Abstract
Full text of issue.
KUNAPIPI
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Kunapipi is a bi-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:

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

As announced in the last issue, we are making some changes in *Kunapipi*. The plan is to bring out three issues a year, in February, June and October. The reason for this is twofold. First we think it is more desirable to have three issues a year. Secondly, by sending out three issues of approximately 125 pages each instead of two of approximately 175, we are able to save in postage which is fast becoming our greatest expense. To mark this change we are also changing our cover, though we would stress that the change in cover does not mean a change in policy.

Finally we would ask our present subscribers to help us find new subscribers, by bringing *Kunapipi* to the attention of their libraries and colleagues, or by giving it as a gift to their friends.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

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THE EDITORS
Fallings Seeds, Flowing Light

_The eye could not see the sun_
_were it not a part of it._

Plotinus

Albert Park seemed twice-lit in a glazing December sun. From beneath the gaze of the lonely New Zealand soldier who commemorates our participation in a dark, best-forgotten war, I watched a thin, greyhaired man who stood in the space before the statue of Sir George Grey arguing with a small cluster of noonhour idlers. He spoke to them with an ungiving, flinty conviction that both intrigued and angered them. In his hands he held a cone-shaped framework of copperwire which he thrust towards his audience, jerking it back again and then bobbing it above his head. The contrivance suggested the veined stretch of a bat’s wings as bits of goldfoil fastened to the intersections of the wires flashed sharply in the sunlight.

Sir George Grey may never have been witness to anything as evidently mad as the spiel that was being given that loafing noon. I caught something about light and the affinities of light-filled beings for each other but the drift of the argument was too abstract, too formidably queer, to grasp at once. And there were jeers to contend with, hurled questions (that fell like stones plopping upon snow) which increased the difficulties of understanding the speaker. When I did manage to pick up what he was saying, I felt momentarily stunned. In habitual, unthoughtful Auckland of the middle Sixties, he was advancing a complete cosmological theory that, in its assuredness, simplicity and archaic wholeness, might have rivalled Anaximander’s vision of primal boundlessness.

I recognized the speaker, abruptly, like seeing a familiar place through different light. He was thinner, more evenly grey and bent, but I couldn’t mistake the taut, inward herbalist whom I had known briefly six years before when we had both worked for a touring Australian circus. Against all odds, he had sprinkled that catch-penny show with some
peculiar spoors, and some had managed to grow a bit. A few still clung to my own mind even as I stood in Albert Park six years later.

Whale Cock (Greg Epperson's giant Maori tentboss) had been the first to see the van. Whooping above the din of the tentsite, he had given a ripping shout that forced us to drop our tasks and look where he was pointing. There, straight ahead through the marquee, parked between the ticket-office and the Hoop-la, a small, bizarre truck had stopped. Even from the interior of the Big Top we could see that it was top-heavy with a clumsy, purple body. A horn beeped erratically. No one answered, and it beeped impatiently a few more times. After a moment, Whale Cock, tired of putting up the heavy wooden stands, led the way out through the clutter of planks, wires and equipment. Fisheyes, Sunshine, the Ding and some other tenthands followed him outside. Attention shifted quickly from the work of setting-up; then, the rest of us shuffled into the blunt afternoon.

Dark purple-red, bordered with nauseous green, the garishly fresh paint of the van hinted at a recent attempt to restore the ungainly, clinker-built shell to Showbusiness startlingness. There was a single sign painted along the side of the van in the same bile-green as the edges.

Roger Wodebith

_Herbalist_

'What does it say?' Fisheyes had wondered. As puzzled as if some bushed crusader (with hooded gerfalcon) had reined up before me, I couldn't answer.

A pale man with grizzled hair stared through the windscreen at the gathering ring of circusfolk. His eyes blinked behind thick, square glasses. When he opened the van's door, we could see that he was slightly built, drooping within a bright yellow shirt, a checkered lemon and leafgreen scarf tied loosely around his neck. He glanced about, appalled (I supposed), at our rough, dishevelled looks. He peered beyond us to the gear-jumbled tentsite as if trying to take it all in at once. 'May I speak with Greg Epperson, please?' he asked finally. With comic formality edging his uncertainty, he added, 'He's expecting me. Before tea.'

Wodebith was never welcomed formally. He simply found a place for his little rig near the end of the string of trucks and caravans. He hung out an awning from the tailgate and settled in. Later, when Whale Cock and the Circus' groom came over to have a yarn, he was sitting in the shade of his awning sorting bottles and jotting into a notebook. We all became familiar with Wodebith's bottles and notebooks. They puzzled us
all, but we knew that with a circus the most aggressive riddles are usually outside the performances.

Toward tea on his first day, I saw Wodebith stroll over to Major Fultz's bus. He must have picked up some idea of what he was supposed to do from the animal trainer since it was at least a day before Greg bothered to speak to him. That very night he replaced Fisheyes in helping to look after the menagerie and the freakshow. He stood in front of the frowzy tent where Greg's misshapen beasts were exhibited, calling in a muted voice to the locals who passed along the tiny midway. With one of the monkeys perched upon his shoulders, wearing Circus coveralls with EPPERSON stitched in blue across the back, he looked as if he had always been there.

I never did learn what had attracted Wodebith to Epperson's Circus or what role Greg had envisioned for him. A herbalist doesn't have an act and there is little chance for him to sell his remedies. Things move too quickly: the crowds gush singlemindedly through the marquee, the acts themselves blur in the splashy lights. So there was a pointlessness about Wodebith's presence. He would help set up the little tents for the midway and he looked after the freakshow in the late afternoons and evenings. Yet, since these were anyone's tasks, it was evident that Greg hadn't needed him. The truth was probably that Greg had hired Wodebith without knowing in the least what to do with him. Greg never refused anyone who wanted to join, hand, performer or drifting eccentric. It was a weakness that had caused him perplexity more than once. Wodebith, following some obscure motivation, had asked to join and Greg, always on the lookout for novelty, had let him come.

Wodebith swiftly worked himself into the life of the Circus. We became accustomed to the sight of the bizarre van and the vivid shirts he wore. When he was not working, he spent most of his time around his van sorting odd lots of bottles and tins. Two or three times I saw him reading in dog-eared books and making notes in a pocket-sized ledger. In his first few days with Epperson's Circus, he was quiet and, had it not been for the oddness of his van and an aggressively open aversion to eating meat, he might have gone largely unnoticed. A circus absorbs eccentricities readily.

Except for the groom, Whale Cock and Major Fultz, the animal trainer, Wodebith spoke to no one unless it was necessary. He liked to play with the Major's monkeys and to feed the cockatoos whose cages crowded around the performers' caravans. Once I saw him down on one knee crooning softly to the pathetic falcon that Greg kept within a tight, wingsqueezing cage. Often he would merely stand quietly along the
midway while monkeys climbed over him. Above everything else in the shifting geometry of the Circus, Wodebith seemed drawn toward Greg’s scarecrow menagerie.

This (known, with raw accuracy, as the doghouse) was a flat semi, painted the basic inkblue and orange of the Circus, upon which were stacked the untidy cages of all the animals Greg carried to entice the locals. Wodebith could be seen walking slowly round the menagerie, bent slightly forward, his eyes intent from behind his goggle-like glasses, while the monkeys, so many affectionate kiddies, clutched his legs or pulled at his clothing. In a business where only elephants and horses truly count (and all other animals are for colour and ostentation, expendable), Wodebith showed a surprising concern for Greg’s depressing collection of chained and cagebound beasts. We grew used to seeing him pet and feed the six-legged sheep, the scale-covered dog and the other freakish creatures that, before his arrival, had been no one’s particular task. He was a silent, intense man who loved all animals but who was, stung from some obscure depth, quite funlessly obsessed.

The further reaches of Wodebith’s obsession were secret but the foreground was clear enough. He was consumed by the idea of natural remedies. Herbalism was not an act, no performance that he prepared and executed in a few minutes once or twice a day, but the expression of a deeprooted conviction. His story, as we picked it up in bits and scattered hints, reflected something passionate, both a certitude and a conversion.

He had been a flash cutlery salesman around Wellington (vaguely footloose in the period just after the War) with no serious objective beyond his weekly commissions. Then, in a Cuba street pub on a dull day, he had stumbled upon a Hungarian transplant who claimed to have lived with gypsies in Europe, Aborigines in Australia, and to have been adopted into a Maori tribe. He was planning to launch a business selling gypsy herbal cures to the hypochondriac English settlers who were flocking to New Zealand. He needed a partner to help him flog the potions and there, perhaps believing design in the face of luck, appeared Wodebith ready to assume his destiny. At first he sold the herbal cures on consignment, keeping everything over twenty-five in a case of thirty-six for himself. Eventually, Wodebith had gone so far along this road that he began to study medical texts and pharmacopias. When the Hungarian disappeared in advance of a bigamy charge, Wodebith had been able to take over the entire business, reconstructing formulas that had never been written down and inventing others of his own. From that moment he had never looked back. Through a mosaic of bitty anecdotes and
inferences, the story emerged, and was probably true enough. Wodebith had the air, fixed and zealous, of a man who, in mastering something important, had experienced a mindwrenching.

His certainties had become clear swiftly. The day after he drove his clinkershell van onto the tentsite, we learnt that Wodebith refused to eat meat. Black, stringy mutton was Spongecake’s stock-in-trade. Sometimes it seemed that it was all he could cook. The day after Wodebith had arrived, the tents were in place once again, and the Big Top was stretched inward from the peg-ring waiting to be raised, when we stopped for lunch. Wodebith, still unknown to most of the hands, walked silently over to the cookhouse. He didn’t look at any of us, just methodically stepped over our out-thrust legs. As we sat over our heaped plates, we could hear him demand potatoes and tea, while pointing to the tar-coloured mutton, telling Spongecake to throw the meat in the dustbin. So Wodebith became a focus of aversion. And for his part, he never missed the chance to express his repugnance at eating meat. He ate only vegetables and bread from the cookhouse and bought fruit in the towns.

His herbalism set him apart. Within his crowded van there were hundreds of labelled bottles ready for sale. All of them contained mixtures that he carried with him in tiny enamelled tins. He ground the ingredients in an olivewood mortar, blackgrained and pungent, that we sometimes observed him sniff caressingly. In the long afternoons before performances, he would study his library of frayed books. Probably they were all, like the copy of Culpepper’s *Complete Herbal* he allowed me to peek into once, compilations of information about the properties of herbs. Every page had been glossed in a crabbed hand with observations concerning the differences between European and Australasian herbs, substitutions that could be made and availability. Wodebith’s mind was nothing, I gathered, if not deliberate. It was a mind for schemes, for diagrams, and for models.

All the bottles in his van bore a label across the top that screamed, in an exaggerated cursive script, the inscription, *Wodebith’s Formula.* Below, in a little space that he filled with handprinted letters from a child’s printset, came the name of the mixture. One in particular was splashingly called Vi-Tal-K. Sipping a bit of it in an old pannikin he handed me, I thought that I could taste coriander and a fuzzy flavour of something nutty that I knew but could not identify. None of this would have mattered a penny’s-worth if Wodebith had not persistently, even compulsively, hawked his remedies within the Circus. Men like Kryptonite, Fisheyes, Sunshine and the other tenthands couldn’t be expected to appreciate the benefits of natural herbal compounds. Spongecake
hated him on principle. There were quarrels, but Wodebith seemed to enjoy holding his own. Among the tonguetied tenthands, his words, like nettles, could draw blood.

Even more unsettling to the precarious balance of the Circus, Wodebith never missed an opportunity to make a sale. Standing in front of the freakshow, he would spot someone with a sickly face, a wart, a growth, or a rumbling quinsy, and lure the always-willing sufferer into a conversation focused upon the complaint the symptoms of which he had already noted and assessed. More times than not, the upshot of this exchange would be a cluster of locals gathered close about Wodebith’s van during the nightly taking-down, all of them captivated by Wodebith’s allure, by secret cures.

The flinty edge of Wodebith’s convictions helped to sell his mixtures but it brought him straight up against his boss. One of Greg’s inhibiting fears sprang from his distrust of authority: studiously, like a man stepping among snares, he avoided anything that might put him on the windy side of the law. Gnawed by forebodings of his show crippled, or lost entirely, Greg’s fear amounted to a continuing funk in the face of local authorities. Collectively, imbued with Greg’s own sense of the fragility of his venture, we walked a cool path between temptations. At least we tried to. Only a few weeks before Wodebith’s sudden coming, there had been a dust-up between some of the hands and local timbermen in a one-pub town near Taupo. It had cost Greg more than he could afford to pay, but he brooded upon worse disasters. And broken gossip, slivers of a history, most of which had been enacted in Australia, that no one, except Greg himself, fully knew, hinted that far more consequential things had occurred in the past. Greg’s worries showed up abruptly, and usually violently. Once when one of the tenthands had whistled at a schoolgirl crossing the lot, Greg had whirled on him in volcanic over-reaction, lashing him with a savage chop to the neck that left him senseless under the up-raised kingpoles. His fear that some unapparent flimflam would bring down upon him the crunch of authority made Greg distrust Wodebith with increasing virulence.

Wodebith not only ignored Greg’s warnings but did his best to sell his remedies even during showtime. Greg began to get his back up. And, hands dangling loosely in front, face red-shot, a vein starting from his forehead in a large ridge that rose from eyes to hairline, he could be daunting. Wodebith missed Greg’s dislike, and would not hear his warnings, heedless in his intensity. He would scowl through his glasses, and in the evenings he continued to enthrall afflicted locals. In the strong lights of the Circus, reds and greens violently cutting the white brilliance
of the floods, Wodebith’s vials would glisten teasingly, like fool’s-gold in
the lightslashed night.

From Greg’s side of the dispute, things looked more chancy by the day.
Wodebith (he said) had given him worms. Whenever we stopped long,
Wodebith quickly began to acquire a local reputation, sometimes even a
following. People sought him out. Occasionally, they were waiting for
him on the lot when we arrived. Greg might have booted him at any
point but he was prevented by a dilemma sprung from his own con-
flicting anxieties. He feared brushes with local authorities but he also
hated to see anyone leave. There were a great many stops on the circus
hierarchy, from Greg’s own trapeeze act down to tenthands like Kryp-
tonite, and he liked to see them all safely filled. Wodebith was slightly
askew from the hierarchy, standing at a fairly sharp angle to it more
often than not, but Greg would want to keep him on. After being
impounded or fined out of existence, Greg dreaded running short of cash
and being left shorthanded. The two were linked: it was his persistent
scarcity of funds that made it impossible to hire sufficient tenthands or to
keep them long through the weary chain of work-galled shows.

Wodebith remained. His place in the circus hierarchy was temporarily
secure, even if it was only imaginary. Imperturbable, he asserted his
calling in the bared teeth of Greg’s threats. For a time, in wordy turbu-
ience, the Circus boiled mildly. Then, imperceptibly as a barometer
rising, he began to win converts. Gino, the musical clown, bought Vi-
Tal-K to give him ‘pep’ (but we thought of his sluggishly fat wife) and a
few of the tenthands quit making gibes. Some even began to take his side
in the daily skirmishes with Spongecake. Then one day, the Ding, driving
tent pegs, smashed a sledgehammer against the arch of his left foot.
Minor as accidents went, the work of setting up the Big Top, though
punctuated by the Ding’s yells, hardly slowed. Major Fultz hurried over
with his first-aid kit but, beyond sprinkling sulfa powder on the purplish
bruise and telling him to rest (not a prescription that Greg encouraged
for ailing hands), there was little to do.

The Ding’s howls soon gave way to moans. By evening, his foot had
swollen painfully. He couldn’t walk and thin bursts of his slobbering cries
disturbed our work. Shortly before the performance began, salt to our
curiosity, the Ding was seen sitting under the awning of Wodebith’s van,
a heavy blanket around his hunched shoulders and his foot sunk in a
scruffy yellow tub. Wodebith had brewed a thick, aromatic footbath in
which bits of rough cherrybark, and other cuttings that seemed like short
lengths of licorice root, or sticks of cinnamon, floated amidst greenish
scum.
The Ding had been soaking his foot for more than an hour when Greg, clouded and stiff in anger, bullied out orders for them to get back to work. Over in the Big Top the performance was underway and all the tenthands were needed to carry out the detachable sections of the wild animal cage after the Major's first act. Greg, grasping after an excuse for anger, raged at their bludging; Heels rooted and braced, Wodebith fought back. Someone, he insisted, had to help that poor bugger of a Ding.

Hunched unhappily beneath Wodebith's awning, complaining softly to himself, his foot thrust into the viscous bath, the Ding remained sitting. Bludgers, Greg shouted, whirling, defeated, back toward the Big Top.

The next morning when we shifted, the Ding wore a wet compress made of the same herbal green slop. By the end of the day, soaking whenever he could and wearing a compress otherwise, the Ding's swollen foot began to heal. Limping carefully, he even helped a bit with the taking-down. In a few days the foot was sound enough to walk upon. Wodebith's victory (it was that, all right) was resounding. Most of the Circus began to accept him. The gibing ceased and his vegetarianism, if not forgotten, was now overlooked. In the next few weeks, we all began adding herbs to our tea and sipping Vi-Tal-K before going to sleep. Even Spongecake's ancient mutton fell out of favour.

Scarceley a month after his triumph, Wodebith's end came as unexpectedly as his arrival. It was early on the second afternoon of a two-day stand near Whangarei. I had been down the road hoisting a few handles with Whale Cock and, as we returned, I felt comfortably inattentive in the afternoon's heat and sea-breezes. As we walked up the midway, turning in between the Big Top and the bending line of caravans and trucks, Wodebith suddenly burst through the door of Greg's posh white Airflow. For an instant he seemed to hang there beneath the lolly-striped awning, holding the frame of his glasses with his left hand while the right was bent behind his back. One leg was raised as if he were uncertain what he should do next. Then, the swing of motion continuing, he lurched forward, his greyflecked head tipped abruptly down, down over Greg's birdcages still touching his glasses. His green shirt caught the air and he thudded to earth in front of the cages. Flushed, and doubled at the waist like a fighter, Greg filled the door. Not a word had been spoken.

Wodebith got up, went to his little pod-like van (the garish colours had become, in the succession of lots, deadened with dust), picked up some cages, took the awning down, and drove away. For an instant Greg had
watched him limping off, still clutching his glasses, then he had slammed the door. I had never seen a more silent eruption of frenzy. Whale Cock stood unspeaking beside me, his head nodding mechanically. My God, I thought, Wodebith has had his hand in the till.

He hadn't. Greg had warned him for the last time about flogging his herbal chunder (there was Greg's style, in a word) and Wodebith, stung by his relentless bee, had tried to argue the point, even to convince him, too, of the virtues tightwound in those secret mixtures. Perhaps his popularity had turned his head or, more likely, it had turned Greg's. The result was the same. Wodebith had confronted Greg with all of his unshatterable certainty and Greg, never more than a thin edge from savagery, had gone crook.

During tea, no one commented on the meat. Spongecake, warped and blackened teeth showing his smile, looked happier than I had seen him in weeks.

Six years later I was listening to Wodebith in Albert Park. And, like weathered thorns, his convictions had lost none of their sharpness. He addressed his straggly, only half-engaged audience unaffected by its resistance. It seemed unbelievable, but Wodebith's speech became clear: in turgid Auckland's clear December, a myth of cosmic birth was emerging yet once more, newly forged, as ancient as Magdelanian caves, from one more out-reaching, in-bending mind.

At some moment in the remote past (he was arguing), but according with the dawn of time, there had been a kernel of light surrounded by darkness. That, I realized, was the significance of the wire cage that Wodebith held before him or above his head. The cage was cone-shaped and there were bits of shiny foil stuck to the intersections of the wires. The tip of the cone was the original, indestructible lightpoint in Nothingness, while the bits of foil seemed to represent the temporal flow of light-spoor. The cage was a model, a crude cosmological model of the universe as Wodebith understood it. It was a diagram of his thought and bore the mindprint of his obsessions. However conceptually raw, it was a striking act of imaginative abstraction for the herbalist to have made. He waved the cone toward his audience, the foil-sparkling tip jabbing forward. The history of the universe hung in that swift movement. Germinating, the original lightkernel had rested and then had begun to split, like a fertilized seed. And slowly the engulfed seeds had begun to sprout and fill the blank nothingness. The process had continued right up to the present hour with light spreading and conquering darkness. Mythically (like Bruno in the maw of formalism), Wodebith seemed to bloom with the primacy of light.
In the snarl of disbelief, indifference and ridicule (as I had once seen him defend the hunched figure of the Ding), he struggled with obscurity. Human consciousness was light enclosed within darkness. Pressed in, it was nonetheless capable of bursting, like a sprout from its pod, through the lightless rind to which it was bound. Men, Wodebith was shouting (the wire frame held constantly above his head now), should seek out those other kinds of existence that embody light, or the most light, and by absorbing affinities strengthen themselves.

Only the notion of affinities sounded familiar. It recalled the herbalism that Wodebith had briefly urged in his season with Epperson’s Circus. The rest was very different. Cosmology was in the forefront, not herbalism. It seemed impossible to tell which had come first: his account of the lightkernel’s growth might have sprung from his original herbalism, or the herbalism might have simply withered into its metaphysical ground. Before me, in either case, was the unchanged link. Insistent, arrogant in mind’s scope, Wodebith held constant.

By the time Wodebith had reached his exposition of ‘affinities’, many of the little group had become abusive. Under Sir George’s statesman-like stare, rude words were hurled. Some of the young men, students from the University, their blue eyes laughing analytically, called out insults and questions without answers (‘Say, Philosopher, do we defecate our affinities?’) to guy him. There were faces flushed darkly, iron-red with hilarity. Wodebith was riding above the mockery of his audience, purposeful and stonily indifferent. If only he had more time, it struck me, he could win them over just as, years before, he had won the circus-folk.

The incredible cosmology, the primitive wire model, all Wodebith’s mad spiel, were yoked by a process of growth, consistent though quite insane, to his earlier herbalism. I saw that by his own efforts alone Wodebith had leapt the chasm between practice and theory. He had shaped a metaphysical theory that could defend, or even prove, his herbalism, and he had done so without reference to, or even an inkling of, three thousand years of human speculation. Thought by hard-won thought, he had found himself compelled to discover abstractions. Like old Anaximander, or like all those island-skipping, toga-clad philosophers, Wodebith had been driven by intellectual need, even while constricted by his lack of knowledge, to struggle beyond his empiricism. Mind’s restless energy had urged him lightwards.
write no poems to me today
do you write poems to a woman
crying in rape
you came gently with poems
once
walked my banks
made love under my trees
swam in my clean body
you wrote poems
as lovers write poems
say nothing to me now
pass over me on your high bridges
turn your face
from my dissipation
build your factories about my hills
dump your garbage your urine your feces into me
cut the flesh from my banks
that you may twist me to your use
tell in your houses of laws
how you will restore me
do not let me hear it
kill me with your poisons
but write no poems to me
the stars sang in me
a thousand years
before the poets came
they will sing again
after loving:
we face the night
back to back

behind the reeds
a blue heron
gathers time

rainy morning:
dusting books
I find old tears

dusk
a soap opera
flickers on the snow

Thanksgiving morning
the river carries
a cargo of shadows

New Year's morning:
cold sunlight fills
the empty glasses

snowblind...
a whisper
shatters dawn

dusk on the Rio Napo
a thousand voices
pierce the mosquito net

evening snowstorm
dulls the city skyline —
an icicle shatters
Monty Reid

BIRDS NOT SINGING

We have not yet learned to hate ourselves well enough. The bird with pale breast feathers leans towards a mirror hung in his cage. A boy is coaxing him to sing. He taps a bell, whistles, and the bird flaps against the plastic-coated bars. Stupid bird the boy says.

In a basement room the boy is crying. For himself his father says. For myself says the boy, knowing nothing he says is true. I hate it all: school, the meals you cook, the books you want me to read, this bird not singing. Look at how he yanks the feathers from his chest.

They settle on the floor, on newspaper covered with shit and husks and gravel, shapeless down plucked from close to the body, so light any movement in the room catches it and it almost flies.

the bird sleeps, puffed, the air retained by its body. The father sits at a window that looks out onto a street where snow is falling in hard dry flakes the cars catch and scatter, only there is so much of it eventually the traffic stops.
He is thinking of prisoners, those
jailed because there is a world that does
not want to change: Brutus, Ngugi,
Timmerman; for what their words
can do to men who do not hate themselves
well enough, who have pistols and electricity
and say tell us everything. Talk.
The father is thinking of how they
slept, in cold cells, expecting
to be dead. He is thinking
of how they have probably never
seen snow.

Late, he goes to watch his son
sleep, stopping in the doorway
with the hall light on. The bird
flutters in its cage but the boy
is still, his breath steady against
the wall he turned to in anger
as his father walked from the room
earlier, turning the pain in on himself.
What can I do to love you he says,
standing in the doorway. In the morning
there will be snow and you will not know
I stood here, as if I was afraid
you’d escape, as if I could avoid this,
everything I’ve done, all the old
burdens invented again
and again.

And even the father sleeps, though
he does not expect it, it falls on him
like feathers at the bottom of a cage.
And they have all slept the same
sleep, the bird with its need
to hurt itself, the boy’s anger, men
with their words. What can you
say about this sleep except that it
is done and we awoke and dreamed
nothing. We never dream.
Is that what a boy wants on a morning crisp and white as new sheets and he is the first one to leave the house. When the trees are puffed up with hoar frost and the father watches him: new boots, new snow. How last night, his shadow in the square of light falling into the room, a feather lifted from the cage by a current he could not feel come through the open door, feel silently, relentlessly, towards him.

KEITH HARRISON

The Arena

Making little jerks on the small black steering wheel, the driver of the Zamboni machine leans out over the ice, looking. The machine circles the arena, leaving behind rising steam and slick dark-grey ice. I wish the game would start. The driver steers into a controlled slide in front of the net that the other workman has dragged out from the crease. The younger man in a brown uniform rests against the crossbar of the goal while the Zamboni makes another, smaller sweep of the rink. Wet ice shines in pools from overhead lights.

I should have sharpened Michael’s skates. Only a thin strip of old snowy surface remains to be scraped clean, and sprayed with hot water. Melting and bonding ice, the big machine hums and drifts through another curve. Heat from the engine must have peeled away the paint on its hood. Here there’s none of that ammonia smell that I remember from my games in run-down arenas. The goal’s dragged back into place. The
guy shoves the rusted anchoring rods down into the two holes drilled out of the ice.

Michael, and all the other Rebels, are still in the dressing room. Players on the other team sit on top of the boards, with their long sticks resting on the new ice surface below. Both bench gates have been flung open. The Zamboni drives out with a clank, disappearing at the far end of the rink, under the Quebec and Canada flags stuck on the wall with the clock. Its time, in yellow dots of light behind the screening, matches my watch: 11:59.

There’s no sign of Michael’s team yet; I hope the coach is psyching them up. The waiting players on the other team leap onto the cleaned ice as the high end boards swing shut. Their gold and purple jerseys spread all over the ice: the Royals. Where’s Michael? I might as well sit down, with the other parents.

‘Hi Daniel.’

‘Hello Bill.’ His son, a stubby defenceman, lugs the puck too much. I keep climbing the concrete steps, to get to the warmer seats. That woman’s son skates on his ankles; he hasn’t even learned the off-side rule. I flip a seat down, and face the ice once more. The Royals circle both nets, skating counter-clockwise. One player trips over his long hockey stick. With the fat fingers of his hockey glove, he can’t pick up the stick he’s dropped on the ice. His father should have wrapped tape around the butt-end: there’s no space between the shaft and the ice for his fingers to slip through. The kid throws a glove down, and, with a bared hand, picks his hockey stick off the ice. Michael should be out there with his new stick.

I hear them coming now, high-pitched voices welling up from the open corridor below. It’s hard to tell who they are, with helmets over heads and cages over faces. Michael won’t get a scar on his face like mine. Is that good or bad? That’s him in the red helmet matching the jersey, and carrying a new Koho stick. He steps tentatively onto the ice, then skates in quick, dancey bursts. My insides feel hollow and tight just watching him warm up. I hope he gets a hat-trick today — they’ve lost three in a row. His red top hangs loosely over the big shoulder pads. He’s wearing No 15 again, the same number as his favourite player on the Canadiens, Rejean Houle. Coming off a broken collarbone, Houle scored two goals against Detroit last night, and was named the game’s first star. Michael fakes his goalie, then slides the puck in on a backhand.

