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Abstract
Full text of issue.
Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

The journal is the bulletin for the European branch of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies. As such it offers information about courses, conferences, visiting scholars and writers, scholarships, and literary competitions.

The editor invites creative and scholarly contributions. Manuscripts should be double-spaced with footnotes gathered at the end, should conform to the MHRA (Modern Humanities Research Association) Style Sheet and should be accompanied by a return envelope.

All correspondence — manuscripts, books for reviews, inquiries — should be sent to:

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COVER: Carnival spectator in Antigua. Photo by Anna Rutherford.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.
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### THE YEAR THAT WAS

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The breeze felt hot. It came blowing towards them up the hill in little gusts, skimming low over the top of the wild grass so that the pointed, dried-up tips appeared combed-back. Each time it reached the red-petalled flower growing wild in the veld, the flower shook, its petals fluttered, with neither breeze nor petal making a sound.

The flower’s knobbly, delicate stem seemed willing to compromise with the breeze in whichever direction it chose to blow. It bowed, it swayed, it strained, it stooped. But each new force of the breeze rejected the compromise. It swooped and swirled in continuous spirals round and round the flower, first crumpling, then stiffening, then flattening out the paper-thin petals. It seemed to him to be inviting the flower’s resistance or to be taunting its lack of opposition.

One will blow away, he thought, each time a sharp burst tugged at the petals. One will blow away now that the breeze seemed to have gathered momentum from somewhere. One will surely blow away should the breeze toss the flower-head wildly about once more. Yet the flower held itself intact, until the different strategies of the breeze failed, and it dissipated itself arrogantly in swooping movements directed victoriously upwards to the sky.

The red flower grew still. Its petals relaxed, then slowly unfurled. At last he could see its vibrant redness vivid against the blackness at its centre. Now it looked vulnerable to him. Unsuspecting, trusting and softly vulnerable. It was as if, having contended with, and resisted, the wantonness of the breeze, the singularly beautiful flower could envisage no other threat to its purpose in life — to grow and produce seeds.

He was engrossed, staring abstractedly at the red-petalled flower when suddenly a greenish-white butterfly poised within the perimeter of its cup. It was as if an invisible hand had wilfully placed it there. An unmarked butterfly, with nothing striking about it, merely a hint of green, perched fairy-like on the bristly black protuberance at the flower’s centre. It will be carried away if the breeze returns, he thought. It will fly away should he move.
He watched while the butterfly flickered, then began a languid movement of its whitish-green wings. It was as if they were mating. Plant and animal. The sensual movement of the faded wings and the bright, captive flower gripped beneath, reminding him of *Leda and the Swan*. Another incongruous mating.

And yet, while he sat motionless near the red flower, its red petals, tissue-paper thin and creased, were to him like just another colour of the finely-veined green wings. The image of the two fragile beings engrossed in their compatible world, disturbed him. He glanced away.

In the distance he saw the farming landscape, squares of cultivated land down the slopes of the hills, modern silvery windmills on top of metal stilts, brown-thatched rondavels and red and green corrugated farm buildings clustered together here and there in the valley. Nearer he made out the landrover, more from the brown-hazed dust moving in a cloud with it, than from any other recognizable sign. *It* also seeming incongruous and active in the rooted landscape. Its purposeful approach was like a reminder to them of the cultivated life below.

The life below described a circle of welcoming homes, and generations of families farming the land; of love for the land and for seasonal growth; and love between those who shared the experience. When he’d thought about experiencing love it had been in the unromantic sense. He knew there’d be more than one woman in his life, but that with one woman there’d remain a connecting thread that would outlast even separation. In those dreams he’d pictured every description of woman, but this one.

At fifteen she had never known fear: she had experienced waking up unaccountably afraid in a quiet, darkened house, listening intently for any familiar sound to reassure her — the reassurance often coming from the sound of her father coughing in his room; she’d been awed into a state hovering between absolute disbelief and the suspicion of a faint possibility — that such things could happen, while listening to her uncle spinning yarns about tokoloshes throwing objects about in a room, and ghosts that followed one home after midnight. But these fears depended on her imagination to frighten her, and could be dispelled as easily as flicking a light switch.

And then she was sixteen, on a night train bound for the Transvaal. She was scheduled to change at Bloemfontein at six in the morning, but a couple of officials on the train stopped by her and slowly and carefully reiterated that she had instead to change at one o’clock in the morning at a remote station she had never heard of, and wait there until three for a train that would take her on to Bloemfontein. She was offered no alternative.
She was put off on the track in the middle of the night. The signalman lighted her way across the metal lines filled in with gravel stones. She was then slightly afraid.

There were no people on the small platform. There were none in the waiting-room. Her apprehension grew.

The signalman could see that she was afraid. He thought she might be better off travelling on to the next station which would be reached when it was growing light. He promptly stopped the next goods train in the middle of the track and once again he lighted her way across the gravel. He put her in the guard’s van and shut the door. The train lurched forward.

The cabin was unlit. The light of the signalman’s lamp had revealed the shapes of two benches on opposite sides of the cabin before the door had shut. The forward movement of the train propelled her towards one side. In stumbling she sat down in total darkness as the train hurtled onwards.

When she heard the noise at the door, she had been travelling for almost an hour. There was no time, however, to brush aside the noise. The door swung open letting in a blast of wind. She turned in terror to the open space. The man who stood there said simply, ‘Do you mind if I sit here with you?’ The door shut. The cabin was dark once more. It was then she experienced dread.

She couldn’t see where the man was. She could neither make out if he was moving towards her or standing still. Then she heard a sagging movement on the opposite bench and the man became a solid shadow in the windowless cabin. She knew fear then.

The cabin opened directly onto the railway track. For the man to have made his way to the rear of the train where the guard’s van was positioned, he must have moved along the side of the speeding train, gripping the hand-rails all along the sides. The recurring image of the man moving in this manner towards the cabin where she sat, horrified her.

He had spoken English — she’d recognized the accent of an Englishman living in the north, or an Afrikaner living in the south. Other than that he could have been anyone — the guard, the signalman, or anyone else for that matter. The question he had asked before stepping into the cabin was all he had said. Now he said nothing to her and oddly, her fears didn’t grow less the longer they sat in silence in the dark.

The imagination that thrived on romance, heroic myths and horror stories, was like a nonentity in this experience of fear. They were in South Africa. She was Black. The man was White. There was nothing else for the imagination to build on — there was nothing to see of the
man. This was the kind of fear she could not get up and run away from. It was the kind of fear no-one could rescue her from. And the cabin remained totally dark. She was afraid to speak to the man and she feared their silence. Without thinking, she prayed.

When the train stopped it was beginning to grow light. The man slipped out of the cabin without either of them saying a word to each other. Not a single aspect of him as a person remained with her. She refused to question the man’s motive or his awareness (or lack of it) that she would have been frightened. But, whatever the direction she had been growing towards in her understanding of South Africa, the experience re-directed.

Stephen Watson

FREEDOM

The almost naked man is running through the surf, in a summer warm and weightless as the blood now in his veins.
He’s running in the sun, in the daylight newly come, racing the green breakers along a glassy morning shore, veering to the sea that’s skating white and beige, half-floundering through thick water, through swirls of cold like smoke...
He is alive again, the light evaporating round his body, his every stride igniting the metal, mineral brine sluicing down his chest and legs and rinsing out his clotted mouth.
In the distance the dunes are white as salt-mounds;  
the pine-mountains cones of green.
In the distance, two women, young like him, stark-naked, 
lie facing the land, face down upon the hot, packed sand.  
They don’t see him approach and pass, don’t see him seeing 
them  
and increase his speed, the down-drive of his arms,  
and fix his eyes to five more miles of waves that pucker,  
heave, and skid across the flats of water-hardened strand.  
They don’t see him, that he’s almost sprinting now,  
puncturing the skin of water, fracturing its skin of light —  
running in the only freedom he knows, the freedom of the body  
when it’s alone;  
in this lovely suppleness of lungs, flex of tendons, muscle,  
reliving the light, thin limbs, the boy that he once was,  
reliving the time before he became this body half-disembodied  
by its need of another body.

But now the women are behind; now there’s no desire.  
Here, in this vertigo of light, there’s no need of any other. 
With the beach disintegrating beneath a backwash,  
in the glaze of water on his thighs and breasts,  
with this coral roar of waves landsliding in his ears,  
he wants only to run, to run on like this forever,  
  through the summer,  
in the water made sun, the light made water, the water  
salt as blood  
with his own sweat no different from the sea’s,  
his mind no different from those scoured shells the tide  
shovels back and forth like grain.  
He wants only to run, faster, far beyond his own exhaustion —  
always deeper in this freedom whose futility he’ll know  
long before the summer’s over.

One has the feeling that Waiting for the Barbarians is written with a greater degree of involvement than Dusklands. Would you agree?

The difference is perhaps that the magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians is fundamentally a sympathetic person while the two protagonists in Dusklands are fundamentally unsympathetic, arrogant or intellectually arrogant and cruel in different ways. So it is difficult to feel close to the narrators in Dusklands. It is possible to feel close to the narrator in Waiting for the Barbarians.

I think that these books illustrate our society, our time. We are more or less all of us that administrator in Waiting for the Barbarians.

Not all of us. Unfortunately some of us in very powerful positions are not. Some very powerful people are in the position of the police in Waiting for the Barbarians. It is perhaps only a minority of people that stand for that rather muddled and perhaps even doomed position that the magistrate takes up. Because it’s riddled with contradictions. On the one hand he wants the ease of the life that he has had. That is an imperial life. It’s a life that has been based on conquest. It’s just that the sharper edge of conquest isn’t visible to him during his particular lifetime. And then he is brought up against the reality of what imperialism is and makes a choice in that situation but it’s not a choice that is historically viable, that people can follow on a large scale as a way of life.

No. But does he have a choice?
Well — yes — there is a choice I think, though for someone in his situation it's not easy. It's not difficult for someone in his situation to learn perhaps to turn a blind eye to what's going on. That's the temptation that is the choice. He could turn a blind eye and live out his days in comfort.

But when I say choice, I mean a sort of transcendent choice where you as it were go over the edge to something new.

No, there is no choice for people like that. I understand your question now. There is no choice for people as old as that and as set in their ways as that. Obviously the fact that he's an old man set in his ways reflects other things. You know, hypothetically the choice would be in fact between the police and the empire and what they stand for, and the barbarian way of life. He cannot choose the barbarian way of life although he makes vague gestures in that direction, in the direction of the barbarian girl. But I'm sure you remember that there is a very strong presence of children in that book and there is no saying — although the book doesn't deal directly with it — what those children might do and what sort of life they might lead. They might be able to make choices that he finds impossible.

I felt that in your first book you were suggesting that one way out of our isolation is through love.

I am not sure. The second book has at its centre attempts by a woman who has lived a completely humanly sterile life to make contact on a human plane and perhaps even a plane of love with two people, one man and one woman with whom she has been brought up together in a relation of master and slave. At a certain point she tries to drop the master/slave relationship in favour of a relationship of equality which I think is entirely sincerely intended on her part. But it fails, and it fails because a mere effort of the will is not enough to overcome centuries of cultural and spiritual deformation.

On the part of the others or on her part?

Well, I think on the part of both. She is the one who makes the massive effort to escape, but there's no saying whether she escapes, much in the same way as we can say that the magistrate in the third book makes an
effort, but who is to say that the effort goes far enough. So in one way these people are not trapped in their situation. Or let me put it another way, perhaps they are trapped in their situation but they don’t resign themselves to being trapped in their situation. But whether they get out of it in their own lifetime, that is another question.

You have been much abroad so you know that if one comes into contact with two very different cultures, one will be able to see both more clearly and one will discover where one is restricted and where enlarged in one’s own country or in the other country. How does being a South African influence your writing?

You mentioned the fear of nuclear annihilation as a continually present reality for a European writer. I think there are other dominating concerns that could be said to be relevant for writers in Europe, for example the meaningfulness of labour. For writers in the United States, there are perhaps slightly different but also profoundly important questions. I think the massive problem that one is faced with is that of finding fictional situations or correlatives in which to confront these questions. Now, the situation in South Africa is different. In a way being face to face with each other in our daily lives, a group of affluent and virtually post-industrial exploiters on the one hand and on the other hand an enormous number of people who live in a world which is effectively nineteenth century, is a situation of naked exploitation. For the South African writer the possible structure of fiction is simpler, much less invention is required, much less massive effort of the imagination than is perhaps required by an European writer. I may be wrong, I may be foolish to say these things, but that is the way it seems from here. So that is you know, if one dares to say it, if it is not too obscene to say it, that is the positive side of the situation.

I think the negative side is a certain obsessiveness, a certain narrowing of horizons. Perhaps a sense that there is an enormous human variety in the world, much more than merely exists in South Africa.

Variety in what sense?

Things one has never guessed at, the things one does not know about. Our positions are not exactly the same in this sense that few visitors from abroad to this country would say that South Africa is merely living through a historical crisis that Europe passed through in the late nineteenth century and in a sense therefore the historical situation of South Africa is irrelevant. I think few people would say that. Whereas I think
there is a temptation and, I think, a profoundly mistaken temptation, for someone coming out of a situation like this to visit, let's say, a country like Denmark or the Netherlands and say that the situation that people face in the Netherlands is unimportant, it is historically unimportant.

But don't you think that is due to the fact that coming here you have an answer, history gave an answer to this situation, it has passed in Europe. And that makes it perhaps, as you say, easier for writers to write about it. You can see the nineteenth century from the twentieth century but where do we go to see the twentieth century? We are at the frontier of our time in Europe.

Yes. That is why it seems to me the situation of the novelist in Europe is more difficult and the effort of imagination required from him much greater than for someone working within South Africa.

When you wrote your first novel, Dusklands, were you back in South Africa, or did you write it in Europe?

No, I wrote most of that in the USA.

I see. From the point of stylistics and structure it seems to me much more complicated, more experimental, than Waiting for the Barbarians.

Yes. You are quite right.

Had that something to do with your being in America?

I don't think so. I may be wrong. What makes me suspicious of my own analysis is that I am very well aware that the favourable response that I have had, particularly to the second and third books, has come from two quarters. It has come first of all from people whose thinking is politically and historically fairly radical and, secondly, it has come from a fairly middle-of-the-road literary establishment. And I am not at all in contact, in this country or overseas, with literary people or literary thought which is formally more radical or more experimental. So it is quite possible, it seems to me, that I might continually be getting a kind of reassurance from a readership of two kinds which isn't fundamentally interested in formal radicalism.

That's what makes me suspicious of my own responses, but nevertheless I would say that the comparative formal inventiveness of the first book didn't really have much to do with the fact that it was written in the
United States. No. I think I would like to be working in a more formally inventive way. And I am feeling a certain dissatisfaction, particularly with this fourth book with limitations of traditional form. But I haven’t got beyond the stage of being dissatisfied to a stage of actually doing something positive about it.

May I also say in connection with this that I do actually feel a great deal of isolation, a great sense of isolation from what might be happening on the borderlines of fiction, because that kind of work doesn’t get to South Africa, and I feel an ignorance there which I would like to mend.

Do you think it is possible to write within such a restricted society and yet transcend the form?

You ask as a general statement? My temptation is to say that despite the fact that all of a sudden you have a Gabriel García Marques coming out of Colombia, nevertheless it is easier if you don’t have to do it all by yourself. It is obvious that a subject matter doesn’t, to use your words, prevent one from transcending a situation.

That isn’t the problem. I think the problem is always created by the limitation of the form itself to deal with, to contain the new possibilities. I tend always to think that formal revolution and whatever the correlative of formal revolution is at the level of material go hand in hand. So, you know, I come up with a very dull sounding answer that I don’t think that it is necessary, that one shouldn’t be condemned to being a minor writer because one is a provincial writer, but it is certainly easier to do major work if you have a wider view than a merely provincial view.

Do you feel that you are also tied down — in a positive sense — by your South African situation? Reading the first and the third book I have a very strong feeling of an effortless way of creating a background which ties back to nature, the geography of this part of the world. Do you feel such an attachment?

I do believe that people can only be in love with one landscape in their lifetime. One can appreciate and enjoy many geographies, but there is only one that one feels in one’s bones. And I certainly know from experience that I don’t respond to Europe or the United States in the same way as I do to South Africa. And I would probably feel a certain sense of artificial background construction if I were to write fiction set in another environment.
Do you then think that the South African writers who left South Africa were cut off as it were? Do you think you could face such a loss and still write the way you do, do you think you could adapt to it?

I don’t think there is any problem about that. You know, one doesn’t have to be in contact with that landscape, with that world. Think of the case of someone like Nabokov who has made a whole lifetime’s career out of a nostalgia for Russia. Nor would I go so far as to say that the only landscape that can mean anything to you is the landscape into which you were born. But I do think there can only be one.

Do you think it can change?

I think that it is possible to be born in South Africa, to have no particular attachment, to emigrate to Europe and to find in England let us say the landscape that really suits you.
Migrant Writing: promising territory

...the archaeology of spatial naming accompanies the development of autonomy of the subjective unit.

(Julia Kristeva, ‘Place Names’)

Kristeva is referring in this essay to the entry of the child into language and, as a consequence, to control over its environment. It may be valid to ask in which instances migrants, who are often positioned as children, are permitted to grow up? When may they gain their cultural franchise? What space may migrants name and hence claim? Professor Kiernan’s paper this morning referred to Australian culture as one composed of ‘the outcasts and the rejected’. In that case, what should those groups construct who have so far, in turn, been excluded even from such a territory? Is ‘culture’ indeed predicated upon the process of exclusion?

For the most part this will not be a discussion of specific migrant writers so much as an argument for their automatic inclusion in any consideration of Australian writing and, in addition, a discussion of the terms under which they might be included. For the sceptics who are unaware of the existence of this group I can brandish bibliographies and other publications including one anthology which I’ve compiled for a Deakin University course. By migrant writers (a term I prefer to ethnic minority writers) I don’t mean only those who write in languages other than English but also those who, like myself, grew up bilingually and who developed, long before encountering Saussure and the semioticians, a scepticism towards the so-called ‘natural properties of language’. In this paper, I will concentrate on those writers who emerge from languages and cultures other than English but who choose to write, predominantly, in English. One of the benefits accruing from acknowledging migrant writers in general is that it reminds us that all of so-called Australian writing is of course migrant writing: possession by naming, an import culture which isn’t quite, as yet, a lucrative export commodity.
This last figure, as well as the ‘us’, in the previous sentence, gestures towards another necessary preliminary, the one of contexts: of countries, of cities, of forums, indeed, of market places. This conference is not being held off the planet. We are meant to be selling ‘Australian Literature’ here, but to whom? To speak of Australian writing in Scotland, in the United Kingdom, encloses a certain area where we may barter for meanings in ways quite different from speaking on this topic within Australia itself. In this particular context Australia is a ‘supplement’ to British writing and here I am deliberately invoking, as I have elsewhere, \(^4\) Derrida’s ‘dangerous supplement’.\(^5\) To protect myself from charges of gratuitous hermeticism I would explain this concept, in part, as the notion of any excess or addendum which, by qualifying a plenitude, in fact re-defines and re-places that plenitude. Thus Australian writing, especially here, functions as a supplement but not a ‘supplement’ (in Derrida’s sense) to British writing. ‘We’, those who are representing Australian writing, need to fight for the latter definition which would construct British writing as that particular instead of as the ubiquitous and undifferentiated ‘English Literature’.

Note here the binary opposition of ‘writing’ and ‘literature’. The latter term is haunted by notions of standards past, of excellence, in which ‘literature’ is re-cycled whereas ‘writing’ is not. We can amuse ourselves later in debating these terms. For my own part, I regard the term ‘literature’ as a discursive formation (in Foucault’s sense) which operates distinctively within the education system as another term of territorial imperatives. It is used often to perpetrate exclusions without having to justify them — a White Australia policy, if you like, of culture. I can also vouch for the fact that the term ‘literary excellence’ when magisterially employed by, for example, members of our funding bodies in the arts, creates a great deal of anxiety amongst migrant writers themselves who fear the stigma of reverse discrimination. Their fears remain impervious to arguments relating to the politics of publishing and, as I’ve indicated, the politics of terms like ‘literature’. The discursive formation ‘English Literature’ will, in this age of specificities and sub-cultures, be increasingly subdivided, one hopes, into suburbs rather than remaining a fortified country. Why should we hope for this? In Australia, for example, there exists the journal CRNLE devoted to ‘new literatures in English’. It could as well, for my money, define itself as being concerned with New English in literature (or writing) because increasingly we have become aware (through the work of sociolinguists for example) of the constantly changing nature of language at the same time that language is revealed as constructing us, that is, as a prime factor in the process of
acculturation, of socialisation and that it is a territory invested with the politics of nomenclature relating to class, to gender, to race, to name a few.

Having set up this endless series of supplements which re-define I will now concentrate on migrant writing in relation to Australian writing. To my mind there are three ways in which it would be useful to explore migrants in relation to writing: migrants as characters, as writers, and as readers.

I. First, migrants as characters, or, as they have been constructed or represented by Australian culture and writing, a process which migrant writers themselves have of course in varying degrees internalized. In any case they must take up positions in relation to this tradition or mythology. The analogy here is with women’s writing in which any so-called \textit{écriture féminine} (writing as a woman) is constrained by a tradition of representation. This would be the place in which to examine such concepts as ‘multiculturalism’ along the lines, for example, of Edward Said’s study of orientalism.\textsuperscript{6} One could begin, for example, with such texts as Rorabacher’s short story anthology \textit{Where Two Ways Meet}\textsuperscript{7} written for the most part by Anglo-Celtic Australians about migrants, or one could explore, as one of my doctoral candidates is doing at present, the ways in which a writer like Patrick White (the apparent daimon of this conference) uses notions of the Greek. This area could also include an analysis of the critical reception of migrant writers, for example, a recent series of reviews of the Greek Australian poet Dimitris Tsaloumas.

II. Migrants as writers (which also falls into sub-sections).
(i) Dual-language texts. This is an enormously complex but very necessary area for, as Franco Schiavoni points out in a recent \textit{Meanjin} devoted to immigration and culture, ‘authentic multiculturalism cannot but coincide with multilingualism’.\textsuperscript{8}

(ii) Related to the dual-text issue, is the whole field of translation studies and may I draw your attention to the recent appearance of Susan Bassnett-McGuire’s book of that name in the New Accents series. In it, pertinently, she quotes Octavio Paz as stating that all texts, insofar as they form part of a literary system are ‘translations of translations of translations’.\textsuperscript{9} In other words, this would provide another means of opening up the study of English Literature to new theoretical frameworks.

(iii) Oral history. Here I must sound a cautionary note. Much of what continues to be marketed as migrant writing falls under this heading of
oral history or first-person accounts. One thinks of the Lowenstein and Loh collection *The Immigrants* and of Morag Loh’s *With Courage in their Cases*. I do not wish to denigrate (and have argued for it elsewhere) the importance of personal histories as a way of extending notions of history but I am worried about restricting migrant writing to this thematic function. In these cases migrant stories are examined for *what* they tell rather than *how* they tell (needless to say, looking at the ‘how’ changes the ‘what’). In such cases the justification or authority for speaking seems to rest on the migrant voice as synonymous with victim and/or social problem. Let us indulge in some of the implications of this. Perhaps we could call it part of the mythology or burden of metaphor I mentioned earlier — the way the migrant is constructed in Oz culture. I quote here from a paper I delivered at last year’s ASAL Conference in which I was arguing for the inclusion of migrant writing within an *Australian* context:

By definition Australia existed as a refuge and a promise to those waves of European emigrants who were fleeing the known world during and after the second World War. How different already, figuratively speaking, was this metonymy compared to those projected by the self-styled legitimate residents of this country who located their national origins in institutions relating to that legitimacy: the prison, the penal colony, the fallen. For one group then, the raising of barriers, the crossing of boundaries, for the other, the boundaries had always been there and in that period of migration, of inundation (the image recurs), had to be re-stated, inscribed in different ways. The boundaries of the penal colony had been internalized to constitute procedures of normalization. The emigrants, who at some mystic Neptune’s line became immigrants, had to be made aware that they were crossing boundaries and that, indeed, they would never stop crossing boundaries all their lives. By definition, to be a new Australian, was to be a boundary crosser, a transgressor, in the eyes of those who like to think that they had always already been there. In themselves, those new Australians represented boundaries or margins, those marginal voices which bordered the known country and were themselves hybrids comprising both the known and the unknown. Insofar as they functioned as representatives of the post-war world, the world of the fallen, they could be used as the second half of a structuralist binary equation in which, by definition, Australian was now, finally after the inundation, unfallen. After the *Sinnflut* of fire and brimstone and the human flood of immigrants, here were the survivors of a regenerated new world. The penal colony was on its figurative journey towards redemption and reincarnation into the promised land, the lucky country.

The rhetoric in that Australian context is noticeably different from the one employed in the present British one. What I am suggesting in this extract is that if migrant writing is only perceived as autobiographical accounts of suffering it then functions primarily to position ‘Australia’, gratifyingly, as the eternal promised land, even when some of the suffering occurs within Australia. Worse still, in terms of a necessary
theoretical sophistication, the first-person mode is perceived as an unproblematically autobiographical one. Any migrant writer who dares to use this mode (and even, say, the third-person) risks being read as autobiography and, often, as unrehearsed autobiography. The attraction of such writing to the dominant culture has been analogous to that found in naïve art.

