanic, earning not very much. If it wasn't for my mother, we'd still be living in the house where I was born—a sunless little place with a tiny yard in the back and nothing in the front. He didn't want to move. I was young, but I can still remember the fights. However. My mother dreams of getting him out of that factory and opening up a kiosk or a little shop. He won't hear of it. The surest way to get him annoyed is to bring *that* up.

8. He doesn't want to own things.

'What do they bring you?' he says. 'Troubles!'

He refuses to buy a car. He can't even drive one. This is another subject it's better not to bring up in his presence.

'Any time I decide,' he roars, 'it will take me exactly two lessons!' But he doesn't, he can't, he won't. I think he's frightened.

9. I mean, he's even frightened of the telephone. The second it starts to ring he looks uneasy.

'Dora!' he calls out to my mother. 'Can't you hear it? It's the telephone!'

He has this perverse thing that if he sees me coming he grabs it first.

'Hello?' he whispers, holding the phone about a foot from his ear. He looks worried, serious, can't wait to put the phone down.

'Who was it?' I ask.

'I couldn't hear a word', he grumbles. 'Why don't they speak properly?' And then, to cover his discomfort, 'If it's so important, they can ring back.' And, still grumbling, he shuffles away, not sure what to do with himself.

10. Yet he fancies himself as a master repairer. The toaster. The iron. The kitchen clock. Which don't necessarily have to be broken for him to get to work. Out come the knives. The screw-driver (with the broken handle). The pliers. He takes up the whole kitchen table, sweeping everything else on it aside. Delicate twists, sensitive adjustments and touches are beyond him (he has big, heavy fingers, the nails rimmed with black), and—'Oh!'—there goes a wire, a connection, a spring.

'Sam!' cries my mother.

'Ssh!' he hisses, but he's not concerned. Now he's really got something to repair. He can sit for hours and hours, fiddling, squinting, opening and closing his knives (that beautiful fish), giving contented moans and groans, and the price we pay for all this is a clock that'll never work properly again, and a huge bill at the electrician's. He's a non-smoker, as I think I've mentioned, but the things he likes to fiddle with best are cigarette lighters. They fascinate him. He owns, at the moment, five—three hopelessly broken, one on its last legs, the fifth (a costly Ronson, which he claims to have found), still operating magnificently. But for how long? What a clicker! What a fiddler! But look how his eyes spark with pleasure each time the flame magically appears. He's busy, he's happy, and it's my fault, I suppose, when I foolishly let him get his hands on one of my things. (A fountain pen, a mechanical pencil sharpener, a pop-up spring-operated desk calendar I won at school.)

11. Newspapers. He mangles them. Try reading one after he's been at it.

12. The same with books. He bends back the covers. He folds over the corners to mark his place. Luckily, all he reads are Westerns, which I get for him from the lending library down the

street. He reads two a week. I thought there was going to be a crisis about a year ago when the librarian told me my father had read every Western in the place. I took him home two he'd read before and didn't say a word. He didn't seem to notice. Some of them he's now read three times, the corners of the pages limp with folding, every now and then one of them actually falling off. Does he know? Would it make any difference to him if he did?

13. My father's idea of a night out is front stalls in the cinema round the corner, a huge, draughty barn of a place. He goes with my mother. The Saturday night treat. With the exception of Walter Pidgeon (who she calls Pidgeon Walter) and Leslie Howard in 'Gone With The Wind', my mother's interest in films is minimal. My father likes Westerns. Loves them. Can't see enough. To my mother, they're incomprehensible. Also they give her headaches, all that shooting and shouting and the horses galloping around. Her idea of a night out is a visit to a sister or a brother, visits from which my father always comes home in a bad mood. They're not his family. He refuses to go.

'Where's the pleasure?' he shouts. 'What do you do there? Sit, talk, smoke, play cards. Feh! Not for me.' So forty times a year at least he drags my mother around the corner to those same front stalls to watch 'The Cowboys', and then home they come, my father looking pleased in his gaberdine coat, probably fancying himself as a sheriff or an outlaw, my mother not saying a word.

14. She doesn't say a word about our holidays either. We go to Hepburn Springs. Every year. 'For the mineral water,' says my father, which he claims is good for his kidney stones, and maybe it is, but that's not the real reason we go there. He goes there (always staying in the same guest house) to talk in Hebrew—*Ivrit*—with people he knew when he lived in Palestine, twenty years ago, old *chaverim*. He worked in a quarry there, hewing out stones. He helped build the old King David Hotel. I'm not sure if these people he talks to are real old friends, or friends of friends, or what exactly. I think anyone who can speak in *Ivrit* my father considers a friend. He sits with these people for hours, talking and joking, sometimes

becoming so animated that he even tries a cigarette. And while he talks, he carves. The first day of every holiday he goes out and finds a good, stout stick, and after cleaning it up properly, stripping off the bark, smoothing out the bumps, he starts to carve, at the top, with one of his pocket knives, a hard, craggy-featured head with a nose like a beak and a brow like a huge diamond, all angles and edges, and then he works down the length of the stick, a long, curling snake, and at the bottom he puts a design. While my mother, who never went to Palestine and doesn't understand a word of *Ivrit*, or know a single person in Hepburn Springs, just sits. With me.

15. Does he want to go back to Palestine, to Israel? He says not. 'What's there?' he says. 'It's all changed.' He doesn't believe in Zionism. 'If all the Jews in the world went to Israel,' he says, 'the whole country would fall apart in two minutes.' He's not religious. He eats on Yom Kippur. Boastfully. Makes a big thing of it, a performance. The one day of the year when you're supposed to fast, he eats a double breakfast. Then strolls around outside the synagogue in his baggy gaberdine coat, picking his teeth with a sharpened match.

'I had six pieces of toast!' he yells at some minor acquaintance, and to total strangers too. 'And I'm going home for lunch!'

'Dad,' I say to him. 'Ssh. You might not believe in it but some people do.'

'What are you talking about?' he snaps, turning on me. 'You know who they were, the Jews? Wild people! Savages! Killers and thieves! What's it got to do with life today? Huh, *gelernte mensch*? Do me a favour, study a little history. Read a proper book.'

16. What else should I mention? His jokes? Better not. The kidney stone in a jar which he rattles in the face of everyone who comes into the house?

'Take a look at the size! I shot it right out, didn't feel a thing!'

The way he handles records, his fingers all over them? It's impossible for him to put one on without making a scratch. I keep my records out of his way, in the bottom of my wardrobe.



Not that he'd ever play them. My records are mostly jazz, which my father refers to as 'His music'.

'Listen,' he says, whenever I happen to be playing one. 'He's playing *his music*.' You can't imagine the sarcasm. I try never to play them when he's home. My father has three records—Mario Lanza singing 'The Student Prince', the soundtrack from 'The King And I', and a record of someone telling Yiddish stories and jokes. About once a month he will decide to play them. Everyone has to be quiet. He turns the volume up really loud, sits down, smiles, grunts, nods his head, closes his eyes.

'Hear that?' he says to me. 'That's music! That's *real* music!'

The whole house booms with it. And then, just like that, right in the middle, he will leap up and switch the record off. Savagely.

'What's the matter with you?' he shouts at me. 'What are you sitting here for? Do something! Get outside!' What's happening? I retreat to my room.

17. So I sit at this table, writing these lists. My room swims with paper, pages and pages, covering the table, covering the floor. These foolish lists. And they're all wrong. My father is not like that. I have written lies, nothing but lies. I try, but I can't write the truth about him. I don't know what it is. I'm sorry. My father stands in the doorway. I smile at him. He stares at me blankly. He must know what I'm doing in here. He walks away. Doesn't he care?

## The last rites of the Nizam

*Fay Zwicky*

'We're all waiting. I'll expect you out of here in five minutes.' Pause. 'Even genius can't sleep in an unmade bed three weeks running.' That hot-stove Sunday betrayal of my unique destiny. Just as art was planting its first timid stranglehold on virtue too. Arrogant and submissive, I hovered in the fanciful inconsistencies of my mother's caged vision. Hating my yearnings for conformity, the alternative possibilities were censured with equal intensity, mild aberrations of conduct that seemed to promise future Promethean fire. A mess of a bedroom. Reading under the covers till all hours with a torch. 'Ruining your eyes again!'—a poor second to T.B. but a start in the desired direction. Her desire or mine? Stiffening under the bedclothes I waited with firmly closed eyes until she closed the door. Then got up, mutely obedient, but still airborne enough for it not to seem so.

'Do I get a sherry?' asked my mother as my father settled into his seat at the table's end, his glass raised.

'Oh, sorry dear. I didn't think you wanted one.' He got up again and walked back to the heavy oak sideboard.

'Can I have one too?' I had to be in the Trojan Women's League.

'Better not,' said my father, half turning from his ministrations, 'Not a good idea when you're studying. When I was a boy my father always said work and alcohol don't mix.'

'Piffle!'

'What's that?' My mother leaned forward awaiting her drink while the beef and vegetables chafed under large shining silver covers in which I traced the expanding and shrinking convexity of my grandmother's head. The gravy had formed a skin, now splitting into irregular islands.

'Nothing. Can we get on with it?' To dare recklessly was so much water off the duck's back.

'All in good time. When I've had my sherry.' She languidly passed the blade of the carving knife through the little whetting wheels. The knife was, in her opinion, never sharp enough and some new gadget was always appearing to change all that. My father was now bending sideways as he poured the sherry from a crystal decanter to check the level.

'You haven't exactly been generous, have you.' He made his way back and sat down with a sigh. She took a sip, made a sour face and put the glass down. No drinker, my mother, but the ritual had served its purpose.

'Will you carve, Victor? Or shall I?'

'You do it, dear.'

'And while they eat their dinner their happiness is established or their lives broken up . . .' Chekhov seemed appropriate for this new step in the transference of power.

'So she's Bernard Shaw now, is she!'

'You do it, Dad.' The war had a lot to answer for and I wanted a Father who Carved. But he was inexperienced and uncomfortable with genius of the female stamp, deaf to that internal voice which directed my conduct. 'The fascinating girl gazed with contempt in her brilliant eyes at the man who called himself her father . . .'

'No, she does a better job than I can. Had more practice . . .'

'She?' My mother, pained.

'She's the cat's mother,' cackled my grandmother, nudging me. We all laughed as my mother took up the knife breathing rather audibly.

'You certainly had a wonderful war', she said.

'Helen's got snot on her nose!' My brother, as if struck by a sudden thought. The youngest could afford such caprice, subordinate but protected. The pecking order is much easier to define and manipulate when you're on the ground floor, escape hatches clearly illuminated.

'Harry! How dare you use that word in my house!'

'Well she has. Look at her—snotty nose, snotty nose, sno—'

'Any more of that and you leave the table!' My mother had

half risen from her chair but there wasn't much purpose in the gesture.

'Spoken like a mother,' said my sister Louise, her ambiguous sarcasm quite alien to the spirit of the spirit of the thing. With her, irony didn't spring from idealism. Those defences had been formed in the school of indifference, the middle child's cubicle. Violence was my contribution, unable to sustain the ideal part in the company of such players.

'I'll chop your bloody head off, you little bastard!' I hissed at him across the table. Harry took a bite of the lone triangle of white bread but we weren't allowed to eat it. White bread causes decay.

'That's enough,' said my father, but he was smiling at Harry. Raging, I leaned with nonchalant contempt on the table, cupping my burning face in a spread fan of fingers. To remove purity's stain with concealed art, the grail always whipped from my hand by a dun nemesis.

I kept a cold stiff distance from the peasantry while the roast was slowly consumed. My father ate as if it were his last meal. My mother picked and supervised, enquired if the meat was tender as she'd ordered a very special cut days ago from Max, 'the only butcher in Melbourne who knows how to cut.' Second helpings were dealt out, but she herself ate with little relish. By the time the dessert arrived, a pale trembling mousse, we were hedging around politics. In this field my mother rested for there were areas sacred to the affairs of men, but I was still sexless. My sister and brother had managed a quick getaway but, like a heavy piece of furniture, I stayed. Humanity's champion.

'Haven't you got an assignment this weekend?'

'I've got masses of time. Hours, in fact.' Not true, but I was too buoyed by friction to move. Snagged in the freedoms of a progressive school the class was looking at an India fresh from partition. Free to choose in the only world that allowed choice, I rejected democracy and the jute yield for the Nizam of Hyderabad and his principality. The name alone was enough. Burnished, jewel-

studded, barbaric, irresistible. Art and virtue bellyached away in my garbled imagination. The winner was anybody's guess.

My grandmother also remained to put the damper on excess. An ally for as long as I stayed temperate, unpredictable dealer of reverence and scorn for the clever-tongued critic on the hearth. Small glass dishes of mousse were passed round and a bowl of cream tagged behind. My father placed a large dollop on top of the shapeless beige hillocks of flummery and began eating hungrily.

'Victor,' said my mother, 'You haven't passed the cream to mother.'

'Eh? Oh sorry, Gran.' He was that absorbed in it. I reached across Louise's empty seat, picked up the bowl and handed it to my grandmother who turned to my mother.

'You know I don't take it, Eve. Why do you bother him?' And to me, 'Stop waving it about and help yourself. You could do with a bit more weight.' Very funny. I was already desperate about my size and height. 'Yes, she's always been big for her age but we hope she'll stop growing soon.' Hope away!

'I haven't had it yet,' said my mother who watched her weight like a boxer. I put the bowl down hard on the table for my grandmother to pass. The little carriage clock in its box of glass and brass ticked relentlessly on the sideboard under a colourless pastoral idyll worked in wool.

'I didn't get cream in Borneo, I can tell you,' said my father scooping up the last patches with a clatter.

'You'll be pleased to know this is special cream, straight from the farm. I got Mrs Austin to bring it back with her on Friday.' Mrs Austin was our cleaning woman, a deserted wife with three children who were cared for by a country relative while she worked for their keep in town. My mother took a meagre spoonful.

'It's not as fresh as I thought.'

'Tastes all right to me,' said my father. I felt myself getting hot with anger and made what I hoped was a thin sardonic line of my mouth.

'How fresh is fresh?' I liked Mrs Austin. An uncritical and

reverential audience for many years but sharp with her own kids. 'You're lucky she gets it for you at all. Everyone else gets it in a shop. Why are we so special?' My mother laid down her spoon, the mousse scarcely touched. My father was looking at his empty plate.

'Victor, are you just going to sit there and let her talk to me like that?'

'Eh? Er, no, no. Eat up now and tone it down a bit, will you?' He addressed me vaguely, his mind on another serving. My mother wasn't so easily mollified.

'I don't know why you're always so ready to stand up for the underdog. How about a bit of loyalty to your own family for a change?'

'The underdog! The underdog!' Mimicking her telephone voice. 'Loyalty to the family, king, country and Bob Menzies!'

'Victor!'

'Drop it, will you, there's a good girl. Let's have a bit of P and Q for a change.' He didn't know which one of us to look at and longed for gentler battlefronts. My grandmother was signalling to me but I was too far gone.

'You don't give a damn for Mrs Austin or anyone but your own comfort. She can slave her guts out for you and you have to ask her to get you your precious cream in her free time.' Obscure yearnings towards my own liberation made for a crude demagoguery. 'The frustrated heroine, incited by the oppression of ruthless tyranny, assumes the leadership of the growing popular movement and . . .'

'Mrs Austin doesn't need you to defend her against me.' Not much she doesn't! 'She's perfectly capable of looking after herself. I don't ask favours of people I pay to work for me. I'm more than good to her *and* she knows it.' Her voice was growing harsher with anger all the time. 'A fine example of education you are anyway! If you only knew what Mrs Austin thinks about *you*. Only the other day she said "Mrs Freeman," she said, "If that's what an education does for them these days I'm glad I never had one."'

'She never said any such thing!' I was appalled.

'As I sit here!'

'I don't believe it. She'd *never* say that. You're making it all up.' The word 'liar' wasn't lightly applied to such a parent and I lacked confidence in my deeper intuition.

'If I never move from this chair that's precisely what she said. Victor, are you just going to sit there and let this go on indefinitely?' My father made some unintelligible sounds peeling a muscatel with clumsy dedication. Was such treachery possible? Mrs Austin had listened to me for years, had *asked* to hear my poems, had told me how much she liked them. The green glass bowl in the centre of the table spilling out grapes and mandarins swam in a haze, the bright shapes blurred in a misty veil. Crushed by loss, I couldn't find words when my mother added that they would like to finish the meal in peace if I had no objection and what, she wanted to know, was all this in aid of?

I was already out of my chair and half way to the door, humiliated by a rush of impotent and ugly tears.

'And excuse yourself when you leave the table.'

'I will not,' I blubbered. Feeble armaments for larger treasons forced me into last-ditch stands on trivia.

'*You will asked to be excused.*'

'I won't!'

'Do as your mother says,' joined my father testily, embarrassed and red in the face.

'I won't, I won't! Why don't you stand up to her for once? Can't you see,' I shouted, 'what she's doing to us?'

'Don't speak like that to your father.' Another ally down the drain.

'I'll deal with her, mother. You keep out of this. Victor, you *must* see that she apologises. She can't be allowed to get away with this kind of behaviour. It just isn't normal. Already a bad influence on the other two and nearly a grown woman!' Where was *I* while all this was going on? 'A pig of a girl, an educated pig, God help me!' Why couldn't I leave then? Why didn't I leave earlier? Was

enough never enough? The tirades must always end shamefully. Insensate.

'Apologise? To you? You can bury me first! Never, never, never!' And, stumbling heavily against the leg of the sideboard, I ran from the room slamming the door behind me.

And that's the way it always was on Sunday in my thirteenth year. Reduced to the clumsy diction of menaced integrity (is there another word for it?), was I only ever to be fit for the society of madmen and liars? Locked in my tower, the flare of betrayal dimmed a little. What had begun as a great swell of tears now dissolved to an almost pleasurable pain. I bore it quite well. In fact I even managed to cast my own death mask before the mirror, stretching the lids taut over eyeballs gritty from weeping. The chief snag to the erection of one's own memorial is that one isn't around to enjoy the effect.

Immediate comfort lay in lies. A world which every brassy rhetorical stratagem helped to make quite remote from my own. Deprived of my lineage, I surrounded the flawless Nizam with a fiery sphere of gleaming pinnacles, and the sun, glinting on the mirror, jetted sparks from his diamonds. The skeletal facts were given flesh. And such flesh! My hero's champaign lands included rich and fertile plains of a green never before glimpsed. Huge bales of raw silk were unrolled before his feet. Merchants in striped robes from every corner of Asia haunted his horse bazaar, and proud Deccan ponies pranced in trappings of gold for his delight. Hell's legions were at bay, and the spirit of the words I placed in his silver mouth might have been those of Aurangzeb, the founder of his dynasty—

I look'd and saw within the Book of Fate,  
 When many Days did lower,  
 When lo one happy hour  
 Leapt up, and smil'd to save thy sinking State;  
 A day shall come when in thy pow'r  
 Thy cruel Foes shall be



Then shall thy Land be free  
 And then in Peace shall Reign:  
 But take, O take that opportunity,  
 Which once refus'd will never come again.

Next day, still dizzy with the intoxication of my reveries, I yielded up the radiant tale with a shaking hand. Long an admirer of my teacher, I looked to her scrupulous blond head for justice. Did her clear eyes detect my simmering anxious arrogance? However much I tried to compress myself into the modest mould of her world, that exemplary grace of conduct escaped me. Unused to such dispassionate rule, I lacked the unworried reserve of my fellow subjects. Forever rampant or prostrate, grace seemed well beyond my spiky grasp. Yet here, in the person of Miss Hornby, was an oasis of kindly scrutiny. I could hardly wait for the verdict.