The referees begin to scoop up the pucks in preparation for the start of the game. Michael chases a puck down in the corner, then loses it to the son of that guy wearing the fur coat. What does he do? The short ref, in
his shirt with dark blue vertical stripes, skates over to the bench below for the team list. He's just a kid too, with his chin strap dangling from his black helmet, and a silver whistle sticking out of his left hand. The other official is checking the nets for puck-sized holes. A buzzer sounds, then a long siren, and, more shrilly, the ref's whistle.

Most of the players skate off the ice, but Michael stays on; I hope he managed to lace his skates tightly enough: he doesn't want me in the dressing room anymore. Michael rushes towards his goalie, and whacks the large pads with his new stick, in imitation of an N.H.L. ritual, then wheels past the plexi-glass above the end boards — probably admiring his reflected image — as the ref's whistle sounds again. Michael glides to centre, stopping on the clear ice above the painted red line. The ref adjusts his glasses. Michael's lined up on right wing, the wrong side for his left-handed shot. The coach should organize them better. Michael, eager, slaps the blade of his stick on the hard ice. My son is the smallest player out there.

The crouching ref throws the puck against the ice. Michael turns as the other team attacks, crossing the blue line into the Rebels' zone. A long shot goes wide of the net, and the puck is cleared off the boards with a dull boom, onto Michael's stick. A defenceman in front of him, in a tight gold and purple jersey, skates backwards, stumbles and trips on a cross-over step. You're in the clear. Michael steers the puck around the fallen player: a breakaway. Come on. He has time to put a move on the goalie. But he's going in too close. 'Shoot, Michael!' The puck hits the huge pads. Number 15 misses the rebound as well. Damn. The Royals' goalie flops on the puck for a whistle.

I stretch, and look up at the open rafters holding the lights, and the curved wooden dome beyond. The ice below now has countless trails of white cut into its dark-grey sheen.

Here's Sarah. She must have walked over, through the falling snow. Her coat, and the bag slung over her shoulder, and her dark hair are all speckled white. Spring's so far away. Damn. Michael's backhand went wide; the one in practice went in. Her small teeth glint up at me. There's another whistle, and, with the stoppage in play, Michael skates off. On the electronic scoreboard there's a round green zero under goals. It should be one to nothing at least. I move over a seat.

'Why do you sit way up here, Dan?'
'It's warmer. Did you see Michael's breakaway?'
'No. I just got here. It's not so cold out anymore.'
'Yeah? He should have scored.'
'Well, winning isn't everything. If you tried your best and had fun,
that's more important, and that's what playing is all about, right?"

'Sarah, what are you talking about?' Her big eyes scan my face, making me nervous.

'It's an ad, Danny, for Quick chocolate. You're supposed to say, "Right," if you're the boy sitting at the table near the fireplace, while the mother makes hot chocolate. I won't tell you what the narrator says in his voice-over, after they kiss.' She looks away, down at the ice.

'You're crazy, Sarah, memorizing T.V. commercials.'

'Michael's only eleven: it's not the Stanley Cup.' She sweeps her shiny, long hair free from the coat collar.

'He's got to excel this year in Midget House League play if he wants to play inter-city next year.'

Her mouth opens partly, then closes without speaking: she's chewing gum instead of saying what she feels. Michael's out there for another shift. She pulls a section of newspaper out of her leather bag. He's on left wing now, where he should be.

'Sarah, Michael's out on the ice.'

'Which one is he?'

'He's right over there, the small one.' Her whole family are midgets.

'Come on Michael! What's the name of their team again?'

'The Rebels.'

'Come on Rebels!'

She used to be a cheerleader. She grabs my arm, is screaming: Michael's got another breakaway! Score this time. He hits the pads again. Damn. Damn.

'Oh, Michael would have been so happy.' She squeezes my arm and lets go: a breakaway.

Now the Royals have carried the puck up to our end of the rink. It's in the net. A chunky player shot the puck into the empty space between the goalie and the near post. 1-0 for them. Michael should have done that. The scorer jumps from the toes of his skates while his teammates congratulate him with taps of their gloves and sticks. On the far side of the arena, the players on the Royals' bench, and their parents sitting in the stands above them, clap and cheer. Over here there's silence, broken by Michael banging his stick on the ice. A green one flashes up on the scoreboard. Sarah unfolds her newspaper. How can she just sit there? I should go down to our bench and tell Michael not to get in too close on breakaways because their goalie isn't moving much.

The puck bounces in off our goalie's deflector. Bill's son was caught up ice after a rush. 'It's 2-0 now. They've scored again.' Michael doesn't
bother to slam his stick on the ice this time; he just skates to the bench, head down.

The siren goes before there's another face-off.

'What was that?'

'The end of the first period, Sarah.' 2-0. She just turns to another page of the newspaper. From the bench Michael yells encouragingly at his goalie who is skating slowly towards the other end. He's a nice kid, as Sarah says, not that it will get him very far. 'I'm going down to talk to Michael.'

'What for?'

'To give him some advice.' I brush by Sarah's knees, avoiding her leather boots that are swung towards the aisle, and stand, looking down the concrete steps at the centre red line. At the team bench Michael's red helmet swivels to watch the play sweep by. We almost score. Nearly 2-1. Here at ice level, it's much faster. 'Michael.' He half turns, eyes still on the moving puck. 'Their goalie isn't moving out to cut down the angles, so don't try to deke him: just shoot for an opening.'

'I almost scored last time, Dad. He just got a pad on it.' I pat him on the back, No 15. 'Remember, it's not whether you win or lose that's important, unless you lose.' He twists around; his large, puzzled eyes behind the metal grill search my face. 'It's just a joke.' I pat him again, and start to reclimb the unyielding stairs. I nod at Bill, who is lighting his pipe. I would love to be out there on the ice with Michael's skating speed. I was always too slow for the jerks picking up teams. Sarah moves over to let me sit down. That woman's son goes off-side stupidly.

'She said you were coming on to her.'

'She must have been imagining things.' She fell asleep early last night again.

Sarah looks across at me, but I avoid her eyes. Michael jumps over the boards for another shift on the ice. Her hard little body hunches forward
beside me. The siren sounds again. The teams change ends. The surface for the final period is old and snowy; it needs to be scraped clean.

'Dan, look at me. We have lived together a long time without lying to each other.'

I have a whole period to find out the score. 'Sarah, I just took your friend and mine to lunch.' Michael, very coolly, has just lifted the heavy black puck over the fallen goalie, into the netting. 'Michael just scored.'

He looks up at us, with his new stick held high in the air, and we wave, together. I'm sorry I took Annie out, tried to hustle her, the bitch. All of us cheer and applaud.

'Up front, Dan. UP FRONT.'

'Quiet, Sarah.' The bald head above the fur coat leans back towards us, and Bill, about to take a puff, stops, his pipe pointing. 'Think of Michael.'

'You didn't. HAVE YOU BEEN FUCKING MY FRIEND ANNIE?'

'Of course not, Sarah.' This is Town of Mount Royal. 'I love you.' I could kill you for doing this in front of everyone.

She picks the wad of gum out of her mouth, and sticks it back into a wrapper, then shoves everything back into her coat pocket. Michael hustles after a loose puck, but a Royal player clears it off the boards. It's icing. The whistle blows, and there's a line change. The coach should leave Michael out there to score another goal. Time's running out. Sarah has never been jealous before. Now it's she who avoids eye-contact.

Annie and Warren have no children. Michael shouldn't be off the ice. They can split up and go to single bars with no hassle, no guilt. The clock keeps running, and he's just sitting there, waiting for the game to end.

Sarah is getting ready to leave, stashing her newspaper in her purse, and buttoning her coat. I'm sweating in this cool air. With only a few minutes left, Michael and his linemates go back on the ice. Sarah's father gave us money for the down payment. She sits next to me, hurt and angry. We had a good chance but that dumb defenceman didn't pass the puck up to Michael; he tried to rush. It's too late now. My legs are numb. The players on both benches count down the last few seconds. The siren goes. Sarah steps quickly past me. 'Where are you going?'

Her eyes are so large because her face is so small. She pauses. She steps away from me, down to ice level, and to her son. He should have scored a hat-trick. The Rebels finish pounding their goalie in congratulations, let him up off the cold, hard ice, and then skate in file past the other team, hitting gloves. A tie feels like a victory when you score the last goal. Sarah waits at the bench for Michael to skate off through the open gate.

The Zamboni sounds its horn and roars on to the scarred ice.
The Quest for Form

There are different and manifold ways in which an imaginative writer may approach the quest for form. I write critical essays but I must confess that many of these are prompted by discoveries one makes as an imaginative writer. Discoveries that open unsuspected doors and windows on the works of other writers one may not have appreciated before. This seems to me a hopeful capacity in that one witnesses, in a strange way, curious fissures that appear in one's biases.

In this brief address, I would like to imply something to do with the enigmatic life of form, the riddle of form, in the tone of my address. I would like to embody some aspect of philosophic and intuitive psyche, so to speak, in a sensuous discourse.

The metaphysic of the imagination deals with violence and force, violence is destructive, force — on the other hand — may be regenerative. They (violence and force) resemble each other. The blow of the rapist resembles the honeymoon blow struck in tenderness by the bridegroom who cares for the bride. The distinction between violence and force has many ramifications in the archaeology of civilizations. A perception of the consequences of our actions is never immediately clear. The burden of foreknowledge, when a particular deed is performed, would be much too great to bear in the instant of performance. Nevertheless a deed or act may draw upon itself a constellation of images whose strangeness — whose half-obscurity, half-transparency — begins to prepare us for degrees of illumination and confession, degrees of implicit comprehension and responsibility for what we have done or are still blindly doing.

None of us can escape entirely the legacies of violence that exist everywhere in our world. The blow one receives that seems utterly unjust is the injustice we once may have inflicted unwittingly upon another.

To see all this, to accept all this, with imaginative capacity, is to open ourselves to a converse miracle. Love is mutuality, art is mutuality. The artist is both feminine and masculine; the male artist is fashioned internally, seized internally, by the women of all ages and climates that he
creates or attacks, strips or sustains, renders violent or summons into sensuous beauty, in his fictions or sculptures or paintings.

The same is true of the woman who sculpts or paints or writes. In the elements she sculpts or assembles into characters in fiction and poetry exist invisible and visible arrows pointed at her innermost guilts, innermost longings and desires, innermost fears of eternity.

What is eternity? Eternity is unbearable womb of endless progression — forever and forever: who can bear the terror of gestating eternity, of being locked into a paradox that annihilates birth and death in human creative terms, leaves nothing but forever and forever and forever and forever. It is easy to say ‘world without end’ — we tend to repeat such phrases like parrots, unthinkingly, unimaginatively.

Beauty and terror are faces of eternity. I recall at this moment a fragment from Rilke’s Duino Elegies —

Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders? And even if one of them suddenly pressed me against his heart, I should fade in the strength of his stronger existence. Beauty is nothing but beginning of terror....

Since eternity is an implacable riddle, since eternity is an extinction of birth and death in human creative terms — and beauty and terror are faces of eternity’s angels — the blow of art, the very genius of love, lies in creating forces that penetrate or make fissures in eternity. Such fissures embody miniaturisations or reductive symbols of a terrifyingly infinite cosmos we tend to identify with our own rages or passions. Therefore it is as if a complex irony is built into the cosmos, an irony within which the cosmos appears to make itself small in order to limit or thwart or overcome what appears to be the projected consequences of our natural hubris, our natural lust for conquests of natures, for ransacking cultures — our natural lust that resembles infinite desire, infinite cosmic ambition. The irony of reduction or miniaturisation that the cosmos plays upon us brings into action a paradox and a marvel. A creative paradox or perception begins to flourish, and through finitude, or limits, conquest may be fissured and the burden of catastrophe shot through by the strangest hope for real change, for mutuality, for a mutual capacity shared by diverse images and cultures and characterisations around the globe. Such reality of change — such capacity to bear and cope with beauty and terror — I call an annunciation of humanity.

May I re-state, in a slightly different way, what is a complex position to do with the ‘quest for form’. The mutuality I imply between images and
cultures and characterisations is a paradox. It breaks, at certain levels, the conscription of polarised worlds bent — it would seem — on destroying each other. It implies a profound irony and comedy of existence built into paradox, into a creative perception of finitude through the poetry of miniaturisations of the cosmos.

Therefore that irony, that comedy, encompasses realistic fallacies or projections of infinite range to human passion through miniaturisations of the cosmos that thwart (to transform), reduce (to overcome), the consequences of such lust for infinity.

Thus it is as if the cosmos coheres into complex miniaturisations that translate infinite hubris — or addiction to infinite hubris — into ceaselessly finite, mutual deaths, mutual re-births, borne by diverse cultures. Such mutuality is an annunciation of humanity. It profoundly alters narrative imagery in forwards and backwards play of associations, reading strategy.

In this context of mutualities, we (as a civilisation) should nurse every dislocated culture in history as if it were re-born on our doorsteps, precariously re-born in the teeth of adverse eternity that we have ourselves escalated into deeds of conquest and sovereign death-wish.

Let us assume for the sake of argument that the birth of the modern world — adorned with all the complex stigmata we associate with our age — occurred somewhere between Dante’s Inferno and the conquest of the ancient Americas. It is possible to nourish hope that the dislocation of cultures need not continue to breed repetitive cycles of eternal violence, eternal revenge, between the exploiters and the exploited we have ourselves bred, the conquistador and the conquered we have ourselves invoked.

The black American whose antecedents came through the Middle Passage, the Jew whose antecedents escaped the gas chambers, the Irish whose antecedents fled injustice and famine, the Russians whose antecedents fled the ancient dynasty of the Czars or the repetitive dynasty of Stalins, the persecuted of all races, are not immune from the temptations of tyranny, of exercising tyranny as insane continuity or lust for infinity — endless progression, endless logic that consumes and despoils.

We create each other, we are each other’s plague as we are each other’s therapy. And the dividing line is virtually non-existent until ‘non-existence’ itself becomes a parable, until ‘non-existence’ itself becomes a cosmic irony, until ‘non-existence’ itself becomes metaphysic — metaphysic of the frail genius of humanity — frail but genuine counterpoint to inflated model, frail but genuine mystery that pits itself against all-consuming orders of the temperament of power.
Because of parables and ironies of existence, the living and the dead speak to each other in fictions of reality (the Mexican novel *Pedro Paramo* is an instance of such fiction of reality), because of parables of 'non-existence' Christ walked on water as if the sea had become an oceanic shawl over the unborn on whose fluid back god walks — as if the ocean were the mother of Man — an ocean apparently seamless, yet fissured by fictions of reality into a discourse between the heights and the depths.

Because of parables of 'non-existence' history is a profound fiction of invisible forces that sustain us in the midst of perils and assist us to blend into an evolving metaphysic of the imagination that counsels us that there is a divine comedy of existence in each particle of dream, in each fissure of originality through implacable circumstance or fate, in each fissure or break through which we clothe our human limits in a wealth of paradox.

I use the term 'evolving metaphysic' with the greatest care.

Quite rightly, I think, the concept of 'evolution' in Darwinian philosophy, in terms of progression, is little used by students of society. Society is liable to unpredictable regress, it stores alarming fears, biases, passions, that may unleash wholly unbargained-for, undreamt-of conflicts that run against the grain of evolutionary models. Nevertheless I cling to the term 'evolving metaphysic' in an alchemical sense. Alchemy infuses fossils with a cyclical life. Rather than remorseless progression, there is cyclical re-birth, a re-birth that ushers us into complex darkness (*nigredo* is the alchemical term) in the middle of day. That re-birth, that complex darkness, is a miniaturisation or reductive symbol of unbearable wheels of light. It secretes a capacity for *visualisation*, a capacity to move with the indirections and the mystery of interior genius, interior illumination.

It is interesting, in this context, to reflect on a play called *The Road* by the Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka. I find this play profoundly moving as fictional reality; as a fiction to be read and visualised in which encounters occur between the newborn and the newdead — in which darkness lies over the eyes of the newborn who cannot yet see as it lies over the eyes of the newdead who are slipping back into the womb of space. Dramatic performance becomes the surrogate, I find, of fiction. In other words, the dramatic performance is a substitute for profound insights that reside in the 'chrysalis of the Word' (as the play puts it). One is not suggesting that the performance is not memorable. Nevertheless a riddle remains: at a certain level the play resists performance on the
stage. Does that imply a failure in a work ostensibly designed for the
theatre? If so, in my judgement, the ‘failure’ of The Road becomes a
parable, ‘failure’ miniaturises theatre of the gods — of the savage god
Ogun — into mask or chrysalis inhabited by the curious and marvellous
life of visualised being in contradistinction not only to visual model but to
theatrical lust for the conquest of sensibilities.

The truth is alchemy of the word, alchemy of the image, is not allegory
in Dantesque, large scale, absolutely sovereign theatre or fixed abode. Alchemy converts, subverts, all realms into profoundest unscience-in-
depth.

The model universe on stage Dante inhabited has become a mis-
conception of the cosmos across many centuries. All absolute model or
stage is partial and needs therefore to be perceived in radical finitude if it
is to confess to its partiality. The capacity of a play to make the stage a
secondary manifestation of its rich, verbal, intricate life, enhances layers
of receptivity within us even as it transforms the model theatre into a live
fossil. The twentieth century — in that sense — may be seen in the future
to have passed the most remarkable judgements on itself within minority
genius that runs counter to majority addiction to visual media and to the
Faustian conquest or conscription of tastes.

Three peculiar works that may be strung together are Djuna Barnes’s
Nightwood, Mervyn Peake’s Gormenghast and Amos Tutuola’s Palm
Wine Drinkard.

Djuna Barnes is, I find, an American woman novelist whose power and
intricacy in Nightwood can scarcely be matched by any other writer. It is
an extremely bleak work with its uninhabited angels, its Matthew-Dante-
O’Connor, its Robin Vote and others. A modern work that resists all
contemporary media and reduces them to signals of the deprived con-
sciousness of an age. An exquisite balance divides sheer deprivation of
consciousness from the mystery of reductive symbol of the cosmos. Tele-
vision thrives best on poverty of script, on banal prose: one is tempted to
say that such poverty (such regard for triviality spiced with violence and
sex) is a reductive symbol of cosmos. But NO. It is not. It may be
converted into the edge of sardonic spirituality in which the television
box becomes a fossil inhabited by moving shadows.

Mervyn Peake is an English novelist. His Gormenghast is a rare
achievement. The character Flay, for example, the creature with the
‘dug-out heart’ is a walking, hollow skin. Where his heart should be fly
golden creatures of beauty and terror. His failure to understand the
evolving metaphysic — the marriage of alchemy and evolution — within
his own fictional body leaves him an outcast even as it tinges the space within him into apparently unconscious womb and maternal longing akin to masculine/feminine reality.

Amos Tutuola’s *Palm Wine Drinkard* was published within the same decade as *Gormenghast*. There too we find walking hollows, a beautiful fossil gentleman whose reduction to a daemonic skull is part and parcel of a terrifying secret of wholeness into which ‘father of the gods’ is initiated as he sets out to win his wife who has been stricken dumb and may be seen as a kind of inverse of the sleeping beauty that we encounter in archetypal European legend.

May I now read a short passage from *The Secret Ladder* that sets out to invoke the terror and beauty of the heavens collapsing into a measure of human paradox: human frailty, human rage, human destructiveness. In the passage one Jordan strikes out at a woman called Catalena but a butterfly becomes the surrogate victim of his anger.

Jordan was furious. He had been made to feel he was a helpless servant whose privileged back could easily be broken. His eye was distracted by a flight of brilliant butterflies sailing out of the bush. They hovered overhead and one enormous distended creature—wings breathing like fans—settled on Catalena’s shoulder. She brushed it off.... It flew straight at Jordan and he struck out savagely.... The fantastic wings were shattered save for the spirit of their design which persisted on the ground like stars of gold painted on the blue skeleton of crumpled heaven.

Twentieth century divine comedy of existence rests implicitly, I believe, on an oblique line that touches on a variety of live fossil spaces, animate and inanimate bodies, social, political, institutional idols, areas of sculpture, areas of mask and paint, half-conscious, half-unconscious flesh-and-blood etc., to illumine an indirect correspondence that transforms all sovereign expectation, apparently sovereign structure, apparently sovereign media, to *partial* elements.

These parts in an evolving metaphysic (in the sense in which I have adopted that term) cry out for different criteria of assessment, I believe, from those now employed in our regional humanities.

The metaphysical butterfly’s wing is the terror, and beauty, of fossil identity (therefore implicit finitude) to absorb unbearable heavens and hells—to transform ‘unbearable’ heavens and hells—‘unbearable’ in the sense that they are so ingrained in human misery and conflict, greed and jealousy, that they seem to tilt the very cosmos towards polarization and oblivion.

Without a profound perception of this—without a profound alteration of fictional imagery in narrative bodies—it is difficult to fissure
the sovereign death-wish; catastrophe appears to endure and to eclipse the annunciation of humanity.

I have sketched in a tentative linkage of fictions in this brief talk. I would have liked to include the Caribbean, Latin America, Australia, Asia, Canada, etc.

We are, I think, despite apparently incorrigible bias, moving into a dimension of hope, however overshadowed that hope may be.

An alteration, however intuitive, in allegorical stasis of divine comedy of existence must affect Faustian hubris. The very cornerstones of European literature may alter and acquire different creative emphases within a world that has so long been endangered and abused in the name of the virtues of the superman, virtues that are synonymous with a lust for infinity.

On 12 February 1982, Raja Rao and Wilson Harris spoke at a British Studies Faculty Seminar at the University of Texas at Austin under the rubric, 'The Quest for Form: Commonwealth Perspectives'. Professor Emeritus Joseph Jones chaired the session. The above is a transcript of Wilson Harris's paper.
E.A. Markham

LATE RETURN

(for Howard Fergus)

'What an odd name, Markham, for a Montserratian!' Canadian tourist in Montserrat.

'There is no Markham in the Directory.' Telephone Exchange.

The ruin, at least, was something, the yard with face half-rutted, was the boy no girl would kiss except in retrospect; blotches of soil erupting like teenage lust: a tangle of green — sugarapple, mango, sour now, outgrowing the graft of family name; other fruit, near-fruit...

With no young scamp to lizard vertical for juice, your nuts are safe: weeds cling in parody to trunk (like boys born after you, tall. Or long-abandoned sons made good, defying dad to wish them better) unharnessed by Nellie’s line on which the great, white sheets of the house would flap their wings in rage. Fringed Afro of arrogance: their better view of the sea taunts us, close to earth, flaunting fruit too high to get at; some beyond-the-milk stage bunched as if in decoration. Well before dark, my challenge from below, half-
remembered, no-more-to-be-taken-up, peters out:  
mine is a garden, not of Eden, but of youth.  
Suspecting things to be as honest, as accurate as they seem,  
that this bit of family, untended, past its best  
season, reflects something in me, I reach  
for the camera I don’t possess. Someone in Europe,  
in America, will find this quaint. For me; a tourist-  
polaroid to arrest decline.

II

I am home again, perhaps two generations late.  
I think, when the jumble of accusation, of longing,  
clears: I am the juvenile not yet exiled.  
This rock is a springboard  
into water, into sea.  
Sea is safe mattress  
for the pole-vaulter, beyond sand;  
my ocean-liner, vast and reliable, absorbing  
shock, proof of completed journeys near to risk,  
knowing the way to ‘abroad’. The jump  
is voluntary as coming to a road which forks:  
sudden pressure from behind makes you choose  
without benefit of signpost. Now this:  
Montserrat has caught up with the world,  
impatient of late-comers, of its children, foreign-ravaged,  
straggling home without humility. (High-flying  
Concorde boxing people’s ears, is enough.)  
Others have been unpersened  
through the idiocies of politics. I, who seek no public  
cut to advancement, am an economic  
not a political dissident.  

Familiar picture: Man & suitcase,  
contents not from this place; professional migrant  
eyeing the landscape. My unpaid guide tells a story  
of a potato-patch, a villa-patch cleared  
too soon. A riot of green is the penalty.  
Less young in energy, we must try again.
Later, second thoughts come to the rescue
and puncture self-conceit: things affecting you
affect not only you, etc. 'Most of what matters
in your life takes place in your absence' is a verdict
with the threat drained out. (In that absence, woodlice
ate your house.) But something of you
lives here, a voice not heard in twenty years,
stubbornly locked in the present. The mind,
like a cat's paw, tries to trap stray cloud of memory,
mists of past, raindrops thrown by an unseen hand...
Inevitably, it locates you in the third person.

Is he a late developer?

He was sure of it, then, hot afternoons
stumped by Latin homework, bowled by the Physics
master before he took guard, before he was ready.
At home, out of the team, without Excursion
to Antigua to represent the School, he had to make do
with books; books one day, hopefully, to be swapped
for passport. Here, he watched the ants

materializing from nowhere
to attack the remains of lunch. He thinks —

*Regam Reges Reget*... Such communication systems grow out of...

*Amabam Amabas Amabat* (Uncomfortable, the imperfect tense)

*Amavero Amaveris Amaverit*...

(What is the consequence if I do not kill these ants?)

His colleagues half-way to Antigua to play the big match,
he imagines he sees them, ants on the boat. He can
advise them. Ivan's late-cut is dangerous. At trials,

Ivan *twice* cut the ball in the air, and got away with it:

*five runs*. Ivan will be caught in Antigua before he scores...

*Capio Capere Cepi Captum*... Were we ants, boys
from School, we would find a way
to cross sea,

get message to Ivan. These ants, he notices,
place information above life: what drives them to it?

Could it be they love one another? Too foolish
a notion for a boy early in his teens
who didn’t make the team, and must settle for Latin:
\textit{Amavi Amavisti Amavit}...

He thinks:
after the bombs, will the ants be here?
(Maybe he has not become a scholar
to sustain such thoughts.) He thinks of a passport
stamped, stamped in Antigua, stamped in the next island,
stamped here; luggage searched, questions asked,
and is not ashamed of the obvious:
Absence of love. We haven’t learnt from the ants.

iv

Again the question: do I unpack?
(Releasing echoes of Wanderer, of Seafarer, of Salesman,
1st Generation immigrant hawking nicknacks
at the door? Do I hope to dazzle
for an hour, a week, and move on? Isn’t it here
that others, with my history, have under-estimated
their capacity for low goals?)

To unpack or not? The case represents
all the skill I have, success, over the years
of reducing the contents of many into one —
like absorbing disciplines into a single brain
(Nellie must have felt this way, here, after the first
cassava-bread: Reaping the root, peeling, washing,
grinding at the Mill — man & boy treading pole —
the white, poisonous cassava piling up in its box, its coffin...
Over-night Press, sifting, baking on hot plate:
thin, light cassava-bread...) What of this remains
in my case?

The opened case, inevitably, won’t close.
A moment of panic: Could the fart of Concorde
on its way to Venezuela, have got into your things?
No, this is man-menopause, faking new consciousness.
I no longer wish to prevent bits of Montserrat smuggling in

though night sounds of crickets and dogs weigh nothing,
bats no longer have a house to be blind in;
Scots at the Agouti, Canadians at Vue Pointe
travel lightly in my head. The biography that grows
and grows in my baggage, started life a pamphlet, an underlined
name, a literate slave at Riley's reading the declaration
of emancipation. Nimcom has filled the years
since 1834, and my case won't close.

And more: Under the bathtowel, samples of beaches
still free to all. Here and there, memory of kindness,
of beauty, verbs of local colour TO DANCE TO SING — TO LOVE?
They belong here: is it crude of me to smuggle them
into that dark place where part of me still lives?

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Arms raised he stirs exultation
beyond rotten roots that renewed him
the sad god of poverty who grew secretly
obsessed with strange identities
to risk the shocks of bluffs of blood
man with a thorny head of subjugation
who found himself among low lying hideaways
yet grafted glorious eyes of success
he practised how to breathe in cash
how to move in it and gesture with it
he drilled himself in other languages
drilled himself to saturate conquerors
till every day began to reflect him
as a swordsharp machete
and he strung little victories together
like stepping stones
and this
upsurge of nonconforming
is all-real
to trouble establishments like a flier from Mars
to make actions into polished milestones
and tossed words ride ocean waves
and missions clothe naked absences
to empty banks into empty pockets
and the world knows him a fresh agitator
our eye and target of the nation

Listen
hear him announced: 'Here he is
knower of tracks to every fireside
sound sleeper on bare boards
good company on parched corn and water for dinner
the bringer
of new dimensions
new textures before the eyes
and bodies growing scarless
our sage
who brightens blackness
our floods on dry time
our builder after hurricane
our own man who talks «roots talk»
as well as «professor talk»
who finds the lost
who wakens the dead and all beginners
who is hard transparent glass
with deep reds and blues
our leader
here he is here he is
our man with eyes all round the head

WLWE
World Literature Written in English
G.D. Killam, Editor

WLWE is a journal devoted to criticism and discussion of Commonwealth literature, Third World writing in English and New World literature in English. Contributions of a scholarly critical nature are welcome on these and related subjects. Volume 22, No. 1 (1983) includes a special section on Wilson Harris. Copies of Volume 21, No. 2, “The Commonwealth in Canada,” are still available.

