Kunapipi 9(3) 1987 Full version

Abstract
Full text of issue.

This full issue is available in Kunapipi: http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol9/iss3/1
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 review, inquiries — should be sent to:

Anna Rutherford  
Editor — KUNAPIPI  
Department of English  
University of Aarhus  
8000 Aarhus C  
Denmark

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

Scandinavia:  
Individuals: Dkr100 per annum or Dkr250 for three years  
Institutions: Dkr150 per annum

Outside Scandinavia:  
Individuals: £9 / US$18 / AUD20 per annum or £25 / US$50 / AUD55 for three years  
Institutions: £15 / US$30 / AUD35 per annum

Copyright © 1987 by KUNAPIPI  
ISSN 0106-5734
Kunapipi is published with assistance from the Literature Board of the Australia Council, the Federal Government’s arts funding and advisory body, and the European branch of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies.

NOTE:
In Volume IX, No. 1, the article on ‘The Indianness of Ezekiel’s Indian English Poems’ was wrongly attributed to the Indian poet Shiv Kumar. The co-author of the article is Dr Shiv Kumar from Kakaliya University. We regret this error.

*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.
CONTENTS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Sam Selvon, ‘Finding West Indian Identity in London’ 34

FICTION
Kate Walker, ‘Night’ 93
Jude C. Ogu, ‘The Road to Heaven’ 121

POETRY
Gerry Turcotte, ‘Forbidden Fruit’ 79
‘Crossing the Mountains’ 80
‘Dark Rituals’ 81
Andrew Taylor, ‘Learning How to Win at Tennis’ 82
‘Washing’ 83
Mark Macleod, ‘Diplomacy’ 84
‘Gun Talk’ 86
‘The Trick’ 88
Diane Fahey, ‘Sacred Conversations’ 90
‘Loaves and Fishes’ 92
Graham Mort, ‘Steps’ 98
‘Moon Language’ 99
— ‘1 The Poems’ 100
— ‘2 The Gold Watch’ 101
— ‘3 Moon Language’ 101
Keki Daruwalla, ‘The Last Whale’ 102
‘Of Mohommad Ali Pasha’ 104
Lauris Edmond, ‘Rhineland’ 105
‘City Lights’ 106
‘Echoes’ 107
‘The Night Burns with a White Fire’ 108
‘Things’ 108
‘Summer Near the Arctic Circle’ 109

PHOTOGRAPHS
Reece Scannell 85
ARTICLES

Stephen Slemon, ‘Monuments of Empire: Allegory/Counter-Discourse/Post-Colonial Writing’ 1

Helen Tiffin, ‘Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse’ 17

Diana Brydon, ‘Hostiles in the Global Village’ 39

Veronica Kelly, ‘Apocalypse and After: Historical Visions in Some Recent Australian Drama’ 68


INTERVIEW

Louis Nowra 51

THE YEAR THAT WAS 124

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS 139
Monuments of Empire:
Allegory/Counter-Discourse/
Post-Colonial Writing

On Tuesday, 22 June 1897, Britain's loyal subjects — at Home, in the Dominions, and in the Colonies — celebrated in song and spectacle the Diamond Jubilee of Victoria's reign. It was not only the Queen's longevity they were celebrating, not only the remarkable progress of Western technology and science over the past sixty years, but also, and most importantly, the spread of the British Empire itself to the point where it now subsumed one quarter of the world's entire population. 'From my heart,' ran the Queen's message, telegraphed across the globe, 'I thank my beloved people. May God bless them.'

The weather in England was glorious — they called it 'Queen's weather' — but in the city of Sydney, capital of the Crown colony of New South Wales, the skies looked threatening. Innumerable celebrations were planned for the day: a grand march-past of troops along Macquarie Street; a procession in the harbour of splendidly illuminated steamers, each of them packed with singing loyalists; a picturesque display in the Domain of school girls dancing in skirts of royal purple. But one of the 'gayest scenes' to be enacted that day was a celebration, not of Victoria herself, but of European settlement on the Australian continent: the unveiling in the Royal Botanical Gardens of a monument to Sir Arthur Phillip, Commander of the First Fleet, and first Governor of New South Wales.

This is how the press in Sydney reported it:

On the footpaths and in the roadway thousands awaited the beat of the drums and the blare of the brass instruments which were to announce the coming of our brave defenders.... The Union Jack draping the noble proportions of the figure of the first Governor of the colony could be seen from the balconies and windows of the handsome houses in Macquarie-street, and people hung out over the railings all along and posed on the giddy heights of flat-topped roofs.... [A] guard of honor from
H.M.S. Orlando formed at the statue [and] was soon surrounded by a patriotic throng. The body guard from the Permanent Artillery under Major Bailey marched in and formed, and the Governor and suite followed...

His Excellency was heartily applauded on advancing to the front of the platform... ‘Look at the picture spread out in front of your eyes today, and compare it in your mind with the view presented by this harbour when the Sirius sailed in,’ said his Excellency. ‘One hundred years or so have passed, and you have this great and populous city, these beautiful gardens, and a magnificent array of shipping which always adorns your harbour. You are now a great and prosperous community, dependent no longer on help from outside, but self-reliant and self-governing.’

(Applause)...

His Excellency then pulled the red, white, and blue ribbon, and the Union Jack fell from the bronze figure, the bronze dolphins at the base spouted water, and the people sent up a mighty cheer....

Three cheers were given for the Queen.

When that flag had fallen and the cheers had died down, the people crowded around this monument would have seen, first, the huge and imposing figure of Phillip himself, dressed in full military regalia and towering above the fountain on his rectangular sandstone column, his right foot purposefully forward and his hand outstretched, as if offering to someone the written document that it displays. As their eyes slid downward to the monument’s second level, they would have observed the half-sized classical figures at the four cardinal points: two males and two females, all of them dressed, but in the flowing robes and scant tunics of a distant culture and a more innocent age. They would likely have noticed, also, the bas-relief inscriptions naming each of these figures: ‘Neptune’ for the bearded man with the trident; ‘Commerce’ for the reclining woman to his right; ‘Cyclops’ for the figure beside her (but probably signifying Odysseus, because the virile figure has two eyes and a cunning look), and ‘Agriculture’ for the woman coddling a sheep. They might also have discerned, if they were close enough, a series of friezes on the statue’s rectangular column, each depicting a scene from classical family life, each inscribed for its respective significance: ‘Education’, ‘Patriotism’, and ‘Justice’. But unless the spectators on that day were very close, they would probably not have noticed the four small plaques on the lowest level of the statue: the level of the fountain water and the bronze dolphins. On each of these four plaques, etched flat into the bronze, is the figure of a naked Aboriginal hunter. And none of these figures is marked by any inscription of language whatsoever.

Most viewers of this statue would recognise in it the operations of some kind of allegorical structure, one going beyond the immediate level of figuration — woman as ‘Agriculture’ or ‘Commerce’, for example —
Monument to Governor Phillip. Botanical Gardens, Sydney.  
Photograph: Reece Scannell.
and applying to the semiotic system of the statue as a whole. In its simplest form, allegory (from the Greek allos — ‘other’ + agoreuein — ‘to speak openly, to speak in the assembly or market’) is a trope that in saying one thing also says some ‘other’ thing; it is the doubling of some previous or anterior code by a sign, or by a semiotic system, that also signifies a more immediate or ‘literal’ meaning. Allegory thus marks a bifurcation or division in the directionality of the interpretive process, and we can see such a bifurcation cutting across the kind of ‘reading’ that this monument to Arthur Phillip seems to demand. On a literal level, the statue commemorates a specific historical figure from a specific historical moment; it denotes a ‘then’ and a ‘now’ and implicitly suggests that the two are connected by the kind of development within continuity, change within permanence, that the Governor’s speech so stirringly evokes. On this literal level, Phillip’s striding figure represents that hallowed moment when European colonists first stepped onto the new land of the Australian continent, and the text he holds forth can be identified as the Letters Patent that authorises the establishment in the colony of the apparatus of British law.

On an allegorical level, however, the statue clearly signifies a great deal more. In the first place, it deploys a complex and interwoven network of spatial, numerical, and magnitudinal codes in order to construct what appears to be a fairly simple binary system of privilege and power. Phillip stands above, resplendent, while the Aborigines lurk below; he is vast in size while they are small; his full clothing resounds against their nakedness; his singularity echoes against their plurality.

Between the two poles of this system is interposed a mediating level: that of the manifold theatre of classicism. The classical world is portrayed as being contiguous to the European present, at once a pedigree of its deeply rooted codes of civilisation and a reflection of its imperial energies, and because of this, the statue can be seen to be combining its basic binary structure with another semiotic code: that of history itself. As we read downward, away from the originating moment of colonisation and Phillip’s indomitable stride, we find ourselves reading backward through time, past the founding moment of Western culture towards the lost origins of the human race itself. Here, on the unknowable, and hence uninscribed, plane of the prehistoric, contemporary Aboriginal culture is figured as the long moment of human savagery, Western culture’s deepest roots.

As this tripartite structure makes clear, then, this statue of Phillip is less an historical monument than a monument to history, and as such it works not only to construct the category of ‘history’ as the self-privileging
inscription of the coloniser, but also to legitimise a particular concept of history: that is, history as the record of signal events, the actuations of great men upon the groundwork of time and space. Within such a concept, where only those 'few privileged monuments' of achievement, those events and figures measurable in bronze and stone, have the capacity to signify, colonised cultures must always remain uninscribed. Their communal practices of quotidian existence, their cultural acts of self-definition and resistance, are written out of the record; and in the process, subjugated peoples are 'troped' into figures in a colonial pageant, 'people without history' whose capacity to signify cannot exceed that which is demarcated for them by the semiotic system that speaks for the colonising culture. On the allegorical plane, then, the monument to Phillip represents the March of History, the inexorable advancement of a universal progress; and significantly, this March finds its purest expression in the territorial acquisition and cultural subjugation implicit in the enterprise of colonialism.

From an aerial view, the statue describes a circle: Arthur Phillip at the centre, his eyes looking searchingly toward the horizon; the Aborigines on the statue's outside wall, their gaze downward, fixed upon the ground. Phillip's gaze encompasses the Aborigines, but their peripheral positioning, along with the angle of their vision, makes it clear that within the system of this statue the Aborigines remain ignorant of him. In this monument to the Imperial presence, the signifiers of gaze represent more than the contrast between benighted ignorance and noble enlightenment. Rather, they encode a third system of representation operating in this statue: that of 'the objectifying gaze of knowledge'. In the logic of the gaze, the percipient constructs that which is 'out there' — individuals, cultures, spaces — into 'units of knowledge', not, primarily, to effect genuine understanding, but rather to effect a subjective construction of Self. The process at work here, in a specifically colonial construction, is not dissimilar to that which some critics see underpinning the practice of pornography, where male viewers inscribe their will onto the bodies of represented women, fixing them to an identity fabricated entirely by masculine desire, and ascribing to them no more than the wish to be subsumed within precisely this gaze. In the imperial context of this statue, that which is Other is 'read' against an already given matrix of identification and learning which erects itself upon the foundations of received tradition — the 'codes of recognition' embedded in the metaphysical, social, and political systems of Western culture — and is made to figure in a system designed primarily to interpellate a subjectivity for the colonising culture itself. There is no gaze outside that of the
coloniser, no angle of vision that opens to a future other than that which the statue, as monument to History, inscribes — unless, of course, it is that of the viewers. But the viewers, in recognising the statue as a semiotic system, and in assembling from the codes it deploys the allegory of Imperial Self, become complicit in the colonising gaze, active participants whose knowledge of Western modes of representation is necessary to the communication of the statue’s allegorical meaning. Like the Aborigines figured on the base of the statue, the viewers, too, are constructed by representation.

The social ‘text’ of Arthur Phillip’s landfall recurs in a series of celebratory moments, the most recent being the physical ‘re-enactment’ of the voyage of the First Fleet during the Australian bicentennial in 1988. The patterns of recurrence which operate through this statue, however, are a little confined to a single national history as they are to a specific temporal moment: in fact, both the ideological process this statue enacts, and the allegorical mode of representation through which it conveys that process, work as a kind of shorthand to that widespread form of cross-cultural management which critics such as Homi Bhabha and Peter Hulme identify as the ‘discourse of colonialism’. ‘Discourse’, as Foucault theorises it, is the name for that language by which dominant groups within society constitute the field of ‘truth’ through the imposition of specific knowledges, disciplines, and values. Discourse, in other words, is a ‘complex of signs and practices which organises social existence and social reproduction’, and its function is ‘to give differential substance to membership in a social group or class’ by mediating both ‘an internal sense of belonging to that group [and] an outward sense of otherness’. As Foucault puts it, discourse is ‘a violence we do to things’; it is a ‘diffuse and hidden conglomerate of power’; and as a social formation it works to constitute ‘reality’ not only for the objects it appears passively to represent but also for the subjects who form the coherent interpretive community upon which it depends. And so the term colonial discourse, or the discourse of colonialism, is the name for that system of signifying practices whose work it is to produce and naturalise the hierarchical power structures of the imperial enterprise, and to mobilise those power structures in the management of both colonial and neo-colonial cross-cultural relationships.

This statue to Governor Phillip, then, functions in at least one of its social dimensions as a signifying practice within this discourse of colonialism, and the ideological process it sets in train is that system of repre-
sentation which Gayatri Spivak calls 'othering': that is, the projection of one's own systemic codes onto the 'vacant' or 'uninscribed' territory of the other. By this process, the Other is transformed into a set of codes that can be recuperated by reference to one's own systems of cultural recognition. The unknowable becomes known; and whatever 'spillage' might have occurred in the problematics of racial or cultural difference becomes stoppered by the network of textualization that is inscribed onto the Other and then read as a 'lack' or 'negation' of that which constitutes the Imperial and transcendent One. The Imperial self that engineers this discourse thus fixes the limits of value and signification of the Other to that which takes place within the projected system, and arrogates to (him)self sole purchase on the possibility of organic wholeness. As for the Others, they are determinant in a system of power and self-constitution, elements somewhere 'out there' beyond the circle, awaiting discovery, conquest, appropriation, and interpretation. As one court ruling put it in 1854, the Others of Empire are 'people whom nature has marked out as inferior, and who are incapable of progress or development beyond a certain point ... [people upon] whom nature has placed an impassable difference'.

The statue of Governor Phillip functions as one of the more spectacular allegorisations of this figural system of 'othering', but the investments of allegory in the semiotics of imperialism do not end here. In oversimplified form, allegory can be understood as a mode of representation that proceeds by forging an identity between things, and it reads present events, whatever the signifying system in which they are found, as terms within some already given system of textualised identification or codified knowledge. As Paul de Man points out, allegory consists of semantic repetition in a rhetoric of temporality, and within this rhetoric the sign is always grounded to a another sign which is by definition anterior to it. In allegory, that is, signifiers from the world 'out there' are semantically fixed to a culturally positioned and historically grounded 'master code' or 'pretext' that is inherent in the tradition and is capable of acting as a matrix for a shared typology between the sign and its interpreters. In allegory, signs are interpreted as modalities of preceeding signs which are already deeply embedded in a specific cultural thematics, and they work to transform free-floating objects into positively identified and 'known' units of knowledge.

That process of recognition which underwrites the statue to Phillip, then, is inherently allegorical, for it depends upon a rhetoric of anterior reference to the metaphysical, political, and social codes that construct the subjectivity of European colonising societies. And this same structure
of allegorical reference and recognition can be seen to have provided an energising impetus to the discourse of colonialism ever since the project of European imperialism began. This, of course, is a point that needs arguing, but to give one example only: when Columbus first arrived in the Caribbean, he named the first two islands he encountered for the Christian deity and the Virgin, and his next three islands for the Spanish king, queen, and heir apparent. The rhetorical structure of this ritual of naming is inalienably allegorical, for here Columbus ‘reads’ the site of otherness by reference to an anterior set of signs that is already situated within an overarching, supposedly universal, metaphysical and political master code of recognition. As a discursive practice such ritual works in concert with other forms of textual imposition to assimilate the so-called ‘New World’ into ‘orthodox relation’ with the religious and political hierarchies of value that comprised the dominant ideology of Europe at the time. Columbus’s onomastics help demonstrate, then, that within the discourse of colonialism allegory has always functioned as an especially visible technology of appropriation: and if allegory literally means ‘other speaking’, it has historically meant a way of speaking for the subjugated Others of the European colonial enterprise — a way of subordinating the colonised, that is, through the politics of representation.

This function of allegory in the dominant narrative patterns of imperialist textuality inherently loads the question of how allegory performs in the context of colonial and post-colonial literatures where, as Homi Bhabha points out, the semiotics of Empire so often return in repetitions whose mimicry bears the traces of a menacing difference. Frederic Jameson, in an article entitled ‘Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism’, has recently addressed the question of how a differential, non-western allegorical practice might establish itself as a social phenomenon, and his site for examining this question is the larger field of third-world textuality. ‘What all third-world cultural productions have in common,’ Jameson argues, ‘and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world’ is that ‘all third-world texts are necessarily ... allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say particularly when, their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel.’ The reason for this inherent propensity to allegorical writing, Jameson argues, is that in the third world the determining imperatives of capitalism have not (yet) fissured the cohesive structures of social existence and therefore have not
effected their 'radical split' between private experience and the public sphere. Instead, 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled structure of the public ... culture and society' in third-world writing, and thus 'the coincidence of the personal story and the «tale of the tribe», as still in Spenser' remains the dominant mode of literary representation.

Jameson admits that his thesis is 'sweeping' in its canvas, but not that it is 'totalising' in its essential binarism, as Aijaz Ahmad wants to argue.\textsuperscript{28} Rather, Jameson insists, his thesis is intended to function as an intervention in the institutional purchase of first-world literary criticism, which in a very basic sense has failed to recognise the 'constitutive presence' of narrative allegory in other parts of the world.\textsuperscript{29} We need to take on board relational ways of 'thinking global culture' and to establish 'radical situational difference in cultural production and meanings', Jameson argues, and this thesis of national allegorisation helps perform the work of this structural emplacement in an effective manner. For critical modes of this cognitive relationality can lead on to specific pedagogical improvements in first-world syllabi, which in their present form can neither initiate genuinely dialectical modes of critical cognition nor recognise the presence of cultural and discursive 'third worlds' within their own social formations.

The interventionary project of Jameson's reading is, of course, wholly admirable in its attempt to call down that professional first-world ethnocentrism which most mainstream programmes of literary study continue to endorse at the level of their methodology. But given the prior investments of allegorical figuration in the tropological technologies of Empire, it is hard not to feel that Jameson's argument overprivileges a culturally expressive reading of 'ex-centric' allegorical practice at the expense of a much more immediate energetics of dialects and relationality. Why, for example, should the performative actuations of textual allegory necessarily be fixed to the dominant modalities of allegorical representation that Spenser's poetry and the English tradition so visibly exemplifies? And why should the conditions of discursive relationality or intervention be bound to, or solely enabled by, a first-world pedagogy which, in ascribing expressive status to the non-first-world text, denies the literature of Others its own measure of radical intervention and textual contestation? The historical positionality of allegorical figuration within the discourse of colonialism would suggest another way of reading at least part of the 'text' of allegorical differentiality, one which would require a realignment of the modality of critical access away from the determining structure of the first-world/third-world binary into the problematics of
what might more accurately be called the conditions of post-coloniality. For the fact is that post-colonial cultures — including not only third-world post-colonial cultures such as those in East and West Africa, South-east Asia, or the Caribbean, but also those colonising/settler societies such as anglophone Canada or white Australia and New Zealand\(^3\) — have been and still are producing an enormous number of highly visible allegorical texts, and many of these allegories are themselves productive of an interventionary, anti-colonialist critique. In the face of this literary form of critical intervention and cultural resistance, then, the project of a radical critical practice might be constituted as something not unlike the close reading of the literary text, except that here the text would be grounded to a specific vector of historical materiality and dialectical positionality. Within such a form of reading, the dynamics of radical critique would inhere not within the avowed methodology of the critical perspective but within the space of post-colonial literary writing itself, and the critic would become no more and no less than a facilitator of the kinds of cultural work certain post-colonial allegorical texts inherently seek to perform. The following comments (in their extremely truncated form) are intended to sketch out some of the ways in which such a form of critical practice might functionally proceed.

The Jamaican writer John Hearne, in a review of Jean Rhys’s \textit{Wide Sargasso Sea}, writes on the question of why it is that so many post-colonial writers find it necessary to write back against literary texts such as Brontë’s \textit{Jane Eyre}, which present colonial cultures and characters according to the dictates of anterior, canonical, and specifically European narrative patterns. The validity of Rhys’s novel, Hearne notes, ‘depends on a book from elsewhere, not on a basic, assumed life. And yet,” he continues

\begin{quote}
...is this not a superb and audacious metaphor of so much of West Indian life? Are we not still, in so many of our responses, creatures of books and inventions fashioned by others who used us as mere producers, as figments of their imagination; and who regarded the territory as ground over which the inadmissible or forgotten forces of the psyche could run free for a while before being written off or suppressed?\(^\text{31}\)
\end{quote}

Hearne’s point here is that the actual experience of life in a colonial or post-colonial culture has been, and continues to be, ‘written’ by the texts of colonial discourse — or in other words, that colonial discourse, through its figurative appropriation of colonial subjects and its inscription of a complex network of textuality upon them, has ‘preconstituted’ social existence in the marginalised territories of Empire. Hearne’s observation thus helps to situate George Lamming’s seemingly hyperbolic comment that the one of the three most significant things ever to
happen in the Caribbean Third World was the development of the West Indian novel. Together, these two observations make it clear that the horizon of figuration upon which a large number of post-colonial literary texts seek to act is this prefigurative discourse of colonialism, whose dominant mode of representation is that of allegory. And thus allegory, in a dialectical sense, becomes an especially charged site for the discursive manifestations for what is at heart a cultural form of struggle. Allegory, that is, becomes an historically produced field of representation upon which certain forms of post-colonial writing engage head-on with the interpellative and tropological strategies of colonialism’s most visible figurative technology. Allegory becomes a site upon which post-colonial cultures seek to contest and subvert colonialist appropriation through the production of a literary, and specifically anti-imperialist, figurative opposition or textual counter-discourse.

The concept of counter-discourse, as the critic Richard Terdiman explains, begins in that ‘present and scandalous trace of an historical potentiality for difference’ which in a Derridean sense inhabits all forms of semiotic ‘presence’ and all complacent or dominant discursive structures. Counter-discourses, that is, inherently situate themselves as ‘other’ to a dominant discourse which by definition attempts to exclude heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and is thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to it. Counter-discourses thus, as Richard Terdiman puts it, ‘read’ that which is structurally unable to ‘read’ them, and the means by which they perform this oppositional ‘reading’ are always textually specific and always strategically variable.

In the context of post-colonial writing, then, certain literary texts inhabit the site of allegorical figuration in order to ‘read’ and contest the social ‘text’ of colonialism, and the ways in which they perform this counter-discursive activity are inherently differential and diverse. Clearly, an adequate critical reading of this form of cultural work would need to proceed at the level of the individual literary text, but the following summary comments may nonetheless help to locate some of the counter-discursive dimensions that characterise post-colonial allegorical practices. In one group of post-colonial allegories, for example, a textual counter-discourse seeks to interrogate those notions of history which colonialism leaves in its wake by reiterating those notions on an allegorical level of signification. Ayi Kwei Armah’s ‘An African Fable’, for example, foregrounds the rape of the coloniser by the colonised and shows how this rape continues into the political sphere of neo-colonialism. Kole Omotoso’s The Combat, V.S. Naipaul’s Guerrillas, Armah’s
Why Are We So Blest?, Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s Devil on the Cross, and Gabriel Okara’s The Voice provide specific allegorical doublings of cultural rupture and its political consequences, all of which can be traced to the colonial encounter. Gwendolyn MacEwen’s Noman stories allegorise the New World myth of a country without mythology or memory, while David Foster’s Moonlight allegorises ironically the pattern of New World capture, appropriation, and settlement. In these texts, allegory functions as a structurally counter-discursive principle, for here received notions of history are bracketed off by a literal level of fictional activity and displaced into a secondary level of the text accessible only through the mediation of the primary fictional level. Allegory here foregrounds the fact that history, like fiction, requires an act of reading before it can have meaning. History must be read, and read in adjacency to, a fictional re-enactment of it, and this relocation of the received shibboleths of history into the creative and transformative exercise of reading opens a space within which new ways of formulating the past can come into being.

In a related group of post-colonial texts — Hearne’s The Sure Salvation, for example, Lamming’s Natives of My Person, or J.M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians — allegorical representation is employed counter-discursively in order to expose the investment of allegory in the colonising project and thus to identify allegorical modes of cognition as the enemy of cultural decolonisation. In a variation of this technique, Lamming’s Water with Berries figures the inescapability of colonial discourse’s cultural préfiguration by narrating the entrapment of realistic characters within the allegorical roles of that paradigmatic colonialist text, The Tempest. And Susan Swan’s The Biggest Modern Woman in the World demonstrates how a fictional character attempts and fails to escape her subordinate allegorical role in a national allegory of imperial domination.

Other post-colonial allegories, such as Randolph Stow’s Tourmaline or Kofi Awoonor’s This Earth, My Brother…, employ the inherently excessive quality of allegorical figuration in order to replace monolithic traditions with the plural typologies which inevitably inhere in cross-cultural situations. This excessiveness can surface as an allegorical carnivalisation of received notions of history, as in Salman Rushdie’s novels; while in allegorical texts such as Armah’s The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born or Keri Hulme’s The Bone People, indigenous or pre-contact allegorical traditions engage with, and finally overcome, the kinds of allegorical reading which a universalising European tradition would want to impose. Still other post-colonial allegories, such as Wilson Harris’s Carnival, attempt to reappropriate allegory from its colonialist archive and deploy it towards specifically differential and heteroglossic structures.
Whatever the specific nature of the counter-discursive strategy, however, all of these post-colonial texts position themselves upon the site of allegorical figuration in order to subvert the codes of recognition which colonial discourse has settled upon post-colonial cultures. They seek to establish the presence of cultural heterogeneity and difference against a dominant discourse that, as Richard Terdiman puts it, 'casts itself and its hegemony as timeless, as transparent, as proof against all corrosion and complication', and they work to transgress that discourse by reclaiming one of the representational strategies — allegory — in which it is grounded. Such acts of post-colonial literary resistance function counter-discursively because they 'read' the dominant colonialist discursive system as a whole in its possibilities and operations and force that discourse's synchronic or unitary account of the cultural situation toward the movement of the diachronic. In other words, these post-colonial allegorical texts inherently historicise the conditions of their own possibility and reinstate the sphere of the political as paramount over the individualistic or private by virtue of its discursive productivity within the material condition of post-colonial existence. These texts establish an oppositional, disidentificatory voice within the sovereign domain of the discourse of colonialism, and in doing so they help to open a space upon which the false clarities of received tradition can be transformed into the uncertain ground of cognitive resistance and dialectical reiteration.

That an essay into the question of allegorical writing in post-colonial cultures should begin with a moment in the history of Empire is, in one way, dismaying. It suggests that the kinds of practices operating within a widespread form of post-colonial literary activity are overshadowed by a discourse of Empire, that a measure of determinism continues to mark the literary production of decolonised cultures, and that whatever writers within those cultures might individually feel about cultural and literary traditions, the hand of a constricting and unwanted History holds their creative products firmly in its grasp. But as Derrida notes: 'the movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures.' If the kind of critical reading advocated by this essay undermines the essentialist or expressive claim of certain post-colonial allegorical texts, it nevertheless manages to ground this widespread form of literary practice to a figurative impulse, one committed to cognitive unsettling of those hegemonic and universalist codes of recognition that colonial modes of representation underwrite,
and one invested in the fissuring of those practices and institutions which colonial discourse continues to inscribe onto geographies of difference. For Derrida's observation suggests that the kind of work now going on in a growing body of contemporary, institutionalised theoretical practice — namely, the deconstructive 'reading' of the social text of European imperialism — is already going on in post-colonial literary activity, and that the project of a fissuring, deconstructive reading or critique has always underwritten certain figural practices in post-colonial writing. Post-colonial literary writing, that is, can be read not only as literature, but also as a form of cultural criticism and cultural critique: a mode of disidentifying whole societies from the sovereign codes of cultural organisation, and an inherently dialectical intervention in the hegemonic production of cultural meaning.

The specific focus of this paper is allegory, but the logistics of the critical practice it seeks to advocate implicitly suggest that the kind of critical, refigurative activity that operates on the site of post-colonial allegorical writing also operates through other modes of textual disidentification and other markers of semiotic resistance. And if this is so, then one of the projects for a future criticism of post-colonial writing is to learn to read not just the overt thematic declarations of anti-colonial resistance in 'ex-centric' post-colonial writing, but also the counter-discursive investments of post-colonial figuration on the level of genre and mode. For it is through the refigurative, counter-discursive articulations of representational mode and generic structure, as much as through the textual manipulation of plot and character or theme and voice, that post-colonial writing reclams its text from the dead hand of received tradition and enjoins the project of cognitive liberation; it is within the space of historical préfiguration that a differential, contestatory, and genuinely post-colonial semiotics actuates through literature in pursuit of political change.

NOTES

2. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Ibid., p. 1360.


10. The phrase is T.S. Eliot's but has been given specific meaning within contemporary historiography by Eric Wolf in his *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley, 1982).


30. For a discussion of how the concept of ‘post-colonial’ can be engaged in these terms, see Helen Tiffin, ‘Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgement’, in The History and Historiography of Commonwealth Literature, ed. Dieter Riemenschneider (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1983), pp. 19-35.


33. Terdiman, p. 343.


35. Terdiman, p. 77.

36. Terdiman, p. 77.


38. Terdiman, p. 69.

39. Terdiman, p. 69.


Earlier versions of this paper were given at Macquarie University and the University of Alberta. For their comments and suggestions, my thanks to those at both institutions, and also (as ever) to my colleagues at the University of Queensland.
Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse

As George Lamming once remarked, over three quarters of the contemporary world has been directly and profoundly affected by imperialism and colonialism. Although it is clear just how profound an effect this has had on the social and political structures of the twentieth century and on the relations which exist between nations in our age, it has until recently been less clear how profoundly this has influenced the perceptive frameworks of the majority of people alive now. The day to day realities of colonized peoples were in large part generated for them by the impact of European discourses. But the contemporary art, philosophies and literature produced by post-colonial societies are not simply continuations or adaptations of European models. The processes of artistic and literary decolonization have involved a radical dis/mantling of European codes and a post-colonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant European discourses. This has frequently been accompanied by the demand for an entirely new or wholly recovered 'reality', free of all colonial taint. Given the nature of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, with its pandemic brutalities and its cultural denigration, such a demand is desirable and inevitable. But as the contradictions inherent in a project such as Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike's *The Decolonization of African Literature* demonstrate, such pre-colonial cultural purity can never be fully recovered.