Judgment fell on Monday. Another week's death mask gone by the board.

'Ah yes, Helen. I'd like to say something about this one for a moment if the rest of the class will bear with me.' I could hardly breathe. The tone was calm. Kind? Was it the longed-for accolade? My heart thumped wildly.

'Yes, Helen. How am I to put this? You've certainly put a lot of energy into it. As you always do but—' The fairness of it all, the impeccable fairness! But?

'You seem to have missed the point of the exercise. In fact—' The pale cool Miss Hornby was actually flushing. 'I'm surprised and disappointed in your choice of subject and your attitude.' The voice rose in pitch, irritably ragged in my head. 'This is, after all, not a class in literature. The imagination is all very well but it can't get you out of everything, you know. You did, it seems, have facts at your disposal but have made very odd use of them. Surely you, of all people, should be aware that a war has just been fought to defend us all from fascism?' Aware? Was my father aware? Was this the 'wonderful war' my mother spoke of with such bitterness? The voice rose even higher. 'Yet you've chosen to

ignore the facts. You've chosen, indeed, to praise an enemy of the Indian people.' Here was the language of a new apocalypse which I was to learn to recognize much later in life. Now it could only fetter me with more guilt. 'A fickle, bigoted, despotic ruler who maltreats his servants, imprisons and murders his opposition, maintains treaties with colonial imperialists, shows an arrogant disregard for the welfare of his people. Just think how many lives the price of his diamonds could have saved! What really bothers me is that you seem to have been most impressed by that arrogance.' Yes, I was, I confess, impressed. Impressed, Miss Hornby. The no longer cool voice broke in again. 'I hope you'll give this some thought as we'll be taking a look next week at jute co-operatives and I want to be sure you get your priorities straightened out.'

My face must have looked a bit queer for she asked more quietly whether I had anything to say. But I could say nothing for my heart was as dry as the desert. And all the way home from school I kept repeating to myself 'Fool, you know nothing. Nothing.' And again. 'Nothing.'

# The child

## *Nene Gare*

Outside the sky was a brilliant hard blue; the shadows of the buildings were black and accurate and bare feet burned on the hot beach. The holiday town was ready for the holiday week-end. Even the air was expectant. City arrivals were showing town residents how to stay cool and relaxed even if it happened to be in the main shopping area and, more modestly, the people from the reserve at the end of the town gathered in tittering groups about their favourite corners or shopped delicately in the big new centres.

It was Saturday morning and summer far enough advanced for everyone to have become blase about the endless unfolding of hot and perfect days.

Inside the gaol the air was hot and fuggy and smelled of Hannah's sweating body. But it was dark and quiet and she could lie there on the bed with her arms over her face and stop thinking, almost stop breathing. If she could truly stop breathing she could stop living but there was no way. Though she scarcely moved on the blanket-covered bed air passed through and was pushed out again between her heavy parted lips. Her eyes were closed under protecting arms. She had kept them closed even after the footsteps had receded. She did not want to go on being. She wanted agonisingly to stop—get off—go away somewhere where there was nobody. Except Mum! At the thought moisture seeped from between Hannah's closed lids and ran into the declivity between arm and cheek. After a little while she had to wipe the wet from her face with her forearms.

She wished she had never had to leave Mum and go to school. She should have stayed up there on the station instead of going into the town to live at the hostel. Except for the basketball she hadn't really liked it. Mum had liked that, her being picked to

play with the team. 'You stay here and learn reading and writing,' Mum had said. 'Get good job somewhere. Not like me.'

School was boring. She had hated it. Too much sitting down—hours and hours of it. Teachers never liked her either. Only liked the smart ones that did everything right. Only time she got a nice look was basketball practice and that was because she was big and strong and she could stop the goalies from getting the ball. Running was all right. Once she got a prize for running. No good job but, when she left school. Same job as Mum only not so good people. Soon got out of that place. Three different jobs now and the last one the best. Should have stayed with those people but her and Betty saved up a bit of money and the two of them had gone off to the nearest town for a bit of a holiday. Had some fun too, the both of them. No harm in that. Might as well have a bit before—the fear hit her again suddenly. What was going to happen to her? Why wasn't Mum here? If Mum was here she'd know what to do. And she'd tell these people to go away and stop their questions and after, she and Mum could go back to the station together where Hannah's mother worked and Hannah would stay there too.

'How old is she?' the magistrate had asked. Impatiently! Frowning! After all, it was a holiday week-end.

'Can't get a thing out of her,' the sergeant had answered, shrugging. 'Frightened, I suppose.'

The magistrate's humour was as heavy as his frowning brows. 'Thinks we might use it in evidence against her.'

'Maybe she doesn't know.'

'She doesn't look very old.' Hard blue eyes appraised Hannah as she stood there in the dock, overweight, slommicky in her shapeless dress, her sullen face scarcely emerged from childhood. 'Not much more than twelve or so.'

'Think she'd be a bit more than that, sir.'

'Shouldn't be in a gaol anyway. Isn't there some other place I can send her?'

'I tried the convent. They're full up—not a room to spare.'

'That woman up on the hill—what's her name?'

'Mrs Gentle? Tried her too. All her folks down for the Show this week-end.'

'We'll have to think of something.'

'Nobody in the women's quarters sir, not yet anyway. She'd at least have the place to herself.'

The magistrate, not a bad chap if only it had not been a holiday week-end, snorted. 'You really think that's a good idea—for this child to spend the time in gaol—alone.'

The sergeant did not speak.

'You mean to tell me that in this whole town there isn't a soul who'd take this child. In custody, of course.'

The sergeant stayed stolidly silent, his gaze polite. The frown grew darker.

'All right then. Over in the women's quarters for the week-end. After that we'll have to see what we can do about her.'

The magistrate, with a further exasperated look at Hannah, went off to his holiday week-end. The sergeant led Hannah off to hers.

The department people had another go at finding out just why Hannah was a neglected child.

She was fourteen and she was pregnant but Hannah was not going to tell anybody that. Let them find out for themselves.

A different someone came to see her. It was not a police officer and it was not someone from the department. Hannah's tears rolled again when she felt her hair pushed gently back from her hot sweaty face. But no, it wasn't Mum. Just a woman. She talked nice but. Not impatient or quick. Nothing to be frightened of anyway. Smoked too. Looked a bit surprised when Hannah asked her for one but handed over the packet and lit up for her. That was better. Hannah sat up to enjoy her smoke. Tilted her head and watched the smoke float in the shaft of light from the doorway. Good, that was.

The woman had a game. Hannah had never seen such a game. First the woman made a word then it was her turn and she made one. They scored and sometimes she beat the woman. When the

woman left she gave Hannah the rest of the cigarettes to smoke.

Hannah had two and a half days to spend in the gaol before the week-end was over. The nights were terrible, long and lonely and full of dark creeping shadows but the days were bearable because she and the woman played The Game and there were always the cigarettes. She and the woman took the grey blankets off the bed and spread them on the cement outside. For minutes at a time Hannah felt almost happy.

On the Tuesday a doctor came down to the gaol and examined Hannah and asked her some questions and found out what she herself had known for a long time. In another four or five months, the doctor said, her baby would be born. Another four or five months on to the other seemed like time without end to Hannah. The weight in her stomach became the actual weight of her frustration. A frenzy of impatience was succeeded by such heaviness of the heart as Hannah had never in her life known. As soon as they let her out she would go home. Would Mum say anything to her about the baby? Give her a beating maybe? Or would she just laugh? If she laughed everything would be all right and they would sit down and wait for the baby to come. To be home again! After this week-end in a gaol, to be home with Mum again. Hannah felt like crying with happiness and relief.

'Thought she was a bit older than twelve,' the sergeant said. 'Not that I haven't seen some even at twelve, poor little devils.'

The magistrate had another good long look at her and Hannah felt her belly grow hot. This was the man who had stuck her in gaol for nothing. She hated and despised him but better not be cheeky or he might do something even worse. While the magistrate coughed and cleared his throat Hannah looked steadfastly at her feet and kept her hate to herself.

'Everything fixed now?' he asked the sergeant.

'She'll be okay.' He spoke to Hannah. 'You'll be okay now.'

Someone from the department came and had a talk with her. She wasn't going home right away. The department man had had a talk with her mother over the telephone and they had both

agreed that Hannah had better wait at this place down south until she was ready to have the baby. Had she made up her mind yet what she wanted done about her baby?

'Done?' Hannah looked fully at the department man, lip jutting. The question had halted the wave of sorrow that had risen inside her. What DID girls do with babies?

'Givim ta mum I spose. Mum look after im.'

Had she thought of adoption—giving the baby up for adoption? She was very young for the responsibility of a baby. He and Mum had discussed adoption and Mum had thought that might be the best thing.

Hannah shrugged. But she felt happier suddenly. It was as if Mum had reached with love and care from all those miles away. She knew Hannah was in trouble and she knew what to do about it.

'I like to go home now but,' Hannah said, mainly into her chest. 'Before, I help Mum round house. Mum got lotta work. She like me help her.'

At this place down south, she could go to school and learn a bit more while she was waiting. It was a very nice place. Hannah would like it. And she would find folk there that she knew. Quite a lot of the boys and girls had come from her own district.

Hannah did not care about that. Again there came the frightening feeling of helplessness, of being caught. She did not properly know how she had stepped on to this new path, nor where it would take her. Would she ever get safely back to Mum?

All she had to do, the department man reassured, was to go down there and wait until she had had her baby, then she could go back to the station and Mum. He did not seem to understand how scary was the thought of having it without Mum there. Hannah wanted to fight but there was only this quiet man who was no stronger than the sergeant had been. Behind them, Hannah sensed forces much stronger than either of them. Forces too big for a fourteen-year-old girl to shift. Her last thought was that she would run away from this place they were taking her to. Somehow get back to the

station. Mum might be worried then but, her doing two bad things. Might be she would just have to go—and stay.

It was a training centre, the place down south. Hannah had spent more than a month there now. It was all right. The food was all right. She didn't like those other kids much. She might have, if they had liked her, but they didn't. At night in her bed she cried because she wanted Mum. The kids teased her because she was fat and having a baby. She felt different from them because of the baby. Sometimes she even felt superior. They didn't know as much as they thought they did, those girls. On the verge sometimes of telling them a few of the things she and her girlfriend had done she always hesitated. Had she been clever, or just stupid. It was stupid not to be able to play basketball. Basketball was a good game. She had been a good goal keep.

Mum wrote sometimes. The woman with the Scrabble wrote oftener. One day a new Scrabble game had arrived for Hannah. A gift from her friend, the Woman. Hannah had proudly shown some of the girls how to play. They had all wanted to play but Hannah was boss because it was her game, and she picked out only those of the girls who had been a little bit nice to her. Nothing was fair in this world though. Before the day was out a half-dozen of the girls knew how to play the game better than she did. Back where she started, with the exception that it was still up to her to lend her Scrabble. It was hers, wasn't it? She hid the box under the mattress. If they were all so smart they could find another game to play.

The boss of this place had had a talk with her. He had repeated what the other bloke had told her. Stay here until the baby came, have the baby adopted, then go home to Mum. She could forget everything. She wouldn't even see the baby. She could go back to being what she had been before—a kid having fun.

'I wish I had some fun now,' Hannah said sadly. 'Them others don't like me.'

They made her feel different because she wasn't in a proper class and didn't have to attend at school unless she felt like it.



Hannah showed them she could write as well as they could. Read, too. But they still laughed at her. Hannah knew it was her stomach and she hated her belly that would not sit down but kept always growing bigger and bigger.

It grew so hard and big she had to walk leaning back to balance it. If waiting had been weary though, much worse was to follow. Hannah had had no idea there was such wracking pain. She was shocked and humiliated. If the people about her could allow this to happen to her it showed they didn't care if she lived or died. While she howled with agony they stood and watched her. The pain proved finally that Hannah was nothing and that nobody cared. Mum might have, if she had been there. Mum! Another thing Hannah had not known about when she was having fun was the tears. She had shed so many in these last months. She did not see the baby. She saw other people's babies and liked them but she did not see her son. She did not even know where he had gone and she didn't like to ask. This was the way they had told her it would be.

But at least the baby was over. Eagerly now she waited the promised reward. Mum, up on the station! She was going home to Mum at last. The end of this terrible world and the beginning of another beautiful one.

The Woman wrote:

'Why don't you go back to the Training Centre, Hannah, and stay there for a year or so? You could learn to make pretty dresses, or take a Commercial course and become a typiste. Wouldn't you like that? And you could play games again now the baby's over—you could join in with the others.'

Even the Woman didn't understand. Hannah gushed with hatred and fright. She felt the forces closing about her again and knew she had to do something, quick, to stop them. She wrote a letter. But though she addressed it to the Woman it was really to Everyone—to all of those who had taken her and made her do things. A thrill of fear warned her to be polite, not cheeky, but the most important thing was to make Everyone understand.

She wrote:

Dear Missus, I got you most welcome letter today. I thought that I would have my baby on the 14th but I had it on the 9th of this month, it was a little boy and also very fat, it wade 8 lbs. 6 ozs. I was very glad you hear some news for you and your family. I don't like the way you told me to stay at the training place for one more year, because it is going to be a long time away from seeing mum, I don't get lonely when I am out in the station with mum and I won't be silly to ask her to pay a fair to where ever I went to go, and also she is not well, she might look well but she is not, I know what the matter with her she told me all about her sickness when we were in Three Springs, if she get sick out on the station who will look after her nobody, she will afto maneg herself, that why I wont to go up to her, nobody will care for her if her get sick nobody but only my brothers and sisters will care for her nobody will care fore her if she get sick nobody nobody she will be way up in the station and I will be stuck at the training place for all of my life, I can't go to see her at all. Do you no what I like you do to myself missus, killing myself because I am put here just like I got no feeling for my mother, why don't that man try and let me go up to Mum they got a constant job up their I would like to go up their I would like to go up to them. It was very hot down here I know how it is up that way how hot it is. I will promise I won't get in the state again to go through all the pains, the boys can go to hell for my liking. I am closing now write backe please, missus. Give my love to your little family my very best love God-Bless you all for now Goodbye,

from Your Sincerely Hannah.

# Aubade

*Marian Eldridge*

When Alvie Skerritt woke, the kids Trish and Billy were squabbling in the next room and the wind was howling in the snowball tree and making kinky shadows on the curtains. Two people, fat round heads swaying on stalky bodies, short arms outstretched, kept coming at her across the curtains, stroking the windowpane, whispering *Alvie! Alvie!* . . . Herbie Mason and Butch Gilbert. She'd sat next to Herbie Mason that period Miss Lamb had handed back their maths tests . . . and just as she'd excepted he'd slid his hand along her leg, over her knee until she'd shot her knee up hard against the desk and bruised his stupid knuckles for him. But Herbie Mason tried that on with all the girls. Real creep. What had she sat next to him for in the first place, then? . . . Alvie jumped out of bed and twitched the curtains apart and of course it was only that massy green shrub with the great white flowers that the wind was tossing against the window, but it unnerved her. Well, goodbye today. The kids were making such a racket by now that she guessed her mother hadn't got up again, which meant *she* would have to see to breakfast and cut all the lunches and plait Trish's hair—and then push her bike to school against a headwind. You couldn't win.

She thumped her feet all the way down the passage so that her father actually put down his paper and said, 'Alvie, your mother has a *headache* . . .'

So what, she thought, whose fault is that eh? If there wasn't another kid on the way we could have carpet like other people . . . Of course he didn't have a reply to these savage, silent thoughts, oh no, he never did, just hid behind his paper and when he'd swallowed his tea he skipped off to work—stayed overtime—coward! She jerked her thumb at him behind his paper so that

the kids giggled and she slapped Trish and slammed peanut butter onto everyone's sandwiches. They hated peanut butter.

. . . He was always on about things like pollution and smoking and H-bombs and trail bikes (Butch Gilbert had one, lucky dog), so that after awhile you couldn't do anything without wondering what *he'd* think . . . Like screwing up the bread wrapping and aiming it plunk! into the tidy. You told yourself you were a dill but all the same you made yourself retrieve it and smooth out the creases and then you used it to wrap the sandwiches. Where was the fun in that? Everyone else had their lunches in neat little plastic bags. If she had a job now, say on a cash register, she could please herself and buy what she wanted instead of always listening to *him* . . .

'Can I leave school, Dad?'

'No, you cannot.' And then the usual spiel about all the opportunities for kids these days, his generation never had anything like it . . . Alvie switched off. Soon he'd be asking her about the result of her maths test and she'd have to tell him . . . and he wouldn't believe her. No wonder. Could anyone really be *so* dumb? After all those months of Miss Lamb banging away with her knuckle on Alvie's skull, crying 'You stupid, stupid girl!' . . .

Miss Lamb had one red ear and one white ear and a mouth that sprang like a mousetrap.

'It seems you don't even know your own name, child!'

Miss Lamb took Alvie's test paper and walked out to the front of the class and crossed her legs. Miss Lamb always stood with her legs crossed, like someone who needed to go in a hurry and had to hold on.

'Do you know what this stupid girl has written at the top of her test? . . . Algebra Skerritt . . .'

Algebra Skerritt . . . Alvie wanted to scream out against the ugliness of it all, the silly grinning class, Miss Lamb with her red ear and white ear, the creeping fingers of Herbie Mason. Against her father who was against all the fun things and sat there talking

about the importance of education while Billy poked his fingers in the toaster and dilly Trish asked if God was everywhere and her father answered

'Yes dear' so mechanically that Alvie knew he hadn't heard a word.

'Inside this room?'

'Yes.'

'In my weeties?'

'Yes yes.'

'On my spoon? . . . In my mouth? . . . Then I-AM-GOD!'

'Oh Dad stop her!' shouted Alvie. 'She doesn't know what she's saying! That's just nonsense—it's blasphemous—how do we know there is a God anyway?—You weren't even *listening!*'

'What's all the excitement?' said Mr Skerritt, rising, pushing in his chair, reaching for his lunch with one hand and his 'Work Safely' overall with the other.

'So long everyone. I might make it in time for dinner. Look after your mother.'

Alvie flung away to her room which she had once shared with Trish but had to herself now that she was growing up. Staying up to study and getting a bustline and staring at herself in the mirror. Sometimes she felt a big goof, alone in the solid quiet with the pop stars and footballers that she and all the other girls collected to pin up on the walls. Then she would turn up her tranny full blast. Or she'd tear down the posters and call in Trish and Billy and they'd have a cushion fight, or she'd jump out at them from the wardrobe.

She called Trish now, and the little kid wandered in as though the room were still hers, dabbing at her eye shadow and quizzing her about the safety razor.

'What you got in that jar, Alvie?'

'Never you mind. Come here, I've got to do your hair.'

Trish dodged, and snatched up the jar.

'*Grasshoppers,*' she said, looking disgusted. 'What for, Alv?'

'Oh belt up, Trish!' Alvie seized her hairbrush and began to bang away at Trish's scalp. Serve her right if it hurt. That jar of

grasshoppers had been a secret. They gave Alvie a funny feeling still, like that time she'd sat next to Herbie Mason. She'd caught them a week ago and released them into an old coffee jar with holes punched in the lid. She hadn't bothered about food or water. She wanted to watch them mating. There were plenty in pairs out amongst the vegetables and on the nature strip, but she had caught only single ones because *she* wanted to be the one who ran things. Like God. Or Miss Lamb. Only they hadn't mated. They hadn't done anything except creep around in the bottom of the jar and stare back at her hugely. And then they'd begun to eat each other. First a front leg has disappeared, than a hunk out of a thigh, then half a head.

