Books


ALTHOUGH THIS is by no means a cheap book it joins the growing collection of invaluable publications in the field of Australian literature produced by Oxford University Press. Two earlier volumes, Australian Literary Criticism edited by Grahame Johnston and Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism edited by Clement Semmler began what is undoubtedly one of the most important publishing ventures at present under way in Australia. These books, together with the monograph series “Australian Writers and their Work”, also published by OUP, bring together much of the best that has been thought and said about Australian literature since its very beginnings.

As the title of this particular anthology implies, Mr. Barnes’ main concern was to bring together various essays all of which have some bearing or comment on the role of the writer who finds himself in a peculiarly Australian environment. Frederick Sinnett, writing in 1856 was in the uniquely fortunate position of being able to comment on Australian literature almost before there was any such literature to comment upon. And yet this Fiction Fields of Australia, the first piece in this anthology, made many points which were to be reiterated throughout the ensuing century. The spirit of Sinnett’s belief, for instance, that “most Australian stories are too Australian” is almost directly answered in the extract from Vincent Buckley’s Essays in Poetry, Mainly Australian published in 1957, where Buckley sees Christopher Brennan as “the first genuinely unself-conscious” Australian writer.

Other essays included are of more specific application and interest. A. G. Stephens’ book, Chris: Brennan, originally published in 1933 is here at last restored to print. It was the first book on Brennan to be published and has been followed by three others together with innumerable articles, and yet still retains that vigorous and fresh outlook which typified almost all of Stephens’ writing. He obviously did not much like Brennan’s verse, though he is rather cagey about saying so. He interestingly places him as a writer “in the rank of cosmopolitan commentators such as Gosse, Saintsbury, Symons”, and perhaps even more interestingly (even if yet wider of the mark) declares that Brennan’s major fault was that he “wrote by eye more than by ear, and (for reasons too many to explain here) the best poetry in all languages is written by ear for an ear.” Only A. G. Stephens among Australian writers would be audacious enough to try and get away with an argument like that and Mr. Barnes pays homage to this audaciousness (and to the astute intelligence which lay behind it) by making Stephens the key figure in this anthology; and by including not just the Brennan book, but a series of essays on Lawson, the Introduction to The Bulletin Story Book, some of the Furphy-Stephens correspondence and even Victor Daley’s merry satire on AGS and his disciples, “Narcissus and Some Tadpoles.” The main point about Stephens is that not only does he write about major writers but that he is a major writer himself. Would it be too much to hope that an offering such as Mr. Barnes gives us will spur some enterprising publisher on to give us a collected AGS? Such a book must be the most needed volume in the whole field of Australian literature.
Yet another virtue of this anthology is that the editor has not restricted his choice to the obvious classics of Australian literary discussion and debate. Even in the section covering the earliest years of our literature he has been able to uncover the unexpected. An essay such as Thomas Heney’s review of an anthology of Australian verse edited by Douglas Sladen in 1888 surprises by the force of its argument against literary nationalism and by its constant insistence that Australian literature must be seen in the context of literature as a whole, and not just as a peculiarly Australian phenomenon having peculiarly Australian standards. Heney wrote:

“There is beginning to grow up amongst certain circles of critics and writers a sort of implied and tacit agreement that much ought to be forgiven a man or woman who writes upon Australian subjects from Australian standpoints on the ground of their local appeal. Rubbish is to be consecrated, provided it be precious, i.e., Australian; and slipshod workmanship, threadbare subjects, rhythmical or unrhythmical verbosity, in a word, every disfigurement of style and every absurdity of conception will be not pardoned only, but cherished, provided it bear the sacrosanct impression of localism.” Bearing in mind the sort of misplaced adulation which has been the fate of so many Australian writers since Heney wrote, his words have an almost prophetic ring.

Of course in many ways the task of an anthologist is a thankless one, even if he is as conscientious as Mr. Barnes has undoubtedly tried to be, even writing commentaries and introductions to link the various pieces he has chosen to print. Certainly it does seem to me to be a major flaw in this collection that it neglects entirely the Norman Lindsay inspired “vitalist” school of writers which flowered in the 1920’s, and whose literary achievements even if now rather critically unfashionable, were nonetheless a major contribution to the development of our literature.