Post-colonial cultures are inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent local identity. Decolonization is process, not arrival; it invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them; between European or British discourses and their post-colonial dis/mantling. Since it is not possible to create or recreate national or regional formations independent of their historical implication in the European colonial enterprise, it has been the project of post-colonial writing to interrogate European dis-
courses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial domination of so much of the rest of the world.

Thus the rereading and rewriting of the European historical and fictional record are vital and inescapable tasks. These subversive manoeuvres, rather than the construction of the essentially national or regional, are what are characteristic of post-colonial texts, as the subversive is characteristic of post-colonial discourse in general. Post-colonial literatures/cultures are thus constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices, and they offer ‘fields’ of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant discourse. The operation of post-colonial counter-discourse is dynamic, not static: it does not seek to subvert the dominant with a view to taking its place, but to, in Wilson Harris’s formulation, evolve textual strategies which continually ‘consume’ their ‘own biases’ at the same time as they expose and erode those of the dominant discourse.

I want now to turn to the ways in which post-colonial literatures in English, and this particular reading of the post-colonial, challenge the traditional discipline of cross national comparative studies, and suggest where such a reading fits in terms of the ways in which ‘Commonwealth’ literature studies have been theorised and practiced. I am taking Comparative literature in this context in the narrow sense of the term, to refer to the discipline which constitutes itself under that title, though arguably much contemporary literary theory involves comparative literary studies, and as such does not invoke the particular problems I have with Comparative Literature (capital C).

Comparative Literature Studies, as they have been constituted and practiced in Europe and the United States, have stressed extra-rather than intra-linguistic comparisons, have concentrated on European cultures and literatures, and have often implicitly assumed, even where this has not been explicitly stated, that the ultimate purpose of the comparison is universalist, and therefore, from my point of view, problematically hegemonic: ‘When Latin lost its position as a «universal» language, and growing nationalisms divided Europe more and more, comparative literature studies assumed new functions: that of restoring a lost unity and universality...’ Although this is advanced by Prawer in his Comparative Literature Studies: An Introduction as a feature of the history of the discipline rather than a current practice, nevertheless much of the later material suggests that universality remains an ideal, and that the hegemonic relation so implied is quite acceptable. Austrian and Swiss
writers like Stifter and Keller are congratulated for regarding themselves 'as writers within the great German tradition of literature' in spite of 'their attachment to their native region'. Moreover, attempts to define just what might constitute separate language groups appeal to the common sense notion of difference, and sweep troubling problems of dialect and power into the footnotes. And although Prawer sees as 'not the least important task of those furthering comparative literature studies a broadening of the terms of reference sufficiently to break down what remains of ... cultural imperialism', the entire field seems frustrated by its refusal to confront its own inherently political constitution. The emphasis on European cultures, the ideal of 'universality', and the stress on 'great traditions' perpetuate a political conservatism or blindness which sidesteps the interesting challenges the 'margins' of any constituted subject inevitably pose. It seems to me that a study of discourses operating within one language group, say, Prawer's German example, might open the field to many more exciting developments both within and between various major language groups than its centrist philosophy has so far encouraged.

Well before Chinweizu drew attention to the appropriating effect of the ambiguity in the phrase, 'English Literature', employed to cover works written in the language, English, and the literature of a particular culture, England, writers and critics in the post-colonial English-speaking world had unconsciously or deliberately been engaged in counter-discursive responses to the dominant tradition. Once colonial Calibans transported the language or had it imposed on them, they used it to curse and to subvert. One of the earliest sites of direct attack apart from institutional and commercial control of the means of production of literature, was the notion of 'literary universality'. This had fostered the centrality of the dominant discourse by enshrining the values of one particular culture as axiomatic, as literary or textual givens, and invoked policies of either assimilation or apartheid for the remainder of the English-speaking world. Either one wrote 'like the English', having thereby 'transcended' the merely 'local' and thus gained entry to the great imperial club, or, more frequently, one insisted on the local and thus remained irredeemably provincial. European hegemonic manoeuvres of this kind can wear a number of masks. The most recent consists in the use of the term 'post-modern' and the practices of some post-structuralist critics, a good number of which, like the 'experiments' of the post-modern text, have themselves been inspired by direct cross-cultural or colonial experience, or are in fact post-colonial experiments. (The New Zealand writer, Vincent O'Sullivan, recently remarked that the first 'post-modern' text
was Melville's *The Confidence Man*, and that this is of course a post-colonial novel.) But like literary universality, these terms and categorisations act to appropriate to a continuing European hegemony any texts that will 'fit' and to marginalise those that refuse Euro-cultural assimilation.

In challenging the notion of literary universality (or the European appropriation of post-colonial practice and theory as post-modern or post-structuralist) post-colonial writers and critics engage in counter-discourse. But separate models of 'Commonwealth Literature' or 'new Writing in English' which implicitly or explicitly invoke notions of continuation of, or descent from, a 'mainstream' British literature, consciously or unconsciously reinvoke those very hegemonic assumptions against which the post-colonial text has, from its inception, been directed. Models which stress shared language and shared circumstances of colonialism (recognising vast differences in the expression of British imperialism from place to place) allow for counter-discursive strategies, but unless their stress is on counter-discursive fields of activity, such models run the risk of becoming colonisers in their turn. African critics and writers in particular have rejected these models for their apparently neo-assimilative bases, and opted instead for the national or the pan-African. But if the impulse behind all post-colonial literatures is seen to be counter-discursive, and it is recognised that such strategies may take many forms in different cultures, I think we have a more satisfactory model than any loose national grouping based on felt marginality can offer, and one which perhaps avoids some of the pitfalls of earlier collective models or paradigms. Moreover, such a model can account for the ambiguous position of say, white Australians, who, though still colonised by Europe and European ideas, are themselves the colonisers of the original Aboriginal inhabitants. In this model, all post-invasion Aboriginal writing and orature might be regarded as counter-discursive to a dominant 'Australian' discourse and beyond that again to its European progenitor. It is this model I wish to take up later in considering J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* which explores the problem of white South African settler literature in relation to the continuing oppression by whites of the black majority.

The alternative to providing some kind of model or field in terms of which to consider literatures in english is the national or regional study, and this has been the way in which these literatures have most frequently been considered. This does, however, run the risk of a continuing marginalisation or ghettoisation, especially outside the particular country or region concerned, and excludes what are obviously fruitful compari-
sons between cultures and literatures which employ a dis/placed language in counter-hegemonic relation to its ‘place’ of origin. And, as Homi Bhabha has noted, national quests for cultural self-ratification and hence origination replicate imperial cognitive processes, reinvoking their values and practices in an attempted constitution of an independent identity. Although the refractions of a Western tradition are accepted as ironical (if not tragic), the demand for a literary tradition, a history, is put in exactly the same historicist and realist terms — the familiar quest for an origin that will authorise a beginning.

Frequently, too, the construction of the ‘essentially’ Nigerian or the ‘essentially’ Australian invokes exclusivist systems which replicate imperial universalist paradigms. For all these reasons, strategic and philosophical, I think national models do ultimately prove unsatisfactory, though it is from national positions that much of the active support for the study of literatures in English has come. And it is nation-based literary associations and individuals who still fight the good fight against the continuing hegemony of British literature and European culture in our universities.

In these days of increasing fetishisation of theory, a constituted field or subject needs a firmer foundation than one which consists in a loose association of nations or regions whose grouping is facilitated by a ‘common’ language. It is possible to formulate at least two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) models for future post-colonial studies. In the first, the post-coloniality of a text would be argued to reside in its discursive features, in the second, in its determining relations with its material situation. The danger of the first lies in post-coloniality’s becoming a set of unsituated reading practices; the danger in the second lies in the reintroduction of a covert form of essentialism. In an attempt to avoid these potential pitfalls I want to try to combine the two as overarching models in the reading of two texts by stressing counter-discursive strategies which offer a more general post-colonial reading practice or practices. These practices, though, are politically situated; sites of production and consumption are inextricably bound up with the production of meaning. The site of communication is of paramount importance in post-colonial writing, and remains its most important defining boundary. In investigating ‘fields’ of counter-discursive strategies within post-colonial counter-discourse, I have adapted the Canadian Dennis Lee’s term:

The metaphor of the field, invoking the idea of an unseen but definable force which patterns the particles that fall within its influence, furnishes ... a way of talking about the overall structures that govern the relationships among a collection of separable items. (In physics a field can only be perceived by inference from the relationships of
the particles it contains; the existence of the field is, however, entirely separate from that of the particles: though it may be detected through them, it is not defined by them.)

An adaptation of this concept seems particularly suitable for post-colonial literatures, in that it avoids the problems of a post-colonial essentialism (undesirable in any case as recursively imperialistic or assimilative), yet allows for the constitution of coherent fields of activity across diverse national, regional and racial boundaries. Within the broad field of the counter-discursive many sub-groupings are possible and are already being investigated. These include 'magic realism' as post-colonial discourse, and the re/placing of carnivalesque European genres like the picaresque in post-colonial contexts, where they are carried to a higher subversive power. Stephen Slemon has demonstrated the potential of allegory as a privileged site of anti-colonial or post-colonial discourse.

But the particular counter-discursive post-colonial field with which I want to engage here is what I'll call canonical counter-discourse. This strategy is perhaps most familiar to you through texts like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and it is one in which a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a British canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes. An important point needs to be made here about the discursive functions of textuality itself in post-colonial worlds. Texts constructed those worlds, 'reading' their alterity assimilatively in terms of their own cognitive codes. Explorers' journals, drama, fiction, historical accounts, 'mapping' enabled conquest and colonization and the capture and/or vilification of alterity. But often the very texts which facilitated such material and psychical capture were those which the imposed European education systems foisted on the colonized as the 'great' literature which dealt with 'universals'; ones whose culturally specific imperial terms were to be accepted as axiomatic at the colonial margins. Achebe has noted the ironies of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* being taught in colonial African universities.

Understandably, then, it has become the project of post-colonial literatures to investigate the European textual capture and containment of colonial and post-colonial space and to intervene in that originary and continuing containment. In his study of nineteenth century France, Richard Terdiman saw what he calls 'textual revolution' as partly conditional on the 'blockage of energy directed to structural change of the social formation'. But he goes on to note that even so, 'Literary revolution is not revolution by homology, but by intended function.'
Literary revolution in post-colonial worlds has been an intrinsic component of social ‘disidentification’ from the outset. Achebe’s essay, ‘The Novelist As Teacher’ stresses the crucial function of texts in post-colonial social formations and their primacy in effecting revolution and restitution, priorities which are not surprising given the role of the text in the European capture and colonization of Africa. Post-colonial counter-discursive strategies involve a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified ‘local’. *Wide Sargasso Sea* directly contests British sovereignty — of persons, of place, of culture, of language. It reinvests its own hybridised world with a provisionally authoritative perspective, but one which is deliberately constructed as provisional since the novel is at pains to demonstrate the subjective nature of point of view and hence the cultural construction of meaning.

Just as Jean Rhys writes back to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, so Samuel Selvon in *Moses Ascending* and J. M. Coetzee in *Foe* (and indeed throughout his works) write back to Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Neither writer is simply ‘writing back’ to an English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds. Like William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest, Robinson Crusoe* was part of the process of ‘fixing’ relations between Europe and its ‘others’, of establishing patterns of reading alterity at the same time as it inscribed the ‘fixity’ of that alterity, naturalising ‘difference’ within its own cognitive codes. But the function of such a canonical text at the colonial periphery also becomes an important part of material imperial practice, in that, through educational and critical institutions, it continually displays and repeats for the other, the original capture of his/her alterity and the processes of its annihilation, marginalization, or naturalisation as if this were axiomatic, culturally ungrounded, ‘universal’, natural.

Selvon and Coetzee take up the complex discursive field surrounding *Robinson Crusoe* and unlock these apparent closures.

In *Moses Ascending* Selvon reinvokes a character from an earlier work, *The Lonely Londoners*, one whose Commonwealth adventures we can follow further in *Moses Migrating*. It is important, I think, to situate Moses within Selvon’s work as a whole, just as it is with Coetzee’s *Foe*, for like the works of Wilson Harris, a complex process of ‘rehearsal’ is taking place here. Through Moses’ adventures two of the most important motifs in post-colonial literatures, the journey and the house are also scrutinized. In *The Lonely Londoners* Moses and his companions journey from
what they regard as their Caribbean margins to the centre of Empire, London, where for most of that novel they lead precarious existences. But in *Moses Ascending* Moses is able to purchase Tolroy’s House and become a landlord, presiding over a menagerie of Commonwealth boarders — Flo from Barbados, Ojo the African, Alfonso the Cypriot, Macpherson from Australia, the elusive Faizull/Farouk from Pakistan, some of whom, interestingly enough, are engaged in subversive activities. Macpherson seems to be in the drug business judging by his anxiety over parcels, and Faizull/Farouk are smuggling illegal immigrants into England.

*Moses Ascending* is one of the most comic novels in the English language, and one of the most complex in terms of the counter discursive strategies it invokes. A thoroughly colonized Trinidadian, Moses, after twenty years of struggling, sets himself up as ‘landlord’, casts off (or attempts to cast off) his old acquaintances and friends, and to crown his success as a Crusoe/Prospero he employs a white Caliban/Friday, Bob, from the ‘wilds’ of England, the ‘Black Country’ of the Midlands. Moreover, the now successful Moses is writing his Memoirs. As Eddie Baugh points out,

This work is important to him not only as the act of self-definition which memoirs tend to be, but even more so because it will display his supposed mastery of English. To have arrived is, in its ultimate expression, to have arrived linguistically. He is bent on ‘showing white people that we, too, could write book’.16

We never see Moses’ actual memoirs - instead, Moses’ first-person narration of his day-to-day doings, his unofficial record becomes the means of subverting the assumptions which lie at the heart of *Robinson Crusoe* and which have formed the foundations of the colonization process that has brought Moses to his present position and inspired him to write his Memoirs (capital ‘M’). In Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* language appears to be as unproblematical as it is for Prospero. It is ‘language’, not Prospero’s language that Caliban has been taught. Language in Defoe’s novel is apparently as clear as glass. It is simply the vehicle for the conveying of ‘reality’. But in *Moses Ascending* it is made deliberately opaque; the ‘struggle over the word’ is thematised in the different discourses which pervade the novel and is characteristic of Moses’ richly hybridized speech with its Trinidadian base. Throughout the novel numerous forms of Englishes are used. There are Brenda’s BBC English, the American Black Panther rap of BP, and Moses’ imitation of the Australian speech of Macpherson (What can I do for you, cobber?),17 and the gangsterland lingo of American movies, ‘IF LANDLORD NOSY
EXTERMINATE HIM' (70) adopted by Faizull/Farouk, and Moses' own favourite archaisms:

Bob had a swig, look thoughtful, then say, 'Much against my will, I gravely suspect it is only because they are black. No whites were captured.'

I was thunderstruck. 'God's blood,' I cried, 'They have gone too far this time. To arms!'

'Hold your water,' Bob say, 'Cool it.'

'Cool it?' I mock him. 'Egad, man, they have really irked my ire now. Come, let us away.' (p. 105)

The presence of so many competing English voices completely subverts the possibility of any re-establishment of the idea of a standard or 'norm' beyond the one appropriate to character in cultural time and place, but since these are Moses' memoirs (small m), modified Trinidadian is in fact the language of thought and narrative voice within which the English dialects of Brenda and Bob are enclosed. Thus the culture which insisted on one 'proper' form of one language and which convinced Moses he must write like that to become English landed gentry is totally undercut.

But if Englishes provide the subversive 'languages' in which Selvon writes the novel, it is not the mode in which Moses intends to write his Memoirs. These will be in 'the Queen's English'. It is black British Brenda who causes him most pain when she criticizes his opus not because, as Galahad had done, she ridicules its subject matter, but because she laughs at his language and style. She has 'ridiculed the very foundation of my Memoirs hurling contempt and defamation on my use of the Queen's language' (114). His capture of his language would put the seal on his house ownership and his appropriation of Prospero's 'book', and make him truly Crusoe in Crusoe's city. 'I will knock them in the Old Kent Road with my language alone ... my very usage of English will have them rolling in the aisles' (86). But although Moses' pretensions are sent up in the novel and his distance from the concerns of 'real' life and 'real' speech castigated by Galahad and Brenda, it is the eccentricities of the English language which are exposed; its clichés and its assumptions, and the implications of its genres; the self-referring project of Memoirs or diary, and the imposition of English culture and its forms as axiomatic throughout the colonial world.

Nowhere is this more forcefully evoked than in the clichéd sayings concerning race that Bob and Moses use. Bob, from the heart of England's 'Black Country' congratulates Moses on having arranged a party for him with 'Damned white of you, old boy' (131), and Moses, in detailing the way in which the British police victimize blacks, comments 'It does seem
to a black man that though he is pure and white as the driven snow ... that it got something, somewhere, sometime, what he do wrong, and that even if it don’t exist, the police would invent one, to trap him’ (37).

But when Moses discovers to his horror towards the end of the novel that English Bob can neither read nor write, he resolves to teach him the alphabet. Moses turns his thoughts to ‘this poor white man who could not read or write’.

I could understand the ignorance of the black, backwards people, but I have a soft spot for whites. It was beyond my ken that Bobbie didn’t know that c-a-t make cat... A-for-apple? I say coaxingly.
Bobbie look at me blankly.
‘B-for-Bat?’ I try again.
‘What’s up with you?’ he ask.
‘Don’t look so bloody pleased with yourself, I say you don’t have to bask in your darkness.’ (p. 138)

Moses (like Crusoe) resolves to teach his Bob/Friday the Bible when he has the time.

The multiple ironic inversions which pervade the novel draw attention to the major effects of colonialism. But Selvon’s subversions of British centrality in terms of language, point of view and so on, do not simply involve inversions of the Crusoe/Friday paradigm (though this is certainly part of it). More complexly, the novel explores the means through which Moses was himself constructed by the imperially axiommatic, and it exposes that construction, taking the imperial urge to conquer and control and colonize back to its specific cultural roots evidenced through language and in text, and draws attention to the power of language and text in the subjectification of colonial peoples. Though Moses knows all the English classics intimately, he is ignorant of his own Caribbean ‘canon’:

‘What shit is that you writing?’ [asks Galahad]
‘I am composing my Memoirs,’ I say stiffly, hoping that my tone would put him off.
...
‘...who tell you you could write?’
‘I am not an ignoramus like you,’ I say, beginning to lose my cool.
‘You think writing book is like kissing hand? You should leave that to people like Lamming and Salkey.’
‘Who?’
Galahad burst out laughing. Derisively, too. ‘You never heard of them?’
‘I know of Accles and Pollock, but not Lamming and Salkey.’
‘You see what I mean? Man Moses, you are still living in the Dark Ages! You
don't even know that we have created a Black Literature, that it have writers who write some powerful books what making the whole world realise our existence and struggle. … How you expect to stay lock up in your room, and don't go and investigate and do research, and take part in what is happening, and write book?"

"Let me remind you that literary masterpieces have been written in garrets by candlelight, by men who shut themselves away from the distractions of the world."

"That's a lot of shit!"

"You are overstaying your welcome," I say coldly.

"I going," Galahad say, getting up to go, 'but you gone, man!' (pp. 49-50)

Relegated at the end to the basement through the machinations of Bob, Jenny and Brenda (the former now occupying his penthouse) Moses finds himself 'kicking aside a batch of Lamming's Water For Berries that was in my way to stand up by the window' (p. 147). Like Caliban, Moses (for attempted 'rape' — following in the footsteps of his English mentor in this field, Bob) has been exiled to his basement/rock by Bob. Bob is now in possession of the Moses/Prospero/Crusoe's 'books', his technological magic, the written word, having taught himself (with Moses's help) to read and write. So the novel ultimately shows the possession of language/writing as fundamental to imperial control, and although Moses' voice is the one that persists to the end, he has definitely descended from his ascendant post at the beginning. He concludes by explaining that all may not yet be over 'I have an epilogue up my sleeve' (149), but in spite of this Selvon shows through Moses' career, the difficulties for the post-colonial of ridding himself of the dominant discourse in terms of both his own interpellation within it, and because institutionally it functions always to bolster and reconstitute its own power in the face of subversive challenges to its authority. As the parody of Lamming's title and Caliban's words ('water for berries') stresses, the interaction remains a politically unequal one.

What Selvon has however achieved (in spite of Moses' descent) is a complete destabilisation of centrist systems and an exposure of their pretensions to the axiomatic. By re-entering the text of Robinson Crusoe (and to a lesser extent The Tempest), the assumptions on which they rest and the paradigms they reflect and construct, Selvon destabilises the dominant discourse through exposure of its strategies and offers a Trinidadian/Caribbean post-colonial counter-discourse which is perpetually conscious of its own ideologically constructed subject position and speaks ironically from within it.

From his first novel, Dusklands, to his latest, Foe, the white South African writer, J.M. Coetzee, has been engaged in a lengthy and profound intertextual dialogue with Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. This
dialogue with *Robinson Crusoe* involves not just the subversion of the imperial perspective imposed on white South Africans themselves, but the subversion of the perpetuated and amplified imperial impulses in the white settler communities which have resulted in the continuing obscenities of legal Apartheid in South Africa today. As Sheila Roberts notes, a number of Coetzee’s novels catalogue the powerlessness and inefficacy of the white liberal position in the face of an intransigent white majority. In *In the Heart of the Country*, for instance, the female castaway, Magda, fantasizes the killing of her father. In the course of the novel, she perpetually imagines his death, dismemberment and burial only to find he will not be got rid of:

> I find my father his broth and weak tea. Then I press my lips to his forehead and fold him away for the night. Once upon a time I used to think that I would be the last one to die. But now I think that for some days after my death he will still lie here breathing, waiting for the nourishment. (137)

The heritage of imperialism in such an intransigent white regime is not so easily disposed of. Magda’s desire to rid herself of the father proceeds from the white liberal impulse to communicate with her slave/servants, Klein Anna and Hendrik; to escape the inescapable (and heritable) constraints of such a history, to rewrite the terms of the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday and the linguistic, epistemological and ontological assumptions within which these relations are constructed and embedded. But the codes of the father have inevitably ensnared the daughter — she cannot escape perpetuating them. Like Crusoe she renames her servant; she resorts to the gun as means of control. She cannot escape the fate of the solitary ‘castaway’ whose ability to function in a relationship with ‘others’ is circumscribed by the inherited codes which subvert attempts to escape its hierarchical binary structurations — to be ‘neither master nor slave … but the bridge between’ (p. 133).

Language, text and author/ity and the discursive fields within which these operate, become the subject of *Foe*. The complicity between narrative mode and political oppression, specifically the cryptic associations of historicism and realism in European and South African white settler narratives, enables Coetzee to demonstrate the pernicious political role of texts in the continuing oppression of blacks and hence the importance of their dis/mantling. Where Selvon’s subversive technique depended on the multiple voices overriding the single dominant voice, Coetzee speaks from within a white liberal position where politics and censorship still stifle Friday’s voice, a world in which Friday is legislated the slave of Crusoe; and where Crusoe lives in a self-generated terror of
the ‘barbarian’ footprint in the sand. Friday, if he is able to speak at all, must speak only in the ‘language’ of Crusoe, and Coetzee, who is able to speak, is not prepared (rightly in my view) to do so for Friday. Instead he chooses to dramatize the oppressive structures which have rendered blacks voiceless: Friday has had his tongue cut out by person or persons unknown before the ‘events’ of the novel unfold. Coetzee’s account also raises the problem of white liberal complicity in this voicelessness, and the ways in which Friday has been constructed as voiceless by the European and continuing colonial writing of South African his/story.

Coetzee adopts the earlier form of De Foe’s name (De Foe was almost forty when he added the ‘De’), but the root meaning of the word, like the elusiveness and bankruptcy of the character Foe carries a wealth of significance. In Foe ‘Cruso’ as a character disappears relatively early in the novel, dying as the ‘captive’ of Susan Barton, the female castaway who has insisted on rescuing him (and Friday) from the island. Cruso dies aboard the ship bound for England, but not before certain important aspects of the relations between him and Friday have been rewritten by Coetzee. Cruso (who may or may not have been responsible for the cutting out of Friday’s tongue) has ‘taught’ Friday to respond to no more of his language than is needed for him to obey orders and fetch and dig. And just as the beginnings of economic individualism, the rise of middle-class values and the birth of the work ethic are discursively fixed by the original Robinson Crusoe and undermined in Foe (Crusoe obsessively builds barren terraces for something to do), so the myth of a ‘liberal’ and paternalistic imperialism embodied in the relationship between Robinson Crusoe and Friday in Defoe’s work is thus rewritten. In the original novel ‘I was greatly delighted with him, Friday and made it my Business to teach him everything, that was proper to make him useful, handy, and helpful; but especially to make him speak and understand me when I spake, and he was the aptest Schollar. ... It was very pleasant to me to talk to him.’

In Foe, however, the practicalities and ruthlessness of this arrangement are exposed. When Susan Barton arrives on the island she is carried by the trained Friday to Crusoe’s abode on his back. The black man’s burden Friday inherits from Cruso is to become in turn the captive of Susan Barton. The history of European imperialism in Africa and its contemporary South African legacy are here depicted. Although Crusoe falls sick and dies, Barton, acting out of motives she regards as benevolent, insists Friday needs to be ‘rescued’ from the island because he cannot fend for himself, in spite of the fact that it is Friday who has always done the ‘fending’ for his master and Barton. In England Friday
and Barton are poor and cold as they become 'characters in search of a bankrupt author'. They are now yoked for life (Barton cannot return 'Friday' to Africa — to any pre-colonised state of cultural purity) and she has absolute control of the interpretations of Friday's actions and motives. As she and the 'author', Foe, wrestle to control the 'truth' of her narrative, in the later sections of the novel, their competing interpretative quests are frustrated by the silence of Friday and by their futile and contradictory attempts to interpret his actions. The cutting out of his tongue has become the central 'mystery' of the tale, not the time on the island or the long-lost-mother motif. Increasingly it is the 'dark Hole' that swallows every other traditional narrative possibility into its vortex. While for Susan (and perhaps Cruso) it remains the mystery, to the reader it is the explanatory force behind narrative itself. This is no doubt why Foe, although he is interested in Friday and Friday's 'mystery' is less so than Susan; he is in fact the 'foe' who has originally cut out Friday's tongue, capturing him in Robinson Crusoe and perpetuating that capture in the discursive strategies that characterise the colonialist text and colonialist practice.

*Foe* is a narrative about the construction of the Other by European codes, but it is also concerned with the perpetuation and continuing application of these codes in post-colonial settler colonies (e.g. US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and, in particular, South Africa).

Throughout *Foe* Susan Barton is associated with slave owners (she confesses she understands why Cruso and all slave owners wish to keep their slaves in subjection) and Foe asks her a question white Australians might ask of each other in relation to Aboriginal peoples: 'As it was a slaver's stratagem to rob Friday of his tongue, may it not be a slaver's stratagem to hold him in subjection while we cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless?'\(^20\)

And Susan herself concludes:

> If he was not a slave, was he nevertheless not the helpless captive of my desire to have our story told? How did he differ from one of the wild Indians whom explorers bring back with them, in a cargo of parakeets and golden idols and indigo and skins of panthers, to show they have truly been to the Americas? (pp. 150-51)

Though Susan desires to 'have our iie. hers and Friday's story told', she forgets Friday in her catalogue of the 'substantial', just as South African settler novelists, Schreiner and Smith, fail to address the problem of integrating the dispossessed blacks into the idyll (or in Schreiner's case the counter-idyll) of African pastoralism.\(^21\) Coetzee solves the problem by continually rehearsing Friday's silence itself as the interpretative problem
which fractures all the potential narratives Barton and Foe attempt to construct. In the final chapter of the novel he dispenses with the author, Foe, whose image now coalesces with that of the Captain, Crusoe, and all of white slaving imperial history and its complicit narrativization, and with the female ‘castaway’ Susan Barton. The ‘I’ narrator now becomes ‘Coetzee’, who, as author, is still necessarily the ‘foe’ of alterity, but who now situates himself directly in relation to Friday and Friday’s potential for speech.

Hauling myself hand over hand down the trunks, I descend, petals floating around me like a rain of snowflakes.

The dark mass of the wreck is flecked here and there with white. It is huge, greater than the leviathan: a hulk shorn of masts, split across the middle, banked on all sides with sand. The timbers are black, the hole even blacker that gives entry. ...

I had not thought the sea could be dirty. But the sand under my hands is soft, dank, slimy, outside the circulation of the waters...

In the black space of this cabin the water is still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago. Susan Barton and her dead captain, fat as pigs in their white nightclothes, their limbs extending stiffly from their trunks, their hands, puckered from long immersion, held out in blessing, float like stars against the low roof. I crawl beneath them.

In the last corner, under the transoms, half buried in sand, his knees drawn up, his hands between his thighs, I come to Friday.

I tug his wooly hair, finger the chain about his throat. ‘Friday,’ I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, ‘what is this ship?’

But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday.

He turns and turns till he lies at full length, his face to my face. The skin is tight across his bones, his lips are drawn back. I pass a fingernail across his teeth, trying to find a way in.

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face. (pp. 156-157)

By taking as his subject, throughout his novels, the representations by which South Africa has interpreted itself to itself and in _Foe_ those by which Coetzee had earlier represented these representations Coetzee writes texts that are necessarily allegorical, intertextual, allusive — texts that are meta-counter-discursive.

But concerned as they are with textuality, with language and with reading of signs, they are deeply situated culturally and politically. All his works represent direct engagements with the South African situation and
the history which produced it. And they are texts which consciously and constantly engage with their own speaking position in that situation. In doing so they invoke the importance of texts in the material capture and annihilation of alterity and by forcing re-readings of fiction through history and history through fiction they emphasize the complicity of western narrative and history in that process, deliberately eschewing an apparently transparent ‘realism’.