But of course migrant writers themselves also play with this burden of metaphor, in this case the trope of the promised land, and turn it to their own advantage, as the Hungarian-Italian-Australian writer Sylvana Gardner has done in the following poem:

HOPE

Another land with stranger customs
yet the promise that this is where
we will stay. Where is the garden
my father promised and the orange trees
laden with fruit for my picking?
He tells me to be patient
and brings me a bagful of apples
from the fruit shop on the corner.

Again we huddle together
on this footpath of no nationality
and I listen to the man who hopes
to find a job without knowing the language.
I interrupt with a compliment
‘you look just like Tarzan!’ and wish him luck
to make it from vine to vine.

My father winces
at the association of dagoes with ape men
and threatens to take away my comics.

Everyone hopes to make money.
I hope for my orange tree
and the name of the street spells H-O-P-E,
a good omen to think about
on Saturday afternoons when we learn English
at the pictures.\(^1\)

(iv) In the fourth sub-category of migrants as writers we have those writers who, like Gardner, subvert the stereotypes, the way the migrant has been constructed by Australian culture. Poets like πΟ. and Ania
Walwicz create the ‘new English’ mentioned earlier by playing with notions of the naive and the so-called broken English of those positioned as linguistically incompetent.

don yoo tel dem troowth
dai dozn belif yoo.\textsuperscript{14}

before they were big i was small they could do things more than me they were something now they are nothing he was a doctor of animals now he was learning to speak properly he talked funny they made mistakes she was clumsy she works in a factory he cleans the floors of the serum laboratory now life can be everybody clean and nice and we are all wrong here i was the translator i was the mother of my mother they were more helpless they were useless nervous didn’t know what to do i was too serious for me it was too early to be like this we walked lost on the street we were looking for john street i was bigger than them my parents were again small old children they were heavy for me they couldn’t do much you are helpless useless.\textsuperscript{15}

In Walwicz’s poetry there is the recurrent image of the migrant as child, that is, positioned as helpless and incompetent by paternalistic institutions.

What such writers achieve is to extend received notions of Anglo-Celtic culture and of Australian English in ways that (I would imagine) resident black and Asian writers are doing here in Britain.

III. Migrants as readers. There is of course an overlap with the previous categories since to write means always to read or to re-read, i.e. all texts are translations. What I mean to focus on here is reading as a self-conscious process, in this case, from migrant positions. I am gesturing here toward the complexities of reader response and reception theory (not just to Wolfgang Iser but also to Halliday and to the work of numerous feminist critics). Here the emphasis is on the way migrants read (and notate) Australian culture, that is, from their standpoint construct Australian culture. For example, \textit{πO.}, Ania Walwicz, Anna Couani, Antigone Kefala reveal Australian culture, like all cultures, to be a network of arbitrarily constructed codes. In other words, they interrogate concepts of the ‘natural’ and reveal it to be a series of choices. And one of the major elements within this system of codes or cultural sign-system is that of language. Here is an example of the kind of opening up of language that I have been talking about. It is from a tale ‘for advanced children’ and in this scene the eponymous heroine is having a meal at her teacher’s home:
‘Are you happy?’
Alexia went immediately into a panic. For she felt HAPPY to be an Enormous Word, a word full of flamboyant colours, which only people who had reached an ecstatic state had a right to use. She saw it as the apotheosis, so to speak, of a series of events which, as far as she could see, lay totally outside her life. But she could not explain this, for everyone on the Island kept asking, as if this Fantastic Word was the basic measure of their days —

... And the more she thought about it, the more confused she became. Did Miss Prudence mean:
Was she happy eating her mashed potatoes?
Being in the house with the grandfather clock chiming?
Happy living on the Island?
or
Happy living in the world?
There she was, with the salt cellar in her hand, which she had been asked to pass on to Mary, not knowing what to say, getting more and more confused between Happiness and Salt.16

I hope I have convinced you that migrant writing is indeed promising territory.

NOTES
2. The third edition of Lolo Houbein’s pioneering bibliography will shortly appear. There is now also Diversity and Diversion: an Annotated Bibliography of Australian Ethnic Minority Literature, ed. P. Lumb and A. Hazell (Hodja, Richmond, 1983). The latter does not however include poetry.
3. The term ‘ethnic minority’ suggests a majority whereas I would prefer to see Australian writing fall into a proliferation of ethnic groups. After all ‘Anglo-Celtic’ is also a misnomer.
10. Bibliographic details in Diversity and Diversion, op. cit.
11. From 'Discourses of Otherness', op. cit.
12. The editors' justification for producing *Diversity and Diversion* is that it would promote greater tolerance, for example, in schools. If one carries this to its logical conclusion then possibly even more sensationalist accounts of suffering need to be included in curricula in order to sensitize blunted sensibilities and to restore Australian humanitarianism. Something like that, I think, has happened with the marketing of the Jewish holocaust. It seems a very limited (indeed pernicious) way in which to study textual productions.


This paper was given at the conference on Australian literature held at the University of Stirling, Scotland, in Autumn, 1983.
Ania Walwicz

WHITE

in icy no sound snow fall so quiet quietly freeze gone away for bad can’t come back a lost how try hard hardly see snow shoes fur coat a fox winter empty ran out no gas low needle talk to me please talk to me why don’t you talk to me talk to me and talk to me talk to me talk to me please talk to me can’t be alone let’s go out let’s go some where but where don’t know where snow town fell fall mary had a little lamb mary had a mary had mary had a little lamb mary had a little lamb where mary had a little lamb fog horn a ship a mistake so sorry know who’s sorry now where are we what saying what’ll we do what tell me can’t decide what which where can’t mind to make up why don’t we make up what do you say what maybe go see a film or something what do you think what do you see someone she said see who where she said go see some one who go bed a sheet sleeps that’s it that’s how the cookie crumbles that’s how a cookie cookie she was fat small cookie cold day begin from scratch have to now how how all over again all over again a snow an icy mountain a very slow cold frozen landscape what’ll you do what snow fell fall snow queen in sledge she kissed me she kissed me kiss kiss can have a kiss can have snow white slept for days slept for days snow white sleeps a glass case clock stops ice ice cubes icicles from roof a hat for my house out of snow big coat woolly pants wears tight shoes ugly sister ugly sister white beard grandfather can’t help me now get a heater low temperature scott freezes food keeps in tins no dogs closed shops on sunday meter run out no money can’t teach stops a line snow under no bread a gap didn’t say much can’t what’s the matter now what’s the matter now what are you thinking about what tell me tell me polar bear zoo has ice is cold south pole grows a beard sit in ice it freezes let go let go we’ll go to another country my maybe new york or paris shift town leave quietly no one knows oh no no one knows bury bury be a life class model and sit still think about nothing he paints walls paints walls who is the artist no body at all do little doctor dolittle took me to the seaside my husband calls walrus his wife sails frosty icy cold sea frozen pier holiday town in winter winter goblins have snow a snail a seal for a wife take a wedding dress and be quiet do as you’re told a blank can’t fire snow man on skis had a tent clean house breath is a cloud scatter scatter what saying now mary had a little lamb mary had a little lamb fell asleep is he dead have a look mister frost comes freeze my glass can’t see snow glasses sledge icy snow now too cold
Pregnant woman, man, chimneys. Photo: Peter Lyssiotis.
scratch a start puddle elephant thaw skin try wake what's going on a hat a boat what time now sluggly fatty don't party was sick can't come a step at a a stitch in hangs paper boat tiny tired a garden count from try jumper is warmer count from one to two maybe baby stocking a stick walk didn't up spring is ugly sweaty armpit pimples bad plays silly doing don't taste much low but stole my bicycle long time tone start from a day at river sludge no no no not again remember every find photo is me badly try club bed early burnt sausage is heavy convalescent nap a mouse in my house is a mouse in my is a mouse in my house is mouse wish never at all too late start think a bit just earth a slip not too water drown a sickly why small is too little a list a bit some just even steven call me letters see mum don't shoes girls still call not every go away is hard tell me not again look boat a hat school uniform had walls soon will be some one may was april march a start a some thing ready paper boats is my head write diary don't see yet cinema elvis again try wake am softly yet mouse minnie so sadly how could happen did did try to ada add tom potplant dies see it ugly dentist says now look teeth is start first lucky game a win armwrestle a fluke read book tape weak sleepy pills better bit go silly a hats for me all day quick more bit she drinks go sydney rock operate appendix know what save me save me snot any talk princess hills see already won't jones again no don't be careful now baby love understand try a pen climb up hill sticky mud save me tractors trucker pack throw rubbish mouse eats she eats no jacket blue dress will next phone a sunday she friday perhaps just want see old age beaky weakly soft some give me mini skirt present visit go see some but no do hats you book make words aiii aiii gurby sledge aiii joke evening how paint olga overcast how to tidy how me going over a think try try bit dull what expect a head hat boat to swim bridge joins mouth try alone all start thaw cloudy no see through yet dusky chips put bits tarzan's grip a slide walk sunday is two yet he asleps me breaks big dinners full me eats hard hard hope no a survive eat me fast things work get better thursday a hop wear skirt blazer good is a mouse in my house is a mouse all over same want different now no use a new yet time shifts a van new house with easier mix paint go through rainbows is a minnie is mouse in my lift starts spring is warmer now tick is mouse in my house is mouse is try sort throw out is think now can hop one day mends week write day start start a chart watch alive soft weak mouse
Sleeping migrants. Photo: Peter Lyssiotis.
no stars ladder to do a hat boat drowns deep sea down up float little lady she mad not going to stay purse bag slow see tram scared little dinners home back licorice sunday pairs penfolds sign sucks dog turn teeth bloody fat leg how get can tell see soon yes every know now again yet again yet not clear never always coming back can do if hard terrible blue house never over rice bed no sheets paint jar thick muds sticks stick in mud can’t get out dark coffee africa win me let me bit bit boots poodle thighs crow spent too no call now think step by step to get all step a one saxophone singer put on brink of taller crossing where now am one drummer moon is dark shadow street no lit yet was dark girl jungle boy am now black maria shut up dark dress spider gets eric to write a tilt down drown drown dark water all night long a all night long all night long a all night long heartbreak hotel sings song brush paint to put how wind blows night street wait for trams lost hope is cross a waste of time don’t want to see you now night classes fish and chips wants to be left alone to be alone to feel me only am so lonely want to be lonely dog howl want to be lonely a feel whistle sharper gets worse clearer yet to step to three to walk to big city to look at me start look at me never yet fully try fully completely this time maybe this time maybe this time be lucky winner maybe this time ends street no lit city blacked out edith had dress she drown well ditch had drunk backyard has night moon has no night no ends no jewels is so poor poor is a hole little house lino floor get out very dark hair painted waitress station two town serves meals don’t care warm hands in soup corridor broke legs two jump out window canal had boat shipwreck children said pool dark field car stood didn’t love me at all no son now didn’t cut cake break heart she waits yvette clerk sunset suicide blonde hair got drunk bad at ball wander back alley is night all a night a all night long a all night long no trees all dark compass can’t tell sea slid to met little girl fell love she idiot bars went out crazy about walk lake around old didn’t want to do any at all no thanks not on your life is so dark dug a ditch swell face no lamp a hat boat drowned lied deceived she waits stupid girl want to see now skull bones thief vendetta wear man’s clothes a dog jump neck blood sausage corsica if had brother is all in a some where thick in paint do me now to some a fight night rescue me save me greasy paint oil change tyre wash wash worst worst sink in sink drown bath pool still water no wind in sails night lap sea a lake dark lake drowned man my boat my head hat
Women working, rocks. Photo: Peter Lyssiotis.
almost almost nearly nearly but not not a wrong jumper shouldn’t took water beach bath at own risk is window colour dusk what miss too late go by yourself wish some one come see biro cider but can’t drunk sober blunt knife too fat wait wait watercolour how you spread guitars make me sad sky walls nice but not happy yet weak sorry now that don’t like towel some better soon venice watery fell canal broke a leg mister blue dog finds me again and again go to pub had a cold don’t feel so bad just you know still friend maybe not quite yet not yet not quite about to and about to walls wall why not yet ready tell me don’t know know what’s what but not really too early maybe cornflowers eyes have jumpers a smock clear days and then and then any day now will get will set will set settle down but not yet not yet not bit thinner water brush on can use big can be small alter up down brittle delicate china doll fragile egg cup fragile egg so sheets socks undies stocking clever accept now accept yes clear by now but not yet not yet watch it step steep stairs very burst some not so askew hat was boat with sails on sunny colder warmer spring had varies see that’s me now a early yet bit sad threw photos letters out already long ago now doesn’t no dream about words link enjoy classes thank you lift a pleasure a pick but you know contact electrician very light very light hair albino bit like rabbit pale eyes not very much not enough would you like music no don’t want to yet put my arms not yet they chat bitter salty salmon kevin am tidy but miss a cue thought good but wasn’t up yet still nearly nearly but not yet super you know super a shine sky ayayayay a necklet beads bracelet earrings in ears lost them don’t matter but miss a lost threw out mistake am easier getting rid of packing gnome where else easier but not yet wouldn’t be any good if then wait wait a bit will had wine balcony early spring hazy didn’t lazy starting to slowly slowly bit by step someday soon any day now across some meet but now too early pyjamas cut low night gown nun room tidy am clearly more a sun a sky a boat on my hat tilt tilt tipsy not drunk turvy prettier pleasant a class adults what to paint hat not ready yet not free engaged see a sign no dogs a higher will get but not middle not be it better but not best yet have to wait when do tape me a jelly glue me sticks a new resort come hotel a room in clean bed no touch nice speak what a pleased sad evening lights but some times slid blacker darker navy for sailor get longer never placid lizard slept sun just living spinster polite well eat three o’clock what now
Migrants above city. Photo: Peter Lyssiotis.
canary jacket summer is heat cruel cupboards norway keeps lighter don’t forget pass so half way there how much longer not long don’t worry now tense up nervous cup crack be careful hot water shower curtain am scared sun walls heats chairs lunch go to town look mirrors photos how alright but tense jenny phone pizza laugh bit too much now little song a voice good now feel higher elevator bends spoons magnet will future to be hope a dream tight rope thin high voice soprano shrills oil sunflower don’t public they feel drunk cook chicken farmer’s wife shaker pepper good middle fitter walker edge sherbet fizz cream nivea beach skin magazine wattle look forward new shoes that’s alright now momma that’s alright rabbits leap thoughts thin line pencil to it tiles bathroom has sun in it drawers draw they very nice but worried will it last was up now what half to have up down a mid pin a point not still a move to come sun morning has dreams begins earlier stay at overnight want no or him maybe but haven’t yet met only lemon not enough for just pass ashamed too not best that’s what want act more sure than am everything will be alright now see come a new place spot a shift my furniture around a clean up out spring a a a eek eek pencil sharp see so at last sharp pencil one by one come goodie clean kitchen bathroom clock tick tick live nice breadroll mid day go afternoon shop blouse thin silk a shake sugar shake a move baby move get in the groove warm arm am young whittle stick rock chair put music record player jollier now better warmer hotter water mister plumber a fix give a sink clear my drains leaves cut tree was too shade checkmate bit stuck be good but only just not what not what why think about clear good enough go class next was scared of big too shy too little yet be brace up brave but can’t only half woman has beard don’t know quiet quite who birds fly up morning in a rush flock hurt my eyes hat is dry cleaned iron jumper he sheets in all hot to trot but not good enough for can do better than that for sure now cider gets my head hat sits but not straight yet do but thin dress flaps high heels nice looking girl bit on edge seat not sure self will slip hot tea she yells children cry kindergarden painted hair didn’t suit him want more want see some more myself when ready will will know what all read but but but au pair girl expected much want travel far upper river nile hot sun a scarf sunshine in a girl fair skin wants man already know dogs no a banana a right big house now for sure steadier but bit nails pluck eyebrows grooms horse rider fitted jacket grins now
Child and iron structure. Photo: Peter Lyssiotis.
Bury me behind the Mountains: the Australian Aborigines, the City and the 1988 Bicentennial

On 16 May 1871 the *Illustrated Australian News* reproduced an engraving illustrating 'A Surgeon's Hut in the Bush'. The accompanying text observed that Victoria still retained 'in its bush life, photographs, so to speak, of the manners and customs which prevailed during the period when the gold fever was raging at its height.' The writer commented on the fact that the difference between such 'unpretending habitations' and 'the princely mansions in Collins Street East' afforded 'a vivid mental panorama of the gigantic strides Victoria has made during the last twenty years'. It is easy to deride such naïve perceptions of time and change. Writing 101 years later in *Punch*, Stephen Toulmin (an Englishman) declared that 'any self-respecting people must find it embarrassing to possess a national history less than five centuries old'. He was writing of America but his assumptions can also be applied to Australia, and especially so as its Bicentennial year of 1988 approaches. This essay attempts to throw some light on what meanings 1988 might have for Australians by examining attitudes to the past and the present expressed by Australian city-dwellers in the period leading up to 1888.

Such a procedure may seem perverse, but Ian Turner once wisely observed that 'to investigate dreams about the future is just another way of studying past and present reality'. He also suggested that 'a law of diminishing returns' applies to the celebration of national anniversaries. Geoffrey Blainey argued in 1980 that Australians have been 'slow to realize that the land has had at least two separate histories, and that the history which began with the raising of the British flag represents, at most, a fragment'. In his Boyer Lectures for the ABC that same year Bernard Smith emphasised that 1988 was 'an important date in the history of black and white alike in this country, though for different reasons'. He expressed the fear that 'only a major event like the coming
together of black and white in the ratification of ... an historic treaty' [on Aboriginal sovereign rights] could prevent the bicentennial from being seen by the Aborigines as 'the whites celebrating 200 years of oppression'.

Blainey had described the meeting between the British and the Aborigines as a confrontation between 'the first industrial nation of the world and the last continent of nomads', and the conflicting priorities of the two civilizations remain the chief reason why Aboriginal culture still does not feature in the felt history of most white Australians. The invading imperialistic culture in Australia valued material artefacts and visible organizational ability, not only a civic sense but also (as early New Zealand respect for the Maoris showed) a certain military spirit. Australian Aboriginal culture offered no such checks to the spirit of free enterprise and 'progress'; 'the Australians of the late nineteenth century looked on the cities that they had built, and found them good.'

Bruce Dawe once observed that it was 'an excess of virtue' that produced suburbia, 'the desire of man not to be a wanderer on the face of the earth but to have a kingdom of his own'; such intimations of the spiritual possibilities of suburbia have not featured largely in Australian culture, however. Yet from the beginning the city was the everyday landscape of most Australians, as it still is today. This unchanging fact helps to explain both an enduring imaginative interest (of which films provide a recent example) in the Bush, and the remoteness of that same Bush (including Aboriginal culture) from most Australian life. It is significant rather than merely coincidental, then, that at about the time that the now-deserted banks of Ophir Creek, New South Wales, were echoing to the cries of excited prospectors, crowds from all over Europe were thronging the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park for the 1851 Great Exhibition of Art and Industry. From gold came 'the high urbanization which is characteristic of Australia', but from London came the investment and the technology that made such urbanization possible. In Australian literature and art the goldminer became a heroic part of the national legend, but in economic terms he was always destined to be a small cog in an urban-centred, multinational machine. While the early rushes lasted the digger could assume the role of a bold individualist (and often was) but as deeper leads required capital investment in the sophisticated technology displayed at the London Exhibition the Australian goldminer, like other labourers all over the empire, worked for wages in a structure where fortunes were made only in stocks and shares. It is a situation that has changed little; RTZ still features prominently in any Australian landscape, for industrialists and investors, if not for artists.
The fifty years from the excitement in Ophir Creek to the opening of the first Federal Parliament in 1901 saw great artistic activity in Australia, and not least among photographers. The industrial processes of early photography bore witness to urban technology and resources as clearly as the Polaroid instant-print camera does today. Equally, those very processes were, from the start, applied not only to recording the growing cityscape but also to surveying and ‘capturing’ those unsettled aspects of the continent which simultaneously threatened and fascinated the city dweller.¹²

Even at the time of the gold rushes, some Australians were aware of how quickly their surroundings were changing, and saw photography as the best way of fixing a vanishing past. ‘What the contemporary observer sees is not necessarily the truth, but the historian neglects it at his peril’;¹³ looking at the neat late eighteenth-century settlements depicted in Thomas Watling’s paintings, Bernard Smith has asked, ‘I wonder what they really looked like?’¹⁴ Photography is the only record of what the contemporary observer saw, of what things really looked like, until the first Australian newsreel recorded the Melbourne Cup of 1896.

Painting presented a more selective vision of Australia. In a book published in 1916, one year before his death, the painter Fred McCubbin sought to trace the debt of later Australian artists to what he termed the early ‘pioneer pictures’ of S.T. Gill, Nicolas Chevalier, Eugen Von Guerard, and others.¹⁵ In doing so he drew a distinction between such pictures of ‘nature in her grander rather than in her homely moods’ and the images which he saw as having the greatest appeal and power for Australians. The early Australian artists, McCubbin felt, ‘ignored, because they did not understand, the effects of man in his relation to Nature — the sun-bleached landscapes, the farm with its neighbouring clump of gum trees, the fields that merge into wayward forests, the winding road with its bullock waggons, men and women toiling, horses and cattle’. It was to this neglect of ‘all the things that savour of man’ that he attributed the fact that ‘these early pictures do not arouse our sympathies, for it is precisely the pictures of things familiar to us, of homely subjects ... which most appeal...’.

McCubbin did not have photography in mind, but his words define perfectly the appeal of genre photography, in which the ordinary routines and events of everyday life were captured by the camera. They also reveal that in selecting ‘all the things that savour of man’ certain unstated preconceptions operated. McCubbin’s vision of ‘homely subjects’, for example, excludes urban and industrial scenes, which presumably savoured of man in unacceptable ways. His remarks indicate, though, a
general preference for what in art is now termed ‘genre’, namely works ‘depicting scenes from daily life’ and seeking to raise ‘the representation of ... the worker to a new heroic dignity’. The Oxford Companion to Art, from which these phrases are taken, recognizes that since the end of the nineteenth century the most important developments in genre ‘have taken place in the art of the film’, but still photography has an important earlier role here. Indeed, like genre painting, it can usefully be seen as a form of historical art which finds its appropriate subjects not in the great (and, by definition, distant) events of ‘History’ but in what McCubbin termed ‘incidents by country road sides, weather-worn farm houses, familiar farm yards, fields in which men are working’. The colonial artist faced difficulties in finding subjects grand enough for history paintings, as shown by the problems William Strutt encountered in finding purchasers for his monumental history painting ‘Black Thursday, February 6th, 1851’. Interestingly, the London Weekly Dispatch for 10 July 1864 commented of this work when it was first exhibited in the Haymarket that the ‘chief merit’ of the picture lay ‘in its fidelity to the aspect of colonial life’, adding that, as a glimpse of ‘the visitations that befall our kith and kin abroad’, it possessed ‘an interest independent of its pictorial claims’.

It was possible for McCubbin, writing in 1916, to recall wistfully those Australian landscape pictures which for him captured what he termed ‘the salient living features of this country’, but it was on the more populous, and certainly less picturesque, mullock heaps of the goldfields that a new kind of painting first emerged in Australia. It was not until late in the century, though, that artists in Australia began to think of urban scenes as a possible source of national characteristics, and not until the immigrant artist Sali Hermann saw Sydney with European eyes in the late 1930s that inner city slums featured in Australian high art. The Aboriginal people had to wait even longer for serious artistic treatment, though the chief public market for photographs was always in aspects of bush life, in which they featured, albeit as curios in their own country.

By 1864 the practice of photographing the Aborigines in groups was sufficiently established for the Melbourne Punch of 19 May to carry a cartoon depicting some of the hazards relating to that particular branch of the ‘fœ-to-tographic’ art. Ten years later the Australasian Sketcher for 18 April 1874 printed an engraving showing ‘A Bush Photograph’ of Aborigines, describing the scene as ‘a characteristic phase of Australian bush life’: A travelling photographer on the lookout for subjects has come upon a camp of natives ... their grim figures will ... be photographed, to serve as ethnological specimens and curios to send to friends in England as
example of the rapidly disappearing Australian race.' As this quotation indicates, interest in the Aborigines (at least to the extent of buying photographs of them) was quickened by the belief that the whole race would become extinct in the near future: 'the rapidity with which the aboriginal retires from off the face of the earth before the progress of civilization will soon give an archaeological value to such illustrations.'

Disturbing though the equation of such 'progress' with 'civilization' is, such articles do reflect a growing sense of historical perspective with regard to the Aborigines at a popular level; to that extent they are part of that wider historical awareness of the recent past which formed an important element in the national consciousness of the late nineteenth century.