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ADDRESS: G.D. Killam, Editor, World Literature Written in English, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, N1G 2W1.
The Question of a Writer's Commitment: Two Points of View

Two African writers give their point of view on the above question.

Elechi Amadi is a Nigerian writer whose major novels, *The Concubine* and *The Great Ponds* deal with the traditional past of the people.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a Kenyan writer whose novels deal with the Kenyan war of Independence and present-day political oppression in Kenya. His involvement with theatre in the vernacular has earned him a year's imprisonment and he is at present in exile.

The editor invites comments and opinions from readers who might like to pursue this discussion.

Elechi Amadi

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THE PROBLEMS OF COMMITMENT IN LITERATURE

The committed writer is one who consciously uses his writing as an instrument for furthering the cause he believes in. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines commitment as among other things, 'engagement that restricts freedom of action'. I will examine in this paper what these restrictions are for the committed writer.

Examples of commitment in literature abound. In *1984*, George Orwell paints a vivid fearsome picture of a thorough-going militarized state where human freedom is severely curtailed, privacy is absent, and the belief in an imaginary foe is preached to keep the populace in a
constant state of alert which leaves them no time to contemplate their enslavement. Orwell shows his commitment to human freedom and his fear, that judging from the trend of events at the time he was writing, the world might get to the 1984 nightmare. In The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Kwei Armah concentrates with nauseating intensity on corruption. One can virtually smell the filth. In Cry, the Beloved Country, Alan Paton hits at apartheid in South Africa while in The Invisible Man, Ralph Ellison lays bare the more subtle forms of racial discrimination in the U.S. Solzhenitsyn exposes the inhuman conditions in Soviet prison camps in One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich while Omotosho attempts to ridicule the Nigerian Civil War in The Combat. Rene Maran attacks French colonialism in Batouala. In A Man of the People, Achebe decries corruption and sharp political practices. In traditional African literature comparable cases cannot be cited since the novel does not exist in that literature. However, in ballads and songs, singers often attack bad behaviour for sheer fun and mischief and as a deterrent. This fact has led Leopold Senghor to comment:

Thus in Africa, art for art's sake does not exist. All art is social. The minstrel who sings the noble into battle gives him strength and shares his victory. When he intones the deeds of a legendary hero, he is writing the history of his people with his tongue, restoring to them the divine profundity of the myth. And so down to the fables which beyond the laughter and the tears serve for our instruction.¹

Apart from Senghor, commitment in literature has many illustrious supporters. In his essay 'The Novelist as Teacher', Achebe is quoted as saying:

The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must now be done in Nigeria. In fact the writer must walk right in front, for he is, after all, the sensitive point in his community.²

Ngugi prescribes more than mere writing:

It is not enough for the African artist, standing aloof to view society and highlight its weaknesses. He must try to go beyond this, to seek out the sources, the causes and the trends.³

No one can deny that the literature of commitment is necessary. How can a writer just look on placidly while the struggle for sheer survival rages around him? We are all familiar with sensational newspaper reports of people fighting with bibles and chairs in churches or with trumpets and drums in nightclubs. Truly, in an emergency a man fights with whatever he has in hand.
Naturally, then, one should expect a writer, when suddenly confronted, to fight with what he has in hand which is his pen. Writing in the journal *Présence Africaine* Arthur Maimane, a South African author and journalist, puts it quite bluntly:

In South Africa if you are black there can only be one thing you feel very strongly about: apartheid. And you do not have to be an artist either—so the first thing those of us who can write want to write about—feel impelled to write about—is the effect of this supremacist ethos on ourselves and on the supremacists themselves.\(^4\)

The question confronting us, therefore, is not whether writers ought or ought not to be committed, for that is dictated by circumstances. The question is whether the effect of commitment on literary quality is salutary. In a lecture I delivered at the University of Iowa in 1974, I described commitment as a prostitution of literature. There were violent and angry rebuttals from some of my friends. I have not recanted yet. What should be understood, however, is that decrying prostitution is not the same thing as denying that up to a point it is unavoidable in most societies. I still think that the committed writer is a literary nightsoiler who is called upon to do an ugly but sometimes absolutely necessary job. Indeed it is doubtful whether aloofness is possible in a setting like apartheid. In writing *Dancer of Johannesburg*, a short play whose plot is based on the conflict in South Africa, I made up my mind to be as dispassionate as possible and to concentrate on the dramatic aspects of the work. But eventually I found myself preaching here and there. I was committed.

Is the literature of commitment good literature? I shrink from launching into a direct full-scale definition of good and bad literature. The hazards in such a venture are too fearsome to contemplate. Instead let us take a look at the various effects of commitment on writing. Thereafter we can all draw our own conclusions.

Firstly, the committed writer loses much of his objectivity and the reader cannot trust him because he knows he has taken a stand which he is out to defend come what may. When he describes a situation or character as beautiful or ugly, the accuracy of his observation becomes questionable. Although he may, and indeed usually does evoke a high intensity of feeling, an inherent falsehood often bedevils any pathos he may conjure up. But some may ask: is absolute objectivity desirable in creative writing? The answer is no. The absolutely objective creative writer does not exist. Subjectivity is a vital ingredient of fiction. Most novelists are partial to freedom, justice, fairplay and other virtues and in their writing they uphold them: But this is not the type of commitment about which we are concerned here. The commitment in question is
narrower and more pointed than mere adherence to the universal virtues we all yearn for. The committed writer is not out to make a general statement; he is out to change a particular situation, or to initiate, reverse, or modify a mode of thinking. His preoccupation is intense and his subject looms so large in his field of view that he sees little else. So he comes up with distorted, if powerfully drawn images. For a reader, especially one not committed to the same cause, such distortion, even though intended to correct a grievous social ill, can be very boring, even irritating. As Wayne Booth points out in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

> There is this much truth to the demand for objectivity in the author: signs of the real author’s untransformed loves and hates are almost always fatal.¹

Let us take a few examples. In *Batouala*, Rene Maran, a West Indian educated in France, who worked as a colonial administrative officer in the then Ubangi-Shari (now Central African Republic) attacks the French colonial system. He makes his intentions quite clear in his preface to the book:

> I shall speak in my name and not in the name of another; I shall expound my ideas and not those of another. And I know in advance that the Europeans whom I shall paint are so cowardly that I am sure that not a one will dare give me the slightest argument. For if one could know on what continuous evil the great colonial life is based, it would be spoken of less — indeed it would be spoken of no more.⁵

Accordingly, Maran goes to work. Here is a typical passage which he puts in the mouth of his hero Batouala:

> I will never tire of telling of the wickedness of the boundjous! Until my last breath I will reproach them for their cruelty, their duplicity, their greed. What haven’t they promised us since we have had the misfortune of knowing them! ‘You’ll thank us later,’ they tell us. ‘It is for your own good that we force you to work. We only take from you a small part of the money we force you to earn. We use it to build your villages, roads, bridges and machines which move by fire on iron rails.’ The roads, the bridges, those extraordinary machines, so where are they! Mata! Nini! Nothing. nothing! Moreover, instead of taking only a part of our gains, they steal even our last sou from us! (p.75)

In passages like this Maran castigates the French. So far so good. But apparently, attacks on the colonial system itself are not enough to dispel the intensity of his feelings. He launches into non-political attacks. Here he focuses on the hygiene of the whites:
Traditions are worth what they are worth. Some are definitely disagreeable. Others like personal cleanliness are quite desirable. Only the whites pay no heed to it. Perhaps they despise it! In any case, the least washing horrifies them. They do it as little as possible. That is doubtless why they always smell like corpses. (p.50)

He attacks the virtues of white women: 'As loose as black women, but more hypocritical and more mercenary, they were full of vices which the latter hadn't know about until then.' (p.76)

Surely, as Wayne Booth would say, the author's untransformed hates and prejudices are clear in these passages which detract from the literary worth of the book. Maran was aware that no French publisher could publish such abuses against the whites. So he had to paint the blacks in sufficiently lurid colours to placate his publishers. Also I suspect that Maran, who was an assimilated black Frenchman, had a securely veiled contempt for his fellow blacks. So he ensures that his hero Batouala is much worse than even the noble savage of European imagination. Although Batouala is supposed to be the great 'Mokoundji', the chief of many villages, his gestures are brutish and he makes love to his favourite wife Yassigui'n'dja without any emotion:

And by a very natural association of ideas he wanted to fulfil his male desires, because, up to now, he had never missed doing so each morning before getting up for good. As Yassigui'n'dja had always been accustomed to these daily liberties, even though she was still asleep, there was no need at all to wake her up. (p.24)

His nine wives are shown as completely immodest. While Yassigui'nja, his favourite wife, prepares him breakfast, 'her eight female companions proceeded to wash their sexual parts, each one with her back leaning against the wall of her own hut' (p.45). This scene of simultaneous public ablation is hard to believe. And finally, here is a circumcision orgy which surely embodies most of the fantasies which the untravelled white man has of Africa:

A strange madness suddenly seized the confused human throng surrounding the dancers. The men tore off the pieces of fabric which served as loinclothes; the women also removed the rest of their clothes. The breasts of the women bounced. A heavy odour of genitals, urine, sweat and alcohol pervaded the air, more acrid than the smoke. Couples paired off. (p.87)

The book was of course published and promptly awarded one of the highest French literary honours, the Prix Goncourt. What redeems Batouala somewhat is the vivid and poetic description of the countryside.
In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Kwei Armah, in a desperate bid to expose the corruption of his country, Ghana, describes the soiled walls of a lavatory with extraordinary attention to detail:

There must have been people who did not just forget to bring their (toilet) paper, but who also did not bother to drop their loads, for the wall has marks that are not mere afterpieces but large chunks of various shit. 

I apologize for this quotation but it shows that corruption looms so large in Armah’s vision that he is forced to descend to this level of vulgarity to make his point. This is not to say that the book is not successful. Quite the contrary. The *New York Times* described it as being ‘in the first rank of recent novels anywhere’.

However, the passages all show how coloured the vision of the committed writer with a missionary zeal can be and why his description or choice of detail cannot always be trusted.

Secondly, the writing of a good novel demands concentration and a singleness of purpose. A mind torn between the desire to transmit a message and the normal demands of literary creativity is bound to wobble a little. The author may intrude blatantly, dialogue may become twisted and in extreme cases logic and moral balance may suffer. Almost invariably the author preaches. Here is Orwell in *1984*.

The aims of these three groups are entirely irreconcilable. The aim of the High is to remain where they are. The aim of the Middle is to change places with the High. The aim of the Low when they have an aim — for it is an abiding characteristic of the Low that they are too much crushed by drudgery to be more than intermittently conscious of anything outside their daily lives — is to abolish all distinctions and create a society in which all men shall be equal. Thus throughout history a struggle which is the same in its main outlines recurs over and over again. For long periods the High seem to be securely in power, but sooner or later there always comes a moment when they lose either their belief in themselves or their capacity to govern efficiently or both. They are then over-thrown by the Middle who enlist the Low on their side by pretending to them that they are fighting for liberty and justice.

This piece which reads like a dissertation on the Marxian concept of class struggle goes on without a break for eleven pages. For a reader who is out to enjoy the author’s creativity this sermon is indeed trying.

Thirdly, quite often the literature of commitment depends for its success on matters of the moment. That being so, it is sometimes difficult to judge whether say a satire derives its popularity from the sheer relevance of its theme or from the author’s craftsmanship. My charge of literary prostitution arises when political or other opinions loosely held together in a poorly written story are blatantly put up for sale to the
public in the name of creative writing. Even while recognising the need for commitment we must draw the line somewhere. Orwell’s *1984* is a very absorbing book. Its success depends in part on the immediate relevance of the socio-political situation it portrays. In it three power blocks: Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia seek one another’s annihilation, a cold war is fanned by continual propaganda, loss of liberty is institutionalized and so on. When these political realities cease to cause world concern the survival of *1984* will then hang on the brilliance with which it has been executed. Clive Wake makes the point clearly:

> Literature of any kind, no matter how great, inevitably dates in certain respects, but much of it, perhaps most of it, dates very quickly and sinks into oblivion because it depends too much on the external features of the historical moments.

Fortunately, Orwell has succeeded in weaving a touching tale of human suffering which should stand on its own without the socio-political props in the book. Also his plea for freedom is for all humanity and this fact commands our sympathy.

All this is not to say that authors should always strive after so-called deathless prose. In the literature of any people there can hardly be more than a handful of books that can be so classified. Even they cannot last for all time. At best, ‘deathless’ can only be interpreted to mean lasting for a couple of hundred years. So it is true that we need much much more than deathless prose. But even so we must recognise the paradox that the more immediately relevant to society a work of art is, the more quickly it becomes irrelevant.

Apart from the depreciation in worth of committed writing when the relevant historical moment is past, there is, I think, yet another reason why such writing often fails to pass for good quality literature. This reason has to do more with human psychology than with anything else. It is this: aesthetics and utilitarianism do not often make good bed-fellows. A work of commitment is too much like an advertisement. Readers generally resent being taken for a ride or being used as target for propaganda no matter how mild or how well motivated. This is true also of other forms of art. For instance any painting used for an advertisement, no matter how well executed, is rejected out of hand in any serious consideration of art. If Mona Lisa, the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, had in the first place been put up as an advertisement for, say, a brand of toothpaste, it almost certainly would never have been noticed. As an advert Mona Lisa would lose her mystery; her famous smile would turn into an avaricious grin. I believe it is for the same reason that hymns have generally not passed for great poetry. Many hymns are great, but
only as hymns. Why is this? It is because hymns are poems of commitment to this god or that.

Now and then a committed author surmounts the difficulties discussed above and produces a beautiful work. When this happens I submit that it is in spite, not because, of the author's commitment. Somewhere, somehow, he has struck a human chord which vibrates in resonance with ours. It may be noted here that a work may arouse a lot of public interest without being successful in the literary sense. Such a work is little more than a socio-political tract. Indeed, if sociologists and political analysts show more interest in a piece of creative writing than literary critics, then the author has cause to worry if he is interested in pure literary merit. For instance, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* aroused considerable public interest when it was published in 1726. Swift was highly praised, viciously attacked, and pronounced insane in turns. Here is a case of a satirist pinching the sensitive socio-political nerve centres of his society. Swift attacked psychologists, scientists, medical practitioners, politicians, artists, the lot. Sometimes his attack degenerated to the personal level. He praised his friends and decried his foes. No wonder then he aroused such violent reactions. Here is what sounds like a political attack:

There was a man born blind who had several apprentices in his own condition, their employment was to mix colours for painters, which their masters taught them to distinguish by feeling and smelling.¹⁰

And a literary attack:

We next went to the School of Languages, where three professors sat in consultation upon improving that of their own country. The first project was to shorten discourse by cutting polysyllables into one, and leaving out verbs and participles, because in reality all things imaginable are but nouns.¹¹

Today such passages would be considered silly and less than witty, but then it is not fair to make comparisons across different literary epochs over two centuries apart. However, in my view what keeps *Gulliver's Travels* alive today is the appeal to our undying love of fairy tales and the sheer grotesqueness of the entire write-up. If the big-men-little-men contrivance was removed much of the popularity of the book, especially with children, would die. But then one may argue that no work, no matter how great, could stand if its centre props were removed. There is some merit in that argument.

There are some who hold that uncommitted writers simply do not exist. There is always a point of view, or a way of life which is uppermost
in an author’s mind and which he wants to project. Is Flora Nwapa not committed to womanhood and its delicate problems in *Efuru*? Is John Munonye not concerned with the grimness of the daily struggle for existence in *The Oil Man of Obange*? And how about Elechi Amadi and his obsessions with the supernatural and traditional rural life? Well, there is a difference between describing a given background faithfully and actively pursuing a cause. Of course, poignancy may be achieved and strong emotions aroused whenever an author tells a story well but these efforts cannot by themselves prove commitment. Admittedly, it may be hard to draw the line, especially in works by cunning authors, but most cases of commitment are easy enough to identify if only because the authors do not usually hide the fact — and they do not have to.

I am aware that critics are often in a dilemma in assessing works of commitment. How much literary merit is there? How much politics, ideology or dogma? A way out is to regard the literature of commitment as a distinct genre and to proceed to evolve appropriate criteria for appreciating it. This should eliminate much of the confusion which arises when works of commitment are compared with other works. It is no use comparing Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* with *1984* or Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* with *Gulliver’s Travels*. These works are worlds apart.

What then? Is the literature of commitment good literature? My view is that commitment seriously impairs literary quality. Should purists haughtily write them off as bad literature? Hardly. Yet there is something disturbing, even lamentable, in the novelist who squanders his art in decrying a bad government or ushering in an untried political system, when it is realized that armies of journalists are doing just this in countless newspapers and magazines all over the globe. The committed novelist should know that as a propaganda tool, the novel is at best inefficient and expensive. It is like sweeping the streets with brooms of gold.

NOTES

Ngugi wa Thiong’o

INTERVIEW

Raoul Granqvist interviewed Ngugi wa Thiong’o in Umeå 22 September 1982.

You have said: ‘In writing a novel, I love to hear the voices of the people working on the land, forging metal in a factory, telling anecdotes in crowded matatus and buses, gyrating their hips in a crowded bar before a jukebox or a live band... I need life to write about life’ (Detained: A Writer’s Prison Notes, London: Heinemann, 1981, pp. 8-9). Yet Devil on the Cross was written in prison. How was that possible? Surely the prison did not provide you with that kind of life.

The conditions in prison, especially for a writer are meant to cut away that writer, or intellectual, or political worker, from contact with active life which is the root or the basis of one’s inspiration. So I was really
pointing out the difficulties of writing in prison, especially for me — and I suppose for most other writers — who need actual involvement in the daily laughter of the people, in their daily cries of sorrow or joy, or in any of their problems, to be able to sustain themselves as writers. In prison it is important to understand the intentions of your gaolers. What they mostly want to achieve is some kind of break-down where the political prisoner denies his previous political stance or denies his previous involvement with people. Once you understand their intentions you can consciously start working against them. In my case I had been put in political detention in a maximum security prison because of my involvement with peasants and workers in Kenya in the building of a culture that reflected their lives and their political and economic struggles. I thought that I’d fight the gaolers by writing a novel in an African language and talking about peasants and workers and their history of struggle against both foreign domination and also internal exploitation and oppression.

How did you look upon your own detention? Did you feel that you were detained as an individual, ‘in your own right’, or as a representative, a scapegoat?

You must understand that what characterizes the neo-colonial ruling minorities in most African countries is their total isolation from the people. They see the people as their enemy, because they, the ruling minority, serve foreign interests which are obviously hostile to the people of the country. So if they could jail the whole population and get away with it, they would. But then to gaol the whole population would in fact defeat the very basis of their existence as mediators between foreign economic interests and the material sources of the country. They therefore pick certain individuals whom they see as representatives of certain ways of thinking; not because of that particular individual but because they want his incarceration to be a symbolic act.

You thought of your own detention as an exemplary symbolic ritual, a rite?

Yes, I think that is correct. Our work at Kamiriithu Community and Cultural Centre was collective: it involved factory workers, poor peasants, a few intellectuals from university, petit bourgeois elements like school teachers and secretaries, and so on. I was picked, not because I was the centre, but rather because they wanted to set an example and
instil a climate of fear in all the others and by implication in every other collective effort in Kenya.

*Your fight against the gaolers, or the 'demons' as you sometimes call them, was then another 'symbolic' fight?*

Writing *Devil on the Cross* and *Detained* I took up deliberately and very sincerely a defiant position against the social classes that had been responsible for killing democracy in Kenya. The events that have occurred since my detention are proving me right.

*You mention in your book Detained that a psychological warfare was going on all the time in prison. What was your part in this, and how could you collect the strength to wage it?*

You are in prison because you sincerely believe in certain principles and beliefs. In my case, I sincerely searched my own mind to find out whether, in what I had stood for, or in what I had been striving to stand for, that is in my writings and in my involvement both in my teaching in Nairobi making literature relevant to the Kenyan people and in the kind of theatre that we started in my village, there was something wrong. And I could not find in any corner of my whole being anything that was wrong. So the very fact that I was totally convinced that Kenyan people were right in struggling against colonial oppression and exploitation and the neo-colonialism which was aided by a few Kenyans who had imbibed the culture of imperialism, gave me the strength to stand up to the very oppressive psychological conditions in prison. What characterizes such a prison is that your gaolers try to use every way possible to break you, like promises, use of a family attachment, and whatever they think you hold dear.

*Is a slave-master relationship a condition that easily develops in prison?*

An oppressing class or nation or group does not only want to enslave the people, but they want to see those people believing that it was really in their interest to be so enslaved. They want you to think that you are really happy being oppressed; the slave is really happy about his slavery. They even try to suggest that the slave really loves his master.

*Your prison became for you an education centre. How?*
In Kenyan political detention prisons, detainees are not allowed to read books, they have no access to newspapers, to radios, to any type of information, not even censured information. At Kamiti Maximum Security Prison the guards were very careful not to bring in any printed matter, even advertisements or other like matter. Conditions in these prisons are extremely oppressive. So when I say that prison became my teacher I do not mean that books were allowed and that I made use of the time there to study more, and that newspapers were available, or that I was allowed to correspond with the outside world, or that I was entitled to enter an extra-mural university course abroad. What I mean is that I tried to learn from the very severe conditions in that prison. For instance, I discovered that the warders did not realize that I had been put in because of my involvement with the collective work in my village. They had been given the impression that I was in for something more sinister than that, so if I asked them about the weather outside the prison walls they acted dumb. If I asked anything even about trees, they would not say anything. But when it came to the question of language they believed this to be harmless, and far from being silent, they suddenly became very outspoken. For me they became very helpful, so I was quite willing not to ask them anything about what was happening on the outside, but learn more and more about their understanding of language. Most of them happened to know Kikuyu very well and were excited about discussing concepts of words and meanings. For me this was like a gift; every day they were giving me a gift, a precious gift. Another source of knowledge were the other detainees who had other experiences that I did not have. For instance, some of the prisoners had been there for eight or ten years. I was a novice in prison, so I was very keen to know how they had coped with being there for such a long time. And I was keen to know about their history.

To what extent would Devil on the Cross have been a different book if written outside prison, or would it ever have been written?

In a sense I do not think it could have been written, at least not in its present form. Or let me put it in another way: it would have been a different kind of Devil. First the very strength to embark on a novel in a language that had no previous history of any modern novel written in it could only have come from the grim conditions of prison. In other words, maybe, if I had been outside prison I might have been tempted to delay this more formidable task, which it is to break away from certain tradi-
tions and from my own private history of writing in English. To break away from these obviously needed a psychological pressure and I felt this pressure in prison. The grimness of conditions in prison created its own opposite, a fierce determination to achieve something in a Kenyan language. Another aspect of the book is its tone; it is a little more light-hearted in tone, if not in concern. The satiric element is more dominating. If you are living in gruesome conditions, you have to develop a certain sense of humour, sometimes a satiric humour, to be able to look at reality. If you live in grim conditions, this grimness can destroy you. But if you put on a mask through which you are able to apparently laugh, then this can be another psychological prop.

How do you assess the role of Amnesty International and other organizations who worked for your release?

Somehow in prison I did learn about a committee founded in London asking for my release and that of the other political detainees. This was a tremendous source of encouragement. Oppressive regimes like to oppress, but they also like to adopt a mask for the outside. So it is a bit frightening to them when they find that nobody believes in their sort of liberalism, democracy and common sense. This kind of solidarity in support of political prisoners is so vital and necessary. A letter to the oppressive regime or to one’s own government to ask them to express concern may seem a small thing, but it may make the oppressive regime uneasy although it does not appear so on the surface.

What is the current situation in Kenya vis-à-vis human rights?

Several people have been detained. They are defence lawyers, journalists and university lecturers. The repression is more organized, more ruthless than at any time in the post-independence history of Kenya. One hopes that international opinion is roused against these arrests.

How do you look upon your own situation?

As a writer from the Third World I am condemned to continue to voice the cries of protests.
Under the city
the real life runs
secretly pounding
the blood’s old drum;
it’s there beneath
that all lives meet
who diverge above,
separate, discreet.

That man who passes,
sidestepping, shy,
there murders all
before his eyes;
the labourers labouring,
exhausted, tamed,
there rape the ladies,
torture, maim

The limbs, the lives
they often curse
but never could
begin to pierce;
and all this flesh
of every sullen hue,
there is bludgeoned
black and blue;

And all lives divided
that stare you through,
there meet their other,
pay what’s due
for passing, re-passing,  
with their skew stare  
past those who cast back  
one more dead glare.

— It’s this that makes  
these streets unreal,  
the facades facades,  
that makes eyes steal;  
it’s this, not commerce,  
not the traffic flow  
that animates these lives,  
drives them below

To where the real life  
has its secret way,  
where the dream behind it  
has full sway  
and all are coupled  
by the same ill:  
rejected, rejecting,  
man wants to kill.

HISTORY

Perhaps it was some fault in him,  
one which he could never fathom,  
that he could never once believe  
what others said must surely be,  
that the dawn at last was coming  
and with its millenium bringing  
an end to history, that ill time  
of repeated misery, perpetual crimes.

Perhaps it was from a fault in him  
which he went on and on repeating
that he foresaw the longed-for dawn
as merely prisoner of another dusk,
that he knew only man would prevail
still ignorant, injuring, failing,
that man would endure, like him,
as that creature always ailing.

Perhaps it was this fault in him
that he could never fathom them,
that he saw that dream of others
as mere reflex of a wretchedness,
that he saw that mania for its own
end, history's bloodiest passion,
ever leading to a bloodless dawn,
but to a misery, teaching compassion.

KEVIN GREEN

Politics and Xavier Herbert's Women

In all his novels, from *Capricornia* to *Poor Fellow My Country*, Xavier Herbert presents us with women opposed to and thwarting men in situations which end in tragedy. This is most obvious in *Soldiers' Women* but it is also present in *Seven Emus*. My first aim in this article will be to show that these surface resemblances reflect certain preoccupations common to all Herbert's novels and which are also present in such Australian classics as *Such Is Life* and *Coonardoo*. My second aim will be to suggest why such a continuous tradition should have gone unrecognised.

In 1960, referring to the genesis of the theme of *Soldiers' Women*, his only novel devoted to an all white society, Herbert talked of what he had
seen while on Army leave during World War II, when he had been struck by 'the general behaviour of women without the customary domination of men'. Sergeant Blackstock, a surprisingly perceptive grazier when discussing politics, echoes this attitude when he laments 'the way our women have gone since we've been away'. Possession and physical domination seem to be fundamental to this very male-centred view, which seems to be so obvious as to need no discussion.

In his critical monograph devoted to Herbert, Professor Heseltine comments that *Soldiers' Women* is outside the mainstream of Australian literature and has, therefore, attracted little critical attention. He notes further that the 'sexually confident, mated male is, with one exception, completely banished' from this war-time novel and contrasts this with the 'virile masculinity which had dominated *Capricornia*'.

We might suppose that there are no 'sexually confident' men in *Soldiers' Women* because they are all at the war but an attentive reading shows that there never have been many and certainly not in the families that most retain our attention, the La Plantes, the Batts and Mrs Ida Fry. Herbert gives us his own analysis of the tensions which destroy the Batt family: Dr Dickey, having listened to Pudsey's fears, hopes and hates, describes the situation as 'that most fascinating of human problems, the Electra complex' (*SW*, p.234).

This diagnosis, while we may consider it clumsily forced on the reader's attention and while it certainly helps us understand Pudsey in her conflict with her mother for her father's love, cannot help us in our analysis of Mrs La Plante's relationships with her family. It is true that Mrs La Plante also dominates her daughter but here there is no struggle for a father's love; Mr La Plante is at the front and has, in fact, never counted for much, even in the eyes of his daughter.

We find in Mrs La Plante two different elements: a certain confusion of sexual identity and, more importantly, a pathological form of maternal attitudes. Herbert insists on her mannishness, in her hair style, her speech and in her dress, and this should not be seen as merely reflecting war-time circumstances, for Mrs La Plante has illustrious predecessors. In *Such Is Life*, Furphy's Nosey Alf also dresses as a man and not simply because this makes her work easier. Beautiful Molly Cooper has become Nosey Alf since this allows her both to avoid the problems met after being disfigured by a kick from a horse and to escape from the dependent position she had known as a woman (Molly's fiancé deserted her after she had lost her beauty). In this, she has reacted realistically to the platitude which Furphy twice includes in his narrative. At the very beginning. Willoughby quotes Mme de Staël to the effect that a man
can be ugly, whereas, as Collins complacently tells Nosey Alf at the end of the novel (SL, p.323), a woman's job is to be beautiful.