Trish pulled a sick face.

'Throw them out.'

Alvie nodded. She didn't want to look at them again.

'You. And then get off to school. I've got to see Mum.'

But in her mother's room she stood twisting her bangles, not knowing what it was she wanted to say. And her mother didn't seem to hear those struggling thoughts. She held up the maternity smock she had just finished hemming.

'I'd love a cup of tea, Alv,' she said, in a weary, pleading voice that Alvie thought was a bit put-on. 'Has everyone gone? Sorry I wasn't up. I think I could stagger to the kitchen now. Oh I'll be glad when this baby's here.' And she stretched, smiling that slow, absent smile that Alvie hated.

She set about making a fresh pot of tea, one eye on the clock. Her mother, wearing her pretty new smock, padded into the kitchen. If she's well enough to dress up and do her hair, why does she leave everything to me? thought Alvie angrily. She watched her mother sit down and put her feet up on another chair. Her legs were knotted with veins. That's what having kids does to you, thought Alvie. We're cannibals. Like those things in the jar.

'And on the way home,' Mrs Skerritt was saying, 'I want you to call in here—and here. I've made a list. Whatever would I do without you, Alvie?'

Well at least I'm good for something, thought Alvie. And felt trapped. She kept glancing at her mother's belly. What did it feel like, growing a baby inside you? What if it turned out . . . well, stupid, even after you'd given it all the opportunities you never had? What if . . .

'What's the matter, Alvie?' asked Mrs Skerritt irritably. 'Is my smock funny?'

Alvie guessed wildly at the amount of tea she was shaking out of the caddy.

'I'm never going to have children,' she said. 'All the bother—the headaches—'

Mrs Skerritt laughed.

'Now don't you worry your head about things. We're all right. We'll manage. You're looking too glum so early in the morning. Is anything else the matter?'

Alvie shook her head. There was nothing, really. Or everything. Just . . . living. It was all too big to explain. And it was time she went to school. She had just seen Butch Gilbert and Herbie Mason ride past the house, and circle round and ride past again. If she hurried, she could catch up. She wouldn't speak to them, of course, oh no, the creeps! Just toss her head and sail past. But hurry!

## For the vernacular republic

*Les A. Murray*

I am seeing this: two men are sitting on a pole  
they have dug a hole for and will, after dinner, raise  
I think for wires. Water boils in a prune tin.  
Bees hum their shifts in unthinning mists of white

bursaria blossom, under the noon of wattles.  
The men eat big meat sandwiches out of a styrofoam  
box with a handle. One is overheard saying:  
*drought that year. Yes. Like trying to farm the road.*

The first man, if asked, would say *I'm one of the Mitchells.*  
The other would gaze for a while, dried leaves in his palm,  
and looking up, with pain and subtle amusement

say *I'm one of the Mitchells.* Of the pair, one has been rich  
but never stopped wearing his oil-stained felt hat. Nearly everything  
they say is ritual. Sometimes the scene is an avenue.



# Kangaroo-paw

*W. Hart-Smith*

You are parsimonious  
with your  
pollen.

Such a vivid signal  
in the drab grey scrub,  
a furred flower

green and scarlet.  
Some feather-weight  
bird

deep-throats you  
and when you say Ah!—  
you dab

delic-  
ately a morsel  
of pollen on his pate.

## Murray River at Haylands, 2 a.m.

*Ian Mudie*

This river is a broad band of starlight  
with black tree-reflections crowding the edges.  
One distant reed-warbler calls in the darkness  
as if impelled to sing on for ever;  
one near-by cricket shrills incessantly.

One point of camp-fire winks from the far bend;  
one dimly seen nightbird hawks close at hand,  
silently half-circles to the tree-tops,  
then scoops at air inches above the water  
where one fish *plunks* in the shadowy surface.

And one lone watcher draws in all he sees,  
half-waking vision of tranquility  
impresses itself on the retina of his inner eye  
so that he feels time will not dim the details  
or the rough thumb of death erase the scene.

Then a soft murmuring moves towards him  
across the vast face of the continent,  
until around him the leaves of ancient trees  
that lean out over the starlit river  
whisper with the faint voice of the night-breeze.

# 15½ miles in 3 days

*Jamie Griffin*

I beat up little old ladies when I'm walking through your town  
I throw children in the river and leave them there to drown  
I'm the guy who beats up truckies and I'll do it all again  
So aren't you glad you left me standing in the rain?

It's a gun that I carry although it looks like a guitar  
If you stop to pick me up I'll try to steal your car  
I only wash at christmas and then its in a drain  
So aren't you glad you left me standing in the rain?

You know I grow my hair long so I can cut it for a disguise  
And I'll seduce your girl-friend by telling exciting lies  
If I wasn't plotting evil I'd travel on a train  
So aren't you glad you left me standing in the rain?

## Roger was no death adder

*Ted Egan*

In the scrub they reckon that a death adder is a no-hoper who sits around all the time, and only shows any energy when he decides to 'bite' someone for a drink. And they used to try to tell me that old Roger was a death adder. Well, I've got news for them.

I can think of dozens of other labels I could put on Roger, but he wasn't a death adder. For one thing, I never met a bloke like him for theories. He had everything worked out. In the middle of the wet season when it was about a hundred and thirty in the water-bag Roger used to get around in an old Army greatcoat. He explained it this way:

'Well, if you want to keep a water-pipe cool you cover it don't you?'

And do you know what? He always did look cool, the old fellow.

And what a memory. When I left Borroloola I was going on to Groote Eylandt, in the Gulf. So Roger, ever the teacher, came over to me as I was departing, and he said:

'When you're on Groote Eylandt, see what you can find out about the inugwamba.'

'What is it?' I asked.

'That's what I want you to find out,' he replied. Well, I did find out a bit about the inugwamba: they're the bark aprons which Groote Eylandt women traditionally carried in order to 'hide' themselves in the presence of strangers. But I thought no more about the incident until I went back to Borroloola quite a few years later. I looked over in the familiar direction and there was the magnificent sight of Roger, straight as a gun barrel, striding across the flat to greet me. But none of your hellos or how have you beens. Oh no.

'What did you find out about the inugwamba?' was all he had to

say. And like Socrates with Meno's slave, he made me feel good as I explained to him something he had found out years before.

I don't know why they'd even consider calling him a death adder. He certainly didn't sponge on others: on the contrary he was generous to a fault with unimportant material possessions like clothes, tucker and money. Perhaps it was because he drank metho? But there are metho drinkers and metho drinkers, and no one would deny that Roger had a bit of class about him. We'd gone out to the Six Mile one time, Roger and Tommy Lee and I, to farewell the trucks as they took all the Aboriginal stockmen back to the Tablelands after the wet season. The Six Mile is a blacksoil plain, where you'd bog a duck after an inch of rain, and we'd had a terrible time digging the trucks out, as there had been a few late storms. Finally they got away, with much yakai-ing and shouts of 'See you at the Races.' And then it was our turn. We had to try to get back to the Loo in Tommy's old '27 buckboard. You talk about bogged. Up to the floorboards in sticky black goo, with Tommy cursing and wishing he had his old camel team again. Roger didn't have any useful theories, but he did make the profound observation that 'She doesn't seem to be functioning, Tom', to which Tommy muttered an unprintable reply. The battle finally ended when Tommy burnt the clutch out, gave the old car a good kick in the slats, and we started to walk home. Roger had a few philosophical gems to put before us as we slurped along, but when you're accumulating black mud on your boots at about an inch every step you're in no state of mind to be comparing Gray and Browning. Besides we knew that Roger was firm in the belief that Gray had no peers, so there wasn't much point in trying to convince him otherwise. But about the metho. We finally got back to the Loo, and as we walked down the airstrip, among the grazing goats, and reached Roger's tank, he said:

'Would you chaps like a champagne?'

Tommy seemed enthusiastic, so I decided that I mightn't be hearing things after all. I said nothing because after you'd known Roger for a while nothing surprised you. For all I knew he could

have had a bottle of Minchinbury in his Coolgardie safe. But no, he took down three pannikins and poured three hefty slugs of metho. Then he took a tin of Sal Vital and stirred a big spoonful into each pannikin.

'Bagman's Champagne,' he announced with a flourish. 'Drink it quickly, boys, and let those bubbles assail your nostrils.'

'Here's mud in your eye, Roger,' toasted Tom.

'A little in yours, too, Tom,' rejoined Roger and they drank deeply. I couldn't come at it, so Tommy knocked off mine, too, for good measure, and I had a pull at the waterbag. Tommy was like that, a bit inclined to over-indulge. Roger, on the other hand, was essentially a social drinker.

Living in a tank was in accordance with one of Roger's pet theories. The Loo was a great place for willy-willies and cockeye-bobs, and they copped a cyclone every five or six years. So old Roger worked out that in country like that if you had a round house it wouldn't matter if it blew away, as you could just keep rolling along until the sting went out of things. As a typical Roger touch his house was a ten thousand gallon tank, and a one thousand gallon tank served as his 'thunderbox' out the back.

Nobody knew much about old Roger's early life. There were rumours that he came from a wealthy family, and that his brothers were prominent doctors, but they say things like that about most of the old fellows who are knocking about the bush. All he ever volunteered to me was that he had walked from Daly River to Borrooloola—a mere four hundred miles—with his Aboriginal wife and her sister. Then he'd done a bit of trepaning in the Gulf, but being one who despised people who turned their lives into a single-minded quest for money, he decided that he would sit down and spend life as it should be spent—reading, writing, debating, and generally concentrating on the important task of getting along with one's fellow man.

Reading. It was the passion of Roger's life, and before the white ants literally devoured the many volumes bequeathed to Borrooloola by the Carnegie Institute, Roger had also attacked them hungrily,

and delighted in the erudite debates which were held under the mango trees at Albert Morcom's place. There they'd sit, on cyclone beds, the scholars of Borrooloola (or the death adders, depending on how you viewed things) drinking tea and chatting away on subjects as diverse as the Greek tragedies and the Stawell Gift. The regulars were Andy Anderson, Old Kieran, Jack Mulholland, Kitson the Mad Fiddler, Albert Morcom, and Roger. The local Aborigines liked to watch these sessions even though they did not follow the discussions; and an old chap named Pompey confided to me that Roger was 'properly smart bugger, him bin givit long wefeller book-name!' The Aboriginal Pompeys, Neros, Homers and Virgils of Borrooloola all bore considerable resemblance to their namesakes. In turn, Roger and the other hermits used to attend the Aboriginal corroborees with due dignity and no interference, but of course this strengthened local white opinion that they were just a bunch of old gin-cuddlers and combos.

Mind you, old Roger wasn't perfect. No fear. I suspect that his biggest shortcoming was his vanity. He delighted in winning an argument, or a game of chess, or hearing people praise his scholarship. And when there was nobody around to match him in debate he would often retire to his tank and have long involved chats with himself. I asked him one day when he had started this habit of talking to himself. He thought for a moment.

'I guess,' he said slowly, 'it was about the time I developed my superiority complex.'

And then he fixed me with one of his quizzical looks and went on:

'And do you know what, it's nice to talk to an intelligent person for a change.' I wasn't quite sure how to take that.

He was burnt black by the sun, and his long grey beard reached almost to his waist. Like the Ancient Mariner, Roger, too, had a glittering eye to match. But he would never have shot an albatross. He'd have known the consequences. And besides, like the Aborigines, he insisted that nothing should be killed unless it was going into the pot or onto the coals. Hector Anderson and I had been

out one day to get a killer, an old scrub bull, and we'd brought back 'a bit of salt' and 'a bit of fresh' for old Roger.

'Good on you boys,' he said, 'I was dreading the thought of having to go out and slaughter another marsupial.'

It was sad the day Biddy, Roger's wife, died. The old fellow was really cut up, but he declined all offers of assistance. He put her body on a wheelbarrow, took her off a mile or so into the scrub, and buried her. He grieved alone, and the only reference he ever made to the occasion was when he asked if someone would plant him alongside her when he passed on. He'd done six months in Fannie Bay Gaol over Biddy, when an unenlightened Government charged him with 'co-habiting with a female Aboriginal without the permission of the Director of Native Affairs.' In Roger's opinion he and Biddy had a 'reasonable agreement going' and for a long while he resisted strongly the pressure to 'legalise' the union. But when it looked as though he was going to cop another sixer Roger consented to letting the local sky-pilot (who was known as the White Stallion) say a few words over them.

'Might as well have jumped over a bloody broomstick,' muttered Roger. Biddy enjoyed it all, though, as she'd made herself a new red dress for the occasion.

Well, he's finished now, old Roger. They dropped him in a hole alongside Biddy and the world became a poorer place. They still breed characters in all walks of life, particularly in the bush, but somehow I've never met anyone who had quite the flair of Roger. Maybe I've got my values all twisted? Maybe anyone who doesn't work, has no money and doesn't want any, lives in a tank, sits around reading the classics and writing stupid poetry, drinking the occasional nip of metho, and living with the blacks—maybe such a person is a death adder? What do you think?



## Keeping our words

*Ross Campbell*

Many people are protesting against the destruction of Australia's historic buildings, and I am with them. Every time I pass a place where one of my favorite hotels in Sydney has been pulled down, like Adams or Aarons, I feel angry. But just now I want to deplore another change which has received less attention—the disappearance of well-loved Australian words and idioms. Who, today, ever asks how is your rotten form? Or tells you to put something up against your duckhouse?

Fortunately there are a few who care about such things. The National Language Trust is fighting hard for the preservation and restoration of historic phrases. I called there to interview the energetic Secretary, Dr Belle Bottler, D.Litt.

'Are many of our native idioms threatened with extinction?' I asked.

'More than you could poke a stick at,' Dr Bottler replied. 'For example, we are concerned about the future of "shooting through like a Bondi tram." This is one of the similes we have given an "A" classification, for outstanding beauty and significance. But unless we can arouse public interest and support, it could go the same way as "drunk as Chloe" and "awkward as a Chow on a bike".'

I confessed I was not familiar with 'awkward as a Chow on a bike'.

'It is recorded by Sidney J. Baker in his invaluable book *The Australian Language*,' she replied. 'The phrase has charm and historic interest. But I'm afraid it would be hard to revive in the present sensitive climate of opinion on racial matters.'

'Do you find that expressions containing proper names are liable to fall into neglect?' I asked.

'With a few exceptions, yes,' she said. 'Blind Freddy is still

around and seeing things, I'm glad to say. But you never hear now of a punter betting like the Watsons, or having a roll Jack Rice couldn't jump over. And it's very rare for an alcoholic to have the Sexton Blakes.'

I mentioned the relations of the sexes.

'I remember the time when a young man could do a line with a jane, or get a knock-down to a ball of passion,' I said. 'He could even put the hard word on a sort. Does your organisation oppose the discarding of fine old idioms like these?'

'Too right we do,' Dr Bottler replied. 'We regret the use of imported phrases in this sphere by the youth of today—being turned on by birds, and so forth. We aim to rehabilitate the good indigenous words "sheila" and "crow". Some of our male members have had success in reviving the old Australian form of greeting: "Getting plenty?" "Knocking it back with a stick".'

'What about the language of eating and drinking?' I asked.

Dr Bottler frowned. 'It makes me ropeable the way our tucker terminology has been mucked up by the cult of European *haute cuisine*,' she said. 'Lots of young Australians have never heard of burgoo or cocky's joy. They hardly know what it means to get shickered on bombo. As an experiment our committee bunged on a rort for some of them, with plenty of snags and red Ned. We got a bit molo and I didn't feel too clever afterwards, but I think our young guests enlarged their vocabulary. It was a bonzer evening.'

'Bonzer! I haven't heard that lately,' I said.

'The National Language Trust favors preservation of old approval terms,' she said. 'In fact we've given a high "B" classification to "curl-the-mo". We are delighted, I may say, by the continued vitality of "grouse".'

'Does the Trust hold any classes for the public?' I asked.

'My oath. We conducted a seminar lately on traditional chiaccking and vituperation, and it was a bobbydazzler. Before the end we had people rousing the tripe out of each other. One woman called her husband a skite and a drongo, dingbats, up to putty,

and not the full quid. Linguistically she was a little trimmer. He got as mad as a cut snake and told her to pull her head in.'

I suggested that we adjourn to the nearby rubbity.

'I'm afraid I'm too busy. I'm flat out like a lizard drinking,' she said. 'But thank you all the same. I can see you haven't got snakes in your pocket.'

'Goodbye for now then, Dr Bottler,' I said. 'Abyssinia.'

'Hooroo, sport,' she said.

Sea variations            I    *Liner berthing*

*R. A. Simpson*

Little to talk about:  
a Sunday afternoon  
and people wave, shout,

run down this wharf to meet  
a liner pressing nearer;  
it's nudged toward our feet.

You speak of the ship we climbed  
fourteen years ago.  
We sailed to England, numbed

by drink, farewells, tears.  
I watch the liner's rails,  
the way each face appears,

achieves complexity  
again—loses the look of stone  
polished then discarded by the sea.

## Interlude — from a series

### *Antigone Kefala*

#### II

The place was small, full of hills,  
palm trees, almond trees, oleanders,  
glass flowers falling from the sky  
on the ascetic hills, the bare houses.  
The ancients had been there looking for copper.

Around the courtyards in the dusk  
grey men in army coats  
followed the leader round the ramparts.  
At night, after the toll, the three  
would come dressed up to count the souls.

We waited there two summers.  
Tall birds with upturned beaks  
picked us like grain.  
We moved in herds  
waited with patience to be fed  
drank at the water places  
between the walls our necks grew longer  
stretching for the night.

## Washing the grain

*Yasmine Gooneratne*

Round and round the year tilts  
from night-time to dawn from sunlight to shadow  
and the pale days falling from this side to that  
yield a fine cloudiness only

We are so far now, so far, cry the grains  
the home-field only a memory warm  
in the husk  
and that too sloughed off  
that too lost  
in the mortar's pounding

Round and round spin the days  
another year of this churning  
and tilting, washing at last  
quite over the rim  
will we lie in clear water  
pure, transparent,  
delicately separate?

We shall become  
consumable! our pale substance  
will satisfy somebody

and this dark grit  
trapped in the bowl's fine furrows  
may be disposed of, thrown  
out upon the wattles and dry grass

# Graveyard looking out to sea

*Diana Kan*

Moments of summer,  
dry sockets  
burn through cracks

at charabancs

registering death  
with patches of sentiment  
on frail grass . . .

when even the most  
recent death  
left someone

exposed . . .

Paper garments

of shadow,

winds tugging

of hair,

profiles launch  
from the sea.

Shipwrecked children  
do not know  
what death will call them—

the brown thrush,  
keeper of stone,  
knows his obituary

by heart.

## Coralscape

*Mark O'Connor*

High by the long island's side  
The rubble banks swim in the evening light  
Death-gray and bleached white, speckled together.

The Wind sings over the coelenterate dead  
The hollow-gutted stone-sheath-dwellers  
The lace-masons, the spicule-shapers

The island-makers.