In *In the Heart of the Country* Magda concludes that the only way to bury her father is to ‘pull him in, to climb in first and pull him in after me’ (p. 92). In *Foe*, Coetzee ‘buries’ liberal white South Africa (Magda) and the father (England/Defoe/Robinson Crusoe) by stressing the intertextual complicities of history, politics, European texts, and settler colony narratives through a reading of one within the terms of the other, acknowledging in *Foe* that the author of a text, specifically texts dealing with racial or cultural alterity, is by definition always the ‘foe’. In an article on the *plaasroman*, Coetzee notes the dangers inherent in the kind of reading of two novels he has just undertaken in this way: ‘It is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn.’

This is the danger Terdiman found characteristic of nineteenth-century French subversions and the one which I suggest post-colonial texts resist. Post-colonial inversions of imperial formations in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Moses Ascending*, *Foe* are deliberately provisional; they do not overturn or invert the dominant in order to become dominant in their turn, but to question the foundations of the ontologies and epistemological systems which would see such binary structures as inescapable.

‘Genuine change’, Wilson Harris suggests, proceeds (as does his own fiction) through a series of ‘infinite rehearsals’ whereby counterdiscourses seek not just to expose and ‘consume’ the biases of the dominant, but to erode their *own* biases. Coetzee shows the dangers of writing of Friday and *for* Friday, and locates the ‘enemy’ in imperial and colonial narratives which interpret and lock alterity within European codes of recognition and their dominant discursive practices. Through a series of almost infinite inversions, Selvon deflates Moses’ hopes of changing places with Crusoe/Prospero and, more significantly, destroys the foundations upon which Crusoe’s dominance rested.
NOTES


3. Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985). Terdiman theorizes the potential and limitations of counter-discursive literary revolution within a dominant discourse noting that counter-discourses have the power to *situate*: to relativise the authority and stability of a dominant system of utterances which cannot even countenance their existence (pp. 15-16). But Terdiman regards counter-discourses as ultimately unable to effect genuine revolution, since they are condemned to remain marginal to the dominant discourse. The post-colonial situation is a rather different one, however, from that which provides Terdiman with his model.


6. Ibid., p. 2.

7. Ibid., p. 7.


12. Terdiman, p. 80.


15. Wilson Harris in ‘Comedy and Modern Allegory: A Personal View of the Revival of Dantesque Scenes in Modern Fiction’, paper delivered at the VIIIth Annual Conference of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica at the University of Turin, 29 October 1985, notes of hiw own work that ‘one novel may pick up something in the fabric of a previous work and rehearse its implications anew, revise, revision itself’. The title of Harris’ latest novel is *The Infinite Rehearsal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
SAM SELVON

Finding West Indian Identity in London

When I left Trinidad in 1950 I had been working as a journalist with the *Trinidad Guardian* for five years. During that time I started to write poems and short stories. The first payment I ever received for my writing was a cheque for two guineas from the BBC’s Caribbean Voices programme produced by Henry Swanzy, which I treasured for months as a marvel before cashing it.

I was earning enough with the newspaper job to find myself being lulled into complacency and acceptance of the carefree and apathetic life around me. And that was the main reason why I decided to go to London, very much a young man, to seek my fortune.

I wrote to Henry Swanzy, who encouraged the move, and asked him to hold on to a payment of ten guineas the BBC owed for a short story. I was hopeful that my little writing experience would help, but I was prepared
to do anything to earn a living, and stilled my qualms with the thought that I could always return if I did not get one in London.

There was also a feeling for the English countryside and landscape which had possessed me from schoolday reading of the English poets. In the hot tropical atmosphere I dreamed of green fields and rolling downs, of purling streams and daffodils and tulips, thatched cottages and quiet pubs nestling in the valleys. And I wanted to see for myself the leafless trees covered with snow as depicted on Christmas postcards.

In my first English summer I went out to various villages and hamlets and felt the deep and exhilarating satisfaction I had hoped for walking in the fields and woods, which I had dared to dream about while reciting English verse under a mango tree in the schoolyard. It was one of the first things I wrote about. What I miss most about England after living there for almost thirty years is the peace and beauty and inspiration I found in the countryside: the land did not deceive me, as the people did.
My first lodging was the Balmoral Hotel in Kensington run by the British Council as a hostel for overseas students, but it also harboured a number of immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, India and other Commonwealth countries. It was my first experience of living among other West Indian islanders, happening in the heart of London thousands of miles from our home territory, and I learned as much about them as I learned about the English, whose ignorance of black people shocked me. This was the country whose geography and history and literature I had been educated upon long before I knew that Port of Spain was the capital of Trinidad, so why did they ask questions like if the people lived in trees, are there many lions and tigers and elephants, and, of course, their amazement that I spoke English: How well you speak our language! Where did you learn? Once I edited a series of articles by a West Indian immigrant for a national newspaper, in which he said that his white workmates followed him around in the factory, even to the lavatory, to see if he had a tail! Years after it was commonplace to see West Indians working as bus drivers and conductors, the Editor of the Sunday Times had to travel to work by bus for the first time, and professed amazement when his ticket was punched by a black man!

The stories — the actualities — are manifest, but I'll only say this: not Buckingham Palace, not the West End or the Tower of London, or the glitter of Piccadilly Circus — not even white men performing menial menial labour as porters or roadsweepers, nor the fact that there were so many whites who could not read or write — struck me as forcibly, or rather impressionably, as this appalling ignorance about my part of the world, when I had been led to believe that I was coming to the fountainhead of knowledge. Though I was from a small island that might be flicked off the map like a speck of dirt from a jacket, I felt ten feet tall.

My first novel was written while I was working as a clerk with the Indian Embassy. (Even here there was flack — how could I be an 'Indian' if I did not come from India ... but eventually I got the job.) What I didn't write in the office I wrote in the damp basement room in Bayswater that I was living in at the time. I typed the manuscript myself, on a small portable typewriter a friend had given me before I left Trinidad. I used the most expensive paper I could buy, a kind of thick parchment quite unsuitable for this purpose, but I thought it would impress some publisher. I showed the manuscript to Maurice Richardson, an English writer and critic who had befriended me. Three weeks later he phoned that he had found a publisher. My head spun. A naïve Caribbean writer, I had just sat down and written about an aspect of Trinidad life as I
remembered it, with no revisions, with no hesitation, without any knowledge of what a novel was, and bam! my first attempt was successful. When the publishers had me to lunch at a French restaurant in Knightsbridge I looked at the menu and forgot all the French I had been taught in Naparima College in Trinidad, except the word ‘gateau’, so I said I’d have that. But my native wit made me quickly agree when they thought I meant for dessert, and I airily allowed them to order the main course.

I lived in two worlds. Hanging about with Moses and the boys, and at the same time hustling to earn something with my writing, making contact with people in the newspaper and literary world. But more than anything else, my life in London taught me about people from the Caribbean, and it was here that I found my identity. I had no desire to shed my background and cultivate English ways and manners. I was discovering a pride, a national pride, in being what I am, that I never felt at home. That was one of the things that immigration meant to me.

In 1953 I was hospitalised with pulmonary tuberculosis. When I came out the following year I decided to be a full-time writer, on the strength of a Guggenheim Fellowship, which took me to America. It was while I was here that the idea of The Lonely Londoners came to me. When I got back to London I sat in a friend’s house in Ladbroke Grove and wrote the novel there in six months. Two of those were spent wrestling with standard English to give expression to the West Indian experience: I made little headway until I experimented with the language as it is used by Caribbean people. I found a chord, it was like music, and I sat like a passenger in a bus and let the language do the writing.

The critical acclaim when the book was published is here for those who want to see it. Suffice it to say that the language and the people added another foot to my ten feet, in spite of a few (inevitable) letters earnestly beseeching me to return to Africa...

It was always a struggle to survive in London, not only because of my non-whiteness, but money. Though I established myself there as a professional writer, I could never write fast enough to keep up with basic expenses like rent and food. The idea of full-time writing was a joke: I was cleaning bars or kitchens in the small hotels around Bayswater: when Turn Again Tiger appeared in 1958 I was swabbing out the shithouse at a little private club owned by an affluent Irishman in Paddington who said, ‘I saw your picture in the Observer yesterday, I didn’t know you were a writer.’
By the mid-70s most of the writers of the postwar efflorescence of Caribbean literature had left London — England. I myself was growing restless. I had spent a great slice of my life inculcating English and European literature and culture, such as eating fish and chips and reading the News of the World every Sunday. As a growing boy in Trinidad, from the time of silent movies I was an avid fan because my brothers worked in a cinema and I could get in free. Whatever curiosity or cultural inclination I might have been developing was also due to American films. During recess at school we played cowboys and Indians, imitated American actors: I relate my youthful years with the American music of the '30s and '40s. (There are obvious reasons that the Caribbean has always come under American influence.) It was a part of my memory that needed experience to widen my concepts, and I was not ready to return to Trinidad, or any of the islands — it had to be somewhere on the Continental mainland.

It turned out to be Canada because that was where my wife wanted to go. She had visited relatives (who had immigrated there) a few times and glowed as she compared the standards of living.

We moved, lock stock and barrel. My native wit had thrown out a few feelers for my career as a writer: my name was not entirely unknown in Canada. But to tell the truth, it was almost like the time when I first left Trinidad, except that this was real immigration: selling house, uprooting family, turning my back on almost thirty years of life in London.

I have never thought of myself as an ‘exile’ — that word returned to vogue as people shuffled around the world getting settled after the war. I carried my little island with me, and far from assimilating another culture or manner I delved deeper into an understanding of my roots and myself. Immigrating did that for me, and provided the nourishment I could not find in the island to foster my creativity.

I feel I do more for myself and my country by being abroad than I would have had the opportunity to do if I had stayed. I am, in a sense, still visiting abroad. But ‘home is where you start from’. And should end from.
For several years it seemed as if Marshall McLuhan had come and gone leaving little trace of his influence on Canadian thinking. Now three new books,* two by ex-students of his at the University of Toronto (Powe and Smyth), engage with his ideas to address the same problem — a post-literate world and its implications for writing, reading and thinking. Fawcett and Smyth carry the inquiry one step further, to consider our potential for the destruction of our environment and ourselves, and our potential for creative social change. Powe writes as an uncritical disciple of McLuhan, Fawcett and Smyth as critics, but each writer poses these questions, as put by Powe: ‘What happens to thinking, resistance, and dissent when the ground becomes wordless, electric and musical?’ (15). In other words, what are the implications of McLuhan’s Global Village for the role of the intellectual in contemporary Canada? Each poses this question according to his or her personal concerns. Smyth and Fawcett both ask why people put up with the way things are, suggest that they do because they cannot imagine alternatives, and therefore make it their job to imagine alternatives. Powe, in contrast, appears to be asking how the traditional intellectual (himself) can maintain his authority when the new organisation of his society no longer needs him to legitimate it. His response to this differently formulated dilemma is to re-assert his authority through plugging into a self-defined tradition of maverick authority. Each of these positions comments on the options available to the Canadian writer in response to the intensified marginalisation of a colonised position.

The metaphors they employ to characterise the blight of the Global Village as new Imperium are revealing. Smyth turns to the Bible for her


metaphoric statement of the dilemma: 'In the Valley of the Shadow, imagination is struck dumb' (17); Powe and Fawcett to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Fawcett writes: 'This is a story about memory and imagination, and about the reorganizations of human intelligence that are about to leave us all in a new — or a very ancient — kind of darkness' (11). In response to McLuhan's statement in *The Gutenburg Galaxy* that 'The Twentieth century encounter between alphabetic and electronic faces of culture confers on the printed word a crucial role in staying the return to «the Africa within»', Powe asserts that «The Africa within» is the heart of darkness. This is, McLuhan knew, a central metaphor in the modern journey to the dark side of human nature' (178). Fawcett takes great pains to reject such a reading of the metaphor, seeing it as apolitical and reactionary, drawing our attention instead to the economic practices such language legitimates. In social vision and political stance, Fawcett is closer to Smyth, yet his metaphors — despite his avowed intentions — often align him uncomfortably with Powe.

Nowhere is this more disturbing than in the gunslinger role the two male writers endorse for the contemporary intellectual. For Powe, writer and reader are alike 'solitary outlaws'; for Fawcett, the intellectual is a 'hostile in the Global Village' (13). Both believe that the individual is under attack by a reorganization of human intelligence that plays to the lowest common denominator in the North American crowd by encouraging ignorance. To reassert that undermined individuality each turns to the archetypal American metaphor of the violent man alone, waging warfare against a powerful system of authority. Each romanticises his writer's role as 'insurgent' and 'guerrilla' (Fawcett, 61); the 'solitary outlaw' who practices 'intellectual terrorism' (Powe, 89), while remaining true to his eighteenth century ideals, particularly a belief in Truth, as accessible to the violent interrogation of human reason.

The aggressive, self-consciously *macho* stance of these writers does much to undermine their message. While ostensibly challenging authority, they claim it for themselves as arrogant authors of their texts. Powe seems untroubled by this contradiction: his outlaw rejects the law but embraces, indeed insists on, authority, an authority he has earned through mastery of the word. The adversaries he sets himself are mostly straw men anyhow. Fawcett seeks a more radical break: 'I don't trust any authority.... Yet to be an author involves exerting authority over one's subject matter. How do I write without falling into the enemy camp?' (14). Clearly different 'enemies' are being confronted here. Powe's enemies don't write: they are the masses who watch TV. Fawcett's enemies include people like Powe, writers who appear to be
attacking the same things — dehumanising consumerism — but who in fact work to deflect our attention away from the real sources of such threats. Yet Fawcett himself cannot fully evade the problem he poses so clearly. When he writes, his macho stance does tend to ally him with the enemy camp. For Smyth, that enemy camp, ‘an amalgam of the nuclear industry ... and various levels of government and military’ is finally traceable to ‘thrust/penetration/power/Male power’ (169), precisely the ‘potency’ Powe and Fawcett do not wish to surrender.

There are no women in Powe’s book and the few who appear in Fawcett’s are treated with scorn. The models both these men set themselves are exclusively male, and in the tradition of ‘healthy aggression’ (Powe, 98) that Powe so much admires in Trudeau. Although Powe rejects ‘nineteenth-century views of the Heroic Author’ as ‘anachronisms’ (188), he presents us with five heroic men (and implicitly himself in their tradition) ‘who have refused to be impotent when faced with the decline of the word’ (16). That their assertions of ‘potency’ have so often involved denigrating others, irresponsible statements and authoritarianism does occasionally bother Powe but he willingly becomes their apologist because he believes the only alternatives to their totalitarian individualism are mass consumerism or — most terrible of all — communism.

Fawcett knows that the inability to imagine other alternatives is our greatest danger. He wants to open up the discourse to allow more alternatives but has trouble suggesting what they might be or how they might operate. Like Powe, he finds it easier to slide into what Edward Said has termed ‘the politics of blame’, employing what Abdul JanMohamed has termed a ‘manichean allegory’ characteristic of the colonialist discourse of which Heart of Darkness is a prime example. JanMohamed points out that

The dominant model of power- and interest-relations in all colonial societies is the manichean opposition between the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native. This axis in turn provides the central feature of the colonialist cognitive framework and colonialist literary representation: the manichean allegory — a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object. The power relations underlying this model set in motion such strong currents that even a writer who is reluctant to acknowledge it and who may indeed be highly critical of imperialist exploitation is drawn into its vortex. (63)

Smyth recognises this trap for what it is, a mask for domination:
The world split in half like a rotten apple. Us and Them. Black and White. Left and Right. The old rhetoric and the old morality which has led us to the brink. Paranoia carefully fostered by the State and maintained by the multinationals who are transnationals whose very existence shows how skin-deep the ideological game is. (84)

Post-colonial and Marxist critics have been pointing out how such an ideology operates to oppress the colonised and the working classes for some time now. But Fawcett’s ambivalence (at times he recognises the danger of such metaphors: at times he succumbs to them) shows how powerful they still are at co-opting even the best-intentioned writers. Significantly, both Powe and Fawcett identify with V.S. Naipaul, the writer most often seen by post-colonial writers, including Said and JanMohamed, as having won his reputation on the basis of having sold out his own people to flatter imperialist prejudices by continuing to work this manichean vein. Like Naipaul, they present themselves as solitary individuals combatting mass ignorance. Like Naipaul, they denigrate their own culture (Fawcett regretfully. Powe automatically) as a way of asserting their right to belong to the ‘universal’ world of the coloniser’s culture.

In contrast, Smyth describes the process of forming a citizen’s coalition to fight bureaucracy and the big corporations that threaten to destroy her community. Her message is that the individual cannot fight alone. We need other people, and the support is there, if we can learn how to mobilize it and work together. The difference between her accounts of the dynamics inside a citizens’ group and her analysis of the co-opted groups created to frustrate change as opposed to Fawcett’s in ‘A Small Committee’ clearly illustrate his fundamentally elitist impatience with other people, especially women, as opposed to her own attempt to bring people together to create community. She contrasts the false community of the Global Village, as epitomised in the shopping centre, against the surviving Nova Scotian communities of people who work and know the land and the new utopian efforts of back-to-the-landers. It would be a mistake simply to categorise Powe and Fawcett’s dedication to separation and Smyth’s to affiliation as gender-determined. What is at stake is a strategy for working toward social change and a debate about the political role of fiction. The contrast between the locally rooted dynamics of the action in Smyth’s documentary story and the highly romanticised cosmopolitanism of her love story implicitly criticises the ways in which fiction has allowed itself to be ‘universalised’, that is divorced from the realities of everyday life and the specifics of time and place. But both parallel stories share a concern with love, that is with positive human relations, and with how they may best be encouraged and achieved. In contrast,
Fawcett's obsession with his role as a 'hostile' stresses the writer's adversarial rather than his enabling role as an envisioner of social change. And his failure to radically question his inherited assumptions about gender undermines his effectiveness even in this role. His hostility is often misdirected.

Powe is the more obviously elitist and reactionary in his sympathies. His two 'exemplary images of the last literates' (66) are two self-acknowledged fascists: Wyndham Lewis and Pound, for whom he unconvincingly plays the apologist. But his section on Trudeau, Liberal Prime Minister of Canada for most of the period from 1968 to 1984, is most revealing of his method. Trudeau, he tells us 'would not try to give rigid theoretical consistency to his thinking. That would lead to the logical result of dialectics: totalitarianism' (90). Such sweeping leaps of illogic are typical of Powe's method throughout this strange book. Thus warned not to expect consistency, the reader will not be too surprised to discover Powe praising Trudeau because 'He had values, but he was prepared to be unprincipled' (95) and quoting admiringly to prove his point the notorious exchange after the War Measures Act:

*Journalist:* 'How far will you go?'

*Trudeau:* 'Just watch me.'

What a man! What a model for the kind of 'dissent' that Powe admires! For Powe tells us that 'Trudeau was a born outsider.... His background encouraged him: strong mother, absent father, wealthy family, private-school education, Jesuit training' (96-7). Powe's ideological games are here at their most blatant. Does he expect us to believe through the mere audacity of his assertions that a millionaire Prime Minister is the archetypal outsider in our society? Indeed he does, and judging from the reviews so far, no one is calling his bluff. Ideological domination often works in just this way, with the men who hold the concrete power insisting their women somehow control them in less concrete ways. It is always an advantage to claim the underdog position, however ludicrous such a claiming may appear to an objective examination.

His other model 'outsiders' are equally establishment figures whose names are well-known throughout the Western world and whose achievements have been amply rewarded with acclaim in their own time: Lewis, Gould, Canetti, McLuhan. Powe presents himself as their apologist and disciple. For Canadian literature, he feels, predictably, nothing but scorn. 'It is my pet conceit, though, that prose in Canada is sadly undistinguished' (148), he mourns. And at greater length, of Canadian writers he asserts that
It is hard to tell whether this kind of writing is being offered as yet another example of how undistinguished the Canadian prose style can be or as an example of the solitary outlaw’s attack on the totalitarian logic of traditional grammar. It is certain that in making many of these assertions Powe is on shaky, and unresearched, ground. Yet this is the kind of privilege he claims as someone above the laws that constrain the rest of us. Has he not heard of the achievements in poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose of writers such as Atwood, Bowering, Klein, Kroetsch and Mandel? The irony is that Powe’s book itself fails to challenge its own milieu, fails indeed to give any concrete sense of what that milieu is like or how it feels to live and try to think and write in Toronto today.

Powe fails because he has no analysis to offer beyond a vague distaste for contemporary popular culture and a knee-jerk disdain for his readers. We readers have, he tells us disarmingly, ‘the approximate concentration span of a gnat’ (149). Instead of analysis he offers intuition. A good example of his method is an early attempt to yoke two disparate ideas together:

‘GO AHEAD...CANCEL, a word-processor tells its user. And at the touch of a key: oblivion.

In a flash of analogy, we see how Lewis’s work was cancelled by the depersonalizing forces he confronted. (27)

Such flashes of analogy are fundamentally false, as a moment’s reflection makes clear. The word processor only responds to commands, it does not initiate them. There must be a person at the controls of a word processor, usually the writer of those words, to initiate a command to cancel, and now there is also usually an undo button to retrieve what has been cancelled if the writer has second thoughts. The word processor, as symbol of depersonalizing forces, cannot be blamed for the metaphorical cancelling of Lewis’s words. People are always behind the ‘depersonalizing forces’ in our society. Things don’t just happen, as Powe implies;
they happen for reasons, usually reasons to do with power and how it is to be got, wielded and maintained. Powe’s obsession with individuals cannot deal with these questions of power. It is here that Smyth’s and Fawcett’s analyses, however faulty in their own ways, can take us further toward understanding what is really at stake in these three texts.

For what Powe took to be inexplicable and puzzling contradictions — Lewis’ equal attraction to Hitler’s fascism and American democracy, the U.S. support of dictatorships abroad, or Trudeau’s flamboyant individualism and his dictatorial authoritarianism — Smyth and Fawcett see as fundamental contradictions built into the systems that control us. Smyth explains:

This is a post-materialist consumer culture whereby individuals are conditioned to accept and function within the limits of a concealed paradox: 1) she/he is encouraged to believe the individual is of more importance than the community because then the individual will buy more 2) at the same time, true individuality is being swamped by the cultural homogeneity of consumerism. (178)

This concealed paradox hides darker ones: the complicity between our consumer economy, our governments and the armaments industry. Smyth addresses these through one group’s efforts to stop uranium mining in Nova Scotia, efforts that gradually reveal ‘a ruthless world of power connections that reached into the highest levels of the federal government and spread out tentacles into the farthest corners of the world’ (120). Fawcett traces their interlinking through ‘Cambodia’, his image for the marriage of imperialism and capitalism: ‘bureaucratic authority has a most unexpected twin: genocide’ (12); ‘Cambodia is the subtext of the Global Village’ and ‘the Global Village has had its purest apotheosis yet in Cambodia’ (54); ‘franchise capitalism shouldn’t be such a surprise … it is the logical result of the coupling of monopoly capitalism and bourgeois ideology’ (58).

It is in trying to make these contradictions concrete for their readers that Fawcett and Smyth introduce their most interesting innovations and produce their greatest disappointments. Both texts offer parallel narratives. Fawcett divides his page across the middle, with a series of fictional stories set in contemporary Canada along the top and an articulated subtext of analytic commentary along the bottom. Smyth begins with autobiographical documentary about the anti-nuclear struggle in Nova Scotia but continually interrupts it with a romantic love story dealing with some famous and some fictional characters set in Europe in the first years of the twentieth century. The dual texts remind us of the connections linking even apparently disparate material and tying us all to each
other. They remind us of how narrative arranges reality to create a ‘reality effect’ so that certain things seem real and natural to us and others don’t. By reminding us of the artificiality of such realism, they remind us also that reality — our perceptions and our expectations of it — can be changed. These dual texts represent Fawcett’s and Smyth’s efforts to bring fiction that engages with reality back to their own people, people much so-called serious fiction seems deliberately not to address. Smyth puts it most clearly:

As a working class, Canadian woman, it still amazes me how thoroughly I have internalized the lesson that Art belongs to Them. When I face my writing, I have to strip myself to the bone: cut through layers of education and learned responses to discover what I think and feel. Yet no individual can situate herself outside cultural history.... What I have to do, what we dispossessed have to do, is to take possession of what is rightfully ours: beauty, grace, and the power of articulation. (107)

The shift from ‘I’ to ‘we’ — the movement Powe and Fawcett are less willing to initiate — shows the necessary shift from individual perception of the problem to collective action toward addressing it. Born in B.C. and living in Nova Scotia, Smyth writes knowing what it is to be marginalized and educated not to trust the authority of your own experience. But she knows too that it is not enough to bemoan your powerlessness. Collectively, the power is yours if you can organise to wield it.

Fawcett writes against a similar imposition of the Imperium’s view of reality on the regional experience: ‘When you live in the same place the details of it pile up and you start seeing what’s really there instead of what you’re told is there and important’ (195). Yet most of his book is devoted to demonstrating the falseness of such a hopeful proposition, showing us instead how easy it is to blind oneself to one’s immediate reality in order to lose oneself in manufactured dreams. ‘The Huxley Satellite Dish’ dramatizes the bitter irony of how the people of Huxley, B.C. came to live imaginatively in Detroit, cut off by the power of T.V. from the dynamics of their own place to imitate those of an alien culture.

What Fawcett omits is the process that enables a subject to change his or her beliefs about what is, what can be and what should be. Elsewhere, he locates this process in the colonial experience:

From childhood on, I took it for granted that the imaginary world beyond my native environment was something that would have to be understood. It was a challenge rather than merely a given. It was mine by heritage, and yet it was not mine, because I could not experience it uncritically. The civil experience I received was similarly disjunctive. (153)
But he fails to develop these insights, either to explain why similar experiences made V.S. Naipaul decide to identify with England and himself to return to Western Canada, or to develop an analysis that could explain why Powe, growing up in Toronto, did not experience the same disjunctions that Fawcett did, a decade or so earlier, in Prince George.

The same liberal humanism that blinds Powe interferes with the clarity of Fawcett’s vision. Both men are interested in celebrating individual consciousness for itself rather than in understanding how it is created and maintained. Neither has a sophisticated analysis of ideological interpellations, the complex process whereby individuals accept or resist the roles, the goals and the definition of reality that their society assigns them and itself. Instead, both rely on instinct, experience and ‘commonsense’ observation, failing to see that these themselves have already been constructed for us. The strength of Smyth’s book is that it does address these issues directly, showing how people can be co-opted, side-tracked and burnt out as well as how they can support one another to resist these negative interpellations.

Whereas Powe expresses nostalgia for eighteenth-century values and sees a return to them as our only solution, Fawcett is willing to ‘Let the old ways die’ and adapt his writing to survive within the ‘new Imperium’ of the Global Village (61). Fawcett knows that working people and colonials would have no voice in Powe’s ideal world and theirs is the class with which he identifies. He and Smyth are on common ground here. Whereas Powe hates and fears the masses for being so stupid and so potentially powerful, Fawcett mourns the diminishment and humiliation of ‘his’ people (170). But this identification comes through only intermittently in the stories that form the upper part of his double text, where the presentation of their diminishment seems uppermost. In contrast, Smyth’s activists learn that there is community support for their adversarial stand, despite establishment efforts to divide them from their allies.

Powe and Fawcett share the same metaphors, metaphors inherited from the discourse of Imperialism. They support the logic of Powe’s ideological affiliations; they undermine Fawcett’s. For each, our modern society is a new heart of darkness where the ‘barbarians are in control’ (Fawcett, 200). Canadians, living in a marginalised society, are in a privileged position to see what is happening and to throw up guerrilla warriors to rail against the unthinking condition of post-literacy. The solutions Fawcett’s subtext offers to the discourse of the Global Village that so effectively hides ‘the connection between economic and political power’ (199) are ‘education and constitutional nationalism’ (199). This is
not good enough. Fawcett has already shown how inadequate his own education was, yet fails to specify education for whom, how it is to be conducted and in whose interests. The post-colonial history he traces demonstrates that he realizes, with Partha Chatterjee, that ‘Nowhere in the world has nationalism qua nationalism challenged the legitimacy of the marriage between Reason and capital’ yet this is what Fawcett’s text seems to want to attempt, at its most ambitious. Why then such a weak agenda finally for action? Could it be that in British Columbia right now, where education and national sovereignty are so much under attack from the new Right, that the manichean discourse again suggests that what the Right attacks the Left must defend? Despite his fictional Lowry’s injunction to locate himself ‘in the interzones’ (165), they seem to have disappeared from Fawcett’s world.

The story with which he ends is even bleaker. ‘The Fat Family Goes to the World’s Fair’ brings Expo 86 and Cambodia imaginatively together, the realities of B.C.’s economy, unemployment in the Interior and Disneyland on the coast, with the world of the ‘fat family’, U.S. tourists more interested in their Cabbage Patch Dolls than the rest of the world: the ‘Dictatorship of the Entrepreneurs’ (198) rather than the dictatorship of the proletariat. But their collision is a non-event and the story ends in suicide and paranoia. This is the emotional message of Fawcett’s book: bitterness, despair and frustrated anger that find all avenues for writing one’s way out of an impasse blocked by the superior forces of a mindless but cunning enemy, intent on crushing all forces for creative social change.

If Powe’s book seems ultimately complacent in that he knows himself to be one of the Elect, writing confidently to them, all of them enjoying the fiction of seeing themselves as Outlaws, much as the French Court once enjoyed playing at being shepherds and shepherdesses, Fawcett’s is the more powerful in its inability to find a way of connecting to the audience he wishes to reach. But because Fawcett’s is by far the more interesting book, its inability to move beyond the polarities so often identified with B.C. thinking, is the more disappointing. The imagery of guerrilla writer versus Fat Family as consumer/barbarian continues the false identification of antagonists that the Global Village encourages. Fawcett’s book is a brilliant attempt to make the invisible sub-texts behind the workings of our society visible and to bring ‘story’ and ‘analysis’ together, but he doesn’t push his writing far enough in its quest for a new language of metaphor to replace the ideologically loaded conventions that he has inherited and he doesn’t take his analysis far enough to attack the true sources of power, that ultimately determine dis-
course, in our society. I am reminded too often while reading *Cambodia* of Smyth’s comments on ‘radicals’: ‘it was always frustrating to see how consistently the «radicals» personalized the issue and how impotent they were when it came to actually making the companies squirm. They reserved much of their self-righteousness for those in the citizen groups who did not agree with their tactics or strategy’ (233). Fawcett fights continuously against personalizing the issue yet seldom with success. When ‘you’, the character in ‘Universal Chicken’, concludes that ‘The villain is Wraparound North America’ (59), nothing in the story contradicts this conclusion, even though ‘Wraparound North America’ is merely the effect achieved by the real villains, the capitalists who profit from it. These are identified in the subtext, but Fawcett’s emotional spleen is vented against the symptoms, the well-meaning liberals and even the victims in his stories. It seems he wants no allies.