That the juxtaposition of expanding urban settlements and the accompanying shelters of the Aborigines led almost irresistibly to a consideration of the history of the former (though not the latter) is suggested by a comment in the Australasian Sketcher for 26 August 1882. Referring to an illustration of 'The Native Encampment, Zoological Gardens, Royal Park' the journal observed that it was 'only necessary to compare this aboriginal encampment with the greater, more durable, and permanent encampment of colonists which we call Melbourne, lying a mile away' to have what it termed 'a curious illustration presented to the mind of the past and present of Melbourne.'

The contrast between the two settlements is taken to 'illustrate' the speed with which the city of Melbourne has overtaken the still-primitive settlements of the Aborigines. In an article published on 15 January 1881 the Australasian Sketcher had expressed only too bluntly the irrelevance of Aboriginal culture to the commercially dominant urban centres:

As he stands in the white man's cast-off rags, gibbering out a request for white money, there is none of the nobility of the savage about him. He is only an unpicturesque vagrant, and, thus contemplated, it does not occasion much regret that his disappearance as a member of the human family is not remote.

It is this 'unpicturesque vagrant' who is depicted in Julian Ashton's 1887 painting 'Give 'Em Bacca Boss' and who poses by his mia-mia (as an exotic 'curio') in so many landscape photographs of the period.

These brief 'photographs' from Australia's past have shown the advancement of 'settlement' and of 'civilization' to be two distinct processes. The impact of urban development and valued upon the Australian Aboriginal people is clear enough. That the Aborigines have confounded the expectations of one hundred years ago, and today are not only survivors but are arguing a case which attracts increasingly wide
support, allows hope for the future. For that hope to be transformed into action, though, demands something more rare than Stephen Toulmin’s second-hand self-respect, based merely on a year count. It demands an informed assessment of the nation’s past — and so of possible national fixtures — shaped by the vision that all Australians have of themselves after 200 years.

Such a vision must inevitably accept and value the city as the expression of the civilization that settlers have made in Australia, and must respond to it with an imaginative scope that does justice both to its special riches and to the fact that those riches are still denied to most native Australians. This is to be truly urbane.

In his autobiography, Patrick White writes of his own attempts, in *The Vivisector*, to ‘paint a portrait’ of Sydney (‘my city’, as he calls it). In their vivid contradictions his words capture something of the intensity with which the urban scene must be apprehended if it is indeed to be a deeply felt part of Australian life, and a possible theatre for acts of real civilization. I close with his words:

my city: wet, boiling, superficial, brash, beautiful, ugly Sydney, developing during my lifetime from a sunlit village into this present-day parvenu bastard, compound of San Francisco and Chicago. I had a lot of exploring to do. It was not so much research as re-living the windswept, gritty or steamy moods of the streets, coaxing dead-ends, narrow lanes, and choked thoroughfares to release those voices, images, emotions of the past, which for my deplorably atypical Australian nature evoke guilt rather than pleasure.

NOTES

3. Ian Turner, *The Australian Dream* (Sun Books, Melbourne, 1968), p.ix; the following quotation is on the previous page.


11. The role of international corporations as major buyers of art of course means that artists, too, have to consider them. For a revealing foray into the largely unexplored area of 'art values' and commercial values see Bernard Smith, 'Art Marketing in Sydney, 1970-1975' in my *Readings in Australian Arts* (Exeter, 1978), pp.74-83.

12. 'As photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal, they also help people to take possession of space in which they are insecure.' This remark appears on page nine of Susan Sontag's book *On Photography* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979). Although I disagree with Sontag's conclusions often, her book is a fine and stimulating account of photography's part in our lives.


18. See Smith, 'On perceiving the Australian suburb', pp.84-6. Smith quotes (p.85) the *Bulletin* as describing Herman's painting 'McElhone Stairs' (1944) as 'a melancholy account of one of Sydney's slummiest aspects'; the painting won the Wynne Art Prize that year.


24. I am aware that to make the riches of the city directly available to all Aborigines (i.e. to make them urban dwellers) is no solution. The city is here referred to as the focus of national wealth; exactly how that wealth can best be used to help redress the wrongs suffered by the Aboriginal people is a problem to which there are no easy solutions. That is not to say it is insoluble, though.


The above is the text of a paper given at an international Seminar on Australian literature held at the University of Stirling, Scotland, 9-12 September 1983. Writing this footnote after the Seminar, I am no less uneasy about the status according the Aborigines in discussion of Australian culture. I believe, however, that the rapid growth of interest in migrant writing in Australia (ironical though it seems) helps to establish a point of view
which can do justice to Aboriginal culture. In this context I wish to record my admiration for the paper on 'Migrant Writing' given at the Stirling Seminar by Sneja Gunew of Deakin University, Melbourne. Had I the time to redraft this text, such a bald acknowledgement would be unnecessary.

REVOLUTION IN PROGRESS

Bald car tyres — massive turds
heaped at the edge of the airfield.
A torn windsock droops from its pole.
Chickens peck the tarmac for loose change.
Near a half-completed hangar
porridgy beer brews in rusted drums.
In a silted irrigation ditch
a butchered buffalo stiffens,
telling a flyblown history
to urchins who hack its flesh
& boil it with cassava in tins.
They sift the litter of paper and plastic
and tread the eggshells of revolution.
From mountains near Kasungu
the loose teeth of a machine gun chatter.
Perhaps they shoot at banana trees
or rebels are being lopped into stillness.
Dark clouds slink in from Mozambique
past customs, where nothing is declared.
Near the airfield a supply plane banks,
disgorging bright blossoms of silk.
Other planes land with government troops.
They eat chicken and yam fufu
and point compasses at the mountains.
They’ll march towards the gunfire
with sunburnt men in green fatigues
who dream baseball & Michelob beer
as they plan the rebel’s destruction.
LINES FROM THE FRENCH

Stupor is the drug of this dominion. 
Ambition wilts on trees in drear lay-bys, 
dries on stone walls that stumble to the sea. 
Employment is some folly from another’s dream: 
prosperity is nudged to the next small town. 
Fishing boats bob and ponder on a sluggish tide: 
seabirds fish for trash that’s rarely there. 
Empty bars claim half the town. 
In one John Wayne, with French subtitles, 
acts at a room of empty chairs. 
Cowboy gunfire clatters on cobbled streets. 
Walled in by wintry sun, Basque hills, 
the town’s a prop from the age of poetry 
when poems sailed into harbour, 
stanzas taut in the midday breeze.

SENEGAL: BEFORE INDEPENDENCE

Crossing the river, you enter another century: 
nose-picking border barons guard the colony 
from contraband & the leprosy of ideology. 
Humidity sails on waves of heat — 
the brash gods of French culture and negritude 
walk streets where time loiters, intending crime.

In St. Louis clerks in bars await the millennium: 
in squat villas from Montpellier or Bourges 
officials yawn over ledgers, palming half the take. 
History seen by the myopic eye of domination 
is taught to blacks in run-down schools. In every 
class the French are watched, present stalking past.
FLINDERS: ILE DE FRANCE

St Elmo's fire dances crazily
over the headland
where Flinders waits for liberty
and the redirection of his mail.

A prisoner of the French
& King George's satanic ambition
this sailor confined to land
is nervous, tetchy, earth-bound.

He chews the skin of metaphysics
from drug-deprived hands,
fingers itching for a sextant
and a quick fix of stars.

At sea slight needs are met —
his heaven stretched before him,
an open hand of cards. Ashore,
limbs crave a pitching deck.

Each day the sea taunts him —
below its implacable waves
the depths ring with sonar
& the amiable chatter of whales.
ITINERANTS

Her family remember her from childhood
as the one who travelled brightly
in a big-roomed house,
who always played for time.

For years now I have been following her,
taking on her disguises — globetrotter
bon vivant, tasting in a glasshouse-array.
Sometimes I have wanted to halt, finally settle
but still she lures me on, across each brink.
She is my sister, we live our lives twice over —
times we have seen hemispheres in space
the way a bird might — or finding villages
weft with stories, feeling local again.
Feasts, illuminations, we have taken all
to heart — artefacts, trips out to markets
buying more than we could carry.

I can never quite catch her
nor does she ever let me rest, to shrink quietly
into the hedgehog of my days.
No, there is more, she swears —
her foot a shadow ahead of mine, circling out
saltbush and spinifex across our eyes,
daring me on to the next stage —
to take our lives to pieces,
fossick for new stones.
THE TRAPEZ-ARTIST’S FIRST PERFORMANCE

She has practised the tightrope,
daily spinning her taut body
afloat in territory
she would claim as hers.

Now the audience is waiting,
they bamboozle her with flowers.
The scene is drunk on air,
its nothingness
that she must navigate.

Suddenly her head’s a map, a study
in letting go. Below —
the fall, the odds.

She throws her act to the audience —
it carries her to them, their rows
of faces. And it is her sky
they give back,
balancing her with their eyes.

PASSENGERS TO THE CITY

This morning she is travelling
eyes steeled on her knitting,
while the man next to her
from time to time turns his head,
glances briefly at the fiery wool
then looks away.

He is silent as a guard, and she
never speaks. Are they together, some pair
perfectly joined by silence?
Or are they today’s complete strangers?
I'll never know, left simply
to knit them together — characters in a story,
a middle-aged couple on a train
waiting for love's fable to happen
to them, for their old lives to be
swept aside, changed, changed —
as she keeps knitting, bumping him
occasionally, at which he shrugs,
turns his head sharply
not like a lover, but content.

Shirley Lim

NO MAN'S GROVE

Crossing the China Sea, we see
Other sailors, knee-deep in padi,
Transformed by the land's rolling green.
We cannot enter their dream.

The sea brings us all to jungle,
Native, unclaimed, rooted, and tangled
On salt like one giant tree.

We spring straight from sea-wave. We see
But do not see grey netted pliants
Shutting out the sun. Where sea and plant
Twine, mammoth croakers crawl on tidal zone.

Some will live in the giant's shade, bend
To the rapidly rolling horizon.
I choose to walk between water and land.
‘History as she is never writ’:  
*The Wars* and *Famous Last Words*

*The Wars* and *Famous Last Words* are both historical novels; they are also fictive biography / autobiography, as they are perhaps most importantly stories about writing and reading. Certainly they are ‘History as she is never writ’,¹ or rather they are fictions that rewrite history in order to give significance to past events by creating patterns which reveal essential truths about human nature that can only be distilled through time and presented through art. This is an essay about the literariness of Findley’s fictions, about the enigmas he pursues and about his creative invention within the intertextual spaces made possible by preceding fictional discourses. Both of these novels problematise history in so far as they blur the distinctions between referential fact and interpretive fiction, for though the events — some factual and some fictional — happen at the time of World War I (*The Wars*) and in the inter-war period and World War II (*Famous Last Words*), their meaning can only be found ‘here’, i.e. in the narrative constructs which interpret those events in a different historical context from the originals. In this sense both are readings and rewritings of history, *The Wars* by a narrator sixty years later and *Famous Last Words* by a narrator whose writings on the wall of the Grand Elysium Hotel are read in the immediate aftermath of the war (1945) and then retold by the novelist with an even later knowledge of endings. In such circumstances, there is no ultimately authoritative reading of history, or as the narrator in *Famous Last Words* declares, ‘All I have written here is true; except the lies’ (p.59).

These texts assert their own fictional space, which is defined by historical context and by other fictional texts to which they refer. It seems to me that the most important referents in both are the names of their protagonists: Robert Ross in *The Wars* and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley in *Famous Last Words*, and it is with these novels as psychobiographies that I am mainly concerned. The proper names attach to figures outside the
novels, yet the novels reinvent the two namesakes giving to each their life stories within the fictions.

The case is more problematic with Robert Ross than with Hugh Selwyn Mauberley who is after all a fictional character created by Ezra Pound. The complicating factor is that *The Wars* appears to exist in relation to other writings about the First World War with its allusions to Sassoon, Owen, Graves and D.H. Lawrence, yet the name of its hero shadows another text to which no overt reference is made. Robert Ross looks a typically Canadian name, as indeed it is, an appropriate choice for the hero of a Canadian war novel. Yet this does seem a naïve reading on our part when we recall that it is also the name of a real historical personage who was a Canadian, though he did not fight in the First World War. (He died in September 1918, aged 49.) That Robert Ross was the son of an Attorney-General in Upper Canada, and he was Oscar Wilde’s Canadian lover in the 1880s — possibly Wilde’s first homosexual lover if we are to believe Ross himself. Ross was the ‘dear Robbie’ to whom Wilde wrote from France after his trial and exile, when he claimed that Ross was his only true friend. Certainly the choice of name hints at a homosexual sub-text in this novel, but arguably Ross has even more interesting subterranean connections with *The Wars*. I think it gives us an important clue to Findley’s literary enterprise by obliquely pointing to a possible model for his novel — not a war novel at all, but another psycho-biography, Wilde’s own *Portrait of Mr W.H.* (1889). Robert Ross was not only Wilde’s secret homosexual partner, he was also his secret collaborator on the story of W.H.³

If we look at Wilde’s story and at *The Wars*, I think the literary connections will become clear. What I am demonstrating is a cluster of similarities which look like more than coincidental resemblances though it may well be unconscious assimilation by Findley as a reader of Wilde. Wilde’s story concerns the search for the identity of the mysterious W.H. (whose initials are all that we have). It is told by a narrator who is haunted by W.H.’s ghost and obsessed by the compelling power of words; it begins and ends — like Findley’s — in a library, and the central piece of evidence is a portrait of a young man who rests his right hand on a book which under a magnifying glass is seen to be Shakespeare’s Sonnets. In *The Wars* Robert Ross’s right hand in the photograph of the Epilogue is seen to be holding something which ‘magnification reveals’ is ‘the skull of some small beast’⁴. It turns out that the portrait in Wilde is a forgery, so that the real face of W.H. remains a blank — just as Robert Ross has no face at the end but only a mass of scar tissue. The crucial effort of Wilde’s narrator is to create a presence in place of this absence, to invent a history
for W.H. — just as for Findley’s narrator his biographical subject is a blank which needs to be invented. The narrators in both psychobiographies work by intuitive flashes rather than on demonstrable evidence. In the process of this literary creation W.H. and Ross each becomes a tangible presence in their narrator’s minds, for by inventing the histories of their lives, the narrators have recreated (in Wilde’s case) the life of the beautiful boy actors in a theatre world which was the perfect expression of an essentially male culture and (in Findley’s) the life of the doomed youths who went off to the Great War. And each narrator becomes aware of the power of art to show us passions in ourselves of which we have never dreamed: ‘It is Art, and Art only, that reveals us to ourselves’ (*The Portrait of Mr W.H.* , p.209). Even when the theory of W.H.’s identity is renounced by the narrator, three things remain: the forged portrait in the fiction, Shakespeare’s Sonnets, and Wilde’s story. Just as whatever view is taken of Robert Ross’s heroism, there remain the fictional photographs of Ross, the Great War, and Findley’s novel. All of which proves Wilde’s theory that physical death or hard fact cannot undermine the perpetuation of man’s essence through art. Immortality lies in the imaginative act, the text itself. This leads us directly back to *The Wars* through its epigraph, ‘Never that which is shall die’ — not if it is perpetuated through art.

So it seems to me that Robert Ross’s name signals the kind of fiction that *The Wars* is: within the framework of a historical novel Findley is writing a psychobiography, speculating on how far something as mysterious as a human psyche may be traced and leave its traces through art. *The Wars* is not a reading of history through Wilde, though Wilde’s is the secret sub-text on which the portrait of Robert Ross is structured, and it provides a comment on the processes of art which immortalise a man’s essence. It is in this sense that *The Wars* is elegy and celebration of heroism beyond the memorial of documentary history.

*Famous Last Words* on the other hand does read the history of the inter-war period through Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’s perspective and is more overtly a fictive autobiography. Findley inherits Mauberley his narrator together with his profession as a writer and his distinctive idiom from Ezra Pound, and the novel is an elaborate transformation of Pound’s poetic sequence in an entirely new historical and narrative context. The intertextual space of *Famous Last Words* is entirely that of Modernism, signalled in the mass of quotations from Pound, the echoes of T.S. Eliot, and indirectly of W.B. Yeats via Auden’s poem in Yeats’s memory. Findley’s interest in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* as the ‘document of an epoch’ (Eliot’s judgment in his 1928 introduction to Pound’s *Selected Poems*) is
shown by his focus on the Mauberley persona as a recorder figure, the 'compulsive witness' of his age, 'recording the lives of those around him, moment by moment — every word and every gesture, instantly frozen in his private cipher' (*FLW*, p.21) with his incriminating notebooks and his final testimonial in the Grand Elysium Hotel, which is the full story of his 'Life and Contacts'. Indeed, Findley's allusive method parallels Pound's own in *Mauberley*, for as J.J. Espey has shown, Pound's text echoes with his reading of Greek and Latin classics and of French and English poetry of the 1890s, all of which is assimilated into the substance of his own artefact. Findley's novel is both a reading of Pound's poem and a new invention, an extension and a supplement to it. Pound's text functions apparently as a catalyst for Findley, giving him his central character and a language with which to interpret post World War I history.

It is generally assumed that Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is a persona rejected by Pound, that of the post World War I aesthete whom Pound chose not to become, and the separation of Pound from his fictive persona becomes the initial situation in Findley's text, fictionalised in the farewell scene between Pound and Mauberley at Rapallo in March 1945 as Mauberley sets out for Austria. Indeed, Mauberley's whole existence in the novel is Findley's invention post Pound's 1920 text, a separation which is made plain by the date of Mauberley's earliest diary entry: Shanghai, August 1924. But just as this entry which records Mauberley's meeting with Wallis Warfield Simpson (later to be the Duchess of Windsor) is prefaced by lines from Pound's 'Envoi' (1919), so Mauberley's life story in the novel is pervaded by the language of Pound's poem. Mauberley's characterisation is faithful to Pound's persona for both share the same 'fundamental passion' for words as 'the currency of the human mind' (*FLW*, p.385) (cf. 'This urge to convey the relation ... by verbal manifestations' in 'Mauberley 1920', II). They are both 'out of key' with their times, resisting the pressures of their age, only to find themselves isolated and relegated to the margins of history.

It is fascinating to see how Findley's text has appropriated Pound's images and literalised his metaphors into the substance of the narrative, so that the 'chopped seas' and 'the coral isle, the lion-coloured sand' of imagination become the scenarios for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor's story, and Mr Nixon's 'steam yacht' is refashioned into the 'Nahlin' and that mirror-ship the 'Munargo' by which the Windsors are abandoned in 1943. In a similar way, Mauberley's own activities in the novel are a literalisation of the poem's figurative language: 'his tool/ The
engraver’s’ becomes Mauberley’s silver pencil inherited from his father, finally appropriated after Mauberley’s death by the young soldier Private Annie Oakley, and used to write his story on the walls of the four rooms in the Grand Elysium Hotel: ‘Every single inch of space had been covered with writing: all of it in pencil. Etched. And thus the smell of plaster dust’ (FLW, p.51). Pound’s image ‘eye-deep in hell’ is both a metaphorical description of Mauberley’s situation as he writes in the prison of the Hotel Elysium and also finds its hideous concretisation in the manner of Mauberley’s death in the novel, from an ice pick through his right eye (the manner of death prefigured in Trotsky’s assassination, another man whose notebook was burned, FLW, p.256). Indeed, eyes are important images in both texts: Pound’s ‘Yeux Glauques’ — ‘The skylike limpid eyes’ — ‘the eyes turn topaz’, and the eyes of Wallis — the Duke of Windsor — the eyeless dressmaker’s dummy of Queen Mary — Ezra Pound’s ‘one mad eye, the left’ (FLW, p.77) — the alligator eyes of Reinhart Mauberley’s assassin — also the eyes of Mauberley’s two readers, Lieutenant Quinn and Captain Freyberg.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’s ‘true Penelope’ features in the novel as Mauberley’s main contribution to the action, where Penelope is the name he gives to the secret Fascist plot for world domination around which the narrative is structured. Though the plot it abortive, the name in its reincarnation becomes a foreshadowing of the political implications there in Mauberley’s elitist criticisms of his age and which are developed in Pound’s later writings. Pound’s lines, ‘The age demanded an image/ Of its accelerated grimace’ in a ‘prose kinema’ echo in the first quotation of the novel (p.3), while the ‘kinema’ becomes Mauberley’s image to describe his writing activity in 1945:

Mauberley smiled. And what a tale to tell. If I could only tell it, he thought. If there was only time and I could tell it all. Oh well. The journals; the notebooks would have to suffice. Except they were like the title cards of a silent film — without the film itself. (FLW, p.35)

But even while creating his ‘prose kinema’ Mauberley is reacting against the demands of his age as he writes in isolation in the freezing hotel like the stylist in Pound’s poem, ‘Beneath the sagging roof ... Unpaid, uncelebrated’. He insists on writing his story of ‘the sublime’:

Maybe he had needed to create another image of the world: innocent and shining, like the one the Duchess of Windsor had intended when she said, ‘we are led into the light and shown such marvels as one cannot tell.... And then...’ (FLW, p.76)
Mauberley's story is decisively rejected as lies by one of his readers (Freyberg) and tainted for his most sympathetic reader (Quinn) because of its truth. As Pound says of such an enterprise, 'Wrong from the start'. And Mauberley writes to the accompaniment of a record of Schubert's piano sonata in B-flat major, 'Schubert's last words' (FLW, p.385), a transformation of the grand piano of Mauberley's last poem 'Medallion'.

'At the end of things' Mauberley does give the age its image in his eyewitness account of 'the ultimate face of the age' (FLW, p.98) and he pays with his own eye and his death. In the novel, Mauberley succeeds in the very activity which Ezra Pound had declared his Mauberley persona was not fitted to do — though Pound does it himself in the first part of his Hugh Selwyn Mauberley sequence with his judgments on post-War England. In Pound's poem Mauberley becomes an exile, paralysed as a writer and capable only of 'maudlin confession', whereas in the novel this judgment is contradicted. Mauberley's drifting 'beneath warm suns' is given to the Windsors in the Bahamas and the aesthetically sterile 'Medallion' poem is replaced by Mauberley's long narrative which is an amplification of Pound's 'Envoi'. The image of the lady becomes that of the Duchess of Windsor with her dazzling lacquered mask, and Mauberley's story is his tribute of passionate admiration and sacrifice for her through twenty years' devotion — though he too shares the sexual 'anaesthesia' of Pound's Mauberley, and Pound's 'still stone dogs' whose mouths bite 'empty air' is echoed in Mauberley's rueful image of himself as one of the Duchess's faithful dogs.

The fictional narrative is Mauberley's final self vindication and his vindication of the power of the written word, which contradicts Pound's assertion of his limitations. Mauberley's story on the walls is his own epitaph as well as that of his age, and his voice in the novel is a conflation of Pound and his persona — for Pound as historical personage writing his Cantos in prison and remembering the past lies like a shadow behind the writer in the Grand Elysium Hotel. Mauberley's last words beginning 'Think of the sea' (FLW, p.386) are not only the product of his namesake's 'imaginary/ Audition of the phantasmal sea-surge' but also of Pound's insight into 'the whispers of chaos, fire and anger' within the human psyche (FLW, p.77), as they create the shape of a threat which is glimpsed momentarily above the surface of the ocean: 'A shape that passes slowly through a dream. Waking, all we remember is the awesome presence, while a shadow lying dormant in the twilight whispers from the other side of reason: I am here. I wait' (FLW, p.396). And Mauberley's testament is not destroyed. Like the ancient hand print in the Altamira Caves, it has been preserved against all the odds to be read after the war.
and recorded in the novel: 'All I can tell you of myself and of my time and of the world in which I lived is in this signature: this hand print: mine' (FLW, p.173). His writing remains, to assert the creative artist’s importance in shaping the chaos of history into art — though such telling lies beyond innocence, as Lieutenant Quinn, the demolitions expert and also Mauberley’s reader, discovers. Mauberley’s silver pencil is booby-trapped, and the walls do blow up in his reader’s face — metaphorically speaking.

As a story about writing and reading, Famous Last Words focusses the central issues of Findley’s historical novels. Just as there is an elaborate play within the fiction between predeterminism (in the record of events already enacted by history and the prescriptive details of characterisation and imagery from Pound’s poetic text) and the assertion of free will in the choice of fictive elements, so this interplay characterises the historical novelist’s activity. In this process of repetition and reinvention, distinctions between fact and fiction dissolve as the emphasis falls not on ‘truth’ but on ‘interpretation’ — on the hand print, the signature, the image of human enigma. And the last words here should be Oscar Wilde’s:

All Art being to a certain degree a mode of Acting, an attempt to realise one’s own personality on some imaginative plane out of reach of the trammelling accidents and limitations of real life, to censure an artist for a forgery was to confuse an ethical with an aesthetical problem. (The Portrait of Mr W.H., p.152)

NOTES

1. Timothy Findley, Famous Last Words (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Co. Ltd., 1981), p.180. All further references to this novel will be taken from this edition and included within the essay.


3. I was alerted to these possible connections by Professor Ian Fletcher’s valedictory lecture on ‘Psychobiography and Literary Forgery’ delivered at the University of Reading, U.K., in January 1983, when he talked about Wilde’s and Ross’s collaboration over The Portrait. Professor Fletcher cannot be held at all responsible for my speculative connections with Findley’s text.


