

passages move from the more historical ones, such as Henry Handel Richardson's *The White Cliffs of Dover* and Rolf Boldrewood's *England Home and Country*, in which the colonies are compared with the Old Country, to the more recent ones on the Vietnam War and the New York of this decade, the changing attitude of Australians to their own country and their deeper involvement and concern with the rest of the world is made obvious.

Unfortunately, this involvement has often been brought about by war. Thus, nearly half of the selection deals directly or indirectly with this subject. A. B. Paterson writes in the unfamiliar role of a war correspondent relating his encounters with men and situations in the Boer War. In *A Mexican Patriot*, Vance Palmer lucidly describes a skirmish between the Federal troops and the rebels. Then there are Hilda Freeman's intriguing memories of the joy with which the Germans greeted the possibility of war. Another view of German patriotic enthusiasm is given by A. H. Chisholm in his description of "The Fuehrer's meeting". Action in North Africa is presented through an extract from a book of Alan Moorhead. The beginnings of the Spanish Civil War are introduced by the personal experiences of Nettie Palmer who was informed by her milkman that "a military rebellion's broken out in Barcelona". Hal Porter perceptively examines Post-War Japan.

Other aspects of Australian experience abroad include A. G. Stephens' *Journey to Chicago* and Allan Ashbolt's *New York in The Sixties*, written a little over half a century later. Both dispel the myth of American greatness, a mere creation of the American genius. Despite some concessions, their conclusions are also very similar. "The dollar is almighty, and

even the cent comes within an ace of omnipotence."

Mary Gilmore explains the ideals of the utopian communistic, Colonia Cosme, and gives an outline of her own life in that Paraguayan settlement. Sarah Bernhardt and Madame Marchesi are interviewed by Katharine Susannah Prichard in Paris. In two *Letters from London*, Henry Lawson gives advice to young writers and, with some feeling, describes the markets of Chapel Street. Other passages by Gilbert Murray, Christopher Brennan, Frederic Manning, Martin Boyd and Denis Warner are to be found.

Of course, in such a selection something is always omitted. But the diversity of the experiences which have been included and their manner of presentation are most adequate as a commentary on Australians abroad, and, undoubtedly, will arouse interest and provoke thought on the relationship of our country and the outside world.

JANICE NASH

BRING LARKS AND HEROES, by Thomas Keneally. Cassell, \$3.75.

THE HIGH acclaim that this novel has received seems to me symptomatic of a general impulse to over-praise a work because it is written by an Australian. Excessive praise of a work that simply does not merit it, can be detrimental to an author as well as misleading to the reader. A case in point is that of Judith Wright, whose early work was received with an enthusiasm that was inspired not so much by her poetry as by the fact that she was both female and Australian. The virtue of being Australian cannot however continue to conceal the shakiness of much of her work, and such is the case, though to a lesser extent, with Keneally.

Bring Larks and Heroes is Keneally's third novel. It is an interesting but essentially patchy work, and to acclaim it "the long-sought Great Australian Novel" is as ridiculous as it is misleading. In a penal colony in the south Pacific in the late eighteenth century (one whose conditions and terrain resemble those of Australia of the same period), Corporal Halloran takes a "secret bride", Ann Rush, since there is no Catholic priest to consecrate the union. Much attention is devoted to this issue and Keneally's concern is not so much with the ethics of the situation as with the contrast between the firmness with which Halloran keeps this unauthorised oath, and the shaky loyalty he accords his official oath to king and country.

We observe Halloran undergo the several physical and mental torments that a vicious system can impose on a man, and Keneally well makes *live* this colonial society of the late eighteenth century, and presents with force the brutality on which it is based. Halloran does not however seem sufficiently compelling a character to sustain the focus of the narrative. Keneally deliberately does not dwell on Halloran's personal torments—we see him always in a situation—because he intends us not to identify with the character but to see him as part of a more general situation—that of the ordinary man suffering at the hands of arrogant authority.

The hundred small humiliations suffered by both felons and officers at the hands of their superiors, are forcefully presented, and Keneally well shows how men work off such frustration and humiliation in savage treatment of their "inferiors". The novel is however flawed in that Keneally fails to achieve a balance between the presentation of a particular story (Halloran and Ann's), and its part of the novel as a whole.