If *Cambodia* is marred by its bitterness, *Subversive Elements* can be a bit too precious and touchy-feely environmentalist at times, but its hard-headed honesty and its wisdom about how people feel make it worth returning to. It represents an effort to reclaim what is rightfully ours by re-shaping fiction to document what is and imagine what might be. Smyth openly articulates what Fawcett implies and Powe fears:

> In our personal lives there is nowhere left to run where we can be free of politics. The logical conclusion is: if we are to be free, we must change the fundamental nature of this political process.

These three writers disprove Powe’s assertion that Canadian intellectuals are not addressing the reality around them. On the contrary, they are becoming more alert to Canada’s neo-colonial status within an Empire that is replacing military control with the technological control that McLuhan associated with the Global Village, and they are considering the implications of this shift for our daily lives as well as for the fictions and narratives we need to help us make sense of them. Each of them is openly an advocate: Powe ostensibly for a return to an impossible past but actually for maintaining the status quo; Fawcett and Smyth, for a future where there could be a more equitable distribution of wealth and power in a more humane world. Powe and Smyth are still looking primarily to European and American models for their thinking; only Fawcett is venturing further afield to consider what other post-colonial intellectuals have done with similar material.

Powe has chosen to follow Canetti in working with the aphorism. It is, he writes, ‘an arresting guide, it allows the reader to breathe between the
lines' (181). It also works well for an atomised culture where connections, such as those between actor and effect, are deliberately obscured. In contrast, Fawcett and Smyth are committed to tracing those lines of connection and showing how they operate. Consequently, they remain faithful to narrative, but to the kind of narrative that can reveal rather than conceal the kinds of connections they wish to highlight. Their forms suggest an agreement with Bertolt Brecht's statement in *Life of Galileo*, that 'If there are obstacles the shortest line between two points may well be a crooked line'. The crooked lines of their interlocking narratives express their commitment to a belief that the narrative line may lead us out of the maze of the Global Village into a space where we can claim our own place.

Together, these three writers show us where Canada is today, still caught between the complacent colonial mentality of Powe, the angry yet proud self-assertiveness of the region in Fawcett, and the reluctant cosmopolitanism of Smyth, who had fled the centres to be at the margins only to discover that escape was impossible. In the use they make of McLuhan, they are continuing the perennial Canadian debate about the relation of individual to community. Like the majority of Canadian writers, Smyth and Fawcett value the local community and believe that the individual can only find true selfhood within it. The writer articulates the community's sense of self, its needs and values, and helps it in its questioning and searching for better ways of doing things together. Powe's is a minority view, always present in Canada but never dominant here as it has been in the U.S. For him, as for Thoreau, writers 'will have the job of staying out of tune' (188); the individual will make himself by standing against his community, a 'solitary outlaw' rather than Shelley's 'legislator for mankind'.

All three Canadians write out of a profound sense of crisis, out of knowing that their familiar worlds are under attack. Compounding the threat that everyone now feels from the nuclear arms buildup is the threat of cultural annihilation. Powe expresses this perennial Canadian fear in terms of a threat to the Western culture of the book, but for Fawcett and Smyth it is more than that. It is not the book itself they care so much about but the function it has served in our society — the need of any sovereign people to tell their own stories and to share in the making and remaking of their views of their place. It is no accident that three such books should have appeared in Canada at a time when our federal government seems more committed than ever to selling out this view of our culture.
GERRY TURCOTTE

‘Perfecting the Monologue of Silence’: An Interview with Louis Nowra

Louis, for the benefit of those who may not know your work, I wonder if you could discuss how you started writing, and whether playwrighting was always your major interest?

I never wanted to be a playwright. My career as a playwright started quite by accident. During my university days I belonged to a street theatre group that performed plays against the Vietnam War. As I was the only person who could type I found that I was not typing out my fellow performers’ efforts but writing my own. When I left university I sent one of the revised scripts to La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. It was 1973 and standards were different from now. My terrible script was accepted. Sitting in the opening night audience I realized I had written the worst play seen by a paying audience for some time. I didn’t want to die with that on my conscience, so I decided to write another one. There, in a nutshell, is the kernel of my decision to become a playwright.

NOTES


You’ve been quoted as saying, ‘In many ways Australia is still a colonial country. We are still continuing to benefit and suffer from the stiff-upper-lip cultural imperialism of the English, and the loud-mouthed imperialism of the Yanks.’ In what ways do you see Australia continuing to labour beneath the mark of this imperialism, and how is it suffering or benefiting from this position?

It is very difficult, if not impossible, for some cultures to escape from American cultural imperialism. Look at the insidious influence of their films, for example. We white Australians have always been in an awkward position. European settlement came about because of the bridging of communication gaps. Our isolation from others was never complete. First there were ships, then radios, planes and now TV. We never had a chance of developing a culture free from the influence of cultural imperialism. Our culture will therefore be an amalgamation of various forces. I would hope that part of the amalgamation (which still has a long way to go) will include part of the aboriginal culture. If it did, then we would have a culture to be proud of.

And yet you are so much more ‘isolated’ than some former colonies, for example Canada.

Yes, but we’re at the cultural crossroads of two enormous influences, the English and the American, whereas the Canadians are only under the powerful influence of the Yanks. That’s why I like David Cronenberg’s movies. He’s a Canadian, yet with a visceral imagination that is more powerful than any American’s.

Almost without exception, your plays have examined this imperial/colonial dialectic, although your metaphors for this relationship have been remarkably diverse. Albert’s imposition of an identity on Edward; Juana’s destruction by Lopez; the incarceration of the Tasmanian outcasts by the government — all are images of cultural imperialism. Why is this such an overwhelming focus of your plays?

Writers don’t cultivate obsessions, obsessions come from their experiences. I suppose that this focus of my plays has been the result of a very bad head accident I had when I was twelve. It affected my brain considerably. After the long process of recovery I became aware of how, during those four years, I had been tremendously influenced by my teachers and those people around me. A child doesn’t notice this process. I did, because I was in my adolescence. Noticing how much influence teachers have, for example, I began to realize how people will force knowledge
Louis Nowra. Photograph: Gerry Turcotte.
(whether it be good or bad or just plain incorrect) on someone. From this realization came my preoccupation with such processes. Out of the preoccupation came a natural metaphor — that of cultural imperialism; something that is very clear (well, to me, anyway), in a play like Visions. When I began to write about Australia I was more sensitive to the cultural imperialism that operates here than perhaps some other writers. From out of the personal always comes the political. And I do apologize for using that dreadful phrase ‘cultural imperialism’, but I can find no better.

So much of your work depicts characters either struggling with inarticulacy or striving to communicate what is inside them with the outside world. This usually results in characters who create a new type of language — an original, personal voice — in order to cope: Venice’s anagramatic language; Betsheb’s telekinesic ‘voice’, or even Pat’s ‘song voice’ in your early play The Song Room. I think it’s also fair to say that you seem obsessed with the depiction of power, both as a personal and as a cultural artefact. Do you see language as a key to power, and is this why these themes are so often paralleled?

Oh, absolutely! Because I had to learn to use language properly in my adolescence I became aware of just what a potent weapon it is. It can be used destructively or creatively. Language is power. For example, notice how important speaking correctly is in our western culture. To speak badly indicates that you’re from a lower class, and probably stupid. Look at how language is used in cults and political parties. Your use of language in Russia can determine whether you are insane or not.

Is there a malicious irony to the fact that the private inner voice of so many of your characters or groups of characters — the Tasmanian ‘misfits’, Ivan — is a language so often based on defective speech patterns, mental instability, illiterate teachers and so forth? Or is it, as you’ve just suggested, that these languages have been marginalized for so long that these are the ones you’re interested in recovering?

With The Golden Age I was trying to make the point that if perhaps we had developed an original language then we would have had a stronger sense of ourselves as Australians. Language gives identity. It is crucial. Look at how the French- and English-speaking Canadians react to the question of language. Over the years I have become fascinated with the idea that perhaps those who may be inarticulate or who express themselves in unusual ways, were using language in a manner that was just as valid as those who are the ‘guardians’ of culture.
Following on this idea, then, as an Australian writer, keenly aware of the ‘cultural imperialism’ of Britain and America, as well as of their particularly identifiable types of ‘languages’, do you feel obliged to seek new forms of linguistic expression for yourself, and, as it were, for your country, in order to challenge or even subvert these louder voices? And is The Golden Age one of those voices you’d offer?

The Golden Age was an attempt to develop a language that the audience would agree (fingers crossed) was perhaps a more interesting and richer language than the carcass of language they now carry around with them. The hard thing was to create a new language and yet it had to be one that the audience could basically understand: a double bind that only the dominatrix of theatre could thrash out. I tried to use rhythms that most of the audience was already familiar with, especially those audience members who are from an English or Irish background. I repeated words and sentences a fair bit so it gradually sank in — or sank without a trace.

And other than in The Golden Age, is your bent for non-naturalistic theatre a reflection of your need to push language beyond the more widely accepted naturalism?

That’s a very good question. Naturalism is a creation of the middle class. It confirms their values, their reality. Even when a naturalistic play is about the working class, it is still a confirmation of the middle class’ attitudes towards them.

The way they want to see the working class.

Yes. Bourgeois culture and its dominance in this century has created the notion that naturalism is the natural theatre form. The use of language reflects what an impotent tool naturalism is (forgive the pun). It uses transparent language devoid of power and purpose and metaphorical colour. It has made sure that language is no longer a weapon, as it is in Shakespeare’s plays. Language should make people re-examine the world. Language should tear apart the audience’s perception of the world and re-make it. The language of naturalism is the language of confirmation. It’s the slap on the back and ‘g’day, mate’ affability.

Hence your need to do new things with language and your annoyance with the naturalistic and ‘safe’ theatre we see so much of in Australia?

Yes. TV does naturalism brilliantly. I think it’s very important that theatre make itself necessary, not as an adjunct of the glowing box in the
corner. TV’s purpose is to baby-sit the mind. The curious thing is that I’ve always considered naturalism to be almost surreal. It is very difficult for me to grasp the idea that people on stage are pretending to be real and that the furniture is real and that there is a fourth wall which has only been temporarily removed. I saw my first naturalistic play when I was eighteen — *Death of a Salesman*. I was flummoxed. It wanted to be seen as real, but I knew very well that theatre is unreal. I also found it unnerving that Miller’s grim world of grubby cardigans and blighted hopes was considered to be important.

*With plays like* Visions, The Precious Woman, Inner Voices and The Golden Age, what one is struck with is a preoccupation with history, but of an unconventional, and unsystematic kind. Do you have a theory of history?

No. I don’t. You’re actually quite right. I am totally unsystematic. Well, my brain is, which is saying exactly the same thing. Although I am often said to be a European influenced writer, my fascination with history comes out of my annoyance that we white Australians don’t have a sense of the past. To give an example. This year is 1988. We European Australians have a perfect opportunity to come to terms with what actually happened to the Aboriginal people over the past two hundred years. It means we’ll have to confront our history. None of the Bicentennial celebrations will operate on this level. It’s a typically Australian form of amnesia. We always turn away from a moral and intellectual obligation to our past and present. The present is the past. That’s my concept of history. The past made us. Bob Hawke could have done something even though he is in his third term he will chicken out of confronting our obligations. Future generations are not going to forgive us because we had the perfect opportunity to confront history and account for it.

So your sense of history is how we interpret the past now, and deal with it morally and intellectually.

Yes. and how we have an incredible capacity to forget what we’ve done.

*You’ve described* Albert Names Edward, Inner Voices, and Visions as plays of a ‘first coil’, your own metaphor for the creative framework in which you’ve constructed your plays. Now, with close to ten other works, including television screenplays, how do you see your plays divided; do you still feel this paradigm of the unwinding coil applies to your pattern of creative development?
I had three quarters of the spiral: *Inside the Island*, *Sunrise*, and *The Golden Age*, but when I was commissioned to do a new play the Artistic Director of the theatre (I will not mention his name for fear of waking the artistically dead), he said, when I told him I wanted to write an Aussie version of *The Magic Mountain* (set in the Blue Mountains): 'It's such a gloomy subject, and I don't even want to commission it. No one will see a play set in a TB sanatorium.' Very Australian attitude, I thought. I have put the play in abeyance because of it. *The Watch-tower*, for that was what it was called, was to illustrate my growing preoccupation with how the body reveals what is happening in the soul and mind. Australians think that they are isolated on an island, snug as a bug, free from the rest of the world's problems. As Australian quarantine officers know, it's a very hard battle to keep Australia free from foreign diseases.

*In a recent Sydney production of The Golden Age, you added a scene with a blind pianist which isn't in the original. How closely do you like to be involved in the productions of your plays, and how much rewriting are you willing to do? More crucially, who decides what will be added and where?*

More good questions. What actually happened was, in the première of *The Golden Age* at the Melbourne cultural centre it was running more than three hours which meant that the staff had to be paid double time after eleven o'clock, so I had to cut out two scenes two days before it opened (a previous scene had already gone, the tennis match). A lot of people criticized *The Golden Age* for having a shaggy dog quality in that it ranges between Melbourne and Germany. But once those scenes went you realized that it did need to go elsewhere. When Neil Armfield did the production at NIDA I restored the scenes that had been cut out of the Melbourne production and I also put in an original scene which had been cut out in rehearsals, the tennis match. I think the NIDA production proved that it was crucial to the undercurrent of it because the two boys are a bit like Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*; they are living this wonderful life and then they fall into the dark hole, down into a topsy-turvy world. The blind pianist is, to me, part of the metaphorical undercurrent, and also I think he's funny. Blind pianists are funny. (Sorry Ray Charles.) When *The Golden Age* went to Nimrod, that tennis game was taken out, which I thought was a mistake. The boys entered the bush too quickly. You have to fall into it, you don't appear in it. You fall into it like Alice fell down the rabbit hole. By taking out that scene you unbalance the play and destroy the emotional current. The Nimrod production was very, very
intellectual and my plays are not intellectual, they’re very emotional, and once you start to accentuate the intellectual quality, they seem pretentious and silly. Now to get back to the second half of your question, once a play goes on I generally don’t revise, I generally don’t see a play again, because I’m usually going on to my new play and I don’t want to be influenced. But with The Golden Age, because of the series of cuts down in Melbourne, I found I had to follow the play constantly, so much so that when it went on in Sweden, I was still revising. And now it’s in its completed form. This process is, however, very unusual for me.

Your plays have always struck me as particularly Gothic. The insanity scene in Inside the Island, Juana’s trances in Visions, and in Sunrise, the African nightmare which pursues Venice from within. And then there are the novels. The comic grotesquerie of a Frogman in The Misery of Beauty or the grossly over-fertile tribal forest in Palu, are each, in their own way, very ‘Gothic’. Is this a deliberate invocation of the genre?

I’ve always been fascinated by horror movies. Good horror movies have always been a revitalization of clichéd metaphor. David Cronenberg’s notion that ‘the body is a weapon that is used against self’ is physicalized in front of you. In horror movies metaphor is physicalized, in the same way as in Gothic where, I think, fears are physicalized, whether it happens to be Frankenstein’s monster or Dracula. I’m fascinated by that process where metaphor can be physicalized. I’ve always thought that one’s first aim is to appeal to an audience on a visceral and physical level.

In other words you find the Gothic voice particularly useful for questioning and subverting cultural and literary expectations?

Absolutely! I think this makes my plays occasionally difficult for people in that they perhaps expect that they are going to be arid Beckett or Arden. But when people actually see my plays, or perhaps read them, I think they realize I have a good waking knowledge of ‘pulp’ culture.

You don’t really like your audience to be comfortable, do you?

I find that the plays that I like, or the films, or the novels, shatter my preconceptions, and shatter the way that I think of the world. The worst thing in life is habit. I want the audience to constantly think ‘I don’t know what’s going to come next and I’m really afraid’.
So where does the Gothic influence come from other than film? I know you’ve read and translated much German writing. I believe you’re also a fan of Kafka’s work?

Yes. I think that, again, one of the nicest things someone said about me was they liked the fact that I could jump from reading Proust to reading the horror comic. I have no sense of high culture and low culture. They’re all on the same level to me. When I was living in Germany I loved things that ranged from Kafka to Murnau, the silent film maker.

It seems strange to me that someone as preoccupied as you are with the inner landscape should have chosen playwrighting over novel-writing, particularly in view of the fact that your approach lends itself so well to the narrative form. Similarly, your ironic sense of — one could almost say black — humour doesn’t get much of a go in your plays, whereas in The Misery of Beauty, for example, it surfaces in every line. Are you, in fact, more comfortable with the novel form?

No, I’m not more comfortable, and I know this sounds abstract, but I think it’s a question of voices. With a novel it’s much harder for me to find a voice, and both novels have been written in the first person. It’s a question of finding a voice. What I like in writing plays is that there are various voices inside me and they can then be physicalized on stage. It sounds very much as if I’m being possessed by voices. In a way, a novel is more than hearing a voice: it’s also a narrative sense. Even though I love writing novels, I gravitate toward plays, which offer a whole lot of voices to control.

In many of your plays you confront the idea of ‘older’ established civilizations crumbling. The demise of these societies often seems to prefigure the collapse of newer, often colonial communities. The plantation in Inside the Island, the new republic in Visions, the colony in the Tasmanian wilderness of The Golden Age, and the Shelton family, with all its bourgeois values and old world inflections, in Sunrise. You parallel this pattern of demise with the idea of war and nuclear madness on the one hand, and with an almost inevitable megalomaniac human condition on the other. In your view of the world is this demise inevitable or are you secretly a closet optimistic writer?

Oh no, you see, the wonderful thing about being a pessimist, is that pessimists are the greatest optimist of all, because they know what the world is like, and so have no illusions to be serious about. I am a pessimist, of course, but I’m the greatest optimist of all time, because I believe
that the things that are wrong will eventually change. Our behaviour, and the way we mix with other people, will change for the better. I'm becoming more obviously optimistic in my plays. In The Golden Age I almost reached the point of reconciliation at the end.

*But almost.*

Yes, almost (laughs). Hey! I'll get there, I'll get there. I think that some people say that *Sunrise* is pessimistic, and it's possibly my most pessimistic play, but it's because two generations have been cut off — the grandfather's generation, the granddaughter's generation — simply because the middle generation fucked it up. I'm good at decline and fall. The novels that I especially like — by Proust, Lampedusa, Martin Boyd — are finally about the end of eras. When civilizations are changing, and at a point of a certain collapse, the reasons for that civilization coming into being, and evolving like it did, become terribly, terribly obvious. The high point of the Renaissance doesn't interest me because it's a time when the train of cultivation was chugging along beautifully.

*In reading your work as a type of 'eschatological discourse' — a type of literature of disintegration — I've noticed, and argued, that those characters striving for new voices, hybrids in a way, never seem to make it. They come so close — they keep coming closer — but still they haven't made it.*

In my new play, *Byzantine Flowers* — and it's a good term, your hybrid — my character makes it. I'm still writing it at the moment, but she finally, in her own ways, destroys the culture that oppresses her. And in my opera, *Whitsunday*, set in 1913, which the Australian opera is performing next year, a similar thing happens. The Kanaka maid, I think, is the only true voice; her voice of love overwhelms everything else around her. I'm getting to the stage where I want to try and discover the strengths of these hybrid people rather than the weaknesses that formerly destroyed them. A sense of spirit, of energy, of coming into the world in a completely different way — all of this is, I hope, a sign not so much of weakness but of absolute strength which can overwhelm the older culture.

*At the end of The Golden Age, Betsheb seems to arrive at a new voice, a 'tele-kinesic' voice, but she seems to have arrived at it too late. And there is that river between her and Francis after all.*
Yes. Well it is too late. The director of the Swedish production had almost a hippy concept of the end, which is not what I was after at all, it was just that Francis had to take her back to where she had to be in order to live. But he was stuck not having the skills to exist in that environment. And they certainly weren't going to set up a hippy commune.

Almost all your plays feature plays within plays: The Precious Woman, Sunrise, two in The Golden Age, maybe three in Byzantine Flowers (laughter). What's the appeal of this device?

Oh. Some of these are very good questions. I read a book that influenced me when I was at university, Anne Righter's Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play. It looked at why he used plays within plays and at how he seemed to grow tired of playwrighting. The book fulfilled a need because the idea of pretending fascinated me. The only plays I saw at the time beside my street theatre work were naturalistic plays, and I couldn't get over the fact, as I've said before, that people were pretending to be real — yes, the stage is patently unreal. Out of this came my sense of how plays within plays reflect in a different light the true circumstances of what's happening around them — it goes back to Hamlet.

Let's turn again, briefly, to The Golden Age. Few would argue that it is your most spectacular achievement. Did you sense, at the time of its writing, that you had such a triumph on your hands?

No. My personal life was in absolute turmoil and I was actually writing it as I travelled from city to city. I thought it was my best work, but when the reviews came out, they were savage. I didn't want to go on again. The reaction stopped me from writing plays for two years. So that's why I turned toward novels again.

How much work went into the construction of that bawdy, hypnotic — and ironically, degenerate — language which the outcasts use?

To be perfectly honest, not very much. I'm a great fan of Finnegans Wake, and some people realize I've nicked off the opening line of Finnegans Wake for the language. I was reading a lot of ballads from the Victorian era, and I also read the Penguin book of bawdy verse. That became very influential because the way that sex was referred to was refreshingly open. When obscene words were used — like cunt and fuck
and prick and things like that — although they were obscene, it was as though the words had been turned upside down and were refreshingly truthful. I became fascinated by the concept that a language could take obscenities and make them beautiful.

One of your short stories deals with the art of translating, and makes some very interesting comments on the activity and the liberty translators have. As well, not only do several of your characters in Sunrise work as translators, but also you yourself have done extensive translating in the area of French and German literature. Any thoughts on translating, and do you really agree with the character in the short story?

(Laughter) I do a bit. The character in the short story takes great liberties with his text, and I actually did that with a play that I grew bored with: Cyrano de Bergerac. What I found really amusing is that it was a huge hit, and it earned me a lot of money, but the final act I radically changed; I paid little heed to Rostand. With Kleist, The Prince of Homburg, which I think is my best translation, I was wholly true to him. But you see I think the translator's art is ephemeral, because I think translations only serve a purpose for ten to twenty years. Because translations are tied to the common linguistic culture of the particular time. For example, you can read a brilliant translation from the seventeenth century, but it seems remarkably silly now. Plays have to be performable and actable. Now, stage language changes radically in, say, a decade. In the fifties and sixties Tennessee Williams' purple language could be considered naturalistic, now it is quite baroque. So every ten or twelve years Cyrano de Bergerac will require a new translator.

But doesn’t the reader — or the listener — do that automatically while he or she is sitting in the theatre? While you're sitting, watching Tennessee Williams, aren’t you, as ‘audience’, filtering it, re-interpreting it, or translating it?

Let me give you an example. When I directed Beaumarchais’s The Marriage of Figaro, I had Nick Enright translate it. We went back to the original and went through all the translations that had been made. There were two that were made in the fifties and sixties which had two problems. One was that it seemed especially English. And the second thing is that Beaumarchais had a rhythm of expletives and the translation made them seem pathetic. Two good reasons emerged for a new translation. Another example: May-Brit Akerholt and I are doing Ibsen’s Ghosts. I’ve read Michael Meyers’ translation. It’s quite wonderful, but again, it is quite English, and it has a 1960s feel. It is also appealing to the
audience through its language by making it sound like a classic when in fact when Ibsen wrote it it wasn’t a classic. Those sorts of things make new translations necessary.

Let’s talk about the new novel, Palu. Briefly, it’s a novel set in Australia and Papua New Guinea. It’s the story of a young woman’s rise to adulthood, and her story is very much that of her country’s. Similarly, her association with Emoti, its eventual ruler and despoiler, parallels the country’s relationship with the man: they are at first indifferent to, then inspired, then led and finally betrayed, by him. The novel recapitulates many of your usual themes of the importance of independence, the danger of power and the potential for its perversion, and so forth. Can you talk a bit about its genesis as a novel?

I became fascinated by what constitutes a victory. How you can destroy somebody else through the richness — the fertility — of your own vision. This partly came out of the Pol Pot regime, where their vision was so barren, so brutal, that finally it had to lose. I suppose that was one of the first things. The second important thing is that she became a voice in my head. I didn’t want to write about a woman, I actually wanted to write about a person like Pol Pot who is married to a woman who had a much richer personality than he did. But as I thought about it more and more, she took over, until, when I sat down to write it, I began to speak in her voice.

Near the end of Palu, when Emoti has virtually turned against all he believed in, and everyone he loved, Palu says of him, ‘He perfected the monologue of silence’. Here again, the balance has been lost. The inner voice, representing the potential for strength, becomes the sound of his defeat. Why do so many of your characters have trouble maintaining the balance?

The art of being human is the art of balancing between inner and outer, between your private and your public, self; between your inner self and the way other people perceive you. That’s my own personal theory of psychology, and I’m sure it isn’t profound at all. I find that all my characters generally are in a historical position of change or crisis. My theory is that when that happens history is affected by human personality, and vice versa. Emoti’s inability to deal with real problems in his country, and also his guilt with not being able to live up to his ideals, means that at a time of crisis he has to retreat from balance — he creates an artificial public persona — and forces all his psychic energies back onto himself. He has perfected the monologue of silence.
I know that you’ve very concerned with the aboriginal question — particularly in terms of this bicentennial situation — where white Australians want to rewrite or have rewritten the ‘story’ in many ways. How is your version of New Guinean history — in Palu — different to white appropriation of an indigenous story? Or should New Guinea never have been mentioned on the back cover?

(Laughs) The latter. New Guinea should never have been mentioned on the back cover and I had a bit of an argument with the publisher about that because I felt strongly that it shouldn’t be seen as New Guinea. Of course, there are obvious parallels, but there was also a lot of West African history in it too, especially in the second half. I was considerably annoyed because I didn’t want to, as you say, appropriate a culture that I’m not an expert on. It was beyond New Guinea entirely. I don’t write about aboriginals because I’m not an expert on them, just as I would never have written specifically about New Guinea. I would never, never have put myself in that position. Again, like all my work, the landscape functions as a metaphor. So I became annoyed with some reviewers who got testy with me saying that I was predicting for New Guinea a time of bloodshed and chaos. I never mentioned New Guinea during the novel simply because I didn’t want to be seen judging a culture that I knew very little about. But the only time I truly got annoyed was when reviewers said how dare I make this culture look absolutely silly, how dare I say that a woman would put a pubic hair in a cigarette, how dare I say that they bite off their eyelashes and rub their faces until they bleed. Quite simply, that’s what happens. I knew more about New Guinea than any reviewer who reviewed the novel, and yet they were telling me what I’d got wrong. That was my argument with the reviewer who said: ‘You still make Palu seem primitive.’ I said, ‘Why?’ He said, ‘Because you make her believe in magic.’ And I said, ‘I don’t regard that as being primitive at all!’

It’s probably a good point to ask you about research. Anyone reading Palu — well, most people — will be struck by the meticulous accuracy of your portrayals of the various rituals and traditions. How much research did you do for this novel, and how much research do you like to do in general?

I’d been to New Guinea and I know a few New Guinea women. I read every book I could find on New Guinean anthropology, and you’ve got to realize there are at least two American antropologists to every New Guinea tribe, so there’s a lot of information about. The real problem is that most have been men so actually to get information from a woman’s
perspective was very hard — well, there’s Margaret Mead, but she got everything wrong anyway. I made sure that every ceremony, every spell, was correct. I could actually give to anybody every single source for this information. Many of the rituals and the like were meticulously researched. I am not, however, generally a great researcher. In *Visions*, my Paraguay resulted from a couple of books that I’d flipped through. When I did *Displaced Persons*, a lot of people thought I’d done a lot of research on quarantine stations and on D.P. camps in Germany and Yugoslavia, but I just read two Penguin specials that came out in 1945. When I did *Hunger* I had a full researcher from the ABC. But I did so much research that, in fact, it blocked me for about six months.

There was a time when the setting of your plays — specifically, the lack of Australian settings — almost overshadowed the plays themselves, at least where critics were concerned. Such a criticism, it seems, would no longer be forthcoming. Do you think this is a sign of new-found maturity among Australian critics?

It’s hard to tell because after I was rapped over the knuckles so many times about setting my plays in other countries I’ve been very scared to set a play in another country again. I’ve wanted to. There have actually been two plays that I wanted to do, but I got tired of being called non-Australian. I got tired of being told, ‘Oh, you’re really a European writer, you’re doing European themes’. I got tired of all that. It just wore me away.

What do you think is a weakness in your work — one which you feel yourself striving against — or which you feel you’ve only just overcome?

Well, that’s really two questions. The main weakness that began to develop at the time of *The Precious Woman* was that my work became tight-arsed, and sort of rarefied. The plays allowed no room for the actor and director to breathe. What was in the text was everything about the play. With *The Precious Woman* I found myself in an emotionally barren cul-de-sac. I realized that if I went along *The Precious Woman* track I’d end up writing the emotionally barren works that Edward Bond now writes for example. So I consciously turned away to write something that was on the level of country and western or soap opera to try and find emotions again because finally that’s what an audience wants to see. I had to find human emotion and I had to find character. I firmly believe that my best work has a very powerful emotional base, and that the characters are strong and interesting. I like it when people say about *The Misery of Beauty*
or Palu that they love the characters. Quite simply, when one thinks of favourite plays they have strong characters and human emotion. With my more recent work I think I have a tendency to take too much for granted, not to fill in spaces when I jump from say, in *The Golden Age*, the wilds of Tasmania to Berlin. I think people find Berlin a problem, when they’re watching it, wondering how it fits in to the rest of the play. I have a tendency perhaps to miss a couple of bases for an audience. I think one has to make it clearer for an audience.