6. It is interesting to note that Pound's attitudes to World War I as portrayed in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* bleed back into *The Wars*, as we see on a re-reading of that novel after *Famous Last Words*. Findley's fictive record of life at the Front could be read as a gloss on the lines of 'E.P. Ode pour l'élection de son sépulcre', IV.

7. The name of the hotel itself finds its echo in Pound's *Canto LXXXI*, as the quotation (*FLW*, p.37) and Findley's prefatory note indicate.


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**Timothy Findley**

**INTERVIEW**

Terry Goldie interviewed Timothy Findley at the 'Fiction and Film Conference' at McMaster University, 5 November 1982.

*The last time, the main thing that we talked about was The Wars and so, today, I'd like to talk about the film of The Wars. Also, the last time you mentioned the novel that you were working on, which was Famous Last Words. Now that's out, so maybe we can talk a bit about that tool.*

All right.

*How did you find working on a film of a novel that was so well established? Was it difficult to turn it into a different medium?*

Yes, but I think I was helped, Terry, in the way you’re always helped by knowing the people who are working with you. Working with Robin Phillips and, ultimately, with the actors the film came first. Of course, there were arguments and there were disagreements, but the film was what mattered.
One thing that a lot of people have been talking about at this conference is how difficult it is to change a novel into a film, particularly because the brief space of time forces you to leave so many things out. I would think that most people in your position would be upset that something that you liked, and that you feel is very important, is going to be left out. Or perhaps you didn’t find that in the end?

Oh, no. I did find that. In *The Wars* there are lots of things left out that break my heart, and some for very difficult reasons. We decided, ultimately, that we would not have the running in the film because so much had been made of *Gallipoli*, in which there is running, and then *Chariots of Fire*, and although both *Gallipoli* and *Chariots of Fire* came, in terms of their inception, long after *The Wars* was a book, they got out first as films. We also had a mishap with the first running sequence with the coyote, out west. So we decided we wouldn’t have the running. That’s an element that’s missing, that I’m very sorry to see go.

*It’s interesting, though, that you mention Gallipoli because when I was listening to you talk about your film, it seemed to me so different. One of my complaints about Gallipoli was that it is so absurdly heroic. People talk about how in the end they actually confront the fact that all these poor young men were dying out there in the war but it’s confronted in an almost Walt Disney way. There’s no real blood. There’s no guts. What you said this morning suggests that in *The Wars* as a film there isn’t necessarily a lot of blood but there is the guts that need to be there.*

Yes, there’s an image that people can’t escape. You mustn’t let people escape, any longer, from what war really is. Now that can sound like Sam Peckinpah and I think Sam Peckinpah is a different kettle of fish. Do you remember *Bonnie and Clyde*? When they shot the first man, there were no consequences. With the second man, the consequence was that they actually had to see the blood, and they found that terribly, terribly disturbing. Then there was an incredible scene when they were all getting shot up trying to make an escape, Bonnie and Clyde and the garageman and the sister-in-law. I have never forgotten Estelle Parsons in the back of the car, screaming about her eye, ‘I can’t see, I can’t see’. If that had not been there, the film would have been a lie. In other words, there is a justifiable quotient of blood and guts and violence which, if it is done with integrity, is there to say, ‘this is what this is *really* like’. If there is a reason, other than simply showing blood and guts, then it’s wonderful. In the case of *Bonnie and Clyde*, I was never once offended by what I was shown, whereas in a film by Peckinpah, I am offended. I’m offended because I know I’m being had.
In your talk this morning you said that when you write a novel you begin with a series of images that just start drifting through your mind. That must make it easier for you to take your novel and then yourself, as a scriptwriter, work it into a film.

I think it probably does, Terry. I think I have a facility, which is natural and innate, to grasp what film is about. I have no real problem setting out the details of a scene and having a scene unfold in my mind and therefore onto the paper. The only thing I have to learn to do when I’m writing a script is to put less on paper, not to tell everyone what to do, because it doesn’t leave any room for the stage designer or the actor to have an idea of his own. Instead of putting the shadings in with precision — her mouth curls at the left hand side for the following reasons — you’ve got to leave the actors and the director room to discover why you’ve said she’s smiling at all. So you can wipe out half of what you might intend to put on the paper before it gets there.

You were saying this morning how important it is that you do not control your characters but let the novel happen. When you’re at that point, though, and turning the novel into a different medium, everything is set. But I suppose if you are creating new scenes, if you are creating new images, then you still give it that freedom.

But there is a slight difference. Since the whole thing now has a shape that is established, you really are still working within that whole shape, with whatever you create that’s new, and you’re not very apt to break out of that whole, with anything startlingly new.

Did you find that the director, Robin Phillips, and the other people did create something new which they suggested to you and then you worked with it?

I talked this morning about a scene in the church that was pure Robin Phillips. It is not so much that Robin Phillips comes along and says ‘I have this terrific idea to do a scene about blah, blah, blah’. He says, ‘I have decided in my mind that I want to try to do this with the scene you have written.’ There’s where the creativity comes. He says, ‘and I do this with it,’ unfolding his hands and making a large shape coming from a little tiny envelope of two words. He will find within the nuance of two or three things that I’ve put on paper a whole relationship which is important to establish and the way of establishing it. In that moment where I have provided two little superficial words, Robin Phillips will find the most surprising means of saying, ‘Ah, this is where I can establish this part of that person’s relationship with that person’. That’s
where the creativity comes in. 'Pass the salt' doesn't really seem to resonate with an awful lot of character-building but in Robin Phillips' hands it does. 'Pass the salt' can become the most rivetting thing in the whole film. It doesn't, I'm making that up, but you see what I mean.

Did you find, then, that this was your best experience, of writing for film?

Oh yes, absolutely, bar none. And it was because Phillips is not only a great director, but also a great teacher. I have to clarify that by saying that in all great directing and all great teaching the thing they hold in common is the creation of a means to an adventurous situation. The teacher comes and says to the writer, 'You give me the map,' and to the actors, 'you will climb the mountain. I know you can stand the cold and the heat and the weather. That's why I've chosen you. Now we're all going to read the map and we're all going to try for the mountain. I know how to get up this part — you know how to get over that part. So, if the map is accurate — we will probably make it.' There's this wonderful sense that he injects into the thing: the adventure and excitement of exploration. He gives you the confidence that if anyone can get you there he can, but he doesn't ever override the whole situation by saying, 'I'm terribly sorry but I have made up my mind and there is no way we are going to do anything more with this scene than what I've decided to do'. He is always open, right to the last, to the creative inspiration of what might happen.

One perfect example is an English scene, in which Lady Barbara D'Orsey makes her first entrance. The scene takes place in a hospital and Robert Ross is sitting beside the bed of his friend, Harris, who is dying. Barbara comes with another character to give flowers to a man who is dying in the same room, further down the way. Barbara says to her companion, 'You give these flowers to him,' meaning her friend in the bed, who is in terrible pain and swathed in bandages. 'I can't stand this any longer.' And she walks away while the friend stays to give the flowers. Here we get pure Phillips. Everything up to this moment in the scene is in the book, but Barbara walks past all these beds in Robin Phillips' filmmaking version and she looks sideways at a stranger, in one of the beds, who only has something wrong with his arm. He is very sexy, and very alive, and the exchange between these two people! This woman who has come to give flowers to a dying man, she's already on the make for the guy in the next bed. It's astonishing. Then she walks on and you know that she's going to have to come to Robert. She disappears behind a screen and then steps out the other side. When she does this, she stops
and she looks around everywhere but at Robert, and Robert is glued to her. Then the chance thing happens that Robin Phillips is brilliant at catching. As Barbara steps back, out of sight, the floor creaks, and that sound is like something yawning open underneath the whole building — and, indeed, the whole safe world. This is the first indication of what Barbara represents. Then she’s gone. But it so happens it was just happenstance that the floor creaked! Another director might have cursed and asked them to fix the floor-boards and re-shot the scene. But Phillips was open to the suggestion the sound gave him and he used it. A very powerful effect.

In reference to sound, how did having Glenn Gould do the music affect your perception of the film, and of the novel?

Having Robin Phillips, having Martha Henry, having William Hutt, Brent Carver, Domini Blythe, Jackie Burroughs, made me regret that my sense of nuance wasn’t on a par with their sense of nuance. Actors have a very powerful sense of nuance. Wonderful. But, of course, I have to realize that their insights are only a step ahead of mine because I have provided some sort of background, from which they can jump forward.

The same was true of Gleen Gould. The first thing Gould said was ‘I want to do this film. I love the story, but I have to tell you I cannot accept it.’ He’d read the book and he’d loved the book, but he said, knowing the book, ‘I cannot score this film unless I am assured that no animals have really been killed in the process of making it.’ And they weren’t. Any dead animal that does appear was got from the knackers. And there was always a vet on the scene. There’s a horse that’s ‘killed’ in front of you but it’s only faked. The vet was there all the time. Once Gould was assured of this, he said, yes, that he’d do it.

Well his first thing, having viewed the film, was to say, ‘All right, most of the music must emerge from the seat of that piano bench in the Ross house.’ He was referring to an early scene in which one of the characters is playing the piano. And he said, ‘I know an Edwardian house would have the Brahms Intermezzi and the Schubert sonatas and some other things and, of course, a songbook.’ So, almost all the piano music emerges as only what could be in that house, in that piano bench. You hear a young man singing, ‘Hello, My Baby!’ That’s one of the first things you hear in the film. Later, you hear, in the distance, military bands, playing way off down the street. Gould uses that. Then you have a classical piece, a Brahms Intermezzo, which becomes thematic.
Then there are variations. For instance, you go to church and you have hymn music, and Gould plays around with that. He gives you a trumpet descant for this church music which adds a military air to it. Then he extrapolates from the church choir, the voices of the boy sopranos, which then get reduced from twenty to two and then to one, so that you’ve got this wavering, lost sound, trying to praise God. The nuance is just astounding.

Every bit of music in the film begins with found music — which was indigenous to both place and time: songs, hymns, bands, choirs, pianos. Then Gould strips it — tears it apart — puts it back together, melded. He was a genius. His contribution to the film was the last thing he did. After he died, we all gathered in St Paul’s Toronto. This was his Memorial service. For me, it was very touching because his favourite scene in the film was the scene shot in St Paul’s — the one for which he wrote the trumpet descant and from which he called the voices of the boy singers. It’s private — but I cannot see that scene without thinking of him.

Had you finished Famous Last Words before you started the film?

No. I was still doing the final editing. I didn’t write the Queen Mary episode, for instance, until about six weeks before the book was published. I went right on writing until the very last minute.

So did you find filming The Wars to be much of an influence on you in writing Famous Last Words? Or was it very much two separate things?

Oh no, I think everything was set in Famous Last Words and The Wars couldn’t influence it really, because all the filmic elements in Famous Last Words were already there.

I would say, though, that Famous Last Words is not as overtly filmic as The Wars. Although The Wars was perhaps less filmic than photographic.

That’s what I was going to say. I don’t think The Wars, as written, was so much filmic as it was photographic. Famous Last Words is not so much filmic in structure as it is obsessed with movies, in an iconic sense. I’m really sort of sad, Terry, that no one has quite picked up on this iconic aspect, which is a very important factor — or was for me. It wasn’t chance that I chose Lana Turner, for instance. Lana Turner was the
movie star of that period. She was the one everyone wanted to fuck. 'It Lana Turner is the best fuck in the land then it's her I'll fuck.' She was the icon of fucking. And what does that say for poor Lana Turner who's got the royal round-up in the street? I mean talk about screwing people up, and that's not a pun. Here's another icon: if Private Oakley is a sharp shooter, you reach for the iconic version of the sharp-shooter, and call him 'Annie' Oakley. And another: Freyberg sounds Jewish, so immediately Quinn assumes he is Jewish and assumes the basis of his rage is racial. I thought it was rather cunning to then have Freyberg react by saying, vehemently, 'I am not a Jew, I am not a Jew.' And perhaps he isn't. It's never said whether he is or not but he knows that it mitigates what his rage is about, if it is only based on his being a Jew. He wants his rage to be unconditional. So then, Quinn says, very smartly and rather meanly, 'Oh, does it matter?' That exchange is about the icons we're saddled with and the icons we think we're saddled with. Quinn is right in knowing it shouldn't matter: Freyberg is right in knowing it does matter.

It's interesting, because the central icons, of course, are the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and Hugh Selwyn Mauberley.

Precisely.

How did you decide to use those people? Did the image of these characters come to you and you had to use them?

Well, no. Yes and no. Actually, you see, the book started out being a book about the murder of Harry Oakes, and once I was in there I had to have the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, and it started working backwards. At first Mauberley wasn't there at all, although Pound was. Mauberley didn't come in until about the third draft, as the unifying voice, to keep the whole thing in one voice. Once I discovered that voice, then I put in everything that Pound had put into Mauberley. I was slavish to the poem sequence, to the detriment of the book, so I'm told. I wanted to get every bit of that poem in there. When the newspaper lady destroyed Mauberley in the press, for instance, she destroyed him with a re-writing, verse for verse, of one whole passage, saying how he was unable to function in the twentieth century; anchored to Flaubert and so on. God, I worked hard on that, and I resented terribly having it cut. Part of it got in but not all. I did a whole thing on Beerbohm, who lived up the hill from Ezra, and Ezra was always teasing Max. Teasing, hah,
I mean Ezra could be a vicious old bastard, he really could. He never let Max off his hook — taunting him that he was a Jew, and saying terrible things about the homosexual situation. All these things are all in the poetry, all in the Mauberley poems. In another section — so we’re told — the model was actually Arnold Bennett — the image of the writer who has sold out for money and fame. I did change this — and made it Hemingway. Hemingway was the literary figure of the book’s period who made all the money and worked so hard at creating a public image — a fame. Originally, I had several Hemingway scenes. Now only one. Anyway, all those portions of the poem were slated to be adhered to, and then they had to be taken out of the book because it made a different book than the one that needed to be. There is one remaining — which I rather like — which is ‘Mauberley’s’ poem to the Duchess of Windsor — ‘braving time’.

A lot of people have talked at this conference about the need to write a film which is true at least in spirit to the novel. But some people have said that anything, any narrative, any story, or whatever, can be used as a spur for a film and it doesn’t really matter whether you’re true to it or not. It just becomes an imaginative device. How close did you feel that you had to stay to history in writing the novel, say for example, in the characterizations?

Well, I think the fairest thing to say is that it would never occur to me to do something with someone real that was unlike them. Nothing that any of the people do in the book that is in fact fictitious even remotely oversteps the boundaries of possibility. Given their character and given the situations they find themselves in they behave as they should. All the scenes between the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, for instance, are very carefully researched. You learn quickly that distortion of real character would distort the fiction. But you still have to make your point and sometimes that involves heightening or underlining characters’ traits. This is where you must be most careful of defamation. There’s a way Lilli Palmer found, a wonderful way, of not getting in trouble with the Duchess of Windsor. In her book, Change Lobsters and Dance, she says, when she met the Duchess of Windsor, her first impression was of an old nutcracker that she had as a child. She had ‘that kind of mouth’. Well, there, you see, you have the image of the ‘ball-breaker’, but Palmer hasn’t said that the Duchess of Windsor is a ‘ball-breaker’. Nonetheless, she has made the portrait of one by providing the image of a toy. That was Lilli Palmer’s way of saying it. I found other ways of saying it.
Did you always feel the danger of saying something that was going to get you into trouble legally?

Oh, sure. For instance, I had to make it very clear that Lindbergh merely delivered a message without knowing that the results of the message would be the murder of Edward Allenby. To imply that Lindbergh would be party to murder would be libellous — and, incidentally, I wouldn’t dream of saying he was. Lindbergh wasn’t like that at all. But I had to make it absolutely clear I was not even remotely suggesting such a thing. If I had been careless, it could have appeared that I was saying something I wasn’t saying. And likewise, Wallis must not say to Mauberley, ‘I want that man killed,’ meaning Oakes. So what she says, instead, is a very diplomatic thing from the writer’s point of view, which is simply, ‘We must do something.’ Mauberley contracts the killing: for Wallis. Wallis doesn’t even know about it.

Most of us would think that the essential icons in your novel are the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, but Hugh Selwyn Mauberley must be a central icon in a certain sense as well because you could have easily created a fictional character who could have done similar things, being around in certain places and reacting to them.

Oh, sure. But then the point would have been missed which is that Mauberley is the creation of Ezra Pound. Ezra is an identifiable fascist sympathizer — and he created, perhaps unwittingly, in Mauberley the perfect image of a different kind of fascist sympathizer. I didn’t want a lot of overt fascism. It had to be the kind of situation where one who should know better opts for the fascist cause because it is his only means of finding safety in a world that otherwise would crush him. This is Mauberley. Pound was different. Pound used fascism to further his own polemical views of history, finance, politics and anti-semitism. I wanted to express both of these facets of fascism. The carelessness of Mauberley: the determinism of Pound.

On the subject of the Windsors. I have been angered by reviewers who write: ‘Oh you know, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor are such superficial people. Why would we want to pay any attention to them? How could they possibly have had anything to do with swaying major events of the time?’ To which I reply, ‘Well, take a tiny look at Ronald and Nancy Reagan. Aren’t they rather superficial? Ahem! But just one minute: remember that around that dining room table down in Washington Mr and Mrs Reagan are making sure that a hell of a lot gets done that they would like to see done and their friends would like to see done. This is
where policy can be established that can't be established through the public mouth of the President. Well — the Windsors, and a good many 'superficial' others in their coterie, did hold sway over public and major events in their time. Try Charles Bedoux on for size. But the point really is, the Windsors were large enough and important enough for people like Hitler to want to use them. And a whole world of truly powerful people — ambassadors, diplomats, lawyers, jurists, etc. — clamoured to sit at their table. The pro-MacArthur people, for instance, used to gather over Windsor's wine during the Korean conflict. They made things happen, too — 'safe-guarding democracy'.

But there is documentation that the fascist elements in Britain thought that something could be made of this. That's historical fact.

Oh absolutely. Oh sure. I'm only talking about the character element, people saying that they're merely superficial. They're not superficial. They're only superficial to people looking at them from a disinterested prospect. But in another view, if you could get to sit at their table, you could have anything you wanted, and that's the point. Wallis wanted to create the kind of dinner table where king-making and influence peddling were possible, and the fascists knew that was her talent. It was her supreme talent. You don't walk off with the king of England and destroy the whole constitution of an Empire without such a talent. People who under-estimated her tended to dismiss her by saying, 'Of course she's nothing but a tart.' That was the popular British view. But the fascist view was more truthful: she caught the king/she destroyed an element of empire. That's hardly superficial. Wallis is best compared to the mistress of a King of France.

One thing I wanted to ask you about was the narrative device of having Quinn and Freyberg reacting to things all the time. Many people have told me they have found that difficult. They have found the narrative structure, the frame, doesn't work for them.

I've had some problems with that myself. I'm not saying it was wrong. I didn't perhaps handle it, or know how to handle it, delicately enough to keep the ball bouncing. But when I wrote them first, there was more of them and therefore they were more complex people. By the time the book came down to the wire, it was much too long, and one way to cut it was to say, 'well, okay, there is a lot of stuff the reader will be doing here.' Every time I came to Quinn and Freyberg, I was pausing, in essence, to give the
reader a chance to breathe. Also, I was pulling them into thinking what 
that pause might be about by saying, ‘okay, let’s start an argument.’ 
These ‘arguments’ start with Quinn and Freyberg, but in fact it should 
be the reader who finishes the argument, who has that argument with 
himself and with his own judgement of what Mauberley has written on 
the wall. So Freyberg and Quinn tend to become black and white people: 
a device. They’re difficult to deal with because they’re almost too ironic. 
They represent very much two opposing camps and there’s hardly a 
subtle bone in either of their bodies. But there’s not much room for 
subtlety in their surroundings. I was always very nervous about them, 
but nevertheless I don’t think the book could do without them. They 
have to be there: somebody has to be there to direct the focus. In film, 
you do this by cutting to a close up — or by changing the point of view. 
It’s a necessary device.

_I was trying to think this morning about how you could get the story across without 
them and it’s very difficult, with the simple device of the wall. You have to have 
people reacting to the wall. How did you decide to use the wall to get Mauberley’s 
memories in print?_

When I first saw Mauberley, I had a flash vision of him standing on a 
chair, wearing a great coat, like that. I had already decided that I wanted 
to do something about the pictographs of Altamira — about how nothing 
changes and how the pictographs tell us that. Even before the ice age ‘we 
made these wars, we saw these stars’, etc. The image, I guess, came out of 
that. Here was another man in another time, standing on a chair, putting 
images on the walls and ceilings. While another ice age came down 
around him, closing him in, and creating the moment in which the 
present is frozen and the future takes off and becomes a new age.

_The original cover that I saw had a picture of the wall, with writing on the wall, and 
I found that quite an intriguing thing._

The American cover now is a variation on that. It’s beautiful, it has the 
rooms, the sunlight streaming through, and in the middle room there’s a 
gramophone standing on a table, and it’s very effective. The only thing I 
didn’t like about that cover you saw was that the candlestick looked like…

_The menorah, the seven candles, and the wall looked like the Wailing Wall, or 
something like that._
I thought we cannot have this because people are going to think this is another Holocaust book and that’s the last thing anybody needs. And so I said, ‘I’m sorry, that is the wrong interpretation of this book. It is not about that.’ And then the artist got all apologetic and said, ‘I hadn’t realized it had that look.’ But it had.

*What’s the next step after Famous Last Words? What are you working on now?*

I’m working on a play about T.S. Eliot and his first wife, Vivien, and I’m working on a book about a blind cat.

*Sounds great. Thanks.*

Thank you, Terry.

Timothy Findley. Photo: Robert Lansdale.
The Society and Woman’s Quest for Selfhood in Flora Nwapa’s Early Novels

INTRODUCTION

The world of Flora Nwapa’s first two novels — *Efuru* and *Idu* — is a near perfect mirror of the patriarchy in which the author grew up. It is a world founded on a value system which is conducive to man’s pleasure and self-realization. It is an ordered world where everyone knows one’s place, and the worth of any woman is proportional to her ability (is it not really willingness?) to repress any impulse capable of challenging men’s self-assigned superiority. It is a world of double standards. There is, therefore, a subtle tendency in the novels to frustrate women’s attempt at self-assertion. The major means of this frustration is the socio-economic anti-feminism of the patriarchy as mirrored in the novels.

SOCIETAL NORMS

One of the most prosaic responses to a feminist approach to African Literature is that, in Africa, none of the sexes has any cause to complain since they are on a par with each other, and play complementary roles. There are, certainly, elements of truth in this claim. As in the past, Africa abounds today in women who are, to all intents and purposes, superior to many men. Women have always had autochthonous means of making their feelings felt by their menfolk. In Igboland, they can even, as Judith Van Allen rightly points out, act ‘to force a resolution of their individual and collective grievances’ through ‘sitting on a man’, boycotts and strikes.¹ Flora Nwapa herself does not tire of stressing the enviable position occupied by women in Oguta, the Igbo community mirrored in *Efuru* and *Idu*.² Nevertheless, African cultures and civilizations are
replete with traits of anti-feminism. Thus in Efuru and Idu the woman, in spite of all the importance accorded to her, is by no means the equal of her brother.

To begin with, a low value is set upon her person. A woman at the funeral of Efuru’s daughter does not regret Ogonim’s death as she would have regretted that of a boy. ‘A girl is something, though we would have preferred a boy,’ she weeps. Even children reveal an awareness of this preference for boys when they thank Nwosu by wishing that his wife should ‘give birth to a baby boy’ (E, 128). In Idu, Iyienu hospital is described as ‘good’ only because many pregnant ‘women who have been there recently had baby boys’. In fact, an expectant mother moves from a hospital near Aba to Iyienu (a distance of about 110 miles) because of that fact (I, 78).

A woman’s life counts for nothing as long as the prestige of the man and the integrity of the family — that corner-stone of the patriarchy — over which he presides, are intact. Thus a woman in Idu accepts the fact that she ought not to hit back when she is being beaten up by her husband (I, 3). Efuru’s father is afraid of premarital sex and its consequent ‘disgrace’ when he hears about Efuru’s nocturnal outings. His mind does not go to his daughter’s personal safety. When Efuru eventually runs to a ‘nobody’ who cannot even pay her bride-price, her cousins are not worried about her personal comfort. They only think of the ‘shame’ which her action will bring to the family (E, 3).

A woman is more or less physically re-created by the society to meet the taste and sexual weakness of the man. Accordingly, Efuru is subjected to clitoridectomy which is portrayed in the novel as having a ‘bath’. The apparent reason for this inhuman operation is the belief that it will enhance child-bearing (E, 10). It is, however, known that in the society reflected in the novel, people are aware of the fact that while circumcision increases a man’s coital ability, clitoridectomy reduces female sexuality. It is safe, therefore, to suspect that in encouraging the operation, the male-centric society is only trying to bring the woman to the level at which the man, with his inferior sexual disposition, can cope with his wife. The use of the metaphor ‘having a bath’ for the ritual ‘castration’ of the woman encapsulates the usual tendency in a patriarchy to denigrate the woman in order to justifiably dominate and re-create her in accordance with men’s taste. One wonders how her clitoris makes her dirty. In any case, she is ‘washed’ to make her more ‘appealing to men’s eyes’ (E, 14). This is also true of the over-feeding to which she is subjected. She is simply fattened, like a turkey for Christmas, to meet men’s taste in a society where plumpness and heavy buttocks on broad
hips are important features of feminine beauty and, by extension, invaluable aphrodisiac.