Barnes in his introduction to the third section of the book seems in fact to be in two minds about the Lindsay school, which reached perhaps its height of influence through the magazine Vision (1923-4). He admits that “there can be no doubt that it was a stimulus to creativity at a barren time”, but almost hedges his bet by also insisting that “far from being avant-garde the magazine was a reflection of the English nineties”. Surely the only answer one can make to this is: so what? Henry Handel Richardson was also an old-fashioned writer but nobody neglects her achievement or denies the importance of her position in the development of Australian writing. If Mr. Barnes’ anthology had included at least Norman Lindsay’s Creative Effort and some of the exuberance from Vision it would have done more justice to this era of our history.

It would be unjust though to close on a carping note for, as I have already suggested, this book is of immense value and interest. The Foundations of Culture in Australia, and cri de coeur of that extraordinary man “Inky” Stephensen is here, as is Rex Ingamell’s Conditional Culture, both long since in need of reprinting. The final section of the book, dealing with writing of the fifties and sixties is perhaps the section where most people will feel that something else should have been included, and something more left out; and if Mr. Barnes’ selection here is a more obviously subjective one than elsewhere in the book it is also a selection which reveals an acute awareness of the sort of critical revaluation which Australian literature is now undergoing.

Leon Cantrell
POVERTY IN AUSTRALIA,
G. G. Masterman.
Angus and Robertson, 171pp., $2.25.

ADDRESSING the Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science in 1962, Bob Hawke of the ACTU described it as "a polite gathering of polite and comfortably-situated people applauding platitudes, uncritical when confronted with nonsense and sublimely unaware of the economic and political realities which face this country." This sort of reaction is not altogether absent after reading Poverty in Australia, a collection of the papers presented at the Institute's Summer School in January 1969.

The opening address was given by W. C. Wentworth, the Federal Minister for Social Services, and it complacently concluded on the note that Australia probably has less poverty than any other country: "It is the combination of our social system and our social services, operating upon our tremendous natural resources and comparative freedom from the shackles of the past, which had produced for us this fortunate state of affairs." Wentworth's war on poverty is to be based on a policy of purely fiscal or social security payments; concepts like "participation" and "community" have not yet reached Canberra. As Jim Spigelman pointed out at the conference: "The Minister's paper could easily have been written at the turn of the century. The types of issues he discussed and the programmes he suggested were those that existed in 1900."

The best contribution came from a visiting London School of Economics Fabian, Professor Donald Dennison, who reminded the delegates that industrial progress does not eliminate poverty and may exacerbate it, that the conventional social services work to the advantage of the "haves", and that "we institutionalise and perpetuate inequality and make it respectable." Other papers, all of which had some interesting things to say, were read by Professor Ronald Henderson of the University of Melbourne, Miss Janet Paterson of the Brotherhood of St. Lawrence, and Professor R. G. Brown of Flinders University.

Not one of the speakers however, looked at the causes of poverty. It was left to a couple of young radical students to raise points of fundamental importance. In particular, Garrie Henderson, a second-year Melbourne University activist, berated the conference for ignoring cultural poverty and he went on to argue that poverty should not be seen as a paradox in advanced capitalist societies. Implicit in most of the papers was the assumption that poverty was some kind of aberration which could be abolished without any fundamental socio-economic structural changes. Yet as Henderson pointed out, poverty in all its dimensions is built into the capitalist system and it will not be eliminated until power in Australia is massively redistributed. That his remarks were completely ignored is not surprising for none of the papers had looked at the distribution of wealth and income. (Henderson later wrote an excellent article entitled "An Introduction to an Analysis of Poverty and Social Change" in National U, 12 May 1969.)

Any satisfactory analysis of the nature of poverty must recognise capitalism as the basic source and socialism as the ultimate solution. Of course, meliorative measures within the capitalist framework are possible, but the system will never be able to eliminate poverty, as Hyman Lumer has shown in Poverty: Its Roots and its Future (New York: International Publishers, 1965).