# Berowra Waters

*Robert Adamson*

Fishermen came in the early morning  
Sliding dinghies over  
The calm river

Through a valley thinking  
Of their catch  
The long silver ribbon-fish I stooped

Carefully over still water  
On a rotting jetty  
Into silence and mist from stars' reflections  
Campaigns

Rose our campaigns  
Against the flags of heaven murder of  
Sacred fishes

Destruction of trees  
And then I rose myself out from reflection  
Heroic in

Bloody victory  
On the jetty beside me  
My catch

As white as the planets shining like  
Prayer

## Visiting the National Trust — from *Tasmanian Landscapes*

*Jamie Grant*

Devonshire Tea in a crumbling mansion,  
Thronged with souvenir prints  
But no tourists: we look out  
Over the moss green lawn  
At a late winter  
Day as blue as water.  
The garden's lined with poplars,  
One cypress near the stable;  
Administered by a wizened gardener,  
The flowers thrive . . .

The scene recalls a moment  
Of my childhood. In such a room  
My grandmother—kindly, spindly—  
Took cakes and tea from a silver tray  
With cherubs on the handles.  
French windows looked out on a garden,  
As do these windows.  
Her lawn was fenced by birchtrees,  
Flowerbeds, a great oak in one corner.

Once  
As winter  
Ended in glass clear spring,  
She sipped with a throng  
Of necessary relatives. No leaf  
Had marred the silver branches.  
From meticulous conversation  
Grandmother broke off at once,  
Gazing over the broad, cropped lawn—

'Those black things, in the trees,  
There's more of them every year . . .'

We looked:

The sky was water blue,  
The air, windless, silent. The branches  
Were empty, their pattern etched clear  
And clean. But still  
Her eyes stared,

Into something we couldn't imagine . . .

# When no-one is looking

FOR CHITRA FERNANDO

*Alexander Craig*

Between those low spiky hills  
in the space where the light is half-lost  
one day when no-one is looking  
we could easily enter the world of things

Tongues of the sardine-tins  
could sing in the remotest picnic field—the beercans  
might be erect or bowing at the waist  
to a stripped car at peace  
parked where it veered above the green verge  
of a street of grey pebbles and water

Worn shoes then shall relax  
because they have walked back at last into nature  
and the bald tyre that lies prone near a paddock  
will be making a new planet's mileage  
Real things that will remain when we have gone  
hold a secret conversation with themselves

One day we may seize the courage to surprise them

## Barbican 09.00 hours

*Laurence Collinson*

Treason in the morning air  
slides, by walls of warming stone,  
with innuendoes of the known,  
and aromatic tricks that dare  
bribe the winter from the bone.

Hot blackmail's hissing eloquence  
coerces from my tidy theme  
silver splinter, glinting dream,  
such that the day's malevolence  
smiles at my smiling self-esteem.

Death's municipality  
has lost three seasons and begun  
the summer crimes that haunt the sun  
whose green assassins lie to me  
as they have lied to everyone

## On perceiving the Australian suburb

*Bernard Smith*

Professor Seddon has noticed that 'Australians are still learning to see where it is they live.' His observation provides the theme of this essay.

How *do* those of us who live in suburbs, and most Australians do, relate to our neighbourhoods? Are they places which, physically and mentally, we are trying to get away from? Do we drive through them each morning and evening, to and from work, our eyes fixed upon the car in front, upon straying pedestrians and traffic lights? Have we seen where we live? Has it entered our imagination?

It is a problem, of course, in perception; and as Sir Otto Frankel has remarked: 'Perception is, in one sense, a personal and private matter'. Perhaps I may be forgiven therefore if I begin on a personal note.

It was my good fortune, many years ago, to become a friend of the first person, so far as I know, to see the Australian suburb. Years later I made the acquaintance of that strange man who first heard the suburban voices. What Sali Herman saw and Barry Humphries heard is today a part of the history of Australian self-awareness. They have taught a new generation of Australians to take more notice of what is around them.

Let me tell you a story about Herman to illustrate my point. It was 1943, during World War II. Herman and his wife lived in Wylde Street, Potts Point, Sydney in the same block of flats as my wife and I and our two children. One evening Sali and I were returning home together when he stopped me, as we arrived at the foot of the McElhone Stairs, which lead from lower Woolloomooloo to Victoria Street, Kings Cross. He tugged at my arm and exclaimed with delight 'That will make a good painting'. It did and some months later Herman entered the painting in the

Wynne Art Prize. The Wynne was the oldest art prize in Australia, established by Richard Wynne who pioneered residential settlement at Mount Wilson, that fine rural retreat in the Blue Mountains. The conditions of the prize stated that the Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales should award it to 'the Australian producing the best landscape of Australian scenery in oils or watercolours or the best example of figure sculpture, executed by an Australian sculptor'. But Herman, who had spent the first half of his life in the cities of Zurich and Paris, submitted this suburban scene of a street stairway and terrace houses. The Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales were sharply divided as to its eligibility for the prize. Was the scene a landscape? I recall the discussion well for, by a curious set of circumstances which need not detain us here, I was acting Director of the Gallery at that time and it fell to me to conduct the vote for the award. As soon as the award was announced in favour of Herman, one highly respected member of the Trust left hurriedly in great vexation, exclaiming loudly 'the painting is not a landscape and the man is not an Australian'.

When Herman painted McElhone's Stairs most of the neighbourhood was regarded as a slum. The *Bulletin* critic described the painting as 'a melancholy account of one of Sydney's slummiest aspects', and four years later a group exhibition, the Strath Group, was criticised as 'mostly slums under the influence of Sali Herman'. Practically everyone agreed in those days, whatever their political persuasion, that the inner suburbs of Sydney were slums and that after the war, with post-war reconstruction, the slums must go. But Herman did not see the inner suburbs in that way at all, and went on painting in the neighbourhood where he lived: Kings Cross, Darlinghurst, Paddington, Woolloomooloo. He painted these suburbs with a new warmth and affection, and in defence of his art he wrote: 'houses are a part of life as it is, just as human beings are. An old man or an old woman may not be attractive but may have beauty in their character. So it is with houses.'

When I paint them I look for the character, regardless of prettiness or dirty walls.'

Herman certainly understood the character of McElhone Stairs. They were a part of his daily life and must have revived memories of stone stairways in Montmartre and the life he had left in Europe. But it was not all memory. On that fine, clear Winter afternoon he saw the stairs as if for the first time: the brown sandstone, the rust-red tin, the wall of the terrace against the blue sky. Art, of course, is like that. Half-way up the steps there is a seat set into the face of the cliff, a popular place for sitting in the sun. Paulette Herman, Sali's wife, often sat there, dreaming at times I suppose of her native Brittany. At the bottom of the steps he painted two American sailors with their girl-friends (the Woolloomooloo Docks nearby were a great place for a pick-up) and higher up he put children and dogs, and pensioners clinging to the rails. Right at the top is a mother with her child—which reminds me how we taught our own two children to count by counting the steps as we walked them every day between our flat and the Woolloomooloo free kindergarten.

Today, of course, Herman's paintings are justly admired for their aesthetic qualities. But they also occupy an important place in the historical perception of the Australian suburb. Prior to 1945 no Australian artist had identified himself so completely as Herman with the suburb, with the exception of Danila Vassilieff, another migrant artist, and Vassilieff worked largely within the more limited vision of the slum syndrome. Before Vassilieff and Herman, Australian artists were not inspired by suburbs. The suburbs were a place where one might be born and reared and might have to work in, but not a place to be experienced for the purposes of art. The suburbs existed, in the words of Robert Rauschenberg, in the gap 'between life and art'.

I do not want to suggest that Australian towns, cities and suburbs were not drawn and painted before 1945. Of course they were. But they were not experienced as a personal environment. They were used rather to justify stock concepts, provide evidence



of prevailing ideas and attitudes. The suburb as a slum is but one of these stock concepts. The earliest drawings and paintings of Australian towns were made to justify a different point of view altogether; to provide evidence of civil progress and good government. Governor Macquarie encouraged Joseph Lycett, the convict artist, to paint townscapes for such purposes and they came up clean and precise; tokens of British order in a southern wilderness. I wonder what they really looked like? Most of our early colonial townscapes are rendered from this point of view. Later, during the second half of the century, it is the social life rather than the building fabric of the towns that is given prominence, but the point of view is similar. Evidence of the Britishness of colonial life is being provided for the information of friends and relatives back home.

Towards the end of the century, Australian artists became more emotionally involved with their subject matter. For a moment in our history it seemed that we might achieve a vision of the city at least comparable with, if not equal to, the urban scenes of the French impressionists. But Tom Roberts's *Bourke Street*, Arthur Streeton's *Redfern Station*, and Girolamo Nerli's *Wet Evening* are brilliant exceptions. The pull was all the other way; to the blue hills, the giant gums and the manliness of bush life. From the 1860s to the 1960s the history of the Australian city is one of vigorous, continuous growth; a growth the beneficence of which was rarely questioned. But it was also a century during which landscape painting was the dominant artistic genre. The story of that predominance from Buvelot to Nolan and his contemporaries has often been told, and I do not propose to recount it, even briefly, here. I propose instead to advance the view that this pre-occupation with landscape has been largely responsible for the creation and maintenance of a false consciousness of what it is to be an Australian. For most Australians, including Australian artists, are born and reared in the suburbs. The suburb is their environmental reality; a reality which few, if any, have chosen to describe. As a young man (for he is usually male) the Australian artist lives with his wife

(or whoever) and children in a rented house in a 60 × 120 ft suburban allotment (give and take a few feet) until his work becomes known and sells well enough for him to contemplate a change of residence. He then moves out, like any other successful member of the middle classes, to a more attractive suburb on the rural fringe of the city, or perhaps into the nearby bush itself. He participates, that is to say, in a demographic trend typical of our cities until fairly recent times. And to this physical movement of residence from the old to the new, from the central to the fringe suburbs, we may compare a parallel movement in the artist's imagination. If he paints suburban scenes at all, they usually belong to his early years as an artist when he is more securely tied to his suburban environment. But this youthful phase does not last. The typical Australian painter, until quite recently, has identified with the bush or the desert as he grew older, and from the 1940s onwards the image of man appears less frequently in the Australian landscape. Our artists, from their suburban allotments, had begun to penetrate imaginatively into the arid regions ruled by the *Deus ex Machina*, that technological god who permits only symbols of space, form and power into his impersonal kingdom; they had entered, you might say, the Simpson's desert of significant form.

The strong preference for up-country imagery has not been, of course, entirely without value. It has helped to unify the Australian tribe, by providing an emotional iconography to which our own particular bourgeois might respond: for of them too it may fairly be said that their work is in the city but their hearts are in the bush and the suburbs are the best compromise. The bush landscape has also performed an important sociological role. It has taught us to appreciate Australia in its natural state: to see the beauty of the wilderness. This is so normal with us today that it is difficult to imagine a time when men thought differently. Yet as late as 1777 the great Scottish historian, William Robertson, could still write: 'The labour and operations of man not only improve and embellish the earth, but render it more wholesome, and friendly to life. When any region lies neglected and destitute of cultivation, the

air stagnates in the woods; putrid exhalations arise from the waters; the surface of the earth, laden with rank vegetation, feels not the purifying influence of the sun; the malignity of the distempers natural to the climate and new maladies no less noxious are engendered. Accordingly, all the provinces of America, when first discovered, were found to be remarkably unhealthy.' Early settlers in Australia had similar unkind remarks to make about our wilderness. But our landscape artists succeeded in imposing an aesthetic order upon the wilderness which has been as compelling and as influential in its own fashion as the pastoral and agricultural orders imposed by human settlement. Indeed many landscape artists such as Sir Arthur Streeton have been vigorous and influential conservationists. Their deep love of natural landscape has greatly assisted the movement for nature conservation; a movement which began more than a century ahead of the corresponding movement to conserve urban environments. Our first national park was gazetted in 1879; but we still await Acts of Parliament which will give legal protection to urban environments. Finally, one must concede that the landscape painters won an audience for art from a rugged, pragmatic, philistine society. In this they have been civilisers. Now I am prepared to concede all this and still maintain that the overwhelming predominance of landscape painting has created a false consciousness of what it is to be an Australian. These images created by suburban artists for suburban man were at best recreational images and at worst images of escape; they testify to a flight from environmental actuality. True, much art is like that, and some great art is like that. But such art at its best comes to us with a sense of personal and inner urgency that most of our bush-motivated art lacks. And there is another way in which such paintings develop a false consciousness. They are presented as emblematic of Australia; but in fact they disguise an old European romanticism—the view of Australia as a wilderness inhabited by wild men of the woods—some black, some white—a view of us which has its origin in Rousseau, and has long prevailed, let it be stressed, in the great metropolitan centres of Europe, Asia

and North America. It is a misleading view, because it is a view which we have taken from others, proceeded to touch up a little, and then cherished as our own. Unfortunately, it is also a view which encourages the belief that the Australian is mindless: a man of nature, distrustful of theory, of intellect, and of those qualities of life traditionally associated with cities and with civilisation. It is a view that has helped to create a mythical Australian; a creature who lives on the other side of history.

There is however, I believe, an alternative available to Australians which will help to redress the imbalance brought to our self-awareness by this obsession with Rousseau's noble savage. That alternative draws its respect from man as fabricator and artificer rather than from his condition as a natural man of the woods: from *homo faber* rather than *homo naturalis*. It replaces mythical man by historical man; and it emerges from a growing awareness that Australians possess a history. Little has been done to trace the emergence of this alternative image of the Australian; and all I can hope to do here is to provide a few pointers that may help to identify some of its sources. In order to appreciate the emergence of historical man in Australia we must, it seems to me, take account of the difference of history for the historian and of history for the man in the street. For the historian, history is a picture of the past which he fashions in a personal struggle with words and documents. But for the man in the street, history is something that he can see, here and now in the present, something which has happened to survive from the past. It is a kind of perception, an ability to see the past as one of the qualities of presently existing things. This historical perception, as distinct from book history, often begins with an awakened respect for the fabric of old buildings. Little, it seems to me, is really known about the psychological sources of historical perception; but it can arise with dramatic suddenness in a society and effect radical changes in the priorities given to popular values.

Something of the kind happened to Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when it discovered its classical past, and to

Britain in the eighteenth century when it discovered its Gothic past. In Australia the primitive beginnings of historical perception make an appearance not surprisingly as we approach the centenary of European settlement. *The Picturesque Atlas of Australasia*, published in 1886 to celebrate the approaching centenary, is a relevant document here. For example, it describes the Rocks area of Sydney as follows: 'it has a quaint, old-fashioned air about it. It has a suggestion of old Folkstone, with a touch of Wapping, and a reminiscence of Poplar. Those in search of primitive Sydney will find more of it here than anywhere else'. The comparisons are admittedly English, but the search is for a *primitive* Sydney. Here, surely, we have the beginnings of a tradition at once popular, antiquarian, and somewhat sentimental. With a new warmth of feeling and a measure of personal identification, artists began to draw the old streets and houses of the city. Etching was fashionable at the time and this newly-discovered awareness of history may best be seen in the etchings of Lionel Lindsay, Sid Long, Sydney Ure Smith and others. In 1902 the New South Wales Government commissioned a group of local artists to paint the buildings of Old Sydney, mostly in the Rocks area. It is not surprising that it was around the oldest area of close human settlement in Australia that a popular consciousness of the historic past began to grow.

At this time too, a few Australian writers began to turn their attention to suburban life. The first suburban factories had begun to appear; and Edward Dyson, born in Ballarat, had worked in one of them. His characters 'Feathers' and 'Benno' introduce a new character, a suburban character, the larrikin, into Australian writing. Louis Stone in his fine novel *Jonah* gave the larrikin to us once, and once only, realistically and in the round before C. J. Dennis proceeded to sentimentalise him out of existence.

The larrikin was an urban product, but his characterisation grimly supported Rousseau's bucolic dream. He is the victim of the cultural impoverishment of the inner suburbs. The city is a mad mother who produces schizoid children. The few artists who turned to life in the cities have a somewhat similar tale to tell.

In his picture *Strike's Aftermath* painted in 1912, Dattilo Rubbo contemplates the direful consequences that may befall those who, by listening to evil council, vainly try to rise above their station in life. This is the view of the city which is adopted by the social realist painters of the 1930s and early 1940s. When Danila Vassilieff began painting street scenes in Sydney in 1935, a critic wrote: 'the drabness, dirtiness and squalor of these regions as they strike a stranger is pungently expressed. In 1939 Harry de Hartog sees the inner suburbs as an impoverished environment.' During the war years Albert Tucker was even capable of seeing the Melbourne tram car as, of all things, a symbol of evil. A whole series of his tram car paintings are called *Images of Evil*. Eventually the town planners succumbed to the image of the evil city. In the years immediately after the war they planned huge radial freeways capable, it was then believed, of bringing the workers daily to and from the dormitory suburbs on the edge of the bush where everyone, it seems, wanted to live.

It is not surprising that seen as a product of industrial society the city was not a place to be loved: from William Blake to Friedrich Engels a powerful, forbidding picture had been drawn; and it was precisely that picture which our social realists proceeded to copy. They polished the dark side of Rousseau's coin. It was not from that source, but the gentler vision of architects and antiquaries that a less hostile vision of the city gradually began to take shape. It began, so far as Australia is concerned and, as far as I know, in the 1870s in the office of James Barnet, the Government Architect of N.S.W. When he designed a new Court House for Bathurst his work quite consciously reflected the work of Greenway some fifty or more years before. The central portico at Bathurst echoes Greenway's Convict Barracks, the wings, his Court House at Windsor, and the extremities of the wings remind one of a colonial homestead like 'Bungaribee' (near Doonside). This retrospective admiration for early colonial architecture is also reflected in Barnet's decision in 1883 to rebuild the Macquarie Lighthouse at South Head of Sydney Harbour in the same style

as Greenway's original. Admiration for colonial work continued on into the present century to culminate in the work of Hardy Wilson. For ten years, from 1912 to 1922 Wilson, with love and affection, sought out old colonial buildings and made magnificent drawings of them. His great work *Old Colonial Architecture* is not architectural history: 'I am no Historian', he wrote. But he possessed what I have called historical perception. 'Years ago,' he wrote in his introduction to *Old Colonial Architecture*, 'when I returned to Australia from the study of architecture in Europe and America, my enthusiasm for ancient buildings was immense. Immediately, I began to search for early architecture, and found a few beautiful old houses in the neighbourhood of Sydney, where they were hidden away and unknown because of the apathy which is felt in new lands towards a past not far enough removed from the present to awaken veneration, or to stir the spirit of romance. Thereafter I spent my leisure hours in looking for more, and with each new discovery my eagerness grew, and I learnt to love these simple structures'.

From Wilson's love of old buildings, and the pioneering efforts of a few of his friends such as Sydney Ure Smith, a new image of the Australian as a man with a history gradually began to emerge. We may gain a glimpse of it in Wilson's great book. 'In pioneering days', he wrote, 'these homesteads resembled small villages. Each provided its own necessary commodities. The grape furnished wine and the wheat bread. On the pasturage grazed sheep and cattle, and grey olive trees gave a fruit which has become distasteful now that salad is taken without oil [he was writing in 1923]. In the kitchen gardens flourished artichokes and luscious lemons, and bountiful crops of commoner nourishment. Blacksmiths, carpenters, shepherds and vigneron, dwelling in out-buildings, were employed in welding iron and turning wood, tending flocks and vineyards, in short performing all those tasks necessary to sustain a village in the wilderness'.

It is, of course, a highly-coloured, pastoral and patrician image that Wilson draws for us. But it is a vision drawn, even if ideal-

istically, from history; of men at work, of *homo faber*, not of the Australian as a beautiful wild man of the woods, or a hero sticking it out in the dead heart.