As for marriage, the woman has no right that the patriarchy must respect. She becomes the property of her husband as soon as he pays her bride-price. Whatever her physical and mental strength, she must submit herself to her husband even if she is physically, mentally and morally stronger than her ‘lord and master’. Thus in Efuru Gilbert’s aunt who, as a child, was influential among her fellow-children (boys and girls) becomes ‘as calm as a lamb’ when she marries (E, 142). Like any other piece of unreasoning property, women can be inherited from fathers by their sons as Efuru’s father ‘inherited all the wives of [his] father’ (E, 22), and from brothers by their brothers as Ishiodu was to inherit Idu from Adiwere. A woman’s personal taste does not count. She is just like a wash-basin in a man’s house. A man, consequently, boasts to a woman, in Idu, that he has ‘three like her in [his] house’ (I, 182). The extent to which women themselves have internalized this value system which regards them as mere objects to be acquired by any man according to the size of his pocket is demonstrated by their repeated assertion that ‘it is only a bad woman who wants to have a man all to herself’.

This, in spite of the incontestable superiority of women to men in matters coital. Witness what Masters and Johnson say about this superiority in their study ‘Orgasm, Anatomy of the Female’:

If a female who is capable of having regular orgasms is properly stimulated within a short period after her first climax, she will, in most instances, be capable of having a second, third, fourth, and even fifth and sixth orgasm before she is fully satiated. As contrasted with the male’s usual inability to have more than one orgasm in a short period, many females especially when clitorally stimulated, can regularly have five or six full orgasms within a matter of minutes.

One, therefore, wonders why a man, whose sexuality (in terms of duration and frequency of coitus) is inferior to a woman’s, should want every woman in his harem, and beyond, all to himself while the woman is denied monopoly of her sexmate.

Perhaps the belief is that the woman, purportedly masochist by nature, can endure the annoying pain of her husband’s sexual inadequacy — an inadequacy which is further compounded by the multiple coital demands of a polygamous situation. After all, Efuru’s mother-in-law waited ten years while her husband continued to enjoy himself with other women. Efuru’s willingness to bear the burden of her husband’s truancy for a while makes her ‘a woman among women’ (E, 107). Born masochists,
women 'do not feel sorrows as keenly as men do', Ajanupu tells us in *Efuru* (E, 89).

A victim of a double standard, a woman is not expected to look outside for the satisfaction of her sexual needs; for an extra-marital affair is acceptable only when it is engaged in by a man. A woman, in *Efuru*, is therefore shocked to learn that there is an adulteress in the society: ‘You mean that she was committing adultery in her husband’s house? Oh, our poor ancestors are wronged no wonder things are not smooth for us’ (E, 65). A false rumour that Efuru has had an extra-marital affair nearly turns the world upside-down. Gilbert, in spite of his own guilt, is upset. He is ready to cast the first stone. Even Omirima who suggests the rehabilitation of Gilbert’s ‘bastard’ nearly sentences Efuru to death. *Idu* is not exempt from this double standard. Obiaku, in that novel, is said to have become mad because ‘she snatched the husband of one [other] woman’ (I, 40).

The excuse for all this damnation of the woman is, often, morality. But, as Rennie Macandrew rightly points out,

down the ages, for political and selfish reasons, men have preferred to keep women in ignorance. The double standard of morality suits men well, for it permits, in a young man, pre-marriage sex experience, and, in the older man, extra-marital adventures, both of which are denied to a woman. The strict sexual morality laid down for women by men is not on account of any ideals on the part of the masculine sex, but simply because most men loathe the idea that the woman to whom they are engaged or married may find the former paramour a more expert exponent of love’s art than themselves.9

Although the woman’s surest access route to the man’s heart is often his stomach,10 a wife’s continued occupancy of a place in her husband’s heart depends on her ability to bear children — especially boys. Non-arrival of babies is blamed on the woman. Her husband is never considered responsible for the lack. Even in the case of Adiewere and his second wife which could have led to Adiewere’s being suspected of impotence, the narrator, faithful to her model society, contrives to get Idu pregnant by Adiewere, after an embarrassingly long period of childless marriage. The resemblance of the boy to Adiewere is emphasized almost *ad nauseam* (I, 150). The young woman’s claim that Adiewere is impotent is thus invalidated.

Such is the premium put on the bearing of children — especially boys — that, in *Efuru*, Omirina who, under normal circumstances, would oppose a marriage because of her impression of the prospective bride’s
parents, recommends an unknown woman as a bride only because she bears a male child: 'A woman who gave birth to such a boy should be married. You don't know tomorrow. Nkoyeni won't be barren of course — she is pregnant already. But nobody knows whether she is going to have a girl or a boy. She might take the footsteps of her mother who had girls and a boy' (E, 248). In any case, no childless wife has any right to look beautiful. Efuru's non-conformity to this norm attracts a gossip's fury: 'Nonsense, I must see Eneberi's [Efuru's husband's] mother. A woman, a wife for that matter, should not look glamorous all the time, and not fulfil the important function she is made to fulfil [i.e. bearing children]' (E, 172).

In general, women in the patriarchy of Flora Nwapa's novels are second-class citizens. They are not allowed to break kola nuts in the presence of a man even if the man is much younger than they. They kneel down to drink wine in the presence of men (E, 23). They are treated as unclean animals when they are menstruating (E, 24). Sending them to school is regarded as a 'waste' even though the usefulness of sending children to school is recognized (E, 242). They are always considered guilty, even though they are very obviously innocent. Idu must, therefore, ask for forgiveness whether or not she is in the wrong. Her husband is categorical: 'If I refuse your food, either for a just or for an unjust cause, you are expected to ask for forgiveness by giving me a present' (I, 175). Idu, of course, accepts his claim; she apologizes with 'a whole piece of eight yards of gorge' (I, 175).

Women have so internalized the value system of the patriarchy and what Kate Millett describes as its 'ideology of male supremacy' that they have become their own greatest enemy. 'Having internalized,' as Millett rightly points out, 'the disesteem in which they are held, women despise both themselves and each other.' This accounts for the shock which Nwasobi and Uzoechi, in Idu, experience when they hear of a pregnant woman who rests while her husband cooks for himself (I, 197). It also accounts for Omirima's anger, in Efuru, on hearing that Efuru and her husband have gone to the stream together (E, 174). So effective is their internalization of the society-fabricated 'disesteem' that they insist that the woman must recognize her place and humbly stay there. She must in all things — social, political, economic, cultural, etc. etc. — be under, and not beside, her husband because they are not 'companions' (E, 174).
It would be easy to fault Flora Nwapa for the self-debasement of her women characters whose only raison d'être seems to be to gratify the male ego. This, however, would be unfair since, from all indications, Nwapa never intended to write feminist tracts. Any value judgement on them, therefore, should not use feminist aesthetics as a frame of reference. This, however, is not to suggest that there are no elements of sexual revolution in *Efuru* and *Idu*. On the contrary, the novels contain several traits of rebellion against the established norms. They feature the quest of women for selfhood almost as much as they celebrate the supremacy of men in a patriarchy.

In *Idu* a husband is blamed for his wife's being a prostitute. Ojiugo wants a baby and boldly leaves her impotent husband when she discovers that she is carrying another man's baby. The rebellion here consists in the fact that Ojiugo elects to leave her matrimonial home even though she can safely stay and have her baby in her husband's house. Amarajeme, her husband, is very anxious to have a child, and the society countenances a rejected husband's claim on a child born out of wedlock as long as the mother's bride-price has not been repaid to, and accepted by, the rejected husband. *Idu*’s refusal to scrape her hair when her husband dies is not a rebellion *per se*, since she refuses because she knows that she will soon join him beyond the grave. Yet she does challenge the patriarchy. By her death, she defies the societal norm which would have made her, against her will, her brother-in-law Ishiodu’s wife. By rejecting life, she implicitly rejects the projection of children as the only thing a woman wants from life. She dies deliberately with a baby in her womb. Despite her great love for her son, Ijoma, and the premium put on male children in the society, she does not hesitate to leave her only and beloved son in the custody of the irresponsible Ishiodu and his frivolous wife, Ogbenyanu. She wants love — a feeling which is neither recognized nor encouraged in a society where marriages are arranged, where a widow is required by tradition to marry her late husband’s brother irrespective of her personal feeling and taste, where a man and his wife are not expected to be seen together.

Traits of rebellion are even more firmly entrenched in *Efuru* where women’s quest for selfhood is more obvious. A woman tells her husband 'in his face that the child’ she carries is not his. 'That when the child grew
up she was going to give her to the real father' (E, 64). The shattering impact of this utterance in the patriarchal set-up is implicit in the reaction of a woman who hears about it: ‘This is an abomination. What is wrong with these children nowadays’ (E, 64-5). In the robbery episode involving Nwabata and her husband, Nwabata ridicules the concept of male supremacy and its attendant masculine valour in her account of how Nwosu slept innocently while thieves ransacked their house. She concludes with a biting sarcasm:

It was then that my lord and master came out with his knife. Kill me, I said to him. I am the thief. He fooled around and went and sat down outside the gate. That’s the man who is my husband. Women are nothing. He, my husband, was asleep when thieves came to the house. But I am only a woman. What can a woman do? (E, 224. My italics)

The sting of the sentences, ‘Women are nothing…. I am only a woman. What can a woman do?’ is felt more when it is realized that Nwabata, and not her husband, saves the most valuable thing in their house — the money they have borrowed from Efuru. In fact, she does it against the will of her husband who complains about women being troublesome and, to use Nwabata’s words, ‘nearly lost his temper for I disturbed his sleep’ (E, 224).

Men are blamed for girls getting pregnant and being forced to marry before they have finished school, and disappointment is expressed at this situation. This seeks to negate the concept of girls being unworthy of the money and time spent on their education because of their excessive sexual appetite (E, 242-3). Men are presented as irresponsible. Adizua deserts Efuru. Gilbert has a child with another woman and cannot attend the funeral of his father-in-law as he is in jail. Contrary to the concept of women as masochists whose main source of pleasure is suffering, Efuru’s patience is not inexhaustible. Unlike Adizua’s conservative mother who waits indefinitely for a playboy husband, she gives her husbands — Adizua and Gilbert — time to mend their ways and quits. It is significant that a woman critic faults Nwapa for letting Efuru leave an adulterous husband who falsely accuses her of adultery. She wishes Nwapa had used that episode as ‘a demonstration of man’s [woman’s?] capacity for suffering and endurance’. Efuru has the makings of a non-conformist. It is obviously because of this that such critics as Femi Ojo-Ade regard her as a ‘cantankerous’ woman who is farther away from ‘tradition’ than ‘her literary sister, Idu’. Although she is a beautiful daughter of a great man, she shocks
the community by marrying a man who cannot even pay her bride-price. When she ‘saw that he was unable to pay anything, she told him not to bother about the dowry. They were going to proclaim themselves married and that was that’ (E, 1). When the dowry is eventually paid, it is by dint of her ‘hard work’ (E, 110). In other words, she, more or less, pays her own bride-price together with the fine imposed on Adizua for taking her, in the first place, without paying a bride-price (E, 22). As an unmarried girl, she engages in nocturnal escapades and keeps late hours in defiance of her father, and contrary to the dictates of filial obedience which takes precedence over love in a patriarchy like the one in which she lives. Self-willed, she chooses her own occupation. ‘Efuru refused to go to the farm with her husband.’ She wants to be a trader (E, 5). Although she submits herself to the ‘bath’-taking ceremony, she stays only one month and does not yield to her mother-in-law’s appeal to continue for at least another month because of ‘what people would say’. Her reply to this appeal reveals her penchant for independence: ‘Never mind what people would say’ (E, 15).

Efuru is the decision-maker in their family in a society where a family must be presided over by a man. The non-conformity of this situation stands out in sharp relief against Adizua’s uncle’s contention that a woman cannot make any decision and influence actions by men even if those men were her sons (E, 21).

The image of the woman as a being capable of independence is further enhanced by the stature of Uhamiri (the Woman of the Lake). Although it is not clear why she does not live with Okita, ‘the owner of the Great River’, to whom she is supposed to be married (E, 255), her life is none the less enviable and a possible model for a self-respecting feminist. Wealthy and independent, she is revered and worshipped by men (E, 255-6) and women:

She had lived for ages at the bottom of the lake. She was as old as the lake itself. She was happy, she was wealthy. She was beautiful. She gave women beauty and wealth but she had no child. She had never experienced the joy of motherhood. Why then did the women worship her? (E, 281)

Her beauty is neither for the seduction of men nor for the gratification of the male ego. Satisfied with, and at home in, the company of her fellow-women, she does not subject herself to male supremacy and its corollary, sexual exploitation. Nor is she obsessed with child-bearing.
With Uhamiri and the other elements discussed above, Flora Nwapa’s novels are potential feminist documents. The only fly in the ointment is that they barely go beyond the exposition of the impact of patriarchy on the woman’s selfhood. The concomitant criticism and revolutionary stance, important factors in feminist aesthetics, are lacking. Women’s selfhood appreciates only in proportion as male supremacy depreciates. But in Nwapa’s novels male supremacy is intact from beginning to end. Consequently, women’s individual quests for selfhood are invariably unsuccessful. The author of Efuru and Idu may well be ‘a social writer and a strong fighter for women’s freedom and interest’ as Aloysius Ibeahuchi suggests. Her exposition of the second-class citizenship of women, in Efuru and Idu, may move fair-minded readers to pity. Her mode of ‘fighting’ in the two novels, however, is by no means feminist. Certainly, gestures, like Ajanupu’s when she gives Gilbert a blow on the head with the ‘mortar pestle’ for accusing Efuru of adultery (E, 275-6), are symbolic of feminist revolt. Such gestures, however, are too few and ill-developed to transform the novels from mere expositions of women’s experience in men’s world into feminist statements.

As a matter of fact, some of the otherwise far-reaching gestures are rendered irrelevant by their very development. Efuru’s and Adizua’s challenge to the traditional marriage institution is neutralized by the fact that the young couple never ‘felt really married’ (E, 23) until the bride-price was paid. Efuru’s stature as a rebel is weakened by the suggestion that, thanks to her relationship with Uhamiri, she is not an ordinary woman. Indeed, she is made a pathetic victim of what is presented as her ill-advised non-conformism.

The source of Idu’s desire to have a baby girl, instead of the much valued baby boy, is by no feminist standard inspiring. ‘She had wanted to have a girl…. A girl was very useful to her mother. She would help with the house when her mother went to the market’ (I, 79). The attack on double standards with particular reference to prostitution is weakened by the repeated condemnation of prostitution when women engage in it:

But whatever you say, prostitution is not good for our women. (I, 38)

Prostitution is bad for our women…. Our Woman of the Lake frowns at it, and that’s why prostitutes of our town never profit by it. (I, 39)

It [prostitution] is foreign to our women. It should be left to women of other lands, not our women. (I, 41)
The Woman of the Lake hated prostitution, she forbade it. If any of the women ignored the Woman of the Lake she gave them two to three years in which to repent, that is, to come home and get married like any respectable woman. If after this period the person did not repent, something dreadful would happen to her. She would either become mad or contract a very bad disease of which she would die. (I, 120)

The demonstration of the unfairness of the societal attitude towards extramarital affairs is vitiated by the implicit suggestion that women are constitutionally ill-equipped for an affair outside of wedlock. Thus Obiaku becomes mad because ‘she snatched the husband of one [other] woman’ (I, 40). Ojiugo, the woman who engaged in an extramarital affair and got pregnant, ‘«died» the day her husband died [because of her boldness]. The day Amarajeme died, that was the day she «died»’ (I, 216).

Whatever is achieved by the portrayal of relatively defiant and self-dependent women is depreciated by the parallel indication that a woman without her husband is nothing. Idu’s taking her own life after her husband’s death confirms this idea.

Where the inability of a married couple to have a baby is in question, there is never any doubt as to who is responsible. The woman is almost invariably presented as the source of the problem, this being proven by having the husband get his other wife or another woman pregnant at a point in time. Witness the lives of Idu, Efuru and their husbands. The only exception to this trend is the marriage of Ojiugo and Amarajeme where the reader’s suspicion that Amarajeme is impotent is confirmed by Ojiugo’s unequivocal denunciation. But even here, as if to apologize for the non-conformist presentation of such a problem, Ojiugo’s behaviour is allowed to be condemned as that of a ‘faithless wife’ (I, 127).

CONCLUSION

According to John Stuart Mill, ‘most of what women produced when they began to write was but sycophancy to male attitude and ego’.

While situations in Efuru and Idu constitute a strong temptation to lump Flora Nwapa with such women writers, it would be grossly unfair to view Nwapa’s novels as a conscious attempt to cater to the self-aggrandizement of the male ego. Equally unfair would be the suggestion that women’s ambivalence towards the traditional societal norms, in Efuru and Idu, is a function of Flora Nwapa’s own inability to subdue her
innate attachment to the society in which she grew up, and thus maintain an adequate aesthetic distance between herself and her characters.

A sociologist almost to a fault, Flora Nwapa is only trying to document, albeit in a fictional form, the way it was in a particular Igbo community at a particular point in time. Her characters' penchant for conformity derives not from the novelist's ideological stance, but from the dictates of her art. The rebellion of women who dare go against the norms of the society is not designed to be a feminist ploy. It is merely used to highlight the impact of socialization on the woman's selfhood.

NOTES

2. Witness, for instance, her interview with Lee Nichols in 'Conversations with African Writers', 17, Voice of America.
3. V.U. Ola, for instance, speaks of how Efuru's and Idu's 'lives demonstrate the amount of freedom, respect and influence a woman can wield in the home and outside the home within the Ibo traditional set-up'. 'Flora Nwapa and the Art of the Novel' (unpublished), 3-Day Symposium and Workshop on African Literature, University of Calabar, 20-23 May 1981, p.7.
4. Flora Nwapa, Efuru (London: Heinemann, 1966), p.87. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
5. Flora Nwapa, Idu (London: Heinemann, 1970), p.78. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. See also p.70.
10. Efuru cooks for Gilbert before they get married.
12. Ibid., p.55.
13. Sigmund Freud sees the 'lust for pain' as an attribute of femininity, a concept which 'can be supported on biological and constitutional grounds'. Quoted in Millett, p.195.
15. 'Female Writers, Male Critics: Criticism, Chauvinism, Cynicism ... and Commitment' (unpublished), University of Ife, p.9.
16. The rebellion here is not in the matter, but in the manner of choice.
18. Kate Millett's paraphrase. Millett, p.139.

There's been a tendency to dismiss Jolley as a pleasant, naïve realist, a kind of 'found' object whose name and much-repeated byline tend to support this little myth: 'Born in the industrial Midlands of England in 1923 Elizabeth Jolley was brought up in a German-speaking household — her father having met her mother, the daughter of an Austrian general, when engaged on famine relief in Vienna in 1919. She was educated at home and later at a Quaker boarding school.'

No mention of a university degree or job. Elizabeth Jolley is obviously some new version of a Good Bloke, in a dress.

But she's much more than that. Her offbeat treatment of such subjects as a nursing home, love between women, rituals of growing and killing, and the sexuality of the aged, her obsessive reworking of a particular image, character or situation from one book to another, open up the process of her fiction and give her work its unique energy.

Elizabeth Jolley may become a major writer. She is also very funny, but as we've seen before in Australian literature that probably means that she will not be taken seriously.

Two other novels not to be missed. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (Virago) is an extraordinary anti-utopian vision of a future Australia, published here with what often seem surprising passages censored from the original text for political reasons before its first publication in 1947, and the third 'Tomorrow' of its title now restored.

And David Foster's new novel *Plumbum* (Penguin). Don’t be put off by the aggressive awkwardness of the title. Latin for 'lead', it's a great name for a rock band in the Heavy Metal Age and points to the novel’s focus on unexpected juxtapositions. Those interested in the treatment of Asia in Australian writing will be drawn to one of the best episodes in the book.
which has the raunchy and ephemeral world of Australian rock brought up against Bangkok and Calcutta and explored as a way of seeing. It's a post-Beatles trip to India that goes beyond exotic travelogue writing and copes quite well with the difficult ambivalence of Shiva and what it represents.

Foster's satiric facility is clear in his picture of Sydney: 'Walking and driving round some of the most beautiful harbourside suburbs in the world is a population dumbfounded by its own lack of importance.' And yet Plumbum takes a well-worn target for satire, the national capital Canberra, and gives it the best of the mere handful of literary treatments that are not dismissive.

Sadly, Kylie Tennant's new novel Tantavallon (Macmillan) fails to do that for either its Sydney setting or its main concern, conservation.

The second novel by poet Peter Kocan, The Cure (A&R) is the sequel to his novel of prison life, The Treatment. Its stark telling is only briefly marred by the cliché cameo appearance of a gay poet, and is a welcome counterbalance to the lush slowness of recent novels by writers who are better known for their poetry.

In poetry, the year's best book is The People's Otherworld (A&R) by Les Murray. There's an attractive metaphysical wit here in poems to his shower, 'that toga worn on either or both shoulders', and his bed, 'Homage to the Launching Place'; and it's good to have collected familiar poems from recent years such as the poem to his double, 'Quintets for Robert Morley'. A poem will stretch Murray's dense and long line to its likely limit and be followed by a meditation on 'The Quality of Sprawl'. The People's Otherworld is clearly Murray's most playful book.

But the painfully blunt, short lines of 'Three Poems in Memory of My Mother' are new. Their confrontation with an aspect of autobiography conspicuously unspoken until now is strangely moving.

Nigel Roberts's Steps for Astaire (Hale & Iremonger) is the other outstanding collection of poetry this year. Roberts is a poet who feels no urgency to publish, partly because of his interest in poetry as performance, and this is only his second book though he has been an influential poet in Sydney for many years. And like his first, In Casablanca for the Waters, it's a good one. I don't know whether he wrote his own dustjacket notes or not, but they convey the book's pace and humour well: 'Again he is the journalist of the id, the desperate reporter getting the facts, sending off despatches from the front — Balmain, San Francisco, Hollywood, and the various check-in points along the way. Some of his new poems sound like the thin tones of people talking long-distance, phone
calls with many voices on the line. Others are like reading love letters punched out by telex.' Get this book before it goes — fast!

Geoff Page's fifth collection, *Clairvoyant in Autumn* (A&R) throughout is laconic in its evocation of a rural Australia on the edges of Canberra, 'our city' one poem says, 'where no one's ever seen on foot'. This is very much a poetry of place. The unreality of invented cities, ghost towns, photographs of past wars and relations, early morning mists and sharp frosts seems to move Page's work from quiet strength to strength.

Mark O'Connor's *The Fiesta of Men* (H&I) reflects the divided world of his imagination. The poems about Europe are still technically assured, erudite, precise in their observation, but quite lifeless. O'Connor is a passionate and energetic poet and the Europe of these poems is a dead place of his learning, quite unresponsive to him. But under the ocean and along the Great Barrier Reef he is a different poet. The opening of papaya is more sexual than any Lawrentian fig; immersion in the undersea world of 'The Diver' is a keenly observed submission to the feminine; again his natural affinity with North Queensland is clear in 'Planting the Dunk Botanic Gardens'. Mark O'Connor will probably tire of reviewers saying it, but his real strength is his 'Muse a thousand miles long'.

Tom Shapcott has published prose poems and novels in recent years, but *Welcome!* (UQP) is a strong collection of his poetry since the *Selected Poems* in 1978: strong because of the variety the collection offers and the changes it represents. The poems here are dramatic, often impersonating unnamed voices. The book travels widely and tends to give an impression of speed, and yet many of the poems are about the aged and lonely. Its final lines are characteristic: 'It was your own blood/ in the snow./ Welcome!'

Other outstanding individual collections are Dimitris Tsaloumas's *The Observatory* (UQP) which, coming as it does from a non Anglo-Celtic Australia, challenges established notions of 'Australian Literature'; and Philip Salom's *The Projectionist* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press). And then there's the year's controversial anthology (everybody's doing it): *The Younger Australian Poets* (H&I). Besides unwisely giving such generous selections from their own poetry, the editors Robert Gray and Geoffrey Lehmann have included few women poets (6 out of 29?), have given poets like Robert Adamson and John Tranter meagre and unrepresentative selections which can only expose the real nature of their editorial claim to objectivity and the criterion of excellence, and by cooking the concept of 'Younger' they manage to include Les Murray and exclude older but 'newer' poets such as Fay Zwicky.
Not the anthology of Australian poetry (why does every anthology claim to be that?) but one to add to the argument, I suppose. It’s been a good year for short fiction. Beverley Farmer’s Milk (Penguin) is the best treatment of Greeks and Australians since Patrick White’s The Burnt Ones. The emphasis in her portrait of women here is on the maternal. Farmer’s technique is not innovative but her eye for detail constantly surprises and pleases.