In his conclusion to Wealth and Power in America (New York: Praeger,
1962), Gabriel Kolko stated that "poverty will continue to be a basic aspect of the American social and class structure so long as no fundamental changes are made in the distribution of wealth and the autonomous control of the corporate machinery." This remark obviously holds also for capitalist countries other than the United States.

**John Playford.**


ALEXANDER WERTH has been writing books for a long time. A lot of them have been about Russia, as he was born in Czarist Russia in 1901, but he emigrated to England and became a British subject.

He spent the years of the Second World War in the Soviet Union and reported the heroic exploits of the Russian people and the Red Army. In 1964 he wrote *Russia at War,* a world best seller now published in 18 languages. In 1965 he was again in Moscow as official guest of the Soviet Government for the 20th anniversary victory celebrations and Marshal Sokolovsky presented him with a war medal. He visited the Soviet Union again in 1967 for material for a new book which he was writing as a sequel to *Russia at War.* It was to be called *Russia at Peace.*

No one could accuse Alexander Werth of being "anti-Soviet". But as he says, "This book had been completed before the invasion of Czechoslovakia and was already at the printer when that tragedy occurred."

He decided to change the name of his book. "Technically, even after the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Russia was still 'at peace'. No war had been declared on Czechoslovakia. But the very fact that, in August 1968, Russian and Czech blood (however little) was flowing in the streets of Prague made the title 'Russia at Peace' singularly incongruous, if not downright offensive." So it was changed to *Russia: Hopes and Fears.*

He used as a theme an excerpt from a letter received from a young Russian in September 1968. "Since Prague, our last year's timid hopes of liberalisation in Russia have dwindled for the present while our fears of a return to Stalinism (or worse) have increased immeasurably."

This is a book about Soviet achievements and about Soviet bureaucracy. It is absorbingly interesting in the light of the problems at present besetting the Communist movement as a guide to greater understanding of them. It is not the analysis of a detached academic but one by a skilled and knowledgeable observer, a reporter who spends most of his time in the Soviet Union talking, and listening, to people — to scientists, economists, writers, workers, young people and old.

The first chapter forming a background against which the whole book is written consists of a penetrating review of the CPSU Central Committee's "Survey" of the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, published in 1967. This survey or thesis is available in Australia.

He refers to it as a sort of Brezhnev-Kosygin "History," of the last 50 years and a perspective for the future. Significant in this he sees a "calm and level headed" historical analysis of Trotskyism without departing from the basic stand against it as propounded by Stalin; admission of the extreme difficulties of collectivisation of agriculture but still justification for its brutalities and the sacrifices for industrialisation; the near destruction of the Soviet Union in the war and
admission of serious miscalculations in preparation for the Nazi attack; the people’s heroic struggle and continued sacrifices for post-war reconstruction.

He sees a more sober estimation of the difficulties of transition to communism. Despite evidence of spectacular industrial growth, productivity and wages are comparatively low compared with the U.S. and difficulties remain in agriculture and in the distribution field.

The “Survey” quotes figures of improvement in the material welfare of the Soviet people and the extension of democracy. On this latter point Werth says, “In reality this passage significantly exaggerates the role of the Soviets as something ‘independent’ of the Party machinery. This ‘democratisation’ of the Soviet Union is somewhat overdone.”

The section on the nationalities does not hint at the anomalies in Soviet society with most responsible posts occupied by Russians and a continuation of the “Jewish problem”, though in a less acute form than under Stalin and Khrushchev.

Of the “Survey’s” attitude to art and literature he says “All these verbal concessions to the ‘new spirit’ are hard to take seriously, and it seems obvious that in the government and Party hierarchy there is still a terrifying hangover from the Stalin days in matters of art and literature.”

He sees, on the face of it, “the Russians final and entirely unambiguous acceptance of polycentrism. Each Communist Party must in other words consider its own national interests first. This is a complete departure from Stalinism.” Then he goes on, “Only is it quite sincere? For if so why the great alarm caused in the Kremlin by the liberalisation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1968.”

Nevertheless the “Survey” which may be regarded as the official Soviet line (and so the voice of Brezhnev and Kosygin), has, as we have seen, its weaknesses; but most Western readers will still find much of it very fundamental and convincing, above all in the anti-war stand taken by the socialist camp . . .”