When the National Trusts came into existence in the years after World War II they inherited from Wilson and his generation both their enthusiasms and their somewhat exclusively patrician point of view. Their sense of history did not extend much beyond Georgian and Regency monuments. But in recent years a more liberal view of what is historic has begun to come into favour. This popular historical perception has now spread to many styles and from the protection of individual historic buildings to the protection of whole historic environments.

It is perhaps worth considering the nature of this historic perception in more detail. It is a mode of vision by which the past is perceived in the present; the past is apprehended as a sensuous quality of things presently observed. In this it is closely related to aesthetic perception and may be seen, I believe, as a kind of fourth or temporal dimension of aesthetic perception; so that things are seen not only as spatial but also as temporal constructs. When we say that one new building fits well into its environment and another fits badly we are, in a sense, aware of agreeable or disagreeable shapes and forms imposed as it were, not upon space but upon time. In some degree the temporal element is present in all perception, since perception is a complex physiological process which involves both pure sensation and memory, or as Bergson put it, 'In the end, to perceive is no more than an opportunity to remember.' But historical perception deepens the temporal perspective: things that were once seen as merely old and obsolescent are seen in a new light as human heritage. In Herman's phrase, we see into 'the character of things'.

It is quite remarkable how quickly an awareness of local history can arise in a community. In Glebe, the area in which I live and know best, the Commonwealth Government, as you will all know, recently purchased some forty-seven acres of Church Land in order to preserve both the traditional community and the historic



environment. Yet as recently as 1970 the State Planning Authority of New South Wales made an official study of the area which took them a number of months to prepare, the result of which was to advise us all that the only buildings in Glebe in its view worth preserving were a group of bungalows built in the 1930s on the edge of the suburb. That study was prepared, surprisingly enough, by young officers of the Authority who were regarded at the time as being reasonably enlightened in these matters. However, an active community unwilling to have its suburb destroyed by two enormous freeways and indiscriminate high-rise developments, flatly rejected the Authority's opinion. It developed opinions of its own about the quality of its environment, and gained a new awareness of local history as a by-product of community participation. Although the threats to Glebe remain, the new sense of historical values which the residents have discovered for themselves and transmitted to others should do much towards making the suburb a more neighbourly place to live in and preserve the environmental fabric of traditional buildings for posterity.

The new awareness of local history at a popular level that is now emerging in many suburban communities in inner-city areas has come about as a response to the challenge of those who wish to demolish the material environment and disrupt the social environment for various reasons, the best-known of which are industrial development, high-rise apartments, and freeways. The response has met with some measure of success; and is now strong enough to be recognised as a continuing issue in local, state and national politics. But it requires a much broader base if it is to survive and develop. In particular it must direct its attention to the acquisition of exact knowledge and the involvement of wider sections of the community.

A broader concept of history must be developed in the public mind so that there is a wider recognition that all environments whether urban, suburban or rural are in some measure historic environments. Each area should possess an active historical society, and that society should be concerned with collecting verbal material

and documents from old residents. It should develop an inventory of the material fabric of the area. A local Photographic society, if one exists, should be encouraged to undertake a visual inventory of the area. Local art groups should be encouraged to make topographical drawings and paintings of buildings and precincts. As Ruskin pointed out many years ago, drawing is one of the best ways of seeing. Sketching in the open air, a practice which has been discouraged by the passionate devotees of abstract art, should be encouraged again. The artist should be seen in the streets again. Some communities may possess a potential archaeological site, an old pottery, a glass factory, which may provide grounds for an archaeological study. The recent creation of a Society for Historical Archaeology in Australia is a highly important indication of the new awareness. So too is the growth and spread of local historical journals. In the area in which I live, the *Leichhardt Historical Journal*, while maintaining a good professional standard, seeks out information from all sections of the local community. The provision of a museum of local antiquities, even if it begins only with a room in the local library, should be encouraged. We desperately need exact knowledge about local building techniques so that conservation and restoration may proceed intelligently. Such knowledge is directly connected with the quality of the perception which we bring to an environment. The psychologists tell us that we do not see that which we do not know. It follows therefore that in order to perceive our own environment as an historical and contemporary reality, we need much more exact knowledge about it. And since we are in part moulded by our environments, a knowledge of one's environment is an aspect of self-knowledge; and conversely an incapacity to perceive one's environment becomes an incapacity to perceive an aspect of personal being. So that these matters should not be thought of merely as pleasant ways of filling in leisure time, for those who possess leisure time. No matter how active people are, how wide their obligations to their businesses, their professions, their trades and callings, they should be encouraged to give a tithe of their personal time towards

improving the quality of life in their own communities. This is a question of no small importance. For the daily activities of many highly important and very busy people frequently involve them in the spoliation and destruction of communities wherein they themselves do not live. This may help to explain their relative lack of interest in their own communities. But we all have to live somewhere. A better understanding of our own neighbourhoods may possibly help us to respect or at least not destroy those of others.

## The airport, the pizzeria, the motel, the rented car, and the mysteries of life

*Frank Moorhouse*

In the airport lounge we embraced. We embraced under the international ideograms. I am hungry. I want to go to the lavatory. I need an interpreter. Where is the doctor. This way out. They spoke to me and I to them above and beyond my greetings to my ex-wife after seven years. I should have listened to them.

I stood in my Breton holiday cap and stared after the people suspended in transit. I liked transit. Some destination ahead. Some place behind. Suspended. Quarantined. No friction. No yelping choices. No possessions. All services present. A true purity.

'Well.'

'Well.'

'After all these years.'

'It's been a long time.'

The droning of the airport called to me. Translated English came through the comforting, depersonalised, Public Address. The voice filtered of all human evil, threat, and mood by the protective quartz crystals and the PA cadence. Another purity.

We got straight into the mysteries where we had left off those years before in the milk bars of our Australian country town.

'I had *deja vu* just then,' she said, my ex-wife, in the airport lounge.

'Oh yes?' I said.

'Do you ever have *deja vu*?'

'Yes, I've had *deja vu*.'

'Doesn't it affect you? I mean, doesn't it serve as a reminder?'

'A reminder?' What had I forgotten? 'I'm sorry, I'm not with you, a reminder of what?'

'A reminder that all cannot be explained. That there are mysterious elements to our universe.'

I used a smiling head movement to say, no one denies that some things are difficult and come on now that's no mystery and who the hell talks like that and what for instance.

'There are explanations of sorts,' I said in words.

'What?' she demanded, courteously petulant.

'Oh physiological—retinal skip—optical paramnesia—something like that.'

'I won't accept that,' she said. I thought I heard a quiz gong.

I waved a generous hand, 'What does it matter—it's certainly a weird sensation,' not wanting grit in the eye of our first meeting.

'I think it's evidence of a previous existence,' she said. 'I know you'll scoff but it has never been explained to my satisfaction.'

'Now . . .' I said, almost choking on scoff, 'where is that fiery atheist from Eden High School?'

'Even you have to admit there are things that cannot be explained,' she said, 'and anyhow I hate people who have explanations.'

Now what do I say? Quite a few women I have known—they might have something to do with them having been denied the scientific tradition—or maybe I attract them—maybe I bring this out in them—maybe this is their rebellion against my personality and its oppression—but so many I have known have held on to some mystical gem, secretly, sometimes ashamedly, usually I have sensed it and prised it out of them like a stone from a hoof, but they have held on to it, on to their pet irrationality, say a belief that there are some card tricks which cannot be explained. Something like that.

I said, 'We cannot explain some things,' wondering if I was giving too much away, 'yet some things cannot be "explained" because they are, well, *primary facts*. I know this is going to sound bad, but I find life pretty simple to explain, especially human motivation, I know this sounds arrogant, but I don't think there is that much to it . . . to life.'

'I find that dreadfully arrogant,' she said, putting a smile on top of her criticism to ease it. 'I think there are eternal mysteries,

*deja vu*, our dreams, dualism,' she took my hand, 'our coming together after all these years—after you disappearing for seven years without so much as a word.'

Dualism? What's this dualism. Where'd she get that.

We formally kissed. 'Now let's get out of here,' she said. 'I hate airports.'

I love airports. I love the opera of airports. People half, or quarter, weeping, and how soon people stop the tears. The flare of excessive interest in someone because they are coming or going. Everyone audience to the person. Speechy conversation which no one can remember afterwards, everyone over-laughing. Families with high-gloss airport emotion, a linkage of smiles and tears and touching. A moratorium on malice, airconditioned goodwill. When the airport sanctuary is left and the automatic doors open into the sweat and blown litter they also open the wounds of family and dust blows into the lacerations.

I did not want to leave the airport.

In the pizzeria we held hands. We held hands before the repetition. Each pizza thrown perfectly together. Parts of life have reached perfection ahead of the rest. Pizza making is one. Thrown together with unthinking dexterity, artlessly sculptured. Perfectly repeated. Oh boy!

'It's been a long time since we ate a meal together,' I said with a squeezed cheeriness.

'It has been a long time. I can't say, though, I call this a meal. Here you are in a new country and the first thing you eat is a pizza from a takeaway food chain.'

'I want to begin with the familiar. I *know* the pizza. New experience has to be stalked.'

'I wish you had let me take you to Enrico's.'

'Remember,' I said, 'those river picnics.'

'Very dearly.'

'Remember doing it on the rock.'

She frowned, as though not remembering.

'It was our first time—you gave me your virginity for my birthday.'

'No, I didn't.'

'Yes, yes you did', I said, frantically, hurt that my effort at sentimentality should have failed, gone unrewarded.

Or was it with someone else?

'No,' she said, 'we didn't do "it" and I didn't give you my virginity—I gave you me.'

'Oh yes, that's what I meant.'

'Did you know that you and Paul have the same birthday. Did you know that? I think that's incredible. Two men in my life and they should have the same birthday.'

'Two pizza specials, please.'

'My astrologist, oh . . .'. She stopped, on the word, putting a hand to her mouth to hold the rest in. 'I remember, you don't talk about astrology.'

'Of course I do, of course I talk about astrology.'

'You don't take it seriously. You attacked me in the letters.'

'Two pizza specials, yes.'

'In some ways you've become more narrow, less open to life.' she said, 'I don't mean to be offensive.'

'No—that's alright.'

I wanted to watch the pizza making.

'Look, ahem . . .' I milled around, 'ahem, well, look, it seems to me the problem of astrology is what to do with this knowledge of the future.'

She looked besieged.

I didn't mean to besiege her.

'I mean, that if you accept predestination—it doesn't mean you can alter it—and if you could wouldn't your attempts to alter it and their outcome—also be, well, foreseeable?'

She did not reply. I feared tears.

'You may as well not know about it all,' I mumbled, to soften it, mumble mumble, 'Gipsies think it is a curse to be able to see the future—not a gift.'

'It is possible that magnetic forces at the time of your birth somehow program your brain cells,' she said, unhappily.

She thought 'magnetic' and 'program' were words which might appeal to me.

'If on the other hand,' I said, nodding at what she had said, 'if on the other hand you believe in the forewarning—which events do you change—and can't fate outwit you?'

'I don't like your approach to life—you used to be more reverent, less arrogant.'

'I'm sorry.'

The pizza came as expected, hot, boxed, honest, precisely as promised, precisely as desired.

'I hate takeaway food,' she said.

'I love it,' I said fiercely, recklessly, which wasn't really as true as I made it sound. But it was too late. I was away—riding an unbroken horse.

'I love Kentucky Fried Chicken. Children love takeaway food above all else—they hate the food at home—children have to be force-fed—did you realise that—for the first years they are physically force-fed and beaten until they eat the lousy food their mothers dish up.'

I knew she harboured a Rousseauian theory that children were instinctively wise and that given no adult guidance they would choose in their best interest. She *harboured* bad theories, like escaped criminals and lunatics in the cellars and attics of her mind. I knew they were there. I didn't need a warrant to search.

'They are propagandised,' she said, 'given the choice without all the pressure they'd do what was right.'

Why do they believe the propaganda? Why don't they know it to be false after the first bite of takeaway food? Tell me that. Why doesn't the instinctively wise child believe reality over propaganda?

'Why!' I said, 'takeaway food is the beginning of the communal kitchen,' I ripped on, 'most people cook so badly they love takeaway food.'



I had flown a thousand miles for one of her smiles at a very high altitude and here we were embattled over takeaway food. The pizzas in their boxes were complaining, burning my hand. I shifted them from hand to hand.

She cherished words like 'communal'. I knew all about emotional in-fighting dressed up as 'discussion'.

The people of the suburbs, I told her, were already learning that it was better to share the services of a professional cook. That's what takeaway food is all about. At last, I blurted, we are getting rid of a million little women in a million little kitchens stirring a million little pots.

Then I came up with something else. I told her I thought that children preferred takeaway food because they feared poisoning at the hands of basically hostile, frustrated, unliberated mothers. The traditional mother is an anti-mother.

Why do I ride these unmanageable horses? Why do I put myself at risk?

In the motel we fought. We fought over the idea of 'motel sex' and the miracle of creation.

'I don't know why but it makes me feel debased—furtive.'

'What you feel,' I said to my ex-wife, straining to make our personalities meet in the middle, and our bodies, 'is that a motel lacks the "ambience of true living" that motels contain no personal "detritus".'

'Yes, you always have a cold word for it,' she said, 'you're a master of the clinical expression.'

She sat in what would have been the comfortable relaxing chair for weary travellers. I lay on the vibrator bed. The motel met my expectations. I thanked it. I had on the musak and the television without sound. The newspaper would be delivered. Nothing could happen without me knowing. Coherent reality. Systematised comfort, cushioned by media.

I had been in a hundred motel rooms in many countries. I like the morning concourse, suitcases thumping into luggage compart-

ments of dusty cars. The clatter of breakfast trays. I say good morning to the people in the adjoining units.

'Have you read the short story called *The St Louis Rotary Convention 1923, recalled?*' I asked. She shook her head and said something about it being a good title.

'In that story a character called Becker sings a song of praise to the motel.'

'We should have stayed with my friend Pieta.'

'I didn't want to stay with your friend Pieta. I wanted to be alone with you on where we could be intimate and snug.'

They are not my words, they are her words.

'A motel room!' she sneered, but didn't sneer properly, she was too nice.

'Yes I feel at *home* in a motel,' I said, paradoxically.

'We should be with Chris—our child. Your daughter.'

'Your child,' I said, 'I fathered her but she is totally your child. For godsake I haven't seen her since birth.'

'Why don't you want to be with Chris?' she said plaintively, tenderly.

'Because I want to be with you in an undivided way.'

'Chris is me.'

'Crap.'

'You wouldn't understand—you've become so cynical. It only hides a fear of life, you know. I am not a single person. It is no use getting accustomed to me. I am a combination of myself and my children.'

'Holy Jesus.'

'Why are you so abusive?'

'Breeding is a rapidly depreciating virtue,' I said.

'Oh I see,' she said, 'so having children is—how would you say it—"invalid"?''

'Yes, you don't need children—unless you're a dairy farmer.'

'How unloving you've become—and I think, a little sick.'

'This patient enjoys his illness.'

I brooded and vibrated.

'Children,' I began again, 'were once an economic necessity, and then a religious obligation—now nothing more than a suburban convention.'

'I don't wish to talk about it in those terms.'

'Why did the State and the Church have to work so hard to convince people to have children—suppressing birth control information—why?—I'll tell you why—because people preferred not to have children. That's why.'

She had closed her eyes, as if to the words. Then she said, 'you must miss so much—I feel really sorry for you—oh, I know you've achieved a lot—you lead what you call a free life but so much pleasure in life comes from having commitments and trials and worries.'

I watched her closely during her speech, the bed vibrating away under me.

'I like my life to be a warm muddle,' she said, 'you wouldn't, I'm afraid, understand that.'

I shook my head vigorously.

How clever the living process was. Oh bloody clever. You couldn't really make a mistake. Whatever you did, the mind reshaped to accommodate and even celebrate it. Except for the intrusion, now and then, of ideal forms.

Then I listened to her mundane certificates of life—her two deeply meaningful love relationships (including those early years with me)

her three 'creative'  
children

her four uncomplicated  
working class friends

her well-worn railings of inaccurate commonsense

her paperback mysticism

How correct all the black things of life then seemed. How basically good and decent pornography was. All the perversity that kicked against formulations of 'fuller life' and 'loving

interpersonal relationships'—all that stinking ideological love. Hippy love.

I told her that Anatole France said that *volupté* was the only solace.

Dispiritedly she said, 'what?'

'*Volupté*! Sensual pleasure! Evil sensuality!'

She said that all she sought from life—now that I'd brought it up—was the warmth of the hearth and 'the sticky fingers of loving children'.

'I guess,' I said brightly, 'that really I'm for Sin and against Motherhood.'

I thought that was a glib enough summing up, so while she was in the bathroom, probably weeping into the sanitised wash basin, I soundlessly left. The second time in seven years.

In the rented car I breathed freely. In the rented car I drove to the airport, breathing freely. A rented car is not an extension of self in quite the same way as a car you own. You are free of the bonds of ownership. The rented car is not your ego, rusting away, scratched. A rented car renews itself at each renting and renews you with it. Certain material things, I said, can be best and freely used when not owned. Then they are not tangled with the ego.

Ah!! Give me the technological life.

I am a simple non-spiritual man, I said to myself, leading a simple rented life.

I spoke to all the international ideograms at the airport, and took the advice of the wine glass.

Despair and disconsolation joined me at the bar some 15 or 20 minutes later when I began to ponder on how hard, difficult, and confounding it was to find *volupté* which Anatole France said was the only solace.

I pulled my Breton cap over my disconsolate brow.

Where *was* this *volupté* when you needed it???

# Prayer to the spirit of the New Year

*Bobbi Sykes*

Dear Spirit,  
 Here we are—at the end of a long year of struggle  
 Against foes of old—oppression, hunger, pain,  
 And we stand again at the threshold of a New Year . . .

Let this be a year not just of the same,  
 Let me not hear again the cry of anguish  
 From the gaol—

Let me not hear again the sounds of mourning  
 From young parents . . . of younger infants.

Let me not hear again the crunch  
 of Baton on bare flesh and bone  
 And let me not hear again        the silence.

Let me not see the un-cried tears  
 Welling in the eyes of my black sisters  
 As they perceive even the little dream they had  
 Die.

And  
 Let me not see the veiled defeat  
 Behind eyes drugged into dreamtime  
 In the strained faces of my brothers.

And instead  
 If I might see the slow dawning *begin*  
 the dawn of understanding

the slow opening  
of eyes and hearts *begin*

the slow death  
of hypocrisy *begin*

the slow end  
of racism *begin*

For legend tells us, dear Spirit,  
that in the beginning . . .

## Against or for beauty

*Richard Tipping*

Peasant woman etc  
 ox paddyfield & so on  
 plough slush straw hat  
 child in arms etc etc

delete arms insert on back  
 child on back—rub out  
 back insert backwards  
 child strapped on backwards

Peasant woman etc  
 screech run fall & so on  
 bullets napalm shrapnel  
 child in mud etc etc

delete mud insert broken  
 child broken—rub out  
 broken insert blown apart  
 child mangled blown apart

Peasant woman etc  
 what can we do & so on  
 being sickened is a luxury  
 aesthetics of pain etc etc

delete pain insert revolution  
 aesthetics of revolution—rub out  
 aesthetics insert beauty  
 revolution must be

## Belfast. July 1973

*Alan Gould*

The day the store in King William Street burst  
the sky rained tailors' dummies, and someone  
found an arm three blocks from the blast,  
(a fact some papers headlined.) When Moran  
bumped into his wall of bullets outside  
the cartoonshow, amazement not horror  
was the crowd's first impulse at such vivid  
screenplay. We of course can't take in such nightmare  
when the buses still run. 'Unreal' we say, lost  
among the flags and statues. On the ghost-  
-ed Crumlin now a lone youngster ambles.  
She hums a skipping tune as her ball rolls  
at the soldier behind the fence, whose each nerve  
is a missile triggered on her each move.