In this wholly male world, the sexual stereotypes are clear and Molly Cooper merely obeys the dominant prejudices in becoming a 'man'. We can also see that the moustache, which Collins considers the distinctive sign of the true Australienne, gives the bush workers a sense of security precisely because the woman is thus seen as being less different, less feminine, less menacing to the practical, democratic but sexually unsure inhabitants of Furphy's Riverina.  

Again, in K.S. Prichard's Coonardoo, Mrs Bessie Watt, finding herself in sole charge of Wytaliba after her husband's death, dresses, apparently naturally, in a pair of trousers and an old hat of her husband's, since she works like a man, organising and directing the operations of the station. Thus, Mrs La Plante's dress and organising drive could be seen as a continuation of this style. They are, however, symptoms of something much graver.

Materkins talks of moulding a man, 'bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, a masculine projection of myself created by myself...' (SW, p.333). She refuses not only the moral autonomy of others, whether son or grandson, but she also refuses to recognise their physical otherness. Mrs La Plante imagines a continuing physical dependence at the same time as she tries to subsume her son's personality into her own. The umbilical cord has not and never will be cut, at least if she has her way.  

We can now also see why there can be no Electra complex in the La Plante family. The Oedipal situation involves jealous rivalry (normally unconscious) between a child and a parent of the same sex for the parent of the opposite sex (Electra's hatred of Clytemnestra, Oedipus' supplanting Laios). This jealousy can arise only when the child is aware of its separate identity, which is precisely what Mrs La Plante tries to prevent. Herbert presents us with a pre-oedipal situation where the conflict turns on the mother's desire to dominate, not on the child's burgeoning sexuality.  

Again, Mrs La Plante is not the first fictional Australian to exhibit these symptoms, though she is certainly the most extreme example. Already we have seen that Mrs Bessie Watt, 'Mumae' to the natives, had directed the mustering and gelding of the brumbies running on Wytaliba. The Aborigines have caught something of the ambiguity of Mumae's role in the name they give her, originally simply their transformation of Hugh's 'Mummy'.  

'Mumae', however, means 'father' in the local language and for the natives Mumae has been both mother and father to Hugh, as well as master of the station and, significantly, an
equal of the elders of the tribe, as she proves when she changes the tribe's marriage rules, sweeping aside all the totemic considerations which rule the group's life, because they do not fit in with her plans (C, pp.3-16). Only Joey Koonarra feels entitled to talk to Mumae as a man and as an equal and then because he is 'the oldest man in the camp'.

What is striking here is less a widow's courage in battling on alone and more the fact that she unmans all the men except Koonarra, since only he is consistently recognised as being one. The implication of Prichard's narrative is that the kinship and marriage laws determine the social status and role not only of the women but also of the men, i.e. who can marry whom, who can communicate with whom; in Lévi-Straussian terms, the norms of acceptable discourse within the community. By sweeping aside this framework, Mumae refuses to acknowledge the Aborigines' autonomy, reducing both men and women to the status of inarticulate children.

As she is dying, Mumae tries to give her son her final advice, telling him she does not want him to take a gin but would rather he took a black girl than an unsuitable white one (C, p.58). Moreover, she recognises that she had been unable to find a girl (i.e. a white girl) for him. At the same time, she has told Coonardoo that she will come back, in the form of a white cockatoo, to haunt her, should she not look after Hugh properly.

It is scarcely surprising that, after such contradictory advice, Hugh reacts badly to his mother's death and the rest of his life is predictable: marriage to virtually the first white girl he sees, who finally abandons him, refusing to stay on the station. Earlier, Hugh had repressed 'every finer, less reasonable instinct' (had refused Coonardoo as a source of love) and at the end of the novel, the natives talk of her as the well in the shadow, the source of life, whose banishment/repression by Hugh had put a 'blight on the place' — and on Hugh.

This Jungian reading is obviously interesting but should not obscure the fact that Coonardoo is presented in the first instance as a 'real' woman. Hugh recognises her as such when, regretting that he has not accompanied his half-caste son to look for his mother, he admits that he has not got the 'spunk' to go with him (C, p.192). Hugh realises that he has been unmanned, by his wife who has left after an argument over Coonardoo but fundamentally by his mother, who had never let him develop naturally, never let go of him.

Thus we see that Mrs La Plante is not the first mother in Australian literature to have tried to remain in control of her son's development but she is far more successful (and destructive) than Mrs Watt. One strand
which runs right through *Soldiers' Women* is devoted to Mrs La Plante's determination to have and to rear a male descendant. If Materkins is so obsessed with the idea of having a son or grandson, while reducing to impotence not only her son but most of the men with whom she deals, it is because her social role differs significantly from that played by Mrs Watt. Whereas the latter is able to assume full responsibility for running her station, Mrs La Plante is in a more typically Australian setting where women are accorded an exclusively domestic role. That Herbert accepts this role stereotype in *Soldiers' Women* is clear when we consider those women of whom the narrator (clearly an authorial spokesman) approves, Selena Linnet and her friend Erica.

Selena, whose name indicates her close affinity with the cyclic patterns of nature, and Erica are presented as petite earth mothers. Fat and maternal, both are content to remain, surrounded by children and animals, 'keeping the home fires burning', as Erica herself says (*SW*, p.30). A woman's place is in the home; her job is to remain faithful to her husband and to have children, not to ask abstract questions about the purpose of life or to play an active role in the wider world. This essentially conservative view of the woman as a 'goddess of the hearth' is justified in Herbert's mind, since only thus can women respect their truly feminine, mammalian nature (*SW*, pp. 166, 466).

It is against the background of this attitude, made explicit only in *Soldiers' Women* but widely accepted in Australia (at least until quite recently), that we must understand Mrs La Plante's rage. Frustrated in her desire to think and work to the full extent of her capacities, she realises that she can 'achieve' only through a man. Hence her original love for her son has been doubly transformed into an aggressive drive to use men to achieve vicariously what they refuse her personally. The possessive mother love which we found in *Coonardoo* and which becomes a striving for total domination in *Soldiers' Women*, is distorted by an urge which J.S. Mill analysed in his *Subjection of Women* and which Herbert explicitly recognises in *Seven Emus*.

Mill saw women as capable of wielding a 'psychic power', of projecting their personal dissatisfaction or bitterness onto their children as a compensation for their material powerlessness or dependence. In describing Appleby Gaunt, Herbert writes, in a striking passage, '...one can't help seeing him, in his beginnings, as a child of limited opportunity but of strong sense of superiority instilled into him by a mother possessed of the same strong sense ... the mother could even blame the father, along with the rest of the unappreciative world, for limiting her and her children, and to her children could transmit a very active idea of their
superior inheritance... Here we have all the elements which Mill was the first English thinker to see and which Freud (who translated Mill's essay into German) and others have developed in the various forms of analytic theory. While it is outside the scope of this study to enter into the detail of conflicting analytic theories, it is not adequate to consider that Mrs La Plante is simply suffering from 'penis envy', as classical Freudian — and phallocentric — interpretations might suggest."

Firstly, her attitudes to her son would seem, even in Freudian terms, to be blocked at a pre-oedipal level. Both Fortitude and any son he may have are treated as children to be made, 'formed', 'moulded'. It is almost as if Mrs La Plante considers them as foetuses still being formed in her womb. Secondly, her attitudes, like those of Gaunt's mother, derive from a social reality, the limited intellectual role allowed to Australian women. This, while far from being limited to Australia, is nevertheless sufficiently marked in that country to have given rise to an abundantly documented literature. Thirdly, a reductive, psychoanalytic interpretation of *Soldiers' Women* does not do full justice to the ethical messages of the light house in Herbert's narrative, as we shall see below.

The third major influence we shall study from *Soldiers' Women* is Mrs Ida Fry, who differs significantly from Mrs Batt and Mrs La Plante in two ways. Firstly, she is the daughter of one of the few dominant men mentioned in the novel. Much of her life can be seen, in fact, as a reaction to the austerity of her upbringing and — and this is the more important difference — she has become something of a *femme fatale*, using clothes and make-up not for what Herbert considers their legitimate ends (to find and keep a husband) but to express her desire to subjugate men, rather than have any sort of sharing relationship with them.

Ida is also the experienced woman initiating others into her glittering world of elegance and sexual liberty — for Herbert, the two are linked — and if she does not actually kill any men, she is directly or indirectly responsible, the author makes clear, for the deaths of Pudsey, Felicia and her own children. Ida and Mrs La Plante are the most extreme versions of a destructive woman in Herbert's fictional world but not the first. He had already looked at this inversion of what is for him the normal man-woman relationship in *Capricornia*, where the Shillingsworth brothers, far from being dominant and virile, are, throughout the novel, dominated by, or running away from, women.

At the beginning, Oscar takes Mark with him to Pt Zodiac only because their mother had insisted on it. Later, Oscar begins to lie and change his life style partly to get on in his job but mainly to please the
nurses at the Government hospital. Very quickly, this transformation is so complete that Oscar, having married Jasmine Poundamore (a nurse), is hardly a Shillingsworth any more but rather has been converted into another member of the Poundamore family.\textsuperscript{13}

Later, Jasmine deserts her husband whom she ridicules as being old, wooden and 'flaccid' (\textit{Cap.}, p.39) and unwilling or unable to keep up with the social whirl. We see, then, that Oscar is quickly reduced to impotence, both psychic and sexual (he is 38 years old at this point of the narrative) by a dominating wife who has despaired of achieving her aims through him. The patterns discernible in \textit{Soldiers' Women} had already been prefigured in \textit{Capricornia} and will find more complex echo in the life of Jeremy Delacy in \textit{Poor Fellow My Country}, where Rhoda finds respectability if not satisfaction with Sir Clement Eaton.\textsuperscript{14} Delacy, after being abandoned by his wife, marries Nanago, who is sterile as is Rifkah Rosen, with whom he falls in love (and whom he sees as a sort of Mother Goddess, Koonapippi and Rebecca, mother of Israel in one). Alfie Candlemas, who is both a sexual and an ideological temptress for Delacy, is also sterile but intellectually so. She seduces him into politics and then into her bed, before he is left, disillusioned and threatened with physical castration as a result of injuries received in a political riot in the Sydney Domain. To underline the sterility Herbert sees both in her and in her Fascist cause despite Alfie's personal seductiveness (no male who comes close to her in the novel can resist her), neither her baby nor her book comes to term before, abandoning everything, she tries to flee the country.

Delacy is interesting, however, not because he conforms to the patterns of the dominated or rejected male which we have already seen, but because of his philosophy of sexuality, which he explains at the beginning and near the end of the novel. When he tries to make clear what he means by the 'power of the mind' (\textit{PF}, p.25), he does so in the general context of 'charada' or love magic and of the rules which govern the choice of marriage partners, rules which, Delacy explains, the Earth Mother originally entrusted to women. Delacy comes back to this, his major and most consistent preoccupation, at the end of \textit{Poor Fellow My Country} and again he juxtaposes the development of human intelligence and the idea of sexual restraint. Delacy (and again there is no significant reason not to see him as an authorial voice in this passage), after a detailed and erudite discussion of Aboriginal marriage law, initiation practices and the sexual regulation exercised by women to maintain social stability, calmly says that he is 'not concerned with blackfellow business ... except to exemplify this idea that's struck [him] regarding the
root causes of differences between [whites] that the blackman doesn't suffer' (*PF*, pp.1304-5).

This apparently startling disclaimer on Delacy/Herbert's part which is, in fact, a key to the architecture of Herbert's life work, must be interpreted in the light of a comment by Professor George Steiner on Lévi-Strauss' work in cultural anthropology. The *moraliste*, says Steiner, uses 'primitive cultures ... as a tuning fork against which to test the discord of his own milieu'.

We can now understand the profound value of Herbert's 'Aboriginal matter', from *Capricornia* to *Poor Fellow My Country*, the analogous role of the lighthouse in *Soldiers' Women* and also much of the autobiographical material he has used in all his works, the ghosts he has tried to exorcise in his writing.

Herbert's interpretation of the woman's role in Aboriginal society is of interest to us mainly because it restates, in Aboriginal dress, the idea expressed by the lighthouse in *Soldiers' Women* that 'Female virtue is no accident. It is inherent in the womb for the protection of the species' (*SW*, p.265). For Herbert, female virtue and, by consequence, social stability are literally associated with the womb, since a woman who remains faithful to her cyclic nature will not only be herself healthier, more balanced but will also introduce into society that degree of measure needed to control 'a world made mad for ever by man's ... sex-hunger and ... indulgence...,' as the narrator makes explicit in bringing out the link between moon and measure (*SW*, p.145). For Herbert, women's role is active; they are to be intermediaries between men and nature. He sees them less as objects of exchange (as Lévi-Strauss suggests in his parallel between language and marriage rules) and more as interpreters.

Yet we find an ambivalence in Herbert's normally pessimistic attitude towards men when he develops his notion of a woman's 'ripe' times, put forward by Madeleine (a woman off the land) and repeated in a long authorial comment at the end of the novel. Herbert is forced to recognise that even such a woman as Selena can be 'inclined to indiscretion (sic) under the influence of the hormonic tide ... the waxing of her patroness, the moon' (*SW*, pp. 392-3). Faced with the need to admit the double nature of women's influence, source of both order and disorder, just as the Aborigines have recognised that the moon provokes 'wrong-side' love (*PF*, p.24), Herbert is driven to say that 'concern for the ... moral rules was really the duty of Adam ... during the period of [woman's] greatest vulnerability (sic)' (*SW*, p.393).

This passage clearly indicates a certain confusion or even fear on Herbert's part; at the end of his investigations into the relationships
between responsibility, including sexual self-control, and social stability, Herbert finds there is no simple, universal answer. Yet, despite repeated failure in this quest, he has persisted and this very obstinacy suggests that the roots of his search are much deeper than his (very real) intellectual curiosity.

Herbert gives us two important clues to these roots; the first in an article published in 1962, where he says that the deep motive of Capricornia was the father/son relationship. The second clue is contained in his autobiography, where he says that his 'all-abiding problem' is his relationship with his father, whom he sees as a threatening, bull-like beast. All of this would seem to suggest a Freudian interpretation of Herbert's development in terms of a classical Oedipal conflict between a dominating father and a threatened son. Yet a close reading of Disturbing Element shows a man frequently obliged by his work to be absent from home, almost entirely his wife's creature or child when he is there and aware of it (DE, pp.1-19).

Here we see, in Herbert's own family memories, most of the destructive elements he condemns in his fiction. To the author's youthful vision, his father had been emasculated by a 'flesh and blood harpy in his bed' (DE, p.104). To the young school boy, overwhelmed by the surge of his pubertal sexuality and 'yearning and weeping' after his father, to whom he looks in vain for guidance, the realisation that his father is as 'helpless' and as 'emasculate' as he himself is, is shattering (DE, p.105). Women and especially his own mother, whom he feels he should but cannot love, are seen as castrating monsters or 'succubi' (DE, p.104; cf. PF, p.556).

Unable to admit to hating and fearing his mother, young Herbert feigns excessive filial love (DE, pp. 12, 48) and, still conscious of the physical terror his father had inspired in him, he finds in the notion of the Oedipal father/son conflict an expression of his predicament both scientifically respectable and, we suggest, more in conformity with the Australian myth of the dominant male, than would have been a less phallocentric interpretation. We should insist that we are not concerned with what may be called the 'objective truth' of Herbert's childhood; our interest is in how he remembers it and how similar material may reappear in his fiction. This may lead us, as here, to re-evaluate Herbert's own beliefs about his life.

Herbert had also seen continence or 'self-control' as necessary to his becoming a man and essential if he wanted to become an artist, to give full expression to his literary talent. In Disturbing Element, he claims that this is the correct allegoric interpretation of his school-boy story, The Speaking Fish (DE, p.107). He felt that he had to learn 'subli-
mation of sexual energy' in order to preserve his creative gift and he has publically recorded that he felt an imperative need to remain absolutely continent while he was writing Soldiers' Women; he could not let his wife 'do the Delilah' on him. 21 Again, we suggest that it misses the point to introduce the notion of an 'internalised oedipian father' as Pons does, 22 when the author himself has given us the image of a woman, which is more consistent with the tenor of his writings, both fictional and non-fictional.

These authorial revelations serve to underline the tragedy of Pudsey who, instead of being helped to develop her creative talent, is led into prostitution and then to her death through lack of both moral and artistic guides. Similarly, we see that Prindy's failure to 'resist' Savitra's 'charada' had, in Herbert's universe, cost him his creativity before it finally cost him his life. Total continence, freely accepted, is the only feature shared by the characters Herbert most seems to approve: Brew, Bob Wirridirridi and Bickering in Poor Fellow My Country and Leon in Soldiers' Women.

Though this article is devoted to a study of the influence of wives and mothers, it is instructive, for a fuller understanding of Herbert's attitudes to sexuality in general, to consider Mark Shillingsworth's reactions when Heather Poundamore tearfully rejects him (Cap., p.32). Mark spends the next thirty years with a mate, Chook Henn. Since mateship is regarded as a fundamental virtue in the mythology of many Australians, it is particularly interesting to see how Herbert treats this theme in the lives of Mark and Chook.

Firstly, Henn's Dickensian surname, which spontaneously evokes his nickname, also indicates a basically feminine personality, which Herbert underlines in a number of ways. When Mark is ill, Henn is his 'kind nurse' (Cap., p.23); later, when Mark toys with the idea of marrying Heather, Chook frets over the news as over an impending bereavement. Rejected, Mark goes back to the 'delighted' Chook.

Herbert's language suggests not a homosexual relationship, in the sense the word has in ordinary speech but, rather, almost a mother/son relationship. Chook Henn (Mother Hen) is jealous and possessive and Heather, who returns to Capricornia in the hope of seeing Mark, recognises that as long as Chook is around, she will not be able to counteract his influence (Cap., p.314). Mark leaves his property to Chook, who goes to gaol partly to save the cost of living by himself but partly also to be with Mark. When, moreover, Herbert points out explicitly that Henn is a contralto (Cap., p.289; cf. SL, p.321), the ambiguity of their relationship becomes obvious. Finally, Mark goes back to Heather permanently only after Chook has drunk himself to death (Cap., pp. 354, 84).
It is not, then, a conscious choice that brings Mark to prefer Heather to Chook but rather the latter's death. This would seem to corroborate the maternal nature of Henn's role, as would the fact that during Chook's lifetime, Mark had not only been Heather's occasional lover but had taken different Aboriginal mistresses. The nature of Mark and Chook's attachment is not sexual but emotional and it takes the death of the 'parent' to free the 'child'.

It would seem, then, that the intensity of Herbert's preoccupations stems from his reactions to his childhood and adolescence. We cannot, however, reject as being too idiosyncratic his imaginative universe dominated not by the images of masculinity and virility typical of Australian popular mythology but by disturbing images of menacing and destructive women since, as we have seen, they are heightened versions of figures which have exercised the imagination of a number of significant Australian writers, especially men. Further, while such clusters of images can be read from a Freudian or Jungian point of view, they do not necessarily indicate neurotic or other pathological situations. They belong, in varying degrees of intensity, to most people's experience and can equally validly be read from a literary or other point of view.

What is significant is the way in which Herbert has made more explicit some of the elements of the uneasiness which women have inspired in Australian novels and has gone beyond this to see the formative role which women could (and, for him, should) play in the social and educational and therefore political development of that poor fellow, his country.

NOTES

1. 'I Sinned Against Syntax', Meanjin, 19, 1960, p.32.
2. Soldiers Women, St Albans, Panther. 1972 (1st ed., 1961), p.283. All further references are to the 1972 edition and are included in the text under the abbreviation SW.
5. A full treatment of this subject would go beyond the scope of this paper but women with moustaches continue to haunt the Australian imagination. In White's The Aunt's Story, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1976 (1948), Theodora Goodman's sister and brother-in-law are embarrassed when confronted with Theodora's real moustache and in The Twyborn Affair, Penguin, 1981 (1979), the child Eddie Twyborn and adult Curly Golson react very strongly to Mrs Twyborn's false one; sexual ambiguity continues to threaten 'normality'.


12. See, among other titles:


19. See, in this respect, 'I Sinned Against Syntax', art. cit., p.32, '...I was left at the mercy of women during my father's absence at World War I'.


21. 'I Sinned Against Syntax', art. cit., p.33. Jeremy Delacy comes back to a similar argument to justify his rejection of Nanago, when he talks of women '...sharing ... Emasculating the male...' (P.F. 1296).


SUMMER ON A DOUBLE DECKER BUS WITH THE BEAUTY

You are whistling she says to me You are beautiful inside.
Down the centre of the bus
I'm fighting their armpits
sharp as a privet hedge.
You can be outside, too. She tells me
about tissue-firming thought
and how my eyes will sing
for life.

The turbanned and hairless head,
her powdered neck, return
to her notes. I think as I pass
she arranges parcels and legs
around the threadveined knees.
I am Miss Finland nineteen thirty three she says, almost breathless
with the heat, and I know.

THE DARK FROG PRINCE

I have opened my door
to the dark frog prince.
He has eaten at my table.
I have searched out
the crying whites of his eyes
in his cot in the night.
He has slept on my pillow.
I have borne for him,
with no right,
the gush of shopping women
Come here you gorgeous bar
of dark chocolate: I
could eat you!
I have kissed him.
I have preferred him
to the surprising
child of my body;
I have thrown him against the wall.
I have forgotten he is a prince;
he is a frog.

YOU'RE KISSING ME AGAIN

You're kissing me again
it's spring and I'm
striding upside down
in ditch water.
All winter long we've killed
the house with our watching silence,
I've been talking
to the soft nails of snow on my tongue.
I've let secrets
blow with the clouds
like a burst of my own language
in a country of strangers,
but now the sky is blue
and pointless and I can't wait:
though you say you're coming out,
I'm going to bring
these words indoors.
The Savage Crows:  
A Personal Chronology

I arrived in Western Australia to live as a six-year-old child in 1949. The plane from Melbourne — where I was born and where my father was a young up-and-coming executive with the Dunlop Rubber Company — was a DC-6. With stops in Adelaide and Kalgoorlie for fuel, the journey took 12 hours. My mother thought we were going to the end of the world; my grandparents did too and our departure from Melbourne was a very tearful one — at least for the adults. My mother was widely thought of among her friends as very 'brave' for agreeing to set up house in Perth. Certainly in 1949 the prospect of living in Perth, WA, was not one to excite wild envy among the eastern Australian middle class. The burghers of Melbourne thought of WA, if at all, as wilderness — sand and snakes and a sea-coast bordering on quite the wrong ocean, the Indian Ocean, not the benign Pacific that they knew. God, what was next? Africa and Asia and all those sorts of places. My uncle Jack, drinking beer with my father before our departure, amiably but rather tactlessly announced that Perth was the arse-end of the earth. The look from my father, presumably excited at being entrusted with the position of assistant State manager of the Dunlop Rubber Company, was ferocious.

I remember vividly our arrival in Perth. It was about 10 p.m., quite dark and we stayed the night at the home of another company employee, a fat, jocular, teasing man. Before I went to bed he took my brother and me to the window and pointed outside to the darkness. 'There are blackboys out there watching you,' he said, ominously.

It took my brother and me, despite our fatigue, a long time to get to sleep. Next morning we learned that the 'blackboys' were, in fact, a species of grass-tree very common in Western Australia, a form of local vegetation with a black trunk and a bristly head. It was my first example, that I can remember, of the laconic Australian sense of humour, also of the benign form of racism that I have come to associate with Western Australia.
Both conditions have had a strong influence on me: the black humour on the one hand and the hyper-sensitivity to racism directed against the Aborigines, on the other. Both conditions, as it happens, are aired fairly thoroughly in my first novel, *The Savage Crows*, and much of it relates to WA. I thought I would discuss that novel today, despite a vague feeling of enchantment at re-examining the book eight years later, as it is possibly the only one you have had the opportunity to read.

It might be of passing interest to anyone here who has read *The Savage Crows* for me to reveal that my original title was *The Genocide Thesis*. I conceived the novel with this title and it remained the title throughout the six months of research and twelve months it took me to write it, right past the galley proof stage. It became *The Savage Crows* at the death-rattle, as it were; at the last stage of publication.

Naturally I saw the original title as representing my intentions as clearly as I thought possible and that the two threads of a novel called *The Genocide Thesis*, the 19th century story and the 20th century story, had a different emphasis and confluence in a book called *The Savage Crows*.

The story of Stephen Crisp — from the cradle to that time in life when the horror of returning to the dust from whence he came begins to torment him — was well served by the original title. Crisp, despite his being — as the doyen of Australian historians, Professor Manning Clark described him — a man 'with a perpetual uproar in the trousers', begins his research at that point in his life when, as Professor Clark says, 'like the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, he has seen all the evil done under the sun, and is almost ready to say that all is vanity and vexation of spirit'.

Perhaps Crisp himself would put it more trenchantly than that, but obviously he is obsessed with mortality.

A brief example of what I am getting at: The stripping of Crisp, the modern protagonist, of paternity and progeny, not to mention fraternity, I would have thought provided an obvious parallel to the condition of the Tasmanian Aborigines, a unique and separate race who were wiped out by the early English settlers within one generation. It seems to have escaped notice by reviewers — the only feedback an author has — so perhaps the hammer-blow of the original title would have nudged them a bit.

If I am still moaning about it, why was the title changed? Because Williams Collins, my publishers in London and Sydney, thought the reading public would imagine *The Genocide Thesis* was either (a) an academic tract or (b) another book on Hitler, and presumably stay away in droves.
A first novelist stands on very shaky ground, so, after some heated argument, with the author declining some suggested alternatives from the publisher like *A White Horse Gallops Darkly* or some such obscurely poetic title from the Oxford Book of Quotations, I decided on *The Savage Crows*. It was, after all, the name of George Augustus Robinson's fictitious book, and a chapter title already, and it pleased everybody — especially them.

Nowadays I think it is a good, perhaps even better, title, and anyway I found the insight into the power and thinking of book salesmen very useful.

Back to the personal chronology of *The Savage Crows*. The story of the Tasmanian Aborigines had been on my mind for about twenty years, ever since I visited Melbourne Museum as a nine or ten-year old and saw a display of their relics. I remember seeing a photograph of William Lanney, the Last Man, and Truganini, the last woman and Tasmanian of either sex, and a few frayed and chipped shell trinkets, and another photograph of Aborigines, with faces quite unlike those I was used to seeing around Perth, lined up on Flinders Island where they had been exiled in the mid-19th century. They were waiting to die, passively frowning, dressed up in English suiting and smoking pipes, men and women alike.

The fact that this episode of our history was deliberately kept out of our school history books by generations of English history-attuned Australian educators also irritated me over the years. Later, as a journalist, I gained a first-hand experience of prejudice against Aborigines, and their general condition in Australian society. Eventually I came to see the subject as the complete Australian backdrop. More than that I saw it as the backdrop of the wider novel I wanted to write. With all the brashness of the youthful writer I applied to the then embryonic Literature Board of the Australia Council and was awarded a literary fellowship. I was probably lucky that two members of that first board, the chairman, Geoffrey Blainey, and Manning Clark, the Australian historians, were not averse to the fictional proposition I was putting forward. Anyway, it changed my life. I left my job as a newspaper columnist and literary editor of *The Australian* newspaper and became a fiction writer.

Immediately I became aware of the difficulties of combining fact and fiction. Not only did the historical research take longer than I had imagined, but the facts were soon in danger of creating a momentum of their own and diverting me from my course. As the gothic pile of bodies grew and grew I worried that I would end up writing the sort of thesis that obsessed Stephen Crisp. Or a sort of Australian *Bury My Heart at
Wounded Knee which I patently didn’t want, as important as these sorts of consciousness-raising exercises might be.

My intention was to try and get Australia whole (which sounds extraordinarily pretentious as I say this nine years later) to capture the bland, blunt-edged randomness of our period — as evidenced by Crisp’s life and travels and contemporaries in Western and Eastern Australia — and to show the civilization with which we have replaced the life of the Aborigines.

Boiling down my intentions even further, they were, I suppose, to write a novel about guilt, certainly an old enough theme. In this case guilt with a capital G, conscious and sub-conscious guilt, guilt on a personal and national scale, working through one man’s private guilts to the most guilt-inducing incident in our short two centuries of history — the genocide of the Tasmanians.

This, to me, was the Australian story.