Werth examines in detail the religious problems and the Soviet citizens’ attitude to sex and the achievements of the Soviet Welfare state in health, housing, education and culture. He discusses the economic reforms, the problems of Comecon and Soviet aid to developing countries.

He deals with the disputes among historians, economists politicos and in the fields of literature, between the “Liberals” and the “Stalinists.”

The views of the Soviet people are lively and illuminating. A Professor of biology from the Novosibirsk Science Centre on Lysenko:

“You people in the West make a terrible song and dance about Pasternak and all that; but for God’s sake, literature is one thing, and one can have a hundred different opinions about any book; but science — oh, those unspeakable cretins nearly ruined Soviet science between 1948 and Pappaska’s (Stalin’s) death. Yes people in the streets wept when he died; to us scientists it was the happiest day of our life.”

Soviet science has continued to extend its independence and is referred to as a “state within the State.”

A history teacher who spent 15 years in a labour camp asked if he had read Solzhenitsyn: “Yes and I also recently read Evgenia Ginsburg’s book and Chukovskaya’s ‘Deserted House.’ Well let me tell you; the Solzhenitsyn story is the most accurate account I know of life in a camp. That’s precisely what my camps were like.”
A professor of philosophy: “Since Stalin’s death, there have been definite improvements. The powers of the NKVD have been drastically curtailed. Police inquisition, though it still exists is more discreet than it used to be. A man like Khru,

shchev though a fool in many ways was more ‘democratically minded’ than Stalin; and Kosygin is better still. But there has been no proper return to Leninist ‘Democratic Centralism’. Secrecy still applies to many fields of activity. It is strongest of all in the field of ideology.”

After an interview with 18 year old Sasha a reporter on the Moscow evening paper, who was too young to remember Stalin. Werth says, “My general impression was that he was not widely interested in ideology, but was very proud of living relatively prosperously in a well-run country that took such good care of all its citizens.”

The book deals in some detail with the Soviet Union’s relations with other countries and in particular with China. Werth says there are “at least a dozen different ‘Communisms’ and the Russian variety has become one of the most innocuous, with the concept of the ‘nation state’ strongly predomi-

nating over that of ‘revolutionary mission’ in the world.”

“There is good reason to suppose that (whatever ‘provocations’ there may have been from the Chinese side) the Russians were glad to have an excuse to stop extensive and intensive economic aid to China in 1960. In other words, it became important for Russia not to turn China, in a very short time, into a vast industrial power.”

Russia: Hopes and Fears is the answer, or a large part of the answer to many of the world’s most ticklish problems. Werth is a writer who is easy to read. He is at present writing a book on the Soviet Czechoslovak conflict.

Jim Moss

FUTILITY AND OTHER

ANIMALS, by Frank

Moorhouse. Garth Powell

Associates, 162pp., $3.80.

FRANK MOORHOUSE has collected twenty-four of his short stories into what he calls a “discontinuous narrative”, which term adequately describes the cohesion stopping short of unity the book as a whole achieves. Even for those who have been previously acquainted with Moorhouse’s stories this ordering of his book will undoubtedly emphasise his dry, rather spare style’s strengths and special appropriateness to his subject matter. These subjects are from Sydney’s non-conformist, young and alienated society – more particularly, the Sydney “Push” and the Andersonian “Libertarian Society” – but, through a combination of such groups’ structures and Moorhouse’s skills, the stories transcend the self-congratulatory knowingness that makes coterie writing so often of this type of work.

In a surprisingly relevant introductory note Moorhouse says the characters in his “interlinked stories” form a “tribe – a modern urban tribe – which does not fully recognise itself as a tribe”. It is just this last aspect of the book’s environment that Moorhouse’s narrative captures so very ably. All stories are in either a direct or implied first person that denies chances for authorial comment of a narrative or moralistic nature while the presentation of their allegedly unstructured milieu does allow the reader to see “the tribe” where individual characters may not.