Halloran's tender idealism with Ann points a contrast with the brutality of regimental life, but the emphasis on secret marriage and the strain it places on Ann's conscience, all seems not to have much purpose — in fact, Keneally has a tendency to introduce philosophical or theological arguments that are given a scope too large for the artistic purpose they serve. Hence Keneally at times seems to be putting his *own* ideas into Halloran's mouth, as for instance, Halloran's reflections on hanging which are hardly in keeping with his general character.

Halloran is moreover an essentially ordinary marine. His is a more sensitive and demanding conscience than most, certainly; but to see him as a sort of extremely aware Christ-figure on a spiritual journey (as some reviewers have suggested), fails to take account of the fact that Keneally places Halloran by gently ridiculing his idealism.

The affairs of Halloran pale in significance beside those of Mr. and Mrs. Blythe, in whose house Ann is kitchen-maid. Old Mrs. Blythe is a bitter, ulcerated woman with a "pious gut" that Mr. Blythe devoutly hopes to crack by starvation. Mrs. Blythe has an excessive concern for Ann's virginity, and Keneally whose manner is often elusive, only hints at the curiousness of the attachment between the old woman and the young girl. Much of the novel's force comes from the rather sordid manner in which this withered old woman identifies with Ann. (Interestingly enough, in the novel's stage version, "Halloran's Little Boat", shown recently at the Independent Theatre, Sydney, the perversion in the attachment is more strongly emphasised when Mrs. Blythe performs a grotesque sort of can-can on the occasion of Ann's death.)

Though parts of the novel are slack and it is sometimes difficult to

see the direction in which affairs are moving (as with the revolt at the Crescent), small incidents and portraits stand out excellently, especially those of the luckless Quinn and of the eunuch, Ewers. As for the "contemporary relevance" of this work, I doubt that one can always demand that a work *have* such relevance, though Halloran is partly the type of man destroyed by a brutal system, and the bitter (but at times acidly funny) relationship of the Blythes is always pertinent. This is not a "great" novel, but is nevertheless well worth reading.

KERIN CANTRELL.

DYNASTY,
by Tony Morphett.
Jacaranda Press, 430pp, \$4.95

"THE BOURGEOISIE . . . has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' . . . (It) has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation."—*The Communist Manifesto*.

Tony Morphett could well have used this quotation as a frontispiece for his new novel, *Dynasty*, an absorbing story of a dirty family fight for control of a newspaper empire. The theme is an affirmation of the *Manifesto's* thesis: three sons of an ageing newspaper proprietor, motivated by naked self-interest, are involved in a plan to steal from their father control of his newspaper. The father knows it and the action, which takes place over one day in the newspaper's board room, concerns the old man's attempts to undo the plan.

There are six men involved in the take-over plot the three sons, and three other directors—the editor of the newspaper, and a lawyer and a businessman who are interested in the

paper purely as investors. They are all, in effect, creations of the old man, but it soon becomes clear that filial and personal loyalties will have no meaning here; it's just a greedy brawl for power and ownership.

As the board room battle is about to be joined, the old man muses: "They were going to get him . . . because he was sixty-eight. . . . Because his body had been born sixth-eight years before. And they were going to get him because he had taken this newspaper and made and moulded it. . . . His body had lasted too long for them, and today they would try to get him. Very politely. Very formally. All i's dotted, all t's crossed. Every manner well mannered. Every hungry set of eyes lowered. He had done things like it himself. Always so much politer than a court. No caps black, and every handshake golden."

Thus the stage is set and, from there, Author Morphett employs the very effective device of examining in depth each man concerned in the dirty little drama, the story of their lives and hopes, loves, adulteries and perversions, and of the influences and motives that had brought them to the stage where, this day, they have to decide whether they are going to knife, or not knife, the old man.

At the close of each man's story, the novel moves back to the board room as the subject just dealt with, in his turn, votes on the elder son's motion to kick the old man upstairs. The shifts and twists in the board room fight keep the action moving swiftly and excitingly.

In the background are the deals, the pressures, the lobbyings, the spying, the hidden hatreds, the bedroom blackmailing and counter-blackmailing, and there is, in the end, not a clean pair of hands among the lot of them. As each man has to declare himself,