*Who, among Australian writers, do you read?*

Ahh... beside those I savage... Well, I like Peter Carey’s stuff; Robert Drewe’s. But, basically, I have a very patrician taste, so in Australia it would be Martin Boyd, just as in Italy it would be Lampedusa, Proust in France. Nabokov, of course. Chateaubriand. Because I’ve been so busy in the last couple of years I haven’t been reading as much Australian stuff as I’d like to.

*What are your impressions of the Australian dramatic scene now, and of your fellow playwrights?*

I like Stephen Sewell’s work a lot. We’ve always promised ourselves that we would write a play together. I like his work because he has a vision that is much larger than a middle-class living room. And I think, in Australia, it’s very important to have a vision that is larger than that because one has to question things. Also, I think it’s very important to actually ‘say’ through an epic structure. Our society is based on interconnecting relationships of class, sex, money and power, and an epic form gives you that. I liked John Romeril, when he was writing early in the seventies. Basically, I think the real problem now is that we are in a period of economic malaise, and when that happens, theatre, throughout history, has gone conservative. It’s gone toward musicals now. I think the distressing thing now is that a lot of young people don’t go to theatre because it is a theatre which belongs to the well-off and over thirty.

*As a way of closing, I wonder if you could describe some of your forthcoming projects?*

Well, *The Last Resort*, a maxi-series which I created for the ABC, is sort of a modern version of *King Lear*. The father is mad: instead of giving his daughters a third of Wales each he gives them a third of a hotel in Bondi, and it’s the most sleazy, run down hotel in Bondi. I’ve enjoyed doing it
because Bondi is a true cross section of Australia, it contains the wealthy, the down and out, the drug addicts, the trendies, and it is also true Australia, as it's based around the beach. There's my new play, *Byzantine Flowers*, which I hope to finish soon, and which I won't go into because I'm still writing it. *Whitsunday*, which is the name of an island off the coast of Australia. That's an opera being put on by the Australian Opera company in 1988. It's about a very wealthy sugar cane plantation family who go to Whitsunday Island to celebrate Whitsunday, and they take along their Kanaka maid with them. It's sort of an Aussie 'Magic Flute'. Then there's the new novel which I've been commissioned to do which will be very pleasing to the critics because it will be set wholly in Australia.

*Well, thank you for doing this interview, wholly set in an Australian office for publication in Denmark.*

**NOTES**

1. This is an edited version of an interview conducted at The University of Sydney, 17 December 1987.


4. Louis Nowra, 'The Translator', *Overland*, 101 (December 1985), pp. 2-6. In defending his 'rewriting' of a German author's 'trash' novels, the character of the story comments, 'Destroyed his creations? I made his pieces of crap into masterpieces' (5). He later avers that, 'I now see that my translations are supreme creations and sometime in the future I will be seen, not as a dishonest translator, but as an honest to goodness writer of the highest quality' (6).
Apocalypse and After: Historical Visions in Some Recent Australian Drama

The year 1983 saw the premiere of three Australian plays dealing with apocalyptic themes. All use extensive and deliberate intertextual allusion, gaining ironic effect by their juxtaposition of Australian history with past European consensual certainties, be they theatrical classics, high bourgeois art-forms like opera, or the Christian myth. These plays are *The Kid* by Michael Gow, *Sunrise* by Louis Nowra and *The Blind Giant is Dancing* by Stephen Sewell. The work of these writers, along with Dorothy Hewett’s and Patrick White’s drama and David Malouf’s *Blood Relations* (1987), represent the main achievements of what can be distinguished as a major mythopoeic tradition of theatre writing which has come to prominence in the last half-decade.

The perception of Sewell and Nowra as addressing the vital concerns of Australian theatre, or at least the mainstage, subsidised part, has been endorsed by the selection of two of their more recent plays for London production during Australia’s Bicentenary year of 1988; *Dreams in an Empty City* (1986) and *The Golden Age* (1985). As part of the ‘New Wave’ of writers who emerged in the mid-1970s, Sewell and Nowra are frequently linked since they deal with more ‘international’ themes than box-set bourgeois drama allows. The recent plays of these writers show that they have a right to be called ‘international’, not only within the framework of nationalist discourses which have tended to privilege some dramatic styles as ‘Australian’, but in the sense that what they write about has applicability to any society touched by the economic crises of the late 1980s. Their interest in ‘The Past [which] has become a form of the Present’, as John McCallum discerns, can be seen as a development to greater conceptual sophistication of the fascination with our history displayed by Australian playwrights during the last fifteen years; itself a reflection of general cultural self-examination focussed by the Bicen-
tenary. But this ‘history’ is not self-evidently or unproblematically accessible. John Frow argues for history as having ‘potential productivity’ when an act of interpretation seizes its ‘unique and momentary fragments’ for progressive use:

Rather than historical continuities, the ever-present availability of tradition, we have access only to a past which is radically discontinuous with the present; and this discontinuity is directly bound up with radical inequalities of power in the present. The possibility of redeeming the past depends entirely on the interests and energies, the play of forces mobilized by political struggle.4

The plays discussed here, while remaining vitally aware of the past of conflict and oppression, move partially into the realm of prophecy: Utopia and Dystopia become their dominant modes of utterance. These fantasies upon historical themes are not, however, retreats into the personal or subjective worlds, but are potent interventions in ideological struggle.

This returns us to the three plays of 1983 mentioned above, and to their striking similarities in theme and dramaturgy. The Kid, Gow’s first play workshopped in April 1982 and produced the next year, owes something to Sam Shepard in its mood. A teenage family — Snake and her brothers Dean and Aspro (the ‘kid’), along with the gentle Donald, picked up and later discarded by the sexy Dean — undertake the mythic Australian journey from country to city: here Sydney, glowing with decaying magnificence and ringed by menacing bushfires. Their purpose is to claim compensation for Aspro’s head accident, a species of quest echoing the Wagnerian quest for the Rhinegold which is alluded to through the Ring excerpts linking the scenes. In Sydney they encounter alienation and failure; the compo is refused, Aspro dies, Donald leaves and the tenuous family disintegrates. This cryptic narrative of modern urban alienation is lifted above deadpan documentary realism by street-wise comedy and by the mythic background with which Gow endows the action, illuminating its significance and implying a cultural grid against which the kids’ quest can be understood. The fulsome certainties of European high romanticism both ‘place’ the contemporary action and are questioned by it; and the irony is by no means conservative, directed merely at a shrunken present, presumed fallen from some implied height of inherited immanent significance. The provisional and ideological nature of all culture is foregrounded, and the European Faustian heritage interrogated through the use of operatic music to frame scenes of individualistic self-indulgence or self-aggrandisement as well as alluding to heroic ideals. The mythology of the Australian colonial past also receives
sardonic treatment, in a scene where a decrepit bookseller plies the bemused youngsters with coffee-table Australiana clichés, which fortuitously sound like an accurate parody of much commercial Bicentennial mythologising.5

The myths which actually operate effectively in the kids’ lives are, significantly, American ones. Dean’s model of heroism — ‘Born to Die’ is his motto (p. 13) — is clearly from the fifties Beat Generation as perceived through late-night movie repeats, and his death-infatuated existential worldliness, fragile though it proves to be, a style modelled on his famous movie namesake. But the truly apocalyptic mythology of the play is delivered to Sydney, like a cargo cult, in the form of boxes sent through the post: ‘Just think, these were packed in America’ (p. 15). The boxes contain bible-belt fundamentalist literature issued by the ‘International Church of the Lord’. Its show-piece is ‘Gard’s’ Survival Kit, whereby the elect are entitled to survive the nuclear holocaust in gun-protected shelters — at the price of ‘fifty dollars for the basic kit and fifteen dollars for a bi-monthly update’ (p. 23). These emissions are received with religious awe by the waif Desiree (the Brunnhilde figure), whose charismatic certainty of the imminent apocalypse infatuates the would-be cool Dean. Eventually, all the packaged faiths which are offered to the characters as ultimate meanings — the opera collections, ‘historical’ Australiana books, the slide-and-tape ‘Survival Kit’ — are seen as failures proffered by a despairing adult world, and the kids’ disenchanted scepticism thus seems justified. However, the withdrawal of values leaves them hideously vulnerable, and their attempts to dream a future and to pull together their fragmented world — shattered like Aspro’s mind — fall victim to defeat. The Kid is an ambitious first play, confidently announcing big themes and large cultural enquiries through its examination of the post-modernist alienation and destruction of the youthful Australian ‘inheritors’.6

Nuclear apocalypse and the failure of inherited culture to nurture the young are the concerns also of Nowra’s Sunrise, which, like The Kid, uses as metaphor the Ash Wednesday bushfires of summer 1983 which destroyed huge areas of land and many lives in infernos of firestorm proportions. Sunrise has been seen as one of the writer’s more pessimistic plays, since even though ‘this time’ the bushfires are turned back at the edge of the ‘island’ property, the fourteen-year-old Venice, in a confused gesture of love, kills her grandfather Clarrie to release him from his despair and anger.7 The characters of Sunrise are not the marginalised of society but an upper middle-class family on their country estate. The play is more overtly aware of the impact of the past on the present, concen-
trating on the two colonial moments of the displacement of Aboriginals and of Australian subservient complicity in the British bomb tests at Maralinga in the 1950s. The grand European heritage suggested through Wagnerian music and references is shown as imposing but inoperative, except in the dreams of the nuclear scientists such as Clarrie who have bequeathed the world as its new Götterdämmerung the spectre of a nuclear ‘sunrise’. The fetishistic ritual of an African people, where Venice learnt her place in the world, is actually more significant to the play’s action than the European resonances of her name, since her experience there taught her that the world of myth, of the collective mind, is as decisive in human affairs as the external events privileged as ‘history’. It is upon this certitude that she is enabled to act to save, as she sees it, her grandfather from his inner demons. The character Venice resembles Desiree — alienated, neglected and confused by the cultures inherited from her elders, and prey to charismatic certainties and solutions. The persistent theme of dead or dying children in this writer’s work has been commented upon elsewhere, suggesting a vision of a culture which destroys or cannot save its young.

Sewell’s The Blind Giant is Dancing draws its energies from two of the sustaining ideologies which have shaped Australian thinking: Marxism and Jansenist Catholicism. Its canvas is Australian public life in all its turmoil and corruption, where the fate of a state Labor Party, and of Australia itself, is played out through a Morality structure concerning the choice between faith and despair of its central character Allen, a democratic socialist. Allen is appalled and fascinated by the vileness and cynicism of capitalism: electing to fight it with its own dirty weapons, he ends as the very embodiment of that which he claims to detest:

The appalling beauty of capitalism is that it creates the illusion of our freedom; that it makes us think we can change it or alter it — that we create it. But that’s not true. It creates us. It makes our desires and our thoughts ... it employs us to maintain and expand itself.... That all we are, are momentary carriers of its power and what’s finally real is capitalism; draining living things of their substance; a rapacious horror that’ll never end until it’s finally eliminated human life completely and replaced it with its own self-reproducing machines.

Like Satan he embraces his icy despair, becoming a ‘monster of pragmatism’, and as he calmly sells out the Australian manufacturing sector to the Americans he can sneer: ‘That’s capitalism’ (p. 112). His path to the inferno is foreshadowed by an already spiritually dead character, the journalist Rose Draper, who functions as his Mephistophilis, probing and tempting him to know the bitter fruits of power. Like Everyman,
Allen is placed between the commanding Rose and his socialist feminist wife Louise, the latter humanly vulnerable through her principled refusal of Rose’s steely certainties. *Blind Giant* is Sewell’s *Inferno*, and the most brilliant dramatic Dystopia of modern theatre. The use of traditional Catholic ethical patterns focusses through myth his Marxist analysis of political and moral corruption. As capitalism recreates the complicit Allen in its own image he becomes in religious terms the Anti-Christ, and the play thus projects a secular Apocalypse: Australia betrayed from within. The play foreshadows the later *Dreams* in that even in this moment of horror Allen’s brother and ex-comrades oppose him and take up the principles he has abandoned: the play is appropriately dedicated to Salvador Allende.

It is fascinating to so discern three mythological tragedies dealing with large political and cultural concerns — on various levels of ambition — emerging in Australian theatre in such a short time-span. It would appear that a crisis point in national affairs is being signalled or prophesied. Perhaps Sewell’s fable of socialist idealism transforming itself into pragmatic neo-conservatism makes sense against the background of the most notable events in federal politics of 1983: Bob Hawke’s replacement of Bill Hayden as Labor leader and the subsequent Labor electoral victory in March. The ensuing five years of recession have seen the dismantling of almost every traditional social or foreign policy of a protectionist or welfare nature, and multinational finance and its concomitant political hegemony enthusiastically embraced. Given this *danse macabre* into Reaganomics and neo-colonialism, one would expect the recent plays of Nowra and Sewell to be even blacker than their 1983 predecessors. Interestingly, however, both *The Golden Age* and *Dreams in an Empty City*, while dealing in dark and bitter fables drawn from Australia’s past and present, opt for formal conclusions privileging the decision to hope and trust in a future, however obscure or problematic that future may seem from the vantage point of an increasingly foreboding present.

*The Golden Age* presents a powerful if elliptical summary of the author’s consistent concerns; with isolation, and with cultural impositions and their concomitant projections of alterity onto submerged groups. In dubbing the play ‘a cup of black romance’ Leslie Rees puts his finger on the play’s central generic project: the recuperation of the romance mode from the very heart of tragedy. Like the tragi-comedies of Euripides or Shakespeare — *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *King Lear* are incorporated as internal playlets — the play pushes its characters to extremes of suffering and loss but finally unites at least two of them, Francis and Betsheb, in an ambiguous final tableau where possibilities of a potential future may be
read. Some critics, however, discern that the dominant mythic patterns of cultural decay and collapse overshadow those narrative moments of conciliation or insight which are located in the personal or imaginative spheres, no matter how powerfully placed dramatically these epiphanies may be.\(^2\) The question thus remains open whether a play’s generic or narrative strategies can successfully transcend their historic moment and project Utopian visions from within ideologies fractured by historical alienations; in either their capitalist or colonial inflections. *The Golden Age* presses upon the conceptual limits of these contradictions more urgently than any other Australian play.

As drama, *The Golden Age* is immediately striking and accessible because of its dynamic theatricality and its bold allegorical dealings with problems of Western history and culture. The insistent presence-through-absence of the Aboriginal experience within white Australian discourses is clear, as it is in the author’s previous plays *Visions* (1978), *Inside the Island* (1980) and *Sunrise*. The pressure of this submerged history upon the dominant conceptual space is exemplified in parable-like plots where white colonised experiences stand metonymically for Aboriginal ones. In *Visions* the Paraguayan people have their speech stolen from them by military and cultural imperialism; *Inside the Island* shows the eruption of a suppressed past as a species of haunting, as — three years before Gallipoli — young Australian soldiers isolated on an outback wheat property run mad from the effects of poisoned flour: that quintessentially Australian colonial method of land clearance.\(^3\) In *The Golden Age* complex layers of historical ‘outcastin’\(^4\) are enfolded within a minor factual incident, the discovery in the forests of the Tasmanian south-west in the late 1930s of an isolated white group, descendents of runaway convicts and gold-seekers, who speak a syncretic patois descended from nineteenth-century British regional dialects. The voluntary return of these historical exiles to ‘civilisation’ fatefuly coincides with the propaganda war against Nazi eugenicism, itself the historical descendent of the Social Darwinism which formerly sanctified the dispossession of the poor and the colonised. The group’s physical deterioration provides justification for their incarceration in a lunatic asylum, where all but the heroine Betsheb die in double alienation.

While suggesting the convict experience, and that of many other displaced refugees of a ruthlessly expanding industrial capitalism, the lost people’s story also incorporates Aboriginal history. The clan’s matriarch Ayre and its daughter Betsheb allude through their dignity and resilience to our images of Truganini, the last Tasmanian fullblood whose death in 1876 supposedly ended their race. The ‘invisible’ yet compelling Abor-
iginal presence in Nowra’s work articulates this history’s paradoxical position within white Australian discourses: as the Other to these discourses it cannot with justification be totally appropriated by our modes of understanding, nor with justice can it be relegated to silence and invisibility. The solution Nowra seeks is to foreground the shapes which their story has stamped upon the European-derived consciousness, by exploiting fruitful ambiguities latent in tragi-comic generic explorations.\(^\text{15}\)

The internal pressures of a fragmentary and alienating white history work like a centrifugal force upon the structures of Sewell’s drama, such that these forces threaten to shatter the plays’ internal coherence. This explosive dynamism is considered a fault according to the strictures of a narrowly realist dramaturgy which seeks to privilege neatness and closure over dynamism and process. Yet Sewell’s theatre daringly operates at the farthest edges of the form’s resources. *Welcome the Bright World* (1982) foregrounds fragmentation structurally and stylistically via short expressionistic scenes where personal pain and isolation explode in screams of agony; by cinematic cross-cutting between past and present, inner and outer worlds; by accelerating tempi and insistent use of an abstract sound-track to articulate, in the mode of melodrama, extra-verbal significations. Its theme is late monopoly capitalism in paroxysms of self-destructive crisis, tearing apart the characters’ minds and souls until moral pain and alienation splinter society, family and the individuals who are microcosms of the over-riding disjunctions of history. These powerful, even paranoid scenic rhythms are mobilised within the forward drive of the thriller plots which Sewell favours, and which aptly express his themes of past historical guilts (Stalin, the Nazis, Chile) problematically intersecting with and contaminating the present. The suspense genre is used to good effect also in *The Blind Giant is Dancing*, where, rather than evil being brought to light and so rendered harmless, the investigating character himself moves into the villain role and absorbs all the evil of a corrupt system.\(^\text{16}\) The actual ‘villain’ is the despair inherent in totalising capitalism: the necessary and mutilating ideological blindesses caused by living within the belly of the beast.

*Dreams* uses all these disruptive energies, plus the suspense plot and the whodunnit quest, yet partially detaches its hero Chris from total complicity in the evil he seeks to combat. The mystic paradigm Sewell seeks to appropriate is signalled, Nowra-fashion, by a play within the play. It is called ‘The Conversion of Father Romerez’, set in a South American dictatorship — Chile and Central America are for Sewell potent dystopian images of Australia’s fate as a too-willing client nation. Christ,
an ex-priest actor playing Romerez, demands to know to what extent mythic parables can be read as carriers of modern historical experience: ‘Is Romerez Christ or not? Because if he is, the play’s bullshit, and if he’s not, it doesn’t make any sense!’ He further voices scepticism that Christ imagery can remain a valid symbol of resistance to brutal political oppression:

You know what really gives me the shits about this play? Under the guise of telling a contemporary story it tries to re-tell the story of Christ’s suffering and death as if it was completely normal for human beings to transcend themselves when someone else is torturing the living shit out of them. (p. 11)

This is a deliberate rhetorical move on Sewell’s part to foreground his play’s own mythic project. For the Chris character, though himself shown as having journeyed to the end of his own moral night, is clearly flagged as just such a Christ figure: betrayed, tortured and eventually ‘crucified’. His Christ status is not shown through exhibitions of meekness, passivity or forgiveness of his enemies, whom he cordially loathes and seeks to destroy, but through his refusal of absolute power. The contrast with the fate of the earlier Allen is clear. So Chris dies, at Easter, refusing the temptations of despair, his last injunction being ‘This is the only life we have! ... Live!’ (p. 88).

The diseased evil at the heart of a bankrupt capitalism is split between the characters of two warring property magnates, Wilson and Wiesland. Wilson embodies the cold despair of damnation, Wiesland its vulgar and vacuous energy. (Disappointingly, the female presence in Dreams is much reduced, and Wilson takes over Rose Draper’s function as demonic tempter and would-be destroyer.) The manoeuvres, fuelled by deceit and hatred, between these two monsters bring down not only the Australian economy, but tip over the precarious interlocked structure of international banking and finance. The play ends in expressionistic scenes of hallucinatory force: the stock market crashes, currencies plummet, and the world is plunged into the next Depression — Sewell’s articulation of the apocalypse of finance capital. The Wall Street plunges of late 1987, however, indicate that the play’s vision of Armageddon is far from eccentric and in fact all too convincing. From the narrower viewpoint of Sewell’s own writing, it is significant that the Inferno of Blind Giant has given way to a Purgatorio. Refusal to despair can survive the end even of this world, as Chris and his lover Karen variously refuse to succumb to, or to become, that which tortures them. Like Golden Age, Dreams tests its way ahead beyond the fall of ‘civilisations’ to discern what Utopian meanings can be recovered with which to make an imaginative future —
a future which of necessity cannot be realistically depicted but which must be gestured towards through use of myth and parable.

In the Australian theatre, frequently judged by criteria of vraisemblance, the strong myth-centred dramas of recent writers risk being dismissed as ambitious failures rather than being seen as attempts to conceptualise, through deployment of gothic, fantastic and popular generic motifs, the broad movements of modern history. Michael Gow, for his part, moves between black satire and comedy of manners. These elements have been successfully combined in his 1986 hit Away, whose incorporation of Shakespearean quotations (from Midsummer Night's Dream and King Lear) attests his continued interest in proffering mythic contexts by which ordinary lives may be reclaimed for the kind of transcendental significance denied to individuals in modern society. It is early days yet in Gow's career as writer to prejudge his future path, although his recent hailing as David Williamson's successor indicates that a powerful theatre-going fraction wishes to 'edit out' any of the broader, transpersonal themes of his work and constitute its engaging suburban realism as the paradigm of 'successful drama'.

Clearly, however, the powerful examples of Nowra and Sewell have reclaimed an authoritative space within modern dramaturgy for theatre dealing with past and present, history as Dystopia or as Utopia, and its pressures on the fragile psychic world. In a culture which carries out much of its mythic self-imaging through the largely realistic styles of cinema and television mini-series, the very theatricality and bold intertextuality of these plays provides opportunities to expand on the contemporary significance of legends from the past beyond a mere reclaiming of lost history, however vital the latter is for the growth of a self-aware society. On a wider level, the plays are unique in world theatre in strikingly articulating the perspective of one particular colonising and colonised society, neither wholly of the Second nor of the Third Worlds, which is the pressured locus of much of the forces shaping and destroying the world we live in.

NOTES

1. At time of writing the third play scheduled for production at the Donmar Warehouse is a popular comedy by Melbourne writer Hannie Rayson, Room to Move (1985), a confident incursion into the 'Williamson' territory of changing urban mores, with their class, gender and generation conflicts.


5. 'Mmm. The smell of a fresh masterpiece. My God. And look. Over the page. The Henty-Jones property. Isn’t it a fine building? Look at the verandahs. How’d you like to sit there at sunset, eh? Eh? With a whisky, watching your cows come home, building a new society? Eh? We get three and a half pages. They start with Oxley, then the squatters. That’s when the Henty-Jones place went up. Apparently his wife was First Fleet. They’ve got a coat of arms over the fireplace. There’s the clearing of the land. How’d you like to chop one of them down before breakfast, eh? Eh? There’s Danny McReady, after they tracked him down. No white man was a match for those black trackers. Oh, and there’s the convict gangs building the road. And then the railway coming. Those wild Irish navvies. Marvellous times. Aren’t you proud? You should memorise every line of this. It took four years to produce. This is your past. You wait till we build our historic village.' Michael Gow, *The Kid* (Sydney: Currency Press and Nimrod Theatre Company, 1983), pp. 8-9. Further references cited in the text.

6. See Nadia Fletcher, review of *The Kid, Australasian Drama Studies*, 2 (2), April 1984, pp. 115-118, for comment on the Wagnerian echoes in the play’s action.


8. Veronica Kelly, '«Lest We Forget»: Inside the Island', in *Louis Nowra*, p. 106.


14. ‘Outcastin’’ is the lost people’s word for exile; the play’s final line is ‘Nowt more outcastin’’. Louis Nowra, *The Golden Age* (Sydney: Currency and Playbox Theatre Company, 1985), p. 54.

15. This theme has been explored in the author’s paper ‘«Nowt More Outcastin’»: Utopian Myth in *The Golden Age*’ given at the Centre for the Study of Australian Literature, University of Western Australia, December 1987.

16. Unlike the classic thriller, Sewell’s plays refuse the closure whereby the enigma is solved and the threat banished: the disequilibrium set up by the irruption of concealed menace is left to spin its way to a catastrophic conclusion. See Stephen Neale, 'Genre and Cinema', in Tony Bennett et al., eds., *Popular Television and Film* (London: British Film Institute and Open University, 1981), pp. 12-18.

18. Peter Fitzpatrick. ‘Sewell’s *Dreams* at the Adelaide Festival’. *Australasian Drama Studies* 9 (October 1986). pp. 35-51. makes the point that *Götterdämmerung* can occur as well in Australia as anywhere else: it being part of multinational capitalism (indeed since the deregulation of Australian banking by the Labor federal government it is more than ever vulnerable to the instabilities of the world system): ‘It is neither naiveté nor presumptuous nationalism which lead Sewell to locate the downfall of international finance in the suburbs of Sydney. The oddity of the idea is precisely the point. Sewell quite deliberately appeals to the legendary cultural cringe which persuades Australians that nothing of any consequence could ever happen here in order to demonstrate the vulnerability of a fabric which can be unravelled by a little tug on a seemingly insignificant thread. To deny that possibility is in Sewell’s terms to accept a sense of powerlessness which is among the breeding-grounds of despair; and might be, in its way, as conducive to destructiveness as the corrupt egoism of a Wilson or a Wiesland’ (p. 39).

19. James Leverett, in his ‘Old Forms Enter the New American Theatre: Shepard, Foreman, Kirby and Ludham’, discerns deconstructed melodrama at work in late 1960s and 70s American theatre, impulses which borrow the power of melodrama-derived popular forms like the thriller, the Gothic tale, the detective story and the western. He claims ‘the result of the breaking up of forms is almost axiomatic: when the moral shell is fragmented and removed, an aggressive, erotic, even fetishistic force is released — an energy that we could well call the soul of melodrama’ (p. 117). The ‘Gothic’ plays of Sewell and Nowra, for their part, appear to seek to constitute a new version of nineteenth-century moral structures, using the ‘released’ energies as motors of political and cultural questioning, or as prefigurations of Utopian alternatives. Daniel Gerould, ed., *Melodrama* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1980), pp. 107-122. See also Veronic Kelly, ‘Introduction’ to Kelly, ed., *Louis Nowra*, pp. 20-22.
FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Beneath the hanging sexuality
of Moreton Bays
where interwoven textures are unseen,
foreigners might feast their lovers’ fingers
by fondling the testes
of the fig-leafed fruit.

Within the gardens barely known
young lovers might cavort
and trample Fringed Love Creepers,
caress the coy pink petals of Caladenia Carnea,
or covet lingeringly
an Orchid’s Tartan Tongue.

Guileless lovers, stunned by strange alphabets of plants
might unwittingly snub a Wedding Bush —
overlook its pink absolving sacraments —
and innocently plait, instead,
the Austral Ladies’ Tresses
by a Cockspur’s hairy side.

Among this unfamiliar botany,
where each curve of fern is unpronounceable
and adventitious lovers innocently fondle maidenhairs,
or probe with irrepressive zeal
those privet edges too secret
to be shared;

Beneath the foreign phrases
of Australian gardens,
lovers from another land
could transgress all propriety
and commit the most audacious moral crimes.
without ever having touched.

CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS

Entering these caverns is a step
into another world:

I am a traveller
taking leave;
that solemn bow at doorways
speaking fond farewell
and promising a last return —
but from the other side of life.

See the wizened caves —
calcareous deposits
furfuraceous sparks on heaving
hillside shoulders.
I should like to reach out my hand
and brush the dandruff
from its crumbled granite clothes.

And perched upon the jagged mouth of cave
I feel the pressure of the past,
a moment's touch
which cannot follow in. It is the glance of mother
begging child to stay,
before he moves to war;
fading even as it is performed.

I am a traveller leaving home. And I will never
turn again and see the landscape as before.
DARK RITUALS  
(1932)

On the plywood doorstep, 
dead infants  
wrapped in burlap  
His large hands collect the babies,  
place them in shallow graves  
behind the shed  

Twenty mounds in two years —  
The offal of prostitutes  
who rent his rooms;  

and in the evening  
his calloused hands massage  
the worn leather of the Bible,  
pass it silently to his wife  
that she may read  
— a ritual of darkness  

Eight youngsters press around  
the kitchen table —  
waiting  

‘Blessed are the children’  
she says,  
and his lidded eyes turn away,  
toward the yard,  
where his garden  
yields dark fruit
Andrew Taylor

LEARNING HOW TO WIN AT TENNIS

The tennis court was a harsh arena, a theatre of shame, a brutal rectangle brimming with embarrassment and fear for a boy with a bad serve. Only my backhand was any good — low, sneaky and sinister, it skimmed the net unaccountably finding my enemy’s blind spot.

My best returns were verbal — a volley of bright remarks, with a crafty topspin of irony that sent them whipping forward as they touched down. Unfortunately they didn’t contribute to the score, while a batch of aces from the opposition did.

My own serve was disastrous. The ball lacked all decorum, but had an erratic career of its own. What I did best I soon learnt, was losing, and I practised that to perfection. In every match, I reasoned, somebody must lose. On the other hand nobody has to win — so why should it be me?

I swore my own tennis court oath — to lose with persistence, determination and skill. That way I sided with the underdog, assured that my reward, the grand slam in the face of all tyrannical opponents, was mine hereafter. I was spared a mantel of tasteless trophies, a life sentence of weekends barracking talented offspring, and pre-tournament nerves. I’d planned it all in advance.
Occasionally my strategy broke down.
A mean little runt who’d never held a racquet
beat me once at my own game.
Another opponent cheated, spraining a wrist.
But mostly it was triumph after triumph.
With nerves of steel and faultless ineptitude
by a single stroke — rearranging the rules —
I’d go down victorious, a snicker on my lips.

WASHING

The garden’s afloat with washing
that swims like a school of colourful jellyfish
in shallow becalming sunlight.
Underpants, little dresses, a teeshirt
bearing a heron and another
stamped boldly WANTED, they play
with the flimsiest rumours of breeze
like innocent friends
empty of everything this morning
but morning’s fragrance, sunlight.

When I take them inside
the clothes-stand will be an autumn tree,
it’s smooth limbs empty for a moment
then filled, extravagantly, with midday.
Jakarta calls you. An ache like a hot tap 
grizzling in your head reminds you that it's there, 
but you bend for the paper anyway and draw 
a hand across the gap in your pyjamas. 
There were thumps like a blocked drain next door 
in the night: someone is alive. 
The soles of your feet are numb and wet, 
there are tracks behind you on the lawn. 
Your voice is sharp and quick 
and you withdraw into certainty. 