Added to those, still largely structural and organisational skills, there is a preoccupation with analysis and knowingness sometimes bordering on a frank self awareness in almost all the characters – the thirty-year-old homosexual whose trip to his parents and
their country town shows him his true home is now the city, or the recently deserted husband who cannot feel fully for others' troubles but who knows it with a strange understanding.

Perhaps one of the most successful of these stories, one that shows their analytical nature's artistic as well as sociological strength, is the first in the book, "The Knife". In this story the narrator, with a large degree of knowingness, plays with ideas of masculinity through his buying a knife to hang from his belt while living in a shack out of Sydney with his young mistress. The story's first line, spoken by the girl when the knife is missing — "The knife was in the duffle-coat — with the Methedrine and Herzog" — cleverly includes emblems of nonconformity, and the masculinity symbols, while its context gives it a wry, satirical humour that the story maintains.

But if "The Knife", often wittily, embodies the uneasiness inherent in looking for identity while rejecting bourgeois, conformist standards (no cliche, this), other stories merely enumerate the special forms of scrutiny this may involve or, as in "Walking Out", suggest, against the tenor of the story I feel, the narrator "drops out" for vague and lazy reasons — exactly those reasons his parents want to believe.

But even the weaker, and they are usually the shorter, stories indicate Moorhouse's, and his character's, fascination with motives and with what I think could be called the intellectual or theoretical issues underlying the conscious adoption of nonconformist attitudes.

However the most successful stories are those that, as well as analysing or portraying motives, shift them into uneasy or tense situations, test situations, and, consequently, out of the field of merely fictional attitudinising. It is in these that Futility and Other Animals becomes a truly accomplished, rather than promising, work and Moorhouse's understanding of the complex nature of difficult or trying situations is conveyed through the ease of good writing — an ease that most often rests in the generally binding quality of the dialogue or the spare objectivity of descriptions rather than any quotable passages.

Reviewers and readers alike are bound to say much about language and attitudes in this collection but the book is in fact distinguished by its very lack of any preoccupations with the sensationally contemporary — abortion, the pill, drugs. In their stead Moorhouse gives an urbane, well ordered and frequently dry humorous view of his "tribe" and what makes it tick in a not particularly experimental language and in situations that other countries' literatures have coped with for up to fifty years now.

CARL HARRISON-FORD.

THE JEWISH PROBLEM IN POLAND, by Paul Novick. Morning Freiheit (US), 36pp. 40 cents (Aust.)

HOW could there be a "Jewish problem" in Poland? Less than 30,000 Jews now live in the country compared with the three and a half million before the war. Poland has had more than 20 years of socialism, with racist propaganda outlawed. And the secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party Wladyslaw Gomulka has a Jewish wife.

Until a few years ago, this would have been the attitude of most socialists in the West to a booklet of this kind. Recently, however, it has been sadly and reluctantly conceded that the raising of the question of anti-semitism in socialist countries...
is not merely a ploy of the imperialist bourgeoisie to slander the communist movement.

Paul Novick, the author, is the most prominent Communist active in Jewish affairs in the United States, and until the last convention was a member of the National Committee of the CPUSA. He has visited Poland for lengthy periods on a number of occasions and has written about the country in booklets and in the progressive New York Yiddish language daily Morgen Freiheit.

Early in the booklet Novick adds to the list of facts of a positive nature on the position of Polish Jews. He points to a number of examples of “a regime which showed real solicitude for its Jewish communal and cultural institutions”. He shows how real concern for the Jewish people disarmed many enemies of People’s Poland and won honor for socialism.

He cites the many cultural institutions which the Polish government helped the post-war Jewish community to set up. He describes the effect of cultural exchanges between Polish and American Jews, and the way in which Jews everywhere were touched by the homage paid by Polish Communists to such events as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the nazis.

Then in March 1968, the old scar on which so much skilled and devoted surgery had been performed, and which had been pronounced by many as healed, opened up. That this happened, and the reasons for it form the main subject matter of Novick’s book.

During the long periods in which right-wing forces ruled Poland, vicious use was made of anti-semitism. The combination of factors making for anti-semitism on a mass scale in Poland could scarcely have been more potent if it had been arranged deliberately. There was ignorance and poverty, national oppression. The worst traditions of Catholic anti-semitism had full scope.