What I am about to say now might seem at loggerheads with all that. For the late 20th century liberal writer there is a problem here, especially for the writer of an Australian novel which takes up the country’s most important social issue, as The Savage Crows does.

Despite its having within it what could be crudely described as a ‘message’, I must say, and this may be misinterpreted, that the general improvement of society and even the betterment of social conditions within our own flawed and fortunate country, while of daily personal concern to me, is not my basic general motivation as a fiction writer.

This is a constant conflict, in this novel and other writing I have done, but I still believe I choose, as John Updike calls it, ‘accuracy of execution over nobility of purpose’.

For what it’s worth, I am much more at home with challenging rather than propounding ideology. I might add, however, that if my novels — and the second one, A Cry in the Jungle Bar, is deeply involved in Asia, have any social value at all, I think this would be strengthened, not lessened, by this position.

Returning to the chronology of The Savage Crows, I was going to freely interpret the historical data and not be bound unduly by factual restrictions. I didn’t realise how hard a task I was setting myself. Most important was the problem of balancing and mingling fact and fiction within the 19th century sections. Obviously I wanted to write the novel on my terms, to fictionalise the historical passages, if you like. I did intend, however, to treat Robinson and Truganini honestly while allowing myself great freedom of imagination in reconstructing actual events.
This freedom of imagination, I am happy to say, nevertheless resisted two great and fashionable traps. The first was romanticising Truganini, of painting her as the noble ‘Princess’ of 19th century newspaper editorials. The second trap I resisted was the commercial one of throwing Robinson’s leech-covered Methodist thighs over her at every opportunity.

It is worth mentioning that Robinson never did write a book of his adventures in Tasmania, though he talked about doing so. The diaries he left behind, not surprisingly, generally showed him in an advantageous light as a courageous man of God, and admitted to few human frailties beyond hunger and exhaustion, certainly nothing of a carnal nature.

I felt I should presume that this would hold true in any book he wrote about himself, but as well as his fine motives I wanted to show his gradual decline into self-aggrandisement and hint at his sexual inclinations towards Truganini, his repressed sensuality and his ill-concealed and very human anger and jealousy when she ran off with other men.

Above all, I had to keep in mind that this was Stephen Crisp’s story rather than George Robinson’s. Certainly Crisp and Robinson could be seen as parallels. It is presumably clear to the reader, though only flickeringly to Crisp himself, that the altruistic colonial civil servant and the disenchanted television commentator are on a similar psychological track, and religious self-righteousness equates easily enough these days with agnostic intellectual arrogance.

Here I might point out that I deliberately made Crisp a TV reporter, not — simple mindedly — because I had myself been a journalist (in the print media actually) but because I saw the TV presentator of anchor-man as Modern Man, if you like. But I also saw him as our society’s equivalent of the petit-bourgeois colonial lay preacher, hectoring society at large with his opinions, his earnest superficiality, and having an influence far greater than his position in society would otherwise warrant.

On this point I’d like to briefly mention the differentiation between journalism and literature. Although you see on TV and read about what’s happening in the world, the Moro trial, the Falkland Islands affair, you can’t discover what’s happening humanly. Unless you pass it through your own soul, you can’t understand it. We live in this so-called Age of Communication, which comes in the form of distracting substitutes for reality. But the reality in these times comes from art. And Australians, unlike Europeans, live in a country that has, with a few exceptions, historically ruled art off limits.

It is hard to interest readers, because they’re not used to following the
human motion of character. The action and movement of the soul is not exciting. Their excitement level has shot sky high. One week the American president is shot, the next week the Pope. This would have caused a holy war two centuries ago, but not, especially in safe, isolated Australia, it only titillates the taste for sensation.

Seeing we are talking about Australian regionalism I should report to you that the scenes in the novel which took place in Western Australia did cause agitation, not to mention animosity, in some circles. Several localities and scenes were drawn more or less from life and I was intrigued, I guess, to give local readers even a momentary shock of identification.

I have a theory that West Australian readers, suffering from an overdose of local outback novels, are struck by such a welcome (or unwelcome) flash of recognition when a novel pops up using a provincial suburban background and familiar characters, that they are immediately convinced this is 'real life' and that the others, being full of sentiment, climate, saltbush and squatters, are what is meant by 'fiction'.

I say this because of the number of letters I received from female readers across Western Australia pointing out smugly who my fictional characters actually were. Perfect strangers accused me slyly of old relationships with women I had never heard of. Several commiserated on my squalid, slug-ridden apartment, my career failure and my loveless state and hoped things would get better for me. Interestingly, on the matter of the novel's attack on West Australian materialism or racism, there was no comment at all, neither for nor against my proposition.

I did use a fair amount of autobiographical material in The Savage Crows, as first novelists tend to, but not as much as West Australian readers imagine. The relationship between Stephen Crisp and his wife, and Crisp and Anna, his girlfriend, bore little resemblance to life. But much of the family scenes from the 1950s were only a minor variation on my childhood. I did also — and I was in my 20s then — share with Crisp the wish to pin life down, to 'get it all down, to codify experience, to try to understand everything starting with himself and working up to the nation'. Otherwise Crisp resembles me only in my worst, depressed, obsessive moments, which of course is hardly ever. It would not be true to say that the ultimate key to the novel lies in the life of the writer.

Actually, I could identify more with Richard Cullen, the buffalo expert who is the central character in A Cry in the Jungle Bar, my second novel, despite his greater age, conservatism, size and football ability. Maybe this is because he is an archetypal Australian, though far, I hope, from being a stereotype. He understands people even less than Crisp
does, and is doomed never to do so. They have in common the fact that they are both lustful Romantics rather than crass womanisers, and are consequently more easily disappointed.

I do share with my characters a pathetic need for our little slice of immortality, as Crisp called it — the sad wish to try to create something which may live after you. A sorry mixture of urgency, vanity and vulnerability enters into the novelist’s condition here, most novelists, in fact. When I have to pin down why I want to write novels it has a lot to do with the belief or hope that I have something to say that I fail to express satisfactorily in conversation — in person — either because I’m inarticulate, or lack the time and patience or worry about the listener’s boredom.

No doubt the wish to please one’s parents entered my life as early as it did both Crisp’s and Cullen’s, and remains forever as a desire to please the world. It does me good to know that James Joyce read all his reviews avidly, for example.

There is also, with me, as for other writers, the revenge motive. I guess in my case it is actually revenge against the Western Australia of the late 50s and early 60s. John Hawkes says: ‘Fiction should achieve revenge for all the indignities of our childhood. It should be an act of rebellion against the conventional pedestrian mentality around us.’ I’m with him there all the way.

Briefly, I operate something like this: I have an image of something that once happened to me, or affected me, or meant something to me. I then write it because I want it to be fixed, so that I can refer to it, build on it, and maybe so that I will not have to repeat it. Most of these things have to do with human relationships, sensuality under restraint, the irony of imperfect communications.

John Hawkes has an apt, if rather precious, metaphor for this — ‘of the writer serving as his own angleworm and fishing himself out of the darkness’. Kafka’s view was that a novel was an axe to break the frozen sea within us.

This frozen sea, if cracked in selected areas, thus becomes the Usable Past. Every fiction writers’ handbook mentions the Usable Past, certainly every fiction writer calls on it frequently. The first time I saw the expression I immediately thought: What about the Unusable Past, that sounds far more interesting.

What about the dirty, libellous, dangerous material? When, I wondered, does the unusable become usable? When it is cleaned up a bit? When it is censored? When does the child-beater of memory become merely a bad-tempered parent? When does your brother’s old crime become a prank? When does your sister’s teenage rape become a mild
assault? When does your mother’s falling-down alcoholism become change-of-life? I guess it all depends on the courage and/or brutal honesty of the writer. Either those factors or the fortunate demise of the character-to-be, in which case you’ll have to answer to him or her somewhere else and not, like me, every time I return to that most provincial and conservative place at the arse-end of the earth that I very much regard as my literary region.
Getting Away From It All

Australian folklore is often bundled together with some kinds of literature as part of the enterprise of seeking out distinctive national characteristics, but it's very different from the triumphalist vision of the 'Advance Australia Fair' kind of nationalism. If we look at collections like Bill Wannan's *The Australian*, we are struck by all the defeat and desperation, with people making the best of a bad lot, and with sad cow-ockies and various bush oddballs struggling to survive. I shall quote one joke as typical:

An old bagman was tramping across a station property, when the station owner appeared in his utility truck, travelling in the same direction.

'Like a lift?' the owner called out.

'No flamin' fear!' said the bagman. 'You open yer own gates.'

We notice here a wariness behind the deflating humour: both literally and metaphorically, the swaggie is not going to be taken for a ride. This attitude isn't really negative; 'defensive' or 'minimalist' would be better words to describe it, but it is not at all like the positive, confident optimism displayed in the literature of national aspiration. The two don't really come from the same stable, though they are usually thrown in together. Where, then, do they originate?

Settlers in new societies have, broadly speaking, two opposite impulses: one is the positive aim of creating a new world which is better than the old one, perhaps an improved replica of it, perhaps better because utterly different, but anyway the civilizing venture of founding a new society, even a new civilization, is invoked. The second impulse is to draw the opposite lesson: because the old world has failed, the emigrant is too world-weary to go through the struggle again. The reason for emigration is to remove himself from all society, not only in the old world, but from society in the new country as well. He wants to get it out of his hair once and for all. At the first sign of pressure, an instinctive tendency to withdraw and to shrink back into privacy and non-caring comes into play. Paradise consists in letting nothing start up. This is one way of
describing 'getting away from it all'. Perhaps the best description is found in D.H. Lawrence's Kangaroo:

Richard found he never wanted to talk to anybody, never wanted to be with anybody. He had fallen apart out of the human association..... This speechless, aimless solitariness was in the air. It was natural to the country. The people left you alone. They didn't follow you with their curiosity and their inquisitiveness and their human fellowship. You passed, and they forgot you. You came again, and they hardly saw you. You spoke, and they were friendly. But they never asked any questions, and they never encroached. They didn't care. The profound Australian indifference, which still is not really apathy. The disintegration of the social mankind back to its elements.  

Both impulses — to start afresh, and to retire from strife — have been apparent in Australia, and we oscillate between them. But their representation in both history and literature has not been in proportion to their respective strength and influence; I think that the impulse to withdraw has been more profound but less prominent. The first impulse is recorded in history and in much nationalist literature: the sons of the south will banish the old world errors and wrongs and lies, and will build a paradise here. There is the promise of a great and glorious future. Spontaneous improvement will make our land an exemplar to others. But the confident, optimistic temper of such beliefs can never provide a full explanation of Australian experience. Dad and Dave hardly exemplify it. Australia has been a harsh and disillusioning country as well as an enticing one, and over the decades a shoulder-shrugging, failure-absorbing temperament has been developed to meet these conditions. Phrases like 'she'll be apples' and 'no worries' cannot be elevated into patriotic slogans. The battler and the survivor are just as important as the Australia-promoter. Not everyone saw Australia as the last unspoiled land, the last chance for a new start. Others saw it as the last unspoiled wilderness, and wanted to retire and forget. But this movement has been recorded only intermittently in our literature.

We usually point to the reasons why people migrate as the main factor determining their attitude in a newly settled land. There are a number of good reasons why emigrants would see Australia as a refuge from the world:

Australia was at the other end of the earth. It was so far away that settlers had, in their minds, to make a permanent break — they would probably never go back, so they had to consciously blot out their past.
Australia's population had continually been replenished by people getting away from Europe's troubles. Last century, they came to avoid industrialization, famine and land clearances in the British Isles; after 1945 they came to get away from a war-torn Europe.

Now while there is a whole literature on reasons for migration, I want to pass over these factors quickly, in order to emphasize that what happened to immigrants and their descendants after they got here — irrespective of why they came — has been the greatest determining factor in producing the desire to see Australia as, in Kenneth MacKenzie's terms, *The Refuge*.

There are factors reasonably particular to Australia. In comparing our experience with the U.S.A., Graeme Turner has written: 'Theirs was a mission of hope, ours the ordeal of exile.' The United States was founded with a purpose, and its constitutional documents enshrine certain basic beliefs — 'We hold these truths...' and so on. But being a convict dump, no similar sense of purpose accompanied our foundation. Convicts hardly regarded Australia under its utopian aspect. George Dunderdale's description of 'the Government Stroke' in *The Book of the Bush* is a vivid example of this:

>'The Government Stroke' is a term often used in the colonies, and indicates a lazy and inefficient manner of performing any kind of labour. It originated with the convicts. When a man is forced to work through fear of the lash, and receives no wages, it is quite natural and reasonable that he should exert himself as little as possible. If you were to reason with him, and urge him to work harder at, for instance, breaking road metal, in order that the public might have good roads to travel on, and show him what a great satisfaction it should be to know that his labours would confer a lasting benefit on his fellow creatures; that, though it might appear a little hard on him individually, he should raise his thoughts to a higher level, and labour for the good of humanity in general, he would very likely say, 'Do you take me for a fool?'

'We see here the beginning of several traits common in Australian folklore: contempt for authority, indifference to the common good, improvisation at best and bludging at worst, a mortal fear of being taken for a ride, and a general scepticism and suspicion, all contained in the inverted humour of the phrase 'The Government Stroke'. In literature we have the creation of emancipated convict Judd in *Voss*. He has suffered a lot, and any easy optimism has long since been burned out of him. He is hard, flinty yet adaptable — Australia has reduced him to his elements. He survives, having 'lived beyond grief'. Judd is a type of the resigned
and undemonstrative early Australian produced by conditions in the colony.

Like the convict system, exploration failed to make the country cohere. In America, an emigrant moving across the country always knew he was heading somewhere. But on an island, there is only one way to go — inwards — and there was little or nothing in the middle. Once off the thin, fertile, coastal rim, things thinned out. This is one theme of Hope’s and McAuley’s poetry in the 1940s, and of Voss in the 1950s.

The traveller is always going away from somewhere, but never to anything. The vastness of the continent dissipated energies rather than concentrated them. The population was too thinly spread to counter these centrifugal pressures.

Following on exploration, we see in literature a restless moving on to find some remoter spot in which to live out one’s days untroubled. After alluvial gold ran out, most settled down on small farms or in provincial towns, but literature boosted the minority, the ‘Lone Hand’ fossicker following the rush that never ended. Similarly, when the small farms failed, most settled down in cities, but literature celebrated the minority who became itinerant outback workers. When the cities of the east coast were industrialized (that is, Europeanized), the search for yet unspoiled paradises went further afield — Lawson to W.A. and N.Z., E.J. Brady to Mallacoota, and finally some even went to Paraguay, which is just about as far away as you can get. There are images of this restless moving out in our folk mythology — like the idea of ‘The Black Stump’, which is always further out than you are at present, or the expression ‘Head for the Hills’ when there is danger (but the hills are hardly a refuge now, since they’re filled with iron, coal, bauxite, shale, oil, copper, etc. which a resource-deprived world now enviously casts its eyes upon).

The land, whether balmy or harsh, induced retreat and withdrawal; living in the great flat plains country made people unwind and forget their cares. You could easily lose yourself in it. The land exhausted you and evacuated your emotions. Only enough energy to keep yourself going was needed as you imperceptibly slowed down to its pace. Vance Palmer wrote of ‘the dreamy indolence of the day’. You retained a certain innocence by rejecting experiences outside your context. Retreat into a timeless present, with neither hope nor nostalgia, and amnesia about the rest, made life at worst bearable and at best quite pleasant. This is the atmosphere of many bush novels like The Passage and Working Bullocks, as well as Bean’s On the Wool Track about Western N.S.W. Today we feel this even more in the wheatlands country of Western Aus-
Australia. Furphy described the inland plains as 'grave, self-centred, subdued', qualities which not only describe the country but also those who inhabited and adapted to it.

But Australia was just as much, perhaps more, experienced as a harsh and difficult place which defeated those who tried to live in and farm it. Life in the bush often had an disintegrating effect on the personality, as we can see with Mrs Spicer in the Joe Wilson series:

She had an expression like — well, like a woman who had been very curious and suspicious at one time, and wanted to know everybody's business and hear everything, and had lost all her curiosity, without losing the expression or the quick suspicious movements of the head. I don't suppose you understand. I can't explain it any other way. She was not more than forty.

Being 'past caring' is an extreme or ultimate form of getting away from it all — you are too exhausted, beaten and weary to care. In general, we can say (and this applies to the city as well as the bush) that failure, and the disillusionment that went with it, blunted the optimism that many people brought to Australia. Such experiences produced many refugees from hope, and increased the numbers and influence of those who resigned themselves to a reduced life here. Vincent Buckley, in his introduction to Brian Matthews' book on Lawson The Receding Wave, has written of such people:

Often they were adults whom deprivation had made almost childish, or at least capable of entering easily into a child's peculiar seriousness. They were radically disappointed men, and they had had to learn humanity through endurance. The result was a mixture of stoicism, sadness, and a sense of decency tinctured with remoteness.

How different such people were from the raucous and extroverted image of the allegedly typical Australian.

I want now to describe three important characteristics of those who were 'grave, self-centred, subdued'. The first is the retreat back to the individual. Originally the whole country was to be independent, separate, self-sufficient (and so on); then this shrank back to the family farm, which was a cosy little world with the same qualities; then, after this failed, it shrank back further to the individual, who was to contain within himself these virtues, which were being denied elsewhere. But this retreat to the individual should not be confused with today's search for self-identity; it was not a bid to understand yourself, but a wish to discard the burden of consciousness itself. You were withdrawing into
yourself, but at the same time you were getting away from yourself. You dissolved the firm outlines of your personality by merging with the background and so losing yourself. Australia was release — release from the world, release from society, and ultimately release from the self. Lawrence has many images of this shedding of the self, 'the strange falling away of everything', the obliteration of consciousness.

The second characteristic follows on from the first. The desire for release from everything is not a carefully worked out view of the world or a set of propositions; it is not a point of view, but the absence of a point of view, and, even more importantly, the prevention of a point of view. Lawrence once again: 'They've got no will except to stop anybody else from having any.' To be 'past caring', to say, as Lawson does, 'It doesn't matter much. Nothing does', to believe that 'she'll be right, mate' and in general these attitudes of shoulder-shrugging resignation, are a form of blotting everything out; in its ultimate state, it is a constant, applied amnesia which prevents questions arising.

Various commentators have tried to fit such peculiar Australian attitudes into some ideology, such as romanticism, existentialism, nihilism, or modernism. But, however much elements of these may be present, it is not an intellectual position at all. Our 1890s writers weren't antipodean cousins of Dostoievsky and Kafka. Our writers faced a situation marked by the absence of power and social forces; the European writers became nihilists or existentialists because they were overwhelmed by an excess of power and social forces. Not to experience something is quite different from rejecting something you have experienced. We are told that Australian attitudes are cognate with Camusian existentialism. A phrase like 'It doesn't matter. Nothing does' goes against the whole tenor of Camus' life and writings, which was to keep trying to find meaning in a world which persistently refused to reveal a coherent answer. This has nothing in common with basking in the absence of answers. Using the vocabulary of the extremities of the European psyche over the past century imports an inappropriate angst into local attitudes, and may give them a spurious grandeur.

A third characteristic follows on from the first two, and that is: silence. If you are disillusioned, and have retreated and wish merely to survive, you lapse into silence. You have no position to expound, nor any urge to speak at all. You just sink back into yourself — and forget.

Now, why emphasize these characteristics - silence, and the lack of any ideological position or strong individual consciousness? Firstly, I think that many ordinary Australians came to be like this. We can think of
Stan and Amy Parker in *The Tree of Man* as people of this kind — not argumentative, gregarious, and full of great hopes and all sorts of views about the country, as the typical Australian is supposed to be, but fairly quiet, private, withdrawn and defensive. Such ordinary Australians constituted, in the literal sense of the phrase, 'the silent majority'.

Because they were silent, their experiences and their trials are underrepresented in the historical record. They are also underrepresented in literature. The nationalists were very articulate, they had many views, and they went into print a lot (and as a result we can read them today). They claimed to express the longings of ordinary Australians, and we have tended to take this claim at face value. But they may have been at the centre of things by self-acclaim. In temperament they were quite different from the ordinary Australians they claimed to represent.

I shall give one example of this underrepresentation. Take the question of the small-farm ideal — Australia as a nation of small farmers, unlocking the land, the selection acts, and so on. Here there are two different failures, which are quite separate. The first failure was the failure to get a block, because of imperfect selection acts, dummying, peacocking, and other loopholes exploited by squatters and their agents. The second failure was the inability, by and large, of those who got blocks to make a go of it.

The first failure — to get a block — is well-known in the historical record because there were popularists who denounced these injustices at the time; the diddling of selectors is known to every schoolchild, and is, quite rightly, part of our national consciousness. The second failure is more important, but less known. For various reasons, the farms decayed slowly: there was no dramatic collapse, just slow dilapidation, which is very disintegrating personally. The men had to find work elsewhere, the family unit broke up, eventually people left for the provincial towns and coastal cities. But those to whom this was happening didn’t speak up about it. There were no protests and no urban agitators. The families who stayed and prospered write the local histories of their districts today — those who left are usually unrecorded. Their plight is remembered today, if at all, only in a subterranean way.

There is little literature squarely describing the collapse of the small farms — it was too hard to bear. The victims themselves were silent. Most was written not by the struggling selectors, but by their children. The most famous example is Lawson’s early stories. In a recent anthology of western district poetry, *Meeting of Sighs*, there is a poem called 'The Selectors' by Emily Kealy, which includes the following stanzas:
They ploughed and sowed, they reaped, they 
mowed, they beat the bush fires out. 
They suffered loss when waterholes were 
dried in years of drought. 

They ploughed to break the stubborn soil 
down where the claypan dips, 
And dust and sweat was in their eyes, 
and salt sweat on their lips. 

In the prime of life, with health and strength, 
they got the land, and then, 
After years of toil and strife, they 
left it broken men. 

The children left the old bush homes 
when farming ceased to pay, 
Some settled down on other blocks, 
some wandered far away. 

With broken hearts when ruin came, 
they saw them leave the door, 
And then one roof, too well they knew 
would shelter them no more. 

We sow for gain, then reap for loss those 
two links in the chain; 
But when sorrows break the links of life, 
they never mend again.
Never admit the pain,  
Bury it deep;  
Only the weak complain,  
Complaint is cheap.

Cover thy wound, fold down  
Its curtained place;  
Silence is still a crown,  
Courage a grace.\(^9\)

The public took up those parts of literature and folklore where the grief had been made comfortable and accommodated. Popular opinion readily accepted the brave face put on things. In David Walker's terms, the dream triumphed over the disillusion.

Nationalism and 'getting away from it all' do, however, have a good deal in common. Both favour an insulated and independent existence, one at a national, and the other at a personal level. In normal times, they exist in opposition to each other. Withdrawal subverts overt expressions of patriotism and exists subterraneously, as a kind of nationalism *sans doctrines*. But in times of crisis, the two combine: the silent individual now needs to express himself, and relies on conventional nationalism to do this. For example, in the Second World War, everyone noticed the great unanimity of the Australian people under the threat of invasion, but there was little visible and verbose patriotic expression, and little of the adventurist rallying cries of previous wars. Vance Palmer in his article 'Battle' (in *Meanjin* 1942) explained this by making the connection between the two explicit:

> If Australia had no more character than could be seen of its surface, it would be annihilated as surely and swiftly as those colonial outposts white men built for their commercial profit in the east — pretentious facades of stucco that looked imposing as long as the wind kept from blowing. But there is an Australia of the spirit, submerged and not very articulate, that is quite different from these bubbles of old-world imperialism. Born of the lean loins of the country itself, of the dreams of men who came here to form a new society, of hard conflicts in many fields, it has developed a toughness all its own. Sardonic, idealistic, tongue-tied perhaps, it is the Australia of all who truly belong here.\(^11\)

Palmer calls this 'an Australia of the spirit' and it only coheres in a more-than-individual form when the perimeter of the paradise has to be defended.

Ultimately, the desire to withdraw needs a protector to keep others out: that is why Lawrence pointed out that is not really apathy. Some agency is needed to ensure that the hermetically-sealed capsule of self-
protection is not punctured. Ordinary Australians, being private and apolitical, have to shelter under someone else’s activities. Last century the nationalists provided the verbal smokescreen under which the mass of Australians settled down. This century, conservatives of the Bruce-Menzies type became the protectors, promising calm and stability, with no threats looming on the horizon and with little internal interference. This leads to an anomaly: Australians left bureaucrats free to do the work for them, which increased the bureaucrats’ power enormously. Thus Australia is at once a highly bureaucratized and a highly privatized society. It is anti-government in attitude, which allows it to be over-governed in reality.

So withdrawal has two sides: indifference, but also a wary defence of that condition. How this is achieved on a personal level is best seen in Russell Drysdale’s familiar painting ‘Moody’s Pub’. One’s immediate im-

pression is to say that the characters here are beaten, resigned survivors, with the stuffing knocked out of them from their hard and deprived life — and so they are. But there is something else present in their demeanour: they stand there watching the tourist or the painter (or us who are intruding on them) with a show of quiet, truculent defiance. They are warning outsiders to keep their distance and to keep out of their hair. Though living in a reduced state, their last comfort is freedom from interference, and that is not easily going to be taken away from them.

The desire to withdraw and retire is present in the cities this century, but it appears in different guises and is, therefore, more difficult to detect. Australians restlessly moved around the continent last century, but at one stage most gave this up, and huddled together in the coastal and provincial cities. This was also a form of retreat and withdrawal, and a giving-up of any great hopes of a new and different life in Australia. Joseph Furphy expressed this feeling in ‘The Gumsucker’s Dirge’:

Sing the evil days we see, and the worse that are to be,
With such fortitude as sorrow will allow —
We are crumpled side by side, in a world no longer wide,
And there is no Up the Country for us now.\(^{11}\)

In the cities you can’t merge back into nature and you can’t escape contact with people. But this can be explained; as Vincent Buckley has pointed out, withdrawal was ‘a function not so much of loneliness in the physical sense as of psychological distance from the structures of civilization’.\(^{12}\) This psychological distance was maintained by having a thick protective outer shell around the individual, which let nothing in — and nothing out either. The personality was insulated from outside influences. The true identity was hidden away; Lawrence called this ‘the withheld self’. So you could be sociable without contributing to society. As De Tocqueville put it, ‘as for his transactions with his fellow-citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but does not feel them’.\(^{13}\) The trouble with this is that the withheld self can wither away into nothingness. Retreat in the cities can run down into simply giving up, and can become the basis for the inert privacy of the suburbs, ‘the faint sterility that disheartens and derides’.\(^{14}\)

One form of insulation was words. In the cities you cannot be silent, but words can be used not as a vehicle of communication, but as a barrage to ward others off and keep yourself intact. Words were often used to enclose, not to disclose. Often they had no meaning in themselves, they just babbled along on the surface forming a barrier to communication.
Mrs Everage spurts out her strings of clichés like this. Such talk is often disconcerting to migrants, who take time to realize that the content may not matter very much. As Mary Rose Liverani's family learnt (in *The Winter Sparrows*):

> It was difficult to differentiate one from the other, for their speeches were all formulaic, and set phrases were punctuated with niggling little irruptions of laughter that made you drop your eyes. It took time to work out that words should be discarded as identity markers.15

Speech could be just verbal insulation, which allowed you to disguise what you really felt, or to disguise the fact that you felt nothing at all.

D.H. Lawrence arrived in Australia at the right time (the early 1920s) and in the right places (Sydney and Perth and their outskirts) to observe the people as they settled down in the cities and coastal towns. He must have been extraordinarily perceptive, for in a matter of months he went through (at lightning speed, but absorbing it all perfectly) the series of reactions to the country which collectively have taken the people one hundred and fifty years. Like many immigrants, Lawrence was restless and looking for something new: he expected to find Australia a new world, free from the pressures and tight control of the old one. But as soon as he arrived he understood that he had been wrong; his famous early passages on the Western Australian bush create a sense of ‘that peculiar lost weary aloofness of Australia’.

All through *Kangaroo*, a hastily written novel, Lawrence strains to find words and symbols and images for that elusive quality of absentness, vacancy, unconcern, blankness he found so powerful in Australia. These passages constitute the most thoroughgoing attempt to define the ingrained Australian tendency to withdraw under pressure:

> Australia has got some real positive indifference to ‘questions’, but Europe is one big wriggling question and nothing else. A tangle of squibbles.

> He left off kicking himself, and went down to the shore to get away from himself. After all, he knew the endless water would soon make him forget. It had a language which spoke utterly without concern of him, and this utter unconcern gradually soothed him of himself and his world. He began to forget...