## Letter to Yevtushenko

R. F. Brissenden

*'One need not fear the strong. All one needs  
is a way to beat them. For every strong man  
there is a special ju-jutsu.'*

—*Precocious Autobiography*

Zhenya, the flowers you gave my daughter  
Are dead and withered; the words you wrote  
For me across your book are fading;  
The page turns yellow.

But what you wrote today  
Won't die or fade:  
*When truth is replaced by silence  
Silence becomes a lie.*

They said you'd sold out and become  
A trusty—but the blade  
You smuggled past the guards has kept its edge,  
The hidden bread its freshness.

We can't pretend to know  
What it is like to live and write in Russia.  
'How can a man who is warm  
Understand a man who is freezing?'

And even to say that  
Is to sound absurdly condescending  
(But to say nothing is not what you want:  
There has been too much silence).

Well, you have broken your silence, Zhenya—  
And now the king-hit brass-knuckle bastards  
Will be waiting to break you. My friend,  
I hope you can remember your ju-jutsu.

## A crucifixion

*J. R. Rowland*

No one could stand  
 Relaxed so, on nailed feet,  
 Arms comfortably extended,  
 Head inclined, in modest meditation,  
 No weight on either hand.

It has been proved: the nails  
 Tear through the palms; only the wristbones  
 Will bear the weight of a slack-bellied carcase  
 Arms strung to sticks, knees jackknifed outwards,  
 Head fallen forward; over rails

Of ribs the skin strung bruised and bloody,  
 A bag of dust-smearred carrion. Paper eyes  
 Dead as a skinned rabbit.  
 This is a version for the chimney-corner  
 Softened to make bearable the body

Of a man destroyed: familiar in a time  
 Of murdered hostages and kidnapped captives  
 Shot down in cellars or in airport lounges  
 By strangers and fanatics.  
 Domesticating violence is a theme

Fit for this Christmas as for others—  
 A fearful symbol tamed, to stand above  
 The noise and warmth of this our family table  
 Teaching us realities: death's acceptance,  
 That linked in hate or love all men are brothers.

Across the room, a mother holds her child,  
In ample robes, doe eyes cast upwards.  
Before and after, the beginning and the end.  
Between the two the span of life and feeling,  
The child adored, the man killed and defiled,

United with us on this Christmas night  
In the deep snow of rural Austria  
Silent, star-governed, pure and cold,  
With one star burning, as was then foretold,  
Above the mountain's head, acetylene-bright.

# Christ at Gallipoli

*Geoff Page*

'This synod is convinced that the forces of the Allies are being used of God to vindicate the rights of the weak and to maintain the moral order of the world.'

Anglican Synod, Melbourne, 1916.

Bit weird at first,  
 That starey look in the eyes,  
 The hair down past his shoulders,  
 But after a go with the ship's barber,  
 A sea-water shower and the old slouch hat  
 Across his ears, he started to look the part.  
 Took him a while to get the way  
 A bayonet fits the old Lee-Enfield,  
 But going in on the boats  
 He looked calmer than any of us,  
 Just gazing in over the swell  
 Where the cliffs looked black against the sky.  
 When we hit he fairly raced in through the waves,  
 Then up the beach, swerving like a full-back at the end  
 When the Turks'd really got on to us.  
 Time we all caught up,  
 He was off like a flash, up the cliffs,  
 After his first machine gun.  
 He'd done for three Turks when we got there,  
 The fourth was a gibbering mess.  
 Seeing him wave that blood-red bayonet,  
 I reckoned we were glad  
 To have him on the side.

## That good night

*Christopher Lee*

July in Canberra is just damn freezing. Tweed and Pumpy and I would go up and warm at the Ainslie pub. Which was about the best pub in Canberra in those days. About seven at night we would be standing round in that saloon bar called the Dugout, just drinking beer quietly there surrounded by the warmth and crush of it all. The Dugout had an atmosphere you could feel. Even on a Tuesday night it was warm and friendly and settled and pretty sure of itself. There was a big cartoon on one wall saying if you knows of a better hole go to it.

For about an hour we stood round drinking beer and telling stories. As you do with friends in a good bar. Middle of second term, settled and sure of ourselves we bought middies in a comfortable three shout. And Tweed had his indefinitely deferred notice on the bar. That little square of cardboard, getting slowly soaked with stale beer, repeating to the bright-eyed and bearded Tweed that under present circumstances he would not be called up. Signed by a public servant called Slee. It told Tweed he did not have to become a man after all. Tweed said he was eternally grateful to Mister Slee and the laws of chance.

Tweed had been getting a bit full. He started drinking to the eternal damnation of Mister Slee. He said you know what? I was born a day late. What if I'd arrived on time? That bastard could have got me.

He had a bird in Sydney, he said, should be in on this. Then while Pumpy and I stood there talking and telling stories we'd heard before, Tweed was pretty quiet for a while till he looked up and just said let's go to Sydney. There in the warmth and cursing of the bar he said we'll hitch down and be back here easy by Thursday afternoon. Pumpy and I just ignored him. July in

Canberra is not for hitching. And besides, three hitching together is too many. Pumpy said no chance Tweed it's your shout.

But somehow Tweed made that damn stupid idea sound a great thing to do. He had that kind of ability in those days. I remember he could recite Hamlet's soliloquy so you felt it wasn't him talking at all. It would sound haunting and worry you after it was over. I once saw Tweed change the whole mood of a party by speaking that piece. And there was a good story told then about how Tony Fenton at four o'clock one morning rang up Tweed and said quick deliver that Hamlet piece with all you've got. Tweed was pretty sleepy but he spoke the lines into the phone then hung up. Tony Fenton swore the next day some young fresher doing english had changed her mind and had climbed into the pit with him after hearing Tweed's monologue.

Pumpy and I let him argue for a while. Tweed said it would be poetic for three blokes to carry that indefinitely deferred notice two hundred miles. Neither cold nor hitching difficulties nor gloom of night shall stay these couriers, he said. The woman must know I'm not to die.

I don't know why we decided to go. We walked out of the dizzy warmth of the Dugout into a night that was clear and freezing. Someone Pumpy knew in the bar drove us out along the highway a few miles. When he turned and drove back into Canberra we were left in the cutting cold. The sound of his motor faded, then there was just blackness with stars and the feeling that time had slowed a little bit.

We didn't talk very much for a while. A few cars went past, just humming towards us with their lights up. It's a funny feeling really. Standing at the side of the road, when the lights catch you the night recedes. Then when the car goes past the black sweeps in behind it and the night means something again.

About ten o'clock a very old tow truck stopped just past us. We heard him coming from a long way off, changing down gears to get up the inclines. There was a badly smashed Valiant winched up

behind with its back wheels running and the front of the car drawn up under the truck's crane.

The driver was an old man with broken teeth and flakey skin cancers on the backs of his hands. He said you fellas look a bit cold you know. I got the heater on here. Going far as Goulburn. Then we just settled there and started talking with the old boy. They can tell you some of the best stories. He had been driving since dawn that day; Cooma, Gundagai, Canberra. And he said got nearly the same run tomorrow.

Pumpy asked him if he took pills to stay awake and the old man grinned and said sure do. You got to you know. He took a packet of tablets out of a pocket and threw them to me and said you bust open a few of them Codral tablets and see what's inside. I snapped a few in half. Each tablet had a little yellow pill embedded in it. Don't know what them yellow lumps are, the old man said, but you can get these pills cheap from a chemist and no doctor needed. You just crack em open and swallow the yellow pills inside and you get pepped to buggery. Truckies don't buy Codral tablets for a cold you know. He thought that was pretty amusing and just sat there chortling for about a mile.

Goulburn took a long time to come that night. It was nearly midnight when we left the old man there. A quarter of the way to Tweed's girlfriend. We walked through the half-lit town out to the other side, where the highway leads on to Sydney. There were no cars and we walked slowly out of Goulburn up a long hill. Down away to our left there was the jail with spotlights at each corner. This was colder than Canberra, and darker. There was no sound at all. Just black around and more stars here than before.

Half way up that hill seemed the best place to get another lift, if ever another car came along the road. We stopped just outside a little stone house with plants growing all over it. The stone house sat coldly in the dark, being slowly choked by the plants that grew in its broken windows and up and across the walls. It had a front fence, bordering the highway, all broken and falling. Tweed sat with his back against the fence pulling at his beard and said if



tomorrow ever comes they'll probably find us frozen gently to death here.

Midnight had passed, and Pumpy and I sat in the quiet cold and Tweed wandered around cursing for a few minutes. Then he walked over to the broken fence and began ripping off palings. A bloody raging fire, he said. This fence should last all night. So we lit a tiny fire and it grew and we tore off more fence till it was a good size and the night pulled back a bit. The same as it does when you're hitching at night in the lights of a car.

So we three sat there, waiting, and a few cars went past in the next hours and one of us would stand up and hitch. Then after the car was past he would come back to the fire and sit down again. When the fire dimmed we would feed it a little more fence. And the feeling that time slowed down came back again. There seemed so much of it.

And we talked a lot but it was different from the Dugout because here we listened too. We talked about Tweed's card from Mister Slee and it didn't seem so much of a joke now. Pumpy started getting pretty serious about it. He told a story we hadn't heard before, about a friend of his from Melbourne who was called up and was killed in Vietnam.

Pumpy said how would you like it, eh. Getting killed in Vietnam. Academics cry into their beers about it and they're pleased as hell. All the writers and bloody demonstrators love every damn minute of it and they all make mileage out of poor bastards getting shot. All their talk about how filthy it is to get shot by the opposition in a paddy field in the middle of an undeclared war. They don't understand. You know what happened to Pete? He was on leave in Nui Dat with some blokes and they went out drinking one night.

And they were in a little bar with some south koreans they met. Tiny little tough blokes. Anyway, Pete was a bit full and buggerising round and somehow he got into a bit of a brawl with one of those south koreans. Ordinary pub brawl. He was pushing this korean round a bit. Then the little bloke pulled out some sort of knife and easy as pie just stabbed Pete a few times then took off.

One of Pete's friends who was there told me later he must have got him in the lung or something. Pete started choking pink froth and throwing up all over the place. Anyway, he died right there in that bar. Makes you sick doesn't it.

Pumpy went over and ripped at the fence pretty savagely. Then he came back and tossed the bits on the fire and sat down and the mood was different somehow. We talked about death, sitting round that fire like american indians. We talked about Ernest Hemingway and John Berryman and Sylvia Plath and why did they do it. About half past two a truck went past and no-one bothered getting up for it. I watched it slowly pulling up the hill in about upper second or lower third gear and it reminded me.

I told Tweed and Pumpy about the time when I was hitching over the mountains and I got a lift with a truckie in an interstate hauler. He told me about a friend of his who was killed coming down the mountains from the central west somewhere. The truckie told me this bloke had been his best friend. He said you just keep an eye out straight ahead young feller, and I'll show you where he got it.

It was at the crest of the mountain that his friend's major load brakes had failed. If that happens a driver only has one chance at a low gear to hold him going down. His friend had missed getting into upper first gear, he was already going too fast. So he just headed down that mountain with a full load, out of gear and with only light cabin brakes that had no chance of even slowing him down.

The truckie told me about half a mile down the hill his friend would have been doing about sixty. He said with a full load you pick up speed pretty quick young feller. Have a look what's round this next bend.

Just around that bend was one of those safety ramps, dug into the mountain. Just an increasing upward slope off the road to the left. Any truckie in trouble pulls off onto the safety ramp and the slope will slow and stop him. It's like a waterhole in the outback or a plank of wood when you're drowning.

See that, the truckie said, them things have saved a lot of blokes' lives. Greatest idea any roadbuilder ever had. Well, he made it round this bend. He knew if he did he'd be right. Driving a full load up a safety ramp about sixty sure buggers a truck, but when she stops you're alive aren't you. Well, he pulled her round here and right in front of him was that ramp. You know what was in the middle of that ramp? A bloody little family having a picnic.

No bullshit. Smack in the middle, with a station waggon parked at the side, a bloke and his wife and two little girls on a rug eating bloody sandwiches.

He had about a hundred yards to decide whether to kill them or himself. He pulled away and kept going down the mountain and made three more bends in the road before he went off the edge. I saw him in hospital a few days later, all hooked up to bloody gadgets and bottles. He told me that story in the afternoon and he died that night. He had two little girls of his own.

We just sat quietly for a while. Tweed sat hunched over, pulling at his beard. You could feel the cold coming out of the ground now. The fire died a bit and the dark came in slowly. Tweed took his indefinitely deferred notice out of his coat pocket. He sat hunched there and looked at it, then he looked up at me. He said you know what, I'll bet my life one of those parents looked up from a Vegemite sandwich and said look how fast that fool in the truck's going, they're a menace on the roads.

I didn't answer Tweed. He didn't want me to. He looked down at that tiny piece of cardboard. Then Pumpy said quietly yeah, I know what you mean. They wrote to Pete's mother and said he was a remarkable young man and he'd been killed in action. I saw the letter.

The night was different now. For the next few hours we didn't hitch. Cars would go past on the road but no one felt like going to Sydney any more. The cold just stayed still all around us and for the next few hours we slowly tore the heart out of that broken fence. The fire would flare on the old wood then slowly fade till we ripped out more fence for it. That was a good night really. Tweed dropped

his little piece of cardboard into the fire and because it was still wet with beer it cooked and went black till it disappeared. Then the dawn came in and the stars and the fire went sort of pallid. We left an emaciated fence and the black remains of a fire and Tweed's little card from Mister Slee and we walked back to Goulburn as the sun came up and everything got warm again.

# Djanggawul

*Gavin Souter*

You will find Djanggawul on only one kind of map, the 1:250,000 series prepared by the Royal Australian Survey Corps. These maps are drawn to such a detailed scale that it takes 540 of them to cover the Australian continent. Djanggawul appears on one of the Arnhem Land sections beside a small red aeroplane that signifies the existence of a landing ground. Apart from numerous water courses and a few unnamed hills, the only markings anywhere near this aeroplane symbol are the words 'paperbark' and 'meteorite craters'.

I first heard about Djanggawul three weeks ago from an officer of the Welfare Branch in Darwin.

'Some Djinba people live there,' she said. 'They sleep in paperbark houses on stilts, with mosquito fires burning underneath, and live on fish, crocodiles, marsupials, and a bit of European food from the Methodist mission at Galiwinku.'

'A mission plane is flown in there once every three weeks by old Harold Shepherdson, who is a saga in himself. But the man who knows most about the Djinba is an anthropologist named Nick Peterson. He's done a thesis on them.'

Back in Sydney, I made more inquiries about Djanggawul. The anthropologist was away at Yuendumu in Central Australia. His thesis had not yet been examined, but the Department of Anthropology at Sydney University seemed willing to let me see it if Mr Peterson agreed. I sent him a telegram, and he sent one straight back. The answer was no.

I did, however, find a paper by Mr Peterson on another subject, which said in passing: 'I have been working with a traditionally oriented band living in and off the bush in Arnhem Land. This band in November, 1966, had 40 people divided into five family

groups.' One of the illustrations showed several young Aborigines in loin cloths beside a paperbark hut on stilts.

As I was going to Arnhem Land in a few days' time for the gala opening of Nabalco's alumina plant at Nhulunbuy, I sent off two more telegrams—one to the Welfare Branch applying for a permit to visit Djanggawul, and another to the United Church in Northern Australia (of which the Methodist Church now forms part) asking whether I could go there in the plane from Galiwinku. Both replies said yes.

At Nabalco's opening luncheon, I met the senior welfare officer in Arnhem Land, Mr C. C. Allom.

'Are you going with Sheppy?' he asked. 'I won't fly with him. He's been lifted up too often by the hand of the Lord!'

Although this was said half jokingly, it was less than fair to the Reverend Harold Shepherdson. For all his 69 years, Mr Shepherdson is an excellent pilot, and still the only man ever to have landed at Djanggawul.

Once in the wet season his plane bogged while landing there, and bent its propeller. Mr Shepherdson had to wait eleven days—living on kangaroo meat, turtle and yams—until a new prop was walked in from the coast. The first plane he ever flew in Arnhem Land was a canvas Heath Parasol, which he built himself in 1932 from some American blueprints.

This stocky, taciturn missionary was an engineer before he went to Arnhem Land forty-five years ago. After working at Millingimbi mission for fifteen years, he established Galiwinku mission on Elcho Island in 1942. He has now retired, but still flies regularly to Djanggawul and one or two other isolated strips.

'We'll leave at three,' said Mr Shepherdson when I met him at Galiwinku, ninety miles west of Nhulunbuy. 'What time do you want me to pick you up tomorrow?'

Somehow I had assumed that he would be staying overnight at Djanggawul too, but apparently he was not. I told him 11 a.m. would do.

He had another surprise for me as well. Four men from

Djanggalwul were now at Galiwinku, and would be returning home with us. One of their relations had died of old age and tuberculosis in the mission hospital, and they had come for the funeral.

This was in fact the entire adult male population of Djanggalwul. There had been some trouble recently, and part of the band had moved to a place called Doindji, thirty miles away. All that remained were the four mourners, seven women and nine children.

So off we went at three o'clock in a little blue Cessna: Sheppy working the controls very deliberately; myself beside him, watching his every move with gradually returning confidence; behind us the four mourners, talking Gupapuyngu; and behind them a sleeping bag, a mosquito net, and some tinned food which I had borrowed from the mission.

The Arafura Sea was peacock blue, the Arnhem Land Reserve an olive green. Soon the green became brighter, almost like lettuce.

'Swamp,' said Sheppy. 'There are salt water crocodiles down there. The natives used to sell the skins, but now they're not allowed to. It's all right for mining companies to come in here, though! We should have kept this reserve closed for another twenty years. Then perhaps we could have done something with the people.'

We had been flying for thirty-two minutes. Sheppy pointed to some tiny rooftops beside one of the few mountains in sight, and meticulously prepared to land. I saw a plain spiked with termite towers. The spikes became taller and sharper, then mercifully gave way to a narrow strip of cleared ground. Our Stall Warning Indicator buzzed angrily, and a second later we were back to earth on two sorely tried but sturdy rubber wheels.

'I'd boil the water before you drink it,' said Sheppy as we unloaded my gear. 'And don't sleep near buffalo tracks.' Ten minutes later he took off, leaving me with a feeling of loneliness I had not really expected.

Here I am in the middle of Arnhem Land with four Aboriginal men, three women, three children and seven starved-looking dogs. One of the men clears his nose on to the ground, and a dog darts forward with intentions that I prefer not to think about. I look at my notebook. The two younger men, in their forties I should think, are Djigawurrdi and his brother Wanamaru. There is a middle-aged man, Biriwun, and a bearded old-age pensioner named Maynyunyu. I practise the names.

Another pensioner is living two miles away in one of the huts we saw from the air. She has Hansen's Disease, which is the new name for leprosy. The women and children who are with us have walked across from those huts, and are now busy making a new camp beside the landing ground. I suspect this may be to save me a two-mile walk.