Barry Hill’s Headlocks and Other Stories (McPhee Gribble) appears similarly conservative but its analysis of masculinity and the suburban gothic images, developed in Hill’s novel Near the Refinery, are distinctive. In the title story here, rough-house becomes nightmare when a boy wrestles his father’s mate to death and then, helped by his father, heaps the mate’s body onto a bonfire. The punch of such images, signified by the titles of the stories ‘Headlocks’, ‘Sluts’, ‘Lizards’, ‘Albatross’ (Hemingway out of Bryan Brown again!) is repeatedly placed against the insecurity of many of the male characters and their relationships with women.

Robert Drewe’s The Bodysurfers (James Fraser) conveys similar insecurities but without the punch. This collection is timely in picking up one of the interesting questions of recent years, ‘Where is the beach in Australian art?’, and its healthy sales attest to its popularity, but the pieces are unsatisfying: ephemeral as dry sand on a windy day, but without the sting. There is nothing here with the depth of, say, Glenda Adams’ beach story ‘The Mothers Have Curly Hair’. I suspect that the essentially visual nature of beach culture will make the projected television adaptation of The Bodysurfers a certain success where the book wavers.

Over Here Harv! (Penguin) collects the stories Bruce Dawe wrote before he became known as one of Australia’s most important poets. The narrator Joey Cassidy is a younger and more comic version of Lawson’s reluctant poet Joe Wilson, who helped tune the various masculine voices of Dawe’s poems. But the stories here stand alone too, evoking a ‘fifties innocence better than anything else in our literature and without the phony hindsight of America’s Happy Days industry.

If the boyishness of men in Australian literature often seems to make their women into mothers, it’s intriguing to place Dawe’s book alongside another first collection of stories by a poet, Fay Zwicky’s Hostages (Freemantle Arts Centre Press). The characteristic voice here is that of the mature woman: honest and sad in her maturity. Readers who enjoy the vigorous musical quality of Zwicky’s poetry may regret its absence here, except in the stories which are more adventurous in style. But the loss of
the music is amply compensated for by the unflinching exposure of guilt and delusion.

A reprint of Shirley Hazzard’s *People in Glass Houses* (Penguin) together with reprints of her early novels shows where *The Transit of Venus* is coming from, and enhances its stature.

And finally Frank Moorhouse’s short fiction anthology, *The State of the Art* (Penguin). Claiming to ‘represent the burning edge of the art form’, the selection is occasionally led astray by its more doubtful claim to ‘look at the state of the art of living in Australia’ (which means when it comes to sex for instance, you look for the lesbian story, the drag queen story, and so on). The exclusion of some established short fiction writers (Hal Porter, Dal Stivens, Thea Astley) on the grounds that they are well represented elsewhere and not others equally well represented elsewhere (Peter Carey, Murray Bail, Frank Moorhouse) is questionable, as is the exclusion of writers such as Glenda Adams on the tired old grounds of her non-Australian residence. Generally though, it’s a good anthology, and evidence again that Penguin is the leading publisher of Australian writing.

And finally, a better year for the publication of new Australian plays. Aboriginal poet Jack Davis’s *Kullark and The Dreamers* (Currency) is more difficult in script form than in production because of the use of dialect words and the reader’s compulsion to keep consulting the glossary. Clem Gorman’s *A Night in the Arms of Raeleen* (Currency) takes up a narrower range of concerns than Williamson’s early play *Don’s Party*, but examines them more closely.

And two plays by new writers. Michael Gow’s *The Kid* (Currency/Nimrod) focuses on young people from a NSW country town confronting the prospect of apocalypse in the city, with a challenging, though some have said pretentious, use of Wagnerian counterpoint. A play that breaks new ground in Australian drama, it didn’t get the houses it deserved at its Sydney premiere: word seemed to get around that it was ‘too depressing’.

Better attended, written with greater polish and pretensions, Justin Fleming’s *The Cobra* (Sydney Theatre Company) attempts the difficult feat of telling the relationship between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas from an ageing Bosie’s point of view. It’s a good example of the provincial view of the metropolitan that doesn’t quite work. Bosie simply isn’t interesting enough. It’s still Wilde’s story.

MARK MACLEOD
After years of novels exploring women’s mid-life crisis, 1983 was the year of the male menopause. We’ve all known someone like Robert Harlow’s Paul Nolan — middle-class, suburban, selfish, shallow. Written from Paul’s perspective though not in his voice, *Paul Nolan* (McClelland & Stewart) reveals the emptiness of his existence with devastating accuracy. To focus so many words upon such an absence is a *tour de force* of a kind, but is this subject worth such attention? Rudy Wiebe’s *My Lovely Enemy* (M & S) introduces a more complicated version of Paul: Dr James Dyck, History professor, is earnest, anguished, dimly aware of his failures to see, but inhibited from development by his adolescent fixation on sex. (His name indicates the source of his troubles.) When Christ miraculously appears to him in the library stacks, Dyck asks Him whether He ever had an erection! Even worse, Wiebe seems unaware of the superficiality of this concern, though he does bring Dyck to realize with shame ‘his almost programmed banality’ near the book’s remarkably daring conclusion. Dyck’s affair with a beautiful young graduate student triggers a novel that tries very hard to break down the barriers between male and female, physical and spiritual, realism and fantasy, but succeeds only in reminding us of how strong those barriers are — at least in the mind of the middle-aged Christian male.

Clark Blaise, in *Lusts* (Doubleday) approaches the problems of the middle-aged male obsessed with his sexual performance from a different angle, fusing it with a self-consciousness about writing and its deceptive relations with language and with reality so that it becomes a story as much about its own writing as about a man trying to grow up. It’s a story we’ve read before, but Blaise does it with style. Robert Kroetsch’s *Alibi* (Stoddart), a more obvious romp through metafictional territory, succeeds less well. Where Blaise’s Richard Durgin looks backward, attempting to make sense of his wife Rachel’s suicide in collaboration with her biographer Rosie Chang, Kroetsch’s William William Dorfendorf lives resolutely in the present, seeking the ideal spa for his boss, the insatiable collector and millionaire Calgary oilman Deemer. Durgin’s quest is nostalgic, inward and personal; Dorf’s is all frenzied movement as if to deny the past and the self in the quest for immersion, in healing spa or woman. Male fantasies become more amusing in Leon Rooke’s *Shakespeare’s Dog* (M & S). Mr Hooker, the dog of the title, delights equally in bawdy romps and extravagant talk, claiming credit in his narration not only for getting the lad Shakespeare out of Stratford and off
to London but also for inspiring much of his work and proving along the way his contention that 'It ain’t words … but how they’re shook'.

This tendency to involve historical characters in fictional narratives shapes several other noteworthy novels of the year. Susan Swan’s *The Biggest Modern Woman of the World* (Lester & Orpen, Dennys) traces the career of the Nova Scotian giantess Anna Swan, lesser known contemporary of Angus MacAskill. Anna tells her own story through journal entries, circus spiels, letters, newspaper accounts and testimonials from friends to build an amusing and suggestive work of some complexity. The story of this independent yet vulnerable giantess becomes the story of modern women in general and the story of Canada in relation to its entrepreneurial neighbour, the United States. Heather Robertsons’ *Willy* (Lorimer), subtitled Volume One of The King Years, centres about another strong woman, Lily Coolican, who tells her version of the decade leading up to King’s election as Prime Minister. Courted by two young men, Talbot Papineau and King, both grandsons of famous Canadian rebels and both obsessed with their mothers, Lily is in an ideal position to observe political events of the period from the marginalised perspective of a working-class woman at a time when Canadian women were still fighting for the vote. Funny, involving, contemporary, this is one of the most interesting novels of the year, even though once or twice it gave me the feeling of Can. lit. by number. Morley Callaghan turns further afield to re-write Biblical history in *A Time for Judas* (M & S), which attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of Judas through the purported discovery of hidden documents relating to the betrayal of Christ.

Other novels which focus on explicitly moral concerns are Stephen Vizinczey’s *An Innocent Millionaire*, Janette Turner Hospital’s *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*, Brian Moore’s *Cold Heaven* (all M&S) and David Helwig’s *Sound Like Laughter* (Stoddart), which completes his Kingston tetralogy in a darkly satiric vein that balances the lyricism and melodrama of the earlier *It Is Always Summer*.

A different Kingston comes to life in Matt Cohen’s collection of stories, *Café Le Dog* (M&S). Although Atwood’s a swimmer we keep expecting to break a record, since *Lady Oracle* she’s done nothing but tread water. With her two new story collections this year, her head’s still above water, but she’s not going anywhere yet. *Murder in the Dark* (Coach House) contains scraps from the desk of an egotistical writer (you can call anything a prose poem and get away with it) and brilliantly comic comments on relations between the sexes. *Bluebeard’s Egg* (M&S), a fatter book, is more conventional, but equally uneven. Some of these stories are
so good they recall Alice Munro, while others patronise their characters and settle for cheap tricks to manipulate their readers. Several other poets published fiction this year: Kristjanna Gunnars, The Axe's Edge (Porcepic), Elizabeth Brewster, A House Full of Women (Oberon), and David McFadden the expensive Animal Spirits: Stories to Live By, illustrated by Greg Curnoe (Coach House). University of Toronto Press brought out A.M. Klein: Short Stories, edited by M.W. Steinberg, and First People, First Voices, an anthology of native Indian writing edited by Penny Petrone. The Oxford Book of French-Canadian Stories, edited by Richard Teleky, provides a conventional survey of representative stories in translation.

Some of this year's poetry mirrored the fiction's narcissistic fascination with sex, most notably, Irving Layton's The Gucci Bag, David Donnell's Settlements (both M&S), and Dorothy Livesay's The Phases of Love (Coach House). Williams-Wallace published three interesting feminist poets: Betsy Warland's A Gathering Instinct and Gay Allison's Life: Still are uneven, but the transplanted Trinidadian Dionne Brand, who published two books this year — Primitive Offensive and Winter Epigrams: Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia — displays an impressive range and diversity. Jeni Couzyn's selected poems, Life by Drowning (Anansi), Sharon Thesen's new collection Holding the Pose (Coach House), Joe Rosenblatt's Brides of the Stream (Oolichan), and Don McKay's Birding, or Desire (M&S) each delights with the deployment of an individually realized voice. Christopher Dewdney's Predators of the Adoration, difficult, post-modernist poetry, was hailed as a brave choice for McClelland & Stewart's Modern Canadian Poets series. He is certainly a poet to watch.

After the welcome surprise of her first book, Erin Mouré's second, Wanted Alive (Anansi), proved a bit disappointing. Rosalind MacPhee's What Place is This?, Don Gutteridge's God's Geography (Brick) and Judith Fitzgerald's Split Levels display a variety of approaches to the long poem. Ralph Gustafson brought out The Moment is All: Selected Poems 1944-83 (M&S), R.G. Everson, Everson at Eighty (Oberon), Fred Cogswell, Selected Poems (Guernica) and Raymond Souster the fourth volume of his Collected Poems (Oberon).

Three important writers died this year: Gabrielle Roy, Alden Nowlan, and Yves Thériault. Ken Dryden topped the best-seller lists while establishing a new high for sports autobiography with The Game (Macmillan).

Outstanding critical works included several from the University of British Columbia Press: Margaret Atwood: Language, Text and System, a collection of essays edited by Sherrill Grace and Lorraine Weir, Second Stage: The Alternative Theatre Movement in Canada by Renate Usmiani,
Invocations: the Poetry and Prose of Gwendolyn MacEwen by Jan Bartley, and An Odd Attempt in a Woman: The Literary Life of Frances Brooke by Lorraine McMullen. Marian Fowler’s Redney: A Life of Sara Jeannette Duncan (Anansi) takes a less scholarly approach to the art of biography. On F.R. Scott: Essays on his Contributions to Law, Literature, and Politics, edited by Sandra Djwa and R. St. J. MacDonald (McGill-Queens) brings together conference papers that present a hagiographical portrait of one of our most versatile men of letters. Frank Davey’s Surviving the Paraphrase: Eleven Essays on Canadian Literature (Turnstone) and Tom Wayman’s Inside Job: Essays on the New Work Writing (Harbour) share a polemical approach to criticism if nothing else, demonstrating the range of the critical spectrum. Modern English-Canadian Prose: A Guide to Information Sources, edited by Helen Hoy (Gale), and The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature, edited by William Toye, testify to our coming-of-age in the eyes of the outside world.

DIANA BRYDON

NEW ZEALAND

The first volume of autobiography from New Zealand’s foremost living fiction writer was the highlight of the publishing year. To the Is-land (The Women’s Press) is a vivid and evocative account by Janet Frame of her childhood and adolescence in Outram, Glenham, Edendale, Wyndham, and Oamaru, small towns of Southland and Otago to which her father’s job with the railways took his family. It is a beautifully written story and gives a valuable insight into the background of Frame’s early short stories and novels.

Frame’s fictions are typically presented as autobiographical fictions and so this ‘real’ autobiography naturally raises some interesting responses. Vincent O’Sullivan, in his New Zealand Listener review, put it like this:

The title Janet Frame has chosen for her own life sets up the simple paradox that an autobiography, that skilful genre that needs to appear so casual if it is to ring true, must always seem like a journey one looks back on. Yet it is not quite like that at all. Self-depiction in itself becomes a form of fiction, selecting the traces and hints and anticipations to make the reader accept that yes, to have arrived here is inevitable. But in any life story there is an imposed sense of order which goes against the flow of experience as it occurred. Travelling to where one is, is where one has been all the time.
Murray Edmond's comment was that 'this deceptively simple book, ostensibly about Frame's typically New Zealand childhood, is really for me, but a literary sleight of hand, a book about writing'.

This volume, which takes Frame's life up until her departure for Dunedin Teacher's College in 1942, is due to be followed by a second, *An Angel at My Table*, this year. *To the Is-land* won the Wattie Book Award for 1983.

There were two biographies of important New Zealand writers. One, *Walking on My Feet, A.R.D. Fairburn 1904-1957: A Kind of Biography* (Collins) by James and Helen McNeish, is a large format, illustrated publication with an accompanying text which links material from various sources in a quick-fire note-form style — as insensitive pastiche-text, according to Katherine Mansfield's biographer, Antony Alpers, when he reviewed this book. The other is a good deal more productive. It is *James K. Baxter: A Portrait* (Port Nicholson Press), by W.H. Oliver, poet and historian, and a personal friend of Baxter. As befits such a book, the poetry is placed at the centre of Baxter's life and the details arranged around that core. This emphasis clears away, or at least places in perspective, the various roles that Baxter the man adopted through his lifetime — as Oliver lists them, 'the father, the showman, the drunk, the philanderer, the agitator, the husband, the parent, the householder, the civil servant'. As a discussion of the poet and the man this study is sensitive and just; although always keeping a critical distance away from the mythology that built up around Baxter, that honesty finally allows a real admiration for both the poems and the poet to be apparent. The photographs of seminal landscapes and the reproduction of other material add further and considerable strength to the book.

Three novels, in particular, need to be mentioned. Maurice Gee has completed his trilogy about the Plumb family with *Sole Survivor* (Faber/Penguin). Raymond Sole, grandson of George Plumb and a journalist, is, as expected, the narrator for his generation's history, retelling the past and recording the present. But equally at the centre of this novel is the unexpected, although depressingly familiar figure of Douglas Plumb, son of Willis and Mirth, Ray's cousin. *Sole Survivor* is about the relationship between these two from their childhood in Loomis and Peacehaven through to their respective adult careers; Duggie is a rising political star in the National Party. The present reality that Gee depicts is grim. Unscrupulous amorality makes for political success, social values are rejected by those who seek alternative lifestyles, and greed, selfishness, apathy, drunkenness and degradation are characteristic of those who remain with the mainstream of society. Sudden and violent death is
a commonplace in this particular world, and the ideals of natural beauty and intellectual endeavour that George Plumb sought after have no place there, are hardly even recalled. Duggie's death, just as he has manipulated himself into the position of becoming the leader of the Party, is by an avenger's bullet. Ray is the survivor. But the questions remain: will the ordinary, fallible human qualities that Ray possesses always be sufficient to ensure survival in such a world, and even so, is survival there worth it?

The two other novels are both by women. *Paddy's Puzzle* (Heinemann) is Fiona Kidman's third novel; she has also written a volume of short stories and two of verse. This time, the setting is wartime Auckland and Paddy's Puzzle is the boarding house where a splendidly exotic group of characters have made their home. It is about Clara Bentley's life among these people, about her upbringing in Hamilton, and about the resolution of the things in the approaching meeting with her eldest sister, Winnie. It's a good novel; better, I think, than Elizabeth Smither's *First Blood* (Hodder and Stoughton). Smither is an established poet and this fictional account of a factually-based murder is a new direction for her. She has also written a children's story and a further book of verse (see below). And while dealing with women's fiction, Victoria University Press has capitalised on the current interest in Janet Frame by publishing her own selection of her short stories, some previously uncollected, called *You Are Now Entering the Human Heart*. It's a welcome collection; a bibliography would have been handy.

Smither is one of three woman poets who have produced fresh work in 1983. Hers is *Shakespeare Virgins* (AUP/OUP), a collection of well-crafted short lyrics. The others are Lauris Edmond's *Catching It* (OUP) and Rachel McAlpine's *Recording Angel* (Mallinson Rendel). These three writers, along with Kidman, form something of a group both in their concerns — for women, for human and domestic detail — and in a coincidental geographical closeness. Smither lives in New Plymouth; the other three live in Wellington.

Three first books of verse to note are *The Auckland Regional Transit Poetry Line* (Hawk Press/Brick Row, 1982) by Roger Horrocks, *The Palanquin Ropes* (Voice Press) by Mike Johnson, and *After a Life in the Provinces* (Lindon Publishers) by Terry Locke. In this case all three men are from Auckland and, again coincidentally, it's possible to discern common stylistic features, at least in each poet's willingness to explore the new territory granted by post-modernism. Horrock's and Johnson's books both consist of a single sequence.

Down south, two Dunedin poets have produced further verse. Brian
Turner's *Listening to the River* (John McIndoe) follows two earlier books, the first of which, *Ladders of Rain*, was joint winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, while Bill Sewell's second volume is *Wheels Within Wheels* (McIndoe). Neither of these poets could be confused with either of the groups mentioned above; both, and especially Turner, can be seen in the context of an Otago pattern which uses more traditional forms and concerns itself with the natural environment.

By grouping these poets in these ways — to simplify, Wellington women writing about family, house, garden, Auckland men writing an academic poetry, Otagoans concerned with tradition and environment — I have no wish to impose any rigidity on the New Zealand poetic scene. Exceptions will be found readily enough, both in the output of these poets, and by pointing to other poets whose product doesn't coincide with any regionalist theory of New Zealand writing. Nevertheless, to go no further, local ways of saying have taken root in the literature we call New Zealand.

In the dramatic literature, a 1982 publication — not available until 1983 — takes pride of place: *Collected Plays* (Oxford) by James K. Baxter, edited by Howard McNaughton. Its publication has sparked off a re-evaluation of Baxter as playwright and of his place in the history of New Zealand theatre. This edition makes it clear that Baxter's work in this field has been greatly underrated.

In criticism, there has been an addition to the Oxford New Zealand Writers' series — James Bertram's monograph, *Dan Davin*. Meanwhile Longman Paul has instituted a series on New Zealand writers aimed largely at the secondary school market and a general readership. It was founded under the general editorship of Peter Smart who contributed *Introducing Sam Hunt* and *Introducing Alistair Campbell*. Other writers so far dealt with have been Maurice Gee, Katherine Mansfield, James K. Baxter, Denis Glover and Bruce Mason. The aim has been to deal with the life as well as the art, and interesting photographs accompany the texts.

A substantial anthology has also been published by Oxford, and, in the established New Zealand tradition, it has provoked considerable debate. It is *The Oxford Book of New Zealand Writing Since 1945* chosen by MacDonald P. Jackson and Vincent O'Sullivan. It consists really of two anthologies, one of poetry and the other of short fiction (entitled 'prose'), along with two introductory essays on each topic; the poetry is treated by Jackson and the prose by O'Sullivan. These essays are good, and the bibliography full and reliable. The criticisms essentially make the charge that this post-war anthology of our 'writing' (but only poetry and short
fiction in fact) is a celebration of the generation of writers who came to maturity in the sixties and seventies. Therefore the representation of writers like Fairburn, Brasch and Curnow, all of whom produced major work before the end of the war, is unbalanced, while the treatment of the younger writers who arrive at the end of the period (1981-82) is cautious and, it is argued, forced into the thematic patterns established by the highlighted generation. Be that as it may, the anthology collects together in one place an impressive bulk of good writing.

Finally, a note on what is new in the journals and magazines. The first number of The Journal of New Zealand Literature (NZJL) has appeared with articles on contemporary literary activity, a select bibliography of criticism, and essays on general criticism. It will be published annually. And, on the other hand, is being limited to four issues. The first of these xeroxed collections of essays contains stimulating work from critics associated with the University of Auckland; perhaps the most interesting are Roger Horrocks’s ‘The Invention of New Zealand’ and John Geraets’ ‘The New Zealand Anthology: Initiating an Archaeology’. Parallax, with whom some of the And writers are associated, has published its third number.

A trilogy completed, a major autobiography begun. I found the year stimulating and promising.

SIMON GARRETT

PAKISTAN

The President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, in a couple of recent speeches stressed the development of Urdu as the national language, while recognising the role that English and Arabic must play in our national and international affairs. Writing in Urdu is flourishing, and an important event in Islamabad was the launching ceremony of Lt.-General K.M. Arif’s book of verse, Gard-i-Safar (Journey’s Dust), published by Ferozsons.

1983 was perhaps the richest year ever for Pakistani letters. Zulfikar Ghose’s South American saga continues in his fantastic novel, Don Bueno (Hutchinson), whose cyclic structure is sustained to the last with great powers of language and imagination. Bapsi Sidhwa, whose earlier novel, The Crow Eaters, had drawn wide interest perhaps as an ‘ethnic’ novel, has written a novel away from the Parsi settings and legends; of life and
married love in the plains of Punjab (Lahore) and the rugged hills of the Pakistani northwest. The Bride (Cape) is Sidhwa’s second published work. Salman Rushdie’s Shame (Cape) drew mixed reactions. Indeed, with this survey Salman Rushdie makes his formal entry into the republic of Pakistani letters. Other commentators have been mentioning his work, but in view of Rushdie’s family connections in Pakistan, his recent visits and statements of affiliation with the country, and — even more — with his latest Pakistani novel, Shame, it is time to take note of the protestations. All three of his published novels are in print. His work is widely read in this country — as an expatriate writer’s — and is often germane to healthy discussion. Tariq Mehmood’s Hand on the Sun (Penguin) was an unusual novel in the year, a picture of the Pakistani/Asian community in industrial England, such as we have rarely had. The author’s first, it confirms the documentary trends that have of late been popular in fiction; but at times the story is too thin, the language too febrile or wooden to be the language of imagination. We shall await a second work by Mehmood. The Overlook Press in the United States have announced the re-publication of some of the earlier novels by Zulfikar Ghose, which is very good news.

Hanif Kureishi has earned a name for himself in the theatre world, and for a few years now his plays have been staged in England, where he lives. His earlier Borderline (Methuen) was followed in print last year by Outskirts and other plays (Calder). Only one volume of poetry appeared: This Time in Lahore (Vision), Alamgir Hashmi’s fourth collection of poems. Hashmi also published a volume of criticism titled Commonwealth Literature (Vision).

XVIII, No 2), which, in addition to the critical material, included thirteen short stories by Intizar Husain, in English translation. Anwer Enayetullah has also published a number of fine translations of Urdu fiction in Pakistan Digest and elsewhere. In the context of Urdu Literature studies, which must interact with English in Pakistan, there are two recent articles to note: ‘Pakistani Urdu Creative Writing on National Disintegration: The Case of Bangladesh’ by Muhammad Umar Memon, The Journal of Asian Studies (USA) XLIII 1 (Nov. 1983), pp. 105-27, and ‘Urdu Literature from Prison: Some Reflections on the Writings of Pakistani Prisoners of War in India’ by Sajida S. Alvi, The Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan (Lahore) XIX 3, pp. 43-54.

In non-fiction, there are two books. My Version: Indo-Pakistan War 1965 (Wajidalis), by General Mohammad Musa, gives a view of the war by the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army during the event, and it adds significantly to the corpus of writing on the subject. Tariq Ali’s stimulating book, Can Pakistan Survive? (Penguin/Pelican), furthers the gloom thesis concerning the state-structure but properly notes: ‘Where Pakistan has, however, been blessed is in its poets. Poetry has retained its vigour and political independence, when these qualities have disappeared in every other field of socio-political or cultural life’ (p. 197).

While the older journals in the country now barely make an appearance during the year, new ones need to come forth. The University of Peshawar had the distinction last year of publishing The Journal of the English Literary Club, which contains some interesting critical and creative work, both by students and older writers.