> What was the good of trying to be an alert conscious man here? You couldn’t. Drift, drift into a sort of obscurity, backwards into a nameless past. And an old, old indifference, like a torpor invades the spirit.

> Was the land awake? Would the people waken this ancient land, or would the land put them to sleep, drift them back into the torpid semi-consciousness of the world of the twilight.16
Lawrence was at first tempted to stay and commit himself to Australia since 'it seemed so free, an absence of any form of stress whatsoever. No strain in any way, once you could accept it.' At first he found this attractive and relaxing but gradually, and somewhat against his inclinations, he was forced to conclude that the attitude had serious limitations.

Lawrence had come here to get away from his European consciousness, and he was seeking a more inclusive consciousness, such as he had experienced in Cornwall. But Australia, he came to realize, was the absence of consciousness, and that he could not abide. The sheer vacancy of life was a double-edged freedom. It was friendly and pleasant, but external and superficial. Inside there was nothing, no consciousness, no soul. Lawrence saw that in getting away from it all, you were ultimately getting away from yourself. Lawrence decided not to stay, as the country was so strong that 'it would lure me quite away from myself'. So he left to seek his deeper consciousness elsewhere, while acknowledging that Australia would be a nice place to retire to after his life's quest was over.

The two novels best describing the mentality are, in my opinion, Lawrence's *Kangaroo* and White's *The Tree of Man*. They work in opposite ways. Lawrence's approach is analytic — he simply keeps telling us what he thinks about it (through the medium of Richard Somers), which is why *Kangaroo* is so easy to quote from. White, on the other hand, creates the feeling through the lives of the Parkers, gradually, over the whole course of the novel. Both novelists have mixed feelings about it. They acknowledge how pleasant it is and its advantages. But both have reservations.

Withdrawal has limitation in both time and space. It can work over one generation, but a man in this condition has little to bequeath to his children, and even less ability to communicate it. Retreat in the country can be rewarding, but once removed from this source, it withers from lack of replenishment. In the cities, there is plenty to retire from, but nothing to retire into. Solitariness is not a fruitful, or even a natural, urban virtue. Both these limitations are evident in the lives of the Parker family in *The Tree of Man*. Stan and Amy Parker are an ordinary couple living a quiet life on a small farm. Although they barely talk to each other, an adequate though reduced life is possible for them through their absorption in nature and through an awareness of the significance of certain small but special things that happen to them. But because they are so self-contained and inarticulate, they cannot pass this life on. The father feels remote from his son, Ray, as the mother does from her daughter, Thelma. As the children drift to the city, the small intimations
of immortality available to their parents are lost to subsequent generations. The Parkers' way of life ends with the parents, except for one grandchild, who understands.

In conclusion, we can say that 'getting away from it all' does make Australia a pleasant place, especially in a time when so many areas of life are being dragged into the arena of public concern. But in the long run it can too easily cross the fine line separating it from merely giving up, and become a balm which legitimizes failure and defeat. The happy man ('beatus ille') in Europe retired from active life to contemplate nature and to see in it analogies to the whole of creation, to rest and restore his energies so that he might once again participate in the world of men and affairs. The Australian version is so loose and defensive that it can lack new sources of inspiration and sustenance, and simply peter out into nothingness. This may partly explain our recurrent worry that there is something missing here, and that a full life can't be lived in Australia.

'Getting away from it all' produces a society which is resilient and adaptive. It absorbs threats. The U.S. poet Kennet Rexroth said when he visited Australia:

Of course, in Australia you have a homogeneous society, with a largely classless and very dense structure, so you don't get the literature of alienation. What is there to alienate from? If some Paris intellectual came to chop into your structure it would just close behind the sword. It is a low-pressure utopia here.17

This makes Australia a much more complex country than it seems on the surface, hard to interpret and baffling to outsiders. Things can't always be taken at their face value. Content and meaning are not connected in a straightforward way. Anomalies abound. The attempt to undermine everything makes analysis difficult.

Getting away from it all constitutes a kind of anti-tradition running through Australian history. It explains why our folklore is full of suspicion and of authority, demolishing or undercutting humour, rubbishing and other forms of verbal banter, a certain lack of ambition (or at least a shyness about expressing it) and so on. These attitudes come from defeat and disillusion, and are stronger than the more publicized attitudes of triumphalist optimism, of which they are not really a part. They have been more persistent and influential, and they explain the country better.
NOTES


The *Bildungsroman* Tradition in *The Greenstone Door* and *I Saw In My Dream*.

Man can never wipe the slate clean and begin anew. He carries all his lumber with him, good, bad, and indifferent.

Although critics have been quick to identify the literary lumber Satchell brought with him to New Zealand in his reliance on outworn British plot conventions, such as the discovery of long-lost relatives and convenient legacies, little has been made of the one item of baggage Satchell borrowed and adapted to his own use in his fourth novel, *The Greenstone Door*,¹ which has generally been admitted to have had the greatest influence on later New Zealand novelists, including Sargeson.

When Philip Wilson, in his first study of Satchell, *The Maorilander*,² points out that the novel in some ways resembles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, he suggests the clue to the novel's identity and the reason for its impact on other writers. Cedric, Helenora, and Purcell, Wilson says, can be compared to Pip, Estella, and Magwitch. He goes on to say: 'This resemblance is largely of technical interest — in the same way, Balzac took over the pattern of King Lear and his daughters to use in *Père Goriot* — and once Satchell's debt [my italics] on these points is acknowledged little further comment is needed, for the impact of the two books is vastly different.'

Wilson begs the question, and then, in this and his subsequent Twayne study,³ avoids the issue by examining Satchell's work as an historical novel, casting Purcell as its principal protagonist.

The case, I believe, is otherwise. The relationship between Dickens's novel and *The Greenstone Door* is more than a matter of 'technical interest'; 'further comment is required' (my emphasis) if we are to determine the kind of novel Satchell was writing. My thesis is that
Satchell, like Dickens, was working in the tradition of the Bildungsroman; that Satchell, the expatriate Englishman, was forced both by his New Zealand material and by his deliberate intention of making his hero a New Zealander (or Maorilander, as he would have called him) to adapt the form in a number of important ways; and that Sargeson, recognizing in the 1914 novel a fable of what it was to be a New Zealander, developed that fable further in his own largely autobiographical novel, *I Saw In My Dream* (1949). The two New Zealand novels, taken together, are landmarks in the literary history of the Bildungsroman in New Zealand fiction written by men, and provide a useful index to the pattern of individual growth and awareness exemplified in other novels of the same type written by both men and women in New Zealand.

*Great Expectations* may be read as a classic English Bildungsroman. First published in 1860-1861, it traces the career of a young man some forty years earlier whose progress from blacksmith's apprentice to gentleman living on the capital of others' labour encapsulates the myth of upward social mobility that was the product of a society embarked on rapid social change and industrialization. Pip, like the rest of his society, is blind to the real source of his unearned wealth. So long as he sees his 'expectations' in crassly material terms he is doomed to a life of spiritual poverty and a cramping of all sense of generosity and concern for his fellows. Although he makes some provision for Herbert Pocket in recompense for the financial straits his own style of extravagant living has led his friend, it is not until the convict, Magwitch returns from Australia and reveals that Pip's fortunes depend entirely on his colonial labour that Pip is given the opportunity to reconsider his behaviour and attempt to remould himself.

Feelings of guilt, terror and inadequacy having been early instilled into the young Pip, it is small wonder that he has but little grasp of his own nature. His being sent to Miss Havisham's for the purpose of playing with Estella is prompted by bitterness and jealousy, encouraged by envy and obsequiousness on the part of Pumblechook and his cronies, and unresisted by his own impressionable and too compliant self. Whatever small graces and accomplishments he has — he has enjoyed the companionship of Biddy at Mr Wopsle's great-aunt's school and has endeavoured to help Joe identify at least the letters of his name — are forgotten as he submits to Estella's contemptuous treatment and willingly accepts her estimate of himself:
'He calls the knaves, Jacks, this boy!' said Estella with disdain, before our first game was out. 'And what coarse hands he has! And what thick boots!'

I had never thought of being ashamed of my hands before; but I began to consider them a very indifferent pair. Her contempt for me was so strong, that it became infectious, and I caught it.4

Pip's self-contempt converts easily into contempt for others, especially those he considers inferior to himself. Having been given the opportunity of being made apprentice to Joe, he feels himself the moral and intellectual superior of Biddy who has now taken over the management of Mrs Joe and the Gargery household. Dazzled by Estella, he is blind to Biddy's sterling qualities and fails to detect the irony of her reply to his questioning her how she manages to both carry out her domestic work and keep abreast of him in whatever he learns:

'How do you manage, Biddy,' said I, 'to learn everything that I learn, and always to keep up with me? ...

'I might as well ask you,' said Biddy, 'how you manage?'

'No; because when I come in from the forge of a night, any one can see me turning to at it. But you never turn to at it, Biddy.'

'I suppose I must catch it — like a cough,' said Biddy, quietly; and went on with her sewing. (p.158)

Even when Biddy points out to him that she was in fact his first teacher he can only respond to her by being patronizing and condescending. When with a great rush of magnanimity he embraces her and proclaims that henceforth he will tell her everything, she silences him with the words: 'Till you're a gentleman.' (p.157)

Without Magwitch's money Pip cannot afford to live the life of a 'brought-up London gentleman' on which Magwitch has set such high stakes. He can, however, learn to recognize that true gentlemanliness depends less on the possession of property than on the exercise of concern for others. In this respect the faithful Joe is more of a 'true Christian gentleman' than men like Compeyson and Bentley Drummle whose behaviour ill sorts with the rank which birth alone has entitled them to.

The dilemma facing Pip and Dickens, however, is that without money there is no place in the hierarchy for such a 'natural' gentleman that does not include a loss of status. Pip, faced with a choice between London (and imprisonment for debt) and the country (a return to Joe's forge) has no alternative but to go overseas, at least temporarily: until another source of colonial wealth can be found.
The displacement of men such as Pip provides the colonial novelist with his first raw material. Satchell's familiarity with Dickens's work is nowhere in doubt. Sarah Brompart remarks in *The Greenstone Door* that she has been reading 'Mr Dickens's new book' which, from its date, we might speculate is *Little Dorrit* (1855-7). And Satchell's novel, like his earlier *The Land of the Lost*, exemplifies a belief, comparable to the one that Dickens expressed in both *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*, a belief in the healing power of love.

Purcell has, like Magwitch, made his fortune in the colonies. He gives Cedric, whom he has brought up, the princely — and incredible — sum of fifty thousand pounds in English Consols. But he is not a convict nor a criminal, unless to share a Maori way of life, marry a Maori woman, and choose to fight with the Maoris be adjudged a crime in British eyes.

Cedric, rather than Purcell, is the focus of the novel. Orphaned by the death of his father, who had espoused the Maori cause in the sacking of the Te Kuma pa, Cedric's first impressions of life are of hiding in the tall ferns and of his rescue by Purcell.

The opening chapters of *The Greenstone Door* bear comparison with those of *Great Expectations*. The flat Essex marshlands, with the grim outlines of the hulks discernible through the gloom, which Dickens evokes as *mise-en-scène* for the criminal activities of Magwitch and the furtive, guilt-laden discoveries of the young Pip, are, in Satchell's novel, transformed into the no less mythic luxuriance of the New Zealand bush. What is remarkable about Cedric, in comparison with Pip, is his total lack of terror and guilt. His vision, like Pip's, is limited, but not by the miasma of desolation, which emanates as much from the noxious works of man as from the marshes themselves, but by the abundance of natural leafy foliage. Both children are surrounded by recent reminders of death, and there is something majestic and awe-inspiring about the echoes of Maori war-cries which sound in Cedric's mind compared with the bewilderment that is Pip's lot in the face of those pitiful little foot and a half long mounds and the stark inscriptions on his parents' grave in the Essex churchyard.

Pip's name is as abbreviated and inconsequential as the lives of his family; Cedric Tregarthen, though he finds difficulty at first in saying his name, is identified by that name as a person of some substance. The fact that his rescuers think he is saying 'Eric' is perhaps Satchell's way of intimating to the reader that he is a boy who 'little by little' will grow up to prove himself worthy of his inheritance. His parentage known, he is educated by the knowledgeable and enlightened Purcell to live up to the standard set by his paternal namesake who rejected England, an English
woman and a fortune for the New Zealand he loved. Neither Pip nor Cedric are what the nineteenth century called 'self made men'; both are what their education and 'expectations' encourage them to be. But from the start Satchell makes it clear how much more expansive and generous are the models available for Cedric the New Zealander to build on than those available to Pip.

Cedric's early years in the Maori pa teach him respect both for himself and for others, regardless of wealth, sex, or social background. Under Purcell's able tuition he is also taught the best the nineteenth century can offer in terms of the mastery of modern languages, science and mathematics. The choice of subject matter alone distinguishes his formal education from that of the conventional English gentleman, as Purcell and Satchell intended it should:

At that date, and even for fifty years thereafter, what was called education was limited to the facts of human history, so that a man might be ignorant as a savage of the whole cosmos, and yet, if he were fairly conversant with Greek and Latin, he was regarded as an educated man. (p.40)

What Cedric’s education is manifestly unfit for, of course, as well he knows, is the world of commerce and competition in the city for which Purcell originally intended him. In Auckland for the first time, Cedric quickly assesses the behaviour of his host’s family to be worse than that of savages and, despite the press of humanity on the city streets, is impressed, as [he] had never been impressed among the Maoris, by a sense of the isolation of the human unit’ (p.149).

Cedric’s Wanderjahre (which last three years in fact) — and Satchell’s use of the term identifies clearly enough his awareness of the tradition he was using — begins in much the same way as Pip’s earlier essay into the world of Satis House. He has not seen a horse nor a white girl before but has a ready answer to those who would judge him a savage because of that. When Helenora attempts to play Estella to his Pip he counters with a straightforward explanation of his admiration for her, and when he cannot mount his horse the right way does just as good a job from the other side. Cedric may be ‘The Little Finger of Te Waharoa’ but he is his own man. Unlike Pip, Cedric hardly falters from the high standard of conduct inculcated in him both by Purcell and his friend Rangiora.

Cedric’s character is grounded in the compact he and Rangiora made as children, with Puhi-Huia, his half-sister, in the cave. The compact of the greenstone door, from which the novel takes its name, asserts the unity of Maori and pakeha and establishes a system of values which overrides partisan claims:
Let us forget that we are of two races ... and remember that we are also of one — the race of mankind. Never shall my hand be raised against you and yours. Let not your hand be lifted against me and mine. Let us rather make between us the compact of the Tatau Pounamu, and if in the years to come one of us should reopen that which is shut, on his head be the loss and the shame. Behold, the Greenstone Door is closed. (p.71)

Having already saved Cedric from drowning, Rangiora shows the solidarity of the pact when he later volunteers his own life to save Cedric when he is about to be killed by the vengeful ariki.

Cedric's own position is tested when war breaks out again between the Maori and the white man. Purcell is forced to choose between them and justifies his siding with the Maori both in a letter to Cedric and in his eloquent testimony before the hastily assembled military court. Purcell denies he is a British subject, having been in New Zealand before it became a colony and never having seen any evidence of British civil authority in his district. Cedric's non-partisanship, which may appear at first as fence-sitting, is not that. His is the first generation, Satchell is saying, for whom the conflict is not between Maori and British but between Maorilander and Maorilander. He cannot take sides because he belongs to both.

That the conflict is internalized is made clear in the final section of the novel when Cedric, like Pip after Magwitch's death, temporarily loses his reason following Purcell's merciless killing in cold blood on Fred Brompart's orders. Having been imprisoned and led captive through the forest in charge of a wretched idiot (whose incapacity is token of an equally brutal abuse of Maori authority), Cedric's mind wanders and finds solace in bucolic fancies culled from his juvenile reading of Wordsworth with Helenora.

Unlike Dickens, who is uncertain what to do with Estella, Satchell brings Helenora back to Cedric and to New Zealand. The lure of an earldom and a fortune in England notwithstanding, Cedric's identity as a New Zealander is confirmed by his refusal to recognize his home as anywhere but New Zealand.

But if England exerts little pull on Cedric, for Satchell the novelist, the weight of his New Zealand material isn't quite strong enough for him to resist the pressure of the Great Expectations archetype; or, to put it the other way, he isn't strong enough to trust his own material. Structurally, there is no need for Helenora to reveal a carefully concealed and gratuitous vindictiveness in her love for Cedric; nor does the characterization of Lady Wylde, Cedric's father's first love, support the notion of her being an embittered Miss Havisham figure.
Satchell faces two related problems in his characterization, one having to do with his male protagonist and the other with his creation of female characters. Both are similar to the problems faced by Dickens in *Great Expectations* and derive directly from the two authors each having to adapt the *Bildungsroman* form to his own use.

Since Carlyle's translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* in 1824 the *Bildungsroman* in England developed as the principal vehicle for the expression of masculine endeavour to effect a *modus vivendi* between the individual and his society. By 1860, as Dickens's novel reveals, there is no place within society available to a man such as Pip. On his return from the colonies he is a man set apart, for whom there is little other function that that of the writer by default. He writes his own *Bildungsroman* out of the material of his own life.

The relationship of the *Bildungsroman* to the *Künstlerroman* is a complex one but one which begins, I maintain, with the kind of *impass* Dickens was beginning to become aware of in *Great Expectations* and which Satchell was not entirely able to avoid: the problem of what to do with one's protagonist. Cedric's decision to stay in New Zealand, while it confirms his own personal integrity, given the parameters in which Satchell allows him to operate, virtually condemns him to the life of a dilettante. Unable quite to make Cedric a writer (for whom at that stage in New Zealand's history would he be writing?), Satchell, at the risk of turning him into a colonial Casaubon, makes him unpaid amanuensis to Governor Gray. Cedric's description of himself as Helenora's pedantic pedagogue (p.205) does not make amusing reading.

Both Dickens and Satchell isolate an increasingly priggish male protagonist at the expense of their female characters, a process which, given the overwhelmingly masculine mode of the nineteenth century *Bildungsroman*, is difficult for any writer to avoid. Although women writers such as Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*, 1848) and George Eliot (*The Mill on the Floss*, 1860) had already opened up the *Bildungsroman* to include a range of female experience in their use of paired male and female protagonists, Dickens resists the logic of his own material even at the expense of doing violence to his women characters. Biddy's marrying Joe provides Pip with a salutary moral lesson but it also ensures that her influence and intelligence are kept strictly within the domestic sphere and lower down the social scale. Magwitch's estranged wife is reduced to a terrified creature who creeps round Jaggers's table, her once powerful wrists engaged in nothing more strenuous than passing dishes, their scars to be exhibited on demand to curious guests. Even the waspish Mrs Joe is rendered incapable by a convenient seizure and is as effectively removed
from society as Miss Havisham is by her 'self-imposed' stagnation. Only Estella cannot be so summarily silenced.

Her reappearance in *The Greenstone Door* as Helenora/'Herenora' Wylde represents Satchell's attempt to provide an effective complement for his singular protagonist. With the substitution of a lingual her English name becomes convincingly Maori while her surname puns on the notion of savage versus civilized which is one example of the balanced opposites (light/darkness, lost/found, freedom/captivity are others) around which Satchell structures his novel. What is so revealing however in Satchell's portrayal of Helenora, the woman who returns to New Zealand in time to coax Cedric out of his temporary insanity, is that he makes his hero first of all mistake her for a man, and an idiot at that, and then when finally he recognizes her and his madness passes, he likens her to 'an angel of heaven'. The real Helenora of the ready retort and patient conversation is, by the end of the novel, reduced to silence: 'She nodded, and lifted her lips mutely to mine' (p.398).

A similar unsatisfactoriness surrounds Cedric's relationship with his half-sister Puhi-Huia. Although Cedric admits to his own jealousy in his early feelings of possessiveness for her, he is happy that she is loved by Rangiora. Nevertheless, only by allowing her a dramatic and sacrificial death — she is shot in battle by a stray British bullet as she stands silhouetted on the parapet of the Maori redoubt — does Satchell finally allow her to join her slain lover.

Even so, if we examine Satchell's women characters in their relationship with men it would seem that they complement each other more equitably than those of Dickens. We remark that Rangiora's mother, Tuku-Tuku ('The Spider's Web'), is capable of restraining her husband's violent impulses and that Lady Wylde, despite Helenora's asseverations, appears to have suffered no very serious blight as the result of Cedric Treagarthen senior's desertion of her. Even Purcell's wife Roma, whose subservience is as much an embarrassment to him as it is to the reader, distinguishes herself in her unfaltering declaration of the truth at her husband's court martial.

More subject to the whims and caprices of their men are the Brompart women, mother and elder daughter, whose lives in the city are manifestly narrow, the result, Satchell makes it clear, of their clinging to a spurious gentility imported wholesale into New Zealand along with their piano and their family's proclivities for trade. Sarah Brompart alone is distinguished from them, principally, as we have seen, by her delight in Dickens, out of whose pages the rest of her family might well have stepped. As Mr Brompart, complaining of his sons' bullying and domi-
tion, says to Cedric: «They want to return to England, Master Cedric; that's their constant cry» (p.207).

The future of New Zealand lay, however, with the Brompart sons, a generation committed to trade and profit, callous and hypocritical in their dealings with Maori and pakeha alike and committed to an urban society in which the Cedrics would feel increasingly alienated. An episode in which a Maori boatman attempts to cheat Cedric provides Satchell with the opportunity to expatiate on the character of this new breed and the effects of their attitude on New Zealand society:

I am not now speaking of those hardy and courageous settlers, true chips of the ancient Anglo-Saxon block, who, taking their lives in their hands, had gone forth into the wilderness, there to hew out for themselves the homes the old land denied them — they, at least, were compelled by their necessities to hold the original owners of the soil in respect; nor of the men of culture and understanding who were able to pierce the dark skin of ignorance and observe with admiration the natural strength of the brain beneath; but of the mass of the townsmen, themselves of no particular education, of narrow, insular views and absorbed in the petty issues of trade. Many of these had come direct from the cities of England and Sydney, hired or purchased a shop or office immediately on landing, and entered on business, as though they had merely shifted from one street to another. Never moving from the narrow limits of the town, seeing only the worst side of the natives in their midst, they could form no adequate conception of the qualities of that race without whose continued forbearance and goodwill their lives were not worth an hour's purchase. (pp.155-6)

Satchell makes no attempt to fit Cedric, his ideal New Zealander, into this new pattern. The novel ends with Cedric and Helenora embracing outside the cave which has served Cedric as a place of retreat and recalling memories of the compact made earlier in that other cave: «You remember,» I said, «the image of the Greenstone Door?» She nodded and lifted her lips mutely to mine. And so at last for us two also the Greenstone Door was closed' (p.398).

Despite the positive image Satchell wishes to convey in this reiteration of the compact, such an ending is at best highly ambiguous. The very words of the compact, with their reference to a door closing, set up negative overtones which Satchell's vocabulary does little to dispel. Cedric and Helenora quote Wordsworth and Schiller to each other and then, we are told, 'turn their backs on Pirongia' and make for the bush, actions all of which suggest that Satchell, while seeking to distinguish them from the increasingly materialistic and philistine strains in New Zealand society, is unable to offer them any convincing alternative. Although the compact establishes a shared concern and sense of equality between man and woman, the breakdown of the earlier compact which
sought to establish such a relationship between Maori and pakeha augurs little hope for Cedric and Helenora, except on a purely personal level. One wonders what Cedric and Helenora will do with their lives beyond reciting poetry. In effect Cedric is left as he was found: a man alone on the fringes of society, facing an unknown and potentially hostile future with few of the resources which enable less sensitive and high principled individuals to survive.

New Zealand society by the time of Sargeson's *I Saw In My Dream* has become so thoroughly permeated with the petty-bourgeois values Cedric and Purcell remarked on in the early days of Auckland that for his protagonist any kind of affirmative response to life is virtually impossible. A repressive puritanism, evidenced most clearly by prudery and hypocrisy in sexual matters, has created in the Henry of the first part of the novel an overwhelming desire to retreat to the safety of the womb ("snug as a bug in a rug") and to the false security of an innocence based on ignorance and fear:

no no the book he found on his bed that afternoon after school, mother must have left it there and it was a hard job trying to look her in the face for days, birds flowers and the 'shining creature' a girl who said I have kept myself pure for you, and he said and I for you, and you could get diseases worse than leprosy, yes and secret vice please NO (p.38)

Nothing could be further from the frank and open delight in each other that characterized the relationships between the young men and women in the Maori *pa* in Satchell's novel than Henry's stammering embarrassment and sense of guilt at the very thought of a woman. His behaviour, if we can judge by his own father's furtive watching of Aunt Clara and his Uncle Bob's too assertive bonhomie, is but one expression of a deep-rooted schizophrenia endemic in his society, the kind of split Dickens observed in his society and portrayed in the character of Wemmick, whose journeys to and from Walworth demand the assumption of two mutually exclusive personalities, and which Satchell noticed as already having begun to appear in urban Auckland, in the disharmony in the Brompart household and in the behaviour of the Maori boatman whom city life has all but corrupted.

It is significant that Henry, unlike Pip and Cedric in the earlier novels, cannot even use the first person when talking about himself but shifts uneasily between second and third person pronouns so unable is he to accept his own thoughts and behaviour or to identify them as single aspects of his own personality. The compartments into which he
separates the different parts of himself mirror the literal enclosures, the
confined spaces, into which he tries, more or less successfully, to put
other people, and reflect his inability to make coherence of his own
experience. Only by means of a complete physical and mental
breakdown is he given the means to achieve some sense of wholeness. His
rebirth as Dave in Part Two of the novel is a measure not only of the
distance he has had to travel in his own mind but also of the difficulties
facing Sargeson in his attempt to write a *Bildungsroman* based on his
own experience as a writer in New Zealand.

Becoming unsatisfied with the vague optimism suggested by the final
sentence of Part One, the original end of the novel, with its promise of a
new job in an office starting, appropriately enough, "after the Easter
holidays", Sargeson thrusts a new-born protagonist into the trauma of
discovering himself anew at the beginning of Part Two: "Why am I oh
why am I here in the cold and the dark? Cold bed rolling over to the sun,
cold embryo waiting to be born. Why am i waiamihea" (p.85).

Dave's question, ending with the Maori-sounding *waiamihea*, voices
Sargeson's own awareness that Henry's life, such as it was, had existed
without reference to that other aspect of New Zealand life and culture,
the Maori experience. But it too, in common with pakeha life, has
become shallow and artificial, motivated by no more noble ambitions
than white society.

If, unlike Henry, Dave's quest for wholeness takes him beyond the
confines of his immediate family to participation in a wider society and
from the city to the country, Sargeson avoids, is indeed at pains to point
out as false, the supposition that all society's evils stem from urban life
and that in the country all is restorative and tranquil. None of the
persons Dave meets during his period of sheep farming, the Macgregors,
the Andersons, Johnny, the Maori neighbours, is any more whole or
adjusted than individuals in the city; the Macgregors, with their
curiously omnipresent but never visible son Cedric and their talk about a
cave into which they have tried to confine him, are probably more re-
pressive than his own family; Rangi, erstwhile companion to this Cedric,
is no noble scion of a warrior race but an ailing consumptive, dying at
twenty-one, with his brood of children clinging poverty-stricken around
his legs while his wife labours to harvest a few potatoes.

Sargeson's displacement of Cedric, his cave, and Rangi/Rangiora to
an off-centre and yet crucial place in Henry/Dave's *Bildungsroman* is his
tacit acknowledgement of Satchell's work and his recognition of the
earlier writer's attempt to come to terms with the deepening alienation
and isolation of the individual New Zealander in his own time.
Satchell tried to locate a measure of wholeness in the past, in rural values and Maori/pakeha solidarity, Sargeson recognizes that neither Maori nor pakeha society offers a viable way of life to the individual when the whole country seems to be split. As Mr Anderson remarks to Dave:

Jack says it's our home but sometimes it'll strike you a different way. As if the white man never should have tried to settle it at all -- though it might be all right for a few Maoris living along the rivers. They'd make it a good enough home, granted. But as for the white man he's only got it on a sort of lease, with the wear and tear all the time getting him down. So he either has to give up and shove off somewhere else, or else he just hangs on until he gets kicked out. (p.128)

This part of New Zealand, Anderson is saying, is subject to landslides: 'it's country that slips' (p.118), producing an 'awfull mess' of tangled lives, left, like so many lumps of clay, 'hard now, dried out and cracked by the sun ... uprooted' (p.117). Rather than face the prospect of working such brittle material in such an inhospitable environment the New Zealand writer had traditionally opted for Anderson's alternative, had given up and shoved off somewhere else, usually to England. Sargeson, setting himself goals similar to Joyce's, to forge the uncreated conscience of his race, determined to stay in New Zealand and work out in his life and in his writing a solution to his discovery that in New Zealand '[they] talk about people leaving home, but round these parts it's more a case of home leaving them’ (p.118).