*Canberra is a beautiful city.* 
*In the winter it is surrounded 
by mountains. You should see it.* 
*The parrots are stunning against the snow.*
Photographs
Reece Scannell
GUN TALK

gun get you
white boy
gun get you guts
dun get you guts
gun get you doors
dun get you doors
gun get you work
dun get you work
gun get you clothes
dun get you clothes
gun get you words
gun get you
women
He pulls the music down tight
over his head like a black tracksuit.
There's more of him here than there should be.
He loves his wife, but he stands on the edge
of the scene every night
getting looked at by a man; or leaves
his tie on the passenger seat and waits
for a business lunch in the park, the ibis
picking their way past him into myth;
or lies alone two hours in the sandhills.
He is Greek. He's impatient.
He is almost beautiful.
He says *I don't have the time*
to be out of it, some profession
of the mind or body. *Two hours.*
It could be so much easier for both of them.
*Someone who will understand why*
*I am here. Not for love,* he says.
That would disgust him.
He could probably manage affection.
The trick is not to appear
to be looking.
Diane Fahey

SACRED CONVERSATIONS

After seeing Titian’s ‘St Mark on Throne and Saints’ at the Church of Maria della Salute, Venice.

I am tired of all those Saint Sebastians standing there at the feet of Madonna or super-saint, among other saved ones all waiting for the next prayerful utterance while ruminating on eternity. He is always so undressed yet so aloof, so helpless yet complacent, so wounded yet whole. I like saints who hide their virtues beneath ample, jewel-coloured robes, for whom pain is pain, and joy, joy, not some awful mix-up of the two.

Still, this Sebastian by Titian stops me. Only one arrow pierces his body; another, fallen from his calf, lies on the floor, abstemiously. He has a serious, inward gaze, and no blood. But the glory of the painting is his stance, graceful yet arrogant — if one could strut while standing still, he’s doing it. My guess is that he was a sixteenth century gondolier, happy to be gaining money for so little effort, but bored with standing motionless for so long on terra firma. So he imagines being gazed at by each woman who enters the church — over four centuries, a tall order, but time has delivered...

Above, Saint Mark is half-shadow: Moses-like, he holds the book, stares at dark stars; but this man’s face is clear, his body resembles neither ravaged nor risen saviour’s, the knots in that white cloth can be undone... For those arrows belong to Eros, and this is not Christ but Dionysus, who has wandered into a strangely silent conversation.
Titian. St Mark on Throne and Saints.
On the quay, someone has placed a pile of glittering grey: twelve wild cats are about to eat the best meal in Venice. They have come from under the garden’s locked gates, the larger cats already revolving that slipperiness in their claws; the smaller ones edge in, tightrope-walking cobwebs of fear, eyeing people, dogs, each other... Still, there is more than enough for all, and huge crusts to accompany. Late in the banquet, one tosses a fish into air, as if to coax it back to life, then nets it with tight paws. Gradually, the cats retire into the garden, are a scatter of statues on shadowed or sunlit lawn. Then, as in the trick page of a picture book, they start to merge with the scene, or disappear... One composes itself in a niche high in a wall; one softens the outline of a tree; one enters a cellar as, poised on the threshold, its double stares into the dark.

The last to return to the meal is bulging with young, her dry black fur edged with the afternoon’s silver. And there is the ginger one who never left, holding his ground at the centre; eating slowly, barely resting.

Now there is just a fishhead in a halo of scales, he moves to the garden, cleans muscular chops with grassy paws. Seeming oblivious, but still wary, he walks on stiff legs, his tail’s fixed spiral a taxidermist’s first attempt.

The cat with white body, black carnival mask, is already watching a bird, while the tabby with irises greeny-brown as today’s canal water takes in the scene, her eyes closing, widening — about to surrender to sleep.
Night

He pulled his feet up, drew his body into a curl. And the bottoms of his sneakers rubbed dirt on the sheets.

Night had inked him into one of its corners; back to the wall; not a lot of choices left now.

'So what ya waitin' for?' he asked himself.

'For the dog,' he answered. 'If the dog yelps, I'll go.'

His arms inside their jacket sleeves prickled. Something about sleeping with so many clothes on made the hairs on his arms ache, like they were all being pushed the wrong way.

He'd slept in his clothes before.

'I don't know how you get your sheets so dirty. You must never wash your feet.'

'Footie practise, Mum.'

She believed anything.

'You don't have to wait for the dog, you know.' Yes he did. The ridiculous smiling aeroplanes on his bedroom curtains told him, 'You're just a kid.' It was too big a step for him to take on his own.

Anyway the pact was already made, in the back of his English book, fifty times over, in neat lines, down the page:

'If the dog yelps, I'll go.
If the dog yelps, I'll go.
If the dog yelps, I'll go.'

So the decision wasn't his anymore, it was the dog's.

'So don't fall asleep.'

'No!'

He needed the warning. Time was moving fast, changing everything, including him.

'And don't chicken out!'

He wasn't 'chicken'. He knew that. If he was, he'd have gone long ago.

He let his eyes make inroads between the stars. He'd never been afraid
of the dark. Imaginary elephants in his room had never been a problem. His quota of fear had already been filled.

Night gleamed glossy black against his window pane and nibbled the curtains. He waited.

The folded edge of the blanket scratched his chin, like an old man with whiskers. He craned his neck to be free of its touch. Pushing the blanket off would have been the easier solution, but the 'easy way' didn't always present itself. And when it did, it wasn't always as easy as it looked. It was night; pushing the blanket off meant being cold, and the blanket, for all its prickles, was warm.

He'd asked for a new blanket once, a long time ago, or at least to have the old one washed in 'Softly', but he'd learned to put up with it, now. Almost.

'One more night and you won't even notice it,' he told himself. That's what worried him most.

He repeated his pact with himself, 'If the dog yelps, I'll go!'

Bed grew warmer; he kept his body curled tight and listened to the 'night' noises.

Voices from the television in the lounge room sounded like vain attempts at communication from outer space.

'You're such a dear.'

'Why are you so good to me?'

'I love you.'

'I love you too.'

Hugs.

Laughs.

A saxophone played.

It was too late for family comedies; she must have videoed them.

'You look so funny. Where DID you get that outfit?'

'I thought you'd like it.'

'Put it this way ... I like YOU.'

Insert the laughter.

Sometimes you could almost believe it was true; that Superman could fly; that Dr Who could catch the down-town time warp in a telephone box. That people really sat around their kitchen tables, saying things like, '...I love you.'

It was all a hoax, of course. There were wires in the back of the set that made it beep and whir. But television hadn't been invented when his mother was a girl, so she hadn't learnt not to believe it.

Her lounge chair creaked as she rose. She was about to make herself a cup of tea. He knew the 'night' noises by heart, the catalogue entire. The
video clicking to ‘hold’, her slippers wearing away the carpet as she walked, the carpet wearing away her slippers. The jug boiling, the tea bag hitting the bottom of the pedal bin, Thwump! all alone without even a biscuit packet wrapper to keep it company.

She emptied the pedal bin every evening, full or empty. Got rid of the day before; dispatched it from memory; pretended it hadn’t happened; started again; turned on the telly; made the tea.

Formula living. Addicted to ritual, addicted to tea, addicted to comedies — her painkillers.

‘You’re such a dear.’
‘You make me so happy.’
‘Why are you so good to me?’
‘I love you.’
‘I love you too.’

The audience, paid to laugh, earned its due.

So much to leave behind: his Mum, his paper run, his prickly blanket. And he was just a kid. His breath shivered out over his lips as he thought about staying; thought about going. He pressed his hands between his knees and let the blanket rub his face to see if he could take it.

As you grew numb to the big things, you felt the little things more. He wondered why.

‘Ya have to feel SOMETHIN’, don’t ya?

His Mum didn’t. He’d never heard her laugh; never heard her cry. Often he’d seen her hit the floor with the Whump! of a rag doll. Seen her bleed just a little, just a few times. But always she’d be there in the same chair the next time it happened, the next time the dog yelped.

She took Lotto coupons; played the numbers game. Some times you win, some times you lose.

Most nights she got a ‘Hello’. Some nights she got a kiss, some nights she even got danced around the kitchen table and taken out for a Chinese meal.

Some nights the dog got a pat and a: ‘Hey, old fellar, waitin’ up for your old mate, are ya. ’Att’a good boy. ’Att’a good fella’.

That was most nights: the ‘some’ nights. But there were ‘other’ nights.

The boy lay motionless in his bed, eyes on the darkness, ears pricked to the silence of the front gate, waiting to see what kind of a night it would be, a ‘some’ night, or an ‘other’ night? The dog was always the first to know.

He was under the floor boards now, lying awake, in his bed of newspapers. Always there, just like Mum, always in her chair.

‘If they can take it, why can’t you?’
Sometimes he thought it took more courage to stay than to go? The ‘other’ nights didn’t happen all that often.

‘One out of … how many?’
‘Who keeps count?’

He ran his fingers along the top of his bedhead and felt the notches there.

‘Should have used gate-post tallying, easier to count.’ There were so many now, his fingertips ran the tracks of them, stumbling at odd intervals on deeper cuts.

He drew his hand back and chewed his thumb nail. That’s what he made the marks with, his nail.

It was getting late. Good sign? Bad sign?
‘Looking for signs now?’

He would fall asleep soon, if he had to wait too long. He was just a kid. And the television was making the whole house dull.

‘Where DID you get that outfit?’
‘I thought you’d like it.’
‘Put it this way…’

They said things like that to each other sometimes. He could recall a few instances, so it wasn’t all that alien.

‘Don’t chicken out now. You promised, if the dog yelps…’
‘Sometimes it takes more courage to stay than to go.’ Or was it, ‘more courage to GO…’? He didn’t know; he was just a kid.

‘I don’t know how you get your sheets so dirty.’

Her chair creaked; she was making more tea. It was starting to sound like one of those ‘some’ nights, which meant it wasn’t going to happen and he was kind of pleased. Pleased for his Mum and pleased for the dog. And pleased for himself, sort of, that the ‘choosing’ was almost over.

He couldn’t keep sleeping in his clothes, they were gunna pong. And there were plenty of those ‘some’ nights, and that made the ‘other’ nights not so bad.

‘Yeah, um … it’s just that…’

He spoke into his pillow and his own warm breath washed back on him. ‘It’s just that…’

When you didn’t know which night it was going to be, that was as good as it being every night. Why couldn’t it be just Fridays? Every Friday’d be great. Then he’d have the rest of the week to himself when he didn’t have to be scared.

His mother burped in the lounge room. She was never scared. Never cried, never hurt, never laughed.

He wasn’t like his Mum, he laughed when he was happy, cried when
he was hurt. That is, he used to. He hadn’t cried the last time; or the
time before.

‘Don’t you hit him!’
‘It doesn’t matter, Mum. It doesn’t matter.’

Brave words, stupid words, but they were starting to ring true. The hits
didn’t matter so much any more, but the waiting...

He hated the waiting. And sometimes the waiting got so bad he
couldn’t wait any more.

‘Hit me. Go on, hit me!’
‘Don’t you hit him!’
‘If you want’a help me, Mum, leave! We’ll go together.’
‘Your father loves you. He loves us both.’

A nice bloke, till he gets a beer in him.

The dog rustled out from under the house and the boy lifted his head.
The gate was about to creak. He knew it. She knew it. The television
went off, the grey light disappeared, the night fell suddenly black and
white. It had happened so quickly. His eyes were wide, letting night pour
in.

He waited for the yelp, for the kicking, for his sign.

‘I’m not the dog! I’m not the dog!’ He couldn’t live from pat to pat.
‘I’m not my Mum! I’m not my Mum!’ He couldn’t live from kiss to kiss.
He hated Chinese food, he didn’t drink tea, and television didn’t take his
pain away.

The gate scraped its metal bottom on the path and the dog ran to meet
its master.

He held his breath. Night wasn’t the whole of his life, but it was
beginning to feel that way.

‘Att’a boy! Waitiin’ up for your old mate, are ya. ’Att’a boy. ’Att’a
good dog.’

A tear moistened the boy’s pillow; he hadn’t cried for ages. The dog
had let him down.

The telly came back on. Footsteps shuffled down the side of the house,
heavy with frozen chooks won at the pub? Heavy with something. He
knew the sounds so well, he’d been listening for so long. The dog settled
back into its bed beneath the floorboards.

‘I’m not the dog! I’m not the dog! I’m not the dog!’

No more tears came. Had he waited too long and grown up at precisely
the wrong moment?

‘Waitiin’ up for me, Elsie love? Where’s the kid?’
‘Gone to bed.’
‘I got something for him.’
'Leave him be. He's got school tomorrow.'
'Nah. I got something for him and I want'a give it to him now, 'cos he's a good kid. that kid of mine. He understands his old man, don't ya, tiger? Look what I got for ya.'
'Elsie?'
'What?'
'Where's he gone, Elsie?'
'What?'

Night gaped at the window; the curtains waved goodbye.

Graham Mort

STEPS

The boy is walking
Out of the future,
Clutching the chair arm
Under his arm
Like a teddy bear.
It pulled clean off.
It bewilders him.
His grandmother may be angry:
He does not know.

The man lying in the road
Under his crashed motorbike,
The old woman pegging out
A clean sheet are dazzled
By the same sun;
The light sets off like a sprinter.
Tonight the moon steals back
Its pale cuticle;
The man sleeps between stone sheets,
His pulse just there,
Only just there.
The old woman rocks in her chair,
Folding her thoughts around him
Where he sprawls in her tears.

The boy she does not know,
Holding the accident
That has not happened
Pauses at the road edge,
Then steps softly into her,
Finding the path of bone
Smooth under his feet.

MOON LANGUAGE

1 THE POEMS

If they will allow words,
Let them be the thread that
Stitches our fabric of speech
From which freedom will unfurl:
Let us take an end each and begin
The tapestry of our lives.

First there will be parents,
Brothers, sisters,
Set-speeches,
Antecedents of all kinds.

Then there will be the birds
That woke us from the womb
On that first morning,
The ravenous birds that still
Gather for the utterance
Which falls from our lips.

And if they will not allow
That our words are not crimes
Do not let your hand falter,
But take this life-line,
This umbilical of grammar,
Lexicon of blood and memory,
Take it and stitch patterns
From the dark in your head,
As the blind women weave
In our concrete reservations.

And remember the vineyards
Where there is now snow,
The settlements
Where stone circles fall,
The hand across the book,
As I remember yours.

Then let our children come
To trace the pattern with their fingers,
The meaning with their tongues.

2 THE GOLD WATCH

The gold watch tocks
At the bedside, tongue
Clucking time in its
Little yellow mouth;
A mouse scurries under the dresser,
The mahogany monument my father
And I hauled upstairs inch by inch.

Outside,
Late cars change gear
For the corner;
Inside,
Her breathing takes on
The deeper tone of sleep.

The children rock in their bunks
In the room above, their heads
Burrow into pillows damp
From the sweat of dreams.

Rows of books faintly gleam;
The dark had discarded their titles.
The typewriter, the desk, the pen,
Are slowly disappearing.

And in the language
That is indecipherable,
With words translated
From the meaningless,
With poetry — the password
Our sentries have forgotten —
I count her dark hairs
Across the pillow.

3 MOON LANGUAGE

This is moon language that
The children are speaking:
They have invented it out
Of the scrapyard of speech.

They name it, laughing;
They chide, gibber and pray
In its cobbled syllables
And we recognize not one word
In the tangle of fires still burning
Behind the eyes of the young.

This is not churchbells,
Or judgement, this is not
Gunfire from that quaking horizon,  
It is the laughter-cratered talk  
Of children with thin arms  
Small desires, huge hope.

And this is you, following  
Your own spoor across a desert,  
Dragging your feet across sand  
To the sulphuric aridity at  
The boulder's heart beating  
In your own chest.

But the children will begin counting  
In moon language and your years  
Will leak into warm stains from  
Which footsteps will quicken,  
And you will be running towards yourself,  
And you will be laughing.

Keki Daruwalla

THE LAST WHALE

When the last whale passes into our Lord's keeping  
how will the funeral go?  
Will the last post ring out, will there be muffled drums?  
A dead Viking, we are told, was laid out  
in all his regalia — the mail-shirt unflapping,  
his painted shield hanging along the bulwarks,  
his drinking horn to remind us of his revels,  
sword and battle-axe in memory of his rages.  
And they hoisted a square sail  
handing boat and body to the wind.
But this is not how it will go at all.
For as the last whale is pulled in
from blood darkened seas, speared
by a harpoon stuffed with explosive,
he will be sliced up with power-saws
and the deck will be slick with blood and blubber.
Whale-meat, after all, is big business in Japan;
and they are murdering them by the shoal
about nine hundred a year for research.
For fifty million years the whales cruised
the oceans without being ‘researched’,
as much a part of the sea as the tide
as reefs, as molluscs, as sea-anemones.
Now of a sudden we want to kill them
to discover how they survived that long!

When the last whale moves into our Lord’s keeping —
the wake abuzz with flies and a procession
of gulls as there never was before —
and the seas turn the colour of red wine
they’ll wonder if this is omen or miracle.
Neither! Just the gashed side of a harpooned whale.

The sea-god, his eyes red with salt-burn,
his beard turned to coral, extends his palm
to ask what’s in store for him.
It’s going to be tough but he better hear the truth:
As many stars as there were before
to brood over tides and chart the course for ships.
The same number of icebergs, more or less;
more oil slicks certainly and tanker fleets,
more aircraft-carriers and submarines. No whales.
OF MOHOMMAD ALI PASHA

We had been into the El Gabal citadel and the Military Museum housed inside; walked past prints that showed Thutmose and Ramses crushing their foemen under chariot wheels. The medieval contraptions of war were there from sword and catapult to fireball and matchlock and a battering ram known as ‘Al Kabash’. After walking past history, at least the official version, from thrashed crusaders and Louis IX led captive before Saladin to the modern campaigns, Yemen in the fifties and the Yom Kippur war (with nary a word about 1967) we came to the Mohommad Ali Pasha mosque and the guide took us over to the great man’s house.

‘Welcome to Mohommad Ali Pasha house! He himself live here in nineteenth century and rule Egypt in same century. These walls strong, but the Pasha even stronger; hard with Egyptians and hard with Mamelukes. Hard with wife also, but that only presumption. Come, embroidery class held in inner room. See how fast their hands work — like pickpocket! Pickpocket take away what Allah give; Allah not give back what pickpocket take away. These embroideries we send to Saudi Arabia. In the past we sent them because Saudia very poor. Now we send them because Saudia very rich!

Now you must see dining room. Those days no eating and sitting room separate; where you eat you sit and where you sit you eat. There were Mamelukes those days, very headstrong, who listen nobody, not Sultan in Istanbul, not Mohommad Ali Pasha in Cairo! You know what they kept? Bad faith and concubine;
bad faith with people, bad faith with Ottoman empire
bad faith with Mohommad Ali Pasha.

So Pasha invite Mamelukes in dinner.
This wooden couch where you sit, see how it open?
Inside he place musket, many musket.
Then lid closed; no one know where muskets sleep.
He called Baltagis to serve meats and viands.
You know Baltagis? Axe-men;
people who were paid to wield axes once.
Pasha start paying them now to wield guns.
When Mamelukes take dinner and finish coffee
Axe-men take muskets and finish Mamelukes.
Only one Bey escaped, all others killed.
Mohommad Ali Pasha, very clever man!

Lauris Edmond

RHINELAND

I walked in the early morning
down the path by the water, and there
I could smell the old river smell

of the brimming Rhine, hear
its purposeful lapping, see the long barges
linked together GEFO TANK2GEFO ROTTERDAM

out already, stooging steadily,
and brown-stained, long abused as it is,
the capable waterway taking on yet another
of its numberless days for shouldering
Europe's cargoes, bearing its poisons
on that wide and glistening back;

and it was as though it turned and looked up
from its liquid trudging, to remind me
that a continent's dying still richly harbours

the knowledge of ancient endurance — which
I acknowledged, nodding to the Old Survivor,
though all round me the elderberry flowers

narrowed, going down with their season
and the faintly acrid-scented may sprigs,
dying too in their own stiff arms.

CITY LIGHTS
for Anne French

On a still evening you stare at the sea's glistening
till it calls up the sheen of that more or less oval pool

of light on your bent knee as you sat marvelling
at taffeta and sophistication at 17 say, or 18

and had to stroke it in wonder till it merged into
the whole temple of light you had gloriously become.

Now as you watch the gleam separates without moving
into needles, stilettos, rapiers, points plunging down

as they form, till the whole darkening body of the sea
is deeply, brilliantly divided. Light on the surface

has produced a total internal exposure. As for the city
that turns on the current, it lies as always out of reach.
You took your hand away of course from that wondering caress, to dance the two-step or was it a waltz

pursuing the light on the arrived moment towards impossible fulfilments, unimagined treacheries.

In the end you don’t see the city at all, only the reflections stabbing the motionless water.

ECHOES

You have to learn solitude,
perhaps by recalling echoes, how they taunted the hills you clambered over as children (how you laughed at so small a miracle) —

you learnt of course to change the vibrations,
stand on steeper ground above the sheep tracks so your call came back awry, turning your name to loony syllables.

It’s different now; it’s the ache of the unknown, the trying for reverberations from a voice you do not know

as though you stand in plantains shivery grass and sorrel and call with a rising intonation when the cadence of your life is dumb.

There was a wild dog too, in the house below the hill; that’s the silence leaping forward, always from behind so you know you have no time to run away.
THE NIGHT BURNS WITH A WHITE FIRE

The night burns with a white fire
and the moths move silently
among the moon flowers; I see her
in the garden standing quite still
beyond the blurred darkness of the fig tree
smiling a little, her pale face
familiar but smaller than I remember it.
I cannot go to her; the Acheron,
river of sorrow, lies between us
and the moon flowers’ unearthly forebodings.

THINGS

Yes I like it here
things have their place
at night there are lights in the water
if you offered me something unexpected
a fast car, a bantam hen
a small bunch of violets
purple velvet and looking authentic
I would be touched
though I could easily refuse

I have choices galore
but the same grey trees lean to the wind
at my window
the same unwary bird is killed
every day on the grass
and I long to long for something attainable
by sheer hard work
— like cars or clothes —

whatever would not, when achieved,
stay in its place looking perfect
with death's shadow
slowly deepening
behind it.

SUMMER NEAR THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

Midnight and still light, Leningrad and I
awake to another white night, that spare
other world where each leaf and stone
is not to be approached, scarcely named,
so rare, so unearthly has it become.

Somewhere there must be a temperate time
the plain night and day that I know, and there
I imagine the green oval of some tiny park
glowing dewy and crisp, lovers walking
just such a path as this, reaching up
to real blossoms (tree-sized narcissi,
white, scentless) the gold dome of a solid
St Ives, as grand, that gleams
in a simple cycle of night-times and noons.
This is more strange: time, caught
in a soft frost of seasons, has left us
outside the door of the days, strangers
to ourselves, opaque shapes in some
neutral clarity — we can't call it light —
on the other side of the air. Half afraid,

I touch the bright grass, dandelion-studded,
the white flowers that perch on the trees,
and hear incommunicable whisperings
from a white Polar noonday stalk the silence
between the Russian lovers and me.
It is the beginning of 1987 and, in the best of all possible worlds, in the most mythic of worlds, the sea gods are at work in Fremantle. Tangaroa, God of the Waitemata Harbour in Auckland, has arranged it all with his Fremantle counterpart. Because of the French infamy in sinking the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland, let the New Zealanders defeat *French Kiss* in the semi-finals of the America’s Cup; because of the American infamy — bullying New Zealand for refusing entrance to U.S. nuclear warships, for keeping Tangaroa’s waters pure — let the young New Zealanders defeat Denis Conner and his *Stars and Stripes* in the finals. Of course, at it turned out, Conner overcame the Kiwi syndicate and the consortium of gods; but, even if this had not been so, the divine vengeance would have come to an everyday halt. After all, the Australians hold the Cup; after defeating the Americans, the New Zealanders would have faced the Australians. Who would the Freemantle harbour god have supported then? After all the surface soil of myth, there is finally the bedrock of parochialism. Still, this is just myth-making: maybe the Fremantle divinity would have allowed victory to the New Zealanders because they have treated the Maori people with the slightest particle of that respect the Australians have denied the Aborigines. This is the soft underbelly of myth, the hopeful part.

**THE MICROWAVE OF MYTH**

For New Zealanders, the last half-decade has been a time of departing innocence. The 1981 protests against the rugby tour by the South African Springboks revealed a New Zealand police force in riot gear for the first time, armed with swivel batons of oriental design and prepared to use them. The steady diminution of the nation’s economic base became painfully apparent, and was compounded by the political heresy of the
new Labour Government — determined to restructure the economy
along free market lines. Unemployment, inflation, and public debt drove
upwards, while government services began carrying double charges.
Violent crime increased in the large cities, alongside the increased
evidence of a monied entrepreneurial class: gaps widened and, if there
was still insufficient reason to declare a class society of the classical sort,
there was the compelling suspicion that the gaps had an awful lot of
brown people on one side of them. Finally, in the blue harbours that
surround the nation, that make it maritime in that most domestic sense
— games on and near beaches — an international struggle over nuclear
hegemonies was being waged. French saboteurs destroyed a Greenpeace
ship; the Americans came down with heavy hands on the New Zealand
decision not to allow nuclear warships into its waters. Who knows
whether the New Zealand stand was a national drive to act as exemplar
in a nuclear world, or whether it was a pious and naïve isolationism,
based on a wholly selfish domesticity: no nukes in our playground,
please. It doesn’t matter why the New Zealanders did it; they soon learnt
what it meant to have done it, and what it costs. What it means and what
it costs are what concern the recent crop of New Zealand novels.

The three novels* I wish principally to discuss in this article have been
written by poets. Two of them are first novels. They have, however, been
rapturously received by the New Zealand literary press and, if we were to
believe it, literature has come of age — in that it has attained a worldli-
ness — in New Zealand. All three novels are complex, and they are very
ambitious. To a greater or lesser extent, each contains passages of
virtuoso writing. But each of them also takes an extended poetic licence
that ultimately sees them fail as finished novels.

Publishing in New Zealand has always been a business of risk. For the
authors, it has been a risk of a satisfaction ringed by limits. Who reads
New Zealand novels outside of New Zealand? Who needs to be famous
within the circumference of one’s own block? For the publishers, it has
been a risk of bankruptcy. Who reads New Zealand novels within New
Zealand? Now, in a nation of three million people, this is not as dire as it
first sounds. The nation is not as literary as Iceland, where, in the long


All three novels are being prepared for international editions.
winter night, one either drinks or writes books (one in six Icelanders has written a book), but a careful publisher with a good product, and a good marketing strategy, can count upon selling 1,500 copies of a novel. This compares exceptionally well with the British figures, which are very little higher amidst a much greater population. At the same time, it means that the sale of 1,500 copies will barely cover the costs of producing the novel. The publisher has to rely upon coffee table books for a profit margin, and operate a policy of as much safety as possible in selecting novels. The joy that surrounds the three novels discussed here is that none of them is ‘safe’; each of them is experimental; and there is the fine suspicion afoot that the reviewers are urging on the reading public — a public stretched large in a thin population — not to let the side down; to support these three novelists so that, in turn, the publishers will be supported, so that, in turn again, more unsafe works can be published. Loyalty makes de boat roll home.

There is something else afoot as well. Two of the novelists, in their guises as poets, were very anxious, in their youth, to roll back the idea that New Zealand poetry could have distinctly New Zealand referents: you couldn’t have a poetry of flora and fauna, and a domestic setting which eluded, almost entirely, the outside world. Russell Haley and Ian Wedde were activists in a campaign to introduce the currents of world poetry to New Zealand — in particular, the French poetry of Rimbaud and Baudelaire, and the American poetry of Charles Olsen and William Carlos Williams. The background of this effort has leant the notion that they are setting up a similar infusion for prose. In the light of the compressed lessons in political reality that New Zealand has undergone in the last five years, it was time for the introduction of novels that concerned politics and, above all the place of New Zealand politics in the currents of international politics.

The questions that arise here are truncated immediately. It cannot be asked, for instance: ‘If we are no longer innocent, which of the swirling international guilts is most like ours?’ For there is still a bravado, a sense of righteousness that isolation breeds. The worst thing that could have happened to New Zealand political consciousness was to ban nuclear ships from a country which no one believes is threatened by nuclear weapons. If purity is based on safety, there’s going to be an awful lot of patronizing stares in the contemplation of what’s ‘out there’. (The lesson the New Zealand Government learnt in all this was that it can’t patronize the United States.)

The second thing is that New Zealand is a country with a great deal of barely-repressed internal guilt. This has to do with the conquest of the
Maori people, and the subsequent repression of the Maori culture. This has caused a curious and unstable approach: 'We approach the guilts out there on the basis of our guilts here.' There has been a huge attempt to reinvigorate Maori culture and to make it a central reference point in determining the argument for the nation's future. It breaks down as soon as it is applied to international affairs. No one 'out there' wants to know what Maori culture and its implied nobility mean 'in there', and, frankly, no one needs to know. This international refusal to know could form the ideological centre-piece of novels; the novelist confronts a set of terms which are inclusive (every nation on earth is included), but which are also exclusive (everything that cannot be measured in terms of power and capital is excluded). Instead, the starting-point has been inverted, and the attempt is to establish a set of standards, explicated from a background of guilt — to that extent, an invention — and to hold up that set of national standards against the perils which international politics might visit upon the country. The new novel does nothing new. It restates the romance that the novelists, as young poets, resisted. The unsafe novel is, in reality, as safe as it can possibly be.

All this is to say how much Ian Wedde's novel, *Symmes Hole*, tries to make it, and to describe the margin by which it fails. Of the three, it is undoubtedly the most ambitious, and it is the one with the greatest number of virtuoso passages. Some of these passages are so extended, breathless, and simply beautiful, that the reader — any reader anywhere in the English-reading world — is going to sit in awe. The constant changes in time and place are as ambitious as any attempted by, for instance, Carlos Fuentes. The weakness of all these leaps about history and location is that they are all hinged on the internalized quest of the narrator (who is barely distanced from the author), and what happens early in the piece is that they become merely vehicles for his sense that he is writing wonderfully. As a series of passages in how to string words together, *Symmes Hole* is masterly. As a series of connected, developing episodes, it is not there. The writing is too great for the book.