The President of Pakistan has ordered the institution of several new prizes and awards for literature and scholarship; for example, the substantial awards given for books published in all Pakistani languages during 1947-81 on Mohammad Iqbal. Further, in November, an international congress on Mohammad Iqbal took place in Lahore on the poet-philosopher’s 106th birth anniversary. The Academy of Letters in Islamabad awarded the Patras Bukhari Award to A.R. Tabassum for his book of short stories, A Window to the East (Vantage, 1981). An effort is being made to improve the climate for creative writing; for example, censorship on magazines was lifted in March 1983. Although colleges and universities had to remain closed for part of the academic year — for reasons beyond, it would seem, everyone’s control — one must note the positive aspects. For example, the Ministry of Education and the University Grants Commission have been very active sponsoring language-teaching workshops and symposia, planning curricula, and re-organising the existing library system throughout the country. In fact, the President
himself ordered the creation of self-sufficient libraries in every major city and district headquarters.

Over-all, this year's work is indeed both excellent and plentiful. One has good reason to believe that it will continue.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

SOUTH AFRICA

1983 saw J.M. Coetzee consolidate his reputation as one of the most disturbing and visionary novelists of recent years. Life and Times of Michael K, which won the Booker award, is an allegory of a simple man in a war-torn South Africa of the near future. While the scenario of apocalypse has become almost a commonplace in contemporary fiction from this country, Coetzee's treatment of the questions of power and individual frailty have a dramatic and philosophic resonance that places his book in a category of its own. By subtly inverting the cherished liberal notion of the 'indomitability of the human spirit' (most critics have, however, chosen to see Michael K simply in terms of humanist ideology), Coetzee shows — as he did in Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) — how rudimentary is any kind of freedom, how subject we are to the demands, first and foremost, of living in a body.

The fundamentals of human response and social restriction, of spiritual revaluation intimately tied to the specifics of water and bread, are also of course germane to Athol Fugard's imaginative terrains, and Master Harold and the 'Boys' (the text now made available by O.U.P.) continued to receive acclaim both in South Africa and abroad, while Fugard's Notebooks (Johannesburg: Donker) provides a fascinating insight into twenty years of playmaking in South Africa.

With Fugard coming under attack from certain marxist critics in this country as he was accorded enthusiastic attention in liberal theatre circles, several black playwrights continued to emphasise theatre as a weapon of revolutionary struggle. Though many of these plays are frankly naïve, Maishe Maponya's The Hungry Earth, Kessie Govender's Working-Class Hero and Woza Albert (a collaborative effort) revealed something of the range and possibilities of a theatre committed to social change. At the same time, the white writer Stephen Gray (the racial labels seem 'inevitable) offered his one-woman play Schreiner, a perceptive portrait of the famous South African novelist, feminist and outspoken
critic of nineteenth-century Imperialism, whose classic *The Story of an African Farm* appeared exactly a hundred years ago in 1883.

To be a black writing in South Africa during the 1970s was almost a guarantee of publication, whereas 1983 seemed to herald the phase of the woman writer. Critical ‘casebooks’ appeared on Olive Schreiner and Pauline Smith (the latter’s ‘Karoo’ stories were reissued), Ravan Press published *Lip: from Southern African Women* and Donker launched a ‘Woman Writers Series’ in which appeared volumes of short stories by Ellen Palestrant (*Nosedive and Other Writings*) and Sheila Roberts (*This Time of Year*), and a novel by Sheila Fugard on sexual liberation entitled *A Revolutionary Woman*.

‘Miss’ as well as ‘Ms’ is the subject of Douglas Livingstone’s book of ‘love’ poems, *A Rosary of Bone*, which was first published in 1975 and has been reissued by David Philip with additional material. The volume includes tender lyrics, witty ‘metaphysical’ pieces, sensitive translations of Goethe, Luis de Góngora and José-Maria de Hérédia, as well as a side-swipe at ‘D.H. Lawrence as Feminist’ and (to quote a poker-faced Livingstone) a ‘serious warning against the hazards of promiscuity’:

Ashes to Ashes,
And Dust to Dust:
If the AIDS don’t get you,
The Herpes must.

This latest Addendum
to VD Lore
Ends: ‘Eros backwards
Equals sore.’

‘Giovanni Jacopo Meditates (On the Beatitudes of Fidelity)’

*A Rosary of Bone* seems set to delight some and enrage others.

By contrast, first volumes of poetry by Jeremy Cronin (*Inside*) and Molefe Pheto (*And Night Fell*) return one to the grim details of the socio-political situation. Cronin was in 1983 released from Pretoria Central after serving a seven-year sentence under the Terrorism Act (he was found to be an active member of the A.N.C.) and has produced several impressive ‘prison poems’. Pheto, a detainee in solitary confinement for almost a year, is also a meticulous documenter of day-to-day life in gaol and his work testifies to an iron determination in the cause of a free South Africa. Of a slighter nature is Don Mattera’s *Azanian Love Song* (a collection reflecting the poet’s time as a banned person), while Modikwe Dikobe’s *Dispossessed* reveals this writer’s talents to be less evident in
verse than in his seminal novel of Sophiatown life during the 1930s, *The Marabi Dance*, which was published ten years ago. Further variety in the poetry scene was provided by Peter Strauss’ *Bishop Bernward’s Door*, Don Maclellan’s *Reckonings* and Ridley Beeton’s *Tattoos*, collections in which the private poet predominates over his social counterpart.

A particularly promising first volume of short fiction is Njabulo S. Ndebele’s *Fools and Other Stories*, the preoccupations being those of township life with a significant shift of emphasis from the concerns of Black Consciousness to those of class division within black society itself. It is, however, the motif of Black Consciousness which lends structural and thematic unity to Menán du Plessis’ *A State of Fear*, a novel set against the background of the ‘coloured’ school boycotts of the early 1980s.

Of the other notable works to appear most were by established authors: Guy Butler’s very readable second volume of autobiography, *Bursting Worlds*; Richard Rive’s *Advance Retreat*, a collection of short stories; Sylvester Stein’s *Second-class Taxi*, a satirical novel of the 1950s, and John Beaumont’s *The Great Karoo* (originally entitled *The Tree of Yggdrasil*), both of these reissued in David Philip’s Africasouth Paperback Series; and a new edition of James Matthews’ *The Park and Other Stories*. Finally, academic interest centred on the purchase by the National English Literary Museum (N.E.L.M.) in Grahamstown of a valuable collection of Roy Campbell’s manuscripts, including corrected drafts and page proofs of his hitherto unpublished study of Wyndham Lewis (written during the 1930s), most of his translations of Lorca’s poetry and the holograph of his proposed ‘bullbook’ (all of this material will be incorporated into the multivolume and annotated *Collected Works of Roy Campbell*, the first two books of which are due to appear under the Ad. Donker imprint in 1984).

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

Randolph Stow's latest novel recounts a series of apparently motiveless murders in the murky atmosphere of an old Suffolk seaport. It reminds us that along with his famous descriptive power, Stow has always been adept at plotting stories which compel the reader with unobtrusive tact. *The Suburbs of Hell* is short and precisely constructed to concentrate the significance of every detail so that it has the satisfying richness of many longer books. This quality is typical of some of his earlier novels, but in *The Suburbs of Hell* he intensifies the suggestive power of a tightly inter-connected plot by using the conventions of the thriller. Not that the reader is simply compelled by the urge to discover who done it; there is a deeper significance in the book than this, hinted by the title, from a speech by Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi* which is also one of the novel's epigraphs.

Harry Ufford, a central figure in the story, reads sensational paperbacks; we learn at the beginning that he is a 'devotee of real-life murder'. His carefully contrived security is shattered when murder is no longer confined to books, but starts to happen around him, and he is implicated in the sinister events which disrupt the society of old Tornwich. It is, we discover, 'a suburb of Hell' where death is sudden and random.

Stow's story is concerned with the immanence of death, the vulnerability of human communities to outbreaks of irrational violence and the delusory element in human nature which lulls us into a sense of false security and persuades us that horror is somewhere outside ourselves, safely enjoyed voyeuristically. This cluster of themes touches on a familiar preoccupation in Randolph Stow's earlier poems and novels, particularly *Tourmaline* (1963) and *Visitants* (1979) — the dark forces lurking at the heart of human nature which reason or good intentions seem powerless to control. At the same time, his writings have reflected a search for spiritual understanding in the face of this bleak insight, and successive poems and novels have embodied the continuing preoccupation differently. *The Suburbs of Hell* is understated, even detached, with a few touches of low-keyed humour, and its tone has a certain similarity (not to be overstressed) with the previous novel, *The Girl Green as Elderflower* (1980). Like that book, the new novel is richly allusive, but it reverts to a source which has informed Randolph Stow's writing from his earliest poems and novels: Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. In addition to its titular epigraph from *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Suburbs of Hell* draws on citations from *The White Devil*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Broken Heart*, *Richard III* and *The Malcontent*. The cumulative effect of all these references is to invoke the insecure and sensational world of revenge tragedy. This at first seems to contrast with the community of Tornwich, but in fact, it suggests a parallel, which is strengthened by references to passages in *Beowulf* about the monster. Both *Beowulf* and revenge tragedy depict 'suburbs of Hell' and betoken the evil also to be found in Tornwich.

The quotations from revenge tragedy are mostly from speeches by the malcontents: Aaron, Richard III, Lodovico, Barabas, Ithamore, Hieronimo, Orgilus and Malevole —
characters who, despite their villainy, fascinate us by their cunning and even court admiration by their cynical wit. Most of them exercise their attraction through soliloquies in which they explain their machinations, and Randolph Stow uses excerpts from these to preface passages in his novel where we are admitted to the mind of the assassin and witness death from his perspective. These short chapters which intersperse a story otherwise recounted objectively introduce a subtly equivocal voice into the narrative which matches those in the epigraphs, but is understated in comparison with them. The effect is daringly successful. From the brief opening chapter, where in the three central paragraphs the agent of death discloses himself, but leaves the reader in doubt about his commitment to some of his rationalizations and perceptions, we are captured intermittently in the murderer’s compulsions and sense their attraction.

In the second chapter, and for the main story-line, Randolph Stow modulates into another register which employs different — and in a sense opposite — allusions. He introduces some of the conventions of the English thriller or horror story: dim winding streets, empty houses, drifting mist blurring lights and faces, creaking stairs, mysterious underground passages, shadowy apparitions, the decaying atmosphere of Autumn turning to winter, and in amongst these, a few niches of apparent security: the warm fug of harbour-front pubs and the fireside from which the tale conventionally begins. The atmosphere evoked recalls Wilkie Collins, passages in Dickens, the Sherlock Holmes stories or, as three of the characters themselves notice, a spooky black and white film of the 1940s.

Despite its use of allusion and convention, The Suburbs of Hell is not a self-consciously ‘literary’ novel. It stands up independantly, without distracting the reader’s attention to contrivance or cleverness. This is typical of Randolph Stow’s self-effacing art. He has always been an allusive writer, but never gratuitously so. Allusion in his novels is assimilated to narrative, description and characterisation. He is an austere artist who is alert to the resonances of his tales, but never forces them, and he can judge precisely the degree of understatement for events bordering on the sensational. In this respect he is just the opposite to the renaissance dramatists from whom he borrows so many allusions. The Suburbs of Hell is played down in his characteristic way. The predominant tone of the novel is set by the milieu in which the events occur; a small harbourside community of seamen, labourers, school-teacher, unemployed teenager, retired people, taxi-driver, whose lives intersect mainly in the pubs of old Tornwich. This world is described in precisely observed and telling detail. Stow is alert to the passage of time (it is, in fact, an important theme in the novel) and he has the poet’s ability to evoke a moment, in language which captures its sensuous qualities. In the second paragraph he establishes the first day of winter through its clarity of light, colour and distinctive smells, and halfway through the book he records the first signs of spring: ‘...in a bay of the estuary, a plain of sea-purslane and sea-aster carved with shining brown runnels, he watched mallard waddle and swim, and flocks of dunlin skitter away like blown white smoke over the sculpted mud.’ The novel is pervaded with such details which firmly establish time and place, and it is through his fluent descriptive writing that Stow introduces with easy naturalness the atmospheric conventions of the thriller.

He has a matching ear for idiom and eye for gesture, and the finely graded accents of old Tornwich sound throughout the book. The dominant note is the voice of Harry Ufford, the sailor home from the sea. His idiom is captured brilliantly and delicately differentiated from those of his friends and pub acquaintances. We encounter these characters in a variety of situations; over beer or Sunday dinners, quietly conspiring or facing moments of despair or terror, and in all these the dialogue is carefully timed and modulated, so that it rings true while it enriches the story.
The result is a seamlessly constructed novel, fully imagined in naturalistic detail, while it is at the same time a great deal more than this allusively and thematically. It is an excellent antidote to the self-referring fiction currently in vogue, in which novels are accepted as excuses for showing off. *The Suburbs of Hell* has all the connotative attributes praised in the work of noisy novelists, but in Stow’s book art is not paraded as evidence of authorial ingenuity, but employed to evoke a fully rounded and allusive vision. This makes it a pleasure to read, and to think about.

BRUCE CLUNIES ROSS


There have been several South African novels in recent years set against backgrounds of civil war or revolution, e.g., Schoeman’s *Promised Land* and Gordimer’s *July’s People*. *Life & Times of Michael K* is the most recent in the series of what seems to be a new ‘genre’ for South African writers. What it has in common with its predecessors is that the effects of the fighting, of martial law, shortages, displaced populations, etc., are shown in greater detail on farms and country towns than on the big cities. And while, in fact, South Africans are generally very proud of the variety and magnificence of their landscape, in these fictions that same landscape is depicted as too spacious and harsh, too dreary and inhospitable. Perhaps that is how landscape must always appear to helpless, frightened people forced, like Michael K, to travel on foot in search of shelter.

What *Life & Times of Michael K* also has in common with its predecessors is the curiously blurred portrayal of who exactly the opponents are in the fight; why they are fighting; and how they are going about it. Although I realize that the author’s intention in every case is not to present an analysis of a revolution, but how a revolution impinges on the consciousness of his protagonist — a protagonist who cannot know all the facts of the fighting — I could not help wondering whether this particular vagueness was a way of avoiding censorship. In spite of the new ‘enlightened’ policy of the South African Censorboard, it is possible that its members would take action against a book that presented an unambiguous and graphic account of white battalions engaged in conventional or guerrilla warfare with black battalions (armed by whom? The Soviets? The Cubans?). In *Michael K* an officer does say that they are fighting ‘so that minorities will have a say in their destinies’ — a statement that is ambiguity itself. Who are the minorities? The whites and their allies, or one or another of the African ethnic groups, any one of which, taken alone, could constitute a minority? What does ‘having a say’ mean? But then, just as protagonists caught in the turmoil of revolutions cannot have a comprehensive view of the war, army officers are unlikely to mouth more than slogans.

*Michael K* is about a young, facially deformed Coloured man who tries to get his ailing mother out of Cape Town during the ‘troubles’ and back to the farm in Prince Albert where she was born. She dies on the way and is summarily cremated by hospital authorities, so Michael continues his journey alone, carrying her ashes and other effects with him. More than once he is picked up by roving bands of soldiers and interned, both before his long secret sojourn on the farm (the most memorable part of the book, published separately in *Harpers*, September 1983, and *Contrast*, Winter 1983) and afterwards. But
Michael K always escapes, finally ending up back in Cape Town where he started from. The book has three sections. The first and third are close third-person narratives that weave in and out of Michael’s consciousness and the second is a first-person account by a pharmacist-cum-orderly who treats Michael in the hospital of a rehabilitation camp and tries unsuccessfully to get Michael to eat the hospital food.

What makes the book compelling reading for me is the way in which Michael’s actions, fears, and preoccupations touch and stir almost forgotten childhood memories. When Michael makes a burrow for himself on the deserted farm in Prince Albert, and covers it over from view, I recalled intense and urgent childhood experiences of making shelters out of boxes and tins; building tree houses and couch-cushion houses; burrowing under blankets and even, once, digging a real burrow out of soft soil on a vacant lot. Michael’s various meals of raw unripe vegetables, grubs, larvae, insects and lizards were horribly fascinating in the same way that childhood conversations were of what we could and could not possibly eat to stay alive. When Michael fears being bitten by a dog, or imagines what the fire must have looked like when his mother’s body was being cremated, I felt an immediate and old empathy within me. Michael K is about the will to survive, hidden and alone, in a man who has not lost a child’s simplicity and cunning.

All of John Coetzee’s books seem to me to touch chords of childishness in us. For instance, all his characters have trouble with their stomachs and their bowels (or are preoccupied with bowel functions), whether it be Jacobus Coetzee in Dusklands splashing his diarrhea over the sides of his wagon, or the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, hidden under the bed in a young girl’s room, needing badly to urinate. Michael K has problems, particularly with keeping food down. We, as adults, can mostly control the times and places of our bodily functions, but we all remember nightmare situations of childhood: sudden vomiting in public places; bed mysteriously wet and cold in the morning; shame because of needing a ‘convenience’ at a time inconvenient for adults. I have heard Coetzee criticized for what seems like an obsession with excretion, but want to rush to his defence, as Patrick White rushed to his own over his characters’ flatulence — our bodies are troublesome, aren’t they? And would be more so under shelterless, menacing conditions.

Michael K’s difficulty in keeping food down begins when he is removed from his burrow on the farm by soldiers and placed in a rehabilitation camp. On the farm he had planted pumpkins and melons and lived a life in tune with the seasons and the temperature, hibernating during the cold weather and creeping out of his hole when it was warm. But his difficulty is more than simply a sensitive stomach revolting against unaccustomed food — it is a rejection of all that imposed confinement, charity, and authoritarianism imply for him. The pharmacist, although not necessarily a reliable narrator, tries to explain his condition thus:

‘And now, last topic, your garden... Let me tell you the meaning of the sacred and alluring garden that blooms in the heart of the desert and produces the food of life. The garden for which you are presently heading is nowhere and everywhere except in the camp. It is another name for the only place where you belong, Michaels (sic), where you do not feel homeless. It is off every map, no road leads to it that is merely a road, and only you know the way.’ (p. 228)

The book ends with Michael imagining that he and an old man, whom he might meet, would once again set out from Cape Town to the country, pushing a barrow between them and carrying seeds in their pockets to plant. When they got to the farm in Prince
Albert and found the pump broken, they would not be non-plussed, but would get water by means of Michael's producing

...a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of a shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon: and in that way, he would say, one can live. (p. 249)

It is never easy to put in a nutshell just what message Coetzee's novels intend to convey, but it is arguable that this one is about the necessity of our being satisfied with what is meagre and simple, ingenious and genuine, if we are to stay free of 'rehabilitation' and able to preserve the child in us, particularly during times of revolution. The characters in all Coetzee's novels are reduced, actually or in their imaginations, to surviving off the barest essentials. There is Jacobus Coetzee, naked, skipping across the desert, in Dusklands; Magda in In the Heart of the Country living on her own deserted farm off almost nothing; and the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians learning in prison how precious little anyone needs to stay alive. Yet in none of his previous books has Coetzee, in my opinion, conveyed as strong a sense of approbation for a character and his eccentricities as he does for Michael K. Michael's childlikeness, his stubbornness, and his canny simplicity, all seem eminently worthy qualities in a world of lies and violence. That this book intends to appeal to the child in the reader, that Michael's own childlike qualities are shown as valuable, is reinforced, I think, in the passage where Michael thinks of his mother, alive and young, standing in the doorway on the farm in Prince Albert:

And behind that child, in the doorway, her face obscured by shadow, he searched for a second woman, the woman from whom his mother had come into the world. When my mother was dying in hospital, he thought, when she knew her end was coming, it was not me she looked to but someone who stood behind me: her mother or the ghost of her mother. To me she was a woman but to herself she was still a child calling to her mother to hold her hand and help her. And her own mother, in the secret life we do not see, was a child too. I come from a line of children without end. (p. 160)

In other South African novels of revolution, the action ends on an undecided note; for instance, what happens to Maureen in July's People when she runs toward the sound of the helicopter? In Life & Times of Michael K we are not allowed much closure, but we are convinced that no matter what happens to the country, Michael K and those like him can survive — provided they are left alone to tend their gardens in the desert.

SHEILA ROBERTS
The past year brought two books of importance to interpreters of the novel and its role in our time, and specifically of the novels and critical theory of novelist-poet-philosopher Wilson Harris — one by his most dedicated and sensitive interpreter, Hena Maes-Jelinek, analysing his fiction from *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) through *The Tree of the Sun* (1978), and the other a creatively revolutionary work by Wilson Harris centering around what he terms 'the cross-cultural imagination', clarifying its potential values to humanity, and illustrating in detail the insights this critical approach, instead of the usual national or regional one, offers into the imaginative works of modern writers around the world.

Even before *Wilson Harris*, Maes-Jelinek had been seen by Harris scholars as the one whose mind and sympathies are most finely attuned to what he voices in his challenging art. Hers has been the most intensive and extensive study of his uses of language, original forms, and the aims of the changing contexts and meanings of images within each novel and within the growing body of his work, which is described by her in the 'Preface' to this book as 'one narrative canvas, at once spiritual autobiography and unrelenting quest for a new art of fiction ... exploring the multilevelled inner space of human consciousness ... and modifying the characters' (and the participating reader's) mode of perception'. Now in *Wilson Harris* she has integrated her thinking on an even higher level than before, refining interpretations and sharpening her assessment of Harris's achievement: the opening words of the 'Preface' boldly state, 'It is no exaggeration to say that Wilson Harris is one of the most original and significant writers of the second half of the twentieth century.' She grants that he is also a difficult writer 'although extra difficulty sometimes arises from the reader's incapacity to relinquish conventional expectations in art' and says that she has tried to deal with 'all major difficulties in both form and content and should like to add that there is no short way to reaching what is most essential in the novels. They must be read with humility and patience'. Clearly this is what she has done in her interpretation of the philosophy and art of what she sees as the three stages of Harris's development through *The Tree of the Sun*.

The first stage consists of the novels in what has been called the Guiana Quartet, to each of which she devotes a chapter, giving each a name that expresses what she finds central to the work. To cite an example, the most well known of these novels, *Palace of the Peacock*, is analysed in a chapter she calls 'Voyage into Namelessness', thus placing her emphasis on the idea that in Harris 'Namelessness, as opposed to racial identity ... is the source of genuine community and is experienced as a preliminary to spiritual rebirth. It is associated with the sacred or the divine, which in Harris's fiction is not a transcendental ideal but suffering humanity (here the ‘unwritten lives’ of the folk) exiled beyond the pale of history.' In each of the works in the Guiana Quartet, as in the case of all the novels discussed in her book, Maes-Jelinek follows the text, explicating it as she proceeds; analyses the central ideas and the central recurring and changing images that convey them; explains Harris's use of what she sees as 'double time' and of dreams to free his readers or characters from the tyranny over their consciousness of a particular time; discusses his sense of a 'multiple reality which exceeds by far the perceptible world'; illustrates the use he makes of the mobility of nature to contrast with human resistance to change or to signify his 'agents' fleeting new conceptions of community; clarifies his
sense of character as a nucleus of selves; explains his rejection of 'absolutes' and of the idea that those who are oppressed should become oppressors in their turn, and his conception that catastrophe, if relived and digested, can lead to truly creative change and renewal; and illumines his re-creation of myths, as he interprets their meanings, from many parts of the world and many cultures. She even clarifies his distinctive, ever previously puzzling to me, use of the word 'and' over and over.

Maes-Jelinek then moves to Heartland which she views as a transitional novel between the first phase and second of Harris's development, in that while 'the main character ... is stimulated by events and characters outside himself', as in the work that immediately precedes, like the characters in the later novels 'he becomes a vessel in which the past is re-enacted and modified as «vision» increases; in which also the tension between life and death plays itself out continually in different shapes.' I am not at this point happy with Maes-Jelinek's division of the novels into 'phases', but her discussions of her reasons give insight into crucial aspects of what is, I think, more of a continuum (the 'one narrative canvas' of which her 'Preface' speaks — and which the division into groups seems at least partly to contradict — or 'one deepening cycle of exploration' to use the phrase Harris chooses to describe his critical essays in the prefatory note to Tradition, the Writer and Society and which I sense also describes his fiction as a whole). Insight of this kind comes in the opening paragraph of Chapter Six, 'The Heart of Inarticulate Protest: The Eye of the Scarecrow', in which, while she explains her conception of the next phase, much else is lighted up:

In both form and content The Eye of the Scarecrow and the three following novels make up a new phase in Harris's fiction. Their subject-matter is, even more specifically than in Palace of the Peacock, the subjective imagination, its working on memory, and its transformation of the raw material of life. Experience in these novels is wholly internalized. The protagonist is not the author but he too is engaged in creating fiction insofar as he is an 'agent' in whose consciousness the reconstruction of the past takes place. His quest is for a new way both of apprehending life and of rendering it. The main character's disorientation in the earlier fiction culminates in Heartland in the equation of his consciousness with a 'vicarious hollow'. This is now the protagonist's initial state of emptiness or breakdown, a state that results from catastrophe but goes together with a freedom from the tyranny of conventional reality, the tyranny of facts as opposed to their inner truth. We recognize here the creative possibilities Harris discerns in catastrophe, which does not merely bring about a change of outlook in the protagonist. The 'crash' which shatters his safe, known world reveals the livingness of the subterranean reality it (the crash) brings to the surface. One has the impression of a dialogue between the perceiving consciousness and the material it perceives, 'the flood of animated wreckage' (15) that runs to meet it and on which the protagonist refuses 'to impose a false coherency'.