Henry/Dave's *Bildungsroman*, which in its physical details closely resembles its author's own *Wanderjahre*, is Sargeson's attempt to come up with a positive statement on the place of the writer (and himself in particular) in this society. In some respects he is Pip confronting the hollowness of Satis House without a Dickens to provide a Magwitch and his material wealth, endeavouring like Satchell's Cedric to find meaning in words and symbols (the compact and the cave) when he has discovered that the cave is really empty and that the ground on which he stands is liable to shift unexpectedly at any moment. Unable to produce a sustained narrative he pushes his hero by an exertion of literary will, as it were, past the impasse of Dickens's dubious endings and Satchell's inconclusiveness by the stratagem of having three separate but related narratives in which he allows himself deliberately to pick up and play around with the lumber and debris left by his predecessors. He seizes on Cedric's cave bequeathed him by Satchell and is no more averse than Satchell to introducing convenient coincidence to assist his narrative. That a New Zealand writer should make use of landslides and caves in his work is not surprising: climbing into caves is a fairly commonplace experience for
most New Zealanders and landslides are a feature of the country. Nevertheless Sargeson’s reluctance to let go of the cave symbolism in particular suggests an inability fully to comprehend what Henry/Dave’s new life will be beyond his initial affirmation that he will be embarking not on a journey with Johnny to England but on ‘something special’, in his own way. Too often, the reader feels, Sargeson is submerging himself in a welter of Joycean literary allusion and association to bridge the weak point in his narrative rather than using it to point up his protagonist’s own indecisiveness. Bookish bastards both, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the two. Just as Satchell felt the need to bolster his already viable material with props from Dickens and German literature, so Sargeson, inheriting the ‘form’ of Satchell’s novel, cannot develop it without throwing out an arm for support to yet another British novelist. The problem of discovering ‘the right me in the right place’, which both novelists thrust upon their central characters may thus be seen as a projection of their own dilemma as New Zealand novelists for whom an unequivocal YES is still something to be striven for.

NOTES

4. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p.90. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
6. I have argued elsewhere that the pairing of Jane and Rochester in Jane Eyre and Maggie and Tom in The Mill on the Floss are the transitional modes by which nineteenth-century women writers move towards a wholly female Bildungsroman.
The Year That Was

AUSTRALIA

After having been three times the bridesmaid at the Booker McConnell Awards, Thomas Keneally is at last the bride with his novel Schindler's Ark (Hodder & Stoughton).

It tells the story of a smooth and wealthy industrialist who managed to use his friendship with high-ranking Nazis and his black market alcohol to help Jewish prisoners escape. With its interest in the relationship between history, reportage and fiction, its grotesque images, and its dialectic between a man too earthly to be a saint and a community which wants to make him one, it's clear that the finished novel develops some of the central obsessions in Keneally's work.

So that although the story of Keneally's accidental discovery of his material in a Beverly Hills luggage store is now famous, the question of whether Schindler's Ark is a novel or not can only have been asked by those unfamiliar with the book and its author.

If Keneally manages to shock his reader out of the comfort of mythologizing the Jewish holocaust, Thea Astley's An Item from the Late News (UQP) leaves you stunned with its conclusion that small minds closer to home can conspire in a destruction that makes the final bomb shelter utterly pointless.

Returning to an earlier direction in her fiction with a female point of view, Astley doesn't quite bring her narrator to life, but the impossibility of the feminine principle in the grotesquely masculine world of this novel makes that partial failure inevitable. Readers who enjoy Thea Astley's comic gift may be disappointed to find this book searingly humourless, but those drawn to her earlier political novel A Kindness Cup will find An Item from the Late News even more disturbing.

Rodney Hall's Just Relations (Penguin) is the most ambitious of an unusual number of novels this year by writers best known as poets. This is Hall's third novel, though, so he's no newcomer to the form. Dealing, as Astley's novel does, with an enclosed and inbred community, Just Relations with Shirley Hazzard's The Transit of Venus is perhaps the most exquisitely written of recent Australian novels, and the beauty of
the writing, while a little slow, throws into startling prominence the political events that enter life in Whitey's Fall towards the conclusion and force a rereading of the novel as a whole.

As incredibly beautiful in its poetic evocation of an Australia marginal to the horror of Gallipoli, David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter* (Chatto & Windus) is the more highly praised of his two books of fiction. But it's the problematical *Child's Play* (Chatto & Windus) that his readers will return to, with its narrator who is both a terrorist stressing the ordinariness of his occupation and an intriguingly difficult metaphor for the artist.

It's almost as if these two short novels, the one with its flawless lyric surfaces, the other with its rather awkwardly expressed philosophic probing, actively deny the synthesis of poetry and ideas that Malouf's work insistently seeks.

Few Australian novelists can equal the energy and skill of Sumner Locke Elliott's dialogue and his often outrageous imagery but, despite some reviewers' suspicion of this facility, there's far more to *Signs of Life* (Penguin) than that. This new novel takes old age and death away from the brave new world of his earlier novel *Going* and, as Virginia Green dies surrounded by her family but absolutely alone, emphasises the inescapable presence of the past.

A theme taken up also by Barbara Hanrahan's fiction, though in *Dove* (UQP) her distinctive combination of childlike innocence, pretty detail, lush sexual landscape and grotesque melodrama seems more finely balanced but less risky than in, say, *The Frangipani Gardens*. Readers who have resisted the common criticism that her work is repetitious ('not another novel about her grandmother!') may be inclined here to concede.

Revised versions of Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (Secker & Warburg) and Christopher Koch's *Across the Sea Wall* (A&R) have tightened both novels beautifully, but only Stow's theme still seems urgent.

New novels by poets Roger McDonald, *Slipstream* (UQP), and Tom Shapcott, *The Birthday Gift* (UQP), Michael Wilding's *Pacific Highway* (Hale & Iremonger) and Gerald Murnane's *The Plains* (Norstrilia) complete this list of the year's fiction with, finally, two of the three outstanding political novels by women.

Whereas Thea Astley combines her political themes with her longstanding interest in the aesthetics of language, first novels by short fiction writer Glenda Adams, *Games of the Strong* (A&R) and poet Jennifer Maiden, *The Terms* (Hale & Iremonger), focus on the politics of language and of relationships. The creation of a language and complex
of ideas, and the deliberate distancing of emotional response, make each of these novels difficult to get into, but readers who persist will find them unusually rewarding.

With two remarkable exceptions, the year's offerings in poetry have been less distinguished. John Tranter's *Selected Poems* (Hale & Iremonger) is an attractively produced collection of the best work to have come out of the so-called 'New Australian Poetry'. Tranter is known for the nightmarish fragments of vision and conversation, and the inner urban nervous energy of his poetry, but what strikes you repeatedly in rereading the poems here is a particularly dry sense of humour. Partly because individual volumes have been published in small editions, he's sometimes regarded as a 'Sydney poet', and this welcome *Selected Poems* should effectively give him a wider circulation for the first time.

Another long awaited volume, Fay Zwicky's *Kaddish and Other Poems* (UQP), winner of the prestigious NSW Premier's Award, adds to 'Kaddish' which is arguably the most powerful long poem here in ten years, a new sequence 'Ark Voices', bound to become a favourite. The intensity of 'Kaddish' itself seems to relate Zwicky to the American confessional poets, but 'Ark Voices' is unique and its imaginative daring is most evident when contrasted with the Canadian Jay McPherson's 'Ark' poems. 'Mrs Noah Speaks', the first piece in the sequence, introduces the female point of view, themes of the artist and of silence; and it's followed by eleven poems each belonging to one of the animals on the ark, with the haunting 'Wolf Song' as an interlude sung by Zwicky when she does these poems in performance.

Edited by Fay Zwicky is *Journeys* (Sisters Publishing), a thesis anthology of the kind most useful to students, with generous selections from the work of a few poets — in this case, Judith Wright, Gwen Harwood, Rosemary Dobson and Dorothy Hewett, with the main re-evaluation in its emphasis away from rocks and gumtrees in the selection from Judith Wright.

A new edition of Les Murray's *Selected Poems: The Vernacular Republic* (A&R) at last includes 'The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle', a long poem that has aroused controversy over its turning to R.M. Berndt's translation of the Wonguri-Mandjikai Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone. The selection also includes recent work such as the very good poems to his bed, to Robert Morley, and 'The Grass Fire Stanzas', which have not been easily available before.

Robert Adamson's *The Law at Heart's Desire* (Prism) moves away from the rather flat naivety of the poems in *Where I Come From* (Big Smoke) which worked best in performance, and shows that when he stops
playing Rimbauds, Adamson can deliver the goods. And despite my initial preference for the hard-edged concreteness of Gary Catalano's *Remembering the Rural Life* (UQP) with its lettuces like babies' heads in outer suburban market gardens, I'm drawn back to the quiet abstractions of his new collection *Heaven of Rags* (Hale & Iremonger) intrigued by its deceptively simple lines.

New collections by Judith Rodriguez, *Witch Heart* (Sisters Publishing), and Vivian Smith, *Tide Country* (A&R), seem unadventurous by comparison with Zwicky and Tranter, but both these poets impress with their quiet mastery of technique: Rodriguez's poems freeing a personal warmth that has been too heavily protected in her poetry until now, and Smith's continuing to shape finely the elegant lyrics, with their interesting combination of French and American resonances, for which he's best known.

The year's best play, *The Perfectionist* (Currency) sees David Williamson more committed to probing at issues that will disturb his audiences, than to pleasing them. The play which travels about as far North as you can go, to Denmark, deals with the conflicting demands of education, marriage, parenthood in the relationship of two Ph.D. students, and develops the theme in Australian writing of the woman's losing battle for her brilliant career.

Equally sensitive in its exploration of the ways idealism is used to excuse and justify failure, the play obviously succeeded in unsettling the audience I was part of: one man in front of me, getting out of his seat and adjusting his waistband up over a business lunch, saying to the woman he was with, 'Well. I can see we're going to have quite an argument in the car on the way home.'

The other outstanding dramatic work this year is David Williamson's script for the film *Gallipoli*, published by Penguin along with extracts from Gammage's excellent study *The Broken Years*, as *The Story of Gallipoli*. Whatever the case against the film's mythology, and Livio and Pat Dobrez make a persuasive one in *Kunapipi*, Vol. IV, No 2, the suggestive economy of Williamson's dialogue and his sense of humour are at their best here.

Mrs Millie Mack has a load of wood delivered to her back yard and is told that one strange looking object is half a piece from a bogey louvre: 'When he said that a most delicious tingle went up Mrs Millie Mack's spine.' This fat suburban woman, with her grey hair drawn into a bun, who, when she's not making jams and pickles, is constantly knitting, is the most unlikely person to share Magritte's experience of having a train come out of her fireplace. But the trains keep coming! The year's best
book for children, *Whistle Up the Chimney* (Collins) is one of the best picture books Australia has produced, with Nan Hunt’s amusing words that beg to be read aloud perfectly complemented by Craig Smith’s detailed and witty illustrations. Children should be warned, however, that most adults will be so involved with this book that they won’t let them near it.

Drier but nevertheless valuable offerings in Shirley Walker’s excellent bibliography of *Judith Wright* (OUP) and Helen Daniel’s critical study *Double Agent: David Ireland and His Work* (Penguin). John Tulloch’s *Australian Cinema* (Allen & Unwin) a less accessible analysis than his excellent *Legends on the Screen* (Currency/AFI) confirms the standing of his work as the best on Australian cinema to date.

And finally, on the eve of its 50th birthday, Denis O’Brien’s history of *The Australian Women’s Weekly*, titled as the magazine is familiarly called, *The Weekly* (Penguin). Australian culture cannot be fully understood without a knowledge of this magazine which in a country of 14 million has been bought by one million people and read by an additional estimated two million each week.

Published just before the magazine became in fact if not in grotesque name ‘The Australian Women’s Monthly’, this fascinating montage looks back on half a century of Australian life when, as the adman said, a week without the *Weekly* was not the same.

**MARK MACLEOD**

**CANADA**

1982 was a year of cross-cultural journeyings. The Seal $50,000.00 First Novel Award went to Janette Hospital Turner for *The Ivory Swing* (McClelland & Stewart), a story of a Canadian woman’s emotional education during the year of her husband’s sabbatical in south India. Popular, well-meaning fiction, the novel examines the culture shock of Canadians in an alien setting. Aviva Layton’s *Nobody’s Daughter* (McClelland & Stewart) takes its protagonist from middle-class Australia to Montreal and marriage with a flamboyant poet remarkably similar to Irving Layton. Occasionally funny but consistently self-indulgent, Daughter’s confessional bitterness is easily forgotten. More interesting are Rachel Wyatt’s *Foreign Bodies* (Anansi), about an English couple’s sabbatical in Canada, Lorris Elliott’s *Coming For To Carry* (Williams-
Wallace), about a Trinidadian immigrant to Canada, George Galt’s *Trailing Pythagoras* (Quadrant), about a Canadian’s journey through Greece, following an ancestor and in search of a philosopher, and *Chinada: Memoirs of the Gang of Seven* (Quadrant), a record of the visit to China of seven Canadian writers as guests of the Chinese Writer’s Association. Each writer contributed a section: diary, postcards, poems and memoirs, and at the centre of the collection is an album of photographs of the contributors: Gary Geddes, Robert Kroetsch, Adele Wiseman, Patrick Lane, Alice Munro, Suzanne Paradis and Geoffrey Hancock. This is a quirky, intriguing volume that offers some insights into the dynamics of cultural exchange.

All of these books provide a context for Michael Ondaatje’s remarkable *Running in the Family* (McClelland & Stewart), the story of two journeys back to Sri Lanka in order to touch the ‘frozen opera’ of his family’s past ‘into words’. Ondaatje seeks the childhood he had ‘ignored and not understood’, the ‘era of grandparents’, particularly of his grandmother Lalla, ‘who managed to persuade all those she met into chaos’, and, most painfully, the father he never knew as an adult, all as part of a continuing search for himself. The shifts from third to first person, from prose to poetry, from print to photograph, from Shakespeare to chronicle, give this beautifully produced book the appearance of an album and contribute to our sense of the book as ‘gesture’ rather than history. *Running in the Family* confirms Ondaatje’s place as a major craftsman and innovator.

A very different kind of challenge to conventional orthodoxies about the shape of fiction issues from Hugh Hood’s latest addition to the New Age cycle, *Black and White Keys* (ECW), where an antiphonal structure balances Matt’s youth in Canada exploring popular American culture during the second World War against his father’s mission to save prominent Jews from the Nazi death camps in Germany. Hood’s use of Christian analogies and sacred art to comment on the structuring of his own grand design for interpreting Canadian life has never been surer. With each new book he establishes himself more firmly as a writer who cannot be ignored, although it is the grandeur of the overall design and the extent of Hood’s ambition rather than the beauty of any single work that compels attention.

Imagine a novel that combines all the stock elements of Canadian fiction — the lost child, the wild child, the ambitious pioneer felling the great tree, building the great house, neglecting his wife and family, discovering a mammoth’s skeleton — with a few new twists — the massacre of a plague of pigeons and a perpetual motion machine — all described in
a style that manages to suggest a strange blending of Conrad and Kroetsch while remaining a style so original, so confident and so surprisingly right that you trust yourself to it immediately. Imagine all this, and you'll have some sense of the best novel to appear in Canada this year — Graeme Gibson’s *Perpetual Motion* (McClelland & Stewart). Gibson has produced a sympathetic study of the nineteenth century mind — obsessed with ideas of progress, intrigued by science and the pseudo-scientific yet still swayed by superstition — in what is very much a twentieth century novel.

Josef Svorecky's *The Swell Season* (Lester Orpen) continues his masterly treatment of Czechoslovakian resistance during the Nazi occupation. Not in the same class as Svorecky but worthy of mention are several novels about contemporary women’s experiences: Carol Shield’s *A Fairly Conventional Woman*, Richard Wright’s *Teacher’s Daughter*, Joan Barfoot’s *Dancing in the Dark* (all Macmillan), and Katherine Govier’s *Going Through the Motions* (M&S).

Alice Munro's new collection of stories, *The Moons of Jupiter* (Macmillan) drew the most favourable attention this year, along with some impressive collections by younger writers, most notably Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *Man Descending* (Macmillan), Keath Fraser’s *Taking Cover* (Oberon), and *The Birth Control King of the Upper Volta* (ECW) by Leon Rooke, this year’s winner of the Canada/Australia Literary Exchange Award. *Making It New* (Methuen), an anthology of contemporary Canadian short stories with brief critical essays by the writers and edited by John Metcalf made history when it was published simultaneously in Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia.

The *New Oxford Book of Canadian Verse in English*, edited by Margaret Atwood, received mixed reviews for its compression of the work of older poets in order to devote about eighty per cent of its content to contemporary poetry. General Publishing brought out *West Window: The Selected Poetry of George Bowering and Gwendolyn MacEwan’s Earth-Light*; McClelland & Stewart, Susan Musgrave’s *Tarts and Muggers* (nothing new or very interesting here) and Robert Bringhurst’s *The Beauty of the Weapons* (an impressive selection from a poet to watch); Oxford, Patrick Lane’s *Old Mother*; Black Moss, *Bursting Into Song: An Al Purdy Omnibus*; Oberon, *The Collected Poems of Raymond Souster*; and Anansi, Don Dumanski’s *War in an Empty House*, an exciting new collection from a lesser known poet.

Macmillan’s *Dramatic W.O. Mitchell*, a collection of five of Mitchell’s stage plays, proves that they are less impressive than his fiction. Also disappointing is *The Work: Conversations with English-Canadian Play-
wrights (Coach House) by Robert Wallace and Cynthia Zimmerman, an ambitious, fat book that tells us very little about the work of the twenty-five playwrights interviewed, although simply because of the absence of this kind of material it provides an introduction to the area. 'Talking Dirty', a lightweight comedy by Vancouver's Sherman Snukal, made Canadian theatre history as the longest running Canadian play, but *Crackwalker* (Playwrights Canada) by Judith Thompson, produced in Toronto, won much higher critical praise. Toronto also experimented by producing a first play by Mavis Gallant — 'What is to be Done?' — to mixed reviews.

Critical publications, as usual, were very strong. The year began with the appearance of Northrop Frye's study of the influence of the Bible on literature, *The Great Code* (Academic), followed by Anansi's collection of his essays on Canadian culture, *Divisions on a Ground*. Anansi also brought out Marion Fowler's *The Embroidered Tent: Five Gentlewomen in Early Canada* and Dennis Duffy's *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario*. Two new scholarly books on A.M. Klein confirmed his importance — and the sadness of his life — Usher Caplan’s biography, *Like One That Dreamed* (McGraw-Hill, Ryerson), and *Beyond Sambatis* on: Selected Essays and Editorials, 1928-1955 (University of Toronto Press), edited by M.W. Steinberg and Usher Caplan. Patricia Monk's *The Smaller Infinity: The Unity of Self in the Novels of Robertson Davies* (University of Toronto Press) and Sherrill Grace’s *The Voyage That Never Ends: Malcolm Lowry’s Fiction* (University of British Columbia Press) contribute to the scholarly evaluation of major figures, and *William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life*, by Clara Thomas and John Lennox (University of Toronto Press), to the art of biography. Phyllis Webb’s *Talking* (Quadrant), George Bowering’s *A Way With Words* (Oberon) and Margaret Atwood’s *Second Words* (Anansi) give us the writers themselves talking about language, while John Metcalf’s *Kicking Against the Pricks* (ECW) presents a personal re-evaluation of the Canadian literary scene that is at once devastating, challenging, and funny. *Taking Stock: the Calgary Conference on the Canadian Novel*, edited by Charles Steele (ECW), attempts a more balanced approach to where we are now — or to where we were when the conference was held in 1978. It already seems dated. We're rapidly revising our literary maps with the publications of each new year.

DIANA BRYDON
Scholarship, that essential prolegomena to criticism, continued to consolidate the information available on Indian literature in English. Bibliographical control is improving at the usual slow rate so far as books are concerned, and K.C. Dutt compiled and edited a *Cumulative Index* to the journal *Indian Literature* published by the Sahitya Akademi (the Indian Academy of Letters), New Delhi.

A number of useful though somewhat repetitive studies by L.M. Khubchandani, were published by the Centre for Communication Studies, Pune: the series of *Miscellaneous Papers on Indian Languages* includes *English as a Contact Language in South Asia* (No 15); *English in India: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal* (No 18); *English in India* (No 6) which has a 'Demographic Study' of English, and one on 'Indian Bilingualism'; and *Language Demography* (No 3) which has two 'Profiles' on 'Language Diversity in India'. G.C. Whitworth's 1907 book *Indian English: An examination of the errors of idiom made by Indians writing in English* was republished by Bahri Publications, New Delhi. Narendra K. Aggarwal's *English in South Asia: A Bibliographical Survey of Resources* was published by Indian Documentation Service, Gurgaon. A comprehensive survey of postgraduate *Teaching and Research in English* was published by the University Grants Commission, New Delhi.

A selection of Sujit Mukherjee's stimulating articles, published between 1952 and 1977, has been published as *The Idea of an Indian Literature* (Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore). Patchy and bitty though it is, Elena J. Kalinnikova's survey of a dozen novelists and eight poets (covering the period from Toru Dutt to Manohar Malgonkar) testifies to increasing interest in Indian Literature in English on the part of scholars from Eastern Europe, (*Indian Literature in Brief*, translated by V.P. Sharma, Vimal Prakashan, Ghaziabad). A collection of critical essays by various hands on new or neglected novelists such as Chaman Nahal, M.V. Rama Sarma, M.C. Daniels, Nergis Dalal, Romen Basu and Veena Paintal, *Indian English Novelists* (New Horizon, Allahabad) is edited by Madhusudan Prasad, and has useful essays on B. Rajan (H.H. Anniah Gowda), Ruskin Bond (Anandlal), Sasthi Brata (G.P. Sarma), Raji Narasimhan (Atma Ram), Anita Desai (Jasbir Jain) and Bharati Mukherjee (M. Sivaramakrishna). R.K. Dhawan edited a selection of essays on more recognised novelists, *Explorations in Modern Indo-Anglian Fiction* (Bahri, New Delhi). S.R. Bald's *Novelists and Political Consciousness* (Chanakya, New Delhi) investigates literary expressions of Indian nationalism in seven novelists between 1919 and
1947. While Sudarshan Sharma examines the *Influence of Gandhian Ideology on Indo-Anglian Fiction* (Soni Book Agency, New Delhi), V.N. Tewari edited a collection of papers presented at a seminar on the 'Impact of Nehruism on Indian Literature, 1889-1964'. This includes Karan Singh’s Valedictory Address, which helpfully defines ‘Nehruism’ as ‘humanism, pluralism, scientific rationalism, socialism, democracy, anti-colonialism and non-alignment’! However, he does point out that Nehru’s contribution probably lay in creating an atmosphere which gave a fillip to Indian literature. *Nehru and Indian Literature* (publications Bureau, Panjab University, Chandigarh) includes Satyapal Anand’s paper which looks more directly at ‘Jawaharlal Nehru as Litterateur’.

The most clearly political of our novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, produced a somewhat linguistically homogenised series of reminiscences, *Conversations in Bloomsbury* (Wildwood House, UK and Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi). Though they also include conversations with other people (e.g. bus drivers), the book concentrates on literary figures such as Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot. These conversations seem, however, to be excuses to explore Anand’s own personality, aspirations and development, and provide the background to his *Seven Ages of Man*. A collection of rather eulogistic *Perspectives of Mulk Raj Anand* was edited by K.K. Sharma (Humanities Press, New Delhi).


D. Ramakrishna’s *Indo-English Prose: an anthology* (Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi) may cause prose to begin to receive more attention, and M.K. Naik has edited *Perspectives on Indian Prose in English* (Abhinav, New Delhi), a companion volume to *Perspectives on Indian Drama in English*. Prem Kumar Basu has collected and edited the diary, lectures and sermons of the 1870 visit of *Keshub Chunder Sen in England* (Writers Workshop). Also from Writers Workshop is Sushil Mukherjee’s *More Frankly Speaking*, a continuation of his *Frankly Speaking*, essays on social life in West Bengal. Other refreshing collections of essays are T.R. Srinivasarangam’s *He Who Laughs Last* (Raghu Publications. Tuticorin), and M.L. Malhotra’s reminiscences and reflections, *Warts and All* (Sunanda Publications, Ajmer), while Rahul Singh edited

Ved Mehta's A Family Affair: India Under Three Prime Ministers is just one of the ever-increasing number of books being published in India, in English, on all sorts of everyday subjects.

Distinguished authors have contributed to the large number of books being written for children (in English) in India. Anita Desai's The Village By the Sea (Heinemann, London) portrays with incandescent clarity a village living out a rooted life in the middle of being modernised, and Ruskin Bond describes his own youth and that of his friends in The Young Vagrants (IBH, Bombay), written when he was in his teens. Also from IBH is Margaret Bhatty's Up Country Down Country: Strange Adventures for Children, and Nilima Sinha's The Chandipur Jewels won a Children's Book Trust competition. K.H. Devsare's Who's Who of Indian Children's Writers covers only Indic languages (Communications Publishers, New Delhi).

There was one noteworthy play (Priyachari Chakravarti's Maharaja's Prayer, Writers Workshop), but around fifty volumes of poetry, including some eighteen first collections. Worth noting are: Man Mohan Singh's Village Poems (foreword by Dom Moraes, Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi); Jayanta Mahapatra's collection of twelve landscape poems, Relationship (Alok Prabha, Cuttack); G. Soundararaj, The Harvest (P.V. Nathan and Co, Madras); Rita Dalmiya, In Aloneness (Prayer Books, Calcutta); Nilima Das, My Roots (Reprint Publishers, Kanpur); Emmanuel N. Lall's Blue Vanda (Writers Workshop, Calcutta); and Keshav Malik's Twenty Six Poems (Usha Malik, New Delhi). With Manohar Bandopadhyay, Malik has also edited Nineteen Poets: An Anthology of Contemporary Indo-Anglian Poetry, which aims at introducing a younger generation of poets (Prachi Prakashan, New Delhi). Tijan M. Sallah's When Africa Was A Young Woman (Writers Workshop, Calcutta) draws attention once again to the Indian experience in Africa and other countries.

Poetry criticism attempted afresh to come to terms with earlier poets: Jasbir Jain's first full-length study of Henry Derozio, The Colonial Encounter, was published by the Centre for Commonwealth Literature and Research, Mysore; Amalendu Bose's Michael Madhusudan Dutt was published by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi; and The Flute and the Drum, a study of Sarojini Naidu, by V.A. Shahane and M.N. Sharma, is
available from Professor Shahane at Osmania University, Hyderabad. Urmila Verma has rewritten a fine Ph.D. thesis on *The Influence of English Poetry on Modern Hindi Poetry: 1900 to 1940* (Lokbharti Prakashan, Allahabad) in terms of technique, imagery, metre and diction.

There were a dozen volumes of short stories, of which Pritish Nandy's *Some Friends* (Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi) and R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* (Heinemann, London) are worth noting. In full-length fiction, attention continued to focus on the new availability of Jhabvala and Narayan in Penguin, though William Walsh's *R.K. Narayan: A Critical Appraisal* (Heinemann, London) must be mentioned. *Modern Indian Fiction* (edited by Saros Cowasjee and V.A. Shahane, Vikas, New Delhi) is an anthology of 'more or less self-contained' episodes from novels by eight of our principal writers.

There was a smaller crop of novels, though these tend to be of better quality generally — if only because the larger discipline involved, discourages all but the most determined: Manohar Malgonkar's latest, and large-scale, novel about espionage and the army, *Bandicoot Run* (Vision Books, New Delhi) is compulsively readable in its exploration of pettifogging and intrigue. Prema Nandkumar's *The Atom and the Serpent* (Affiliated East-West Press, Madras) is misleadingly advertised as the *first* novel about campus life in India; it is realistic, if undistinguished in its language. Kamala Sanders' *Tempestuous Heights* (Exposition Press, New York) is a very readable story, but is set in a locale which confuses elements from different regions. Arabinda Ray's *Sorrow in Knowledge* (Arnold-Heinemann, New Delhi) is a moving semi-autobiographical novel about an attack of polio, and six months in a London hospital, by a now-handicapped author. Pramod Bhatnagar continues the recent interest in the hills of the north-east in *Zoramthangi: Daughter of the Hills* (Vikrant Press, New Delhi). And it is good to see Humayun Kabir's 1945 novel, *Men and Rivers* back in print (Orient Longman, Bombay). A.K. Shiri Kumar is a new novelist: *The Wonderful World of Nilayan Swamy* (Writers Workshop, Calcutta), and Kamala Markandaya's new novel, *Pleasure City*, was published by Chatto, London.