What do I mean when I say that the book doesn't develop? I don't mean to say that it doesn't tell much of a story (it doesn't). I mean that the book doesn't develop its sense of politics. The quest for Moby Dick (Mocha Dick here), the polite settlement of Wellington, and its subsequent location for a MacDonald's Hamburger Bar, are treated, with hilarity, as the cumulative extensions of capitalism. The point is that it is the sort of capitalist encroachment that writes its own history. It 'officializes' all it manufactures in its own image. Simultaneously, it trivializes the history of others, in particular the history of those on the margins of
polite society. So, in Wedde's book, the marginalized and the hunted fight back. Mocha Dick fights back. Worser Heberley, the failed whaler gone native with a Maori wife and tribe, takes centre stage. The whale and the whaler liberate their history and fling it in the face of the official version.

None of this is new. As a movement among historians it has gained immense cachet from the work of Braudel in France. E.P. Thompson in Britain, before his fame as a campaigner against nuclear weapons, worked in this mould, as did other British academics such as Raymond Williams. As a man of many talents, Williams has written novels as examples of his literary theories and historiography. They are attempts to reclaim a local history and to make it a history that was established on the terms of the local, everyday people. It is, in short (and I think admirably), a socialist history. The difficulties of this sort of history lie in the expansion of the circle in which it is located. From local to regional, to national, to international, this history requires a number of intermediaries — people who act upon the pressures from the masses below them, and the pressures of vested interests above them. It is one thing to say that the pressure of the masses was more influential overall than anything else; in this sense, we can say that they created history and that this has not been officially recognized. The difficulty comes in analysing those who were the intermediaries, who were, in some sense, pivotal. In international relations, this difficulty has had its most extreme revelations. Latin American theorists of the Dependentista school, such as Andre Gunder Frank, had to invent a Comprador class of people: a class who intervened between local exploitation and international capitalist gain. These were people who collaborated at the national level with the international bosses. For helping along the immiseration of their own people, these collaborationists were allowed to get rich (though not as rich as their overlords). This approach had all kinds of difficulty, not least that presented by the politicians of developing nations. Had those who had suffered to bring independence to their countries been, all the while, collaborationists? Does wealth depict collaboration?

Whatever the merits of the Dependentista theory, the point here is: where, in Wedde's work, are the Compradors? Where is the opposition? The few figures of opposition in the book are either not fleshed out (the 'new people' of Wakefield's dreams), or are caricatures (MacDonald's hamburgers). The opposition does not exist in itself, except as shadowy or cartoon symbols of international capitalism; and, more particularly, the opposition is not manifest in terms of intermediaries at the points of choice and intervention. No hero of Wedde's book, no figment of the nar-
rator’s internalized quest ever comes up against an opposing character or a collaborationist with the opposing side. There is, in short, no battleground founded on contradiction in *Symmes Hole*: the book which advocates a socialist history has no dialectical tension. Who is confronted with what? Someone composing a myth of whaling is expressed (or expresses himself) in paragraphs that dazzle; but he and the myth are counterpointed with nothing. The myth has no weight gained from struggle. It is a fast myth, a convenience that extrudes from the writing. It is, in an appalling irony, a replica of the fast food that symbolizes Wedde’s capitalism. This is not an unfair judgement. The novel eschews a normal story-line. It is presented deliberately as the revelation of a myth; it is a myth which has two simultaneous purposes. Firstly, it expresses an unofficial history. Secondly, it is a history which claims precedence and correct placement above the official history. If a normal story-line is not to develop, then the novel must have a political development, an ideological expression, and must be made to prove itself in combat. What there is instead is a New Zealandism which has marked no progress in terms of that country and the rest of the world.

**PARANOIA IN AN ENCLAVE**

Russell Haley’s novel, *The Settlement*, avoids many of these problems, but poses some of its own. Born of the effects of police brutality during the Springbok rugby tour of New Zealand, the novel supposes a time of civil unrest and official subjugation of it. The word, ‘suppose’, is used advisedly, as the reader is meant to suppose himself or herself through the novel. The unrest is an assumption in a background that is never painted in. The novel’s action occupies a foreground in a mental hospital, so the supposition is that the major characters can’t be reliable either. Now, this is either an extremely subtle device — the contradictions are all interior ones, interior to a hospital grounds, interior to the heads of a small population of protagonists, and interior to the head of the reader — or it is a deliberate sidestep to elevate what would have been a tense and suggestive short story into a novel. The novel’s failure can be blamed on the reader. The author, meanwhile, abdicates a great measure of his responsibility, effectively restarting the story from a shifted premise one third of the way through. It is, one supposes, to put across the idea of interior perspectives. The point is, however, that Haley regrasps the rights of a novelist for the book’s ending, as he manipulates the camouflage of his characters, abruptly introduces a new one, and deposits all
and sundry, the reader included, into the real world — whatever sort of interior perspective has been achieved. Haley abandoned the novel’s visible directorship so that his readers could explore an enigma. After patiently doing just that, the reader finds all enigma removed by the deus ex machina resuming his role. The technique of the novel has been a setup and has dissolved into a sham.

The annoyance of all this is that the reader is set up with care. Details of extreme pedanticism are introduced. (Should I remember the Latin name for that flower? Am I missing something? Was there a clue back there which should have illuminated this heavy going?) The fundamental annoyance of the novel, however, is that it, of itself, illuminates nothing — in particular, nothing of the use of politics which hovers in the background. That’s fine: the novelist can say that the reader should do that; the paranoia induced from plodding through the novel exemplifies the political paranoia that backdrops it all. It is a dark warning when the reader finds there is no escape from the political process implied throughout. Haley can say he has written a novel of despair and a novel of warning, and it has been accepted as such by New Zealand reviewers.

To accept it in this manner is to accept a not insignificant achievement. The actual writing, moreover, is that of a craftsman, and the book bears all the hallmarks of having been patiently written and (on the part of the publishers) lovingly produced. But, as the end to the novel illustrates, it is not that there is no escape from the politics inferred by the novel, but that there is no escape from the novelist. All the tension of reading has been subsumed into a tension between the reader and the writer. Why did the author do this? What did he mean by this? Is my response the correct one in the author’s context? I have imagined a world, I have made a personal sense of this enigma, but is it the sense that the writer intended, i.e. will it lead me to the end of the novel in a satisfactory and satisfying manner? And it doesn’t — because there, at the end, is Haley in full novelist’s uniform. The Settlement is, therefore, a failure as a political novel. It is a success as a form of written duplicity; but, because we are arguing with the author, and have transferred our paranoia to him, the deep recesses of the New Zealand political condition are dissipated. So, let’s call Haley’s bluff: the failure of the novel is the fault of the novelist.
IRRADIATED MYTH

The third novel to be discussed here is by a writer who has only recently come to public attention. Moreover, his publisher is a small press without the facilities of the others responsible here. The pedigree of the operation lies firstly in the risk of the publisher: *Lear — The Shakespeare Company Plays Lear at Babylon*, all 220 pages of it, was set by hand on an antique letterpress machine. All who helped set it became sick — no doubt from exhaustion — but the first edition was marshalled to a run of 3,000 copies, making it an epic of hand production, and demonstrating the publisher's faith in a virtually unknown writer. Moreover, the book is bound into a spine which refuses destruction: it cannot be torn straight DOWN. The book's production is, therefore, an assemblage of sweat, faith, and superglue. But what of the novel within?

Mike Johnson avoids New Zealand politics by setting his novel in a post-nuclear holocaust landscape which is, nominally, near Babylon — but which could be anywhere. It is possible that centuries have passed since the bombs fell, but epidemics of radiation-plague still decimate the remnants of humanity. This same humanity perversely continues to seek to multiply, and the perversity of challenging a self-ordained but gradual extinction is the central image of the book. Nothing in the novel is erotic in the normal sense, although some New Zealand reviewers carelessly paraded the word. There was a rumour that it might be declared obscene, but the book is not that either. Its sexual course (or courses) are simply perverse — because they reflect the universe in which they occur, they reflect the futility of reproduction, and they form the plot's underlay and mirror, as, in an irradiated slum, The Shakespeare Company, the very last bad-trip high-school-circuit travelling ensemble of hacks and shit-artists, run through *Lear*. And if *Lear* is not a play about futility, then what is? In a way, the novel's setting, while inventive and individual in New Zealand, takes no chances in a landscape where everything is predetermined.

All of the action takes place over twenty-four hours, and concerns the power struggle within The Shakespeare Company — both over who runs The Company and, simultaneously, who gets to sleep with whom; and over which actor gets to play which part. They cannot really change the play, since this would change the power struggle. The one actor who seeks a new play is the only one who dies. The Shakespeare Company is doomed to be a one-play ensemble, the actors growing into the characters they play, and being unseparated from them in everyday life until the next power-struggle is resolved. In an environment where everything is
doomed, The Shakespeare Company is doomed to keep enacting doom, and, with variations of personnel, to give doom a particularized but endlessly repetitive flavour. It is a reasonably sweet joke, therefore, for a novel about destruction to be bound into an indestructible spine.

Unlike the Wedde and Haley novels, Mike Johnson’s work has a traditional format within his extreme setting. The population of characters do play off against one another. To a large extent, the tension this generates is a predictable one, since they live out various of the stage personae they nightly assume. But the tension is made properly real by the fact that some characters want to transform themselves into other roles. It is a traditional novel and a reasonably successful one.

If it is more successful as a novel than Wedde’s and Haley’s, it is less successful as a piece of writing. It sets out to be beautiful writing, but there is a one-dimensional quality to the scenes of playing Lear (we know it is a play), and a one-dimensional languor to the sexual couplings (we know that the author is making it up, probably having a good time doing so, writing it to a deadline and smiling).

As a novel, it escapes the sword-and-sorcery genre. As a piece of writing, however, there is a marked similarity between some of Johnson’s work and that of Moorcock, sword-and-sorcery’s doyen. The affectionate and offhand heroism of Moorcock is here transferred into an affectionate and offhand sexual perversity. It is necessary for the story and for the book, but it writes and reads more cheaply than the book would have wanted and, given the book’s ambition, more cheaply than it deserves. Still, the product augurs well for Johnson’s future and that of his publisher. Wedde and Haley wrote substantial parts of their novels while on fellowships at the New Zealand universities of Wellington and Auckland respectively; Johnson’s novel has just won him a fellowship at Canterbury.

FAME, EFFORT, AND CONSCIOUSNESS

The Wedde, Haley and Johnson novels were all published in 1986, and continue the experimental New Zealand novel. It has had a short history, but surfaced to international attention when Keri Hulme’s The Bone People won the 1985 Booker Prize in Britain. Wedde, in particular, would have wanted to give his work the tight structures that were largely absent from Hulme’s book. Very present in Wedde’s work, however, is the consciousness of Maori precedence: they were in New Zealand first, and
it was their culture that officialdom has most ignored. Its claim to an unpatronized position in New Zealand history has only recently been given an official credence. There is a New Zealand peculiarity that Wedde shirks from: he does not make the Maori his centrepiece of unofficial history. The Maori are associated with unofficialdom in so far as Worser Heberley marries into a Maori tribe, but Heberley is, essentially, out there on his own, and, if he represents any distinct underdog community, it is the community of exiled whalers around the Wellington coastline.

The New Zealand peculiarity dates from a 1973 decision by a Labour Government to allow registration on the Maori electoral roll on the basis, not only of blood, but of identification and solidarity. This was a legislative sentiment, an anti-racialist romanticism. Keri Hulme is, by blood, one eighth Maori but, according to her own dust-jackets, identifies wholly with the Maori people. She and others do so rightly; their commitment is measurable. For many others, however, becoming an armchair Maori, or insisting that all New Zealand culture must be armchair-Maorified, has become a fashion of sleeve-displaying more than anything else. Wedde has rightly resisted this, but pays an honest due in Symmes Hole and in his other work — notably in his editorial policy for The Penguin Book of New Zealand Poetry. But how to choose in this matter, and exactly what one is choosing among, are issues clouded in the current New Zealand political and literary debate. In literary terms, the 1986 publication of Maurice Shadbolt’s The Season of the Jew raises interesting questions. Can a European writer, such as Shadbolt, who has made no personal commitment to Maori culture, write from a Maori perspective? He certainly seeks to do this, and his Maori characters are sympathetically drawn in a gripping, traditional novel. Wedde’s caution in deciding against exactly this lies in the nearness of guilt which suggests that Maori culture was unofficialized by Europeans; at this stage in history, it should be reclaimed by Maoris themselves, and not by Europeans. It is a question of symbols, but the Shadbolt book enters a debate which its author has made no real show of acknowledging.

How then to be polite to the work of Maori novelists who fail from attempting too much? Whose cultural mission of reclamation flounders on the limits of their craft? Witi Ihimaera’s 1986 novel, an epic work called The Matriarch, won literary prizes in New Zealand, and it won bucketsful of critical praise — based, it seems, largely on its effort and reach, and the sheer size of the book as an expression of things Maori and Pacific. It is as if people were surprised that Maori culture could take up
so much room. In this atmosphere of armchairism and genuine naivety, if not gaucheness, it will be some time before novels by Maori writers can be properly assessed.

There was one oddity in the 1986 New Zealand list of novels, and that was Keith Ovenden's *O.E.* Ostensibly a thriller, it also portrayed a New Zealand subjected to foreign interventions. International politics, and shady ones at that, infiltrated God's Own Country. The trouble with Ovenden is his parade of his own worldliness. He is not a New Zealander, though married to one, and would probably like most to be back in Oxford or Paris. Not being back there, he recalls his old stomping grounds in the sort of travelogue which insists that the author has been there and he is writing for readers who haven't. The politics of the book are also a hierarchical expression. Ovenden was once a politics don, and his novel has the joint pedanticism of a travelogue for beginners, and a set of lecture notes. But he has got one basic premise right. The danger to New Zealand is out there. Someone like Wedde, to lift a line from one of his poems, would say that out there is mediated from in here. But, while we're refining our internal view, our international innocence might be running amok. That is, as New Zealanders construct their late-20th century myth, they must have a detailed appreciation of reality's international bedrock. The feeling of uniqueness, which has always been the bane of the New Zealand world view, should not be replaced or augmented by a sense of corrected righteousness. You can spend so much time searching for Worser Heberley and his meaning, that you trivialize the external threat in symbols of hamburgers.

Haley's novel was entirely an interior exploration. National currents were in such a background that their international cousins or progenitors never got a look in. At the novel's end, two characters emigrate to England, and a fine line is drawn — then crossed by the two — between the civil unrest in New Zealand, the mental chaos of the characters, and what lies beyond, what lies outside. The exploration of what lies outside is something untouched in New Zealand writing. It is a consciousness untouched by the effort of writing and the local fame it brings, together with the local myth it helps to build and hopes will last. This hopefulness is no armour.
The Road to Heaven

The powerful sermon lasted for thirty minutes. Then Reverend Samson, the tall, slim, itinerant Scripture Union preacher called for a concluding, say-your-own-aloud prayer. He set the pace himself there at the lectern. He prayed with his eyes closed, his head nodding energetically, his lips fast-moving, his hands gesticulating and his whole face wrinkled and tense with enthusiasm.

Stephen, sitting at the back pew, was lost in admiration. He wished he could pray like the forty-year-old preacher, full of the Holy Spirit. Then he was startled when the lady next to him, keyed up to excitement, bounced up, shrieking and ruffling up her clothes in prayer. The whole room of fifty brethren was rowdy with diverse prayerful demonstrations.

He should also show signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in him, Stephen thought. The president of the prayer group was sitting, instead of standing, behind, apparently under the influence of the Holy Spirit himself. But he had the gift of discerning when a member had not received the Holy Spirit during general prayers, and would draw the member’s attention soon after. Stephen had been mildly reproached twice before and didn’t want another warning that night. Then he burst into his own prayer, rattling in tongues, jumping, yelling and clapping his hands.

Five minutes later, he noticed signs of choking in his lungs. Asthma again? He reduced the volume of his prayer; yet he lacked sufficient air. Something was pressing in his lungs. He felt dizzy which made his clapping irregular and the words escaping from his mouth without control. He was jabbering. Then came bouts of blackouts in his head until there was total darkness. He fell.

When Stephen opened his eyes one hour later, he was in his room in the hostel. Reverend Samson and three others, including the president, were there. ‘Praise the Lord!’ Reverend Samson said, and his companions responded halleluya. Stephen responded with a quivering smile. ‘Brother Stephen,’ Samson called, ‘this is the work of the Holy Spirit. I know you have a message for us.’
Stephen smiled and nodded. He knew he had no message, except to say that he had had an attack. But he would not say it there. The brethren would frown at that, because his was the most spectacular ‘trance’ of the night’s prayer meeting, and the visiting preacher would go home with a high opinion of the congregation. As the members rose to go, Stephen promised to say something in the future. ‘I’m too overwhelmed to talk now,’ he said. The brethren agreed with him and left.

Alone, Stephen was lost in thought. He had had this asthma from infancy. But until he left the secondary school, he never had it as bad as he had been experiencing since he came to the university. The university medical centre placed him on a special drug, but occasionally he abandoned it, expecting an instant cure from the Holy Spirit. At times, he felt better for months without the drug until, quite suddenly, the symptoms would return fully and force him to take his drug. This night’s attack was the worst, without any antecedent symptoms for months.

Very early the following morning, he went to meet Reverend Samson, to tell him that what he experienced last night was an attack not a trance. ‘There is no need pretending or telling lies about a message I never received,’ he said. Reverend Samson said he was expecting nothing but how Stephen battled with the devil. ‘You are hiding a terrible sin.’ Samson said, ‘and you will never be cured until you confess it.’

Stephen owned up to having taken an entrance examination for his friend two years ago. Samana, his best friend, was to take entrance examinations to two universities, one of which was where Stephen was already a student. Incidentally, the entrance examinations to the two institutions came up the same Saturday. Samana persuaded Stephen to represent him in the examination to the one in which Stephen was already a student, while he, Samana, sat for the examination to the other university. He passed the two examinations and was admitted to do engineering in both. Because of Stephen, he chose to come to this university where both were doing the same course, with Stephen in his third year and Samana in his second.

Having heard the details, Reverend Samson said, ‘You must confess the sin and make amends. You must tell the university what you did before God forgives you completely.’ Stephen must go and bring Samana immediately. He met Samana hurrying to the cafeteria and hinted that they would visit a place briefly after breakfast.

Thirty minutes later, they were in Reverend Samson’s charlet in a guest house outside the university gate. ‘The two of you must tell the university how you co-operated in a fraudulent admission into this place,’ he said to them. ‘Without that, all your labours here will earn you
They should go to the registrar immediately and make the disclosure. Samana was worried and reminded Samson of the possible danger awaiting their action. He also argued, 'I could have passed the examination to this university myself, and I could have gone to the other university but for my desire to be near Stephen.' But Samson insisted that they must go and promised, 'I will go on praying while you confront the registrar. He must expressly forgive you after hearing the story.'

When Stephen finished narrating the story of their impersonation, the bewildered registrar asked, 'Do you know the weight of what you are saying?' Stephen said he knew. The registrar called for their files, and after studying their academic records said, 'Stephen Benja, by your records, you are heading towards the first class; your friend, Samana Damla, has shown similar signs. Don’t drag me into your conspiracy of self-destruction... Leave my office...'

Stephen cut him short, 'It is devilish...,' but the registrar would not allow him to continue. 'I know you are a Scripture Unionist,' the registrar said. 'Get the degree, and, while you work, give all your earnings to the poor. God will accept that in atonement for your sins.' He dismissed them without further argument.

Reverend Samson heard the reaction with a chuckle. He saw the registrar as speaking for the devil, who must be driven out of the campus that day. 'What is the joy in following a first class degree to hell?' he asked. He instructed that the two friends must write the whole story in a letter to be sent to the registrar immediately. 'I shall pray over the letter, and once the registrar gets it, the sin becomes his and not yours.'

Samana refused to sign the letter which Stephen wrote hurriedly. Reverend Samson cajoled him into signing and following Stephen to deliver it by boasting of the efficacy of his prayers. 'I will pray him into submission.'

Six hours later, Stephen and Samana were summarily expelled from the university. Samana, with a matchet in hand, went about hunting for Samson. But as the Scripture Unionists were smuggling Samson out of the university environment, Samson saw Stephen smiling artificially and said, 'Praise the Lord! From now onwards, your road to heaven is an express-way.'
In some ways Les Murray and an Oxford anthology are strange bedfellows. A republican with a passion for the Koori and Celtic heritages in Australia, Murray might have been expected to reject the invitation to edit *The New Oxford Book of Australian Verse*. Instead, he exploits it.

As an anthologist, Murray gives the strongest representation so far to poetry from Aboriginal Australia; there’s a strong representation of vernacular poetry generally, and enough stroppy republicanism to make anglophiles dismiss this anthology under the heading ‘The Empire Strikes Back’.

Not as satisfactory are his decisions to limit all poets equally to a maximum of three poems, and to avoid including the pieces usually chosen to represent the best-known poets. This means that the selections from Judith Wright and A.D. Hope among others are eccentric, to say the least. Another liability is that only 15% of Murray’s poets are women.

Alarmingly, this has been a standard percentage in Australian anthologies (most of them edited, incidentally, by poets rather than academics). Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn at last put that right in *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets*. It’s an eclectic anthology, stimulating in its acknowledgement of many feminisms, and the poems are not inevitably about being a woman. Essential reading.

Colin Johnson, Australia’s first Aboriginal novelist, publishes an astonishing first collection of poems in *The Song Circle of Jacky and Other Poems* (Hyland House). Bobbi Sykes has spoken of the need for Aborigines to create heroic figures in their writing, and Johnson’s Jacky is an affirmation of Aboriginal strength in the struggle against colonialism. In both subject matter and language, this book breaks new ground in placing Aboriginal experience in an international context.

Two other first collections are particularly strong. Philip Hodgins’ *Blood and Bone* (A & R) is a book many people won’t want to read. Hodgins has chronic myeloid leukemia, and it’s incurable. The book’s refusal of euphemisms, from the title onwards, and its confrontation with
death in a society increasingly incapable of responding to mortality, are
inescapably political and subversive. Hodgins’ hard-edged imagery
sometimes reminds you of Robert Gray, but the vitality of the language
of death here recalls Anne Sexton. A rewarding challenge for readers who
can cope.

Less intense perhaps, but remarkable for the range and cohesiveness of
its vision is Jan Owen’s Boy With Telescope (A & R). Her poems are philo-
sophical, funny, sexy — buoyant with life. A sequence of poems is set in
a suburban spa; a wonderful comic poem called ‘Freud and the Vacuum
Cleaner’ about a woman who’s been through six phallic symbols in ten
years. This collection is a real find.

More a novel in verse than a long poem, Alan Wearne’s The Night-
markets (Penguin) explores the fate of the ’60s generation with an extra-
ordinarily detailed sense of social and political context. Although the ease
of the vernacular is sometimes strained by rhyme, one of Wearne’s
considerable achievements here is the differentiation of his six narrators.

Other highlights of the year’s publishing in poetry are Phantom Dwelling
(A & R), a collection of spare new poems by Judith Wright; Rhyll
McMaster’s Washing the Money (A & R), which makes intelligent use of a
photographic essay; Bruce Dawe’s Towards Sunrise (Longman Cheshire),
Andrew Taylor’s Travelling (UQP) and Nearer By Far (UQP) by Richard
Tipping.

Often stern but always stimulating, The Lyre in the Pawnshop (Uni of
W.A. Press) collects Fay Zwicky’s essays and reviews, mostly on Aus-
tralian poetry and American literature. Zwicky’s fondness for an
unfashionable thinker like Steiner is typical of her uncompromising indi-
vidualism and her essays such as those on the Australian laconic and on
the absence of love in poetry written by Australian men have provoked
considerable comment.

In fiction, although Patrick White had declared he was through with
the novel and would now write only plays, Memoirs of Many in One
(Jonathan Cape) made one young critic, dubbed the ‘Literary Rambo’,
wish he had kept his word. Others were lavish in their praise of this
excursion into postmodernist trickery. It’s a minor novel, with White in a
playful mood: a bit unsubtle, but fun.

Not the word for Christina Stead’s I’m Dying Laughing (Virago), a
novel published posthumously but written and reworked for over twenty
years. Like Sam Pollit, Emily Wilkes-Howard is simply overwhelming,
and her story too is of the destructiveness of passion and political ideals.
Set in McCarthyist America and in Paris, I’m Dying Laughing is too long,
but nevertheless one of Stead’s three or four major works.

125
Though far less ambitious, the year’s best novel is Elizabeth Jolley’s *The Well* (Penguin), winning her at last the Miles Franklin Award. Here’s Jolley in her darker mood, with a gothic feel to this wheat-belt tale of two mutually dependent women and possibly a dead man down a well. Right from the title, its apparent simplicity resonates with suggestion: Kerryn Goldsworthy, for example, called it an inverted Rapunzel story.

Again from Western Australia, Tim Winton’s *That Eye the Sky* (McPhee Gribble). Winton’s young narrator, Ort Flack, seems almost simple-minded but there’s an intensity in his view of family and death and belief that’s absolutely compelling. As in *The Well*, and writing by other Australians such as Astley and Hanrahan, I’m constantly reminded here of fictional worlds from the southern United States.

Probably David Foster’s most difficult novel, *The Adventures of Christian Rosy Cross* (Penguin) is an exploration of the strange connections between alchemy and Christianity in Rosicrucianism. Given the bizarre fiction of Rosicrucianism itself, there’s no point wondering where Foster’s erudition in this picaresque satire leaves off and his invention begins. His ebullient language gives you two choices: submit, or run for it!

Kate Grenville’s *Dreamhouse* (UQP) is well written but the characters are so unlikable. On the other hand, Archie Weller’s collection of short stories, *Going Home* (Allen & Unwin) is so badly written but its vision of race relations in Australia compels both shame and sympathy. Little radical anger, though. Unlike the cautious optimism of Colin Johnson’s poems, its unrelieved hopelessness about the future for Aborigines is, in the long run, politically conservative.

Other outstanding short fiction in Frank Moorhouse’s *Room Service* (Viking/Penguin), John Clanchy’s *The Lie of the Land* (Pascoe Publishing), George Papaellinas’s *Ikons* (Penguin) and Don Anderson’s state-of-the-art anthology, *Transgressions* (Penguin).

The year’s two best plays are Tony Strachan’s play of life on an Aboriginal reserve, despair, and the power of the imagination, *State of Shock* (Currency) and Michael Gow’s *Away* (Currency). Although the virtuosity of Gow’s language is less evident here than in, say, *On Top of the World*, part of the tremendous appeal *Away* has had is that, like all his plays, it speaks for a generation disillusioned by the 60s’ failure to deliver anything more than affluence.

Several books useful to the study of Australian Literature: Dorothy Green’s revised *Henry Handel Richardson and Her Fiction* (Allen & Unwin); two collections of interviews with Australian writers, *Yakker* (Picador) edited by Candida Baker and *Rooms of Their Own* (Penguin) edited by
Jennifer Ellison; and a study of narrative in Australian film and fiction, Graeme Turner’s *National Fictions* (Allen & Unwin).

Those interested in Barbara Hanrahan’s fiction will find the highlighting of various influences and the sexuality of her work useful in *Barbara Hanrahan: Printmaker* by Alison Carroll (Wakefield Press). And finally, redressing the balance and telling the story of Catholic girlhood in Australia, *Sweet Mothers, Sweet Maids* ed. K. & D. Nelson (Penguin) is variable, but includes outstanding memoirs by such writers as Veronica Brady and Anna Rutherford.

In Australian children’s literature, after a shaky history, fantasy continues to figure prominently. A sleeper when it was first released Gillian Rubinstein’s *Space Demons* (Omnibus) became one of the year’s most popular books for older readers. It’s about a wealthy but unhappy boy who unexpectedly zaps a gun out of the computer game he is playing into his hand, and what happens when he turns it on one of his friends. This novel says so much quite succinctly — perhaps too insistently towards the end — but I couldn’t put it down.

*Taronga* (Penguin), Victor Kelleher’s frightening view of a future in which Sydney’s zoo is the only safe place to be, and *All We Know* (A & R), Simon French’s beautifully written study of an adolescent girl, are the other outstanding books for older readers.

Paul Jennings’ funny and surreal short stories in *Unreal and Unbelievable!* (both Penguin) are, with Robin Klein’s books, favourites of readers 10 and over. And finally the outrageous *Sister Madge’s Book of Nuns* (Omnibus) with poems by Doug Macleod and loopy illustrations by Craig Smith tells of Sister Helga who ate too many reindeer meatballs when she was young, grew antlers and became the convent hatstand; the Sisters of No Mercy, who form a bikie gang and rip through the local supermarket in a modern Cleansing of the Temple; and many other sisters from *Our Lady of Immense Proportions*.

This book is loved by readers of all ages, including nuns.

MARK MACLEOD

CANADA

Exciting things are happening to Canadian literature. The range, variety and quality of this year’s writing is remarkable. Much of the innovative writing is coming out in attractive paperback first issues from small
The novel of the year was Timothy Findley’s *The Telling of Lies* (Viking/Penguin), a powerful mystery probing the painful area where the political and the moral collide, so elegantly written the style seems almost to redeem the horrors of the subject matter. On a smaller scale, the eleven stories in Alice Munro’s collection, *The Progress of Love* (McClelland & Stewart) work much the same miracle, ranging from tragedy to comedy without missing a beat. These were deservedly the high profile publications this year, but there was much, much more worth our attention.