The introductory section of Chapter Nine, 'A "Novel-Vision of History": Ascent to Omai', also casts light beyond the idea of a second fictional cycle on which it too focuses:

Ascent to Omai is the climax of Harris's second fictional cycle, his most daring experiment with the form of the novel, and it comes nearest to actualizing his concept of narrative as a dynamic structural design. It could be likened to an abstract painting whose components would have the capacity to move. This novel brings together the different perspectives from which Harris has approached his material since Heartland
and initiates yet another line of development. The first part of the novel alone combines the inland expedition fundamental to Heartland and The Eye with the spiral-like progress of the lovers in The Waiting Room and the coincident movements of ascent and descent to be found in Tumatumari. The fragmentation that characterizes the earlier novels is still a necessary stage of discovery in Ascent but it goes together with a constant awareness of wholeness. It seems even that, to understand it rightly, the reader should be able to grasp the novel as a whole while discerning at the same time its interwoven elements and the correspondences between its several layers of meaning. He must also keep in mind that this novel is more clearly than any other about writing a novel and that it offers the most eloquent example in this cycle of Harris’s conception of character as a vessel for other existences.

The concluding chapter, ‘«The Novel as Painting»: From The Sleepers of Roraima to The Tree of the Sun’, is a series of splendidly concentrated discussions of ‘Yurokon’ and its myth in The Sleepers of Roraima, Black Marsden, Companions of the Day and Night, Da Silva da Silva’s Cultivated Wilderness, Genesis of the Clowns, and The Tree of the Sun. In these works Maes-Jelinek finds the main theme to be the ‘resurrection’ of humanity as an open possibility; and in The Tree of the Sun she sees aspects of the second and third cycles coming to a head:

The joint process of interiorization and expedition into ‘otherness’ that began with The Eye of the Scarecrow is still linked with a probing into the working of a creative mind as into the very nature and mystery of creativity…. I have had occasion before to draw attention to the complexity and unifying quality of his language, particularly the metaphors. In this novel they once more convey several layers of meaning like ‘the tree of the sun’, basically a metaphor for the process of creation, which combines several modes of achieving vision.

Maes-Jelinek’s book summarizes itself with this conclusion about The Tree of the Sun:

The reciprocal movement between the living and the dead, the conception of characters who are at once themselves and other than themselves in another dimension, the fluidity of the narrative form, and the rich complexity of a language which presents together and in their constant movement the antinomies of existence, are the fundamental aspects of an opus as much concerned with the spiritual salvation of man as with the renewal of the art of fiction. It is an open-ended opus since, like each novel, it finds no resolution but rather presents life in the making with its self-deceptions and revelations, ‘a hand dissolving the elements, constructing the elements’ (72) in the hope of running into the moment of vision.

WILSON HARRIS’S ‘THE WOMB OF SPACE: THE CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGINATION’

The relationship Wilson Harris perceives between the inner world of consciousness/imagination and the world of flesh-and-blood people acting in time and space has always been more directly communicated in his critical essays than in his fiction, though the essays no less than the fiction are expressions of his poetic imagination. They are filled with passion against divisions in humankind and for a vision of an evolved humanity integrated and creative as a result of the fertilization of imagination by the artist, whose
responsibility is therefore sacred. Harris’s critical theory (a complete break with the usual view of separate regional, ethnic, or national literatures), very much developed and unified in The Womb of Space, is his clear expression of this passion for a transformation of the inner and outer world. Never before has his perception of universal images central to myths of many places and to many modern novels and poems, created in many parts of the world and in many cultures, been so richly demonstrated. To Harris recurring images of terror, of falling, of pregnancy, of creation, of resurrection, of flying, of metamorphoses, of doubles and twins, of merged animal and human, of harlequin figures, of the ‘sent dead’ as in Haitian Vodun, of rainbow bridge and tree linking sky and earth, and other variable images of life-in-death, death-in-life all attest to the ways in which the past can speak to the present and future as well as to people of all cultures. They are images which, because of the ‘dynamism of metaphor’ (Rimbaud) are capable, Harris feels, of changing our ways of relating to others since they reveal ‘the necessity for community to evolve through complex visions of apparent catastrophe’ and the necessity, especially in a time of nuclear war possibility, for a vision of the rebirth of humankind in contrast to the ‘death of Man’ popularized by the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and evidenced by widespread nihilist literature, theatre, film, and television.

John W. Blassingame and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. give this succinct summary of The Womb of Space in their ‘Series Foreword’:

Harris is concerned to show the fundamental unity of the human community, both by underscoring repeated patterns of symbol-making or ‘figuration’ in the world’s cultures and art and by revealing the movement from unawareness to consciousness as depicted in the mythic symbol. By discussing texts from the American, Latin American and European literary traditions, Harris analyzes that quality which ‘mythical’ novels share.

It should be added that Harris looks deeply into almost a score of well-known modern works — poetry as well as prose fiction — from the Caribbean, Africa, Australia, and Asia, as well as the areas named in the foreword.

In his ‘Introduction’ Harris compresses the literary philosophy that constitutes a breakthrough in modern critical theory, the latter being so generally negative about the possibility of language to communicate and about the possibility of any shared interpretation. He states the purpose of his ‘cross-cultural exploration’ as an attempt ‘to bring into play certain disregarded and yet exciting pathways that bear upon cross-cultural capacities for genuine change in communities beset by complex dangers and whose antecedents are diverse’. He explains his selection of novels and poems in his exploration (Faulkner’s Intruder in the Dust, Edgar Allan Poe’s Arthur Gordon Pym, Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man, Jean Toomer’s ‘Box Seat’ in Cane, Juan Rulfo’s Pedro Páramo, Jay Wright’s The Double Invention of Komo, Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea, Paule Marshall’s The Chosen Place, the Timeless People, Patrick White’s Voss, Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope, Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast, Emma Tennant’s The Last of the Country House Murders, Claude Simon’s The Flanders Road, Djuna Barnes’s Nightwood, and several works by poets of the Caribbean, Africa and Asia); he states that he sees them as gateways into the largely submerged territory of the imagination, but that other works could have been chosen: ‘In this particular study, and within the stresses of exploration rarely undertaken by readers or critics, I had no alternative but to limit my selection in order to highlight variables of dialogue that tend to be suppressed in so-called normal classifications of fiction and poetry within regional scholarship.’ The works Harris analyses are related by him not only to the myths,
folklore, and visual art of earlier times but are continually related, chapter by chapter, to each other through cross-cultural images, thus forming a cross-cultural web that reflects his conception of a ‘cross-cultural loom’. Harris explains that his exploration will start with his reflections on *Intruder in the Dust* since this analysis will clarify at once some of the issues and possibilities involved in a cross-cultural perspective:

It is unlikely, as we shall see, that Faulkner was aware of how strangely his imagination had been pulled in this novel…. Let me dwell a little on the phenomenon of otherness that moves in the novel yet remains curiously beyond Faulkner’s vision, so to speak. Had he seen it — had the life of heterogeneity, in unconscious or intuitive dialogue with his creativity come home to him — he would have been driven, I think, to revise the one-sided moral conclusions built into the closing premises of the novel. What perhaps I should say now is that the phenomenon of otherness borders on the validity of mental images as distinct from intellectual conclusions. (My italics — J.S.A.)

In the opening chapter, ‘Reflections on *Intruder in the Dust*’, Harris finds that the ‘barren philosophical climax of the work … gives some weight to the charges’ often directed against it, but that *Intruder in the Dust* has a capacity ‘that breaches conventional logic and gives the novel its complicated power and focus’. He is struck first by young Mallison’s precipitous fall which is an ascent in that it turns the world of the segregated South in the novel upside down; then by the coincidence of Faulkner’s fictional events with the Haitian belief in the ‘sent dead’ invoked to destroy the living — a fate countered only by a *hungan* figure who can succeed in making the dead let go; then by the ‘twins’ Faulkner sees (Mrs Beauchamp and Miss Habersham) who have dwelt in separate life-destroying ghettoes, one black and one white, and in the parody of that twinship in the double-headed coffin and elsewhere. To Harris, Faulkner’s ending of his novel with a defense of ‘territorial-inmoral imperative’ is an instructive failure, showing how the unconscious creative power of the novelist in this book ‘freezes and aborts itself’. To Harris, ‘This brings home the reality of evil, in which cultures are enmeshed in codes to invert or overturn each other rather than become involved in complex mutuality and the difficult creation of community’. Because this mutuality and community constitute Harris’s idea of the goal of imaginative literature, the epic is what he feels the novel should aspire to.

The chapter that follows, ‘The Schizophrenic Sea’, looks back to an earlier work Harris feels to be a forerunner of many self-divided twentieth-century works, *Intruder in the Dust* among them, and that is Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Again he concentrates primarily not on the author’s conscious intention but on his intuitive self as revealed in his images. It is not possible here to outline Harris’s analysis of the ‘schizophrenic genius of Edgar Allan Poe in this strange narrative’, except to say that it too features odd twinships between black and white of which Poe must have been unaware and Poe’s ‘Freudian slip’ when he refers to himself and Peters as the only white men on the island in spite of the fact that he had earlier associated the Amerindian Peters with the ‘Negro’ toward whom Poe had obsessive feelings of aversion (as evidenced by his portraiture of all the black characters in the work) to such an extent that the very teeth of the later ‘metaphysical blacks’, as Harris describes their role, are black, to show them utterly frightening. Harris relates *Pym* to pre-Columbian myths of cannibalism and to distorting reports by Spanish explorers about ‘cannibal’ Indians: ‘The excesses of Poe’s *Pym* begin to yield to judgments and criteria born of the twinship of intuitive self and myth.’ As I understand it, Harris feels that there is something intrinsic yet still buried in the human species, only as yet momentarily resurrected and seen, and that in *Intruder* and *Pym* these impulses and their related images (such
as the twinships of black and white) break through, creating fissures in the authors' partial views that 'masquerade as totality'.

In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* Harris sees a novel that is epic 'in thrust'. To him it tells of 'foetal man' in the womb of an age who neither aborts nor comes to birth, repetitively dying yet psychically re-awakening in each phase of the novel, each phase representing one of the 'concentric horizons' that give this chapter its title. In *Invisible Man* Harris convincingly sees a blend of Homeric, Anancy (African) and Christian imageries that is 'substantial to the womb of evolutionary space that Ellison seeks in dying (awakening) epic god on each horizon or concentric ring'. To him the invisible man of the novel is a black Odysseus 'in whose fictive musical blood Anancy runs' and who is pursued, as much within his own skull as from without, by Cyclopean 'nightmare'. Harris makes an outstanding contribution to an understanding of the role of the female characters in the work for he stresses 'the bleakness of awakenings black Odysseus experiences when the female is consistently disadvantaged'. Nor does Harris limit this point to black Odysseus, for he stresses, too, the need to understand the significance of women in relation to the rainbow arcs or bridges between cultures and by implication between male and female human beings.

The question of the place of women in the minds of men becomes an important element in the chapter 'The Untamable Cosmos', playing a major part in the discussion of Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and pre-Columbian Mexican myth in which Harris finds Rulfo's fatalism rooted:

The hidden status of the female in pre-Columbian myth — as well as the conscripted and debased faculty of women in modern fiction — does place, as we have seen in Ellison's major novel, in Toomer and in Rulfo, a bleak capacity upon gestating hero or man/god. So it is not surprising to find that ideologies harden into a conviction of the demise of pregnant spirit; once that position is reached the next step, for whatever philosophical reasons, becomes the 'death of Man' in an age of computer-robots and dread of nuclear technology.

It is because of Harris's deep sense of the fundamental human significance of this question that I am encouraged to ask that he and other critics of world literature written in English take another look at Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* which is consistently depreciated when Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is (justly) appreciated, something which I find too facile. I would strongly urge readers to give their attention to the interpretation in the 'monumental' work by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, in which, in their chapter on *Jane Eyre*, they document meticulously their reading of Bertha as Jane's double, an avatar of Jane, whose deeds duplicate Jane's anger and dreams, even to the desire to burn down Thornfield Hall, symbol of Rochester's mastery and her own servitude; it is only when Thornfield Hall is burnt down and a marriage of equality is possible that Jane can happily enter into a mutual relationship with him, something that Antoinette in Jean Rhys's work might also have found satisfying. Of course Charlotte Brontë does not have Jean Rhys's knowledge of slavery and conquest in the Caribbean nor what Harris refers to as her 'imaginative inheritances' both 'white' and 'black' which link her imagination to Arawak myth through her awareness of Caribbean obeah, but neither is it a work to be dismissed as an expression of a rigid view imposed by a partial culture masquerading as totality, at least insofar as the relationship between men and women is concerned. Women's studies in the field of literature have often widened the scope of our understanding of the literary
imagination and its role in enriching life, and very often these studies, too, have helped to cross cultural barriers, since what Harris calls the consistent disadvantaging of women cuts across place and time. I feel Gilbert and Gubar’s analysis should be studied before critics again dismiss *Jane Eyre* as a work in which Jane and Bertha are intended as polarizations, angel and monster, sanity and madness; Jane’s feeling of madness, of wild rebellion and rage and their parallels in Bertha need to be reviewed.

‘The Whirling Stone’ chapter adds a new dimension to the conception of doubles in literature itself: Harris sees many works as parallels in unsuspected ways, as in the case of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and The Double Invention of Komo: ‘Neither mirrors the other in like rhetoric or appearance, yet a significant likeness exists when one perceives the extremities that live in each work…. The catholicity of *Wide Sargasso Sea* turns into subtle conniunctio of cultures that address the sparked cradle of Komo.’ Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* parallels works involving a ‘death of Man’ symbol in Harris’s view, and he feels that a parallel can be charted to Poe’s *Pym*, seeing, as I understand it, an ambivalent rebellion within each work. While her intuitive imagination uses flying and falling motifs running through Icarus, Anancy, and flying trickster folklore and oral African/American traditions of slaves longing for wings to fly home, the novel, on the face of it, presents the ‘folk body’ of an imaginary Caribbean island as so resistant to change as to make the novel seem what Harris calls a ‘comedy of manners’ work of fiction. He feels that she has not pursued the clues her intuitive imagination has expressed that might have opened up the possibility of change. Only ‘involuntarily’ does the novel expose ‘adventitious «timeless order» built on terror of the unknown’. Nevertheless the ‘seminal force of arbitrating genius’ in this work, as in the others previously examined, ‘is never entirely vanquished’. A potential of dynamic cross-cultural perception resides, Harris seems to be saying, in the intuitive imagination that can lead to change in the inner and outer life of humanity. While it is too late for Poe to consider this, Paule Marshall will find it thought-provoking.

A very important strand in the cultural web Harris weaves in *The Womb of Space* is his interpretation of Patrick White’s *Voss* and of what the cross-cultural approach can help us to see better in ‘another deceptively realistic novel … by the great Australian novelist Patrick White’. (He has in mind ‘the realist texture’ of the work that tends to give a common-sense vision to events.) He relates *Voss*, throughout the section called ‘Paradoxes of form’, to the works earlier considered, through its images of pregnancy; mental travel; doubles and shadows; seals on the imagination blocking mutuality; the alchemization of hubris, bridges between day and night, ‘perpetual discovery’, alchemized stone, expanding circles, ‘invisible man’, and finally the Rainbow Serpent that writes itself with stars in the sky, revealing the death of Voss as ‘consistent with creation myth rooted in the necessity for community to evolve through complex visions of apparent catastrophe’. It is not the apparent realism that fascinates Harris in *Voss* but its ‘curiously subversive fantasy’. The reader of *The Womb of Space*, too, will draw parallels — between White’s partial interchange of disadvantaged and privileged lives and Harris’s dialogue with otherness; between Harris’s *alchemization of hubris* and the thrust in the novel toward this alchemization in the white explorer Voss who would cut himself off from all ‘flesh-and-blood contact’ (Harris) with others, who jubilantly saw himself as God, whose ‘implicit obsession with conquest turns … upon him’; and between the Rainbow Serpent, ‘the Great Snake, the grandfather of all men … come down from the north in anger’ and Harris’s ‘untamable cosmos’. And in many other ways the fantasy in *Voss* seems to be closely related to the imagination of Wilson Harris. Both are subversive of divisions in humanity.
In all the works I have mentioned and in those treated in the last two chapters, Harris finds clear sparks of the ‘intuitive’ imagination. Only in regard to *The Serpent and the Rope* by the twentieth-century Indian writer Raja Rao does he find that kind of imagination very much suppressed, though he considers the work an imaginative achievement of a sort, perhaps the most remarkable ‘and profoundly intelligent example’ of the combination of Western historical consciousness and non-evolutionary Indian stasis, a combination that he feels characterizes much twentieth-century Indian literature. The discussion (need I say?) shows no animus toward India (where part of his own ancestry lies) nor toward Rao. One gets the impression that Harris wrote this section as a duty, to reveal ‘patterns of consent’ to things as they are, rather than to creative change, to a ‘seductive passivity’ in the face of what is supposedly ‘the incorrigible pathos of time’. The novel’s symbols are rooted in the concept of a ‘timeless order of mind’, of ‘absolute Non-Dual Ego’ of ‘absolute order’. Such a philosophy divorces itself from conceptions of ‘evolutionary marriage between cultures and peoples’. God in Hindu theology, Harris tells us, is not ‘Other’ but pre-empts all selves within absolute Non-Dual Ego, subjecting all natures ‘in concubinage’ to the Ego, not to a true marriage. ‘Changeless order ... is stained by mental incest,’ says Harris, thus making a connection with *Intruder in the Dust* imagery. These things make Rao’s novel ‘a profoundly revealing, confessional fiction of conservative Southern India. Equally fascinating is the degree in which it resembles European despair and the philosophies of the absurdity of mutual existences or genuine wealth in reciprocity between cultures’. What Harris feels is absent is ‘the conception of psychical re-dress leading into economical or cultural metamorphosis’. Harris, however, senses also ‘remorse and misgiving, if not the torture of the damned’ in Rao’s book.

The last two lines in *The Womb of Space* are by Whitman and never has Whitman’s meaning been more clear to me than in this context: ‘O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,/ O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you.’ American-born Whitman could be saying this to Harris; Guyanese-born Harris could be saying it to Whitman; each of them could be saying it to each of us. That, among a wealth of other things, is what *The Womb of Space: The Cross-cultural Imagination* conveys.

JOYCE SPARER ADLER


Since *Palace of the Peacock* Wilson Harris’s writing has developed considerably as his philosophical and aesthetic explorations gradually modified the metaphorical design of his fictions. The latest ‘London’ novels present a very different world from that of the *Guyana Quartet*. But one constant in his work, at first intuitively groped for, then consciously achieved, is the joint attempt to present a transformed vision of reality and to do so in a genuinely original form or language. Originality for Harris is not synonymous with difference or novelty, even if these characterize his work, but is rather an attempt to recover traces of an ancient or an eclipsed reality usually ignored by the factual recreations or descriptive analyses of much realistic writing. It implies a contrasting juxtaposition between what he sees as the realist illusion and the deeper reality — relations in depth — that the breakdown of the objective world can give access to.

Gradually also, contrary to the impression created for many readers by *Palace of the Peacock*, it has become clear that the purpose of the protagonist’s quest in Harris’s novels is
not a vision of totality or absolute truth, which in his eyes are associated with unbearable terror and beauty. A recurring theme in his recent fiction has been man’s lust for infinity, for Paradise, for impossible utopias (a major temptation in *The Angel at the Gate*). This usually entails the idealization of a given reality and the assumption that it can be whole and self-sufficient. Harris’s reverse view that truth is unfathomable, that no reality is final or sovereign has led in his fiction to a breakdown of the continuous objective narrative. Because reality is not one, it lends itself to a division into successive layers (‘divisions within divisions’ as the narrator says in *The Angel at the Gate*) between which the exploring consciousness moves. Hence the unrealistic plot and the frequent shifts in the narrative between ‘objective’ reality and the irrational, paradoxical but no less real associations and reversals of situation which become perceptible at a deeper level of consciousness. Similarly, the human personality is not one but a series of selves extending through experience to apparently lifeless objects (like the wheel and carpet sold together with a slave girl in the eighteenth century in this novel) as well as the natural and the animal world. Rather than clearly recognized and categorized areas of experience, Harris’s protagonists explore a ‘no man’s land’ between entrenched and opposed positions which he, as narrator, ‘translates’ for his readers.

The role of the narrator (W.H.) in *The Angel at the Gate*, as in *The Waiting Room*, *Companions of the Day and Night* and *The Tree of the Sun*, is to reveal the intensely real material that emerges from the subconscious of the protagonist, Mary Stella Holiday, through her automatic writing and her conversations under hypnosis with Father Joseph Marsden, a character first introduced in Harris’s fiction in *Black Marsden*. The deep commitment and seriousness of the narrator’s task makes him the very reverse of the ‘fabulator’ of much contemporary fiction. A major theme here is that modern society is diseased, our civilization dying, and a new sensibility is in the process of being born. The disease and the possible rebirth are both presented through Mary’s experience, the malaise she suffers from and the hope embodied in her three-year old son John, the ‘miracle child’ born at once of her marriage with Sebastian, an unemployed drug-addict, and of her spiritual union with Joseph Marsden, who employs her as secretary at Angel Inn and thus supports her and her family.

As in most of Harris’s novels, each bare fact offers the possibility of understanding what he sees as the ‘variable forces’ (angelic or daemonic and terrifying) at work in human beings and in the universe. Each event can lead to very different developments, just as similar actions can entail different or wholly unexpected results that contradict their motives. Reality is thus never imprisoned into an inevitable mould, and this constant capacity for openness and transformation gives the novel its form. The most striking example in the plot of *The Angel at the Gate* is the splitting of Mary Stella’s diseased personality into Stella and Mary. Since Mary Stella is in a sense the muse of an ailing modern imagination, the splitting amounts to a ‘fissuring of her’ sovereign death-wish’ (Wilson Harris, ‘The Quest for Form’, *Kunapipi*, V, 1, 26-27). The death-wish is enacted when Stella commits suicide, though after death she intensifies Mary’s visionary powers and stimulates her imaginative quest into other cultures. This occurs through Mary’s apprehension of the life and predicament of three ‘angels’, Indian Khublall, black Jamaican Jackson and British Wheeler, through her perception also of the ways in which catastrophic events in their lives (the death of Khublall’s child-bride or the disappearance of Jackson’s ‘daughter of man’) can be converted and become part of the conversion of the age. Individual tragedies and real or threatening disasters that may affect large numbers, such as atomic warfare, are evoked concomitantly and seen either to possess the seeds of change or a ‘capacity for conversion of deeds to avert catastrophe’ (p.88). In a remarkable
Marsden, who lies wounded on the pavement after being struck by a bale fallen from a lorry, emerges with the miniature world the bale has become and reveals through the prophetic grace he lights in Mary's body the possibility to transform the 'mesmeric quantity' of atomic fire into 'qualitative mystery', a new dimension in the mind (thus a revival of imagination) to cope with atomic fire and prevent the terror it arouses from blinding us.

This complex image (less paradoxical, however, in the light of the Fiery Furnace episode in the Bible) is one example among many of the way in which visions of apparently implacable catastrophes are reduced and seen to possess a constructive element. The surface fragmentation of the narrative is not an end in itself; it shows that the images in man's psychological space are all partial and must not be mistaken for a whole that remains elusive. Similarly, the shift of interest in the second half of the narrative from the deprived 'holy' family of Sebastian, Mary/Stella and John to Khublall and Jackson as Mary envisions their experience in the mirror of Marsden's Angel Inn is not so arbitrary as it may at first seem. The men are 'living masks' of Marsden whose spiritual authority has grown out of the suffering or 'slicing' imposed on him by fate in different parts of the world. Joseph (Marsden), not Mary, has the redeeming role. Like his mythical forbear two thousand years ago (a Yeatsian analogy), he is the protective and compassionate man who looks after Mary and cures her. But unlike Yeats's pessimistic prophecy, his 'annunciation of humanity' (p.31) is envisaged as a real possibility through Mary's encounter with other cultures, other forms of violence and deprivations the 'angels' (who are also 'prey of the furies') were involved in.

Actually, both Mary's 'son of man' and Jackson's 'daughter of man' have the same grand-father, Mack-the-Knife, an infamous character who with a set other personae, Lucy Brown, Sukey Tawdry and Jenny Diver (the mother who reappears in times of crisis) comes straight out of a Louis Armstrong song, itself inspired by John Gay's Beggar's Opera. Harris's well-known equation of writing with other forms of art has led here to his using music as a 'profound metaphor' actualizing through its mutes and voices the rhythms of Mary's consciousness and the movements of the characters who come into life within it when she effaces herself. Music plays the same role as painting in the earlier novels bringing together and creating a 'mutuality' ('Quest for Form', 22) between alien or seemingly incompatible characters and elements in their lives or the cultures they represent. The musical metaphor is the structural design which sustains what Harris calls 'a profound alteration of fictional imagery in narrative bodies' ('Quest for Form', 26). Possibly, in the alteration we find in novel after novel lies the secret of his inexhaustibly inventive genius.

HENA MAES-JELINEK
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