Djigawurrdi is the leader. He and his brother both speak some English, but an English that I can scarcely understand. They pronounce fish as bish, and string as dring. Would I like to see some blowers? We walk between pandanus palms and termite hills to a billabong that is covered with white and yellow water-lilies. Wanamaru wades out to pick a flower, sucks up some water through a stalk, and offers me a lily root to chew.

'Good ducker,' he says. 'Like gabbage.' As we walk back through the reeds he grips something between his toes and says what at first I take to be 'lizard'. It is a leech.

Fires are lit, dampers baked in the coals, and grass tufts tomahawked out of the way to make smooth sleeping places. The women do all of this. I heat a tin of stew and boil some water from the billabong. It looks clear enough. Djigawurrdi sits beside one of his two wives, Wanagairr, drawing thoughtfully on a Macassan pipe that resembles a small didjeridoo. At six o'clock the sun goes down and the mosquitoes arrive: just a few of them at first, then millions. Maynyunyu says something to Biriwun, and bursts out laughing. Djigawurrdi leaves his pipe long enough to explain: 'Biriwun god no ned.' How he will survive the night without one I cannot imagine. The rest of us retreat abruptly under our nets,



leaving the unseen horde shrilling like bagpipes outside. I wriggle into my sleeping bag and take a sleeping tablet.

Dawn at Djanggawul. Through my net I see forty-three stationary mosquitoes, a distant wall of mist, and pink light in the eastern sky. The moon floats palely overhead, almost outdone by the morning star. A dog shakes its ears and scratches its belly. In the net nearest to mine, Wanamaru's baby daughter, Karrmandowi, starts to cry. Her father goes goo-goo-goo and she stops. One of the old men coughs and hawks. I hear crows, some cockatoos and, in the distance, doves.

Weetbix and powdered milk for breakfast. 'Go udder billabong?' asks Djigawurrdi. The two of us set off across the plain, through pandanus palms and knee-high grass. Now and then we cross a bare claypan with fresh animal tracks. 'Bubbalo,' says Djigawurrdi at one of these. At another, 'wallaby'.

He walks in front of me, but often slows down to talk.

'You know when Nick Bederson come back here?' Unfortunately I don't. 'He say come back in one year.' I ask Djigawurrdi where he was born, and he points to the ground. Has he always lived here? Always, except when he and Wanamaru went to Mataranka during the war.

We come to an old camp site littered with white bones. Djigawurrdi picks up a jawbone with sockets for 14 teeth and says: '*Bairu*. Grogodile.' I put the bone in my hip pocket. At this moment the jaw of the crocodile eaten by Aborigines seems an object of some value. Djigawurrdi points to both his thighs, and I notice a scar on each of them. *Bairu*. At a second camp site we find turtle bones, the thigh bone of an emu, and various fragments of wallabies and kangaroos. In the middle of this site, two circles have been dug about six inches deep. They are six feet across and five yards apart. 'My gorroboree here,' says Djigawurrdi.

Yet another camp site, on a flat shoulder of the hill that is called Djanggawul. Djigawurrdi points down to the billabong we have come to see, and to the huts far away which I have already seen

from the air. He lights his pipe and says: 'Dis gamp here binish. My granbada and granmudda buried here.'

He strips a long piece of bark from a sapling, splits it several times with his fingernails, then plaits the pieces together by rolling them vigorously on his thigh. 'Dring,' he explains. 'For bishing.' As well as turtles and crocodiles, there are catfish and barramundi in the billabongs.

On our way to the huts we come to a reddish monolith which, as Djigawurrdi remarks, vaguely resembles a giant turtle. As best I can make out, this is a sacred place connected with turtle-hunting and a ceremony called *Mokarr*. Nearby is the site of another ceremony connected with string. It is called *Rawurr*.

I find that the huts are not built on stilts. The mosquito houses I have heard about are on higher ground several miles away and are used only in the wet season. This is a dry-season camp. Only the old woman with leprosy is at home. She offers Djigawurrdi a saucepan full of wild honey, and he dips a finger appreciatively.

Djigawurrdi collects an old shotgun and several cartridges which he wants at the new camp, and before we leave he shows me four spears. One is a steel-pronged fishing spear. He fits it to a woomera and impales a rusty tin can ten feet away. The other spears have long wooden points. What are these for?

'Drangers,' replies Djigawurrdi. He picks up a spear, makes as if to throw it, and says: 'Miss him!' Throws again: 'Miss him!' And a third time: 'Binish!' This is done seriously enough, but I am not sure that I am meant to believe it.

We leave the old woman and walk back towards the landing ground carrying shotgun, cartridges and wild honey.

'What dime Shebby gome?' asks Djigawurrdi. I tell him eleven, and look at my watch. It has stopped at 8.30 a.m. At the landing ground three grass huts have appeared. Wanamaru sits in the shade with wife and daughter, playing a scratched LP on a battered transistor phonograph. The record is called *Swanee River Boys In Nashville*. As he turns the record over, Wanamaru looks up and says: 'Shebby?' I listen, and sure enough it is.

I fixed my watch. According to Sheppy it was 11 o'clock, almost on the dot. Sheppy unloaded a box of stores from Galiwinku (Djanggalwul pays its way with two age pensions, and a little income from bark painting); and suggested that before leaving we should hold a short service. He and Djigawurrdi each said a few words, and the assembled company sang 'What a friend we have in Jesus'—*Djesu limurrungu lundu*. Biriwun and Maynyunyu stayed aloof in the shade of their hut.

Sheppy helped Djigawurrdi's wife on board the Cessna. She was sick. No one knew what the trouble was, so she was going into hospital. I felt vaguely ashamed that I had not been aware of this. I shook hands all around, and climbed on board. We circled once, then headed north. Sheppy pointed over to where the rest of the Djanggalwul people were now living.

'BHP were prospecting at Doindji in the dry season last year,' he said. 'I'm surprised they haven't come back yet. Not that we want them!'

POSTSCRIPT: Back in Sydney I received a letter from Nicholas Peterson explaining why he had declined my request to see his thesis. 'The most unique thing about the Galiwinku outstations,' he wrote, 'is that the Aborigines of the area have been given a real choice about their way of life. Shepherdson has made living in the bush a possible alternative to living on the mission by providing access to the more valued European goods and services in the bush.'

'Many, indeed most, families have now opted for living at the mission; but some, such as the people at Djanggalwul, remain in the bush. Although the reasons for this are complex, a key factor is the desire to live in a situation where they can control contact with Europeans and live privately in such style as they desire.'

'While I am sure that your write-up will be sympathetic, my feeling is that it will only draw unwelcome attention to Djanggalwul, and probably attract a number of overland visitors deviating from the four-wheel drive road. The only situations in

which I would personally want to be involved in publicising the community are either if there is some threat to them, such as mining, or if it would help substantially their claim to and granting of the land.

‘If you do visit the people, you will certainly find them friendly and disconcertingly trusting. They are in no position to make a comprehending judgment about your visit until they have been overtaken by events, so the burden of looking after their interests has to be shouldered by yourself.’

What was I to do? That little community had seemed so remote that the prospect of it receiving unwelcome visitors had never occurred to me. Yet after reading Mr Peterson’s letter I had to admit that the community might be at risk. I hope I have acted correctly in changing its name. It is not called Djanggawul.

## Destinations

*Roger McDonald*

When crickets tap like sticks  
and wet stars glide  
down gullies of insect-haunted black,

when the house darkens like a breath  
at midnight, fogging impossible glass,  
and the door is closed and the cat steps

warily into night, and the torchbeam slips  
room by room in a yellow hovering descent  
to blink, eyeless, in the acrid dark,

then a loosened width  
of landscape lies revealed: the far side of earth,  
where outer limb, rooted trunk, leaf-mulch and bedded granite

swing in hollows between stars  
un-dreaming discovery. Here pale roads wind  
through hills lapping on silence,

while destinations offer themselves  
at any moment, or else nowhere along the way.

## An old song

*Hal Colebatch*

The Hero gained the legendary cave.  
The gate's grim guard was gone to dusty bones.  
No monsters here, only the sleeping girl,  
enchanted, waiting. Water dripped on stones.

After their warnings it has been a matter  
of hills and cliffs and ancient mossy stair.  
The Hero felt a certain sense of something  
anti-climactic in the whole affair.

The quest was done, never a guard remained.  
Almost too easy was the prize he sought,  
The dreadful warnings proved but blowing dust—  
'How first impressions do deceive!' he thought.

The Hero shrugged, and kissed the sleeping girl:  
'Arise, princess! The time is come! Arise!'  
And something entered from the inner cave  
with sabre mandibles and mantis eyes.

# Angelus

FOR SARAH MADELEINE

*Paul Brosgarth*

Morning will hover fictitious,  
A probability only,  
Until the gear-wheels meet

And their tired old teeth  
Invoke the familiar circle;  
Spin the mill-boy dizzy

With dreams of sky-lovers,  
Pillowed on stars  
And the stirrings of lunar air,

Moving delicately together  
Through the trembling and the flood  
To a perfect consummation.

## Movement

*Robert D. FitzGerald*

Wheels whirred beneath me; and above,  
where the star-tangling roof-tops flowed,  
the moon rode with me as I rode  
through shortening streets to meet my love.

This is not just what years recall:  
forty years gone and more are less  
than one breath-moment's happiness;  
time has no part in it at all.

Drifts of our streaming life expand  
into the neither now nor then  
of movement become the world—as when  
this hand goes out to touch her hand.



## Ritual gift—from the series 'Willoughby Poems'

*Philip Roberts*

In the black hours of a birthday  
Willoughby was trying to forget  
(‘Do you accept this call  
from your well-wishing Mom & Dad  
in the Tulsa Old Folks Home?’)  
ocular vibes split the dark,  
rumbled him. Turned on the light.  
A four-eyed tarantula two hands wide  
within spitting distance of his head.  
Zap! the quartet of beams  
clouded in the generous shot  
of flyspray, then soft & slow  
it moved into a vertical tango.  
An hour later the agony bones  
slid off the wall, hit the floor  
like a sack of secondhand toenails.

When daytime came Willoughby found  
as a birthday thought the beast  
had left tiny copies everywhere,  
one for each corner, one for each room,  
one for each year. The house is filled  
with creaking eyes, the day is marked  
by a steady construction of web.

## Here's death

*Rhyll McMaster*

Here's death, in a netting of cold air;  
 Riding a field of wind it plumes and drifts,  
 it smacks my cheekbones red,  
 it gobbles stone.  
 I'm not the chosen form in this glass shade  
 though entangled, thin and glinting as a blade.

There's death; what fun and games. I don't believe  
 how neat it pushed you down that spill of snow,  
 your black head bobbing. You cheerfully miss a bush.  
 The kickwire's up. That's you it will garrotte.  
 You sail past, death sighs,  
 'Game's up.' You wave and stop.

Death,  
 here's death, quick catch,  
 before it goes away.  
 She's in that box (all bow heads  
 and pray).  
 Has she room? She must be laughing?  
 What dress? Humiliation's cheap  
 as they roll her, horizontal, down the aisle  
 on a (well-oiled, apparently) tea-tray.

## Remembering Michael

*Judith Wright*

When you were dying, we couldn't stop thinking of you,  
counting what we had of you  
(letters kisses poems).  
They tasted chemical strange. So did the world.

I sat in small-plane harness  
bucking, dropping in wind over the coast-sea  
Sydney to Newcastle.  
Round me the nervous briefcases  
sidled and shunted  
from crophead to crophead  
(Cromwell's men  
going on missions  
against the longhairs),  
briefcases packed with our future in even black typing.  
Over the tilting sea  
streams of red sunlight poured.

Smelters, refineries, crouched among smoking phalluses  
smoking six colours  
cylinders blocks cubes  
swung at our left as we turned to the airfield.  
Behind them a hell of a sunset  
enraged their outlines  
a stumping circling dance of black geometrical dwarfs  
among black geometrical towers,  
below them the chemical waters  
attacked those leaking shores.

That wild copper mare of a sunset  
reared right out of this world.  
Flanks stabbed by chimneys  
acidic smoke in its veins,  
kicking the sun's last arc  
to death.

## In northern Tasmania

*James McAuley*

Soft sodden fields. The new lambs cry,  
And shorn ewes huddle from the cold.  
Wattles are faintly tinged with gold.  
A raven flies off silently.

Bare hawthorn thickets pearled with rain  
Attract the thornbill and the wren.  
Timber-trucks pass now and then,  
And cows are moving in the lane.

At dusk I look out through old elms  
Where mud-pools at the gatepost shine.  
A way of life is in decline,

And only those who lived it know  
What it is time overwhelms,  
Which they must gradually let go.

## The beginning of an Australian intelligentsia

*Manning Clark*

In this essay I propose to have a look at some aspects of Australian intellectual life in the period before Kendall began to make his contribution to the conversation of mankind in Australia. It is always difficult to know where to begin. I propose to begin with two responses to the Australian scene. In 1836 the young English naturalist Charles Darwin was appalled by almost everything he saw in our country. He was horrified by the sterility of the country, and the extreme uniformity in the vegetation. He was repelled by the sight of the bark on the gum-trees hanging dead in long shreds, which swayed around in the wind, and fell to the ground making the forests appear desolate and untidy. After observing the fauna of Australia he began to wonder whether perhaps this was a country in which the Creator had not finished his work. So it was not surprising that when he sailed down the majestic waters of King George's Sound, he summed up his impressions in those unkind words: 'Farewell, Australia, I leave thy shores without sorrow or regret.'

Now, as you will remember, Darwin was not the first or the last human being to recoil with horror and alarm on first seeing the land and the people of Australia. What I call the 'horror and disgust' response had a long history. Willem Jansz who first saw our country in 1606 found to his dismay that there was little good to be done here, as it was a barren land occupied by exceedingly black barbarian savages. Some eighty years later an Englishman, William Dampier, described it as a 'land supporting the miserablest people in the World'. Nor were the early settlers at Sydney

The second Herbert Blaiklock lecture, delivered at the University of Sydney, 19 July 1972, reprinted by courtesy of *Southerly*.

Cove any more enthusiastic. Barron Field found our country to be a place of 'perfect desolation', and concluded God had cursed the land and made it barren for punishment for the 'wee lapse' of the common ancestors of the human race—just as God had punished women by making them bring forth children in pain and suffering, and man by making him earn his bread in the sweat of his brow, and the snake by making him spend all the days of his life on his belly.

You will find this response quite prominent amongst many of the people who celebrated on January 1838 the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the colony of New South Wales. I call them the 'B'ant like home men'—all those who wanted snow with their Christmas plum pudding. They were the ones who either uttered the exiles' cry of despair, or believed that just as the Israelites of old had their faith in God's power to turn the hard rock into a standing water, so they must not lose their faith in their power to change the ancient, barbaric land of Australia into an English park, and plant spires, squares and manors in the Australian bush. As they saw it, there were no palaces, no castles, no old country houses, no parsonages, no thatched cottages, no ivied ruins, no cathedrals, no abbeys, no universities, no counter-charm in Australian life and countryside to compensate for what they had left behind in the United Kingdom. A belly-full, they argued, was not an adequate compensation for the absence of the full-blown civilization of Europe.

Perhaps William Grant Broughton was the most distinguished and impressive man amongst that group who were troubled that Australia might develop into a country where vulgarians chanted 'Hurrah for a belly-full', and a country where bush barbarians took over from the primitive savages who had once roamed in the wilds of New Holland. In his long exile in Australia he devoted his vast energies and talents to plant the civilization of the Old World—to build schools and churches rather than rum shanties so that a race of men, worthy of that great privilege of being made in the image of God, would flourish rather than a race of

'monkeyfied men'. He was also haunted all his days in Australia by that nightmare that British civilization was to be brought to ruin by dissenters, republicans, and Irish Catholics—that their days of power would be followed by an age of unbelief in which men would pursue the sensual pleasures of the goat and the monkey. By 1838 he had also become deeply puzzled by the Australian Aboriginal. Broughton wondered, as did many other high-minded men, why it was that the Aborigines did not want the precious gift of Christian civilization: he wondered, too, why it was that contact with the white man caused the Aboriginal to decay so rapidly both physically and morally that he wondered whether the time was not distant when the Aborigines would become extinct. The fruits of ten years in Australia had cast a shadow over his face, and given him that sorrowful countenance of the man who believes in God's goodness, but sees that the hearts of the men he honours are filled with evil and madness while they live.

Yet he had not lost faith. So on that 26 January 1838 he preached a most judicious sermon about human wickedness. By then Broughton was one of those men who believed there was hope for God, but not for man. He never sensed any contradiction or incongruity between all the protestations of human unworthiness enumerated in the Book of Common Prayer, and all those sentiments about 'foulness' and 'darkness' in the hymn book being uttered in a country distinguished for its garish days and its majestic nights. He saw no contradiction between all the stooping and knee-bending before the throne of grace in the dim religious light of the churches and all those protestations of devotion and love to a pale version of the Galilean in a country where people took delight in the bright light of the sun, and seemed to be strangely indifferent to all the metaphysical anguish and yearning of that civilization of which Broughton was such a distinguished member.

Besides on that day the great Australian boast was not about things of the mind, let alone things unseen, but rather about their material achievement as evidence of their abilities as men. Fifty



years earlier, the *Sydney Herald*, the *Australian*, the *Sydney Gazette* and the *Colonist* proudly reminded their readers, savages and the beasts of the field roamed the woods round Sydney Harbour: now there were civilized human beings. Fifty years ago the frail and clumsy canoes of the Aborigines plied the blue waters of Sydney Harbour: now vessels capable of cruising in every ocean of the world rode at anchor in their harbour. That day a party of native-born hired a ship called *Australia*, and unfurled an Australian emblem on its mast. Significantly the ship puffed steam into their limpid air—a promise, in their eyes, that the day was not far distant when industrial civilization would come to this colony, when steam ships, railways, and electric telegraphs would end the two causes of Australian inferiority—their material backwardness and their isolation.

Yet when they came to talk about the destiny or identity of their country they fumbled and faltered like deeply divided men. That night at the anniversary dinner two serious toasts were drunk before the wine cup turned their minds to toasts about that other bay in which all men love to ride. One was 'To the land of Australia'—or 'The land, boys, we live in'. But the other was 'To the sons of St George, St Andrew and St Patrick'. It was as though they were not certain whether even they, the native-born, the patriots, let alone the migrants and all the miserables who wailed their 'B'ant like home' were Australians or Britons or Australian Britons. One thing they seemed to be certain about was their loyalty to the shrine. But the serious part of the evening passed by without any of the native-born like Bob Nichols (Wentworth was huffing away at Vaucluse House) putting forward the idea that Australians were the Prometheans of the Southern Seas who in the age of steam and the spinning jenny would steal fire from heaven, and become like gods. In their cups these men showed no sign they had dreamed a great dream: they kept on drunkenly patting themselves on the back, and boasting and bragging that since the days when Adam had wandered over the face of the earth there had not been a people who had advanced so

rapidly. They did not feel the need to apologize for anything the white man had done in Australia. They were not conscience-stricken either by the degradation of the Aboriginal, or the flogging of convicts. Australia, unlike Russia and the United States, had no conscience-stricken landlords. No Australian at that time ever said anything like those simple words of a Russian on reading of the life of the serfs: 'God, how sad our Russia is.'