Findley also brought out a revised edition of *The Butterfly Plague* (Penguin), first published in 1969. Scott Symons broke a long silence with *Helmet of Flesh* (McClelland & Stewart), a cranky, misogynist yet compelling tale of a woman-hating, Canada-hating man, York Mackenzie, who discovers the ‘complete antidote’ to these curses in Marrakesh. Aritha van Herk’s irreverent *No Fixed Address: An Amorous Journey* (McClelland & Stewart) provides the antidote to Symons. The novel takes the form of a ‘Notebook on a missing person’, an unnamed narrator’s quest for the mysterious underwear saleswoman, Arachne Manteia, from her childhood in Vancouver through her marriage in Calgary and her journeys across Alberta to her disappearance in the North. Anne Cameron’s *The Journey* (Spinsters/Aunt Lute) rewrites history from a feminist perspective, tracing the travels of two women through the Canadian West to the Pacific. For laid-back whimsy turn to David McFadden’s *Canadian Sunset* (Black Moss), as it chronicles the cross-Canada travels (focussed on Vancouver, the Kootenays and Toronto, with a side-trip to New Mexico) of a helicopter salesman and his unlikely contacts with painters, writers and mystics. But Paulette Jiles’s delightful *Sitting in the Club Car Drinking Rum and Karma-Kola: A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies Crossing Canada by Train* (Polestar) provides the ultimate post-modernist parody of this suddenly popular Canadian subgenre, the amorous journey. Here ‘the train is a perpetual performance, a carnival, a traveling medicine show, a sort of genteel psych ward going around the bend’.

Jiles’ *The Late Great Human Road Show* (Talon) imagines a post-nuclear Toronto in a science fiction format, more successfully than Helene Holden’s treatment of a similar theme — the aftermath of an unspecified disaster — in *After the Fact* (Oberon). Leona Gom’s *Housebroken* (NeWest) is an elegiac romance, exploring the friendship of two women in Chiliwack, the agoraphobia of Susan and the guilt of Ellen, who could not help her, across the backdrop of contemporary B.C. politics. Helen Potrebenko’s *Sometimes they Sang* (Press Gang), with a similar setting
(Socred B.C. in 1979), makes a stronger polemical statement but is no less engaging for it. As the author explains in a Note inserted in the middle of the story: ‘...this is my book and Odessa will act like the women I know rather than the women portrayed in real writers’ novels.’

The winner of this year’s Seal First Novel award, Jo Anne Williams’ *Downfall People* (McClelland & Stewart), treats cross-cultural encounters in a West African setting. Among other first novels, Leslie Hall Pinder’s *Under the House* (Talon) exposes the repressive silences of respectable family life, Jane Urquhart’s *The Whirlpool* (McClelland & Stewart) develops an historical mystery, and David Gilmour’s *Back on Tuesday* (Coach House) narrates the Lowryesque musings of an ineffective father who has kidnapped his daughter and fled his efficient wife in ugly Toronto for the worst bar at the end of the world in Jamaica.

Hugh Hood’s *The Motor Boys in Ottawa* (Stoddart) is number 6, the middle point in his New Age series, and extremely topical now that its subject, the Canada/U.S. Auto Pact, may be up for revision in the free trade talks. It’s vintage Hood, almost unbearably tedious but fascinating to the student of his brand of Canadian conservatism. David Helwig’s *The Bishop* (Viking) is a quiet, realistic novel exploring religion and morality in a Kingston setting. Matt Cohen’s *Nadine* (Penguin) is another realistic character study on Jewish themes. Andreas Schroeder’s *Dustship Glory* (Doubleday) treats the strange obsessions of a man who built an ocean-going steamship in the middle of the prairie, over a thousand miles from the nearest port. Also in the documentary fiction vein, Heather Robertson brought out the sequel to *Willie: Lily: A Rhapsody in Red* (Lorimer). And Josef Skvorecky’s *Dvorak in Love*, translated by Paul Wilson (Lester & Orpen Dennys), fictionalises the dead composer’s life.

One of my favourite books of this year is Clark Blaise’s *Resident Alien* (Penguin), accomplished, haunting stories that record, Blaise writes, his ‘obsessions with self and place; not just the whoness and whatness of identity, but the whereness of who and what I am’. Audrey Thomas continues her analysis of male-female relationships in stories set in the Gulf Islands and Greece in *Goodbye Harold, Good Luck* (Penguin). Janice Kulyk Keefer, who won first prize in the CBC Radio short story competition for the second year in a row, has published her first collection of stories, *The Paris Napoli Express* (Oberon). Janette Turner Hospital’s *Dislocations* (McClelland & Stewart) continues her exploration of her title theme and includes the story which provided the genesis for *The Ivory Swing*. Edna Alford’s *The Garden of Eloise Loon* (Ooolican) contains some haunting stories. Unfortunately, the interconnected stories of Ray Smith’s *Century* (Stoddart) fall somewhat flat. John Metcalf’s two
novellas and three stories in *Adult Entertainment* (Macmillan) are sophisticated and accomplished. Alister MacLeod, another meticulous craftsman, brought out *As Birds Bring Forth the Sun and Other Stories* (McClelland & Stewart). Anne Cameron’s *Dzelarhons: Myths of the Northwest Coast* (Harbour) provide more magic, feminist fables as a sequel to *Daughters of Copper Woman*.

Essential poetry publications for the year are Margaret Atwood’s *Selected Poems II: Poems Selected and New 1976-1986* (Oxford) and *The Collected Poems of Al Purdy*, ed. Russell Brown (McClelland & Stewart). These are surely two of our best poets. Two of the most ambitious new books are Christopher Dewdney’s *The Immaculate Perception* (Anansi) and Robert Bringhurst’s *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music* (McClelland & Stewart). Both are post-modernist, experimental, boundary-crossing works that mix diagrams, calligraphy, maps, fragments of prose and poetry and glossaries of the terms and references used throughout. These are challenging books that elate in their efforts to rethink the mysteries of how we think and perceive (Dewdney) and — more interesting to me and probably the readers of this journal — of how to learn to ‘speak across and against’ the colonial culture to which we belong (Bringhurst). Yet both also have their overly intellectualised moments which make one long for the lyric simplicity of what Bringhurst terms ‘breathing through the feet’. In a similar attempt to fuse science and poetry Pier Giorgio di Cicco sees physics as ‘meta-poetry’ and hunts ‘holistic paradigms’ in *Virgin Science* (McClelland & Stewart), a less compelling book.


In a year of increasingly politicised fiction, one of the most political books to appear has been Brian Fawcett’s unclassifiable *Cambodia: A book for people who find television too slow* (Talon). This is a collection of philosophical fictions with an articulated essay-like subtext that claims to locate itself in the ‘interzone between the First and Third world’. Its tone of angry self-righteousness irritated most of my friends but I liked it for its dark humour and serious questionings. Paul de Barros provides a similar attempt to combine documentary journey and fictional stories with North/South explorations in *Big Plans* (Talon). Talon has also published
Michael Mercer's play, *Goodnight Disgrace*, based on Conrad Aiken's friendship with Malcolm Lowry.


Margaret Atwood and Robertson Davies made the short list for the Booker Prize this year although neither won it. The Canadian Book Information Centre promoted what it termed 'Canada's ten best young fiction writers' in a contest named 45 Below. The winners were: Sandra Birdsell, Matt Cohen, Janette Turner Hospital, Susan Kerslake, Bharati Mukherjee, Paul Quarrington, David Adams Richards, Sarah Sheard, Guy Vanderhaeghe and Aritha van Herk.

DIANA BRYDON

PAKISTAN

The year began with the installation of an elected government and the gradual easing of the larger socio-political tensions in the country made room, even if grudgingly, for other kinds of social and cultural expression. On the whole, it was a year filled with literary festivals, commemorations and fresh resolves for the future.

A four-day conference in March celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Progressive Writers Association (circa 1936) at Karachi. In attendance were major writers and critics from Pakistan and India. The conference reviewed the present situation and re-affirmed its pre-Independence objectives. Some of the *élan* and flavour of its proceedings were conveyed by the columns and editorials in the national dailies, such as 'Writers Call for End to Imperialist Influences' (*The Muslim*, 10 March). In April the four-day World Punjabi Conference was held at Lahore, with participants coming from many different countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and
North America. Apart from these events, the Writers’ Group in Lahore and Margalla Voices, a poetry group in Islamabad, were also quite active, with an impressive schedule of readings, talks and discussions. Indeed, a pleasant surprise is the development of a poetry-reading and lecture series at the prestigious Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore, whose schedule includes a good deal of English literary activity under what amounts to a fairly benevolent kind of official patronage. The President’s new directive to design and encourage book-publishing programmes throughout the country will be implemented by the Pakistan Academy of Letters and the National Book Council of Pakistan.

Among publications, those in the categories of fiction, anthologies and non-fiction were voluminous, qualitative and most written about in the press. Ahmed Ali’s third novel, *Rats and Diplomats* (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), is a first-person, humorous narrative, allegorical in design and satirical in purpose. The novel takes Ali’s English work on to a different path and effectively contradicts the rumours heard for some time that Ali’s migration had somehow cooled the creative fires first seen in *Angare* (Burning Coals, 1932), and still better seen in *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Ocean of Night* (1964). Zulfikar Ghose’s tenth novel keeps us in South America. *Figures of Enchantment* (London: Hutchinson; New York: Harper & Row) presents such figures as those of beautiful or attractive women, or of sums of money, of lottery tickets and island paradises, which haunt the characters as the delusions they must pursue and destroy. The everyday desires lead to disproportionately severe ironic reversals of a kind that were the characters not so well evoked or sympathetically portrayed the result would have been a ringing farce. It is a deep psychological outlook, and the most artful of story-telling which transform the material of this novel into the reflective rhythms and overtones of tragedy. The many ironies of fate which Ghose’s characters must endure, besides those of exile and failure to obtain love or anything else they set out for, include the supreme irony that some of them are not who they are supposed to be. But the supposition itself is questionable. Sense of time and identity change under the stress of circumstance or the whimsy of reincarnation, and even the text of the novel itself is a remanifestation of an earlier verbal identity in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*; with its own analogues of Prospero, Miranda, Caliban and such other references as are irrepressible to the English-educated memory. In a sense, Ghose’s Brazilian trilogy (1972-1978) as a whole was a ‘Frontier Novel’ incorporating the ‘Historical Romance’. The place and the setting have since depended less on external referents and more on place as merely a ‘setting’; though without being innocent of what place it is. The journey
since has been more and more into the ‘interior’ of the human soul as enlightened by a powerful moral vision.

The two better poetry collections, both first books, were Selected Poems (Lahore: Nirali Kitaben) by Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed and Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Nomad and Other Poems (Rawalpindi: Subah Publications) by Raja Changez Sultan.

At least five fine anthologies were published during the year. Inspirations (Lahore: The Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), edited by Hina Babar Ali, includes poems by Pakistani and American poets: Inamul Haq, Michael Lynch, Hina Babar Ali, Taufiq Rafat, Alamgir Hashmi, Waqas Ahmad and Elizabeth Sewell. A Various Terrain: An Anthology of Pakistani English Poetry (The Quaid-e-Azam Library Publications), edited by M. Athar Tahir, includes poems by Aneeq Ahmad, Hina Babar Ali, Inamul Haq, Alamgir Hashmi, Waqas Ahmad Khwaja, Taufiq Rafat, Jocelyn Ortt-Saeed and M. Athar Tahir. Selected Short Stories from Pakistan — Urdu (Islamabad: The Pakistan Academy of Letters), edited by Ahmed Ali, contains some of the best contemporary Urdu short stories in good English translation, while The Penguin Book of Modern Urdu Poetry, selected and (all of it) translated by Mahmood Jamal, shows a dedicated translator at a critical disadvantage as an anthologist and a compiler. He defines the ‘Modern’ in Urdu rather narrowly; and accordingly he chooses some poets and poems of questionable quality or translatability, while excluding some major work. Jamal’s is a laudable effort, to be followed up and bettered by a more coherent and a more comprehensive anthology. The Worlds of Muslim Imagination (Islamabad: Gulmohar Press), edited by Alamgir Hashmi, appeals to the present writer to resist commenting critically and confine himself to description; it is ‘an anthology of modern and contemporary multilingual literature of the Islamic countries since the great poet Iqbal’. The book includes poetry and fiction originally written in English as well as works translated into English from other Pakistani and world languages, plus a number of scholarly articles by such critics as Bruce King, Adele King, P.J. Stewart, Roger Allen, Prithwindra Mukherjee and Eric Sellin.

Among translations, two volumes stand out: The Prison House (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), a selection of Ahmed Ali’s Urdu short stories translated by the author himself; and Journal of South Asian Literature: The Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto (Michigan State University, East Lansing), a special issue edited by Leslie A. Flemming, which contains a number of short stories by Manto in English translation by various hands. The stories included in the special issue are sometimes different from those to be found in the earlier The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan
Manto (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd., 1985), in which the biographical and critical sections were written by Leslie A. Flemming (as also contained earlier in the Stateside edition of her work) and all of the short stories were translated by Tahira Naqvi. The present special issue also contains critical pieces about Manto, an interview with a Manto friend and a Manto bibliography. So, in more ways than one, the 1985 and the 1986 editions of Manto by Flemming complement each other.

Also of interest may be Karamatullah Khan Ghauri's China Doll, Urdu short stories in the author's own English translation published in Beijing (International Culture Publishing Corp.); certainly no less than Ashfaq Hussain's Urdu poems in English translation by various hands, The Day Will Dawn, which was published in Toronto (Pakistan-Canada Amity Forum). The second, revised edition of Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation (Karachi: Akrash Publishing), by Ahmed Ali, was also published during the year, drawing a long subscription list from far and wide.

In non-fiction, the Forster-Masood Letters (Karachi: Ross Masood Education and Culture Society of Pakistan), edited by Jalil Ahmad Kidwai, complements the sections relevant to the two correspondents in Selected Letters of E.M. Forster, edited by Mary Lago and P.N. Furbank. Other books to note in this category are: Disastrous Twilight: A Personal Record of the Partition of India (London: Leo Cooper and Secker & Warburg), by General Shahid Hamid, one-time A.D.C. to Field Marshal Auchinleck; Contemporary Muslim World (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture) and Islamization of Pakistan (Lahore: Vanguard Books Ltd.) by Afzal Iqbal, diplomat and scholar; The Lighter Side of the Power Game (Lahore: Jang Publishers) by Muhammad Asghar Khan, formerly Air Marshal and Chief of Pakistan Air Force and currently a politician; Memoirs and Other Writings of Syed Amir Ali (Delhi: Renaissance Publishing House), edited by Syed Razi Wasti; Political Legacy of Jinnah by K.F. Yusuf; and Volume II and Volume III of The Collected Works of Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Karachi: East and West Publishing Company), edited by Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada. For general, leisurely reading, a charming, personal book is Iftikhar Haider Malik's Pakistan, People and Places: Reflections on Living and Travelling (Islamabad: Margalla Publications).

Further, Kaleem Omar and Shuaib bin Hasan both continued to write their highly popular, though highbrow, columns: 'Letter from Karachi' in The Star and 'Books and Writers' in The Pakistan Times, respectively. Two new English daily newspapers, The Nation (Lahore) and The Frontier Post (Peshawar), began to publish last year, and both have been putting out attractive weekly magazines, which carry items of literary and
cultural interest. And although the English theatre had no major events, Hassan Habib published *The Story of Mrs Simpson and King Edward: A One-Act Play in Three Scenes* (*The Frontier Post Magazine*, 20 May, pp. 14-15, 18), while Shahryar Rashid had his short play *The Whale* broadcast by the B.B.C. *The Journal of the English Literary Club: Session 1984-1985* also came out during the year, and it contained interesting work by Pakistani writers and critics. *Annual of Urdu Studies* (Chicago), No. 5, which appeared late in 1986, had special sections devoted to N.M. Rashed, Rajinder Singh Bedi and Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

The critical yield has been good, while the attention is noticeably on the contemporary. Much of the critical writing published during the year concerned writers like Ahmed Ali, Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir Hashmi, Daud Kamal, Saadat Hasan Manto and N.M. Rashed. Two important books published during the year were: *Pakistan: Literature and Society* (New Delhi: Patriot Publishers) by Fahmida Riaz and *Punjabi Literature — After Independence* (Lahore: Punjabi Adabi Board).

Among articles, I must mention 'The Literature of Pakistan' (with a select bibliography) by Alamgir Hashmi (*World Literature Written in English*, 26, 1, 192-199), which may serve well as a starting point for a study of Pakistani Literature in English. Also of interest may be a fine article by Bruce King, 'From Twilight to Midnight: Muslim Novels of India and Pakistan' (in *The Worlds of Muslim Imagination*, ed. Alamgir Hashmi (Islamabad: Gulmohar Press, 1986), pp. 243-259), which discusses the work of Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, Zulfikar Ghose and Salman Rushdie.

Finally the prizes. Bapsi Sidhwa won the Pakistan Academy of Letters’ Patras Bokhari Award for 1986 for her novel *The Bride* (1983). A new national prize for younger writers, the Townsend Poetry Prize, has been announced. According to the press release, ‘the Townsend Poetry Prize was established to encourage English-language creative writing in Pakistan, and is a tribute to the work of individuals who are making a positive though quiet contribution toward intercultural communication and the enrichment of community life’. The prize was created by Professor Alamgir Hashmi, who knew Ms Townsend in Lahore in the early 1970s as a working colleague in the arts and as a friend. The Townsend Poetry Prize will be administered by the American Center in Islamabad.

ALAMGIR HASHMI
1986 was a most eventful year for literature and the arts in Singapore. Two major events coincided to make the year among the most memorable ever. The Seventh Triennial Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the bi-annual Singapore Festival of Arts were held in the same month — June. For the first time in the history of the Singapore Festival of Arts it was decided to have a Writers' Week as an integral part of the overall programme. The ACLALS Triennial and the Writers' Week were held back to back so that maximum results would be achieved in terms of Readings and Discussions. For two whole weeks, therefore, Singapore's literary scene bustled with activities. The ACLALS Conference had attracted over two hundred participants from about thirty countries and Writers' Week brought in some twenty-five writers and academics from about sixteen countries. It was an exciting time. Never before had Singapore seen so many literary types assembled at the one time. For the organisers there was a sense of euphoria coupled with anxiety; for those interested in matters literary a golden opportunity to meet and listen to some of the best contemporary writers offered itself, and for Singaporeans at large there was a definite pride in having come of age. The incorporation of a Writers' Week into the official Festival of Arts cannot be over-emphasised: it marked the beginning of a new ethos in the nation's sense of Culture.

It would be difficult to describe all that happened at the two events and to mention the names of all those who contributed to the success of the occasions, but *Kunapipi* readers will be familiar with the names of Rudy Wiebe, Aritha van Herk, Charles Causley, Timothy Mo, John Tranter, Nissim Ezekiel, Raja Rao, Kamala Das, Nora Vagi, Albert Wendt, Vincent O'Sullivan, Sam Selvon, Lee Kok Liang, Ee Tiang Hong, Blanche D'Alpuget, David Dabydeen. These writers, together with many others from the Commonwealth and from outside the Commonwealth, joined their Singaporean counterparts in a real literary bash. There were readings everywhere: at the National University, at various branches of the National Library, at junior colleges, at schools, and at public auditoriums. There were readings and forums during lunch-time and in the evenings. The aim was to attract as large a public as possible.

Alas, this large public was not always there. Part of the problem, I suspect, lay in the very inadequate publicity given to the literary events. By the time people became aware that all these exciting writers were in Singapore, the Festival was about over. Perhaps we also had been over-
ambitious in planning such a packed and full programme. Whatever the reason, the lessons learnt will help in the organising of future literary events.

This is not the place where a report of the ACLALS Conference should be given, but a few words are in order. The Conference had a very relevant theme: ‘The Writer as Historical Witness: The Commonwealth Experience.’ After twenty years of its existence, the energies of the Association were rightfully channelled into the discussion of such a theme. Some excellent papers were delivered and useful exchanges took place formally and informally. When the selection of Papers from the Conference is published readers will know just how high the standard of presentations was. The Conference was seen by all to be a great success. Participants were kept busy throughout the day with academic sessions, readings of poetry and prose, cultural programmes and the delights of Singapore (of which there are many!)

There was a successful Book Launching during the ACLALS Conference. Among the many books launched were two titles from Singapore, both by the present writer: *Palm Readings* and *Critical Engagements*. The first is a collection of poems written by Singh over the years 1965 and 1986. Readers will discern common themes, among them, displacement, anxiety, prejudice, loneliness.

```
shadows move outside my door
metaphysical propositions
do not console as they once did
nor the brownness of earth without water.
```

*Critical Engagements* is described as ‘the first book to be wholly devoted to a serious discussion of poems written by Singaporeans’. Scholars from all over the world (among them Yasmine Gooneratne, Louis James, A.V. Krishna Rao, Shirley Lim, Anne Brewster, Dorothy Jones) critically examine a given poem so as to provide a frame for further reference. The book also contains a short anthology of poems and a select bibliography. Teachers and students of Commonwealth literature will find it an invaluable book of practical reference.

Robert Yeo’s *The Adventures of Holden Heng*, a novel, was launched with great pomp and ceremony at the Writer’s Bar of Raffles Hotel later in the year. The novel, dealing with the sometimes comical and sometimes unfortunate attempts of a young man to find suitable female companions in an environment not easily responsive to his kind of needs, gave rise to considerable controversy regarding Yeo’s depiction of women and their role. While the controversy may have been based on a mis-reading of the
novel (the present writer fails to perceive any real injustice!) it did certainly enhance the sales. I gather that a reprint is imminent. The novel aimed for a popular audience and got it. Perhaps more Singaporean writers will now shed their ‘élitist’ approach and write for a mass readership?

The Department of English of the National University brought out a collection of poems by a young poet: Angeline Yap. Angeline had been featured in various anthologies for quite some time and it was time she came out with an individual collection. She writes well, with a fine control of the language giving the poetry a persuasiveness hard to resist:

we are but silent men;  
single voices, after all, of no account  
we do not speak  
but accuse in whispers  
that mount and crush.

If she continues writing the way she does in Collected Poems readers can look forward to the confident maturity of an engaging new Singaporean poet.

One other important book published this year — but which has not had the impact it deserves — was Arthur Yap’s Man Snake Apple. Those who know the Singaporean poetry scene will be interested in this new collection from Yap. Man Snake Apple marks a departure from Yap’s intriguing language-games and registers a new emotional preoccupation. Curiously enough the collection reminds one of Yap’s first book Only Lines. Yap is now responding to matters of the heart. Poems to close friends reveal the significance of feelings and bonds which transcend geography. There is a spiritual dimension as well, and it would appear that Yap, having explored those wonderful linguistic permutations which delight the academic to no end, is now returning to the source of poetic commitment. Man Snake Apple is only a very slim volume but its importance can go unnoticed.

The government-supported Singa magazine continues to publish creative efforts of several Singaporean writers as does Focus, the Journal of the University’s Literary Society. Considerable excitement surrounds the development of theatre in Singapore with Max le Blond’s direction of Emily of Emerald Hill (a play by Stella Kon), which at the Edinburgh Festival received rave reviews in the British press. It is tragic that this play, in spite of the Minister’s support, should have been turned down by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation. Antiquated attitudes continue to plague the healthy and natural growth of the literary arts at at least this
official level. We can only pray that the people in charge of radio and television in Singapore will realise soon how crucial it is for a nation to know its literature through significant media.

KIRPAL SINGH

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

STEPHEN SLEMON is a Canadian who has recently completed his doctorate at the University of Queensland. He has now taken up an appointment at the University of Edmonton in Alberta. With Helen Tiffin he is editing a collection of essays, *After Europe: Critical Theory and Post-Colonial Writing*, to be published by Dangaroo Press.

HELEN TIFFIN teaches at the University of Queensland. She has published widely in the area of post-colonial literatures and literary theory. She has co-authored (with Bill Ashcroft and Gareth Griffiths) a monograph on post-colonial literary theory and is currently working on a book on counter-discourse.

DIANA BRYDON teaches at the University of British Columbia. She has recently completed a book on Christina Stead and has published widely in the field of post-colonial literatures and criticism.

VERONICA KELLY teaches at the University of Queensland. She edits *Australian Drama Studies* and is editor of a collection of essays on Louis Nowra.

GERRY TURCOTTE is a Canadian from the province of Quebec. He has published fiction and poetry in both French and English and is at present completing his doctorate in English at the University of Sydney.

ANDREW TAYLOR teaches at the University of Adelaide and is one of Australia’s major poets. In 1986 he was Australasia/Pacific winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for his collection *Travelling*.

MARK MACLEOD teaches at Macquarie University. His first collection of poetry, *Finding Echo Point*, with photographs by Reece Scannell, will be published by Dangaroo Press in August 1988.

REECE SCANNELL is photographer at Macquarie University. See above for publication details of his book of photographs.

DIANE FAHEY is an Australian poet who has won major awards in Australia, including the Mattara Prize and the Wesley Michel Wright Prize. Her latest collection of poetry was shortlisted for the ABC Bicentennial Poetry Australia Award. Dangaroo Press published her second collection of verse, *Metamorphoses*, in 1988.

KATE WALKER is an Australian writer who is well known for her books for children.

GRAHAM MORT was born in Lancashire in 1955. He works as a writer and creative writing tutor and is Chairperson of the Northern Association of Writers. With Maggie Mort he founded the poetry magazine and press *Giant Steps*. His first book of poems, *A Country on Fire* (1986), was given a major Eric Gregory Award by the Society of Authors. His third collection of poetry, *Sky Burial*, will be published by Dangaroo Press in 1988.
KEKI DARUWALLA is a leading Indian poet. In 1987 he won the Asian section of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize with his collection *Landscapes*.

Lauris Edmond is one of the best known of New Zealand’s poets. In 1985 she became the first person to win the Commonwealth Poetry Prize £5,000 award for the best overall poet for her *Selected Poems* (OUP). A later volume, *Seasons and Creatures*, was published in 1986.

Stephen Chan teaches International Politics at the University of Kent.


---

**Dangaroo Press**

is proud to announce the following new publications. Orders may be sent to any one of the addresses listed below

Denmark: Pinds hus, Geding Søvej 21, 8381 Mundelstrup
Australia: Box 1209, G.P.O. Sydney, NSW 2001.
U.K.: P.O.Box 186, Coventry, CVH 7HJ
**Rented Rooms** is edited by David Dabydeen and contains poems by Alison Brackenbury, Clive Bush, David Dabydeen, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Rolf Lass and Pauline Melville. It is accompanied by a tape of the poets reading from their own work. Alison Brackenbury has been described as a 'vivid, intelligent and forceful new talent' (*The Listener*) Linton Kwesi Johnson and David Dabydeen are among Britain's best known poets of West Indian origin. Clive Bush, Rolf Lass and Pauline Melville represent a vein of the rich talent of contemporary British poetry.

ISBN-871049-40-7

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Book</strong></td>
<td><strong>£ 4.95 / $ 9.95</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tape</strong></td>
<td><strong>£ 4.95 / $ 4.95</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tape and book</strong></td>
<td><strong>£ 8.50 / $ 17.95</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Metamorphoses** by Diane Fahey is the second collection of poems by one of the newest and most exciting poets in Australia today. Diane Fahey has won numerous awards for her poetry including the Mattara Poetry Prize in 1985 and the Wesley Michel Wright Prize in 1987. Her latest collection of poetry was shortlisted for the ABC Bicentennial Poetry Australia Award.

Metamorphoses draws on Greek myths to tell the story of contemporary woman journeying from patriarchy to reclaiming her own space and authenticity. The poems place the reader at the centre of a battlefield where humans and gods, women and men, act out their conflicts.

Diane Fahey's poetry is thoughtfully feminist, questioning conventionally accepted images of power and exploring emotion in original ways. This is excellent poetry likely to win considerable renown.

*Angela Livingstone*

ISBN 1-871049-05-9

£ 4.95 / $ 9.95
An Articulate Anger: Dambudzo Marechera: 1952-87
Kirsten Holst Petersen interviewed Dambudzo Marechera in Harare in May, 1987. He died on the 18th of August, 1987. In the interview Marechera talks about death, paranoia, politics, the impetus behind his writing, his ghetto experience, both in Rhodesia / Zimbabwe and in London, violence and much more.

ISBN 1-871049-60-1 £1.95 / $4.00

Modern Secrets is a collection of new and selected poems by Shirley Lim. A winner of the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, Shirley Lim is recognized as one of the outstanding poets from S.E. Asia.

'While maintaining touch with her native Malacca, Shirley Lim manages to encompass a whole world beyond Malaysian shores ... There is throughout ... that certainty: no other word, no form would do to express this thought, that feeling. (She) edges ahead of her rivals by the sheer confidence of her verse'. Martyn Goff, Chief Executive, Book Trust.

ISBN 1-871049-00-8 £4.95 / $19.95
Finding Echo Point
poems by Mark Macleod
photographs by Reece Scannell

Finding Echo Point brings together for the first time the work of two Australians: the distinctive voice of Mark Macleod's poems and the sharply focused eye of Reece Scannell's photographs.

"Some of these poems will become classics, expressing the extremity of encounters and emotions not openly enough lived and written of.

Judith Rodriguez

"Simple, esoteric and egalitarian statements like enlargements from tiny documentary negatives. The photographs are interesting because of the variety of selected material... well observed, the reality of the pictures appeases the soft moody form of the verse.'

Max Dupain

ISBN 87-88213-22-6

£ 8.95
$ 15.95
Displaced Persons explores the problems faced by refugees and migrants in the rich society of the Western world today as they are seen by the refugees and migrants themselves. Consequently the main focus is on the literature written by these displaced persons. In articles and interviews the writers discuss the issues of language, cultural transmission and racism, and in short stories and poems they give artistic expression to their thoughts and feelings. The one exception to this is the article tracing the changing legal concept of refugees which is written by Sweden's ombudsman for refugees, Peter Nobel.

Contributors

John Agard  Zia Moheyddin
David Dabydeen  Peter Nobel
Chitra Fernando  Caryl Phillips
Zeny Giles  Salman Rushdie
Sneja Gunew  Philip Salom
Claire Harris  Sam Selvon
Antigone Kefala  Vilma Sirianni
Sue Kucharova  Aritha van Herk
Peter Lyssiottis  Ania Walwicz

The purpose of the volume is to offer an insight into the lives and problems of displaced persons and incidentally to show the high quality of the writing which is coming out of those communities today. The book also contains an annotated bibliography.

ISBN 1-871049-30-X  £ 8.95 / $ 19.95
AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Sam Selvon, Finding West Indian Identity in London.

FICTION
Kate Walker, Jude C. Ogu.

POEMS
Gerry Turcotte, Andrew Taylor, Mark Macleod, Diane Fahey, Graham Mort, Keki Daruwalla, Lauris Edmond, David Kerr.

ARTICLES

INTERVIEW
Louis Nowra.

PHOTOGRAPHS
Reece Scannell

THE YEAR THAT WAS

COVER: Sydney Harbour Bridge. Photograph-Reece Scannell.