The Poles have long felt a sense of national frustration, a sense of having been a pawn in the international big power game. Then came the appalling suffering of the Second World War, and a number of aspects of their socialist history which tended to aggravate the strong nationalist feelings.

The Communists and progressive forces of Poland faced such a task in building the new society that many have felt, and still feel, that criticism of shortcomings or directing attention to problems is unjust. Novick refers, for example, to an anti-Jewish pogrom, in Kielce carried out by reactionary forces as recently as 1946, in which 42 people died.

But what emerges from the booklet are facts which put the question of anti-semitism in Poland on quite a different level from shortcomings and omissions in the struggle against the past. The real point here is the use of anti-semitism for political purposes by leaders and factions in the Polish government and Polish United Workers’ Party.

March 1968 was a time of sharpening difficulties in Poland, which manifested themselves in several spheres, including the universities, the economy, and in the Party. It was evidently felt by more than one faction that with ammunition running low, a shot or two of anti-semitism could still be effective.

Novick demonstrates that what developed was a considerable campaign against ‘Zionism’, particularly after the Arab-Israel conflict of June 1967. There were pointed press references to disloyal elements, the percentage of Jews in the Party, and a singling out of Jewish Communists who had been
associated with crimes of the Stalinist past.

Examples are given of distortions of the history of the Jews in Poland, such as the playing down of the heroic Warsaw Ghetto uprising of 1943 - a struggle which inspired all anti-fascist fighters. Anniversary celebrations of the event began to receive cool treatment by Polish leaders.

The main responsibility for the upsurge of anti-semitism according to Novick, is due to a Party faction led by former Interior Minister General Mieczyslaw Moczar. Most of the examples are from this grouping. But it also becomes clear that the supporters of Gomulka were not guiltless.

General Moczar, for example is quoted from the Warsaw press as having said in a speech: "... The Israeli aggression against the Arab countries goes hand in hand with the anti-Polish campaign which international Zionism conducts throughout the world. This campaign is promoted through the modern means of communication such as the press, the film, television and literature, all of which are overwhelmingly controlled by the Zionists. On our part this campaign will meet with protest and condemnation. International Zionism attempts to whitewash the Germans of the crimes they committed against the Jews and in a perfidious manner it seeks to make the Poles equally guilty..."

Statements like these deserve some pondering. While they do not approach the viciousness of some of the utterances of Moczar, some statements by Gomulka himself, and particularly by one of his prominent supporters, Andrzej Werblen, must be deeply disturbing to all socialists. They are quoted at some length, and the anti-semitic character of the statements in the context of Polish politics are analysed.

It is said that opposition to Zionism, even denunciation of Zionism, is not anti-semitism. This statement in itself is true. But the term 'Zionist' can be used in a context in which it assumes a definite anti-semitic meaning. Novick puts it as follows.

"The anti-Zionist line which permeates so much of the Polish press appears to be an odd blend of Marxist-sounding phraseology and of the 'traditional' anti-semitic notions which are easily recognisable to anyone who was exposed to the anti-semitism of the pre-war Poland. The old hobgoblin of the wily and powerful International Jew always taking advantage of the decent and well-meaning non-Jews is slightly altered: instead of 'Jew' we now have 'Zionist'; instead of the 'world Jewish conspiracy' we now have the 'international Zionist conspiracy'."

A curious twist to the tragedy is provided by the fact that the super-vigorous "anti-Zionist" campaign tends to feed political Zionism. With the din of the campaign continually in their ears, it is natural for some Jews to conclude that perhaps the only solution is to pack their bags for Israel. Even the assimilated Jew who rejects Zionism has his latent soft spot for Israel sensitised. He takes more interest in the fortunes of the Israeli or Zionist leaders, and even identifies himself with them while having no thoughts of going to Israel.

Novick in no way comes out as an anti-Polish crusader. He banks on the traditions of the true patriots and humanists of this country about which he obviously feels so deeply, and especially does he bank on "the tradition of the Communist Party of Poland which was fighting anti-semitism during the regime of Pilsudski and the colonels".

Dave Davies