They seemed to be driven by a strong drive to tell the world (taking it for granted someone would be interested) that a new branch of the human family had been born in Australia, the members of which were unusually tall, and remarkably awkward in their movements. They were also distinguished by their use of the English language. The 'B'ant like home' men found the vocabulary, the idiom and the pronunciation nauseating, nasal and inane. They saw native-born Australians as 'hard-faced, grim-visaged, dry-countenanced human beings' on whom the bloom of youth quickly faded, who had ingrafted a London mode of pronunciation on to the very 'dross of the English language'. They were also distinguished by their claim that Australia belonged to them and their descendants: that the Aboriginal had no more title to the soil than the kangaroo, and that all 'bloody immigrants' and 'foreigners' should keep their 'filthy paws' off the land of Australia. But, except possibly for Wentworth, no native-born Australian had made by 1838 any contribution to the conversation of mankind, or risked giving the world a view of their hearts.

Then towards the end of that dry year of 1838 when the bones of dead cattle were bleaching in the sun beside dried-up water-holes, and William Grant Broughton was beseeching God to look down with mercy upon his unworthy servants in Australia who were suffering a just chastisement for the enormity of their offences against His Divine Majesty, and assuage their sufferings by sending them moderate showers from heaven (they were far too wicked to have any greater expectation), and angry men were asking why should white men be hanged for slaughtering eleven Aborigines—a people on a not much higher rung on the ladder of creation than

that on which the monkeys swung—the voice of the native-born began to be heard in the land. Some years earlier they had briefly raised a somewhat raucous voice when Horatio Spencer Howe Wills published the weekly, the *Currency Lad*. But as he was in the habit of denouncing the Englishmen in their midst in one issue as 'high-salaried foreigners', and then excusing himself in the next issue for his use of such scurrilous language on the grounds that his elbow-bending on the previous night had forced him to take a painful emetic, he was not taken very seriously.

Towards the end of 1838 a writer with some of the bounce and larrikin streak of Wills, but redeemed by a high seriousness and a dignity to which nature did not allow Wills to aspire, published *The Australian Sketch Book*. The author, James Martin, was only eighteen years old. As he was under one when he arrived in Australia he was an adopted member of the native-born. He called his work the 'first literary production that has ever emanated from the pen of an individual educated in Australia'. Unlike the early Dutch sailors, and William Dampier, and Barron Field and Charles Darwin who had found the place dreary, barren, inhospitable, forbidding, and uncouth, he loved it. Not England, or Ireland (his own native land) or America could boast, he said, of a 'spot so picturesque and enchanting' as Bondi Beach. Like the young but not the mature Wentworth, Martin believed providence had singled out Australia and Australians to be ranked high among the empires of the world. Just as the young Wentworth in his poem *Australasia* had prophesied that the day would come when an Austral Milton, or an Austral Pindar would soar with daring like an eagle in the skies of Australia, so Martin was confident that our poets, philosophers, and statesmen would be in time the Homers, Platos, and Ciceros of the Southern Hemisphere.

But Martin was an Australian and as such found it easy to be generous about the mighty men of renown in the past or the giants of the future, and bucket the mud in his heart over his own contemporaries. He called them the 'snarling, diminutive whelps

. . . the perpetrators of ridiculous and unmeaning trash'. For Martin suffered from the Botany Bay disease of taking the mighty down from their seat. He was one of the early members of that kingdom of the mockers, that band of the disenchanting. Charles Harpur was another member of the same band. Like Martin he loved Australia. Raw Europeans looked at the gum-trees as 'those miserable looking trees that cast their annual coats of bark, and presented the appearance of being dead'. But to him, as he put it, they were 'objects of incomparable beauty'. Raw immigrants angered him by pining for 'home'; he saw no reason to prefer the dingy gloom of a London street to the 'exhilarating summer' of Sydney. He was proud of everything made in Australia. As for gin, he used to say, 'give me Cooper's', for that was unsurpassable.

Yet, like Martin and Bob Nichols and William Charles Wentworth, and Betsy Bandicoot and nearly all the currency lads and lasses, Harpur was sceptical of any creed or doctrine which promised better things for mankind. This pessimism on the future of humanity, or human capacity, came partly from a conviction that the supporters of all such creeds, those who promised perfectibility in the life of the world to come as well as those who promised perfectibility in the 'here and now', proposed to reduce all men to 'a dead social level' and 'impose a regimented sort of unity', which would emasculate men of their true moral glory and splendour. But experience in Australia had grafted in him a sardonic view of the life of man. Like his contemporaries and his father's generation, he had seen the fruits of trying to plant the outward and visible signs of civilization in a harsh land with the labour of their hands. Like them he grew up amongst men who had come to accept man's impotence: both his power to change the physical environment, and his capacity—and his desire—to change human behaviour. Like his contemporaries he believed anyone who was convinced that the human situation could ever be any different was either a knave or a fool. The young Harpur was a patriot who put into his poems such as 'To the Lyre of Australia' and 'Australia Huzza' his hope that once Australians

were liberated from those foreigners, the Englishmen, those gaolers of human enterprise and thought, then there might be a 'nobler manhood' in what he called 'This Southern Land of Ours'.

In the same year as Charles Harpur was entertaining these hopes for Australians, one Nathaniel Pidgeon, a Wesleyan missionary from Ireland, was also displaying his love for Australia in a somewhat eccentric way. Ever since he had drunk whisky out of a human skull he had walked round the world loaded with a sense of guilt until he was 'washed clean in the blood of the lamb'. In the early summer of 1842 he was so overwhelmed with the beauty of Sydney Harbour that one of his shouting fits came over him as he walked by the shores, and he cried out 'Glory to God'. Then, wondering whether one such shout did sufficient justice to the majesty of the scene, he shouted again 'Glory to God'. But up to that point in time no one had attempted to sketch what Australians would achieve, or what would be their distinctive contribution to the human story, or how and when they were to shed their colonial status and make their own history. No one had even asked whether it would be possible for men to be makers of their own history in such an environment, or whether the last-named would in time make the Europeans like the Aborigines—vagabonds on the face of the earth.

By one of those odd ironies in the history of mankind, both the vision of a distinctive Australian way of life and the faith in man's capacity to create it first took root in the minds of the men Broughton and all the other improvers of the morals of mankind had branded as the 'bush barbarians'. In the eyes of Broughton and all the others who lifted their eyes up to heaven for relief from human folly, these men were poxers of lubras, slaughterers of savages, Sabbath-breakers, godless, ignorant, and brutish beaters of any white women or black gins who had the misfortune to become their concubines and bottle-washers. Broughton and men of like mind feverishly built churches in the Monaro, New England, Wellington and Australia Felix in which they hoped their injection of the 'means of grace' into these men would hasten the

coming of the day when the bush ceased to be infested with men who slobbered at the mouth, and Aboriginal women so degraded by the pox that they looked more like 'mangy animals' than beings made in the image of God. In these temples in the wilderness men were to learn that God alone could work the great marvel of strengthening weak, fallen man. But they were like voices shouting at a great wind. For the winds of the secularization of life were beginning to blow over the earth. The galloping parsons, the galloping priests, the schoolmasters, and God's special moral constables in Australia—the bush 'Mums'—all struggled against that great wind in vain.

It never occurred to Broughton and men of like mind that the coming age of unbelief might be distinguished not by men descending to the level of the goat and the monkey but by men conceiving another vision of human capacity than the one propagated in the Judaic-Christian version of the meaning of life. It never even occurred to him that these 'bush barbarians' who invariably drank all their earnings away, and then came out of their spree penniless, and suffering from the 'blue devils almost to madness', and then vowed never to live again through such a hell on earth, only to find invariably that they either could not or would not stop, that these men entertained for each other something like that peace of God which surpassed all human understanding. The moral improvers were only aware of the flaws in the bush barbarians—the xenophobia, the racism, the conception of the Aboriginal as an animal not far removed from the monkey kingdom, the laughing at the misfortunes of others, the unawareness of romantic love between men and women, and the uncouthness. They were not aware that these men had stumbled on two concepts of their own. Previous generations had been influenced by the Judaic-Christian concept of equality in the sight of God; these had come quite naturally to the conclusion that every man should consider himself on a level with everyone else. Previous generations were aware of the divine command that men should love one another: these men developed spontaneously a regard for each

other by working together in the bush. Their way of life produced habits of mutual helpfulness, and the conviction that men should stick by each other through thick and thin. Under such conditions a man trusted his 'mate' in anything.

Men who were sustained by the 'regard' of their mates, and strengthened by the discovery of their own qualities, especially their courage, and that confidence in their powers which was probably increased by looking at the world from the saddle of a horse, no longer felt the need to turn to any God, or mysterious powers in charge of the universe for help and guidance, or the desire to wash away their guilty stains in Christ's redeeming blood. The mighty bush planted in the hearts of these children of nature their own distinctive version of that equality and brotherhood of man which the teachers of the Enlightenment in Europe had put forward as an alternative to the Judaic-Christian infamy about the depravity of man. In the mighty bush that hope of a meeting beyond the grave, that hope of a life of bliss in the world to come to compensate for the 'vale of tears', was not needed.

Well, what happened to this vision of the 'bush barbarians'? I can only hope to sketch one possible answer. My impression is that in the 1840s when the ideals of mateship and equality were first put forward in the bush of Australia, the giants of British Philistinism soon dwarfed them. During the 1840s the assisted immigrants, the men and women who were to replace the old vulgar, noisy but magnificently alive convict working-class of eastern Australia and Tasmania began to arrive in large numbers. These men and women had been promised a 'belly-full' in the wilds of Australia, but they brought with them more than this hope of a belly-full. They had come to man's estate during the period of the great evangelical revival in the United Kingdom. It was the coming together of these protestant puritans, and Irish Catholic puritan Jansenists which explains the strength of British Philistinism in Australia from that period down to a time within the memory of men still living. I am thinking of the puritan morality, the war against the sinful lusts of the flesh, the prudery,

the puritan Sunday, the temperance movement, the censorship of books, painting, sculpture and drama, that putting on of black looks with one's neighbour when he behaved in a way that was displeasing, and that revival of the idea that God, not man, could rescue humanity from all the evil and corruption in the world. British Philistinism and the harsh, barbaric environment both encouraged a spirit of resignation, that sense of man's impotence, that conviction that some things both in man and in nature were from eternity and would never change. All this intellectual 'barrage' was to survive long after the religious beliefs which had encouraged such a morality had disappeared. By the turn of the century Australian cities were to be inhabited by a people who had a morality but not a faith. The dead hand of the past was to lie for generations on the brain of the living.

For in the 1840s the bourgeoisification of the Australian working-class began. During that period they were corrupted with the petty-bourgeois ideal of a society of small property owners—the ideal of bourgeois individualism as distinct from the old convict and bush communalism. Migration was not a means to provide socialists and radicals with an opportunity to create a new society in the South Seas, but as an opportunity to gain that material well-being which the society of the Old World either could not or would not provide. I imagine it was mainly disgust at the pursuit of Mammon by these migrants, and the encouragement given to them by the propertied classes in the Australian colonies which explains a curious kink or quirk in the thinking of Australian intellectuals when they suddenly perceived the direction in which the river of life was flowing in Australia. By 1847 and 1848 Charles Harpur was so disgusted by the sordid society growing up in Sydney, and what he called the 'miry level of their intellectual grossness' that he decided it would be preferable for Australia to be ruled from London, because, as he saw it, the 'state-botches of Downing Street were fully fifty years in advance of our half-educated wool kings' and were infinitely preferable to anything the locals could tinker up. As the only gifts he had ever received



from the petty-bourgeois Philistines of New South Wales were hunger and rags, and disparagement of the children of his heart, or an insolent indifference, he had decided that his fellow countrymen were unworthy of him. So in the decisive years of 1849-50 men such as Harpur and Martin, who might have responded to a call for freedom and independence during the agitation against the transportation of convicts, became the lackeys and time-servers of British imperialism. Australia was to become a country like New Zealand where British influence was to survive long after it had ceased to contribute to the creative or progressive forces.

So I suggest that those whose business it is to tell the story of why we are as we are would do well to explore the decade between 1840 and 1850, when the 'bush barbarians', those children of nature who were the forerunners of our bush culture, those innocents who were liberated from the corrupting influences of the Old World, began to succumb to the all-pervading influence of British Philistinism. I happen to believe that if you sniff around in that decade you will begin to understand why we are still haunted by certain ghosts, and dead ideas and dead beliefs—that you will begin to understand more deeply our present anguish and despair. After all, the whole point of knowing the past is to give men a chance to rid their minds of such ghosts.

## Palingenesia

*'cognovi clipeum'**A. D. Hope*

In nineteen sixty four  
 Plumbing the world abyss,  
 I, Pythagoras, saw  
 The holy tetraktys  
 And knew by its witnesses  
 I had been here before.

Brookhaven was the place  
 Where, from our cyclotron  
 Probing the bottom of space,  
 The shield of Euphorbos shone.  
 What the world rests upon  
 Stared me once more in the face:

The mathematical ark  
 On which I first set forth  
 To chart the void, to mark  
 The eight-fold way's true north.  
 My dove, for what it was worth,  
 Returned as a triple quark:

My pebbles were baryons now  
 And the charges they bore not mine  
 But the frame was enough to show  
 A craft of the same design  
 And there for a seal and a sign  
 Shone Omega at the prow.

She was rigged by more subtle men:  
 They had probed far deeper than I:

Yet when I looked again  
Something had gone awry:  
Where was the harmony  
Plucked from the sacred ten?

Deep in the atom's core  
Number was still the frame  
Of all things as before  
But music no more than a name  
And the rainbow never came  
Down to that final floor.

Yet I who had scanned the night  
Lit with its lamps above  
And measured the boundless height  
Knew, though I could not prove,  
As the soul is tempered by love  
Or darkness tempered by light,

That here at the bottom of things  
The infinitesimally small  
Was tuned like the phorminx strings  
To the limitless and the all—  
But Furies rise to appal  
And destroy the poet who sings:

And the dogs of song give chase  
Loosed from their leash of rhyme:  
And the dove on the waters' face  
Is drowned for Hippasos' crime  
If she tells how the sphere called time  
Joins there with the sphere called space.

I saw and was silent then:  
There is peril in truths concealed  
By Zeus from the minds of men  
Shall this, too, be revealed?  
Shall I look once more on the shield?  
I must wait to be born again.

# Doctor Donne of Paul's: the statue Jack built

FOR JOANNE LEE DOW

*Philip Martin*

This survived the fire that ruined the church  
Where when the love-songs stopped he preached the sermons  
To which all London flocked. The statue rises  
Out of the painting he himself commissioned.  
He got from his deathbed, climbed into his shroud,  
'Paint me like this', he ordered.

It's very witty, a friend said, go and see it.  
Now as I stand beneath, some guide explains,  
'Towards the end, of course, he grew quite morbid.'  
I can't let that pass, give her a short lecture.  
What does she make of that last hymn, in fever,  
'I joy, to see my west'?

Morbid at the end? Then morbid ever,  
Lovers parted were always, for him, dead worlds,  
Even together they died (but rose the same).  
Death weighs upon his eyeballs now. And yet  
The beard and the moustache are somehow jaunty,  
The shroud's tucked at the head

To the shape of a small crown. What style he had,  
Not merely enduring what he must  
But playing as he went. An actor first,  
Wearing his Melancholy Lover's hat  
Black and extravagant, an actor last,  
Great visitor of ladies,

Great frequenter of plays, and very neat,  
Now after the many nights he showed

His masculine persuasive force, his centric  
Happiness concentric unto Her,  
He folds his hands over his genitals,  
Closing them for the night.

## Poems drowning

*Judith Roderiguez*

Every day they drown in dozens  
clawed down; or land throttled,  
trailing the venomous deadlines.  
They clog my cracks,  
they die by inches,  
day rises and quivers  
and rises and is unaware.  
In the end there is nothing left of them.

But you, poem,  
sighted so close to surfacing,  
you I will have out  
if it's by the hair;  
yes this one, alive  
or nearly—  
by assault or guile  
by the feet or the hair  
or anything handy or even halfway fair.

## Snake

*David Campbell*

The tiger snake moves  
Like slow lightning. Like  
A yard of creek water  
It flows over rocks  
Carving the grass.

Where have you gone,  
Long fellow, cold brother  
Like a lopped limb or  
Truth that we shy from  
Leaving a cast skin?

Snakes are like a line  
Of poetry: a chill  
Wind in the noon,  
A slalom in the spine  
Setting ears back, hair on end.

'Some people will not live  
With a snake in the house.'  
Mice make off. Look  
Under your chair; worse  
Take down a book:

A line like an icicle!



## Day-time and night-time vision

*A. D. Hope*

I have sometimes been led to reflect on the sort of knowledge, or rather, the sort of contribution to the sum of human knowledge by which poets are distinguished in general from scholars and scientists.

There was a time but it is long past, when a man of parts could seriously propose to take all knowledge for his province. Bacon, who made this claim for himself in a letter to Lord Burleigh, must have known that even in his own day it could not be realized even in part. Nowadays scholars and scientists are forced by the requirements of their subjects to confine themselves to narrower and narrower specialisms. There is a real sense in which a poet must be prepared to take the whole world of experience as his field and it is not enough to say with Sir Philip Sidney that his business is not knowledge but invention or imagination, because without accurate and personal knowledge as a base, what he imagines will be without substance. Without both, beauty can be no more than specious.

What sort of knowledge is it then, that the poet can claim in this sense without collapsing into emotional journalism or hardening into what someone has described as the 'incurable triviality of the polymath'?

There is first of all Terence's remark which the poet must make to himself

Homo sum, humani nil  
a me alienum puto.

I am a man: I think nothing that concerns man out of my scope.

It is in this sense that primarily a poet concerns himself with the whole world of experience. It is his task and his delight to observe and deal with the world so that for any subject that sings to him his endeavour is to make it in turn sing for the rest of the world.

Address to The Australian National University, April 1972.

He is concerned not with analytic knowledge but with eliciting what the medieval philosophers called the *quidditas*, the *whatness* of things. And perhaps in a world in which we hear more and more of the fragmentation of science this is a kind of knowledge not unimportant even to scientists themselves. This idea has been beautifully developed in the past by various writers from Aristotle onwards but it has been restated in modern terms by the economist Michael Oakshott in his now famous essay: *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*.

But there is another sense in which the poet, indeed the artist in general, is concerned with the advancement of knowledge. This is my belief, but it is a kind of knowledge which is at present viewed with some scepticism by scientist and philosopher alike, so that I advance it only with great reservation.

I can best explain what I mean by resorting to the poets' method of suggesting truth by analogy or metaphor.

The analogy is that of day-time and night-time vision. We actually see with different parts of our retinas in daylight and in darkness and the night-time vision is not nearly so precise or clear. In fact if you look straight at a small object it tends to disappear. Daylight vision is infinitely superior, more exact and precise. But it has one limitation.

Had the human race grown up in a world continually illuminated by the sun it would have considered the earth, the sun and the moon to be the whole universe. Whereas in fact we know that we live only in a tiny corner of that incredible system of matter and energy. It was only the dim night-time vision that made this knowledge possible in the first instance.

I compare the world of science and scholarship which are the main concern of universities to the daylight world. I cannot defend it by scientific argument, but I believe that the poets, that artists in general, have another kind of vision, that the imagination is an instrument of seeing and apprehending, and that its function is constantly to be enlarging the scope of the scientists' vision.

This is a bold and perhaps a rash claim. It was made confidently

enough by the poet Shelley but he failed to put it on a solid basis of fact and since his day the poets have largely failed to live up to their possibilities. They have renounced their function and withdrawn from the intellectual adventure we call science.



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