The new and anti-traditional genre of autobiography looms larger and larger: of exclusively literary interest is Prakash Tandon's latest volume, *Return to Panjab, 1961-75* (Vikas, New Delhi); Jagjit Singh's *Memoirs of a Mathematician Manque* (Vikas) is by the father of Operations Research in India; Minoo Masani was a member of the Lok Sabha, the Lower House of Parliament, from 1957 to 1970, Indian ambassador to Brazil, and Chairman of a UN sub-committee on Discrimination and Minorities (*Against the Tide*, also Vikas); Saroj Chakrabarty's *My Years*
with Dr B.C. Roy, 1882-1962, former Chief Minister of West Bengal (self-published, Calcutta) makes extensive use of Roy's correspondence with national figures such as Nehru, Pant and Patel; another Chief Minister, E.K. Nayanar of Kerala also published his autobiography, *My Struggles* (Vikas again); and N. Keshavan, ex Member of Parliament, published *Autobiography of an MP* (Vichara Sahitya, Bangalore); the civil servant K.P.S. Menon's *Many Worlds Revisited* (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay) is a companion to his earlier *Many Worlds*. P.D. Tandon, journalist and politician, produced *Flames from the Ashes* (St Paul Society, Allahabad); R.N. Sen, industrialist and businessman, wrote *In Clive Street* (East India Publishers, Calcutta); Mar Aprem's *Strange But True* (Maryland Publishers, Trivandrum) is the honest and humorous self-portrait of the youngest Indian arch-bishop; and *Towards a Revolutionary Theatre* (M.C. Sarkar, Calcutta) consists of the reminiscences of the socialist Bengali director, producer and stage and screen actor Utpal Dutt, which throws considerable light on the People's Theatre movement in the context of recent political developments.

While not, in the strict sense, English Literature, all this shows how broad and varied has become the context of English-language literary activity in India.

PRABHU S. GUPTARA

NEW ZEALAND

With more than twenty collections of verse published in 1982, besides the *Collected Poems* of Alistair Campbell, the *Selected Poems* of our two foremost poets, Curnow and Baxter, two poetry anthologies, and a landmark anthology of contemporary Maori writing, the poetic year has been both abundant and various.

Alistair Campbell won the year's New Zealand Book Award for poetry with his *Collected Poems* (Alister Taylor); although its publication date is given as 1981, it didn't arrive in the bookshops until the new year. It is largely drawn from *Kapiti: Selected Poems 1947-71* and his two subsequent collections *Dreams, Yellow Lions* (1975) and *The Dark Lord of Savaiki* (1980) and marks a summing up of his career so far, rather than a new burst of creativity.

In that respect it may be compared with Allen Curnow's *Collected Poems 1933-1973*; since that fallow period Curnow has produced work of
quite extraordinary power, and the publication of *Selected Poems* (Penguin) replaces a book that has become increasingly redundant as subsequent work has appeared. The new selection encompasses a poetic career ranging across forty years, from 1939 (Curnow selects nothing before *Not in Narrow Seas*) to 1979 (all of *An Incorrigible Music* is included); one of the most enduring impressions one has is of the wholeness of the enterprise: like Eliot: 'What we call the beginning is often the end/ And to make an end is to make a beginning' — and another is the continuing increase in poetic strength that Curnow displays from one collection to the next. This book presents, to my mind, as excellent a body of verse as has been produced in this country; it also suggests that Curnow must be considered among the best of the contemporary writers of verse in English.

The other important selection is that of James K. Baxter and has been made by J.E. Weir, the editor of the monumental *Collected Poems* (1979), a splendid achievement both for publishing and scholarship but because of its necessary bulk, one that makes ready access to Baxter's finest work difficult; with its publication a selection was clearly essential. *Selected Poems* (Oxford) takes 248 poems from the 774 of the earlier work — which in turn were drawn from the more than 2,600 poems that Baxter wrote. Again a fine achievement; the only quibble one might make is that after not only preparing the *Collected Poems*, but also the three volumes of posthumous selections, Weir might well have stood aside as editor of this volume — which will remain the definitive one for some time — in order that a different perspective be given on this poet.

Oxford has also brought out its *Book of Contemporary New Zealand Poetry*, chosen by Fleur Adcock. This presumably 'updates' Alistair Paterson's *15 Contemporary New Zealand Poets* (1980) — publication rights for which, incidentally have been taken up by Grove Press in the United States — but I find it gives a much more conservative and colourless account of the contemporary scene than does the earlier one. Although Adcock presents twenty one poets, she has but eight in common with Paterson, due partly to some silly nonsense about whom she defines as a New Zealand poet (of course Paterson also made some foolish omissions, which he defends on the spurious grounds that, in 1980, there was a particular direction in which New Zealand poetry was moving; his selection was designed to reinforce that view, and so the cart came before the horses), and also to what some have seen as a bias towards Wellington based poets. In any event the forthcoming publication of Penguin's replacement of Curnow's *New Zealand Verse* (1960), this time edited by Ian Wedde and Harvey McQueen, should by all
accounts supercede the Adcock venture. The other general anthology is volume five of the biennial *Poetry New Zealand*, a competent but largely uninspiring survey of two years' output.

However, the most important anthological publication has been that of Maori writing, *Into the World of Light* (Heinemann), edited by Witi Ihimaera and Don Long. Having acknowledged the long tradition of oral Maori literature, the editors discern a radical change dating from the early 1960s whereby 'Maori literature began to unfurl the views of the people, until then participants in virtually the largest underground movement known in New Zealand, into the world of light'. The 39 contributors offer *waiata*, poetry, prose and drama and the anthology is truly an exciting justification for the editors' argument.

Any attempt to assess the large output of individual verse collections would be foolhardy; nevertheless an outline of the product can be given. Allen Curnow has immediately supplemented his *Selected Poems* with a new collection, *You Will Know When You Get There* (Auckland University Press, Oxford University Press), which is, in my opinion, equally as powerful as his acclaimed *An Incorrigible Music*; the two books seem designed to be taken in tandem with each other.

Other established poets who produced further collections in 1982 were C.K. Stead with *Geographies* (AUP/OUP); Vincent O'Sullivan who had both *The Butcher Papers* (AUP/OUP) and *The Rose Ballroom and other poems* (McIndoe); Bill Manhire, *Good Looks* (AUP/OUP); Rob Jackaman, *Solo Lovers* (South Head Press, Australia); Barry Mitcalfe, *Beach* (Coromandel Press); W.H. Oliver, *Poor Richard* (Port Nicolson Press); Louis Johnson, *Coming and Going* (Mallinson Rendel); Alistair Paterson, *Qu'appelle* (Pilgrims South Press); Sam Hunt *Running Scared* (Whitcoulls), and John Summers, *Prancing before the Ark* (Pisces Press). Hone Tuwhare has *Year of the Dog: poems new and selected* (McIndoe).

Of these, I particularly enjoyed *Good Looks*; I thought Jackaman achieved real assurance in *Solo Lovers*; I was impressed with the technical excellences of *Geographies*; and delighted to renew an acquaintance with Butcher, Baldy and company in O'Sullivan's *Papers*. Mitcalfe's *Beach* is both a poetic and visual evocation of the New Zealand coastline — during his year as Writer-in-Residence here at Canterbury he also completed a long narrative sequence called 'Parihaka' which was published both in *Pacific Quarterly Moana* and in *Poetry Australia*.

Two poets followed up successful first collections with a second — Meg Campbell with *A Durable Fire* (Te Kotare Press), and Anne Donovan with *Heads and Leaf* (Walden Books, Westland). Both of these are well produced and both confirm the initial promise shown by their authors.
Two of the best of the first collections have also been written by women: Keri Hulme's *The Silences Between* (Moeraki Conversations) (AUP/OUP), and Cilla McQueen's *Homing In* (McIndoe). New Zealand women verse writers find themselves part of a strong tradition and these four poets do nothing but strengthen what was started by Blanche Baughan and Ursula Bethell.

Other collections during the year were *Zephyr* (Piano Publishing) by Gary McCormick, *This Night Is Winter* (Helicon Press) by John Paisley, and *Solo Flight* (University of Otago Press) by Bill Sewell. Koenraad Kuiper's *Signs of Life* is a haiku-style sequence beautifully printed by Wai-te-ata Press, and a first book, as is Bill Direen's *Twenty Nine One* (Prototype Publications) and R.F. Brown's *Gone No Address* (Coromandel), with illustrations by his son Nigel. Fiction writer Barry Southam has collected poems written over a number of years as *The People Dance* (Northcott Reeves). The title suggests Southam's social concerns; his subjects are treated both satirically and compassionately.

Women writers also contributed strongly to the fiction written during the year. The best novel of the year was a first novel: Sue McCauley's *Other Halves* was immediately successful, and tells of the relationship between a divorced woman and a Maori adolescent, displaying both rage — at social and bureaucratic iniquities — and tenderness, in discussing the trials of the protagonists. Yvonne du Fresne's *Book of Ester* is also a first novel and treats a bicultural theme, here the life of a girl born of Danish parents in New Zealand and her efforts to combine aspects of her past and her present in a new whole. *Greenstone Land* (MacDonald Futura) is a wide-ranging costume drama by Yvonne Kalman, already in paperback, as also, from the previous year, are Fiona Kidman's *Mandarin Summer* and Phillip Temple's *Beak of the Moon*. From the indefatigable Coromandel Press are two novels by Sue Freeman, *Wales on a Wet Friday, I Cried in My Donut* and *Fat Chance*, both road novels, the second set in New Zealand. Finally, I look forward to reading James McNeish's latest novel *Joy* (Hodder & Stoughton), a comic satire about a town called Joy and its inhabitants, the Jovians.

The output of short fiction has not been as considerable as in 1981 but three collections stand out. Fiona Kidman follows her two novels with *Mrs Dixon and Friends* (Heinemann), Owen Marshall displays the fruits of his 1981 Writer-in-Residency here at Canterbury in *The Master of Big Jingles and other stories* (McIndoe) and Michael Gifkins has impressed with his stories in *After the Revolution* (Longman Paul). Out too late to be remarked in last year's Year was Michael Morrissey's *The Fat Lady*
and The Astronomer (Sword Press): it won the 1982 award for the best first work of fiction.

A fascinating re-publication has been Vincent O'Sullivan's edition of Katherine Mansfield's The Aloe, with Prelude, where the earlier story is set side-by-side with the later one. It's a fine effort too by Port Nicholson Press, a new publishing house whose initial list includes not only this and Oliver's Poor Richard (above), but also an autobiography by Ormond Wilson, An Outsider Looks Back. In this field, and following his death, Penguin have reprinted the three volumes of Frank Sargeson's autobiography — Once is Enough, More than Enough and Never Enough — together as Sargeson, and also The Stories of Frank Sargeson; these two volumes include a great deal of his finest work.

With the death of Bruce Mason at the end of the year, it was not only the world of New Zealand theatre that suffered a great loss; Mason was not only a man of letters in the widest sense but in his generosity towards young artists of all kinds he was an enormously positive influence on the development of the arts in New Zealand. His loss will be deeply felt.

The majority of dramatic publication in New Zealand emanates from Wellington, and from two established outlets in particular. From the consortium of Price Milburn, Victoria University Press and Currency comes Roger Hall's latest publication, Fifty-Fifty, while Playmarket under the general editorship of David Carnegie continues its thrifty service in publishing New Zealand Theatrescripts with Mark Prain's Seized. The exception is Hodder & Stoughton's Once on Chunuk Bar, Maurice Shadbolt's first play.

Hall's latest performed play is Hot Water, an indication that there has been no drying up of his prolific talent. David Carnegie's account of the Second New Zealand Playwrights' Workshop (in Landfall 144) is of a highly successful occasion and speaks well of the four fully workshopped plays — Hilary Beaton's Outside In ('an intense female prison drama'), Marcus Campbell's Household Gods ('a play of Chekov-like inactivity punctuated with surrealist visual images on the margin of an erupting Ruapehu'), Seamus Quinn's A Street Called Straight (set in Protestant East Belfast) and Carolyn Burn's Objection Overruled ('a serious play in comic mode about women and society'). This last has already been performed — a popular success at Christchurch's Court Theatre.

The end of 1981 also saw the publication of the first full length critical and historical study of our drama. Howard McNaughton's New Zealand Drama (Twayne) begins from 1840 and follows the development of writing for the New Zealand theatre through to 1979 and playwrights
Joseph Musaphia and Roger Hall. A work of thorough scholarship.

Two major works of literary criticism are both concerned with New Zealand fiction. Peter Simpson has written a study of Ronald Hugh Morrieson, an author whose four novels and two short stories were only 'discovered' after Morrieson's death in 1972 at the age of 50, his life having been spent in the seclusion of the small Taranaki township of Hawera. Besides being a first class study of the writer this book has already attracted considerable attention because of Simpson's radical argument for a re-appraisal of the critical approaches to New Zealand fiction as a whole. The latest issue of Landfall (144) has a well considered critique of the approach by Lawrence Jones. Simpson's Ronald Hugh Morrieson is in Oxford's New Zealand Writers and their Work series.

There has also been Critical Essays on the New Zealand Short Story (Heinemann), edited by Cherry Hankin. This may be seen as representing a conservative tradition in the criticism of New Zealand fiction. There is a particularly fine essay on Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace by Bill Pearson.

As far as the journals are concerned I should mention first that Pacific Quarterly Moana has upheld its high standard of interest and punctuality, despite my neglecting to notice it in last year's Kunapipi review. Besides a general issue, the journal has included two issues covering specific areas — Oral and Traditional Literatures and Each Other's Dreams, the second an anthology of contemporary Black American writing selected by L.E. Scott.

Following the death of former editor, Peter Smart, Landfall continues under the editorship of David Dowling and Michael Harlow. The first issue of Parallax, a journal of post-modern literature edited by Alan Loney, made its first appearance; but there was nothing from Islands in 1982. Finally, while not strictly a New Zealand journal, Span, the SPACLALS organ, is being edited from the University of Canterbury by Peter Simpson, after its sojourn in Queensland.

All in all, a strong year, especially for poetry. Besides Alistair Campbell's Collected Poems, the 1982 New Zealand Book Awards were Maurice Gee's Meg and Vincent O'Sullivan's Dandy Elison for Lunch jointly for fiction, and Robin Morrison's book of photographs, The South Island of New Zealand from the Road, for non-fiction. Allen Curnow will spend 1983 in Menton as the Katherine Mansfield Fellow.

SIMON GARRETT
PAKISTAN

An eventful year, it witnessed a country-wide teachers’ strike for a quarter of the academic year and harsh federal cuts in the grants to universities, which the Punjab University attempted to ameliorate by celebrating its Centenary with such frills as literary congresses and symposia. Meantime, the International Literacy Day passed unnoticed. And a reflective gloom hung over the literary world as Death took away some of our best Urdu writers: poets Ehsan Danish, Hafeez Jullundhari and Firaq Gorakhpuri, and novelists and short-story writers Khadija Mastoor and Ghulam Abbas.

Although Ustad Daman, the famous septagenarian Punjabi oral poet, turned down grants awarded him by the Academy of Letters and the Punjab Governor, for reasons of conscience, the Government intends to direct greater attention to the questions of culture and language. The Academy of Letters in Islamabad plans to give annual awards for literary works published in all the main tongues spoken in Pakistan (which includes English). Sindhi writers and intellectuals have called for the creation of a language commission to settle the question of languages and finally determine the relationship of the national language (Urdu) to the regional languages. In addition, a panel of English professors met in Lahore, at the University of the Punjab, and discussed the teaching of English in the country. The meeting, which was chaired by the Vice Chancellor of the University, analysed the problems of teaching languages within the educational system and concluded with a resolution of support for bilingualism in education, thereby affirming the continuance of both English and Urdu as instructional media. A couple of seminars were held in Islamabad to explore a larger subject, Cultural Identity, but these were dominated by religious and social science talk without much reference to creative expression in society. But Islamabad can be lively and went to town for an international mushaira (poetry symposium), with Pakistani, Chinese and Egyptian poets, on Independence Day (14 August).

Translation, on the whole, has picked up in the last couple of years and its substance and significance can now be seen. Taufiq Rafat’s Bulleh Shah: A Selection Rendered into English Verse (Lahore, Vanguard) has made its mark as a beginning for literary translation in the 1980s, and more volumes are expected. The present book is the widest selection available in English of the work of the mystical Punjabi poet, Bulleh Shah (1680-1758). The book also contains a fine introduction to Bulleh Shah and his times by Khaled Ahmed. Faiz Ahmed
Faiz has been translated widely, and last year alone saw the publication of English translations of his Urdu poems by Ikram Azam, in Poems from Faiz (Rawalpindi, Nairang-e-Khayal Publications); by Carolyn Kizer, Naomi Lazard and Alamgir Hashmi, in the Annual of Urdu Studies (Chicago); and by Faiz himself, in Only Connect: Literary Perspectives East and West edited by Guy Amirthanayagam and S.C. Harrex (Adelaide & Honolulu, CRNLE & East-West Center). Also of interest were the Selected Short Stories of Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, translated from the Urdu by Sajjad Shaikh (Karachi, National Book Foundation), and the appearance of the second edition of Pakistan: Modern Urdu Short Stories (Islamabad, RCD Cultural Institute) compiled by the late S. Viqar Azim. Khushwant Singh's English translation of Muhammad Iqbal's Shikwa & Jawab-i-Shikwa (Complaint and Answer: Iqbal's Dialogue with Allah) (Delhi, OUP) has drawn much adverse criticism in India, Pakistan and other places. C.M. Nairn, Daud Kamal and Khalid Hasan published their translations of Urdu and Punjabi work in several journals.

Zulfikar Ghose's new novel, A New History of Torments (London, Hutchinson; New York: Holt, Rinehart), is a substantial addition to his Brazilian saga. Set in contemporary Brazil, the novel exploits the resources of the story in multiple directions to elicit from the land a meaning for those who inhabit it. Ghose knows how to make his language sing, and it is good to have him back on the familiar ground since his last novel, which might soon begin to look like an inter-novel. The present novel has already drawn wide and favourable interest. Its 'torments', however unreal, are the believable segments of an increasingly sombre vision.

Poets have been publishing in magazines both in Pakistan and abroad: Taufiq Rafat in The Ravi (Lahore), Kaleem Omar in The Ravi and Tempo (Karachi), Daud Kamal in The Muslim (Islamabad), Lotus (Beirut) and Viewpoint (Lahore), and Alamgir Hashmi in the Liberal and Fine Arts Review (USA), Ariel (Canada), Orbis (UK), and Aspect (Australia).

Ahmed Ali has been investigating the socio-political problems in Pakistan's refurbished Islamic set-up and giving TV lectures in Karachi. He has also revised his novel, Ocean of Night (1964), for re-publication. And I must mention two titles in criticism and non-fiction: Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition by Fazlur Rahman (University of Chicago Press) and A.K. Brohi's Islam in the Modern World (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation/al-Maarif). From among contemporary writers, only the work of Zulfikar Ghose, Alamgir
Hashmi and Intizar Husain was the subject of criticism, in the form of reviews and articles. Gerhard Stilz's volume, *Indien (India)*, in the Fink Verlag (Munich) series concerning New Literatures in English only covers 'Indian' Literature in English and will not help much for the literatures of any other parts of South Asia, although some items of Pakistani and Sri Lankan interests are included.

*The Ravi*, edited by Babar Hashmi, brought out a fine issue (LXXI 2) deservedly praised by *The Pakistan Times*. It included the work of several Pakistani poets and the prose writer Shuaib bin Hasan. *Explanations* (Lahore) is still under involuntary suspension. The Jamshoro journal, *Ariel*, is of critical and scholarly interest, apart from being the only English professional journal published in the year.

ALAMGIR HASHMI

SINGAPORE

After the excitement of the previous two years, 1982 was surprisingly a very quiet year insofar as literary activity is concerned. Indeed, one is left to wonder if the energy burnt itself out?

Only one book needs to be specifically mentioned here: Goh Poh Seng's *Bird With One Wing*. This collection of poems is Goh's third and is handsomely presented. The contents are quite another thing. Goh has a good satirical touch but this he does not exploit to advantage in this collection. Nor does his sharp, incisive commentary show itself in this volume. Rather he has moved on to more personal themes (such as relationships, history, myth) using the narrative as his major mode. On occasion he succeeds, but rarely: he does not, with very few exceptions, have the ability to sustain a long poem. The poetry becomes prosaic (and Goh is certainly a prose writer of strength) and threatens to slide off. The positive thing about *Bird With One Wing* is that it shows Goh coming to grips with a new and, one might add, important, aspect of creative writing — the confessional, especially when this is linked to broader themes. One looks forward to Goh's next book with a certain amount of interest.

The Ministry of Culture's *Singa* magazine continued a struggling existence. Produced two times each year *Singa* can play a vital role in forging a viable literary identity as it publishes translations of Malay, Tamil and Chinese works as well as those written in English. And some quite good
new talent is to be discerned within its covers. Furthermore each issue has an essay or an article that deals with one or other of the remaining arts of dance, drama, painting, etc. As always, the two issues which came out this year are very attractive and, for the price ($2.50), exceedingly cheap.

A regular and popular part of the local literary scene, the Sunday Times' Poetry Corner came to an unfortunate close after nearly three years. Its editor, K. Singh, took up a visiting appointment at the University of Papua New Guinea and Poetry Corner ceased as a result. This is the third time that such a feature has come and gone. The earliest Poetry Corner column was begun by Edwin Thumboo, it was later rekindled by Arthur Yap and, finally, by K. Singh. We do not know if a fourth attempt will be made. The thing that we do know is that through its columns some fine poems emerged and it is hoped that the contributors to Poetry Corner will not be denied other avenues for publication.

The highlight for 1982 as far as the arts are concerned was the Singapore Arts Festival which took place towards the end of the year. It naturally attracted huge crowds and manifested the fact that in spite of its image overseas as essentially a 'shopover' city, Singapore has a soul. But from a literary point of view it is saddening to note that the consultant-director, Anthony Steel (who may be known to some readers as having directed the well-established Adelaide Arts Festival) did not see fit to incorporate some kind of a Writers' Week. There is enough going in this respect to make such an event practical as well as interesting. There were some dramatic works put on — and we might here mention The Samseng and the Chettiar's Daughter which was based on The Beggars Opera — but more could have been done by way of forums, discussions, workshops. Perhaps the next time round the organisers will bear writers in mind?

Other usual literary activities such as those organised by the University's Literary Society, the Society of Singapore Writers, the National Library, the National Book Development Council, continued as normal, but without any great impact. Maybe what is lacking is a concerted effort to pull resources together to ensure that literature does not suffer the ignominious fate of undue neglect.

KIRPAL SINGH
1982 saw Athol Fugard mark his fiftieth year with the semi-autobiographical play *Master Harold and the 'Boys'.* Set in a café in Port Elizabeth during Harold's (Fugard's) youth, this powerful exploration of a characteristically South African 'master-boy' relationship deserved the honours accorded it by American critics during its opening runs at Yale and in New York. And recognition of Fugard as a leading contemporary dramatist was confirmed in the form of *Athol Fugard: A Source Guide* (compiled by Temple Hauptfleisch, Donker, Johannesburg) and a 'casebook' of critical articles, *Athol Fugard* (ed. Stephen Gray, McGraw Hill, Johannesburg). In addition, a major monograph and Fugard's own *Notebooks* are due to appear from Donker in 1983.

The 'casebook' on Fugard was one of a new 'Southern African Literature Series', published by McGraw Hill, and was launched together with *Soweto Poetry* (ed. Michael Chapman), a collection of press reviews, interviews and articles that attempts to place the black poetry 'renaissance' of the 1970s within a literary and social context. This 'casebook' may fruitfully be read in conjunction with two comprehensive anthologies, *Voices from Within: Black Poetry from Southern Africa* (eds Chapman & Achmat Dangor, Donker) and *The Return of the Amasi Bird: South African Black Poetry 1892-1982* (eds Tim Couzens & Essop Patel, Ravan Press, Johannesburg), while further volumes of black poetry to appear were Mongane Serote's *Selected Poems* (Donker), Mafika Gwala's *No More Lullabies* (Ravan) and Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, reissued by Donker.

Other important reprints included Sol. T. Plaatje's great political book, first published in 1916, *Native Life in South Africa* (Ravan), a powerful response from this pioneering black writer to the Native Land Act of 1913, in terms of which Africans began to feel the impact of institutionalised apartheid. The theme of racial confrontation is also central to Harry Bloom's novel, *Transvaal Episode*, and Todd Matshikiza's autobiography, *Chocolates for my Wife*. Both works were banned when they originally appeared around the time of Sharpeville and have now been released in South Africa along with Can Themba's collection of short stories, *The Will to Die*. (All of these books appear in a new series, 'Africasouth Paperbacks', by David Philip of Cape Town.)

In fact, 1982 was notable more for its reprints, anthologies and secondary works than for developments in imaginative expression. Nevertheless, alongside such seminal publications as Peter Alexander's *Roy Campbell: A Critical Biography* (OUP, London & David Philip),
Jack Cope's *The Adversary Within: Dissident Writing in Afrikaans* (David Philip) and *South African Literature 1980* (the first in a series of annual overviews of literary events, Centre for Southern African Literature & Donker), there appeared two interesting volumes of poetry (Chris Mann's *New Shades* and Stephen Gray's *Love Poems: Hate Poems*, both from David Philip), a novel on the legacy generated by 'Soweto' (Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto*, from Ravan) and a first collection of short stories by Mutloatse Mothobi entitled *Mama Ndryalila* (Ravan). The appearance, too, of David Adey's anthology, *Under the Southern Cross* (Donker), was a reminder that the short story is a major genre in South African literature — but one that has not yet received adequate critical attention.

If 1982 was a lean year for novels (André Brink's blockbuster, *A Chain of Voices*, was perhaps the most notable achievement), there continued to be encouraging signs of activity in 'fringe' theatres in Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town, with a playwright of definite promise emerging in Paul Slabolepsky, whose *Saturday Night at the Palace* offered a particularly fresh treatment of the 'master-servant' relationship that was also germane to Fugard's *Master Harold. Woza Albert*, in which Mbongeni Negema and Percy Mtwa utilise (under Barney Simon's direction) the conditions of Poor Theatre, vividly depicted the return of the Messiah, as a black man, to South Africa of the present day, while Maishe Maponya's *The Hungry Earth* (staged, like *Woza Albert*, both in South Africa and abroad) continued to define a poetics of protest and resistance within 'township drama'.

What with the ever-inventive example of Fugard, the increasing willingness of 'fringe' theatres to produce indigenous plays and the expected appearance, in 1983, of the first comprehensive anthology of South African English drama, the coming decade could well see a truly 'South African' theatre at last beginning to gather momentum.

MICHAEL CHAPMAN

The absence of reports on East and West Africa and the Caribbean is not due to prejudice on the part of the editor. The absence is due to the failure on the part of the people who promised to write the sections to fulfil their promise. Editor.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Rawdon lives in Alberta. A book of his stories will be published this year. Bruce Cudney is a Canadian poet living in Ontario. Monty Reid is a co-editor of the Canadian journal The Camrose Review. Irene Gross McGuire is a Canadian poet who lives in Ontario. Keith Harrison teaches at Dawson College, Montreal. His novel Dead Ends was published in 1981. Wilson Harris’s most recent novel is The Angel at the Gate (Faber). E.A. Markham is assistant editor of Ambit. His collected poems are soon to be published by Anvil Press. James Berry won the 1981 British National Poetry Prize. New Beacon Press have recently published a book of his poems, Lucy’s Letters and Loving. Stephen Watson teaches at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Kevin Green teaches at the University of Besancon and is writing a book on Xavier Herbert. Mark Macleod is poetry editor of Meanjin and teaches at Macquarie University, Sydney. Robert Drewe’s most recent novel is A Cry in the Jungle Bar. Patrick Morgan teaches at Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education, Victoria. Margaret Butcher is Education Officer at the Commonwealth Institute in London.

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Perhaps the best compliment I can pay it is to mention that when I had finished reading it, I thought of the tag used by Cameroon children to elicit another story: «Yu no get oda wan?» (Haven't you got any more?)'

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Donald Cosentino's general introduction speaks of the collection's affording the opportunity «to appreciate the God's plenty of West African traditional and modern storytelling» and this is certainly the impression with which one is left after reading it.

John Thieme, *Kunapipi*

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